

Monthly Update – October 2013

UN Resident Coordinator's Office Nepal



This report is issued by the UN RCO with inputs from its UN Field Coordination Offices and other partners and sources. The report covers October 2013. The next report will be issued the first week of December 2013.

CONTEXT

Political update

During October, election campaign moved into full swing across the country. Unlike during the previous election in 2008, when parties mounted many large rallies, the emphasis this time has been more on personal contact with voters through village-by-village and door-to-door canvassing. There have been incidents of election related violence across the country, ranging from minor scuffles to acts of vandalism to serious assaults—two people have been killed in apparent political violence, one at the beginning of October and another at the beginning of November (see below for more details). Concerning as the level of political and election related violence is, it is currently much lower than during the 2008 campaign.

Some violence involve clashes between participating parties but the majority of cases involve the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist), which is boycotting and attempting to disrupt the process along with an alliance of 33 other parties. So far the CPN-Maoist has refrained from lethal violence and attempted to avoid confrontation with the security forces, though some members of the party have been arrested for poll obstruction activities. Even in areas where the CPN-Maoist is perceived to be relatively strong, interlocutors of other parties report that they are still able to campaign, indicating that the political space remains open to all for the most part. Many of the CPN-Maoist's attacks are directed against the party from which it split in June 2012, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M). The CPN-Maoist is expected by many interlocutors to intensify its activities in the final weeks of the election campaign, as election staff and materials are deployed to polling centres across the country—though media reports on 7 November indicated that the 33-party alliance might reduce the length of the all Nepal *bandh* already planned 11-20 November (see below for more details).

The political parties have released their manifestos, which put forward similar economic visions and mostly restate the parties' previous positions on outstanding constitutional issues (including on federal state restructuring and forms of government). However, campaigning to date has largely focused on personal and local issues rather than policy debates. Importantly, the campaign has not yet seen a repeat of the tensions surrounding identity and federalism issues at the time when the first Constituent Assembly (CA) dissolved in May 2012. In many places election races are close and keenly competitive, especially where major national political leaders are vying against one another. At this point in time, the overall result is impossible to predict.

On 6 November, the UN Resident Coordinator issued a statement on behalf of the International Community in Nepal regarding the elections process to-date.¹ The statement applauded “the efforts of all stakeholders, including the interim government, the Election Commission, the political parties and the media, to make this process a success. Especially we commend the role of thousands of candidates who are conducting their election campaigns abiding by the Election Code of Conduct.” In the statement, the international community advocated that “Everyone should respect the democratic right to take part in a peaceful, open and inclusive election. Bandhs or strikes, when enforced by violence or the threat of violence, are a violation of the political rights of citizens and against the laws of Nepal” and was encouraged by “the restraint shown so far by the police, security forces and the Home Ministry, in providing election security with professionalism in the face of provocation during this sensitive period.”

Operational space

The principal operational space challenges faced by Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) signatories during October were dynamics surrounding the ongoing election campaign and the enforcement of the 'election

¹ The full statement is available at: <http://www.un.org.np/headlines/statement-un-rc-behalf-international-community-nepal>.

code of conduct'. Some development organizations were compelled to postpone or cancel their planned trainings, workshops and community visits to remain in line with the code of conduct, or because key government and political counter-parts were busy with election preparations and campaigning. Some activities conducted by poll opposing parties have also impacted on operational space. For example, the CPN-Maoist transportation strikes in various districts—in Bajura and Achham districts on 19 October, in Doti and Dadeldhura districts on 20 October, in Okhaldhunga on 28 October, in Siraha and Udayapur on 25 October and in Sunsari, Dhankuta and Tehrathum on 24 October—to obstruct the visits of the UCPN-M Chairperson to these districts. Though no direct restrictions were placed on development partners, some BOGs signatories (especially with red-plated vehicles) imposed self-restrictions on their movement during the strikes. The Federal Democratic National Front affiliated Federal Limbuwan State Council (FDNF-FLSC) carried out *bandhs* in the nine districts east of Arun River² on 3, 4 and 28 October to protest against the CA elections and to obstruct the election campaigns of other parties. All *bandhs* were observed as partially effective with sparse public vehicular movements in Taplejung, Ilam, Panchthar, Dhankuta and Tehrathum districts and parts of Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts. No obstructions to UN or diplomatic vehicles were reported during these *bandhs*; however, the *bandhs* reportedly affected INGOs and their implementing partners using red-plated vehicles.

Meanwhile, the Banke District In-charge of CPN-Maoist has threatened to obstruct the movement of some election observer groups in the villages, creating a sense of insecurity among some local election observation groups (particularly in the remote and isolated areas in the Mid Western Region). Apparently one election observer group vehicle was stopped on 23 October in Bardiya District. Generally, CPN-Maoist representatives in the Mid Western Region have expressed dissatisfaction about the support of development partners to programs for voter education.

EMERGING ISSUES AFFECTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Overall trends of the election process

Overall, disruptive actions and political violence escalated after the candidate nomination deadlines at the beginning of October.³ While some violence has occurred between political parties campaigning for the 19 November elections, the predominance of violence and disruption has been carried out by parties opposed to the elections. Importantly, many actions have been carried out by 'unknown actors' making attribution between these two categories difficult.

Overall, the scope and scale of violence has been moderate and, despite such violence being regrettable, there are several key positive trends to-date:

- Violence perpetrated by political party youth wings has been low in comparison to the wide use of youth wings for violence or counter-violence during the 2008 elections;
- The activities of armed groups (at least activities that are directly attributable to armed groups) have been negligible, despite a security focus on the threat of armed groups;
- There has been no significant 'communal' or identity-based violence; so far, there has been no emergence of the types of contention and volatility over identity and federalism that was experienced during April and May 2012 in parts of the country in the lead-up to the constitution drafting deadline;
- The use of weapons has generally been low (perhaps only 49 incidents of weapons use during October). However, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of IED plantings with 11 incidents in October compared to 1 in the previous two months combined (most are attributed to 'unknown' groups). There has been a dramatic increase in vehicle arson and arson of campaign materials during October (at least 23 incidents—again, mostly committed by 'unknown' actors), making arson the most

² Jhapa, Ilam, Panchthar, Taplejung, Morang, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Tehrathum and Sankhuwasabha, these districts are claimed to be included in the territory of Limbuwan province.

³ The following analysis is based on information about events consolidated from media, police, UN, civil society, human rights and other development partners. Although every attempt is made to confirm and validate information, factual inaccuracies may occur.

prevalent ‘weapon’ for both anti-polling parties and campaigning parties;

- The numbers of political murders or attempted murders is so far low. There was only one ‘political murder’ (CPN-UML candidate for Bara-4, Mr Mohommad Alam, who was shot on 4 October) during October and this may have been a result of an intra-party feud or for non-political reasons.⁴ On 19 October, an unidentified masked man shot and injured a UCPN-M cadre in Duruwa VDC, Dang District. At the time of writing, only one other purported political murder (Dailekh District Committee member of Tarun Dal, Mr. Nabin Singh Rana Magar⁵) has occurred during November.

Escalating obstruction by political parties opposed to 19 November elections

The CPN-Maoist and the 33 party alliance opposed to the 19 November elections increased their obstruction activities from the beginning of October (with approximately 26 obstruction incidents in August and 92 in September, increasing to approximately 146 such incidents in October). During October, the opposing parties have shifted from the use of blanket *bandhs* and the obstruction of electoral operations (such as voter registration) to a mix of direct actions focused on those parties competing for the elections (particularly, though not exclusively, targeting the UCPN-M). The predominant tactics during October were ‘targeted’ *bandhs*, obstruction of election campaigning and vandalism (including the arson of vehicles and destruction of campaign materials). Direct ‘attacks’ and ‘inter-party clashes’ only made up a minor component (less than 20%) of all reported disruption activities related to poll opposing parties. There were also numerous reports of ‘threatening letters’ directed at competing candidates, black flag raisings and the appearance of ‘threatening graffiti’⁶. Though it is difficult to assess the veracity of these threats, some local interlocutors believe that this has contributed to creating a climate of fear in some areas of the country (such as in Panchthar District). On 27 October, CPN-Maoist organized a number of events across Rolpa at which they massed their cadres and put on a ‘show of strength’. The party also announced Rolpa District as an ‘election campaign restricted area’, banning all election activities in the district. Following the announcement, the CPN-Maoist reportedly increased its presence of cadres, particularly in Holeri, Ghartigaun, Jinabang, Dhawang and Airiwang VDCs. However, no reports of obstruction to elections campaigns were reported in the district by the end of October and a wide number of parties are known to have conducted campaign activities across the district. In addition to violent and disruptive tactics, it is important to note that poll opposing parties have also been conducting peaceful anti-elections campaign activities across the country, including door-to-door campaigns, rallies and public programmes, urging people to boycott the CA elections.

Restricted political space in Panchthar District

According to a local human right defender, the political space was severely affected in Panchthar during October where poll contesting parties were not being able to carry out their campaigns freely due to the actions of poll opposing parties. Campaigning parties were forced to limit their activities to door-to-door canvassing and have often been compelled to change the venue of programs due to security issues. A journalist based in the District noted that, with subsequent increased presence of security personnel, poll-opposing parties will be deterred from taking overt obstruction activities—however, instead, they may resort to covert activities such as IEDs and even ‘shootings’.

Despite dramatic media headlines of specific events, obstruction activities have not yet had a strategic impact when measured on a national scale. Instead, strong obstruction has only occurred in a limited number of ‘stronghold’ districts or VDCs of poll opposing parties. The strength and tactics of obstruction seem to be determined by local conditions, rather than being a monolithic campaign by opposing parties. Obstruction has been most prevalent in the Eastern Region (due to the combined support of the CPN-Maoist and FDNF-FLSC). However, only 11 districts across the country have experienced four or more obstruction incidents during October—these most affected districts were: Panchthar, Ilam, Morang, Jhapa, Sunsari,

⁴ On 4 October, the CPN-UML candidate of Bara Constituency No. 4, Mr. Mohmmad Alam, was shot at Parwanipur in Bara—he later died on 10 October. Police arrested former CPN-UML CA Member, Ramchandra Pyasi Kusahawa, for his alleged involvement in Mr Alam’s murder. Mr Alum’s wife, Nazma Alam Khatun, filed her candidacy in his place.

⁵ The beaten body of Mr Magar was discovered in a stream near his house on the evening of 5 November and police quickly deployed an investigation team to the site. Tarun Dal (NC Youth wing) issued a press statement accusing CPN-UML of the murder, while CPN-UML has also issued statement saying that their cadres were not involved in the incident. Currently both political parties are collecting the information from their cadres in Salleri village. The situation may exacerbate political tension if not managed.

⁶ For example, in Rolpa District such graffiti has included slogans such as “*Jasale garchha vote, usale paauchha chot*” (“Those who will vote, will be beaten.”)

Dhankuta, Jajarkot, Taplejung, Dang, Surkhet and Terhathum.

In addition to disrupting the campaigning of those parties participating in the elections, the poll opposing parties have also continued activities aimed at disrupting electoral operations. During March and May of this year, these activities focused on disrupting voter registration. During October, tactics shifted to the theft and destruction of voter education materials and the obstruction of civic educators in a handful of districts, which in turn has resulted in incomplete voter education in a number of VDCs.

Tensions and violence between parties campaigning for elections

Candidates running under first past the post seats in the CA election formally registered their candidacies across all districts on 3 October, with the process concluding relatively smoothly and peacefully despite some obstruction efforts by poll opposing parties. On 4 October, the preliminary closed-list of proportional representation candidates was submitted by parties at the ECN Headquarters in Kathmandu. Though there were some internal party tensions with the selection of candidates, this did not result in any significant violence or disruptions.

With the end of the Dashain festival at mid-October, political party activities and election campaigns gathered greater momentum across the country at the local levels. Political parties and candidates were busy reaching out to their respective constituencies through door-to-door campaigns, VDC mass-meetings, the dissemination of publicity materials and the formation of ward and VDC committees. Both regional and national level leaders were actively pursuing their campaigns, as well as conducting visits to the regions during the second half of the month.

Compared to the extent of obstruction and violence carried out by poll opposing parties during October, inter-party campaign violence and obstruction was limited. Direct actions between parties only began after candidate nomination at the beginning of October, but then escalated from mid-October (since the end of the Dashain festival). Obstruction of campaigning and vandalism of party materials, vehicles and offices were the most prevalent types of incidents during October. Inter-party attacks and clashes occurred across the country, but were limited overall. There have been relatively few clashes between security forces and parties participating in the elections. Districts most affected by inter-party campaign-related violence during October were Rukum, Baglung, Dang, Kailali, Kanchanpur and Siraha. Election campaigning by political parties and candidates was reportedly going smoothly in the *Tarai* districts of Eastern and Central Regions, despite pre-election security fears. While some inter-party tensions and clashes have occurred in *Tarai* districts, local interlocutors have opined that, so far, the election campaign has been more peaceful than in 2008.

For the most part, local interlocutors have reported that democratic space has so far seen to have expanded across most regions, more so than during the 2008 CA elections. While this has meant more open and free campaigning, it has also contributed to increasing political rivalry and tensions. Most local interlocutors also note a progressive increase in the presence and deployment of Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Temporary Police (*Myadi Prahar*) and the Nepal Army throughout the districts.

Looking ahead into November

Although the overall election and political situation is currently manageable, a number of factors could contribute to increased political tension and violence before the 19 November election date.

Parties opposed to the polls may escalate the scope and scale of their disruption activities after the Tihar Festival. In particular, they have scheduled an all Nepal *bandh* from 11-20 November in order to obstruct the election. At this time, it is difficult to determine the full capacity of the opposing parties to effectively carry out such a prolonged *bandh*. Many local interlocutors have suggested that, while the parties may be able to successfully conduct *bandhs* in certain stronghold VDCs, the parties cannot likely sustain such a *bandh* on a national scale for so long. Nevertheless, despite these assessments, the CPN-Maoist *bandh* on 1 November to obstruct the campaign visits of UCPN-M top leaders to the Western, Mid Western and Far Western regions was observed as largely effective. However, on 7 November, some Nepali media houses began reporting that CPN-Maoist Chairperson Baidya and the 33 party alliance were engaged in discussions to perhaps reduce the length of the planned *bandh*.

Linked to this is the risk that the security services will begin to use more robust tactics to manage the security situation. It is possible that **escalating use of force by the security services may catalyse**

strong counter-reaction from poll opposing parties and create a spiral of violence. Conversely, such tactics may effectively deter or suppress direct violent actions by opposing parties (though some observers suggested that this may push parties into more insidious actions, such as IEDs and shootings).

The mostly ‘disciplined’ **campaigning by parties participating in the elections could still slide into wider campaign obstruction and violence.** Election Code of Conduct violations by political parties contesting the election have been widely reported in the media. Some local human right defenders, journalists and elections observers have noted that extravagant expenses (like multiple vehicles, ‘buying voters’, organising feasts, distributing clothes, etc.) by some candidates may trigger inter-party tensions. In some districts, political parties are reportedly using public buildings and schools for their campaigns. Some human rights interlocutors have also noted that in isolated districts and VDCs there is more scope for restricting political space and pressuring human rights groups, suggesting that election observers should seek to focus more attention on such ‘vulnerable’ areas. Parties may also still resort to manipulating known identity-based and communal tensions or mobilising ‘aggrieved groups’ (such as the landless, conflict victims, etc.) for their political interests.

A ‘surge’ of obstruction and violence might occur in the two weeks leading-up to the elections. This is partly because the festival season will conclude and the environment will be more conducive for mass mobilisation. This was also the pattern of violence during the 2008 elections, when 30% of all political violence occurred in the two weeks prior to polling day and 25% of violence occurred on polling day itself.⁷ The delivery of sensitive elections materials to polling areas will also begin to take place and may be a key target for parties opposed to the election—direct actions against such electoral operations also brings the risk of violence occurring between the cadres of the poll opposing parties and the security forces.

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind two other important factors in coming weeks. Firstly, the attribution of some violence as being ‘opposition’ or ‘campaign’ related will be challenging as many incidents (such as IEDs, ‘torching’ of vehicles, attacks, etc.) are being committed by ‘unknown’ actors. Many events will not be related to the election at all as **some actors will use the electoral process as cover to commit violence for ‘non-political’ purposes** (criminal, economic, personal, ‘settle old scores’, etc.). Secondly, **the analysis of the current context should keep in mind the levels of political violence from the 2008 elections**, which was considered a major post-conflict democratic success. One report recorded 485 incidents of political and electoral violence in the lead-up to and on polling day in 2008, with a total of 50 deaths, 1,286 injured and 116 kidnappings.⁸

HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

Overview of recent local disasters

There were no major disasters reported during the month of October throughout the country. There was a mild rainfall during the mid of October throughout the country which had only a little impact on paddy crops.

Ongoing responses to local disasters

According to authorities in Jhapa, the Jhapa District Disaster Relief Committee has started reconstruction and rehabilitation to resettle flood victims with support from the Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee (CNDRC). Retrofitting and reconstruction of those schools which were damaged during the 2011 earthquake in Ilam and Taplejung districts have been completed with support from Save the Children and UNDP.

Disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction efforts

Mahottari and Dhanusha districts in central Terai are working on mainstreaming District Disaster Risk Management Plans (DDRMP), with the support of UNFCO Biratnagar and other partners. Also, UNFCO Biratnagar and UNICEF co-facilitated DDRMP training organized by the DDRC Parsa.

In the Far-Western Region, the District Development Committee (DDC) Dadeldhura organized a District Disaster Risk Management Plan sharing and validation workshop during the third week of October. The

⁷ See Democracy and Election Alliance Nepal, ‘Election and Political Violence in Nepal—Final Report’ (Kathmandu, 2008).

⁸ *Ibid.*

DDRMP is scheduled to get its final shape after the CA election after holding another round of stakeholder's meeting. In Kailali District, a five-day training on 'Emergency Household Water Treatment System' was organized with the objective to develop a number of volunteers in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and prepare them to respond during an emergency situation. Twenty two volunteers and Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) district chapter officials from 19 districts of the Mid-Western and Far-Western regions participated in the training program which was organized by the NRCS central office.

In the mean time, Dhangadhi Municipality in Kailali District has initiated preparatory works to implement an earthquake vulnerability profile and preparedness plan which was developed earlier in 2009/10 with the technical support of UNDP. In order to expedite the process, a taskforce under the leadership of a technical officer of the municipality, coordinator of OXFAM and UNFCO Dadeldhura has been formed. Dhangadhi municipality has already declared enforcement of building code which is one of the crucial components of the preparedness itself.

Authorities in Kanchanpur (one of the more disaster prone districts of the Far-Western Region) have requested the establishment of a district emergency operation centre (DEOC). After several rounds of discussions, Mercy Corps has agreed to develop physical infrastructure required for the DEOC. The DEOC will be established in coordination with Ministry of Home Affairs and UNDP with essential communication equipment and other equipment.

RECENT MAPS AVAILABLE

The RCO Information Management Unit produced a number of mapping products, some of which are listed below and also available on the UN Nepal Information Platform: <http://www.un.org.np/resources/maps>.

Nepal: Report of Security Incidents October 2013

<http://un.org.np/maps/nepal-report-security-incident-1-31-october-2013>

Nepal: Reports of Bandh/Strikes October 2013

<http://un.org.np/maps/nepal-reports-bandhs-strike-1-31-october-2013>

Nepal: Constituency Delimitation 2008

<http://www.un.org.np/maps/nepal-constituency-delimitation-2008>

Nepal: District wise Constituency Maps (Select map type District Constituency Map and click apply)

<http://www.un.org.np/maps/nepal-banke-district-map-constituency-boundary>

<http://www.un.org.np/maps/nepal-bardiya-district-map-constituency-boundary>

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Visit the UN Nepal Information Platform at www.un.org.np

Disclaimer: The information in this report is consolidated from media, UN, NGO and other development and humanitarian partners, subject to availability of data. Although the RCO aims to confirm reports independently, occasional factual inaccuracies can occur.

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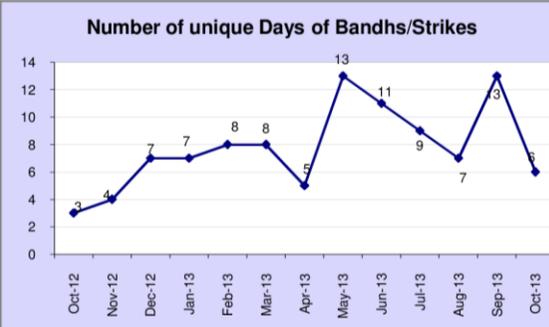
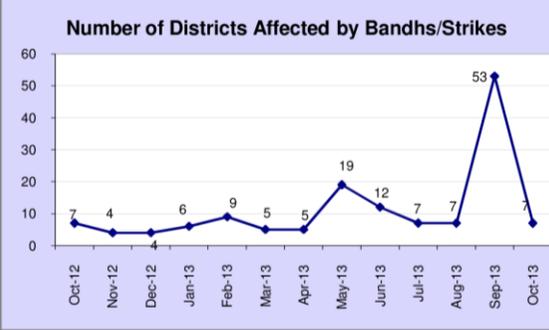
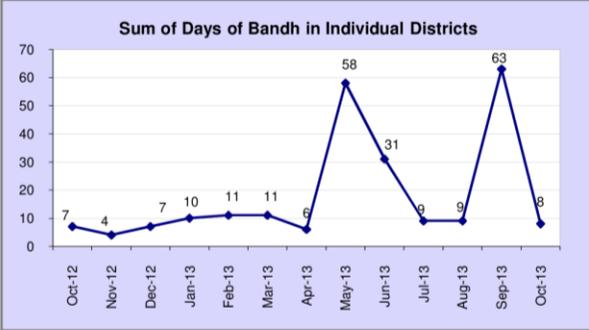
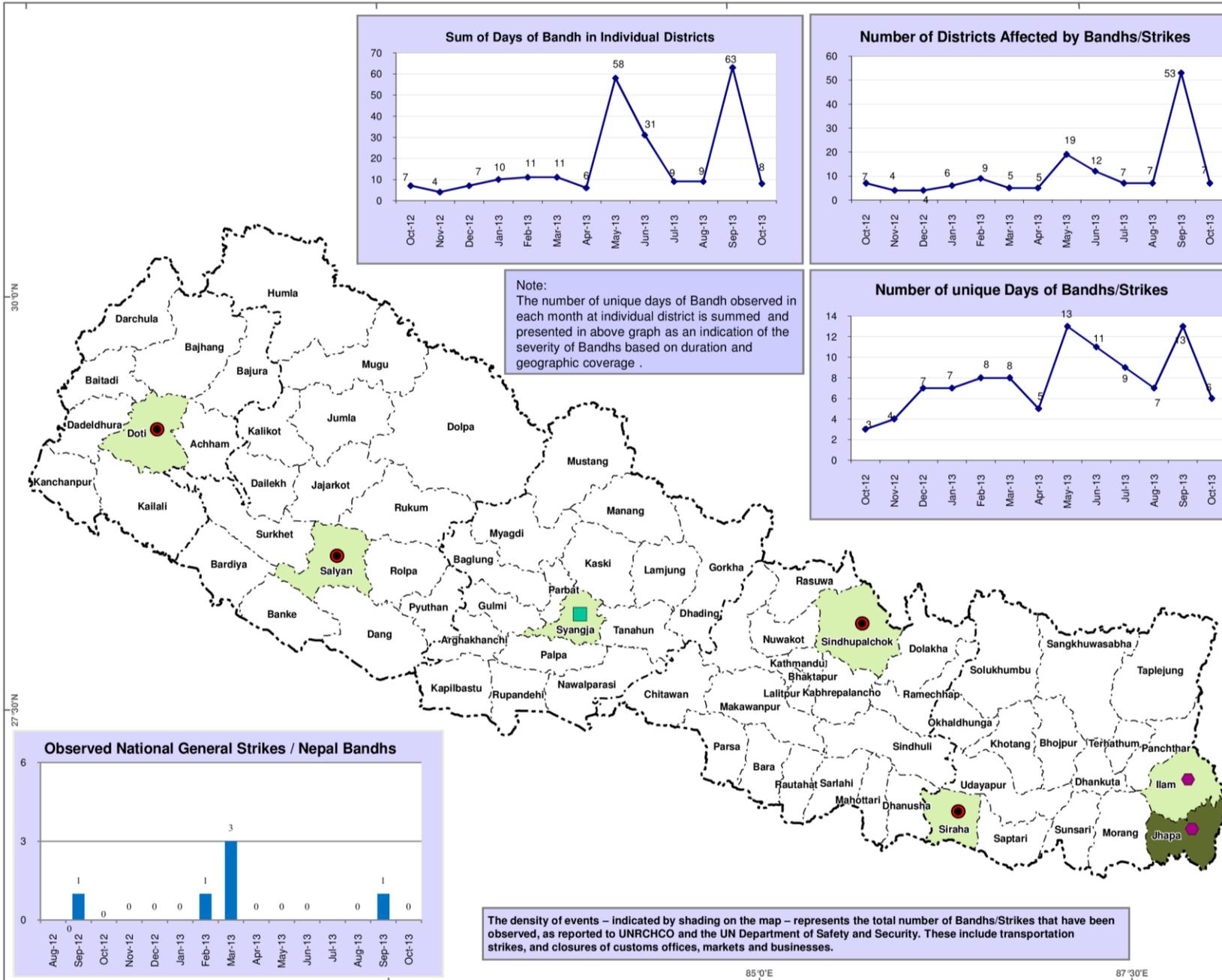
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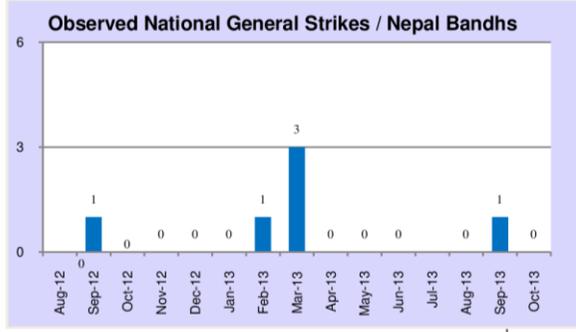
Visit the UN Nepal Information Platform at <http://www.un.org.np>

NEPAL - Reports of Bandhs/Strikes

1 - 31 October 2013



Note:
The number of unique days of Bandh observed in each month at individual district is summed and presented in above graph as an indication of the severity of Bandhs based on duration and geographic coverage.



The density of events – indicated by shading on the map – represents the total number of Bandhs/Strikes that have been observed, as reported to UNRCHCO and the UN Department of Safety and Security. These include transportation strikes, and closures of customs offices, markets and businesses.

Legend

Administrative Boundaries

- International
- Development Region
- District

BANDHS

- 1
- 2
- No incidents reported

Groups Calling for Bandhs/Strikes

- CPN-Maoist Baidya
- Political Parties
- Kirant/Limbuwan/Khumbuwan

Map Produced by RCHCO with information consolidated by UNDSS.
Department of Safety and Security

Map Doc Name: BandhStrike_October_2013_A4_131106_v01
GLIDE Number: N/A
Creation Date: 6 November 2013
Projection/Datum: UTM 44N/WGS84
Web Resources: <http://un.org.np/resources/maps>
 0 50 100 kms
Map data source(s): International and domestic media and field reports from UN Agencies, DFID-GIZ/RMO, Donors and I/NGOs. Geodata: GIST, ESRI, UNOCHA COD/FOD http://cod.humanitarianresponse.info/search/field_country_region/154 <http://un.org.np/resources/common-data-repository>
Projection/Datum: Modified Transverse Mercator
Disclaimers: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Transition Support Strategy
 A service of the United Nations Country Team in Nepal.
 UN RC Office, Nepal

