



Impact of the Saptari Incident on the Electoral Environment

Analysis Update – 2

Period: March 7 to 15, 2017 | Published: March 28

Summary

Five *Madheshi* citizens were fatally shot in Maleth VDC of Saptari during a clash with security forces on March 6.¹ The incident immediately brought *Samyukta Loktantrik Madheshi Morcha* (*Madheshi Morcha*) supporters and citizens to the streets to protest, and generated nationwide dialogue about the ability to hold elections in the current political environment. On March 15, *Madheshi Morcha* withdrew its support from government and announced it would protest the elections.²

During March 7-15, at least 20 violent incidents occurred across the *Tarai*, including vandalism of government offices, burning of public vehicles, and *Madheshi Morcha* supporters clashing with security forces and CPN-UML supporters (see map below). There were also strong reactions to the CPN-UML's *Mechi-Mahakali* campaign in parts of the western *Tarai*, with *Madheshi Morcha* and *Tharuhat Tarai Party* supporters attempting to prevent campaign events from happening on March 14 and 15 in Banke and Kailali, respectively. Without significant political resolution, it is expected that protests and related incidents will continue as the government moves to implement new local bodies and prepare for elections, and as political campaigns continue.³ There have been no serious election-related incidents outside of the *Tarai* since the announcement of the polls, but several protests against the local-body restructuring process.

The deaths in Saptari, resulting incidents of violence, and the *Madheshi Morcha's* decision to withdraw support for the government and boycott and disrupt the elections, has increased the volatility of the already unstable political and security situation in the *Tarai*. *Madheshi* political parties continue to demand that a political agreement on contested constitutional

¹ The clash occurred when *Madheshi Morcha*, an alliance of seven Madhesh-based parties, attempted to obstruct a Communist Party of Nepal-Unified-Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) campaign event. For more about the incident refer to DRCN and COCAP|Nepal Monitor's [Analysis Update – 1](#).

² On March 8, two days after the Saptari incident, the *Madheshi Morcha* presented the government with a five-point demand that must be fulfilled within a week, or the *Morcha* would withdraw support from the government. The memorandum included demands of "...withdrawal of the local level elections slated for May 14, amendment of the constitution, keeping the local level structure within the provincial jurisdiction and implementing the three-point agreement reached with the alliance during the formation of government" (See the Kathmandu Post's '[Morcha submits 5-pt memo to PM, gives 7-day ultimatum](#)'). On March 15, the *Morcha* withdrew support from the government after it failed to address its demands, staged a strike that resulted in several incidents of violence, and announced it would boycott and disrupt the local polls. Whereas the *Morcha's* demands included changes to the federal boundaries through a constitutional amendment, Prime Minister Dahal was only able to promise passage of an amendment that would engage an independent commission to determine boundaries.

³ According to the Government of Nepal (GoN), new local bodies came into effect on March 15. There are now 744 local bodies, including four metropolitan cities, 13 sub-metropolitan cities, 246 municipalities, and 481 village councils.

issues be addressed before local polls are held, and have reiterated they will protest creation of new local units and the elections. There now exist serious concerns that holding polls under the current situation in places across the *Tarai* may not be possible, or if the government does push forward the possibility of more violent incidents is likely.

Holding an election without significant parts of the population participating, or an election that results in violence and potential distrust between communities runs the risk of reversing significant progress made over the past several years. This could inhibit communities from coming together at a time when they are best placed to grow with newly elected officials in more powerful local governments.

Overview of Incidents from March 7 to 15

Election-Related Incidents

Madheshi Morcha called a *Tarai*-wide *banda* (strike) on March 7-8 following the Saptari clash. According to media reports, the strike was effective across the *Tarai*, but particularly in Saptari, Morang, Siraha, Dhanusha, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Nawalparasi and Banke districts.⁴ *Madheshi Morcha* also called a nation-wide strike on March 10. The strike was reported as strongly enforced in the *Tarai*, and partially effective in the Kathmandu valley where approximately 30 individuals were arrested while attempting to enforce the strike.⁵

In addition to strikes, the Saptari incident triggered a series of violent incidents across the *Tarai*, including vandalism and *Madheshi Morcha* supporters clashing with security forces and CPN-UML supporters. Of the 40 election-related incidents recorded by Nepal Monitor in the period of March 7-15, at least 20 were violent.⁶ Almost all of the incidents occurred in *Tarai*, mostly in the districts of the central and eastern *Tarai*.

Immediately after the shootings in Saptari, *Madheshi Morcha* supporters staged protests, some leading to vandalization of government offices. On March 7, *Madheshi Morcha* cadres burned the Local Peace Committee office and an Armed Police Force check post in Saptari, and vandalized the Survey Office, the Revenue Office and the Post Office in Birgunj, Parsa. On the same day, *Morcha* supporters protested against President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's visit in Kapilbastu, during which two tractors were burned in Taulihawa. Also on March 7, a group of protestors hurled stones at a vehicle carrying National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) officers in Rajbiraj, Saptari. A similar attack happened on a vehicle carrying Mohna Ansari, the NHRC spokesperson, on March 9.⁷ On March 8, protesters burned the Nepal Tourism Board office in Janakpur, Dhanusha. On March 9, *Morcha* cadres set fire to the Land Reform Office in Rajbiraj, Saptari, and a bus was also set on fire in the district for defying the strike. On the same day, *Morcha* cadres threw stones at and burned the nameplate of Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav's house in Rajbiraj.

⁴ In Saptari, a strike was announced immediately and enforced from March 7-10.

⁵ <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/13610>

⁶ [This link](#) leads to a search of the Nepal Monitor incident database that shows all incidents for the period March 7-15.

⁷ The vehicle was supposedly vandalized by family members of the individuals killed during the March 6 incident in Saptari. Mohna Ansari was visiting Saptari to investigate the aftermath of the March 6 incident. None of the protesters or NHRC officials was injured in both incidents. [Read the Nepal Monitor incident report here.](#)

CPN-UML supporters faced obstruction and were attacked after the Saptari violence. On March 7, *Madheshi Morcha* cadres burned documents and furniture of the CPN-UML office in Lahan, Siraha. On March 14, *Morcha* supporters set fire to a bus carrying CPN-UML cadres in Nepalgunj, Banke.⁸ According to news reports, nobody was injured in either attack. On March 15, the *Tharuhat Tarai Party* called for a strike against the CPN-UML's *Mechi-Mahakali* campaign in Kailali, and set fire to a campaign gate in the district.

Two of the three violent clashes reported were between *Madheshi Morcha* supporters and the police. On March 7, the police and *Morcha* supporters clashed in Saptari as the latter demonstrated against excessive use of force by the security forces during the Saptari incident. The agitators set an Armed Police Force check post on fire in Bhardaha, Saptari. On March 14, *Morcha* supporters clashed with police again in Gunana, Banke. The police later said they had to fire blank shots after the *Morcha* cadres threw stones at them. Another confrontation was reported between *Morcha* supporters and business owners in Birgunj, Parsa on March 8, resulting in the injury of a *Morcha* district leader. The confrontation took place when *Morcha* cadres manhandled a local shopkeeper who had not closed his shop during the *banda*.

Local-Restructuring Related Incidents

Outside of the *Tarai*, the political situation has remained largely peaceful since the announcement of the elections. However, there were incidents related to the on-going local-body restructuring process. On March 13, citizens in Mirmi, Syangja who have been protesting against making Birgha the center of Kaligandaki Village Council padlocked the Local Development Office. On March 14, the Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (Khotang Chapter) protested against the Local Level Restructuring Commission's report as it allegedly ignores the language, history and culture of indigenous communities. Also on March 14, community members of three VDC's in newly formed Chhathar Village Council in Dhankuta district set up an alternative village council center office at Jorpati to protest against the official decision of establishing the village council center at Kaimane.

This is the second 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.

⁸ During the incident *Madheshi Morcha* supporters set fire to a bus carrying CPN-UML supporters at Udharapur, Nepalgunj. The bus was transporting UML supporters participating in the *Mechi-Mahakali* campaign. Following the incident, *Morcha* cadres preventing vehicles carrying UML supporters to the *Mechi-Mahakali* campaign event from reaching the venue, and also called a *banda* in Nepalgunj. CPN-UML changed its event venue from *Ramleela Maidaan* to the Road Division Office to avoid *Morcha*'s strike and protest. [Read the Nepal Monitor incident report here.](#)

Incidents around the run up to Local Elections Mar 7 - 15, 2017

15 Mar - Protesters burnt the welcome gate made for CPN UML campaign

8 Mar - Birgunj shopkeepers retaliate against UDMF attack
7 Mar - Cadres vandalized government offices in Parsa

10 Mar - Vehicle vandalized for defying bandh in Nawalparasi

9 Mar - UDMF cadres torch bus for defying strike in Saptari
9 Mar - SLMM cadres torch Saptari Land Reform office
9 Mar - NHRC's vehicle vandalized in Saptari
9 Mar - UDMF cadres vandalize vehicles in Saptari
8 Mar - CEC Yadav's house vandalized
7 Mar - Agitators set blaze at APF check-post in Bhardaha
7 Mar - UDMF cadres clash with police in Saptari
7 Mar - UDMF's strike cripples life in Tarai region

10 Mar - Strike enforcers torch bike in Sunsari

Legend

Types of Incident

- Non-violent incidents
- ★ Violent Incidents

Count of Incidents Reported

- 0
- 1 - 2
- 3 - 4
- 5 - 11

14 Mar - Police fire blank shots in Banke
14 Mar - Morcha torches bus carrying UML supporters
14 Mar - UDMF calls for bandh in Nepalgunj to obstruct CPN UML's campaign
7 Mar - Madheshi Morcha cadres vandalize vehicle in Nepalgunj

7 Mar - Morcha cadres protest against president, torch two tractors

7 Mar - UDMF cadres torch Tourism Office in

7 Mar - UDMF cadres vandalize UML city office at Lahan

