



OCHA Nepal Situation Overview

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Highlights:

- Koshi River embankment collapse causes flooding in Sunsari and Saptari district, affecting up to 70,000
- Relief operations led by the Government are in full swing; humanitarian community mobilizing support
- Although monsoon rains are less than usual, a number of floods and landslides are reported from several districts
- Maoists, UML and MJF form coalition to end political stalemate
- Prime Minister and MJF Ministers sworn in, while UML stays away demanding second rank
- Food crisis continues in much of Mid and Far Western region, as WFP appeals for additional food relief

CONTEXT

Political situation

Nearly four months after the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, three of the four largest parties in the CA, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M), CPN-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), agreed to form a coalition government after a series of consultations over power-sharing issues. On 14 August, the CPN/M, UML and MJF reached an agreement to form a new government without the second largest party, Nepali Congress (NC), which opted to stay in opposition. On 15 August, Pushpa Kamal Dahal ("Prachanda"), the chairman of CPN/M, was elected as the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Nepal after receiving support from 464 CA members, a significant majority. On 22 August, eight ministers were sworn in by PM Prachanda, forming the nucleus of a new cabinet. Several other parties were also expected to join the Government.

The three parties agreed to a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which set the priorities of timely drafting of a new constitution, bringing the peace process to a logical end, restructuring of the state, immediate relief to the conflict-affected people, integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist army and implementation of past agreements, among others.

However, there was still no consensus about the post of the Deputy PM. As the UML's demand to be given that post and thus the second rank in protocol was not fulfilled, it chose not to participate in the swearing in ceremony on 22 August. A number of ministerial posts, including crucially that of the Minister of Home Affairs (MoHA), thus remain vacant for the time being. The issue was however expected to be resolved within days after the return of the PM from the People's Republic of China.

The Prime Minister, in his first days in office, visited the flood affected areas in Sunsari district, addressed the nation on television and, subsequently, travelled to Beijing for a 5-day visit on the occasion of the closing of the Olympic Games there.

President Ram Baran Yadav called for the Fourth Session of the Constituent Assembly to convene on 5 September.

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has introduced a new price and distribution policy for diesel that among other things has increased the retail price for commercial buyers while retaining the existing price for public transporters. This will be first introduced in Kathmandu valley only. If it is successful the same arrangement will be made right across

the country. As per the new arrangement the rate for commercial buyers will be Rs. 80 and Rs. 70 for public transporters.



Flood displaced people in Sunsari district, Photo: IFRC

Safety and security

Incidents of extortion, violence and killing were reported in the Eastern Region. Civilians including children continue to be under threat. On 11 August, a student was killed by an unidentified armed group in Biratnagar. On 12 August, an unidentified gang detonated a socket bomb at a house in Biratnagar. On 12 August, an unidentified group shot dead an elderly woman of Rajpur of Siraha. On 12 August, a civilian was found dead in a sack in Biratnagar of Morang. On 13 August, another civilian was found dead at Janga River in Mahottari following his abduction. On 15 August, a local of Umaprempur of Dhanusha was found dead following his abduction. On 15 August, cadres of the armed group Akhil Tarai Mukti Morcha (ATMM) threatened to kill a civilian demanding donation for the group's first convention.

Despite commitments by Maoist leaders to stop all forms of violence, some Maoist cadres were reported to threaten and intimidate civilians at the local level. In Sankhuwasabha, Maoist cadres allegedly looted maize crops from farms and houses at Siddhakali.

There were also reports of trafficking in Bhojpur. About four persons in the district were arrested on charges of trafficking two young girls, who had been rescued by the police from Washtim VDC on 13 August while being trafficked to Kathmandu.

In the Eastern Region, civic life and vehicular movement was badly affected due to an indefinite transportation strike

called since 12 August by Janakpur Zone Bus Entrepreneurs Association, All Nepal Free Transport Workers' Association and other transport organisation demanding government to ensure safety and security of transport workers and transportation on the highway. They called off the strike on 16 August after the transporters and the government signed an agreement addressing security concerns and a compensation of Rs 1 million to the family of a driver murdered by an unidentified gang in Sarlahi. The bandh seriously affected the hilly districts Ilam, Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha and Tehrathum, which largely rely on food materials transported from the Terai. Enraged by the strike, vegetable farmers of Dhankuta district staged demonstrations and briefly seized a police van and motorcycles to protest against the loss they incurred due to the bandh, as around 500 quintals¹ of vegetables were ruined before reaching the market. Ambulance services of Dhankuta were also obstructed due to fuel shortage.

The situation in other eastern districts, including Mahottari, Sarlahi, Dhanusha and Sindhuli also remained affected by the strikes. In the Far-West Region (FWR), the Kailali Chamber of Commerce and Industries (KCCI) organised an indefinite strike on 18 August of the shipment of goods to protest against the truck syndicate system. Previously the KCCI had prevented the loading of trucks from 6-11 August. All districts in the FWR had already been hit by the July transportation strikes that lasted almost three weeks. On 21 August, representatives of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Transport Entrepreneurs met with the PM and agreed to withdraw the protest programme. The Government stated that it would resolve the syndicate problem within two months.

Reach of the State

On 13 August, the government staff in some districts in the Terai halted their work for more than 10 days demanding security. Almost all offices including financial institutions remained closed. The reach of the government remained minimal due to frequent explosions of IEDs in government offices and donation calls, and threats of killing both Pahadi and Madhesi staff from different armed groups. The absence of government staff in the field in many areas results in a lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of programmes implemented in rural areas.

In Siraha, most government offices remained closed. In Sunsari, where government offices had remained closed after 5 August, they resumed their work from 11 August after an agreement between employees and security officials in Inaruwa. On 25 August, an unidentified armed group abducted a VDC secretary in Siraha district. In Dhanusha, 95 out of 101 VDC Secretaries reportedly work from district headquarters. Only government health staff is commonly found working at their assigned health posts. In Bara, civil employees of three government offices at district headquarters Kalaiya halted their work for an indefinite period from 17 August demanding security and an improved work environment.

Operational space

The operational space for I/NGOs in eastern Terai was negatively affected as aid workers were facing difficulties in carrying out fieldwork for monitoring and implementing development programmes. NGOs have problems in reaching

communities due to the fear of abduction and killing at the hands of armed groups demanding donations. CARE Nepal and Caritas have not been able to operate in Janakpur since July due to IED explosions and threats from JTMM-Rajan Mukti. The group has also threatened to close other I/NGOs' programmes if they failed to obtain their prior approval for implementing development programmes.

At a meeting at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Janakpur the overall security situation and strategies for working under such an environment were addressed. Participants found that very few NGO programmes focussed on conflict affected VDCs, and that a lack of effective social mobilisation and a lack of transparency by NGOs at the VDC and community levels had negative impacts. The focus on marginalised communities could be improved. In addition, there is a need to provide quick income generation activities for youth by engaging them in livelihood programmes, which may help to divert them from armed activities. During field observations, it was found that NGOs in Dhanusha and Mahottari that focussed on poverty alleviation, had maintained financial transparency and had more locally hired employees were less likely to face threats.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Protection

OHCHR and UNICEF conducted an assessment of protection and child protection issues related to the flooding in Sunsari district. Agencies documented several concerns relating to the situation and protection of women and girls, including the absence of separate sleeping and bathing areas; toilets without lighting (making them inaccessible for women and girls at night) and a lack of security in or around the camps. OHCHR also noted with concern that women were not being included in camp management decisions. There were no reports of gender-based violence or discrimination in the camps, but if gender-related concerns are not addressed, the risk of both is expected to increase.

Fifty five prisoners, including the alleged leaders of three armed groups, escaped from Siraha jail through its main entrance on 13 August in circumstances which are not yet clear. One escapee was shot dead by a prison security officer. Only five have been recaptured. The Government has formed a three-member committee to look into the escape led by the Director of the Prison Management Department.

On 14 August, 1,068 Tibetan protestors were arrested outside the Chinese Visa Section in Kathmandu. OHCHR witnessed police using minimum force against those resisting arrest and observed only one isolated act of excessive use of force. All arrested were released the same evening. Police have been arbitrarily stopping and arresting Tibetans on the street in Kathmandu on the grounds that they might be planning to participate in pro-Tibet protests. One nun was seriously ill-treated by police who arrested her in Boudha, several kilometres from the site of pro-Tibet protests.

Food security

On 19 August, the World Food Programme (WFP) has called for urgent assistance to ease the food crisis in Nepal. The impact of the food insecurity situation has over-stretched local coping mechanisms. Children and women are particularly vulnerable. Most at risk are nine districts - Achham, Rukum, Kalikot, Humla, Mugu, Dolpa, Bajura, Dailekh and Jajarkot - according to a joint emergency food and security assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture and

¹ A *quintal* is equivalent to 100 kg and is a standard measurement of mass for agricultural products in India and Nepal.

Cooperatives and WFP. It found that over 90 percent of the population experienced food shortages in these districts, which have very poor roads and experience extreme crops losses due to winter droughts. Reports from Rolpa and Doti have also highlighted the effects of the food crisis there.

During the past two weeks, the effects of monsoon rainfalls, landslides but also transportation strikes along the supply routes prevented the replenishment of stocks in many areas. The main highway in Kalikot has been obstructed due to a landslide.

In Achham, 32 of 75 VDCs are affected by drought and an estimated 24 VDCs are considered as in an acute food and livelihood crises. The majority of Achham District relies upon the main roadway from Doti District for transportation of supplies. In several places, the stocks of the Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) have been depleted. In another district, Dailekh, there are reports of most families migrating to India due to lack of food.

In its latest Market Watch report, WFP analyses the severe food insecurity in the Mid and Far Western hills exacerbated by current food prices. It also found national cereal prices have continued to rise, and expected this trend to continue. The fuel supply situation has improved but guaranteed supplies in the future remain uncertain. WFP is preparing to reach 2.5 million people in at least 31 districts by mid 2009 - up from 1.2 million at present. To do this, WFP's budget of US\$54 million would have to nearly double to \$104 million.

Health

The supply and transportation problems due to landslides and strikes in the Mid and Far Western hills, as well as security concerns in Central and Eastern Terai have also had a negative effect on the access to health services for many Nepalis, especially residents of rural areas. From Kalikot, an absence of medical staff has been reported. Shortages or the lack of medical staff was also reported from Bajhang, Bajura and Achham. The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) has reported that continuous rainfall had contaminated drinking water sources and increased the risk of typhoid, diarrhoea and dysentery in Achham. The lack of trained medical staff hinders the capacity of the district to respond to emerging health needs and prevent epidemics. Where areas are inaccessible by road, helicopters are not normally affordable for the health services. Often, they also do not have sufficient fuel to operate vehicles to reach outlying areas.

The security concerns due to threats and extortion of government health staff are affecting health care services for up to 5.9 million people in the nine Terai districts between Sunsari and Parsa. In these districts, health staff has been receiving threatening calls for "donations" over the past six months. Many health workers are forced to make regular payments to extortionists in exchange for security. In the past month, three senior government health workers have sought transfers due to extortion related fears. Bara district has only one government doctor working for a population of 635,000 people. Senior health workers, including doctors, rarely leave the district headquarters due to security concerns, in particular a fear of abduction. Supervision and support of PHCs, health posts and sub-health posts has suffered as a result. The impact of these developments is unclear, but the loss of funds and absence of staff is likely to have a negative impact on health service delivery and, as a result, on morbidity and mortality. This is especially worrying at this time of year, given the annual increase in monsoon related diseases.

Meanwhile, the Regional Health Office in the MWR and FWR announced that a measles vaccination campaign will be conducted for children between the ages 9 months to 5 years old in the MWR and FWR from 10 September onwards.

Education

A number of schools in the MWR/FWR were affected by recent natural hazards. School buildings were damaged in Kalikot, Surkhet and Mugu districts. School buildings are housing landslide affected people in Dadeldhura, Kalikot and Bardiya (Rajapur Delta). Several schools were closed due to food insecurity. Many schools remain closed due to the lack of education materials. For instance, in Kalikot, students from 360 schools remain deprived of textbooks and schools remain closed.

Floods/Disaster relief

The Government, under the leadership of the PM and the MOHA, has taken the lead in the rescue, relief and rehabilitation effort following the 18 August breakage of the Koshi River embankment and the subsequent flooding of at least four VDCs of Sunsari (Shree/Haripur, Shreepur/javdi, Lokahi, Kushaha Paschhim). The Government puts the figure of affected people at 70,000. More than 20,000 displaced people have been temporarily accommodated in shelters in Sunsari and Saptari. Moreover, a significant number of displaced persons from India are currently seeking assistance on Nepali territory. MoHA estimates the number at 3-5,000, while other estimates are higher, reaching a total of 10,000. MoHA has confirmed that humanitarian assistance will be provided on equal terms to those in line with international principles.



Aerial view of Sunsari district and adjacent Indian villages. Photo: UN DSS

The CDOs of Sunsari and Saptari have been put in charge to coordinate the efforts on the ground. The DDRC remains the principal format for coordination. OCHA has offered its support and has been present in Inaruwa (Sunsari) since 18 August, with a permanent presence since 21 August, and a presence in Rajbiraj (Saptari) as of 26 August.

A full repair of the East-West Highway and of the breached eastern embankment of the Koshi River is not likely to be completed until the end of the monsoon season. The Government of Nepal has established contact with an Indian team of experts in order to look into repairing the embankment. The Koshi barrage installations were built in the 1950s and are leased to India, regulated under the Koshi Project Treaty between Nepal and India.

A number of assessments have been carried out and the relief operation is under way. OCHA coordinates these efforts from

its office in Biratnagar and its presence in Inaruwa and posts all available assessment results on a designated website and shares all relevant information among agencies on the ground. OCHA has also issued a series of special Situation Reports and maps on the floods. See: <http://www.un.org.np/floods/index.php>

Other districts also saw a series of incidents related to floods and landslides. Continuous downpours from 10-17 August triggered deadly landslides in Kalikot where five persons were killed, five are still reported missing and over 40 households were displaced. The heavy rainfall also damaged cereal crops and an estimated 16 schools in that remote and impoverished district. Chhapre, Bharta, Sukatinya and Odanku VDCs were reportedly worst affected. A District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) emergency meeting was held on 17 August. However, there was lack of effective response and of available materials to meet the needs of the affected population. The Chief District Officer (CDO) and other District Officials were not present in the district to lead the response. There is apparently no medical doctor present.

On 17 August, continuous rainfall in Jumla damaged several houses and increased the risk of landslides, in particular affecting communities in Malikabota, Badki, and Haku VDCs. In Pyuthan on 15 August, two members of a family died and fourteen others were injured in a landslide in Sari VDC. In Accham, the flood and landslide triggered by the continuous downpour further exacerbated the tough conditions for the local people. On 19 August, an estimated 12 houses were damaged and land cut by the flooding Geruwa River in the Rajapur Delta area in Bardiya. In Mugu, recent rainfall increased the risk of houses affected by landslides in Pina near Rara Lake and forced households to seek shelter elsewhere. In Panchthar, on 14 August, 17 families (83 members) from Imbung VDC were affected by landslides. Several houses are at high risk of being swept away in case of renewed heavy rains. Local people have been requesting help for resettlement as that area is risky for them to stay but no decisions have been made regarding resettlement so far.

An earthquake occurred in western Xiang, China, (Tibet, 228km north of Jumla DHQ) on 25 August, with a revised 6.6 magnitude. The earthquake shocks were reported felt in Dolpa, Mugu, Jajarkot, Salyan, Banke, Dang and Kailali. UN, I/NGO and government staff are reported safe throughout

the MWR/FWR. No reports of incidents as a result of the earthquake are reported to date.

COORDINATION

OCHA convenes daily Contact Group coordination meetings for the flood relief in Inaruwa, Sunsari. OCHA maintains a presence in Inaruwa and Rajbiraj, Saptari, for the time being. OCHA has also set up a designated website on the UN Information Platform which includes assessments, reports, maps and updates on numbers and locations of displaced persons, as well as relief items.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- Health and Nutrition cluster coordination meeting to discuss Koshi flood response, 27 Aug, 1400, Department of Health (EDCD), Kathmandu-Teku, contact: Damodar Adhikari, WHO
- Local Donors Meeting (re. Koshi floods), 28 August, 1500, Ministry of Finance, contact: MoF, Foreign Aid Coordination Division
- IASC meeting, 28 August, 1100, UN Conference Room - the tentative agenda includes a review of the current humanitarian situation (focus on floods), humanitarian response reform, and planning into 2009. Contact: Aditee Maskey (maskeya@un.org)
- Coordination and SPHERE standards workshop, residential, Park Village hotel in Budhanilkanta-Kathmandu, from 1 to 5 September, Contact: Aditee Maskey (maskeya@un.org)
- Consultative workshop on disaster preparedness and risk reduction approaches, 4 September, Kathmandu Contact: Aditee Maskey (maskeya@un.org)
- Protection Workshop, 23-24 September, Kathmandu (venue tbd), Contact: Vincent Omuga (omuga@un.org)

Disclaimer: The information in this report is consolidated from media, UN, NGO, and other humanitarian partners, subject to availability of data. Although OCHA aims to confirm reports independently, occasional factual inaccuracies can occur. For inputs, questions or comments please contact: Marcus Brand, Humanitarian Affairs Analyst on ph. 98418 29420, brand1@un.org

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