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## Nepal: First Phase of Local Polls Successfully Concluded: Update No. 348

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It is to the credit of the Election Commission of Nepal that it conducted successfully the first phase of local elections on May 14 despite many hiccups and hurdles.

The election by itself was a stupendous task with nominations for 13,356 seats in 283 local units of 34 districts of three provinces- 3, 4 and 6.

In the beginning of the month, it looked as though, the government may not be able to go through the first phase of elections. It all started with the impeachment and suspension of the Chief Justice Sushila Karki, who had just two months left for retirement, followed by the RPP leaving the government and the Home Minister Bimalendu Nidhi resigning in protest. The Government briefly lost its majority.

The impeachment of the Chief Justice on flimsy charges and that too without proper discussion and debate was an affront to the separation of powers between the judiciary and the Executive. The Supreme Court rightly issued a stay order to the parliament not to move ahead with the impeachment motion. The Court observed that the move was *prima facie* against the spirit of the Constitution.

A few Observations on the local polls conducted are-

1. Though it is just the beginning, successful conduct of the first phase of polls puts an end to the uncertainty that was being felt so far in the conduct of the three tier elections to be concluded within the mandatory period and in the implementation of the new constitution.

2. For the first time, Nepal will really be moving into a federal form of governance. This is the first significant step in the new constitution.
3. 40 percent of the candidates were women, a step that was long over due.
4. With the firming up of elections at the local level, one can expect peace and stability at the grass roots level.
5. This election has brought out strange alliances- the Nepali Congress and the Maoist centre have formed an alliance at many places. One example is the support given to Dahal's daughter, the mayoral candidate for Bhaktapur by the Nepali Congress. Similarly, the UML and the RPP who till now were at the opposite ends of the political spectrum have joined together in an alliance for the local polls.
6. The election was by and large peaceful. There were sporadic incidents of violence and some very close to the polling dates. IEDs (improvised explosive devices) were detonated at three places in Nawal Parasi, Makwanpur and Siraha districts on 12<sup>th</sup> of May. A cylinder bomb was discovered in Bhaktapur and the Police bomb disposal team removed it before it could be detonated. Two more IEDs were discovered in the houses of two candidates in Syangja and Sindhphuchok districts.
7. Almost after two decades, the elections to the local bodies were taking place. There was visible enthusiasm amongst the people. People are certainly looking forward to leadership roles at the grass roots level and it is hoped that the political leaders who are a problem, concede empowerment at the lowest level.

Some good news has emanated on the constitutional amendment too. The government has introduced the Constitution amendment bill today, a commitment made to the Madhesi groups.

The UML which wants to continue with its "nationalist image" is bound to oppose the bill. It is said that its chairman K. P.Oli is also for conducting the second phase of local polls earlier than the scheduled date of June 14. The UML is also expected to play the "spoil sport" in not letting the government increase the grassroots units in the Terai districts, in proportion to the population in those districts. It looks that more than anyone else, it is the UML that wants to scuttle the speedy implementation of the Constitution!

It is hoped that the Madhesi leaders who have since discarded Upendra Yadav from the Maha Gatabhandan show some flexibility in participating in the second and last phase of local elections scheduled for June 14 for provinces 1,2,5 and 7.

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