

Incidents and Electoral Environment around Local Elections

Analysis Update – 4

Period: April 1 to April 21, 2017 / Published: May 8

After the Madheshi Morcha¹ withdrew its support from the government² on March 15, Morcha cadres intensified protests across the Tarai while demanding that the constitution be amended before local elections.³ From April 1-21, 51 incidents related to the local-elections and local-level-restructuring were reported across Nepal. 36 of the incidents were directly related to the Madheshi Morcha protesting the local elections. The incidents included Madheshi Morcha cadres holding rallies, picketing District Election Offices (DEO), obstructing Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) events, and one attempted attack on CPN-UML cadres. Apart from a few smaller clashes between protesters and the police, most of the incidents were non-violent.

A political agreement between Madhesh-based parties, the government, and CPN-UML remained the major pre-condition for the Madhesh-based parties to participate in the May 14 elections. While the Madhesh-based parties continued protests, they also participated in multiple rounds of talks with the government in an attempt to resolve demands. However, no agreement was reached as of April 21.

A second set of protests began when the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) ruled that only parties that had secured a seat in the existing Parliament during the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections would have their election symbols printed on local election ballots.⁴ Due to this ruling parties with no representation in parliament will have to participate in upcoming elections with their members registered as independent candidates, each candidate potentially being assigned a different symbol than other candidates in the same party.⁵ Several parties protested against the ECN's decision to demand that the symbols for all parties be printed on the election ballots.

In the first half of April, Naya Shakti Nepal Party (NSNP) and 67 other parties organized nine protests against the ECN's decision. Police intervened at some of NSNP's protests and arrested

¹ Samyukta Loktantrik Madheshi Morcha, or Madheshi Morcha, is an alliance of seven Madhesh-based parties. On April 20, six of them excluding Sanghiya Samajwadi Forum Nepal announced a unified party called Rastriya Janta Party Nepal (RJPN), led by Mahantha Thakur. However, the Madheshi Morcha continues to exist.

² For a more detailed analysis of why Madheshi Morcha withdrew its support, read DRCN and COCAP's [second Analysis Update](#).

³ Morcha's original demands included, "...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](#)'. But later in the talks, Morcha agreed on participating in the elections if their other demands are addressed before the elections.

⁴ See [this Kathmandu Post's report](#) for more information.

⁵ There are 112 parties registered at the ECN. 27 of them have at least one member in the current parliament and will have their party symbol on election ballots.

NSNP leaders and cadres, although the protests were largely peaceful. Other smaller political groups also demonstrated and mobilized their cadres. Two other election-related incidents were reported during this period, both reportedly undertaken with the intention of disrupting the elections in some way in respective localities.

The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)⁶, which has remained mostly inactive over the past several months, held at least five protests against elections during this period. CPN reportedly clashed with the police in at least three separate occasions during these protests.

Local level restructuring continued to be contested in certain areas across Nepal. At least four incidents were reported of citizens protesting to express dissatisfaction over the boundaries and centers of newly formed local units. CPN-UML cadres clashed with the police during one incident.

Overview of Incidents⁷

Election-Related Incidents

Madheshi Morcha Protests

At least 36 incidents occurred in Tarai that were directly related to Madheshi Morcha protesting against the local level elections. The incidents included rallies, picketing of DEOs, obstructing CPN-UML events, and an attempted attack on a CPN-UML leader. Except for a few smaller clashes, most of the incidents remained non-violent.

Below is a sample of major incidents that occurred during this period:

- On April 6, Morcha cadres were reported as preventing Saroj Chaudhary, secretary of Dhaubini Rural Municipality in Parsa, from entering his office. They warned Chaudhary not to enter the office until Morcha's demands are addressed.
- On April 8, police arrested 18 Morcha cadres as they attempted to disrupt a CPN-UML rally in Lahan of Siraha. Morcha and CPN-UML cadres clashed in front of Pashupati Aadarsha Secondary School. Police intervened to bring the situation under control. There was no report of injuries resulting from the clash.
- On April 11, Morcha cadres reportedly manhandled CPN-UML's Mahottari district president, Jamun Mandal, while he was participating in an internal meeting of municipal committee of the party on election preparations. A group of approximately 50 Morcha cadres interrupted the meeting and vandalized office furniture.
- On April 13, Morcha supporters organized torch rallies in Birgunj, Parsa and Janakpur, Dhanusha to demand that the constitution be amended before conducting local elections.

⁶ Officially known as Communist Party of Nepal, one of the splinter groups of the erstwhile Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (UCPNM), is led by Netra Bikram Chand Biplav. They have announced that they will disrupt the local elections.

⁷ For a complete list of incidents during this period please visit the [Nepal Monitor website](#).

- On April 16, Morcha cadres picketed DEOs in Lahan, Siraha; Birgunj, Parsa; Kalaiya, Bara; Janakpur, Dhanusha; Jaleswor, Mahottari; Ramgram, Nawalparasi; and Bhairahawa, Rupandehi. The picketing obstructed office activities.
- On April 20, Morcha cadres held a *lathi julus* (stick rally) in several places across the Tarai as a part of the Federal Alliance's nationwide protest program demanding resolution of demands before local elections.⁸ Rallies were held in Chandrauta, Kapilbastu; Rajbiraj, Saptari; Gaur, Rautahat; Janakpur, Dhanusha; Birgunj, Parsa; Kalaiya, Bara; Jaleswor, Mahottari; Biratnagar, Morang; and Lahan, Siraha. During these protests, there were clashes between Morcha cadres and police in Janakpur as well as Gaur. In Janakpur, the clash began when police attempted to stop the *julus* at Ramananda Chowk. No injuries were reported. A larger clash occurred in Gaur when police attempted to stop Morcha cadres from attacking Ram Kumar Bhattarai, a CPN-UML parliamentarian from Rautahat, at Gaur Municipality Office. As police moved to protect Bhattarai, Morcha cadres started hurling stones at them. The police then reportedly resorted to firing tear gas shells to break up the protestors, and arrested three protesters, including a former member of parliament Rambha Devi Yadav. It was reported that at least one protester sustained minor injuries.
- Also on April 20, police arrested 13 Morcha cadres as they attempted to disrupt a voter education training in Janakpur, Dhanusha. The arrested protesters included cadres of the newly formed RJPN.

Incidents Related to Election Symbol Allocation

NSNP and 67 other parties staged a total of nine protests against the ECN's decision not to provide their parties with symbols on the local election ballots. These parties demonstrated in front of the election commission office in Kathmandu and at DEOs in several places across the country.

- On April 2, five political parties including NSNP picketed the ECN office in Kathmandu demanding a single nation-wide election symbol for their respective party. Police arrested protesters including former Prime Minister and Chairman of NSNP Baburam Bhattarai, NSNP leader Hisila Yami, and Communist Party of Nepal Maoist-Revolutionary (CPNM-Revolutionary) leader CP Gajurel.⁹
- On April 3, NSNP and 63 other political parties were reported as demonstrating at several places in the country. These parties burned a copy of the election law in front of DEO in Kathmandu and also picketed the DEO in Lalitpur. 37 NSNP cadres were arrested while they were picketing the DEO in Butwal of Rupandehi. Police also arrested 15 NSNP cadres including central members in Janakpur when vandalism occurred while the members were picketing Dhanusha DEO.

⁸ The Federal Alliance is an alliance of several Madhesh-based parties and Janajati parties that has been demanding a constitution amendment before holding elections.

⁹ CPNM-Revolutionary, led by Mohan Baidhya Kiran, is one of several parties that splintered from former UCPN(M).

- On April 15, NSNP and 67 other parties reportedly began a relay hunger strike at Shantiwatika in Kathmandu, which lasted until April 21. The parties also stated that they would disrupt voters' education programs conducted by the ECN.

Other Election-Related Incidents

- On April 16, an unidentified group set fire to the contact office of Nepali Congress Party at Gulara of Lamkichuha Municipality in Kailali. The group burned office furniture and the party flag. The president of Kailali Constituency-2 attributed the incident to individuals who intend to disrupt local elections.
- On April 17, a socket bomb was discovered at Om Shree Roshan Emporium, a shop in Rajbiraj, Saptari. The Nepal Army later defused the bomb. Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha-Krantikari (JTMM-K), an armed Madheshi group led by Jaya Krishna Goit, was reported to have planted the bomb in order to intimidate residents ahead of local elections.¹⁰

Incidents Involving CPN

CPN, which had remained quiet over the previous several months, held at least five protests against local elections during this period. The party has made claims that it will disrupt the elections.

- On April 6, CPN staged a demonstration at Khalanga, Salyan demanding that the local level elections should be cancelled.
- On April 9, CPN vandalized signboards in four rural municipalities including Malika, Madan, Darbar and Chandrakot in Gulmi, and padlocked the Madan Ward Office.
- On April 18, police intervened in two anti-election programs organized by CPN in Butwal, Rupandehi and Janakpur, Dhanusha. In both cases, police entered the event stage to end programs, which resulted in clashes between the CPN-Maoist supporters and police.
- On April 20, police moved to end a demonstration staged by CPN against local level election in Bharatpur, Chitwan. Police initiated a *lathi-charge* after demonstrators began hurling stones at them. 13 demonstrators were arrested during the incident.

¹⁰ JTMM-K is an underground armed-group that was formed in 2004 after splitting from Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The group says its aim is to separate the Tarai from Nepal.

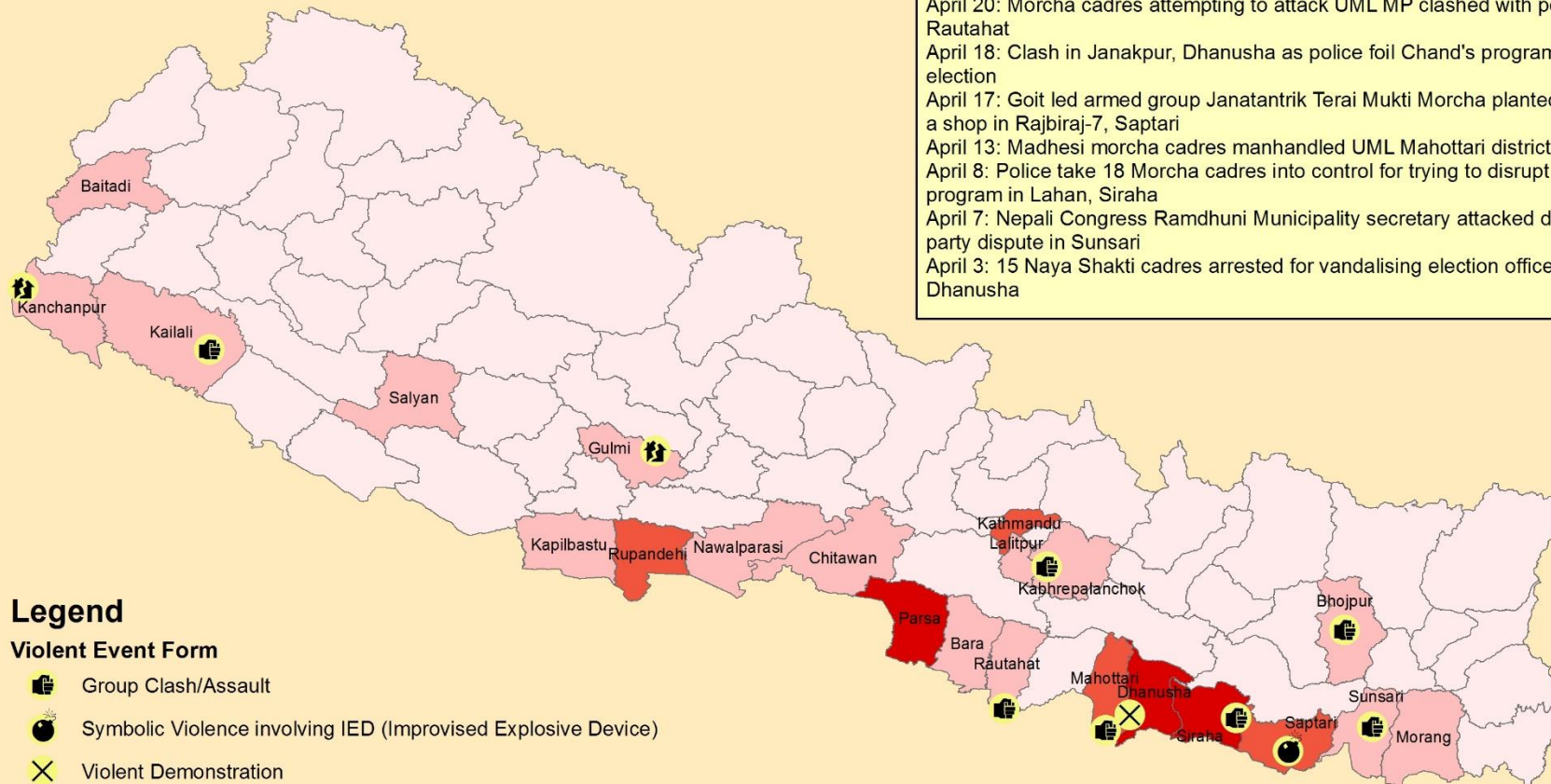
Local-Level Restructuring-Related Incidents

At least four incidents related to local-level restructuring occurred during this period. The incidents involved citizens expressing discontent over the boundaries and centers of newly implemented local units.

- On April 2, citizens from four former VDCs of Hakpara, Sanhaitha, Krishnapur and Lagadi demonstrated in front of the Siraha District Administration Office (DAO) to demand that their four former VDCs be placed in a separate rural municipality with Sanaitha as its administrative center. Protesters submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Dahal through the Chief District Officer (CDO) stating their demands.
- On April 3, residents of former Raghunathpur VDC picketed DAO Dhanusha protesting against splitting the former VDC in two different municipalities. The recent restructuring has merged wards 1-8 of Raghunathpur into Sabaila municipality while ward 9 into Ganeshman municipality. The residents of Raghunathpur demanded to remain with Ganeshman municipality.
- On April 5, six citizens from former Sukhipur municipality in Siraha began a hunger strike in protest of the Local Level Restructuring Commission's decision to scrap its municipality status and transform it into a rural municipality. The government had issued Sukhipur municipality status in September 2015 by merging the former VDCs of Mohanpur, Kamalpur, Kabilasi, Bidhyanagar, Larkanha, Balhi and Silorawa Pachhawari. The residents have been protesting against the commission's decision for the past month.
- On April 11, CPN-UML cadres clashed with police in Dhungharka, Kavre as the police attempted to prevent CPN-UML from removing the signboard of Bethanchowk Rural Municipality office. The cadres were removing the sign as a form of protest against the decision of assigning Dhungharka as the center of Bethanchowk.





This is the fourth of a series of periodic analysis updates that Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) | NepalMonitor.org will be releasing during the upcoming election period. This project receives financial and technical support from The Asia Foundation and The Carter Center.

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




Legend

Violent Event Form

-  Group Clash/Assault
-  Symbolic Violence involving IED (Improvised Explosive Device)
-  Violent Demonstration
-  Vandalism

Total Incidents (Both Violent and Non-Violent)

-  0
-  1 - 2
-  3 - 5
-  6 - 10

April 20: Morcha cadres attempting to attack UML MP clashed with police in Rautahat
 April 18: Clash in Janakpur, Dhanusha as police foil Chand's program against election
 April 17: Goit led armed group Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha planted a bomb at a shop in Rajbiraj-7, Saptari
 April 13: Madhesi morcha cadres manhandled UML Mahottari district chairman
 April 8: Police take 18 Morcha cadres into control for trying to disrupt UML's program in Lahan, Siraha
 April 7: Nepali Congress Ramdhuni Municipality secretary attacked during intra-party dispute in Sunsari
 April 3: 15 Naya Shakti cadres arrested for vandalising election office in Dhanusha

April 16: An unidentified group vandalised Nepali Congress Office in Lamkichuha, Kailali
 April 11: A group of men vandalised the contact office of Nepali Congress in Kanchanpur
 April 11: Locals and Police clash in Dhunghkharka in Kavre during dispute over centre of rural municipality
 April 9: Cadres of Biplav led Communist Party vandalise signboards of 3 rural municipalities in Gulmi

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