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[Home](#) > Nepal: Terai Erupts Again: Update No. 328

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## Nepal: Terai Erupts Again: Update No. 328

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Protests erupted again after a lull in many of the districts of Terai ( Madhes).

### **Firing incident at Rangeli Bazar in Morang District:**

Following a firing incident at Rangeli in Morang, the SLMM intensified protests in Siraha, Sunsari, Janakpur and Morang districts. There was palpable tension in Janakpur, the main seat of unrest. Buses were stopped. Educational and Business institutions were again closed.

In Saptari, protestors shut the schools and colleges. At Lahan the East West Highway was blocked.

It all started with a provocative meeting by UML cadres that goes by the name "Youth Force" at Rangeli. Both K.P.Oli and party leader Ishwor Pokhrel were supposed to attend. In the end only Pokhrel attended.

But the meeting itself at this time on 21st of this month was totally uncalled for when the Madhesi groups as a whole were already angry with the UML government who were proceeding to pass the constitutional amendment bill over the objections of the Madhesi leaders.

Protestors had gathered at Rangeli Bazar on the morning of 21st December itself in anticipation of the arrival of the UML leaders. When the Police decided to evict the protestors from the area of the meeting, violent clashes ensued. Three people including a woman were killed and nine others received bullet injuries. The condition of some of them is said to be serious.

## **Terai in Deep Distress:**

For almost six months now, life in Terai has come to a standstill. Consider the following:

- \* All educational institutions, hospitals, government offices, industries, banks, shops are closed.
- \* All agricultural activities and transport services have been crippled.
- \* Essential items like food grains, petrol and gas are in short supply.
- \* There is rampant black marketing.
- \* The State Mechanism has ceased to function.
- \* A humanitarian crisis is developing and neither the government nor the Terai leaders seem to care about the depressing situation.
- \* The Police continue to act in a high-handed manner. Killing of three persons including a woman is unacceptable. Except for some representatives from the Human Rights organizations no one seems to care. One would have expected at least the Nepali Congress who are now in opposition with many of their leaders having been elected from Terai to protest. But this has not happened.

It is just a question of time before the extremists in various groups take charge. Already Matrika Prasad Yadav has made a call to start a violent movement in Terai.

## **Constitutional Amendments Passed unilaterally**

On the night of 23rd the government unilaterally passed the Constitution amendment bill for proportionate inclusion in state organs and delineation of electoral constituencies.

Two amendments from the Nepali Congress were accepted. These were

- \* Minendra Rijal's proposal- that the Constituency delimitation Commission shall delimit the constituencies in every province keeping population-based representation as main basis and geography as secondary basis . . . Every district in the federal provinces shall have at least one constituency- were accepted. Using both the provinces and districts as basis for delineating the constituencies is going to be

problematic.

\* Farmullah's proposal that "Economically, socially and educationally backward women, dalits, Adibasi/janajathi, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslim, differently abled people, backward classes, gender and sexually minority groups and citizens of backward regions shall have the right to participate in state structures on the basis of the principle of proportionate inclusion" was also accepted.

But the amendments were silent on the delineation of the provincial boundaries and the Madhesi groups were dissatisfied. They have therefore decided to continue the agitation.

### **Visit of PM Oli to India, Demonising India and Review of Indo Nepal Relations:**

Prime Minister Oli has again reiterated that he would visit India only after the supposed "informal blockade" is lifted by India and the border traffic gets stabilised. Except for some hiccups in the Raxaul- Birgunj route almost all the border points are operative and there is steady flow of goods and commodities. The situation on the border is almost normal and if PM Oli has reservations about visiting India, he should be allowed to have his way. India should officially make it clear that he is not welcome. The government and many of the political leaders of the three main stream parties are encouraging "India bashing." This is unfortunate. Nepal's long term interests are not served by demonising India.

There was a media report that PM Oli has set up a task force to review the entire gamut of relations with India. This is a good step and my suggestion is that since official Nepal has so many grievances against India, let Nepal decide the kind of relationship it wants with India. There is no need for a special friendship treaty either. Let Transit laws be also determined by the international rules and nothing more.

#### **Tags:**

[Nepal](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

[Constitution](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

[PM Oli](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

[Indo Nepal Relations](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

#### **Category:**

[Notes](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

#### **Countries:**

[Nepal](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

#### **Topics:**

Political [7]

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**Links**

- [1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/58>
- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/623>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1243>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1223>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/notes>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/nepal>
- [7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>