

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture / Fear for safety/ Medical concern

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NEPAL

**Sindhunath Pyakurel (m), former chairman of the Nepal Bar Association
Bishnu Nisturi (m), General secretary Federation of Nepali Journalists
Hundreds of others including student activists and members of political parties**

On 1 February, the King of Nepal dismissed the Government and assumed direct power. He declared a nationwide state of emergency, placed political leaders under arrest and severed all internal and external communications links. Independent Nepali media offices were closed down and according to state owned radio a number of rights, including freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, were suspended.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those named above and others, who have reportedly been arrested since the declaration of the state of emergency and the King's assumption of direct power.

According to reliable sources, Sindhunath Pyakurel was arrested by security forces personnel on 1 February at his office in Kathmandu. He is the former head of the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) and has made public criticisms of human rights violations by security forces. The NBA is a national association of lawyers that works on human rights issues. Sindhunath Pyakurel suffers from a heart complaint and it is feared that he will not receive proper medical attention while in custody.

Bishnu Nisturi is the general secretary of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). He was reportedly arrested by security forces personnel on 4 February and it is feared he has been targeted because the FNJ released a statement on 2 February condemning the recent measures taken by the King suppressing freedom of expression. These measures include press censorship and the presence of the army in media offices.

There have been widespread reports that the homes and offices of many human rights activists have been visited by security forces personnel. Several activists have gone into hiding fearing for their safety.

Hundreds of members of student groups and political parties have been arrested since the King took direct control. There are reports that many are being held at the headquarters of the APF in Halchowk, Kathmandu.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The human rights situation in Nepal has deteriorated in recent months in the context of the conflict between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) which began in 1996. The King suspended parliament in 2002 and since that time three consecutive Prime Ministers have been appointed by the king. The most recent Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed in May 2004 following protests of thousands of people calling for the reinstatement of an elected government. He had appointed a coalition government of members of mainstream political parties. However, following the King's seizure of power, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and members of his cabinet have been put under house arrest.

During the conflict there has been a pattern of killings, detentions, abductions, torture and threats against human rights defenders by the security forces and the CPN (Maoist). Amnesty International is concerned that following the seizure of direct control over government by the King, violations against human rights defenders will increase and journalists and human rights organisations will find it difficult if not impossible to operate freely.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Nepal or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Bishnu Nisturi and Sindhunath Pyakurel and all those arrested following the declaration of state of emergency, the dismissal of the government and the King's assumption of power on 1 February 2005;
- calling on the authorities to immediately grant them access to their relatives, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- urging that they be treated humanely while in custody and not tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for them to be released immediately and unconditionally, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that human rights activists, journalists, lawyers and other members of civil society are able to carry out their work without fear of arrest or harassment by the security forces.

APPEALS TO: (Faxes may be switched off outside office hours, 5 ½ hours ahead of GMT. If someone answers the telephone please ask them in English to switch on the fax machine, and resend the fax).

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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Nepal accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 March 2005