Voices for inclusive state structure have been raised from every part and region of the country. The political parties have brought out their models of federal and inclusive state with economic and social transformation in their election manifestos during the Constituent Assembly election. However, the issue demand for federalism is not new in Nepal.

The first voices for demands of federalism in Nepal were raised around 2008 BS by Kula Nanda Jha of Tarai Congress. In 2015 BS, Raghu Nath Thakur made written submission for federalism. Madhes Mukti Andolan (Madhes Liberation Movement) had also raised the issue in 2024 BS. In later times, Nepal Sadbhawana Council had accepted federalism in 2040 BS. However, the credit for making federalism a household concept, taking it to the public and going for its exercise goes to the Maoists (Shrestha 2065:23-24).

Federalism only gained currency in the last four/five years 50 years after first being raised. In 2060 BS during the conflict, the Maoists brought the idea of dividing the country along with ethnic and regional autonomy into nine autonomous republic provinces: Kirant, Madhes, Tamang, Newa, Tamuwan, Magarat, Tharuwan, Bheri-Karnali, and Seti-Mahakali. After the Maoists entered the mainstream, the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee has also forwarded the same nine autonomous provinces. Of the nine, Kirant, Madhes, Tamang, Newa, Tamuwan, Magarat, Tharuwan are based along ethnic lines and other two Bheri-Karnali and Seti-Mahakali along geographic lines.

For the CA elections 2008, the Maoists have revised their previous concept. Their manifesto proposes the possibility of restructuring the state along ethnic, geographic feasibility, linguistic base, economic feasibility into 11 autonomous provinces and further sub-regional provinces or units (UCPN (M) Commitment Paper 2064:21). Among these, Seti-Mahakali and Bheri-Karnali are based on regional basis, and Magarat, Tharuwan, Tamuwan, Newa, Tamsaling, Kirant, Limbuwan, Kochila and Madhes are based on regional identity. Within Madhes, Mithila, Bhojpura and Awadh have been proposed as sub-provinces based on linguistic basis (UCPN (M) Commitment Paper 2064:21).

This proposal was a revision of the conflict-period concept of nine autonomous provinces. Then proposed Kirant province has been divided into Limbuwan and Kirant, and Kochila has been proposed to be carved out of Madhes province. Chitawan which had been put in Madhes has been included in Tamsaling. Furthermore, within Madhes, Mithila, Bhojpura and Awadh were proposed as sub-provinces based on language. The Maoist proposal seems to have been in reaction to the Madhes and Limbuwan movements.

However now, the Maoists have submitted a 13-province model to the Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power. But on September 3, 2009, Maoist leader Dev Gurung proposed 13 autonomous provinces and four centrally administered
geographic regions. Of these, 11 are based on oppressed ethnicities and two oppressed regions. Tharuwan, Madhes, Magarat, Tamuwan, Tamsaling, Newa, Kirant, Limbuwan, Kochila, Sherpa and Bhotela are based on oppressed ethnicities and Seti-Mahakali and Bheri-Karnali are based on oppression regions. Ridi, Tamakoshi, Narayani and Bijayapur have been proposed as centrally administered geographic regions as other castes outnumber the oppressed ethnicities in these regions.

The Maoists have proposed to establish ethnic autonomous zones and protected villages for endangered communities within the provinces. Thus the Maoist proposal on federalism is basically an ethnic and regional one.

[...] on federalism we believe that the more scientific and practical basis is ethnic and regional identity. It is necessary to understand that by ‘ethnic’ we mean common language, common geography, common economy and a group of people with similar history and culture or ‘nationality’ and not ethnicity or race or caste. Also, attention must be paid to the fact that there will be sub-national units within a province and liberation of one ethnicity should not be at the cost of other nationalities, and rights of minorities should be ensured in provinces with mixed nationalities (UCPN (M) Commitment Paper 2064:20).

The 11th General Convention of the Nepali Congress had decided to go for restructuring of the state and inclusive democracy. "State restructuring has been necessary to change the centralised structure by making changes in the present political culture and character of the state to realise democracy. The Nepali Congress realises that it is necessary to democratise the state by providing full rights and autonomy to the people for political participation based on equality," it is said in the concept of the Nepali Congress, "the Nepali Congress will take concrete steps to move towards doing homeworks to hold comprehensive discussion about the practical aspects of restructuring. The state should be restructured in such a way as to reflect ethnic and regional diversities in the state mechanism and power."1

Referring to the various discriminations existing in Nepali society, the political proposal and working direction paper further states, “Inclusive democracy should get rid of discriminations and it is necessary to have reservations in the state mechanism itself to ensure participation and economic and social equality and justice. Nepali Congress will strive to work towards achieving inclusion”.

The Nepali Congress formed a task force under the coordination of central member Dr Rambaran Yadav to design a model of state restructuring. Since then, Dr. Yadav has gone on to become the first president of the republic Nepal. The task force was supposed to provide a model of scientific restructuring based on economic, social and cultural relationship. However, it did not achieve much.

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1 Political proposal and working direction approved by 11th General conference of the Nepali congress, in Aug/Sept 2006
The Nepali Congress (Democratic) which had splintered from the main Nepali Congress had also followed the mother party on issues of state restructuring. It had decided to go for representative federal democratic model of state restructuring.

“It has been decided that from the present centralised and unitary state, there will be move towards democratic representative processes,” states the proposal paper of then Nepali Congress (Democratic), “it instructs the central committee and leadership to study the various models of federalism in practice such full federalism, semi-federalism, regional federalism, and keeping in mind Nepal's multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic, multi-religious social, economic, and physical structure, to take the lead in initiating dialogue on citizenship, electoral system, relationship between the centre and provinces and interrelationship between the provinces, and to reach consensus on models of restructuring.”

The proposal further states, “to find a long-lasting solution to the present violent conflict; to further the achievements of the historic 1990 people’s movement; to develop an inclusive process to give access and guarantee in the state to the Dalits, women, Janajati and Madhesi; to promote the slogan of common Nepal of mountains, hills and Tarai for peace and good will, it is necessary to move away from unitary and centralised government system”. It was the concept of the party that federal democratic system was needed to include Dalits, women, Janajati, and Madhesi who have no access to the state.

Nepali Congress and Nepali Congress (Democratic) merged in Bhadra 2064 (September of 2007). During the CA elections, it proposed federalist democratic republic based on pluralism. Regarding the bases for federal provinces, its manifesto states, “The bases for provinces will be Nepal’s national integrity; geographic location and feasibility; population; natural resources and economic feasibility; interrelationship between provinces; language, ethnicity and culture majority, and political and administrative feasibility” (Nepali Congress 2064:11).

The manifesto also about guarantees to recognise the unique characteristics of Madhesi of Tarai, Janajati of the hills, Dalits and others in the federal structure (Nepali Congress 2064:12). Though it has envisioned central, provincial and local government structure, duties and authorities, it is mute on the number of provinces. It has decided to wait until the suggestions of the people, opinions of the experts and recommendations of the State Restructuring Commission.

CPN (UML) had presented its concept about states restructuring in Srawan 2063 (2006). It had specified bases for federalism in the concept. “State’s character will be based on federalism and ruling system will be based on the structure of autonomy where duties and rights are clearly divided among the centre, region and local agencies,” it said in the concept, “Geographic situation, population and settlement of ethnic groups, use of mother language and other languages, mix of cultures, administrative accessibility, socio-economic interrelation, availability of means and resources and historical aspects will be the bases while dividing political and administrative units.”

Although the UML has prepared its concept about restructuring of the state, it does not seem to be

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2 The concept of state restructuring is approved by meeting of the UML in 2063 Bhadra 2nd.
comprehensive and clear. Even if some bases have been specified in the UML’s concept, issues like how many regions and how to form regions have not been mentioned in detail. This was approved by the twelfth seating of the central committee of the party. The party had entrusted the then central committee member and now party secretary and permanent member Shankar Pokharel to prepare the detailed models of restructuring after concurring with experts. That report was included in the manifesto of the party.

UML had stated its bases for federal restructuring in its election manifesto. It had stated that restructuring would be on the based on characteristics of ethnicity, language, culture and geography. The manifesto states that ethnic concentration, language affinity and cultural characteristics, historicity and geographic distinctiveness should comprise any one entity (UML 2064:20).

While delineating the federal provincial and local unit borders, geographic location, population and ethnic settlements, use of mother tongues and others, cultural characteristics, administrative accessibility, econo-social inter-relationship and capability and feasibility, availability of natural resources and history will be taken into account. The names of such units will recognise their ethnic, lingual, cultural and historical identity (UML 2064:20).

Even through UML came up with the bases for federal structures, it did not provide the numbers and models of restructuring. It stated that there should be consensus on determining federal provinces and on the basis of recommendations of the restructuring commission.

Thus, the parties have provided different bases and models of federalism. Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Nepal) has demanded the Tarai be a single autonomous political and administrative province in the state restructuring. “We think we will only be free of the internal colonialism the present state system only when there is a ‘unified’ Tarai-Madhes. In the changed population of the Madhes, there will be no single majority of Madhesi community in the fragmented provinces.” States the Forum manifesto. It further adds, “The premeditated attempt to mislead the Madhesi people by naming Kochila, Mithila, Tharuwan, Tharuhat, Bhojpura, Awadh in the Madhes will not in the long run be free of the control and decisive influence of the non-Madhesi ruling class”. Its manifesto mentions that their demand for a Madhes state is not for an ethnic Madhesi state but instead is for a regional one.

Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party in its manifesto has stated that it is in favour of an administratively unified and Tarai-Madhes autonomous unit. “Only unified Tarai-Madhes will free us of prevailing internal colonialism. In the changed transformation of population in the Tarai, none of the Awadh, Tharuhat, Bhojpura, Mithila and other Madhesi provinces will be free of the decisive influence of the non-Madhesis,” states the manifesto, “therefore, the area from Kanchanpur to Jhapa should be established as an autonomous region.” The party manifesto gives it rationale for a single autonomous region for there is geographic uniformity, cultural and language affinity, similar climate, agriculture as the backbone of economy, identity of being similarly oppressed and colonialised, unity of feeling and purpose in the struggle for respect and dignity
Rastriya Prajatantra Party has said the restructuring should establish an inclusive, participative and just state by ending centuries-old discriminatory practices based on caste and gender, problems in language and culture, oppression and inequality. It has said that the constitution should enshrine the role of the central government to look after the economic and fiscal policy, foreign policy, defence, sovereignty, communication, foreign trade, and development, maintenance and management of projects of national importance, while the provincial governments should be allowed to function autonomously. The number of provinces should be based on the recommendations of a high-level commission which should also include experts.

Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) has said that while delineating provinces, nationalities, language and cultural uniformity, similar historical background, and geographic convenience will be taken into account. “The issue of sustainability of provinces based on economic resources, production, and tax base should be looked into,” its manifesto states, “federal provinces will increase the administrative expenses and the issues of additional expenses should be taken seriously. Economic sustainability will be the chief measure of federal restructuring.” Its manifesto recommends five to seven provinces including centrally administered regions.

Nepal Communist Party (Unified) has stated that “ethnic-regional principle and autonomy will be the chief basis of federalism”. Nepal Majdur Kisan Party (Nepal Workers and Peasants Party) has state that it would be practical to turn the present zones into provinces.

With the exception of Rastriya Janamorcha, all the other parties with representation in the CA have accepted federalism in their manifestos. It has opposed federal government system. It advocates establishment of unitary government system based on democratic decentralisation and local autonomy and governance. It is the only party opposed to federalism with four members in the 601-member Constituent Assembly.