

Mobilization and Incidents Around the Announcement of the Local Elections

Analysis Update – 1

Period: Feb. 20 to March 6, 2017 | Published: March 14, 2017

Summary

On Feb. 20, 2017 the Government of Nepal (GoN) announced that the first local elections in 20 years will be held on May 14, 2017¹. Citizens are eager to elect local representatives in their own communities and have met the announcement with anticipation. However, the announcement has also led to protest and violent clashes in areas of the Tarai where the constitution remains contested and there are outstanding demands that political issues be resolved before elections are held. Multiple injuries and at least four deaths have been the result of Madheshi protestors and cadres of Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) clashing, or security forces mobilizing to resolve tension between these groups. Strong concerns exist that protests, clashes, and as a result violent incidents, may continue if political resolution is not sought as the country continues towards polls.

Overview of Incidents from Feb. 20 to March 6²

Protests and strikes began immediately across the Tarai after the announcement of the election date on Feb. 20. On Feb. 21, Madheshi Morcha supporters held protest programs against the announcement across eastern and central Tarai districts. On Feb. 22, a Tarai-wide strike (banda) was held in protest of the election. The banda was enforced to varying degrees across the Tarai, with reports that the strongest enforcement was in the Madheshi strongholds of the central and eastern part of the Tarai.

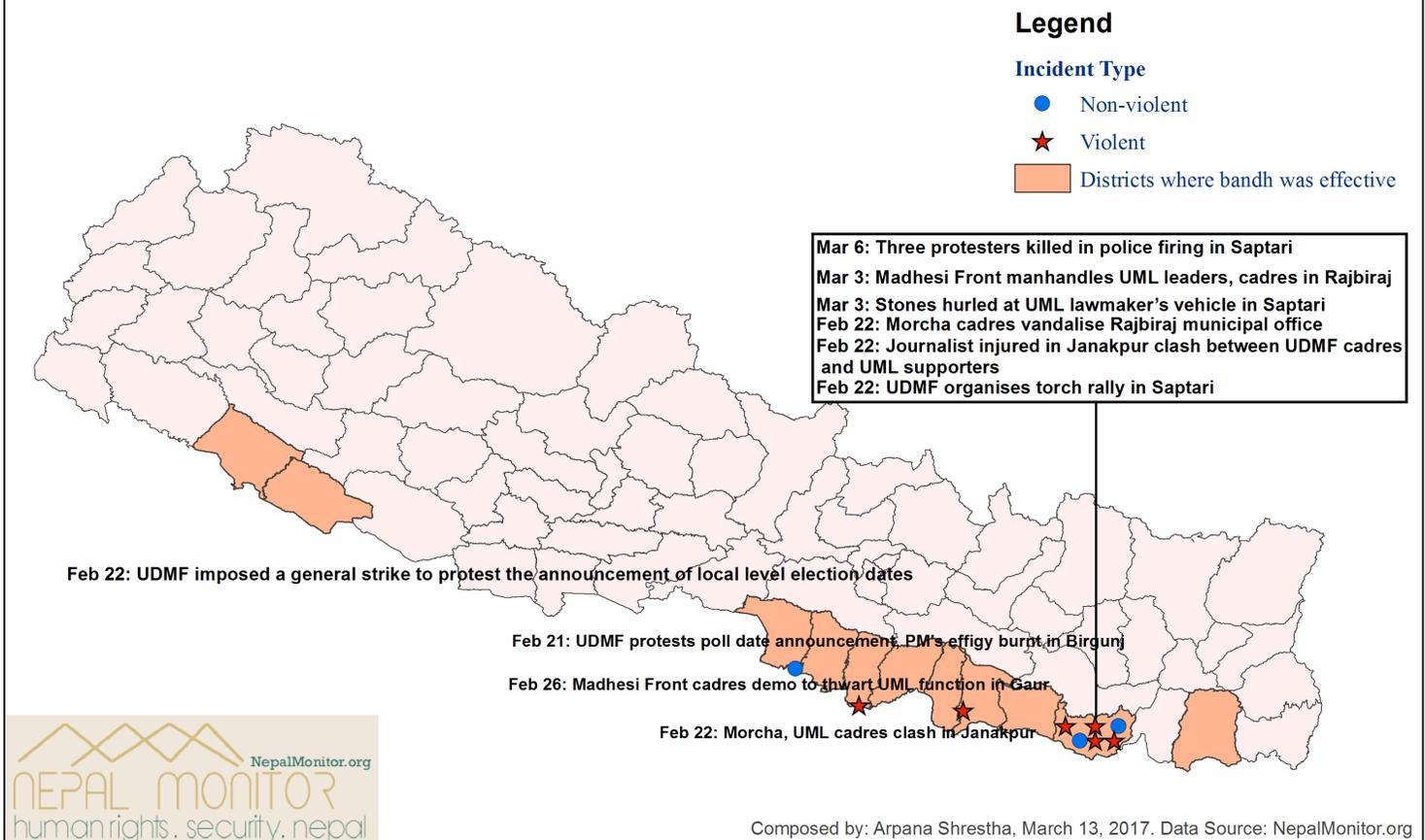
Strikes and protests over the two-day period were largely peaceful. However, on Feb. 22 in Rajbiraj, Saptari Madheshi Morcha supporters vandalized the municipality office stating it was in retaliation for calling the elections without amending the constitution. Also on Feb. 22, a clash occurred in Janakpur, Dhanusha between Madheshi Morcha and CPN-UML supporters resulting in at least two injuries. On Feb. 21, members of the Sadbhawana Party gathered in Birgunj, Parsa and burned an effigy of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and demanded that the constitution be amended before elections.

¹ The last local polls in Nepal were held in 1997.

² Analysis is primarily based on data collected by Nepal Monitor (nepalmonitor.org). Secondary sources, including reports from field monitors are consulted to verify information and provide additional information about incidents.

Two additional violent incidents were the result of Madheshi protestors and CPN-UML cadres clashing, or the security forces mobilizing to resolve tension between Madheshi Morcha and CPN-UML cadres. A clash led to injuries in Gaur, Rautahat on Feb. 26 when the police attempted to prevent Madheshi Morcha from obstructing a CPN-UML program. The launch of CPN-UML's Mechi-Mahakali³ campaign on March 3 also increased tension between CPN-UML and Madheshi Morcha supporters. On March 6, security forces fired on Madheshi protesting a CPN-UML Mechi-Mahakali campaign event in Maleth VDC of Saptari, resulting in several injuries and at least four deaths. The clashes in and resulting deaths shook the nation, leading national news outlets and analysts to raise strong questions about the status of the security situation. As of March 7, UML announced it would postpone campaign events for three days after the Saptari incident. On the same day, Madheshi Morcha announced a two-day Tarai-wide *banda* in protest of the incident.

Incidents Around the Announcement of Local Elections February 20 - March 6, 2017



³ CPN-UML's leaders have said this is a 15-day campaign to promote national unity across the country. The events also seem to double as part of the party's local election campaign.

Description of Clashes from Feb. 20 to March 6

Janakpur, Dhanusha (Feb. 22, 2017)

On Feb. 22, Madheshi Morcha and CPN-UML supporters clashed in Janakpur throwing stones at each other. The incident occurred when Morcha supporters went to picket in front of the house of Raghbir Mahaseth, who is the national chairman of the Madheshi Democratic Organization (a UML sister organization). Madheshi Morcha has said that two supporters were injured during the event. UML also claimed their supporters were injured without specifying the number of injuries. Two journalists covering the incident were also reportedly injured. Approximately 40 individuals were reported by various news outlets to have been involved in the incident.

Gaur, Rautahat (Feb. 26, 2017)

Madheshi Morcha supporters and police personnel clashed as Morcha supporters attempted to obstruct a CPN-UML function organized to induct new members into the party. The function was attended by former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal among others. The clash began when police attempted to prevent the Morcha from obstructing the function. Two journalists and a policeman were reported as injured. Approximately 200 individuals were reported by various news outlets to have been involved in the clash, including Madheshi Morcha supporters and police.

Maleth VDC of Saptari (March 6, 2017)

At least four people were killed, and several others injured, in Maleth, Saptari, after security forces opened fire on Madheshi protesters. Protestors had been demonstrating outside CPN-UML rally being organized as a part of its Mechi-Mahakali campaign. Security forces claim and some reports state that security forces opened fire at protesters as they tried to enter UML rally. However, as of March 7, there are multiple and contesting reports about the sequence of events that led to security forces taking action, as well as numbers of deaths and injuries.

This is the first of a series of periodic analysis updates that Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) | Nepal Monitor, will be releasing during the upcoming election period. DRCN aims to promote democracy in Nepal through localized observation, research, and objective reporting. COCAP contributes to the peace process in Nepal in many ways, one among them by promoting social security system, strengthening democratic practices and developing culture of human rights. This project receives financial and technical support from The Asia Foundation and The Carter Center.