

# Palace Prisoner

is The people could well  
take over Nepal

SOME men are blind by choice. They fail to see the writing on the wall. Gyanendra of Nepal is one such. He refuses to realise that time is running out for him. His overweening confidence that the writ of the palace can override the will of the people is doomed. There is hardly any evidence to support the optimism of Karan Singh, prime minister Manmohan Singh's special envoy to the king, that Gyanendra would respond to the popular sentiment for democracy in Nepal. The available evidence is to the contrary. The assault on unarmed protestors on the streets of Kathmandu resulting in the death of four people is evidence of the palace's unwillingness to respect the norms of democracy and legitimate expressions of political dissent. As thousands pour out on to the streets of Kathmandu defying curfew, Nepal is witnessing a shortage of essential supplies including food. The political mainstream and the Maoists are demanding that the king lift all repressive measures and announce elections unconditionally to restore democracy. What if he doesn't agree to elections or to face a constituent assembly as demanded by the Nepalese people? What if the people call for polls in spite of Gyanendra's defiance? When Louis XVI barred the French National Assembly from the Palace of Versailles they met at a tennis court to discuss and press their charter of demands and decide the future course of action. That marked the assertion of popular will and the beginning of the French Revolution.

Democracy does not flow from the top; it is built from the base upwards. It does not derive legitimacy from institutions, but provides legitimacy to institutions. The king, the palace, and parliament are incidental to Nepal's democracy. If the crowds on the streets, the mainstream political parties, and the Maoists who control almost all of Nepal, come together and declare elections, the only choice before Gyanendra would be to join the queue on polling day. New Delhi has done its best to get Gyanendra to respect popular will. It should now leave the rest to the people of Nepal and not push for a face-saver for Gyanendra, who today is virtually an isolated prisoner in his own barricaded palace.

## King says he's handing over power to people; not enough feel parties

It's not the be-all and end-all, but at this point in time, I think there is definitely a light at the end of the tunnel."

At least 12 people have been killed and hundreds wounded in the pro-democracy campaign, which was launched on April 6.

On Friday, protesters burned tyres and threw logs and barbed wire across the streets of Kathmandu as a curfew imposed to prevent a march on the palace came into force.

Black smoke rose from several places in the city of 1.5 million people as protesters, angry at the king's sacking of the government last year, tried to block movement of police and troops.

Protesters burned a government revenue office on the outskirts of the capital and fought street battles with police elsewhere in the city. There was no word of serious casualties.

The curfew in Kathmandu began at 9 a.m. and was to continue until midnight but was only being enforced within the city limits.

On the ring road outside, tens of thousands marched, waved party flags and chanted slogans demanding the king leave the country. Riot police, troops with automatic weapons and armoured cars stood at major intersections to bar protesters planning to march on the palace.

Gyanendra sacked the government and took full powers in February 2005, vowing to crush a decade-old Maoist revolt in which more than 13,000 people have died.

US Ambassador James Moriarty, speaking to Reuters Television just two hours before the address, said the king had no choice but to relent to the parties' demands.

"If he doesn't do that, I think the monarchy will not last and... we are going to see a revolution inside Nepal. "It would mean wider chaos and it would mean a good chance for the Maoist insurgents to take over this country."

The rebels have a loose alliance with the political parties and have vowed to join the mainstream if there is a representative government in Kathmandu.

*Reuters*

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INDIAN EXPRESS

# On strike eve, King tightens anti-terror law, bans political rallies in Kathmandu

NEPAL ■ Law amended: Anyone in contact with Maoists a terrorist accomplice

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

AHEAD of a general strike called by Nepal's seven-party alliance from April 6, King Gyanendra's government today banned protest rallies in Kathmandu for an indefinite period.

The royal government also tightened an anti-terror law, allowing it to jail anyone in contact with Maoists as a "terrorist

accomplice", *The Kathmandu Post* reported today.

The government amended the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Ordinance (TADO) by adding new provisions that could be used against journalists and political activists.

The ordinance, the newspaper reported, defines "terrorist accomplices" as those with



any contact with the rebels. Dissemination of Maoist-related information is also punishable under the anti-terror law. Offenders could face up to 3 years imprisonment or Rs 50,000 in fine or both.

Political leaders said they fear the amended law would be used against them because they have thrown their support

behind the four-day strike which begins Thursday and is aimed at mounting pressure on King Gyanendra to restore democracy.

Ian Martin, representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, too expressed serious concern over the new amendment in TADO. The ban on rallies comes two days before the general strike called by the alliance. (*With PTT*)

## Nepal parties intensify agitation

**KATHMANDU:** Intensifying their agitation against King Gyanendra, Nepal's Opposition on Sunday launched a "non-cooperation movement" and asked people not to pay taxes to the Royal government, as police fired at protesters in various parts of the Himalayan Kingdom, injuring at least 18. Amid calls to the King by international community to end his direct rule and pave way for multi-party democracy, Indian envoy Shivshankar Mukherjee met the King at his Narayanhity palace and discussed the situation.

The coordination committee of the seven-party alliance for restoration of democracy appealed people not to pay taxes.

"As part of a non-cooperation movement against the autocratic royal government, we call upon the taxpayers not to pay any kind of taxes to the Government and also for consumers not to pay anything for water, electricity, telephone or other services," it said in a statement. — PTI



# 6 killed as Nepal rebels storm town

## Curfew Re-Imposed In Kathmandu To Thwart Fresh Demonstrations Against King Gyanendra

**Kathmandu:** At least five Maoist rebels and a Nepali soldier were killed when hundreds of rebels stormed an eastern town overnight, the army said on Monday, as a fresh curfew was clamped on the capital to thwart anti-king protests.

Sunday night's attack by the insurgents—fighting to overthrow the monarchy since 1996—was among the biggest in nearly three weeks since a mass pro-democracy campaign erupted across the impoverished Himalayan kingdom.

The attack may have been designed to increase pressure on the king and engage security forces already struggling to quell protests around the country, analysts said. It took place in Chautara, about 100 km (60 miles) east of Kathmandu, when the rebels attacked a police station, district administration office, a telecommunications tower and a jail in the town, authorities said.

"We have found bodies of five Maoists in combat dress. One soldier also died," an army officer told Reuters, adding that four civilians were wounded in the crossfire.

"We have foiled their attempt to overrun the town," he said.

Chautara lies in the hills of Sindhupalchowk district, a stronghold of the rebels. A Reuters reporter on his way to the area said that the rebels had blocked the road about 30 km short of Chautara town with fallen trees and boulders, apparently to prevent troops from rushing in reinforcements.

District authorities had requested helicopter support and reinforcements,

time since this round of protests began on April 6. Although the 27 km ring road lies within the curfew zone, large stretches are in the hands of the protesters, with burning logs and tyres blocking access to security forces.

Authorities clamped a fresh curfew on the capital from 11 am until 6 pm in a bid to thwart Monday's planned protests. On Friday King Gyanendra, who seized power last year, offered to hand it over to the seven-party alliance, but his offer was rejected by the parties and has failed to quell the protests.

The country's main political parties entered a loose alliance with Maoist rebels to end royal rule last November.

The rebels, who control vast swathes of the countryside, seek to establish a communist republic in a conflict that has cost more than 13,000 lives.

Maoists are demanding elections for a special assembly to write a new constitution and curb the king's powers, a demand which the political parties have now taken up. Rejecting Gyanendra's offer to hand over power, party leaders said they did not trust the king and want him to revive parliament, dissolved in 2002.

That in turn would give them the authority to call elections for an assembly to prepare a new constitution and could pave the way for the Maoists to rejoin the mainstream.

The alliance has been agitating since April 6 to force Gyanendra to restore multi-party democracy. At least 12 people have been killed and thousands wounded in protests since then. Reuters



Pro-democracy protesters shout slogans as they set up fiery road-blocks on the streets of Kathmandu on Monday

one government official said, while some locals near the area said the fighting could still be going on.

News of the attack came as an alliance of seven political parties vowed to hold more anti-king protests on Monday, to fill the entire ring road with peo-

ple," Kashinath Adhikary, an official from the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the country's second biggest political party, told Reuters.

He said top leaders would lead the demonstrations on Tuesday for the first

# King restores parliament

Sudeshna Sarkar

KATHMANDU, April 24: He had ruled Nepal with an iron hand for 16 terrible months with the army and a battery of astrologers and tantriks. Though he made sacrifices regularly to the gods, finally, even the gods deserted the arrogant King of Nepal who thought he was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. A 19-day "people's war" by tens of thousands of unarmed Nepali men, women and youngsters finally brought King Gyanendra to his heels, something that 10 years of armed communist insurgency could not.

Under intense pressure to quit both at home and abroad and yet refusing to yield, the 58-year-old was finally humbled by a sea of unarmed protesters who had converged on the capital today. Minutes before midnight, the King, in a televised address, announced his decision to restore parliament dissolved in May 2002 and for the first time in his reign, expressed sorrow for the deaths caused by the action of his security forces.

"The Nepali people are the source of state power," the King, who had captured power with the help of the army last year, said. "Sovereignty and executive powers lie in the people." The man who had refused to look at the truth till Friday and claimed the people were with him, finally admitted he had realised what the people



A Nepalese policeman beats up an Opposition activist during a demonstration in Kathmandu on Monday. ■ AFP



Activists shout slogans in front of Nepal's embassy in Bangkok on Monday. ■ AFP

desired and was choosing the Seven-Party Alliance's road map over his own. King Gyanendra said he was accepting the parties' demands and to begin with, was restoring the lower house of parliament. The session of the restored house would start on Friday at 1 p.m. at Parliament House. The SPA has described the King's proclamation as positive.

The King was silent, though, on the other demands made by the parties, which includes holding constituent assembly elections to write a new Constitution for Nepal that would decide if the country would remain a kingdom or become a republic.

Anti-King protesters had planned a show of strength in Kathmandu tomorrow where the top Opposition leaders would come together for the first time and it was expected to draw 2 million people. The mounting anger against

the king, his fawning ministers and bureaucrats chosen over others was near its peak and people feared a bloodbath could take place in Kathmandu Valley tomorrow.

Minutes after the King's proclamation, shouts of joy rang in the dark streets as people started screaming pro-republic slogans.

Young men danced on the streets, women ululated and the SPA decided to convert tomorrow's scheduled protest programme into a victory rally. A Nepali Congress source said the party chief, Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, was likely to be appointed the Prime Minister.

Earlier, the diplomatic community in Nepal had begun readying for a quick exit as the USA and Canada pressed the panic button first, with Korea and Japan following suit. The Centre, however, said it had no plans to pull out Indian nationals and officials from

Nepal. It said the situation in Nepal did not warrant such a thing. The civil aviation ministry also denied that the national carrier, Indian, had been put on alert. The international community, that had hailed King Gyanendra's call on Friday to the Opposition parties to name a Prime Minister, had blissfully thought the offer would be snapped up and peace would prevail by the weekend. The British Embassy in Kathmandu even planned a bash today to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's 80th birthday, inviting royalist ministers and senior government officials, at a time when the country had been clamouring for abolishing the monarchy and exiling the King. Prospects of a quick resolution, however, receded after the SPA announced its plans to stage a massive show of strength tomorrow.

The fear of violence was also stoked by a fresh Maoist raid in northern Nepal last night when thousands of guerrillas devastated Chautara, headquarters of Sindhupalchowk district near the Tibetan border, resulting in at least 11 people being killed, according to the Nepal TV. While the army today said a soldier and five Maoists had been killed in the attack that lasted till around 5 a.m. today, the channel put the toll at nine rebels, a soldier and a civilian who was caught in the crossfire.

See pages 3 & 4

**GYANENDRA ■ Meets India & US envoys; House revival to pave way for interim all-party govt**

# King signals he's ready to revive Nepal Parliament

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, APRIL 24

WITH the seven-party alliance rejecting his half-baked offer and protests on the streets getting shriller, King Gyanendra today indicated he was ready to reinstate the dissolved House of Representatives as a prelude to formation of an all-party government accountable to parliament.

The King gave indications to this effect to Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee who met him last night—this was their fourth meeting in a week—and to US Ambassador James F Moriarty today. Both envoys have become the unofficial channel between the King and the political parties.

The Supreme Court Chief Justice has also been consulted by the King to ensure that revival of the House gets an honourable endorsement.

Nepali Congress spokesperson Krishna Sitaula said: "Soon after the revival, the House will form an all-party government which will simultaneously pledge to hold elections to the constituent assembly and call upon the Maoists to join the political mainstream".

The reinstatement, according to highly placed sources, may happen before the rally in Kathmandu tomorrow which alliance leaders plan to attend. Tomorrow will be the twentieth day of the general strike called by the alliance to press for the



He is feeling the heat

restoration of democracy.

So far, at least 14 people have been killed, an estimated 5,000 injured, and many missing after a string of clashes with security personnel.

"Once the Maoists respond positively to the call, the Cabinet will be converted into an interim one which would take step-by-step decisions on the ceasefire, management of their weapons so that the date and modalities for elections to the constituent assembly can be announced," Sitaula said.

The reinstatement of parliament also frees the 7-party alliance from Maoist pressure to jointly form a parallel government and challenge the King's government. Many in the alliance feel it would mean accepting Maoist leadership in districts where they are strong. Others point out that the alliance could lose international legitimacy.

Sitaula said he hoped the Maoists would join the interim government in order to translate the 12-point understanding between them.

# NEPAL ■ Over 500 units in the Birganj-Simra industrial corridor have stopped work, economic crisis looms Workers in King's factory join the protests

JAI PRAKASH YADAV  
BIRGANJ, APRIL 24

**T**HE largest cigarette producer in the embattled Himalayan kingdom—Surya Nepal, also houses the worst kept secret of the country. It's common knowledge here that the factory is owned by none other than King Gyanendra.

For the last 17 days, however, this factory has not produced a single cigarette. All its workers have left work and joined the anti-King protest. If the workers of Surya Nepal are on the warpath then how can others be left behind.

Tribhuvan Rajpath—the national highway extending from Birganj to Simra—is the industrial corridor of the country. More than 500 major industrial units flank this highway. For the last two weeks not a single one of them has produced anything. Thousands of workers earning their livelihood from these units have joined the pro-democracy protest turning the highway into a war farm.

The ongoing strike and protest in this industrial region has started shaking the economy of Nepal. "This country will be ruined if the strike continue for long. The GDP has already come down to 2 from 4 percent and is set to turn negative even if the movement ends now," pointed out Vijay Kumar Sarayogi, president, Birganj Chamber of Commerce.

But the common masses are

not bothered about the economic issues. They seem to be set for a decisive battle with the monarchy. "Bread and butter is important but we are not going to succumb before it. This King has to go. He is a murderer. He will destroy our country," declared Navraj Khatiwada, a worker in Surya Nepal.

He said that the workers of Surya Nepal were among the first to join the protest against the King. "Everybody knows that this factory is actually owned by King Gyanendra and thereby we were the first to revolt", he declared, waving a cartoon which showed the King being shooed out.

Birganj accounts for 40 percent of the country's revenue earnings which is virtually dead now days. Trade and commerce has come to a stand-still. The dry port situated outside the city has been locked. Cargo movement from the Indian ports has stopped.

There is also shortage of essential commodities in the interior parts of the country. Salt is selling at Rs 80 per kg in the interiors, informed a trader. "Traders and businessmen are bearing huge losses in the form of detention and demurrage charges. Ultimately it will be passed to the customer who are loosing their purchasing power", declared Sarayogi.

Various commercial organizations are trying to impress upon the agitators the fact of an imminent economic breakdown that necessitated an early solution to the ongoing crisis.



An opposition party supporter throws back a tear gas shell at policemen during continuing anti-King Gyanendra demonstrations in Katmandu on Monday. AP

## 'Stop shoot-at-sight'

KATHMANDU: NEPAL must immediately repeal a curfew-enforcing "shoot-at-sight" policy that is targeting innocent people, and violating international law, a UN rights expert said on Monday. For three weeks protests have rocked Kathmandu, and police have clashed with demonstrators demanding King Gyanendra relinquish the absolute power he seized 14 months ago.

On Monday, officials placed the capital under curfew for a fifth straight day. Security forces have been issued with shoot-at-sight orders against anyone trying to enter the curfew zone.

"Under international law, widespread or systematic attacks against the civilian population are crimes against humanity," said Philip Alston, the UN's special investigator on illegal and arbitrary executions. —PTI

## US, China asks its nationals to leave Nepal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BEIJING, APRIL 24

CHINA and US have asked tourists from their countries to leave Nepal quickly and urged its citizens living there to take care of their personal safety following the political turmoil in the Himalayan kingdom.

The US Embassy asked families and non-essential staff to leave Nepal because of concerns over dwindling supplies, shortages in medical expertise,

protests and sometimes "violent measures" used by the regime to break them up.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry called on Chinese citizens in Nepal to enhance awareness of self-protection, given the unstable safety situation there. It also suggested to its nationals not to travel to Nepal if there was no special needs.

The Foreign Ministry requested Chinese citizens to contact the Chinese Embassy in Nepal in case of emergency.

Meanwhile, at least seven people were injured in police firing in Basundhara area of Kathmandu. The protest was smaller than on the previous days. Two dozen others were also injured as the police baton-charged and fired tear gas shells at the peaceful demonstrators at Narayanganj Chowk in northern Kathmandu in the afternoon.

Thousands defied the curfew which was reimposed in the capital from 11 am to 6 pm today, and rallied in various parts of the

city including Swayambhu, Gongabu, Kalanki, Koteswori, Chabahil, Ason and Ombahal to protest the royal proclamation.

On Sunday, more than a thousand Maoist rebels launched simultaneous attacks with guns and grenades on a telecom tower and at a police station at Chautara, 120 km northeast of Kathmandu. The incident left 5 Maoists and a soldier dead, the Defence Ministry said in a statement. Four civilians were also injured in the cross-firing, it said.

# Nepal King restores dismissed Parliament

## SPA WELCOMES GYANENDRA'S DECISION

**ANIRBAN Roy**  
Kathmandu, April 24

KING GYANENDRA on Monday night reinstated the House of Representatives, which he had dismissed on May 22, 2002. In a message to the nation at 11.35 pm (IST), the 58-year-old monarch announced that the session of the reinstated Parliament would be held at 1 pm on Friday at Singha Darbar, the seat of administration in Nepal.

King Gyanendra said he was optimistic that the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) would accept the offer and expressed his heartfelt condolence for those who had lost their lives. He wished a steady recovery to those who had been injured in the people's movement. SPA leaders were euphoric over the king's proclamation. Spokesperson of the Nepali Congress Krishna Prasad Sitaula told *Hindustan Times* that the King had, at last, bowed down to the pressure of their pro-democracy movement. "This is a positive development in Nepal," Sitaula said, adding that they were optimistic that the royal proclama-

tion would usher in peace and tranquillity in Nepal. "The King has finally come up with a positive solution to the problem," Pradip Nepal, politburo member of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), said.

The King's late-night announcement followed close on the heels of the US State Department ordering all its citizens to leave the country immediately. The Chinese government, too, had urged its citizens to leave Nepal or take measures for their personal safety.

The SPA had earlier announced that a huge anti-King rally would be held around Ring Road in the Himalayan kingdom on Tuesday. The rally was supposed to move around Ring Road covering three cities — Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur — NC (Democratic) acting president Gopalman Shrestha had earlier said.

The alert issued by the US embassy earlier on Monday said it had ordered the immediate departure of mission members and non-emergency US employees from Nepal. "All US citizens should depart from Nepal as soon as possible," the alert had said. US ambassador James F. Moriarty

on Monday had officially informed the mission community of the embassy's recommendation of leaving the country.

The US State Department had been planning flying in a special aircraft to Kathmandu on Monday night and Tuesday morning to evacuate its citizens.

Several other countries were also known to have been considering ordering the immediate evacuation of their employees and citizens from Nepal, sources in Kathmandu's diplomatic circles said.

Earlier on Monday, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee chaired a high-level meeting at his South Block office to review the current crisis in Nepal. Home minister Shivraj Patil and senior officials, including the defence, home and foreign secretaries, attended the meeting, along with the chief of the army staff, general J.J. Singh, and senior Intelligence officials. While a variety of contingency plans were discussed, there were "no plans, whatsoever, for the evacuation of Indian officials or nationals from Nepal", an official statement had said.

See also report on Page 3



# PALACE BOWS TO PEOPLE

## Parliament to be restored

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 24:** The Nepalese people have brought their beleaguered monarch to his knees. King Gyanendra was forced to retreat by the people's movement today.

In a late night announcement on state-run TV, he proclaimed that he was reinstating the parliament.

A grim King Gyanendra admitted that "state and power sovereignty were inherited in the people of Nepal."

The king was forced to take public cognizance of "the wishes" of the "Jan Andolan (People's Movement)", which he mentioned twice in his short address, and the road map for peace, democracy and people's welfare presented by the seven-party democracy alliance.

The king said the parliament, which he had dissolved on May 22, 2002, would now be reconvened on April 28 at 1

pm. The proclamation made no mention of elections to a Constituent Assembly, the basic demand of the Maoists and the people. However, his recognition of the road map of the seven-party alliance implies election to a Constituent Assembly — the final destination.

"Now the ball is in our court. We have to move cautiously but with determination

tion towards a Constituent Assembly. This is only the first step," said Shekhar Koira of the Nepali Congress.

Former foreign minister Chakra Prasad Bastola said the king's proclamation would pave the way for "resolving the 10-year-old Maoist insurgency".

The king was forced to relent after 18 days of country-wide protests that left 15 dead and after his earlier offer was rejected by the people.

Yesterday, the king's emissaries held secret talks with the political parties. King Gyanendra also consulted Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee last night.

After a quiet exchange of proposals with the parties yesterday, the king's secretary, Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan, today called on Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala. UN representative Mathew Kahane is believed to have helped in the exchange of proposals, yesterday.

The king's statement today was different from the offer he made last Friday. Today, by a clear reference to the Jan Andolan, he made it clear that the reinstatement of the parliament was not a gift from him but the outcome of a democratic movement.

Unlike last time, when he only offered to hand over state power to the people, he was forced today to declare that

KING CONCEDES STATE AUTHORITY AND SOVEREIGNTY



Nepalese communist party supporters at a protest meeting in Kathmandu on Monday. (AFP)

both "state authority and sovereignty" lay with the people. This settles an important question in Nepal of whether sovereignty lies in the crown or in the people.

Most important, the king was forced to regret the loss of lives in the agitation against him and wish speedy recovery to those injured by the security forces.

As for the instrument to be

used for reviving the parliament, the king announced that it was a political decision. He did not act under Article 127 of the Nepalese Constitution (Power to Remove Difficulties in the implementation of the Constitution) or through the Supreme Court.

"This would make it easier for the parties also to take a political decision on announcing Constituent Assembly elections to a Constituent As-

sembly," said a leader of the seven-party alliance.

The remaining big questions are: Will the Maoists accept this settlement publicly without any mention of a Constituent Assembly? Or, would they accept a commitment from the seven-party alliance that the moment the parliament is revived, they will announce a Constituent Assembly?

■ See Page 8

Outdated calculations and manipulations may work no more

# Endgame in Nepal

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DEB MUKHARJI

The seven-party alliance in Nepal has done well so far to hold fast to its demands with continued rejection of the 'offer' from King Gyanendra to transfer executive power to a prime minister of the parties' choice. Seemingly reasonable, the offer is without substance and clearly aimed merely at overcoming the present upsurge across Nepal. As we look at the future, some of the issues involved need simple, almost catechistic, elucidation.

There have been two royal coups in Nepal in the last few years. The first on October 4, 2002 did away with parliament and, while all authority was vested in the king, prime ministers and cabinets were appointees, to be changed frequently and at will. There was no perceptible improvement in any of the internal parameters in Nepal after 2002. The Maobadis grew in numbers and the territory under their control increased while Nepali and international human rights organizations increasingly accused the Royal Nepalese Army of targeting civilians. Those killed in the violence in Nepal in the past decade number 13,000. Translated in terms of the population of India, this would be 200 killings a day, two-thirds by the army.

As the king discarded every single one of his advisers who would offer rational advice and surrounded himself with courtiers known for their obsequiousness, as violence remained unabated in the country, as tourism plummeted and economic activity slowed down while the palace imported fleets of exotic cars, public discontent grew. Deciding that he had not been firm enough, King Gyanendra carried out his second coup on February 1, 2005. Pretences were done away with and the king became the CEO of Nepal. His leading assistants became loyal and elderly gentlemen who had run the *panchayati raj* for King Mahendra in the Sixties. The king's road map for the future were local body elections in 2006 (which were boycotted by all significant political parties) and parliamentary elections in 2007 to bring back the controlled democracy of the Sixties. The second coup with its blatant rejection of any democratic process was opposed by the international community. Internally, Nepal has been at an increased level of turmoil since February, 2005.

India had been quick to react to the February coup, and it was one of the reasons for which the prime minister, Manmohan Singh, declined to attend the Dhaka SAARC

The author is former ambassador to Nepal

summit a few days later. In the days that followed, conflicting signals emerged from India with the feudocracy, army and defence minister advocating business as usual. Eventually, wiser sense prevailed and India remained consistent in its stand that full democracy should return to Nepal. Later, by all accounts and inferences, India facilitated a dialogue between the Maobadis and the political parties. Agreements between the two were reached in November, 2005 and March, 2006. Besides agreeing on the future course of action to revive democracy and move towards a constituent assembly, the agreements also held out hopes for a return of Maobadis to

legitimacy or support of parliament. The king was merely undoing the second coup. There was silence on the minimum demand of a revived parliament which could take the necessary steps for a constituent assembly and negotiate peace with the Maobadis. The king's offer came a day after the curtailed visit of the Indian prime minister's envoy, Karan Singh.

The Indian establishment, which had held a steady course on Nepal over the past months, suddenly faltered. Karan Singh's status and ability notwithstanding, it is not clear that a member of a former Indian royal family should have been entrusted with the task of carrying

ent, appreciated by the civil society of Nepal, that this position was only a reflection of what the Nepali people felt. Indian views would always go by Nepali sentiments as they evolved in this and other matters.

The coming days will be difficult for Nepal. It is a time when the wisest heads of the country have to chart a course and avoid the shoals. Regrettably, many of them remain incarcerated even as the king swears by his commitment to democracy. Two major issues await resolution. One is a fresh look at the 1990 constitution by a constituent assembly. The framers of the constitution were not careful enough and clauses have been used by the palace both with regard to the deployment of the army as also the invocation of absolute authority, which go against the grain of a democratic framework. The other issue is a negotiated settlement with the Maobadis to bring peace to Nepal.



Power to the people

multi-party democracy.

The current phase of the turmoil in Nepal started with the four-day strike call from April 6 by the political parties. This was met by the administration with curfews and police violence on demonstrators. The international community has asked the administration to refrain from undue use of force (which has already taken several lives) and there are suggestions that those found responsible will be debarred from United Nations peace-keeping duties, a lucrative outlet. With lakhs of people in Kathmandu and across the country defying the government, King Gyanendra asked the political parties on April 21 to suggest for his consideration a prime minister of their choice to whom the executive authority of the state would be granted. In short, it was an offer to return to the regime after the first coup of October, 2002. The new prime minister would serve, as before, entirely at the king's pleasure, without the

prime minister's message. It could be portrayed by India's detractors as a subtle message of support to the king at a difficult hour. A general would surely not be sent for discussions with a neighbourhood general who has indulged in a coup. A graver error was the hasty welcome of the royal proclamation of April 21, by the ministry of external affairs and the prime minister's envoy without, quite evidently, studying the substance of the king's offer. Manmohan Singh's reference in his on-board-aircraft comments to journalists to the king's move being in the right direction must be interpreted to mean that the king would now proceed further and undo his first coup of 2002. Unfortunately, however, fires cannot be put out in segments. The emphasis, by the prime minister and others, on the twin pillars of Nepali polity, the constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy, not heard of in recent months, has also to be moderated by the foreign secretary's comm-

From a strictly Indian point of view, the palace has consistently played a negative role over the past 45 years and the equation of Nepali nationalism with anti-Indianism was born at Narayanhiti. There is not the slightest reason for India to promote the interests of the palace. Given also the disdain in which the palace is held by the Nepali people today, we cannot expect it to be a moderating influence in the days to come, were that to be part of any calculation.

The Indians may be understandably concerned at the establishment of the Maobadis in Nepal, but these concerns should not be tinged with paranoia. The fact also is that they are a reality and there is zero possibility of solving the problem militarily, unless, of course, the countryside is denuded of population by death or exile. It may be in the interests of some to perpetuate the conflict for their own perpetuation, but that is hardly in the interests of Nepal, or India. The recent negotiations between the political parties and the Maobadis do offer a way out and need urgently to be pursued.

Perhaps the most significant message emerging out of the past fortnight is that people of all classes have thronged the streets. Their numbers and enthusiasm far exceed any expectation of the political parties. Wives of soldiers have joined the movement, discharging their duty to their nation as their husbands carry out theirs. The spontaneous movement has achieved more in a fortnight than the Maobadis in their 10 years of insurgency, and serves as a warning that outdated calculations of manipulation may work no more. It is important to take cognizance of the emerging reality with respect and neither scepticism nor apprehension, as the Nepali people fulfil their destiny.

# নেপালে মহামিছিল আছে পড়ার আগে রাতে সংক্ষিপ্ত ঘোষণা

## শুক্রবার পাল্লামেন্ট, নয় চালা রাজার

অনিদ্য জানা • কাঠমান্ডু

২৪ এপ্রিল: আর একটা চালা দিলেন রাজা। জিভিতে দু'মিনিটের বক্তৃতায় রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র ঘোষণা করলেন, ২০০২ সালের ২২ মে ভেঙে দেওয়া পাল্লামেন্ট ফের বসবে আগামী শুক্রবার দুপুর ১টায়। দীর্ঘ উনিশ দিনের আন্দোলনে এক ঘরে রাজা এই ঘোষণা করে কৌশলে যেমন, নিজের অস্তিত্ব চিকিৎসে রাখলেন। অন্য দিকে, আন্তর্জাতিক মহলাকে নতুন ঘোষণা করে বার্তা পৌঁছে দিলেন যে, তিনি দেশে গণতন্ত্র ফেরাতে কতটা আগ্রহী।

আগামিকালই একটা এসপার ওসপার করতে মহামিছিলের ডাক দিয়ে রেখেছিল রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি। আজ গভীর রাতে রাজার এই ঘোষণার পরে সাত দলের জোটের অনেকেই চাইছে, কালকের মহামিছিলই বিজয়মিছিলে পরিণত হোক। কিন্তু তা যে হবেই এমন কথা হাল্কা করে এখনই কেউ বলে দিতে পারছেন না। কারণ, নতুন প্রস্তাবেও মাওবাদীদের বিষয়টি এড়িয়ে গিয়েছেন রাজা। একই ভাবে নতুন পাল্লামেন্ট সংবিধান বল করতে পারবে কি না বা রাজার অস্তিত্ব বিলাপ করতে পারবে কি না, সে সম্পর্কে নীরবই থেকে গিয়েছেন রাজা।

মাওবাদীরা অবশ্য রাজাকে নেপালের গণতন্ত্র থেকে একেবারে মুছে ফেলতেই চায়। এই পরিস্থিতিতে মাওবাদী প্রত্নবিত জনতা ফের যদি এই প্রস্তাবও ছুড়ে ফেলে দেয়, তবে বিজয় মিছিলের বদলে শনিবারের বিক্ষোভ মিছিলেরই পুনরাবৃত্তি দেখতে পারে নেপাল।

পাল্লামেন্ট বসুক। সর্বদক্ষীয় সরকার গঠন করা হোক। সরকার আনোচনায় বসুক মাওবাদীদের সঙ্গে। অত্র প্রভেৎ (কারণ, মাওবাদীরা নাকি এখন রাজনীতির মূলশ্রোতে একটা 'অ্যাঙ্কিং' চাইছে। তাই তারা পতাকা নিয়ে বিক্ষোভ মিছিলে হাটছে) মাওবাদীরা আসতে রাজি হলে তাদের মন্ত্রিপরিষদে নিয়ে আসা হোক। সেই মন্ত্রিপরিষদ সংবিধান সভা ডাকবে। সেই সভা ভোট ঘোষণা করবে। তার পর ভোট হবে। তাতে আমজনতার মতো রাজাকেও লড়তে হবে। দেখা যাবে কে জেতে। এবং প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কেরালার আশীর্বাদপুঞ্জ শৈলজা আচার্য রাজার ঘোষণার আগেই জানিয়ে রেখেছিল, "আমরা



গণতন্ত্র চাওয়ার জবাব রবার বুলেটে। কাঠমান্ডুতে সোমবার। — রয়ট্যাস

জিতে নতুন সংবিধান বানাবা। সেই সংবিধান অনুযায়ী দেশ চলবে। সেটাই হবে প্রকৃত গণতন্ত্র। এই সংবিধানে রাজার হাতে প্রচুর ক্ষমতা দেওয়া আছে। উনি ইচ্ছা করলেই প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে আবার হটিয়ে দিতে পারেন। ওই সংবিধান আমরা আর মানি না। নতুন সংবিধানে রাজার ক্ষমতা অনেক ছেঁটে দেওয়া হবে।"

এই দীর্ঘ প্রক্রিয়া কত দিনে শেষ হতে পারে প্রশ্ন করলে জবাব পাওয়া যাচ্ছে, "বিপ্লবের টাইমে সময় বেশি লাগে না। ও সব নিয়ে চিন্তা নেই।" বরং বিক্ষোভকারীরা অনেক বেশি চিন্তিত, ক্লান্ত, উত্তেজিত রাজা-প্রতিপালন করতে কত অর্থ ব্যয় হয়, তা নিয়ে। সেই হিসাব এখন মুখে মুখে ঘুরছে এবং তা

আমজনতাকে উন্নত করার পক্ষে যথেষ্ট। যেমন, রাজা মাসে বেতন পান সাত্বে আট লক্ষ নেপালি টাকা (যেখানে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বেতন মাসে ৩২ হাজার), রানি এবং যুবরাজের বেতন যথাক্রমে সওয়া চার লক্ষ এবং দু'লক্ষ টাকা। রাজপরিবারের দেখভাল করতে খরচ হয় বছরে ৬৪ কোটি টাকা। এমনিতেই রাজা বীরেন্দ্রের অকালমৃত্যুর পরে জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সিংহাসনে বসা নিয়ে নেপালি জনতার মনে দীর্ঘমেয়াদী ক্ষোভ রয়েছে। তাঁরা এখনও প্রকাশ্যে বলেন, জ্ঞানেন্দ্রই সেই ঘটনার পিছনে আসল যত্বস্বত্বকারী। এই আন্দোলনে সেই জোখ লাভাশ্রোতের মতো বেশিরয়ে আসছে। সন্দেহ নেই, রাজপ্রাসাদ দখল করতে পারলে ভোট-টোট দুয়ের কথা, অকালশ্যে জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে ফাঁসি দেবে জনতা।

রাজার ঘোষণার আগে পর্যন্ত শোনা যাচ্ছিল, আগামিকাল কাঠমান্ডুতে 'মহামিছিল' করবে বিরোধী সাত দলের রাজনৈতিক জোট। সেখানেই তারা 'সমাজবাল সবকার' গণের সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করতে পারে।

ইতিমধ্যেই কাঠমান্ডুর আমেরিকান দূতাবাসের কূটনীতিক-কর্মীদের পরিবারের নিরাপত্তা বাড়ানো হয়েছে (কারণ, আমেরিকা রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের আসের প্রস্তাবকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে। এবং নেপালি জনতার মুভ বুকে ভারত ২৪ খণ্ডার মধ্যে ডিগবাজি খেলেও আমেরিকা খাননি। ফলে মার্কিনদের উপর ক্ষোভ বাড়ছে নেপালে।) একই কারণে, নেপালে ভেঙে-আসা অষ্ট্রেলীয় নাগরিকদেরও সতর্ক করা হয়েছে। এমনকী, ইংল্যান্ডের রানির জন্মদিনের যে পাটি আজ হওয়ার কথা ছিল, তা-ও অনির্দিষ্টকাল স্থগিত ঘোষণা করেছে কাঠমান্ডুর ব্রিটিশ দূতাবাস।

এর পর হরের পাতায়

## চাল রাজার

প্রথম পাতার পর

তখনও নীরায়ণহিতী' প্রাসাদে চূপচাপ রয়েছেন রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। দেশের সঙ্কটজনক অবস্থার জন্য ব্রিডুবন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সমস্ত পরীক্ষা স্থগিত রাখা হয়েছে। কাঠমান্ডুর অনতিদূরে চৌতরায় কাল রাতে পুলিশের উপর মাওবাদী হামলায় মৃত্যু হয়েছে মোট ন'জনের। আর ভারতের প্রাক্তন বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ কাঠমান্ডু সফর পিছিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

তার সঙ্গে ছিল, আজও বেলা ১১টা থেকে সন্ধ্যা ৬টা পর্যন্ত কার্ফু। রিং রোডের বিভিন্ন অংশে সেই কার্ফু ভেঙে বিক্ষোভকারীদের শহরে ঢোকান চেষ্টা, যত্রতত্র ভাঙচুর, রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের বিরুদ্ধে উত্তেজিত স্লোগান, রাজার কুশপুতুল দাহ, পুলিশের লাঠিচার্জ, কাঁদানে গ্যাস, রবার বুলেট ছোড়া, একাধিক বিক্ষোভকারীর আহত হওয়া, কাঠমান্ডুর সাধারণ লোকের জীবন ওষ্ঠাগত-হওয়া— গত কয়েক দিনে যা যা হয়েছে। তফাতের মধ্যে কালকের ১১ ঘণ্টা থেকে কমিয়ে আজ ৭ ঘণ্টার কার্ফু, মিছিলের মধ্যে সরাসরি লালের উপর তিন তারকা চিহ্নিত পতাকা নিয়ে মাওবাদীদের যোগ দেওয়া।

আর ছিল রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির কর্মীদের আফালন, "নেপালিরা সহজে কোথাও এগোয় না। এগোলে, পিছিয়ে আসে না।"

নেপালের চলতি সঙ্কট ঘোচাতে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে দিয়ে ফের একটি বিবৃতি দেওয়ানোর জন্য আজ সারা দিনই চেষ্টা চালিয়ে গিয়েছিল ভারত। এর আগে ভারতের অতি সক্রিয়তায় ক্ষোভ প্রকাশ করেছিল নেপাল। নেপালে দৌতা করতে কর্ণ সিংহের সফরকে কেন্দ্র করে ভারত কূটনৈতিক অস্বস্তিতে পড়ায় তা সামাল দিতে গত তিন দিন ধরেই সক্রিয় ছিল সাউথ ব্লক। এই ক'দিনে সরকারের সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তাদের নিয়ে বৈঠক করেন প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়। তিনি গত কাল এবং আজ বৈঠক করেন ক্যাবিনেটসচিব, স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব, বিদেশসচিব, সেনা গোয়েন্দা, র, কেন্দ্রীয় গোয়েন্দা বাহিনীর সঙ্গে। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলের সঙ্গেও তিনি আলাদা করে বৈঠক করেন। প্রাক্তন বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ, সিপিএম পলিটব্যুরোর নেতা সীতারাম ইয়েচুরির সঙ্গেও বৈঠক করেন তিনি।

আজ বৈঠকের পর সন্ধ্যায় প্রণববাবু জানান, "আমরা চাই বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠা হোক নেপালে। শান্তি ফিরে আসুক। তবে শুধু প্রস্তাব বা সুপারিশ করাই আমাদের কাজ।" ভারতের উদ্বেগের কারণ ব্যাখ্যা করে প্রণববাবু জানান, "প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রে কোনও গোলমাল হলে তার প্রভাব ভারতে পড়তে বাধ্য। বিশেষত, সেই দেশ যদি নেপাল হয়। মাওবাদীদের কথা ছেড়েই দিচ্ছি। ভারত ও নেপালের মধ্যে অবাধ যাতায়াতের ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে। ওখানে গোষ্ঠা রেজিমেন্ট থেকে আমরা নিয়োগ করি। অনেক ভারতীয় ওখানে রয়েছে।" এই অবস্থায় সীমান্তে নজরদারি বাড়ানোর জন্য সব রকম ব্যবস্থা নিতে বলা হয়েছে।



# Last-minute parleys on to revive Nepal Parliament

Emissaries shuttle between King and parties

Siddharth Varadarajan

**KATHMANDU:** With the Seven Party Alliance's promised million-person march on the Nepalese capital less than 24 hours away, King Gyanendra finally appeared to blink with his emissaries indicating to the parties that the monarch might be willing to concede one of their key demands: revival of Parliament.

Even as the streets of Kathmandu witnessed spirited clashes between youthful demonstrators and the police, Monday saw some back and forth movement between the palace and key leaders of the SPA. "Even now, the clock is ticking and the King can't seem to make up his mind," Shekhar Koirala of the Nepali Congress told *The Hindu*, adding that since the announcement to dissolve Parliament came at midnight, Gyanendra could still reinstate the Assembly in the middle of the night. Diplomatic sources familiar with the back-channel negotiations said the King was looking at various legal options — primarily to do with forestalling Constitutional change — while the parties too felt obliged to consult the Maoists, with whom they have established a united front of sorts on the question of a roadmap to genuine democracy.

But as with all offers made by the Nepalese King so far, the revival of Parliament is unlikely to offer anything other than a very temporary respite for an in-



• King looking at various legal options

• "Nepalese people will not settle for anything less than a Constituent Assembly"

creasingly beleaguered monarchy.

"If Parliament is reconvened, I think it would have less than 24 hours to announce its decision to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly," said Krishna Khanal, a key civil society leader of the democracy movement. "Otherwise the people will turn against the parties too."

He spoke to this reporter on the sidelines of a massive outdoor public meeting in the working-class Kathmandu suburb of Kirtipur. The mood in the meeting was distinctly republican and the 8,000 strong audience did not seem very inspired when one or two speakers from the SPA laid emphasis on revival of Parliament. According to Mr. Khanal, the Nepalese people will

not settle for anything less than a Constituent Assembly. "There are basically three ways to get there," he said. "First, a revived Parliament decides immediately to go for it. Second, the King himself concedes the demand for elections to a Constituent Assembly. Or third, there is a mass upsurge which forces the King to leave." The third option, he added, would require the cooperation of the armed forces.

## Assessment

Mr. Shekhar Koirala agreed with Mr. Khanal's assessment that a restored Parliament would have less than 24 hours to decide on a Constituent Assembly. "If the Maoists are to be brought into the mainstream and take part in multiparty elections, then there has to be Constitutional change." Mr. Koirala said that even though the King may say that Parliament had no right under the 1990 Constitution to convene a Constituent Assembly, the parties would invoke the doctrine of necessity to do so. "There is no room for legal hair-splitting now."

A senior South Asian diplomat concurred. "The only way out of the present crisis is for the King to bridge the gap between himself and the parties. And the only way he can do this is by surrendering on each of the demands raised by the SPA."

Natwar's charge: Page 10

20 APR 2006

THE HINDU

# Protesters defy curfew in Nepal, 23 hurt

*Feb 87 - 1990-91*  
*7/1/9*

**Kathmandu:** Thousands of protesters defied a daytime curfew in the Nepali capital on Sunday to chant slogans against the king, but the demonstrations seemed less intense and more peaceful than in recent days.

Nevertheless, at least 23 people were injured in clashes between police and protesters in different parts of the city, some hit by rubber bullets, according to an official at a private hospital.

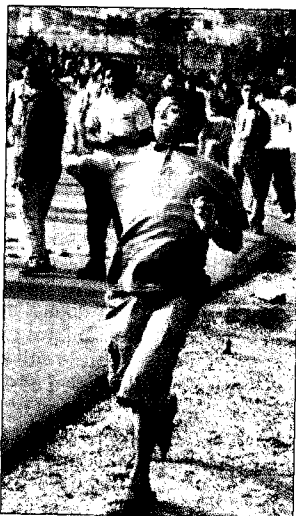
King Gyanendra's offer on Friday to hand over power to an alliance of seven political parties has failed to quell protests against his rule, which entered an 18th day on Sunday. Instead, a movement which started out with the aim of restoring democracy has, for some of its participants at least, now more radical goals.

"Police and soldiers, you are our brothers— shoot Gyanendra," one group chanted at rows of padded and helmeted riot police wielding sticks and shields.

Behind the police, soldiers in green camouflage uniforms gripped submachine guns and automatic rifles, with orders to shoot to kill if the crowd broke through the police ranks and barbed wire barricade. "We will burn the crown and we will run the country," the crowds chanted. "Gyanendra, thief, leave the country."

Sunday's protests were largely confined to the ring road surrounding the capital. Although the road lies within the curfew zone, large stretches are in the hands of the protesters, with burning logs and tyres blocking access to security forces.

In the north of the city, a group of protesters carried a wooden stretcher with an effigy of a dead Gyanendra, ostensibly on its way to cremation. Others hung a rat from electricity wires, a banner hanging from its body saying "Gyanendra is dead, God is great". In a country where many people traditionally



**Pro-democracy activists hurl stones at police during a protest against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on Sunday**

revered the monarch as a Hindu god, the sentiments break a centuries-old taboo.

In the interior of Kathmandu, streets were devoid of traffic and shops shuttered, but tension appeared to have considerably eased. Children played football and badminton on the street and people came out of their houses, chatting in small groups.

Elsewhere in the country, tens of thousands took to the streets in the southern town of Narayanghat, which has seen some of the largest protests against the king.

On Saturday more than 100,000 people broke into Kathmandu's city centre from the outskirts and police opened fire in at least two places to beat them back.

At least 150 people were wounded in the police action and a stampede that broke out when the marchers were dispersed, witnesses and political activists said.

The seven-party alliance which has led the protests has rejected Gyanendra's offer to hand over executive power to a prime minister of their choosing. Agencies

# Nepal parties turn up pressure

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 23:** Ratcheting up their agitation, Nepal's major political parties have announced a programme of massive rallies for Tuesday.

At the same time, after having been advised not to declare a state of emergency, King Gyanendra has apparently sent a feeler to the parties about modalities of reinstating Parliament.

To put further pressure on the king, the top leaders of the seven-party alliance have decided to come out on the streets themselves.

Now Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhav Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Anandi Devi, Narayannan Bijukche, Vishnubahadur Manandhar and Amik Sherkhan, leaders of the different constituents of the alliance, will address seven different

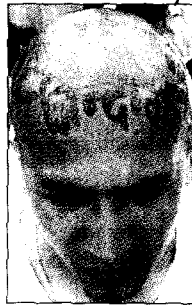
rallies on Ring Road. These are at spots that have witnessed violent clashes and deaths in firing by security forces.

Simultaneously, the parties are reacting to the king's feeler about how the Parliament dissolved in May 2002 could be revived. This is the first step in the alliance's roadmap. It is understood that some in the parties have even drafted what they want the king to proclaim.

The key issues that they want the king to address are:

■ The people should be the ultimate source of state authority and sovereignty

■ Respecting the sentiments of the people and the agenda of the seven political parties, the



An activist in Kathmandu. (AFP)

king should agree to restore Parliament immediately

■ The government formed by the reinstated Parliament would be competent to implement its agenda of peace, democracy and welfare

■ This would include resolution of the Maoist armed conflict.

According to reliable sources, this has not been accepted as yet by the king's interlocutors. Instead, they want the parties to nominate a Prime Minister who can then do all that the parties are demanding from the king.

The parties claim that only a reinstated Parliament can choose the new Prime Minister: "If the king does not direct-

ly want to reinstate Parliament, he can get the Supreme Court to do it," said a source close to the parties.

The Nepali Congress today welcomed Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran's statement that the king needs to do more and that New Delhi will always be with the aspirations of the Nepalese people.

The parties and civil society organisations are now urging the UN and the international community to follow India's example and reassess their positions.

Civil society representatives met the head of the EU mission (the ambassador of Finland), the heads of missions of Canada and India and UN representative Mathew Kahane. They impressed upon them that their "hasty reaction" had been painful for the people of Nepal. (See Page 8)



## 2 Palace off the wheels <sup>2011-6</sup>

IT IS a measure of King Gyanendra's 'achievement' that in the space of a few days he has managed to convert the pro-democracy upsurge in Nepal into a movement demanding the end of a more than 250-year-old line of monarchs who were, till not so long ago, revered as living gods. The scornful reaction of the seven-party alliance (SPA) to the king's offer of taking the reins of government is a measure of how much the ground has shifted from under King Gyanendra's feet. Listening to his Friday speech offering to restore "executive power" to the people, it was difficult to decide which model of monarchy he was espousing — that of Louis XVI, who refused to see the approaching revolution, or his successor, Louis XVIII, who inspired Talleyrand's immortal comment that the Bourbons had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing.

King Gyanendra ought to have at least known that the circumstances of February 2005, when he seized power, and of April 2006, when he was compelled to make his offer in the face of mounting protests, are not the same thing. Time has not stood still: the monarchy's position has been eroded

and its options sharply reduced. The SPA has been superseded by a people's revolt that may not be in anyone's control. At the same time, the Maoists in the countryside have become more powerful.

The king's actions may or may not have been occasioned by his meetings with the Indian prime minister's special envoy, Karan Singh, on Thursday, but it should be clear that India has nothing but Nepal's best interests in mind. Geography, specifically the Himalayas, makes us the mountain kingdom's only real neighbour and, therefore, we have great stakes in each other's well-being. At the same time, it should be clear that the time for restoring *status quo ante* has gone. So, while the restoration of the 1990 model constitutional monarchy may be good in theory, it may no longer be a practical proposition, given the widespread distrust and revulsion that King Gyanendra's tactics have evoked. If the Nepalese people are determined to create a Constituent Assembly and become a republic, so be it. It is not in India's interest to block change in Nepal, but to ensure that it takes place peacefully and does not destabilise the country.

# King gives a little, takes a lot

**Statesman News Service**

KATHMANDU, April 22. — Within hours of saying he was returning sovereign power to people immediately, Nepal's King Gyanendra ordered the suspension of mobile phone services yet again, enforced day-time curfew for the third day in a row, and made no move to lift the order to security forces that they fire at protesters defying the curfew if necessary.

Reports spoke of "a dozen demonstrators" being shot in the capital as

they began marching around the city, rejecting the king's call to political parties to come up with a prime ministerial candidate. Protesters, including supporters of the seven-party Opposition alliance, Maoist cadres and citizens owing no particular allegiance, warned the parties that they would not be forgiven if they compromised to get power. Slogans of "Gyanendra chor, desh chhor. Ganotantra zindabad" rent the air in Kathmandu, Pokhara and the southern districts as the

agitators vowed to keep up the protests till Nepal became a republic, a key point on the Maoist agenda. Though the nationwide bandh entered its 17th day today, Saturday, and it has caused a loss of over (Nepali) Rs 3.5 billion daily and untold hardship to people, the Nepalese people themselves seemed to be urging the political parties not to compromise. "The king's offer is a ruse to defuse the movement. Leaders, don't be duped. We are with you and we will continue our strug-

gle," were among the slogans raised. King Gyanendra, on the other hand, has repeatedly claimed that Maoists/terrorists having infiltrated the ranks of the protesters and "taken over the demonstrations".

The king's offer was also rejected by the seven-party alliance that met at Opposition leader Mr Girija Prasad Koirala's residence to decide on its official response, though there are reports of some differences of opinion within. "The peaceful movement

■ See NEPAL, page 12

## NEPAL: rebels rail, world bails

Continued from page 1  
will continue," Mr Gopal Man Shrestha, acting president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic), said. He added that the alliance has asked security forces to exercise restraint and not suppress the movement for restoration of democracy. "People's sovereignty can be assured only by a constituent assembly (that would write a new constitution for Nepal)," Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal, leader of the biggest communist faction, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, said. "Unless the ground for a constituent assembly elec-

tion is laid, our agitation will continue."

The king's call was, predictably, spurned by the Maoists who today said their decade-old "armed struggle" would continue unless the monarch "unconditionally agreed to a constituent assembly". Dismissing the royal address yesterday as "meaningless and insignificant", rebel chief Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, said it was "an insult to the sea of humanity that was clamouring for a republic and a constituent assembly to reach that stage".

The international com-

munity has, however, welcomed the king's attempt at resolving the impasse. UN secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan said he hoped Opposition political parties would work out the modalities for the transfer of power in a timely, orderly and responsible manner so that lasting peace could be established.

The USA said it was pleased the king had returned sovereignty to people and India said it hoped now Nepal would be able to achieve political stability and economic recovery. The EU and Canada also welcomed King Gyanendra's offer.

High  
10-17-11

# Oppn parties reject Gyanendra's offer

23/11



Lathi-charge on pro-democracy protesters were witnessed across Kathmandu

**Kathmandu:** Not in a mood to give in to King Gyanendra's gambit, the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) spearheading the pro-democracy movement on Saturday rejected his offer to transfer executive powers to the people and vowed to continue with its agitation.

Even as the alliance announced its decision, thousands of protesters converged on Kathmandu's streets demanding an end to monarchy. "We will not not accept the king's proclamation. We will continue with our peaceful agitation," Communist Party of Nepal leader Madhav Kumar Nepal said. "The king's proclamation has failed to address the objective and agenda of the people's movement. It

has devalued people's sentiments."

They opine that the king's decision to retain the power to step in at any time under Article 127 of the constitution indicates that there is no guarantee that the transfer of power is irreversible.

Meanwhile, at least six people were injured on Saturday when Nepalese forces opened fire at tens of thousands of protesters who marched towards the royal palace defying fresh curfew orders.

Demonstrators belonging to SPA were stopped by the army and armed police at various points, triggering pitched street battles, leading to injuries to about six people. Agencies

23 APR 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# উত্তপ্ত কাঠমাড়তে আন্দোলনের রাশ নিচ্ছে মাওবাদীরা

## রাজা চাই না, উত্তাল জনতার মন বুঝে প্রস্তাব ফেরাল সাত দলের জোট

অনিন্দ্য জানা • কাঠমাড়

২২ এপ্রিল: হতে পারে লাগাতার আন্দোলনের মুখে নরম হয়েছেন রাজা। হতে পারে দেশে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র ফিরিয়ে আনার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছেন। কিন্তু কয়েক ঘণ্টার জন্য শিথিল-কার্ফু কাঠমাড়তে তো সেনার ছড়াছড়ি। নারায়ণহিত প্রাসাদের সামনে একশো ফুট অন্তর দু'জন করে সেনা এমপি-১৬ মেশিনগান উঁচিয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে। তার মধ্যে এস এন বা যা বললেন, তাতে গায়ের লোম খাড়া হয়ে যাওয়ার জোগাড়।

এ দিন সকালে প্রাসাদ থেকে টিল ছোড়া দূরত্বে, বলতে গেলে কার্যত রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর নাকের ডগায় দাঁড়িয়েই নেপাল কংগ্রেসের ওই কর্মী চিৎকার করে

বললেন, “গণতন্ত্র কে দেবে? গণতন্ত্র ছিনিয়ে নিতে হয়।”

ঘটনা হল, নেপাল জুড়ে সাধারণ মানুষের মনোভাব এমনই রোমহর্ষক। রাজা বীরেন্দ্রর হত্যার পরে তাঁর ভাই জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর প্রতি ক্ষোভ ফেটে পড়েছিল গোটা দেশ। সেই ক্ষোভের আঁচ ফের পাচ্ছেন নেপাল-রাজ। এ বার আর তাঁকে কোনও রকম ছাড় দিতে জনতা নারাজ। আর সেই ক্ষোভ আন্দাজ করেই আজ সকালে রাজার প্রস্তাব ফিরিয়ে দিয়েছে সাত দলের জোট। চার ঘণ্টার বৈঠকে রাজার প্রস্তাব মতো প্রধানমন্ত্রী বাছাই নিয়ে কোনও কথাই হয়নি। কেউ কেউ নরমপন্থী মনোভাব নিলেও গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরাল, মাধবকুমার নেপাল বা শেরবাহাদুর দেউবার মতো প্রবীণ নেতারা জানিয়ে

দেন, রাজার প্রস্তাবে মাওবাদীদের সম্পর্কে নির্দিষ্ট

করে কিছু বলা নেই। তাদের ১২ দফা দাবি সম্পর্কেও উচ্চবাচ্য করা হয়নি। সুতরাং তাঁদের শান্তিপূর্ণ আন্দোলন জারি থাকবে।

সাত জোটের নেতারা আন্দোলন চালিয়ে যাওয়ার কথা বলছেন বটে, কিন্তু আন্দোলনের রাশ কি আর তাঁদের হাতে আছে? ‘শুট অ্যাট সাইট’ কার্ফু ভেঙে রাস্তায় নামা জনতার সমর্থন মাওবাদীদের প্রতি, এমন সন্দেহ কিন্তু ক্রমেই জোরালো হচ্ছে। সেই সঙ্গে উঁকি দিচ্ছে হিমালয়ের কোলের এই ছোট দেশে অরাজকতা ছড়িয়ে পড়ার আশঙ্কা।

মোবাইল পরিষেবা পুরোপুরি বন্ধ। ল্যান্ড লাইন-ও অনিয়মিত। বিক্ষোভকারীরা যাতে সংগঠিত হতে না পারেন, সে জনাই নাকি এই ব্যবস্থা। অথচ, রাজার প্রস্তাব প্রত্যাখ্যান করে মাধব নেপালের ঘোষণার পরেই রাস্তায় জনতার ঢল। বেলা বারোটা বেজে গিয়েছে। কার্ফু। তো? দু'লক্ষ মানুষের তাতে থোড়াই কেয়ার। আর তাদের সামনে সন্নি ওচানো সেনারাও যেন কেমন থতমত।

অনেক পরে নড়েচড়ে বসল সেনাবাহিনী। রাজপ্রাসাদের দু'কিলোমিটার দূরে ত্রিপুরেশ্বরে গুলি চলল। এক মহিলা-সহ আহত হলেন ১০ জন। লাঠি, কাঁদানে গ্যাস চালানো হল

কোথাও কোথাও। কিন্তু ‘হামরো আন্দোলন জারি ছ, জারি ছ, জারি ছ’ আর ‘বীর শহিদ অমর রহন’ স্লোগান তোলা জনতার বিন্দুমাত্র ক্ষম্প নেই। তাদের দাবি, রাজপ্রাসাদের কাছে রত্না পার্কে সভা করতে দিতে হবে। হোড়াইডির কাছে ফের মিছিলের উপরে গুলি চালায় সেনা। ২০ জন বিক্ষোভকারী জখম হন। তাতেও জনতা ছত্রভঙ্গ হয়নি। পরশু কালাঞ্চিককে নেপাল রয়্যাল বাহিনীর হাতে তিন বিক্ষোভকারীর মৃত্যু হয়েছিল। জনতা সেই কালাঞ্চিকের নাম দিয়েছে ‘লোকতন্ত্র চক’। সেখানে দাঁড়িয়ে বিক্ষোভকারীদের ঘোষণা, ‘রাজা আসলে আমাদের ললিপপ দিয়েছে। আমরা রাজা চাই না। আমাদের সংবিধান আমরা নিজেরাই বানাব। রাজা সংসদের অধিবেশন ডাকুক। তার পর সরে যাক।’



গণতন্ত্রের দাবিদারদের পিটিয়ে দূরত্ব করার চেষ্টা শনিবারও অব্যাহত কাঠমাড়তে। — এ পি

শোনা যাচ্ছে, এই বিক্ষোভকারীদের ৮০ শতাংশই কাঠমাড়র বাইরে থেকে আসা। যার অর্থ, মাওবাদী সমর্থকেরা ঢুকে পড়েছে রাজধানীর আন্দোলনের স্রোতে। কালাঞ্চিককে তো স্লোগান উঠল মাওবাদী নেতা প্রচণ্ডের নামে। এবং সেই ‘বহিরাগত’দের দু'হাত তুলে স্বাগতই জানাচ্ছে নেপালের রাজধানী। মিছিল চলাকালীন দেখলাম, রাস্তার দু'পাশের বাড়ি থেকে জল ঢালা হচ্ছে বিক্ষোভকারীদের উপরে। অকুণ্ঠ সমর্থন জানানোর নাকি এটাই প্রথা এ দেশে।

আর এটাই চিন্তায় রাখছে দিল্লিকে। পাশের দেশে মাওবাদীদের রমরমা বাড়লে মনমোহন সিংহ স্বস্তিতে থাকবেন না। গণতন্ত্রপন্থীদের হাতে ক্ষমতা তুলে দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে রাজাকে রাজি করাতে তাই কর্তৃ সিংহকে

নেপালে পাঠিয়েছিলেন তিনি। সেই চাপে ফলও হয়েছিল। কাল রাজা প্রস্তাব দেওয়ার পাঁচ মিনিটের মধ্যেই তাকে পাগত জানিয়েছিল ভারতের বিদেশ মন্ত্রক। তাই নিয়ে রীতিমতো মুখবামটা খেতে হল এস এন বা'র কাছ থেকে। “ভারত পড়শি, পড়শির মতো থাক। নেপাল কি হিজড়ে দেশ, যে এখানে কিছু হলেই তোমরা নাক গলাবে?”

সাত দলের বৈঠকের সময় ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের প্রতিনিধি দলও সেখানে গিয়ে নেতাদের সঙ্গে দেখা করে প্রস্তাব মেনে নিতে বলে। কিন্তু সেই প্রচেষ্টাও বিফলে গিয়েছে। নেপালি জনগণের সাফ কথা, আমাদের দেশে কী হবে, তা আমরাই ঠিক করব। এবং সেই ব্যবস্থায় রাজার কোনও স্থান নেই। কাঠমাড়র মানুষ বলছেন, ‘আন্দোলন রুখতে চাল চলেছেন রাজা। তিনি এক নায়কই থাকতে চান। রাজা চাইছেন, তাঁর কাছে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দরখাস্ত নিয়ে যাওয়া হোক। কে যাবে? যদি কেউ যায়, তাকে জ্বালিয়ে দেব।’ এই উগ্র মনোভাবের পরে আর জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর প্রস্তাব নিয়ে নরম

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

● অসন্তোষের লাভায় ফটছে নেপালের গাঁ-গঞ্জ...পৃঃ ৫

### আপনার মতে

রাজার প্রস্তাব ফিরিয়ে দিয়ে নেপাল কি সশস্ত্র বিপ্লবের দিকেই এগোচ্ছে?

এসএমএস করুন ৮২৪৩ নম্বরে

হ্যাঁ হলে লিখুন: Apoll a

না হলে লিখুন: Apoll b

উত্তর পাঠান হাচ, এয়ারটেল, টাটা ইভিকম, বিলায়েশ ইন্ডিয়া অথবা বিএসএনএল মোবাইল থেকে।

রাজতন্ত্রকে পুরোপুরি উচ্ছেদ না করে কি শান্ত হবে না নেপাল?

হ্যাঁ ৯১% না ৯%

### রাজা চাই না

প্রথম পাতার পর

হওয়ার সাহস দেখাননি সাত দলের জোটের নেতারা। অবস্থান পাল্টেছে দিল্লিও। বিদেশ সচিব শ্যাম সারন বলেছেন, নেপালে কী ভাবে গণতন্ত্র ফিরবে, সে ব্যাপারে ভারতের কোনও প্রেসক্রিপশন নেই।

নিজেদের পথ নিজেরাই ঠিক করতে রাস্তায় নেমেছে নেপালের মানুষ। সেনাদের যাবতীয় চোখ রাঙানি উপেক্ষা করেই। কাঁদানে গ্যাস, গুলিতে যা হয়নি, তাই হল প্রবল বৃষ্টিতে। মিছিল ভাঙল। তবে রাজপথ থেকে মানুষ সরলেও লাগোয়া অলিগলিতে মাথা বাঁচিয়ে ইতস্তত জটলা। এক দিকে, ক্রমশ জঙ্গি হয়ে ওঠা জনতা। অন্য দিকে, রাজপ্রাসাদ ঘিরে অনবরত ট্যাঙ্ক ও সার্জোয়া গাড়ির টহল। দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে ফের সংঘাতের আশঙ্কা বুকে নিয়ে রাত জাগছে কাঠমাড়।



# People dictate snub to palace

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 22:** The people on the streets of Nepal are making history. They are dictating the mandate of their political leaders and denouncing in their tens of thousands the royal proclamation as "deception".

It was no surprise then that the seven-party alliance of Nepal today rejected King Gyanendra's offer of selecting a new Prime Minister, saying it "did not address the agenda of the parties and the aspirations of the people".

Even while they deliberated on the royal offer at Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala's residence, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. But the people took no

chances. They stood outside to ensure that there was no compromise with the king.

"The *andolan* (movement) will continue," Koirala declared from the roof of his house. "The king's proclamation is meaningless," said Madhav Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist).

The parties' roadmap to peace and democracy contained the reinstatement of Parliament, the formation of an all-party interim government, a dialogue with the Maoists and polls to a constituent assembly.

"For all this, the Royal Nepal Army must come under the control of the interim government," said Navraj Subedi, secretary-general of the Jan Morcha, part of the alliance.

American and EU ambassadors met the political leaders to persuade them to accept the king's offer. But their efforts were in vain.

"Our not forming a government is an admonition to India," said a Nepali Congress leader upset with Delhi's reaction. "Our roadmap should be implemented fully along with the 12-point understanding with the Maoists," said CPN (UML) politburo member Amrit Vohra.

The decision of the parties was a result not only of the inadequacy of the king's offer but also of the people's pressure. They came out on the streets, occasionally clashed with police, and despite the curfew, took control of Thamel, barely a kilometre from the

palace. Only sudden rain saved Kathmandu today.

The international community now seems confused. If the political parties form a parallel government, as they are reportedly deliberating, that would pose a serious challenge to them.

"For a beleaguered king, the only lifeline is the international fear of chaos. Should we allow a parallel government to fill the gap if he is swept aside?" asked a diplomat.

For the king to relent and avoid these imponderables, there is a feeling that the very message must come from the international community. Only then a reasonable solution may emerge. Or else, there might only be extreme solutions left. (See Page 2)

THE TELEGRAPH

# India urged to reassess response

## Parties call for Delhi backing



A policeman runs away from pro-democracy activists during clashes in Kathmandu. (Reuters)

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 22:** The constituents of the seven-party alliance have described India's quick support for King Gyanendra's offer as completely off-tack and want it to make a course-correction.

Although claiming that India seemed ignorant of the peoples' sentiment in Nepal, they have left the door open for New Delhi to reassess the situation and take corrective action.

They want India to come out in favour of the democratic aspirations of the people and not be seen to be supporting the king. India must recalibrate and reassess its response, most political leaders here felt. Just as the peoples' heightened sentiments have forced them to reject the king's offer, they are hoping that Delhi would also not remain oblivious to the sentiment on the streets of Kathmandu.

How much ground India can retrieve at this stage is not very clear. There are people here, however, who claim that with its hasty reaction Delhi seems to have lost the chance to stem anti-India sentiments in Nepal for years to come.

Much as Delhi might argue that there was an element of sincerity in what it did — posing the issue as “compromise with the king vs. chaos” — this does not was with the Nepalese. The Nepali Congress had criticised the Indian reaction last night itself. Today, the other constituents of the seven-party alliance joined them.

“Our friends, without talking to us decided to welcome the king's move. This is not good. India must correct this. India has no monarchy and, therefore, has no experience of this kind of deception. When the people of Nepal are rejecting the king's offer, how can India go against their democratic wishes?” asked K.P. Oli, senior leader of the Nepal

Communist Party (United Marxist Leninist).

Rajendra Mahto of the Nepal Sadbhavna Party (Anandi Devi), which largely represents Nepalese of Indian origin, shared his sentiments.

“India must rethink its position. The king's statement is meant to confuse the international community. Not only India but the international community must examine its pros and cons again and support our democratic movement,” Mahto argued.

Instead of going on the



A woman cries after her son was shot dead by security forces during clashes in Kalanki, Nepal. (AFP)

## ‘This bloody king is a dictator’

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 22:** “We want independence from the king, sir. We don't want this bloody king,” said 21-year old Vikas Jha politely while consigning a tyre to the flames at Basundhara on Chakrapath or Ring Road.

Why did he not want the king? “This bloody King is a dictator sir,” he replied.

A civil engineer assigned

to broaden the Ring Road, he said that now he was using the boulders meant for that to block the road.

Was he a Maoist? “No sir. I am an engineer,” he replied innocently.

Those who had got up in the Nepalese capital this morning thinking that the anger of the people had boiled over were in for a rude awakening. Tens of thousands poured into the streets shouting against the king's “deception”.

The anti-monarchy sentiment on the street was explicit. As the situation got out of hand, curfew was reimposed at mid-day. The protesters burnt tyres, felled trees and blocked roads with boulders and logs. They whistled, danced and sang.

Their slogans were radical. They shouted: “*Shahi Sena kharij kar*” (Get rid of

the Royal Nepal Army), “*Rashtriya sena nirmaan kar*” (Create a national army) and they said to King Gyanendra: “*Natra bhane gaddi chhod*” (Otherwise, leave the throne).

Others demanded the creation of a Constituent Assembly. If the Maoists had not won the battle for Kathmandu, they had certainly won the battle for correct slogans.

Rajendra Sapkota, a student, said: “We don't only want democracy but a democratic republic. *Gantantra. Not Jantantra,*” he said emphasising the difference.

Nirmala Adhikary, a 30-year old housewife, said: “I am going to protest to ensure a better future for my children in a democracy”.

She was angry with King Gyanendra and argued: “What is the use of his being

there if the people are suffering?”

Bhaktaraj Basnet, a 24-year old casino worker, had been hit on the head in a baton-charge yesterday. He was back protesting with a bandage shouting: “Today's programme is to bring in the republic today itself.”

From Gongabu, they marched towards Girija Prasad Koirala's house in Maharajganj. The leaders of the seven-party alliance were meeting there. They did not want them to compromise.

Those who reached the house shouted: “*Durabar bhitra chor hi chor, chor hi chor. Gyane chor, desh chhod*” (The palace is full of thieves. Gyanendra thief, leave the country). They kept up a din till Koirala appeared on the roof to declare: “The movement will continue. Now go and demonstrate peacefully.”

23 APR 22



Police break up a demonstration near the palace in Kathmandu on Saturday.

## NEPAL AT THE CROSSROADS

# Maoists keen on return to mainstream

**ALOKE Banerjee**  
Kolkata, April 22

# ROYAL SNUB

SPA will settle for nothing less than full democracy

**ANIRBAN Roy**  
Kathmandu, April 22

THE SEVEN-PARTY Alliance (SPA) on Saturday rejected the Nepal King's offer of handing over power to the people. The SPA rejected the king's offer saying it failed to address key issues and vowed to continue the nation-wide strike.

"The King has ignored the aspirations of the people," Madhav Kumar Nepal, Communist Party of Nepal (UML) general secretary said after a meeting with other SPA partners at former PM GP Koirala's residence.

The veteran leader, released from jail on Wednesday, urged the Nepali people to up the ante against the monarch.

"Our movement will continue till complete sovereignty of people is restored and the foundation for Constituent Assembly elections is ensured," Nepal said as more than two lakh people defied the curfew and marched on the streets of Kathmandu on Saturday.

Police fired rubber bullets at Tripureswore, Dilli Bazar, Koteswore and Chabahil areas to disrupt a large crowd which was trying to move to downtown Ratna Park to pay tributes to the 15 people killed at pro-democracy rallies.

More than a dozen protesters were seriously injured while thousands crossed Bagmati Bridge and reached Thapathali from Patan to head towards Singha Durbar, the seat of power.

Doctors at Kathmandu Model Hospital said over 100 injured protesters were brought to the hospital; the condition of more than 20 injured was serious.

Security throughout the city was intensified. Royal Nepal Army personnel put up pickets in different parts of Kathmandu. Tanks and armoured vehicles were placed at strategic locations to thwart attempts to storm Narayanhity Palace. Curfew was re-imposed in Kathmandu and Lalitpur from 12 noon to 8 pm. The royal government at 3.45 pm on Saturday snapped all the 5.5 million mobile connections in the country.

Demonstrators from Kalanki merged with the rally and went through Samakhushi, Thamel, Thahiti, Ason and Bhotahity. There was a strong reaction when the government denied to hand over the body of Basu Ghimire (killed while demonstrating at Kalanki on Thursday) to his family and cremated it forcibly at Pashupati Aryaghat crematorium.

See Big Story on Page 10

MAOISTS IN Nepal will shun violence and enter the political mainstream. This is what the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) chairman Prachanda and second-in-command Baburam Bhattarai told CPI(M) leaders in Delhi last week.

The two leaders met CPI(M) leaders Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury to voice their support to the struggle for democracy in Nepal. Prachanda and Bhattarai's arrival in India was kept a secret. The two leaders, against whom Interpol has issued "red corner" notices, didn't meet Maoists in India.

Yechury on Saturday said that during talks, the two Maoist leaders felt that political power can no longer be usurped through violent means. "They told us that they decided to shun violence. The participation of Nepali Maoists in the political mainstream will make it difficult for Indian Maoists to stay away from the democratic process in India," Yechury said.

Yechury urged the Indian government not to fall prey to "manoeuvring" by the Nepal monarch to keep Maoists out of the political process. He also criticised the BJP's opposition to Nepal Maoists' being included in the political process.

"Maoists in Nepal have a very strong influence and their inclusion in the democratic process will have an impact on India Maoists. It will be difficult for Indian Maoists to stay away from the mainstream," Yechury said as the Indo-Nepal Solidarity Committee convenor. "The integration of Maoists in Nepal will have a salutary effect in India."

23 APR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



Chronicling the battle that nature's most efficient scavenger lost in the indifferent corridors of power  
PAGE 14

Children who watch violence on TV are likely to end up having fewer friends. Those who watch in groups adopt other means of socialising too  
PAGE 16



A reluctant King Gyanendra finally steps back. The challenge now before the Seven-Party Alliance, writes **Yubaraj Ghimire**, is to fit in both the monarchy and the Maoists in a prescription for Nepal's shared future

Opposition party supporters demonstrate against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu last week

**SUBJECT TO PEOPLE POWER**

**2005**

- Feb. 1:** King Gyanendra sacks PM Sher Bahadur Deuba, declares a state of emergency and takes power
- Feb 22:** India, Britain stop military aid to Nepal. India later resumes non-lethal military supplies.
- April 30:** The king calls off emergency but retains his extraordinary powers
- Sept 1:** Nepali Congress drops a 60-year-old written pledge to uphold constitutional monarchy
- Sept 3:** Government rejects rebels offer of a three-month ceasefire
- Nov 22:** The seven main political parties and Maoists pledge to cooperate to end the absolute powers of the king
- Dec 2:** Rebels extend truce by one month; government rules out any matching gesture

**2006**

- Jan 2:** Rebels end ceasefire
- Feb 1:** Street protests erupt across Nepal on the first anniversary of King Gyanendra's power seizure
- Feb 8:** Low turnout and protests mark local elections
- Feb. 19:** The opposition rejects the King's offer to join talks
- March 14:** The Maoists begin a road blockade that chokes supplies
- April 4:** The government indefinitely bans protests in Kathmandu
- April 9:** The strike, originally called for four days, is extended indefinitely
- April 16:** The king holds talks with the US, Chinese and Indian ambassadors
- April 19:** Two protesters are killed, taking the death toll from two weeks of demonstrations to at least eight

**K**ING Gyanendra's pontificating quotes have marked the skylines on the hoarding across the Capital at the Government's expense. But the monarch's action does not match his words at all. What comes through is a 21st century king with a medieval mindset, desperate to prove that any popular aspiration of his 'subjects' can be suppressed.

It took years and loss of several human lives for the king to realise that he was losing control. As crowds of hundreds of thousands across the country were marching ahead to 'abolish the monarchy', the king relented, and tried to present a brave front. "The Shah dynasty has always ruled in accordance with the wishes of the people," he said in a televised address to the nation on the evening of April 21.

While his sincerity remains disputable, he brought to an end the direct control that he assumed on February 1, 2005. The king, however, made it clear that he was handing back the power to the people reluctantly.

Dr Karan Singh had a lunch meeting with the king on April 20 as a special envoy to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The message was clear. India was willing to put all the eggs in the basket of the pro-democracy forces if the king refused to hand over power to them. Day after, the king felt secured once he sensed that India, and the western democracies, would continue to extend due respect

to the constitutional monarchy. He softened and invited the seven parties to decide who the Prime minister would be.

The country was still burning with fury. The brutality of the security forces against the pro-democracy protestors, which had taken eight lives besides impairing many, was fresh in their memory. And the pro-democracy movement was also gradually taking a pro-republic dimension aiming to end the 237-year old institution. King Gyanendra's 'bold retreat' — as an army General put it — has given him some lease of life, but how long will depend on how sincerely the king will behave in giving democracy a chance.

**C**OMING after the Palace assassination, Gyanendra's ascent to the throne on June 4, 2001 did not begin on a happy note. "I would not be a silent spectator like my brother," he began to assert himself during early interactions with politicians, bureaucrats, security officials and the media. He had no qualms in displaying utter contempt for the politicians, using people's antipathy towards them as the rope to absolute power.

Despite making his ambition known right at the beginning, he moved systematically in realising it. Exploiting internal feuds among the political parties was the first visible method he chose.

He deftly handled the international community in this exercise. He



**ON THE BOIL:** Protestors outside the royal palace in Kathmandu

made it clear that he would need their support to 'defeat terrorists' (read Maoists). "Terrorism is terrorism. There is nothing called good terrorism or bad terrorism," he said at the SAARC summit in Dhaka in November, accusing some countries of adopting dual standards towards terrorism. He was desperately trying to secure the regional body's recognition to his regime.

The sense of urgency, at least from his point of view was understandable. No country other than China and Pakistan were supporting him after he became an authoritarian ruler on February 1, 2005.

The king would be fascinated by

crowds. State would organise crowds wherever he went. But he has a different explanation for that. "By visiting different parts of the country, we made honest endeavours to acquaint ourselves with the hopes and aspirations of our people, mitigate their hardships and boost their morale," he said in his April 21 address.

But hardly anyone was impressed. His tours have been expensive. Expenses for his domestic trips were largely diverted from local development budgets, while that abroad were clearly at the cost of state exchequer. His three-week trip to South Africa and West Asia in November cost the country around 300 million Nepali rupees.

Along with the appropriation of the executive powers, the Cabinet headed by the king has enhanced the budget for the palace. The King imported the first 6-door limousine, besides fleets of car including BMWs and a Rolls-Royce. In fact, his regime made a mockery of his own pledge during the takeover that he wanted direct rule for three years to end terrorism, to promote transparency in the governance and fiscal discipline.

Under his rule, inflation rate touched double digits and economists predicted an economic collapse. "That's our worst fear. Once a country collapses economically, its recovery becomes very difficult," Indian foreign secretary Shyam Sharan, who visited Nepal with Dr Karan Singh, said.

On April 6, the Seven-Party Alliance decided to begin its 'decisive movement' against the king. "I want the end of absolute rule, peace, full-fledged democracy and an independent, prosperous and sovereign Nepal," said G P Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress and the seniormost leader of the alliance. "We want continuity of history as we can not survive without it. But it is for king to decide, if he wants full power, he will have none," he said.

**I**N FACT, the king's open contempt for the parties and his ambition to rule the country purely with the support of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA), pushed the pro-democracy parties to

work together with the Maoists towards a 12-point goal. Maoists were looking for a safe-landing and would have no problem working with the alliance if they would go against the absolute monarchy. In fact, India is supposed to have facilitated such an initiative hoping that if Nepal's Maoists join political mainstream, it would also inspire the Indian Maoists.

But what the king offered to the parties — a fully empowered government accountable to the constitution — is not what the Maoists would advise the alliance to accept. With the alliance's refusal to work with the Maoists as long as they would be in possession of arms, the Maoists are under pressure to declare an unilateral ceasefire to explore a more durable peace alternative.

With the king's declaration, India, US and UK governments are also likely to resume military assistance they had stopped after February 1, 2005. But fight against Maoists would go against the alliance's determination to seek a solution of the conflict that has already seen 13,000 lives lost in the past ten years.

The King's retreat is a necessary condition for democracy's success in Nepal. But Maoists' support is vital for peace and prosperity. The alliance's government, in all probability led by G P Koirala, will soon face its toughest challenge in adjusting the king and the Maoists as part of the same package deal.

# Giving it a shot

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA

**W**HY Karan Singh? That was the question doing the rounds this past week when the senior Congress leader was chosen as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to meet Nepal King Gyanendra.

The immediate answer was the royal connection. Singh is said to be distantly related to the Nepal royal family. And that did matter, given that the BJP's Jaswant Singh had approached

the government last weekend for a briefing, claiming he had been invited to visit Nepal by Gyanendra.

But beyond that, somewhere down the line, amid the deteriorating situation in Nepal, New Delhi decided that it needed to reach out to the King and deliver the bad news that the time had come for him to relinquish executive powers. There was a roadmap in the prescription, one that wanted the Seven-Party Alliance to form a govern-

ment, which could then talk truce with the Maoist rebels and set the stage for elections. The hope in India was that the message, borne by the Kashmir Maharaja, would sink in better. After all, Gyanendra does take royalty seriously.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* after his return, Singh said he was very encouraged after meeting the King but kept his "fingers crossed" for the kind of announcement the monarch would make. "Let us hope for

the best, we did our bit," is what he said minutes before Gyanendra went live on TV on Friday to announce the transfer of power to the people.

A day earlier at Gyanendra's palace, the two had spent over an hour together. "It was a one-on-one. Everywhere else (Foreign Secretary) Shyam Saran was with me but when I went to meet the King, it was just he and I," he said. "I gave him the Prime Minister's message and discussed with him the situation in Nepal. He was positive...he did realise that something needed to be done because the situation was getting worse."

But was the King serious about democracy at all? "Yes, he wants democracy to be re-



**TELLING IT WITH A SMILE:** Singh with the King last week

stored. But then there is the problem of the Maoists...it is a serious problem. I can't reveal all that happened, but I left with hope," said Singh.

The King apparently was calm and composed throughout the meeting. "He was willing to talk. I had a very good meeting and told him that democracy needed to be restored." Outside the palace, however, Singh admitted the situation was bad with thousands milling about in protest.

In the end, did he fulfil his brief and did the royal connection work? Singh says he played his role, though he his lack of familiarity with Gyanendra, having only him once before. But, he says, "I just gave it a shot."



# Nepal King agrees to cede power, asks alliance to name premier

It's not enough, says Opposition and vows to continue protests

**KATHMANDU:** Yielding to mass protests, Nepal's King Gyanendra on Friday announced he would hand over the political power he had assumed 14 months ago back to the people and asked the seven-party alliance to name a new Prime Minister. However, the alliance rejected the offer as inadequate.

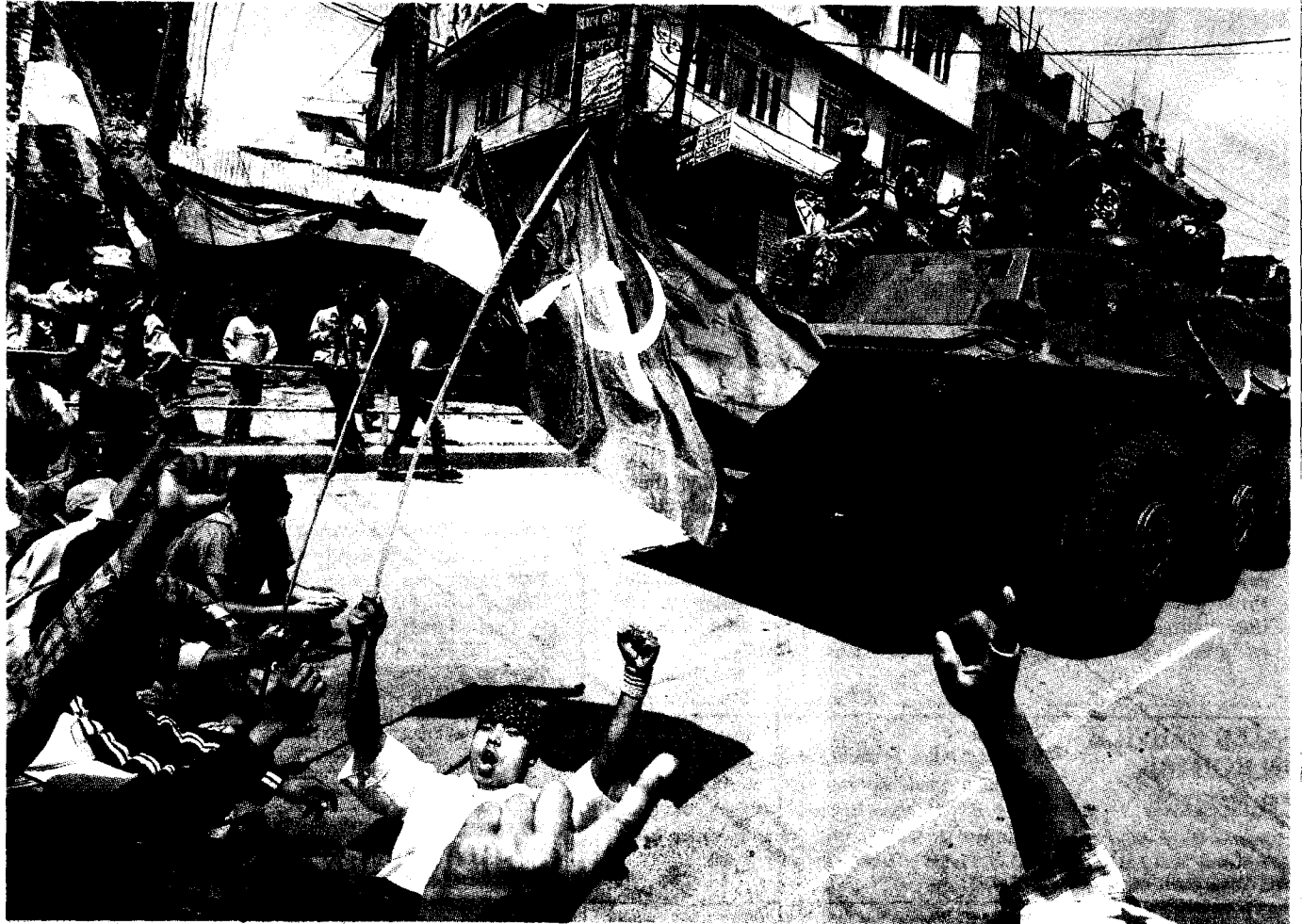
"Executive power shall from this day be returned to the people," the beleaguered King said as tens of thousands of pro-democracy activists virtually laid a siege of the capital for the second day defying curfew and shoot-at-sight orders.

The announcement by a grim-faced monarch, in a 10-minute address to the nation on State-run Nepal Television, came a day after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's special envoy Karan Singh told him to restore multi-party democracy and hold a dialogue with political parties.

It remains unclear how the transition will take place but the 58-year-old King asked the alliance, spearheading the agitation against him, to recommend at the earliest a name for an interim Prime Minister till the election process is over. Till the new Cabinet is constituted, the present Council of Ministers would continue, said the monarch, who had seized executive power after dislodging the elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba on February one last year. The King said he was returning executive power to the people according to Article 35 of the Constitution.

The King, who gave no dates for holding elections, said that he was committed to multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy and expressed the hope that peace and order would be restored in the country.

The monarch's announcement came after over two weeks of bitter protests by pro-democracy activists who demanded an end to his rule and restoration of total democracy in the Hima-



**RELENTLESS FIGHT:** Pro-democracy activists stage a protest in front of an armoured military vehicle in Kathmandu on Friday. — PHOTOS/REUTERS

layan kingdom.

The alliance launched a nationwide general strike on April 6. Security forces cracked down on protesters leaving over a dozen of them dead and hundreds wounded.

When the King sacked the Deuba government last year, he had blamed politicians for failing to hold elections and tackle the Maoist insurgency which has left 12,500 people dead in a decade in Nepal.

**'Defeat not complete'**

Opposition parties dismissed the offer as not enough and vowed to carry on protests. "The King has been defeated but the defeat is not complete," said the spokesman for the Nepali Congress-Democratic. "The message is not sufficient," said Minendra Rijal who speaks for one of the parties in the alliance.

"He says he is giving power to the people but the statement is influenced by his own agenda focusing on general elections. He has given hints that he is bending but actually he is not," Mr.

Rijal said.

He said "anything less" than the elections to a constituent assembly was "now unacceptable". "To make sure that the autocracy is completely defeated the movement will go on," he vowed.

For the Nepali Congress, the biggest party in the kingdom, the King's address was "inadequate and ambiguous," said deputy general secretary Ram Sharan Mahat. He also said the King was "sticking to his own roadmap of holding elections." "We will decide about it after the meeting of

the alliance on Saturday," Mr. Mahat said.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) also agreed. "The King has not touched the issues raised by the alliance," said spokesman Pradeep Nepal. "Much will depend on Saturday's meeting of the seven-party alliance," he added. — PTI, AFP

More reports on Op-Ed Page and Pages 12 & 15

Himalayan  
87, P. P. P.

H0-1

22/9

10

# King must leave country: protesters

27/21  
119-15  
for report

## Agitation, crackdown continue

**KATHMANDU:** Even as Nepal's King vowed on Friday to bring multi-party democracy back to his Himalayan nation, demonstrations broke out quickly in a few Kathmandu neighbourhoods after the speech, with some marchers chanting "Hail democracy! Gyandendra leave the country!"

Demonstrators said they were pleased with the King's announcement — but remained unsure if he had promised enough, or could be trusted to keep his word.

"We have won the battle, but we still must win the war," said Grihendra Shrestha, one of hundreds of marchers.

Hours earlier, more than 100,000 pro-democracy protesters defied a government curfew and filled the streets on the outskirts of Kathmandu and the U.S. Ambassador warned that the King's regime could be nearing collapse.

Three separate groups of marchers converged on an area on the western edge of Kathmandu called Kalanki, where police shot three demonstrators dead on Thursday and wounded dozens more.

An Associated Press reporter at the scene estimated the crowd at more than 100,000; independ-

ent Kantipur television said there were about 150,000.

They faced off against security forces that have ringed the city issued with shoot-on-sight orders against anyone who tried to enter the curfew zone.

As the tension grew, so did the international pressure on Gyandendra.

### Blunt warning

U.S. Ambassador James Moriarty bluntly warned that the King could be forced from power within days unless he made major concessions to those who want him to relinquish absolute power.

"His time is running out," Mr. Moriarty said in an interview with several reporters hours before the King's speech.

"Ultimately the King will have to leave if he doesn't compromise. And by 'ultimately' I mean sooner rather than later."

But despite the talk of compromise, the crackdown continued.

Two senior Opposition leaders involved in negotiations with Maoist rebels were arrested on Friday as they tried to return to Kathmandu, said Amrit Bohara of the Communist Party of Nepal. —AP

22 APR 2006

THE HINDU

# Nepal king abdicates power

## Asks 7-Party Alliance To Form Govt in Run-Up To Polls

TNN & AGENCIES

**Kathmandu:** After a turbulent 14-month period marked by rising discontent and Maoists violence, Nepal King Gyanendra on Friday announced that he was shedding power and has asked the seven-party alliance to name a new prime minister.

In a televised address to the nation, the beleaguered monarch said power was being returned to the people and he would like elections to be held as soon as possible.

However, it remained unclear how the transition will take place but the 58-year-old king asked the seven-party alliance, spearheading the agitation against him, to recommend at the earliest a name for an interim prime minister till the election process is over.

Till such time, the new cabinet is constituted, the present council of ministers would continue to function, said the monarch, who had seized the executive power after dislodging the elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba on February 1, 2005.

Gyanendra's decision seems to have been precipitated by various reasons. These included the 100,000-strong gathering outside Kathmandu, several high-level parleys between Indian envoy and former foreign minister Karan Singh with the king and a rather blunt message from the US, which

strongly advocated a "more ceremonial role for the king in the political process".

In fact, the Bush administration is learnt to have warned the monarch to either end the political crisis or lose kingdom. "It is time for the king to return political power to the parties so they can appoint a prime minister and take over governance. It's time the king adopts a more ceremonial role and allows the political process go forward," assistant secretary of state for south and central Asia Richard Boucher told reporters at a roundtable at the state department.

"We are in touch with other governments on Nepal, particularly the government of India and we are making all our efforts to try to ensure a peaceful restoration of democracy," he had said a day earlier on Thursday.

While promising all help to the Nepalese political parties, including training and organising for an effective governance, Boucher also urged the Maoists "to adopt a real ceasefire, to end their violence and participate solely in the political process."

Earlier on Friday, US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty called for the king to hand over power, warning that Gyanendra "will lose his kingdom" if he doesn't quickly end political crisis.

"His time is running out," Moriarty said in an interview with

reporters, adding, "Ultimately the king will have to leave if he doesn't compromise. And by 'ultimately' I mean sooner rather than later."

Moriarty's comments came as a massive crowd of protesters—reported to number around 100,000, rallied on the outskirts of capital Kathmandu after defying a government curfew a day after security forces opened fire on demonstrators in a deadly display of force.

Three separate groups of marchers—each numbering in thousands—converged on an area on the western edge of Kathmandu called Kalanki, where police shot three dead on Thursday and wounded dozens more.

At Kalanki, protesters claimed the area with a message scrawled in large red and white letters on the pavement, "Martyrs' square, long live the martyrs." They waved the flags of opposition political parties and chanted, "Long live democracy! The blood of the martyrs will not go to waste!"

Friday also saw the special Indian envoy Karan Singh and senior BJP leader Jaswant Singh meeting the Prime Minister. While Karan Singh briefed the PM on his visit to the Himalayan country a day earlier, Jaswant Singh said the Nepal issue should be resolved in favour of democratic forces after talks with King Gyanendra.



Such scenes of pro-democracy protesters defying government orders in their face were seen across Nepal

KING ASKS ALLIANCE TO NAME PM

# Power back to people

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 21: Shouts of joy, catcalls and thunderous slogans rang out in the streets of Kathmandu in the evening as joyous Nepalese began pouring out defying the extension of curfew till midnight, minutes after King Gyanendra addressed the nation on the state media, announcing he was "returning power to the people".

He asked the seven-party opposition alliance, the David that had brought this Goliath down, to send him the name of their consensus candidate for the post of Prime Minister, vacant since October 2002 when he sacked Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba. Till the parties agree on a candidate, the King said the present Cabinet chaired by him would continue governing the country.

Though there was mounting expectation since India's special envoy to Nepal Dr Karan Singh's meeting with the King yes-

terday followed by another one this morning between the King and Indian ambassador to Nepal Mr Shiv Shankar Mukherjee that the current - and hated - Cabinet would be dissolved, the wily King bypassed that as well as the parties' demand for the restoration of parliament dissolved in 2002.

"This is a ploy to block our efforts for a new constitution," said Mr Prakash Man Singh, former minister and son of a legendary national hero, Ganesh Man Singh, who had been one of the leaders of the earlier mass movement in 1990 that had clipped the wings of the present King's brother, Birendra.

In his brief address, the unsmiling King, who faltered once, stuck to his guns that he had assumed absolute power to save the nation from the Maoists and corruption. He also insisted that the people were with him in his effort to "wipe their tears" and tacitly blamed the parties for not obeying his bid to

begin a dialogue with him. For the first time in his 16-month totalitarian rule, Gyanendra, without naming the Maoist insurgents, included them in his brief message lasting less than 10 minutes. He said those who had left the constitutional way should be brought back to the mainstream for peace and development of the country. The King insisted that elections were the way to choose people's representatives.

As the seven opposition parties began a hurried consultation to chalk out their response to the offer, there was a sense of *deja vu*. The same situation had occurred again and again and yet again since 2002 when he asked the parties to name a PM, then ignored them and appointed three candidates of his own choice in a row.

"As long as the King remains and the army remains under him, we can't expect any election to be fair, be it for parliament or constituent assembly," said an opposition leader.



# NEPAL King asks seven-party alliance to name PM, does not mention constitution change; campaign to continue

# King gives in but parties say not enough

**GOPAL SHARMA**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 21

**N**EPAL'S King Gyanendra, facing sweeping anti-monarchy protests, said on Friday that he was handing over political power to the people and asked the seven-party alliance to choose a new prime minister.

But the king appeared to rule out any change of the constitution to curb his powers, which has been one of the parties that have spearheaded more than two weeks of violent protests to force the restoration of democracy.

The Nepali Congress, the country's largest political party, said the offer was not enough and that protests against him would continue.

"The king has not clearly addressed the road map of the protest movement," said Krishna Prasad Sitaula, a party

ministers, which will bear the responsibility of governing the country in accordance with the constitution."

Looking serious and dressed in a Nepali cap and black jacket, Gyanendra said he was making the move "in keeping with the tradition of the Shah dynasty to reign in accordance with the popular will, in the greater interest of the nation and the people, and our unflinching commitment toward constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy."

The reactions of local residents were mixed.

"The king has given all he can," said Bobby Singh, a pilot with Royal Nepal Airlines. "Now the ball is in the seven-party alliance's court."

Prominent women's rights activist Prabha Thakar said: "It's the best news in a while."



**The address to the nation**

spokesman. "Our protest campaign will continue."

"Executive power of the kingdom of Nepal, which was in our safekeeping, shall from this day be returned to the people," the king said in an address to the nation.

"We ask the seven-party alliance to recommend the name for the post of prime minister at the earliest for the constitution of a council of



**Kathmandu residents adding their bit to the campaign on Friday. AP photo**

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

# King gives, but not enough

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

Kathmandu, April 21: A hesitant, nervous but unapologetic King Gyanendra today made an overture to restore democracy in Nepal by inviting the seven-party alliance for democracy to select a Prime Minister.

He said that sovereignty, which was in his "safe-keeping", was now being returned to the people. The king claimed he was returning executive power to the political parties.

The seven-party alliance, scheduled to meet tomorrow to discuss the offer, may not be able to accept it easily.

While India has welcomed the offer, informally the Nepalese political parties are describing it as a "betrayal."

Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee met the king for more than an hour this morning but did not take the parties into confidence about what transpired in the talks. India's controversial role in what was being described by some as "a dirty quick-stitch solution" may come in for questioning by the agitators.

The king's offer, after two weeks of mass protests and shooting of several agitators, may turn out to be too little too late. It may not be able to curb the movement against the monarchy.

"There is no room to be optimistic about the king's proclamation," Sher Bahadur Deuba, president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic), said.

About 200,000 people were agitating in the city centre defying the curfew, extended till midnight, even as the king made his offer.

WILL FIRE OF DEMOCRACY CONTINUE TO BURN IN NEPAL?



A pro-democracy protester shouts slogans in Kathmandu on Friday. Thousands of protesters burned tyres and threw logs and barbed wire in the streets as curfew came into force. (AFP)

In his 10-minute televised address, the king said he remained committed to multi-party democracy but insisted on a role for himself claiming that the Shah dynasty believed in "constitutional monarchy".

The monarch was unapologetic about his snatching of power. He, in fact, justified all his actions since October 2002

had not been successful in achieving the goals he had set for himself.

The king left out several major issues agitating the people. He said nothing about restoring Parliament — a key demand of the political parties; made no promise that the transfer of power was irreversible; gave no indication of

who would deal with the Maoists and how; and said nothing about who would control the Royal Nepal Army.

The political parties went into a late-night huddle to discuss the address. Their initial reaction was that there was nothing new in the proposal — he had appointed Prime Ministers over the last four years

under the same provision of the Constitution (Article 35), which he was invoking now.

"This is meant to divide the political parties. He has offered executive power to the political parties but wants to keep state power for himself," said Shekhar Koirala of the Nepali Congress.

"How can the leaders of

the seven parties choose a Prime Minister? This is a job best done by Parliament," Koirala said.

Diplomatic pressure was being put on the parties to act favourably. The US and Chinese ambassadors met Nepali Congress president Girirja Prasad Koirala.

■ See Page 8



## Ire at India

India quickly put its stamp of approval on the offer by King Gyanendra (picture above), inviting censure from political parties who are unhappy with the monarch's proposals.

New Delhi said the king's action "should now pave the way for the restoration of political stability".

An activist associated with the Nepali Congress said: "The people will not like this as India will be seen as not sharing their aspirations."

"It is sad that the largest democracy in the world has raised its voice to save the monarchy," said a dejected bureaucrat.

Many in the Nepalese capital believe India will end up looking "very foolish" if the seven-party alliance for democracy alliance rejects the king's offer, a likely possibility.

# NEPAL KING GIVES IN TO... PEOPLE POWER



REUTERS

## Too little, too late, says Nepali Cong

**ANIRBAN Roy**  
Kathmandu, April 21

IN WHAT future generations of his countrymen may see as only a reluctant concession to the forces of history, King Gyanendra of Nepal on Friday succumbed to the pro-democracy movement and promised to hand over power to the people.

In a televised address to the nation, the 58-year-old monarch said he would hand over executive powers to the people under Article 35 of the Constitution of Nepal of 1990 and invited the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) to name a consensus Prime Minister to head a caretaker government.

Reiterating his commitment to the principle of multi-party democracy, the King said he hoped Lord Pashupati would now bless the people of Nepal and ring in an era of peace and tranquillity.

The government under his chairmanship would stay in office only until a new government with an SPA-recommended Prime Minister was ready to take over, the King said.

SPA leaders said they would react to the King's message only after the coordination committee's meeting on Saturday. Joint general secretary of the Nepali Congress, Ram Sharan Mahat, told *Hindustan Times* after the King's speech that it was too early to react. "Representatives of all the seven political parties will meet on Saturday and take a collective decision," he said.

Veteran politician and member of the Communist Party of Nepal's politburo Pradip Nepal said they would not comment before consulting other political parties.

But Sekhar Koirala, member of the Nepali Congress's central working committee, and



On Friday, protesters continued to defy curfew in Kathmandu (top). Gyanendra (above) later promised to surrender to their wishes.

Amrit Kumar Vohra, officiating general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal, said the King had failed to address the main political issues. Both said their pro-democracy movement would continue as the King had failed to announce election to a constituent assembly.

The King had wrested absolute executive powers on February 1 last year after dismissing the Sher Bahadur Thapa government.

The parties, under mounting pressure over the last two weeks to press ahead with their movement, have lately been hijacked by young protesters who won't settle for anything short of "total democracy" and "ceremonial monarchy".

With Gyanendra omitting to address the Maoist rebels' demands, the parties, who have a 12-point agreement with the insurgents for restoration of democracy in Nepal, are still not convinced they know the King's future plans.

Earlier, the SPA had rejected Gyanendra's offer on April 14 (Nepali New Year) to hold parliamentary elections.

Continued on Page 13

## NEWSANALYSIS Is this the end of Shah dynasty?

**NILOVA Roy Chaudhury**  
New Delhi, April 21

IS FRIDAY'S announcement the beginning of the end for the Shah dynasty of Nepal? Analysts said the monarch, Gyanendra, had "offered too little, too late," and the popular agitation against him would continue until he was forced to relinquish the throne.

While India welcomed the announcement by Gyanendra, offering to hand over power to the seven-party alliance, analysts and opposition parties discounted the offer as a "hoax" and a "ploy" to "buy time."

There was initially a sense of relief in New Delhi, of India having been "vindicated" by the announcement, which met the terms India had laid out. The euphoria appeared to dissipate as analysts and opposition parties in Nepal said it fell far short of their demands. The King had reverted to the situation that prevailed before he assumed absolute power on February 1, 2005, and that was not adequate to meet the tide of popular unrest.

"He has again played politics and tried to confuse the issue with pure rhetoric," said S.D. Muni, professor and long-time Nepal watcher. "Nowhere has he mentioned that he has revoked Article 127 of the 1990 Constitution, nor has he chalked out a road map, with elections to Parliament or a Constituent Assembly," he said.

প্রহসন বলে প্রত্যাখ্যান দলগুলির

# জনতার হাতে ক্ষমতা দিতে তৈরি নেপালরাজ

অনিন্দ্য জানা • কাঠমান্ডু

২১ এপ্রিল: পিছু হটলেন নেপালের রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র বীরবিক্রম শাহ দেব।

জনতার দেশ জনতাকেই ফিরিয়ে দেওয়ার কথা বললেন তিনি।

বিরোধী সাত দলের জেটকে বললেন, দ্রুত তারা তাদের পছন্দসই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নাম জানাক।

বললেন, নির্বাচনী ব্যবস্থার মাধ্যমে তিনি দেশে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র ফিরিয়ে আনতে চান।

অতএব, দীর্ঘ ১৬ দিন ধরে চলা অচলাবস্থার অবসানের পথে পা বাড়াল নেপাল।

এবং আপাতত জয় হল জনতার।

বিরোধী সাত দলের জেট অবশ্য রাজার আহ্বান প্রত্যাখ্যান করে দিয়েছে। রাতে তারা জানিয়েছে, রাজার উচিত ছিল সরাসরি সাংবিধানিক পরিষদ (কনস্টিটিউয়েন্ট অ্যাসেম্বলি) তৈরির কথা ঘোষণা করে দেওয়া এবং তার আগে পার্লামেন্ট পুনর্গঠন করা। নেপালি কংগ্রেসের নেতা শেখর কৈরাল্লা সংবাদসংস্থাকে বলেছেন, “রাজা জনতার আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষার সঙ্গে বিশ্বাসঘাতকতা করেছেন।” তাঁর কথায়, পার্লামেন্ট পুনর্গঠনই তাঁদের লক্ষ্য ছিল। ওই দলেরই নেতা গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরাল্লা সংবাদসংস্থাকে বলেছেন, মাওবাদীদেরও আলোচনা ডাকা উচিত ছিল। নেপাল কমিউনিস্ট পার্টিও রাজার আহ্বান উড়িয়ে দিয়েছে বলে খবর।

রাজার ঘোষণার পরে পরে কিন্তু সাত দলের জেট প্রাথমিক ভাবে ঠিক করেছিল, আগামী কালই তারা সর্বসম্মত ভাবে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নাম ঠিক করার জন্য বৈঠকে বসবে। কিন্তু রাত বাড়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে নেতাদের বিবৃতি যত চড়া হয়েছে, কালকের প্রস্তাবিত বৈঠক ঘিরে সংশয় তত তীব্র হয়েছে। জেটের দুই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অংশীদার নেপালি কংগ্রেস এবং নেপাল কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির অসন্তোষই এই সংশয় বাড়ার কারণ। আন্দোলন এখনই থামবে না বলে রাজনৈতিক নেতারা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। জনতার হাতে ক্ষমতা দেওয়ার কথা বললেও নেপালরাজের ঘোষণায় যে আত্মসম্মতির হয়ে গিয়েছে, তাকে ‘চ্যালেঞ্জ’ ছোড়ার জন্য এই সময়টাকেই বেছে নিতে চাইছে দলগুলি। সাংবিধানিক পরিষদ গড়া মানে যে আদতে রাজাহীন সরকার গঠনের পথে যাওয়া, সেই কথাটাই তুলে ধরে আন্দোলন চালিয়ে যাওয়ার কথা ভাবছে তারা।

এ সবে পশাপাশি মাওবাদীদের কোনও স্পষ্ট প্রতিক্রিয়া জানা যায়নি। ফলে, আগামী কালের আগে বলা যাচ্ছে না, কার্যক্ষেত্রে নেপালের পরিস্থিতি কী চেহারা নিতে চলেছে।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় জাতীয় টেলিভিশনে মিনিট দশেকের সংক্ষিপ্ত বক্তৃতায় রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র যা বললেন, “সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্র এবং বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্রের উপরে আমি সম্পূর্ণ আস্থাশীল। আমি হিংসা চাই না। শান্তি চাই। সাংবিধানিক ৩৫ নম্বর অনুচ্ছেদ অনুযায়ী নেপাল জনতার দেশ। জনতার সেই দেশ আমি জনতাকেই ফিরিয়ে দিতে চাই। জনতা যা চায়, তা-ই হবে। সাতটি বিরোধী দলের জেটকে বলছি, দ্রুত আপনাদের পছন্দসই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নাম আমায় জানান। তত দিন পর্যন্ত বর্তমান মন্ত্রী

চায়, তা কালও রাজাকে বলে গিয়েছিলেন ভারতের বিশেষ দূত কর্ণ সিংহ। আজ দুপুরেও রাজার সঙ্গে প্রায় এক ঘণ্টার বৈঠকে সেই কথারই পুনরাবৃত্তি করেন নেপালে নিযুক্ত ভারতীয় রাষ্ট্রদূত শিবশঙ্কর মুখোপাধ্যায়। প্রসঙ্গত, গত কাল এবং আজ কর্ণ সিংহ বলেইছিলেন, রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র খুব দ্রুত ‘এক জরুরি ঘোষণা’ করবেন। ভারতীয় দূতের কথা রেখেই রাজা জাতিকে জানিয়ে দিলেন, তিনি নেপালে গণতন্ত্র ফেরাতে চান।

এই ঘোষণা না-করে সম্ভবত



বিপ্লবের আগুনের মধ্যেই গণতন্ত্র ফেরার ইঙ্গিত নেপালে।—রয়টার্স

পরিষদই ক্ষমতায় থাকবে।”

আপাতত কূটনৈতিক জয় হল ভারতেরও।

কারণ, জ্ঞানেন্দ্র যা বললেন, সেই কথাটাই বারবার ভারত বলে এসেছে এত দিন ধরে। বলে এসেছে, যখন ২০০৩-এর ডিসেম্বরে পার্লামেন্ট ভেঙে দিয়েছিলেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। বলে এসেছে, যখন সরকার মাওবাদী আন্দোলন দমন করতে পারছে না, এই যুক্তিতে ১৪ মাস আগে ২০০৫-এর ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেরবাহাদুর দেউবাকে হটিয়ে দেশের সমস্ত ক্ষমতা নিজের হাতে নিয়েছিলেন রাজা, তখন থেকে।

বস্তুত, ভারত যে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র

কোনও উপায়ও ছিল না নেপাল নরেশের। বিশ্ব জুড়ে শুরু হয়েছিল নেপালে গণতন্ত্র ফিরিয়ে আনার জন্য রাজার উপরে তীব্র চাপ। এক দিকে ভারত, অন্য দিকে আমেরিকা। তার সঙ্গেই রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ। যাদের তরফে শশী থারুর সরাসরিই বলেছিলেন, অতীতে রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মি শ্রীলঙ্কা-সহ একাধিক দেশে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের হয়ে কাজ করেছে। কিন্তু এই সঙ্কটে নেপাল রাজসেনা যে ভূমিকা নিয়েছে, তাতে ভবিষ্যতে তাদের রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের পতাকার তলায় কোনও বাহিনীতে

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

● নেপালের আরও খবর...পৃঃ ৫

## গণতন্ত্রের জয়

অবশেষে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের শুভবুদ্ধির উদয় হইল। পক্ষকালব্যাপী গণতান্ত্রিক বিক্ষোভ পুলিশ ও নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী দিয়াও দমন করিতে ব্যর্থ হইয়া তিনি তাহার রক্তপাতহীন অভ্যুত্থানের আগের স্থিতাবস্থায় নেপালকে ফিরাইয়া দিলেন। গণতন্ত্রের পুনরুদ্ধারের দাবিতে আন্দোলনরত সাত দলীয় জোটের হাতে কার্যকর রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতা প্রত্যর্পণ করিয়া তিনি নিজেকে কেবল সাংবিধানিক প্রধানের ভূমিকায় ফিরাইয়া লইলেন। অতঃপর এই সাত দলীয় জোটই প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনোনীত করিবে, যিনি আবার অবশিষ্ট মন্ত্রিসভা নিযুক্ত করিবেন। ১৯৯০ সালের সংবিধান অনুযায়ী নির্বাচিত আইনসভা ও সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রের দ্বৈত বন্দোবস্তই তিনি ফিরাইয়া দিলেন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সুপারিশ ও তাহার বিশেষ দূত করণ সিংহের দৌত্য যে সফল হইয়াছে, তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। কেননা ভারত নেপালে ঠিক এই পথেই মীমাংসা চাহিয়াছিল। মার্কিন বিদেশ দফতরের মুখপাত্রও দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাষায় রাজার ক্ষমতার সঙ্কোচন এবং রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির নির্বাচিত জনপ্রতিনিধিদের হাতে শাসনভার ফিরাইয়া দিবার পক্ষে সওয়াল করিয়াছিলেন।

ভারতের উদ্বেগ ছিল অত্যন্ত স্বাভাবিক। প্রতিবেশী এই রাষ্ট্রে রাজনৈতিক অস্থিরতা নয়াদিল্লির পক্ষে সুখকর হইতে পারে না। বিশেষত সেই অস্থিরতা যখন মঞ্চের পার্শ্বে অপেক্ষমাণ মাওবাদী গেরিলাদের বিশৃঙ্খলা সৃষ্টির, এমনকী ক্ষমতা দখলের সুযোগও করিয়া দিতে পারে। ভারতের বেশ কয়েকটি রাজ্য ইতিমধ্যেই মাওবাদী গেরিলাদের উৎপাতে দীর্ঘ। নেপালে একটি উগ্রপন্থী রাজনৈতিক গোষ্ঠীর ক্ষমতারোহণ ভারতের স্থিতির পক্ষেও বিপজ্জনক সাব্যস্ত হইতে পারিত। বিশেষত নেপাল ও ভারতের মাওবাদীরা যখন পরস্পর নিবিড় বন্ধনে আবদ্ধ। উপরন্তু গণতান্ত্রিক রাষ্ট্র হিসাবে ভারতও তাহার সংলগ্ন ভূখণ্ডে আর একটি গণতান্ত্রিক শাসনব্যবস্থাই চাহিবে। তবে রাজা বীরেন্দ্রের সময় রাজতন্ত্র নেপালে যে জাতীয় ঐক্য ও সংহতির প্রতীক ছিল, সেই অবস্থান ও মর্যাদা হইতে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র তাহাকে বহুলাংশে স্থলিত করিয়াছেন। এখন নেপালের রাজাকে আর কেহ শ্রদ্ধাভক্তি করে না, কাঠমাণ্ডুর স্কুলপড়ুয়ারাও প্রকাশ্যে রাস্তায় রাজার আদ্যাশ্রদ্ধ করিয়া থাকে। গণতন্ত্রের আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে নির্মম ভাবে রাষ্ট্রীয় জুলুমে দলিত করার ধারাবাহিক নির্বুদ্ধিতা অল্প কালের মধ্যেই রাজার জনপ্রিয়তা ঘুচাইয়াছে, রাজতন্ত্রকে জনচক্ষে অপ্রাসঙ্গিক, অপ্রয়োজনীয় এবং বাতিলযোগ্য বন্দোবস্ত রূপেও প্রতিপন্ন করিয়াছে। সাংবিধানিক প্রধানের রক্ষাকবচের অন্তরালে এই অবস্থা হইতে ঘুরিয়া দাঁড়ানো রাজতন্ত্রের পক্ষে কতখানি সম্ভব, বলা কঠিন।

পরিস্থিতির এই জটিলতাই প্রতিফলিত হইয়াছে দেশবাসীর একাংশের প্রতিক্রিয়ায়, যাঁহারা মনে করিতেছেন, রাজা অনেক দেরিতে অনেক সামান্য ছাড় মঞ্জুর করিয়াছেন। তাঁহাদের অনেকেই রাজাকে এমনকী আর সাংবিধানিক প্রধান রূপেও চান না। হাজার হোক, এই সাংবিধানিক রক্ষাকবচের সুযোগেই তো জ্ঞানেন্দ্র জরুরি অবস্থা জারি, নির্বাচিত সরকার বরখাস্ত করা, পার্লামেন্ট ভাঙিয়া দেওয়া এবং যাবতীয় ক্ষমতা আপন কৃষ্ণিগত করার মতো স্বৈরাচারে লিপ্ত হইয়াছিলেন। ভবিষ্যতেও যে অনুরূপ স্বৈরাচারের পুনরাবৃত্তি ঘটিবে না, তাহার নিশ্চয়তা কী? তাঁহারা তাই রাজার সাংবিধানিক ক্ষমতা ও বৈধতার সম্পূর্ণ বিলোপ চান। হয়তো রাজতন্ত্রের মধ্যযুগীয় বন্দোবস্তকে নেপালের ভূমি হইতে সম্পূর্ণ উচ্ছেদ করার ইহার চেয়ে ভাল সুযোগ আর আসিবে না, এমনই তাঁহাদের ভাবনা। নেপালের জনসাধারণই নিশ্চয় এ ব্যাপারে শেষ কথা বলার অধিকারী। রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি ইচ্ছা করিলে গণভোটের মাধ্যমে এ ব্যাপারে জনতার প্রকৃত অভিপ্রায় যাচাই করিয়া লইতে পারেন। নূতন করিয়া সংবিধানসভা আহ্বান করিয়াও দেশের শাসনপ্রণালীর ভবিষ্যৎ রূপরেখা নির্ণয় করিতে পারেন। তবে যাহাই করা হউক, মাওবাদী উগ্রপন্থীদের কাছ হইতে বিপদের আশঙ্কা কিন্তু আগের মতোই অপরিবর্তিত থাকিবে। নেপালের গণতন্ত্রকে মাওবাদী চ্যালেঞ্জের মোকাবিলা করিতেই হইবে। কাজটি জবাবদিহির দায়মুক্ত কোনও স্বৈরতন্ত্রী শাসকের পক্ষে যত কঠিন, নাগরিকের মৌলিক অধিকার রক্ষায় দায়বদ্ধ নির্বাচিত গণতন্ত্রের পক্ষে তাহার চেয়ে শতগুণ কঠিন।



# Monarchy reached point of no return

**ANIRBAN ROY**

Kathmandu, April 21

FORGET THE brazen show of confidence that was being fed live to Nepal's media from Kathmandu's Narayanhiti Palace. Observers believe that, as the incidents unfolded over the past 16 days, King Gyanendra knew that, this time, the danger was for real and the situation might soon spiral beyond his control. And this understanding, they say, led the otherwise egoist Nepal monarch to signal a climbdown, and let the protesters have their way.

Unlike the earlier 1990 movement, the ongoing demonstrations against the monarchy in the Himalayan kingdom caught international attention and the 58-year-old monarch has been under "tremendous pressure" from international communities, including India, which traditionally supported the monarchy even as it sang democracy tunes elsewhere.

Another interesting feature of the

protests this time, one that helped the demonstrators shape public opinion against the monarchy's excesses, was the extensive use of technology.

As an increasingly edgy administration unleashed ruthless force on demonstrators, Internet and blogs ensured that pictures and words of the free-for-all in Nepal's streets caught the attention of non-resident Nepalese and, crucially, the UN and other international human rights organisations.

Traditionally, the King, who has always been considered as a reincarnation of God Vishnu in Nepal, is now being regarded as one of the most unpopular rulers in the history of the country for his crackdown on pro-democracy campaigners.

In the process, the movement by the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA), which began with the demand for restoration of multi-party democracy, snowballed into a claim for a "republic" and "ceremonial monarchy" during the past two weeks of strife.

## Nepal king gives in

**Continued from Page 1**

Nepal's last parliamentary elections were held in 1999.

The King's address was preceded by a tense build-up. About two hours before the King came on air, heavily armed troops of the Royal Nepal Army took control of the entire capital, parking tanks and armoured vehicles at all strategic locations, especially around the Royal Palace.

The curfew too was extended up to midnight, fuelling fears that the monarch would impose Emergency. A crackdown appeared imminent when police arrested two leaders of the Communist Party of Nepal, Bam Dev Gautam and Jhala Nath Khanal, at the airport moments after they arrived by a flight from New Delhi. The

two leaders had been camping in Delhi for the last two and a half months since the March 19 signing of the second agreement between the SPA and the Maoist rebels.

More than three lakh people assembled at Kalanki, Chabahil, Gwarko, Maharajgunj, Satdobato and Khumaltar and marched along the 27-km Ring Road around Kathmandu shouting, "End to King Gyanendra's autocratic rule".

Police fired rubber bullets at Satdobato and Khumaltar, wounding dozens of pro-democracy activists, but refrained from firing live bullets.

The demonstrators set fire to the police beat at Kalanki and declared the area a "Loktantrik Chowk" (Democracy Square) in memory of those killed in Thursday afternoon's firing.



A pro-democracy protester demonstrates in front of an armoured vehicle at Kalanki in Kathmandu. AFP

## Climbdown fails to sway protesters

**AGENCE France-Presse**

Kathmandu, April 21

FOR MANY of the thousands of people walking home on Friday from massive protests after Nepal's King Gyanendra announced that he was handing back power to political parties, the move was too little too late.

The chants still called for Gyanendra to leave the country and accused him of being a thief and a murderer. Cries of "get the funeral pyres ready for Gyanendra" and calls for the king to flee rang out. Along large stretches of the capital's ring road, scores of felled trees and massive burning barricades blocked the way.

"I want full democracy, all the power with the people," said Lekha Nath Bhatta, a 22-year-old employee in an export company. Asked whether the king's latest move was enough, around 10 protesters from different backgrounds all agreed with Bhatta. Police made no effort to enforce a night-time curfew imposed on the crisis-ridden capital. Police vans edged through the crowds but the mob made no move to attack them.

"He has been using force against the people and he is a thief," said another protester who did not want to give his name. "I'm not with the political parties, the king should leave," added the 20-year-old student.

Groups of men, some clearly drunk, manned the scores of barricades and roadblocks and

threatened passers-by. As people approached on motorbikes, the men would threaten violence, but when they found out the passengers were foreign journalists, they relaxed and showed a way through the blocks.

On one straight length of the road the fires stretched for kilometres ahead, in contrast to the city centre where soldiers carrying machine guns were still clearly in charge.

Bhatta said that the king's climb-down paved the way for more mismanagement by the political parties he ousted when he sacked the government and took direct control in February 2005.

"The political parties are just going to fight with each other like they used to," he said. When the king seized power

er many in Nepal believed that he would bring stability and a solution to the decade-long insurgency.

Fourteen months down the line, the king's popularity is at its lowest ebb, and calls for a complete abolition of the monarchy have increased.

Bhatta said that the king's announcement won't prevent people coming onto the streets again on Saturday. "I think tomorrow we'll protest again. All the people will go to the royal palace," he said.

In 1990, a massive popular movement for democracy saw hundreds killed before Gyanendra's much more popular brother legalised political parties, paving the way to Nepal's first multi-party elections.

## ALL THE KING'S MEN

# গণবিক্ষোভে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র মাথা নোয়ালেন, তবু জট খুলল না

দিল্লি ও কাঠমান্ডু, ২১ এপ্রিল (পি টি আই)— তীব্র গণবিদ্রোহের মুখে নেপালে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্রের দাবি মেনে নিলেন রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। সরকার গণতন্ত্রের জন্য আলোচনায় ডেকেছেন সাত দলের বিরোধী জোটকে। আজ সন্ধ্যায় টি ভি-ভাষণে রাজা ঘোষণা করেন, তিনি ক্ষমতা ছেড়ে আবার নিয়মতান্ত্রিক রাজার আসনে ফিরে যাবেন। যত তাড়াতাড়ি সম্ভব নির্বাচন হবে দেশে। এমুহূর্তে সাত দলীয় জোট নতুন প্রধানমন্ত্রী ঠিক করুক। যতদিন নতুন সরকার তৈরি না হয়, বর্তমান সরকারই কাজ চালাবে। গত বছর ফেব্রুয়ারিতে নির্বাচিত সরকার ভেঙে সমস্ত ক্ষমতা কুক্ষিগত করেন রাজা। তারপরই শুরু হয় অশান্তি। হালে মাওবাদীদের প্রাচুর্য সমর্থনে গণতন্ত্র পুনরুদ্ধারের আন্দোলন তুঙ্গে ওঠে। সাত দলীয় জোটের এই আন্দোলনের আজ ছিল ষোড়শ দিন।



মানুষের জয়। নেপালে রাজতন্ত্রের অগ্নিশুদ্ধি। ছবি: এ এফ পি

কার্ফু, সেনা, গুলি অগ্রাহ্য করে আজও পথে নামেন মানুষ। মিছিল যায় নারায়ণহিত রাজপ্রাসাদের দিকে। উজ্জল বিক্ষোভের মুখে শেষ পর্যন্ত নতি স্বীকার করতে হল রাজাকে। উল্লাস ছড়িয়ে পড়ে বিক্ষোভকারীদের জমায়েতে। কিন্তু ক্ষমতার হস্তান্তর ঠিক কীভাবে ঘটবে তা পরিষ্কার হয়নি রাজার ভাষণে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী বাছাইয়ের প্রস্তাবটিও বেশ গোলমালে। বিরোধী নেতারা সতর্ক। সাত দলীয় জোটের পক্ষ থেকে জানানো হয়েছে, সবাই মিলে বৈঠকে বসে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হবে। জোটের অন্যতম প্রধান শরিক নেপালি কংগ্রেস তো জানিয়েই দিয়েছে, আগের সংসদ ফিরিয়ে আনতে হবে প্রথমে। মাওবাদীদেরও এই প্রক্রিয়ায় সামিল করতে হবে। কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি অফ নেপাল রাজার প্রস্তাব পুরো খতিয়ে না দেখে এখনই মতামত জানাচ্ছে না। ফলে সমস্যা কিন্তু এখনও মিটল না। চলবে আরও দর কষাকষি। জনরোষের হাত থেকে বাঁচতে রাজা পিছু হটেও বিরোধী গণতান্ত্রিক শক্তিকে জটিলতার মধ্যেই রেখে দিলেন। কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি অফ নেপালের দুই নেতা ঝালানাথ খনাল এবং বামদেব গৌতমকে আজ আটক করেছে পুলিশ। মাওবাদীদের সঙ্গে এঁরা যোগাযোগ রাখছিলেন। ভারত থেকে বিমানে কাঠমান্ডু আসামাত্র আটক করা হয় খনালকে।

এদিন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র যে কিছু ঘোষণা করতে চলেছেন, দিল্লিতে আগেই তার ইঙ্গিত দিয়ে রাখেন করণ সিং। গতকাল ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিশেষ দূত হিসেবে করণ সিং দেখা করেন রাজার সঙ্গে। ভারতের রাষ্ট্রদূত শিবশঙ্কর মুখার্জিও আজ জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে দেখা করে নতুন করে চাপ দিয়েছেন। বলা যেতে পারে, ভারতের চাপ বা পরামর্শ মেনেই জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর আজকের ঘোষণা। দিল্লিতে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠক করে করণ সিং আজ সাংবাদিকদের জানান, রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র আজ রাতের মধ্যেই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কিছু সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করতে পারেন। এবং তাই হল। এই ঘোষণার আগেই এদিন দিল্লিতে সি পি আইয়ের পক্ষ থেকে এক বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, নেপালে এবার মানুষ রাজতন্ত্রেরই উচ্ছেদ চাইছেন। দিল্লির উচিত নয়, এসময় রাজাকে কোনও বাঁচার রাস্তা বাতলে দেওয়া। সি পি আই (এম এল) সাধারণ সম্পাদক দীপঙ্কর ভট্টাচার্যও এক বিবৃতিতে ভারত-সহ বিভিন্ন বিদেশি শক্তির নিন্দা করেন নেপালে রাজতন্ত্রকে রক্ষা করার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে বলে। চীনের বিদেশ মন্ত্রক থেকে বলা হয়েছে, নেপালের অভ্যন্তরীণ বিষয়ে বাইরের পৃথিবীর হস্তক্ষেপ করা উচিত নয়।

22 APR 2006

ANJAL

# Democracy struggle rings in hard times

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 20

THIRTY-YEAR OLD Lalita Joshi almost lost her life on Thursday. She was scheduled to deliver her first baby and her husband, Suraj, was finding it difficult to arrange an ambulance in the curfew-imposed capital to take her to Model Hospital.

"All the ambulances are being used to ferry the doctors and other hospital staff," Suraj told *Hindustan Times* helplessly as he was trying to make some armed police personnel understand his exigency. The security personnel were also not in a position to ferry the expecting lady to the hospital in their vehicles as several lakh demonstrators were marching towards the city, demanding "total democracy" in the Himalayan Kingdom.

The problem with the Joshi family was not the lone case of hardship in the violence-hit Nepal during the last two weeks. "I was badly beaten up recently in the outskirts of the city while the protestors were engaged in pelting stones at the police," Nagendra Sharma, a college student said.

Nagendra, who is not participating in the pro-democracy movement, said he could not attend the classes as all the schools and colleges were closed during last 15 days following the general strike, called by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), and the Maoist guerrillas.

Normal life has been badly affected in because of the SPA-sponsored strike. Trucks with essential commodities could not enter the country from India because of "total blockade" of the national highway by the Maoists.

In Kathmandu, which has a population of around 15 lakh, prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed. "Can you believe that we had to buy green chilies for Rs 350 per kg?" Alka Chetri, a housewife said adding, a kilogram of salt was costing them as high as Rs 250 now.



Police baton-charge protestors during a demonstration in Katmandu on Thursday.

There was acute shortage of LPG cylinders and kerosene in Kathmandu because of the NH blockade. Communication was affected in the first one week after the Royal Palace jammed all the 5.5 lakh mobile phones in the country, fearing that

"We understand that people are facing a

lot of hardships because of the ongoing agitation, but we cannot help it," Pradip Nepal, a veteran Communist Party of Nepal leader told *Hindustan Times*, adding that despite the hardships, people were still taking active part in the movement.

## Tourism takes a heavy beating

**HT Correspondent**  
Kathmandu, April 20

THE PORTAL, [www.mount Everest.net](http://www.mount Everest.net) has always been the 'Bible' for the tourists to the Himalayan Kingdom, especially for those, who were interested in trekking or mountaineering.

But, the website has put up serious alerts, and has instructed the visitors to postpone their trip to Nepal. "Something's brewing in Nepal. Curfews and general strike have halted the country," alerts, put up in the portal, said.

For years, political strife in Nepal has been consciously kept well clear of foreign visitors because it had nothing to do with them and, more importantly, no one wanted to disrupt the inflow of tourist dollars to the impoverished nation.

The situation in the Himalayan Kingdom looked completely different for the last 14 days as the Maoists and cadres of Seven Party Alliance (SPA) joined hands to dethrone King Gyanendra and bring in "total democracy" in the country.

As the general strike brought normal life to a grinding halt, thousands of tourists, who were scheduled to go on trekking, got

stuck in Kathmandu, and several others, who were to return to the capital to take flight back home, got stranded elsewhere. "It's really bad. We cannot go trekking," Melinda Watson from Canada, said adding, they had come with an 18-member group to go trekking around Pokhara. They could not get a vehicle to go because of the strike, and flew back to Montreal.

In addition to the alert in [www.mount Everest.net](http://www.mount Everest.net), almost all the embassies have advised their citizens not to visit Nepal because of the deteriorating law and order condition. It has affected the hotel industry, and almost all the hotels had occupancy between 20 to 25 percent only.

There were more than a dozen empty tables every evening at the famed mountaineers' hangout — the Rum Doodle Bar — where anyone who has conquered Everest gets a free meal.

Tourist arrivals have fallen from a peak of 5,50,000 in 1999 to 297,000 in 2003 and to 1,10,000 in 2005. The collapse of tourism industry is definitely a big blow to the country's economy as more than 45 per cent Nepalis are below the poverty line, and the annual budget of the nation of 23 million people is \$1 billion.



# Curfew clamped, at least 3 killed in Kathmandu



KATHMANDU, April 20: Once a placid, hospitable city, Kathmandu turned into Asia's curfew capital today as the government reportedly extended the 18-hour curfew by seven hours till Friday morning.

But seething protesters marched in thousands towards the city, defying bullets, tear gas shells and baton-charges, demanding King Gyanendra's ouster and a democratic republic.

At least three people were killed in Kalanki the capital itself and it is feared the toll would mount as reports poured in of firing on unarmed marchers in other pockets, including the temple city of Lalitpur.

Overnight, the toll claimed by 15 days of continuous protests climbed up to 13. Here was no indication of any quick resolution, with India's special envoy Dr Karan

Singh's mediation bid having apparently failed.

While the Opposition parties said they would continue their protests till the King stepped down, the marchers expected New Delhi to Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur remained paralysed. Not a single resident had received their morning newspapers, milk, water supply. In an unprecedented violation of the Vienna Convention, the royalist government refused to issue curfew passes to its diplomat community and UN human rights officials.

"The authorities have informed they will not allow our human rights monitoring teams to be deployed in Kathmandu Valley during the curfew," a spokesman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for human rights in Kathmandu said. ■ SNS

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THE STATESMAN

# জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর ঘোষণার আশায় দিল্লি কার্ফু উড়িয়ে বিক্ষোভ অব্যাহত, বাড়ছে মৃত্যুও

অনিন্দ্য জানা • কাঠমান্ডু

২০ এপ্রিল: আর এগোনো যাবে না! রিং রোডে আচমকাই ব্রেক কষে থেমে গেল বাসটা। দাঁউ দাঁউ করে টায়ার জ্বলছে সামনে। ঘন, কালো ধোঁয়া উঠছে কুণ্ডলী পাকিয়ে। নাগাড়ে জল ঢেলে আগুন নেভানোর চেষ্টা করছে কিছু উর্দি-পরা চেহারা। বৃষ্টির মতো ইঁট-পাটকেল পড়ছে দু'পাশের গলি থেকে। তাদের উৎস লক্ষ করে লাঠি উঁচিয়ে তেড়ে যাচ্ছে 'রায়ট-পুলিশ'। অ্যাসল্ট রাইফেল তাক করে আছে রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মি। দূরে দেখা যাচ্ছে দরবার মার্গ। দেখা যাচ্ছে নারায়ণহিতি রাজপ্রাসাদ। প্রাসাদের সামনে দু'টো ট্যাক্সি ঠায় দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। রাস্তার মোড়ে মোড়ে কাঁটাতারের ব্যারিকেড। সার্জেরা গাড়ি।

কাঠমান্ডুতে আপনাকে স্বাগত! সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে, যেখানে গণতন্ত্রের দাবিতে জনরোষ আহুড়ে পড়ছে অহরহ। যেখানে টানা বনধ আজ পঞ্চদশ দিনে পড়ল। সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে, যে শহরের উপকণ্ঠে আজ 'শুট আউট সাইট' কার্ফু অগ্রহা করলেন লাখে মানুষ। যেখানে পুলিশের গুলিতে মৃত্যু হল চার জনের (আজ নিয়ে সংখ্যাটা দাঁড়াল ১৫), গুরুতর আহত হলেন অন্তত ১২ জন। সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে, যেখানে মরিয়া, বিক্ষুব্ধ, গণতন্ত্রপিপাসু জনতাকে হাততালি দিয়ে আশপাশের বাড়ি থেকে স্বাগত জানাচ্ছিলেন মহিলারা। আর নেপাল সরকারের স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক বলছিল, "আমজনতা-টনতা বাজে কথা। মাওবাদীরা বিক্ষোভে ঢুকে পড়ে গোলমাল পাকাচ্ছে।" সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে, যেখানে রাত আটটায় টানা ১৮ ঘণ্টার কার্ফু শেষ হওয়ার কথা ছিল। কিন্তু শক্তিত প্রশাসন তা বাড়িয়ে দিল কাল ভোর ৩টে পর্যন্ত। সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে, যেখানে আজ রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে দেড় ঘণ্টার বৈঠক শেষে তিন দিনের সফর দু'দিনে সেরেই নয়াদিল্লি ফিরে গেলেন ভারত সরকারের বিশেষ দূত কর্ণ সিংহ। এবং

যাওয়ার আগে বলে গেলেন, "হিজ ম্যাজেস্টিকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর চিঠি দিয়েছি। আমাদের তরফে পরামর্শ দিয়েছি (যা কিনা একান্ত ভাবেই বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র ফেরানো)। নেপাল নিয়ে ভারতের উদ্বেগ এবং চিন্তার কথাও জানিয়েছি। আমাদের আশা, ইতিবাচক কিছু একটা হবে। খুব দ্রুত উনি কোনও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ঘোষণা করবেন। বল এখন ওঁর কোর্টে" (এবং দিল্লি ফিরে গিয়ে দাঁড়ি-কমা সমেত একই কথার পুনরাবৃত্তি করেছেন)। সেই কাঠমান্ডু, যেখানে তথ্যমন্ত্রী শমশের সিংহ রানা জানতে চাইছেন, "রাজার ক্ষমতা ছেড়ে দেওয়ার কথা উঠছে কেন, বুঝি না। রাজা তো আলোচনায় রাজি আছেন।" সেই

এয়ারওয়েজের দিল্লি-কাঠমান্ডু উড়ান যখন নামছে ত্রিভুবন আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরে (আজ অন্তর্দেশীয় টার্মিনাল বন্ধ), নীচের রাস্তায় লাল-সাদা পতাকার ভিড়, কালো কালো মাথা। তাদের রাস্তা আটকে দাঁড়িয়ে সেনা আর পুলিশ।

খাঁ খাঁ বিমানবন্দর। কিছু পর্যটক, কিছু ঘরে-ফেরা নেপালি আর তাদের সঙ্গে এই আগন্তুক। বাইরে বেরিয়ে মনে হচ্ছিল, যুদ্ধক্ষেত্রে এসেছি। রাস্তায় বাস্কার। ফৌজি গাড়ি। এ ছাড়া চার দিকে কোথাও প্রাণের চিহ্ন নেই। ট্যান্ডি নেই, প্রাইভেট কার নেই। কাল রাত দু'টো থেকে আজ রাত আটটা— কার্ফুর চাদর মুড়ি দিয়েছে মূল কাঠমান্ডু। কী করে ঢুকবে এই শহরে?



প্রতিবাদীর মৃত্যু, প্রতিবাদের নয়। কাঠমান্ডুতে। — এ এফ পি

কাঠমান্ডু, যার দখল নিয়ে নিয়েছে উর্দিধারীরা আর রাজপ্রাসাদে বন্দি হয়ে রয়েছেন রাজা। চার দিকে সব বন্ধ। সুনসান। একঝলক দেখলে মনে হয়, শহরটা 'ভেনিস'—এ চলে গিয়েছে। কিন্তু ঠাণ্ডার করলে বোঝা যায়, তার শিরায় শিরায় বয়ে যাচ্ছে অসম্ভব আকৃতির এক ঢেউ। যে ঢেউ আওয়াজ তুলছে— রাজতন্ত্র নিপাত যাক!

গণতন্ত্রের দাবিতে উন্মত্ত হয়ে উঠেছে গোটা নেপাল। চূষকে বহির্বিষ্মকে তা জানান দিচ্ছে এই শহর। সেই কাঠমান্ডুতে আপনাকে স্বাগত। বেলা দেড়টা নাগাদ জেট

দেখা গেল, লজঝড়ে একটা বাস ছাড়ছে। একটাই বাস। বিমানবন্দর থেকে শহর, শহর থেকে বিমানবন্দর। এমনিতে ভাড়া ৯ টাকা। আজ ২০০! তাতেই গাদাগাদি করে উঠে পড়লাম। ড্রাইভারের পাশে ইঞ্জিনের উপরে তিনটে থ্রি নট থ্রি রাইফেল শোওয়ানো। হাতে ম্যান-প্যাক ওয়াকিটকি নিয়ে তাদের তিন মালিক বাস ছাড়ার আগে লাফ দিয়ে এসে উঠলেন। আমাদের 'রায়ফ'-এর মতো নীল-সাদা ছোপ ছোপ উর্দি। নাচার বাসযাত্রীদের এঁরাই 'কার্ফু-পাস'। কী করা যাবে? এই প্রথম নেপাল এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়



# King sends Karan packing

## Gyanendra in defiant mood

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, April 20: "Failure" seems to be the only likely word to describe the Prime Minister's special envoy Karan Singh's foray to the Nepalese capital. He beat a hasty retreat to Delhi this afternoon, leaving a day earlier than scheduled.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran tried to package Singh's visit as a "first-hand" fact-finding trip and an attempt by a "friendly neighbour" to share its "objective assessment" of the situation with King Gyanendra.

However, there is little Delhi does not already know about the Nepal crisis. What India seemed ignorant about is the extent of the obduracy of the monarch.

It was clear that to lend credibility to any solution, India advised an immediate and irreversible transfer of power by the king to the political parties; the execution of the transfer of power to be in a manner that people perceived as permanent; the political parties to decide whether or not there should be a Constituent Assembly; and the deployment and control of the army to be with the political executive.

The king does not seem to have given any indication he was willing. In the event, Singh had to cut short his visit.

Two decisions the king took over the last 24 hours suggested he was in no mood to re-

linquish or dilute his power. From last night, he had been trying to persuade the ailing former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai to accept forming a new government.

After some dithering, Bhattarai refused this afternoon, asking the king how he thought he would get this past the seven-party pro-democracy alliance.

It is learnt that even Bhattarai, whose opportunism has earned him the sobriquet of "Banarasi Thug", did not want to be appointed under Article 127 of the Constitution which gives the king emergency powers.

The article is called "Power to Remove Difficulties" in implementing the Constitution and was used by the king to dissolve Parliament and justify his coup.

Second, even as royal emissaries were being dispatched to Bhattarai's residence, the king showed utter contempt for the people. Armed police were ordered to fire at peaceful demonstrators at two places on the outskirts of Kathmandu, which left at least five dead and hundreds injured.

Singh could not be seen in Kathmandu when India's advice was being so openly rejected.

Since Delhi did not want to be seen as being too prescriptive at this stage, there was nothing left for Singh to do except perhaps to visit his in-laws or Kathmandu's temples. Both were impossible when



A pro-democracy protester shouts anti-king slogans in Kathmandu on Thursday. (AFP) ■ See Page 8

there were shoot-at-sight orders in the capital.

The leaders of the seven-party alliance made it clear to Singh that the sincerity of the king and their inability to tr-

st him were two important issues which had to be addressed.

They also pointed out that given the intensity of the people's movement, they had to take into account their senti-

ments. This, the leaders pointed out, both constrained their decisions as well as raised the level of what was acceptable.

Singh said after his meeting that he was in no position

to say what the king might do. "The ball is in his court. I do not want to pre-empt anything but I hope that there will be a positive outcome," he added, still managing to smile.

# NEPAL! SING

## Troops shoot to kill in capital

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 20

**KATHMANDU** ON Thursday resembled a city under siege with troops patrolling the streets in armoured cars and manning camouflaged gun-mounted bunkers at strategic points amid rumours that the King was moving to either proclaim Emergency or invoke martial law.

Several protesters were killed and dozens injured after security forces opened fire at Kalanki, outside Kathmandu, when more than 1.5 lakh pro-democracy activists defied curfew orders and threatened to march on the capital. The curfew, scheduled originally to be in force until 8 pm, was extended till 3 am, Friday.

The Royal government declared a complete ban on movement of journalists in Kathmandu, leaving television and FM channels hopelessly dependent on rumours, word-of-mouth reports and guesswork.

With intense media speculation over what the 58-year-old monarch's next move might be, the King had made a formal request to former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai to take charge of a caretaker government.

Bhattarai's associates refused to comment, but SPA leaders said they would press ahead with their campaign for "total democracy". The alliance also called for a countrywide blackout from 8 pm in protest against the "Kalanki massacre".

Bullets and emergency wiring did not stop our cadres from taking part in the protests.

Prakash Man Singh, a former minister and senior leader of Nepali Congress (Democratic), said.

Representatives of rights groups, who were present at Kalanki, said the security forces fired more than 100 rounds from automatic weapons and chased away Red Cross volunteers who tried to treat those who received gunshot wounds.

Lauding the protesters' courage, Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), said, "This is a great success". He said the bloodshed wouldn't go in vain and the King would be forced to restore multi-party democracy.

The Kalanki march triggered similar demonstrations in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu with some protesters almost reaching the eastern gates of Singha Darbar, the seat of administration.

Police also had to open fire on pro-democracy protesters in the Gwartko, Syuchatar, Dhungaadda, and Balkhu areas. Nepali Congress leader Arjun Narsingh KC and Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Prakash Saran Mahat were leading the rally.

With battles raging around the capital, and large swathes of the Kingdom virtually controlled by the Maoists, who are lending moral support to the seven-party alliance, minister for industry, commerce and supplies Buddhi Man Tamang cancelled his visit to Dhaka where he was to attend a meeting of ministers from SAFTA countries.

More reports on Page 13



AFF A protester defies cops to shout anti-King slogans in Kathmandu on Thursday.

## Act before it is too late, India tells King

**VINOD SHARMA/MILOVA ROY Chaudhury**  
New Delhi, April 20

**KARAN SINGH**, the Prime Minister's special envoy to Kathmandu, flew back on Thursday after making a "strong pitch" for restoration of multi-party democracy in the troubled Himalayan Kingdom. He was "optimistic" that King Gyanendra would take India's advice.

The letter from Mammohan Singh, which Singh handed over to Gyanendra, expressing India's "deep concern" over the situation in Nepal, broadly contained the same old message: the King should act fast and hand over power to the seven-party alliance (SPA).

King Gyanendra was warned that the institution of monarchy would be "completely isolated" and in jeopardy unless a "genuine dialogue between the constitutional forces in Nepal" took place.

Singh told *Hindustan Times* that he had made a "very candid presentation" on the current situation and India's concerns for the future of Nepal. He advised Gyanendra to act at the earliest as the situation was worsening by the day and "time was running out."

The special envoy came out of the meeting with the impression that the King had been receptive to his suggestions. After their 90-minute meeting, during which they had lunch together, Singh said, "The ball is entirely in the King's court. I am optimistic. I am hopeful that the King will make an announcement shortly, possibly within the next 24 hours."

The absence of foreign secretary Shyam Saran and India's ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee at the meeting with the King was attributed to Singh's own preference for one-on-one interaction to put Gyanendra at ease for a "frank exchange of views."

However, Saran had met the chief of the Royal Nepal Army, Pvar Jung Thapa, on Wednesday and joined Singh in



AP Karan Singh with Gyanendra.

his meetings with leaders of the SPA, including former premiers Girija Prasad Koirala, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Madhav Nepal. They also met Surya Bahadur Thapa, who had been called for consultations by the King earlier this week.

The Communist Party's Madhav Nepal is learnt to have sought the formation of a constituent assembly, but other SPA leaders did not articulate this view. Singh conceded to *HT* that popular opinion in favour of a republic was getting stronger, hence the need for the King to act fast.

In a brief but significant statement after the talks, the Indian Embassy said, "A lasting solution to the problems of Nepal has to be found by the people of Nepal through a peaceful political process."

Even while the King weighed his options, the political and economic crisis afflicting the country took a turn for the worse, with several protesters killed in what the United Nations office of the commissioner for human rights in Nepal called "excessive use of force" by the security forces.

# Thousands take to the streets against King in Nepal

3 killed in police firing; police storm hospital, seize bodies

**KATHMANDU:** Nepalese police opened fire on thousands of protesters on Thursday who were marching towards the capital, killing at least three and wounding dozens of others, witnesses and hospital officials said.

Separately, security forces using rubber bullets and live ammunition, fired on protesters in a southwest town on Thursday, wounding at least 26, according to the Defence Ministry.

Doctors at Model hospital in Kathmandu said three persons had died and more than 40 were in serious condition, mostly with head injuries, after police fired rubber and live bullets at protesters.

Police stormed the hospital later in the evening and seized the bodies. Hospital staff reached by telephone said police did not give a reason for taking the bodies. Relatives had not reached the hospital to identify or

claim the bodies because of a curfew in Kathmandu.

Among the wounded, at least 10 were in critical condition, a doctor at the hospital said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation.

The police fired both rubber and live bullets in the Kalanki area on the western edge of Kathmandu, said

Kunjan Aryal of INSEC-Nepal, a Kathmandu-based rights group.

"Our volunteers have already picked up several wounded people and there are reports of many more wounded waiting for rescue," said Aryal, whose office is in the same neighbourhood. A witness said the wounded were scattered on the road.

— AP

## "Children being beaten up"

**NEW YORK:** In a strong criticism of the royal government's crackdown on pro-democracy protests, global rights group Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Nepalese security forces of "brutally"

beating and shooting at even children as young as 12 years. The U.S.-based group also asked King Gyanendra's government to take immediate action to end all "unnecessary use of force" against protesters. — PTI

2008-04-02

# Under siege, Gyanendra takes aim at the media

HD-12

21/4

to be reported

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** Decrying the monarchist regime's shoot-to-kill policy during curfew and its refusal to issue journalists with curfew passes, the International Federation of Journalists has called upon Nepal to respect both human rights norms as well as the media's right to freely report on the ongoing situation.

On April 19, at least five journalists were severely injured when security personnel opened fire on a demonstration organised by the seven opposition parties in Chandragadhi in the eastern district of Jhapa, the IFJ noted in a press release.

The injured journalists are: Umakant Khanal of *Purbanchal Dainik*, Narayan Khadka of *Nepal Samacharpatra*, Sekhar Sedhai, Tika Ram Neti and Santosh Dhakal. Mr. Dhakal, a trainee journalist, received a bullet injury to his head whereas Mr. Khanal and Mr. Khadka sustained bullet injuries to their legs. Security personnel also beat up Mr. Neti and Mr. Sedhai despite them showing their media identity cards. At least four persons were killed in the incident.

According to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ)-Jhapa, security personnel indiscriminately opened fire on the protesting crowd without provocation from the demonstrators. Dozens of others also received bullet injuries. Security personnel also charged batons on the protesters, injuring over 100 people.

## Call for restraint

The IFJ has called on Nepalese authorities to show restraint and respect human rights by not following the 'shoot-to-kill' directive during the curfew that has been imposed in Kathmandu to prevent mass demonstrations against the monarchy. "We are imploring the government to show respect for human rights and not allow the peaceful demonstrations to turn into a bloodbath," IFJ president Christopher Warren, said. "By not recognising the Nepalese people's right to free assembly and the media's right to report freely on these activities, the king is demonstrating his complete lack of respect for the people of Nepal."

In addition to imposing the curfew the Government has extended detention orders on journalists and activists being held through the misuse of the Public Security Act. Among the journalists facing up to several months detention are Shyam Shrestha, editor of *Mulyankan*, a weekly newspaper, as well as Kanak Mani Dixit. Though Mr. Dixit was arrested recently, Mr. Shrestha was arrested on January 19. The IFJ says Rajendra Gautam, journalist of the *Jibisha* monthly, was arrested on April 17 from his house in Lalitpur by an unidentified group.

Biswamitra Khanal, president, FNJ-Nuwakot chapter and reporter with Nepal Television was arrested on April 19 while reporting on the protest staged by Radio Nepal's employees and artists. His equipment was also seized and he is being detained at the district police office in Hanu-mandhoka. In another incident, police beat up BBC correspondent Narayan Karki and Nepal Television reporter Ramesh Poudel at Pokhra while they were reporting on the pro-democracy movement.

21 APR 2006

THE HINDU



## WEATHER

THURSDAY  
Partly cloudy  
sky with possi-  
bility of rain or  
thundershower.  
High 34°C.

Details in Kolkata Live, P4

TODAY: 22 pages, including HT  
Kolkata Live and HT City  
Vol. V No. 205

# Nepal heads for a showdown

HT Correspondent & Agencies  
Kathmandu, April 19

PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS and the royal government are headed for a showdown in Nepal on Thursday with the activists preparing for a massive road show in Kathmandu and the government imposing a curfew.

Opposition parties have called for a huge demonstration in protest against King Gyanendra. The United Nations wants the government to allow the protest to go ahead and even Maoists have issued a statement urging the people to join the demonstration.

The government responded by imposing curfew for 18 hours from 2 am on Thursday in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. That would mean it would last till Friday afternoon. Since millions of people are likely to take part in the rally, called by the Seven Party Alliance, the government decided not to take any chances.

If any indication was needed of how the protesters would respond to the curfew it came from Pokhara in western Nepal. The government issued a curfew there after a woman agitator died of injuries sustained during clashes with police. Radio Nepal also announced that anyone violating the curfew would be shot, yet demonstrators defied the curfew and took out massive rallies.

Apart from the woman, three other protesters were killed and 12 injured on

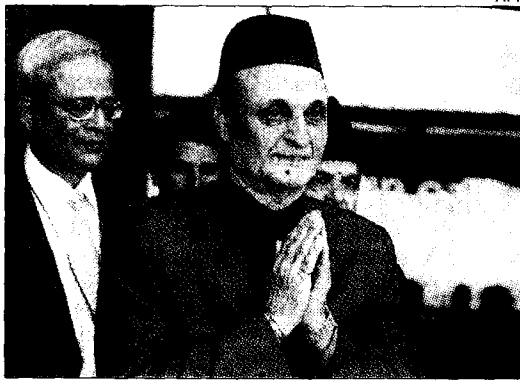
Wednesday afternoon when security personnel opened fire on them in Jhapa, taking the toll to seven in the crackdown on protesters.

As the two sides prepared for Thursday's showdown, the United Nations and Maoists both made statements on behalf of the rally.

A United Nations human rights monitor on Wednesday urged Nepalese authorities to let anti-royal protesters hold the massive rally in Kathmandu. Ian Martin, the Nepal representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, "I would call on the authorities to allow Thursday's demonstration to go ahead and on the organisers to ensure that it is conducted peacefully. A repeat of recent behaviour by the security forces could turn that demonstration tomorrow into a further flashpoint, with serious consequences for human rights."

The Maoists, on their part, sent an email to *Hindustan Times* appealing to the people of Nepal to gather in large numbers and register their protest in the strongest possible way for restoration of democracy.

"We heartily appeal to all political activists, mass organisations, ethnic and regional fronts and the broad masses for an extensive and active participation," said Prachanda, chairman of Communist party of Nepal (Maoists), and his deputy Baburam Bhattarai.



AFP

## Karan's secret: A face-saver

ANIRBAN Roy  
Kathmandu, April 19

KARAN SINGH, New Delhi's special emissary to Kathmandu, met Nepal's pro-democracy leaders on Wednesday, armed with a closely guarded "magic formula" which, he hinted, could defuse the crisis in the Himalayan Kingdom.

Singh, married to Princess Yasho Rajya Lakshmi, granddaughter of Maharaja Mohun Shumsher Rana, the last Rana prime minister of Nepal — and thus also known as the "Jamai (bridegroom)" of Kathmandu — arrived accompanied by Pankaj Saran, joint secretary of external affairs ministry, to convey Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's message to King Gyanendra. "I have brought a good message from India for the King, and best wishes from the people," he said at the airport, adding that he hoped his meeting with the monarch would be fruitful and restore peace in Nepal.

Accompanied by foreign secretary Shyam Saran and India's ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, Singh then went straight to the task, meeting former PM Girija Prasad Koirala.

Continued on Page 2



20 APR 2008



# Date with king, curfew

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 19:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's special envoy Karan Singh hit the ground running and began consultations with pro-democracy leaders immediately after his arrival here this afternoon.

Singh is carrying a letter from the Prime Minister for King Gyanendra.

Ironically, the capital of Nepal would be under curfew when he delivers Manmohan Singh's message for restoring democracy to the king at 11 am tomorrow.

A strict curfew has been imposed from 2 am tomorrow till 8 pm to thwart a planned encirclement of Kathmandu by five lakh protesters. Karan Singh will go under an armed escort to urge the king to step back.

Although the contents of the letter are not known, India is likely to urge the king to allow political parties to form an interim government and choose their own leader.

The mandate of the interim government may be twofold: to hold early elections to a new Parliament, and to talk to the Maoists for a political settlement without which elec-



**Pro-democracy protesters at a demonstration in Kathmandu. (Reuters)**

tions cannot be held.

New Delhi believes that unless the political parties are allowed to choose their own Prime Minister, the process would not be credible. The king, it seems, still wants a Prime Minister of his choice.

Quite fittingly, there was no curfew this afternoon when Karan Singh met three major leaders of the democracy movement — Nepali Congress president G.P. Koirala, Nepali Congress (Democratic) chief Sher Bahadur Deuba and Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal.

A grim-looking Koirala refused to say anything about

his meeting with Karan Singh, who was accompanied among others by foreign secretary Shyam Saran and Indian ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee.

Deuba, however, said: "We have said that we cannot deviate from the road map of the seven-party alliance. Dr Singh has told me that he has come with a package that includes the Maoists."

Reiterating that India favoured democracy, Karan Singh said: "We are gravely concerned about the situation in Nepal. I have come with a positive attitude. I hope some solution will emerge tomorrow."

Asked what might happen, the special envoy said: "I am a politician, not an astrologer. I will speak after I have met His Majesty the King."

Nepal, who was released along with eight other leaders barely an hour before Karan Singh was to meet him, said: "We stressed that the people's movement had reached a new height and the people's wishes must be respected. The king must recognise that full sovereignty must belong to the people and their representatives. The Indian delegates were convinced of this position."

■ See Page 4

# Cry to include Maoists in Nepal solution

**BHARATBHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 19:** Madhav Kumar Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) general secretary who was released from prison today, said: "The fate of the king and country" should be left to the constituent Assembly.

"There is no place for trickery any longer. There is no possibility of any new alliance with the king without the Maoists. We have to bring the Maoists into democratic politics by accepting their demand

for a constituent Assembly," he claimed.

About the possible Indian proposal for an interim regime, the communist leader said: "The real issue is to ensure that sovereignty firmly rests with the people."

It is not clear as yet whether the Indian proposal is a short-to-medium-term solution or a strategic one that is clear about a constituent Assembly, restructuring of the Nepalese state and adequately and positively including the Maoists in the solution. It also is not clear whether there can

be a ring-fence around constitutional monarchy while going for a constituent Assembly.

Even as foreign secretary Shyam Saran called on the army chief, General Pyar Jung Thapa, this evening, five persons were shot dead and scores injured when the Royal Nepal Army opened fire on a crowd of 50,000 pro-democracy protesters. This happened in Chandragarhi, the district headquarters of Jhapa in eastern Nepal, which has now been seized by the army.

**Reuters adds:** Ian Martin, the

special representative to Nepal of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters in Geneva that "democratic rights do not exist at present in Nepal".

"The international community as a whole has to urge the king to take steps to resolve the situation peacefully," he said.

He said most economic activity and transport had been halted across the country of 26 million people as a result of the general strike. "This is not a situation that can continue indefinitely," Martin added.



A policeman bleeds after being injured in clashes with protesters in Kathmandu on Wednesday. (Reuters)

**Kathmandu, April 19** (Reuters): Nepal's economy can hold out for months even if it is isolated by donors and allies angered by King Gyanendra's crackdown on a pro-democracy campaign, the World Bank representative to the country said today.

Although the economy was suffering a lot of strain from a two-week strike in the campaign by a seven-party alliance for the restoration of democracy, it had foreign exchange reserves of about \$1.5 billion, equivalent to the full annual budget, said Ken-ichi

## 'Economy can survive for months'

Ohashi, the bank's Nepal country director.

"How long has Burma (Myanmar) survived?" he said. "I think evidence is pretty clear that if a country decides to endure some hardship, the economy just doesn't collapse very easily."

"And especially the Nepalese economy, it's so well integrated into the Indian economy that it's not going to collapse."

India slapped a partial trade blockade on Nepal in the late 1980s following political differences, but it had only a limited impact even though it lasted for several months. "If India plays hardball, India can put pressure," Ohashi said. "But the pressure is only through essentially making everybody's life miserable."

NEPAL ■ Top Opp leaders freed, BJP sending Jaswant to Gyanendra next week

# King hints he may give up direct rule, Karan in talks with alliance

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE &  
PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA  
KATHMANDU, NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

**A**S Karan Singh, Prime Minister's special envoy landed in Kathmandu and asked leaders of the 7-party alliance to resolve the Maoist problem through consolidation of the constitutional process, King Gyanendra sent out strong signals that he just may give up the absolute powers he assumed 14 months ago.

There were indications that the King was ready to issue a proclamation, acknowledging that sovereignty lies with the people and he would remain purely the constitutional monarch.

As Karan Singh flew in and protests picked up—two persons were shot dead at Chandragadi, 500 km south-east of Kathmandu—the government freed two top Opposition leaders who had been in detention for three months.

Madav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of Communist Party of Nepal (UML), and Ram Chandra Poudyal, general secretary of Nepali Congress, were released and the government gave no reasons. Only two days



Special envoy Karan Singh after landing in Kathmandu on Wednesday. AP

ago, Poudyal's detention had been extended for another three months.

On his arrival here, Karan Singh said he was "optimistic" about the talks he would be holding with the King and leaders of political parties. Singh met Madhav Nepal and former prime ministers G P Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Singh is believed to have told the leaders that the future of democracy lies in the consolidation of democratic forces and how they collectively

address the Maoist insurgency. An alliance between the parties and the Maoists, the leaders were told, would only imperil the future of democracy.

As G P Koirala, Deuba and Madhav Nepal expressed lack of faith in the King's sincerity, Singh advised them to correct the situation once they form a government.

There was also buzz that CPM politburo member Sitaram Yechury would fly down to convince the CPN (UML) to be part of a consolidated

democratic system. What has worried the seven-party alliance and the Government of India is the gradual "hijacking" of the two-week long strike by the Maoists who have announced a parallel agenda which wasn't there when the alliance called for a general strike. The Maoists are asking people to target government offices and demolish statues of kings.

Meanwhile, the BJP is sending former External Affairs Minister and senior leader Jaswant Singh to meet the King next week. According to Jaswant Singh,

he had asked the Government for a briefing after a confirmation from Gyanendra last weekend but no one got back to him.

Jaswant is going to Kathmandu on April 24. The King has been reaching out to the BJP and his advisor had even extended an invitation to L K Advani in January who had politely turned it down.

Jaswant has stuck to the line that constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy are the two pillars of political stability in Nepal. "We must remember that our neighbours are sovereign countries and we do not interfere in their matters," he told *The Indian Express*.

THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2006

## Next stop, constituent assembly

**T**he unambiguous message India's special envoy, Karan Singh, must convey to King Gyanendra in Kathmandu is this: "Your time is up. Either step back and allow the political parties to lead the country towards a constituent assembly, which might yet salvage a ceremonial role for the monarchy. Or be swept away by the rising tide of public protest." Such a message will be factually accurate, morally incontrovertible, and politically sound. The mass upsurge against the autocratic and increasingly hated monarchy will soon enter its third week. Every day brings with it an ever-greater sense of popular determination to see the struggle for democracy through to the end. The partnership between the seven-party alliance (SPA) and the Nepalese Maoists has held firm. The security forces seem in no mood to precipitate matters by opening fire on peaceful civilians. Ominously for the King, the one country that tried to block political unity between the SPA and the Maoists appears to have bowed to reality; the United States ambassador in Kathmandu, James Moriarty, has now begun to invoke images of an ignominious Saigon-type evacuation for Gyanendra. New Delhi is no longer firmly wedded to the 'two-pillar' theory that has underpinned its Nepal policy for nearly two decades; it now appears ready to endorse whatever arrangement emerges from a democratically elected constituent assembly.

The Indian Government has played its cards on Nepal quietly and, in the main, judiciously. Its condemnation of Gyanendra's February 1, 2005 putsch, the arms embargo, and the quiet encouragement of contacts between the SPA and the Maoists have all helped Nepali democratic forces reach a decisive stage in the struggle. What New Delhi must not do at this critical juncture is compromise the democratic goodwill it has built up by endorsing some kind of political half-way house. Returning to the *status quo ante* is no longer an option for Nepal; nor will it do for the King to ask the SPA to nominate an interim Prime Minister. Any interim arrangement in which the King surrenders power to the political parties must explicitly aim to implement the commitment to a constituent assembly. A key development of the past year has been the establishment of confidence between the parties and the Maoists — built on the understanding that a permanent solution to the nation's political crisis requires new constitutional arrangements. India facilitated the establishment of a working relationship between the two principal political players in Nepal without getting directly involved. While there is merit in New Delhi maintaining a studied distance from the rough and tackle of this process, the demand for progressive Indian facilitation is likely to grow as the struggle for democracy enters a more mature stage and the pressures on the working partnership between the Maoists and the SPA increase.

THE HINDU

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# King on a precipice

One can only pray for his safety

One can only chant "Ram, Ram" for a cow grazing on a steep slope, but can't lend his shoulders - so goes a Nepali saying that is, as much, an accurate description of King Gyanendra who is literally on a precipice. He has failed to crush the Maoist uprising despite ruling with an iron hand for 14 months. On this ground alone he should step down because he dismissed a democratically elected government for failing to quell the rebellion. With international pressure on him to hand power back to the people, he is plainly looking to save face by meeting envoys of various countries, including India. The Seven Party Alliance, which has hit the streets and is planning to intensify its campaign from this week, wants nothing short of the restoration of multi-party democracy. Too much need not be read into the King on Monday meeting two former Prime Ministers, KP Bhattarai (Nepali Congress) and Surya Bahadur Thapa (Rashtriya Janashakti Party) because while the former is out of politics the latter's party is not even part of the SPA. Bhattarai did run an interim government in 1990 until the first general election was held under the new constitution. After meeting the King he was quoted as saying "The present situation will change", adding that he was a royalist and would never agree to a constituent assembly. Why should the King have summoned him, of all people, unless he has in mind a rewriting of 1990 history? Political reality has so changed since then.

Whatever the King's next move, he has at least realised the futility of reimposing emergency - that he cannot continue the crackdown on peaceful demonstrators for long is certain. What could severely tarnish the royal administration's image is the treatment being meted out to detainees in improvised camps - inadequate food and facilities. There are reports of alleged abuse and acts of terror, a shade of the Abu Gharib variety. A letter by incarcerated Himal editor Kanak Dixit smuggled out of jail and published in The Statesman, speaks of a gross violation of human rights. Dixit says those with money and political influence get away but the poor cannot. At the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva last year Nepal defended the army action against Maoists but most inmates in the camps are either poor or daily wage-earners picked up while watching the anti-King demonstrations. One of them described how the "demons" - meaning policemen - "kicked my head as if it was a football". Surely this will not have escaped the UNHRC's notice.

THE STATESMAN

# NEPAL ■ Let political parties take charge and sort out the Maoist problem: India, US PM sending Karan Singh to King, message clear: restore democracy

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA &  
YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

NEW DELHI, KATHMANDU, APRIL 18

**W**ITH tensions rising in Nepal and economic indicators worsening, India today decided to send senior Congress leader Karan Singh on Wednesday as a special envoy, carrying a message from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for King Gyanendra.

The message from the PM, while expressing concern, is expected to emphasise the need for the King to immediately respond given the public outrage and protests being backed by the seven-parties political alliance. This could also open up opportunities for negotiations with the Maoists, who are a major security challenge for the monarch.

The Prime Minister, in his message, will make it clear that while India does not have any intention of intervening in the domestic issues of its neighbouring countries, it was extremely concerned by the developments in Nepal.

Karan Singh, related to the monarch through his wife, told *The Indian Express* that he did know Gyanendra "tremendously well" but had met him a couple of years ago. "I knew his father well... but I will give it a shot because the situation is getting dangerous and deteriorating fast."

While Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran will be joining him from Bhutan tomorrow, Singh said he will hold a one-on-one meeting with the King and personally hand him over a message from the PM. "Some steps need to be taken... the institution of democracy needs to be restored."

Singh also gave examples of other monarchs across the world, including the King of Bhutan who has voluntarily taken steps towards democracy. While agreeing that the Nepal King had



Red Cross workers walk past riot police in Kathmandu on Tuesday as anti-King protests showed no signs of ending

missed out on opportunities, he added that even political parties had taken time to respond to the threat being posed by the Maoists.

India has already made it clear to Gyanendra through its Ambassador S S Mukherjee that he must immediately let the political parties form a government and let them choose a leader from among themselves so that the constitutional processes can be set into motion.

Once a government is formed, it can then take a decision on how to move

forward by way of elections or a constituent assembly. But first, New Delhi feels, the government should be given the mandate to negotiate a peace settlement with Maoists given that the alliance of political parties has already reached an understanding with them for the moment.

That Gyanendra does not have much time to decide was made clear by US Ambassador James Moriarty in Kathmandu. In an interview, Moriarty did some plain speaking, saying no-

body wanted a situation where the King had to cling on to the wheel of a fleeing helicopter.

Moriarty too had advised the King that power should be irreversibly handed over to the political parties who would be responsible for finding a solution to the Maoist problem.

The King, sources said, told most leaders he met not to doubt his democratic credentials. He was quoted as saying "I know that an absolute monarchy is not suited for the 21st century".

# Killings, curfew greet Karan

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 19: In what is considered a slap on the face of India's diplomatic efforts to resolve the Nepal crisis, the royalist government has imposed a curfew on the Kathmandu Valley from 2 a.m. today to 8 p.m. tomorrow to thwart an Opposition rally.

On his arrival here today, India's special envoy Dr Karan Singh said: "I am always optimistic. I bring the good wishes of the people of India for the people of Nepal... Prayers and hope that Nepal will get out of its present difficulties and return to peace and prosperity."

Even as he was speaking in the capital, security forces were firing on demonstrators in Jhapa district, killing at least three people in Chandragadji town and injuring dozens. Private TV channel Kantipur put the toll at four. With today's killings, the number of people who died during the fortnight-long protests climbed to 10.

However, Dr Karan Singh's arrival effected a small miracle with the government releasing top Communist leader Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal and Nepali Congress leader Mr Ram Chandra Poudel.

Mr Nepal, leader of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, and a former deputy Prime Minister, had been under house arrest since mid-January after which last month, he was placed under arrest. Dr Singh had told the media in New Delhi, before his departure for Kathmandu, that he would like to meet Mr Nepal if the leader was out of jail.

Releasing political leaders on the eve of visits by foreign envoys had become a hallmark of the royal regime. However, they are arrested again when the Opposition plans an anti-government protest. Dr Singh met leaders of two of the biggest parties in the seven-party Opposition alliance - Nepali Congress leader Mr Girija Prasad

Koirala and sacked premier Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba. Now he would also meet Mr Nepal. He also had a lunch meeting with Pashupati Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, who is related to Dr Singh. Tomorrow, the day he is supposed to have the royal audience, Dr Singh is also meeting Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, leader of the Rastriya Janashakti Party. The RPP and RJP, which are not in the Opposition alliance, have a soft spot for monarchy.

On the 14th day of the strike which began on 6 April for the ouster of the King, things have never looked bleaker for monarchy. The domestic airlines, barring the Royal Nepal Airlines, are suspending all flights tomorrow.

There are rumours that after meeting Dr Singh, the King will decide what to do next. The Indian government might also send CPI-M leader Mr Sitaram Yechury to Kathmandu as an "interlocutor".



# Protester killed, Nepal king meets ex-PMs

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 17

WITH DEFIANCE of royal rule spreading through a paralysed Nepal, security forces fatally shot a sixth protester in Nijgadh on Monday as King Gyanendra searched for a way out of a crisis that is threatening to break his grip over this Himalayan land. Twelve days of often-bloody pro-democracy protests and a general strike have emptied Nepal's highways, and cities were running low on fresh food and fuel.

In a move that many hope is a sign that the king is ready to blink, Gyanendra on Monday invited three former prime ministers to the Narayanhiti Palace to discuss the crisis. Two of them — veteran Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Rastriya Janashakti Party chairman Surya Bahadur Thapa — met him, while the third, Lokendra Bahadur Chand demurred. Not one of the leaders was of the SPA, which is leading the nationwide agitation.

The meeting with Bhattarai lasted 40 minutes. Bhattarai, who is not participating in the ongoing pro-democracy movement, said after the meeting that he was convinced that democracy would soon be restored in

Nepal. He had, however, declared himself, before entering the palace, "a royalist". Bhattarai said he did not have faith in the Assembly elections, which the SPA has been demanding. "The present Constitution should be reactivated," he said.

But the opposition, perhaps sensing its moment has arrived, says there will be no compromises. It is demanding a new Constitution that would limit — if not eliminate — the monarchy's role. "We have not been asked by the palace to attend any meeting and even if we are called, we will not go," said Krishna Sitaula of the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the SPA.

The SPA believes that April 20, the date chosen for a mammoth rally in the capital, would be an acid test for Gyanendra. Hundreds of thousands of people are likely to take part in the rally. The government has already banned gatherings, processions and sit-ins on the Ring Road and 200 metres from the Ring Road in Kathmandu Metropolitan and Lalitpur Sub-Metropolis.

Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal, president of the Nepal Government Employees' Association, said they had no alternative but to come out openly to save the country from a catastrophe. "We



AFP

Nepalese policemen clash with anti-king protesters in Kathmandu on Monday.

are public servants, not slaves of a single person," Murari Bhattarai, the president of civil employees association, said.

Supreme Court employees too joined the movement on Monday

with demonstrations in front of the court. The Kathmandu branch of Federation of Nepalese Journalists organised a meeting at Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu, to protest against

the attack on journalists. Meanwhile, the Nepal government has issued three-month warrants against the 20 journalists arrested during a protest meeting on Sunday.

## Petrol scarcity grips Valley

WITH THE anti-king strike in its 12th day, the Kathmandu Valley is facing an acute shortage of petroleum products. Most gas stations remained closed bearing No Petrol signs, with the Maoists' highway blockade keeping oil tankers away.

Though the Nepal Oil Corporation claimed to have enough stock at the Thankot Depot to satisfy the valley's needs for at least one more week, the SPA hopes scarcity of petrol and diesel will restrict the movement of security forces. "If NOC does not have enough fuel, how can police and army vehicles ply?" Najendra Prasad Adhikari of the Nepali Engineers Association said.

NOC sources told HT that the corporation was under pressure from the Indian Oil Corporation to clear outstanding payments. The NOC owes the IOC more than Rs 100 crore.

Nepal is solely dependent on India for petroleum products.

HTC, Kathmandu

# Heat rises, bullets fly in Nepal



Shoes of Nepalese demonstrators litter the street of Chahabail in Kathmandu on Monday after troops opened fire on anti-monarchy protesters. (Reuters)

## Troops open fire to stifle democracy cry

**Kathmandu, April 17** (Reuters): Nepali troops opened fire on anti-monarchy protesters in an eastern town today and killed one man, witnesses and officials said, as international pressure increased on King Gyanendra to restore multi-party democracy.

It was the fifth person to be killed in 12 days of violent pro-democracy demonstrations that have brought the impoverished Himalayan nation to a standstill. Hundreds have been wounded.

Witnesses said troops had opened fire on protesters in the eastern town of Nijagadh, 200 km east of Kathmandu. One person had been killed and five wounded, they said.

Local officials initially denied the reports but later confirmed the death. The Communist Party of Nepal (UML) however said that two people had been killed.

The ambassadors of the US, China and India met Gyanendra yesterday and have asked him to take action to end the agitation.

Sources said that, while the king might take some initiatives, he was unlikely to meet all the protesters' demands. "He will not tolerate any clipping of his powers," said one diplomat. "And whatever he offers may not satisfy the movement. The movement has gone far beyond even what the parties had expected."

Gyanendra sacked the government and assumed full power in February 2005, vowing to crush a decade-old Maoist revolt in which more than 13,000 people have died.

He has offered to hold elections by April next year, but activists say he is not to be trusted and should immediately hand over power to an all-party government.

In Kathmandu, unrest rocked the tourist quarter of Thamel for the second day, as police burst tear gas shells and charged at slogan-shouting youths to break up a protest.

Thamel is a maze of alleys full of backpacker hotels, bars, restaurants, shops and tour agencies that has been largely

immune to the anti-monarchy campaign. In normal times tourism is the country's main foreign currency earner.

In other parts of the city, security forces lobbed tear gas shells and carried out cane charges against protesters.

Government officials said an army-escorted convoy of trucks bringing in food and fuel had set off for Kathmandu from Birganj, on the border with India and the main transit point for goods flowing into the landlocked nation.

A strike in support of the campaign has sent food prices shooting up, and triggered a fuel shortage. Hundreds of cars and motorcycles were queued at gas stations in Kathmandu and pump owners had begun impromptu rationing.

"Petrol supply has completely stopped," said Harendra Bahadur Shreshtha, chief of the consumers forum. "There is supply good for one month, but the government is busy in suppressing the movement and is not paying any attention."



An agitator lobs stones at security forces in Kathmandu. (AFP)

## India asks king to begin talks

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, April 17:** As the pro-democracy movement spread like wildfire in Nepal, India today asked King Gyanendra to start immediate dialogue with political parties to end the instability.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh went into a huddle last night with senior cabinet colleagues, heads of security agencies, the army chief and the foreign secretary to assess the developments. The meeting was necessitated after Indian envoy to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee met Gyanendra at Narayanhiti Palace.

The event assumed significance as it was the first time the king had met the Indian diplomat in seven months.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran briefed the top brass about the outcome of the meeting. Sources said Gyanendra told the envoy that he was ready to hand over power to political parties but did not

give any assurance about reinstating Parliament.

Delhi is also suspicious that the king, who invited political parties for dialogue, might try to split his opponents.

Gyanendra met three former Prime Ministers of Nepal, including Surya Bahadur Thapa and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, today.

Sources said the security agencies have been told to prepare a contingency plan to tackle any eventuality in wake of the fast-paced developments in the kingdom.

The possible scenarios were reviewed at the meeting with the government also exploring the possibility of the king abdicating and leaving the country. Delhi does not want a vacuum in Kathmandu if Gyanendra leaves.

Sources said he could hand over power to an interim cabinet before fresh elections are held.

India is also planning to put the army on alert if the crisis deepens in Nepal.

18 APR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

# Nepal's Maoists back call for economic pressure

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HD-15

**Fifth death in police firing since protests began two weeks ago**

189

**KATHMANDU:** A fifth anti-royal protester died on Monday in Nepal as the army was deployed to ensure food reaches the capital on the 12th day of a strike in which neither the King nor the Opposition is backing down.

Security forces shot the man in southern Nepal, the fifth death since widespread protests hit the country two weeks ago, a district official said.

"We have received reports that one protester died while being rushed to the hospital after security forces opened fire at an anti-royal demonstration," said

an official from the Bara district, on condition of anonymity.

## Food shortages

After political parties declared economic war on King Gyanendra on Sunday night to force him to hand over power, and with food and fuel shortages biting, the Government took action.

Prices for fresh food have rocketed in the capital as trucks had been unable to enter the Kathmandu valley, home to some 1.7 million people.

Late on Sunday, an alliance of

seven political parties called on citizens to halt tax and utility bill payments and boycott businesses run by the royal family, ahead of a mass protest in Kathmandu set for Thursday.

Maoist leader Prachandra on Monday backed the call for economic pressure on the royal government and urged everyone to join in.

"We are firm in our stance that until the goal of a democratic republic is achieved ... the ongoing movement should not be stopped," he said. — AFP

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THE HINDU

# Nepal begins countdown to final push

## New Delhi tells king to step back

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 16

THE DEMOCRACY movement in Nepal took on the dimensions of a siege on Sunday, with the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and Maoist rebels mobilising their political and material resources for the final push to overthrow King Gyanendra's "autocratic" rule amid rumours that the King was moving to promulgate Emergency.

As if in anticipation, former US President Jimmy Carter cancelled his visit to the Kingdom. Carter, who was to reach Nepal on May 3 on a four-day visit, was reportedly advised by the US Embassy to cancel the trip.

The US and Chinese envoys met the King separately, urging him to restore democracy. But former deputy prime minister and veteran leader of the Communist Party of Nepal Bharat Mohan Bhattarai told HT that time had run out for the King. "The countdown has begun, and our goal isn't far," he said.

CPN(UML) politburo member Pradip Nepal predicted the King would capitulate within a week. To speed up things, Joint Movement Central Coordination Committee (JMCCC) urged people after a meeting in the evening to stop paying taxes to the "autocratic government".

Former prime minister and president of Nepali Congress (Democratic) Sher Bahadur Deuba appealed to non-resident

40.88 10000



Pro-democracy activists demonstrate against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on Sunday. AP

Nepalis not to send remittances until democracy was restored. The SPA requested friendly countries, donors and the international community not to give any financial aid to the "unconstitutional" regime. The streets of Kathmandu were tense with rumours rife that the King was planning a Durbar. Out on the streets, people were seen stocking up provisions in anticipation of a protracted siege. Several areas of Kathmandu, including downtown Ashan, plunged into darkness following a blackout call by the pro-democracy activists. "We don't mind, as long as there is democracy at the end of it all," a fruit vendor said.

**NILOVA ROY Chaudhury**  
New Delhi, April 16

WHEN INDIAN Ambassador to Nepal, Shiv Mukherjee, met King Gyanendra on Sunday, he conveyed a strong message from New Delhi: If the King wanted to salvage what he could of the monarchy, he needed to step back and hand over power to the seven-party alliance of political parties in Kathmandu.

That was the only way he would be able to stem the rising tide of unrest sweeping across the kingdom, the envoy told him during the meeting, their first in seven months. Mere talk of elections would serve little purpose, he was told. Only by handing over actual power to political parties and stepping into the background would the monarchy be able to salvage a role for itself in the future. The advice was to hand over power and let the political parties sort out the issue, taking the wish of the people into account.

Though Gyanendra's response was much the same as it has been in the past, with him saying he was always keen to encourage democracy, it was unclear if the message had got through. Though nobody quite knows how the situation will play itself out, the future of the monarchy and what little, if anything, it can salvage for itself depends entirely on how the king plays his cards. The endgame could play out as early as tomorrow, next week or over several months, analysts said.

After the meeting at Narayanhity Palace, Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran met the Prime Minister and discussed the crisis in Nepal, its effect on India and rapidly unfolding scenarios. It is believed they spoke of contingency plans in the event that Gyanendra decides to or is forced to abdicate at short notice. It is unlikely he would seek asylum in this country, but that is one of a wide variety of options being factored into India's calculations.

India has been largely instrumental in bringing political parties and the Maoist insurgents together to restore multi-party democracy. Through wary of the Maoists, India has noted that they have desisted from violence since the crisis snowballed.

# Siege spreads to Nepal lifelines

## Palace invites Indian envoy

J. HEMANTH

**Kathmandu, April 16:** King Gyanendra held talks with diplomats from India and the US amid a call for full-blown civil disobedience and speculation about the likely imposition of emergency in Nepal.

Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukhejee and America's James Moriarty were among the envoys called by the king during the day for talks.

The invitations were sent out as the ground situation within Kathmandu valley and elsewhere threatened to spiral out of control.

Political parties waging a campaign for democracy asked people to stop paying taxes and international donors to halt aid to the royalist government.

"We ask taxpayers not to pay any tax to the government, civil servants to disobey orders and security forces to take off their uniforms and join the people," said Krishna Prasad Sitaula of the Nepali Congress, the country's biggest political party.

Protests erupted for the first time in Kathmandu's Thamel tourist district and by dusk many streets of the capital were littered with stones and the ashes of burnt tyres.

"We will burn the crown

## REVOLT CALL TO PEOPLE AND POLICE



A woman offers flowers to a policeman, inviting him to take part in the peaceful protest, in Kathmandu on Sunday. (Reuters)

and run the country," youths shouted, dancing around a bonfire in Thamel. "Death to the government."

The district is a sprawling maze of alleys in the centre of the capital full of backpacker hotels, bars, curio shops and trekking and travel agencies that is a magnet for tourists.

The unrest in Thamel, which many Nepalese consider a foreign enclave, was unusual. The district has usually been insulated from protests because of worries it would affect the tourist trade, a main source of the impoverished kingdom's earnings.

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held a meeting with his senior cabinet colleagues for over 90 minutes to discuss the Nepal situation. No official comment was available till late tonight but India - as well as the US - have criticised the crackdown on the pro-democracy campaign and urged the king to quickly resolve the situation.

The embattled monarch spent the entire morning holding confabulations with senior members of his government.

Thereafter, the palace sent out invites to the diplomats,

including Chinese ambassador Sun Hepping. While the American envoy was the first to be called to the palace around 5 pm, the Indian ambassador went in next. The Chinese ambassador was the last to hold discussions.

Sources told **The Telegraph** that each of the diplomats spent an hour in the palace. Gyanendra apparently discussed various options available to him to deal with the crisis and sought the opinion of the envoys.

The sources said Mukherjee conveyed the Indian Prime Minister's view that the

monarch had to take the first step forward by inviting the seven-party alliance for talks. He also informed Gyanendra that the government cannot use repressive measures.

The sources said the American envoy reportedly conveyed a similar message.

The council of ministers of the Royalist government met this evening and discussed the possibility of imposing a state of emergency to quell the protests. At a simultaneous security meeting, top officials suggested immediate imposition of emergency, sources said.

## King and his shaky throne

**Kathmandu, April 16** (Reuters): For centuries, the Shah kings of Nepal have swung from being absolute monarchs to titular figureheads and back again, usually after horrific violence.

As present King Gyanendra, the 12th of the dynasty, battles pro-democracy protesters, many are wondering if he can remain on the throne at all.

"Gyanendra, thief, leave the country" is the warcry of the tens of thousands campaigning against his rule, a slogan that would have been heretical just a few years ago when the Shahs were worshipped as reincarnations of Lord Vishnu.

"That kind of traditional respect is over," says Yubaraj Ghimire, editor of the local weekly *Samay*. "A kind of momentum is building up."

To be fair to the king, the mystique surrounding the dynasty was torn apart by the 2001 palace massacre. "That incident sent a strong message that people we worship like gods are using drugs and killing their parents," says Ghimire. "How are they different from any common criminals? That was a flashpoint."

King Gyanendra was out of the city at that time, and succeeded his much-respected brother King Birendra, the last Shah to transition from being a ruler to a titular monarch.

Despite a somewhat unsavoury reputation as a hard-



Gyanendra: Fading glory

nosed businessman, King Gyanendra's countrymen appeared ready to give him a chance to restore the prestige of the monarchy.

Instead, within four years, he sacked the government and assumed full power, saying it had failed to put down a raging Maoist rebellion. The move reversed his brother's decision to allow multiparty democracy and a constitutional monarchy in 1990 after a campaign in which up to 300 people were killed.

The resulting public anger against Gyanendra was fuelled by nagging suspicions many harboured about why he was away at the time of the massacre.

"It was a missed opportunity," says Ghimire of King Gyanendra. "He was a royal but he didn't expect to be king, so he was also a commoner. He could have given a new thrust to the monarchy."



# Nepal teeters on the brink of collapse

By Keshav Pradhan/TNN

**Kathmandu:** The embattled Himalayan kingdom's capital city shut down on Saturday as an indefinite strike called by pro-democracy parties kicked in. But there was no let-up in demonstrations and violence, with police attacking protesting journalists in Kathmandu with truncheons, leaving at least 14 of them wounded, some with serious head injuries.

More than 130 people, including journalists, were arrested from among the 75,000 or so protestors who swarmed Kathmandu's streets, pushing through police barricades and breaking and regrouping as rubber bullets and tear-gas shells rained on them. About 50 persons are reported to have been injured.

Meanwhile, autocratic monarch Gyanendra's refusal to heed calls to restore parliament and kickstart democracy pushed his already impoverished nation to the brink of economic collapse with supplies from India choked off by transport disruptions and the prices of commodities skyrocketing.

A Raj Parishad (royal privy council) member on Saturday said Nepal was facing a serious economic and fiscal crisis. "The kingdom is standing close to a precipice. Its entire economic system has come to a halt," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The parishad has forwarded some recommendations to the palace after discussing the alarming situation, but the cabinet has not so far openly talked about price rises.

For the last one week, there has been no move-

ment of supply trucks and oil tankers from India. An Indian diplomat said, "All trucks and tankers are stranded on our side of the border." These vehicles are stuck mostly at Jogbani and Raxaul (Bihar) and Nautanwa and Rupadiha (UP) and Panitanki (Darjeeling).

Similarly, there has been no movement of supplies within the kingdom. People fear an acute shortage of fuel within the next few days. "The only saving grace is we do not immediately need much petrol and diesel because of bandhs and curfews," said one resident.

At Lazimpat, about 100 metres from the heavily-fortified palace, a medicine dealer said, "We have not



A child perched on his father's shoulders gets a bird's eye view of a pro-democracy rally in Kathmandu on Saturday

got supplies of medicines and baby food from India for almost ten days. We do not know what will happen after we pull down our shutters from Sunday in support of democracy." Rallying behind the democrats, doctors and pharmacists have also decided to close down OPDs in all hospitals and medicine vends. Their services will be available only for emergency cases and to those wounded in police action.

Prices of commodities started shooting up after the Royal Nepalese Army started blocking highways to stop pro-democracy supporters from attending an anti-king rally on April 6.



**2001**

King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and others killed by drunk Crown Prince Dipendra, who then shoots himself. Gyanendra is crowned. G P Koirala quits as Maoists step up attacks. Deuba becomes PM. Emergency declared.

**2002**

Parliament dissolved, fresh poll called amid row over extending Emergency. Gyanendra dismisses Deuba's interim govt, puts off polls. Lokendra Bahadur Chand appointed to head government.

**2003**

Rebels, government declare ceasefire. Chand quits and king appoints his own nominee Surya Bahadur Thapa as new premier.

**2004**

Thapa resigns following opposition protests. Deuba back as PM. Maoist rebels stage week-long blockade of Kathmandu, stopping supplies from reaching the city.

**2005**

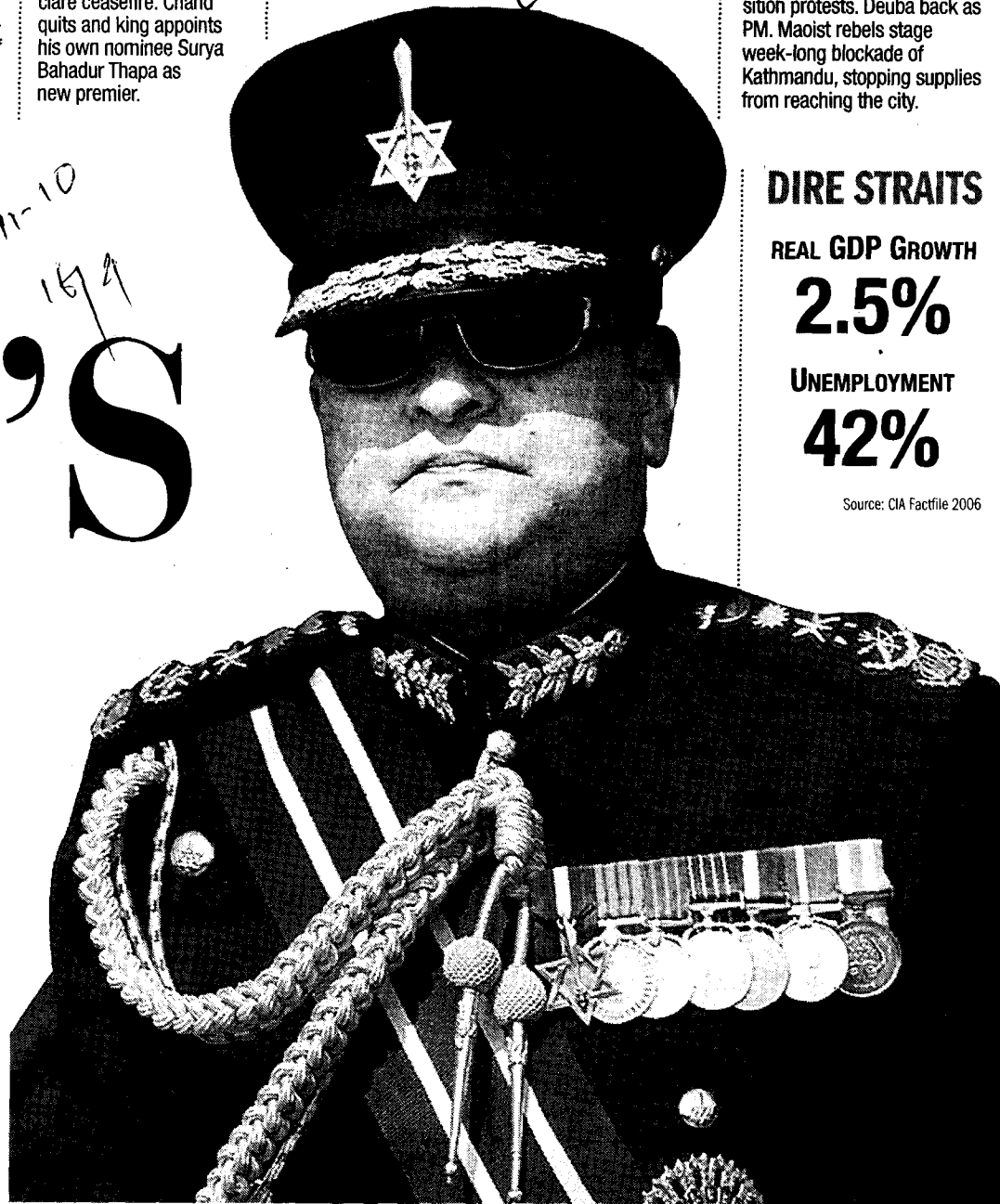
Gyanendra dismisses Deuba and his government, declares emergency and assumes direct power, citing need to defeat Maoists. Lifts emergency in April after international pressure. Rebels announce unilateral ceasefire, the first truce since peace talks broke down in 2003.

**2006**

Truce ends. Strikes and protests called by opposition in protest against direct rule of the king. Fierce clashes in capital. Gyanendra calls for general elections.

# THE KING'S LAST GAMBIT

Something's gotta give. And it looks like it's going to be the monarch. Just back from Kathmandu, Akshaya Mukul reports



**DIRE STRAITS**

REAL GDP GROWTH  
**2.5%**  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
**42%**

Source: CIA Factfile 2006

## Family Foibles

Once Revered, Now Reviled

Sujata Dutta Sachdeva

The royal family is a threat to Nepal. They have no place in the country, least of all as rulers," says Prof A C Sinha, author and Nepal expert. Ever since the royal massacre on that fateful night of June 1, 2001 at Narayanhiti Palace, royalty in Nepal has never been the same again. Far from being revered, it's now the symbol of everything that's wrong with the country. "The common man doesn't trust the king anymore. For him, the king is a ruthless businessman, a black-marketeer who wants to rule for personal gains," explains Sinha. And what's adding to this image is his utter disregard for popular sentiment.

It's been more than five years since the massacre of King Birendra and his family but the incident still casts a shadow over the palace. "People suspect Gyanendra and his son Paras of having masterminded the murder," says Prof Bimal Prasad, former ambassador to Nepal. "He thinks he was born to rule since he was *de facto* crowned king as a four-year-old when the Ranas usurped power," he adds.

Prince Paras has also earned a good deal of notoriety — a case in point being a hit-and-run involving a popular Nepalese singer while driving under the influence of alcohol. His high-handed behaviour is the talk of the nation. "Even King Gyanendra's loyal friends have now been sidelined by Prince Paras," says Professor S D Muni, a Nepal expert.

Throughout Nepal's history, the monarchy has been the single consistent factor. However, the role of the king has undergone significant transformation over time: from conqueror to symbolic figurehead under Birendra to absolute ruler under Gyanendra. Unlike his brother, who was seen as a monarch willing to make compromises, the present king is seen as a despot. Most political parties have united in protest against the monarchy.

So what does the future hold for Nepali royalty? "They have no future, not even as a titular head," says Mishra. Sinha feels that if at all they survive, they will be symbolic heads with no power. Muni says the king's survival depends on three factors: "First, a confused international community which does not understand the Maoists; second, a divided polity; third, the Nepalese Army." But these factors are temporary, and soon, the monarchy will have to give in. "They cannot survive, it's just a matter of time."



Sacred crown of Nepal

**DOWN THE AGES**

- 400 BC** | BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA AT LUMBINI
- 879 AD** | BEGINNING OF NEPAL ERA
- 1482** | DEATH OF YAKSHA MALLA, LAST SOLE KING OF KATHMANDU VALLEY
- 1628** | JESUIT JOHN CABRAL IS FIRST EUROPEAN TO VISIT THE NEPAL VALLEY
- 1743** | PRITHVI NARAYAN SHAH CROWNED GORKHA KING (GYANENDRA'S ANCESTOR)
- 1793** | KIRKPATRICK MISSION TO KATHMANDU
- 1809-10** | SIKH RULER RANJIT SINGH HALTS GORKHALI EXPANSION IN THE WEST
- 1814-16** | ANGLI-GORKHA WAR
- 1840** | APPOINTMENT OF BRITISH MINISTRY
- 1911** | TRIBHUVAN BIR BIKRAM SHAH BECOMES KING OF NEPAL
- 1947-48** | FORMATION OF NEPALI NATIONAL CONGRESS, NEPALI DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS
- 1950** | BOTH PARTIES MERGE INTO NEPALI CONGRESS; KING TRIBHUVAN FLEES TO THE INDIAN EMBASSY
- 1951** | FORMAL END OF RANA REGIME AND ESTABLISHMENT OF COALITION GOVERNMENT UNDER RESTORED KING TRIBHUVAN; M P KOIRALA FORMS CONGRESS GOVERNMENT AFTER COLLAPSE OF COALITION
- 1955** | KING TRIBHUVAN DIES IN SWITZERLAND, KING MAHENDRA SUCCEEDS HIM
- 1959** | KING MAHENDRA HOLDS NEPAL'S FIRST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
- 1959** | B P KOIRALA BECOMES PM
- 1960** | MAHENDRA IMPOSES DIRECT ROYAL RULE
- 1972** | BIRENDRA CROWNED
- 1990** | START OF PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT; KING LIFTS BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES
- 1991** | G P KOIRALA'S CONGRESS GOVT FORMED
- 1996** | COMMENCEMENT OF PEOPLE'S WAR
- 2001** | GYANENDRA IS CROWNED KING

**R**ewind to April 8. Two days of a successful bandh called by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and Maoists cripple the hill kingdom of Nepal, and a brutal curfew is imposed to stymie what looks like a gathering storm of protest against the monarchy. But a former Nepali diplomat, who has survived all regimes, is confident: "Kathmandu 2006 will never become a Saigon 1975."

His reference is to the year when the South Vietnam ruler abdicated power voluntarily — a step that led to the creation of unified, modern Vietnam. What the ex-diplomat ruled out was the possibility of Gyanendra abdicating. This and more. After saying that democracy and civil rights were all very fine, he said none of this would have any meaning without the king. Why? "King is the religious and spiritual head of our country. Who would you look up to even with such rights?" The long and short of his nervous rambling was he couldn't visualise Nepal minus the monarch. He couldn't visualise a system other than the monarchy either. And he isn't alone — courtiers, diplomats, king's ministers and traditionalists felt only two weeks ago that the king was ordained to be there.

Two weeks later, the moth-eaten monarchic paraphernalia looks shakier than ever before. Gyanendra's haughty defiance of the popular

against it. On Thursday, junior bureaucrats of the home ministry struck work for two hours. The bureaucracy is always the last to switch sides and rarely is it wrong in figuring which way the wind is blowing.

How the future unfolds will depend on the games the two sides — the monarchy, on one hand, and SPA and Maoists, on the other — play. Take the king first. He has already played the election card. Even when the King was away in Pokhara, his loyalists in Kathmandu were forcefully arguing that announcing elections would help restore order. In fact, much of what King said in his speech has been articulated several times by former PM Surya Bahadur Thapa, considered close to the king.

When TOI met Thapa last week in Kathmandu, he had said: "I want the raja to first announce elections and talk of people power. He should remain a constitutional monarch which is beautifully delineated by our Constitution. There is no need to have a new constitution. He felt "the present complication" has aggravated due to the understanding between the Maoists and SPA.

"I know SPA leaders cannot take an independent decision now. There is pressure from Maoists," he said. Admitting that Maoists cannot be shunned, Thapa wanted them to be disarmed before their demand for a constituent assembly was met. "Otherwise, they

SPA's poll boycott would be bad for the country. "We have already become an international outlaw," he said. His fear is that refusal would lead to more repression from the state.

Contention of the two powerful Thapas is contested by Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of the pro-democracy fortnightly, Himal. "Parties with a highly radicalised cadre now cannot co-exist with the king. Gyanendra has not only shunned parties but has a contempt for people," he told TOI. "The more he delays in agreeing to the demand of SPA and Maoists, the more difficult it will be for him to continue as king. If he restores the government which he dismissed in 2002 and allows election, he still has hope of continuing as a ceremonial king with power to control palace affairs and rituals."

Many in Kathmandu claim the king was being egged on by the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) to resist democracy at all cost. Said an European diplomat: "Votaries of royalty are constantly telling him that he should not give away since he is in control at least of the kingdom of Kathmandu, RNA, bureaucracy and the business class."

Dixit differs. "The army has not covered itself in glory and fought a dirty war, complete with disappearances of civilians. It has been unable to engage the Maoists. Moreover, the top echelon of RNA is corrupt and arrogant. Their role model is the Pakistan army, while the king's model is Burma: no matter how shrivelled your society, carry on regardless."

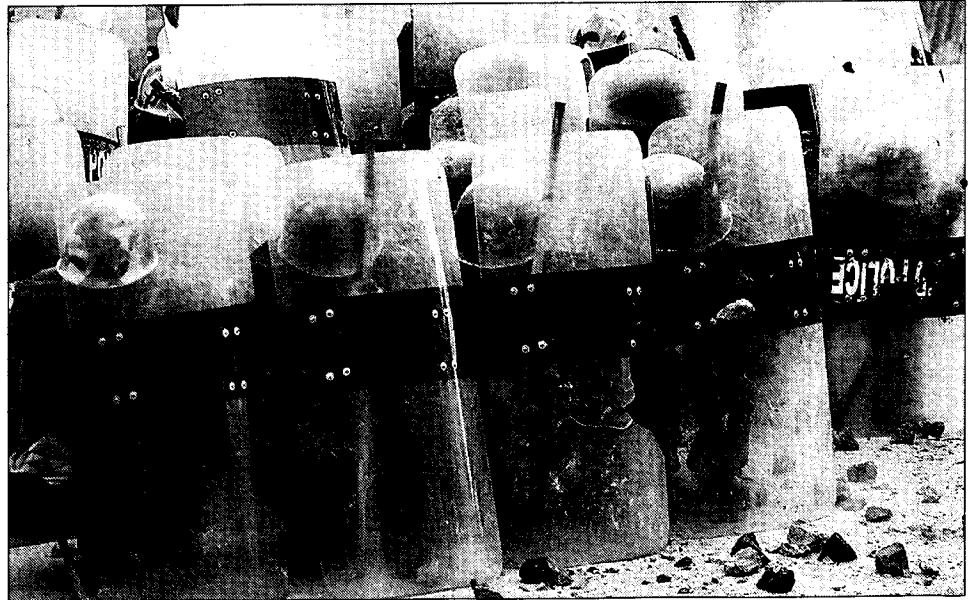
Cracks are appearing even among the king's support group. On Thursday, business chambers of 60 out of 75 districts declared support for the democratic movement and decided not to pay taxes to the government.

What about the relative strength of SPA and Maoists? SPA comprises a motley group of parties that have in the past flirted with the king and co-existed with him. But since the 12-point agreement with Maoists, SPA has kept its distance from the monarch and even the poll carrot has not helped in weaning it away. SPA-Maoists are still fixed on their basic demand: restore the Sher Bahadur Deuba government which was sacked in 2002 and hold a free and fair election to the constituent assembly under the interim government. Dixit maintains revival of parliament would be the most humane way since it could lead to 205 points (strength of parliament) of revival in the country.

On their part, the Maoists have largely lived up to the promise they made in the 12-point agreement that was followed by a four-month ceasefire which ended in January. Top Maoist leaders like Baburam Bhattarai have not only termed the agreement with SPA "historic", but also indicated in an exclusive interview to TOI that the Maoists were prepared for a multi-party democracy and shunning violence.

Like them or not, Maoists are easily the most important political formation in Nepal today. And the fact that they are moving away from their headline "revolutionary" position and willing to co-exist with other democratic parties shows that they sense the endgame in near — it's no longer useful now to keep up positions that will deter the world from dealing with them.

All in all, changes are taking place in Nepal at a truly bewildering pace. Something has to give — and right now it looks like that will be the monarchy.



BRICKBATS BUT NO BOUQUETS: Riot police feel the heat in Kathmandu

mood has led to a steely determination in the SPA and Maoists to overthrow the regime and bring in multi-party democracy. Meantime, world opinion, too, has weighed in favour of democracy, leaving Gyanendra a very lonely man. It was hardly surprising that his offer of elections has been spurned by the opposition. Both SPA and Maoists have said the offer is nothing but a desperate man's effort to clutch at straws. It came, after all, when on Thursday, one lakh anti-royalists congregated at Chitwan. In other words, Gyanendra was dealing from a position of extreme weakness.

Change, political analysts say, is a foregone conclusion in Nepal. Apart from the highly visible and voluble protest by ordinary citizens and professionals, what could be the death-knell for the present regime is that even the bureaucracy has slowly started turning

will dominate the constituent assembly," he said.

Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, former ambassador of Nepal in India as well as former foreign minister, is a votary of a liberal monarchy and wants the country to go back to pre-2002 position: a happy co-existence of multi-parties and the king. He argues that of the two sides, one would have to stop acting tough. The king's poll announcement, he felt, was the way out.

What did he think of the Maoists? "First, let there be restoration of civil rights, followed by election. Only then should the combined constitutional force have a dialogue with Maoists," Bhekh Bahadur Thapa said. He felt "there is room for everyone, including Maoists, in the political space" but efforts to salvage the situation should take place fast.

Bhekh Bahadur Thapa also thought that



A pro-democracy protestor gets a taste of royalist wrath

## Royal Mess For India

Indrani Bagchi

**T**hough India did wake up to rap King Gyanendra on the knuckles on Wednesday, it took an uncharacteristically long time doing so. After efforts to persuade the king to step back from autocracy while he was on vacation proved unsuccessful, the government wasn't left with much of a choice. Ideally, India would have preferred a king-plus-parties combine to counter the Maoists. But that did not happen. Instead, the king turned out to be the biggest obstacle to peace and democracy.

And with the West looking to India to guide the chaos into democratic order, the government had to fine-tune its response. Though it did not give up its opposition to the Maoists, it worked on the conviction that they should be brought into the political process rather than targeted militarily.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran and Indian ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, who earlier led the diplomatic effort to try to talk the king out of his present policies, managed to keep the IB-army establishment — which wanted to back the king because they perceived Maoists as the bigger threat — from actively opposing their policies.

But two things are still necessary, point out analysts. First, a Plan B — which, sources say, India has been working on. According to Nepal watcher S D

Muni, "India needs to work towards setting up of an interim government."

To be fair, Indian officials are working hard to sort out the disarray. The worry is that if protests continue at their present rate, the call for democracy may get more radicalised, propelling the Maoists into centrastage. An official said, "We are trying to prevent a situation where Maoists and political parties get into a wrangling match."

There are informal proposals to get some key EU countries to impose "smart sanctions" or "visa bans" on the Nepalese royal family and the top generals of the Royal Nepalese army as a public shaming exercise.

The International Crisis Group (ICG), a conflict management NGO, will propose in a forthcoming report that an external contact group, led by India, be set up. This could negotiate a peace process and help the Nepalese set up a constituent assembly. Roderick Chalmers, ICG's pointperson for Nepal, said the immediate need is for a "benign monitoring" of the present tinder-box situation.

Another issue will be reining in the RNA from becoming an absolute power in the Nepal vacuum. Here, the Indian army has a big role to play, having been mentors of the RNA for years.

You notice the king is nowhere in the picture. Gyanendra may have written the monarchy out of Nepal's future history.



# Rebels, political parties reject election call

## Fresh Protests Rock The Mountain Kingdom As Democracy Activists Seek King Gyanendra's Exit

By Keshav Pradhan/TNN  
& Agencies

**Kathmandu:** Sensing that Nepal's monarchy was teetering under the onslaught of the pro-democracy movement, the kingdom's agitating seven-party alliance and Maoists on Friday outright rejected Gyanendra's palace offer to hold general elections and a peace dialogue.

And as many Kathmandu-based diplomats also took the promise to restore democracy with bagfuls of salt, pro-democracy leaders said they would take their struggle to the finishing line on their own terms and won't bow to royal diktats.

"We will intensify the protests until we get rid of the autocratic monarchy," said Krishna Sitaula of the Nepali Congress.

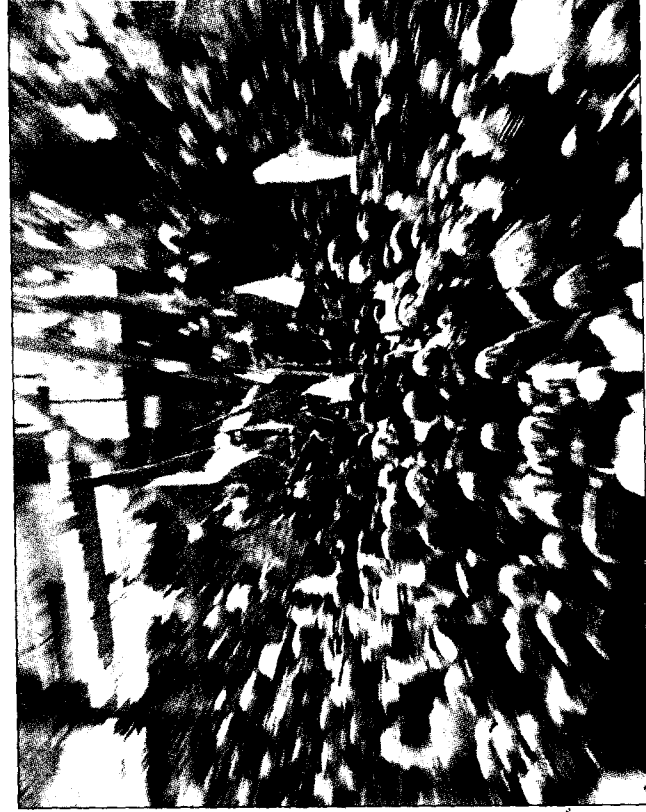
Despite it being the Nepali New Year holiday, anti-monarchy protests blazed away in Kathmandu and elsewhere. Scores of people were arrested and taken to jails already crammed with political activists, writers, journalists and intellectuals. No serious violence was reported as police broke up clutches of protestors shouting: "Gyanendra thief. Quit the country."

Underground Maoist chief Pushpakamal Dahal, aka Comrade Prachan-

da, reacted angrily to Gyanendra's olive branch wrapped in democratic jargon. In a statement, he said the Nepali New Year would mark the "liberation of the Nepalese people from autocratic rule". The guerrilla leader, whose armed cadres control nearly 70% of the countryside, called the announcement a ploy to "continue its repression". He reiterated his party's support to the seven-party alliance.

After he ascended the throne on June 4, 2001, Gyanendra had said, "I want to be both seen and heard. I do not want to remain a silent spectator." Now, after he has made and unmade five governments at will over the past five years, it became clear the Nepalese are in no mood to allow him to fulfil his vaulting ambition. The alliance constituents, who held over 90% of seats in the Parliament Gyanendra dissolved in May 2002, said the royal proposal did not address basic problems faced by the desperately poor Himalayan nation of 27 million and demanded formation of a new government that would reopen peace talks to end the crushing Maoist violence.

Girija Prasad Koirala, a four-time prime minister and president of the Nepali Congress, the largest political party, said time was running out for the king and urged the international



**CYCLE OF THE STORM:** Nepali activists in a protest in Kathmandu on Saturday. The alliance of the seven political parties rejected King Gyanendra's calls for dialogue and vowed to intensify the ongoing anti-royal protests

community to continue pressuring the monarch. Krishna Khanal, a politics professor at Tribhuvan University,

pressure is intense."

The pro-monarchist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party too looked divided over the king's call for elections. An RPP leader, who claimed that his phone is tapped, described the king's offer as "old wine in a new bottle". He regretted the palace had not been able to gauge the people's mood. Lately, there were reports about differences of opinion in the king's cabinet about handling the popular movement.

Diplomatic circles here said Gyanendra had not taken a whole-hearted step for rapprochement with the parties mainly for two reasons. First, he thinks India, the US and other major donor countries will not put excessive pressure on him because of the Maoist factor. Second, he is still confident that he can contain the pro-democracy agitation on his own strength.

Despite this, many Nepalese politicians said India's recent statement on the situation had rattled the king. One of them added, "For the first time, India did not describe the Nepal government as His Majesty's Government." Nevertheless, the king did not take India into confidence when he addressed the people on Thursday with his poll and dialogue proposal. An Indian diplomat said, "The king did not make any attempt to communicate with us."

said Gyanendra's call for elections came too late. "It's natural for the professor at Tribhuvan University, ties to dismiss it because the people's

‘For God’s sake, why do we need democracy?’

# A silent revolution in Thunder Dragon land

**N**orzin Lam in Thimpu is what Durbar Marg is in Kathmandu. These two arteries that slice through the capitals of Bhutan and Nepal symbolise what’s right and wrong in the two reigning monarchies in Asia.

On a cold, drizzly morning last week, young couples, cloaked in *gho* and *kira*, the Bhutanese traditional robe-like clothes for men and women, strolled through Norzin Lam, holding hands. On the Thimpu street, tranquillity reigned supreme — no posters, no slogans and no signs of the unrest the Kathmandu street is rocked by.

Clearly, the credit for this peace in Bhutan goes to its far-sighted monarch, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. While King Gyanendra of Nepal seems bent on holding on to power at any cost, King Wangchuck is giving it up voluntarily. If the Nepalese king is battling democracy, his Bhutanese counterpart is paving the way for it.

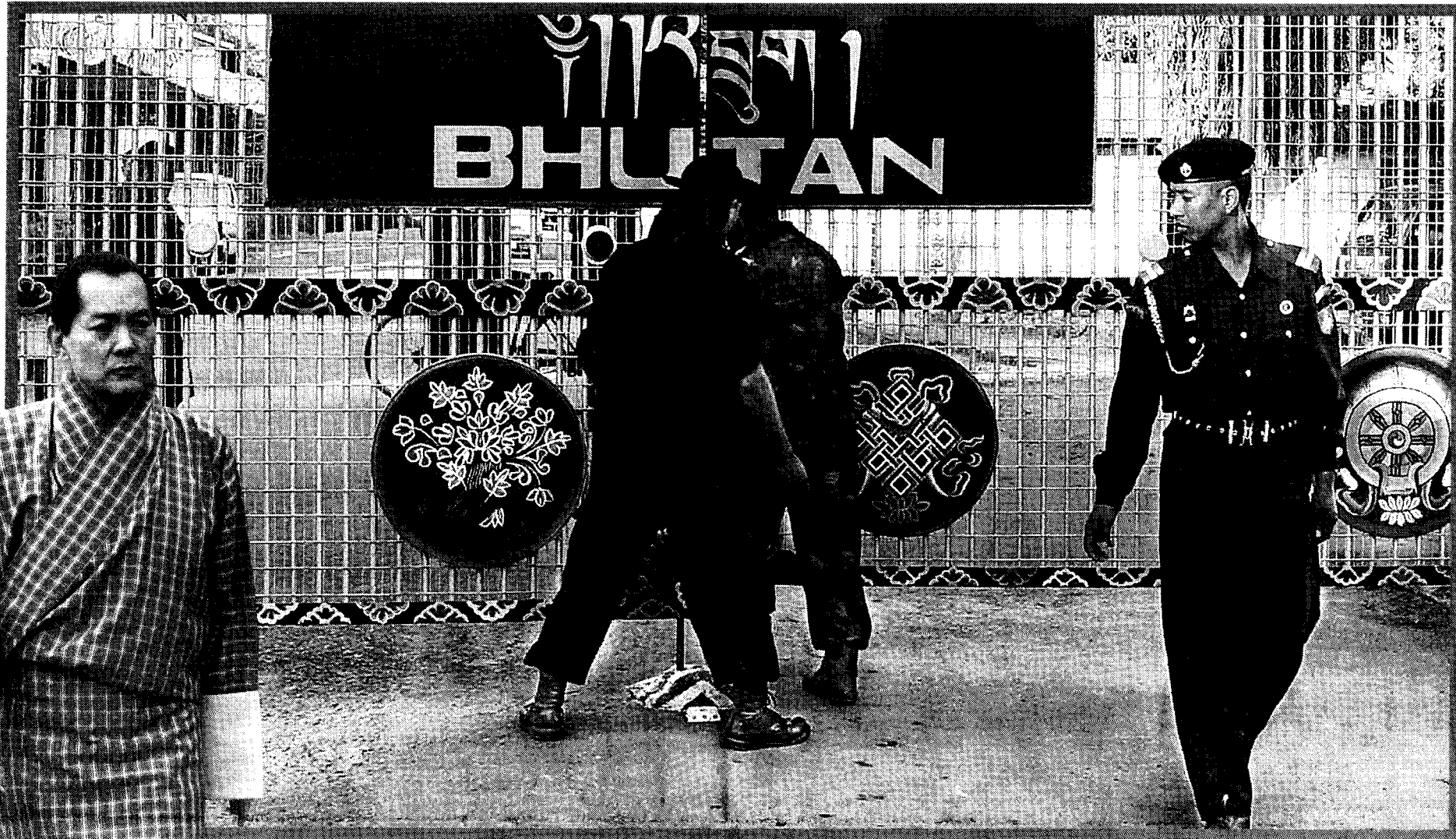
What’s happening in the Land of the Thunder Dragon, as Bhutan is referred to in Dzongkha, the Bhutanese national language, is nothing short of a bloodless revolution. The signs of change are everywhere in this tiny, landlocked country wedged between India and China. And it’s a top-down, monarch-driven move that is transforming the Himalayan kingdom even though the monarchy faces no “external or internal pressures” for political change, as Bhutanese foreign minister Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk puts it.

Yet no one is sure how Bhutan’s tryst with democracy will turn out. Will it lead to a stable and prosperous nation, as envisioned by the reformist king, or lead the country into a whirlpool of political chaos and corruption? This is the question being debated in Bhutan.

As the country takes the first tentative steps towards democracy, the Bhutanese are wary. After all, despite rapid economic growth (the gross domestic product climbed to an impressive 8.7 per cent in 2004-2005 from 6.8 per cent in 2003-2004) in recent years, mainly driven by the spurt in construction and Bhutan’s abundance of hydro-electric power that it sells to power-strapped India, the nation of only 7.52,000 people remains bogged down in a morass of poverty and illiteracy. Only 54 per cent of its population is literate and 37 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

“The majority of the Bhutanese is poor farmers living in villages and they have no idea what democracy is. They are worried,” says Professor Jagar Dorji, provost chancellor of The Royal University of Bhutan in Thimpu. He says the educated are “concerned” as well. “We don’t know whether democracy will work in Bhutan as we have a huge illiterate population,” the educationist says.

Many Bhutanese feel that the country is not yet ready for the parliamentary democracy it’s all set to embrace in two years. The ties between the people and the monarchy are also strong. So people don’t see the reason for change. “For God’s sake, why do we need democracy? My king is my God and I want him to stay on after what he has done for this country and



Bhutan’s monarch, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, is ushering in dramatic changes in the Himalayan kingdom, reports **Debashis Bhattacharya** from Thimpu

being”. In its quest to create the benchmark, now a \$2.00,000-project funded by the UNDP and the Bhutan government, the centre will embark on a nationwide survey of 6,000 households next year. It will cover nine areas, including the living standards, health, education, cultural resilience and emotional well-being of the people.

To be sure, there are apprehensions and trepidation about something as unknown as democracy. That, in a way, is understandable in a country that opened up to the world only in the late 1990s when television and the internet were allowed in.

For nearly half a century, Bhutan had pursued a deliberate policy of isolation, keeping largely to itself. It had severely restricted the number of tourists visiting the country and kept television away from its people, fearing that “outside” influences would corrupt its culture and destroy its age-old traditions. After all, this is one of the few countries in the world that has kept a national dress code alive.

**B**ut as the king — Druk Gyalpo to people — opens the country’s doors wide, things once unthinkable are happening. A Bhutanese can now see *Desperate Housewives* or, for that matter, *Sex and the City* on cable TV at home in Thimpu or Paro, some 64 km from the capital where the country’s only airport is located. Consumers in Bhutan are now offered a bouquet of 32 channels, most of them Indian and Western.

With the Internet accessible in all the 20 dzongkhags or districts in the country, information technology is the latest buzzword here. After an initial attempt to police the Net, the Bhutan government left it to parents and schools to keep children from cyber porn.

Mobile phone services, launched last year, are a huge hit. In fact, residents of Thimpu already fret about cabbies taking their hands off the wheel and their eyes off the mountainous roads to answer frequent calls on their

cellphones.

Bhutan Telecom has invited and received bids from three international companies, one of them Indian, to launch broadband services by the end of this year.

Bhutan is, clearly, zipping down the information superhighway and, if all goes well, the first “free” privately-owned newspapers will hit the news stands in June. Dawa Penjor, a civil servant with the information ministry’s media department, says they have already issued licences to two private companies that are bringing out the *Bhutan Times* and



**Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is now travelling through the country, seeking the people’s opinion on all 34 articles of the Constitution**

*Bhutan Observer*.

The gale of change sweeping through Bhutan has not left the state-owned *Kuensel*, so far Bhutan’s only newspaper, untouched. From an eight-page weekly in 1986, it has become a 20-page bi-weekly newspaper, with reduced government control and subsidies. *Kuensel* editor-in-chief Kinley Dorji says he now runs the paper professionally with a team of eight journalists, two photographers and a circulation department. “We are now critical of every government ministry,” Dorji says.

At the moment, the country is confronted with its newly framed Constitution — its first — that pledges, among other things, to “enhance the unity, happiness and well-being of the people for all time”. Bhutan’s journey from an absolute monarchy to a “democratic constitutional monarchy” with the king as head of state and an elected government running the country hinges entirely on the Constitution’s acceptance.

It took Bhutan nearly four years from 2001 to get the draft ready and Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (the monarch in waiting) is now travelling through the country, seeking the people’s opinion on all 34 articles of the Constitution.

“They have learnt from history, from what’s happened in democratic India since 1947,” says senior lawyer K.K. Venugopal of the Supreme Court of India, an advisor to the high-powered Bhutanese committee that drafted the Constitution. For one, Bhutan will have only two political parties — one a ruling party and the other an Opposition party — to avoid a coalition government. For another, only a “natural-born citizen not married to a person who is not a citizen of Bhutan” will be able to hold constitutional office in the country. Bhutan clearly aims at preventing the political furor that India faced a few years ago over Italy-born Sonia Gandhi’s chances of becoming prime minister.

Significantly, a public election fund will be created by parliament to finance elections in Bhutan. Government funding of elections, Bhutanese officials say, will go a long way towards curbing any business-politico nexus that could flourish in a democratic set-up.

At this juncture, analysts believe a democratic Bhutan will mean a lot to India, Bhutan’s closest ally and the single largest development partner. If nothing else, it will prevent another Nepal-type situation on its doorstep. Sudhir Vyas, Indian ambassador to Bhutan, says the change of government will, however,

decade or so, starting at the village level. Already, the country is run by an elected council of ministers with a rotational prime minister as the head of government.

**B**hutan High Court judge Jigme Zangpo says it might take Bhutan a while to get used to the idea of a democracy but it will pick up as it goes along. After all, Bhutan doesn’t yet know what political parties are or, for that matter, what a *bandh* or a *gherao* is, the offshoots of democracy. But the king is putting all democratic institutions — including the Supreme Court, an Election Commission and an Anti-Corruption Commission — in place before the transition takes place in 2008, Zangpo notes.

The young — more than 45 per cent of the Bhutanese is under 15 — seem to be already enjoying the new openness the promise of democracy is bringing in. School girls brought in to watch the proceedings of the National Assembly’s last session argued vociferously on how men were trying to get around a marriage Act that stipulated that at least 20 per cent of the basic pay of a divorced man should go to his child until he or she turns 18.

And at an Internet cafe in Thimpu last week, Dechen and her friend Leela, both in their early twenties, squealed with delight each time their online boy friends replied to their instant messages. And they were not wearing the *kira*, the traditional dress for women, but shirts and faded blue jeans. “Earlier, the police would chase us and even fine us if we went around in this,” Leela says, pointing to her jeans. “But now, they ignore if we wear casual dresses after we return from work.”

Clearly, who wants a Durbar Marg in Thimpu?

# Force follows peace pledge

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 15

**EVEN AFTER** inviting all agitating political parties to resolve their grievances across the table, Nepal's King Gyanendra on Saturday continued to deploy "excessive force" to crush the pro-democracy movement, which brought life in the capital to a grinding halt on Saturday with its general strike.

With his carrot-and-stick approach towards the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), Gyanendra only helped strengthen the protesters' allegations about his tyrannical traits. The king, who had forcefully seized power 14 months ago, had urged political parties on Thursday to come forth for a formal dialogue with the royal palace and also added the promise of holding elections in 2007.

But on Saturday, Gyanendra proved there was a wide chasm between his words and his actions, when he swooped down on the pro-democracy activists. A former Nepali Congress MP

from Chitwan, Sabitri Bogati Pathak, was seriously injured when security personnel opened fire at a rally in the Sanepa area of the capital. Police used tear gas, charged with batons and fired rubber bullets at the activists when they tried to enter the prohibited Ring Road. Pathak was rushed to Kathmandu Model Hospital, and doctors described her condition as stable.



**King Gyanendra**  
*Still aggressive*

More than 8,000 people had gathered at Kalanki on the western fringes of Kathmandu, shouting slogans against the monarch. The strike called by the SPA and the Maoists shut down shops and

business establishments in the capital, and kept public and private vehicles off the road. Baton-wielding police also charged at local journalists during an anti-king demonstration and arrested at least a dozen scribes. Many of the journalists were hurt.

The pro-democracy activists, however, were still optimistic. "We are confident that we will bring the king down on his knees soon," said Sunil Shrestha, a member of the youth wing of the CPN (UML). International pressure, the protesters believe, would leave Gyanendra with no other option but surrender.

The CPN (UML) youth wing on Saturday took out a protest demonstration at Bhotahiti in downtown Kathmandu, not very far from the Narayanhiti Palace.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on Saturday added his voice to the global chorus of the US, India, European Union and Canada urging Gyanendra to take urgent steps to defuse the crisis. Pro-democracy activists believe Annan's reaction followed an appeal by the members of Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ).

"But, India is the one country that can play a pro-active role in the restoration of democracy in Nepal," a doctor at Kathmandu's Model Hospital said. The people of the country had not forgotten the way New Delhi helped institute democracy in 1990, he added.

The though was echoed by a large section of the Nepali media. India's direct pressure on the Royal Palace was the only way to douse the fire raging in the Himalayan kingdom, they said. "If India sets up economic roadblocks against Nepal, the King would surrender immediately," a senior Nepalese journalist said.



# Scribes baton-charged in Nepal

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
KATHMANDU | APRIL 15

At least 12 journalists were injured, six of them seriously, and four others arrested after police baton-charged scores of scribes who held a rally demanding press freedom and democracy in Nepal.

Police indiscriminately baton-charged about 300 journalists including Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) General Secretary Mahendra Bista, Former Press Council Chairman Harihar Birahi and Former FNJ President Iaranath Dahal at the rally organised by the FNJ at the Gaushala area in the capital, FNJ sources said.

The injured have been admitted to the Kathmandu Model Hospital for treatment.

The incident occurred as the journalists started the rally from the FNJ office at Tilaganga and marched about one kilometre. Police intervened before the scribes could organise a corner meeting, the sources said.

Major political parties, including Nepali Congress and Nepal Communist Party-UML,



Police arrest a pro-democracy activist in Kathmandu on Saturday. AP

condemned the police action. On Thursday, police also opened fire at a peaceful demonstration organised by lawyers in Babar mahal in which six lawyers sustained bullet injuries. More than 70 lawyers who were arrested were released later.

The demonstrations took place at Chabahal, Baneshwor, Kalanki, Gongabun and Thamel amid heavy deployment of armed security personnel despite lifting of curfew.

Meanwhile, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) warned the royal government against its crackdown on peaceful demonstrations across Nepal.

"The international community is eyeing on Nepal and those responsible for human rights violations should be aware that they are accountable to national and international laws for their actions," said Nicholas Howen, ICJ General Secretary.

## Jimmy Carter cancels Nepal trip

KATHMANDU: Former US President Jimmy Carter has cancelled his trip to Nepal scheduled for next month in view of the prevailing situation in the Himalayan kingdom.

Carter's 4-day visit scheduled from May 3 has been called off on recommendation of the US Embassy here.

The Noble peace laureate for 2002 was also scheduled to have met King Gyanendra and pro-democracy leaders on his private capacity, but there were hopes that his moral authority would have some positive impact in easing out the situation.

Carter had offered to facilitate in resolution of the Maoists if his services were sought for, but the proposal proved to be a non-starter as the King never responded to the letter he sent about two years ago. Carter was scheduled to visit the Mustang area.

—Yubaraj Ghimire

## জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের ঘোষণা নিয়ে ঘোর সংশয়

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৪ এপ্রিল: নির্বাচনের কথা বলেছেন। কিন্তু দিন ঘোষণা করেননি। রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র গত রাতে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র ফেরানোর কথা বললেও তাই সন্দেহ যাচ্ছে না নেপালের রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির। অনেকটা একই সুর নয়াদিল্লিরও।

জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের ঘোষণাকে স্বাগত জানালেও ভারতীয় কূটনৈতিক মহলের মতে, এখনই বেশি আশাবাদী হওয়ার কোনও কারণ নেই। কারণ, জ্ঞানেন্দ্র অতীতে বহু বার এ রকম নির্বাচনের প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন। তা ছাড়া, দু'মাস আগে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলিকে বাদ দিয়েই জ্ঞানেন্দ্র আঞ্চলিক স্তরে নির্বাচন করিয়েছিলেন। তবে ভারতের চাপের মুখে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র যে শেষ পর্যন্ত নির্বাচনের কথা উল্লেখ করেছেন, সেটাকে নয়াদিল্লির সাফল্যের খাতায় রাখা হচ্ছে। গণতন্ত্র ফেরাতে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র কী ধরনের রোডম্যাপের কথা ভাবছেন, তা জানতে এখন তৎপর

ভারতীয় কূটনৈতিক মহল।

যদিও, জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের মুখে নির্বাচনের এই ঘোষণা সম্পর্কে বিন্দু মাত্র আস্থা নেই নেপালের রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির। আজও কাঠমান্ডুর পথে তাদের বিক্ষোভ ছিল অব্যাহত। বিক্ষোভকারীরা আজও স্লোগান দেন, “চোর জ্ঞানেন্দ্র, দেশ ছাড়া।” দেশের বৃহত্তম রাজনৈতিক দলের নেতা গিরিজা প্রসাদ কৈরলা ও ১৪ মাস আগে রাজার হাত ক্ষমতাচ্যুত প্রধানমন্ত্রী শের বাহাদুর দেউবা, উভয়েই সমস্বরে জানিয়েছেন রাজার ঘোষণা সম্পর্কে তাঁদের অবিশ্বাসের কথা। জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের দেওয়া আলোচনা প্রস্তাব এক কথায় খারিজ করে দিয়েছেন রাজনৈতিক নেতারা।

তাঁদের বক্তব্য, এক দিকে দেশজোড়া সাধারণ ধর্মঘট এবং অন্য দিকে আন্তর্জাতিক মহলের চাপ, এ দুইয়ের মাঝে পড়ে এখন গণতন্ত্রের বুলি আওড়াতে বাধ্য হচ্ছেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। কিন্তু মুখে নির্বাচনের কথা বললেও আদতে

গণতন্ত্র ফেরানোর কোনও ইচ্ছা তাঁর নেই। এই প্রেক্ষিতে নেপালের গণতন্ত্রকামী ৭ রাজনৈতিক দলের জোটের তরফে জানানো হয়েছে, জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার কোনও প্রশ্ন নেই। শাসনক্ষমতা পুরোপুরি ছাড়তে হবে তাঁকে। গণতন্ত্র পুনঃপ্রতিষ্ঠা না হওয়া পর্যন্ত রাজবিরোধী প্রতিবাদ ধর্মঘটও তুলে নেওয়া হবে না।

ভারত ছাড়া আমেরিকা, ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন এবং কানাডাও নেপালে রাজার শাসনের বিপক্ষে। বিশেষ করে আমেরিকা কূটনৈতিক ভাবে নেপালের রাজশাসিত সরকারকে যথেষ্ট চাপে রেখেছে। মার্চের গোড়ায় ভারত সফরে এসে নেপালে গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠার কথা উল্লেখ করেছিলেন মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ। আপাতত নেপালে সাধারণ ধর্মঘট এবং বিক্ষোভকারীদের উপরে পুলিশি জুলুমের প্রেক্ষিতে সেখানকার মার্কিন কূটনৈতিক বিভাগগুলি একে একে গুটিয়ে ফেলা হচ্ছে।

# Emergency ends, not conflict

HEB REPUN  
SF 3  
15/11

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, April 14: Nepal today started its new year – the year 2063 -- with curfew being lifted from Kathmandu valley and King Gyanendra's government deciding not to impose emergency again. But it was clear conflict between the monarch and the parties as well as Maoists would continue till something snapped.

It was expected that the king would either declare emergency or dates for general elections when he addressed the nation, a tradition observed on New Year's Day. While it became clear yesterday the government would think twice before it declared emergency, following the diplomatic slap in the face delivered by the US government that scaled down its activities in Nepal and authorised non-essential staff to leave, it was equally clear it would not give in to Opposition pressure.

The king stuck to his roadmap of 2005, saying multi-party democracy could be initiated only by an exemplary democratic exercise like elections, hinting he would go ahead with his plan to hold parliamentary polls by April 2007, despite widespread Opposition.

The king also asked the political parties to hold dialogue, an offer that was dismissed as "meaningless" by the parties. "He has not

deviated an inch from his old roadmap," said former minister Mr Prakash Man Singh, who was sent to prison illegally after the king seized power last year. "The king wants to legitimise his coup and the general election is a ploy to achieve that. When a man who seized power unconstitutionally talks about democracy, who will believe him?" The top leaders of seven Opposition parties met today to discuss King Gyanendra's address and decided to continue their stir peacefully. For the first time since they began their agitation, the parties chalked out a concrete strategy for future, outlining the steps that would be taken once a democratic multi-party government replaced the king's regime. Asking people to support the anti-king movement, the leaders promised all employees who faced being fired or victimised would be reinstated unconditionally, while hospitals, nursing homes and health centres that treated injured protesters free of cost, would be repaid when a democratic government came to power.

Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda said the king's emphasis on elections exposed his intention to continue his repression. He also said his party would observe the new year as "the Year of Freedom from feudal despotism".



# Maoists turn down Gyanendra dialogue call

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 14

NEPAL'S MAOIST rebels on Friday rejected King Gyanendra's Nepali New Year call for dialogue with opposition parties as mere "eye-wash".

In a statement issued on a website, Maoist leader Prachanda alias Pushpa Kamal Dahal, said they would intensify their campaign against the Royalist government for restoration of total democracy in Nepal. The Nepali New Year, he said, would mark "total liberation" of the people of the Himalayan Kingdom from Gyanendra's "autocratic rule".

Leaders of prominent political parties too said Gyanendra's message "failed to address the blazing problems of the country".

The king had urged all political parties to come forward for dialogue that would pave the path for multi-party democratic polity and peace in the Himalayan kingdom. Political analysts believe that the 58-year-old

## 'Crisis could lead to India-China friction'

The US and Europe should help the formation of democratic government in Nepal, an editorial in *The New York Times* urged on Friday, saying that the Nepal crisis was a potential flashpoint between India and China. "The king should be asked to step back... First, there is a potential for friction between the two giants, India and China, if they feel the little country shifting one way or the other. Then there is the fact that the world does not need another failed state, especially one with a powerful Maoist militia." *The NYT* said.

**PTI, New York**

monarch was forced to offer the olive branch to the agitating Seven Party Alliance (SPA) following tremendous international pressure. Criticism has rained on Gyanendra from the US, India, Canada and EU.

CP Mainali, general secretary of CPN-ML, said the king needed to something "more concrete" than verbal appeals. Political leaders too are discontented with King Gyanendra's appeal, since he did not mention whether talks would include the Maoists or not. The SPA and the

Maoists have a 12-point agreement of mutual cooperation to restore democracy in Nepal.

Interestingly, even as the king spoke of peace, his government on Friday deported two foreign doctors for treating people injured in the clashes between anti-king demonstrators and the police. A German doctor and an American expert on emergency medicine, Dr. Brain Cobb, have been deported, sources said. Dr. Cobb was arrested at Gangabu on Wednesday and detained for six hours. He was not allowed to

inform the US embassy, and released only after he promised to leave the country immediately. Before leaving for New York, Cobb told reporters that the police treated him like a criminal.

Meanwhile, political activists, professionals and social workers continued their protests on Friday, but the demonstrations were largely peaceful. In Kathmandu, 14 protesters were arrested from a NGO Federation rally at Baneshwor. Forty-four others, including 14 journalists, were arrested at Baglung Bazaar.

Though the king, on Thursday, talked about holding elections, the opposition said the present situation was not conducive to electoral exercise. It wants restoration of people's rights, revocation of prohibitory orders, release of political detainees and representatives of civil society and ultimately the formation of an all-party government, which would include representatives of the underground CPN (Maoists).



Anti-king demonstrators march with flaming torches at Chyasal in Patan on Friday. AP

# King's Kathmandu iron fist now falls on Nepal's lawyers

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 13

EVEN as the United Nations again expressed concern at the "excessive use of force" by security forces against protesters in the ongoing general strike in Nepal by the opposition, the police opened fire on a procession of the Nepal Bar Association leaving at least four lawyers wounded.

Seventy-two others were arrested as the police continued its crackdown on the eighth day of the strike called against King Gyanendra's rule.

In a statement issued from Geneva, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, said she would have to take up the "human rights violations". She said reports of excessive force by members of the



4 lawyers hurt in police firing

Armed Police Force and the Nepal Police against demonstrators, leading to serious injuries and at least three fatalities, have risen "alarmingly".

Her statement has lent credence to the general belief that the number of people killed in firing by the security forces is much more than the official toll of five. Nepal's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has also said it would fix individual responsibility for the excesses committed by the security forces.

Apart from lawyers, police

also rounded up nearly 200 aid workers who sat on a dharna in solidarity of the movement for democracy.

Yesterday, the police had fired at a procession of writers, poets and artistes, carrying out a peaceful protest under the leadership of 85-year-old Satya Mohan Joshi, a respected historian.

About 180 km south west of Kathmandu, in Chitwan, around 1.5 lakh protestors defied the curfew to take out a procession.

Although the government has restored mobile phone facilities, suspended on April 5, people are not sure whether the King is ready to relent yet. Gyanendra has not indicated what he might say in his customary New Year's message tomorrow (April 14 is Nepal's New Year day).

INDIAN FORCE 33

# King's Gambit

But Gyanendra is fast losing control of Nepal

**G**YANENDRA, Nepal's monarch who imposed absolute rule on his country 14 months ago, is getting isolated both domestically and internationally, and his options are fast running out. An opposition strike shut down Kathmandu for four days, and casualties from police firing on protestors are mounting. Gyanendra tried to reverse historical processes by rolling back the constitutional monarchy that came about after the success of the pro-democracy movement in 1990. But people, having tasted democratic rights, don't give up on them so easily, and even Gyanendra had to dress his assumption of all powers in the garb of restoring democracy in three years. The problem is he made no credible steps towards this, while repression of political parties and civil society groups mounted. Now businessmen, lawyers and professionals too have joined the movement against him. By subverting the compact between crown and people Gyanendra may have endangered the monarchy itself. Gyanendra's fate has been sealed by the understanding arrived at between the seven-party alliance (SPA) — which has inherited the mantle of the democracy movement — and the Maoists, and a Nepali republic looks conceivable now.

It is just as well, therefore, that New Delhi has dropped its "twin pillars" approach towards Nepal, whereby both the monarchy and political parties were thought to be necessary for Nepal's stability. The rationale for supporting Gyanendra was that without his steadying hand Nepal might fall to the Maoists; but New Delhi is beginning to recognise that Gyanendra himself may be pushing people into the arms of Maoists, and therefore a factor for instability. Another rationale may have been to prevent Beijing or Islamabad from filling the vacuum in Nepal if New Delhi pulled out. But Beijing recognises a loser when it sees one, and Islamabad, which has its own insurgencies to deal with, would merely embarrass itself if it stepped in to shore up Gyanendra. New Delhi has done the right thing by condemning repressive measures resorted to by Nepal's government. It has acted in concert with Washington, which said Gyanendra's takeover "has failed in every regard". Luckily, the Left too is aboard on this one. New Delhi could follow up its initiative, and gain credit for itself in the region, if it stood four-square behind the democratic movement in Nepal and peaceful negotiations regarding the country's future. Maoists too should be welcome to participate in negotiations, as long as they play by the rules of the democratic game.

# Peace prayers in Himalayan kingdom

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 13

IT IS the Nepalese New Year on Friday — the beginning of the year 2063, according to Nepal's calendar. And on New Year's Eve, the people have a prayer on their lips — for peace.

For them, the last two months of 2061 and the entire 2062 were definitely black chapters. During this period, first, King Gyanendra unilaterally assumed full executive authority. This was followed by protests and a blood-bath across the country.

But the common man, caught between the violent protests and the subsequent security crackdowns, are confident on the New Year's eve on Thursday that 2063 would usher in an era of peace, tranquility, prosperity and development.

"Let's hope that with the arrival of the New Year, the ongoing problem in the country would be resolved amicably," Karni Bahadur, a sales representative in a departmental store in the capital, said, adding that the last one year of misrule has ruined the economy of the country.

Traditionally, the fun-loving people of Nepal always welcome the New Year with pomp and traditional gaiety. Even before the elections had been declared, there were a lot of expectations that the 58-year-old monarch might make some historic announcement on the first day of the New Year, which would resolve the ongoing imbroglio.

"Let's hope that the king would be able to find a way out," Anil Pradhan, a school teacher, said. They were optimistic that

while delivering message on New Year, the monarch would be able to appease the crusaders of the pro-democracy movement, and would bring an end to the ongoing violence.

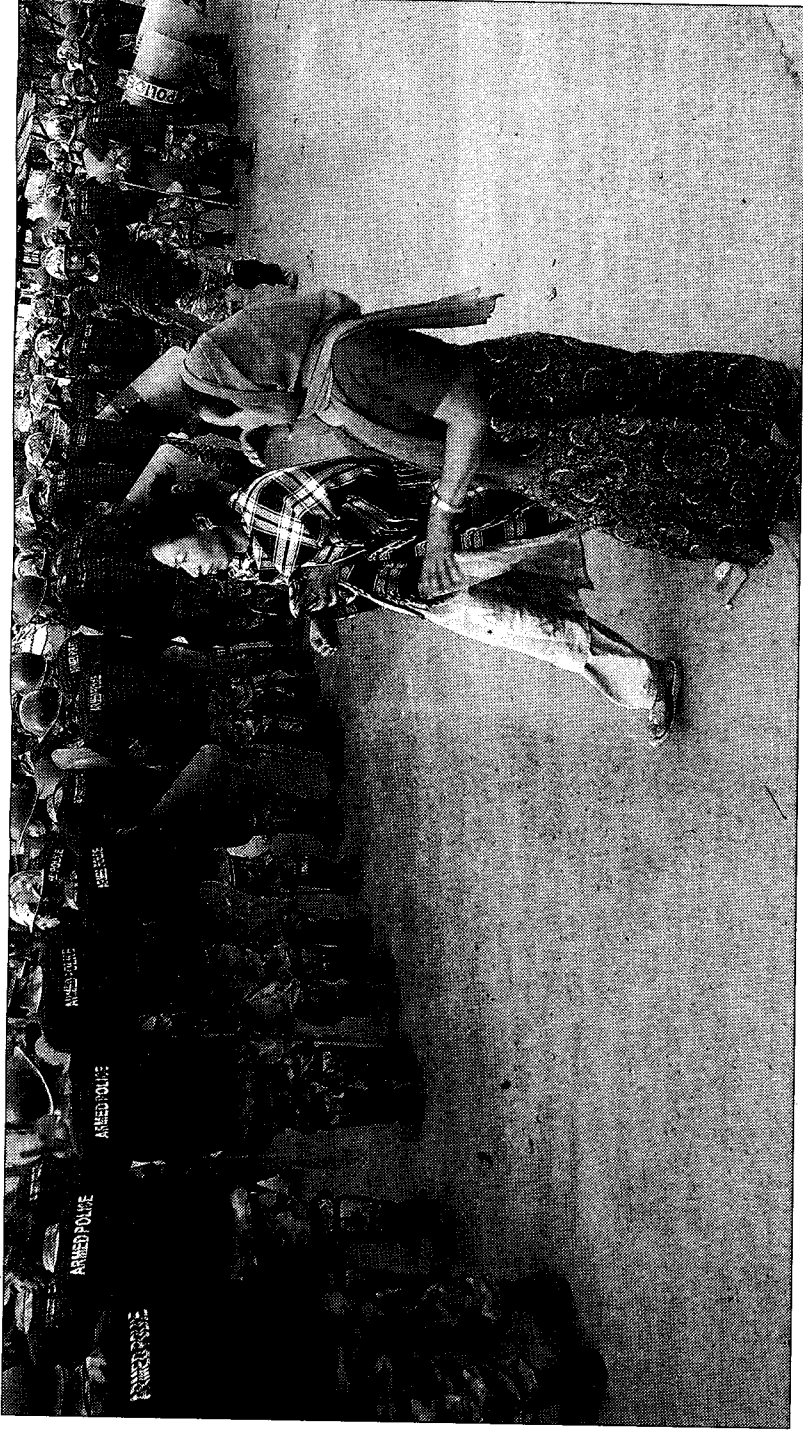
In addition to the seven political parties and Maoists fighting for democracy, the king is already under tremendous pressure from the US, India, the EU and Canada, and would be left with no other option but to make some promise, which would indicate restoration of democracy in the kingdom.

The president of Rastriya Janashakti Party, Surya Bahadur Thapa, who has been "close" to the Royal Palace, said the New Year should be welcomed by respecting the sentiment and aspiration of the Nepali people and restoring peace through the joint effort of the king and the parties.

The former prime minister emphasised on the prime need of initiation of a meaningful and trustworthy dialogue so as to enliven the New Year and put an end to all the series of violence, and let the people return to a normal life.

Ramden Sherpa, a local taxi driver is highly sanguine that democracy would be restored very soon in Nepal. He said a well-known astrologer has already forecasted that the year 2063 would be the "Golden Era" for the people of the Himalayan Kingdom.

However, members of Seven Party Alliance (SPA) who had been protesting since April 6, did not sound very optimistic and vowed to continue with the movement till the stepping down of the King, and restoration of democracy.



**MAOIST ATTACK Nepal**  
Maoists exploded a bomb at the ancestral house of assistant minister for agriculture and cooperatives, Govind Choudary, at Simra Bhawanipur in Rautahat district on Thursday morning

**CELLS ARE BACK Nepal**  
Telecom resumed its mobile phone services in Kathmandu on Thursday evening, which was snapped on April 6, following directives of the government

Women walk past Nepali troops during a pro-democracy rally in Kathmandu on Thursday.

REUTERS

## Nepal crackdown on lawyers, aid workers

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 13

IN CONTINUATION to the ongoing crackdown against pro-democracy activists, Nepal's royal regime on Thursday pounced upon lawyers and international development workers for alleged taking an active part in the pro-democracy movements in violence-hit Kathmandu.

Members of the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) told Hindustan Times that the police attacked a rally of the lawyers without any provocation as they were marching towards the Babarmahal

### KINGDOM IN TURMOIL

More than 500 members of NBA, wearing black coats, had taken out a rally.

Several senior lawyers, including Bharat Mani Gautam, Tanka Chaulagain and Ramchandra Simkhada were seriously injured as police showered rubber bullet at them. The police also fired tear gas shells at the lawyers, and arrested more than four-dozen black-coat pro-democracy

activists. NBA president Shambhu Thapa sustained multiple head injury, and has been rushed to Kathmandu Model Hospital. Doctors at the hospital said a CT scan report indicated that Thapa had blood clots around the cerebrum. However, they said Thapa was out of danger.

The NBA, which represents 6,000 practicing lawyers, was the first professional body in the country that termed the seizure of power by King Gyanendra as "illegal" and had joined the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) demanding restoration of democracy in

the Himalayan Kingdom. The crackdown came close on the heels of the arrest of four-dozen journalists in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The Royal Nepal Police on Thursday afternoon also arrested 193 workers of international development organisations as they had staged a sit-in protest at Matighar Mandala area.

A home ministry spokesman said the members of Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) had violated the prohibitory orders as demonstrators and rallies were banned inside the Ring Road. However, home min-

ister Kamal Thapa could not be contacted for comments.

The director of Action-Aid Nepal, Shivesh Chandra Regmi, who is also the president of AIN, said the arrest of the development workers in Kathmandu was direct violation of citizen's right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Several international development agencies would soon lobby to pressurise the Royal Palace for its alleged non-democratic rule in Nepal. The overseas NGOs are engaged in development programmes in the rural and far-flung areas of the kingdom.



Nepal lawyers at a protest rally in Kathmandu on Thursday.

AFP

✓  
A kingsize mess

1371  
T HE DEEPENING strife in Nepal is spiralling out of the control of King Gyanendra — or, for that matter, anyone else. Clearly, the more the king tries to quell the current unrest against his direct rule, the faster he seems to be running out of options. Mobilising the army in Kathmandu to enforce an indefinite curfew has not only pitted it directly against the people, but it has also shut an important window of opportunity of restoring normality. People had said that the king has done more harm to the monarchy in Nepal in a year since he seized power in February 2005 than what the Maoist rebels may have done in ten. That may not be quite true, but the king's management of the crisis — or lack of it — has led to the strengthening of the idea of a republican Nepal.

At the time, King Gyanendra's argument that the takeover was necessary because political parties failed to deal with the insurgency had many takers — even when he went about dismantling Nepal's polity, ostensibly to strengthen the fight against the insurgency. What he needed, he said, were three years to

restore peace and democracy. But it has become clear that he is not interested in restoring democracy as much as re-establishing the prerogatives of the monarchy that had been shed by his brother, King Birendra, in the face of the 'Jana Andolan' of 1990. King Gyanendra has only himself to blame for pushing the agitating parties into the arms of the Maoists, as the dismal rounds of midnight raids and house arrests rule out any accommodation between the monarchy and the democratic forces. The seven-party alliance apparently insists that this stir — dubbed 'Jana Andolan II' — would continue until the 'people's sovereignty' is restored.

But the king's mishandling has now ensured that the Maoists need to be cut into any deal to restore popular rule. India has maintained a silence in the face of current developments, though countries like the US have been openly critical of the monarch. There is, of course, a lot more at stake for India than the US. But it may be time that the king was given an unequivocal message about the need to restore democracy — or get out of the way.

# Gyanendra back in Kathmandu amidst speculations that he may give up power

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 12

AS streets in the capital were stained in bloods, and smokes of anti-monarchy protests smouldering all over the country, King Gyanendra returned to Kathmandu with his wife Komal, instantly fuelling speculations that he was ready to give up powers which he seized on February 1, 2005.

There have been no word from the palace yet, but a pro-monarchy journalist who was one of the eight to meet him in Pokhara said, "The King is worried about the situation and wants the bloodshed to stop". Contrary to what he said, a section of the present government led by King's controversial advisor Sharad Chanda Shah are said to be advising the King that the "movement would peter out in matter of days".

The return of the royal couple saw the week-long curfew lifted in the capital, but the arrest of journalists, writers, teachers and artists continued. Similarly, violation of curfew in

parts of the country and chorus of anti-king slogans showed no sign of abatement in those areas, specially Chitwan and Pokhara.

There were reports of at least one activist—Bishnu Poudel—being killed in the police firing at Nawalparasi, about 210 kms from the capital. This takes the death toll during the current spate of protest beginning April 6 to four.

"Any half-way measure by the King would not work", Former Prime Minister and Rashtriya Janashakti Party leader Surya Bahadur Thapa told *The Indian Express*. Thapa was responding to possible appeal to the seven-party alliance by the King on April 14—the Nepalese New Years—for a dialogue.

Demonstrators calling for the restoration of democracy took to the streets, with about two dozen activists defying a ban on protests in Kathmandu. They shouted slogans and waved party flags before being stopped by riot police. About half-a-dozen were arrested, while the others were chased away by police waving ba-



Police arrest political activists at Ratna Park in Kathmandu on Wednesday

tons and protected by riot shields.

"Long live the democratic republic!" and "Down with autocracy", they had shouted before police moved in.

Witnesses said 30 journalists who had joined the protests were arrested on Wednesday morning.

Businessmen, doctors and lawyers also vowed to join the pro-democracy government forces. —With Reuters

REUTERS

1 2 100 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Nepal invites global outcry

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 11: World outcry mounted at the continued crackdown by King Gyanendra's government on protests by the Opposition parties and members of civil society with USA calling his reign an utter failure and a top European Parliament official warning she would ask the United Nations to drop Nepali soldiers from UN peacekeeping missions, the biggest source of EU funding for Nepal's government, if the King did not relent.

The strongest statement

since King Gyanendra grabbed power through a coup last year was issued by Ms Neena Gill, chair of the European Parliament delegation to SAARC and South Asia Countries, who attributed the worsening situation in Nepal to the "unpopular direct rule imposed by the king". "The situation can't be allowed to degenerate further," she said. "Too many lives have already been lost."

"How can we justify using forces that oppress their own people to help stabilise other countries?" Gill said. "I can't stand by and do nothing while

innocent civilians are massacred." She said it was evident "the current policy of strict oppression is just making matters worse." Gill said, "The more the king clamps down on his people the more flammable the situation becomes." Dismissing the curbs imposed by the government in the name of combating the Maoists as counterproductive and taking the country further from democracy, she said, "Cosmetic exercises undertaken to impress international community are not fooling anyone."

As Kathmandu valley

remained under day-time curfew for the fourth day and protesters continued defying prohibitions, reports said security forces had raided medical students' hospital at one of the oldest hospitals in the capital, the Teaching Hospital, last night, assaulting students.

Doctors today closed the outpatient department in protest. Government spokesman Mr Shrish Shumsher Rana, however, iterated security forces had used minimum force to keep under control an agitation "infiltrated by terrorists".

12 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN



# Swansong for a King?

Gyanendra, it seems, will never learn

Nepal is literally in flames and, unlike the previous anti-government demonstrations which fizzled out because of repressive measures, the current agitation by the Seven Party Alliance could well bring the end to King Gyanendra's autocratic rule. Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators have been rounded up, curfew is in force and at least two protesters have been killed, but how long the government can sustain this is the big question. The Maoists have lent tactical support by declaring a partial indefinite ceasefire in Kathmandu Valley but they have an understanding with the SPA to form an all-party government, and hold elections to the constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. Some argue that once the Maoists oust the autocratic monarch, they will ditch the SPA. This thinking has possibly prompted the USA to condemn the democratic parties' 12-point understanding with the Maoists, reached last November.

At last week's silver jubilee celebrations of the World Hindu Federation at Birganj, King Gyanendra spoke of lasting peace being the need of the hour but he himself has turned out to be the biggest hurdle. Some Indian participants reportedly suggested that the Supreme Court could help by recommending restoration of parliament. This was Nepali Congress chief GP Koirala's main demand until the SPA came into being. Constitutional experts have argued that parliament stands automatically reactivated if elections are not held in time. But now that the NC has deleted from its party charter the reference to constitutional monarchy, this might be difficult to reverse. If the King is thinking in terms of reimposing emergency - his last resort - he will have learnt nothing from the November 2002 emergency, which is largely responsible for today's chaos and anarchy.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2006

## Beginning of the end?

**T**he tsunami of protest in Nepal against the brutally unconstitutional rule of King Gyanendra is virtually a rerun of the People's Movement of 1990 – with an important difference. Sixteen years ago, the street protests were directed against the absolute monarchy of his elder brother, King Birendra; they helped usher in a multi-party democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Then, as now, the King used repressive tactics to protect his position, surrendering to the demands of the people only when it became clear that the protestors would not be intimidated into backing off from the palace doors. But King Birendra was a much wiser man than his business-minded brother. He was astute enough to cut his losses by forging a deal with the political parties that ensured the monarchy would continue in a diluted, constitutional form. It helped his case that those spearheading the protests also thought it unwise to do away with the monarchy. That has changed. After five years of King Gyanendra, more and more people in Nepal are questioning the wisdom of holding on even to a constitutional monarchy. The seven-party alliance for the restoration of democracy has acquired a distinct republican hue, to the extent of forging a loose political understanding with the Maoist insurgency whose avowed aim is to abolish the monarchy. The proliferating protests in Nepal despite a vicious Palace crackdown reveal that even those who initially bought the King's promise that he would restore democracy have completely lost faith.

King Gyanendra's shenanigans are shown up in stark contrast by the actions of other monarchs in the region. In Thailand, the people revere King Bhumibol Adulyatej; and he protects this status by a studied policy of non-interference in the day-to-day politics of his country. Leaving that to the politicians and steering clear of divisive ambitions, he has carved out for himself a role of such moral authority that in the recent political crisis, all it took was a word from him to make the discredited Thaksin Shinawatra resign as Prime Minister. In Bhutan, a sagacious King Jigme Singye Wangchuk is voluntarily preparing to change from an absolute monarch to a constitutional one. When Gyanendra ascended the Nepal throne on June 4, 2001 after an infamous massacre of the royals (with an unpopular Paras next in the line of succession), he needed badly to establish his credentials. He could have fashioned a role that was constructive for the country's fledgling democracy but has shown himself incapable of anything like that. Notwithstanding an international chorus for "constitutional forces" – meaning the democratic political parties and the monarch – to come together to resolve Nepal's political crisis, it is unlikely that this King will be acceptable to his people even in a constitutionally marginalised role. After all, what is the guarantee that his crude political ambitions will not rise to the top again?

THE HINDU

# Crack appears in Nepal govt amid violence

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 10

**P**OLICE fired rubber bullets at anti-monarchy protesters as new clashes erupted on Monday in the capital, while most residents spent the bulk of the day huddled at their home on the third day of a government curfew.

Police also fired tear gas to break up rallies in Kalanki, Gangabu and Dhumbarahi in Kathmandu to demand King Gyanendra relinquish control over the government. No major injuries were reported.

Nepal's crisis has deepened in recent days, with mobs rampaging throughout the country and a crackdown by security forces leaving three protesters dead and some 800 arrested.

Unabated defiance of curfew coupled with the anti-monarchy movement has thrown up the first sign of cracks in the royal regime with the Democratic Nepal Party (DNP)—a constituent of the king led council of ministers—demanding a dialogue between the king and political parties, followed by attempts to bring the Maoists rebels into the political mainstream.

The DNP headed by Agriculture Minister Kesar Bahadur Bista fired its first salvo



**Protesters being punished in Kathmandu. Reuters**

demanding dialogue with the agitating 7-party alliance without any pre-conditions. "The government must call upon the constitutional political forces in the country for dialogue in a strong, credible and forceful way," a statement issued by DNP's co-chairman Janardan Acharya said.

In a statement by the royal regime, it said that at a time when peace is what the country is longing for, murder and violence cannot be a way out of the stalemate: "Political parties must look at the gravity of the situation and take initiative for bringing the Maoist rebels into the political mainstream. Let all sides set aside their stubbornness."

9-10-2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Maoists to join Nepal protest

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, April 10: Even as the royalist government in Nepal continued its crack-down on pro-democracy protests, Maoist rebels upped the ante by declaring that they would join the general strike which has crippled the Himalayan kingdom for the last four days.

In a joint statement issued late last night, Maoist supremo Prachanda and his colleague Baburam Bhat-

tarai said that they have directed their cadres to violate curfew and prevent vehicular traffic on all highways in Nepal.

"We will continue our support to the civil society and political parties seeking restoration of complete democracy," they said, adding that their cadres would also tear down all royal statues in the country.

The Maoist statement came hours after home minister Kamal Thapa claimed

that the rebels had infiltrated the pro-democracy movement. He also said security forces had arrested several Maoists from the political rallies.

The security forces continued to be very severe with anyone who violated curfew orders across the country.

More than 70 demonstrators were injured, 15 of them seriously, when security forces intervened in a protest rally in the border town of Dhangadhi, western Nepal today. In the western tourist town of Pokhara, school and university teachers defied curfew orders and were arrested this morning.

Demonstrations were held all over Kathmandu this morning. Several of these protests were broken up by security personnel who used rubber bullets on the demonstrators. One person was injured. Taking a defiant stand, the leaders of the seven-party alliance announced that they would take the agitation to a new level no matter what happens.

Addressing journalists at the Reporters Club here, Nepali Congress joint general secretary Dr Ram Saran Mahat said they would not give up unless the sovereign rights are restored to the people.

10 APR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

# Nepal Maoists side with Opp



An injured demonstrator is taken away by a human rights activist after clashes with riot police during a demonstration in Gongabu, Kathmandu on Monday. ■ AFP

## Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, April 10: As King Gyanendra's government continued to keep Kathmandu valley under curfew today, for the third day in a row. But Opposition parties continued to defy the ban and clash with security forces and the Maoists decided to enter the stage with a fresh war cry against the king.

The guerrillas, who consolidated their alliance with the Opposition recently, said they were supporting the decision by the parties to extend their general strike indefinitely and would start taking the highways under their control. If translated into action, it would mean a virtual blockade again, the second time this year, and catch the government in a pincer attack.

Issuing a statement from hiding last night, Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, and his deputy, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, said they would also prevent payment of taxes and other government dues and take action against administration officials and people supporting them. In what is intended to be a direct attack on the institution of monarchy, they have also warned to remove statues of the royal family, present and

past and signboards marked "His Majesty's government" and support protesters' attempts in the past four days to declare areas of the kingdom "liberated zones". Kathmandu valley remained curfew-bound from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. today, the fifth day of the strike called by the Opposition parties. Everything ground to a standstill and even most diplomatic missions and the offices of the UN and European Union remained closed. "We will continue the strike and protests till our demands are met and the government lifts its repressive measures," Arjun Narsingh KC, former spokesman of the Nepali Congress party said. "Neither the threat of emergency nor bullets can stop us. The brutal repression started by the government indicates the end of the autocratic regime is dawning." While apologising to the people for causing them hardship, the

leader added, "Everybody had to pay a price for freedom and liberty. We ask everyone to make a small sacrifice for the greater cause." Alleging that the protests had been taken over by the Maoist "terrorists", the government said it would not compromise with violence. Security forces kicked and beat up the unarmed demonstrators.

Women and children, lying in blood-soaked bandages in the city hospitals recounted how they had been attacked mercilessly even when they were mere bystanders. People also complained security forces had forced their way into their homes, intimidating, arresting people and even looting food stuff.

Two royalist ministers, including home minister Mr Kamal Thapa, who said emergency could be imposed, had their party offices vandalised by demonstrators.

# Curfew can't stop protests in Nepal

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Kathmandu, April 10

POLICE FIRED rubber bullets at anti-monarchy protesters as new clashes erupted on Monday in Kathmandu, while most residents spent the bulk of the daylight hours cooped up at home on the third day of a government curfew.

Police also fired tear gas and beat protesters with batons to break up rallies in Kathmandu's Kalanki, Gangabu and Dhumbarahi neighborhoods, while demonstrators staged similar rallies in other neighborhoods and suburbs to demand King Gyanendra relinquish control over the government. No major injuries were immediately reported.

The country's long-simmering crisis has deepened in recent days, with mobs rampaging in cities throughout the country and a crackdown by security forces leaving three protesters dead and some 800 arrested, mostly without charge. While most people are staying indoors, the security forces don't seem to mind the handful of tourists walking around.

Gyanendra dismissed an interim government and seized power more than a year ago, and an alliance of the country's seven major political parties — with vocal backing from the country's armed Maoist rebels — are demanding he restore full democracy. Neither side has shown willingness to back down, and the royal government said it may have to use even more force to restore order, alleging that Maoist rebels had infiltrated political protests and fired on security forces over the weekend.

Four suspected rebels were arrested along with other protesters, and spent gun cartridges were discovered at protest sites, home minister Kamal Thapa said on Sunday. The opposition rejected the allegation. "This is baseless. Anyone could have put the cartridges there," senior Nepali Congress leader Ram Sharan Mahat said on Monday. "This is a peaceful movement. By alleg-

## US democracy call

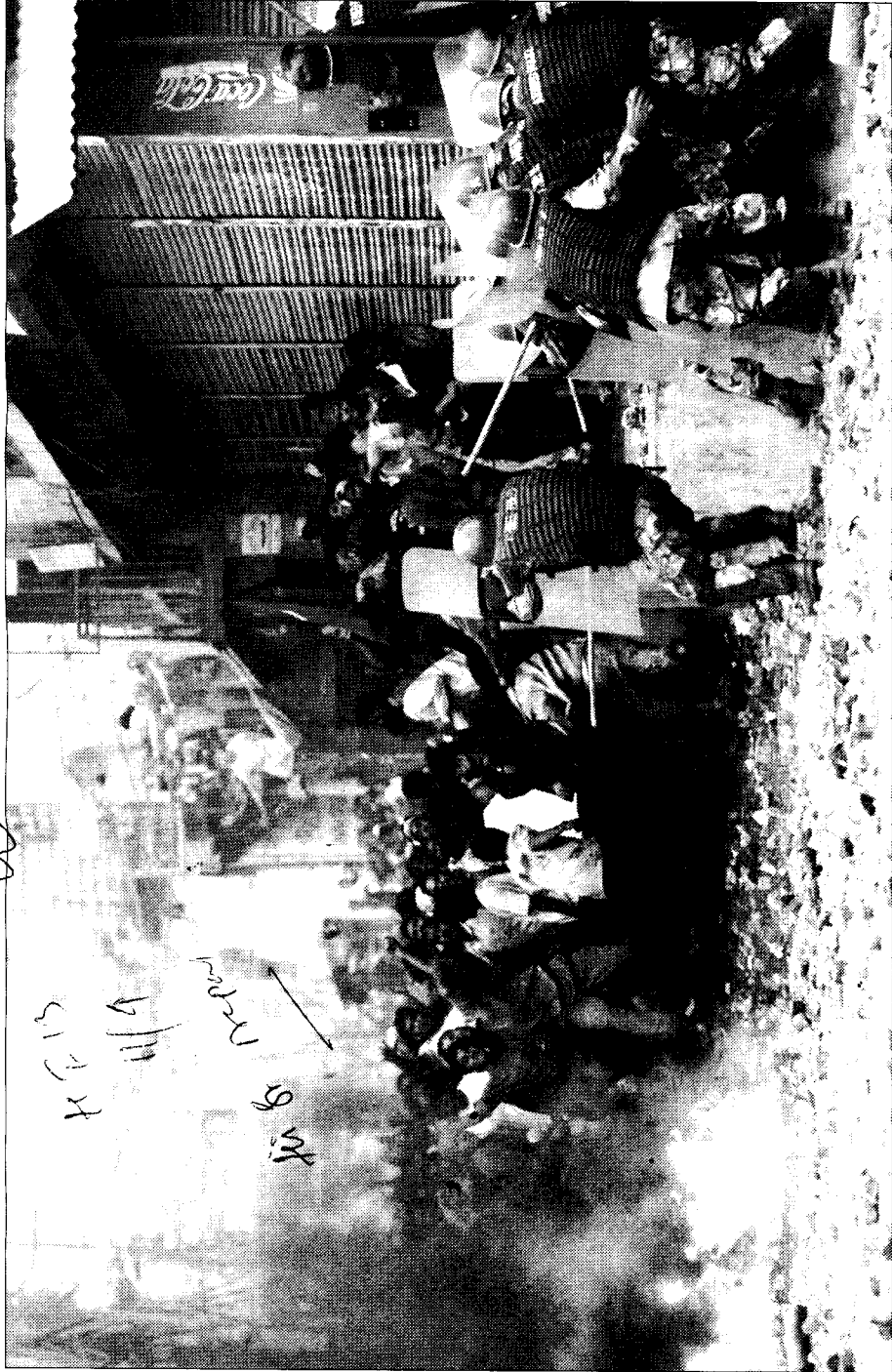
THE US State Department has called on King Gyanendra to restore democracy, declaring that 15 months of direct palace rule "has failed in every regard." "The demonstrations, death, arrests and Maoist attacks in the past few days have shown there is more insecurity, not less," spokesman Sean McCormack said. Dialogue with political parties should also begin, McCormack said. "It is time the king recognises that this is the best way to deal with insurgency," he added. **AP**

ing that Maoists have become part of it, the government is trying to legitimise its oppression." However, the protesters have not been entirely peaceful. Thousands of youth have hurled bricks and stones at police, injuring many, prompting information minister Srisht Shumsher Rana to call them "hooligans." "Ideally, I'd have preferred an entirely peaceful movement," Mahat said. "But these are young people. If you provoke them, they will hit back."

Many people initially welcomed Gyanendra's takeover, but the insurgency and the faltering economy has fuelled discontent that has brought hundreds of workers, professionals and business people into the streets. "No one expected such a massive public participation," said Lok Raj Baral, executive chairman of the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies.

On Monday doctors across 17 hospitals said they would join the protest with lunchtime gatherings, without affecting medical services. "Unless the situation improves, there are chances of civil war," said Dr. Vijay Sharma, surgeon at the city's prominent Bir Hospital.

The government had imposed a round-the-clock curfew in Kathmandu over the weekend, and extended it till Monday, but with reduced hours. Day curfews continued in Pokhara and Bharatpur.



Anti-king protesters fight police officers during curfew hours in Kathmandu on Monday. **AP**

## Diplomats, tourists caught in riot jam

INDO-ASIAN News Service  
Kathmandu, April 10

THE DAY curfew imposed afresh in Kathmandu Valley on Monday by King Gyanendra's government, with the intention of reining in Maoist guerrillas, has inadvertently hit tourists and the diplomatic community in Nepal.

Most international diplomatic missions remained closed and tourists hesitated whether to venture out of doors on Monday because of the uncertainty prevailing till late in the morning about the curfew timings. The government had imposed day curfew during the weekend to prevent the opposition parties from holding a mass protest here to pressure the king into

restoring parliament and relinquishing power he usurped in a coup last year.

Curfew was extended for up to 13 hours on Sunday, with the government saying it was done to prevent violence by the Maoists who, it said, had taken control of the opposition protests.

In the absence of any fresh announcement on Monday, the residents of Kathmandu valley braced for curfew from 7 a.m. again. It was only late in the morning that the authorities announced that Monday's curfew would be from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

While some of the diplomatic missions and foreign aid agencies in Kathmandu kept their offices open with a skeleton staff, mostly expatriates, others remained closed. The offices of the UN and the EU, which

generally remain open during shutdowns called by the opposition parties and the Maoists, were closed. The US embassy and the American Center also remained closed while the French embassy said it would close after lunch. The German embassy operated with a skeletal staff but its development agency remained closed. Only the British and Indian embassies functioned as usual.

The uncertainty left tourists in the lurch. "I think it's a shame. Such a beautiful country, but look at the mess," said Kevin Sheehy, 33, from Dublin, Ireland. Ishay Waldman, an Israeli from Moshav Kfar Aviv, frustrated at being forced to stay indoors, said, "The people's cause is quite right. The King sounds like an absolute dictator."

## Gyanendra's options

### King talks to parties

Protests gather pace and King Gyanendra finds himself isolated at home and abroad. He decides he has no choice but to negotiate. The parties have in the past refused talks unless the issue of resolving the Maoist revolt is also on the agenda. The king, whose government calls the Maoists "terrorists", may agree to their pre-condition if the protests get out of hand.

### King uses force to crush all protests

King Gyanendra is not known to think that his elder brother, the late King Birendra, who gave in to a similar campaign in 1990. With the army behind him, Gyanendra may believe he can crush protests by force. Home minister Kamal Thapa has said that troops had been restrained despite orders to shoot curfew violators but they would no longer be so.

### Maoists step up violence

Maoist rebels, who are backing the political campaign and have announced a truce in Kathmandu, could step up attacks on the army in the countryside. This would divert the attention of the army away from the capital, where it is playing a key role in containing the protests. That could leave riot police badly stretched and put more pressure on the king to negotiate.

### King throws in the towel

The king decides to step down, return power to an all-party government which will then go on to hold elections to a constituent assembly to decide on the future of monarchy. This would satisfy a key demand of the Maoists. This is considered the simplest way to end the political crisis but also the most unlikely considering King Gyanendra's hardline stance.

# Emergency whiff in Nepal air

Sudeshna Sarkar

KATHMANDU, April 9: The shadow of another Emergency loomed large over Nepal today with the Opposition parties deciding to continue their nationwide strike indefinitely until the government of King Gyanendra was brought to its heels. In retaliation, the government said the protests had been infiltrated by the Maoist guerrillas and appropriate measures would be taken to control acts of "terrorism".

The four-day shutdown called by the Opposition parties was to end today. But after the royalist government enforced day curfew on the last two days, arrested dozens, beat up demonstrators and fired on them, resulting in two deaths, the opposition coalition said the protests would continue till democracy was restored in Nepal.

The government too moved swiftly, with home minister Mr Kamal Thapa holding an emergency meeting with security top

brass, attorney-general Mr Laxmi Prasad Nirala and the chief secretary, Mr Lokman Singh Karki, to discuss future measures. It is speculated that in the meeting, they discussed a draft for the promulgation of a state of Emergency, which has been sent to Pokhara city for the approval of the king.

Meanwhile, as Kathmandu valley remained under a 13-hour curfew, and curfew was also imposed on Butwal and Pokhara, Thapa warned of stricter measures. "We have shown restraint so far because the parties were associated with the agitation," Mr Thapa told journalists at his office in Kathmandu today. "But we have proof the (Maoist) terrorists have taken now control of it. In future, we will treat a curfew like a curfew and bring the situation under control." Earlier, he had said future measures could include declaring a state of Emergency.

Mr Thapa said police had arrested four Maoists from

Kathmandu valley after the protests began. He said they had been sent to incite violence during the protests the parties had claimed would be peaceful.

The four rebels, Mr Thapa said, had been brought to the capital and given shelter by a regional leader of the Nepali Congress party of former prime minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, that is leading the Opposition coalition. Asked if the government would take action against Nepal's oldest democratic party, government spokesman and information and communications minister Mr Shrish Shumsher Rana said the law would take its own course.

The statements have fuelled fears that the government might declare Emergency again and crack down on the parties, if not ban them altogether. The Nepali Congress said it saw no need to comment on the allegations by the royalist government. "It is the nature of this government to make such allegations," a member said.

PALM BLESSINGS





# More violence, one dead in Nepal

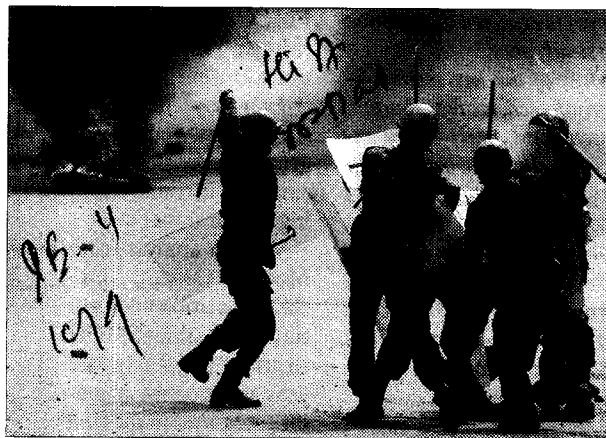
YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 9

WITH the order to shoot at sight, security forces opened fire on pro-democracy protesters in at least half a dozen places across the country wounding 60 and rounding up scores on the fourth day of the general strike called by the seven-party alliance.

Pro-democracy activists defied curfew in Kathmandu, Chitwan, Butwal and Kavre often clashing with the security groups led by the Royal Nepal Army as anti-king sentiments are gradually rising.

Police firing has increased the death toll to three since yesterday with Tulsi Chhetri succumbing to her injury in Chitwan today morning and Shiva Hari Kunwar killed in Banepa during indiscriminate firing by the police.

RNA quietly transported the body of Bhimsen Dahal,



Police officers beat up an opposition party supporter at a rally against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on Sunday. AP

who died during police firing in Pokhara, to his native town of Banepa provoking locals to rise in revolt against the government. "King Gyanendra should be held accountable for the murder," the crowd chanted.

Buoyed by the level of support, the coordination committee of the seven-party al-

liance decided to continue with the protest until the goal—restoration of democracy—is achieved.

The government in panic resorted to the imposition of curfew for the second day, with more government officials now openly supporting the movement.

But Home Minister Kamal

Thapa warned that the curfew will become sterner as "the movement was clearly controlled by the Maoists".

The coordination committee, however, discounted the claim and Thapa was frustrated. "This is a proof that people have realised that they are sovereign and no longer the King's slaves," said former PM Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The government today barred most of the media from covering the events. Curfew passes were given only to the government sector, or pro-government media.

The King's regime, a top government source said, is also spending around Rs 50 million—for the dissemination of favourable news through the media. The government, he claimed, has also secretly hired a New York based American consultant company—GAGE—to boost the King's image.

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INDIAN EXPRESS

# Annan worried as Nepal burns

## Sudeshna Sarkar

KATHMANDU, April 6: Even as UN secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan expressed concern at the fresh confrontation building up in Nepal between the government and the parties and the US condemned the mass arrests of Opposition leaders to foil the four-day strike called by them, Maoist guerrillas struck in southern Nepal, near the

Indian border, devastating an important town that killed at least 21 people.

At least six security personnel, five Maoists and two civilians died when hundreds of guerrillas invaded Malagawa, headquarters of Sarlahi district, around 9 p.m. yesterday, attacking the district police office, municipality office, armed police forces' base, security base camp of the Royal Nepalese Army and

office of the district administration. One of the civilians was an Indian working in a hotel, private radio station Kantipur FM said.

The guerrillas also attacked the district jail, freeing over 100 prisoners, of which at least 22 were their comrades, and took the chief district officer prisoner Mr Bhoj Raj Ghimire and nearly a dozen soldiers.

The army casualty is

## India condemns

NEW DELHI, April 6: India today condemned the arrest of political leaders and pro-democracy protesters in Nepal as well as the violence by the Maoists and called for greater "cooperation among constitutional forces" there. ■ IANS

expected to go up as an MI 17 helicopter, carrying two pilots and 10 soldiers, that

had been rushed to the site to repulse the attack, exploded around 1.30 a.m. about 2 km west of Malangawa. Issuing a statement from underground, Maoist supreme Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda attributed it to his cadre, hailing it as a major victory.

The RNA headquarters in Kathmandu, however, said it was an accident caused when the mortar bombs aboard exploded.

An army probe team has gone to the site to investigate.

Besides the Maoists, the government struggled to cope with the four-day strike called by the Opposition from today that paralysed life across the kingdom. Transport braked to a halt, offices and markets closed and protests went on erupting on the streets.

Riot police arrested over 100 protesters in the capital

and more from the districts, including Opposition leader Mr Girija Prasad Koirala's daughter Sujata.

In a statement issued from his office in New York, Mr Annan urged the Maoists to take further steps to fulfill the commitments they have made publicly and asked both them and the government to work towards peace through a reciprocal ceasefire agreement.

# Big response to pro-democracy strike in Nepal

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, APRIL 6

THE four-day general strike called by the seven-party alliance across the country evoked an enthusiastic response on its first day despite the government's prohibitory and repressive steps.

Major cities in the country including the capital wore a deserted look with private businesses shutting down, and roads with a far less number of vehicles than normal.

As the momentum against the King's absolute regime was picking up, the Royal Nepal Army lost one of its MI-17 aircraft during an anti-insurgency operation early today morning along with 10 RNA personnel—three members of the crew and seven Ranger Battalion shooters.

While six bodies have been recovered from the site, that of the pilot and two others were still seen strewn in the wreckage, and extricating them was becoming difficult as there were live bombs close by.

Although Maoists claimed that they shot the aircraft down, reports suggest that the explosive carried by the aircraft accidentally went off causing major damage its roof.

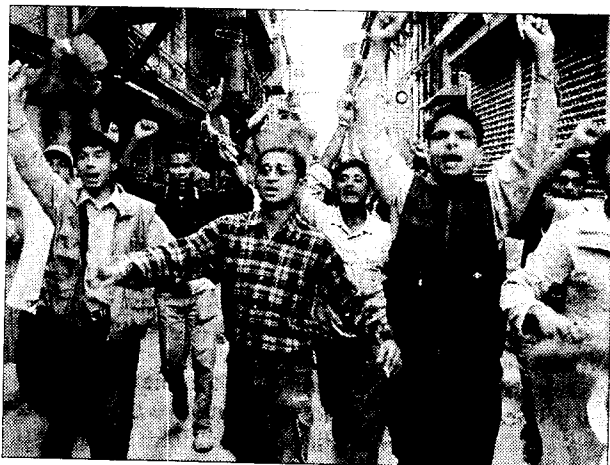
The aircraft crash-landed around 1.35 am local time at Malangawa as it was conducting aerial attacks on Maoists

who had launched an attack on a jail, government offices and police posts. Reports say at least 10 people—five policemen, three Maoists and two civilians—lost their lives in the clash while Maoists succeeded in freeing about 110 prisoners.

The aircraft, official sources said, was carrying around 120 explosives. The Army Headquarters has ordered a detailed internal probe into the crash. The setback the RNA has suffered coupled with the growing participation of the masses in the pro-democracy movement have only increased the government's agony. The demonstrators shouted anti-King slogans and threw stones and bricks on the security forces.

In Patan and Kirtipur, students and pro-democracy activists, with their determination to defy the prohibitory orders, forced the riot police to retreat. The Nepal Medical Association, which joined the movement for democracy, issued a call to all the hospitals to shut-down their services except the emergency related ones with immediate effect.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the US government have expressed concern over the largescale arrest of leaders suggesting that this would only minimise the chances of conciliation.



Opposition party activists protest against King Gyanendra in Katmandu on Thursday. AP

09 APR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Fleeting 'republic' in Nepal

J. HEMANTH

**Kathmandu, April 8:** For a few tantalising hours today, the idea of a republic became a reality in the kingdom of Nepal.

Hundreds of students stormed the headquarters and other government buildings in a southern Nepal district to declare Chitwan the kingdom's first republic before being driven out by troops loyal to King Gyanendra.

The march for democracy matched another 150 km away, in the capital Kathmandu, where students wrested control of Tribhuvan University, screaming "death to Gyanendra" as they fought off riot police.

The protests came as the four-day national strike called by Nepal's seven main political parties against the king's rule entered its third day.

In Chitwan, where the national park is famous for its

one-horned rhino and the Bengal Tiger, over 50,000 protesters took control of all the government offices in the district headquarters after driving out police personnel.

They were evicted after additional forces reached Bharatpur town and regained control of the government installations. Curfew has been clamped in the area.

The brief show of strength brought back memories of the recent student protests in France, where thousands marched against a job law that allowed employers to summarily fire workers under 26 during the first two years without giving any reason.

In Kathmandu, hundreds of students hurled stones at police. Some beat up a constable who got separated from



his comrades while others destroyed two statues of the king's grandmother on the Tribhuvan University campus.

Elsewhere, protesters set fire to a post office, which was doused. Tyres were thrown on the road and set on fire at some places.

"Vacate Narayanhiti, Democratic Republic is arriving," some activists shouted, referring to the royal palace in Kathmandu.

"Down with Gyanendra", "Gyanendra leave the country", chanted others.

Authorities declared a day curfew from 10 and shut off mobile phone services after SMS messages flew thick and fast calling for a quick end to monarchy.

In the Mahargunj area, hundreds of professionals,

among them doctors, lawyers and journalists, violated prohibitory orders to take part in a protest. More than 400 were arrested from all over the valley.

In the resort town of Pokhara, 200 km west of Kathmandu, troops shot dead an activist, Bhimsen Dahal, during a protest rally, organised despite a curfew. Soon after the incident, demonstrators took control of the Pokhara sub-metropolis office and vandalised it.

"He was shot in his head and he died instantly," said Yogesh Bhattarai, a senior leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML).

In a statement, the army said troops opened fire in self-defence when protesters tried to attack a telephone office.

In Kapilavastu, the birth place of the Buddha, the rebels freed 110 prisoners from a jail.

08 APR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

08 APR 2006  
THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Nepalese protester shot dead at rally

**ASSOCIATED Press**  
Kathmandu, April 8

NEPALESE FORCES fired at anti-monarch demonstrators on Saturday, killing one protester and injuring two more at a resort town near where King Gyanendra is vacationing. In another town where 25,000 people had taken to the streets, three women were hurt.

In Kathmandu, the government crushed opposition plans for a massive rally with a curfew and shoot-on-sight orders, emptying the roads and sending protesters indoors after two days of violent protests. The protesters want the king to restore democracy. In the southern town of Bharatpur, more than 25,000 pro-democracy activists rioted in the week's largest protest. They set fire to at least half a dozen government offices and forced riot police to retreat from the main square. Three women were hurt as police fired bullets and tear gas to disperse the crowd.

In the resort town of Pokhara, Gadhara Baral, said he was among a group of protesters pelting security forces with stones when the soldiers shot at them. "We were protesting. Suddenly the soldiers fired at us. One of my friends was killed instantly," Baral said at the hospital in Pokhara.

In Kathmandu, protesters hurled bricks, shouted slogans and clashed



**King Gyanendra**  
*Cracking down*

with cops before the curfew came into effect, but then the city went silent and people scurried home. The curfew began at 10 a.m. and was to continue until 9 p.m. in Kathmandu and two suburbs for security reasons, the government announced on state-run Radio Nepal. Violators would be shot, it said. Streets quickly emptied out. Tourists were only allowed to travel to or from the airport. Soldiers patrolled in pickup trucks and armoured cars.

A key protest organizer said the rally would be delayed until Sunday. "The curfew is illegal and illogical. There is no ground for this," said Khadga

Prasad Oli, deputy leader of the Communist Party of Nepal. The party is not linked to the Maoist rebels.

The rally was intended to be the high point of a four-day general strike called by Nepal's seven main opposition parties to pressure King Gyanendra to restore democracy.

Gyanendra seized power in February last year saving the government failed to quell the insurgency. For the first time, the parties protest has the backing of the Maoist rebels, with whom they formed a loose alliance in December.

Authorities have cracked down forcefully on the protests. On Friday, police battled protesters in the narrow alleys of Kathmandu, using batons and tear gas. The number of pro-democracy advocates arrested swelled to 751. A post office in Kathmandu was set on fire on Friday, and students at the capital's Tribhuvan University ransacked the dean's office and briefly held several officials hostage.

Of the 751 people arrested over the past three days, 115 were jailed under a tough public safety law that allows authorities to imprison people without charge for 90 days. Home Minister Kamal Thapa said.

Gyanendra called for calm in a speech broadcast live on Friday on national radio and television.

## Maoist threat for Manisha

NEPAL'S MAOISTS have asked Bollywood actress Manisha Koirala to apologise for supporting King Gyanendra's seizure of power. If she does not, she will be subject to "physical



**Manisha Koirala**

punishment", Veri-Seti regional committee cultural unit chief Ganesh Bhandrai said. "Manisha cannot save herself even if she escapes to Bollywood," he said.

Manisha's films have been banned in some cities, including Pokhara and Butawal, after she canvassed three months ago for a mayoral candidate during the civic polls, boycotted by pro-democracy parties. PTI, Kathmandu



A policeman throws a stone at protesters to clear a blocked road in Kathmandu on Saturday. AP

# Curfew in Nepal to foil Opposition rally

**KATHMANDU:** The Nepal Government has announced that a dawn-to dusk curfew clamped in this city will be extended to Sunday in an attempt to foil a rally planned against King Gyanendra's direct rule.

A notice on the state-run Nepal Television said the curfew would be imposed between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. in Kathmandu and surrounding areas. The cur-

few provision gives these security forces orders to shoot any violator.

On Saturday, the Government imposed the curfew from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. here and in the suburbs of Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, saying it was necessary to ensure the safety of the people and property.

Saturday was the third day of a four-day general strike called by

an alliance of seven parties that oppose King Gyanendra's seizure of power last year.

Several clashes occurred between the protesters and the police in Kathmandu and other towns for the past three days. Hundreds of people were arrested and dozens injured.

## Protester shot dead

In the tourist town of Pokh-

ara, 200 km west of Kathmandu, the Army gunned down a demonstrator, said K.P. Oli, vice-general secretary of the Nepal Communist (Unified Marxist-Leninist) Party. There was no comment from the Army.

Outside the capital, a demonstration turned violent in Bhaktapur in Chitwan district, where the police opened fire on some 25,000 protesters de-

manding restoration of democracy, witnesses said.

"Demonstrators went on the rampage as they set on fire government offices and clashed with the police for the whole day in Chitwan," Narayan Sharma, a local journalist, told AFP on phone.

He said dozens of protesters were injured in the clashes. -- AP, AFP



# Maoists issue *fatwa* against Manisha

Sudeshna Sarkar

KATHMANDU, April 7: After being targeted by the mafia of Mumbai, Bollywood star Manisha Koirala is now facing a fresh threat - from the Maoists of Nepal.

The communist guerrillas have issued a *fatwa* against the Nepali actress, warning they would take action against her if she continued to support King Gyanendra in public, the man they are trying to topple and establish a republic. The warning was given this week at a press conference called by the guerrillas in remote Bardiya district in far western Nepal. A leader belonging to their cultural wing, Ganesh Bhandari, said if the actress did not stop, their long arm would reach out to her in the tinsel town.

The new *jihad* comes after Manisha camped in Biratnagar town in eastern Nepal last month, canvassing for a municipal poll candidate to show solidarity with the royalist government that decided to hold the polls despite most of the parties staying away as well as voters. Manisha's initiative did not help her candidate win but it earned her the wrath of student organisations, who burned her effigy in protest and "banned" her films in Nepal.

However, the unfazed actress flew in once again today to Birgunj near the Indian border to attend a religious meet inaugurated by the king. Demure in a sari, Manisha accepted a token of appreciation at the silver jubilee celebration of the World Hindu Federation,

another controversial body headed by a former general and aide to the king, Bharat Keshar Simha, that has been supporting the royal coup and urging Hindus worldwide to rally behind the "emperor of the only Hindu kingdom in the world".

While the king said at the meet that lasting peace was the need of the hour and asked everyone to give some time to peace-building, security forces continued to arrest scores of Opposition party members and students in the capital and outside districts, on the second day of the four-day nationwide strike called by the Opposition.

Defying a ban on rallies, protest marches erupted on the streets throughout the day and students clashed with police,

taxis and other vehicles that had ventured out. The curbs and arrests are anticipated to grow to prevent the climax of the protests tomorrow, when the Opposition have called a mass meeting in the capital to prove to the world the unpopularity of the king's regime.

## 300 protesters arrested

Over 300 protesters, including senior politicians, were arrested and at least eight others were injured in Nepal today on the second day of the nationwide strike called by the opposition even as an embattled King Gyanendra responded to violence urging for calm. Hundreds demonstrated in different parts of the city today to demand restoration of democracy in the state, defying the government ban.



# Right royal mess

But Nepal's top gun least perturbed

*M. S. Nepal  
S.A. S.S.*

Nepal's political puzzle is becoming hideously complex but the country's top gun seems least perturbed. King Gyanendra's rule was a temporary measure to "defend multi-party democracy by restoring peace" after he found that "democracy and progress contradicted each other". At least that is what the royal proclamation stated when he assumed executive powers in February last year. But his near 14-month authoritarian rule has only served to create a yawning gap between the palace and the people, so convinced is he that nothing can go wrong with the army staying loyal. The seven-party opposition alliance last February rejected his olive branch and their latest four-day nationwide strike marks the beginning of a "decisive agitation" to bring the King to his knees. The Maoists have joined the chorus by declaring an indefinite ceasefire in Kathmandu valley but the crony cabinet thinks this is intended to infiltrate rallyists and unleash violence. Hundreds of political leaders and professionals, including journalists and doctors, have been rounded up.

The truce, the fourth in as many years, is partial and not likely to concern the King. It is seen more as a show of solidarity with the opposition alliance with which the Maoists have an understanding to end the autocratic monarchy, something the USA has spoken against. If the King was serious he could have responded to the Maoist overture while they were observing a three-month truce from September last year (extended by a month on the UN chief's request). Instead, he took advantage of this and travelled abroad to round up support. But he can ill afford to ignore the fact that his prolonged confrontation with democratic forces is making several European donor countries wary - some have already slashed aid, concerned over repeated human rights abuse. And this is not a very happy augury for a poor country like Nepal.



07 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

# Going will get tough for Gyanendra

By Jal Taraporewala/TNN

The four-day general strike in Nepal, jointly called by the opposition Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoist rebels, has focused attention on the two-pronged approach which king Gyanendra has adopted to try and counter the political forces ranged against him.

On the diplomatic front, Gyanendra is attempting to ride out the ongoing criticism by India, the US and UK against the suspension of multi-party democracy in Nepal. Gyanendra seems to calculate that despite this criticism, these nations will not impose significant economic sanctions against Nepal on account of geopolitical compulsions and their current preoccupation with other international concerns.

He is also looking to reduce the adverse fallout of the arms embargo imposed by these countries by continuing to purchase more weapons from China.

In terms of domestic politics, Gyanendra is seeking to deal with

the opposition campaign by proceeding with his own plans for a return to a controlled form of democracy, pursuing a fairly tough stand on law and order and highlighting the divisions between the Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoists. However, Gyanendra's efforts notwithstanding, he will find it increasingly difficult to assert his authority in the country.

Although substantive differences persist between the mainline opposition parties and the Maoists on such crucial issues as the relevance of the armed struggle in advancing the political agenda, the broad lineaments of a future polity and land reforms, both sides have reached a tactical understanding to put aside these divisions for the time being in order to focus on the immediate task of intensifying the pressure on Gyanendra.

Moreover, Gyanendra lacks the grassroots support he needs to effectively press ahead with his

plans to hold parliamentary elections on his own terms by March 2007. After all, this point was clearly underscored by the extremely low turnout of voters in local government elections earlier this year which were boycotted by the Seven-Party Alliance and opposed by the Maoists.

Gyanendra's problems will be further compounded by growing economic problems, the inability of the government to extend its writ to large parts of the rural areas and Nepal's strained relations with India and the West.

These factors will enable the Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoists to step up their calls for the restoration of the multi-party system, the establishment of a titular monarchy and the convening of a constituent assembly to draft a new basic law for Nepal. Gyanendra's refusal to concede substantial ground on these issues will only lead to greater instability in Nepal.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# 300 arrested in Nepal on Day II of strike

**PRESS Trust of India**  
Kathmandu, April 7

OVER 300 protesters, including senior politicians, were arrested and at least eight others were injured in Nepal on Friday, the second day of the nationwide strike called by the opposition even as an embattled King Gyanendra responded to violence urging for calm.

Hundreds demonstrated in different parts of the city today to demand restoration of democracy in the Kingdom, defying the government ban on protests and despite the heavy mobilization of riot police and army personnel.

In his speech broadcast live on national television and radio from Birgunj, about 200 km south of Kathmandu, King Gyanendra urged for calm. "Let us all pledge today to devote time for establishing permanent peace...It is the need of today to establish permanent peace," he said.

Clashes between protesters and the riot police took place in the premises of Tribhuvan University in Kirtipur Municipality, Gongabun, Baneshwor and Ason leaving half a dozen activists injured, the party sources said.

The Nepali Congress alleged that government infiltrated into demonstrations and turned them violent in some places, otherwise the agitation was peaceful. It also rejected allegations that Maoists had infiltrated peaceful rallies. Police baton-charged protesters, lobbed tear gas shells and even resorted to firing during some agitations.

07 APR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Activists defiant, curfew in Nepal capital

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 5

AS political activists and pro-democracy professional groups appear determined to make their four-day strike beginning Thursday decisive, the Government panicked and resorted to imposition of curfew and mass scale of arrest of leaders.

Amid the tension, the King has been advised by his traditionally friends in India's Hindu organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, to end the confrontation with pro-democracy political parties and think in terms of isolating the rebel Maoists by restoring the dissolved House of Representatives.

But so far there has been no response of the king to the RSS suggestion and instead it has only flexed its muscles. It brought the twin cities of Kathmandu and Patan under curfew from 11 in



The president of the Nepal Association of Lawyers, Shambhu Thapa (L), is arrested by police while defying the government's ban against demonstrations in Kathmandu on Wednesday. Reuters

the night, while all the four entry points on highways connecting the capital with rest of the country have been closed.

At least 37 leaders belonging to the 7-party Alliance for Democracy were arrested in an

early morning swoop to prevent a possible breach of peace. That, however, hardly deterred the pro-democracy activists. Forty-four pro-democracy activists, including eminent doctors, lawyers and journalists who have formed

the Professional Alliance for Democracy, were also arrested in the morning. Gagan Thapa, a prominent leader of the Nepali Congress-affiliated student organisation said, "We are determined to defy the curfew and prohibitory orders even if King Gyanendra turned the capital into a valley of death."

King Gyanendra who has been away from the capital—mostly relaxing in the tourist town of Pokhara—is scheduled to inaugurate the silver jubilee celebration of the World Hindu Federation (WHF) in Birgunj, along the boarder with India, coinciding with the commencement of the pro-democracy movement in the country. The silver jubilee celebration will see, among others, prominent RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad delegates from India.

There is speculation that the Indian guests would come with the

message that absolute monarchy is not possible in today's world, if what Baleswar Agarwal, general secretary of the International Coordination Council, an RSS outfit, wrote in the latest issue of the RSS journal, Organiser, is an indication. Agarwal has suggested that the king seek the Supreme Court's opinion on the revival of the House of Representatives—dissolved way back in May 2002—as demanded by the mainstream political parties.

Although the king has consistently refused to concede to this demand raised by the parties, the suggestion coming from Agarwal carries much significance. The Hindu leader has a long association with the palace, especially with the late King Mahendra. Agarwal is also a friend of Dr Tulsi Giri, the all powerful Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers, who himself began his political career as a RSS activists.

# Nepal crackdown rolls before strike

12:18 PM  
10/2/05

**Kathmandu, April 5** (Reuters): Nepal's royalist government detained dozens of activists and politicians in Kathmandu today in a crackdown ahead of a general strike and protests planned against King Gyanendra's seizure of power last year.

Nepal's seven main political parties have joined with Maoist insurgents to call for a four-day nationwide strike from tomorrow and a day of protest on Saturday, April 8, the day multi-party democracy was established 16 years ago in the Himalayan nation.

The government of King Gyanendra has banned rallies in Kathmandu, the centre of the campaign, and vowed to crush any protests, saying that it had evidence Maoist rebels would use the occasion to infiltrate the capital.

Witnesses said about two dozen lawyers, journalists and doctors were detained when they defied the ban and staged a small protest this morning.

Police also raided the homes of several political leaders and activists in a pre-dawn crackdown and detained many of them, party officials said.

"I have been handed over a detention order saying I am being detained for 90 days under the Public Security Act," Minendra Rijal, a senior

member of the Nepali Congress (Democratic) party, said.

Although anti-monarchy protests have become a regular feature in the country since the king's coup in February 2005, the latest rallies are expected to be the biggest so far.

The campaign has also gained weight as it comes after the political parties and Maoist rebels reaffirmed their commitment to a loose alliance struck last November that seeks to end the king's absolute rule.



**A journalist being arrested in Kathmandu on Wednesday.** (Reuters)

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The ...



# Nepal Maoists call truce

Sudeshna Sarkar  
in Kathmandu

April 3. — In a manoeuvre intended to checkmate King Gyanendra on the eve of a series of protests called by the Opposition parties from Thursday, Nepal's Maoists have announced an indefinite ceasefire in Kathmandu valley from tonight, saying it was intended to show solidarity with the agitation and expose the "naked conspiracy" of King Gyanendra's feudal government.

Issuing a statement from underground, Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dhala aka Prachanda today said his banned Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) would suspend all its "military activities" in the capital as well as its adjacent cities of Bhaktapur and Lalitpur till further announcement withdrawing the truce.

"We have taken this decision in

answer to appeals by the seven political parties and civil society," Prachanda said. "Our ceasefire exposes the conspiracy by the feudal government to repress people's peaceful protests in the name of combating Maoist infiltration." The truce comes on the eve of a four-day nationwide strike called by seven Opposition parties from Thursday, that is scheduled to culminate in a mass protest in the capital on Saturday. In January, when the Opposition front had planned a similar protest, the government put it down ruthlessly by arresting Opposition leaders in a midnight raid, imposing dawn to dusk curfew and snapping telephone connections.

This time too, royalist ministers have been hinting at similar measures. Home minister Mr Kamal Thapa last week said the government had arrested five Maoist guerrillas and received information that the rebels had sent a

special task force to Kathmandu valley to infiltrate the Opposition protests and unleash violence. "We consider the protests to be terrorist activities and would treat them accordingly," Mr Thapa told the media. Despite the truce, the government is likely to crack down on the agitation.

However, the move will only increase the growing public discontent with the king and his handpicked government.

The Maoists had called a four-month unilateral ceasefire last year too but the government refused to heed calls both at home and abroad to build on it by starting peace talks with the rebels. Instead, the army was asked to step up military operations in guerrilla strongholds, resulting in the death of at least one senior rebel leader. The new truce, however partial, will put fresh pressure on the king to hand over power to a multi-party government.

0. Apr 1994  
THE STATESMAN

# Maoists in Nepal call truce as govt warns parties

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
& AGENCIES

KATHMANDU, APRIL 3

NEPAL'S Maoists announced an indefinite ceasefire here and the surrounding valley on Monday in response to a call by political parties, which have decided to go for a nationwide general strike in a 'do-or-die' spirit ignoring the government's warning that it may have to go for curfew and 'shoot to death' orders.

Nepal's seven main political parties have called a four-day nationwide strike from Thursday, to be followed by a protests and a big rally in Kathmandu on April 8, in a bid to pressure King Gyanendra to restore democracy and cede absolute power.

The ceasefire in the Kathmandu was aimed at "creating an easy atmosphere for the people to participate in the peaceful protest movement" against the king, said Maoist chief Prachanda.

The government has vowed to halt the protests, saying Maoist rebels could infiltrate rallies and create unrest.



King Gyanendra

Warnings from the government were based on its 'credible information' that the Maoists, whom the government has branded 'terrorists', were likely to infiltrate the protest programmes and cause violence. "We are determined to foil any such possibility", Union Home Minister Kamal Thapa said. He threatened to treat the alliance as 'terrorists' on the ground that the Maoists and the alliance had entered into an understanding on 12 different issues, including the end of 'absolute monarchy'.

"I have met Prachanda a few times before arriving at the understanding. Let the government show the courage to brand me terrorist", said former PM and Nepali Congress chief G P Koirala, the senior-most leader of the alliance.

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Maoists violate truce, abduct 11 soldiers

**DRIMI Chaudhuri and AP**  
Kathmandu, April 29

NEPAL'S MAOIST rebels abducted 11 unarmed soldiers as they headed home from vacation on Saturday, despite a Maoist declaration of a three-month ceasefire. They later freed eight of the soldiers, but the whereabouts and condition of the remaining three were unknown.

The abduction came on a day when veteran Indian Communist leader Sitaram Yechury said the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist was ready to join the democratic process. The CPI(M) Politburo leader and acting chairman of the India-based Nepal Democracy Solidarity Committee was hopeful that the Maoist participation in Nepal's mainstream politics would have a positive impact across South Asia.

The soldiers were captured in the remote village of Ramdittha, about 500 km east of Kathmandu, and eight of them were later handed over to representatives of the human rights group, INSEC-Nepal, at Jitpur village.

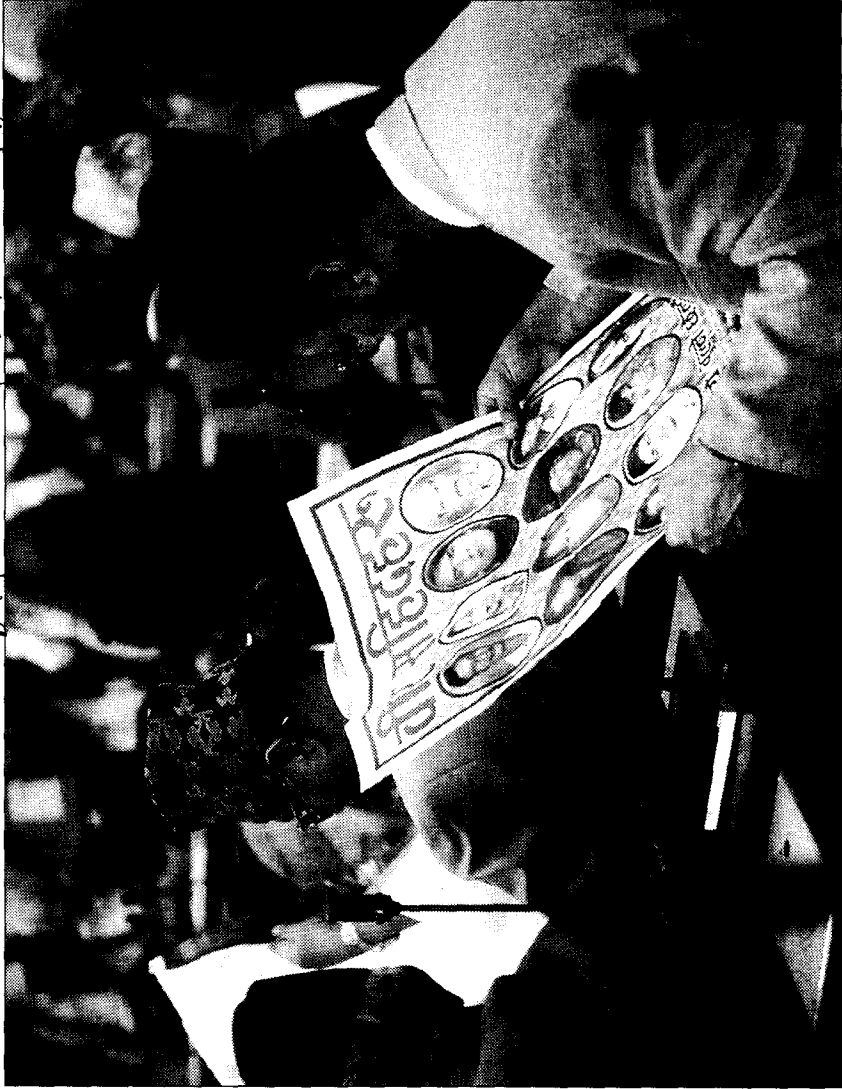
There was no official reaction to the abduction - with the King effectively out of power and the Prime Minister-designate too ill to be sworn in - but there were no immediate indications that the

incident would affect the truce declaration or spark renewed political turmoil. Sources said that it was possible the guerrillas behind the abductions did not know of the announcement since the rebels have a very limited communications network.

The ceasefire had eased some of the pressure on the Parliament, reconvened by the King on Monday after weeks of often violent protests against the royal dictatorship.

Meanwhile, legislators demanded the King be stripped of control over the 90,000-strong army, fearing he could use its loyalty to propel himself into power again. "It is the Prime Minister who should be the supreme commander of the army and not the King. The existing laws should be amended immediately, and that is what we are going to do," said Shivraj Basnet, a lawmaker from the Nepali Congress, the country's largest party.

Indian leader Atul K. Anjan (CPI), also visiting Nepal with Yechury, let his support saying: "There is no room for royal anarchy as well as social anarchy in a democracy. We want a stable democracy in Nepal and would impress upon the Indian government to provide more assistance to the country in future."



AP  
A Nepalese lawmaker looks at a poster with photographs of the activists who were killed during the recent pro-democracy protests in Kathmandu on Saturday.

## Koirala swearing-in

NEPAL'S PRIME Minister-designate, the octogenarian Girija Prasad Koirala, will be sworn in on Sunday at the House of Representatives. The ceremony, scheduled to take place on April 28, was postponed because of Koirala's illness.

Unanimously chosen Prime Minister, Koirala is suffering from bronchitis and has been on artificial respiration. He missed the first session of



Parliament, but the deputy speaker read out a written message from him, outlining his proposal for Constituent Assembly elections and peace talks with the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist.

According to a Nepali Congress spokesperson, the veteran leader's condition has improved, but he has been advised rest by the doctor.

HTC, Kathmandu

# নয়া সংবিধানই চাই, দাবি থেকে সরছে না নেপাল

কাঠমান্ডু, ২৮ এপ্রিল: একই দিনে দু'টো বিশাল সমাবেশ দেখল কাঠমান্ডু। দুই সমাবেশ থেকেই নেপালের জনতা দাবি তুলল, নতুন সংবিধান চাই-ই চাই। সেই জন্য চাপ হালকা করার কোনও প্রসঙ্গ উঠছে না।

চার বছর বাদে আজ পার্লামেন্টের অধিবেশন বসেছিল। কিন্তু অসুস্থ শরীরের জন্য সেই স্বরবীর মুহূর্তের সাক্ষী থাকতে পারেননি ভারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরাল। আর আজই রাজধানীর বুকে প্রকাশ্য সমাবেশ ডেকেছিল মাওবাদীরা। তিন বছরের মধ্যে আজই প্রথম বার জনসমক্ষে বক্তৃতা দিলেন প্রথম সারির কোনও মাওবাদী নেতা।

রাজতন্ত্রের বিরুদ্ধে এবং গণতন্ত্রের পক্ষে প্রতিবাদ করতে গিয়ে গত তিন সপ্তাহে প্রাণ গিয়েছে যাঁদের, তাঁদের স্মরণ করেই আজ শুরু হয়েছিল পার্লামেন্টের নতুন অধিবেশন। লিখিত বার্তা পাঠিয়ে অসুস্থ কৈরাল। পার্লামেন্টকে জানিয়েছেন, খুব দ্রুত সাংবিধানিক পরিষদের জন্য নির্বাচন করা হবে। যাতে নতুন সংবিধান তৈরি করা যায়, মাওবাদীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা চালানো যায় এবং সংঘর্ষ-বিবর্তি ঘোষণা করা যায়। বস্তুত, মাওবাদীদের আলোচনায় বসার ডাকও দিয়েছেন কৈরাল। কার্যনির্বাহী স্পিকার জানিয়েছেন, এই প্রস্তাব আলোচনার জন্য রবিবার বিতর্ক ডাকা হবে।

ভিতরে যখন নতুন করে অধিবেশন বসার উত্তেজনা, পার্লামেন্টের দরজায় তখন শয়ে শয়ে লোক। বিভিন্ন দলের পতাকা হাতে সেখানে

পার্লামেন্ট ভেঙে দেওয়ার ক্ষমতা রাজার হাত থেকে নিয়ে নেওয়ার দাবিতে তারা একই রকম অনড়। প্রেক্তারি পরোয়ানার পরোয়া না-করে মাওবাদীদের ছাত্র শাখার নেতা লেখনথ নেউপানে সভায় বলেছেন, “আমাদের হাত শুধু মুঠো করার জন্য নয়। আমরা শক্তির জন্য একটা বিপ্লব করছি। তবে দরকার পড়লে আবার বোমা-বন্দুক তুলে নিতে পারি।” মাওবাদী সমর্থকেরা তাঁদের নেতা প্রচণ্ডের বিবর্তিতও বিলি করেছেন। সেখানে প্রচণ্ড বলেছেন, ষেরতন্ত্রকে পরাস্ত করতে সারা পৃথিবীর মানুষের কাছেই আবেদন এটা। অবশ্য বোমা-বন্দুক না ধরলেও অপহরণ এখনও জারি রেখেছে মাওবাদীরা। আজই ধনকুটা জেলায় ১১ সেনাকে অপহরণ করে মাওবাদীরা।

ডেপুটি স্পিকার চিত্রলেখা যাদব জানান, কৈরালার প্রস্তাব আলোচনায় উঠবে রবিবার নিম্ন কক্ষের বৈঠকে। স্পিকার তারানাথ রানাভাত ইত্তফা দিয়েছেন। রাজার প্রতি অনুগত রানাভাত পরিবর্তিত রাজনৈতিক পরিহিতিতে থাকতে চাননি। নতুন করে গড়ার সময়ে গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরালার অসুস্থতা এক প্রস্ত সংশয় তৈরি করেছে। ভয়ঙ্করের জন্য কাল গণতন্ত্র-পন্থীদের বিজয় সমাবেশে যোগ দিতে পারেননি কৈরাল। আজ প্রথম দিনে পার্লামেন্টে অনুপস্থিত ছিলেন ব্রহ্মহট্টসে আক্রান্ত কৈরালকে কাল অস্ত্রাজেন ও স্যালাইন দিতে হয় বলে পারিবারিক সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে।



‘এখনই থামছি না’ কাঠমান্ডুতে সাংবিধানিক পরিষদের দাবিতে মাওবাদীদের সভা। -এএফপি

গ্যালারিতে ভারতীয় নেতাদের অভিধানও জানিয়েছেন নেপালি পার্লামেন্টের সদস্যরা। ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহও কথা বলেছেন কৈরালার সঙ্গে। কৈরালার সরকারের জন্য দিল্লির পূর্ণ সমর্থনের কথা বলেছেন তিনি। সিংহদরবার সচিবালয়ের কাছে মাওবাদীদের সমাবেশ থেকে দাবি উঠেছে, শাহিসেনা ভেঙে নেপালি সেনাবাহিনী গড়তে হবে। নির্বাচিত

# Tough agenda for Nepal MPs

MATTHEW ROSENBERG  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

**N**EPALESE legislators headed back to work on Friday after a four year-break—their jobs reinstated by a monarch whose regime was left teetering by weeks of unrest, but their power to carry out the reforms they've promised unclear.

The reinstated Pratinidhi Sabha (Lower House) got a bit of breathing space when communist insurgents with whom they teamed up to take power back from King Gyanendra announced a three-month cease-fire on Thursday.

Even without an immediate rebel threat, the task ahead is enormous for legislators essentially returned to power by hundreds of thousands of Nepalese who took part in nearly three weeks of protests against Gyanendra's royal dictatorship—and now demand real change in this near-feudal land where most eke out pitiful livings as landless farmers.

Many of Nepal's 27 million people remain distrustful of the political elite they backed in the demon-



Speaker Chitralekha Yadav addresses the Lower House at the first session of the reinstated parliament in Kathmandu on Friday. AP

strations, well aware of the infighting and corruption that marked Nepal's last crack at democracy, which began after similar unrest in 1990 and ended with Gyanendra's seizure of power last year.

"We spilled our blood to end the king's autocracy," said Saroj Thapa, a 28-year-old hotel worker in Kathmandu. He was referring to the 15 people killed by security forces during the often-bloody

demonstrations and the thousands injured. "Now these politicians must respect the power of our people," he said. "We can't again go back to the protests."

The top priority for the lawmakers—who last sat in 2002 before Gyanendra dismissed the parliament at the request of the then-prime minister—is readying Nepal to hold elections for a special assembly to rewrite the con-

stitution. The current charter gives the king broad powers to dismiss governments along with supreme command of the army. The expectation on the streets—and the key demand of the Maoists, who remain well-armed—is that a new constitution will limit or eliminate the monarchy's role, ensuring that Gyanendra can never seize power as he did in February 2005.

Those constitutional provisions will be the top target of any special assembly, but experts say it's not clear if a new charter can legally remove the king from his role as the supreme arbiter of power in Nepal, or as the top commander of the military. Any moves against the king's power are sure to face challengers in courts packed with royal appointees.

"The Constituent Assembly has come only as a slogan," said Shreehari Aryal, a Supreme Court lawyer. Making a "political decision is not enough. The process has to step within the legal framework," he said. "There is always a chance the royalists can challenge the formation of such an assembly in court." —AP

NEPALESE PM PLEDGES NEW CONSTITUTION

# Koirala road to peace

Sudeshna Sarkar

KATHMANDU, April 28: They had waited for four years for parliament to convene. And today when the reinstated House of Representatives opened, Nepal's 27 million people had to wait further as prime minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala's ill health delayed the session by four hours. Still, the 30-minute session ended amidst thunderous applause as the brief message sent by Mr Koirala pledged to have a new constitution and install peace.

With Speaker Mr Taranath Ranabhat forced to resign earlier this week for having supported King Gyanendra, the brief session was chaired by Deputy Speaker Ms Chitralekha Yadav, who asked the House to observe two minutes' silence in memory of the "martyrs, known and unknown" of the 19-day peaceful people's movement that forced King Gyanendra to relinquish power.

The 84-year-old Koirala, who could not be sworn in in the morning due to ill health, was also unable to attend the first session of



the House. However, his physicians said his health was improving. In his brief message, read out by Ms Yadav, the new PM said he was committed to upholding people's desire and was directing the House to begin urgent discussions on holding constituent Assembly elections that could transform Nepal into a republic.

Mr Koirala also pledged to hold dialogues with the Maoists at the earliest, declare a ceasefire and create fearless and violence-free atmosphere. The House would sit again on Sunday, at 4 pm.

A thunderous welcome was also given to CPI-M leader Mr Sitaram Yechuri, who today attended the

session with an Indian delegation at the invitation of Mr Koirala.

It marked a pleasant change from his first visit during the pro-democracy movement when the King's men stoned his car.

People had been awaiting the historic session since morning, taking out rallies in the capital and outer districts, warning the seven parties not to forget their pledge to hold an election that would decide if Nepal would remain a monarchy or become a republic. In an unprecedented show of revolt against King Gyanendra, many of the MPs discarded their national dress *daura saruwal*, that had been obligatory at all official programmes. They also discarded the royalist logo earlier worn by MPs as well as the symbolic royal sceptre.

#### CPI hails victory

SNS adds from New Delhi: The CPI general secretary, Mr AB Bardhan, today said that the victory of the Nepalese struggle for democracy proved that "those who are united are always victorious and no police or Army repression can put them down".

9 27 2008

THE GUARDIAN



# Nepal parliament meets after 4 years

**Kathmandu:** Nepal's parliament reconvened on Friday for the first time in four years, after weeks of often-bloody protests forced the king to give up absolute power and return the country to democratic rule.

Girija Prasad Koirala, the ailing 84-year-old veteran politician named prime minister, was not present as legislators met in the ornate meeting hall in the heart of Kathmandu. Koirala was to have been sworn in Friday morning, but an unspecified lung problem had forced the ceremony to be rescheduled, his aides said.

"Welcome to all the members. We express our gratitude to those who died in the democracy struggle," said deputy speaker Chitra Lekha Yadav as she called a minute's silence. "What we've achieved is really admirable—to go on



**WARMTH OF DEMOCRACY:** Nepal MPs greet each other in the first session of the reinstated parliament in Kathmandu on Friday

united is what we need," she said. "If we ever bring about such a political crisis again, not one of us would be left unpunished," she said.

Outside, thousands of political activists jammed the streets in front of the parliament building, demanding incoming legislators quickly make good on promises to

have the constitution rewritten. Thousands more marched through the city's streets.

"We expect parliament will make a decision today about the constitutional assembly," said Bamdev Gautam of the United Democratic Front, a group rallying in a park about a kilometre from the parliament building. AGENCIES

15 1990

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Yechury in Nepal democracy pantheon

## BHARAT BHUSHAN

**Kathmandu, April 28:** Sitararam Yechury has replaced Chandra Shekhar in Nepali folklore about democracy. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has replaced Benaras.

In 1990, it was Chandra Shekhar who brought a group of Indian politicians to attend the first open meeting of the banned Nepalese political parties at the residence of Ganesman Singh, the father figure of Nepali Congress. That was the beginning of the end of King Birendra's managed democracy.

Today, it is Sitararam Yechury of the CPM and D.P. Tripathi of the Nationalist Congress Party who are playing a similar role.

Chandra Shekhar had met the grand old man of the Nepalese democratic movement, B.P. Koirala, in Benaras. Yechury and Tripathi met Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in JNU where they were student leaders.

Today, when Yechury and Tripathi entered the reinstated parliament, it was left to former foreign minister and a good friend of India, Chakra Prasad Bastola, to send a note to deputy speaker Chitralekha Yadav. He wanted her to recognise their presence in the House. She did it to wild clapping by the MPs.

"This is purely a victory of the Nepalese people," an overwhelmed Yechury told the media. "Often India is viewed

as the big brother. India and Nepal are brothers but they are twins. The agony of one is reflected in the other. The victory of one is celebrated by the other," he said.

Yechury and Tripathi, along with Rahul Barua of the South Asia Foundation, set up the Nepal Democracy Solidarity Committee in India last year. But their association with Nepal goes back to 1990.

Yechury and Tripathi's role in supporting the return of democracy has been complimentary. While Yechury has been able to use his influence within the Maoists, Tripathi is close to the Nepali Congress and its breakaway faction led by Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Nepali Congress (Democratic).

Yechury is believed to have been approached by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to use his influence with another JNU alumnus, Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai. Tripathi also knows Bhattarai well but has the additional advantage of knowing the Nepali Congress leaders.

It was Yechury's involvement that apparently facilitated the 12-point agreement between the Nepalese political parties and the Maoists.

The CPM leader, however, is dismissive of the media dubbing the agreement "Yechury formula".



Sitararam Yechury at the first session of the reinstated parliament in Kathmandu. (AP)

ed with it after the Karan Singh fiasco because I was saying exactly what the Nepalese wanted," Yechury explained.

Welcoming the restoration of the parliament and the process of organising a Constituent Assembly, the CPM leader said: "Nepal must embark on a new democratic path. The political process must not remain limited to restoring what was gained in 1990. This is im-

portant because it is this understanding that will bring the Maoists into the democratic mainstream."

Yechury arrived here today, just in time to attend the first extraordinary meeting of the reinstated Nepalese House of Representatives. He apparently talked to the Maoist leader before leaving Delhi.

"Their point is very clear. Twice the Nepalese people ha-

Often India is viewed as the big brother. India and Nepal are brothers but they are twins. The agony of one is reflected in the other. The victory of one is celebrated by the other

Their (Maoists') point is very clear. Twice the Nepalese people have been betrayed on the question of a Constituent

Assembly — first in 1951 and then in 1990. They don't want a repetition

**Sitararam Yechury**  
in Nepal

India. Revolutions today must factor in people's yearning for democracy," he said.

Yechury and Tripathi, here on the invitation of Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala, had a meeting with leaders of the seven-party alliance tonight. They are scheduled to meet Koirala tomorrow morning. They will stay till Sunday when Koirala is sworn in as Prime Minister.

## PM calls Koirala

### OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 28: India today offered support to Nepal's new government and promised to help revive its economy, crippled by months of pro-democracy agitation.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh rang up Prime Minister-designate Girija Prasad Koirala and conveyed "the best wishes of the people of India to the people of Nepal", Singh's media adviser said.

Delhi had recently annoyed Nepal's pro-democracy protesters by jumping the gun and welcoming King Gyanendra's initial peace overtures, which the strikers found inadequate.

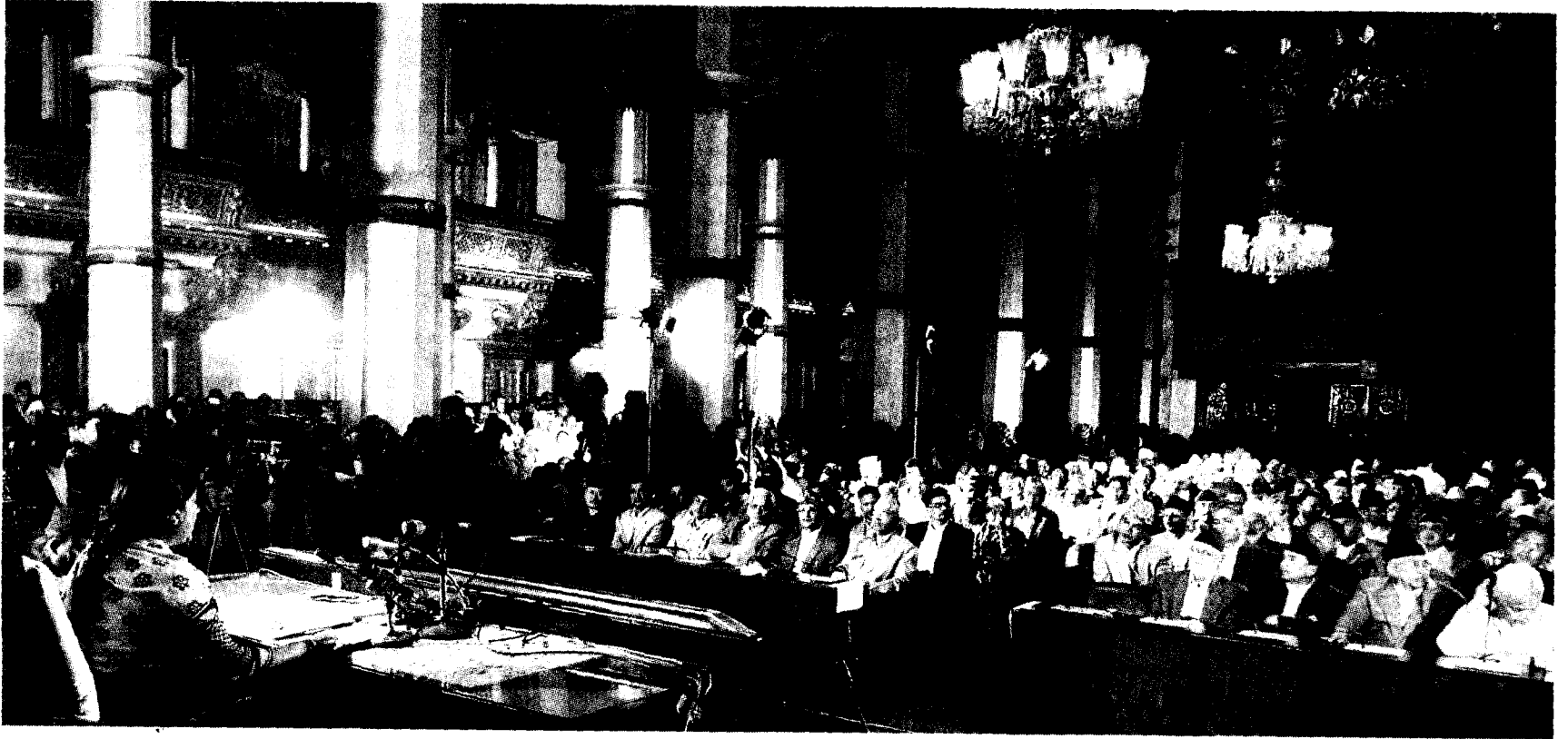
Singh, who was on a tour of Germany and Uzbekistan when King Gyanendra gave in to the protesters, reviewed the Nepal situation at yesterday's meeting of the cabinet committee on security.

Delhi is planning an aid package that, officials said, might include concessions and loan waivers to help Nepal rebuild its economy. The pro-democracy agitation has led to a severe shortage of essentials in the country.

A large number of trucks are stuck at the Indo-Nepal border because of the strike.

# Parliament meets in Nepal

Resolution on constituent assembly tabled; debate, vote on Sunday



**DEMOCRACY ENTHRONED:** Speaker of the Nepalese Parliament Chitralekha Yadav addresses the House at the first session of the reinstated Parliament in Kathmandu on Friday. — PHOTO: AP

Siddharth Varadarajan

**KATHMANDU:** As thousands of people kept up a noisy vigil outside the handsome white-washed gates of the Singha Darbar, seat of Nepal's government, parliamentarians meeting on Friday for the first time in four years loudly applauded the tabling of a resolution calling for elections to a constituent assembly.

The resolution — which took the form of a letter written by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala — was read out by Deputy Speaker Chitra Lekha Yadav as Mr. Koirala was unable to attend the session due to an infection of bronchitis. His illness also meant the Grand Old Man of the Nepali Congress could not

formally be sworn in Prime Minister. His nephew, Shekhar Koirala, said Mr. Koirala was expected to recover in time for the next sitting of Parliament on Sunday. "He will also be sworn in Prime Minister on that day."

In his message, Mr. Koirala proposed that Parliament commit itself to the election of a constituent assembly, in keeping with the demands of the *janandolan*, or people's movement as well as the 12-point agreement reached with the Maoists last November. He also proposed that the terrorist tag be removed from the Maoists and that a ceasefire be declared by the government in order to facilitate the peace process with the rebels. As Ms. Yadav read out each of these

proposals, MPs loudly thumped their desks in approval. One MP who conspicuously did not applaud was Budhiman Tamang, a former Minister in King Gyanendra's Cabinet.

In a major semantic shift that was symbolic of the changed political circumstances, Ms. Yadav in her remarks ditched the old word for democracy — *prajatantra* — in favour of "*loktantra*." The message, of course, being that the Nepalese were no longer subjects but citizens.

Mr. Koirala's proposals were seconded formally by Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other leaders of the Seven Party Alliance (SPA). The

House was then adjourned till 4 p.m. on Sunday.

The proposals themselves will be discussed on that day before being formally approved. "The idea is not so much to pass a Bill as for Parliament to commit itself to elections for a constituent assembly," Jhala Nath Khanal, a senior leader of the CPN (UML) told *The Hindu*. "Parliament will set the direction for government, which must then fix the date for elections and also work out the modalities."

Prominent among the demonstrators outside the Singha Darbar were representatives of Nepal's different ethnic and tribal groups such as the Newars, Magars, Sherpas and Gurungs, most of whom are marginalised

by the current political system. Marching under the banner of the Nepal Magar Mahila Sangh, for example, Kavita Alemagar, a famous singer, said Nepali's *janajatis* were in favour of a constituent assembly that would protect their rights. "All Nepalis have suffered a lot these past few years but now we are conscious and alert and will not give up the struggle till there is a new constitution." Asked about specific changes, Mr. Alemagar said Nepal should not remain a Hindu nation. "People of all religions live in Nepal. That is why the state must be secular."

The demand for a "*dharmanipeksh*," or secular, state figured prominently in the placards and slogans of the demonstrators.

29 APR 2005

THE HINDU

# Maoists decide to give peace a chance

## Declare three-month-long ceasefire

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 27

THE MAOISTS have decided to give peace a chance. They will be holding a peaceful rally in Kathmandu on Friday, around the time Girija Prasad Koirala forms his alliance government.

Sources close to the underground outfit said the rally, by its unarmed cadres, would converge at Khulla Manch — also known as Swahid Manch — around noon.

The rebels have also declared a three-month cease-fire, easing a key burden on the new government. The elusive leader of the Himalayan country's Maoist rebels, Prachanda, said in a statement that his group's fighters would refrain from any assaults to give the country a chance for peace.

The pro-Maoist All Nepal National Independent Students' Union-Revolutionary (ANNISUR) is convening Friday's rally. So far, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has not issued any statement on the gathering.

On Thursday, lakhs thronged Khulla Manch to celebrate the "victory" of the pro-democracy movement. "This is people's victory." "Leaders, beware! Elections must for the constituent assembly," people shouted at the gathering.

The slogans ranged loud and clear but Nepali Congress president and Prime Minister-designate Girija Prasad Koirala could not attend the rally owing to ill he-

### Party over for Manisha's dad

**MANISHA KOIRALA'S**

father, who was a minister in the royal government, has been sacked from the Nepali Congress and will lose his seat in Parliament. Prakash Koirala was science, technology and environment minister in the cabinet formed by Gyanendra after he seized power last February.

Nephew of PM-designate G.P. Koirala, Prakash was removed from the party alongwith with another former royalist minister Narayan Singh Pun.

**HTC, Kathmandu**

alth. But other SPA leaders, like CPN (UML) general secretary Mahav Kumar Nepal, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, United People's Front Nepal's chairman Amik Sherechan and Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party's Narayanman Bijuckche were there.

At a meeting held at Singha Durbar, the Nepali Congress Parliamentary Party (NCPP) unanimously elected Koirala as its leader. All Nepali Congress MPs except Prakash Koirala (a cousin of Manisha Koirala's father) and Narayan Singh Pun attended the



**REUTERS**  
A Nepali Maoist belonging to the People's Liberation Army of the Bhojpora battalion salutes her senior in a jungle in the Terai region on Thursday.

### Boucher to visit Nepal

**HT Correspondent**  
Kathmandu, April 27

THE US Embassy in Kathmandu informed that assistant secretary of state for south and central Asian affairs, Richard Boucher, is arriving in Kathmandu on May 2 on a two-day visit to take stock of the recent developments.

Boucher will be meeting key political leaders and civil society representatives. AP quoted Boucher as saying the US would consider renewing military aid to Nepal, but the move would depend on the army supporting the return of multi-party democracy.

### Delhi review

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on Thursday discussed the developments in Nepal.

The 90-minute meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and attended, among others, by Union minister for home affairs Shivraj Patil, army chief General J.J. Singh and Union home secretary V.K. Duggal. The Prime Minister was briefed on the situation in Nepal, an official spokesman said. Singh, who was on an official visit to Germany and Uzbekistan, returned to New Delhi around midnight on Wednesday night.

# China irked as Nepal trumps king card

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 27: Alarmed at the fall of King Gyanendra's regime, China has rushed a delegation to Kathmandu to gloss over its unstinted support to the monarch and appease the new government.

When a new democratic government is formed this month, Beijing is apprehensive whether it would be able to retain its stranglehold on Tibetans, a policy so far supported by the King in lieu of support for his coup last year.

On Monday, the King reinstated parliament through a near-midnight proclamation and by Tuesday, China had sent a three-member delegation headed by Mr Luo Chao Hui, Beijing's deputy director for Asian affairs, to meet prime minister-designate Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, other top-ranking political

leaders and influential foreign envoys stationed in Nepal. However, with Beijing preferring to lie low about the visit, it was not known immediately if the team would meet King Gyanendra and any of the royalist ministers.

Already facing international criticism over human rights, China's image took another battering when it stepped up financial assistance to King Gyanendra's regime, continued arms sales and retained diplomatic relations when the international community isolated the King. India, the US and the UK stopped military assistance, President Mr George W Bush declined to invite him to the dinner in New York after the UN General Assembly meeting and Mr Nelson Mandela declined to meet him when the King turned up in South Africa. China, however, sent foreign minister Mr Li

Zhaoxing to meet the King a month after the royal coup, followed by a visit

by state councillor Mr Tang Jiaxuan last month. China also invited Royal Nepalese Army chief Pyar Jung Thapa and foreign minister Mr Ramesh Nath Pandey for official visits, an invite repeated only by Pakistan.

It also distanced itself from the Maoists, who could be in the government in future. Beijing dubbed them anti-government forces and used its influence with the King to stop the official media from calling them Maoists, saying they had brought disrepute to their late leader.

One of Beijing's concerns is the Tibetan refugee issue. Under instruction from the palace, Nepal had shut down the Tibetan Welfare Centre helping refugees and has stopped issuing exit passes to the refugees.

# Parties gearing up in Nepal

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## G.P. Koirala taken ill on eve of reconvening of Parliament

Siddharth Varadarajan

**KATHMANDU:** King Gyanendra's eleventh-hour climbdown may have averted a violent showdown but the people's revolution in Nepal shows no signs of letting up. On the eve of the reconvening of Parliament, more than one lakh people crowded into the Khula Manch grounds at Ratna Park on Thursday to hear what the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) leaders intend to do once they assume power.

Holding aloft flags of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party, they raised slogans demanding a constituent assembly and warning their leaders not to betray the movement. Above all, they wanted assurances from Prime Minister-designate Girija Prasad Koirala, but the grand old man of the Nepali Congress (NC) was taken ill with an unspecified lung ailment. Instead, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Communist Party of Nepal (UML) leader Madhav Kuma Nepal sought to spell out the kind of steps their all-party government would take in its first days in office.

### Deuba's stand

Mr. Deuba, an establishment figure who has flirted between the palace and the opposition for nearly half a decade, declared that "there is no alternative to a constituent assembly." On his part, Mr. Nepal announced that

if Parliament did not take a decision on holding elections for a constituent assembly, he would resign from the House and re-launch the people's movement. He also said the new government would remove the terrorist label from the Maoists, reciprocate the ceasefire declared by the insurgents on Wednesday night, and start negotiations towards a final settlement of the conflict.

### "An excellent avenue"

On Thursday, the U.S. Embassy also issued a statement calling the proposed constituent assembly "an excellent avenue for the Maoists to join the political mainstream and peacefully help address Nepal's problems." But in a veiled warning to the SPA about the limits of their proposed peace process, the Embassy also insisted that the Maoists could not participate in any elections unless they "first ... lay down their arms and renounce violence."

SPA and civil society leaders say such a demand is not only improper for a foreign government to make but also unrealistic. They say it is possible to devise a peace formula that would include the intermediate step of placing the Maoists' army under international supervision during elections pending their final laying down of arms.

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Another report on Page 12

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# Nepalis keep up the pressure

Many questions remain on eve of Parliament session

Siddharth Varadarajan

**KATHMANDU:** In an attempt to put the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) on notice on the question of an unconditional constituent assembly in Nepal, the Maoists are likely to try and mobilise their supporters for a rally at Khula Manch grounds at Ratna Park at noon on Friday. On the eve of the reconvening of Parliament, more than one lakh people crowded into the Khula Manch on Thursday to hear what the SPA leaders intend to do once they assume power.

Local news reports said Friday's rally would be held under the auspices of the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union Revolutionary, considered close to the Maoists.

The 205-member House of Representatives will meet at 1 pm on Friday, though expulsions and deaths have reduced its strength to 200. The NC is the strongest group with 72 MPs, the UML has 66, the NC (Democratic) of Mr. Deuba has 39, while smaller parties, including a handful of royalist outfits, make up the rest. Since the Speaker, Taranath Ranabhat, has resigned, Mr Koirala, as the eldest member of the House, will preside over the first meeting.

If Prime Minister-designate Girija Prasad Koirala, who was taken ill, recovers in time to attend the opening of Parliament on Friday, one of the issues on which there is as yet no clarity is where the swearing-in ceremony for the Prime Minister will be



**HAPPY DAYS AGAIN:** Three Nepalese Maoist rebels share a light moment in Saranbari, 290 km southwest of Kathmandu, on Thursday. — PHOTO: AFP

conducted and who will administer the oath.

Responding to public sentiment, Communist Party of Nepal (UML) leader Madhav Kuma Nepal declared on Thursday that the swearing-in should be done in front of the people rather than in the palace. Another unresolv-

ed question is the status of the upper House, whose recall was not mentioned by King Gyandendra in his last proclamation. Any legislation, let alone constitutional amendment, will require the upper House's assent. Yet even if it were to be convened immediately by the all-party

government under the doctrine of necessity, as some legal experts have argued, there are 19 vacancies which need to be filled.

Besides these weighty issues, parliament staff are also grappling with problems that are more mundane. The Kantipur

daily reported that the House of Representatives secretariat was desperately trying to outfit its marshals with the necessary uniforms in time for Friday's deadline. And more than half of Parliament's fleet of 65 motor-cars are not in working condition.

# Read the Nepal quake right

**K**ING GYANENDRA may not have many supporters in his own country, but there are several "royalists" in India who believe the Indian government should have done much more to have buttressed his draconian rule. Such sentiments, redolent with the aroma of regression, combined with the spectacularly inept handling by the Indian government of the Nepal crisis, have ensured India remains the ugly, manipulative entity that it has long appeared to the ordinary Nepali.

The fear of rampant Maoism is what ostensibly drives such stances, but not many make the obvious link between the popularity of a political ideology that has been in decline everywhere else in the world, and 200 years of royal rule. The Shah dynasty — which emerged when Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1768 — and the Ranas ruled in a manner that would have put even Tughlaq to shame. With the self-acquired aura of quasi-spiritual authority (the king is said to be an avatar of Lord Vishnu) the palace could continue to exercise power well into the 21st century only because it deployed the most brutal means.

The hundred-odd years of Rana rule, after the Kot massacre of 1846, only saw a refinement of these measures. People were controlled by the overarching Muluki Ain (law of the nation). Night curfew was the order of life. No large gathering, no organised social and cultural meetings. Education was actively discouraged. The world changed but the kingdom remained sealed in splendid Himalayan isolation. It saw no struggle against colonial rule since the British recognised Nepal's existence as an independent kingdom (in fact, the soldiers of the Jang Bahadur Rana helped crush the 1857 resistance in India, and the Rana himself was invited to Queen Victoria's court for his pains). It saw no social reform worth the name. Even religious reform movements were harshly suppressed. The Ranas forced Arya Samajist Madhav Raj Joshi to go into exile in In-



## Two centuries of royal rule created the Maoists in the first place

PAMELA PHILIPPOSE

dia, and his son — Vedanta — was hanged in 1941 for sedition. Newari Buddhist reformers were equally unlucky.

The end of Rana rule with India's help in 1951, and the handing over of full control of the kingdom to King Tribhuvan — a direct descendant of Prithvi Narayan Shah — meant only the replacement of one elite by another. It brought no respite from rapacious palace rule. If Nepal is one of the poorest nations in the world today, it is because of the cumulative impact of this highly hierarchical, controlled and moribund system of governance. Those who ruled from their chandeliered palaces in Kath-

and that he would "introduce a democracy more suited to the conditions of Nepal". King Mahendra's 1962 constitution ushering in "panchayat rule" only helped him tighten his grip on the people. It began with the words: "The sovereignty of Nepal is vested in His Majesty and all powers — executive, legislative, and judicial — emanate from him..."

The rise of Maoism in Nepal goes back to the sixties and its incredible spread testifies to the deep, structural inequalities in Nepali society created and perpetuated by Shah-Rana rule. According to figures thrown up by Nepal's 2002 agriculture census, 47 per cent of land-

### The elected governments of the '90s were undoubtedly corrupt and incompetent, yet the decade saw more change and progress than 200 years of Shah-Rana rule

mandu didn't care to look beyond their shoulders. The unrepresentative nature of the regime was captured by poet Krishnabhushan Bal: "Kathmandu can no longer mean/The whole of Nepal..."

While the natural wealth and labour of the hill and mountain regions were extracted to benefit a few in the Kathmandu valley, very little was put back in terms of education and healthcare. And nothing tells this story better than the fact that in 1951 Nepal had a literacy rate of 2 per cent. The blindness to reality that King Gyanendra exhibited recently is by no means unique. His father, King Mahendra, wore the same blinkers in 1960, when he pulled down the existing government and announced that Nepal was not ready for multi-party rule

owning households owned nearly 15 per cent of the land, with an average size of less than 0.5 ha. The richest 5 per cent owned nearly 37 per cent of the land, and almost 29 per cent of rural households do not own any farmland. It is not surprising that the Maoists first established themselves in the countryside by demanding land reform and highlighting rural indebtedness in a country where 70 per cent of the population existed below the poverty line.

The challenge before the democratic forces in Nepal today is to address these deep cleavages in the political economy of the country, bring Maoists to the mainstream, and eliminate the need for violent insurgencies. Whether the seven-party formation has the capacity to do this is difficult to say at this jun-

ture. What can be stated with absolute certainty is that the king, with all the arms at his command, could not have defeated the Maoists in a hundred years, because he and the regime he represents are the primary reasons why Maoism has thrived.

Nepal today needs democracy. Not palace butchery or violent peasant uprisings. The modest progress that has come its way so far required the 1990 movement, which had brought in its wake constitutional guarantees of basic rights. The elected governments of the '90s were undoubtedly corrupt and incompetent, yet the decade of the nineties saw more change and progress than 200 years of Shah-Rana rule. A literacy rate that was 2 per cent in '51 rose to 54 per cent by 2002. The state set for itself the goal of achieving universal education by 2015. Democracy brought with it the expansion of communications and marginally better healthcare. There were even feeble attempts at devolving power. The Local Self-government Act, 1999, provided a framework to bring local communities into governance.

Nepal today cannot afford to return to the slippery slope of palace control. The 1990 constitution had a fatal flaw. While it conceived the king's role as that of a constitutional monarch, it granted him the extraordinary power to declare a state of emergency in the event of a grave threat to the sovereignty, unity and security of any part of Nepal. It was, additionally, fuzzy about whether the king can proclaim a state of emergency without consulting his government. It also recognised the king as the "supreme commander-in-chief of the Royal Nepal Army". A clever despot like Gyanendra knew the constitution well. The rest is history — a very tragic history.

Nepal will now have to ensure that this history is not repeated, and it can do this only by getting the palace completely out of its politics. This is the bitter lesson learnt over 200 years.

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# অবরোধ তুলে

অনিন্দ্য জানা • কাঠমাড়ু

২৬ এপ্রিল: একটা ফোনাই পাল্টে গেল চিত্রটা। অস্তিত্ব আপাতত।

কালই যে মাওবাদীরা সাত দলের জোটের মনে নেওয়া সম্মানসূত্র পরিজ্ঞ করে আন্দোলন চালিয়ে যাওয়ার হুমকি দিয়েছিলেন, তাই আজ অবরোধ তুলে নিলেন কাঠমাড়ুর উপর থেকে। শুধু তাই নয়, গভীর রাতে একতরফা ভাবে তিন মাসের জন্য সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির কথাও ঘোষণা করে দিলেন মাওবাদী নেতা প্রচণ্ড। যদিও মাওবাদীরা অবরোধ তুলে নেওয়ার সময়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে সংঘর্ষ-বিরতি ঘোষণার দাবি জানিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কোনও রকম আশ্বাস পাওয়ার আগে নিজেরাই তা ঘোষণা করলেন।

বস্তুত, আজ সকালেও কাঠমাড়ুর রাজঘাট অচল করে দেয় মাওবাদী সমর্থকেরা। তার পরেই দু'পক্ষের ফোনলাপ। সাত দলের জোটের তরফে মাওবাদীদের বলা হয়, তাঁরা যখন নতুন সরকার গঠন করে সাংবিধানিক পরিষদ নির্বাচন করার জন্য প্রস্তাব নিতে চলেছেন, তখন তার বিরোধিতা করার অর্থ কী?

এই নিয়ে চতুর্থ বার প্রধানমন্ত্রী হতে চলা গিরিজাপ্রসাদের সঙ্গে এই নিয়ে চতুর্থ বার প্রধানমন্ত্রী হতে চলা গিরিজাপ্রসাদের মধ্যে লেটিন্স তুলে নিতে হবে। দুই, এক তরফা বেসেছিলেন। প্রথমত, তাঁদের উপরে জারি থাকা রেড কনার চেয়ে জটিল তা হল, তাঁদের শীর্ষ পর্যায়ের সংঘর্ষ বিরতি ঘোষণা করতে হবে। তিন নম্বর, এবং যেটা সব চেয়ে জটিল তা হল, নেপালের সেনাবাহিনী রাজার অধীন। তার কিছু নেতাকে সেনাবাহিনীতে সামিল করতে হবে। ঘটনা হল, নেপালের সেনাবাহিনী রাজার অধীন। তার নামও রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মি। সেই বাহিনীতে মাওবাদীদের গঠি হবে কী করে!



কাঠমাড়ু কিরেছে কাঠমাড়ুতেই। শহরের মাঠে মান্দারির খেলা। এ-এফপি

ইয়েচুরিকে অনুরোধ করেছেন কেবল। যদিও ইয়েচুরি জানান, সরকারি ভাবে এমন অনুরোধ পাননি। দীর্ঘ রাজনৈতিক জীবনে অনেক চড়াই উৎরাই দেখেছেন গিরিজাপ্রসাদ। ৮১ বছর বয়সে আরও একটা চ্যালেঞ্জ নিলেন। সেনাবাহিনীকে রাজার আওতা থেকে মুক্ত করা, নেপাল প্রশাসনে নারায়ণহিতি প্রাসাদের ক্ষমতা খর্ব করা তো আছেই। তার চেয়ে বড় কাজ, মাওবাদীদের সামলানো আর সাত দলের জোট টিকিয়ে রাখা। সব অস্ত্র ছাড়তে মাওবাদীদের রাজি করানো, না কি এই সে দিন পর্যন্ত পরস্পরকে আক্রমণ করে চলা সাত দলকে এক সঙ্গে রাখা, কোনটা কটন কাজ তা এসএমএস গোলার জবরদস্ত বিষয় হতে পারে।

আর এই অসাধাসাধনের ভরসাতেই দাঁড়িয়ে নেপালের ভবিষ্যৎ।

# কৈরালাকে স্বস্তি দিল মাওবাদীরা

এ.স.সি. নেপাল

এই গ্রামের উত্তরে প্রচণ্ডের তরফে বলা হয়েছে, সেনাবাহিনীকে রাজার আওতা থেকে মুক্ত করাই হবে নয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অন্যতম কাজ। এই সব শর্তেই আপাতত আন্দোলন স্থগিত রাখছেন তাঁরা। কেবলমাত্র এক সময় দিয়ে দেখে নিতে চান, কোথাকার জল কোথায় গভায়। এই 'শান্তি চুক্তি'তে স্বস্তির শ্বাস ফেলছেন রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির নেতারা। যদিও মাওবাদীদের নিয়ে মাথাব্যথা কাটছে না। যেমন, নেপাল কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির নেতা মাধব নেপাল। মাওবাদীদের অবরোধ প্রত্যাহারের সিদ্ধান্তে সন্তোষ প্রকাশ করে বলছেন, "আমার আশা, ওরা অস্ত্র ত্যাগ করে রাজনৈতিক মূলপ্রোগ্রামে ফিরে আসবে।" কিন্তু একই সঙ্গে বলছেন, কাজটা খুবই কঠিন। প্রচণ্ডের দলকে মূলপ্রোগ্রামে আনতেও আলোচনা শুরু হয়েছে। মূল সংগঠনের নামে না হলেও কোনও শাখা সংগঠনের বকলমে যাতে মাওবাদীরা সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রে যোগ দেন, সেই পথ খোলা রাখার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে। মধ্যস্থতা করার জন্য নাকি সিপিএম নেতা সীতারাম

ইয়েচুরিকে অনুরোধ করেছেন কেবল। যদিও ইয়েচুরি জানান, সরকারি ভাবে এমন অনুরোধ পাননি। দীর্ঘ রাজনৈতিক জীবনে অনেক চড়াই উৎরাই দেখেছেন গিরিজাপ্রসাদ। ৮১ বছর বয়সে আরও একটা চ্যালেঞ্জ নিলেন। সেনাবাহিনীকে রাজার আওতা থেকে মুক্ত করা, নেপাল প্রশাসনে নারায়ণহিতি প্রাসাদের ক্ষমতা খর্ব করা তো আছেই। তার চেয়ে বড় কাজ, মাওবাদীদের সামলানো আর সাত দলের জোট টিকিয়ে রাখা। সব অস্ত্র ছাড়তে মাওবাদীদের রাজি করানো, না কি এই সে দিন পর্যন্ত পরস্পরকে আক্রমণ করে চলা সাত দলকে এক সঙ্গে রাখা, কোনটা কটন কাজ তা এসএমএস গোলার জবরদস্ত বিষয় হতে পারে।

আর এই অসাধাসাধনের ভরসাতেই দাঁড়িয়ে নেপালের ভবিষ্যৎ।

# Maoists lift their blockade, but with elections rider

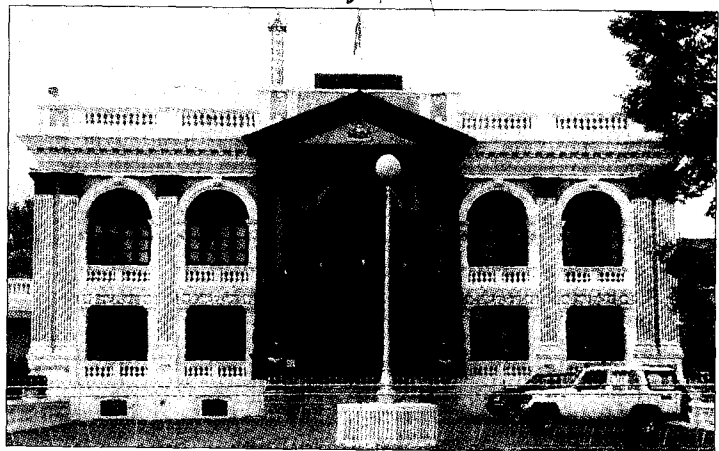
**ANIRBAN Roy**  
Kathmandu, April 26

THE MAOISTS on Wednesday called off their blockade of the Kathmandu valley and other district headquarters, but only till Friday evening. That's the deadline they have set on Prime Minister-designate Girija Prasad Koirala to announce elections to the Constituent Assembly. If their demand is not met by then, they will resume their blockade.

Earlier, Koirala had urged the Maoists to call off their general strike in the wake of the political developments in Nepal. The Maoists weren't all that euphoric after Gyanendra's announcement to reinstate Parliament. They had threatened to continue their stir till announcement of elections to the constituent assembly.

Though they climbed down on Wednesday, the Friday deadline has brought little respite to the political establishment. Koirala was not available for comments despite repeated attempts.

The Seven Party Alliance had decided to announce elections to the constituent assembly, but some leaders felt it may not be possible to complete the formalities on day one itself. The first session of the reinstated parliament begins at 1 pm on Friday when members will assemble at Singha Darbar. But the swearing-



The lower house of the Nepal Parliament.

AFP

in and other official formalities will take up most of the day.

The SPA leaders are worried the Maoists will call them "traitors" if the election announcement was delayed. Already, at the victory rallies on Tuesday, several banners warned the political class to be cautious.

If the Maoist demand is a worry, Koirala has more on his hands. The Nepal Bar Association (NBA), an umbrella organisation of lawyers, has urged him to scrap all draconian ordinances — brought into effect during Gyanendra's direct rule — on Friday. It has also called for the dismissal, and if needed, impea-

chment, of all officials to constitutional bodies — appointed after February 1 — for curtailing peoples' rights. That's not all. It wants the SPA to officially declare truce with the Maoists and call them for talks. They are also demanding a constitutional amendment to pave the way for holding elections to a constituent assembly.

The Supreme Court Bar Association has its own set of demands. It has urged the House to curtail the monarch's power, including the provision on succession and control of the Royal Nepalese Army. It also called for the Raj Parishad's dismissal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Army gives a yard, Maoists move an inch

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 26: Nepal's Maoists today grudgingly gave an inch in response to new prime minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala's appeal to call off their blockade. A statement issued said they would put the new agitation off till Friday, when the first - historic - session of the reinstated parliament convenes after four years, following a 19-day war of nerves between King Gyanendra and the people of Nepal.

The olive branch, however, was held out by the Nepalese army, the nation's pet hate under the King's direct rule, which said it was ready to recruit Maoists and work under the new government for the sake of peace. General Pyar Jung Thapa, chief of the Royal Nepalese Army, told CNN in an interview in Kathmandu: "For peace, anything is acceptable."

In a bid to allay suspicions that the King might

## Maoists declare 3-month truce

KATHMANDU, April 26: Maoists in Nepal tonight announced a three-month unilateral ceasefire. Announcing the truce, Maoist supremo Prachanda, in a statement here, iterated the rebels' demand for a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Constitution. During the truce period, the Maoists will halt all types of military action, he said. Prachanda said the Maoists were committed to the 12-point agreement they had reached with the Seven-Party Alliance last November. ■ PTI

still plot another coup with the help of the army, Gen. Thapa said the RNA was willing to work with any government and take orders from the prime minister and defence minister. "The political parties have an opportunity now to address the problem (of Maoist insurgency) and

come to a solution," he said. "All conflicts should be settled as promptly as possible."

Asked how he felt about Maoist supremo Prachanda's recent proposal of merging the guerrillas' "People's Liberation Army" with the RNA to form a truly national army, the general, who rarely gives an interview, said the RNA was willing to recruit Maoists if they gave up violence and fulfilled the recruitment criteria.

Fresh pressure mounted on the Maoists to drop their guns from the international community as well. Since Monday, when King Gyanendra recalled parliament, the USA, UK, the European Union and Denmark have issued separate statements pledging assistance for the new government of PM-elect Mr Koirala and asking the Maoists to call a ceasefire and join the political mainstream. Though the guerrillas had called a

■ Turn to page 3

# Light on Kathmandu

*King Gyanendra had no choice but to restore Nepal's Parliament. The monarch, suffering from delusions of grandeur, had cut himself off from the people. Now it's for the democrats to restore order*

AS TIME was running out for him, King Gyanendra finally restored Nepal's Parliament after the Indian Prime Minister's special envoy, Karan Singh, made him read the writing on the wall. It is a clear victory for pro-democracy forces in Nepal. The king's policy of 'too little, too late' inspired no confidence. The people of Nepal had little or no trust in him as they could see through him and were apprehensive of his subterfuges. Singh made it amply clear to the king that India's affinity remained with the Nepali people and their democratic aspirations. Some of the malodorous propaganda projecting India's intervention as a last ditch bid to save the monarchy was nothing but abusive libel.

Jaswant Singh was less than gracious to Singh by employing the semantically nuanced appellation of 'Maharaja' while referring to him — hinting as if the 'Maharaja' may have had a soft corner for Gyanendra. In fact, we owe a vote of appreciation to Karan Singh for having conducted his delicate diplomatic mission in Nepal with singular skill, grace, clarity and discretion.

The late Ganesh Man Singh, who had successfully led the movement for democracy in Nepal, had at one time made up his mind to abolish the institution of monarchy. He had, however, finally opted for giving it a chance. Had Gyanendra proved himself to be worthy and people-friendly, the monarchy could have lasted — at least for a trial period — for a while. The 1990 Constitution of Nepal was, however, wilfully violated by the king, who along with the politicians of Nepal, made a mess of the institution of democracy.

The good news is that the alliance of political parties now see the magnitude of the perils of political mismanagement and are united in their resolve to restore democracy. One only hopes that they will stand united and not go back to the bad old ways of pointless altercation and decisive and self-destructive disunity.

The tragic massacre of the royal family in Nepal and the public suspicion against King Gyanendra and his family has put paid to the monarchy's credibility and survival. It is not the 1990 Constitution that has failed the people of Nepal, but the monarchy under King Gyanendra and Nepal's politicians. Nothing short of a broad-based constituent assembly or a restored Parliament can save Nepal from chaos and disintegration at this juncture. Even the king's abdication may not suffice.

His earlier speech claiming that the executive power was in his 'safe keeping' only added insult to injury. What Nepal needs today is a democratic

Constitution and the unity and solidarity of political will to make the Constitution work democratically.

Gyanendra suffers from delusions of grandeur and has lost touch with the grassroots of Nepal. He has consistently acted in disregard of constitutional norms and capriciously in dealing with democratic institutions. King Gyanendra committed a series of unforgivable Himalayan blunders by denying and defeating democracy at every step and putting in its place a form of personal despotism. It is a noteworthy irony of history that India, which helped pave the way for the tyrannical Ranas to be replaced by the benevolent regime of King Tribhuvan (who was virtually a prisoner of the despotic Ranas), now has to enter and register an unequivocal plea on behalf of the people of Nepal against the lapses and excesses of the monarchy.

Karan Singh made the king see the light at least for a while. But the people and the pro-democratic alliance had no faith in the king, a man who enjoys a dubious reputation as a master of 'divide and rule'. But India's role as a friendly neighbour is not yet over.

With G.P. Koirala chosen by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) as Nepal's prime minister, the king should apply for leave of absence so that Parliament may begin the task of Constitution-making or that the constitutional assembly may be convened in consultation with the SPA.

Nepal is no longer divided on the issue of democracy. The king is already far too isolated to rule. At this critical juncture, Gyanendra must have the good sense to jettison his coterie and sycophants and abandon all pretense of power.

Sovereignty must now be vested in the people and Parliament or the Constituent Assembly of Nepal. That would be an act of partial and *pro tem* abdication, seemingly a sacrifice by the king but in reality, the only real service he can render to the Nepalese nation.

Having forfeited the legacy of King Tribhuvan and his elder brother, an initiative for democratic constitutional governance is the only way Gyanendra can redeem himself and save his country from the tragedy of chaos, insurrection and disintegration. India's goodwill for Nepal and its people is boundless. But its patience with the wily ways of an oppressive monarchy and egotistic politicians has been severely strained if not altogether exhausted.

*The writer is former Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MP and was India's High Commissioner in the United Kingdom*



VERY UNEASY LIES THIS HEAD: King Gyanendra



# Koirala gets ready to rule with slim team



AFP  
A pro-democracy activist wears a paper crown to mock King Gyanendra at a rally in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

**ANIRBAN ROY**  
Kathmandu, April 26

NEPAL'S SEVEN Party Alliance (SPA) government, led by Girija Prasad Koirala, which is scheduled to take over the reigns of the Himalayan kingdom on Friday, has decided to have a "small Cabinet".

All SPA partners are in the final stages of selecting their representatives in the interim government. Koirala is to present the final list to King Gyanendra's secretariat at Narayanhiti Palace on Thursday evening. "We have decided to keep the Cabinet as small as possible," Madav Kumar Nepal, CPN (UML) general secretary, told HT on Wednesday. A jumbo-size Cabinet was not a solution to the country's political crisis, he said. The decision was taken at a meeting of the SPA coordination committee, where all partners were urged to play a "proactive role" in the run up to the Constituent Assembly elections.

Most of the members in Koirala's council of ministers would be from the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) and the Nepali Congress (Democratic). The Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party and the Nepal Sadbhawan Party (A) are also expected to get

27/4 800 1980

## Paras tried to stop Gyanendra surrender



NEPAL'S CROWN Prince Paras (picture right) tried till the last moment to prevent King Gyanendra from relinquishing power, a Nepalese weekly said on Wednesday. It was Paras and other royal relatives who leaned on the King to hang on to power and incited security forces to shoot at demonstrators, the *Jana Astha* reported.

The King decided on Monday to reinstate parliament. The palace secretariat's draft proclamation was approved by political parties next morning, but was made public late at night. The reason for the delay, the weekly said, was Paras, who vehemently opposed his father's decision. There was apparently a huge tussle between the father and the son.

IANS, Kathmandu

cabinet berths, sources said. It could not be confirmed whether the Jana Morcha Nepal would also join the Cabinet. It is the only SPA partner which has declared itself "not fully satisfied" with Monday's royal proclamation, which announced the restoration of the Parliament. Former Prime Minister and president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic), Sher Bahadur Deuba made it clear that he would join the council of ministers under Koirala. "I would prefer to play the active role of a

watch dog," he said. Deuba had been one of the biggest sufferers of Gyanendra's power grabbing exercise, with his government being dismissed twice. "I did not meet him (King Gyanendra) after my government was dismissed, and would prefer to stay away from him," Deuba said.

Senior Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Prakash Man Singh said all SPA allies would play crucial roles in designing the country's political future. The alliance, he said, was as strong as ever, with no party

showing any signs of disillusionment.

In order to forge better working relationships between the seven political parties, Koirala has been calling for meetings of SPA partners almost every day since Monday. He has also called several meetings of the central Working Committee of his party.

"There should not be any problem for us in leading the country to the constituent Assembly elections," Hridayesh Tripathy, a senior leader of Nepal Sadbhawan Party (A), said.

Meanwhile, fundamental questions remain over the terms under which the Assembly would work. The Maoists are demanding the Assembly come without preconditions, in other words have the power to strip the King of his title, adds Reuters.

But would the king agree to an Assembly on those terms? Hardly likely. The Supreme Court, packed with royal appointees, might also object, especially since the law allows no room to change the main pillars of the Constitution — which include the monarchy. Nor will the king readily surrender his strongest card, control of the Royal Nepalese Army, which remains loyal.

Many observers fear they have seen the last of Nepal's unruly monarch.

# Nepal's Next Step

*Some knots still to be untied  
to resolve crisis*

The release of tension in Kathmandu — following Gyanendra's decision to hand back power to parliament — certainly occasions a few whoops for democracy, but not three cheers yet. A significant step has been taken with the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) naming the veteran Girija Prasad Koirala as prime minister in a new government, but its road ahead remains strewn with hurdles before the key players in Nepali politics can come to a negotiated settlement. All depends on how swiftly and surely parliament moves after reconvening on Friday. Its first priority must be preparing for constituent assembly elections, which was the basis of the SPA's understanding with the Maoists. The latter, who hold large parts of the countryside, have rejected the royal proclamation. While they have lifted their blockade of Kathmandu and district capitals, they may reimpose it any time. Apart from pragmatic reasons for setting up a constituent assembly — the government must deliver on its part of the deal since Maoists have lifted their blockade — there are sound historical reasons as well. A loophole in the country's political arrangements post-1990, when multiparty democracy first arrived in Nepal, has been that the king retained control of the Royal Nepalese Army. This is at the root of today's political crisis, and any new constitution will have to undo this.

That gives the interim government another reason to move swiftly, as Gyanendra may attempt to subvert any new constitutional arrangement once he thinks the heat is off him. The two challenges the interim government will face, therefore, are getting the army to transfer allegiance from the king to itself, and getting Maoists to surrender their weapons and integrate in the political mainstream. With luck, one can be traded off for the other. Cussedness and incompetence on the part of politicians at the helm of today's SPA have fed into Nepal's recurrent crises since the 1990 reforms, and they will have to do better this time. On New Delhi's part it must set aside preconceptions about Nepal and respond quickly to changes as they occur, keeping in mind the situation there is fluid and fast-moving. If Nepalis have decided to move on from monarchy, so be it; if Maoists participate in multiparty elections, so be it. New Delhi should be prepared to facilitate constituent assembly elections and any resultant political arrangement — as long as it lies within the framework of multiparty democracy — because they represent the free will of the Nepali people.

27 APR 2005

## Maoists give in, for now

**Kathmandu:** Maoists on Wednesday announced that they were withdrawing their blockade of Kathmandu and other district headquarters until Friday, when the first session of the restored parliament begins, following a request from G P Koirala who has been named to head a new government.

On Tuesday, the rebels had rejected King Gyanendra's proclamation restoring the parliament and had attacked the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) for accepting the monarch's offer, saying it was a betrayal of the aspirations of the Nepalese people. They had also vowed to continue the blockade of the capital and other district headquarters until their key demand for a constituent assembly was met.

However on Wednesday, Maoist chief Prachanda released a statement saying the rebels had withdrawn the blockade till Friday as per the request of Koirala, who had assured them that he would take up the issue of constituent assembly elections during the parliament session. Prachanda, however, said the rebels would continue other programmes like demonstrations and rallies in various parts of the country. The Maoists also warned that they would restart the blockade if their demand for elections for a constituent assembly was not met. AGENCIES

# Maoists soften stance in Nepal

But warn parties against delay

Siddharth Varadarajan

**KATHMANDU:** Responding to an appeal by Nepal's Prime Minister-designate, Girija Prasad Koirala, the Maoists on Wednesday lifted their blockade of Kathmandu and all district headquarters. But in a statement announcing the decision, Maoist leader Prachanda said that he wished to "make it clear that if the first meeting of the [restored] Parliament does not take a positive decision on the declaration of an unconditional constituent assembly, we will be compelled to reimpose the blockade."

Though couched in the language of a warning, Mr. Prachanda's latest statement reflects a softening of the Maoists' initially hostile reaction to King Gyanendra's announcement that Parliament was being reactivated. The Maoists on Tuesday had termed the SPA's endorsement of the King's decision a "betrayal."

Since Mr. Koirala is widely expected to make a positive announcement about his new government's decision to press ahead with a constituent assembly when Parliament convenes on Friday, the Maoists' statement opens the door for renewed cooperation between the insurgents and the SPA.

"The basis of this movement is the 12-point agreement and the promise of a peace process," said Krishna Pahadi, a leading human rights activist. "When it meets, Parliament must address the task of achieving long term peace. There is also the need to end impunity — to not allow human rights violators to get away — and to resolve the issue of the monarchy." Only an unconditional constituent assembly can provide the basis for tackling all these issues, he added.

As the question of constitutional change comes to the fore,

a debate of sorts has started here about the legal obstacles that any push for a constituent assembly might face. In meetings with diplomats, for example, some SPA leaders have spoken of their fear that the Supreme Court might quash or stay any attempt to hold elections for a constituent assembly.

According to Shambhu Thapa, president of the Nepal Bar Association, these fears are misplaced. Article 116 of the 1990 Constitution allows for amendments "without prejudicing the spirit of the Preamble," which refers, *inter alia*, to constitutional monarchy. "The first step, therefore, is for Parliament to amend the preamble to include a reference to a constituent assembly. The amended Preamble should also state clearly the purpose of a constituent assembly, i.e. to enable the people to decide what kind of political system they want."

Once this is done, says Mr. Thapa, no court can ever challenge the legality of going in for a constituent assembly. "Is there any legal or social jurisprudence which can stop a process which seeks to ascertain what people want?"

Some analysts are critical of the SPA for waiting for King Gyanendra to announce the restoration of Parliament. "The parties should have announced the decision themselves," says Kanak Mani Dixit, the editor of *Himal*, who spent nearly three weeks in prison for defying curfew. Even now, says Mr. Dixit, the symbolism of the process is important.

"The peoples' movement has brought Gyanendra's nose to the level of mud and that is where it should remain. Koirala should insist on being sworn in by the Chief Justice and not by Gyanendra," he says.

"That would send a very important message."



# Nepal parties want Koirala as Prime Minister

हि ४ अप्रैल

## People tell Seven Party Alliance not to deviate from aims of movement

Siddharth Varadarajan

meeting in Vasundhara, not far from Mr. Koirala's house, one speaker declared: "If Girija babu does something funny, we will hang him." The crowd around him cheered lustily.

### Only the beginning

Having maintained so far that the ball of political change was in the King's court, the parties woke up on Tuesday to find the ball firmly in their possession. After firming up their tactics, the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), spearheading the anti-monarchy protests, issued a statement welcoming the King's latest proclamation and declared that Mr. Koirala will be their candidate for prime ministership. "Restoration of the House of Representatives is only the beginning for us," the SPA declared, conscious of the mood on the streets.

Following King Gyanendra's humiliating late-night climbdown on Monday, in which he agreed to reinstate Parliament, hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life descended on the Nepalese capital on Tuesday to stake their claim to the political future of the country.

Jubilant, boisterous but good humoured and well-behaved, the enormous crowds seemed as intent on celebrating their victory over the King as on warning the political leaders set to assume power not to deviate from the aims of the movement.

The slogans raised and banners put up outside the residence of Nepali Congress leader Girija Prasad Koirala said it all. "Netahru, savdhaan [leaders, beware]," the crowds chanted. "We want a constituent assembly." At an impromptu roadside



**PEOPLE'S POWER:** Waving flags and cheering wildly, jubilant Nepalese throng the streets on the outskirts of Kathmandu to celebrate the reinstatement of Parliament by King Gyanendra. - PHOTO: AP



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2006

## A people's victory

**T**he announcement by King Gyanendra restoring Nepal's Parliament that was dissolved in 2002 is a historic victory for the country's pro-democracy movement. It is a true measure of what a genuine people-based movement can achieve in the face of the most repressive brutality. In the last few days, the movement led by the Seven Party Alliance grew spontaneously into a mass agitation that refused to be cowed down by shoot-at-sight orders, curfew and other strong-arm tactics of the Palace. Such was the strength of the movement that the King — after a proclamation on April 21 that pretended to restore democracy but was recognised as a ploy to hang on to power — had no option but to announce a full retreat three days later. The revival of the dissolved House of Representatives was the main demand of the SPA. Its quick nomination — without the unseemly bickering that had characterised similar exercises in the past — of Girija Prasad Koirala as the consensus choice for Prime Minister speaks of the maturity it has gained during the anti-King struggle. The Alliance has also done well to assert at once that the reinstated Parliament will immediately pass resolutions for negotiations with the Maoists and for holding Constituent Assembly elections. With this, the SPA has reiterated its commitment to the agreement it reached with Maoists in November 2005 and March 2006 for the formation of a Constituent Assembly. For sure, the demand for a Constituent Assembly is no longer restricted to the Maoists, who are committed to the abolition of the monarchy and establishing a republic. As the full-throated slogans during the 18-day agitation indicated, there is now a widespread demand for re-examining the role of the monarchy. The SPA knows it must act in the spirit of that struggle.

While the Maoist rejection of the reinstatement of the House takes some fizz out of the victory celebrations in the SPA camp, it was not unexpected. From the time the democratic alliance and the Maoists reached their agreement, both sides differed on the route to a Constituent Assembly. The Maoists were emphatic about immediate elections to a Constituent Assembly; the SPA wanted this after the revival of the parliament. The Maoist attack on an army camp within hours of the April 24 royal proclamation was a violent reminder that the main challenge now is to bring the insurgents on board the democratic process. But if the difference is only over the timing, it can be surmounted by the SPA calling for Constituent Assembly elections at once. The resolution that the democratic parties intend to pass in Parliament could even provide a definite time frame for holding the elections. The last thing the SPA can afford now is to get lulled into complacency by its triumph. The people of Nepal have won an important battle. They must guard against the dangers that still lurk on the road to a stable democracy, peace, and prosperity.

26 APR 2006

# Koirala tipped to be Nepal PM

**Kathmandu:** Nepal's Seven-Party Alliance (SAP) on Tuesday decided to propose Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of Nepali Congress, the largest political party, as the new prime minister and call off the 19-day-old anti-monarchy agitation.

The 81-year-old Koirala, who has thrice been Nepal's prime minister, was backed by leaders of the seven political parties who held a meeting at his house on Tuesday, a day after King Gyanendra decided to revive parliament. "The meeting has decided to form a new government headed by Nepali Congress president and top opposition leader Girija Prasad Koirala," said Nepali Congress central member Arjun Narsingh K C. The alliance affirmed its road map of holding constituent assembly elections through parliament. The parties have held that this is required to bring changes in the constitution and divest the king's powers to sack elected governments.

Narsingh said SAP would work towards restoring full democracy and ultimately hold the constituent assembly election to resolve the crisis. After parliament is convened, it will form an all-party government, initiate a dialogue with Maoists and start the process of holding constituent assembly elections, he said, adding that action would be taken against those



**PARTY AFTER PROTESTS:** With King Gyanendra throwing in the towel, it was celebration time on the streets of Kathmandu on Tuesday

who were active in suppressing the agitation. Besides, it has been decided to pay compensation to the families of those killed during the anti-king agitation.

Normalcy returned to Kathmandu, with mobile phone serv-

ice being restored, vehicles plying on roads and shops reopening. Schools will reopen on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels on Tuesday rejected the king's offer to reinstate parliament, saying it was a ploy to save his "auto-

cratic monarchy". They said they had planned blockades in the capital and other major centres. Maoist leader Prachanda urged people to continue their demonstrations and warned of violence against anyone who tried to repress the protesters. AGENCIES

25 APR 2008

THE HINDU

# Victory rally in Nepal as Gyanendra gives in

Streets Wear A Festive Look, Oppn Cancels Planned Protests

**Kathmandu:** Tens of thousands of people flocked to the centre of Nepal's capital on Tuesday to celebrate 'Victory Day' over their King where days earlier protesters had fought pitched battles with police.

Clouds of teargas were replaced with waving flags as Nepalese rejoiced after forcing King Gyanendra to end 14 months of absolute rule and restore parliament after weeks of pro-democracy protests.

Feelings continued to run high against the king with one group of angry men kept back by heavily armed police from the humbled monarch's central Kathmandu palace.

Others destroyed billboards displaying the king's messages dotted outside his palace in the heart of the city. Hundreds of police were on standby on the road leading up to the royal residence.

But the general mood was overwhelmingly joyful.

"This feels great," said Bedramkander Kendel, 26, as he joined thousands in Kathmandu on a road banned for years from use by protesters.

"I want parliament to be established and for there to be a peaceful monarchy," he said. "But we don't want King Gyanendra—he's corrupt."

Gangs of men jammed into the backs of pick-up trucks waving flags as the throng converged on the heart of the city yelling 'Long live democracy'.

Another protester Yuvraj Ghimire said, "It feels great because we've got our freedom and our lives back and we're ecstatic."

Crowds from different parts of the capital headed into the centre, filling the road and a central park as people sprinkled cooling water from the roof tops onto the teeming masses, an AFP reporter said.

Opposition parties cancelled a massive protest rally for Tuesday and turned it into a victory party after Gyanendra caved in late Monday to protesters' demands.



**CAST OF FREEDOM:** Detained Nepalese democracy activists walk out of the district court after being released on Tuesday, following the king's decision to restore parliament

IAFF

Battling to preserve the monarchy, the king announced that Nepal's parliament would meet on Friday for the first time since he dissolved it in 2002.

Addressing the nation, his third since April 13, the monarch said, "Keeping in mind the wishes of the Nepalese people who are currently engaged in an agitation, and the roadmap of the agitating seven-party alliance, I do hereby restore parliament." He added that the House would meet at 1 pm on Friday. He asked agitating parties to move ahead for national unity and progress.

Despite the Maoists' rejection of the king's offer and threats of further violence, at least 100,000 people amassed on the 27-km ring road—the scene of the worst clashes over the last three weeks.

Earlier in the day, trucks carrying supplies rumbled through the streets of Kathmandu and queues formed at newly-opened shops as the Nepalese capital breathed a sigh of relief over the king's climbdown.

Just an hour after King Gyanendra announced he was restoring parliament, vehicles laden with rice and water began arriving in the city, effectively signalling the end of a 19-day general strike.

Shops that had been shut during the protests and daytime curfews of the last 19 days opened their doors.

"I'm very happy today because there's peace everywhere," said Srijana Shreshtha, 32, who opened her grocery shop in central Kathmandu in the morning, though there were few items for sale.

However suspicions remained of the king. "We have to still come out on to the streets," said Chavindra Raj Kadel, who looked to be in his late thirties, "The king has deceived us many times. We are not ready to fully trust him yet." AFP

On Monday, the US embassy had ordered the families of its diplomats to leave crisis-hit Nepal.

The United States embassy told the families and non-essential staff to leave because of concerns over dwindling supplies, shortage of medical experts, widespread protests and sometimes "violent measures" used by the regime to break them up. In a statement it warned other American citizens "should also depart Nepal as soon as possible". China and Australia have also advised people against travelling to Nepal.

AGENCIES

FIRST HURDLE FOR PM-ELECT

# Maoists corner Koirala

**Sudeshna Sarkar**

KATHMANDU, April 25: After leading a successful people's movement against King Gyanendra's autocratic rule, three-time former prime minister and opposition leader Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, who was named Nepal's new prime minister today, will now have to grapple with another grave challenge: an indefinite blockade of Kathmandu valley and its neighbouring districts called by the Maoists.

As the King made a near midnight proclamation yesterday and conceded the opposition parties' demand for restoration of parliament, there was jubilation in the kingdom that there would finally be peace but it was shortlived. By the time the seven parties had held an emergency meeting at Mr Koirala's residence in Maharajgunj, the political centre of the anti-King agitation, and chalked out their strategy once parliament convenes from Friday, their former allies the Maoists struck a blow, saying they were opposing the royal gesture and continuing the protests that had paralysed Nepal for 19 days.

First, the rebels' spokesman Mr Krishna Bahadur Mahara told BBC Radio his party would not settle for anything less than constituent assembly elections. It was followed by a statement issued from underground by the two top leaders of the Maoists, Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, and his deputy Dr Baburam Bhattarai aka Lal Dhoj, who called the parties' acceptance of parliament reinstatement a betrayal of the Nepali people's aspirations.



The grand old man of Nepal politics is back at the helm.

**Profile, page 3**

"The King's proclamation on Monday is yet another move to divide the Nepali people and safeguard his autocratic rule," the rebel leaders said. "It has not addressed the demands of the people agitating on the streets for a constituent assembly and republic or the understanding between us and the political parties. Those parties in the alliance who have welcomed the royal proclamation have betrayed people's aspirations and dealt a blow to our pact with them. The crux of our understanding with them is holding constituent assembly elections. By supporting the old tradition that kings have the prerogative to reinstate parliament, they have supported the King's autocratic rule."

To pressure the parties into focusing on constituent assembly elections, the Maoists have called an indefinite blockade of the valley and headquarters of the neighbourhood districts.

# Nepal parties minus Maoists

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, April 25:** As Nepal's seven-party alliance formally welcomed King Gyanendra's proclamation reinstating the parliament, the entire country went into a well-deserved celebratory mode.

This morning, the parties unanimously nominated 84-year-old Girija Prasad Koirala, the president of the Nepali Congress, as Prime Minister of the new interim government. There was no bickering.

The parties promised to undo the wrongs committed by the king during the last four years of his unfettered rule and reiterated their commitment to the 12-point agreement with the Maoists.

However, their allies in the people's movement for democracy, the Maoists, used heightened rhetoric to describe their welcoming the king's proclamation as a "historic mistake" and "a violation" of the agreement with them.

It would be erroneous, however, to see this as a confrontation building up. The parties themselves are not too upset. The Maoists were not expected to praise the king's act. There is an agreement to disagree on the reinstatement of the parliament as well as the route to the Constituent Assembly.

Communication between the seven-party alliance and the Maoists is continuing. As the parties unfold their policies and actions, the Maoist response is likely to change.

An indication of how the Maoists felt about the reinstatement of the parliament was evident in the attitude of Amik Sherchan, leader of the Jan Morcha. Considered ideologically close to the Maoists, the Jan Morcha is a part of the seven-party alliance.

"We are not going to welcome this fully. Our reservations will continue till a Constituent Assembly is announced. We have had a brief consultation with the Maoists. They have told us that they will continue calling the king's move a 'deception' till an unconditional Constituent Assembly is announced. They also want the Royal Nepal Army to be brought firmly under the parliament," Sherchan said.

The alliance has described the reinstatement of the parliament only as "a point of departure". They said in a statement that they would use the parliament to form an all-party government, organise elections to a Constituent Assembly and move in the direction of an "inclusive and cooperative democracy" and a "restructured state".

The parties also made three announcements: to declare all "unconstitutional decisions" taken by the royal government null and void; to set up a commission to probe atrocities by the security forces and punish the guilty; and to immediately release all those arrested during the people's movement.

■ See Page 6

# Cry for republic and king's blood

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, April 25: The crowds celebrating the capitulation of King Gyanendra's unfettered rule are in a retributive mood. Tens of thousands of them poured into the streets of the Nepalese capital not only demanding a republic but also baying for the monarch's blood.

The republican sentiment in the street was palpable. The people chanted "*Shahid ko ragat ke bhancha? Gantantra. Gantantra* (Blood of the martyrs is crying out - A republic. A republic)" and "*Nepali janta ke bhancha. Gantantra. Gantantra.*"

They warned their leaders not to forget their agreement with the Maoists — "*Netaharu savdhan. 12-boonde yaadgar* (Leaders be careful. Remember the 12-point agreement)." Others carried huge banners urging the leaders not to repeat their mistakes and advised them to solve the Maoist problem and not accept any salary in the reinstated Parliament.

Wherever one went, people could be seen pouring out of the lanes and by-lanes of the Nepalese capital onto the main streets to participate in the "Vijay Utsav". Kathmandu was a sea of colour — more red than the mixed colours of the non-communist party flags.

The cry of "*Gyane Paras lei phansi de, phansi de* (Hang Gyanendra and Paras)" or variations of it ("*Hatyaro lei phansi de, phansi de*") rent the air.

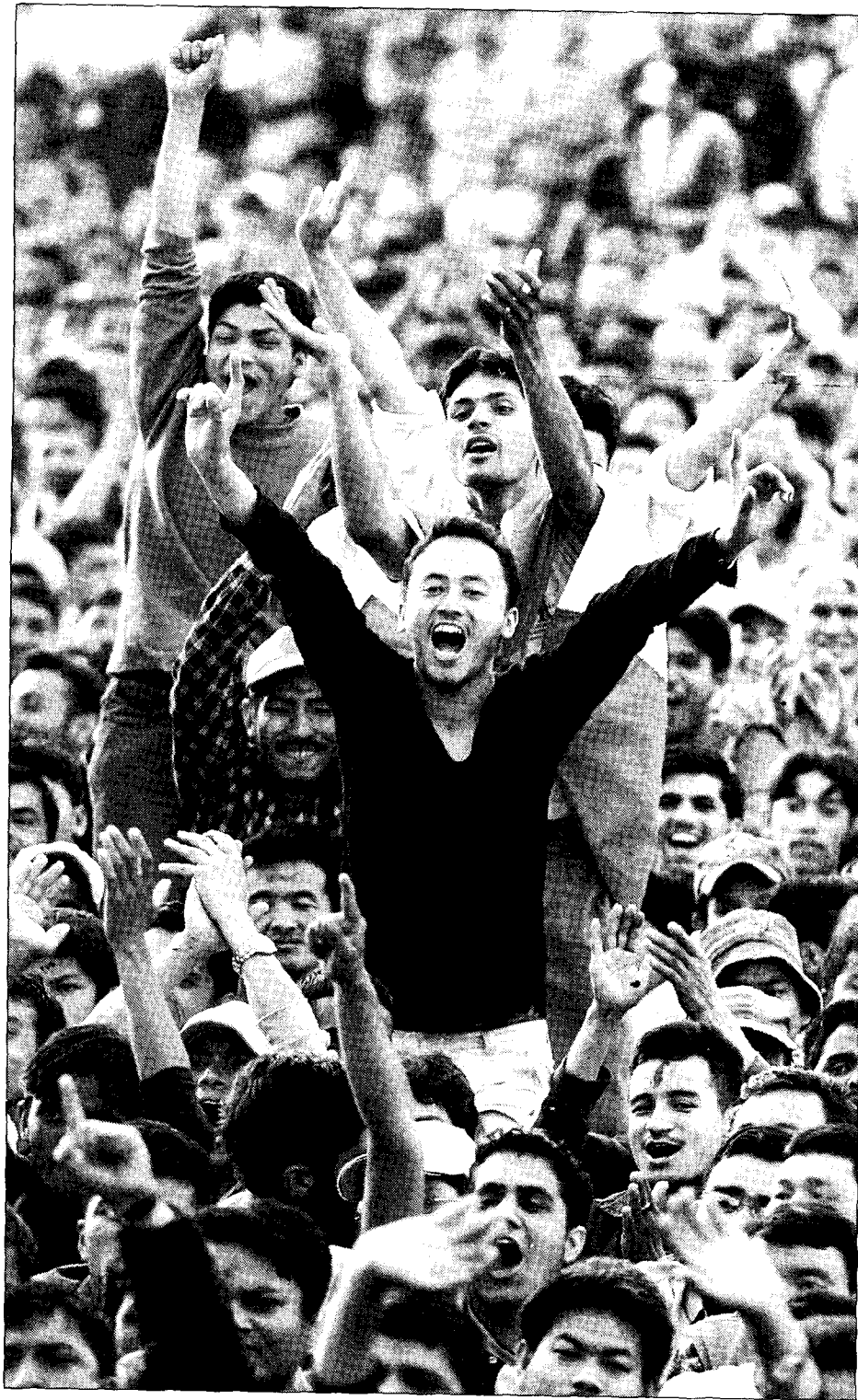
Even the king's notorious home minister, Kamal Thapa, was not spared as people wanted him also to be strung up. Rumours were that he had given his security detail the slip and had gone into hiding.

As the processions poured into Khula Manch in the city centre next to Ratna Park, one could see that the big signboards displaying profound utterances by the king had been defaced and overwritten with a simple but chilling slogan — "*Gyane hatyaro*" (Gyanendra murderer).

The processions were shouting: "*Desh chhodalas Gyanendra. Hisab-kitab baaki cha* (Don't leave the country Gyanendra. We still have scores to settle)."

This reporter saw a two-km-long procession where people had walked nearly 20 km from Bhaktapur in the adjoining district of Kathmandu to come to Kalanki Chowk on the Ring Road where people had died in police firing during the movement.

The political parties had converted the protest rallies planned for today into victory



Pro-democracy activists at a rally in Kathmandu on Tuesday. (Reuters)

rallies and quite wisely directed people to move from the city outwards — to the Ring Road. If the direction had been reversed, there might have been looting and violence.

However, some processions did manage to come towards Ratna Park in the city. They wanted their leaders to address them — but the big victory rally is planned for Thursday. In the event some of the leaders did turn up to calm the public.

There were two kinds of people in the processions — those who were celebrating vi-

ctory and those who gave the impression that they had been cheated. The body language of those celebrating was relaxed and they only shouted about "*loktastra*" or "*gantatra*" and remembering the martyrs of the people's movement.

The others, much younger and carrying red flags, seemed tense — perhaps about a battle half won. They shouted sharper slogans — "*Sansadvadi dhoka ho, dhoka ho* (Those for parliament are cheats)."

They were significant in number, sang songs and danced. They were often from outside

Kathmandu valley.

It was clear the Maoists, having participated in the people's movement, could not be relegated to the shadows, even if the parties so wanted. As their slogans and energy indicated, they would have to be given open political legitimacy.

The Maoist supporters who participated in the street demonstrations already seem to be asking: "What is in it for us? Perhaps a ceasefire followed by a dialogue and a Constituent Assembly may just satisfy them that things were moving in the right direction.

## Delhi twice shy on Nepal

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 25: India today welcomed the Nepal king's announcement to revive Parliament and called it a "victory of the people" but has adopted a policy of adhocism for the aftermath.

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee (in picture), who chaired a meeting of the cabinet committee on political affairs in the absence of the Prime Minister, said India will not "pre-judge" developments in Nepal that will ensue with the reconvening of its Parliament from Friday.

"So many things will develop in course of time. Let us not pre-judge all these things. Now there is a 12-point understanding between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance. What will be the ultimate outcome will be too difficult to say right at this moment," Mukherjee said after the committee issued a statement on the events in Nepal.

The statement makes no mention of King Gyanendra or the fate of monarchy. Neither does it say anything specific on the Maoists who have rejected the acceptance of the seven-party alliance of the king's decision.

Today's statement is the second on Nepal after Delhi gave another welcoming statement when Gyanendra said last Friday that he will transfer executive authority to the people.

But in the four days between that statement and today's, India was forced to reconsider its position by the sustained demonstrations in Kathmandu. It is of some solace to the Indian government that there was evidence of celebrations in Nepal's capital today despite the Maoists rejecting the stand of the seven-party alliance in accepting the king's decision.

"This (the announcement to re-convene Parliament) is a victory for the people of Nepal who have displayed extraordinary courage and reaffirmed their faith and commitment to freedom and democracy. The future of Nepal is safe in their hands," the official statement said.

It acknowledged that there are more issues that needed to be sorted out. Mukherjee wo-

uld not take a question on where India stood on the Maoists' demand for a Constituent Assembly.

"We are conscious of the challenges that lie ahead for Nepal as it embarks on the journey towards restoring political stability, achieving economic recovery and finding a peaceful solution to the armed conflict," the statement read.

Asked if India will resume arms supplies to Nepal, the defence minister said: "Let the government be installed. That will depend on the requirement of the government." Mukherjee sought to underplay In-



This is a victory for the people of Nepal, who have displayed extraordinary courage... The future of Nepal is safe in their hands

— From the statement issued by the Government of India

dia's hand in shaping the king's announcement and in getting the seven-party alliance to accept the revival of the Nepalese parliament.

"We do not have any role beyond that of a neighbouring country. We have to have peace with our neighbours. We cannot change our neighbours," he said.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran, who is a Nepal hand having been the ambassador to Kathmandu, was by Mukherjee's side as the defence minister gave the briefing after the meeting.

The 90-minute meeting was attended by, among others, human resource development minister Arjun Singh, home minister Shivraj Patil, railway minister Lalu Prasad and agriculture minister Sharad Pawar.

## এখনও অনেক পথ

নেপালরাজ জ্ঞানেন্দ্র আরও এক পা পিছু হটিলেন। এ বার তিনি চার বছর আগে ভাঙিয়া দেওয়া পার্লামেন্ট বা জনপ্রতিনিধিসভাও পুনরুজ্জীবিত করিলেন এবং শুক্রবার তাহার অধিবেশন সূচনারও আশ্বাস দিলেন। তাহার এই ঘোষণাকে গণতন্ত্র পুনরুদ্ধার আন্দোলনের সংগঠক সাত দলীয় জোট স্বাগত জানাইয়াছে এবং ইহাকে নিজেদের বিজয় হিসাবে শনাক্ত করিয়া আন্দোলনে ইতি টানার আভাসও দিয়াছে। সত্য, রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সর্বশেষ ঘোষণায় গণ-আন্দোলনকে স্বীকৃতি দেওয়া হইয়াছে, আন্দোলনে হতাহতদের জন্য দুঃখপ্রকাশ করা হইয়াছে এবং রাষ্ট্রের কর্তৃত্ব ও সার্বভৌমত্বের আধার রূপে জনসাধারণকে শনাক্ত করা হইয়াছে। এ সবই তাহার আগের ঘোষণা হইতে গুণগত প্রস্থান। সাত দলীয় জোট এ জনাই সম্ভবত আন্দোলনে নির্ণায়ক জয় হইয়াছে ধরিয়া লইয়া পরবর্তী প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসাবে গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরালার নাম ঘোষণা করিয়া দিয়াছে। আপাতদৃষ্টিতে মনে হইতে পারে, নেপালে অতঃপর অশান্তি ও অস্থিরতার অবসান হইবে এবং পরিষদীয় গণতন্ত্রের রথ অপ্রতিরোধ্য গতিতে অগ্রসর হইবে।

কিন্তু রাজকীয় ঘোষণায় সংবিধান সভা বা গণপরিষদ গঠনের কথা নাই। জোট নেতারা বলিতেছেন, পার্লামেন্টের অধিবেশন হইতেই গণপরিষদ গড়ার সিদ্ধান্ত গৃহীত হইবে। কিন্তু সেই গণপরিষদের বিচার্য বিষয় কী হইবে, যে নূতন সংবিধান পরিষদ রচনা করিবে তাহাতে রাজা শাসনব্যবস্থা হইতে নির্বাসিত হইবেন, নাকি প্রাসাদ-অভ্যন্তরে বসিয়া রাজনৈতিক ষড়যন্ত্র রচনার ক্ষমতা প্রয়োগ করিতে পারিবেন, এ সব বিষয়ে এখনই কেহ চিন্তা করিতে চায় না। অথচ গণতন্ত্র পুনরুদ্ধার আন্দোলনের চূড়ান্ত লক্ষ্য ছিল সেটাই। রাজার সাংবিধানিক ক্ষমতা অটুট রাখিয়া যে কোনও গণতন্ত্র সার্থক হইতে পারে না, নেপাল তাহার জলন্ত প্রমাণ। এ জনাই আন্দোলনকারীরা রাজতন্ত্রের পূর্ণ উচ্ছেদ চাহিতেছিলেন। রাজা যে শাসক হিসাবে তাহার নৈতিক কর্তৃত্ব হারায়াছেন, আন্দোলনকারী প্রজাদের আচরণে তাহা স্পষ্ট হইয়া ওঠে। অথচ পার্লামেন্ট পুনরুজ্জীবিত করার ঘোষণাতেই সাত দলীয় জোটের নেতারা যে রূপ উল্লসিত, তাহাতে সন্দেহ হয়, রাজতন্ত্রের পূর্ণাঙ্গ উচ্ছেদের জন্য তাহারা আন্দোলন করেন নাই। এই জোটের শাস্তিক দলগুলি আগেও সরকার গড়িয়াছে। সেই সব সরকার নেপালকে স্থিতিশীলতা দিতে পারে নাই। দুর্নীতি, স্বজনপোষণ ও অপশাসনের পরাকাষ্ঠা স্থাপন করিয়া রাজাকে সুযোগ করিয়া দিয়াছে আপন কর্তৃত্বকে স্বৈরাচারী করিয়া তুলিতে। এক বার ক্ষমতার স্বাদ পাইলেই সাত দলীয় জোটের শরিকরা রাজা-বিরোধী সংগ্রামের ঐক্য ভুলিয়া দ্বন্দ্ব অবতীর্ণ হইবে না, তাহার নিশ্চয়তা নাই।

রাজকীয় ঘোষণায় অন্য যে বিষয়টি অনুপস্থিত, তাহা হইল বিবর্তমান এই রাজনৈতিক বন্দোবস্তে মাওবাদীদের ভূমিকা কী হইবে? অথচ মাওবাদীদের বাদ দিয়া রচিত যে-কোনও বন্দোবস্ত যে ব্যর্থ হইতে বুঝা, তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। আন্দোলন যে ১৮ দিন ধরিয়া চলিতে পারিয়াছে, উত্তরোত্তর অনমনীয় ও জঙ্গি চেহারা লইয়া রাজাকে শেষ পর্যন্ত নত হইতে বাধ্য করিয়াছে, তাহার কারণ আন্দোলনে মাওবাদীদের যোগদান। সাত দলের জোটের সহিত মাওবাদীদের এই মর্মে বোঝাপড়া হইয়াছে যে, অস্ত্রসংবরণ করিলে তাহাদের শাসনব্যবস্থার শরিক করা হইবে। কিন্তু মাওবাদীরা আবার সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রের বিরোধী, তাহাদের প্রকল্প অবাধ প্রজাতন্ত্র। কাঠমান্ডুর বাহিরে সমস্ত প্রত্যন্ত অঞ্চলেও নেপালি জনসাধারণ রাজার প্রতি যে ঘৃণা ও বিদ্বেষ ব্যক্ত করিয়াছে, তাহাতে বুঝা যায়, মাওবাদীদের জনসমর্থন সুদূরপ্রসারী। এ অবস্থায় মধ্যপন্থী জোট নেতৃদ্বয় মাওবাদীদের কী ধরনের ক্ষমতাবিন্যাসের প্রস্তাব দিবে? আর যে কোনও ডামাডোল ও অনিশ্চয়তা যে রাজাকে আবার স্থায়িত্ব ও ঐক্যের প্রতীক হইয়া উঠিতে প্ররোচিত করিবে, তাহাও ঠিক। পার্লামেন্টের পুনরুজ্জীবন কিংবা গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরালার প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত অতএব অস্থির নেপালে কোনও মৌলিক পটপরিবর্তনকে এখনও সূচিৎ করে নাই। এখনও অনেক পথ বাকি।



# Future of Nepal monarchy bleak

Ceremonial role for King may lead to Himalayan kingdom's stability

VINOD Sharma  
New Delhi, April 25

THE REVIVAL of the Parliament that King Gyanendra sent packing in 2002 has apparently cleared the way for the restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal where the future of monarchy, however, seems "bleak". All would depend largely on the King's "dealings" with the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) and his ability to "side" with popular opinion.

"We've achieved what would have satisfied political parties in that country", highly placed sources claimed here on Tuesday.

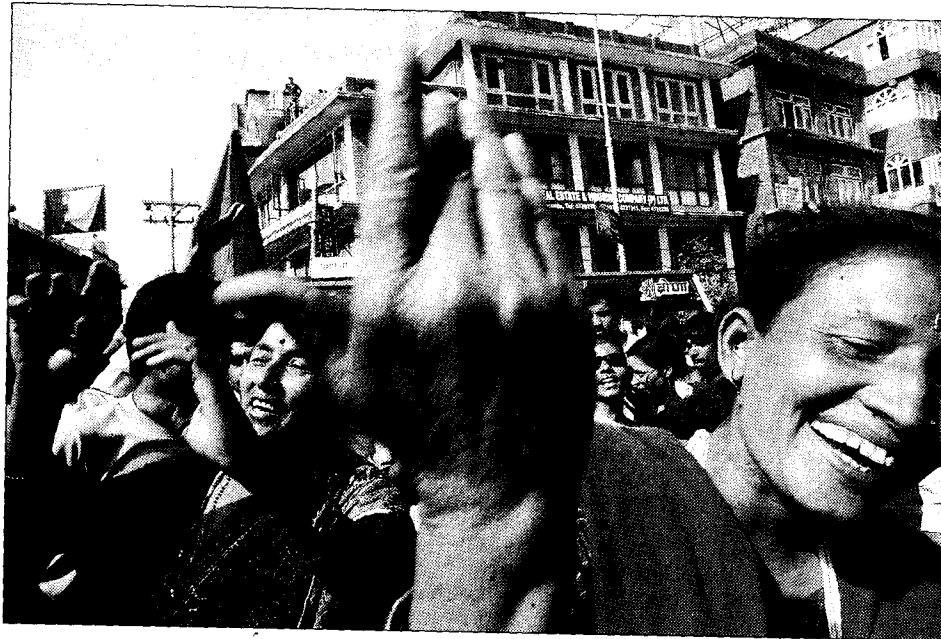
Hinting at an Indian role in breaking the impasse over the King's first announcement, the sources said the Nepali Congress president, G.P. Koirala's proposed installation as Prime Minister has the support of, among others, the NCP (UML)'s Madhav Nepal and Sher Bahadur Deuba of the breakaway NC group.

Once the House is revived and executive powers transferred to the Koirala regime, India, while nudging the key players towards multi-party democracy, will try to put together a package to bail Nepal out of its economic cul-de-sac, mainly through financial assistance and supply of essential commodities. But, the sources added, "there is no talk yet of resumption of military aid". The attitude of Delhi, they said, was like "let the new government be formed first and we'll respond to what they want".

Sources said the King's predicament was largely on account of his proclivity — in disregard of New Delhi's advice — to be a player rather than a referee in the political game. In the unfolding new scenario, the monarchy's status in the constitutional scheme would depend on the consensus in the talks the SPA is committed to hold with the Maoists who have to keep their part of the bargain by giving up arms and joining the political mainstream.

If South Block has read the prevailing mood correctly, a majority view in the SPA could be supportive of a ceremonial role for the monarch without draconian powers (under Article 127) to dismiss elected regimes and exercise control over the Royal Nepal Army. But it remains to be seen whether mainstream parties will stick to this view in the face of radical opinion. Sources conceded that the King could still be swept away by events. "In our view, a ceremonial role for him will add to stability. But everything depends on what he does to side with popular sentiments," said observers.

And what if the Maoists get the better of the SPA at the negotiating table? "In that situation, not only India but the international community as well will have to unite to oppose violence and support multi-party democracy," the observers replied. They added: "Those who charge New Delhi of 'masterly inactivity', conveniently forget that we can be influential in Kathmandu only if we are discreet."



Celebrations outside former Nepalese PM G. P. Koirala's house in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

## Kathmandu erupts in joy

Continued from Page 1

But the Maoists weren't impressed. In a statement emailed to HT, Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda and his deputy, Baburam Bhattarai, said the SPA was committing a 'historic mistake'. At Maharajgunj they held banners telling the SPA not to commit the blunder.

Saying that the royal proclamation has failed to address people's demands, they have threatened to continue mobilising people and holding demonstrations. They threatened to blockade the valley and district headquarters till announcement of elections to the constituent assembly. Even the Jana Morcha, an SPA partner which helped broker peace with the Maoists, will continue with the movement.

The Maoist stand was echoed on Kathmandu's streets when some youths shouted, "Gyanendra re lai fansi deo (Hang King Gyanendra)" and "Down with autocracy". Others described the 58-year-old monarch and Crown Prince Paras as "thieves" and "murderers".

The Maoists freely distributed leaflets at Kalanki in the afternoon. Some youths even wanted Kamal Thapa, home minister in King Gyanendra's government, hanged.

The CPN (UML) tried to placate the Maoists by saying it would immediately initiate dialogue with them — as per the 12-point agreement — for a political solution. The SPA decided to set up an inquiry commission to look into the incidents of firing and killings during the pro-democracy movement.

Nepal also said they would try and scrap all draconian laws, which had come into existence during Gyanendra's "direct rule". The SPA decided to extend ex-gratia to the 17 "martyrs" of the movement and provide free treatment to those injured during the 19-day strike.

## Uneasy lull after storm

PRAMOD Giri  
Dhulabari (East Nepal), April 25

HOURS AFTER King Gyanendra's proclamation that he would reinstate the dissolved Parliament, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) on Tuesday burst three bombs in this town famous for its foreign goods. Although no one was injured, they were a clear indication that the NCP(M) would continue with its demand for the setting up of a constituent Assembly and fresh elections.

The blasts took place in the house of Kalyan Khadga, mayor of Mechi municipality, in the house Prajapati Koirala Jhapa, zonal commissioner, and the Nepal Rastriya Bank.

At 9.30 am on Tuesday, two Maoists on a motorcycle visited the house of Kalyan Khadga at Dhulabari, 12 km from the Indo-Nepalese border, and asked his family to leave the house. Immediately after-

### KINGDOM AT CROSSROADS

wards, there was a bomb blast and the house was completely damaged.

According to Punya Prasad Kharel, a member of the Progressive Writers' Association of Nepal, peace would not last long unless the NCP(M)'s demands for a constituent Assembly and fresh elections were met. That the NCP(M) has already rejected the royal proclamation and blamed the Seven-Parties' Alliance (SPA) for betraying the people was a clear indication that the Maoists would relaunch their attacks, he feared.

A Press release issued by Prachanda, NCP(M) chairman, said: "Our party, honoring highly the Nepalese people's great initiative, scornfully rejects the conspirator-

al proclamation of feudal elements and expresses determination to persevere with the movement till the Nepalese people's sovereign right has been guaranteed by way of an unconditional constituent Assembly election, as a minimum basis".

Kharel added that, although no one could say with certainty what lay ahead, Monday's royal proclamation had definitely brought great relief to the people.

On Tuesday, unlike in the earlier days, there were no police forces even as citizens celebrated the "victory of the people" and chanted pro-democracy slogans.

Hundreds of people took out rallies at Kakarvitta, Dhulabari, Chandragari, Birtamore and Bhadrapur. Business establishments were open and traffic was normal. Nepal-bound trucks, however, are still stuck at the Indo-Nepalese border at Panitanki.

# Back to democracy

**T**HE ENDGAME in Nepal has only now begun after a needless hiatus brought on by the ham-handed handling of the problem by King Gyanendra and his advisors. The mainstream political parties have nominated the venerated G.P. Koirala as prime minister and called off their agitation and will now have their members of Parliament participate in the first session of the revived Parliament on Friday. The experience of the past year and the king's tyranny is likely to persuade the new Parliament to call for the revision of the Constitution to make the monarchy's role ceremonial, or even to do away with it altogether.

The Maoists have revealed their hand by opposing these new developments, declaring that this was "a conspiracy to protect the regime", and that their 'struggle' would continue — presumably against the country's legal and elected government. This makes things simpler because it clearly establishes a line between those who seek to maintain Nepal as a liberal democracy — whether or not in the form of a constitutional monarchy — and those whose agenda is to overthrow this order. The swift return of nor-

malcy to the Kathmandu valley following the king's decision, of resuming Parliament and presumably accepting the people's verdict on his future, indicates that the Maoists don't have as much support in the area as they may have been led to assume from the massive demonstrations that rocked the capital.

New Delhi's interest is not in blocking change in Nepal, but to ensure that the process takes place in a stable and peaceful manner. This is not to suggest that India get involved in Nepal's political tangles. How the interim government deals with the monarchy or the Maoists are strictly its own concerns. But New Delhi need not shy away from affirming that it is for a democratic Nepal and will therefore provide all assistance to a legal government to meet the Maoist challenge. Given the belligerent tone adopted by the Maoists, it is clear that they mean to do everything they can to bring the new government to its knees. New Delhi must go out of its way to help the new government find its feet and do whatever needed to help it meet the many challenges it will confront in restoring democracy, peace and order in Nepal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 APR 2005

# The countdown in Kathmandu has begun

India's Nepal dilemma must be resolved soon, in favour of popular sovereignty. *Hi for Nepal*

Siddharth Varadarajan

AS THE date for the launch of a new nationwide agitation against the autocratic rule of King Gyanendra approaches, all the players on the Nepalese political stage are being forced to confront the imminence of their own particular moment of reckoning. All except India, that is.

Faced with the prospect of mass protests to be launched in unison by the Maoists and the seven-party alliance (SPA) of parliamentary parties on April 6, the monarchy has turned once again to the familiar weapons of intimidation and deception. The parties are being warned of dire consequences if they operationalise their latest political understanding with the Maoists. And the people of Kathmandu are being fed stories about armed Maoists infiltrating into the Capital to wreak terror on its inhabitants.

But if King Gyanendra's armoury is the same, there is a new urgency in the manner in which it is being deployed.

The monarch knows that the second understanding reached between the SPA and the Maoists last week is a decisive twist in the noose that is slowly tightening around the neck of autocracy. For the first time since the two principal players in the struggle for democracy agreed last November that a Constituent Assembly holds the key to ending Nepal's political crisis, an agenda for united political action has emerged. The identical statement released separately but simultaneously by the Maoists and the SPA on March 19 unequivocally declares that "the People's Movement is the only means to achieve [the] goal" of ending the conflict, "establish loktantra and restore people's sovereignty" in Nepal. To be sure, the Maoists have not renounced violence as the parties and India would like. But for them to concede the primacy of a people's movement is a major step in the direction of reducing the salience of 'people's war.'

The first test of this new alliance will be on April 6 when the two partners launch a three-day "mass mobilisation programme" in Kathmandu. The March 19 agreement was struck in the teeth of opposition from both the Palace and the United States, which had publicly denounced the 12-point agreement reached with the Maoists last November and warned the parties against taking their understanding any further. Having failed to prevent the 'Second Memorandum of Understanding' from being reached, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, James Moriarty, has joined hands with King Gyanendra to ensure next week's agitation does not get off ground.

For India, which indirectly facilitated the



**UNDETERRED:** Political activists stage a rally, in Kathmandu on Wednesday, demanding the restoration of democracy in Nepal. - PHOTO: AFP

conclusion of the latest agreement between the parties and the Maoists, the political and diplomatic challenge has now become critical.

When King Gyanendra usurped power on February 1, 2005, India was quick to signal a tough line against him. Despite being aware of the monarchy's historical role in continuously interrupting the development of democracy in the kingdom, the Indian Government raised its demand for the resto-

ration of democracy within the framework of the 'twin pillar' theory, which saw constitutional monarchy as central to Nepal's political stability. At the same time, senior officials have been saying privately that India's commitment is to Nepal and its people and not to any institution. And that if forced to choose between the monarchy and the Nepalese people, India would have to back the latter. New Delhi has been reluctant to articulate this sentiment publicly though se-

nior officials point out that the Ministry of External Affairs' latest pronouncements on Nepal have undergone a subtle change in this direction. Recent statements, for example, make no reference to twin pillars. Indeed, the February 8 statement issued by the MEA after the farcical municipal elections says: "We are of the view that the grave challenges facing Nepal demand the initiation of a genuine process of national reconciliation, dialogue and participation which can facilitate a peaceful political settlement." The implication, say officials, is that dialogue and reconciliation with the Maoists is one of the keys to a peaceful political settlement of the crisis in Nepal.

Though the officials may be right in arguing that India's public position has begun to change, the transformation is far too subtle and slow to have any serious political impact.

The irony is that having backed the latest understanding between the Maoists and the SPA, India will have to bear all of the associated political costs without being in a position to ensure that any benefits accrue to it. The King and the U.S. know the Second Understanding between the Maoists and the parties would not have been possible without India, as do the two parties to the understanding. But in the absence of some public signalling by India, the SPA will always be plagued by doubts about the extent of India's commitment to their new course of action. This, in turn, makes the parties susceptible to the King's threats.

Even as it remains wary of getting directly involved, India needs to send a clear and unambiguous message that it backs Nepal's parliamentary parties in the course of action they have chosen to follow. In the run-up to April 6, an Indian announcement of support to the pro-democracy forces would be a major morale booster for the leadership and cadres of the SPA. Such an announcement would also send an unambiguous message to King Gyanendra and Washington that the only pillar democracy in Nepal really needs is people's sovereignty.

On their part, the Maoists should consider the announcement of another ceasefire as a means of encouraging the widest possible public participation in the planned demonstrations. Their attack on Thankot on the eve of an earlier mass demonstration by the parties in Kathmandu gave the King an excuse to impose curfew. This time too, King Gyanendra is likely to impose curfew on the eve of April 6. But the announcement of a ceasefire by the Maoists would take the political initiative away from the Palace and help cement their new partnership with the parliamentary parties.

30 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

# Unholy alliance

Nepal's royalty and army vs the media

Nepal today presents a classic example of royalty and the military working hand in hand to muzzle the media. King Gyanendra's refusal to meet a delegation of 12 international media organisations, notably the International Press Institute and Reporters sans Frontieres, must rank as blatant discourtesy on the part of the palace. This deliberate slamming of the doors of Narayanhiti, after allowing the team to enter the kingdom on a fact-finding mission, suggests that the king, who ascended the throne in literally bloody circumstances, has much to hide... and also as much to answer for.

King Gyanendra may even be acutely embarrassed, even disgraced, over the array of misdemeanours that the media mission has stumbled upon during its visit to the kingdom. Detention and attacks are reprehensible enough already; what makes the royal blueprint so starkly sinister is that the king has involved a pliant army in the cynical exercise of scuttling the freedom of expression. The exercise verges on crass hypocrisy; almost hand in hand with the crackdown on FM stations, the government has the gall to grant licences to the Royal Nepalese Army to start no fewer than six FM stations with four mobile FMs on the anvil. It has also noted that the army has been blocking critical websites.

The international mission's finding is a damning indictment of royal control that has been geared to "promote military propaganda and divert public resources and advertising revenue from the community sector". Indeed, the policy of the palace to release advertisements only to the pro-state media in the country is a classical tactic to bend the press. As crucial as the findings is the delegation's success in circulating its observations. By any standards, this must rank as a remarkable victory for the freedom of expression. King Gyanendra as much as his soldiers, in the process, have been thoroughly exposed; his refusal to grant an audience to the visiting international press has therefore turned out to be an attempted cover-up that has failed.

Nor for that matter has that shameful attempt been able to conceal the grotesque violation of human rights and the sheer travesty of the legal procedure. The rape threat during detention — the woman journalist was freed after a Supreme Court order — and arrests without trial confirm the king's desperate ruthlessness. Well may the delegation demand compensation for those journalists tortured by the army. It remains for Nepal's Opposition to guarantee the freedom of expression if and when democracy is restored. The road appears frightfully tortuous at the moment.

28 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

26 MAR 2006

# Nepal turns down fact-finding request of international media

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, March 25. — Continuing his policy of not meeting anyone critical of his regime, King Gyanendra turned down a request from 12 international media organisations on a fact-finding mission to Nepal. It's his second refusal in less than a week after saying "no" to a team of British MPs.

The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal, a

coalition of 12 media organisations, including Reporters Sans Frontieres, International Federation of Journalists, International Press Institute and World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, said today, at the end of their six-day visit, that the "intimidation, harassment, attacks and detention of media professionals" have continued, both by the state and the Maoists.

"Of particular concern is the increasing involvement of the

Royal Nepalese Army and armed police forces in press freedom and freedom of expression violations, as well as interference in the media sphere," the mission said.

The statement comes on a day when a local daily reported how Bhawana Prasain, a reporter with the *Mazdoor Awaz* monthly, was constantly threatened with rape during her five-week illegal detention. Prasain, arrested in Kathmandu last month while covering a politi-

cal demonstration, was released with a Supreme Court order this month.

The mission also noted that five journalists had been arrested under a controversial and draconian ordinance issued by the King that allows the government to detain anyone seen as a national security threat for a year without beginning legal proceedings, and has demanded compensation for all journalists subjected to maltr-

eatment and torture by the security forces. While King Gyanendra's government has been clamping down on the media, especially FM stations, the Royal Nepalese Army was recently given licences to start six FM stations while another proposal made by the army for four mobile FMs are being considered.

"The allocation of civil licences to the RNA will promote military propaganda as well as divert public resources

and advertisement revenue away from the existing FM and community stations to the army corporate sector," the mission said. It has also noted that the army was blocking critical web sites and asked to lift the curb. The government's policy of giving advertisements to only pro-state media is prejudiced and threatens the survival of the independent media, the team said, asking the King not to issue new ordinances that would

curb media rights guaranteed by the constitution. While meeting senior Maoist leaders and asking them to stop "intimidating, abducting, and harassing" media practitioners, the mission has also asked opposition parties to ensure that when a democratically elected government comes to power, the state media would be transformed into a public service media with press freedom and freedom of expression guaranteed.

## Nepal: ban on Maoists upheld

**KATHMANDU:** In two significant decisions, Nepal's Supreme Court on Friday upheld a ban on the Maoists, paving the way for the monarchy to continue branding them as "terrorists" and gave credence to a controversial provision in an anti-terrorism law that allowed police to detain suspects for a year without trial.

A full Bench of the apex court quashed a petition by a Maoist sympathiser asking the court to withdraw the tag and questioning the constitutionality of the government decision (to ban the rebel outfit).

The Court said no sufficient evidence was produced to substantiate that the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was a political party with constitutional recognition, officials here said. — PTI

25 MAR 2006

## Common ground against Gyanendra

**T**he "second understanding" between the democratic political parties of Nepal and the Maoists is certain to inject fresh energy in the agitation against King Gyanendra. The two sides first reached an agreement in November 2005 that allowed them to work in concert to boycott the February 2006 municipal elections. The success of the boycott showed that, by acting together, the seven-party Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) and the Maoists could isolate Nepal's monarchy. The March 19 agreement is a reiteration that they will work together for "full democracy." Its immediate consequence was the Maoist decision to end a week-long blockade of Kathmandu that had resulted in considerable disruption of civilian life. The Maoists have instead pledged to mobilise forces for the ARD's mass agitation from April 6, significantly a day after the high school examinations end.

The agreement does not mask the differences between the political parties and the Maoists. That they chose to make separate statements is evidence enough that the political parties want to keep their identity distinct from that of the Maoists. While explaining the absence of a joint statement, Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress, spoke of "international difficulties," an apparent reference to the open hostility of the United States, and the ambivalence of India, to the Maoists. The political leadership counts the backing of both countries, more so India's, as crucial to the struggle. But it is also true the political parties themselves are wary of the Maoists, who remain committed to armed struggle. It is to the credit of both sides that these differences did not prevent them from agreeing on the greater political cause of defeating the anti-democratic plans of King Gyanendra.

24 MAR 2006

THE HINDU



# Nepali Communist leader whisked away

Whereabouts of Madhav Nepal not known

**KATHMANDU:** Armed security forces on Thursday stormed the home of a top Opposition leader who was under house arrest and whisked him away to an unknown location, an official of the Communist Party of Nepal said.

Officials refused to give the whereabouts of party secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, who had been under house arrest for two months, said Amrit Bohara, a party colleague.

"This is another criminal act by the authoritarian government and an example of jungle rule in this country," Mr. Bohara said.

Students and activists protested across Kathmandu on Thursday to demand the leader's release. Students burned tyres and raised anti-government slogans outside about a half-dozen colleges in the Nepalese capital. Party supporters also rallied.

Police made no arrests and there were no reports of major scuffles.

Security forces placed Mr. Nepal under house arrest on January 20 during a royal Government crackdown on Opposition activists to pre-



*Nepal Communist Party leader Madhav Nepal in this 2005 file photo.*

vent protests against King Gyanendra's rule.

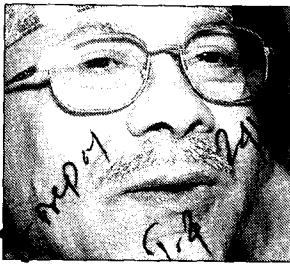
Police have surrounded his house since his arrest but have mostly stayed outside. — AP

# Nepal leader detained

Kathmandu, March 23 (Reuters): Nepal's royalist government put a key Opposition leader in police detention today after confining him in his house for more than two months, a government official said.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML (CPN-UML), was taken from his home in a Kathmandu suburb to a police base at Kakani, about 30 km outside the city.

"He was under house arrest. Now he has been detained at a security base," a top government official, who did not wish to be named, said. Nepal had been detained under the Public Security Act, he added.



Nepal: Fresh blow

Another official said Nepal would be kept in detention for three months.

The CPN-UML is restive Nepal's second-biggest party and a key constituent of the seven-party alliance, which is planning a series of anti-king protests next month.

"There is no rule of law," said Amrit Kumar Bohara, a

top UML leader, reacting to the move. Nepal had been under house arrest since January. Yesterday, police also searched his house and seized telephones, a computer and a fax machine.

## Journalist injured

Three people, including a journalist, were injured today when Maoist rebels fired indiscriminately at a busy market place in Nepal.

*Nepal Samacharpatra* correspondent Satya Prakash Shrestha, police constable Shiva Thapa and an employee at the Bara district health office were injured when two rebels on motorbikes fired in Bharatchowk town of Bara district, police said.

# Fresh clashes hit east Nepal

RAJEEV RAVIDAS

**Kakarvitta (Nepal), March 22:** Fresh violence rocked eastern Nepal today as the situation in the trading town of Birtamode remained tense after yesterday's daring Maoist attack.

In the latest clash at Urlabari, 60 km from Kakarvitta in the Morang district, a group of armed Maoist rebels in a jeep attacked a convoy of two vehicles carrying cash from a branch of the Nepal National Commercial Bank to the local police station at 3.30 pm (IST).

Unlike yesterday's incident at Birtamode where the police put up little resistance, the Maoists in Urlabari were involved in a shootout with the police for 45 minutes. The Maoists, however, failed to get any of the cash.

The body count at the end of the skirmish read: three Maoist rebels, two policemen — Bir Bahadur Limbu and Krishna Khadka — and an unidentified woman who was caught in the crossfire.

The police also recovered

one assault rifle and two pistols from the site of the encounter, sources said, adding that the arms may have belonged to the slain rebels.

In Birtamode, the situation was tense with most shops remaining closed for the second day today. The local police station and traffic police office, which was the target of the Maoist attack, however, continued to draw curious residents.

"This is terrible and the earlier this mindless cannibalism ends the better for us," said Harka Bahadur Sharma.



Relatives mourn the death of a policeman in Kathmandu on Wednesday. (Reuters)



Lucy Liu at the premiere of *Lucky Number Slevin* in New York. (Reuters)

# Maoists attack police post near India border

22/3 5:30 PM 8/12/06  
**RAJEEV RAVIDAS**

**Birtamode (Nepal), March 21:** Maoist rebels killed nine policemen, including three officers, during an early morning attack on a police post here today.

Three Maoist rebels were also killed after their vehicle overturned at Garamuni, 4 km from Birtamode.

According to witnesses, about 150 Maoists entered Birtamode, 20 km from the border town of Kakarvitta and 500 km southeast of Kathmandu, in two trucks. They launched attacks on the district police station and the district traffic police office in the heart of the town. The police were caught off guard and had little time to retaliate.

The Maoist operation began at 7.10 am (IST) and continued till 8 am (IST). Eight police personnel were killed in the skirmish at the police station, including assistant sub-inspectors Bir Bahadur Tamang and Khem Basnet. Assistant sub-inspector Shyam Karki was killed at the traffic police office, 200 metres from the police station.

"I was on duty outside the traffic police office when the rebels arrived in a truck. Two of them got down from the truck and yelled out before firing at the ASI who was stand-

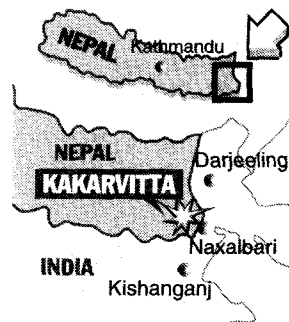


The charred remains of a truck that was set ablaze by the Maoists on the highway to Birtamode, eastern Nepal, on Tuesday. Telegraph picture by Kundan Yolmo

ing near the office gate. Immediately, others jumped from the truck, but before they could get at me, I ran for my life. Some of them followed me for some distance, but I entered a bylane and hid in a shop," said a visibly shocked traffic policeman who did not want to reveal his identity.

The ASI was the only casualty among the traffic personnel. It was the regular policemen who suffered the maximum casualties.

Before launching their attack on the town, the rebels had cut-off all entry points to



Birtamode. They set a truck on fire on the east-west highway to prevent reinforcements from reaching the town from

the eastern headquarters of the Royal Nepalese Army in Charali, 6 km from Birtamode.

Elsewhere in Nepal, 20 Maoists were killed during a search operation carried out by security forces in Darechowk area of Dhading district, 80 km west of Kathmandu, today. The forces launched the attack after a tip-off that a large number of armed Maoists had gathered in the area, an army official said.

The two sides exchanged fire but, according to the army, they did not suffer any casualties.

22 MAR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

# Nepal Maoists, parties sign pact

## They agree to form an interim government and to hold polls to the Constituent Assembly

**KATHMANDU:** Joining forces against King Gyanendra, seven political parties and the Maoists in Nepal on Sunday announced an agreement to launch a fresh agitation next month against his autocratic rule and find a political solution to the decade-old armed conflict by holding polls to the Constituent Assembly.

### Interim government

The seven-party Alliance for Restoration of Democracy also urged the rebels to end the blockade of roads connecting Kathmandu and the rest of Nepal.

The Maoists and the Alliance agreed to form an interim government by holding a national political conference of the agitating democratic forces and to establish full-fledged democracy by holding elections to the Constituent Assembly, the parties

said in a joint statement. Nepal Congress central member Shekhar Koirala said the Maoists agreed to withdraw the three-week-long economic blockade. But a rebel statement on this is yet to come.

### Peaceful protests

The intensified agitation programme starting on April 6 includes a four-day general strike and civil disobedience movement, besides a massive public rally in Kathmandu on April 8.

government, which will hold a dialogue with the rebels. The parties have also agreed to continue a dialogue with the Maoists to seek common ground; both the sides have accepted that a people's movement is the only way to end autocratic rule, the statement said.

• **Alliance partners urge rebels to end three-week-long economic blockade**

• **General strike, civil disobedience movement to be launched from April 6**

• **Seven parties will continue parleys with Maoists to seek common ground**

### Pact signed by Prachanda

On behalf of the seven-party alliance, Nepali Congress spokesman Krishna Sitaula and party treasurer Mahanta Thakur, Nepal Communist Party UML's senior politburo mem-

bers Jhalanath Khanal and Bamdev Gautam, Janamorcha Nepal President Amik Serchan and CPN-Unity Centre leader Prakash inked the agreement while CPN-Maoist chief Prachanda signed for the rebels in the understanding they reached in Delhi, party sources said. — PTI

# Maoists call off Nepal blockade

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, March 19. — Ending mounting anticipation, Nepal's Maoist guerrillas today called off their indefinite blockade, imposed for six days, and withdrew a closure call given on 3 April, even as seven major Opposition parties in return announced a four-day countrywide shutdown and non-cooperation movement from 6 April.

The pact between the guerrillas and the Opposition, sealed after a meeting of the parties in Kathmandu today, resulted in both sides issuing separate statements to make public the new developments.

Maoist supremo Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal said in a statement from underground that bowing to entreaties by civil society, rights organisations and parties, his underground party was withdrawing its protest programmes and would support

the parties' peaceful protests in April.

Already reeling under an indefinite blockade imposed by the Maoist guerrillas since Tuesday, Nepal's government received a fresh blow with the Opposition parties announcing a four-day countrywide bandh and non-cooperation stir from 6 April. The highlight of the protests would be a show of strength in the capital on 8 April, a move likely to trigger fresh crackdown by King Gyanendra's government.

The Opposition announcement came after a meeting, which began at former prime minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala's residence on Friday and continued till today. The

meeting put the seal of approval on the new understanding reached between the Maoists and Opposition leaders during secret talks in New Delhi

earlier this month. Though there was speculation that the talks had run into rough

weather and could lead to both sides breaking off the fragile understanding forged between them last year, the defiant parties today said it had been consolidated. According to the understanding, the parties would press for the restoration of parliament, dissolved in 2001, form an interim government

and begin talks with the Maoists. On the basis of an agreement with the rebels, an election would be held to form a constituent assembly, which would write a new constitution for Nepal.

The decision would come as a blow to the king as well as the US government, with the first fearing the alliance due to the threat it poses to monarchy and the latter because it feels the Maoists would ride piggyback on the parties to seize power from the king. It shows a growing rebel influence on

the parties with the Maoists having urged them in the past to formulate stronger action against King Gyanendra's regime.

In a separate statement issued from underground today within hours of the Opposition decision, Maoist supremo Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda said: "All agitating forces have agreed on restoring the House of Representatives,

forming an interim government and starting dialogue with the Maoists, on the basis of which elections would be held to write a fresh constitution for Nepal. This is the way to restore democracy and end the conflict in Nepal."

"We have agreed a mass movement is the only way," the underground leader said, pledging his banned party's support for the April stir announced by the Opposition.

**AGITATION ■** Reds lift blockade, alliance calls 'decisive' April 8 rally for parliament restoration

# Nepal 7 plan to end King's rule, Maoists behind them

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, MARCH 19

SETTING the stage for a direct confrontation with King Gyanendra, Nepal's alliance of seven pro-democracy parties, fresh from their talks with Maoists in New Delhi and Kathmandu, today announced a "decisive" agitation next month aimed at ending "absolute monarchy" and finding a political solution to the decade-old armed conflict by holding Constituent Assembly polls.

The Maoists came out in open support of the alliance plans and announced withdrawal of a highway blockade that had crippled life in the kingdom for nearly a week.

A statement by the Maoists, signed by their leader Prachanda, said they were ending the six-day blockade and suspending an indefinite general strike that was to begin April 3. The Maoists said they would support and endorse the April 6-9 general strike called by the alliance of seven parties.

The alliance will hold a "decisive, peaceful rally" in Kathmandu on April 8 to mark the declaration of "end of absolute rule" 16 years ago by late King Birendra following a massive movement for democracy in the country in 1990.

The King's government has warned that it may even im-



Gets ready for showdown

pose curfew to foil the rally.

The alliance and the Maoists came out with public appeals through separate statements because some constituents of the alliance feared that a joint statement with the Maoists, who are still targeting civilians and have not renounced the gun, could be counter-productive for the alliance.

The alliance, in a statement signed by former prime ministers G P Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba and five others, called for restoration of parliament (dissolved in May, 2002) followed by the constitution of an all-party government which would hold talks with the Maoists to establish full-fledged democracy through Constituent Assembly polls.

The seven parties have also called upon the international community to support and back the initiatives taken by them to end absolute monarchy and establish complete democracy.



# Nepal Maoists storm border town

## 18 cadres raid armed police posts, snatch gun ■ Cop and civilian killed

### PRAMOD Giri

Kakarvitta (East Nepal), March 16

TEN DAYS ago Maoists had struck an East Nepal hamlet at night. This time, they struck at noon.

They engaged security forces in a 45-minute gunbattle in Kakarvitta, killed a policeman, carried off a rifle and some ammunition, and escaped unscathed. Another man was killed; locals say he was a civilian but the police say he was a Maoist.

The Maoists appeared to be testing their abilities. This was borne out not just by the daylight attack but also by their strength — just 18 Maoists, most aged between 16 and 21, were involved.

As on any other day in the border town, 35 km from Silliguri, Nepal Armed Police men at four posts were frisking those entering from India when firing rang out from all sides. By the time the forces could collect their wits, the attack had already killed havildar

Dilip Mehatat and businessman Surya Gautam (25), described by the cops as a Maoist.

Another havildar, Santosh Mehey, was critically injured and was airlifted to Kathmandu.

Kakarvitta police O-C Pralhad Shah told HT the Maoists had come from their stronghold in Ilam — 10 km from Kakarvitta — in a jeep and two motorcycles. They had left their vehicles at Baundangi Road and walked the 500 metres before opening fire.

After the attack, they walked back to their vehicles and fled to Baundangi. They also took away an LMG belonging to the police.

An army officer conceded that the attack was a daring one. An armed police officer said, "They were looking for international attention."

Indian security forces, including the Sasastra Sima Bal (SSB) and the RAF, were on high alert on the Indian side to tackle any eventuality.



NEELAM GHIMERAY/HT

The attack led to heightened vigil at the border outpost.

# Maoists lay siege to Kathmandu

**Sandeshia Sarkar  
in Kathmandu**

March 15. — Nepal's key highways began emptying as Maoist guerrillas began an indefinite blockade of Kathmandu valley and major cities and towns on Tuesday, vowing to step up the disruption with an indefinite strike nationwide from 3 April.

Though the government put a brave face and said security had been beefed up and the supply of essential commodities from India would not be disrupted, the trust broke off after the rebels set fire to a defiant truck in Saptari district in southern Nepal and took the driver and his helper under their control. Kantipur FM, Nepal's largest independent radio station, said only rickshaws, ambulances and some private cars were seen plying on the two major highways in the east and Nepal's lifeline, the east-west highway, bringing

supplies from India.

However, there were no untoward incidents and the full effect of the blockade was not felt immediately as the valley celebrated Holi on Tuesday. In a new strategy to combat the Maoists, King Gyanendra combined the carrot with the stick, dangling the bait of a cash reward and amnesty before the guerrillas. Home minister Mr Kamal Thapa, who was given the ministry last year for his talent in inducing defections, said the government had formulated a surrender and rehabilitation policy, according to which senior Maoist leaders who surrendered with arms would be paid a cash reward of up to NRS 10,00,000 while those down the rung would get lower sums.

The government is also offering different sums for the surrender of arms, ranging from NRS 500,000 for 81 mortars to NRS 500 for plastic grenades. A new rehabilitation centre would be set up in Kathmandu, in

addition to the existing one at Tanahun district in western Nepal.

Besides, the government is also offering to withdraw charges and cases against those who surrender, keep their identities secret, offer them protection from vengeful comrades and find jobs abroad for them. For those who want to begin self-employment schemes, the state would provide financial aid worth NRS 15,000. Last year, after King Gyanendra seized absolute power through a coup, he had offered amnesty to the rebels. Though over 1,000 Maoists surrendered, there were no top notch leaders among them. Besides the Maoist blockade, the government also came under fresh pressure from the Opposition parties, who plan to hold a mass protest in the capital on 8 April, the day in 1990 when the then King Birendra was compelled to remove the ban on a multi-party system.



King Gyanendra

## Nepal offers amnesty, cash & land to Maoists

ASSOCIATED Press  
Kathmandu, March 13

NEPAL'S ROYAL government on Monday offered amnesty, cash, employment and land for communist rebels who surrender in the next three months.

"The main purpose of our offer is to restore peace in the country," said home minister Kamal Thapa. "We expect a huge number of them to answer to our offer and surrender." Senior Maoist rebel leaders will be given up to Rs 1 million (\$14,000) if they surrender, and guerrillas will receive up to Rs 5,00,000 (\$7,000) for weapons handed over by mid-June.

Thapa also said all arrest warrants and legal cases lodged in courts against rebels would be withdrawn for those who turn themselves in.

Surrendering rebels would be housed in rehabilitation centres for six months, and then released with security guarantees from the government. Nepalese authorities have made amnesty offers in the past but without the lucrative incentives.

The rebels have escalated violence since withdrawing from a ceasefire earlier this year.

The guerrillas have fought for a decade to replace Nepal's constitutional monarchy with a communist government. The insurgency has claimed nearly 13,000 lives in the Himalayan kingdom.

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16 MAR 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Bush to Gyanendra: patch up

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, March 9. — Less than a week after US President George W Bush's visit to India, his envoy, principal deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs Mr Donald Camp flew to Kathmandu to reiterate the message sent out to Nepal jointly by the president and Indian prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh but it seemed no one really listened.

"The two statesmen (Mr Bush and Dr Singh) agreed that the Maoists should abandon violence, and that King Gyanendra should reach out to the political parties to restore democratic institutions," Mr

Camp said at a press conference in Kathmandu today, winding up his two-day visit. "This succinct statement is the policy of the US towards Nepal." However, the Maoists gave no sign they had heeded the message, either from Delhi or Mr Donald Camp.

Three soldiers of the Royal Nepalese Army were killed and six people injured today morning when the rebels planted a time bomb near an army check-post in Ghorahi, headquarters of Dang district in midwestern Nepal, considered a Maoist stronghold. The fresh ambush came four days ahead of a week-long Kathmandu valley blockade called by them from 14 March.

Neither did King Gyanendra give any indication of relenting. The

monarch continued his mysterious sojourn in Pokhara city, where he has been meeting royalists since last month.

Home minister and government spokesman Mr Kamal Thapa this week asserted parliamentary elections would be held by April next year though the US has called any elections without the participation of political parties "hollow".

Even the seven Opposition parties, who have been agitating against King Gyanendra's regime, have not heeded US fears that an alliance with the Maoists would be detrimental for them.

Opposition leaders are reported to be in New Delhi currently, expanding their loose pact with the guerrillas.

# Nepal Maoists raid border jail, 100 flee

**PRAMOD Giri & AMITAVA Banerjee**  
Siliguri/Darjeeling, March 6

HUNDREDS OF Maoists stormed government installations in East Nepal's Ilam on Sunday and freed 100 prisoners from jail during a nightlong battle that killed four guerrillas, two policemen, an army officer and two civilians. When they fled, they took with them the bodies of their comrades.

The Maoists, including women, stormed the mountainous district headquarters at 9.30 pm and attacked the district jail, administrative headquar-

ters, electricity office, police camp and army barracks. The Royal Nepal Army sent forces in a helicopter. "But the helicopter did not find a place to land and had to return," a witness said.

The Maoists surrounded Ilam from all sides. They also bombed and set on fire the district administration office building, the revenue office and the local municipality office.

Ilam is just 32 km from the Darjeeling border and has often come under Maoist attack. Border forces have been put on high alert. "We have sent additional forces to the border to check pos-

sible infiltration. We have to be cautious that none of the injured Maoists enter Indian soil looking for treatment. All the same, we feel this is most unlikely," a senior officer said.

For the Bengal administration, the attack added a northern dimension to the Maoist menace. Several cops and politicians had already been murdered in South Bengal over the past week.

DGP S.C. Awasthi on Tuesday rushed to Maoist-affected areas, where he will try and pep up the morale of the existing forces. IG (law and order) Raj Kanjia's men, still combing the area in

vain for the killers, are thoroughly demoralised by the recent spate of attacks.

The chief minister, back from a tour of Vietnam, met the DGP and home secretary at Writers' and sent the former to Lalgarh and Barikul. "He will assess the situation and take steps to ensure peace," Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said.

In West Midnapore, Kanjia said, "We are taking steps to boost the confidence of the people and policemen. We have intensified long-distance patrolling and IG (zonal) Banibrata Basu is camping on the spot."

**See Kolkata Live Plus Bengal**

# King offers talks, parties unmoved

Kathmandu, Feb. 19 (Agencies): Nepal's King Gyanendra made his first formal approach to the country's estranged political parties today, urging them to join talks and try to put democracy back on track.

"We... call on all willing political parties to come forth to fully activate, at the earliest, the stalled democratic process in the greater interest of the nation," the king said in a national democracy day statement.

But terming the appeal "meaningless" and "artificial", the pro-democracy seven-party alliance today staged a rally to protest the king's autocratic rule.

Senior leaders of the alliance vowed to continue the fight against the king's direct rule and rejected any possibility of compromise with him.

"It is a meaningless offer", said CPN-UML leader Subhash Nemwang, adding there is nothing new in the king's call for dialogue and questioned whether it was his genuine effort.

"It is an artificial appeal



Gyanendra: Democracy cry

that does not mean anything for us. If he is really serious about resolving the problems, he should have directly approached us and not made such a vague appeal," said Khadga Prasad Oli, the deputy leader of the Communist Party of Nepal.

Carrying red hammer-and-sickle banners, protesters squatted on a major thoroughfare in the temple-studded capital, shouting anti-king slogans.

"We don't want absolute

monarchy... We want democracy," they chanted at the rally, organised by Nepal's seven mainstream political parties, which say they have been sidelined by the king.

Today's protests came hours after the monarch made his statement.

The king, who is camping in the resort town of Pokhara in west Nepal, also urged anti-monarchy Maoist rebels to shun violence and rejoin the mainstream.

"Let us listen to others, put across our views, do away with discord and enhance mutual understanding; let us consolidate peace and democracy," he said.

Gyanendra plunged the Himalayan kingdom into turmoil in February 2005 when he seized absolute power, firing the government, jailing politicians and suspending civil liberties, including media freedom.

He said the move was necessary to quell the 10-year-old Maoist insurgency in which over 13,000 people have died. But he has faced near daily protests in recent weeks.

# Nepal King swears by Constitution, all others sceptical

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY

19

ANY hope that King Gyanendra would give a clear response to the Supreme Court's direction that the Nepalese King should act solely on the advice of elected ministers was shattered when the royal made only an unconvincing appeal to "willing democratic parties" to come forward for dialogue to restore the democratic process.

"Let us hear each other, remove differences, build consensus and conciliation and strengthen peace and democracy," said Gyanendra in his speech on the occasion of the country's Democracy Day. But political parties have characterised the king's appeal as "half-hearted" and aimed at legitimising his takeover of executive powers on February 1 last year.

"We cannot achieve real democracy so long as the king stays," said a statement issued



by the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML).

Gyanendra, however, made it clear that any one coming forward for dialogue has to recognise the recently held elections to the municipal bodies as a meaningful exercise in democracy. Only 21 per cent voters had cast their ballots for less than half the 4,100 seats in 58 municipalities for which contestants had filed nominations. Pro-democracy political parties had boycotted the poll. "This successful exercise has encouraged the Nepalese to have an election conducted for all the representative bodies," said Gyanendra.



# Nepal parties reject reconciliation

## King Gyanendra's appeal for democratic process is meaningless, say leaders

**KATHMANDU:** Rejecting King Gyanendra's appeal to come together for reactivating the stalled democratic process in Nepal as "meaningless" and "artificial", the pro-democracy seven-party alliance on Sunday staged a major rally to protest his autocratic rule.

In his appeal for the first time after the seizure of power last year, King Gyanendra said, "We call on all willing political parties to come forth to fully activate, at the earliest, the stalled democratic process in the greater interest of the nation." But

senior leaders of the alliance, who addressed the rally vowed to continue the fight against the King's direct rule and rejected any possibility of compromise with him.

### "Artificial call"

"It is meaningless offer", said CPN-UML leader Subhash Nemwang, adding there is nothing new in the King's call for dialogue and questioned whether it was his genuine effort.

"It is an artificial appeal that does not mean anything for us. If he is really serious about resolv-

ing the problems then he should have directly approached us and not made such a vague appeal," Khadga Prasad Oli, deputy leader of the Communist Party of Nepal said.

The parties also held prayer meetings to mourn the death of two political activists during peaceful anti-elections rallies on February 8.

In Kathmandu, more than 6,000 political activists gathered to oppose the authoritarian rule and mourn the death of Nepal Communist Party-UML activist Umeshchandra Thapa and Ne-

pali Congress (Democratic) worker Hurrilal Ranamagar, who were killed during an army shootout in western Nepal two weeks ago.

### Peaceful rally

Later, the seven-party alliance took out peaceful rallies carrying the photographs of the duo, whom they call the first martyrs of the pro-democracy agitation, and went round the city before converging into a public meeting.

Constituent Assembly election is the only way out to re-

solve the current political crisis said Janamorcha Nepal leader Lilamani Pokhrel, adding absolute monarchy has no place in the present democratic world.

If the Government tries to suppress the peaceful movement, the people will have to opt for other choices, he warned.

Nepali Congress general secretary Shushil Koirala said monarchy is the only destabilising force in the country, so the present movement is directed against abolishing autocratic monarchy. — PTI

# Royal rubbish

Nepalese King gets slap on wrist

There's a lot to be said for the adage about misfortune and twins never coming singly because it seems to ring true for King Gyanendra, who has suffered two setbacks within a week. The 8 February municipal poll was a farce, even if he refuses to admit it, because the results have done the talking. Now comes the Supreme Court's historic judgment about the formation of the Royal Commission for Corruption Control being unconstitutional and that it needs to be immediately dissolved — a slap, if ever, in the King's face. Formed two weeks after he assumed executive powers on 1 February 2005, the Commission was empowered to summon anyone suspected of whatever. About a dozen former ministers were targeted. Last July, it sentenced former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to two years' imprisonment for alleged irregularities in the multimillion dollar Asian Development Bank-funded Melamchi drinking water project and fined Rs (NC) 9 lakh. His release within hours of the RCCC's dissolution justifies his earlier contention about its appointment being "unconstitutional and illegal". If the King was really serious about controlling corruption or punishing offenders, he might have relied on the existing Commission for the Abuse of Investigation of Authority, the Revenue Investigation Department and the Special Police Department. It is clear that the motive behind forming the RCCC was to finish former ministers politically.

The ruling resurrects the independence of Nepal's judiciary and should strengthen citizens' trust in the apex court. Corruption is second nature in a country where generous funds from donor countries should have lifted the majority above the poverty line. If, despite new developments, the King is determined to play the bull in a china shop then the future cannot be anything but bleak. Maoist supremo Prachanda, perhaps, was not exaggerating when he told the BBC that "King Gyanendra will ultimately be exiled or executed... he has taken steps that do not give any room for compromise". For Nepal's sake, might that not come to pass.

THE HUMANITARIAN

# King's corruption panel gone, Deuba released

REUTERS  
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 14

JAILED former Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was freed from prison on Monday after the Supreme Court dissolved the controversial anti-graft panel which jailed him, a relative and party officials said.

central committee leader of Deuba's Nepali Congress (Democratic) Party, confirmed the former Prime Minister had been released, as did party spokesman Minendra Rijal. But there was no official word on the release.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court dissolved the controversial anti-corruption



Deuba in Kathmandu after his release on Tuesday. AP

"He has been released. He is at home and in good health," said Bicky Deuba, the former PM's nephew. The Royal Commission for Corruption Control, formed last year after King Gyanendra sacked Deuba and assumed absolute power, had jailed Deuba after accusing him of embezzling \$5.3 million in awarding a contract to supply drinking water to Kathmandu.

Deep Kumar Upadhyay, a

panel saying it was established "against the spirit of the constitution." It also outlawed all decisions taken by the Commission, paving the way for Deuba's release. Deuba was sacked by King Gyanendra last year for failing to curb a Maoist insurgency which has killed over 13,000 people since it began in 1996. However, analysts say the King's one-year rule had not improved the situation.

# Fight will go on: Deuba

Conspiracy foiled, says ex-Premier

**KATHMANDU:** Nepal's ousted Premier was defiant after being released from prison early on Tuesday, hours after the Supreme Court dissolved the royal anti-corruption body that jailed him, striking a blow against King Gyanendra's absolute rule.

"The conspiracy to assassinate our political character has been foiled," Sher Bahadur Deuba told journalists at a press conference.

"I am committed to democracy and in the days ahead I will be fighting alongside the seven-party political alliance," he said. "I will not compromise with the

King at the cost of democracy."

About 115 political leaders and human rights activists were also freed on Tuesday in Kathmandu and neighbouring Patan town, though another 700 also rounded up by the King's Government ahead of controversial elections held last week were still in detention, an official said.

"Some were released on the basis of a court order, and some were released by the Government without any reason," Kathmandu's chief administrator Shushil Ghimrie told AFP.

Mr. Deuba was jailed for two years last July on accusations of



*Sher Bahadur Deuba*

corruption by a body established after the King sacked him as Prime Minister, kicked out his Government and assumed total control on February 1 last year. — AFP

## জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের মৃত্যু বা নির্বাসন চান প্রচণ্ড

নয়া দিল্লি, ১৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: নেপালের রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে হয় মৃত্যুদণ্ড দেওয়া হবে নয়তো নির্বাসনে পাঠানো হবে, কারণ তিনি রাজনৈতিক আলোচনার সব দিক বন্ধ করে দিয়েছেন। এই হুমকি নেপালের মাওবাদী প্রধান প্রচণ্ডের।

একটি ব্রিটিশ চ্যানেলকে দেওয়া সাক্ষাৎকারে আজ প্রচণ্ড বলেন, “জ্ঞানেন্দ্র এমন সব ব্যবস্থা নিচ্ছেন, যা দেশে শান্তি প্রতিষ্ঠার সব পথ বন্ধ করে দিচ্ছে। মাওবাদীরা এবং রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি তাঁকে আলোচনার প্রস্তাব দিলেও তিনি তাতে কান দেননি। দেশটাকে তিনি নরকে পরিণত করেছেন। মৃত্যু অথবা নির্বাসন— যে কোনও একটি পরিণতি লেখা রয়েছে তাঁর জন্য। জনতার আদালতে তাঁর বিচার হবে।”

তবে প্রচণ্ড হুমকি দিলেও এই মাওবাদী নেতার নামের সঙ্গে চেহরার বা ব্যবহারের কোনও মিলই নেই। ব্রিটিশ সাংবাদিক বলেছেন, “প্রচণ্ড ৫২ বছর বয়সী অত্যন্ত নম্র, লাজুক, ভদ্র ও শান্তশিষ্ট এক ভদ্রলোক। এই প্রথম টিভিতে সাক্ষাৎকার দিতে গিয়ে তিনি যথেষ্ট উত্তেজিত ছিলেন। ছটফট করছিলেন, হাসছিলেন, এমনকী মজাও করছিলেন। তবে

অনেক বিপ্লবী নেতার মতো তিনি অহেতুক অহংকারী নন।”

তাঁকে প্রশ্ন করা হয়, মাওবাদীরা কি কাঠমন্ডু দখল করতে পারবে? দোভাষীর মাধ্যমে দেওয়া এই সাক্ষাৎকারে প্রচণ্ড নেপালি ভাষায় বলেন, “আগে তো ভেবেছিলাম পারব। কিন্তু আমেরিকা, ব্রিটেন ও ভারতের মতো দেশ মাওবাদীদের দমন করার বিষয়ে জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের নীতিকে সমর্থন করছে। ফলে কাজটা একটু কঠিন হয়ে গিয়েছে। তবে তার মানে এই নয়, যে কখনওই পারব না। পাঁচ বছরের মধ্যে আমরা নেপালকে প্রজাতন্ত্র রাষ্ট্রে পরিণত করব।”

প্রচণ্ড জানান, নেপালে এই রাজনৈতিক বিপ্লবে শিশুদের মৃত্যুতে তিনি দুঃখিত। কিন্তু মাওবাদীরা শিশুদের কখনওই দলে সামিল করে না। তাঁর দাবি, “পিপলস্ লিবারেশন আর্মি নয়, গ্রামীণ জঙ্গিরা শিশুদের দলে নেয়।” ভারতের মাওবাদীদের সঙ্গে তাঁদের আদর্শগত সম্পর্ক ছাড়া অন্য সম্পর্কের কথা খারিজ করে দেন তিনি। পেরুর ‘সাইনিং পাথ’ বিপ্লবীদের দ্বারা উদ্বুদ্ধ প্রচণ্ড বলেন, “আমরাও কমিউনিস্ট, ওঁরাও। আর কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই ওঁদের সঙ্গে।” — রয়টার্স

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

# নেপালে মাওবাদী সংঘর্ষে হত ২০ গণতন্ত্র দিবসে মহাবিক্ষোভে ৭ দলের জোট

১১ ফেব্রুয়ারি— মেকি নির্বাচন ও স্বৈরতন্ত্রী রাজ শাসনের বিরুদ্ধে সারা নেপালে বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ সংগঠিত করছে ৭ দলের জোট। নির্বাচন পরবর্তী রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি পর্যালোচনা ও বিক্ষোভ কর্মসূচি নিয়ে জোটের বৈঠক হওয়ার কথা ছিল আজ, শনিবার। ১০ ফেব্রুয়ারি জোট মুখপাত্র ও নেপালি কংগ্রেস নেতা কৃষ্ণ মিতাউলাকে পুলিশ গ্রেপ্তার করায় ওই বৈঠক পিছিয়ে গেছে দুদিন। হবে সোমবার। ৭ ফাল্গুন (২০ ফেব্রুয়ারি) নেপালে গণতন্ত্র দিবস পালিত হয়। ওই দিন রাজধানী কাঠমান্ডু-সহ সমস্ত জেলা ও মহকুমা সদরে বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ সংগঠিত করা হবে। রাজতন্ত্রের অবসান, পরিপূর্ণ গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠা, গণ পরিষদ গঠন ও সাধারণ নির্বাচনের দাবি সামনে রেখেই এই বিক্ষোভ। নেপাল কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (ইউ এম এল) স্ট্যান্ডিং কমিটি সদস্য প্রদীপ নেপালের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করা হলে তিনি জানান, ৭ পার্টি জোটের বিক্ষোভ কর্মসূচি চূড়ান্ত করা হবে

জ্যোতিপ্রকাশ খান, কাঠমান্ডু

সোমবার। এ ব্যাপারে মাওবাদী নেতৃবৃন্দের সঙ্গেও মত বিনিময় করা হতে পারে। ২৪ চৈত্র

(৭ এপ্রিল) নেপালের সংবিধান দিবস। পালিত হচ্ছে রামনবমী-ও। এদিন আরও ব্যাপক বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ করার প্রস্তুতি নিচ্ছে ৭ পার্টি জোট। এদিকে মধ্যপুর, ভজপুর ও সিঞ্জা পুরসভায় মেয়র ও মেয়র পারিষদদের দপ্তরেই ঢুকতে দিলেন না জনতা। ডাঙ-এ সি পি এন (ইউ এম এল) নেতা উমেশচন্দ্র থাপার হত্যাকাণ্ডের প্রতিবাদে শনিবারও বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ হয় কাঠমান্ডু ও জেলা শহরগুলিতে। এদিকে নওয়াল পারাসি জেলায় মাওবাদী ও নিরাপত্তারক্ষী বাহিনীর মধ্যে জোর সঙ্ঘর্ষের খবর পাওয়া গেছে। ১৫ জন নিরাপত্তা কর্মী ও ৫ জন মাওবাদী নিহত হয়েছে। ১২ নিরাপত্তা কর্মীকে মাওবাদীরা ধরে নিয়ে গেছে। এদিকে পুরসভা নির্বাচনের ব্যাপারে ভারত-সহ আন্তর্জাতিক মহলের বিরূপ সমালোচনাকে দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ ব্যাপারে হস্তক্ষেপ বলে দাবি করেছে নেপাল সরকার।

# Royal loo more precious than human life in Nepal

**INDO-Asian News Service**  
Kathmandu, February 11

IN NEPAL, one of the poorest countries in the world, human life comes cheap, costing far less than a makeshift bathroom for the king.

Last month, King Gyanendra, who seized power last year, went on a three-week tour of the eastern districts, which cost the cash-strapped government dear.

Besides having to pay for helicopter fuel, security for the royal couple and putting up welcome arches, the royalist government also had to foot an additional bill — for a lavish bathroom.

"Kings of other countries lead ordinary lives. They wear poor man's clothes and eat ordinary food," the *Jana Astha* weekly



AFP  
The family members of slain Nepalese politician Umesh Chandra Thapa grieve as his body lies ready for the funeral in Kathmandu on Friday.



**King Gyanendra**  
*Can't think small*

wrote. "But our king stayed at the regional headquarters of the Armed Police Force where the walls of the VIP guesthouse were torn down to build a toilet." According to the weekly, the construction cost \$2,800.

The news came a few days after the royal government paid the family of a taxi driver shot in Kathmandu for plying his cab during Monday's strike \$2,100 — less than the cost of the makeshift bathroom.

The biggest irony is, after having built such a costly loo, the government now does not know what to do with it. After the King left, it stays locked.

Since last month, when the government began a massive crackdown on Opposition activists, a large group of women were detained in the same place.

However, *Jana Astha* reported the detainees were not allowed to use the hallowed toilet. Instead, they had to make do with the constables' toilet that does not even have power lines.



# Nepal slams insolent world

**Kathmandu, Feb. 11 (PTI):** In a strong rejoinder to countries which had criticised the recently-held municipal polls, the royalist government in Nepal asked them to refrain from making "insolent", "baseless" and "unacceptable" comments on its "domestic" affairs.

The government "finds the statements made by a few countries on the municipal polls in Nepal as totally objectionable thus unacceptable, and asks them to refrain from making such insolent comments on matters that fall within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign country," the foreign ministry said.

The government claimed that the elections, which witnessed a very low voter turnout in addition to an Opposition boycott, were held without any incidents of rigging and booth-capturing.

The Opposition had described the polls, the first after King Gyanendra's takeover in February, 2005, as "a drama to legitimise authoritarian rule".

The royalist government said it was "incomprehensible why some countries have gone to the extent of deploring the municipal elections instead of appreciating the sincere efforts made to put derailed democracy back on track".

Countries, including India, the US, Britain, Japan and the EU called polls a "hollow and meaningless exercise" and asked Gyanendra to restore democracy and freedom.

Britain had said the polls were "a meaningless exercise conducted without people's support".

India had criticised the election process saying: "Any credible electoral exercise should have the active involve-

ment and participation of all the mainstream parties."

The US had said the polls held by keeping political activists in detention, restricting media and not inviting international observers were a hollow exercise to legitimise power.

Nepal's largest donor, Japan, also deplored the way elections were held without broad popular support and regretted that activists of the political parties were arrested in the process.

Earlier, the vice-chairman of the council of ministers, Tulsji Giri called the comments from the international community as "baseless" and said the government would go on to hold parliamentary elections.

"The claims are baseless. They have been lying and their comments are a part of a ploy to destabilise Nepal," he said yesterday.

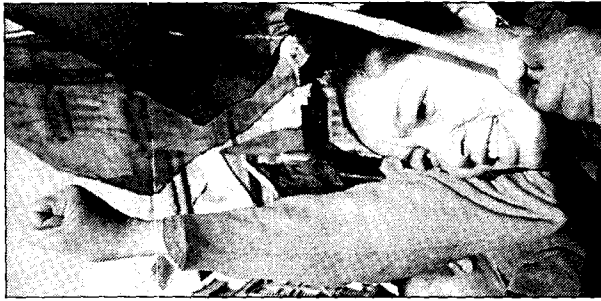
The Nepali Congress today said the Opposition boycott of the polls had proved to be "highly successful".

"The international community's straight evaluation of the polls has proved that the polls were no more than a hollow attempt to legitimise autocratic rule," a party spokesperson said.

## Royal 'victory'

Nepal today announced that government-backed candidates won 29 powerful mayoral seats and another 29 seats were won by independent candidates who were said to support the king.

Results announced by the election commission said candidates from the pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra party won 25 seats while candidates from the pro-government Nepal Sadbhawana party won four.



An anti-monarchy activist protests in Kathmandu. (Reuters)

# Talk it over

Guns no solution to Nepal anarchy

Hi 8r  
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5/6

Nepal's Maoists have called off their seven-day bandh, happy it served the purpose of sabotaging the 8 February municipal elections. The royalist government is definitely not going to take this lying down, but it is for the world to read between the lines. The polls were reportedly conducted in only 58 municipalities in 43 of the 76 districts, with poor turnout and willing voters being helped by armed personnel. That several candidates were returned unopposed is precisely what King Gyanendra had in mind when he announced elections last October. Of course, many filed nominations but withdrew fearing Maoist reprisal. At least two candidates were killed and 13 people died 48 hours before the poll. The King may have satisfied himself but does holding an election in the shadow of the gun and with no political parties participating any kind of a democratic exercise? With the Maoists breathing fire, it could well spell disaster for the elected candidates after they are sworn in.

King Gyanendra's 1 February 2005 proclamation after dismissing the democratically-elected government may have reflected a resolve "to defend multiparty democracy by restoring peace for the nation", but what he is now doing is just the opposite. Had peace been the priority, he should have reciprocated the Maoists' conciliatory gesture of a four-month unilateral ceasefire. That doubtless was a truce of significance with two earlier ones having come to nought. Also significant was the Maoists' willingness to accept multiparty democracy if elections were held to the constituent assembly. The King should ponder the recent rather well-timed interview Maoist supremo Prachanda gave to a local daily in which he said a constituent assembly "is not a demand of the Communists... it is a democratic process established by capitalists a long time ago". The King must realise that dialogue, and not guns, is the only viable option.

12 11 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Pro-King party wins most seats in Nepal polls

AGENCIES

KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 10

95 9 11/2

NEPAL's pro-King Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (Thapa) led by Home Minister Kamal Thapa has won most of the seats in the municipal polls which were boycotted by key political parties amidst charges of rigging and misuse of security forces.

Out of the 53 declared results, candidates belonging to Thapa's party won in 22 municipalities including nine unopposed, the Election Commission said today.

Four mayors went to Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Mandal), another pro-King party led by Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation, Badri Prasad Mandal and the rest went to independent candidates.

India, the US, Japan and the EU have questioned the credibility of the election in which no major political party took part and hundreds of activists were arrested. The results came in the backdrop of simmering anger over the death of a Nepali Congress (Democratic) worker, who was shot dead by the Army on poll day.

Party sources said security forces shot dead Hurilal Rana, 25, of Dhangadi. Rana was cremated on Friday, attended by political activists in-



**Umesh Thapa killed in police firing in Dang was cremated in Kathmandu on Friday. AP**

cluding senior Opposition leaders.

Britain has also condemned the elections, saying the low turnout was proof that the vote lacked public support.

Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells on Thursday said Britain did not believe that the polls "were a meaningful exercise in canvassing the political wishes of the people of Nepal."

# More violence as Nepal mulls fresh polls

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Feb. 10. — Even as they called off their four-day nationwide bandh, Nepal's Maoist guerrillas struck again in western Nepal, ambushing a security convoy and capturing 12 soldiers and policemen.

At least seven people, including a civilian, were killed in the attack on Thursday. There are fears that the number of casual-

ties may be higher in reality. Till late afternoon, the state media employed to hold up Wednesday's controversial municipal polls as a success with mass participation, remained silent on the attack while the Maoists issued a statement from underground, detailing the casualties.

On Friday, Mr Ramesh Koirala, the spokesman of the guerrillas' self-styled Western Military Command, made pub-

lic the names of 12 soldiers and policemen taken under control after the rebels attacked a security convoy on the East-West highway, also known as Mahendra Highway, that passes through Rumbhapur town in western Nepal.

The guerrillas said four of their cadres as well as a woman passerby who was caught in the crossfire had been killed. Initial media reports said at least two security personnel had been

killed though the rebels claimed the toll was higher.

A convoy of five military vehicles was caught in the ambush with the rebels setting four ablaze, reports said. Meanwhile in the capital, the chief election commissioner Mr Keshav Raj Rajbhandari said

on Friday that fresh municipal elections would be held to fill the over 2200 posts left vacant despite Wednesday's elections due to lack of contestants for

the posts or due to the resignation of people who fear the Maoists.

Mr Rajbhandari said talks were being held with security and government officials to determine a date for the repolling.

The state media called the exercise a success despite the low turnout of 21 percent, citing the 11 percent voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir in India.

## A royal farce in Nepal

**A**nationwide election that could not be held in half the number of districts in the country; which all major political parties boycotted; for which candidates could be found only for a third of the available posts; and which attracted just 21 per cent of voters on election day — this farce is what King Gyanendra would have the world believe heralds the return of democracy in Nepal. The results are no surprise. Most contestants were either pro-royal independents or belonged to the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party; so the municipalities where the elections were held are now in the hands of the King's men and women. The royal camp blames the Maoist threat of violence for the low participation. That is to ignore the undemocratic building blocks to this electoral exercise, including restrictions on the media, the arrest of political leaders, and the ban on legitimate political activities. Judging by the immediate reaction, the world has not been taken in. New Delhi has correctly said the elections lacked credibility and would not help restore democracy in Nepal. The United States condemned the entire exercise as a "hollow attempt" by the King to legitimise the power he grabbed unconstitutionally in February 2005. Britain and Japan have also come out against the King. Elections are a part of a process, all the elements of which have to be democratic. Plainly, an election imposed by an autocratic regime with patently undemocratic rules cannot pass for democracy.

The cynicism with which King Gyanendra is trying to window-dress his unconstitutional rule is bound to strengthen the republican sentiment in Nepal. Until recently, it was only the Maoists who wanted to abolish the monarchy. The people were apprehensive that the armed Maoists would rush into the vacuum left by the monarchy and establish their own dictatorship. In this respect, the unequivocal declaration by the Maoist leader, Prachanda, in an interview to *The Hindu*, that the party had embraced the idea of a multi-party democracy (and his appeal to similar parties in India to do the same) is encouraging. It was on this understanding that the Maoists and an alliance of seven political parties decided to join hands last September in the struggle for democracy. Although these parties are still not fully convinced about doing away with Nepal's monarchy, they are not closed to the idea as much as they were even a year ago. India, whose initial hopes that the monarch would act honourably have been dashed, may also need to rethink its support for retaining the "two pillar" formula of a constitutional monarchy in a multiparty democracy, as Prachanda has demanded. But the Maoists must realise that they can never hope to be completely trusted by democratic forces so long as they are committed to achieving their political goals through violence. Were they to give up the armed struggle, they would also deny the King the fig leaf of a reason for his continued authoritarian rule and delaying the return to democracy.

# “Multiparty democracy in Nepal will be message to Indian Naxalites”

In the second and final part of this exclusive interview with *The Hindu*, Maoist leader Prachanda provides his evaluation of the role of India, China, and the United States in the struggle for democracy in Nepal. And he has words of advice for the Maoists in India: it is time you started thinking about multiparty competitive democracy as well.

Siddharth Varadarajan

I want to ask you about the 2001 royal palace massacre. I was in Kathmandu to cover the story. I was initially suspicious of the Dipendra theory but later, I spoke to close relatives of those who died – who spoke to survivors like Princess Ketaki Chester who cannot really be considered part of monarchical factions with a particular agenda. And they all said it was Dipendra who committed the crime.

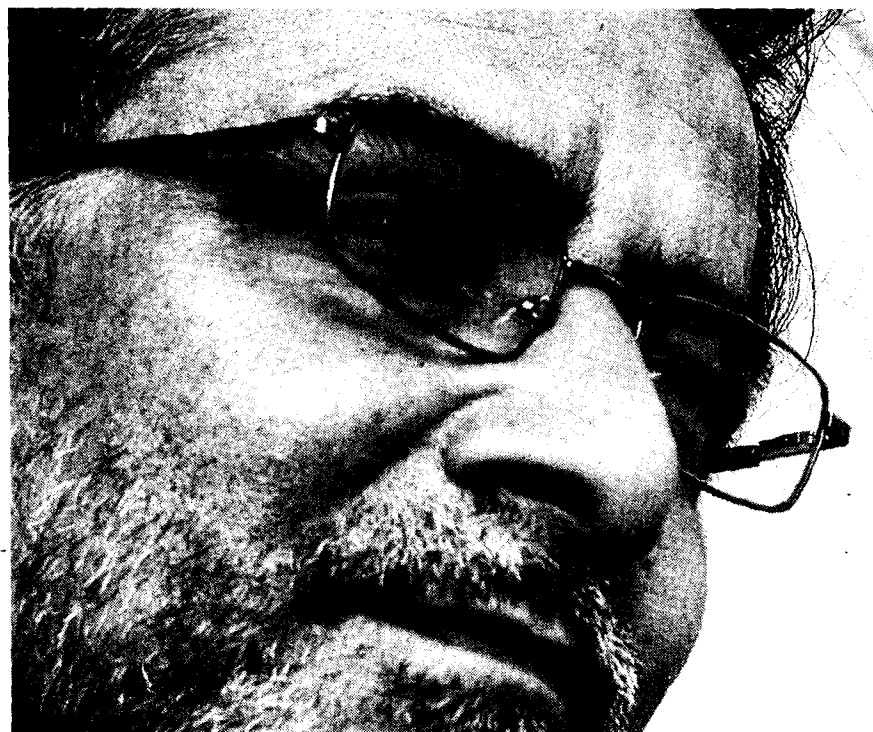
**Prachanda:** This is impossible. Of course, the [Gyanendra] clique has managed to establish the story amongst its own circles, among people who may be neutral as you say. They have established it in their class but that is not the reality. You know how different stories were put out immediately, that the guns went off automatically, then another story was made. There was even an effort to suggest Maoists had made a surprise attack. In the end, they pinned it on Dipendra. So the question arises, if it was so clear-cut, why didn't this story come out in the beginning? But my main logic is not this. If you look at the whole history of [crown prince] Paras – he was there at the time; second, the role of Gyanendra in the 1990 movement. He had a big role then – he wanted to shoot down 2,000 people in Kathmandu and control the movement through force, he was a die-hard element. And what kind of [person] Paras is – this is also known. For more than a month, the massacre was planned and Gyanendra based himself outside. So I don't think for even a moment it was Dipendra. And in any case, the Nepali people simply refuse to believe this story.

**How do you see the role of India today? Last year, when the king seized power, India took a tough stand against him that surprised many. It is also significant that the Indian Government does not seem to regard the Nepal Maoists as illegitimate in the way that the king and the U.S. regard them.**

In the past, India's policy was one of total alignment with the king. Last year, after February 1, ever since the situation changed in a big way, the role of the Indian authorities strikes us as positive. There is now a tough stand against autocracy. Still, the two-pillar theory [that Nepal's stability rests equally on constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy] persists and the Indian authorities have not officially abandoned it. They are right to support the democratic movement, but sticking to the two-pillar theory causes confusion...

**But if India abandons it, wouldn't the king accuse the Indians of interfering in Nepal's affairs, and then he will accuse the Maoists of being agents of India...**

We don't think such a thing is possible. During the 1990 movement, when Rajiv Gandhi imposed a blockade on Nepal, the Nepali people did not oppose the blockade because it was in the context of the blockade



Prachanda: “Once a democratic republic is established in Nepal, the doubts that have existed in the relations between Nepal and India can be ended.”  
– PHOTO: V. SWERSHAN

that the democratic movement picked up speed and advanced very fast. If India is in favour of the democratic movement and a forward-looking political solution, then it will not be considered intervention. But if India supports regressive forces, this would be called intervention. Some political leaders came from India recently to show solidarity with the movement. Gyanendra tried illegally to detain them at the airport, calling it intervention. But more than 99 per cent of Nepali people did not regard that as intervention. Of course, when Hindu fundamentalists like this [VHP leader Ashok] Singhal come to Nepal, the king welcomes them. When they crown him 'King of the Hindus,' he doesn't call it interference! So the anger of the Nepalese people has grown against the king, not India.

**If you were to meet Manmohan Singh, what would you ask him to do?**

First, change this two-pillar theory. The Nepali people are trying to end the monarchy and you should end your relationship with it. Second, release all our comrades who are in prison in India. We are fighting for genuine multiparty democracy but they are imprisoned there, in Patna, Siliguri, Chennai. If you release them all, a message will go out. And if you feel the Naxalite movement in India is a problem for you, we feel we are trying to deal with the problems in Nepal in a new way, so if you release our comrades and we are successful in establishing multiparty democracy in Nepal, this will be a very big message for the Naxalite movement in India.

In other words, the ground will be readied for them to think in a new political way. Words are not enough, we need to validate what we are saying by establishing that democracy. Third, once a democratic republic is established in Nepal, then the historical doubts that have existed in the relations between Nepal and India can be ended once and for all. So for all these reasons, you should strongly support the movement for democracy.

**In many ways, the U.S. has emerged as the king's strongest backer. How do you evaluate Washington's role?**

The U.S. role from the beginning has been negative and they are still trying to effect a compromise between the monarch and the political parties against the Maoists. Despite the fact that we are talking of pushing multiparty democracy, the U.S. has decided our movement and alliance has to be crushed.

**What is the American interest in being soft on the king?**

It is not that they are afraid of what might happen in Nepal. Rather, their strategy is against the Indian and Chinese people and also, I think, against the Indian and Chinese authorities. The U.S. has a grand strategy, and Bush is talking of China and India as big economic powers and even as threats. Perhaps they see Nepal as a country that is between these two countries and believe that if the situation here does not give rise to forces which are in step with the U.S., then there could be a problem. So the U.S. is

looking at Nepal from the strategic point of view. It is not that they have any economic interest here. Political control is the key, so they want to strengthen the king.

**What about the attitude of China? Some people in India argue that if India continues to take a tough stand against the king, he will turn to China for help and Beijing will benefit strategically at New Delhi's expense.**

Earlier, we had a doubt that perhaps China might be behind the king, that China would try and take advantage. But then we analysed the situation and came to the conclusion that China would not play this role. China's relations with India are improving and China will not want to jeopardise such a big interest by backing the Nepal king. And in the end, I think our analysis has been proved correct. Recently, when Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran went to Beijing, he had talks, and a few days later, for the first time, the Chinese authorities issued a statement saying they are worried about the situation inside Nepal and that it needs a careful resolution. Until then, Beijing had always maintained that what was happening inside Nepal was an internal problem.

China has no interest in antagonising India to build a relationship with the king. This is our analysis. We are glad with the new situation that is emerging after Shyam Saran went to China. If China and India do not work together, there will be a big problem not only for now but the future. So they need to have an understanding in favour of democracy, in favour of the people of Nepal. Our movement is going forward and I think in two or three months, if the struggle continues, there is a real chance of ending the kingship once and for all and making a democratic republic in Nepal. This is the best outcome for China and India and everyone else. Of course, the U.S. does not want this. They want to maintain the monarchy at all costs.

**To what extent do you think the logic of your line on multiparty democracy applies also to the Maoist movements in India?**

We believe it applies to them too. We want to debate this. They have to understand this and go down this route. Both on the question of leadership and on multiparty democracy, or rather multiparty competition I believe those who call themselves revolutionaries in India need to think about these issues. And there is a need to go in the direction of that practice. We wish to debate with them on this. If revolutionaries are not going to look at the need for ideological development, they will not go anywhere.

**Indian police agencies say you are providing weapons and training to the Indian Maoists but here you are saying they should go in for multiparty competition...**

There is no question of us giving anything. They blame us for Madhubani, Jehanabad, but we have no relationship of this kind with them.

(The complete transcript of this interview has been posted on [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com))

# US, India democracy plea to Nepal

**Statesman News Service**

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — The extremely low voter turnout for Nepal Municipal elections yesterday has led to India, as well as the United States of America, asking King Gyanendra to change his stance on talks with the Opposition political parties.

While the USA used strong language in its statement, the Indian response was more "diplomatic".

The Indian ministry of

external affairs spokesperson, Mr Navtej Sarna noted the Election Commission of Nepal's report on the conduct of municipal elections.

The official voter turnout was just 22.07 per cent yesterday, all over the country.

He pointed out the elections were held in the backdrop of boycott by political parties, whose "legitimate activities" were sharply curtailed by the state with "continued arrest and detention in various forms of many of their leaders".

There also had been several violent attacks by the Maoists in the run-up to the elections.

India has said "any credible electoral exercise should have the active involvement and participation of all the mainstream parties". "Only then would such elections be able to contribute to the restoration of democracy and political stability," said Mr Sarna.

He added that the grave challenges facing Nepal "demand the initiation of a genuine process of national reconciliation, dialogue

and participation which can facilitate a peaceful political settlement".

The US state department spokesperson, Mr Sean McCormack, said: "The United States of America believes Nepal's municipal elections called by the King represented a hollow attempt to legitimise his power."

He added that the King's refusal to restore democracy, release political prisoners and talk to the political parties "is leading his country further down the path of violence and disorder".

2006

THE STATESMAN



# Nepal polls fail to enhance king's image

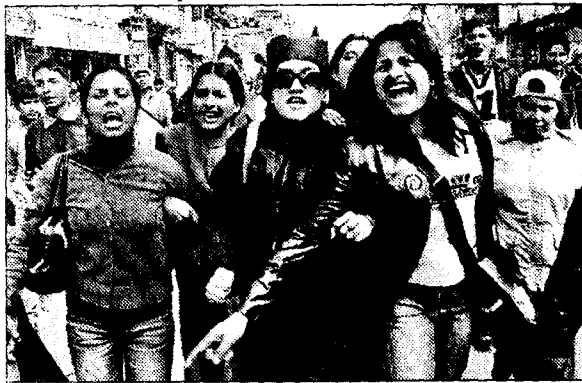
Debasis Sarkar

PANIKANKI (INDO-NEPAL BORDER)  
9 FEBRUARY

**A**FTER the 'not so palatable' US reaction to the just-concluded nationwide civic body election in Nepal on Wednesday, it seems King Gyanendra's endeavour to boost his image within or outside Nepal by calling for the election, could not yield much.

has not changed much. Along with India and other South Asian countries, the US was also urging the Himalayan country to take adequate action to restore normalcy and withdraw bans imposed on the international media.

At a press briefing in Washington DC on Wednesday, US state department spokesman Sean McCormack said there was a clear lack of public sup-



House On Fire: Agitating Nepal activists protest against army firing in Dang. - AP

Nepal, already under pressure from neighbouring as well as other countries in trade and commerce, political and other affairs, is not likely to breathe any easier in the near future. After conclusion of elections for 618 municipal seats in 36 municipalities in 28 districts across the country, amidst reports of violence and protests by seven agitating political parties, the US officially said: "Nepal's municipal elections called by the king represented a hollow attempt to legitimise his power."

Apparently, the US view of Nepal, that had taken a downward turn after imposition of emergency in February, 2005,

port for these elections. "Voter turnout in the capital is estimated at under 25%. Outside Kathmandu, turnout was reportedly half that amount in some places," he said.

The US attitude is going to bias views of several other countries towards Nepal. This is likely to affect external affairs of the country, putting extra pressure on the king, who is already having a tough time internally, political observers felt. According to chief election commissioner of Nepal, KR Rajbhandari, the number of voters was encouraging. But as figures show, on an average only 20% of the voters practised their electoral right.

2006

## প্রহসনের গণতন্ত্র

লক্ষা ছিল, প্রাসাদের জন্য গণতান্ত্রিক বৈধতা আদায় করা। সেই লক্ষ্যেই রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সরকার দেশের ৫৮টি পুরসভায় নির্বাচনের অনুষ্ঠান করিয়াছিল। কিন্তু দেশের প্রায় সব রাজনৈতিক দলই নির্বাচন বয়কট করে। অর্ধেকেরও বেশি আসনে কোনও প্রার্থীই মনমোয়ন পেশ করেন নাই। ভোটগ্রহণের সময়ও দেখা গেল, বুথ ফাঁকা, ভোটদানে ভোটারদের কোনও আগ্রহই নাই, রক্ষীদের নিশ্চিন্ত নিরাপত্তার বলয় সঙ্কেত জনসাধারণ ভোটগ্রহণ কেন্দ্রে হইতে দূরে-দূরেই সরিয়া থাকিলেন। এক কথায়, নেপালরাজের গণতান্ত্রিক পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা একটি হাস্যকর প্রহসন হইয়া রহিল। অনেকে বলিতেছেন, মাওবাদী জঙ্গিদের ছমকির জমাই এমন অবস্থা হইয়াছে। অংশত তাহা সত্যও। মাওবাদীরা জনসাধারণকে ভোটদানে বিরত থাকিতে বলিয়াছিল। এমনকী ভোটে প্রার্থী হইলেও প্রাণনাশের ছমকি দেয়। সে ছমকি যে তাহারা কার্যকর করার ক্ষমতা ধরে, তাহা বুঝাইতে নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী ও পুলিশের উপর ক্রমাগত হামলাও চালাইয়া যায়। কিন্তু মাওবাদীদের কাছে ইহা প্রত্যাশিতই ছিল। তাহাদের শান্তি-আলোচনার প্রস্তাব এবং একতরফা সংঘর্ষ-বিরতিতে প্রাসাদ সাড়া না দেওয়ায় তাহারাও যে রাজতন্ত্রের প্রতি বিরূপ হইবে, ইহা স্বতঃসিদ্ধ। কিন্তু পুর-নির্বাচনের নির্ধৃত ঘোষণার সময়ই সরকারের ইহা অনুমান করা উচিত ছিল।

সরকার তবু জেদ করিয়া নির্বাচন ডাকিয়া লোক হাসাইল। নির্বাচিত পার্লামেন্ট বরখাস্ত, সব রাজনৈতিক ক্রিয়াকলাপ নিষিদ্ধ, মতপ্রকাশের মৌলিক অধিকার খর্ব, নেতারা হয় স্বগৃহে অন্তরীণ, নয়তো আত্মগোপনে বাধ্য, প্রকাশ্যে বিক্ষোভ প্রদর্শন, সভা-সমাবেশ আয়োজনও বারণ। ইহা কি নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠানের, গণতান্ত্রিক পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা চালাইবার অনুকূল পরিস্থিতি? শুধু রাজপ্রাসাদের ছকুমত চলিবে, রাজকীয় মুখপাত্রের বিবৃতিই জারি হইবে, আর জনসাধারণ রাজাকে গণতান্ত্রিক আশীর্বাদ দিবেন, তাহা কি হয়? যদি ধরিয়া লওয়া হয় যে মাওবাদীদের সন্ত্রাসই গণতান্ত্রিক নিরীক্ষার এই ব্যর্থতার কারণ, তাহা হইলেও প্রশ্ন ওঠে, সে সন্ত্রাস দমন না করিয়া এমন নিরীক্ষার তাড়াহুড়াই বা কী ছিল? বস্তুত, সে সন্ত্রাসকে নিরস্ত্র করার সুযোগও রাজতন্ত্রের নাগালে ছিল। মাওবাদীরা আত্মসমর্পণ না করিলেও অস্ত্রসংবরণ করিয়াছিল। গণতান্ত্রিক দলগুলির সহিত সমন্বয় করিয়া যৌথ গণ-আন্দোলনে যোগ দিতেও প্রস্তুত ছিল। অন্তত এই পূর্বে তাহাদের আবার সশস্ত্র সন্ত্রাসের পথে ঠেলিয়া দেওয়ার দায় কি রাজতন্ত্র এড়াইতে পারে? পুর-নির্বাচনের আগের দিনও মাওবাদী নেতা 'প্রচণ্ড' প্রাসাদকে আলোচনায় বসার প্রস্তাব দিয়াছেন। কিন্তু প্রাসাদ নিঃসাড়। মাওবাদীদের সহিত একযোগেই সব রাজনৈতিক দলও নির্বাচন বয়কটের ডাক দেয়। ফলে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের গণতন্ত্রী সাজিবার আকাঙ্ক্ষা মাঠে মারা গিয়াছে।

অতীতে বহু দেশেই স্বৈরাচারী শাসকদের তরফে এ ধরনের নির্বাচনী প্রহসন মঞ্চস্থ করিয়া গণতান্ত্রিক বৈধতা অর্জনের চেষ্টা করিতে দেখা গিয়াছে। এই উপমহাদেশেই পাকিস্তানের প্রয়াত প্রেসিডেন্ট জিয়া-উল-হক, বাংলাদেশের ফৌজি নায়ক হুসেন মহম্মদ এরশাদ তাহাদের সামরিক স্বৈরতন্ত্রকে বিশ্বের কাছে গ্রহণযোগ্য করিয়া তুলিতে অনুরূপ নির্বাচনের আয়োজন করেন। জ্ঞানেন্দ্রও তাহাদেরই অনুগমন করিতেছেন। কিন্তু তিনি যে গণতন্ত্রে বিশ্বাসী নন, নেপালের শিশু গণতন্ত্রকে হত্যা করার মাধ্যমেই তাহা ইতিপূর্বে জানাইয়া দিয়াছেন। ভারত ও বহির্বিশ্বের দাবি এবং দেশের ভিতরে জনসাধারণের অভিপ্রায় উপেক্ষা করিয়া আইনসভায় জনপ্রতিনিধি নির্বাচনের লগ্নটিকে অনির্দিষ্টকাল স্থগিত করিয়া দিয়াছেন। এখন পুর-নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে আপন গণতান্ত্রিক দায় প্রতিপন্ন করার প্রয়াস বিশ্বাসযোগ্য হইবে কেমন করিয়া? তাহার এই কাজের ফলে প্রাসাদ তথা রাজতন্ত্রের মর্যাদা জনচক্ষে আরও হ্রাস পাইতে বাধ্য। আর এ সবে ফলে লাভবান হইতেছে কিন্তু মাওবাদীরাই। গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলনের বর্তমান দুর্বলতা ও শক্তিহীনতায় মাওবাদী সন্ত্রাসই প্রাসাদ স্বৈরতন্ত্রের একমাত্র জবাব বা বিকল্প, এমন একটা বিভ্রম জনমনে সঞ্চিত হওয়ার আশঙ্কা। তা ছাড়া, গণতান্ত্রিক ক্রিয়াকলাপ নিষিদ্ধ হওয়ায় সৃষ্ট রাজনৈতিক শূন্যতা ভরাট করিতে মাওবাদী উগ্রপন্থার উত্তরোত্তর সংহত হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা শেষ পর্যন্ত নেপালে সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রের অস্তিত্বকেও সঙ্কটাপন্ন করিতে পারে।

# From people's war to competitive democracy

As leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Prachanda is arguably the most important political player in the Himalayan kingdom today. In an exclusive face-to-face interview with *The Hindu*, he discusses his party's road map for the end to monarchy and the creation of a democratic republic in Nepal.

Siddharth Varadarajan

*Besppectated and greying, 52-year-old Prachanda looks and sounds distinctly professorial. His measured tone and quiet demeanour bear no resemblance to the fearsome descriptions propagated by his royalist detractors. When I met up with him at an undisclosed location, he spoke for more than an hour-and-a-half on a wide range of topics concerning the situation in Nepal, its international ramifications, and the theoretical problems confronting the communist movement in the 21st century, which have led the Maoists to embrace multiparty democracy. Excerpts:*

**In your party plenum last August, you took a momentous decision – to participate in multiparty democracy. If you were going to accept multiparty democracy after 10 years of "people's war," why go about this in a roundabout way?**

**Prachanda:** Three years ago we decided that the key question of the 21st century is how to develop democracy. This meant the negative and positive lessons of the 20th century have to be synthesised for us to move ahead. And we decided we must go in for political competition. Without political competition, a mechanical or metaphysical attitude will be there, without competition we will not be able to go forward. This was a unanimous decision. Last August, we took serious decisions on how practically to build unity with the parliamentary political parties. We don't believe that the peoples' war we initiated was against, or mainly against, multiparty democracy. It was mainly against feudal autocracy, against the feudal structure.

**Is this decision a recognition by you of the impossibility of seizing power through armed struggle?**

Here there is not only one question. There is a specificity to the political and military balance in today's world. The second thing to be seen is the experience of the 20th century. Third, there is the particular class, political, and power balance in Nepal. It is by taking these three together that we came to our conclusion. We are talking of multiparty democracy within a specific constitutional framework that is anti-feudal and anti-imperialist. That is why armed struggle is also necessary, and unity in action with other political parties against the monarchy is also a necessity. The socio-economic change we are fighting for is against feudalism and imperialism and it is within the context of that struggle that we are talking of multiparty democracy.

**If the king says the steps he took last year were wrong and allows free and fair elections under the present Constitution, the Maoists will not take part? Is a new constitutional framework a pre-condition for taking part in elections?**

Yes, you can put it that way. If the king says I was wrong, now come on, let us sit across the table, and then he talks of a free and fair election to a constitutional assembly, we will be ready. Our bottom line is the election of a constitutional assembly, that too under international supervision, either by the United Nations or some other international mediation acceptable to all. Under those circumstances, we will go in for elections and accept whatever the peoples' verdict is. But if the king says make an interim government and hold elections, we will not come forward.

**Is your alliance with the parties tactical rather than strategic? When the monarchy is weakened or defeated, might you turn against them?**

It is not like this. Our decision on multiparty democracy is a strategically, theoretically developed position, that in a communist state, democracy is a necessity. We are telling the parties that we should end not only the autocratic monarchy but monarchy itself. After that, in the multiparty democracy which comes – interim government, constitutional assembly and democratic republic – we are ready to have peaceful competition with you all. Of course, people still have a doubt about us because we have an army. And they ask whether we will abandon our arms after the constitutional assembly. We have said we are ready to reorganise our army and we are ready to make a new Nepal army also. We are talking of a democratic republic and our understanding with the parties is that the way to realise this is the constituent assembly. At that time, any other party would be free to call for a ceremonial monarchy, some may be for constitutional monarchy – such a thing is possible with the seven parties.

**But whatever the outcome, you are ready to accept it?**

We are. This we are saying in clear-cut language.

**Your recent ceasefire did a lot to improve the image of the Maoists, which had been damaged by incidents like the Madi bus blast. What was the logic behind that ceasefire and when might you declare another one?**

We called our ceasefire basing ourselves on the whole political situation because on our side too some mistakes were increasing, from below, in the implementation of our policy and plan. Mistakes were happening such as the Madi bomb blast. Our relation-



*Prachanda: "Our strategically, theoretically developed position is that in a communist state, democracy is a necessity." – PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN.*

ship was getting worse with the middle class. We were saying things from the top but still this was not being implemented. So we wanted the middle classes to be with us, and put out our political message to the broad masses in a new way. We also wanted to tell the international community that Gyanendra is not a monarch, these are autocratic elements more keen on bloodshed than anybody else. For these reasons we decided to go for a ceasefire. As for the specific timing, the U.N. General Assembly was going to be held and the so-called king was going to go there and say he was for peace and democracy. We thought a ceasefire is one way politically to hit him. We also wanted to tell the international community we were different from the way we were being projected. When we ended the ceasefire, we clearly stated that if a forward-looking atmosphere for a political solution emerges, we can again announce a ceasefire. But now, that situation does not obtain.

**Are you prepared to join together with the parliamentary parties, with Mr. Koirala and Madhav Nepal, and go and talk face-to-face with the king to discuss the future of Nepal?**

If there is unanimous understanding with the parties that we should talk to the king, we will go. We are not prepared to meet the king alone, and we are requesting the parties that they also not go alone. Nothing will come of it. Only if we act collectively can we achieve anything.

**Rather than the Maoists calling a seven-day bandh against the municipal elections, wouldn't it have been better for you and the parties to have given a joint call for boycott?**

I agree. When the 12-point agreement was reached with the parties last year, there was a second understanding that within a week or two we would issue a joint statement appealing to the masses to boycott elections and stage mass demonstrations. But that has not proved possible.

**Why?**

Because the parties' leadership is a little hesitant. They are perhaps a little afraid that if they join with the Maoists and issue a joint statement for boycott, there could be greater repression on them.

**Some feel the Maoists' military actions are reducing the political space for the parliamentary parties. For example, a few days before their big demonstration in Kathmandu, you attacked a police station in Thankot and the king imposed curfew. Can't you act in a way that increases your political space but does not squeeze the parties?**

I agree a way has to be found. This is a serious and complicated question. When the 12-point agreement was reached, there was need for continuous interaction between us and them. Only then could we establish some synchronicity between their move-

ment and ours. This did not happen. Despite this, we told the parties that whether we stage actions or not, the king is going to move against you. Even if we had done nothing in Thankot, curfew would have been imposed anyway.

**Does the king control the Royal Nepal Army or does it control the King?**

This is a very interesting question. Right now, in fact, this is precisely what we are discussing within our party and outside. Until now, it seemed the balance was 50-50. Sometimes the RNA controls the king, and sometimes the king controls the RNA. But it seems as if we are now going towards a situation where the RNA is in the driving seat. This seems to be the emerging situation but we cannot say this with facts. One thing is clear. Gyanendra became king after the royal massacre – and it is clear that without the RNA, that massacre could never have happened. So there is no question of his going beyond the script dictated by the RNA.

**What kind of guarantees can you give in the run-up to any constitutional assembly election that your People's Liberation Army will not place obstacles in the way of the parties?**

We understand the parties have reservations about us and our army. So we made a proposal to them that you rehabilitate parliament, we will support you. A two-thirds majority of MPs is with the Nepali Congress, UML, and smaller parties. Call a meeting and declare that parliament has been reinstated and that what Gyanendra is doing is illegitimate. Do this and then set up a multiparty government with the main aim of elections for a constitutional assembly. In this restoration of parliament, the king would be illegal, and we will come for negotiations with your leadership. Under your leadership, we will be in the interim government. As for the RNA, you should appeal to the democratic elements within it by saying the king has violated the constitution, you come over to this side, this is the legal government and it is your responsibility to support it. And then the king should be given an ultimatum of a week or two to agree to elections for a constitutional assembly. If he doesn't agree, we would then abolish the monarchy. And we would tell the international community this is the legitimate government. Please stop recognising or supporting him.

Under such a situation, the RNA's democratic elements will be there, and so will the PLA, so we will organise the army as a new Nepal army. At that point, the problem will not be our weapons. The problem of arms and weapons is with the RNA, which for 250 years has been loyal to the feudal lords. Our army has only been around for 10 years. This is not a problem. If there is a political solution, we are prepared to change that too. This is the first proposal that we have put forward. We will abolish the monarchy, there will be an insurrection, and then we

will have the peaceful reorganisation of the army.

**What you are proposing is that the parliamentary parties stage a revolution!**

This is one way to deal with this problem and we are seriously putting it forward. It is revolutionary, it is viable, it is possible. This is our first proposal but you are right, the parties are not ready for this. The second way is also what we have been discussing, that the U.N. or some other credible body supervises things. The RNA will be in the barracks and the PLA will also be under supervision. Both armies and arms will be under international supervision and will not enter the fray. Then there will be elections for a constitutional assembly. Our army will not interfere in the process.

**What form will this international supervision take? Will it include foreign troops?**

No troops. There can be a militia or police, which we create only for election purposes.

**Who will be part of this militia?**

We have not gone into such details – perhaps cadres of the different parties, but all without firearms, to manage security for the elections. So there will be elections for the assembly and whatever verdict comes, it is on that basis that the army has to be reorganised. If the republic result comes, then the RNA's generals and commanders will have to go and the interim government would appoint as generals officers who are loyal to democratic values. If a constitutional monarchy wins, then there is the danger that the old generals will remain. So my point is that the army can be changed.

**But you concede there is a history, which is why the parties are suspicious...**

Yes there is, but we are talking about this too. There have been attacks by us on them, and we had seized property. Whatever had been taken from the Congress leadership has been returned – land and property – UML leadership too. So we are trying to build an understanding. If the parties' leaders say that in the past the Maoists attacked us, then we can also say that the RNA army was deployed against us when you were in government and so many of our comrades were killed.

Whatever we may have done, the other side did so much more and this also has to be accounted for. But if we start talking like this, we will not be able to solve the major problem. If we have to make a breakthrough, then we should both review our history. We have to review our mistakes but you have to as well, because we have a common enemy – feudal aristocracy. We have to defeat this enemy and in consonance with democratic values we have to reorganise the army and state.

*(Tomorrow: Prachanda on the role of India, China, and the U.S., and on the Indian Maoists.)*

# Low turnout blights poll

Nepal's Maoists claim success in enforcing election boycott

**KATHMANDU:** Maoist rebels ended a nationwide general strike they had called to disrupt Nepal's first local election in seven years after the poll on Wednesday was marred by a low turnout and violence.

"Our campaign aiming to boycott the polls has been successful and taking into consideration appeals made by the seven political parties, various organisations and people, we have withdrawn our strike," said Maoist chairman Prachanda and a leader Baburam Bhattarai in a joint statement.

The strike was in its fourth day and had largely paralysed the troubled Himalayan nation.

## Sporadic attacks

King Gyanendra called the poll as part of a "road map to democracy" after he sacked the Government and seized absolute power a year ago, promising to quell the 10-year-old rebel militancy that has claimed 12,500 lives.

The rebels had threatened those taking part in the poll, committed sporadic acts of violence against candidates, and together with the country's seven main political parties, urged a total boycott of the election.

More than half of the 4,146 seats had no candidates, and people have already been appointed in 22 of Nepal's 58 municipalities ahead of voting because of a lack of opposing candidates.

At least one protester died in election-related violence while eight Maoist rebels and a soldier were also killed in clashes, police and the army said.

Witnesses reported a low voter turnout in all 36 participating municipalities, while an hour before polling closed state-run media reported that less than 10 per cent of eligible people in Kathmandu had cast their votes.

Results will be announced in



**CIVIC POLLS:** Nepal-born actress Manisha Koirala casts her vote during the municipal elections at Biratnagar, Nepal, on Wednesday. - PHOTO: AP

the next two days, election officials said.

The Election Commission spokesman claimed, despite the shootings, that violence had not disrupted polling, which was conducted amid a heavy presence of police and soldiers.

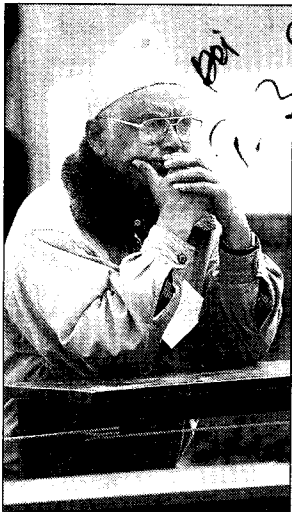
"Everything has been going

on normally, the election has not been postponed anywhere. At some places there has been a good turnout, but at some it has been bad," said spokesman Tej-muni Bajracharya.

The rebels retorted that the poll had failed. "The nationwide attacks by our People's Liber-

ation Army, and the active protests by the seven party alliance and strong public support has made the so-called elections a total failure the statement said. Many of the King's opponents have instigated the elections were a bid to try to legitimise his power grab. -AFP

# Vindicated rebels think of calling off Nepal strike Maoists mull V-day gift



An official waits for voters in Kathmandu. (Reuters)

SUJAN DUTTA AND  
J. HEMANTH

**Kathmandu, Feb. 8:** The Royal Municipal Polls are a failure despite what King Gyanendra's courtiers may claim. Few voters turned out to cast ballots today.

Official figures were not available till this evening but unofficial estimates said less than 10 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise.

The Maoists, who had called a seven-day general strike to coincide with the polls and the call of the seven-party alliance for a boycott of the hustings, are likely to call off their strike because, sources said, the point that the king was not trusted has been

made by today's poor turnout.

In interviews published yesterday, the chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Prachanda, said the rebels were prepared to hold talks even with the king's dispensation.

There is little doubt that the flexibility shown by Prachanda in interviews timed to perfection has added to his stature and allowed the Maoists to shed their dogmatic sheen. Prachanda's quotes were the subject of discussion in huddles around newsstands across Kathmandu today.

The polls, which were held amid heavy security, were marred by stray incidents of violence.

A political activist belonging to the Communist Party of Nepal was killed when a soldier of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) opened fire on demonstrators in Gorahi of Dang district in western Nepal. Another activist of the same party suffered bullet injuries.

According to reports, the activist, Umesh Thapa, was killed when the soldier fired to disperse a group which was trying to disrupt the polls.

Kathmandu valley was virtually taken over by the security forces with huge deployment of personnel belonging to the armed police and RNA. Armoured carriers belonging to the RNA were deployed in all major intersections.

# Nepal lolling on polling day

SUJAN DUTTA

**Kathmandu, Feb. 8:** Armed force cop Gyan Bahadur Lama was pointing an Insas rifle at a flock of pigeons on Durbar Square but he wasn't being cruel. He was only using the barrel as a finger to count the birds that settle to peck grain in front of Kumari Temple.

"At least there are more of them here than there," the cop said, jerking his head at the two polling booths behind him and the fistful of voters for the municipal elections.

He is in Durbar Square as of noon today. "But every time that bull" — there is a black quadruped in the middle — "wags his tail, the birds fly away and I lose count."

Kathmandu is lolling but King Gyanendra is saying it is polling.

Nepal's royal democracy is a sham. There are several times more people on the streets of Kathmandu sunning themselves than there are voters in front of booths getting their fingers inked.

There are two booths here — one for men and another for women — in the brick-paved platform in front of the Hanuman Dhoka-Durbar Square Heritage Conservation site office.

There are 5,800 voters listed in this ward No. 23 polling centre of the Kathmandu Municipal Corporation. Five hours later, after the close of the election, 566 people have cast their ballots.

The ballot paper is huge — nearly one-and-a-half feet by two feet — and it displays the symbols of 18 parties/candidates. Seven of them are of the alliance that has called for a boycott of the elections. Four men clustered around the election officer say there are only three candidates.

One of them is here. He is Krishna Prasad Sahi, 54, in red T-shirt and tight blue denims. Sahi is a Royal Democrat. He is also a loyal democrat,

loyal to King Gyanendra's Narayanhiti Palace.

At 5 pm when voting is closing, Sahi says he will definitely win. "One hundred and fifty per cent!" All the votes are genuine.

"I am Independent. And that is why I will win. If the (parliamentary) parties were contesting, there would be so much fraudulent voting. Few votes, but all genuine," he says. His closest competitor, he claims, is Raja Ram Shrestha from one of the four factions of the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party. "I'm happy with the voters. They are all mine. If the parliamentary parties had contested, there would be so much rigging."



**Actor Manisha Koirala votes at Biratnagar in Nepal on Wednesday. (AP/PTI)**

True. It is difficult to rig an election when few votes are cast. In Kathmandu, forget Calcutta. There is no booth jamming.

But the streets in this kingdom's capital are full of people. Milling around, walking about, hands in pockets, shoulders slouched, dragging feet, plenty of time, little to do. The government has banned public transport for the day. Shops are closed. Offices are shut. The Maoists' bandh is on and the state has declared a holiday.

So Kathmandu lolls.

■ See Page 3



# Six killed as Nepal voters spurn polls

*Low turnout, rebel assault, boycott mar first vote in 7 years*

**AGENCIES**  
Kathmandu, February 8

A REBEL attack and the army's shooting of protesters marred Nepal's first elections in seven years, as few voters turned out on Wednesday to cast ballots for the municipal polls seen as a referendum on the king, who seized power a year ago. The violence left at least six people dead, among them a protester shot by soldiers.

Maoist rebels called off the strike after the polls closed. The rebels and nearly all major political parties had pledged to disrupt the poll — calling it a sham intended to legitimise King Gyanendra's rule — prompting the government to warn it would shoot anyone trying to do so.

Hours before polls closed in the southwestern town of Dang, the army said

"soldiers were compelled to open fire" on protesters trying to interfere with the vote, killing one and injuring another.

Although final figures were not yet available when polls closed, the Election Commission said that at midday, only 8 per cent of voters had cast ballots in Kathmandu. Results are not expected until Thursday.

The royal government billed the local elections as a step back toward democracy, hoping to ease a power struggle among the monarchy, rebels and the country's main political parties. Instead, they prompted the boycott and near-daily attacks from rebels.

Hours before the polls opened, Maoist rebels launched a major assault on the eastern town of Dhankuta, where the guerrillas bombed at least 12 government buildings and destroyed the bank.

One policeman and one civilian were killed, and seven government officials and three policemen were taken hostage.

When polls opened, there were short lines at stations. At the Royal Nepal Academy in a densely populated Kathmandu area, the soldiers and police far outnumbered the voters.

About five hours after voting began, a polling officer at Kathmandu square said only about 60 of the station's 1,900 voters had cast ballots. Dozens of people loitering around the edge of the square said they had little interest in the elections. "Why should I risk my life?" said Udaya Shahi, a 23-year-old student.

The poll boycott pledge prompted Gyanendra's government to arrest 30 politicians and activists who were trying to organise protests on Wednesday morning in an eastern border town.



A man casts his vote in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

REUTE

# নেপালের দুই-তৃতীয়াংশ মাওবাদী দখলে সমান্তরাল সরকার গড়ার ডাক প্রচণ্ড-র

৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি— ১৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি নেপালের মাওবাদী (কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি অফ নেপাল, মাওইস্ট) পরিচালিত 'জনযুদ্ধের' এক দশক পূর্তি হবে। ১৯৯৬-এর ১৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি রাষ্ট্রের বিরুদ্ধে সশস্ত্র মুক্তি সংগ্রামের আহ্বান জানায় সি পি এন (মাওবাদী)। নেপালের দুই-তৃতীয়াংশেরও বেশি এলাকা এখন মাওবাদীদের প্রত্যক্ষ দখলে। কাঠমান্ডুর বাইরে সমস্ত জেলাতেই তাদের প্রভাব বিস্তৃত। শুধু প্রচার নয়, সাংগঠনিক শক্তি ও তাদের সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বল এতটাই। পুর নির্বাচনের ঠিক মুখে দাঁড়িয়ে রাষ্ট্রে সমান্তরাল সরকার গড়ার ডাক দিলেন সি পি এন চেয়ারম্যান পুষ্পকুমার দাহাল বা কমরেড প্রচণ্ড। মঙ্গলবার ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি নেপালের 'কাঠমান্ডু পোস্ট' পত্রিকায় দেওয়া সাক্ষাৎকারে কমরেড প্রচণ্ড জানিয়েছেন, রাজ সরকার যদি সত্যিই সমস্যা সমাধানে আগ্রহী থাকে, তবে যুদ্ধবিরতি ঘোষণা করে আমাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসুক। আমরা প্রস্তুত। আলোচনায় থাকবে অন্য রাজনৈতিক দলগুলিও। আলোচনা হতে হবে ১২ দফা দাবির ভিত্তিতেই। আলোচনার মূল লক্ষ্য হতে হবে নতুন সংবিধান রচনা ও গণপরিষদ গঠন। কিন্তু সে আলোচনা ব্যর্থ হলে, আমরা মাওবাদীরা রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে সমান্তরাল সরকার গড়ব। সে সরকার যাতে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ ও আন্তর্জাতিক সমাজের স্বীকৃতি পায়, তারও চেষ্টা করব। প্রচণ্ডের প্রস্তাব, জনযুদ্ধ বাহিনী এবং ৭ সংসদীয় পার্টির জোটের এক সম্মিলিত বাহিনী

জ্যোতিপ্রকাশ খান, কাঠমান্ডু



পুষ্পকুমার দাহাল ওরফে প্রচণ্ড

সংগঠিত হোক। রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মি এবং এই সম্মিলিত বাহিনীর তদারকিতে থাকুক রাষ্ট্রসম্বন্ধ বা বিশ্বাসযোগ্য আন্তর্জাতিক সংগঠন। এই অবস্থায় গণপরিষদের নির্বাচন প্রক্রিয়া করা হোক। প্রজাতন্ত্র না রাজতন্ত্র— না এর মিশেল, এই প্রশ্নে নেপালের জনগণের রায় মেনে নিবেন তাঁর দল। সাক্ষাৎকারের সময় উপস্থিত ছিলেন ড. বাবুরাম ভট্টরাই। এদিকে, গত রাতে দু'জায়গায় বড় ধরনের হামলা চালিয়েছে মাওবাদীরা। এই হামলায় ৮ নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীর মৃত্যু হয়েছে। জখম ১৫। পুর নির্বাচনকে আদৌ মেনে নিচ্ছে না মাওবাদীরা, বৃহত্তর রাজনৈতিক জোটও। তারা মনে করছে, এই ভোট করে রাজ সরকারই কায়ম করার চেষ্টা করছেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। বৃহবার নেপালের ৪৩টি জেলায় ৫৮ পুরসভার ৪১১৬ পুরপদের নির্বাচন। সি পি এন, নেপাল কংগ্রেস-সহ ৭ সংসদীয় দল এবং মাওবাদীরা নির্বাচন বয়কটের ডাক দিয়েছে। নেপাল নির্বাচন কমিশনের নথিকৃত ৭৩টি রাজনৈতিক দলের ২৩টিও প্রার্থী জোগাড় করতে পারেনি ২৫ শতাংশ পুরপদের জন্য। ২৪টি পুরপ্রধানের পদে একটি করে মনোনয়ন জমা পড়েছে। ৩১টি উপপ্রধানের পদেও প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা হচ্ছে না। পৃথী নারায়ণ পুরসভায় (গোর্খা জেলা) বিনা প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতায় নির্বাচিত পুরপ্রধান মানবাহাদুর শ্রেষ্ঠ ও উপপুরপ্রধান রামকুমার শ্রেষ্ঠের বিরুদ্ধে ঋণখোলাপির অভিযোগ এনেছে ন্যাশনাল কমার্শিয়াল এরপর ৫ পাতায়

## সমান্তরাল সরকার গড়ার ডাক প্রচণ্ড-র

১ পাতার পর

ব্যাঙ্ক। প্রথম জন ফেরত দেননি ২.৩৭ কোটি টাকা। দ্বিতীয় জন মেরে বসে আছেন ৮.১৮ কোটি টাকা। ৬০০ প্রার্থী মনোনয়ন প্রত্যাহার করেছেন। কারাবন্দী নেপালি কংগ্রেস (গণতন্ত্রী) নেতা এবং প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেরবাহাদুর দেউবা নির্বাচন বয়কটের আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। ভোটের প্রচারে নেমেছেন অভিনেত্রী মনীষা কৈরাল। সোমবার বিরাটনগরে সাংবাদিকদের তিনি বলেন, রাজনৈতিক প্রয়োজনে তাঁকে প্রত্যক্ষ রাজনীতির আসরে আসতে হতে পারে। তথ্যমন্ত্রী সমরেশ রানা বলেন, ভুল বা বিভ্রান্তিকর তথ্য পেশ করার জন্য শাস্তির ব্যবস্থা থাকবে নতুন আইনে। বি বি সি-র সাংবাদিক পাল্টা প্রশ্ন করলেন, রাজনৈতিক নেতা ও সাংবাদিকদের কারারুদ্ধ ও গৃহবন্দী করে কি সৃষ্টি নির্বাচন করা সম্ভব? এদিকে বৃহবারও কাঠমান্ডু ও জেলা শহরের চেহারা ছিল সর্বাঙ্গিক বনধের। বাজার ও প্রধান সড়কে অবস্থিত বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রবেশপথের শাটার ছিল নামানো। সকালে আনাজ ও মুদির দোকান খুলেছিল। বেলা বাড়তে তা বন্ধ হয়ে যায়। গাড়ি বা মিনিবাসের নম্বর প্লেট কাগজে ঢাকা ছিল। গাঢ় নীল পোশাকে পুলিশি টহল বেড়েছে। বহু বিদেশি

পর্যটক আটকে পড়েছেন শহরে। রাস্তায় ঘুরে সময় কাটাচ্ছেন। তবে মঙ্গলবার রাজধানীর প্রধান চকগুলিতে মেলার মতো বিক্রি হচ্ছিল ফুচকা, ভেলপুরি, জামাকাপড়। সেজেগুজে মানুষও বেরিয়ে পড়েছিলেন পড়ে পাওয়া চোদ্দ আনার সপ্তাহব্যাপী ছুটি কাটাতে। ১৫ মাস পরে সাধারণ নির্বাচন হবেই, টিভিতে ঘোষণা করলেন রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। কারোর কোনও হেলপোল নেই। নেপালের রাজনৈতিক ডিবিয়ং নিয়ে কেউ বাজি ধরতে চান না। অনিশ্চয়তার জেয়ার এতটাই গ্রাস করেছে হিমালয়ের কোলের এই রাষ্ট্রকে। নেপালের বর্তমান রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি বুঝতে ফিরে যেতে হবে ৫ বছর আগের ঘটনায়। রাজা বীরেন্দ্র মাওবাদী গেরিলা মোকাবিলায় রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মি নামানোর পক্ষপাতী ছিলেন না। ১ জুন, ২০০১, সংঘটিত হল প্রাসাদ হত্যাকাণ্ড। রাজা-রানী-সহ প্রায় সব সদস্যই নিহত হলেন। সিংহাসনে বসলেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। জনযুদ্ধ মোকাবিলায় ব্যর্থ, এই অভিযোগে গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরালকে বরখাস্ত করে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করলেন শেরবাহাদুর দেউবাকে। সরাসরি জনযুদ্ধ মোকাবিলায় নামানো হল রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মিকে। জুলাই মাসে, দেউবা মাওবাদীদের প্রস্তাব দেন আলোচনার। মাওবাদীরা

পেশ করল তাদের প্রধান দাবি— রাজতন্ত্রের অবসান ও প্রজাতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠা, অন্তর্বর্তী সরকার গঠন এবং নতুন সংবিধান রচনার জন্য নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধি সভা বা গণপরিষদ গঠন। সাময়িক যুদ্ধবিরতি ঘোষিত হল। এর পর মাওবাদীদের দাবি খারিজ এবং অচলাবস্থা সৃষ্টি হল। ২১ নভেম্বর ২০০১, সি পি এন (মাওবাদী) চেয়ারম্যান পুষ্পকমল দাহাল বা কমরেড প্রচণ্ড ঘোষণা করলেন আলোচনা ভেঙে গেছে। এর দু'দিন বাদে ৭৫টি জেলা সদরে গেরিলা অ্যাকশন চালিয়ে শাস্তি আলোচনার সমাপ্তি ঘটাল মাওবাদীরা। জরুরি অবস্থা ঘোষণা করলেন রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। চালু হল 'প্রেস সেন্সরশিপ'। গেরিলা অ্যাকশন ও রাজনৈতিক অচলাবস্থা চলতে থাকল ৩ বছর জুড়ে। ১৮ আগস্ট ২০০৪, সি পি এন (মাওবাদী) শুরু করল রাজধানী কাঠমান্ডুর অর্থনৈতিক অবরোধ। চলল ২৪ আগস্ট পর্যন্ত। ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০০৫, রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র আবার জরুরি অবস্থা ঘোষণা করে তাঁরই নিযুক্ত দেউবা কোয়ালিশন সরকার বরখাস্ত করে রাষ্ট্র পরিচালনা ক্ষমতা নিজের হাতে তুলে নিলেন। রাজনৈতিক নেতারা হলেন কারারুদ্ধ ও গৃহবন্দী। গণতান্ত্রিক অধিকার, তথ্য সম্প্রচারের অধিকার কেড়ে নেওয়া হল।



# Maoists kill 13 a day before Nepal goes to polls

## Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Feb. 7. — As government spokesman and communications minister Shrish Shumsher Rana said in the capital today, bravehearted Nepalis are ready to risk their lives and limbs to take part in tomorrow's municipal polls. Maoists, testing the minister's claim, launched mul-

tiples attacks that killed at least 13 people in 48 hours.

Fierce fighting was reported from Udaypur district in eastern Nepal where the rebels attacked a security post, killing five men and losing two of their own cadres. Two security personnel died in the attack along with a civilian, who was hit by stray bullets that penetrated his house, in clashes that occurred closer to home, in Panauti town

just 30 km east of the capital.

The rebels killed a taxi driver last evening for defying the week-long bandh called from Sunday, prompting stronger measures by the government. The royalist government announced today that the movement of all vehicles, except ambulances, fire brigades, security vehicles and cars with special passes issued by the administration, would be

prohibited in Kathmandu valley between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. for the polls scheduled to be held tomorrow. Telecommunication sources said mobile telephones and wireless phone services operated by the Indian joint venture United Telecom Ltd would be disconnected from the evening.

Security forces killed an unidentified person while an armed police force personnel

was killed in Mahendranagar in farwestern Nepal while trying to remove a bomb. Meanwhile, Maoist supreme Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, made a surprise appearance in Nepal, with the two biggest dailies, *Kantipur* and its sister publication, the *Kathmandu Post*, carrying an extensive interview with the underground leader who is the subject of an Interpol arrest alert.

Dahal said: "We have an army, we have guns. Let's sit together with all, including the seven parties (with whom the Maoists have a loose alliance now). ... Let's make a national army."

The army, he said, would support an electoral college that would write a new constitution for Nepal, turning the constitutional monarchy into a republic.

# Prachanda unveils road map for change in Nepal



Prachanda: Nepal's top Maoist leader

## Maoist leader hails Indian stand but calls for end to 'two-pillar theory'

Siddharth Varadarajan

**AT AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION:** Asserting that the democratic movement against King Gyanendra was now unstoppable, Nepal's top Maoist leader, Prachanda, called on the Indian Government to abandon its "two-pillar theory" and choose the one pillar of multi-party democracy over the "so-called monarchy" that had usurped all power in the country.

In an exclusive face-to-face interview to *The Hindu* conducted over an hour-and-a-half, the Maoist leader spelt out his party's "minimum political slogan" — the realisation of a "democratic republic" through the election of a Constitutional Assembly under international supervision. The Maoists, he said, were fully committed to multi-party democracy — the phrase he prefers to use is political competition — so long as it was under a "new constitutional framework."

are telling the parliamentary parties that we are ready to have peaceful competition with you all." He agreed that it was natural for parliamentary parties to have doubts about the Maoists' intentions because the party has an army. "They ask us whether after the constitutional assembly is elected we will abandon our arms. We have said we are ready to reorganise our army together with the democratic elements of the Royal Nepal Army and make a new Nepal army." The Maoists' army was not the problem, he added. It was the RNA, which had been serving the country's "feudal lords" for 250 years.

The Maoist leader stressed that when elections for the Constitutional Assembly are held, the party would accept whatever verdict emerged democratically. "We are convinced people will choose a democratic republic. But if people choose a ceremonial or constitutional monarchy, we are ready to accept that too."

Mr. Prachanda said the Maoists had also suggested that the parliamentary parties reconvene parliament and declare themselves the legitimate gov-

ernment. "Two-thirds of the MPs are with the Nepali Congress, the UML and smaller parties. They should call a meeting and declare themselves the legitimate parliament and set up a multi-party government." The Maoists would not be part of that government but would support it. "And then you invite us for negotiations and we will come forward. After that, there will be a move to set up an interim government, and the main aim of that government will be to have elections for a Constitutional Assembly." The King, he said, would be given an ultimatum to back down, failing which the monarchy would be abolished because it would be "illegal."

Although this route would quickly bring about insurrectionary conditions, he acknowledged that the parliamentary parties were not ready for this. "That is why we are also talking of a Constitutional Assembly elected under international supervision."

(Excerpts from the interview will be published in *The Hindu*.)

Why the King says that I was wrong to have done what I did last year, now come on, let us sit across the table, and then he talks of a free and fair election to a constitutional assembly, then we will be ready to take part," Mr. Prachanda said. "Our mini-

## EXCLUSIVE

mum, bottom line is the election of a Constitutional Assembly, that too under international supervision... and whatever the peoples' verdict, we are ready to accept that. This is our bottom line."

He stressed that the Maoists' commitment to multi-party democracy — as practically enunciated in a major party meeting last August — is not tactical but the result of a lengthy ideological debate within the party over three years. "Our decision on multi-party democracy is a strategically, theoretically developed position," he said. "And we

# Nepal rejects UN appeal on booths

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, FEB 5

THE Nepal government on Sunday rejected UN's appeal and decided to have polling booths in schools for the February 8 municipality elections.

Booths have been set up in many residential private schools, putting the residents' security at risk. According to the Association of Parents and Boarding Schools, at least 25 residential schools will be turned into booths.

The UN High Commissioner's special representative to Nepal Ian Martin, UNICEF and the Nepal office of the UN had appealed to the government against booths in schools in view of a Maoist threat during the polling.

Education Minister Adha Krishna Mainali and Foreign Affairs Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey charged the UN



Nepalese police stand guard near shops in Kathmandu

system in Nepal was going beyond its mandate, and the government was not going to heed their advice.

Meanwhile, Maoists guerrillas have been holding three executives of Surya Nepal, a subsidiary of the Indian Tobacco Company, after they were kidnapped from Birgunj on Friday night. The insurgents have made not made their demands public yet, although officials claim that the kidnapping was done for 'ransom'.

6 FEB 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

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# Maoist strike paralyses Nepal ahead of civic polls

AGENCE France-Presse  
Kathmandu, February 5

A GENERAL strike called by Maoist rebels to disrupt controversial elections this week has brought Nepal to a standstill.

The rebels — who want to depose King Gyanendra and turn the poverty-stricken country into a Communist state — called the week-long strike to disrupt Wednesday's local elections. The Maoists have pledged to step up attacks in the run-up to polling day.

Tension has risen in Nepal in the run-up to February 1, the first anniversary of Gyanendra's sacking of the elected government, a step he justified by saying he needed emergency powers to quell the Maoist rebellion.

Wednesday's polls are part of the king's declared "road map" to democracy. He has pledged they will be followed by general elections in the next 15 months.

But the municipal elections are opposed by the Maoists and opposition parties, who have formed a loose anti-royal alliance. They condemn the polls as a sham aimed at legitimising the king's power grab.

The royal government, which has been rocked by recent street protests, has told Nepalis to ignore the Maoists' strike call and threatened to arrest those who try to stop businesses from opening or who vandalise property.

In Kathmandu, people appeared initially to have heeded the warning, with many businesses opening in the morning, although fewer taxis and buses were seen on the streets.

By Sunday afternoon, however, most traders had downed shutters and the streets began emptying of traffic. Soldiers and army personnel launched foot and vehicle patrols.

In Nepalgunj, the strike brought activities to a standstill, a local journalist said, speaking by telephone from the gateway town to the Maoist dominated mid-western region.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1-6 FEB 2008



# Nepal Minister's house attacked <sup>file 8r</sup>

**KATHMANDU:** Seven Maoists were killed in skirmishes with security forces across Nepal, even as the rebels carried out a bomb attack on the house of a Minister. Four Maoist rebels, including a battalion commander, were killed in a retaliatory attack by the security forces in Nepalgunj.

bomb at the residence of Assistant Land Reform Minister Yagy Bahadur Budhathoki in Dang district last night, police said.

The building was destroyed but nobody was injured as the rebels evacuated the house before planting the bomb, they said, adding that the Minister was i

PTI

THE HINDU

1-6 FEB 2006

## Candidate shot dead in Nepal

Kathmandu, Feb. 3

(Reuters): Suspected Maoist rebels in Nepal have killed a politician and his aide ahead of next week's municipal elections which the guerrillas have vowed to disrupt, a district official said today.

Trideni Majhi, a member of a small royalist party headed by a cabinet minister, and a colleague were shot late yesterday by two alleged rebels in the town of Biratnagar, 450 km east of Kathmandu. Both men died later in hospital.

Majhi had registered as a candidate for the controversial February 8 municipal elections called by King Gyanendra as part of his plan to restore democracy in the troubled Himalayan kingdom.

Gyanendra sacked the government and seized executive power on Feb. 1 last year.

The move threw Nepal into turmoil as he jailed politicians and suspended civil liberties, triggering widespread protests at home.

The king said his takeover had been necessary to crush an insurgency that has left more than 13,000 dead since 1996.

4 FEB 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

## Nepal's crown of thorns

KING GYANENDRA seems to have hit upon a novel method for ushering in democracy in Nepal: announce elections and then declare a winning list of 'candidates', never mind that many of the candidates themselves didn't want to contest! This suggests that Nepal may see more trouble soon. For it's now clear that over three-quarters of the 4,000-odd seats in local polls scheduled for next week may have no contestants at all. The main reason appears to be concerns over security after Maoist guerrillas issued new threats against those standing, forcing the government to place most of its 'candidates' in safe houses across the country.

For the king, a lot depends on holding these elections. He has described them as a 'roadmap to democracy', which will supposedly set the stage for parliamentary polls by mid-2007. Unfortunately for the people, this could turn out to be wishful thinking since all that the king has achieved so far is to alienate the main op-

position parties. As a result, the political parties are boycotting even local polls, which they have reason to fear are aimed at legitimising an 'illegitimate' regime.

Indeed, the people of Nepal never had a good deal from the time late King Mahendra established a rubber-stamp government and Parliament, after retaining absolute power and outlawing political parties. The run of absolute monarchy ended only when street protests forced the king to hand over power to a multi-party government in 1990. Six years later came the Maoist insurgency, pitting a backward-looking monarchy and an abusive military against fanatical rebels. Gyanendra has obviously worsened the difficult relationship between democracy and royalty with his confused policies. His only chance now to deal with the insurgency and resolve the constitutional crisis lies in initiating dialogue with the political parties. Democracy by any other name would be a sham.



## Nepal King faces EU, US criticism

KATHMANDU, Feb. 2. — A year into power and still no closer to bringing peace in Nepal, King Gyanendra found himself facing a fresh volley of criticism, with the European Union asking him to declare a ceasefire and USA urging a reconciliation with political parties.

Javier Solana, EU high representative for the common foreign and security policy, urged the king to call a ceasefire and to work for an "urgent change of direction" to deliver peace, democracy and other civil liberties. Solana's appeal was followed by a statement by Admiral William J. Fallon, commander of the

US Pacific Command, who arrived in Kathmandu yesterday and met the king, and top army and government officials as well as political party leaders. He said that "all parties with a common interest in a stable and peaceful Nepal" should begin dialogue to form a "truly participatory government."

The UN has voiced fresh concern over the controversial municipal elections scheduled for 8 February, saying schools should not be used as polling booths in view of the potential hazard from Maoist guerrillas who have threatened to disrupt polls. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

03 FEB 2006

# Spare Nepal schools: UN

JHEMANTH

Kathmandu, Feb. 2: The UN has expressed serious concern over the Nepal government's decision to locate polling stations in schools for the controversial February 8 municipal elections.

In a statement issued here today, the UN said the conflict between the government and the Maoist rebels was damaging the school system in Nepal.

"We are now concerned about a new threat: the decision to locate 75 per cent of polling stations for the February 8 municipal elections in schools," it said.

The UN statement said that it was a normal practice in many countries to use schools to house polling booths. "And in schools in countries at peace, there may be more litter in the playground the next day, the desks and furniture may need to be rearranged, but the school goes back to being a school."

Referring to the plans of the seven-party Opposition alliance and the Maoist rebels to disrupt the municipal polls, the UN said the election process would render the schools vulnerable to the

threat of violence or damage.

"If schools become a place where the conflict is fought out, then they are no longer safe places of education."

The UN said that in countries where elections could result in violence, schools can then become the focus or target of that violence. "Nepal does not have enough school buildings at present. Its children cannot afford to lose any more school buildings to explosions."

Saying that the progress made in the last 10 years to improve literacy and to get more children into schools is under serious threat, the UN said that the parties to the conflict have engaged in violent and destructive activities in schools.

"Schools have been caught in the crossfire and have been used as barracks and for political purposes. Their playgrounds have been dug with trenches. Both sides have left explosive devices near school premises, sometimes with fatal results," it said.

THE TELEGRAPH

03 Feb 2006

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# Less majesty

How illogical can Gyanendra be?

576

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The situation in Nepal has taken a macabre turn, with a fresh ban on demonstrations, mass arrests of democratically-elected opposition leaders and human rights activists (some of them since released) and the imposition of curfew — continuing proof of King Gyanendra's singleminded agenda to stay on as a permanent centre of power. The wisest course for him now would be to end the confrontation; if he really has the country's interests at heart he must put on his thinking cap and come up with a mutually acceptable method to wriggle out of a mess of his own making. He took over on the excuse that political parties failed to govern effectively and rein in the Maoists, but the Royal army's offensive has achieved no better. So he loses the legitimacy to rule and should, it in the fitness of things, step down gracefully. It is difficult to fathom why he made no effort to reciprocate the Maoists' unilateral four-month ceasefire despite appeals from the UN chief, the European Union and several friendly countries. There was no need to exaggerate Maoist threats any longer because not only have the rebel leaders aligned with the seven-party alliance, they have also shown a conciliatory gesture by accepting multi-party democracy. But the King is suspicious and this precisely is what is widening the rift between him and his people. His tour of districts — obviously to tell rural folk of the failure of the democratic system — is not likely to cut much ice since the Maoists are said to control more than 50 per cent of the districts.

If the King persists with his decision to hold the February municipality elections ignoring the upsurge of public protests and the fact that all political parties have boycotted it, he might have to pay heavily. Already violence has taken a toll of more than two dozen people, security and police personnel included. What is happening in Nepal willy-nilly affects India so Delhi must continually use its influence to smooth over the political crisis.

THE STATESMAN

30 JAN 2006

# 500 quit Nepal election race

**KATHMANDU:** With Maoists threatening to take severe action against those contesting the February 8 local body polls in Nepal, some 500 candidates, including 50 from the capital Kathmandu, have withdrawn their nominations.

A total of 3,654 candidates had filed nomination papers for 4,146 seats in 58 Municipalities across Nepal. Out of which, some 500 have withdrawn their candidature, media reports here said on Sunday.

The seven-party Opposition alliance has already announced it would boycott the election, alleging that it was a "drama"

aimed at "legitimising the autocratic rule" of King Gyanendra.

Some candidates told Nepal's private television that they were forced to file nominations and others claimed that they were unaware of their candidature.

The Government has put many candidates under army security following Maoists' threat to take severe action against them.

Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala, meanwhile, appealed to civil servants to keep themselves away from the election process.

All national parties have decided to boycott the polls. — PTI

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2006

# Poll shield in Nepal

Kathmandu, Jan. 28 (Reuters): Nepal's royalist government has gathered dozens of candidates for next month's municipal polls — the country's first elections in years — into "safe houses" to protect them from Maoist rebels.

"This is a precautionary measure keeping in view the security threats to candidates from the Maoists," a government official said from Sarlahi district, a rebel stronghold in the east.

In several areas regarded as highly dangerous, candidates for the February 8 polls for 58 municipal councils, which the rebels have vowed to fight, were taken to heavily guarded public buildings near army or police posts after filing their nominations.

"We have provided separate security guards to those who are unwilling to stay in groups," another official said.

The rebels, fighting to top-

ple the world's only Hindu monarchy and impose a communist state, have threatened candidates and called a week-long strike from February 5 to disrupt the polls, the first of any kind since national elections in 1999.

"Candidates in security camps," read a front page headline in the *Kathmandu Post* daily. In places, weeping relatives pleaded with candidates not to go ahead with their nomination, local newspapers said.

In Guleria in west Nepal, Maoists kidnapped a politician who had planned to contest the elections.

Last Sunday, suspected rebels killed another politician who had declared his intention to stand in the southeastern town of Janakpur.

And at least 11 rebels and two soldiers were killed overnight when Maoists stormed an army base in Bhojpur, 400 km east of Kathmandu, the army said.

Nepal's main political parties protesting against King Gyanendra, who seized power last year, are boycotting the polls, saying they are aimed at legitimising his regime.

THE TELEGRAPH

29 JAN 2006

# Nepal's glamour girl in poll predicament

**Sudeshna Sarkar** SM  
in Kathmandu

Jan. 27. — Having played rather daisies in distress too often in reel life, Bollywood star and Nepal's prodigal daughter Manisha Koirala found herself in a tight spot in real life too with angry protesters "banning" her films in eastern Nepal.

Manisha, who visited Kathmandu last year with the promise of starting a film academy but came back empty-handed this month to campaign for the controver-

sial municipal elections called by King Gyanendra, had a taste of public displeasure yesterday when she flew to Biratnagar to support a renegade politician.

With the country left paralysed by a strike called by seven major Opposition parties asking for a boycott of the 8 February polls, Manisha, under heavy security, filed the nomination paper of Mr Binod Aryal, former member of the Nepali Congress Party, contesting the mayor's post.

Ironically, the strike was

led by Manisha's great-uncle and three-time former Prime Minister, Mr Girija Prasad Koirala.

While Mr Koirala, his daughter Sujata and nephews Dr Shashank Koirala and Dr Shekhar Koirala are all stalwarts of the Nepali Congress and are opposing King Gyanendra's absolute rule, Manisha has been vocal in her support of the King. So has her father, Mr Prakash Koirala, who was expelled from the Nepali Congress. Mr

Prakash Koirala, made a minister by the King for his support, is the son of Mr BP Koirala, Nepal's first elected Prime Minister, who nearly 50 years ago was sacked and jailed by the present King's father.

While angry protesters had shouted slogans against the Bollywood star yesterday, protests snowballed today with student activists in Sunsari district in eastern Nepal burning her in effigy and announcing they would not allow theatres in the district to screen her movies.

King Gyanendra has received a severe jolt with fewer than 15 of the 72 registered parties fielding candidates. Of the 3,255 nominations filed for 4,146 posts in 58 municipalities, most are submitted by independent candidates. Only three parties, all headed by newly-appointed ministers, have sent up a substantial number of candidates. The bandh and fear of Maoists kept away candidates and it is expected some would withdraw their nominations tomorrow.

Reports say renels kidnapped the mayoral candidate of the Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Badr) in Gulariya in western Nepal on Wednesday, two days after they had gunned down another high-profile candidate of the same outfit in eastern Janakpur city. The municipal elections cover 43 out of Nepal's 75 districts with just 13 per cent of the population having their voting rights.



# Not enough candidates for Nepal municipal polls

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, JANUARY 26

IN WHAT came as a major loss of face for King Gyanendra personally, prospective candidates for the municipal elections scheduled on February 8 chose to side with the seven parties pro-democracy alliance which has given a call for poll boycott.

According to the information so far, only around 200 candidates filed their nomination against four thousand plus various posts in 58 municipal bodies in the country. While the alliance called for general boycott of the poll including the nomination process, Maoists have warned that candidates and the government official on duty would face death penalty.

The government on the other hand, assured of full protection to the candidates and the voters while the election commission announced insurance cover for the candidates against death and injury.

The only date slated for nomination was marred with nationwide strike called by the alliance in protest against the large scale arrest and use of violence by the government on pro-democracy leaders and activists largely paralysing the normal life including nomination process.



Nepalese police check a candidate coming to file his nomination at City Hall in Kathmandu on Thursday. Reuters

In Pokhara, about 200-km west from here, police opened fire on protesters in which at least one student was wounded. About 100 pro-democracy supporters have been rounded up there. Officials said while Kathmandu metropolitan was lucky to have some four mayoral candidates, the total number of candidates for other posts including that of the deputy mayor ran short.

In Bhaktapur, another district in the capital valley, drew blank as no one ventured to file the nomination. The King who heads the council of ministers has stoutly rejected pleas

from the international community and pro-democracy leaders at home to call of the elections and hold dialogue with democratic forces to avoid violence in the country.

Top political leaders, including Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala, Nepal Communist UML general secretary Madhav Kumar, Nepal and Nepali Congress (Democratic) President Sher Bahadur Deuba, who are in detention, yesterday asked people to disrupt the "election drama" being staged by the royal government to legitimise its autocratic rule.

INDIAN EXPRESS

27 JAN 2006

# King will cash in on divide between parties, Maoists

By Jal Taraporewala/TNN

11-15  
26/1  
The opposition Seven-Party Alliance in Nepal and the Maoist rebels have convergent aims in stepping up pressure on King Gyanendra at this stage. Both share the common objective of undermining Gyanendra's efforts to hold municipal elections in February. After all, the polls have become a key test to determine the evolving dynamics of power in the country.

If the turnout of voters in the local elections is low, Gyanendra will find it difficult to press ahead with his plans of limited democracy by bypassing the demands of the opposition parties and the Maoists.

By turning up the heat on the government, the Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoists are also underscoring their annoyance with Gyanendra for not adequately responding to their recent political overtures. For instance, although the Maoists observed a unilateral ceasefire for the last four months of 2005, the government did not either declare a similar truce or express a willingness to hold exploratory talks with the rebels.

This has prompted the Maoists to resume the armed struggle as a means of consolidating their support-base and increasing pressure on the government to make substantive concessions.

For its part, the Seven-Party Alliance has accelerated its efforts to organise public demonstrations in order to emphasise the point that the prospects of holding discussions with the government will hinge on the

latter easing censorship regulations and curbs on political activities and agreeing to restore multi-party democracy.

Recent events in the Himalayan kingdom should also be interpreted in terms of the understanding reached between the opposition parties and the Maoists on the broad contours of a political map for the country, including, the convening of an assembly to draft a new constitution and the setting up of a titular monarchy. The informal agreement between the Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoists is essentially a tactical arrangement aimed at further undermining Gyanendra's hold on power.

Despite this agreement, significant differences persist between the mainstream parties and the Maoists on such crucial issues as the relevance of the armed struggle, the institutional framework of democracy and the future of

land reforms.

Gyanendra will try and play on these divisions in an attempt to ride out the political storm. He will also seek to take advantage of the ideological and personality differences between the constituents of the Seven-Party Alliance, especially those between the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist-Leninist.

However, Gyanendra's ability to do so is rather limited on account of his narrow base of support, growing economic hardships and the current tensions in relations between Nepal and its traditional allies—India, Britain and the United States.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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26 2006



There is still space and time to accommodate the Maoists, political parties and monarchy in a workable solution, says RHODERICK CHALMERS

# Is history repeating itself in Nepal?

**W**HEN Nepal's King Gyanendra seized power in February 2005 he breathed new life into Marx's dictum about history repeating itself. Thirty years of royal rule from 1960 to 1990 had been tragic enough for most Nepalis. Economic stagnation and stunted political evolution compounded ethnic, regional, caste and economic inequality, creating the perfect conditions for a Maoist insurgency. The idea that Nepal could be returned to the 1960s — resurrecting King Mahendra's model of a palace-guided Panchayat democracy "suited to Nepal's soil" — smacked more of farce. Attacking graft while his own cabinet was tainted by corruption set the tone. But the king's coterie of Panchayat-era advisors blinded themselves to the transformation of Nepali society over the last decades and pressed on with their plan to turn the clock back.

The palace now seems to have acquired a taste for replaying history. With only days to go before the anniversary of the last royal coup, on Thursday Kathmandu once again awoke to cut phone lines, curfew orders and news that most democratic politicians had been detained.

Whatever his critics say, King Gyanendra's steadfastness has pleased his supporters. He promised unwavering leadership and has stuck to his vow that "[outsiders] will say what they have to say but I will do what I have to do". His refusal to bow to external pressure has played well among Nepali nationalists and he has successfully called the global community's bluff. Those who never welcomed multiparty democracy have applauded the iron fist he has shown to the parties. But has he done what he had to do?

Addressing November's SAARC summit, he explained he would be able to hold municipal elections in February thanks to the "improved security situation". His ministers have been boasting of having "broken the Maoists' back" and insisting that the polls will, as promised,

**The parties should not accept a simple repeat performance of 1990. Their own credibility has been tarnished by their poor record in office**

reinvigorate democracy. But the Maoists have now struck at Kathmandu militarily and all major parties, including royalists, are boycotting the elections.

Elsewhere too, authoritarian governance has been strikingly ineffective. You won't hear ministers referring to the ambitious 21-point plan announced by the first post-coup cabinet, for almost none of the plans have been implemented. In March 2004, the king had ordered the immediate shift of mid-western regional government offices from Nepalgunj in the plains to Surkhet in the hills. Finding on a return visit in August '05 that his orders had been ignored, he threatened action if the shift was not completed within three months. But to no avail. Dictators are at least meant to make the trains run on time.

We should not be surprised that the putative roadmap for democracy is also going astray. Holding elections amidst armed violence is always risky. Misjudged polls often serve to inflame conflicts rather than resolve them. The fact that the royal government chose not to consult its own peace secretariat on the po-

tential dangers of the exercise is telling. For the palace, the polls seem to be part of a strategy of confrontation, not reconciliation. The king's honorary aide-de-camp Bharat Keshar Simha, a retired general and president of the World Hindu Federation in Nepal, told Tehelka that elections will go ahead "irrespective of how many people die." Some royalists would rather have a bloody showdown than risk losing face.

Nepal's democrats are also hoping history will be replayed. As winter draws to a close the season of political agitation begins. It was in the spring of 1990 that the democracy movement gathered momentum. But the parties should not expect a simple repeat performance. Their own credibility has been tarnished by their poor record in office. And the king has made it clear he will not compromise in the face of popular protest as his brother did.

Meanwhile the disciples of Marx and Mao have a different script for Nepal's future. So far the palace and parties have played their role to perfection, their bitter division emboldening the rebels. Although the Maoists still believe in a linear history of inexorable progress towards a communist republic they have shown signs of flexibility. During a four-month unilateral

ceasefire they signed a deal with the parties that offered major concessions. No one need accept these at face value. But their truce had presented the state with a good opportunity to judge them by their actions.

Announcing his first coup a year ago King Gyanendra warned that "those who cannot stand in favour of peace will stand condemned by the motherland." The time has come to test all political players against this standard. Nepal's conflict is still soluble. The party-Maoist agreement did not insist on republicanism; it deliberately left space for accommodation with the king. At the moment, as thinking royalists have long realised, palace hardliners are the greatest threat to the future of the monarchy. Gyanendra has proved himself an adept gambler. If he is willing to take a risk for peace he can recover respect for the monarchy by cancelling the flawed and misconceived elections and working towards the settlement Nepalis long for. Of course this will not be easy. But the easy options will lead only to continued bloodshed and political collapse.

*Rhoderick Chalmers is a visiting fellow at Nepal's Tribhuvan University*



As winter draws to a close, the season of agitations is beginning

2-11-2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

washingtonpost.com

## Power of Nepal's King May Not Be So Absolute

Gyanendra Struggles Against United Opposition

By John Lancaster  
Washington Post Foreign Service  
Wednesday, February 8, 2006; A11

KATMANDU, Nepal, Feb. 7 -- Barely a year after seizing absolute power, King Gyanendra is a monarch under siege -- shunned by former allies, struggling to contain a raging Maoist insurgency and confronting a new alliance between the rebels and mainstream political parties that dismiss as farce his plans for restoring democracy.

The parties are boycotting municipal elections scheduled for Wednesday, a step that in combination with Maoist threats has ensured that more than half of the 4,000-plus local seats will not even be contested. The Maoists are also enforcing a week-long general strike that has paralyzed normal life in cities and towns throughout the country.

So tenuous is the king's position that some Nepalese journalists and analysts have begun to speculate about the odds of a military coup, or perhaps a hurried departure by the royal family in the dead of night, spelling the end of the troubled Hindu dynasty that has presided over this impoverished Himalayan kingdom since 1768.

While few predict an outright victory by the Maoists, whose popular support has waned since they launched what they called a "people's war" a decade ago, the rebels roam freely throughout the countryside and have escalated their attacks on government targets since ending a four-month unilateral cease-fire last month.

To prevent protests against Wednesday's elections, the government has rounded up hundreds of political organizers, student leaders, human rights activists and professional association leaders under a draconian law that permits detention for up to 90 days without trial.

"The king, he speaks in favor of constitutional monarchy and democracy, but in practice, he's behaving like an autocrat of the 18th century," said Bishnu Manandhar, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (United), one of the country's largest parties, speaking from behind the iron gate of the makeshift detention facility where he was being held with more than 100 others this week.

Gyanendra, 58, has defended his handling of the country's political turmoil, asserting last week in a televised speech that the "cloud of pessimism" was dissipating and that "the process of reactivating multiparty democracy has now begun." He promised to hold parliamentary elections next year.

The king's taped address came just hours after a Maoist force estimated at several thousand overran a government outpost in western Nepal, killing 19 security personnel, seizing weapons and taking dozens of hostages. In separate attacks Monday, Maoists killed seven security personnel, two of them near

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Katmandu, and shot a taxi driver who had defied their strike order on the outskirts of the capital, authorities said.

On Tuesday, most shops and businesses in Katmandu remained closed in observance of the strike, and traffic was much lighter than usual, with drivers who chose to defy the ban taping over their license plates so they could not be identified. Soldiers manned fortified positions outside government buildings and patrolled on foot or in pickup trucks.

In another, potentially more positive development Tuesday, the leader of the Maoists, who goes by the name Prachanda, said in an interview published in the Katmandu Post that the rebels would be willing to talk with the government if it agreed to the rebels' demand for an elected national assembly that would write a new constitution.

Nepal is a source of growing concern in foreign capitals, including Washington, where officials fear the potential emergence of a failed state in a strategically sensitive region between China and India. Gyanendra ascended to the throne in 2001 following the assassination of his elder brother, King Birendra, in a bizarre palace massacre carried out by Birendra's deranged son and heir apparent, who then killed himself.

Political instability has worsened under Gyanendra, an aloof, unsmiling figure who often appears in military uniform and is said to have grown wealthy from business interests in tourism, tea and tobacco. He suspended elected government in 2002 and assumed direct rule last year, defending the move as necessary to defeat the Maoists and restore full democracy.

In response, the United States and India have suspended arms transfers to Nepal while urging Gyanendra to reconcile with the main political parties. But they remain at loggerheads over the parties' insistence that Gyanendra reinstate the parliament that was dissolved in 2002. Last fall, the parties formed a loose alliance with the Maoists after the rebels agreed to stop killing politicians and party workers.

U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty said in an interview this week that parties may come to regret what he termed the "clammy embrace of a violence-endorsing totalitarian movement." But analysts here say the deal speaks to the deep frustration among political and civil society leaders, who have begun to talk openly of doing away with the monarchy or perhaps reducing it to a purely ceremonial role.

"The last year was our year of knowing the king, and we don't like what we see," said Kanak Dixit, a prominent journalist. "This is an institution that is pretty much made or broken by who is sitting in the throne, and the king has pretty much ruined it."

One burning question among journalists, diplomats and analysts in Nepal is whether the disaffection has spread to the officer corps in the Royal Nepal Army. Dixit said thoughtful officers are "very worried about the lack of political engagement by the king."

Late last year, Gyanendra traveled to several African countries, prompting speculation that he might have been scouting a potential refuge -- or perhaps secreting money abroad -- in case he needs to make a hasty departure.

In an interview Tuesday, Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey dismissed such speculation as "nonsense." He said the king traveled to Burundi to visit Nepalese peacekeeping troops and to South Africa as part of an important diplomatic mission that could not be publicly described.

The king, he asserted, is open to discussions with political parties as a way out of the current crisis. "There is no difference on multiparty democracy," he said. "The only difference is on methodology."

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# Nepal lifts night curfew, anti-King protests continue

REUTERS

KATHMANDU, JANUARY 24

NEPAL's royalist government lifted a night curfew and curbs on public rallies in some parts of the capital on Tuesday, a day after activists fought pitched battles with police during anti-King protests, officials said. However, a ban on

rallies in the heart of Kathmandu remained.

"We have the feeling the security situation has improved," Home (interior) Minister Kamal Thapa told reporters, adding that the restrictions would be reimposed if there was fresh trouble.

Authorities also restored some mobile phone connections late on Monday after snapping them last week.

The curbs were imposed to thwart a pro-democracy rally planned for last Friday and which had been called by an alliance of seven mainstream political parties to protest against King Gyanendra's seizure of power last year.

The political parties planned more protests for Tuesday and called a general strike for Thursday, when

candidates for municipal elections are expected to start filing their nomination papers. The elections are due on February 8.

The mainstream parties are boycotting the polls, which were set by the King without consulting political leaders, and Maoist rebels have vowed to stop them.

## China silent on Nepal

BEIJING: Amid worldwide censure of Nepal's royal government for its latest crackdown on pro-democracy parties, China on Tuesday termed it as an "internal affair" of the Himalayan kingdom and stressed on dialogue to end the turmoil.

"It is their internal affairs," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan in his first comments on the latest political turmoil in Nepal.

"As a friendly neighbour, we hope that the situation can be stabilised at an early date and various sectors in Nepal can narrow down their differences through dialogue and make concerted efforts to ensure prosperity and development of their own country," he added.

—PTI

# Nepal King shows true colours

**B**y arresting prominent politicians from democratic parties and bringing in other restrictions on political activity through a sudden countrywide emergency, King Gyanendra of Nepal has acted true to type. Only the naïve could have believed his promises to restore democracy. His desire to expand his powers after ascending the throne as a constitutional monarch culminated in the February 2005 coup, in which he dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba Government and assumed executive powers. The autocratic monarch then made a show of taking steps to restore democracy, including a decision to hold municipal elections. Few were fooled. A democratic seven-party alliance rightly questioned the legitimacy of a municipal election called by an unconstitutional ruler. Demanding that the King restore democracy first, they announced a boycott of the February 8 elections. The mass arrests and restrictions on political activities, including protest marches and demonstrations, a day before the parties were to hold a rally in Kathmandu against the elections, provide clinching evidence that there is not one democratic bone in King Gyanendra. Following an outpouring of protest, the royalist government released three of the arrested leaders, notably Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress. If the King thought that by selectively freeing some leaders he could create a rift in the democratic alliance, a firm statement from the NC that it would not play to the monarch's tune has banished that hope.

Still courtiers are putting up an elaborate defence of the King's actions. Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey has spoken of a "road map to peace, stability and democracy" that is "concrete and realisable." The monarchy is also using the resumption of attacks by Maoist insurgents, who called off a unilateral ceasefire three months after announcing it, as an excuse for the emergency. The regime says the crackdown was necessary to prevent Maoists from infiltrating the Nepal capital during the protest rally. But then the Maoists have justified their return to violence on the ground that the King refused to respond to their ceasefire. It does appear that King Gyanendra let the truce die because he preferred the Maoists to revert to attack mode. The political parties would then reconsider aligning with the Maoists, and this situation might enable him to consolidate absolutist powers under the banner of national security with the help of the Royal Nepal Army. India, which continued to supply arms to Nepal even after the King usurped power last year (it has since stopped the supply) must not allow itself to be taken in again. Only a multi-party parliamentary democracy can ensure peace and stability in Nepal, not a dictatorial and reactionary monarch with street cunning. India cannot stress this enough.

THE HINDU

11/18  
11/18/04

## Nepal's going nowhere

11/18/04  
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ROUND TWO, square one. That sums up the happenings in Nepal, as a dawn-to-dusk curfew and arrests hit Kathmandu. King Gyanendra's draconian tactics are aimed at saving the monarchy, or to be more accurate, a democracy under suspension. If the king had been serious about democracy, he should have opened talks with the political parties to work out a compromise solution. Instead, he was apparently busy working out the schedule for local elections next month that nobody may even contest, as political parties have reportedly decided to boycott them.

When he took power a year ago, there was some expectations of resolving the gridlock between the monarchy, political parties and the rebels. Lamentably, the king didn't prove up to the challenge, even when he had the opportunity to during the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Maoists. More importantly, the king wasted precious time trying to second-

guess the Maoists whom he thought were regrouping and re-arming. It's time King Gyanendra realised that he is clearly running out of options. Immediate political reverses apart, these developments potentially threaten the very institution of the monarchy, which is proving to be short-sighted and inept. The long-running Maoist rebellion had earlier given him a good alibi to suspend civil rights and give unprecedented powers to the army to deal with protestors but banning dissent and gagging the press is hardly the way to go about restoring peace.

That said, the democratic forces in Nepal too need to realise that if they are unable to sustain their current upsurge, it will be curtains for them, at least for the near future. In other words, the time has come for them to show their mettle and prove to the Nepalese people that they, not the Maoists or the monarch, are the true representatives of the Nepalese people.

# Irrelevance of the king

TWENTY-TWENTY

BHARAT BHUSHAN



Under a cloud

The slogan, "Gyane Chor, Desh Chhod" (Gyanendra thief, leave the country), shows the distance the Nepalese people have travelled from venerating their monarch as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Never before have they stood up to monarchy like this.

Today, the king has lost his legitimacy. His gameplan for the induction of a political system that would have monarchy as its fulcrum is coming unstuck. The political parties have re-established their acceptability among the people. There is consensus on the need for restructuring the state and formulating a new peoples' charter through an elected constituent assembly. And, after running an insurgency for over a decade, the Maoists are preparing a safe landing into the net of multi-party democracy.

When the king staged his coup on February 1, 2005, there was some approval for it among ordinary Nepalese. They thought that he could deliver — he had justified seizing power on the promise of peace and declared all those against peace as traitors. Today, it is he who stands between peace and the Nepalese people.

Peace and democracy are being recognized as conjoined twins in Nepal today and people are once again looking for the leadership of democratic forces. The political parties as well as the Maoists have publicly apologized for their past mistakes. Together they are talking of a post-monarchical agenda. The debate is not about what to do with the king but what to do after monarchy.

The only monarchical constituency is the Royal Nepal Army. King Gyanendra himself dons military fatigues while touring the country nowadays. Some say that this is to identify himself with the armed forces because he does not know how long the unity of the army will hold. The fatigues apparently also hide a bulletproof vest.

However, the RNA cannot be a permanent constituency — in post-monarchical Nepal, it will not survive in its present form. The political parties and the Maoists are already talking of a new army — the Maoists want the People's Liberation Army to be converted into the national army, the political parties quite understandably oppose this. Whichever way the RNA is reorganized, the fact remains that its royalist elements will be purged.

What is the king's game plan to get out of the present crisis? First, to constitutionalize his snatching away of executive power from an elected government; and second, to retain the sovereignty he has forcibly taken away from the people.

The election to 58 municipalities

is not being pushed for the sake of democracy. His attempt is to get a variant of the pre-1990 *panchayat* system. Royalists and their henchmen are being encouraged to float political parties and contest elections. It is no surprise then that of the seventy-odd new political parties registered in the run-up to the elections, there are some headed by wrestlers and boxers.

The entire objective of the king now seems to be to revive the spirit of the *panchayat* system — "Mahendra-path" as one of his lackeys described it, naming it after Gyanendra's father, King Mahendra, who introduced the partyless system after dismissing a democratic government. This runs counter to the aim of the political parties — to limit the king's powers and compel him to stay within the written constitution.

Laxman Aryal, one of the framers of the present constitution and former justice of the Nepal supreme court, is right in pointing out, "The whole question revolves around popular sovereignty. We wrote in the Constitution that the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Nepal 'inheres' in the people. No one has to give it to them. Sovereignty always resides in the peo-

ple. That is its natural seat. If others exercise it, it can only be by force."

The streetfights in Kathmandu and elsewhere in Nepal are about the people trying to regain popular sovereignty snatched away by King Gyanendra. The imposition of daytime curfew and shoot-at-sight orders shows that half the battle has already been won by the people. One cannot be a popular and legitimate monarch at gunpoint.

Despite the entire leadership of the political parties being under arrest, people came out in the streets of Kathmandu on January 21 to take on the security forces. This is clear evidence of public support for the political parties. The world must salute the brave people of Nepal who faced the armed police with nothing but randomly picked up bricks and stones to defend themselves.

Nepalese journalists and political activists who have toured rural Nepal are bringing back reports of huge crowds at rallies organized by the political parties against the king. And they are not party cadre. This should be food for thought for those in Delhi who still harp about the king being a unifying force in the diversity of Nepal.

The diverse identities of Nepal today are not looking up to the monarchy for a solution. They are instead seeking it in a restructured state where feudalism will be demolished and the social structures democratized. They want a participatory and inclusive democracy where adequate attention is paid to the issues of women, Dalits, the ethnic communities, the Madhesis (people of Terai), the people of remote hills and those of the poor. The king is an obstacle to this agenda — a part of the problem.

The most important development in Nepal has been the Maoists taking their battle to the political sphere. Through the 12-point understanding with the political parties, the Maoists have committed themselves to multi-party democracy, respect for human rights and an elected constituent assembly to reshape the Nepalese state. This has paved the way for all democratic political actors to work towards a situation where people can make their choices without fear.

There are certain responsibilities that devolve on India in the rapidly changing situation in Nepal. While taking a principled stand, Delhi must not fear the charge of intervening in the internal affairs of Nepal. Indian interests in Nepal, especially in the well-being of the Nepalese people, cannot be denied.

India must, therefore, send two clear signals — one to the Nepalese people and the other to the Royal Nepal Army. New Delhi must unequivocally lend support to the democratic aspirations of the Nepalese people. This would entail ensuring through moral and political pressure the facilitation of an early end to the instability in Nepal.

The second message must go to the RNA. If the king would not listen to reason and concede defeat, then India, along with the international community, must focus on the RNA. It is a brother army of the Indian army. That influence can be used productively — there can be a Nepal without the king but there cannot be a Nepal without a national army. The RNA can be used to change the mind of the king.

The Nepalese people must not be made to suffer because King Gyanendra's ego would not allow him to swallow his pride. He should be advised that the only option before him is to either accept a ceremonial role, after apologizing to the people for snatching away power, or he can be helped to safely relocate to Taipei or Mauritius, where he has apparently bought residential property, or anywhere else that he might prefer.



# Nepal poll candidate among 24 killed

Sudeshna Sarkar  
in Kathmandu

Jan. 22. — Suspected Maoist rebels today shot dead a candidate in next month's municipal elections in southern Nepal, while 17 rebels and six security forces were killed in fresh fighting close to the Kathmandu Valley, officials said.

The fresh violence came close on the heels of a twin-attack launched by the insurgents on two police posts in the valley seven days ago, in which 12 policemen were killed.

The civic polls called by King Gyanendra despite widespread opposition and fears of a bloodbath claimed their first victim today when suspected Maoist guerrillas shot dead Bijay Lal Das, who was contesting for mayor in Janakpur city in Dhanusha district in eastern Nepal. Das belonged to the faction of the

## Koirala released

KATHMANDU, Jan. 22 — The Nepalese government today released four top leaders of the seven-party alliance, including Nepali Congress president Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, who had been placed under house arrest since Thursday. Besides Mr Koirala, Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party president Mr Narayan Man Bijukchhe, UML leaders Mr Bharat Mohan Adhikari and Mr K P Sharma Oli were released this evening.

The government, in an attempt to foil demonstrations by the alliance on Friday, put the leaders under house arrest. Dozens of other leaders and cadres of the alliance were also arrested ahead of the anti-government protest. — SNS

Nepal Sadbhavana Party headed by general administration minister Mr Badri Prasad Mandal.

As the army began a manhunt for the killers,

the rebels fled to Makwanpur where a fresh clash began. A private FM station said the army reinforced the attack with a night-vision helicopter that began aerial bombing on suspected rebel hideouts. The houses of some civilians were damaged in the attack and 18 people injured, Kantipur FM said. The fresh violence erupted as King Gyanendra was scheduled to return to the capital today after a three-week unofficial tour of the eastern regions. The rebels also bombed four different buildings in Nuwakot district, north-west of Kathmandu, including a municipal office, a school and an electricity department building.

Besides the Maoist violence, the King faces a new challenge by seven Opposition parties which have called a nationwide strike on 26 January.

# Hundreds arrested in Nepal protests

Demanding removal of King Gyanendra and restoration of democracy, activists clash with police

**KATHMANDU:** Nepali police arrested more than 300 supporters of the seven major political parties here during a demonstration demanding the restoration of democracy and the removal of King Gyanendra who had seized power nearly a year ago.

Thousands of supporters of the parties raised anti-King slogans on the streets, defying the prohibitory ban on political activities on Saturday and clashed with security forces in various parts of the capital.

Security forces fired several rounds of tear gas and charged at the crowds with batons to disperse thousands of people attending the demonstration in various parts of the city, the parties said.

Over a dozen activists of the parties were injured in the baton charge, the parties alliance said.

## Rescheduled

The parties had rescheduled the peaceful demonstration in Kathmandu after the Government imposed a day-long curfew in addition to the night time curfew.

The supporters of democracy gathered in various places, demanding an end to the autocratic monarchy in the Himalayan Kingdom, and converged in a mass meeting in Beshantpur, the city centre of the capital, which is also a prohibitory area for mass gathering to foil the demonstration of seven parties.

Nepali Congress joint general secretary Ram Sharan Mahat,



**DEFYING FORCE:** A demonstrator clashes with a policeman during a demonstration in Kathmandu on Saturday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

treasurer Mahanta Thakur, student leaders Guru Raj Ghimire, Yubraj Gyawali and Kamal Koirala, former vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University Nabin

Prakash Jung Shah were arrested from various parts of the city.

Democracy supporters clashed with security forces in various parts and burnt tyres

and pelted stones.

Protest rallies were carried out from various corners of the city despite interventions at various intersections and the strong

presence of security forces.

There are reports of such demonstrations outside Kathmandu supporting the movement of the seven party alliance

for the restoration of democracy in the Himalayan Kingdom.

Dozens of pro-democracy supporters were arrested in Biratnagar, while the Surkhet bazaar remained shut following a one-day general strike called by the alliance in the wake of the arrest of dozens of leaders and activists from Friday's protest programmes.

Senior leaders including the Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and CPN, UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal have been under house arrest.

## Litterateurs injured

Police also intervened in a peaceful demonstration being organised by artists, litterateurs and writers at New Baneshwore and arrested literary figures including Anand Dev Bhatta, Dr. Tulasi Bhattarai, Arjun Parajuli and Nanda Krishna Joshi.

Some literary personalities were also injured during the police intervention.

The parties have been demanding the restoration of democracy since the King seized power on February 1, 2005 and the movement has intensified recently.

India, U.S., U.K., European Union, Japan, United Nations and Human Rights organisations around the globe have condemned the Government for the arrest of political parties, who are saying that their protest would be peaceful. — UNI

# নেপালে মাওবাদীদের পর পর বিস্ফোরণ

কাঠমান্ডু, ২১ জানুয়ারি: জ্ঞানেন্দ্র সরকারের সঙ্গে গণতন্ত্রপন্থী সাত দলের জোটের সংঘর্ষে নেপালের রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি এমনিতেই অগ্নিগর্ভ। এরই মধ্যে কাল রাতে দেশ জুড়ে পর পর মাওবাদীদের বোমা বিস্ফোরণে অবস্থা চরমে উঠেছে। বোমা ফেটেছে একাধিক পুলিশ ফাঁড়ি, ব্যাঙ্ক আর সরকারি দফতরে। নিহত হয়েছেন অন্তত ৬ পুলিশ। আহত অসংখ্য।

গণতন্ত্রকামীদের মতো মাওবাদীদের কাছেও জ্ঞানেন্দ্র এখন অপ্রিয়। রাজনৈতিক টালমাটালের সুযোগ নিয়ে তারা কিছু দিন ধরেই নিজেদের জঙ্গি কাজকর্মের ক্ষেত্র বাড়িয়ে তুলছিল। একই দিনে পর পর বিস্ফোরণ তারই ফলশ্রুতি।

কালকের সব কাঁচি বিস্ফোরণ মোটামুটি একই সময়ে হয়েছে। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, মেচিনগর পুরসভার শুষ্ক বিভাগের দফতরে আচমকা সাইকেলে চড়ে তিন জন মুখোশধারী উপস্থিত হয়। দফতরে বোমা রাখা হয়েছে জানিয়ে তারা কর্মীদের বাইরে বেরিয়ে আসতে বলে। তার পরেই সেখানে বিস্ফোরণ হয়।

মেচিনগরেই একই সময় উপস্থান্য কেন্দ্রে বোমা ফাটে। রৌতাহাট জেলায় জঙ্গিরা রাজস্ব বিভাগের দফতর ও কৃষি উন্নয়ন ব্যাঙ্কে বোমা হামলা চালিয়েছে। বোমা ফেটেছে ধানগাঙ্গির

নেপাল ব্যাঙ্ক লিমিটেড ও কৃষি ব্যাঙ্ক লিমিটেডের দফতরে। বিস্ফোরণে এখনও পর্যন্ত সবচেয়ে বেশি মানুষ মারা গিয়েছেন নেপালগঞ্জ ও ভারত-নেপাল সীমান্তের জামুনাহা পুলিশ ফাঁড়িতে। এখানেই ৬ পুলিশের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। ১৬ জনের খোঁজ পাওয়া যাচ্ছিল না। পরে ভারতের রুপাইডিহা অঞ্চলের থানার সঙ্গে তাঁরা যোগাযোগ করতে পেরেছেন বলে খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে।

এতগুলি বিস্ফোরণের ধাক্কা কাটার আগেই আজ সকাল থেকে ফের রাজকীয় সেনার সঙ্গে আন্দোলনকারীদের তুমুল সংঘর্ষ শুরু হয়েছে। কাঠমান্ডুতে গণতন্ত্রপন্থী জোটের বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ ঘিরে গত কয়েক দিন থেকেই রাজনৈতিক উত্তাপ বাড়ছে। আজ শহর জুড়ে কড়া সেনা পাহারা বসানো হয়েছিল।

এরই মধ্যে কয়েক হাজার বিক্ষোভকারী দুর্বার মার্গে প্রস্তাবিত সমাবেশস্থলে যাওয়ার চেষ্টা করলে খণ্ডযুদ্ধ বাধে। বিক্ষোভকারীরা ইটবৃষ্টি শুরু করলে নিরাপত্তারক্ষীরা এলোপাথাড়ি লাঠি চালায়। অবস্থা সামলাতে কাঁদানো গ্যাসও ছুড়তে হয়। মার খেয়েও বিক্ষোভকারীরা জ্রোগান দিতে থাকে। এই ঘটনায় গণতন্ত্রপন্থী জোটের বেশ কিছু প্রথম সারির নেতা ও প্রায় ৫০০ সমর্থককে আজ গ্রেফতার করা হয়েছে। —পি টি আই

## Torture flight memo lands Blair in trouble

**VIJAY DUTT**  
London, January 20

**PANIC GRIPPED** Whitehall after British foreign office lawyers warned ministers and officials that the country could be in breach of strict international laws banning ill-treatment of prisoners by agreeing to allow secret CIA planes to touch down in Britain.

Sources said the move had made Prime Minister Tony Blair and foreign secretary Jack Straw vulnerable to charges.

Both had earlier denied about knowledge of any extraordinary rendition — CIA flight on which error suspects are put and sent to interrogation camps in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Straw told the foreign affairs committee in December that there was "no truth in the claim that the UK is involved in rendition".

Blair too, at a Downing Street press conference in December, said he had absolutely no evidence to suggest that anything illegal "has been happening here at all". But a leaked memo from the foreign office to Number 10 in early December shows that Blair was warned that Britain might have approved US requests to permit so-called 'extraordinary renditions'.

It is alleged that hundreds of planes carrying terror suspects captured by the US have landed in England over the years on their way to interrogation camps in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

# Curfew shuts down Kathmandu

**AGENCE France-Presse**  
Kathmandu, January 20

**BANNED STREET** demonstrations against King Gyanendra were postponed until Saturday after mass arrests of activists and a daytime curfew in Nepal's capital shut down Kathmandu on Friday.

The crackdown left the city streets deserted except for a huge security force deployment that prevented anyone reaching the central Durbar Square where the protest was to have taken place.

"Due to the curfew the seven-party alliance programme scheduled for Friday has been shifted to Saturday," Rajendra Prasad Pandey, a member of the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist Leninist) and a protest organiser, said. The protest is now planned at the same venue from 2:00 pm on Saturday, Pandey said. More than 190 people were detained on Friday for breaking the curfew, among them political activists, protesters and civilians, said a police officer. "We do not know when they will be released," said the officer.

Nepal authorities cut mobile phones, arrested more than 100 leaders and activists and imposed the curfew after the political parties announced they would go ahead with the protest despite a government ban on

demonstrations. The authorities cited the possibility of Maoist violence at the protests as reason for the crackdown.

"I was placed under house arrest this morning," Bharat Mohan Adhikari, a leader from the Nepal Communist Party, said over telephone. "Eleven armed police are stationed in my residence, and I understand that other leaders have also been placed under house arrest," Adhikari said.

The party's general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal said he, too, had been placed under house arrest. "Armed police surrounded my house at 4:00 am. They came inside at 6:00 am and at 7:30 a police superintendent came and handed over a warrant."

The US, India, the European Union, Japan and Britain have all strongly criticised the royal government's tactics.

Durbar Square remained deserted for most of Friday, save for police.

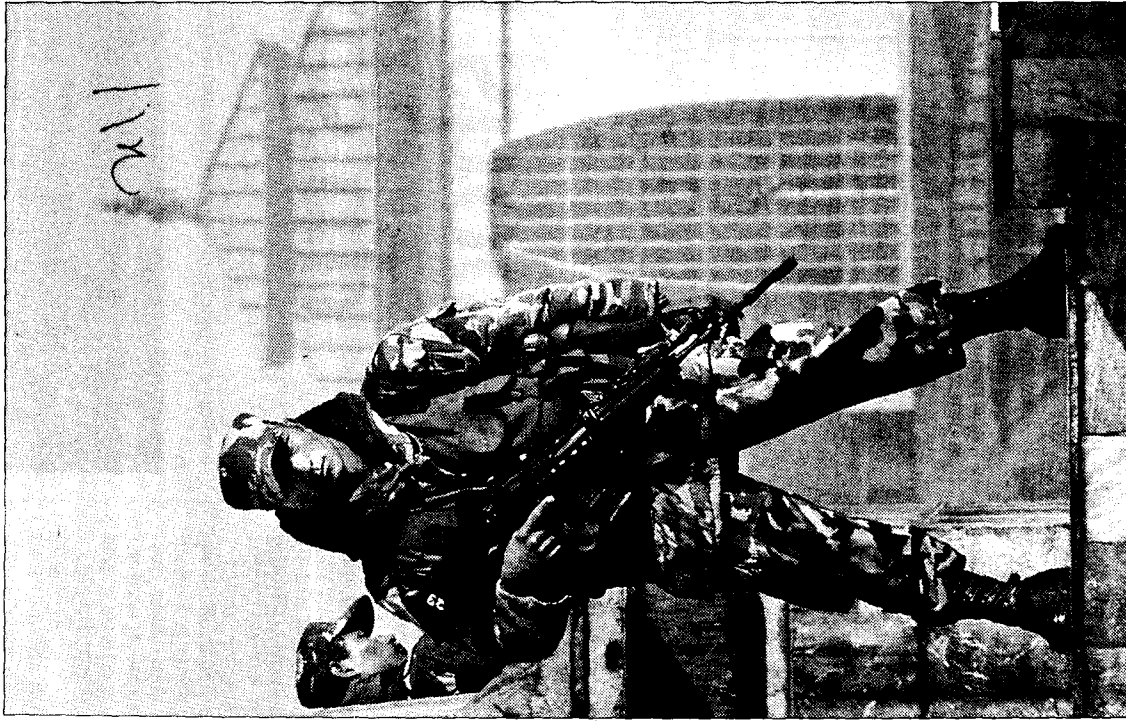
Residents rushed to work before the 8:00 am to 6:00 pm curfew came into effect, but most businesses kept their shutters down as truckloads of police rumbled through the city and soldiers took up positions at key points.

As soon as the curfew ended, residents thronged the streets and streamed to markets ahead of the night-time curfew which starts at 9:00 pm and lasts until 4:00 am.

## Rebels kill 6 cops

**MAOIST REBELS** attacked two security checkpoints in Nepalgunj, in western Nepal, on Friday, killing at least six policemen and injuring four others. The attackers fled with weapons and ammunition snatched from the police post. In a second attack on the outskirts of the town, two policemen were killed and five were reported missing.

**AP, Kathmandu**



**AFP**  
Policemen stand guard in front of the royal palace during a daytime curfew in Kathmandu on Friday.

# Top Nepalese leaders placed under arrest

**KATHMANDU:** Nepal's royal Government imposed a dawn-to-dusk curfew in the capital on Friday, put top Opposition leaders under house arrest and detained some 200 pro-democracy activists to derail plans for a massive protest against the King's seizure of absolute power nearly a year ago.

Troops surrounded the homes of at least five top politicians from the alliance of seven major political parties trying to organise the protest rally in Kathmandu, while about 15,000 soldiers and police patrolled the streets of the capital and its suburb Lalitpur.

Communist Party General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal said he was told he could not leave his home for 90 days and that he could receive no visitors

during the period. Also placed under house arrest were Girija Prasad Koirala, Nepali Congress party president and a former Prime Minister; Bharat Mohan Adhikari, another Communist Party deputy leader; and Narayan Man Bijuchche of the Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party.

Police raided a building in east Kathmandu, arresting about 200 activists suspected of planning a rally in violation of a curfew and a ban on demonstrations.

The Government imposed an 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. curfew on Friday in Kathmandu.

The city was deserted after an initial burst of activity as residents rushed to buy groceries and drive to work before the curfew began. — AP

THE HINDU

# Nepal worries the world

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Jan. 20. — As King Gyanendra's government imposed a day-long curfew in Kathmandu Valley today and arrested nearly 600 people to prevent a protest rally by opposition parties, global concern began mounting, with UN secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan, the European Union, USA, UK, India and Japan voicing dismay and urging for the immediate release of detainees.

Six political activists, including Nepal Sadbhawana Party leader Mr Rajendra Mahato, were today arrested for defying curfew and staging demonstrations as thousands of troops patrolled the streets of the capital to enforce the regulation aimed at thwarting a massive anti-King rally.

Capital city Kathmandu and its adjacent municipality Lalitpur remained paralysed after the home ministry imposed curfew from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with schools, business establishments, and transport closing down. Only security forces, ambulances, human rights activists monitoring the curfew and journalists

roamed the deserted streets. The coalition of seven major Opposition parties outwitted the government, rescheduling their mass protest for after curfew hours. Only a symbolic protest was held in the capital by Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi), a member of the opposition coalition, whose top two leaders Mr Rajendra Mahato and Mr Anil Kumar Jha were immediately arrested. Also arrested from a dharamshala near the Pashupatinath temple were 200 activists who had come from outer districts to take part in the protest rally. The government had arrested most of the top leaders and about 300 students yesterday. Opposition leader and three-time PM Mr Girija

Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress as well as two top Communist leaders, Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, and Mr Narayan Man Bijukchhe of Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, were formally put under house arrest today.

UN Secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan's office issued a statement in New York, saying the envoy was dis-

mayed by the latest developments in Nepal. The Secretary-General had repeatedly called for urgent dialogue in order to avoid confrontation, and for a bilateral ceasefire between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, the statement said. This appeal was not heeded, and the four-month unilateral ceasefire declared by the Maoists came to an end. "The Secretary-General once again appeals to all sides for calm, the suspension of fighting and the urgent initiation of an inclusive national dialogue." The USA said it "condemned the decision by the King of Nepal to detain political party leaders and civil society activists in advance of political demonstrations. These arrests are a violation of their civil and political rights, Mr McCormack, spokesman of the State Department, said.

The UK, which had expressed concern yesterday as part of the EU, again urged the Nepal government to release the detainees. Three rights watchdogs, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and International Commission of Jurists, said they feared violence could spiral in a joint statement today.

2006

THE STATESMAN

# Himalayan contrast

## Bhutan's far-seeing King

Bhutan is moving fast in the field of development and democratisation, and all credit to its dynamic 50-year-old ruler, King Jigme Singhye Wangchuck who assumed the monarchy when he was 23. On Sunday, he stunned the country by saying he would abdicate in favour of his 25-year-old son, Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, in 2008. That he made this announcement at a remote village, 900 km from Thimphu is evidence of his respect and regard for his people, no matter how far apart they live. He has been touring Bhutan for some time to familiarise himself with problems and to tell the people that the country's progress depends on their efforts and unity. When National Assembly members complained of "terrorist activities" by Lhotsampas (Bhutanese of Nepali origin in the southern districts) in the late 1980s, he gave a veiled threat to abdicate if he was not able to crush the unrest and they pledged their support to the throne. In December 2003, supported by the National Assembly to use arms to flush out Ufa and Bodo militants, the King himself led the operation successfully.

Bhutan is going to be "a parliamentary democratic country" by 2008. Significantly, the King is doing this without pressure from any quarter. It will be in India's interest to have a democratic neighbour. Fully aware of the future of the monarchy, the King ordered sweeping reforms in 1998 to gradually dilute his absolute power. He even gave the legislature the power to dismiss him by a two-thirds vote. Last April, copies of the draft constitution were circulated to elicit public opinion. It envisages a 75-member National Assembly and a 25-member National Council. Here, on one hand, is a forward-looking King using practical wisdom to win minds and hearts. And there is Nepal's King Gyanendra, who is busy strangling democracy. Each shall reap as he sows.

THE STATESMAN

# Bhutan King sets date with democracy

19/12  
Agencies

GUWAHATI, Dec. 18. — Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has announced he will abdicate the throne in 2008 in favour of his 25-year-old son, Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk.

The 50-year-old king made the surprise announcement at village Trashi Yangtse, 900 km east of Thimpu bordering China, late yesterday, which was celebrated as Bhutan's national day, according to reports reaching here. He said: "I am going to hand over responsibility to the crown prince in 2008. I want my countrymen to know this. The country will progress and become strong under his rule."

However, the Web site for Bhutan's state television and radio reported that the king "said Bhutan would be a parliamentary democratic country by 2008." The king, though, has been slowly trying to move Bhutan toward some form of democracy. The king's announcement has taken the

people by surprise as they had not expected a formal announcement so soon. The king was visiting different parts of his country to drum up support for the king-



King Jigme Wangchuk — A file photo

dom's move to democracy.

He had announced last month that the monarchical system in his tiny Himalayan kingdom was flawed and the best option for the people would be to opt for parliamentary democracy. The people say they are not ready for democracy and want the king to stay on. Bhutan earlier this year unveiled a 34-point constitution, which is being sent to all 530,000 citizens for their views.

The proposed constitution that specifies the role of the monarchy, the clergy and the duties and responsibilities of the people is expected to be ratified by the yearend after a referendum. The draft constitution, which has been in the making provides for two houses of Parliament — a 75-member National Assembly and a 25-member National Council. The king would become head of state under that plan, but Parliament would have the power to impeach him by a two-thirds vote. Despite the king's support for the constitution, his announcement stunned Bhutan, where the pace of change is slow.

THE STATESMAN



# Nepal swoop on party leaders ahead of rally

**Kathmandu:** In a major crackdown ahead of the planned anti-King agitation by the pro-democracy alliance on Friday, Nepal's royal government on Thursday arrested some 200 political party leaders and cut off mobile phone services. All top leaders of major political parties, except Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and Nepal Communist Party-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal were rounded up by security forces early Thursday.

Nepali Congress general secretary Ramchandra Poudyal, Nepali Congress (Democratic) acting president Gopalman Shrestha, Nepal Communist Party UML politburo member Ishwor Pokharel, CPN-UML spokesman Pradip Nepal, Sujata Koirala (daughter of GP

Koirala), were among the 200 arrested during Wednesday night raids. Security is tight around the residence of top political leaders and their telephones are also being tapped, party sources said. The government is overreacting and is spreading terror in the country the name of security, Madhav Kumar Nepal said. "The government is scared of the peaceful demonstrations being launched by the seven-party alliance," he said.

"We will defy the government's ban and organise our protest shows as usual on Friday," he said, adding there will be nationwide protest against the government. "People will throng the streets and thousands will court arrest. Meanwhile, authorities severed internet

services, both landline and mobile telephone services on Thursday but later restored landlines and internet communications.

Taking a strong view of the arrest of political leaders and curbs on civil activists in Nepal, India on Thursday said the events were "regrettable" and of "grave concern" to all those wishing to see constitutional forces in the Himalayan kingdom work together to achieve peace and stability there.

"These actions of his majesty's government of Nepal are regrettable and a matter of grave concern to all those who wish to see the constitutional forces in Nepal working together to achieve peace and stability in the country," external affairs ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said in response to a question on developments in Nepal.

ANTI-KING  
AGITATION



# Kingdom swoop corners 300

Statesman News Service

## Regrettable: India

KATHMANDU, Jan. 19. — Forty-six years after King Mahendra waged war on an elected government and multiparty democracy and sent political leaders to prison, and a year after King Gyanendra followed in his father's footsteps and seized power with the help of the army on February 1, 2005, Kathmandu valley lies under a siege conducted by the palace once again.

After imposing a curfew from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. and banning all demonstrations in the capital, the government headed by King Gyanendra began a fresh crackdown on Thursday, arresting top Opposition leaders and human rights activists and snapping mobile phone lines indefinitely.

Opposition leader and three-time Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was placed under house arrest. The octogenarian leader's daughter Sujata and nephews Shashank and Shekhar Koirala, all of them senior leaders of the Nepali Congress party, were arrested in a dawn swoop. Former deputy prime minister Ram Chandra Poudel was arrested from his residence as were several former ministers. Another former deputy prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who heads the largest communist party in the kingdom, the Communist party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist,

NEW DELHI, Jan. 19. — India today described the events as "regrettable". "These actions of His Majesty's Government of Nepal are regrettable and a matter of grave concern to all those who wish to see the constitutional forces in Nepal working together to achieve peace and stability in the country," the MEA spokesman said. — PTI

was also put under house arrest.

By noon, over 300 people were arrested. Those arrested included student leaders, human rights activists and an editor. Shyam Shrestha, whose weekly *Mulyankan* recently carried an interview with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai. Scores of opposition leaders went underground, pledging they would go ahead with a mass protest meeting in the capital Friday. To prevent the anti-king rally from taking place, the royalist government Thursday snapped telephone lines from dawn to 8.30 am. Though most of the land lines operated by state-run Nepal Telephones became operational after that, the phones of key opposition leaders and activists remained cut off. All mobile phones were cut off indefinitely.

Phone connections of United Telecom Ltd, a joint venture between India's VSNL, MTNL and TCIL and Nepali partner Nepal Ventures were also shut down. There is fear that phone lines could be disconnected again on Friday.

20 JAN 2006

THE STATESMAN

# Praise for Delhi on Nepal

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, Jan. 18:** For once, India's Nepal policy is drawing praise from the international community.

"If only the European Union and the US had been as clear as the Indians at critical moments in Nepal, things would have been different today," said a European diplomat based here.

He dismissed the charge that India's Nepal policy was confused. "We are aware of the dynamics that comes into play on Nepal in Delhi. Despite that, Indian policy has been very firm," he said.

Although India has not agreed to a UN role in Nepal, which some in the international community want, a European diplomat still said: "India must continue to provide leadership on Nepal or else some others may be tempted to step in."

It is because of the influence it wields in Nepal that often vested interests create confusion about the signals from India.

After the Saarc summit in Dhaka, for example, somehow a perception was created that Indian policy was taking a U-turn. When foreign secretary Shyam Saran visited Kathmandu in December, some royalists claimed that India was finally on "bended knees" before King Gyanendra.

Two developments in quick succession dispelled doubts about any policy

change — the extension of the 40-year-old transit treaty by only three months and a nonsense interview given by Indian ambassador Shivshankar Mukherjee to the local Kantipur TV.

While defending India's policy, Mukherjee said: "So far as the king is concerned, we continue to believe that he has a role as a constitutional monarch, which is not only important but also a critical role. But its importance comes from being a constitutional monarch, a symbol of unity of Nepal, integrity of Nepal, continuity of Nepal and the symbol of the diverse cultures of this diverse land which he pulls together."

However, he said: "What we do not agree with is a monarchy that is a political player, a monarchy that is competing for political power with the political parties. That role should belong, in a multi-party democracy, to the political party representatives who are elected by the people of Nepal."

What was new in this? A UN diplomat said: "Nothing. But in diplomacy, if a policy is repeated concisely and firmly at the appropriate moment, it becomes more effective."

While the diplomatic community has begun to appreciate India's grip on Nepal and the Maoists, some Nepalese politicians resent its alleged facilitation of an understanding between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance.

Former Prime Minister



**Nepal Workers' and Peasant Party supporters in a rally against the monarchy in Kathmandu on January 10.**

(Reuters)

## ROAD FOR NEPAL

Suryabhadur Thapa thus claimed: "This is not a problem of Nepal alone. The Maoists are active members of Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and Confederation of Maoist Parties of South Asia. If the understanding between political parties and the Mao-

ists is good for Nepal, then will it also be implemented in India? This is my question to India."

Nepalese foreign minister Rameshnath Pandey played both hot and cold on the Indian role. "The Nepalese people do not accept interference. History shows that we are capable of solving our internal problems," Pandey said.

Did he feel that India was interfering in Nepal?

"I would not go that far. But India should not try and export its political ideology. One size does not fit all," he said.

However, describing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as "a true statesman", Pandey argued that the current political interregnum should be used to transform India-Nepal relations.

"After Parliament is elected, the Opposition may not allow the government of the day to improve ties with India. Anti-Indianism is equated with patriotism here. People sign agreements and then campaign against their implementation as happened with the Mahakali Treaty. We should use this window available to change the nature and character of India-Nepal relations," he argued.

An Indian diplomat laughed off the attempt to dangle a carrot. "Are we crazy to sign any deals with this government? If we legitimise the king now, the political parties and the ordinary people will turn against us."

# Maoists vow not to disrupt protest rally

**J. HEMANTH**

**Kathmandu, Jan. 18:** The Maoist rebels today announced that they had no plans to take part in the mass rally being organised here on Friday by the seven-party political alliance to mobilise public support against the February 8 municipal polls.

In a statement, Maoist supremo Prachanda criticised the government for imposing prohibitory orders, including night curfew, in the Kathmandu valley, saying it exposed its "cowardice and defeatist mentality".

He said his party would honour its commitment to the alliance and support all peaceful protest programmes.

"We will not use any force or provoke violence at the peaceful protest called by the seven parties", he said, adding that the government was raising the bogey of "Maoist infiltration" to sabotage the rally.

"Our party, once again would like to clarify that there will not be any power show, infiltration or chaos from our side in the rally," he said.

In a separate development, the home ministry advanced the night curfew timings to 9 pm tonight.

18 JAN 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

## নেপাল: স্বখাতসলিল

রাজার নিজের ক্রিয়াকলাপই যদি রাজতন্ত্রের অবসানের লক্ষ্যে নিয়োজিত হয়, তবে তাহার উচ্ছেদের জন্য প্রজাদের আর সচেত হওয়ার দরকার পড়ে না। নেপালে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র অনিবার্যভাবে নেপালে রাজতন্ত্রকে অপ্রাসঙ্গিক করিয়া তুলিতে সচেত হইয়াছেন। তিনি চাহেন নিজের হাতে কুক্ষিগত সার্বভৌম শাসনক্ষমতাকে চিরস্থায়ী করিতে। কিন্তু তাহা করিতে গিয়া তিনি যে-সব পন্থা অবলম্বন করিতেছেন, তাহা নিশ্চিত ভাবেই রাজতন্ত্রের বিদায়ের ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত করিতেছে। একে তো তিনি নির্বাচিত পার্লামেন্ট ভাঙিয়া এবং রাজনৈতিক ক্রিয়াকলাপ নিষিদ্ধ করিয়া সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রে নিরঙ্কুশ স্বৈরাচারে রূপান্তরিত করিয়াছেন। রাজতন্ত্র উচ্ছেদে সশস্ত্র সংগ্রামে লিপ্ত মাওবাদীদের সহিত আলোচনার দরজা বন্ধ করিয়া তাহাদের নাশকতা ও বিদ্রোহে ফিরিতে বাধ্য করিয়াছেন। নাগরিকদের মৌলিক অধিকার খর্ব করিয়া নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে একটি প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক শাসনব্যবস্থা কায়েম করার যাবতীয় প্রকল্প অনন্ত কাল ধরিয়া স্থগিত করিয়াছেন। উপরন্তু এখন নিজের নিরঙ্কুশ স্বৈরাচারের অনুকূলে প্রতিনিধিত্বের বৈধতা অর্জন করিতে দেশের ৫৮টি পুরসভায় ফেব্রুয়ারির প্রথম সপ্তাহে ভোট করার সিদ্ধান্ত লইয়াছেন।

প্রশ্ন হইল, পুর-ভোট দিয়া কি রাজতন্ত্রকে গ্রহণযোগ্য করা যাইবে? দেশের দেড় কোটি ভোটারের মাত্র ১২ শতাংশ পুর-এলাকাগুলিতে বাস করেন। ভোটে হয়তো রাজার পছন্দের প্রার্থীরাই জয়ী হইবেন। কিন্তু তাহাতে কি রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র আপনাকে নেপালি জনসাধারণের প্রতিনিধি রূপে দাবি করিতে পারিবেন? অবশিষ্ট বিষ্ণুও কি সেই দাবিকে বিশ্বাসযোগ্য মনে করিবে? বরং লোকদেখানো এই পুর-ভোটকে প্রহসন বলিয়াই নিন্দা করা হইবে। নেপালের এখন যাহা দরকার, তাহা একটি বৈধ প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক শাসনব্যবস্থা, যাহা নির্বাচকমণ্ডলীর প্রতি দায়বদ্ধ। কেবল নির্বাচিত জনপ্রতিনিধিদের আইনসভা হইতেই তেমন শাসনব্যবস্থা উদ্ভিত হইতে পারে। সেই আইনসভা বা পার্লামেন্ট নির্বাচনে কোনও আগ্রহ না দেখাইয়া নেপালরাজ পুর-ভোটে মনোনিবেশ করিয়াছেন। যেন দেশকে একটি শাসনব্যবস্থা দেওয়ার চেয়েও কাঠমান্ডু কিংবা পোখারার জঞ্জাল সাফাই করা বেশি জরুরি। রাজার যে বুদ্ধিব্রংশ হইয়াছে, তাহা স্পষ্ট। এবং কে না জানে, বিনাশকালেই এমন বুদ্ধিনাশ হইয়া থাকে।

এই বুদ্ধিনাশের প্রভাবেই তিনি নেপালিদের মধ্যে উগ্র জাতীয়তাবাদ উস্কাইয়া তোলার চেষ্টাও করিতেছেন। প্রাসাদ হইতে নিরন্তর নেপালি স্বাভাবিকবোধের অনুকূলে প্রচার চলিতেছে এবং রাজাকে সেই জাতীয়তাবাদের কেন্দ্রে স্থাপন করা হইতেছে। কিন্তু সে দিন আর নাই যখন নেপালে রাজাই ছিলেন জাতীয় ঐক্যের প্রতিভূ। নিজ অপকর্মের ধারাবাহিকতায় জ্ঞানেন্দ্র সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রের সেই মহিমা নষ্ট করিয়া ফেলিয়াছেন। এখন রাজতন্ত্রের অবসান এবং প্রজাতন্ত্রের উদ্বোধন ছাড়া নেপালে অন্য কোনও রাজনৈতিক প্রকল্পের স্থান নাই। এমনকী উগ্র জাতীয়তাবাদকে ভারত-বিরোধিতায় পরিণত করার এবং সে জন্য চীন ও পাকিস্তান তাস খেলার বিপরীত বুদ্ধিও আজ আর তত ফলপ্রসূ হইবে বলিয়া মনে হয় না। ভারতের সংলগ্ন ভূখণ্ডে ওই দুই দেশকে দূতাবাস খুলিতে দিবার প্রচার কিংবা চিনের কাছ হইতে রাজতন্ত্রের পক্ষে সমর্থন আদায় করিয়া ভারতের সহিত দূরত্ব রচনার চেষ্টা নয়াদিগ্নিকে আদৌ বিচলিত করিতে পারে নাই। নেপালে নির্বাচিত পার্লামেন্টের হাতে ক্ষমতা ফিরাইয়া দিবার দাবি হইতে ভারত সরিয়া আসিবে না। এ ব্যাপারে সাহায্যদানকারী পশ্চিম রাষ্ট্রগুলিও যে জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের রাজতন্ত্রী প্রকল্প সমর্থন করিতেছে না, তাহাও দ্ব্যর্থহীনভাবে জানা গিয়াছে। নেপালে রাজতন্ত্রের আয়ু তাই দীর্ঘস্থায়ী নয়। রাজা দীর্ঘজীবী হউন, এমন শ্লোগান নেপালের গণতন্ত্রীরা আর দিতে প্রস্তুত নন। জ্ঞানেন্দ্র যদি সম্মানের সঙ্গে নিজে সরিয়া গিয়া গণতন্ত্রকে পথ করিয়া দেন, ভাল। অন্যথায় বিশ্বের অপরাপর রাজতন্ত্রে রাজার যে দশা হইয়াছে, নেপালেও তাহার পুনরাবৃত্তির আশঙ্কা উড়াইয়া দেওয়া যায় না।

# Nepal king imposes curfew

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Jan. 16. — A year after imposing direct rule in Nepal and claiming the security situation had improved considerably, King Gyanendra's government today imposed indefinite curfew in Kathmandu Valley as Maoist guerrillas shook up the administration with a spate of attacks during the weekend that left 12 policemen dead.

Curfew from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. till further notice was clamped down in Kathmandu and in key areas of its neighbouring municipality Lalitpur from tonight with security forces being given the power to shoot people who ventured out during curfew.

The home ministry issued a notice today evening, asking residents to remain indoors from 11 p.m. till 4 p.m.

Violating the curfew was punishable with one month imprisonment.

If a violator proceeded to continue moving forward defying security orders, troops have been empowered to shoot, the ministry said.

In case of emergency, residents could go out during curfew after obtaining permission from security authorities, the ministry said. The curfew order comes after Maoist insurgents attacked two police posts Saturday evening, killing 12 policemen and bombing various government offices in Kathmandu valley.

The attacks prompted the opposition parties to express fears that the government was gearing up to impose curfew and eventually martial law with the suspension of civil liberties. The curfew is also being regarded as a step by the government to prevent

a coalition of seven major opposition parties from staging an anti-king mass protest in the capital on 20 January.

Opposition leaders said they feared the government would try to prevent the meeting on the pretext it could be infiltrated by the guerrillas. Political observers have been fearing escalated violence in Nepal with the countdown having begun to the civic polls, scheduled for 8 February.

The major parties are boycotting the polls, calling it a farce by the government and a ploy to legitimise King Gyanendra's unconstitutional power grab with the help of the army last year.

The Maoists have warned they would disrupt the polls and resumed arms against the government from this month after a four-month unilateral ceasefire called by them.

THE STATESMAN

# Glimmer of hope in Maoist pact

**BHARAT BHUSHAN**

**Kathmandu, Jan. 16:** The agreement between the Maoist insurgent leaders and representatives of the seven-party alliance for democracy has injected a new sense of hope for peace in Nepal.

"A quantum leap forward" is how a European diplomat described the 12-point understanding between the seven-party alliance fighting for democracy in Nepal and the Maoists.

"It commits the Maoists to multi-party democracy and respect for human rights. The instrument for achieving democracy will be the Constituent Assembly and there the two sides have admitted their differences," the diplomat said.

"Getting the Maoists to agree to multi-party democracy and the outcome of an elect-

ed Constituent Assembly even rhetorically is a huge step forward," he added.

Suryababadi Thapa, described as the "sly old fox" of Nepalese politics and five times Prime Minister of the country, however, dubbed the alliance "unnatural".

"Principally, I don't agree with it. It is born out of compulsions of the political parties, the Maoists and their advisers, whoever they might be. Still, I say, that the political parties should take advantage of it," Thapa said.

"The Maoists have shown good strategic thinking. The political parties now have to turn the alliance to their advantage. If they don't then we won't have to wait too long for the consequences," he added grimly.

Why did the Maoists agree to reach an understanding with the political parties?

Shyam Shreshtha, the editor of the Left-wing magazine *Mulyankan*, explained: "The Maoists knew that even if they could seize state power militarily, they could not hold on to it.

"To push their agenda they needed the support of the international community

and the opinion-making middle class in Nepal. They couldn't do so by sidelining the political parties. They were also the sufferers of the king's February 1 coup."

He added that "perhaps their popularity had also diminished because of their excessive use of force and coercion. A combination of these factors brought about a change in their strategy".

Professor Lokraj Baral, so, it is good." Girija Prasad Koirala, the president of the Nepali Congress, the primary moving force for a dialogue with the Maoists, sees the understanding reached with them as a first step towards bringing them within a democratic value system.

"Democracy also imposes a responsibility on us to bring

an eminent political scientist venerated by young Nepalese for voicing Republican sentiments much ahead of the political parties, seemed to agree.

"The Maoists have their own problems and want a safe landing. But what is wrong with that? They should give up arms, the use of violence and accept democracy. If they do

## ROAD FOR NEPAL

even non-democratic elements within the democratic framework, I am convinced that the Maoists can be brought to the democratic path. The 12-point understanding is a measure of our success in that direction," he said.

Koirala's views are underlined by another stalwart, Madhav Kumar Nepal, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), a member of the seven-party alliance.

"The seven-party alliance and the Maoists have agreed to bring down this autocratic monarchy, hold elections to a Constituent Assembly and establish complete democracy. Together with the Maoists, we are exploring how to bring about a participatory democracy in this country. These are no longer just slogans," he said.

Hari Sharma, director of

social science, Baha, claimed "the 12-point understanding is a turning point in Nepalese politics".

"It ends the politics of displacement—the Maoists first displacing the political parties and then the king doing so through his coup. It marks a new politics of engagement that makes peace possible, identifies contentious issues and ensures that any future dispensation will have to begin with this minimum agenda," Sharma said.

He pointed out that "the future dispensation will have no place for the king. There will be multiple negotiations at the popular level—between ethnic, religious and regional identity groups. Which group does the king belong to? The current engagement is taking place outside his realm—both traditional and contemporary".



# Night curfew in Kathmandu

**J. HEMANTH**

**Kathmandu, Jan. 16:** Fearing Maoist violence in Kathmandu in the next few days, the district administration today imposed a curfew in certain areas of the valley from 11 pm to 4 am starting from tonight.

The night-time curfew will be in force in the area within the Ring Road of the Kathmandu valley until further notice.

"The curfew has been imposed for maintaining law and order, for the welfare of the people and to prevent untoward incidents from taking place," the administration

said in a notification adding that security forces have been directed to shoot anybody trying to break the curfew orders.

The move comes after increased violence by the Maoist rebels within the valley. Two nights ago, hordes of heavily armed rebels launched a brazen assault in the valley by attacking two police check-posts and killing 12 policemen and injuring six.

They also detonated bombs in several places to protest against the royalist government's plans to hold municipal elections on February 8.

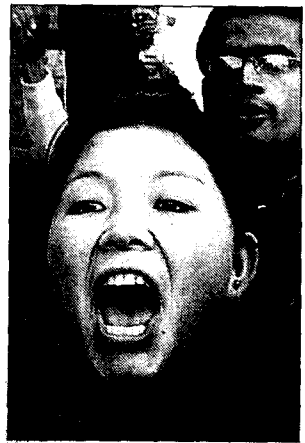
In a separate development, the Indian ambassador to

Nepal, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, left for New Delhi today to brief his government on the emerging political situation in Nepal.

In New Delhi, Mukherjee is set to hold discussions with foreign secretary Shyam Saran and other senior officials of the external affairs ministry.

He is also expected to call on defence minister Pranab Mukherjee and home minister Shivraj Patil.

Mukherjee's visit to New Delhi comes in the aftermath of the collapse of the Maoist ceasefire triggering violent clashes in several parts of the country.



**Students at an anti-monarchy protest in Kathmandu. (AFP)**

# Security tightened after Maoist attacks in Nepal

**Kathmandu:** Security in and around the Nepalese capital was heightened on Sunday after communist rebels attacked two police stations on the outskirts of the city, killing 12 policemen.

Police and soldiers were posted at major intersections of Kathmandu, and patrolling was increased on the streets. People were not allowed to gather in groups in the main areas of the city.

In the first attacks near the capital since the rebels withdrew from a unilateral cease-fire on January 2, the rebels killed 12 policemen and wounded six more on Saturday night, government officials said.

A Royal Nepalese Army spokesman in Kathmandu said the situation was normal in the areas where the guerrillas had struck.

In the first attack on Saturday, rebels stormed a police post at Thankot, the main western checkpoint out of Kathmandu, killing 11 policemen, police officials said.

Minutes later, an explosion by the Maoist rebels at Dadikot, about eight km east of Kathmandu, killed one police official and left six critically injured. The rebels claimed responsibility



A guard mans the Thankot checkpoint where 12 policemen died on Saturday

for the attacks in a brief statement posted on their Web site. It said none of their fighters was killed in the assaults. The attacks were the first to have been carried out so close to Kathmandu since the rebels withdrew from a unilateral cease-fire this month and resumed attacks on government troops and targets.

Earlier, Nepal's defense ministry said soldiers killed at least 16 rebels in fighting in western Nepal—the largest number of rebel casualties since the guerrillas withdrew from the truce.

One soldier was also killed in the clash late Friday near Manakamana village, a remote mountainous area about 200 km west of Kathmandu.

The attacks are the latest in a series of bold attacks in Nepal since the rebels ended their four-month, unilateral cease-fire because of the government's failure to reciprocate.

Several policemen have been wounded and killed across Nepal in the past two weeks. The guerrillas, who say they are inspired by Chinese revolutionary Mao Zedong, began fighting in 1996 to create a socialist state. The insurgency has claimed about 12,000 lives. AP

# Target head in assault on spine

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, Jan. 14: Climb on the spine to hit on the head or "dhand ma tekera touku ma hanne" is the Maoist slogan, which defines their emerging strategy. The spine is the high-ways, supply routes in the periphery, the areas of military presence; and the head is Kathmandu.

The Maoists want to show that the armed forces of the state cannot provide safety and security in the urban centres, not even for holding municipal elections.

This has been evident in their attacks on the security forces near Nepalganj and in Dhangarhi, after they called off their four-month unilateral ceasefire for lack of response from the king.

"The Maoists are holding mass meetings in the periphery of the cities and towns surrounded by their own security personnel. Step by step, they are converging towards the city centres and the municipalities. They will be there by the time of the municipal elections on February 7," said Mahesh Maskey, a leading member of the Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Peace.

Shyam Shreshtha, editor of the Left-wing *Mulyankan* magazine, also feared an upsurge in urban violence. "The Maoists will create a big disturbance in the urban centres. Despite their commitment to the UN (that) they will not kill non-combatants, in my estimation, in the next 30 days you will see



READY FOR BATTLE: Maoist guerrillas during an exercise in Bhojpur, eastern Nepal. AFP file picture

a lot of violence in Nepal."

C.K. Lal, an eminent political commentator, pointed out the downside of the Maoist strategy. "The problem with this strategy is that paranoid foreigners will once again begin to see the king as the saviour."

He thought an agitational mode with relatively open Maoist participation would give the king less room to play, even though it may take a little longer.

However, the indications are of an intensification of violence. Sudheer Sharma, a political analyst who has studied the Maoists closely, claimed that they are increasing their military strength and that "their tactics are becoming Kathmandu-centric".

Sharma pointed to the re-organisation of the military command structure of the Maoists as an evidence of

this. The Peoples' Liberation Army of the Maoists used to have three divisions — now it has been expanded to seven.

"To meet the recruitment challenge, they are converting 50 per cent of their political cadre into military cadre. They believe that the decisive

## ROAD FOR NEPAL

phase of a republican movement is always violent. They want to go with the political parties, but should the parties be enticed away by the king, then they fear violence would intensify.

"Even otherwise, they think that increased military strength will give them increased bargaining power with the parties," Sharma said.

Earlier, the Maoists had

three separate geographical military commands — East Central Command, West Central Command and the Mid-Central Command. The Mid- and West Central Commands have now been merged. And a new Special Central Command that includes Kathmandu and its surrounding areas (previously under the East Central Command) has been created.

"Now the political and military moves from both the east and the west will be towards Kathmandu," Sharma explained.

"The Maoists believe that they can help lift the movement in Kathmandu and increase its intensity. In the first phase, they will not go for violence in the capital.

"They will take military action in the areas identified as the spine or the lifeline of Kathmandu. This will both

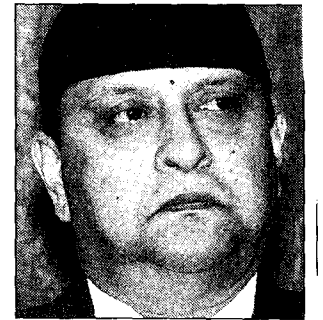
further the republican agenda and affect the municipal elections," he said.

In the last and decisive phase of the agitation in Kathmandu, the Maoists believe that the king will use violence to suppress the movement.

"At that time, they think that even the two big political parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), may invite action against the Royal Nepal Army (from the Maoists)," Sharma said, looking into the future.

The king has been clever up to now and has not used force against the people.

But this is increasingly becoming a republican movement and it is not unthinkable that a time would come when he might have to suppress it with all the force at his command.



Gyanendra

The problem with this strategy is that paranoid foreigners will once again begin to see the king as the saviour

A political commentator on the Maoists' urban-centric plan

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, Jan. 14: In a well-orchestrated move, Maoist rebels detonated bombs at several places in Kathmandu and killed at least 15 policemen in attacks on checkpoints at two other places.

According to unconfirmed reports, at least 10 policemen were killed in coordinated attacks on the Thankot and Dadhikot

checkposts in Bhaktapur district late this evening.

The rebels attacked the Thankot checkpost — the entry point to the Kathmandu valley on the national highway — by detonating bombs and firing indiscriminately. A police inspector, Mahesh Rawal, was report-

edly killed in the attack.

Simultaneously, another group of rebels raided a police post at Dadhikot near Bhaktapur city at the valley's other end. Reports said five policemen were killed.

Officials are yet to provide details about the number of casualties. A Royal Nepal

Army source said forces are conducting search operations in Thankot. Vehicular movement at the entry point to Kathmandu has been stopped.

Krishnasenonline, a pro-Maoist news agency, claimed responsibility for the attacks and said the rebels did not

suffer any casualty.

Suspected rebels also triggered a blast at the office of the Lalitpur municipality's ward number 9 and at Boudha Papal Bot. Reports of explosions in some ward offices in the Kathmandu valley are coming in.

Today's raids were the first major attack by the rebels in the Kathmandu valley since they ended their four-month unilateral ceasefire earlier this month.

## Maoist serial strikes

# Maoists mark truce end with huge strike

JHEMANTH

**Kathmandu, Jan. 11:** Within days of ending their unilateral four-month-long ceasefire, Maoist rebels launched a major attack on Dhangadhi town, the district headquarters of Kailali district in western Nepal late this evening.

Reports reaching here said scores of heavily armed Maoists simultaneously attacked the district police office, a ward police office, the regional police office, the Unified Command (police and army) barracks, Sukkhad base camp, a Nepal Rastriya Bank's branch office and other government buildings in Dhangadhi.

The rebels exploded bombs and in retaliation the security forces exchanged fire for about half an hour. Both the sides have reported casualties, but the exact figures remain unclear, security sources said.

Of the 25 policemen in the ward police office, only 15 were in contact till last reports came in, the sources said.

Unconfirmed reports said seven security personnel had been killed in the incident.

According to the sources, around 10 pm, the Maoists at-

tacked the district jail and the district police office. They also looted some weapons from the ward police office.

The rebels ended the truce on January 2 and since then at least six people have been killed and more than a dozen wounded in a string of attacks before today's strike.

While calling off the truce, the Maoists had indicated they would go on the offensive to defend themselves against government forces.

The unilateral ceasefire that was extended once under popular pressure came to an end as the King Gyanendra-led regime did not match it.

The King, who seized power nearly a year ago from the elected government, believes the rebels use ceasefire as a camouflage to regroup.

"The royal army is surrounding our People's Liberation Army, which is in defensive positions, to carry out ground as well as air attacks on us," the rebels had said.

"Therefore, we are compelled to go on the offensive not only for the sake of peace and democracy but for the sake of self-defence," Prachanda, the Maoist chief, said.



Gyanendra



Maoist rebels during training in Bhojpur, eastern Nepal. (AFP)

As the Maoist ceasefire ends, YUBARAJ GHIMIRE argues that the king cannot delay reaching out to pro-democracy forces much longer

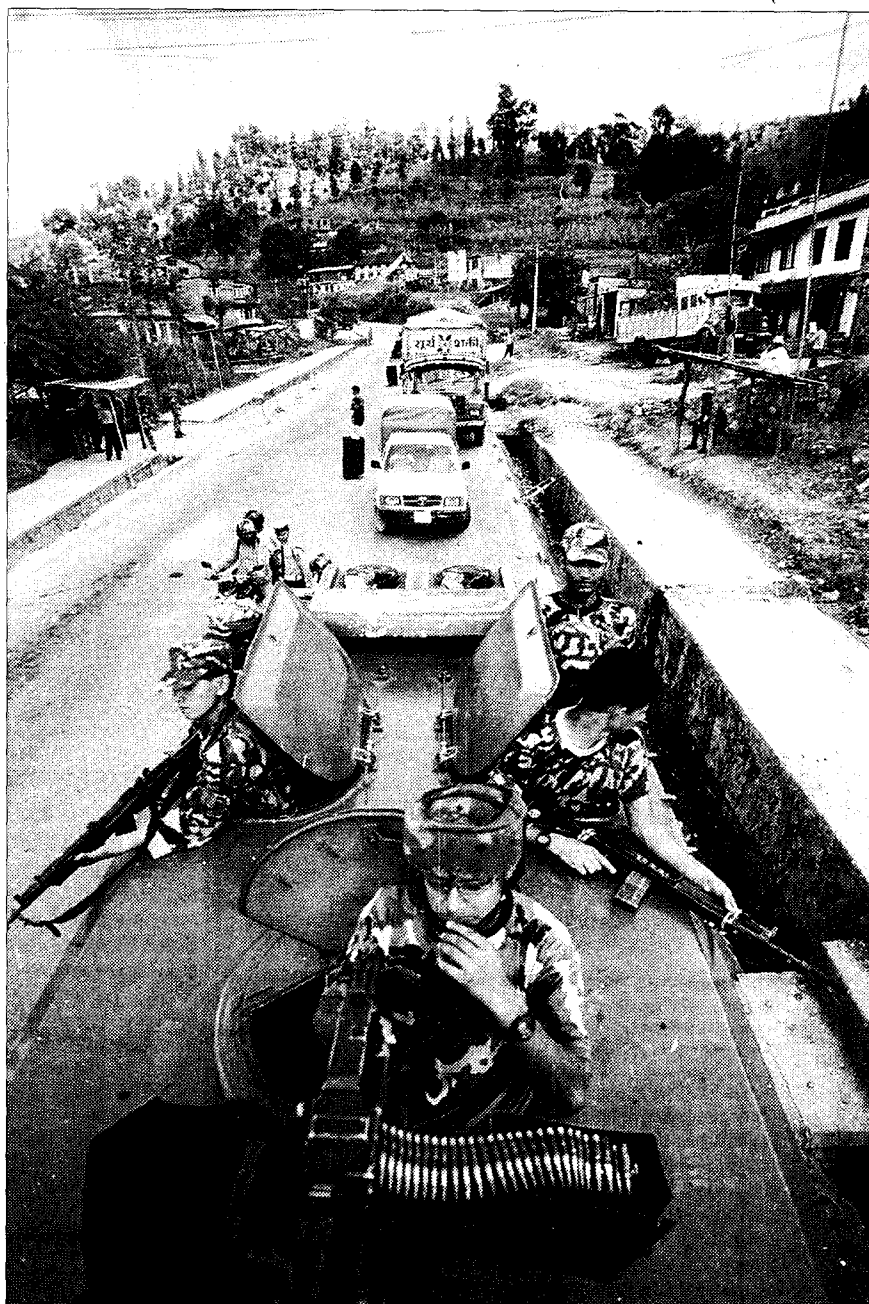
# In Nepal it is a three-horse race once again

**A**N EXPERIMENT with peace by Nepal's Maoists worked quite satisfactorily for four months. The average of ten killings a day dropped down to less than one, and tourist traffic into the country increased by 15 per cent as guns fell silent in Nepal during the period. But on January 2, the Maoists declared an end to the truce and announced resumption of violence, asserting that "the right to revolt against the feudal tyranny is our biggest human right". In the first three days, there were about half a dozen explosions in different parts of the country, including one in western Mahendra Nagar in which three security personnel were wounded.

Maoists had declared the ceasefire unilaterally for three months on September 3, a week before King Gyanendra was scheduled to embark on a visit to the United States where he was expected to solicit international support for his campaign against "terrorism". US President George Bush sent across a humiliating message to the king around the same time to the effect that he would be among eight heads of state not to be invited during a reception he would be hosting if the king did not restore democracy. Adding salt to injury, major political parties wrote to the UN secretary general not to entertain the king as the legitimate representative of the country as "he had unconstitutionally appropriated executive power".

The international community's cold reception to the king's overtures had a visible impact on Nepal's internal politics. Maoists and seven pro-democracy parties opposing the king's takeover on February 1, 2005, found common cause under the banner of anti-monarchism. Maoists could not have achieved this rapport without putting their arms into disuse. In fact, the truce led to the two sides signing a 12-point charter of understanding on November 22 in Delhi, pledging to work together for a "democratic republic" within the framework of a multi-party parliamentary system. They agreed on the need for an elected constituent assembly which would decide on restructuring the state apparatus and design a new constitution to replace the one launched 14 years ago, following the end of the king's direct rule in 1990.

In fact, there had been doubts in political circles as well as in the international community about the Maoists' sincerity in professing allegiance to the peace process. Even the parties which had signed the memorandum of understanding had made it clear that they could not work together with the Maoists so long as they did not re-



nounce violence permanently.

But now these parties are blaming the king more than the Maoists for the end of the ceasefire. King Gyanendra consistently turned down appeals from all sides — the UN, India, US and European Union included — to reciprocate the ceasefire and give peace a chance. The king's only concrete commitment to returning Nepal to democracy was to hold elections for 58 municipalities in the country on February 8, and then to the House of Representatives in April 2007.

The point is that the monarch makes little attempt to hide his hatred for major politi-

cal parties, and that accounts for the reaction of these political parties. They have decided to boycott the elections. Maoists have said they would target candidates and government officials on election duty. Political parties say that they are committed to a sustained political movement for the establishment of a "full-fledged democracy" — while leaving space for a truly constitutional monarch.

Why did the government not reciprocate the ceasefire even when the Royal Nepal Army suggested to the king that "we should turn the situation to our advantage"? There are many theories floating

around, but the one which sounds most plausible is that the king, surrounded by his coterie, is in a vengeful mood. He is apparently confident that the military solution alone will contain the "terrorists". Dr Tulsi Giri, vice chairperson of the council of ministers, even claimed that the Maoists felt forced to declare a ceasefire because "the government has broken their back".

Moreover, in the government's assessment, the understanding for the ceasefire was between the Maoists and the seven parties only, with no role provided for the government.

The international community has expressed frustration over the end of the ceasefire, an expression that is certainly not charitable to the king, and it has been reiterated that the conflict does not have a military solution. It has been followed by repeated appeals for a ceasefire by both sides, and cancellation of the proposed municipality elections, so that the king and political parties can initiate a substantive dialogue.

King Gyanendra has in months past assured UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that he is seeking a return to democracy. He said as much to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during their first meeting after the takeover way back in April 2005 in Jakarta. He repeated the same thing in Dhaka when they met at the SAARC sum-

**The Royal Nepal Army is feeling the crunch as India and other pro-democracy countries stop supplies of arms. Kathmandu did, however, recently receive 18 truckloads of arms and ammunition from China**

mit. But he was more assertive — it was his model of democracy that he wanted to restore. Polls would be held under his régime, no matter whether major parties participated or not.

Meanwhile, the Royal Nepal Army with around 82,000 personnel is feeling the crunch as India and pro-democracy countries have stopped the regular supplies of ammunition. The government recently got 18 truckloads of arms and ammunition from China, but there are doubts whether the requirement can be matched from the north alone.

There is still no sign of political dialogue with the political parties and steps for the restoration of democracy. If the king does not change, that would be a sign that he is putting at risk Nepal's monarchy, an institution that is 237 years old. His unpopularity is rising by the day.

Nepal is at the crossroads. Which way it goes from here will depend on whether the king reaches out to pro-democracy forces, or augments the crushing power of the RNA with arms supplied by China.

*Yubaraj Ghimire is a Kathmandu-based journalist*

## End of a ceasefire

**W**ith the Maoists in Nepal deciding not to extend their four-month ceasefire, the country is set for an intensification of the political crisis that began nearly a year ago with King Gyanendra's reactionary coup. Were the monarch a well-intentioned ruler, as he regularly claims to be, he would have surely seen the ceasefire as an opportunity to start exploring a peaceful, political route to the restoration of Nepal's multi-party democracy. Instead he deliberately ignored the truce and spent money buying arms for the Royal Nepal Army. The Maoists first declared the ceasefire on September 3 for three months, and then extended it by one more month. The truce also saw the seven-party democratic alliance and the Maoists agree on an agenda to establish "total democracy" through elections to a constituent assembly for framing a new Constitution. For the first time, the Maoists committed themselves to democracy, and the political parties agreed to the Maoist demand for the rewriting of the Constitution, which has the potential of ending the monarchy and even the constitutional regime Nepal has had since 1990. This was a significant victory for Nepal's democratic forces against King Gyanendra. The outplayed King believes the best way of tightening his grip is to return to violence. It also seems to be his calculation that the political parties will find it difficult to sustain their newly formed friendship with the Maoists once they resume insurgency.

It can only be hoped that the Maoists will not play into King Gyanendra's hands. During the truce, Nepal's countryside saw a period of peace and tranquillity unprecedented in a decade. Across the country, there is a yearning for this to continue but the indications are to the contrary. In a statement, Maoist leader Prachanda declared that henceforth his party's actions would be directed "against the royal government only." But violence has a way of engulfing everything in its path, and the Maoists cannot guarantee that the violence, once begun, will remain confined to specific targets. A confrontation seems imminent at the municipal elections to be held from January 26. The pro-democracy political parties have rightly decided to boycott the elections, which they describe as a ploy by the monarch to try and convince the world that he is genuine about restoring democracy. The only candidates in this election are those from royalist parties. Late last month, a statement from the Maoist leadership warned of "special action" against the contestants. Over the past four months, the Maoists won respect from the people of Nepal and the international community for their maturity in announcing the truce and making common cause with the political parties — actions that helped isolate King Gyanendra. They must do nothing now that will help him claim legitimacy for his crassly unconstitutional rule.

# Blasts rock Nepal

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, Jan. 3. — Three western Nepalese cities were rocked by near simultaneous blasts, hours after Maoists called off their four-month unilateral ceasefire blaming continued Army operations against the rebels.

No one was injured in the blasts which occurred in Pokhara, a popular tourist spot in Kaski district, and in Butwal and Bhairahawa cities in Rupandehi district last evening, police said. However, the district education office in Bhairahawa was damaged in the explosion, they said.

The blasts came hours after the Maoists declared an end to their unilateral ceasefire, accusing the army of terrorising people in Rolpa, known as their headquarters, by conducting aerial and ground operations that also left one of their leaders, Kim Bahadur Thapa, dead.

A country-wide alert had been issued after the rebels ended the ceasefire as the Himalayan kingdom was gripped with the fear of fresh resumption of violence. "We express commitment to fight from the side of Nepalese people till the last minute so long as the Royal Army continues to create terror as it has done through Rolpa operation that led to end of ceasefire," Maoist chief Prachanda said in a statement yesterday. He urged people to bring a hurricane of movement by both peaceful means and armed struggle to end absolute monarchy.

Prachanda, however, said his party was ready to reconsider its withdrawal of the ceasefire if the government agreed to empower people by holding a national political conference. Royal Nepal Army spokesman Brig Gen Nepal Bhushan Chand said Maoists' decision to call off the ceasefire has not affected the Army's regular patrol and operations.

## UN warning

The UN has warned the government of escalation in violence following the withdrawal of the ceasefire by the Kingdom's Maoist rebels. The world body has urged both the government and the Maoists to respect international humanitarian laws.



A Nepali soldier monitors vehicular traffic in Kathmandu. — AFP

THE STATESMAN



# Maoists call off truce

**Offensive would be directed at the royal regime, say the rebels**

**KATHMANDU:** Nepal's Maoist rebels said on Monday they would not extend a four-month truce which ends at midnight, and that they were abandoning the ceasefire in self-defence.

The truce was first announced for three months in September and extended for another month under popular pressure. It was not matched by the Government headed by King Gyanendra, who seized power in February.

"The royal army is surrounding our people's liberation army, which is in defensive positions, to carry out ground as well as air attacks on us," the rebels said in a statement.

"Therefore, we are compelled to go on the offensive not only for the sake of peace and democracy but for the sake of self defence," said Prachanda, elusive chief of the Maoist group.

There was no immediate comment from the Government which has in the past said the rebels use ceasefires to regroup.

## Abductions

King Gyanendra, who fired the Government 11 months ago, had refused to match the truce. The guerrillas have accused his royalist government of provoking them to break the ceasefire.

While the ceasefire had resulted in fewer deaths, the army and rights activists said the rebels continued abductions. The Maoists are fighting to establish one-party communist rule in the Himalayan nation,



**VOCIFEROUS DEMAND:** Journalists raise slogans as they take out a protest march demanding freedom of the press in Kathmandu. — PHOTO: AFP

one of the world's poorest.

The revolt, now nearly 10 years old, has killed more than 12,500 persons and delayed national as well as local polls.

Mr. Prachanda said the rebels' new offensive would be directed at the royal regime. He said the Maoists would respect a recent pact with political parties in which they agreed to rejoin the main political process.

Mainstream political parties blamed the Government for what they said was its failure to seize the opportunity for peace.

"A fresh cycle of violence and bloodshed would begin due to the rigid attitude of the state despite the flexibility of the Maoists," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, chief of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML, the second biggest political party. — Reuters

THE HINDU

0 - JAN 2006



# Clock ticks on rebel truce, Nepal on edge

**Kathmandu, Jan. 1** (Reuters): A new year dawned in revolt-torn Nepal today amid growing fears of fresh violence as the Maoist rebels' unilateral truce neared its end.

The rebel ceasefire, first announced for three months in September and later extended for another month under popular pressure, is due to expire at midnight on Monday.

King Gyanendra, who seized absolute power 11 months ago, has refused to match the truce while the guerrillas have accused his royalist government of provoking them to break it.

Still, the four months saw fewer killings.

"An end to the ceasefire would naturally mean resumption of violence," said Yubaraj Ghimire, editor of *Samay*, a weekly magazine. "But there is still some hope that the Maoists will continue with their unilateral ceasefire for some time."

The truce neared its end amid unconfirmed reports that the Maoists, who hold sway in the countryside, were now setting their sights on the high-security capital, Kathmandu, which has so far been



**Security forces stand guard in Kathmandu on New Year's Day.** (Reuters)

spared major attacks.

The rebels are fighting to establish one-party communist rule in the mountainous Himalayan nation, one of the world's poorest.

The revolt, now nearly 10 years old, has killed more than 12,500 people and delayed national as well as local polls.

On Friday, United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan expressed concern that fight-

ing could resume and urged the government to join the ceasefire.

Annan also called on the rebels to extend the truce, saying that the people had benefited from the de-escalation of violence in the last four months.

But analysts said the royalist government, which asserted recently that it had broken the rebels' "backbone", was unlikely to take heed as it believes the rebels cannot be trusted. "Continued refusal by the state to reciprocate the ceasefire would not only discredit it further but establish that it is the government which is more responsible for the possible resumption of conflict and the likely bloodshed," Ghimire said.

He said the guerrillas had probably realised that their credibility as a political entity had a chance of being accepted under a ceasefire.

"This is the only factor that raises the hope that the Maoists would extend the ceasefire," Ghimire said.

Nepal is due to hold elections for 58 municipal councils on February 8 and the government says they could lead to parliamentary polls in 2007.