

Crackdown on Pro-Democracy Movement in Nepal

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In the course of a sustained battle against the monarchy in Nepal, launched jointly by all opposition forces, Nepal's pro-democracy movement has entered a new phase despite a fresh and massive crackdown.

After the January 20 crackdown, King Gyanendra seems to be facing isolation not only nationally but internationally as well. Since he sacked the government on February 1 last year, all the opposition forces including CPN(Maoist) and the seven-party alliance have been working in tandem against the monarchy. CPN(Maoist) had declared a unilateral ceasefire, while keeping alive its emphasis on a Constituent Assembly and constitutional changes towards a full fledged Republic.

Ironically the king had sacked Deuba government accusing him of failure to hold elections. Since then, enjoying absolute power, he has not even bothered to restore the parliament and hold elections. The massive repression against the struggling forces has intensified. It was in this backdrop that CPN(Maoist) withdrew the unilateral ceasefire.

In the meantime the King declared sham municipal elections scheduled to be held on February 8. To defeat this Machiavellian design of the King, the seven-party alliance gave a call for a mass rally in Kathmandu demanding restoration of parliament and democratic rights.

However, King Gyanendra resorted to a massive crackdown to foil the protest rally. Top leaders of various political parties were arrested. Curfew was imposed in Kathmandu. Mobile phone services were cut off. Journalists were arrested, Nepalese FM stations and the print media were reined in. For the first time since the February 1 sacking of the government last year, army personnel with automatic rifles were deployed to thwart civil demonstrations.

Yet the pro-democracy activists defied the government restrictions and took out rallies in many parts including Basantpur Durbar Square and New Road in the heart of the capital city of Kathmandu. As per media reports, hundreds of demonstrators clashed with heavily deployed security forces and courted arrest. Police resorted to baton-charge and fired tear gas shells to disperse the agitating masses.

Political parties continued to defy the government crackdown on protestors for days, calling for a Nepal Bandh on January 26 and boycott of sham municipal elections announced by the monarch.

P.S.

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