

Return of Democracy in Nepal

The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal has been witnessing large scale violence at the hands of Maoist rebels ever since King Gyanendra ascended the throne. They have been demanding an elected Constituent Assembly. Initially the movement did not aim at ending monarchy or at clipping the wings of the King. But with the passage of time, as the stands were hardened, the Maoist rebels were joined by students and the UML parties. The government tried to crush the uprising with an iron hand but failed. The movement gathered more strength day-by-day.

The King had to finally give in. In a televised address to the nation on April 24, 2006, he agreed to reinstate the Parliament that was dissolved in 2002. "The session of the House of Representatives will take place on April 28", the King said. He further said, "We call upon the Seven Party (opposition) Alliance to bear the responsibility of taking the nation on the path of national unity and prosperity while ensuring permanent peace and safeguarding multi-party democracy."

The Parliament met on April 30 and Unanimously passed a resolution calling for elections to a Constituent Assembly. For the first time in history, the fate of the king was placed in the hands of its people. The Constituent Assembly will draft a new constitution for the country. It could also decide whether Nepal should remain a monarchy or become a democracy.

The Seven Party Alliance has already decided to scrap the Raj parishad. This Parishad had been supporting the King and advising him to usurp all power and establish a strong autocratic rule. The SPA has now asked the Maoist rebels to give up arms and join the political mainstream in the country.

It is now clear that the winds of change are fast blowing and across the country. Shorn of his powers, the King will find it extremely difficult to stage a comeback. It is hoped that genuine democratic rule will rid the country of violence and bloodshed it has been passing through for the last several years.

All, however, does not appear to be as simple as it looks. The Maoist insurgents have not yet laid down arms. They have agreed to cease fire and see that the elections bring about the desired changes. It is quite possible that they might raise their head again if things do not go the way they like. Some powerful pro-democracy forces like India or the UN may have to intervene to oversee the process of elections to the Constituent Assembly.

In the meantime, the people appear to have won a historic victory. Nepal now appears to be moving towards a strong, stable, democratic country. The people of Nepal must be vigilant. They must guard this hard-won freedom and take the country on the road to prosperity and peace.