

Parties Focus on Constitution-drafting and All-party Government



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The earthquake brought together the parties with sour relations among them. The political parties got ready to move forward without care for the ruling or the opposition coalitions. To address the earthquake-related issues, the parties endorsed a commitment proposal from the legislature-parliament. In addition, they forwarded a proposal for a strong national consensus government. They also became active to forge agreement on the disputed issues to promulgate the constitution.

Unity among the parties

The government came under criticism for its ineffective role post-earthquake. Then Prime Minister Sushil Koirala urged all the parties to unite and resolve the problems of the earthquake victims. Prime Minister Koirala expressed his belief that the problems could be resolved through the unity of the parties in the meeting of the legislature-parliament on May 8, 2015. 'We commit that every political steps will transform this calamity into a new source of strength and take Nepal on a path of prosperity through dialogue, collaboration, unity, and cooperation',¹ said the prime minister. UML chairperson KP Sharma Oli stressed the need for 'an environment for unity and participation of the parties and all stakeholders to deal with the national calamity by removing minor difference, pettiness, and self-interests'.² UCPN (M) also said, 'National commitment and unity is necessary for state-restructuring and reconstruction'.³

All-party government

UCPN (M) demanded a strong government after the earthquake. Addressing a meeting of the legislature-parliament, UCPN (M) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal had said the role of the government in disaster management had been weak and stressed the need for a strong government. The UML leaders/former Prime Ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal also stressed the need for an all-party government. Also, UCPN (M) leader Baburam Bhattarai also demanded the formation of a national government. However, none was clear on the leadership of the government. After UCPN (M) and UML raised the issue of all-party government, spokesperson of the government and Minister for Information and Communication Minendra Rijal stated that Prime Minister Sushil Koirala was ready to transform the present government into national government. Then an extended meeting of UCPN (M) central office took place, where government formation was also discussed.

¹ Address by the prime minister to the legislature-parliament on May 8, 2015.

² Address by UML chairperson and leader of parliamentary party KP Sharma Oli on May 8, 2015.

³ Press release by UCPN (M) on May 18, 2015.

UCPN (M) made public its position in a press release, 'If national government is formed rising above petty political interests, UCPN (M) is ready for an open discussion'.⁴

Formation of national government was also discussed in the meeting of Congress central working committee. The office-bearers suggested Prime Minister Sushil Koirala to form a national government by including other parties.⁵ Senior Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba expressed the need to give the present government a national form to establish unity among the parties. While talks about national consensus government was going on, leaders of UML and UCPN (M) also met, and their discussion was focused on formation of a national government. While discussions among the parties were going on, UCPN (M) chairperson Dahal put forward the condition of drafting of the constitution for formation of a national government.⁶ Then meeting of Congress, UML, UCPN (M), and Tarai-Madhes-focused parties took place in the Office of the Prime Minister at Baluwatar, which also discussed formation of national government. UML stressed on immediate formation of an all-party consensus government. UML deputy general secretary Bishnu Paudel gave an alternative, 'The prime minister should bring all the parties in the Constituent Assembly in the government, or make way for one'.⁷

Constitution-drafting

Prime Minister Koirala stressed on constitution-drafting. While addressing the legislature-parliament, he said, 'For national reconstruction, federal democratic republican constitution will be the strongest basis'.⁸ UML chairperson Oli also urged all the political parties to unite to focus on the drafting the constitution to face calamity.⁹ Meanwhile, President Yadav, addressing the nation, urged that reconstruction and constitution-drafting be taken forward in tandem'.¹⁰ A meeting of Congress office-bearers decided to prioritise constitution and reconstruction in the present situation.¹¹ Constituent Assembly chairperson Subash Chandra Nemwang expressed his belief that if there is agreement among the political parties, the constitution could be promulgated within mid-August.¹²

Conclusion

Despite being focused on providing relief to the earthquake-affected and resettlement, the issues of national consensus and constitution-drafting gained importance among the parties and the government. The parties agreed in principle to form a national government and draft the

⁴ Press release by UCPN (M) on May 18, 2015.

⁵ *Let's form national consensus government for unity: Deuba*. Retrieved June 5, from <http://setopati.com/raajneeti/28664/>.

⁶ *Prachand's condition for consensus government*. Retrieved June 5, from <http://setopati.com/raajneeti/28766/>.

⁷ Khanal, Durga. May 30, 2015. *Rush for government change*. The Kantipur Daily, p1.

⁸ Address to the legislature-parliament by Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on May 8, 2015.

⁹ Address to the legislature-parliament by UML chairperson and parliamentary party leader KP Sharma Oli on May 8, 015.

¹⁰ Address to the nation by President Ram Baran Yadav on May 28, 2015.

¹¹ *Constitution and reconstitution priority: Congress*. May 31, 2015. The Kantipur Daily, p1.

¹² *Constitution within mid-August if agreement on issues and process: Nemwang*. Retrieved June 5, from <http://setopati.com/raajneeti/28864/>.

constitution. However, the parties were not clear on the leadership of the government. While Congress wanted to turn the incumbent government into a national consensus government by including other parties, UML and UCPN (M) were in favour of changing the leadership of the government. They had two alternatives before them: form a new government with agreement of Congress after issues of the constitution have been agreed upon, or move ahead with a vote of no confidence. The parties started to seek agreement on the issues of the constitution.

Major Political Developments

May 4

- Prime Minister Koirala urges all parties to unite to solve the problems of earthquake victims.

May 8

- Meeting of legislature-parliament. UCPN (M) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal states a strong government is necessary during calamities.
- UML chairperson KP Sharma Oli stresses on an environment for unity and participation of the parties and all stakeholders to face the national calamity by removing minor difference, pettiness, and self-interests.

May 9

- Meeting of legislature-parliament. Former Prime Ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhala Nath Khanal, and Baburam Bhattarai demand formation of a national government.

May 16

- UCPN (M) spokesperson Dina Nath Sharma states that all the parties should be [united] in one place during calamities and a national consensus government is necessary for that.

May 17

- Meeting of senior Congress and UML leaders discusses formation of a national government.

May 18

- Minister for Information and Communication Minendra Rijal states that Prime Minister Sushil Koirala is ready to transform the present government into a national government.
- Extended meeting of UCPN (M) central office discusses formation of national government.

May 21

- Meeting of Congress office-bearers suggests Prime Minister Sushil Koirala to form a national consensus government by including other parties.

May 22

- Senior Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba expresses the need to give the present government a national form to establish unity among the parties and to take the country forward.

May 28

- President Ram Baran Yadav in his address to the nation urges reconstruction and constitution-drafting be taken forward together.

May 29

- Meeting of senior UML and UCPN (M) leaders discusses formation of national government.
- UCPN (M) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal demands guarantee of drafting of the constitution should be a precondition for a national government.
- Meeting of Congress, UML, UCPN (M), and Tarai-Madhes-focused political parties at the residence of the prime minister in Baluwatar. Discussion on formation of national consensus government.

May 30

- Meeting of Congress office-bearers decides to give priority to constitution and reconstruction.

May 31

- Constituent Assembly chairperson Subash Chandra Nemwang states that if there is agreement among the political parties on the issues of the constitution, the constitution can be promulgated within mid-August.