

MADHESH PROVINCE: FROM MOVEMENT TO IMPLEMENTATION OF FEDERALISM

No. 6 February 2024

Summary

Although the Interim Constitution promulgated after the people's movement of 2006 envisaged a 'new and inclusive Nepal', it did not mention the federal structure. After the movement led by Madheshi community, the provision to restructure the country in a federal structure was added to the Interim Constitution. Out of seven provinces created as per the Constitution promulgated in 2015, only Madhesh Province had the clear majority of the single (Madheshi) community.

The Madhesh movement aimed to end racial and communal discrimination. Following the movement, the self-esteem and confidence of Madheshi community have significantly increased. The movement demanded the naming the province based on identity which the province was successful to name it based on community identity. Like other provinces, Madhesh Province also has limited rights, while the federal government is still reluctant to hand over all the constitutional rights of the provinces. The province government has been legally and peacefully fighting for its constitutional rights with the federal government.

The composition of provincial cabinet and other provincial structures have not yet reflected the internal diversity and proportional inclusion. The province appears to have made some commendable efforts for social inclusion. Despite the lack of adequate officials, the province government has advanced infrastructure development activities. However, province government has been criticized for poor governance and lack of transparency and accountability. As the province government is not able to meet people's expectations there is

also a growing level of frustration among citizens. However, due to the long history of discrimination, deprivation and disdain, the Madheshi citizens express hope and trust in the federal system of governance.

Introduction

The Madhesh movement played primary role in introducing federalism in Nepal. Although, the interim constitution promulgated after the 2006 people's movement envisaged a 'new and inclusive Nepal' it did not mention the federal structure. After the Madheshi community protested against it, a provision was added in the interim constitution to restructure Nepal into a federal structure. The Constitution of Nepal promulgated in 2015, established a federal structure with seven provinces with Madhesh Province being the only one with a clear majority of one community.

It has been eight years since the federal constitution was promulgated and six years since the formation of provinces. In this context, this analysis centers around the gains made by Madhesh province since the Madhesh movements and its positioning in the subsequent adoption and implementation of the federal system. For this, field visit was conducted in Dhanusha, Mahottari, Siraha and Saptari districts of Madhesh province and interviews were conducted with Province Assembly members, political party leaders, media persons and citizens. During the analysis, published materials were also used. This update contains five sections. First section discusses the background of the Madhesh movements and the assertion of community identity. The second section provides an account of struggle of Madhesh Province with the federal government to exercise its rights. Efforts

made by Madhesh Province for inclusion and participation is discussed in the third section. The functioning and challenges experienced by Madhesh Province is discussed in fourth section, while the final section delves into the perception and expectations of citizens towards Madhesh Province.

1. MADHESH MOVEMENT AND IDENTITY

For a long time, the citizens of Tarai/Madhesh were subjected to oppression, discrimination and exclusion. Political analyst CK Lal describes it as an internal colonization which is experienced in different forms such as socio-cultural discrimination, economic exploitation, administrative biases, and political exclusion.¹ Contesting with the provisions in the Interim Constitution promulgated on January 15, 2007 for not addressing the demands of Madhesh, the Madheshi Janaadhikar Forum (MJF) protested in Kathmandu which expanded to the whole Tarai. The Madhesh movement demanded an end to ethnic, caste and regional discrimination, as well as self-governance, and a proportional electoral system in the Constituent Assembly elections. Additionally, their demand also included the reorganization of electoral constituencies based on population and proportional representation of Madheshi community in all the state institutions.

During the Madhesh movement, 39 citizens were killed, and hundreds were injured. After a series of negotiations between the government and the MJF, a 22-point agreement was reached. The agreement ensured provisions to compensate the individuals killed in the movement, relief and treatment to the injured, and proportional inclusion and representation of Madheshi, Janajati, Dalits, Muslims, and Women in all the state institutions. The agreement also included the formation of a state restructuring commission and formation of autonomous provinces from the Constituent Assembly, provision of a tri-lingual policy (mother tongue, Nepali and English) for communication. However, claiming that the government did not pay attention to implement the agreement, an alliance named Joint Democratic Madheshi Forum (JMDF) was constituted including MJF and Nepal Sadbhawana Party and prepared for another movement. Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party led by Mahanta Thakur also joined the JMDF. Later, JMDF led the second Madhesh movement. Eventually, in March 28, 2008 another 8-point agreement was reached between JMDF and the government. This agreement also gave importance to implement the

22-point agreement. One of the provisions also included that the government will mandatorily implement proportional inclusion and appoint, promote and nominate individuals belonging to Madheshi, Adivasi Janajati, Dalits, Women, and other marginalized communities and backward areas and in all state institutions. In addition, there was a provision to ensure proportional inclusion and group entry of Madheshi and other communities in the Nepal Army.

Madheshi political parties represented as a strong force in the first Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly was dissolved without promulgating a constitution mainly because there was no consensus on identity-based federalism. In the second Constituent Assembly elections the Madheshi political parties could not get better representation due to their lack of unity among Madheshi parties and unhealthy competition to remain in power.²

In the second Constituent Assembly, three main political parties—Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN (UML)], Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN (Maoist Centre)]—and the Madheshi Janadhikhar Forum (Democratic) led by Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar [MJF (Democratic)] reached a 16-points agreement on June 8, 2015. Other Madheshi parties protested against this agreement. After the draft of the Constitution was released by the Constituent Assembly, the protests got intensified. Mainly, the demand of the Madheshi parties (except the party led by Bijay Kumar Gachhadar) was to create only two provinces out of 22 districts of whole Tarai-Madhesh. Eventually, Madhesh Province was created including only eight districts in the eastern Tarai. Therefore, when the Constitution was promulgated on September 19, 2015, the protests spread out in Tarai/Madhesh. However, due to the lack of unity and consensus among the Madheshi parties regarding the provisions in the Constitution the movement fizzled out.³

The Madhesh movement was not only for equal participation in state institutions, but also to end racial discrimination

² Madheshi parties won 81 seats in the first Constituent Assembly, while they won 49 seats in the second Constituent Assembly.

³ MJF led by Upendra Yadav, Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party led by Mahant Thakur, Sadbhawana Party led by Rajendra Mahato, Tarai Madhesh Sadbhawana Party led by Mahendra Prasad Yadav, Nepal Sadbhawana Party led by Anil Jha, Madheshi Janaadhikar Forum (Republican) led by Rajkishore Yadav and Rastriya Madhesh Samajwadi Party led by Sharad Singh Bhandari decided to boycott the first phase of local elections. But the MJF participated in the second phase of local level elections. Rashtriya Janata Party Nepal (RJP) was formed by merger of six parties in the front. It participated only in the third phase of local elections of Madhesh Province.

¹ Hachhethu, Krishna. 2070 [B.S.]. Regional Nationalism and Madhehi Parties. *Madhesh Adhyaan*. 2(3): 27-42.

against them.⁴ After the first Madhesh movement, the self-esteem and confidence among Madheshi community increased significantly. According to a political analyst Tula Narayan Shah, the main achievement of the Madhesh movement is the decrease in the discrimination and disrespect against the Madheshis and the establishment of the Madheshi identity.⁵ Madhesh movement contributed to the end of centralized and unitary system of government. One of the popular slogans of the Madhesh movement was ‘our province our governance, our culture our administration’.⁶ While the demand for the entire province as a single province or two provinces could not be met, a province covering eight districts of Eastern Tarai was demarcated as Province No. 2.

The Madhesh movement demanded naming the province based on identity. There was a lot of debates in the Province Assembly to name the province. Some of the proposals were ‘Mithila Bhojpur Province’, ‘Janaki Province’, ‘Middle Madhesh Province’ etc. Finally, out of the seven provinces, only Province No. 2 passed the identity-based name as Madhesh Province with a two-thirds majority in the Province Assembly. On January 17, 2022, 99 out of 103 members of the Province Assembly attended the meeting called for naming the province. Among them, 80 members voted in favor of the name Madhesh Province and remaining 19 members voted against the proposal. The Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal (JSP) and CPN (Maoist Centre) jointly proposed the name Madhesh Province which was supported by Loktantrik Samajwadi Party Nepal (LSP). The province government celebrates the national self esteem day on the day when the province was named.

2. STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Madheshi civil society and political party leaders are dissatisfied with the rights given to the provinces.⁷ But due to the centralized mentality of the senior political leadership

⁴ Gautam, Bhaskar. 2064 [B.S.]. Madheshi Rebellion: Politics of Depression. In *An Account of Madhesh Rebellion*. Bhaskar Gautam, ed., p. 1–16. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

⁵ Conversation on February 21, 2024.

⁶ Nepal, Aditya. 2024. When Madhesh Agitated Demanding Rights *Ukaalo*. January 19, 2024. Available at: <https://www.ukaalo.com/news/20240119-memory-of-first-madhesh-movement/14187>; Accessed on February 23, 2024.

⁷ Nepal, Aditya. 2023. Madhesh has been Upset with the Constitution for 8 years. *Ukaalo*. September 19. Available at: <https://www.ukaalo.com/news/20230919-opinion-from-madhesh-regarding-constitution/10550>. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

and high-ranking bureaucrats of the federal government, the province has not been able to exercise the limited rights given to the province. The federal government is still controlling the offices, projects and programs that should be transferred to the provinces. There are cases where the offices and projects transferred to the provinces have been taken back by the federal government.⁸ It is a major challenge for the province government to function in a situation where the federal government has not enacted important laws on time and is also apathetic to implement the laws that have been enacted.

The Madhesh Province government and the state assembly have not only repeatedly demanded the federal government to transfer the rights granted by the constitution, they have also protested against the federal government. The Madhesh Province government has also filed a half dozen petitions against the federal government in the Supreme Court to hand over the rights that were taken away by the federal government. The Madhesh Province has filed a case demanding the Sagarnath Forest Development Project and Divisional Forest Office in the districts should be under the provincial jurisdiction as per the Constitution. Similarly, cases have been filed demanding the province government should have the rights to transfer local government employees within the province. Similarly, other demands include the transfer of police personnel, and Tarai-Madhesh Irrigation Special Program to be under the provincial government. These cases have been under consideration in the constitutional bench which have not been resolved yet.⁹

On October 15, 2018, Madhesh Province Government drafted Province Police Act, ahead of other provinces. However, even after five years the provincial police has not been constituted. Although the federal government has drafted the Police Personnel Adjustment Act, it has not shown any interest in its implementation. Since, the federal government has not initiated the police adjustment process, the provinces have not been able to exercise their rights related to police administration and law and order. The Madhesh Province Assembly passed a resolution to start the police adjustment process immediately. The then Chief Minister Md. Lal Babu Raut along with other ministers from

⁸ Kafle, Pratikshya. 2022. Federal Government has Taken Back Programs Transferred to Provinces. *Kantipur*, December 13, 2022. Available at: <https://ekantipur.com/news/2022/12/13/167090959107555201.html> Accessed on February 24, 2024.

⁹ Bam, Yam. 2022. Two Federal Governments in Five Years, Both Reluctant to Devolve Powers to Provinces. *Nayapatrika*. October 20. Available at: <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/98250/2022-10-20> Accessed on February 23, 2024.

the province staged protest in front of the office of the Chief of State several times. On November 5, 2020, Minister of Internal Affairs and Law, Gyanendra Kumar Yadav also filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court after the Nepal Police released a recruitment vacancy notice before the police adjustment. However, the Supreme Court did not issue an interim order to stop the recruitment and start police adjustment. On September 25, 2020, the Minister Yadav had also sent a letter to the then Federal Home Minister to arrange that police mobilization and operations should be done through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law. According to the Constitution, the peace and security of the province is the sole authority of the province government. Similarly, another Minister of Internal Affairs and Law, Bharat Prasad Shah, had also filed a similar case in the Supreme Court on February 16, 2022. This has not been resolved yet. On August 7, 2022 Mr. Shah had also submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to hand over the police to the province within a week which was not considered.

Province Assembly member Ram Ashish Yadav argued that the federal government has not completed police adjustment process with an intention to make the provinces weaker.¹⁰ According to Rani Kumari Tiwari, also a Province Assembly member, it has become difficult to solve the grievances and problems related to the security and police administration because police personnel are not under the control of province. She said, “My constituency borders with India. People often approach me related to security issues. We are unable to coordinate with security persons to resolve the issues in time. Since the police is not under the control of province government, they are not obliged to follow instructions from province government.”¹¹ A youth from Siraha also said that since the chief district officer under the federal government is in charge of district administration and security, there is no role of the provincial government in coordinating the security of the province. He said that the citizens of Madhesh feel that the province government is powerless, and Pahadi rulers are still dominating.¹²

The meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Federal Government held on June 5, 2019 decided to bring the Sagarnath Forest Area Development Project spread over Sarlahi, Mahottari and Rautahat district under the control of federal government. Against this decision Madhesh Province filed a petition to the Supreme Court on August

8, 2019 challenging the decision claiming that the national forest within the province is exclusive rights of the province government. On December 11, 2019, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court issued an interim order stating that the ‘Sagarnath Forest Development Project will be under the Province until the final verdict’. Similarly, the Province Assembly has also unanimously passed a resolution to strengthen the federal democratic system and assert the rights of province and direct province government in December 2023. Prior to this, on November 9, 2023 the province government had also submitted a six-point letter drawing an attention to the Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The points in the letter included province police adjustment, enactment of Federal Civil Service Act, and hand over the rights to use public and Guthi land, rights over finance and prosecution to the province government. The letter also stated that if the demands were not met within 30 days, there would be a protest against the federal government. According to Bajrang Nepali, the leader of Nepali Congress from Mahottari, the leaders who led the Madhesh movement should have taken the leadership of the Madhesh Province government in order to strengthen province and have greater bargain power. He added “if the province was led by senior Madheshi leaders the problems and anomalies seen in provincial government could have been minimized to a great extent. The leadership would be effective to put greater pressure to the federal government. But, the Madheshi leadership put forward the second layers of leadership which has not been successful to meet people’s expectations”¹³

These examples demonstrate that the Madhesh Province government and the Province Assembly have been struggling to assert their rights, fighting legally and peacefully for their constitutional rights. On the other hand, the province government has also been trying to convey the message that it has not been able to work effectively and meet people’s expectations due to the federal government’s reluctance to hand over power. Therefore, apart from legal remedies, the province government is also making requests and putting pressure to the federal government.

3. SOCIAL INCLUSION IN MADHESH PROVINCE

Madhesh movement made proportional representation of different castes and ethnicities in the State mechanism as a major issue. Accordingly, the provincial government is trying to ensure inclusion in the provincial civil service and provincial police service by making laws. The *Madhesh*

¹⁰ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

¹¹ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

¹² Interviewed on February 17, 2024.

¹³ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

Province Civil Service Act, 2021 reserves 49 percent of the posts to marginalized community. Within the reserved quota, 54 percent is allocated for Madheshi, 17 percent for Dalit, 12 percent for Muslim, 6 percent for Tribals/ Indigenous groups, 5 percent for Tharu, 4 percent for economically disadvantaged Khas Arya, and 2 percent for persons with disabilities.¹⁴ Similar provisions are also made in the *Provincial Police Act, 2019*.¹⁵ Both acts include a provision for 50 percent reservation for women across all reserved categories. The reservation policy has already been implemented in the posts filled by the Madhesh Province Public Service Commission, in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Similarly, the *Dalit Empowerment Act, 2020* includes a provision to form a Caste Discrimination and Untouchability Monitoring Committee at the province level, led by the Chief Minister. This committee is responsible to monitor the cases of caste discrimination and untouchability and to implement the law. The law also mandates the formation of such committees at the local level. The provincial government has also implemented policies to support Dalit students in pursuing technical and higher education. Additionally, a Dalit Development Committee has been established, chaired by the Minister of Social Development, to formulate and implement programs and plans that address the rights and interests of the Dalit community. Furthermore, the province has introduced initiatives such as the ‘Insurance for Daughter’s Education’ and ‘Dalit Scholarship’. These efforts have been recognized by Province Assembly members and political party leaders as significant steps towards inclusion within the Madhesh Province.¹⁶ The political leadership take pride in the fact that Madhesh Province has implemented such measures ahead of other provinces.

The impact of the aforementioned legal system on the diversity of the civil and police services in the province will likely to be reflected in the coming years. Presently, there is a lack of adequate representation of various castes within the Madheshi community in the Province Assembly, local government, provincial government, and subordinate bodies. Specifically, the representation of Women, Dalits, Muslims, and other minority communities is disproportionately low compared to their population, while the representation of

Yadav and upper-caste Madheshis is relatively higher.¹⁷ As a result, the advantages of federalism have not been effectively extended to the general population. Tula Narayan Shah stated, “Federalism has primarily benefited the traditional upper castes and elites, granting them greater access to resources, while failing to bring about substantial improvements in the representation and access for Dalits, Muslims, Women, and minority Madheshis.”¹⁸

As a result, the contention that the Madhesh Province has not adequately prioritized the political representation of marginalized and minority communities, while the privileged and accessible groups have taken advantage of the implementation of federalism, remains strong. Civil society representatives express their dissatisfaction, stating that in the six years since the implementation of federalism and the establishment of the provincial government, Madhesh Province has also failed to address the unequal representation in provincial institutions.¹⁹

The provincial government cabinet is also not inclusive. A total of 30 ministers (counting repeated individuals twice) were appointed in the provincial council of ministers during the first five-year term (2017–2022) led by Md. Lal Babu Raut, and in the second term (2022–2027) led by Saroj Kumar Yadav. However, certain influential groups and upper castes from Madhesh, such as Yadavs and Shahs, are overrepresented.²⁰ In the first term, the representation of Women, Dalits and other Madheshi and non-Madheshi minority groups was very low. The provincial cabinet composition does not reflect the proportional and inclusive representation of Madhesh’s population. Nevertheless, some commendable efforts have been made by the Madhesh Province towards social inclusion in bureaucracy and police and other areas. Building upon these legal foundations, it is expected that further progress will be made in this direction in the future.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PROVINCE GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING

As an achievement, the first Province Assembly passed 48 bills and certified by the Chief of State. In the second

¹⁷ Nepal Madhesh Foundation. 2079 BS. *Status Analysis of Madhesh Province*. Lalitpur: Nepal Madhesh Foundation.

¹⁸ Interviewed on February 13, 2024.

¹⁹ Interview with vice chairperson of Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Dhanusha, Abadhesh Kamat on February 16, 2024.

²⁰ Shah, Puran. 2023. Madhesh Government: Not Inclusive? February 7. Available at: <https://www.himalayatv.com/2023/02/07/86981/> Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹⁴ *Madhesh Province Civil Service Act, 2021*, 9(8).

¹⁵ *The Act made to make arrangements for the Madhesh Province Police Service, 2019*, 9(7).

¹⁶ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

Province Assembly, three of the nine bills registered within one year have been passed. The Madhesh political leadership and civil society representatives proudly assert that Madhesh played a crucial role in establishing federalism, following the Madhesh movement. The Madhesh Province government demonstrates some level of enthusiasm in formulating laws and policies to strengthen governance, administration, and address the demands of the movement. As a result, Madhesh Province became the first among the seven provinces to enact the Province Police Act and Province Investigation Bureau Act. Additionally, the province has established the Act on the formation of the Province Public Service Commission and the Province Civil Service Act. Since the federal government has not implemented the Police Personnel Adjustment Act, the Provincial Police Act has not been put into effect yet.

To ensure competent, fair, transparent, corruption-free, and participatory activities of the provincial government, and to facilitate equal and easy access to services for citizens, the *Janalokpal Act* (Public Ombudsman Act) has been formulated. The effectiveness of this act has been debated. Despite the formulation of important laws by the provincial government, their implementation appears to be lacking. The full implementation of the Provincial Civil Service Act has been impacted due to the delay in the Federal Civil Service Act. As a result, the province currently faces a shortage of employees, with only 30 percent of the approved posts being filled.²¹ Ram Saroj Yadav, a member of the Province Assembly, expressed concern over the situation, pointing out that only half of the required staff are working in the ministries. He said, “How can the budget, programs, and plans be effectively implemented in the absence of sufficient staff? The federal government transfers employees without the knowledge of the Chief Minister and the Minister, often within a span of two to three months. This constant turnover of staff raises concerns about the smooth functioning of provincial government. Employees are considered as permanent government. How will the work of the provincial government proceed when they are temporary?”²² Saroj Kumar Yadav, the Chief Minister of Madhesh Province, expressed his frustration with the federal government’s actions, highlighting that three secretaries were transferred within a span of eight months without any prior information provided to him.²³

²¹ Mishra, Anil. 2023. Always Employ Crunch in Madhesh Province. July 29. Available at <https://kantipur.tv.com/news/2023/07/29/1690639480.html>, accessed on February 13, 2024.

²² Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

²³ Kantipur. 2024. Madhesh Government has submitted a 6 point-demand letter to the prime minister, a 30 days ultimatum to implement

Despite the lack of adequate staff, the provincial government has successfully carried out various development activities, as claimed by the members of the Province Assembly. Notable achievements of the Madhesh Province government include the upgrading of rural roads, provision of irrigation through deep boring, enhancement of provincial laboratories, construction of five kilometers of blacktopped roads in all 64 constituencies, construction of concrete roads, establishment of three provincial-level universities, and providing employment opportunities to the families of the people killed in the Madhesh movement, among others.²⁴ Rani Kumari Tiwari, another Province Assembly member, emphasized the need for future planning to further enhance the pride of Madhesh, drive social transformation, create employment opportunities, and preserve the underground water resources of Madhesh.²⁵

5. CITIZEN PERSPECTIVES ON MADHESH PROVINCE GOVERNMENT

The government of Madhesh Province is viewed with a mix of hope and despair by its citizens. The Madhesh movement has played a significant role in strengthening their confidence and increasing their participation in politics and society. A citizen of Siraha says, “Now I feel proud to be a Madheshi. This is the gift of the Madhesh movement. The state’s discrimination of Madheshi as second-class citizens is deeply rooted in our hearts. Others have the same pain as me. That’s why we always stand for the rights of Madhesh.”²⁶

According to members of the Province Assembly and representatives of political parties, the establishment of the province government has led to increased access to resources and development activities for citizens. Speaker of the Madhesh Province Assembly, Ramchandra Mandal highlighted the ease with which citizens can now raise their concerns with province government ministers and assembly members. He narrated the experience of previous political system of having to go to Kathmandu even to ask for small projects and spending a lot of money in gone days.²⁷ Progress has been reported in various programs

it. November 9. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2023/11/09/the-madhesh-government-submitted-a-6-point-demand-letter-to-the-prime-minister-a-30-day-ultimatum-to-implement-it-02-18.html> accessed on February 24, 2024.

²⁴ OCMCM, Madhesh Province. 2022. *Four years of government of Madhesh Province*. Janakpur: OCMCM, Madhesh Province.

²⁵ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

²⁶ Interviewed on February 17, 2024.

²⁷ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

such as tube-wells, irrigation bore-wells, ponds, and roads. However, citizens have voiced different complaints. They argue that only a certain class and political cadres have access to state resources. “After the establishment of the provincial government, projects are available nearby us, but with it, the tyranny of a certain group has increased. They are crowded in the ministries and agencies of the province,” said a Nepali Congress leader.²⁸

The citizens express the opinion that the provincial government should focus on establishing a strong regional identity through comprehensive plans and programs. They feel that the government has only implemented small, fragmented schemes, which has not effectively established its significance. Additionally, it has been reported that a significant portion of the provincial government’s budget has been allocated to non-productive areas. Ram Saroj Yadav, a member of the Province Assembly and former minister of the Physical Infrastructure and Development Ministry, acknowledges that the provincial government has struggled to prioritize programs due to a lack of data.²⁹ The controversy surrounding the distribution of bicycles to girls in classes 8 to 10 under the ‘Chief Minister’s Teach Daughter, Save Daughter Program’ further highlights financial irregularities within the provincial government.³⁰ Despite being conducted with great enthusiasm and publicity, the program faced scrutiny due to alleged financial manipulation. Citizens have voiced concerns about financial irregularities and corruption within the provincial government. However, Ram

Ashish Yadav, another member of the Province Assembly, questions how financial irregularities can occur when the province is unable to spend its development budget due to a lack of staff.³¹ Bhola Paswan, a leader of the JSP, claims that the media and social media have created a false narrative regarding increased corruption in the province.³²

In the Province Assembly elections of 2022, there has been a decline in the influence of the main parties such as JSP and LSP, which were at the forefront of the Madhesh movement and currently hold power. This decline suggests that citizens are dissatisfied with these parties. However, the Madheshi citizens continue to experience deep pain due to discrimination, deprivation, and contempt imposed by the unitary and centralized state system. Despite the increased dissatisfaction with the parties, the level of dissatisfaction with the federal system in Madhesh has not seen a significant rise. Nevertheless, the performance of the provincial government has been disappointing. It is crucial to recognize this reality and take immediate action to promote development and good governance with broad participation. The provincial government must address the concerns of the citizens and work towards fulfilling their expectations.



²⁸ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

²⁹ Interviewed on February 16, 2024.

³⁰ Mahato, Shailendra. 2024. Madhesh Government’s Popular Program Stalled due to Corruption. *Onlinekhabar*, February 15, available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/02/1435005; Accessed on February 25, 2024.

³¹ Interviewed on February 15, 2024.

³² Interviewed on February 20, 2024.

Founded in 2014, the Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) is a national non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and research of social and political issues. Since its establishment, DRCN has consistently undertaken in-depth and evidence-based research into various aspects of Nepal’s transitional political landscape, including the implementation of federalism, local-level restructuring, and election observation. The outcomes of these studies are shared with stakeholders, fostering discussions and debates. DRCN’s overarching objective revolves around advancing efficient governance within Nepal’s federal framework through these rigorous research endeavors and thoughtful discourse.



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