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[Home](#) > Nepal: Parliament Dissolved: Fresh Elections in April/May 2021

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## Nepal: Parliament Dissolved: Fresh Elections in April/May 2021

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The internal dispute within the Ruling Party between Prime Minister Oli and the other top leaders of the Party reached its climax today with the Cabinet convened by PM Oli recommended a dissolution of the Parliament.

As expected the “Rubber Stamp” President, Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the Parliament on the recommendation of the Cabinet and announced fresh elections on April 30th and May 10th 2021.

A Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ruling Party was scheduled to be held today. It is said that the Party is likely to take action against Oli for his unconstitutional move in recommending the dissolution of the Parliament.

Dahal alias Prachanda blamed PM Oli for staging a coup-de-tat of the Republic.

The Stock market index NEPSE went down immediately but recovered slightly towards the course of the day.

Students and Youth leaders of the Prachanda- Madhav Nepal faction held a protest rally at Matighar in Kathmandu against Oli’s recommendation of dissolution of the Parliament by Oli.

Sources say that the decision to dissolve the cabinet was not unanimous. Four Ministers, some close to him had opposed the resolution.

Pradeep Gyawali, the Foreign Minister asked the PM directly “Have you considered the political and legal consequences of such a recommendation” Another three ministers Barshaman Pun (Irrigation), Ghanshyam Bhushal (Irrigation) and Yogesh Bhattarai

(Tourism) advised the PM to delay the decision and give time for resolution.

Pradeep Gyawali, the Foreign Minister is close to PM Oli. The PM was adamant and went ahead to the President's Residence to submit the resignation.

Jhalnath Khanal one of the top trio in the Ruling NCP, indicated that the Standing Committee will take political and Constitutional steps against the decision of the Prime Minister to dissolve the Parliament. During the day, the three of the top leaders, Dahal, Madhav Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal had met at Dahal's residence to consider taking disciplinary action against Oli.

The response of the opposition Party was also very critical. Gagan Thapa, the Youth leader and a promising young Politician, said that the validity of the Peoples' vote for the Nepal Communist Party is over. He called the decision to dissolve the assembly as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and unacceptable".

Earlier, but too late in the day, the opposition Nepali Congress decided to protest on the total failure of the Government in all respects. It staged impressive and massive protests on 14th December in all the seventy-seven districts of the State.

In the course of the day, Oli claimed that he was compelled to recommend the dissolution of the Parliament after he received information that the President's impeachment was imminent and he wanted to prevent it. On paper, impeachment could be possible if one third of the members of the Parliament move a resolution. The President can also be suspended if twenty five percent of the Members of the Parliament register a motion in the Parliament.

Although the President deserves to be impeached, yet there was no evidence of any move of the rebel groups within the NCP or the opposition to have made any move towards the impeachment. It looks to be a concocted story of Oli himself!

What triggered the latest move, was the hurried passing of an Ordinance on the 15th by the President on his recommendation. Normally a quorum of five members is to be observed in taking any decision in the Council. Unfortunately a large number of Constitutional Posts have been left vacant and the meetings could not take place for want of a quorum. Oli wanted to amend the provision to ensure that meeting could be convened with a simple majority of the members present during the meeting. This would have given sweeping powers to the PM as the chairman of the Council to make all the appointments.

The Ordinance was opposed very bitterly in the Standing Committee meeting and Oli agreed to withdraw the ordinance. Instead of moving the President to cancel the Ordinance, Oli went ahead to convene the Council the next day ignoring the undertaking he gave to the other senior leaders of the Party.

For some reason the Council Meeting did not take place the next day and it was suspected that Oli was up to some thing. It is presumed that he followed it up instead by recommending the dissolution of the Parliament!

Oli's decision to dissolve the Parliament and go for elections was not an "off the cuff" affair. He had been planning for some major move, ever since the differences within the Ruling Party became irreconcilable. He tried first to get a majority in the Standing Committee of the Party for a while but failed again, when Bam Dev Gautham joined the rival group. He then tried his best to woo the other UML faction led by Madhav Nepal within the NCP and this also failed. He met the opposition leader Deuba once perhaps to explore and "alliance". This also perhaps failed.

He had managed to have the Chinese Ambassador and the President of Nepal on his side in his dispute with his party colleagues and on three occasions the Chinese Ambassador intervened to save Oli for the sake of the Unity of the Party. We had described these efforts earlier in our papers as "Band Aid" arrangement that may not last long. The CCP International Liaison Department also contacted Madhav Nepal once but none of these efforts seem to have succeeded finally. This is certainly a set back for the Chinese diplomacy, as Nepal had the third largest communist party after China and Vietnam.

A major realignment of forces is inevitable and can not be predicted right now. What is predictable is that a combination of any two of the three factions within the Ruling Party- Oli's faction, Madhav Nepal's faction and that of the Maoist Group led by Dahal cannot obtain a simple majority in the next elections. Reconciliation between Oli and the other two factions is also not that easy.

Unfortunately, the opposition Nepali Congress is in disarray. The party is riven by two major factions that of Deuba and of Ramchandra Paudel. Of late, the Youth leader Gagan Thapa is getting active but he is not in any of the two factions. Probably some younger elements along with the Koirala family may emerge but it is too early to say. All we can say is that Nepal is passing through a very critical phase and needs support and unity of all the democratic elements in the State.

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

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

**Category:**

[Papers](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

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- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/nepal>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>