

Role of the International Community in People's Movement of Nepal-2006

Binod Thapa

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Binod Thapa

Email: drbinodthapa@gmail.com.253

Authors Affiliation:

Associate Professor, Tribhuvan University, Central Department of History

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Abstract

The April 2006 People's Movement in Nepal was a decisive struggle against King Gyanendra's autocratic rule. Beginning with a four-day general strike on April 6, organized by seven political parties with Maoist support, the protests quickly escalated nationwide. Industries, schools, and businesses shut down, while government repression led to arrests, injuries, and deaths. International concern grew as the UN, EU, Japan, India, and the U.S. condemned violence and urged dialogue. The strike evolved into a sustained uprising, gaining global attention. International community criticized the King's direct rule. Despite mounting pressure, King Gyanendra's April 21 announcement returning executive powers was rejected as deceptive. Continued protests, combined with warnings from military leaders, compelled him to restore parliament on April 24. After king's restoration of the parliament, Girija Prasad Koirala was appointed Prime Minister ending the 19-day movement. International actors welcomed the restoration, urging Maoists to renounce violence and resume peaceful politics. Donor nations resumed aid, reinforcing democratic commitments. Ultimately, the movement forced a transfer of power, reshaped Nepal's political trajectory, and marked a revival of democracy through the combined strength of domestic resistance and international support. Therefore, the significance of this article lies in providing information about how the 19-day movement progressed, what events took place, and what role the international community played.

Keywords: movement, role, democracy, demonstration, USA, India

Introduction

In B. S. 2058, following the royal massacre, King Birendra's younger brother Gyanendra ascended the throne. The Maoist conflict, which had already been ongoing for some time, intensified further during his reign. Although the government attempted negotiations with the Maoists, these efforts repeatedly failed. Consequently, King Gyanendra dissolved the elected House of Representatives and formed a new government under his own leadership. On February 1, 2005, King Gyanendra declared a

state of emergency and took direct control of government power into his own hands. This widely discussed *move of Magh 19* (February 1st) further angered the political parties, fueling the fire of the people's movement. As a result, the parties intensified their struggle, while countries such as the United States, India, and the United Kingdom, along with various international organizations, began to show deep concern over Nepal's unfolding political events. Before February 1, the international community had largely supported the King and urged the protesting parties to reconcile with him.

However, after King Gyanendra's direct takeover, suspicion toward him grew internationally, and support increasingly shifted toward the political parties and the Nepali people. In this context, the seven major political parties formed an alliance and launched a movement on April 6, 2006 to end the King's autocratic rule. In this context, the purpose of this article is to answer the question of what role the international community played in Nepal's second people's movement of 2006 and what impact it had. Therefore, this article seeks to shed light on the role and influence of the international community during that movement.

Problem Statement

The problem statements adopted in this article are as follows:

- (a) What role did the international community play in Nepal's people's movement of 2006?
- (b) What impact did that role have on the movement's outcome?

Objectives

The objectives adopted in this article are as follows:

- (a) To highlight the role of the international community in Nepal's people's movement-2006.
- (b) To explore the impact of international role in the second people's movement-2006.

Methodology

The research employed qualitative historical methodology using descriptive and analytical approaches drawing from primary and secondary sources including government documents, Academic books, articles and contemporary newspaper. In necessary place, Gregorian (A.D.) and Bikram Sambat (B.S.) date systems have been used in the main text of the books, journals, newspapers etc. However, A.D. has not been mentioned in English dates and all Nepali dates in this study are presented according to the Nepali calendar (Bikram Sambat B.S.). The main achievement of this article

lies in clarifying the role of the international community in Nepal's movement of 2006 and its impacts.

The Early Phase of the Movement

The seven political parties engaged in the movement advanced a decisive campaign to end King Gyanendra's autocratic rule. As the first step, they announced a four-day general strike from April 6 to April 9, 2006. In line with the 12-point agreement, the Maoists also expressed support. They lifted the blockade of the Kathmandu Valley and declared a ceasefire within the Valley.

On the first day of the strike on April 6, demonstrators staged widespread protests in major areas of the capital and beyond. Industries, factories, educational institutions, and commercial centers were shut down. The government intervened with force, injuring many and arresting numerous protesters. This incident immediately drew global attention. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the situation, expressing concern that it was escalating into confrontation. The Embassy of Finland, representing the European Union in Kathmandu, issued a statement saying that restrictions and arrests violated international conventions Nepal had signed, particularly those protecting freedom of assembly and expression. Japan expressed regret over the arrests and urged both the government and the parties to build mutual trust and begin dialogue. India reacted by calling the situation counterproductive (Nisthuri, 2063 B.S.). From these developments, it is clear that the government adopted an aggressive policy from the very first day, prompting the international community to caution it against such actions. However, countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany did not issue any immediate response, appearing instead to adopt a "wait and see" approach.

On the second day of the strike, on April 7, the seven political parties again staged demonstrations in the capital and other major parts of the country.

The government attempted to suppress these protests with force. On this second day, employees from various unions, organizations, and offices also joined the movement. Because of the government's repressive measures, many protesters were injured and many others were arrested. International organizations and friendly nations continued to criticize the government's policy of repression. Richard Boucher, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, expressed a clear stance: *"Since the King has mocked democracy, there is no basis to support him"* (Kantipur, 2006, April 8, p.1). He further emphasized that the steps taken by the King a year earlier had failed, and therefore democracy must be restored in Nepal (Nisthuri, 2063 B.S.). Boucher argued that Nepal was knowingly moving in the wrong direction. The King's attempt to abolish democracy and rule alone had not worked, nor would it ever work. His actions had only led to the arrest of citizens, yet even that was ineffective. Thus, the restoration of democracy in Nepal was essential. He stressed that cooperation among political parties was necessary, because only through such collaboration could democracy return and the country be governed in a democratic manner (Kantipur, 2006, April 11, p.7).

Alongside Richard Boucher's remarks, on the same day seven members of the U.S. Congress also wrote a letter to King Gyanendra condemning the arrest of party leaders and members of civil society. In their letter, they urged the government and police to release those detained, to respect the fundamental right to assemble peacefully in the coming days, and to exercise restraint toward demonstrators. They also called on the King to restore press freedom and to begin dialogue with political parties (Aryal & Paudel, 2006). Receiving such a letter from members of the U.S. Congress made it somewhat difficult for King Gyanendra and his government to continue pursuing a harsh policy against the movement and the parties. Thus, from the second day of the general strike onward, it became evident

that the U.S. government had taken a position against King Gyanendra, while the international community's support leaned toward the movement. To try to break the strike organized by the parties, the government imposed curfews across all three cities of the Kathmandu Valley. However, the parties defied the curfew and continued the protests, during which four people lost their lives.

On April 8 and 9, the general strike continued. The four-day strike did not end; instead, the parties decided to carry it forward as a sustained people's movement. During this period, government repression led to many arrests, numerous injuries, and even some deaths among the protesters. The international community watched these events with close attention.

On April 10, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher once again urged the King and the government to restore democracy and protect citizens' rights (Kantipur, 2010, April 24). However, his appeal was ignored by both the King and the government.

On April 11, the movement spread nationwide. That same day, the U.S. State Department issued a statement declaring that the King's direct rule was failing in every respect. It noted that protests, killings, and arrests had made the country's security situation fragile, and therefore the King should urgently begin talks with the parties to restore democracy.

On April 12, India's Ministry of External Affairs also called on the King to initiate dialogue with the parties, stressing that negotiation and consensus were the only solutions. On the same day, a high-level U.S. congressional delegation led by Speaker J. Dennis Hastert had planned to visit Nepal to learn about the people's movement, but the situation prevented their arrival. Nevertheless, Hastert sent a letter wishing for the success of the movement (Ghimire, 2065 B.S.). Also on the same day, U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty expressed hope that the seven-party movement would succeed in

restoring democracy. He met with Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala and UML Acting General Secretary Amrit Bohara, assuring them of U.S. support for the movement and condemning the government's repression (Kantipur, 2006, April 13). Thus, as the movement advanced, international support for the Nepali people grew stronger day by day.

The people's movement continued into its eighth day, while the government intensified its policy of suppression. On April 13, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour declared that the government had violated the right to peaceful and free assembly. Arbour expressed shock at the excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests carried out by the security forces to suppress the protests (Kantipur, 2006, April 14). Ian Martin, the UN Human Rights Chief in Nepal, also urged the government not to repress demonstrators engaged in peaceful protest (Ghimire, 2065 B.S.). Meanwhile, the U.S. Embassy issued a statement advising its citizens to remain in Nepal only if absolutely necessary, and otherwise to leave due to the widespread protests, violence, and growing political instability. The embassy even closed its consular visa section and library from April 12, citing staff shortages (Nisthuri, 2063 B.S.). In the United States, the State Department added Nepal to its travel advisory list, warning against visits due to increasing insecurity (Kantipur, 2006, April 14). Senator Patrick Leahy also released a statement expressing dissatisfaction with the government's repressive policies against the democratic movement. He noted concern that while Maoist forces were advancing, the King remained inflexible toward pro-democracy groups (Aryal & Paudel, 2006). Additionally, American physician Brian Cobb, who had been treating injured protesters and security personnel since the start of the strike, was ordered by the government to leave Nepal (Kantipur, 2006, April 14). From these developments, it becomes clear that compared to other countries, the United States was

showing heightened concern and involvement regarding Nepal's people's movement.

On the ninth day of the strike, on April 14, coinciding with the Nepali New Year, King Gyanendra delivered a speech calling on the political parties to enter into dialogue. However, the seven parties concluded that the King's address was merely a continuation of his regressive roadmap. They argued that it did not address the political crisis, and therefore reaffirmed their commitment to intensify the movement. Although the King called for dialogue, the government left no stone unturned in trying to suppress the protests, which drew condemnation from the international community. On the same day, UN spokesperson Stephan Dujarric warned that if evidence of police or security forces deliberately violating human rights during the peaceful movement was found, the UN would take the matter very seriously. Similarly, the International Federation of Journalists drew attention to violence against citizens and attacks on journalists in Nepal. It wrote to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, urging him to pressure the King to restore democracy. Meanwhile, Nepali diasporas groups in the United States, including the *Democratic Youth Council*, *Alliance for Democracy*, and *United Democratic Forum*, organized programs in support of Nepal's democratic movement (Nisthuri, 2063 B.S.). At the same time, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed concern that no steps had been taken toward a political resolution in Nepal. He stated that to stop bloodshed and improve the situation, the King needed to take a "bold step" (Kantipur, 2006, April 15). Although Annan did not specify what that step should be, it can be inferred that he meant the King should act in accordance with the will of the people.

On April 15, the people's movement continued much as before, and the government also persisted with its policy of suppression. On that day, the United States, India, Japan, the European Union, and the United Nations expressed concern over the

increasing violence during the protests. They voiced alarm and outrage at the government's widespread violations of human rights and advised the King to hold talks with the protesting parties in order to return to a democratic system (Annapurna Post, 2006 April 16).

Later Phase of the Movement

On the eleventh day of the movement on April 16, former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, along with former foreign ministers of Bangladesh and the Maldives, Kamal Hossain and I.H. Zaki respectively, issued a joint statement expressing solidarity with Nepal's peaceful people's movement (Nishthuri, 2063 B.S.). On the same day, Gujral also urged meaningful dialogue to end repression and violence (Kantipur, April 24, 2010). Same day at the evening, King Gyanendra separately summoned U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Indian Ambassador Shiva Shankar Mukherjee, and Chinese Ambassador Sun Heping to the palace to discuss the situation created by the seven-party movement. Although the U.S. and Chinese embassies did not disclose details of their conversations, one source reported that during his meeting with Ambassador Moriarty, the King had expressed the idea of using final force and, if necessary, imposing a state of emergency or martial law to bring the situation under control. Moriarty, however, warned that if the King pursued such measures, the monarchy might not survive for long (Ghimire, 2063, Baisakh 15 B.S., p. 25). Perhaps recognizing that the movement was becoming too strong to suppress, Moriarty cautioned the King against such steps even for the sake of preserving the monarchy. Reportedly, after hearing this warning, the King assured Moriarty that he planned to act in line with the spirit of the people's movement and the roadmap of the seven parties (Ghimire, 2063, Baisakh 15 B.S., p. 25). Similarly, according to the Indian Embassy, the King discussed with Ambassador Mukherjee about the current political situation and ways to move forward toward peace (Kantipur, April 10, 2006). In that meeting, all

three ambassadors advised the King to quickly restore democracy and move toward dialogue and consensus with the political parties (Annapurna Post, April 17, 2006).

On the twelve day on April 17, the movement continued. Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai, who had been supporting the protests after signing the 12-point agreement with the seven parties, issued a statement on April 17 declaring that the struggle must continue until it achieved a democratic republic. On the same day, King Gyanendra summoned former Prime ministers Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Surya Bahadur Thapa to the palace to discuss the political situation.

After meeting King Gyanendra, U.S. Ambassador Moriarty gave an interview to CNN in which he strongly remarked that the King would face serious difficulties if he delayed transferring power to the people. Consequently, on April 18, the government sought clarification from him regarding his statement (Kantipur, April 19, 2006). In reality, Ambassador Moriarty had understood that the King's position was becoming increasingly unfavorable because the seven-party movement was gaining success with the support and cooperation of the Maoists. That was why he expressed the view that failure to hand over power to the people would put the King in great difficulty. However, instead of reflecting on that view and making an appropriate decision, the King asked Moriarty to provide clarification.

On the tenth day of the movement on April 18, the ongoing protests in Nepal were also raised at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland. In the meeting on Nepal's human rights situation, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Commission of Jurists called for King Gyanendra, his senior aides, and top military officials to be barred from entering other countries and for their assets to be frozen (Nishthuri, 2063 B.S.). In fact, they made this appeal because of the repression and human rights violations committed

by the King, his aides, and military leaders in their attempt to suppress the movement.

On the fourteenth day on April 19, Dr. Karan Singh, a member of India's Upper House of Parliament, arrived in Kathmandu as the special envoy of Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to discuss Nepal's political situation. He met with Girija Prasad Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress; Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the UML; Sher Bahadur Deuba, president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic); Surya Bahadur Thapa of the Rastriya Janashakti Party; and Pashupati Shamsheer of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party for political discussions.

After meeting with representatives of the political parties, on the fifteenth day (April 20), Dr. Karan Singh met King Gyanendra to discuss the ongoing people's movement. It is said that at that time he also conveyed a message from Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the King (Raj, 2006). However, the content of the message was not disclosed. It is likely that the message advised the King to return executive powers to the people, since the very next day the King did restore executive authority to the people, confirming this assumption. On that same day, the government imposed a 24-hour curfew, but protestors defied it.

On the sixteenth day on April 21, King Gyanendra announced that he was returning executive powers to the people and called on the political parties to recommend a name for prime minister as soon as possible. In fact, this announcement was the outcome of several days of discussions the King had held with political leaders and foreign diplomats, as well as his immediate talks with Indian special envoy Dr. Karan Singh. Both the United States and India welcomed the King's address. The U.S. State Department issued a statement honoring the courage shown by the Nepali people in their struggle for democracy and urged the protesting parties to quickly select a prime minister and form a cabinet (Nishthuri, 2063 B.S.). However,

although the King returned the executive powers he had seized on February 1, 2005, the people regarded his royal address as a deception and a tactic to suppress the movement, and they intensified their protests even further.

Since the parties continued the movement after the King's address, on April 22, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice welcomed the King's announcement at a press conference at the State Department, but emphasized that the seven parties should form a government (Nishthuri, 2063 B.S.). United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan also took the royal declaration positively (Annapurna Post, April 23, 2006). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of India welcomed the King's statement, saying that democracy and constitutional monarchy were essential for Nepal. Similarly, the U.S. State Department expressed satisfaction that the King had acknowledged the sovereignty vested in the people, and urged the parties to select a prime minister and form a cabinet (Gorkhapatra, April 23, 2006). Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh stated on April 21 that the King's address to the nation reflected the right path, while the United Kingdom and China also welcomed the King's statement.

Foreign nations' welcoming of the King's address did not satisfy the protesting parties. Therefore, on April 23, they met with representatives of diplomatic missions and urged them not to hastily support the King's declaration, but instead to speak only after understanding the situation (Nishthuri, 2063 B.S.). The protesters argued that sovereignty had not truly been returned to the people; even if a government were formed, it would hold executive powers but lack constitutional legitimacy. Thus, such a government would be no different from the three governments created and dismissed under Article 127 between *Asoj 18 and Magh 19*. Political prisoners also sent open letters from jail to ambassadors of the U.S., India, China, as well as representatives of the United Nations and the European Union, requesting them not to accept or

welcome the King's declaration (Kantipur, April 24, 2006). As controversy grew over support for the royal declaration, India corrected its formal response, stating that Nepal's future would be determined by the Nepali people themselves. The U.S., the U.K., and other countries, however, did not issue any further reaction.

The Decisive Day of the Movement

Even after the King's earlier address, the seven-party alliance continued to push the movement forward with nationwide strength. In the end, their struggle succeeded. At 11 p.m. on April 24, 2002, King Gyanendra made another royal proclamation (Manandhar, 2014). In it, he announced the restoration of the House of Representatives, which had been dissolved on May 22, 2002, and called for the reconvened parliament to meet on April 28, 2006. With this declaration, the 19-day people's movement that had begun on April 6 came to an end. Accordingly, on April 28, Girija Prasad Koirala was appointed prime minister, and the first session of parliament was held.

One notable point is that throughout the protests, the King had attempted to suppress the movement using the army, armed police, and civil police. Referring to this, U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, speaking in the Senate, directly mentioned Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa by name, saying: "Having received training in America, Pyar Jung Thapa should not go against the democratic values and principles he learned there" (Ghimire, 2063, Baisakh 15-21 p. 25). This statement placed moral pressure on Thapa. He was compelled to consider: how long could the movement be suppressed by force? Consequently, in a meeting of the Security Council chaired by him, it was concluded that unless the King made a decision acceptable to the parties, the situation would spiral out of control and even the monarchy could not be saved. After Thapa conveyed this reality to the King on April 23, Gyanendra, who until then had believed the movement could still be

crushed by force was compelled to announce the restoration of parliament the following day.

Countries including the United States, India, China, the United Kingdom, and Norway welcomed King Gyanendra's proclamation. The U.S. State Department, saluting the courage of the Nepali people who had participated in the peaceful movement for the restoration of democracy, expressed confidence that the political parties would act responsibly and move forward toward full democracy and good governance in line with the people's aspirations. It also emphasized that the Maoists must immediately renounce violence and enter a peaceful political process, noting that only such efforts could contribute to stability, peace, and the restoration of democracy (Kantipur, April 27, 2006). Following the restoration of democracy, on May 2, 2006, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard Boucher visited Kathmandu (Boquerat, 2006). and pledged renewed support for Nepal's development and democratic commitments (Kantipur, May 3, 2006). Likewise, the United States and other donor nations and organizations resumed all forms of assistance that had previously been suspended. In this way, during the 2006 people's movement, the international community supported the Nepali people and opposed the government. As a result, the government came under moral pressure to negotiate with the protesting parties and transfer power.

Conclusion

After King Gyanendra took direct control of state power on 2005 February 1, the political parties intensified their movement, while the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and other nations, along with international organizations, began to show deep concern over Nepal's unfolding political events. Until February 1, the international community had supported the King and urged the protesting parties to reconcile with him. But following his move, global suspicion toward the monarchy grew. In this context, the seven major political parties launched a

nationwide movement on April 6, 2006 to end the King's autocratic rule (Nepal, 2023). International support for the political parties and the Nepali people increased, with repeated appeals to the King to restore democracy. However, disregarding their advice, King Gyanendra pursued a policy of harsh suppression against the movement. As a result, the international community sided with the Nepali people and opposed the government. This placed moral pressure on the regime to negotiate with the protesting parties and transfer power. Ultimately,

this played a crucial role in bringing about a new political transformation in Nepal.

This article has been prepared using information derived from Nepali sources. However, if one could study the news reports and articles published in the concerned countries and in the international arena regarding the 19-day People's Movement, and conduct a more detailed and in-depth investigation into the role and influence of the international community, the work would appear even more effective and informative.

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