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Nepal: Fears of increasing violence

Amnesty International today urged the government to rein in the security forces, saying it feared an increase in violence over coming days.

"Rather than justifying the use of excessive force, the government should be ensuring that the police and army act within the law to protect people's lives," said Purna Sen, Asia-Pacific Director at Amnesty International. "Restricting peaceful demonstrations by ban orders and curfews and arbitrarily arresting hundreds of people only enflames an already volatile situation."

Three people were killed and many more were injured by members of the security forces over the weekend in attempts to control the sometimes violent demonstrations; and the Home Minister has made a veiled threat warning that the government could take stronger action against protestors.

Observers in the country noted that the number of protesters and security forces out on the streets appears to be growing, and that both sides are increasingly resorting to violence. While many of the demonstrations held across Nepal in recent days have been peaceful, others have involved aggression by protestors, some of whom have thrown rocks, bricks, bottles and other projectiles at members of the security forces.

At a press conference yesterday, the Home Minister warned that "[t]he government has maintained maximum restraint so far. Now, we will no more remain a silent spectator".

Government security forces have neither maintained maximum restraint nor can they be called 'silent spectators'. Members of the security forces were seen beating, kicking and throwing stones at protestors. In many cases, the security forces continued to beat and abuse protestors after they were brought under control. Some of those taken into custody had sustained serious injuries, according to local journalists and human rights defenders. Local observers also reported that members of the security forces in Kathmandu were entering private homes in areas where rallies were held, assaulting residents and destroying property, and detaining some individuals.

"The government must order immediate and impartial investigations into all allegations of the misuse of force or firearms by the security forces," said Purna Sen. "Victims and their families deserve justice and compensation."

Representatives of the political parties estimated that more than 1,000 people have been detained over the past week. The seven-party political alliance that called the recent demonstrations has pledged to continue its protest programme, despite the government's threat to take additional

measures to limit such activity.

Amnesty International has called repeatedly for the government to uphold the right to peaceful political protest.

Local journalists and human rights activists say the government has restricted the provision of curfew passes in an apparent attempt to limit public scrutiny of the conduct of the security forces in policing demonstrations. Some human rights activists who have attempted to intervene in cases of police brutality have themselves been subjected to assault and harassment.

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