



Moragoda

# The country requires a strong Executive Presidency to navigate the Post-Covid world says Milinda Moragoda

Milinda Moragoda, former Cabinet Minister and founder of the Pathfinder Foundation spoke about the need for Sri Lanka to be fast and agile in order to face the economic,

social and international challenges of the Post-Covid environment.

He stated that: 'there is no disputing the fact that the country benefited from having strong

executive decision-making during the early stages of the pandemic. And as a result, many lives were saved.

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Disappointingly, no major political party has yet put forward a coherent governance and governing structure for the nation in their policy platforms.

'Each has been predictably very chameleon-like when addressing issues related to constitutional and governance-structure related matters in their manifestos. This is especially unfortunate in light of the dysfunctional relationship that now exists between the Executive and the Legislature and the proven potential for gridlock, both a result of the enactment of the 19th Amendment.'

Against this backdrop, without any coherent or credible proposals thus far having been presented by any major political party, Moragoda proposes that all thoughtful Sri Lankans take up the following points for their consideration, discussion and if appropriate advocacy :

**A.** The establishment of a strong Executive Presidency that can act decisively and yet be ultimately accountable to Parliament. After all, the presidency is the only office elected by all Sri Lankan voters. Thus, the individual occupying this post will be implicitly accountable to all citizens, be they from Kankasanturai or Dewinuwara.

**B.** An independent legislature that will promulgate legislation and act as a responsible check and balance to Executive excess. This legislature should be elected on a first-past-the-post basis with a small percentage of members being chosen through a proportional representation system.

This change should lead to a stable parliament where most members are directly accountable to their constituencies and citizens. The preference vote system which has only created chaos and in-fighting should be dispensed with.

**C.** The Provincial Councils should be abolished and empowered local councils set up to address the day-to-day issues of the citizenry.

**D.** An empowered Senate should be created to represent minority and regional interests.

Moragoda further pointed out that 'Forty-two years have passed since the establishment of Sri Lanka's Executive Presidency and that all those who criticize this form of government have still not been able to convince Sri Lankans of any better option. Notably, when the opportunity for abolishing the presidential system present-

ed itself in 2015, the then government was unable or unwilling to conduct a referendum to abolish the presidency. And, as we are now on the verge of facing the most challenging period in our post-Independence history, the need of the hour is a strong executive.'

To lend further context to his point he noted that: 'The first conception of a Presidential system was forged in the late 18th century after the American war of Independence against the British. Extensive debates surrounding the extent of the powers of an Executive Presidency took place during the drafting of the American Constitution. One of the founding fathers and authors of the US Constitution, Alexander Hamilton, argued for a strong Executive leader making the point that:

" 'A feeble Executive implies a feeble execution of the government. A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execution, and a government ill-executed, whatever it may be in theory, must be, in practice, a bad government.'"

'In the final analysis Sri Lanka cannot afford to have a crippled government especially at this critical juncture where a large number of lives and livelihoods are at stake.