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EDIT PAGE

Hundred days of solitude

Suhas Chakma

Amnesty International in a press conference in New Delhi on March 17, 2004, stated that human rights crisis is now on the brink of catastrophe. Though over a half-a-dozen political leaders have been released from house arrest, Asian Centre for Human Rights has documented continued detention of 133 persons including key political leaders such as Sher Bahadur Deuba, GP Koirala and Madhav Nepal. The only institution, which can respond in a state of emergency, is the judiciary. But the judiciary succumbed to the security forces even before the declaration of emergency on 1 February 2005. Lawyers are frightened to file habeas corpus petitions, the only right available at the moment.

By allowing Amnesty International, the erstwhile bete noire, to hold a press conference in the Capital, New Delhi has sent another message to King Gyanendra. However, South Block has so far officially refused to confirm the suspension of all military aid to Nepal.

While restoration of multi-party democracy is fundamental, international community must see beyond the restoration of multi-party democracy. The Maoists virtually control 70 per cent of the landscape. Political parties have simply failed to take concrete measures due to a host of factors including ambiguity as to who calls the shot - the King and his Royal Nepal Army or the political parties. With most of the RNA personnel stationed in their barracks in the rural areas, they at best can frighten the over ground political activists, human rights activists, journalists, academics and lawyers. Therefore, any intervention on Nepal must not only be confined to the restoration of democracy but creating a process to find a negotiated solution to the Maoist crisis.

India, the United States and European Union have recalled their envoys for consultations. But King Gyanendra need not respond positively to international pressure. King Gyanendra reportedly sought three months - 100 days - during his talks with the US envoy, James Francis Moriarty on February 11, 2005, to bring the situation in the country under control and remove curbs on citizens. With most of the RNA personnel engaged in enforcing emergency, protecting the King and the Kathmandu valley, and providing escorts to the vehicles caught in the Maoists' road blockade, King Gyanendra's deadline to bring normality in the country within three months is ludicrous. His Majesty possibly hopes that international pressure will gradually evaporate and he can gain legitimacy by slowly lifting the curbs and freeing political leaders.

If he does not gain legitimacy, His Majesty may also approach China and Pakistan to provide military assistance or wait till the Maoists come to the kingdom, which is confined to Kathmandu valley, and create a dilemma for international community to choose between two despots - himself and Prachanda, the leader of the Maoists.

The crisis in Nepal is not a simple case of an old fashioned monarch's grab for more power. As a four-year-old Prince Gyanendra was declared the King by Prime Minister Shamsher Rana in 1950 when his father Tribhuvan fled to India. As a prince, Gyanendra was infamous for meddling in political affairs and even allegedly supported the Maoists in the beginning to discredit the democratic forces. The psychological aspect for certain amount of irrationality in the decision making by King Gyanendra cannot be underestimated. He had set two conditions for appointment of Deuba - to bring the Maoists to talks by January 13, 2005, or hold elections by April 2005. Tughlaqism of the 21st century by any yardstick!