

King cuts nation off from world

BY BINAJ GURUBACHARYA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KATMANDU, Nepal — King Gyanendra dismissed Nepal's government Tuesday and declared a state of emergency, closing off his Himalayan nation from the rest of the world as telephone and Internet lines were cut, flights diverted and civil liberties severely curtailed.

Britain and India both expressed concern, saying the king's actions undermined democracy.

This was the second time in three years the king has taken control of the tiny South Asian constitutional monarchy, a throwback to the era of absolute power enjoyed by monarchs before King Birendra,

Gyanendra's elder brother, introduced democracy in 1990.

King Gyanendra denied his takeover was a coup, although soldiers surrounded the houses of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other government leaders.

The king also suspended several provisions of the constitution, including freedom of the press, speech and expression, peaceful assembly, the right to privacy, and the right against preventive detention, according to a statement from the Narayanhiti Palace.

"We will oppose this step," Deuba, who was not allowed to leave his home, told reporters. "The move directly violates the constitution and is against democracy."

Another bump in Nepal's political road

Nepal's government has been crippled by instability since the June 2001 killing spree that ended the lives of much of Nepal's royal family, including the king, at the hands of the crown prince.

June 4, 2001 - Slain king's brother, Prince Gyanendra, takes throne

July - Maoist rebels step up violence

July - Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, announces truce with rebels.

November - Maoists kill 24 police in 15 attacks; king declares state of emergency

May 2002 - U.S. pledges \$20 million to fight the rebels. Maoists offer truce, government declines.

May 22 - King dissolves Parliament, orders fresh elections; Deuba remains interim prime minister.

King Gyanendra

Aug. 28 - Government lifts state of emergency.

Oct. 4 - King fires Deuba

Jan. 29, 2003 - Rebels declare cease-fire

May 30 - New prime minister resigns

June 4 - King appoints monarchist Surya Bahadur Thapa, 75, as new prime minister.

Aug. 27 - Rebels call off cease-fire; fighting resumes.

May 7, 2004 - Prime minister resigns, in face of pro-democracy pressure

June 2 - King reappoints Deuba as prime minister with the task of holding elections.

August - Nepalese rebels blockade Katmandu, demanding the government free jailed guerrillas.

Feb. 1, 2005 - King dismisses government and declares a state of emergency, taking control of the kingdom.

Online auction sites generate complaints in record numbers

BY GENARO C. ARMAS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Americans are increasingly turning to Internet auction sites to buy and sell goods from around the world, and a growing number think they might be getting a raw deal online.

The number of complaints filed with the Federal Trade Commission over Internet auctions has nearly doubled from 51,000 in 2002 to more than 98,000 last year, the agency said Tuesday in its annual report on consumer fraud and identity-theft complaints.

The online complaints cover everything from the failure of sellers to deliver goods or services to consumers claiming their purchases weren't worth the price they paid.

Complaints for all types of fraud have grown since 2002, according to the FTC report. Internet auction grievances comprised 13 percent of the 403,000 total fraud complaints in 2002; in 2004, it made up 16 percent of the 635,000 grievances.

Americans are becoming more wary of potential scams, heeding the advice of public awareness campaigns, said Betsy Broder, a lawyer with the FTC's consumer protection bureau.

"We like to think that people are

more savvy about shopping online. They've learned to take precautions, that just because it's on the Internet doesn't mean that it's legitimate," Broder said.

The only other category in which more complaints were filed in 2004 was identity theft — 39 percent, more than 246,000 of the total complaints, down slightly from 40 percent in 2002. It was the fifth straight year that identity theft topped the list of consumer concerns.

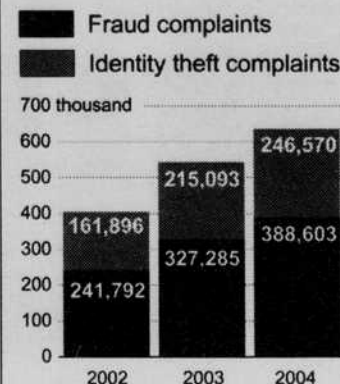
Identity theft involves stealing someone's personal information for financial gain. The most common cases involve credit cards, followed by telephone or utility, bank and workplace fraud.

Consumers and businesses appear to be taking more caution in protecting credit card information, Broder said. In 2004, 17 percent of identity theft complaints involved someone trying to use a victim's personal information to open a credit account, down from 24 percent in 2002.

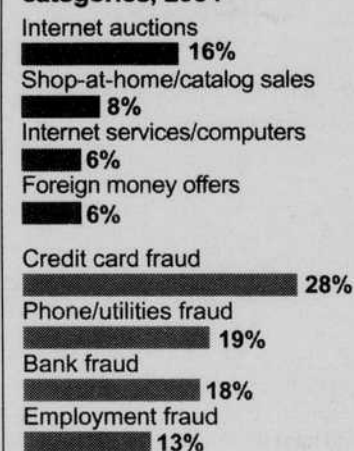
Neil Creighton, president of GeoTrust, a Needham, Mass.-based firm that secures online credit card transactions, said more companies are using electronic authentication services like security "certificates" to protect their sites and consumers.

Fraud, identity theft complaints on rise

Consumers reported 635,173 complaints of fraud and identity theft in 2004, according to government statistics.



Leading complaint categories, 2004



SOURCE: Federal Trade Commission AP

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