

Maoists capture ex-Nepal army chief's property

Even as angry businessmen began enforcing an indefinite general strike in Nepal to protest atrocities by the Maoist guerrillas, the rebels continued their attacks on civilians, seizing the property of a former army chief and royal advisor.

Gen Sachit Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, a former chief of the Nepal Army and staunch supporter of King Gyanendra, became the latest target of the Maoist attack in western Nepal.

Gorkha district, famed for its brave Gorkha soldiers, saw a band of Maoists forcefully occupy a resort owned by Rana Monday and hoist their red flag. The sprawling Gorkha Hill Resort, spread over several acres with over half a dozen huts, was captured by the Maoists, who said they would continue to seize the property of royalists.

Rana was an influential member of the Raj Parishad, the council of royal advisers that supported King Gyanendra's power grab two years ago. The hawkish general had also advocated the taking on the Maoist guerrillas and suppressing the insurgency by force.

The Raj Parishad was abolished after the fall of King Gyanendra's 15-month reign last year and Rana was summoned for questioning by a commission formed by the new government to punish the royalists who advocated the use of force against unarmed protesters.

The resort was attacked thrice during the 10-year Maoist insurgency.

The Maoist area leader who led the raid Monday was reported as saying the seizure was a retaliation for a Maoist attack eight years ago in which 12 rebels died in Kavre district. Prakash, the rebel leader, was quoted by a local daily as saying his party would continue to seize the property of all royalists so that they could be taken over by the state and used for people's benefit.

There was no immediate reaction from the seven-party government.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and his lieutenant home minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula have been drawing flak from Nepal's business community who say there is no law and order in Nepal.

The abduction of two businessmen and their roughing up by Maoists last week provoked Nepal's business community Monday to announce an indefinite closure.

At least 71 business organisations have united to call for an indefinite shutdown of industries, businesses, markets, banks, educational institutions and transport, including air services.

Maoist supremo Prachanda Monday apologised for the two abductions, saying they were carried out by workers' unions. He also promised that the people responsible for the violence would be punished. The fresh wave of Maoist excesses comes more than four months after the rebels signed a peace pact with the government and agreed to stop extortion, abduction and intimidation and allow industries to work unhindered.

However, there are widespread reports of the rebels continuing with extortion and intimidation with impunity even after the government has taken the responsibility of maintaining their guerrilla army

and is currently negotiating to induct the Maoists in the cabinet.

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)