

## Sri Lanka: The Political Crisis: View from Sri Lanka

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Guest Column:By V.Sivanendran

Colombo is eerily quiet. There are less people on the streets than usual. Buses are not overcrowded. There are intense conversations in tea boutiques among members of the public. The topic is the same. That is the ongoing current political crisis. People are anxious of the outcome and nervous of the consequences. The average citizen is confused and is in fear of the future.

I attended the demonstration at Liberty Plaza on Tuesday. This was supposed to be against political manoeuvrings of the President. The assembled people were not all in support of the Prime Minister. Most of them were those who campaigned to elect the President and the Prime Minister resulting in the overthrow of the previous Mahinda regime. Some of them were critical of Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe.. The charges levelled against Ranil were many. One of them was that his government did not deliver what was promised. But they have come only register their protest against the unconstitutional methods adapted to put Mahinda Rajapakse in power.

Even though, there was discussion in the press in past few weeks promoting a caretaker government to be formed by the President under Mahinda Rajapakse, Ranil and his Ministers did not take it seriously. For that matter no one took it seriously. After the event they are now in a state of shock. There is now a concerted attempt made by Ranil and his allies, to win back power. They believe that the road back to power is through parliament. So both the parties are engaged in counting the number of members of Parliament they can rely on support.

There are a lot of activities going on behind the scenes. The reason is, neither Ranil nor Mahinda has an absolute majority. It is rumoured that as much as Rs. 250 million and a ministerial appointment is offered to MP's to cross over. The sums are huge and the people are wondering where is this money is coming from. Ranil has already lost five members who have crossed over to the other side. The magic number to save his Premiership is 113. The TNA with 16 and the JVP with 6 have taken up hands off position. This is adding to the

uncertainty. The person crossing over is not certain whether the other party has the numbers to demonstrate its majority.

So, the President has prorogued the parliament to give Mahinda the space to get to work. It appears that he is finding it hard to get the numbers. Meanwhile, there is considerable pressure from the West urging the President to respect the constitution and recall Parliament. The President is doing his best as the gatekeeper to ward off these forces. There is an issue of legitimacy hanging over this new regime. Except for a couple of minor countries, no one else has so far recognised this new regime.

There is fear that the days of old will return to trample democratic rights, freedom of expression and human rights. Journalists and other citizens who have taken a risk to publicly oppose the previous Mahinda regime are concerned for their safety. There is also concern that some of the mechanisms created to deliver transitional justice will be dismantled. It is no secret that this new regime will not take any measures to implement the UNHRC resolution 30/1. So it is expected that the domestic conditions will change for the worse in the short run and international environment will be hostile to the new regime.

So, all are waiting for the recall of parliament. Yesterday, it was announced that a new date has been set for the reconvening of Parliament as 5<sup>th</sup> November. Later, a Minister denied that such a new date has been agreed. The sooner this event takes place the better for the country, and to put it out of its current misery.

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