

## **Nepal's King Ousts the Government and Declares an Emergency**

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1 - Nepal's king dismissed the government and declared a state of emergency on Tuesday, at the same time effectively cutting off the troubled Himalayan nation from the outside world by suspending phone, Internet and most air links.

Professing himself a champion of multiparty democracy, King Gyanendra announced on state-run television that he had fired the multiparty government, including the same prime minister he dismissed in October 2002 and later reinstated. He said he would set up a Council of Ministers under his chairmanship, and suggested that security forces would be given greater powers to combat a growing Maoist insurgency.

In a statement, the king also suspended the constitutional freedoms of press, speech and expression; the freedom to assemble peacefully; the right to privacy; and the constitutional protection against news censorship and preventive detention, The Associated Press reported.

His decision was condemned by India, Britain, the United Nations and the United States. The State Department spokesman, Richard A. Boucher, said the Bush administration was "deeply troubled by the apparent step back from democracy" and demanded an "immediate move toward the restoration of multiparty democratic institutions."

News reports said that soldiers had surrounded the houses of the prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and other government leaders, and that armored military vehicles were patrolling the streets of Katmandu, the capital. There were reports that leaders of two political parties - the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), which have regularly clashed with the monarchy - were being detained in their homes.

Land and mobile phones in the capital were not working, and officials with Jet Airways and Indian Airlines in New Delhi said their flights were not being allowed into or out of Katmandu. A Thai Airways flight, unable to land, returned to Bangkok, airline officials said.

The country, whose beauty and spirituality have long made it a major tourist destination, is for the time being cut off from the outside world, much as it has been under recent blockades mounted by the Maoist rebels the government is fighting.

The mountainous, majority-Hindu kingdom has been fighting an insurgency since 1996, when the Communist Party of Nepal, which is Maoist and distinct from the Marxist-Leninist party, announced that it intended to abolish the constitutional monarchy and establish a people's republic in its place. At least 10,000 people have been killed since.

Multiparty democracy was introduced to Nepal in 1990 by the current king's brother, but the country has been flailing politically almost ever since. King Gyanendra, who took power after a palace massacre in 2001 that killed his brother, who was then the king, has either appointed weak governments or acted to weaken them. Parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for November 2002, have yet to be held. The current government was appointed last July after street protests prompted the previous prime minister to resign.

In his announcement, the king faulted the government for its failure to conduct parliamentary elections and its inability to restore peace in the country. "A new cabinet will be formed under my leadership," he said. "This will restore peace and effective democracy in this country within the next three years."

Political analysts vehemently disagreed. "This is a fairly disastrous decision, the worst possible option," said Dr. Ajay Sahni, the director of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi.

The move, he said, will alienate the king from all of the nation's major political forces even as it does nothing to strengthen his hand against the rebels. Nepal's army, outnumbering the Maoists at best seven to one, is stretched far too thinly over the country's formidable terrain to defeat them, he said. Diplomats from Western and regional powers backing the government have offered similar assessments, saying the conflict cannot be won militarily.

The king's action was criticized in unusually blunt terms on Tuesday by India, Nepal's neighbor and ally.

"These developments constitute a serious setback to the cause of democracy in Nepal and cannot but be a cause of grave concern to India," a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs said, adding that the king had "violated" the principles of Nepal's Constitution. "The latest developments in Nepal bring the monarchy and the mainstream political parties in direct confrontation with each other. This can only benefit the forces that not only wish to undermine democracy but the institution of monarchy as well."

C. Raja Mohan, professor of South Asian studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, noted that Nepal borders three of India's largest states, all of which are battling Marxist Naxalite insurgents, who have links to the Maoists. It shares a border with China as well. "Strategically, you can't get any bigger than this," he said.

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