

Nepal Blocks Protest Rally With Arrests and Curfew

By [SOMINI SENGUPTA](#)

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NEW DELHI, Jan. 20 - Flouting international condemnation, [Nepal](#) quashed a pro-democracy protest scheduled for Friday in the capital, Katmandu, with an all-day curfew enforced by soldiers and the police and mass arrests of organizers.

The police said 200 people had been detained for curfew violations, and armored personnel carriers mounted with machine guns were posted on the streets of the capital, Reuters reported from Katmandu. The leaders of the country's major political parties, which had called for the rally, were placed under house arrest, Reuters said.

The government of King Gyanendra announced a ban on public demonstrations earlier this week, on the grounds that Maoist insurgents waging a decade-long war against the state would use it to foment violence. On Thursday, the police rounded up about 100 people, mostly political party workers involved in the preparations, and blocked telephone communications.

A coalition of seven political parties, once stridently opposed to the rebels and now increasingly vocal against the palace, had planned the rally to call for a full restoration of political rights.

The arrests on Thursday prompted critical statements from the United Nations secretary general, [Kofi Annan](#), as well as from the United States, the European Union and India, a powerful neighbor of Nepal. On a visit to New Delhi on Friday, R. Nicholas Burns, under secretary of state for political affairs, criticized the king and the rebels.

"The United States is very concerned by the actions of His Majesty the King and arresting and detaining of members of the political establishment in the last couple of days," Mr. Burns said.

The fresh crackdown comes nearly a year after King Gyanendra took absolute power, suspended civil liberties and arrested hundreds of political leaders, journalists and others opposed to the royal takeover in an effort to crush the insurgency. The king lifted a state of emergency three months later but kept in place many restrictions on press and political freedoms.

The United States, once an important backer, India and Britain suspended military aid after the takeover by Gyanendra on Feb. 1, 2005.

A unilateral cease-fire declared by the Maoists in September expired this month, raising fears of a resumption of guerrilla attacks.

The Associated Press reported that gunmen suspected of being Maoist rebels killed six police officers late Friday in western Nepal.

King Gyanendra has called for municipal elections to be held next month. But the country's main political parties have vowed to boycott them, and the Maoists have threatened to disrupt them.

The home minister, Kamal Thapa, this week invited the political parties to resume talks with the palace and warned them against supporting the rebels.