



OCHA Nepal Situation Overview

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Highlights:

- A 19- day confrontation between security forces and pro-democracy protesters across the country leaves 16 persons dead and some 5,000 injured;
- The King reinstates Parliament and an all-party government takes office;
- The CPN-Maoist announces a three-month ceasefire, later reciprocated by the government for an indefinite period;
- Concerns are raised about shortage of supplies and price rises during the strike;
- Development work almost paralysed due to unrest;
- The outcome raises hope among aid community for a substantial improvement of their ability to work effectively across the country.

The next issue of this Situation Overview will focus on the operational space. It will attempt to capture how the UN, donors and I/NGOs perceive their ability to implement their different programs in the new context.

THE CONTEXT

Politics

On 24 April, after 19 straight days of widely supported nationwide pro-democracy protests called by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), King Gyanendra reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives and handed sovereignty back to the Nepali people. A week later, the House voted unanimously to hold elections to the Constituent Assembly, a key demand by the SPA and the CPN-Maoist as stated in their November 12-point agreement.

On 27 April, CPN-Maoist announced a three-month ceasefire which was reciprocated by the new government for an indefinite period. The government, headed by Nepali Congress Prime Minister G P Koirala, also lifted the international arrest notice against top CPN-Maoist leaders, including Party Chairman Prachanda and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai.

The protests and demonstrations witnessed across the country, with hundreds of thousands of people defying curfew orders, resulted in 16 people killed and an estimated 5,000 injured. The OCHA Incident Database recorded 337 protests and rallies between 1 and 24 April in all but nine of the country's 75 districts; the trans-Himalayan districts of Mustang and Manang saw the first ever anti-king protests.



Courtesy: Nigel Gravey

Victory rallies take place throughout the country after restoration of the House of Representatives

Though the demonstrations were officially led by the SPA, the CPN-Maoist actively supported the movement which translated into a significant drop in PLA attacks. After the reinstatement of parliament on 24 April, CPN-Maoist held public rallies in a

number of districts, including Morang, Kathmandu and Kailali. They were not apprehended by security officials, though in some cases the CPN-Maoist fighters were armed.

After the reinstatement of the House, CPN-Maoist leaders reiterated (in a Biratnagar rally) their readiness to place their arms under international monitoring, provided the Royal Nepal Army also agreed to do so. During the reporting period, CPN-Maoist Chairman also suggested that the Royal Nepal Army and the People's Liberation Army be "fused" to form the National Democratic Army; the Chief of Army Staff said RNA could consider absorbing the PLA personnel in its ranks.

Reactions from the international community

The international community welcomed the reinstatement of Parliament, expressing its commitment to support Nepal's transition to a functional democracy. But it also urged the CPN-Maoist to give up violence and translate into action its recent commitment to competitive multiparty politics.

In a statement issued on 27 April, the US pledged support for Nepal as it launches a functioning and effective multiparty democracy, adding that the Constituent Assembly could prove an excellent avenue for the CPN-Maoist to join the political mainstream and peacefully help address Nepal's problems.

The CPI/M leader Sitaram Yechury, who has been mediating between the SPA and CPN-Maoist said the two sides have agreed on a four -point roadmap: the new Parliament decides elections to the Constituent Assembly; and sets agenda to implement the 12-point agreement between SPA and CPN-Maoist; the interim government officially invites CPN-Maoist for talks; Parliament annuls laws adopted during the King's direct rule.

The European Union urged security forces to be prepared to work under a democratic government. It also asked CPN-Maoist to join democratic political mainstream, renouncing violence and decommissioning weapons. The UK said the reinstatement of parliament was a tribute to the Nepali people's desire for democracy and peace, adding the CPN-Maoist now needed to prove their commitment to democracy by giving up violence.

Erik Solheim, Norway Development Cooperation Minister, during his visit (2-5 May) to Kathmandu, informed that Norway was restoring its annual US\$25 million aid package for Nepal. This decision was taken 'to show immediate support to this new government and to its peace effort with the Maoists. It

said it would make available an additional USD 2.3 million to Nepal, and depending on a continued positive development, further increases may be expected. New Delhi said a major economic package for Nepal was in the offing.

Advocacy and policy

During the reporting period, an unprecedented influx of international media in Kathmandu gave the SPA protests and demands and plight of the Nepali people extensive international exposure.

A number of statements aimed at pressuring the authorities to avoid violence and protect the population were issued by the UN. On several occasions OHCHR called on the security forces to refrain from using excessive force against peaceful demonstrators. Twice, UNICEF expressed concern at reports that children had been injured, arrested and detained in the demonstrations in Kathmandu and other cities.

Urging for access to the needy, WFP called for free movement of food stocks while UNICEF called for support to its critical Vitamin A distribution campaign. In turn, OCHA issued a press release highlighting the impact that over two weeks of strike was beginning to have on the population's wellbeing and expressed concern.

During the reporting period, the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator and OHCHR-Nepal Representative actively engaged with the national and international media to ensure worldwide understanding of the political crisis, the human rights implications and the consequences for Nepalese. These interviews have been widely appreciated by Nepalis and the international community in Nepal.

IMPACT

Protection

Many nationwide protests were directly monitored by OHCHR staff throughout the 19 days. Numerous serious human rights violations were committed, including excessive use of force (baton-charges, and shooting live and rubber bullets).

Hundreds of people were injured, some of them seriously; OHCHR documented 13 cases of individuals shot dead by security forces and a 14th apparently killed as a result of receiving serious head injuries after being beaten. Two others died in the context of the demonstrations.



Courtesy: OHCHR

OHCHR human rights observes on duty in one of the protest sites in Kathmandu

The new Government stated it will set up a commission of inquiry. OHCHR is asking the security forces to carry out

internal investigations and for the courts to prosecute any cases brought before them. It is also monitoring the case of the alleged rape and murder of a woman, followed by the killing of six demonstrators by the RNA in Belbari on 25/26 April. It is following up reports that the RNA has arrested the captain of the unit responsible.

The issue of impunity and accountability, both for the violations which occurred during the *bandh* and for past abuses such as disappearances, is one of the priorities to be addressed during the next months.

The political changes have already started to have an impact on the human rights situation with the release of several hundred political and civil society activists who had been arrested mostly in April in relation to the national strike. The question of the release of detainees held under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Ordinance (TADO) has also been identified by the Government as an issue to be tackled, as well as the repeal of ordinances issued by the King which were in violation of human rights.

Health

As protests escalated and police crackdown began, hospitals in Kathmandu had to handle a high number of patients as a result of the demonstrations, which stretched their resources. There were as many as 5,000 cases of injuries across the country, with the highest number in Kathmandu.

Nepal Red Cross Society was able to get curfew passes and provided first aid assistance to some 1,500 victims in Kathmandu during the protests. UNICEF supported the Red Cross with 180 much needed first aid kits and surgical gloves.

The issue of post-treatment assistance to the victims is a concern: many wounds (mainly from rubber bullets) will need long-term and costly support for specialized rehabilitation treatment.

An interagency assessment carried out by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA in six hospitals in the Kathmandu valley showed that hospitals were able to cope with emergencies of the scale witnessed in terms of medical supplies. The challenge was the transportation of patients and medical staff during the strike/curfew period (due to limited number of curfew passes for ambulances/hospital vehicles, for example) and depleting stocks of food, cooking gas and petrol at the health facilities.

The findings from the Kathmandu hospitals are applicable in the districts in the Eastern and Central regions, where medical stocks were not a problem, but transporting medical supplies to health posts and regional hospitals proved very difficult.

In the Mid Western region, hospitals were often only attending emergency cases due to the absence of doctors; medical stocks were depleting and villagers were hesitant to visit hospitals because of the political unrest. Particularly in Jumla district in the Mid Western region, all health and sub-health posts were closed, creating problems, especially in emergency delivery cases. Health camps run by INGOs were also postponed. In Baitadi, delivery of drugs to the health posts was not possible. In most districts across the country, there was coercion from the SPA and the CPN-Maoist to shut down health facilities.

The 27th Vitamin A campaign conducted nationwide on 19-20 April by UNICEF and its partners fell right in the middle of curfews and demonstrations; initial reports indicate that it was successful with high coverage even in the urban areas, where demonstrations were concentrated. Reports from 10 out of 58 municipalities indicate that the turnout was more than 80 per cent for the approximately 3.3 million children aged from six

months to five years targeted for Vitamin A capsules and the 3.1 million children aged one to five years for deworming tablets.

A rapid assessment of districts which had the lowest turnout because of the curfews, and a household coverage survey is being planned in May. A media campaign will be launched shortly to encourage those families whose children did not receive the supplementation to visit the nearest health facility to receive their Vitamin A. If required, a mop-up campaign will be conducted in the districts which had a low coverage.



Courtesy: Nigel Gravely

Throughout the protests the Nepali Red Cross assisted hundreds of injured

Avian Influenza

No AI case has yet been found in Nepal and the samples sent by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC) to Australia in March for re-testing gave negative results. During the reporting period, however, animal surveillance came to a halt due to the general strike.

Between 2 and 7 April, the World Bank led a multi-donor mission, including the European Union, UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, WHO and FAO for a pre-appraisal of the Nepal National Avian Influenza and Influenza Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan. Objectives were also to identify areas for improvement, and agree on actions required to enable the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) and Ministry of Agriculture (MoAC) to further develop the Strategic Plan to a level that can be financed by development partners. The mission concluded that the Strategic Plan presents an effective and comprehensive approach to dealing with avian influenza and to the possible infection of humans. It serves as a strong foundation for preparedness. However, the detailed content and cost of the proposed strategies and actions require further definition. The main task for the mission, therefore, was to begin the process by which the Strategic Plan could be put into action, or to define the steps for drafting the “Operational Plan”. These steps are now outlined (<http://un.org.np/uploads/news/20060504234321.pdf>) and time-bound actions have been established.

Food Security and livelihood

Throughout the country, the 19-day strike significantly affected people’s lives with the ability to earn daily wages completely halted, prices of food rising and acute shortages of cooking gas, petrol, diesel and kerosene.

This was particularly felt in the Mid and Far Western regions and in the Eastern districts of Khotang and Bhojpur shortages of food were also reported. In the food-deficit Karnali zone, the stock of Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) was used up; distribution of food by the NFC was disrupted, and in Mugu district, food was made available only to government staff. Scarcity of staple food was reported in Kalikot, Doti, Achham

and Bajura districts. Food prices went up in most districts (up to 40% in case of vegetables and 100% for mutton, for example, in Kathmandu). Right across the country, households resorted to stocking due to fear of severe food shortages.

On 17 April, during the nationwide transport shutdown, UN vehicles escorted trucks loaded with food items for the 106,000 Bhutanese refugees based in the Eastern region.

Also over April, hailstones severely damaged crops in three Mid and Far Western districts – Bajura, Jumla and Achham. Food shortages might hit these districts, where production has already been affected by severe drought. As much as 80% of wheat harvest was lost to hailstones in 16 VDCs in Bajura on 22-23 April. Similarly, some 45% of harvest was lost in 11 other VDCs in the same district to hailstones, which also damaged rice seedlings prepared for the monsoon plantation. In Achham, hail destroyed crops in five VDCs (Kalika, Bartadevi, Timelsen, Darna and Mayagar).

Water and Sanitation

After weeks, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) stopped load-shedding in April, as pre-monsoon rains began to fill major reservoirs – in Kulekhani and Marsyangdi – where water levels had dropped to alarmingly low levels due to dry winter and spring.

Drinking water supply was also badly affected until mid-April. In Kathmandu, the Drinking Water Supply Corporation was additionally burdened during the dry spell because of power cuts and the inability to pump in water from boreholes

In April, UNICEF worked with the Nepal Red Cross Society to assess water shortages in the three districts of the Kathmandu Valley. Several vulnerable communities were identified. UNICEF provided the Red Cross with water purification and chlorination agents to be used for “point-of-use” water purification for communities, who had to switch to unsafe sources because of the decrease in safe water sources in the valley. It also provided oral re-hydration salts.

Population Movements

According to OCHA’s NGO partners, small individual groups of people moved between and within all five regions. According to OCHA field office, in the Mid-Western region, the number of people coming back from India increased after 24 April. It has not been established whether it was due to the new political situation or due to the upcoming farming season.

According to the CDO in Kanchanpur district in the Far West, 400 families affected by the floods in Dadeldhura have established a temporary camp in Kanchanpur. Their living conditions are reportedly very poor and they are in need of assistance.

OHCHR, UNHCR and OCHA were prepared to comment on the National IDP Policy on Internal Displacement adopted by the Government of Nepal on 9 March. The document highlighted concerns and asked for clarification on concrete steps for implementation amongst other points. Considering the evolution of the current situation, the same agencies will discuss the policy with representatives of the Government of Nepal when it is ready.

Operational Space

After 24 April, NGOs and UN lifted bans on field missions but still continued to advise their staff to carefully look at the local security situation before travelling to districts.

During the reporting period development work almost came to a standstill. Banks and financial institutions were closed making it impossible to channel funds from the centre to partners in the field. All planned meetings, workshops and

construction works to be conducted by NGOs were postponed. From the 35 UNDP partner municipalities, it was reported that no programme activities took place during most of April. This affected savings, collection, credit distribution and training programmes.

Municipal staffs either directly participated in the protest programmes or stopped their work to express solidarity with the protests. In the regions, most professionals (including health workers) were asked by the SPA and the CPN-Maoist to join the demonstrations in the district headquarters. During the protest days, mayors stayed inside army barracks or their own heavily guarded houses.

CPN-Maoist district secretaries in Bhojpur and Sankhuwasabha in the Eastern region issued a circular asking NGOs and development agencies not to continue their programme without complying with the party's demand for registration and participation in CPN-Maoist activities

According to UNDP, most mayors and deputy mayors left their posts after the King's proclamation on 24 April. In some locations, municipal staffs prevented mayors from entering their offices.

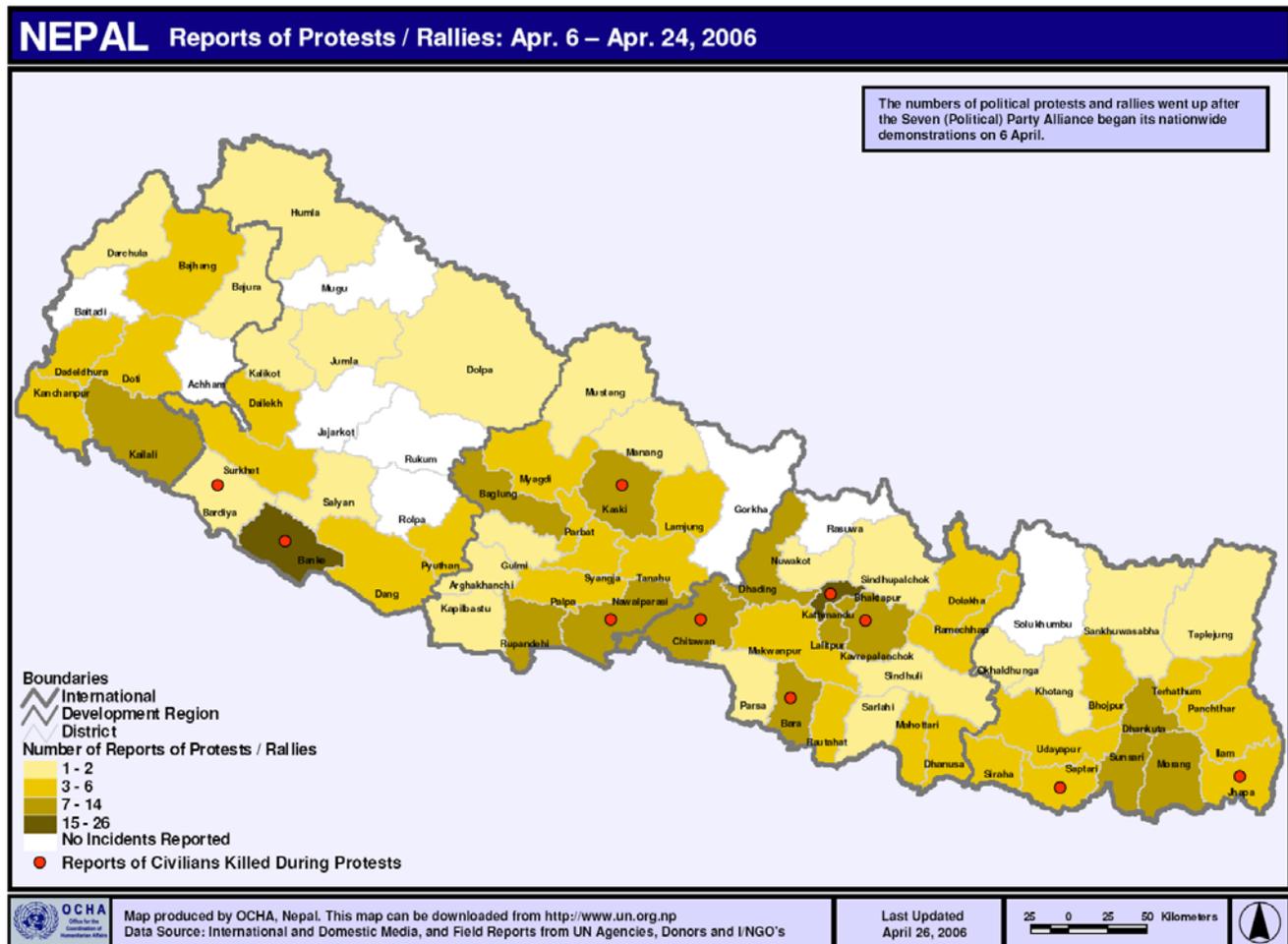
OHCHR, UNHCR and OCHA work on a coordinated response to internal displacement. An IDP Protection Working Group, sub group of the Protection Working Group, will be co-chaired by OHCHR and UNHCR.

The first meeting of the Inter Agency Standing Committee Nepal was called on 13 April; this coordination forum deals with humanitarian issues and gathers representatives of UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement (IFRC and ICRC), the World Bank and 4 international NGOs (Save The Children US, Action Against Hunger, ActionAid and Terre des Hommes).

An inter-agency contingency planning workshop was held (17-19 April) in Kathmandu, in spite of curfews and strikes. Some 60 participants looked at situations of complex emergency and natural disasters. As a direct follow up, the first meeting of the newly created Contingency Planning Task Force was held on 26 April.

On 27 April, members of UN agencies, international NGOs and donors discussed at a regular Contact Group meeting the human rights situation in the country, the rapidly evolving context and its impact on development or aid programmes. ■

COORDINATION



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

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