

SANSAD

South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy

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SANSAD News Release:

Nepal Takes a Backward Step

On February 1, 2005 King Gyanendra of Nepal, the constitutional monarch of this Hindu kingdom in the Himalayas, declared a state of Emergency, dismissed the Prime Minister and government, and put the Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba and all leaders of the political parties either under house arrest or under military detention in unknown locations. Their fate is unknown. The King suspended the fundamental freedoms of speech, expression, and assembly and imposed restrictions on the movement of people within Nepal and from outside. In a royal proclamation he denounced the political parties while claiming to champion democracy. He has promised to give more power to the army despite ample evidence of its widespread violation of human rights in Nepal.

For over fifty years the people of Nepal have aspired to a democratic polity. In 1959 they succeeded in promulgating a constitution based on a multi-party system, only to have it abrogated in 1960 by King Mahendra. In 1990, after intense and prolonged struggle they again achieved a democratic constitution but have since had little opportunity of enjoying the benefits of multi-party democracy. Soon after becoming King in 2001, Gyanendra declared a state of emergency and suspended parliament. These undemocratic measures were taken in the face of the increasing strength of the Maoist insurgency that had been building since 1996. The subsequent agitation of the people of Nepal for democracy in 2004 compelled the King to reappoint Sher Bahadur Deuba, whom he had dismissed in 2002, as Prime Minister. Deuba was appointed with a mandate to initiate talks with the insurgents and to hold elections by March 2005. At this juncture, the dismissal of the government and the attack on all political parties, along with the suspension of fundamental and democratic rights is a serious blow to the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people. This cannot be masked by the King's proclamation of himself as the savior of the Nepali people from both Maoist insurgents and political parties. The South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) utterly condemns the King's assault on the democratic and human rights of the people of Nepal and his self-destructive choice of a military solution to the insurgency that has raged for nearly a decade and taken more than 10,000 lives. For many years the Royal Nepal Army, with the military and financial support of India, Britain, and the US, has been engaged in a brutal counter-insurgency that has not only failed to contain the insurgency but has escalated the violence and the violation of human rights. We join our voice with that of all democratic people in Nepal and in the world in demanding an immediate end of "Emergency", and preparing the necessary conditions to facilitate building of political institutions consistent with the democratic aspirations of the people of Nepal.