

## Stalled Constitution-drafting and Pressure of UML CA Members

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A prime minister could not be selected even after seventh round of elections. Major political parties UCPN (M), Nepali Congress, and UML were more focused on getting the seat of the government rather than on drafting the constitution. Attempts to seek political consensus failed because of party stance. Except for one meeting to amend the CA calendar of events after extension of the CA deadline for one year, there was no meeting of the CA. The Constitutional Committee without any work agenda postponed its meetings indefinitely. There was no significant breakthrough in the report studying committee formed to study the disputes seen during the constitution-drafting process.

After an understanding between the senior leaders of UML and UCPN (M), UCPN (M) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal had withdrawn from the prime ministerial election. This made Congress suspicious. The discord among the leaders was making the election of the prime minister uncertain. There was criticism of not only the parties for their power-centric conduct and activities but also the CA members. The possibility of working as per the CA calendar was becoming thin.

Amidst this confusion, there was a meeting of the UML parliamentary party in the second week of June 2010. CA members criticised the leadership for not taking the lead in stalled constitution-drafting process. They said, 'The constitution-drafting process is stalled not due to the CA members but the leadership. Therefore, leadership has to take the initiative to take the constitution-drafting process forward.' After the CA members put pressure on the leadership, the meeting decided to give momentum to the constitution-drafting process.

After putting pressure on the UML leadership, representatives of the UML CA members met CA chairperson Subash Nemwang and vice-chairperson Purna Kumari Subedi on September 20, 2010. They stated that if the constitution-drafting process does not take momentum, it will not be possible to complete the constitution in time. The chairperson and vice-chairperson asked the UML CA members to submit the thematic committee reports to the Constitutional Committee by third week of October, 2010. They also drew the chairperson's attention to immediately calling the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. After meeting the chairperson, UML CA member Yamlal Kandel said that they became active after constitution-drafting process became overshadowed.

The UML CA members had drawn the attention of the chairperson pointing out that delaying in submitting the thematic committee reports would also delay finalising the integrated draft of the constitution. It was the CA UML members' view that the report studying committee had to submit the consensus and disputes in the thematic committees as they are. The leader of the representatives Binda Pandey said that it would be easier to resolve disputes in the Constitutional Committee as all the senior leaders were members of the Committee. UML CA member Bishnu

Rimal said that campaign was to prepare a whitepaper on all the works completed by the CA to create an environment to promulgate the constitution on time.

The UML CA members reached a conclusion to coordinate with other parties to put further pressure on drafting the constitution. They held a meeting with other parties represented in the CA on September 26, 2010. UML pointed out the relevancy of the meeting—‘The meeting was called to create further impetus to the constitution-drafting process’. In the meeting, Congress CA members Gagan Thapa said that it would be better to move forward together as collective voice would be heard. The meeting was attended by CA members from UML, Nepali Congress, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Democratic, CPN (ML), CPN (ML-Socialist), Rastriya Prajatantra Party, and CPN (Unified). None of the members from the largest party in the CA UCPN (M) participated in the meeting. The meeting participated by members from eight parties decided to exert pressure within their own parties to actively work for constitution-drafting.

As the UML CA members were active in exerting pressure on constitution-drafting, CA chairperson started consultations with political parties. Parties discussed the delay in constitution-drafting in the meeting. As no consensus could be reached in the frequent meetings, the meeting on October 11, 2010, formed a high-level taskforce comprising of senior leaders from seven parties including UCPN (M), Congress, UML, and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum. The UML CA members seemed positive on the formation of the taskforce that even if the report was not sent to the CA by third week of October. UML CA members Rabindra Adhikari claimed that the taskforce was formed due to their pressure.

The taskforce was given the deadline to submit its report by October 24, 2010. After the taskforce sought more time for discussion, a meeting of 27 parties on October 24, 2010 decided to extend the deadline for 11 more days citing satisfactory work of the taskforce. In the extended 11 days, consensus was reached in some issues but not all. The consensus on local bodies, states, language and others gave reason for extending the deadline. UML CA members stated that the deadline of the taskforce should not be extended time and again—‘The tendency to extend the deadline of the taskforce citing insufficient time for discussions will further add to the delay’. However, they could not move collectively. They could not exert sufficient pressure on the UML leadership to work on constitution-drafting and neither could they work with CA members from other parties to exert pressure on UCPN (M) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Nepali Congress president Sushil Koirala and senior leaders of other parties.