



OCHA Nepal Situation Overview

Issue No. 15, July

Highlights:

- **Interim Parliament passes law to govern Constituent Assembly elections**
- **Cabinet sets 22 November as date for Constituent Assembly polls**
- **The second phase of registration of CPN-Maoist combatants begins**
- **Competition and denial of political space by different groups noted across the country**
- **Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) and other groups continue to affect the 'reach of state'**
- **Bandhs called by different groups continue to paralyse life across the country**
- **Monsoon induced disasters begin to take toll in different parts of the country**
- **Natural Disaster Contingency planning workshops held in the regions**

Kathmandu, 10 July 2007

CONTEXT

Politics and major developments

On 14 June, the Interim Parliament approved a law earmarking seats for women and ethnic groups in this year's Constituent Assembly (CA) election. The election due in November for the 497-member assembly, will among other things draft a new constitution and decide whether to retain the nation's monarchy or establish a republic. The parliament passed a law allowing voters to elect 240 members to the assembly directly whereas the other 240 seats will be filled on proportional representation with special reservation for women (50%), Madhesi, indigenous groups, lower castes and other groups.

On 18 June, the second phase of registration and verification of CPN-Maoist combatants began at Division 1 Cantonment site in Ilam District, Eastern Nepal. The process started following a decision arrived at by the Joint Monitoring and Coordination Committee (JMCC), which comprises representatives from CPN-Maoist, Nepal Army and United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). A team of about 100 UN staff from UNMIN, UNDP and UNICEF were involved in the verification of the CPN-Maoist Combatants, which was completed on 27 June. According to the Tripartite Agreement on Management of Arms and Armies, the combatants identified as minors or post 26 May 2006 recruits through the verification process will be discharged from the CPN-Maoist army once a re-integration package is ready. The results of the verification at the first cantonment site was presented to the CPN(M) leadership on Friday 29 June. The verification teams are expected to move on with verification at the second cantonment site in Sindhuli pending agreement on several issues.

On 19 June, following its central level committee meeting in Mahottari District, the Madhesi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) demanded the removal of the CPN-Maoist from the interim government and imposing of a 'ban' on its youth wing, the Young Communist League (YCL). The MPRF reportedly later met the Prime Minister and tabled similar demands, reportedly on claims that the CPN-Maoist had violated the peace accord by declaring war on MPRF and engaging in criminal activities.

On 20 June, the UN Secretary General appointed UN Senior Political Officer Tamrat Samuel as his Deputy Special Representative for Nepal and Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN).

On 21 June the government formed a special committee headed by Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel to look after the integration procedures of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the Nepal Army. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting which also decided to form a committee to probe into the cases of disappeared persons and appointed a former Chief Justice to head the Committee. The committee has yet to commence its meetings.

On 22 June, the Cabinet fixed 22 November 2007 as the date for the Constituency Assembly elections. The cabinet also decided to request the Election Constituency Delimitation Commission to review its previous report on constituency delimitation within 21 days.

During the reporting period, restriction of political freedom by cadres of different political parties notably increased. On 16 June, YCL members reportedly kidnapped and beat up an individual in Tansen Municipality, Palpa District on claims that he was a 'royalist' and a member of Nepal Deshbhakta Sangh (a pro-monarchy group). Similarly, on 18 June, the President of Nepali Congress-Democratic (NC-D) Sher Bahadur Deuba accused the CPN-Maoist of preventing leaders of other parties and security personnel from going to the rural areas in the Far Western region. He claimed that the CPN-Maoist had placed stones on the road, hindering his free movement during a two week visit in the region. On 26 June, members of the Chure Bhawar Ekta Samaj (CBES) blocked the Mahendra Highway near Chandranigapur in order to deny passage to a group of leaders of the Nepal Sabhavana Party (NSP) who had planned to travel from Rautahat District to Sarlahi District to carry out a political activity there. The CBES also torched the gates and the banners hung by the NSP in Chandranigapur. The NSP leaders managed to reach their destination via an alternative route. During the first week of July, JTMM (Jwala Singh) reportedly announced a ban on any political activities of non-Madhesi people in Eastern Region's Sunsari District. The announcement, which primarily targeted political activities as well as programmes like strikes by non-Madhesi people and organizations also threatened stern physical action

against those who try support any actions initiated by people of hill origin (Pahadi).

Conflict and Security

During the reporting period, tension between MPRF and CPN-Maoist erupted in the Western Terai, after months of relative calm. On 23 June, MPRF supporters reportedly damaged the CPN-Maoist office in Parasi, Nawalparasi District. The incident took place after MPRF had declared a bandh on 22 June, during which some of its supporters damaged vehicles escorted by the police which were defying the bandh. After the police arrested 11 persons in relation to the attack on the vehicles, the MPRF demonstrated in Parasi to demand the release of the arrested members. The protest continued the following day, when a group of demonstrators reportedly attacked the CPN-Maoist office with stones. The police reacted by firing tear gas and managed to disperse the crowd.

During the reporting period, killings abductions and demands for ransom, notably by both factions of TJMM as well as MPRF continued to be observed. On 13 June, two YCL members were murdered in Rupandehi District by unknown people. During the funeral ceremony of one of its cadres, a Central level Maoist Leader threatened to mobilise the CPN-Maoist to take out the weapons stored inside UN containers in Cantonment sites if the series of killings of CPN-Maoist cadres continued. On 23 June, a CPN-Maoist coordinator of Saptari District was abducted and subsequently killed by people suspected to be from the TJMM (Goit) in Nengda VDC. On 23 June in the evening, the CPN-Maoist called a three-day bandh to protest at the killing and burnt a night bus that had defied the bandh at Kalyanpur in Saptari District. In reaction, transport workers staged spontaneous demonstration in front of the CPN-M office in Rajbiraj, Saptari District. During the demonstration, violence reportedly erupted between the transport workers and the CPN-Maoist cadres who were in the office leading to serious injuries from both sides. On 20 June, the YCL reportedly abducted the Mid Western Regional Medical officer of health in Nepalgunj, Banke District. The abducted officer was later rescued when police officers stormed the YCL office. During the reporting period, the Madhesi Tigers also reportedly distributed letters to Businessmen and Medical Officers demanding amount varying from 100,000-500,000 Nepali Rupees and threatening those who failed to give the money with abduction and death.

Bandhs (strikes) and blockades called by different groups for a variety of reasons continued to be observed in various parts of the country. On 14 June, an indefinite strike called by both (JTMM-Jwala Singh) and MPRF affected normal movement along East-West Highway in all the Terai districts of Central Region (Parsa, Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Mahottari and Dhanusha) as well as Siraha, Saptari, Sunsari Udaypur and Morang in the Eastern Region. On 21 June, CPN-Maoist's YCL organised rallies in several places in Banke and Bardiya districts of Mid Western Region. The rallies were organized to demand that the government investigate and disclose corruption cases, and to protest the police raid on the YCL office in Nepalgunj on 20 June. On 22 June, MPRF announced bandhs in several districts of the Terai (including Dhanusha, Mahottari, Bara, and Rautahat in the Western Region and Banke in the Mid-Western Region) districts reportedly to protest the abduction of the MPRF Kathmandu Valley Youth Forum chairman. On 25 June, Sarlahi District civil society organisations called a bandh to protest at an incident the previous day when a civilian was killed and a 13-

year-old boy injured by a socket bomb that detonated in front of a local temple in the district headquarters, Malangwa. On 25 June, in Rautahat District, the CPN-Maoist called a bandh to protest against failure of the government to bring to justice the perpetrators of the Gaur killings of 21 March. Following the killing of a CPN-Maoist Cadre in Saptari District on 23 June, the CPN-Maoist called an indefinite bandh that affected movement in Saptari and Siraha districts until 28 June when the strike was called off by the CPN-Maoist Central leadership. As the CPN-Maoist leader that was killed in Siraha district on 23 was also a Tharu community leader, on 24 June, the Tharu Kalyankari Shabha (TKS), a member organization of NEFIN, called a three-day long bandh in Udayapur District. Protesting at the burning by the CPN-Maoist of vehicles that were defying their 24 June bandh, on 26 June the Transport Unions of the Koshi and Sagarmatha Zones in the Eastern Region called for an indefinite transport strike to demand security on the East-West highway. The strike was called off on 2 July after the government agreed to consider some of the demands made by the strike organisers.

The reporting period also saw continued usage of bombs and explosives to either terrorise ordinary citizens, political opponents or just to make a political statement. On 20 June, an unidentified group exploded a bomb in an abandoned police post in Barsayam village, Saptari District. On the same day, at least nine persons, including a child, were injured in a series of blasts in Central Region's Birgunj Municipality near the border with India. A notorious criminal with links to India claimed responsibility for these blasts. Similarly, on 24 June, one person was killed and another seriously injured when an explosive device was detonated in Malangwa, Sarlahi District. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the bomb was detonated by a group called Terai Rebels (Terai Baghi), the same group that took responsibility for detonating a similar bomb at a tea shop in Kalaiya of Bara District the following day.

Operational Space

During the reporting period, new groups as well as CPN-Maoist continued to interfere with the way development and humanitarian workers operate, especially in Eastern and Central Terai Districts. On 18 June, CPN-Maoist reportedly obstructed the work of a drinking water project in Bhojpur District on claims that it was being funded by 'foreigners'. On 30 June, CPN-Maoist are also reported to have stopped the work of a partner of an INGO and asked the staff of the partner organisation to leave the area in Mid Western Region's Surket and Jarjakot districts. During the reporting period, CPN-Maoist are also reported to have issued death threats and other forms of intimidation against a staff of a UN agency in Mahottari District in order to influence staff selection process. On 4 July, CPN-Maoist in Khotang District reportedly barred a national human rights official from moving to other villages within the District to verify certain cases of abduction that had been reported to the organisation. Similarly, on 14 June, TJMM (Jwala Singh) issued letters to several I/NGOs in Eastern Region's Sunsari District, demanding varying amounts. The letters were reportedly followed by death threats to individual I/NGO workers who failed to comply with the demands. On 20 June, similar letters were sent to I/NGO workers by TJMM (Jwala Singh) who gave a 48-hour ultimatum demanding money and threatening 'physical action' for those who failed to comply.

On 14 June, staff of a Human Rights NGO investigating rape cases in Siraha District were threatened by community members and given 5 days to leave the area. The Community members involved in the incident were reportedly opposed to the Human Rights organisation talking to the victims and encouraging them to take the cases to court.

Reach of the State

During the reporting period, both factions of TJMM as well as other new groups continued to abduct and intimidate government officials, especially in Eastern region, seriously disrupting delivery of services. On 15 June, both factions of TJMM (Jwala Singh) and TJMM (Goit) reportedly abducted a VDC secretary and a former Nepal Congress Parliamentarian in Siraha and Sarlahi districts respectively. The abductors are reported to have demanded ransom prior to releasing the captives. Similarly, government officials located in the District Administration Offices (DAO) as well as Village Development Committee (VDC) Secretaries reportedly continued to receive threats and demands for money from different groups. During the reporting period, DAO officials in Sunsari District and VDC Secretaries in Morang District received letters from the Madhesi Liberation Tigers and TJMM (Jwala Singh) respectively demanding 250,000 Nepal Rupees from each VDC Secretary and threatening physical action if they do not give the demanded amounts. The demands and threats reportedly compelled many VDC Secretaries from Southern parts of Morang District to relocate to the district headquarters. On 14 June, following the shooting of and serious injury to a VDC Secretary by TJMM (Jwala Singh), all the 49 VDC Secretaries of Sunsari District protested from 14 to 25 June to demand increased security. On 25 June the protesting VDC Secretaries agreed to resume services only in the villages where the police posts have been re-established.

NATURAL DISASTER

On 17 June, a minor earthquake hit Devasthan area in Dhading District. According to the National Seismological Centre, Department of Mines and Geology, the earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale hit the area at 8:15 in the morning. No damage was reported.

On 29 June, the final workshops to support the Government of Nepal in preparing a national Strategy for Disaster Risk Management based on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was completed. The Workshop, which was organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), lead line ministries of the respective sectors and UNDP (With financial support from DG ECHO) was aimed at sharing the final draft of the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management based on HFA and receiving final inputs from the 8 electoral leaders and focal points. During the reporting period the government delegation led by the Secretary, MOHA attended the International global forum on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New York and subsequently established a local committee to plan and set up a National Disaster Risk Reduction Platform in Nepal.

On 2 July, a landslide induced by the ongoing monsoon rains reportedly destroyed homes and caused displacement of seven families while threatening other twenty five (25) families in Dobhane village in Bhojpur District. The affected families were reportedly assisted to evacuate to safe areas by the Nepal police and got further material assistance from the

local Chapter of Nepal Red Cross. During the reporting period, similar losses caused by monsoon induced landslides were reported in Eastern Region's Solokhumbu and Sankwasabha districts.

Following the signing of the Expedited Customs agreement between the United Nations and the government of Nepal on 31 May, the government requested OCHA to organise a training of its key immigration and customs staff on how to implement the agreement in the event of a major disaster.

CAAFAG

The inter- agency working group on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) continued the implementation and further planning for activities which aimed at addressing the specific protection needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed groups. The working Group which is coordinated by UNICEF and consists of two UN agencies, 6 INGOs, 4 NGOs and 3 observers has developed community based programmes to provide re-unification and reintegration support to this group of children nationwide. During the reporting period, UNICEF worked closely with UNMIN and UNDP teams in Ilam cantonment site in the ongoing verification exercise to identify those who are under 18 years of age who could in future be discharged, reunified with their families and reintegrated into their communities through appropriate support.

Health and Nutrition

Every monsoon season, Nepal suffers from outbreaks of communicable diseases. This year, diarrhea diseases and cholera in particular have claimed a heavy toll on the population in remote VDCs in Kalikot and Rautahat districts. On 29 June, the Epidemiology & Disease Control Division (EDCD) reported that 45 people died in Kalikot, 2 in Rautahat and 5 in Kathmandu districts due to acute gastro enteritis. During the reporting period, 20 cases of cholera were confirmed in Kathmandu, 6 in Rautahat and 2 suspected cases noted in Bhaktapur District. Although new cases are expected in the coming weeks, both outbreaks are currently under control.

In response to potential outbreak of communicable diseases, at the end of June, EDCD and District Health Officers dispatched outbreak control teams and collected specimens from affected VDCs in Kalikot and Rautahat districts. The teams also investigated Water sources, notified the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage and strengthened health education. Following alerts by the EDCD/WHO, members of the Emergency Health and Nutrition Working Group (EHNWG) contributed to collection of stool samples in Kalikot (MSF-Holland) and investigated case stories in Rautahat (UNFPA). In addition, WHO donated intravenous infusions (10,000 bottles of Ringer's Lactate and 2,000 bottles of 5% Dextrose Saline) for Sukraraj Tropical Infectious Diseases Hospital in Teku and dispatched two cholera kits to Rautahat and Kalikot districts.



COORDINATION

On 28 and 29 June, OCHA facilitated an inter-agency Natural Disaster Contingency Planning workshop for the Mid-Western Region in Nepalgunj. A similar workshop was conducted by OCHA for IASC partners and government officials in Biratnagar on 4 July. The workshops, which were a follow up of the outcomes of the Kathmandu workshop held in early June were held with the objective of reviewing in-region response capacity, actual preparedness levels of key actors/clusters as well as coming up with interim arrangements and action plans for effective regional response to Monsoon induced natural disasters this year.

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