

DELHI HAS LITTLE ROLE TO PLAY BUT WATCH THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF NEPAL'S DOMESTIC POLITICS PLAY OUT

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Prime Minister [K P Sharma Oli](#)'s move to opt for fresh elections rather than bow to the demands from within the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) to accommodate his rivals in the power structure has pushed Nepal into political uncertainty. Oli's recommendation on Sunday to dismiss the House of Representatives and have fresh elections, nearly two years ahead of schedule, was immediately accepted by President Bidya Devi Bhandari. Legal experts and politicians described the decision as a "constitutional coup" and have challenged it in the Supreme Court. All these moves will test the fragile consensus on the country's constitution and, possibly, force a vertical split in the NCP.

The origins of the current crisis can be traced back to the formation of the NCP in 2018, after the merger of the CPN-United Marxist Leninist and CPN-Maoist Centre. Oli, the face of CPN-UML, had led the combine to nearly a two-thirds majority in the elections the previous year. Though it was decided that power will be shared between leaders of the two parties that merged, Oli was reluctant. Confident that it was his popularity on account of taking a strident anti-India position in the wake of the 2015 border blockade that enabled the communist alliance to sweep the polls, Oli chose to impose his will on the NCP. This was bound to deepen the divisions within the party. The CPN-UML and the CPN-Maoist had been bitter rivals after the communist movement split in the 1990s over ideological issues and the Maoists launched a guerrilla war against Kathmandu. For years, Oli had demanded that the Maoists under Pushpa Kamal Dahal be held accountable for war crimes, including the killings of CPN-UML cadres. These differences were papered over when the two parties decided to contest to parliament under a new constitution in 2017 and merge into one outfit post elections. Clearly, there has been no reconciliation within the outfit. Besides, party rivals have accused Oli of engaging in one upmanship and unwilling to share power. On his part, Oli sought to fob off all criticism about his conduct by suggesting that his rivals were conspiring with India to remove him from office.

Oli had the mandate to iron out the rough edges of the constitution, address the concerns of Madhesi groups, and strengthen Nepal's institutions. But he preferred to consolidate power and sought to rally support by adopting anti India postures and cosyng up to China. With the NCP unravelling and Oli preferring fresh elections over a truce with rivals, Delhi has little role to play but watch the internal dynamics of Nepal's domestic politics play out. Given the internecine wars and erosion of his own standing within, an election may not deliver the clean slate that Oli is hoping for.

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