

Prayers and Concerns

Nepal Update: February 2006

Political updates

First anniversary of Royal Takeover—On the occasion of the first anniversary of the royal takeover, the king addressed the nation on Feb. 1, 2006. In his address he defended his royal move and refused to hand over power, claiming that there has been significant improvement in the security situation and governance of the country in the last one year under his direct rule. He said that the country has started heading in the right track toward progress through elections for sustainable development, constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. (Feb. 1)

Different political parties, civil societies and human rights organizations marked Feb 1 as a “black day” and organized several protest programs. Many leaders and human rights activists were arrested on the night of Jan 31.

Municipal elections conducted—The municipal elections were conducted in 36 municipalities out of 58 under very tight security. Candidates of 22 municipalities were elected unopposed. There were heavy numbers of security forces in polling booths but the numbers of voters were negligible. Less than 20% of the voting population took part in the election. The elections were held peacefully in all places. The government claimed that the elections were successful whereas the opposition parties and the Maoists said that it was a total failure. (Feb. 8)

The international communities commented on Feb. 8 municipal elections negatively. India, the UK, and the United States considered the elections as meaningless and a hollow attempt to legitimize the royal government.

Some of the elected mayors and municipal candidates resigned citing different personal and health problems.

The Supreme Court (SC) dissolved the Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC)—The SC ordered the dissolution of the RCCC, which was formed a year ago after the royal takeover. The court also ordered scrapping all the decisions of the RCCC. Former PM Deuba and ex-minister Singh were released immediately after the court dissolved the RCCC. (Feb. 13) They had been imprisoned by the RCCC, accused of corruption in a water project.

The political parties' activities—The political parties continued demonstrations, mass gatherings and awareness programmes in different parts of Nepal, demanding absolute democracy. The parties refused to make any kind of reconciliation with the king unless he hands over power.

Petroleum products' price hike—Petroleum products' price was hiked again due to which transportation fares and market prices of commodities have increased significantly.

Security Updates

Palpa District Headquarters attack—The Maoists attacked the district headquarters of Palpa District, Tansen, on the night of Jan. 31. Almost all the district level government offices were destroyed and the prisoners from the jail fled. Eleven security forces and 6 Maoists were killed in the incident. The Maoists also abducted the Chief District Officer (CDO) and 21 policemen during the attack, but they were set free after two weeks.

Series of attacks in government offices—The Maoists attacked many other government offices and security forces all over the country. Different district government offices, residences of high government officials, and municipality offices were attacked and destroyed.

The regional headquarters of the midwestern region, Nepalgunj, has been a very hot spot all this month. Several incidents of crossfire and attacks occurred in the busy marketplace and airport. The Maoists also attempted to attack all security units in the headquarters.

Nationwide strike (bandh) Feb. 5–9 amid the municipal elections—The Maoist bandh starting from Feb. 5 was found to be very effective all over the country. All transportation, businesses, markets, educational institutions and industries remained closed. The bandh was announced from Feb 5 to 11 to disrupt the municipal elections, but it was withdrawn from Feb. 9 after the election, which took place on Feb. 8.

The highways were also closed and many obstacles were set along the major highways. In the east-west Mahendra Highway near Butwal a clash occurred while security forces were trying to clear the obstacles. Eighteen security forces and a civilian were killed in the incident. The road was not fully opened for two weeks. (Feb. 8)

Bandh and demonstration

The Maoist forthcoming strike programmes—The Maoists have announced an indefinite blockade of regional, zonal and district headquarters, especially Kathmandu valley from March 14, 2006.

Similarly, from April 3, 2006, the Maoists have announced an indefinite nationwide bandh.

In numbers—This Month (Feb.) (Source —national newspapers)

- 3 civilians killed and 14 injured, including students
- 51 security men killed and 13 injured
- 20 Maoists killed and 3 injured

(This data is according to the national news; the actual number might be different.)