

Political Update - 21

Election Preparation and Political Activity

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DEMOCRACY
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Elections for the House of Representatives and provincial assemblies are taking place on November 20, 2022. The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) has been making intense preparations to conduct the elections. Since October 12, 2022, when the ECN published the final list of candidates and distributed election symbols to candidates, political parties and candidates have increased their election-focused activities.

This political update focuses on preparations made by district election offices, offices of returning officers, and election-oriented activities of political parties. This update has been prepared on the basis of interviews conducted with district election officers, returning officers, chief district officers, candidates, political party representatives and citizens in Siraha and Dhanusha in Madhesh Province, Jhapa and Morang in Province 1, Syangja in Gandaki Province, Kanchanpur in Sudurpachshim Province, and Sindhuli in Bagmati Province. Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) researchers visited these districts between October 16 and 24, 2022 for the purpose of this update.

Election preparation by election offices

In the districts visited for this update, employee details were being collected from government offices with the aim of managing human resources required to conduct the elections. Various training activities were also ongoing.

District election offices were also updating the voter identification cards. At election offices, ballot boxes were being examined, counted and kept in ready condition. Districts where ballot boxes were not available in adequate numbers were requesting the ECN for additional ballot boxes. The District Election Office in Siraha, which had received 2,213 ballot boxes, had requested the ECN for an additional 312

ballot boxes. The District Election Officer in Syangja, which has a total of 320 polling stations, said that the plan was to put five ballot boxes in each station, but the available ballot boxes were inadequate, and therefore a request had been sent to the ECN for additional ballot boxes.

Arrangements had been made for district election offices to purchase the 15 different kinds of materials necessary for conducting elections. District election officers informed DRCN that the materials had already been purchased accordingly. Arrangements had already been made to securely store ballot papers and other election materials in the respective districts.

New voter registration had been halted after the election date was announced, and DRCN was told that district election offices have been updating the voters' roll. Names of voters who had died or whose names had been repeated were being expunged from the voters' roll and the details were being corrected.

Election officers and chief election officers said that they had been inspecting polling stations and working toward making polling centers well-managed and secure.

Preparation for voter education

District election officers said that the ECN was preparing to conduct a door-to-door voter education program in communities over 15 days at the ward-level in order to teach voters the correct way of casting their ballots through the use of sample ballots and other voter education materials. Additionally, DRCN was told that preparations were made to conduct discussion and interaction programs along with sample voting across all local levels. Provisions exist which provide for the formation of voter education coordination committees at the municipal level under the coordination of the chief administration officer, and at the ward-level

under the coordination of voter education operation committee. Accordingly, such committees had been formed at the local level.

An election officer at the Siraha District Election Office told DRCN that while the required material and human resources for voter education would be procured by local levels, district election offices would provide the relevant municipal units with other voter education materials like brochures, sample ballots, etc. Election officers said that door-to-door programs would be conducted through local levels to provide voter education by deploying women health volunteers to cover entire wards.

Preparation by political party and candidate

In the districts visited, political parties and candidates had intensified their election activities. Parties had established contact offices all the way to the ward-level, and had also formed cadre mobilization committees. Parties who had entered into coalitions had formed joint election campaign committees. Independent candidates were campaigning to promote their candidacy and actively meeting their voters.

Since registering their nominations, most political parties and candidates had already started corner meetings, door-to-door programs, voter interactions, and cadre training programs in order to conduct election campaigns

Electoral coalition

Various political parties are entering the upcoming elections by forming alliances. Five parties including Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) [CPN (MC)], Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) [CPN (US)], Rashtriya Janamorcha

(RJM), and Loktantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP) are in one coalition. Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxists-Leninists) [CPN (UML)] and Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) are coordinating their election efforts. In some constituencies, CPN (UML) is coordinating with Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP).

Since political parties with disparate ideological backgrounds have entered into coalitions, leaders and cadres in those parties told DRCN that it has been difficult to create an environment of trust. The sense that such coalitions had been ‘forced’ upon cadres by the party centers was pervasive. Many cadres were dissatisfied at coalitions. However, candidates were trying hard to create an environment of mutual trust in their respective electoral constituencies and districts.

A JSP provincial committee member in Jhapa said, “We are dissatisfied with the coalition between CPN (UML) and JSP because our understanding of federalism and identity-based politics is so different from each other.” However, a JSP provincial committee member in Morang said that since CPN (UML) and JSP had already entered the elections as a coalition, there is no alternative to participating in the elections through mutual cooperation.

Cadres in Jhapa and Syangja said that since many candidates from the five-party coalition had lost the local elections owing to a lack of mutual cooperation, there is an obligation to help coalition candidates during the forthcoming elections. However, in Dhanusha, parties in the five-party coalition are contesting the elections against each other.

Cadres were suspicious about the success of coalition because even within the same district there were coalitions in some constituencies while in other constituencies there was no coalition. For example, in constituency 1 and constituency 3 of Dhanusha, there is the five-party coalition, and the alliance of CPN (UML)

and JSP. However, in constituency 2 and constituency 4 of the same district, political parties have rejected coalitions, and fielded separate candidates. A JSP candidate for the provincial assembly asked, “When

candidates oppose each other in constituencies without coalition, how can we then ask people to vote for the other party in constituencies where we are in coalition with other parties?”



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