

Recent Political Developments in Nepal

Formation of the Constituent Assembly

The people of Nepal exercised, for the first time in history, their most important fundamental right on April 10, 2008 in electing a 601-member Constituent Assembly mandated to write a new constitution for the country. The election was held in a free and peaceful manner and the voters' turnout was high. Out of 601 members, direct election was held for 240 constituencies under the first-past-post system, 335 were elected under proportional system based on popular votes secured by each contesting political party (considering Nepal as a single constituency) and the remaining 26 have been appointed by the Prime Minister based on political consensus and understanding among the political parties in the Assembly. However, the Assembly has currently 594 members (elections to fulfill five seats vacated by the winners are yet to be held and one member nominated under political consensus has not yet taken the oath of office).

It was one of the most observed elections in recent years and the international observers have, while endorsing the fact that the polls were largely conducted in a peaceful manner, acclaimed the election as a historic opportunity for the Nepalese people in defining their destiny. The leading external institutions/agencies that were involved in the election observation include: the EU, the Carter Center, Asian Network for Free Election, Forum Asia, the Asia Foundation, National Democratic Institute, International Crisis Group, South Asia Forum for Election System, Socialist International, etc. In addition, members of parliament from India, the UK, Australia and several representatives from the Kathmandu-based diplomatic missions also participated in observation. A large-number of domestic institutions, such as the National Human Right Commission, too, observed the election. Nepal's friendly countries, including neighbors, and major powers of the world have congratulated the people of Nepal for the successful holding of the election. All stakeholders in Nepal have been urged to respect the people's verdict.

The election has demonstrated to the rest of the world that an armed conflict can successfully be converted into a peace process with the courage and determination of the political leadership and the whole-hearted support of the change-oriented people. The election was an important step towards bringing the ongoing peace process to its logical conclusion. The peace process is a homegrown initiative of the Nepalese people, who fought ceaselessly for decades to establish their rights and freedoms, supported by Nepal's friends and well-wishers in the international community. The April 10 polls have widened the prospect for Nepal's becoming a stable, peaceful, democratic, inclusive and prosperous country in South Asia.

Party-wise strength of the Constituent Assembly:

Party	Constituent Assembly									
	FPTP Seats			PR Seats			Nominat ed Seats	Total Seats		
	Male	Female	Total #	Male	Female	Total #	#	#	%	%
Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists)	96	24	120	50	50	100	9	229	38.1%	87.7%
Nepali Congress	35	2	37	37	36	73	5	115	19.1%	
Communist Party of Nepal (U.M.L.)	32	1	33	35	35	70	5	108	18.0%	
Madhesi People's Rights Forum, Nepal	28	2	30	11	11	22	2	54	9.0%	
Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party	8	1	9	6	5	11	1	21	3.5%	
Sadhvawana Party (Mahato)	4		4	3	2	5		9	1.5%	8.0%
Communist Party of Nepal (M.L.)				4	4	8	1	9	1.5%	
Janamorcha Nepal	2		2	3	2	5	1	8	1.3%	
Rastriya Prajatantra Party				4	4	8		8	1.3%	
Communist Party of Nepal (United)				3	2	5		5	0.8%	
Nepal Workers and Peasants Party	2		2	1	1	2	1	5	0.8%	
Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal				2	2	4		4	0.7%	
Rastriya Janamorcha	1		1	2	1	3		4	0.7%	4.3%
Nepal Sadhvawana Party (Anandidevi)				1	1	2	1	3	0.5%	
Rastriya Janshakti Party				2	1	3		3	0.5%	
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified)				1	1	2		2	0.3%	
Federal Democratic National Forum				1	1	2		2	0.3%	
Nepali Janata Dal				1	1	2		2	0.3%	
Rastriya Janamukti Party				1	1	2		2	0.3%	
Chure Bhawar Rastriya Ekata Party Nepal				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Dalit Janajati Party				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Nepa: Rastriya Party				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Nepal Lokatantrik Samajbadi Dal				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Nepal Pariwar Dal				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Samajwadi Prajatantrik. Janata Party, Nepal				1	0	1		1	0.2%	
Independent	2		2					2	0.3%	
	210	30	240	174	161	335	26	601	100.0%	

Abolition of Monarchy and Declaration of Nepal a Republic

Under the Interim Constitution, the first Session of the Constituent Assembly was to be held within 21 days of the publication of the final results of the elections. The Election Commission released the final result on May 8, 2008 and the Prime Minister on May 12, 2008 announced May 28, 2008 as the date for the first sitting of the Assembly. The Members of the Constituent Assembly were sworn-in on 27 May 2008. On May 28, 2008 the major political parties agreed on the creation of a ceremonial President, and the executive power to be exercised by the Prime Minister.

The Constituent Assembly, meeting at its historic first session, decided by an overwhelming majority to abolish the 240-years monarchy and formally declared Nepal a republic. In fact, it was a step towards implementing the provision of a Republic enshrined in the Interim Constitution. 564 members of the Constituent Assembly voted on this motion, with 560 in favor and four against. Of all the parties represented in the Constituent Assembly, only the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Nepal) voted against the motion. The then King was given 15 days to vacate the Narayanhiti Royal Palace which he complied.

Election of President and Vice President

President: The Rt. Hon'ble Dr. Ram Baran Yadav

Vice President: The Rt. Hon'ble Mr. Paramanand Jha

The Constituent Assembly elected Dr. Ram Baran Yadav by a majority vote as the first President of the Republic of Nepal in presidential run-off on 21 July 2008, as none of the candidates was able to secure a required majority in the elections held on 19th July 2008. However, Mr. Paramananda Jha was elected Vice President in the first round of election held on 19 July.

The elections were held after the Fifth Amendment to the Interim Constitution was passed on July 14, 2008. Under the Fifth amendment, the majority party would form the government, the CA would elect the new President on the basis simple majority and a new provision that the Opposition Leader would be a member of the Constitutional Council.

Formation of a New Government

On August 15, 2008 the Constituent Assembly elected Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Chairman of Nepal Communist Party (Maoists), which is the largest party in the Constituent Assembly, as the first Prime Minister of Republic of Nepal. He was sworn-in three days later on 18th August. He heads a coalition Government of 6 parties represented in the Constituent Assembly namely, CPN (Maoist), CPN (UML), Madheshi People's Rights Forum (MPRF), Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Mahato), CPN (United) and People's Front Nepal.

To settle the issue of power sharing among the coalition partners and to run the Government smoothly, the three major parties, the CPN (Maoists), CPN (UML) and MPRF signed the following documents on 21 August 2008:

- Common Minimum Programme for National Coalition Government
- Code of Conduct for Ministers
- Governance Code

The present Council of Ministers consists of a Prime Minister, a Deputy Prime Minister and 21 Cabinet Ministers (initially 22 Ministers, one Minister has just resigned).

The composition of the Council of Minister is as follows:

Rt. Hon. Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Prime Minister, Women, Children and Social Welfare

Hon. Mr. Bam Dev Gautam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home

Hon. Dr Baburam Bhattarai, Minister for Finance

Hon. Mr. Upendra Yadav, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Mr. Ram Bahadur Thapa, Minister for Defense

Hon. Mr. Bijaya Kumar Gachchhadar, Minister for Physical Planning and works

Hon. Mr. Bishnu Poudel, Minister for Water Resources

Hon. Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Minister for Information and Communications

Hon. Mr. Jayaprakash Prasad Gupta, Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives

Hon. Asta Laxmi Shakya, Minister for Industry

Hon. Mr. Dev Prasad Gurung, Minister for Law, Justice and Constituent Assembly

Hon. Mr. Rajendra Mahato, Minister for Commerce and Supplies

Hon. Mr. Gopal Shakya, Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Pampha Bhusal, Minister for General Administration

Hon. Hisila Yami, Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, Minister for Health and Population

Hon. Renu Yadav, Minister for Education

Hon. Mr. Kiran Gurung, Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation

Hon. Mr. Janardan Sharma, Minister for Peace and Reconstruction

Hon. Mr. Gopal Kiranti, Minister for Culture and State Restructuring

Hon. Mr. Ram Chandra Jha , Minister for Local Development

Hon. Mr. Lekh Raj Bhatta, Minister for Labor and Transport

Hon. Mr. Ganesh Shah, Minister for Science and Technology and Environment