

# Manele under threat: the political crisis in Solomon Islands



National Parliament of Solomon Islands

*Photo Credit: Photo: Solomon Islands Government*

by Dorothy Wickham

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Solomon Islands is once again facing a high-stakes political crisis following the sudden and coordinated resignation of ten Members of Parliament from Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele's administration. Among the defectors are five Cabinet ministers and five government backbenchers — an exodus that underscores growing dissatisfaction with Manele's leadership and sets the stage for a potentially game-changing motion of no-confidence, scheduled for 6 May.

These developments raise profound questions about the future of the ruling coalition, the cohesion of the Ownership, Unity and Responsibility (OUR) Party, and the broader implications for governance, international partnerships and political stability in the Pacific region.

Last Monday afternoon, at approximately 1:30 PM local time, formal resignations were submitted by a bloc of MPs from both the executive and legislative arms of government. According to Rawcliff Zeza, Private Secretary to the Governor General, the Cabinet ministers stepping down include several high-profile and strategically significant figures:

- Manasseh Sogavare, Minister of Finance and Treasury and parliamentary-wing leader of the OUR Party
- Manasseh Maelanga, Minister for Infrastructure Development
- Nestor Ghiro, Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources
- Rollen Seleso, Minister for Rural Development
- Freda Tuki, Minister for Women, Youth, and Children's Affairs.

Justice Minister Clezy Rore briefly joined the exodus but then retracted his resignation, opting to remain in his post. Bradley Tovosia, Minister for Mines and Deputy Prime Minister, also resigned on Monday but seemingly in an attempt to calm the waters — some of the defectors had cited dissatisfaction with his conduct.

The resignations were not limited to the Cabinet. Five government-aligned backbenchers — Claudius Tei'ifi, Stanley Sofu, William Marau, James Bonuga and

Lazarus Rima — also announced the withdrawal of their support for the government. Collectively, these resignations amount to a significant weakening of Manele's parliamentary majority and expose deep rifts within the coalition.

Although no joint statement accompanied the resignations, political observers point to several contributing factors behind the move. Chief among them appears to be waning confidence in Prime Minister Manele's leadership, particularly in navigating intra-party tensions, managing economic pressures and handling the country's foreign policy orientation.

The resignation of Finance Minister Manasseh Sogavare — a former Prime Minister and key political operator in Solomon Islands politics — carries particular symbolic and strategic weight. Given he is the parliamentary-wing leader of the OUR Party, Sogavare's departure suggests a critical breakdown in the party's internal cohesion. His resignation could indicate an intent to form a new bloc within Parliament, further complicating Manele's path to retaining office.

Other ministers, such as Maelanga and Ghire, are seasoned political actors whose decisions to resign are unlikely to have been taken lightly. Sources within Honiara suggest that frustrations over the centralisation of decision-making power in the Prime Minister's Office and a perceived lack of consultation on key policy areas contributed to their exit.

Additionally, mounting public pressure over service delivery failures, particularly in infrastructure, rural development, fisheries and mining management may have created a sense of urgency among ministers to distance themselves from an increasingly unpopular administration.

Gordon Darcy Lilo, a veteran politician and former Prime Minister (2011–2014), is the mover of the current motion of no-confidence against Prime Minister Manele. Known for his long-standing involvement in the country's political affairs, Lilo has returned to the spotlight by challenging the government over issues such as economic mismanagement and alleged cronyism. (He previously withdrew a similar motion in late 2024 due to lack of parliamentary support).

The timing of the resignations is especially notable. With the motion of no-confidence set for 6 May, this mass withdrawal of support severely compromises the government's ability to survive a parliamentary challenge. It shifts momentum to the opposition, which is likely now in a stronger position to secure the simple majority needed to unseat Manele.

If the motion passes, it would trigger a leadership transition — either to a new Prime Minister from within the current Parliament or, potentially, via an early general

election, depending on the outcome of coalition negotiations. In either case, the government's legislative agenda is now effectively frozen, and ministerial vacancies in crucial departments mean administrative paralysis in several areas, including financial planning, infrastructure development and fisheries regulation.

This crisis is not just a matter of political manoeuvring — it reflects deeper structural and systemic issues with Solomon Islands' governance. The country has long struggled with coalition fragility, where loosely bound political parties and shifting alliances lead to frequent changes in leadership. The lack of a stable party system continues to undermine policy continuity and long-term planning.

Furthermore, the presence of prominent political figures such as Sogavare among the resignees raises concerns about fragmentation within the OUR Party. The possibility of splinter factions emerging from the current ruling coalition suggests that Solomon Islands politics may soon undergo a significant realignment, with unknown implications for domestic governance and foreign relations.

The political instability in Honiara also has implications beyond the country's borders. Solomon Islands has been at the centre of increasing geopolitical interest, particularly from China, Australia and the United States. The government's foreign policy pivot under Sogavare's earlier administration — especially the security cooperation agreement signed with Beijing — drew international scrutiny.

Although Manele's leadership has aimed for a more balanced diplomatic posture, a change in government could further recalibrate the country's foreign relations. If a new administration takes power, it may reassess key bilateral and multilateral engagements, including reconsideration of infrastructure financing, security cooperation and aid arrangements.

International stakeholders — especially those with development programs or security cooperation agreements — will be watching the upcoming no-confidence vote closely. The outcome could affect the implementation of major projects and reshape diplomatic engagements in the Pacific.

The coming week will be critical for Solomon Islands. As Parliament prepares for the no-confidence vote, both the government and opposition are expected to intensify negotiations, lobbying MPs across party lines in a bid to sway the final outcome. The fluid nature of political allegiance in Solomon Islands politics means the result is not a foregone conclusion — even with the recent resignations.

Nevertheless, the events of 28 April have already reshaped the country's political landscape. Even if Manele survives the motion, his weakened mandate and fractured Cabinet raise serious questions about his ability to govern effectively.

Conversely, a successful no-confidence motion could lead to a period of intense political bargaining, temporary power vacuums and the potential for policy reversals.

Solomon Islands faces a moment of profound political uncertainty. The coordinated resignation of key ministers and backbenchers reflects a broader crisis of confidence in leadership and exposes the fragility of the country's political institutions. With the 6 May no-confidence vote looming, the nation stands at a crossroads — between continuity and change, between stability and disruption.

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