

Electoral News Meager Again, Some Progress on Statute Writing: Bulletin 8

(Electoral and Political issues during January 16-February 15, 2012)

Part One: Electoral News in Media

Meager Electoral News

Summary

As the committees under the Constituent Assembly failed to forge consensus on the disputed issues in the drafting of constitution, there was meager news coverage about the electoral system. However, the repeated directives of the Election Commission to the political parties to submit election expenses got good coverage in print media. Scanning six daily newspapers- *Annapurapost*, *Kantipur* and *Gorkhapatra* (Nepali language) and *The Republica*, *the Kathmandu Post* and *the Himalayan Times* (English language), a total of 14 news items on election were found this month. This is almost half the last month. The news and articles were related to the election in the local bodies, voters' registration, transparency on election expenses, and discussion on new electoral system in the constituent assembly. Most of the matters were published from the central level. Very few news as voters' registration is reported from the local level. The *Gorkhapatra daily* published three news stories and one article about electoral system and voters' registration while the *Kantipur daily* carried three stories about transparency in election expense and local election. Similarly, the *Annapurnapost* carried news about voters' rights and election in the local bodies. The *Kathmandu Post* threw light on the transparency in the expense of political parties in a news story. Moreover, *the Republica* carried three news items while the *Himalayan Times* brought no news at all about the election.

News items in Table

Newspaper	News	Article	Editorial	Others
The Gorkhapatra	3	1	-	-
The Annpuranapost	1	1	-	-
The Kanitpur	3	-	-	-
The Republica	3	-	-	-
The Kathmandu Post	2	-	-	-

The Himalayan Times	-	-	-	-
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Important News

The Republica daily, with dateline Kathmandu, January 27, published a news story, 'EC to prove parties' finances'. The news mentions that the Election Commission was coming up with research on financial aspects including auditing of the political parties in near future. According to the news, commissioner in the Election Commission Dolakh Bahadur Gurung was heading the team to conduct the research. Most of the political parties (30) including the Nepali Congress have, however, submitted auditing report to meet the formality. But 30 other political parties are silent whether they could submit the financial details.

The news has also brought forth the views of the persons seeing finance/economy of the political parties. Similarly, the news has talked about the income and expenditure of the party. The news makes question how the money comes from to feed and mobilize some 180,000 full time cadres and some 200,000 others. The news has also questioned the financial report of the CPN-UML. The second largest party, Nepali Congress' failure to submit financial reports in 2010 and 2011 has been also focused. This news has made meticulous reporting on the financial aspects of the political parties.

In this regard, another daily, the *Kathmandu Post* wrote on January 29, 2012 under the title, '42 parties to face EC action' and mentioned that the Election Commission was to take action against 31 political parties who were dillydallying to submit financial details. Similarly, the EC was also to take action against 11 other political parties for they flouted the submission process. The Election Commission had issued a notice in the *Gorkhapatra daily* giving 15-day ultimatum to the political parties to submit the financial details, the news said, adding that As many as 80 parties have been registered in the Election Commission. Among them 42 would face action. Similarly, 31 are yet to submit financial details. According to the news, the Rastriya Janashakti party, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Nepal, and Tarai-Madhesh Democratic Party, are being penalized by the Election Commission. If the political parties do not submit financial reports without meeting due procedure, their registration is scrapped as per the Election Commission Act-2006. The news mentioned that the Commission was to initiate action from February third week. Although it is a comprehensive reporting, it lacks the views of the representatives of the parties who failed to produce the financial reports.

There is a legal provision that the political parties need to submit financial details before six months of the passage of every fiscal year by conducting auditing of the income and expense by a government auditor. However, most the parties have flouted the legal provision in spite of the passage of three years following the election to the Constituent Assembly (CA).

On January 20, 2012 the *Republica daily* published a news story, 'Submit financial details: EC to parties' and informed the public that among 30 political parties in the parliament, the Madhes-based political parties were unable to submit the financial details. The news has carried the views of the representatives of some political parties who failed to submit the financial details.

The state-run *Gorkhapatra daily* published a news item 'Pressure to put for election in local bodies,' on January 23, 2012. According to the news, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party is to organize nationwide campaign to exert pressure on the concerned authorizes to hold election in the local bodies.

Related to the election in local bodies, a minister in course visit said the Election would be held in April/May. The news on this is published by the *Kantipur daily* on 22 January, 2012. Minister for Information and Communication, Jayprakash Prasad Gupta said this while speaking at a program in Rajbiraj.

Moreover, the *Gorkhapatra daily* published a news story, 'Multi-member constituency level fully proportional list system appropriate' quoting the acting Chief Election Commissioner, Nilkanth Uprety. He said this at an interaction on electoral system and representation of dalit in the capital city on 22 January, 2012.

Similarly, on January 20, 2012, the *Kantipur daily* published the news, 'Directive to hold election at local bodies'. The news mentioned that a committee under the Legislature-Parliament directed the government to hold election in the local body without rendering any effects on peace and constitution writing process. The committee chairman urged the government to hold election in the local level though for interim purpose, saying the local bodies must not be remained without people's representatives. According to the news, the members of the UCPN-Maoists in the committee said it was not good to go on election in the local bodies without settling problem of restructuring of state. However, the news story further mentioned that most of the committee members were for holding election in local bodies reasoning they must be left without people's representatives.

The *Gorkhapatra daily*, on January 19, 2012, published an article, 'Election in Local Body and Republic' by Prem Kumar Khanal. Mr Khanal in the article has argued that the announcement of election in the local level will set up civic administration.

Similarly, the same daily on January 24 published news about the sharp decline in the number of voters in Bajhang, district in the far western region of Nepal.

On January 13, 2012, the *Republica daily* published the news, 'Undisclosed Sources Funding Parties: EC'. The news has mentioned about the income and expenditures details of the UCPN-Maoist, Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML. As per the news, the details the parties submitted to the Election Commission lacked several details.

Moreover, the *Kantipur daily* published a news story, 'Parties demand more time to submit financial details' on January 24, 2012. Some political parties including the Nepali Congress have demanded more time with the Election Commission for the submission of their financial details.

The *Annapurna daily* brought forth the news about the decision of the constitutional committee that the Nepali people with 18 years of age would be given voting rights in all levels. The news came under the title, '18 Year for voting in House of Representatives' on January 18, 2012.

On January 16, 2012, the Kathmandu Post published a news, 'Local Election in November December' quoting the speech of Minister for Local Development, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi. Minister Rayamajhi was speaking at a program in Arghakhanchi, a hilly district in the western region of Nepal.

Analysis

Analyzing the six national dailies, no special discussion and debate was held in various committees of the Constituent Assembly. It obviously resulted in meager news coverage this month. It also means that there was no investigative reporting and coverage on electoral issues.

The newspapers carried the news about the maladies in the local levels in the absence of elected representatives and the need of holding election immediately. The news converge about the failures of the political parties to submit the details of election expenses, Election Commission's prods to them to submit the report, transparency in election expenses, Election Commission's decision in these regards can be taken very positively. The media prioritized these issues. The media which worked actively on need of local election last month focused on the situation to be resulted after the political parties failed to submit the details of their election expenses this month. Most of the news were produced from the central level.

However, the Nepali media only made the follow up stories on the activities and warning of the Election Commission. They failed to make direct approach to the political parties and inquire the parties, dig further news and develop follow up stories. As a result, it could be a matter of debate and discourse in the public level.

The slack committees under the Constituent Assembly in terms of discussion and debate on form of governance and election resulted in few number of news compared to the last month. There were some news stories from the district levels about voters' registration.

The readers expressed their views on electoral system relating these on form of governance through the letters to editors.

There was no editorial on election this month. Other relevant issues as the size of the parliament in the central level under the electoral system, formation of the constituency, determination of

the structure of provincial government, type of local government and election also eluded the media.

Conclusion

Most of the newspapers published from Kathmandu carried the news about the efforts made by the constitutional sub-committees, agreements in various committees, details of party's expenses in election.

Although election is the integral part of the democracy, Nepali media has not internalized it as an important agenda to ensure democratic environment in future. Similarly, the electoral issues seem to be taken lightly as an issue under the form of governance and state restructuring. However, the electoral news is given first page priority.

It can be expected that the electoral issues would emerge vibrant and enter into further debate and discourse after the political parties forge consensus on the form of the electoral system in the provincial and local government. Similarly, media is yet to bring news and create discourse about the guarantee of the autonomy of election commission in the changed context.

Part Two-Political Reform

Some Progress on Peace, Constitution-Writing

Statute Writing and Peace Process

Assessing the news this month, some negative news came in the media in the initial days but some positive ones appeared from the second half of the month about the political development especially on constitution making and peace process. The process of bidding farewell to the Maoist combatants opting for voluntary retirement has been concluded. The beginning of the returning home by combatants is a great achievement on peace process in spite of some hurdles from combatants themselves and the commanders. Seizing of paycheques have been observed during the farewell process. The much awaited report of State Restructuring Commission (SRC) has been submitted to the Prime Minister. But as per assumptions of many, it failed to lead to the way out in terms of contentious issues on state restructuring. The decision of government to recognize the transaction of land deal as per the guidelines of Maoists' so-called people's government during the conflict era has hindered the ongoing peace and statute writing process. These obstacles have obviously delayed and obstructed the working calendar of constitution writing again. The news highlights regarding the land issues and its negative effects are titled as: *Recognition of land and property transactions by Maoists' People's Government during Insurgency (Kantipur, Jan 17, 2012)*, *Distance widens (Kantipur, Jan 18, 2012)*, *Snag on Peace and Constitution (Kantipur Jan, 18, 2012)*, *NC, UML boycott four-party meeting (The Himalayan times, 17 Jan, 2012)* *Parliament Obstructed by Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal–United Marxist and Leninist (CPN-UML) (Kantipur, Jan17, 2012)*, *Land deals: Stay order stays(Kathmandu Post ,Jan 31)* *Oppn's 7-day ultimatum to govt (The*

Himalayan Times Feb 7, 2012), *House Moves ahead after Govt. backtracks (The Himalayan Times, Feb 9, 2012).*

These news titles clearly depict the initial political development of this month. Mainly, the governments' recognition of the land and property transactions by so-called Maoist Peoples Government during the insurgency period created trust deficit among political parties. Opposition parties protested the government move by obstructing the Legislature–Parliament meeting with the parties in the government. Finally, the government was compelled to roll track the move after the Supreme Court stay order on the land and property deals. Consequently, the routine of constitution writing and peace process halted. Following the stipulated deadline and failure to make tangible progress as per plan, political parties have amended the Constituent Assembly's (CA) work schedule for the third time after CA's term extended for the last time. This development has been covered by the newspapers *Constitution drafting calendar amended (The Kathmandu Post, Feb 2, 2012)*, *CA work plan to be amended (The Himalayan Times, Feb 11, 2012)*, *Reshuffling Constituent Assembly action plan (Gorkhapatra, Feb 13, 2012)*

State restructuring and federalism as the most debated issues of constitution making process are yet to be determined. State Restructuring Commission has submitted the report to the government in the divided form and has failed to give a way out on contentious issues of state restructuring and federalism. Rather, consented issues from concerned committees of CA have been resurfaced by State Restructuring Commission (SRC) report. The news titles have revealed the SRC report and initial reaction of different communities including political parties on it as: *SRC term extended (The Himalayan Times, Jan 27, 2012)*, *Divided SRC members agree to submit single final report (The Kathmandu Post, Jan 31, 2012)*, *SRC submitted divided report (Kantipur, Feb 1, 2012)* *State restructuring: SRC fails to offer a way out (The Kathmandu Post, Feb 1 2012)*, *Obstacle might become by two report (Gorkhapatra, Feb 1, 2012)* *No meaning of SRC report (Kantipur, Feb 2 ,2012)*, *Don't obey the report of Commission (Gorkhapatra, Feb 4,2012)*, *Ethnic and non-territorial province is unacceptable: Nepali Congress (Kantipur, Feb 10, 2012)* *SRC report burned by parties (The Kathmandu Post, Feb 10 2012)*

The farewell of the Maoist combatants opting for voluntary retirements has been concluded by the special committee on Arms Adjustment, Rehabilitation despite some hurdles for providing first installment of paycheques. However, this has been a great achievement on peace process in this month. This news has been highlighted in newspapers as: *Combatants farewell begins within three days (Kantipur, Feb 27, 2012)*, *Voluntary Retirement to conclude Saturday (Republica, Feb 11, 2012)*

The seizure of paycheque during the farewell to the combatants by the commanders ridiculously proved Maoists' 'money minded revolution' and *misuse* of huge payment by state fund. At the same time, UCPN-M's sister wing YCL demanded cash incentives with its party and it is reported that the party will give cash incentives to the YCL. All these news are revealed on newspapers as: *Fight after paycheque seizure by Commanders (Kantipur, Feb 6, 2012)*, *Money taken from combatants for YCL (Kathmandu Post, Feb 9, 2012)*, *Combatants runs to police to save her money (Republica, Feb 8, 2012)*, *Cut from retiring fighters to go to the disqualified (Kathmandu Post Feb 9, 2012)*, *Maoist party to give cash incentives to YCL cadres (The Kathmandu Post, Feb 8, 2012)*

Moreover, the paycheque seizure incident and the YCL demand for cash incentives reasoning they are the real combatants and just been out because of party promise to compensate them later, and acceptance of their demand by the UCPN-M , revealed the fact that the blame of other parties that YCL were brought out of cantonments.

Party Building

In comparison to the last month, the internal rift of the main political parties has been shrunken this month. The internal rift in UCPN-M has narrowed down by accepting both ideas of revolt and peace with constitution-writing process by the meeting of its central committee. These notions are revealed by the news as: *Maoist Meeting: Both proposals will be discussed to lower level (Kantipur, Jan 15, 2012)*, *Maoist dispute heightened in Banke District (Kantipur, Jan 16, 2012)*, *'Peoples revolt' Maoist parallel action plan (Kantipur Jan24, 2012)* *Maoist internal rift stalls peace, statute writing (The Kathmandu Post, Jan 20, 2012)*, *Maoist Gen Secy announces end of party disputes (The Himalayan Times, Feb 1 2012)*.

The third largest political party, CPN-UML announced unity drive to consolidate the party. The news on this are covered as, *CPN-UML starts unification of leftists (Kantipur, Jan 17, 2012)*, *Unifying UML activists (Kathmandu Post, Jan 29, 2012)*, *Factionalism ended (Gorkhapatra, Jan 16, 2012)*

The main opposition party NC has also been strengthening its internal capacity initiating dialogue to resolve the internal rift and forming party departments. The internal rift regarding dissolution of few sister wings has been under resolution by creating different ad hoc committees belonging to both Deuba and Koirala factions. The news on this came as: *Congress forming Madhes department (Kantipur, Jan 18)*, *Deuba faction wishes dialogue (Kantipur, Feb 2, 2012)*, *Congress settles disputes over sister wings, (The Himalayan Times, Feb 5, 2012)*

Compared to the last month, the internal rift in the main political parties has been diminishing. But it has grabbed other Madheshi parties. This news has been covered as: *Rift widens in Forum democratic (Kantipur, Jan 18 2012)*.

The issues of political finance and transparency of party expenditure has become major issue this month due to vibrant role of Election Commission (EC). The EC forced the political parties to submit their financial details otherwise face action as per law. This has really compelled most of the parties to submit their expanses to the EC. Some news highlights on these issues are: *Thirty eight parties submitted details (The Himalayan Times, Jan 19, 2012)*, *Thirty one parties in the process of punishment (Kantipur, Jan 26, 2012)*, *How rich are the political parties (Kantipur, Feb 11, 2011)*

Conclusion

The farewell to the ex-Maoist combatants can be taken as a significant achievement in the peace and constitution-making process. It has further accelerated parties to the implementation of arms adjustment and rehabilitation plan passed by the army integration special committee. But, suddenly erupted issues of providing cash incentives to YCL and self- interpretation of adjustment package with different vow on rank harmonization in army integration can create trust among parties. This may hamper the arms adjustment and rehabilitation process.

Because all political parties have negatively responded to the report of SRC, which failed to show any way out of existing stand and debate on restructuring and federalism, the first and final resolution on these matters must come from the consensus among the parties. Similarly, frequent amendments of the CA calendar for not making decisions within stipulated timeframe, resurfacing the consented issues on CA, confusing and double standard of the major party-UCPN-M, may invite further hurdles on conclusion of peace process and constitution-writing within the stipulated time.

