

NEWS ROUND UP

Monday, October 29 , 2018

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President justifies Ranil's exit, MR's entry

President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday justified his actions as being in the best interests of the country, arguing that the removal of Ranil Wickremesinghe was done constitutionally and calling for all parliamentarians to support him.

Addressing the nation, Sirisena gave detailed explanations of his actions, recalling his decision to become the common candidate in 2014 and the challenges that he faced over the last three years. He denied that the change on Friday was unconstitutional but did not give an explanation as to why he prorogued Parliament until 16 November.

“Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe and the UNP complain that the establishment of a new government and appointment of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister were contradictory to the provisions of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. I categorically state that the appointments were made totally in accordance with the Constitution and on the advice of legal experts. No constitutional violation was done when appointments were made and the removal was enacted. With all due respect, I completely reject the charge that what was done was a violation of the Constitution,” he said.

Sirisena also called for the support of all lawmakers, encouraging them to join him to develop the country and put the economy on a better footing. He also said the political crisis had declined since he swore in Rajapaksa.

“I extend an open invitation to all 225 honourable Members of Parliament to join the new government. I do this with the pure intention of taking the country out of the present political crisis and economic problems. Now, the political crisis has somewhat declined. I appeal to everybody to extend the fullest cooperation to the new government formed by me with Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister to strengthen democratic governance, freedom of the people, human rights and fundamental rights and media freedom and take our Motherland towards prosperity and make a better and decent society.”

Giving several examples of why he decided to leave the coalition government, Sirisena also touched on recent investigations into allegations of an assassination plot and insisted that the United National Party (UNP) had refused to take the threat seriously.

“There is also the involvement of a Cabinet Minister in this plot to assassinate me. Furthermore, there has been tremendous pressure on investigations. There were instances of some responsible officers of the Attorney General's Department evading investigation duties. Under these political problems, economic troubles and the strong plot to assassinate me, the only alternative open to me was to invite former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and appoint him as Prime Minister to form a new government.”

Even though he ceded some executive powers, Sirisena noted that Wickremesinghe had not been sufficiently inclusive in his decision-making processes, leading to disagreements between the two and eventually a rift that was unmendable.

“Ranil Wickremesinghe's political conduct was unbecoming of civilised politics and belittled the victory achieved risking my life in 2015. I believe that Mr. Wickremesinghe and his group of closest friends, who belonged to a privileged class and did not understand the pulse of the people, conducted themselves as if shaping the future of the country was a fun game they played. I feel that Hon. Wickremesinghe grossly violated the very principles of good governance we pledged to uphold.

“Once in the Government, Mr Wickremesinghe arrogantly and stubbornly avoided collective decisions, and tended to take individual decisions. This behaviour led to many conflicts. Due to his lack of collective decision-making through discussion, our country had to face harsh consequences when he used to take decisions with a group of his very close associates. I must state that there was also a policy conflict between Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe and me during the last three and half years. Apart from policy differences, I noted that there were also differences of culture between Mr. Wickremesinghe and me. I believe that all those differences in policy, culture, personality and conduct aggravated this political and economic crisis.”

The Central Bank bond scam was also mentioned by Sirisena along with details of how he came to appoint a presidential commission of inquiry despite protests from the UNP.

“I wish to reiterate here that Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe must take responsibility to bring Mr. Arjuna Mahendran to Sri Lanka and produce him before courts. That is because, as everybody knows, Mr. Arjuna Mahendran is a very close friend of Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe. Local industries of the country were weakened in the last few years and for them to recover, the blessings from the Government alone are not enough.”

He emphasised that there were questionable decisions taken by the UNP and that his efforts to stop these or provide more transparency were not successful. He also charged that it was the UNP which had slowed down corruption investigations and hampered legislative changes that would have improved governance.

“You must have seen in the media about the monetary deal of the EAP company. That company was given to a foreigner. That deal was done fraudulently without calling for tenders. There will be a thorough investigation on this in the near future. Many valuable assets were given to foreigners without tenders. Construction awards were also given without tenders. The emergency Cabinet papers were presented to award such tenders and massive construction awards were given despite objections by the Cabinet.

“One such example is the Kandy Highway Project. Another is the Land Ordinance Special Act, which was presented to Cabinet last week. Then there was the paper on establishing a land bank. I lodged strong protests and postponed those Cabinet papers. The majority of Cabinet Ministers were against these proposals.” .(Daily FT)

Rajitha says over 100 signatures urging P'ment to reconvene

The United National Party yesterday claimed that over 100 parliamentarians had signed on to lobby for Parliament to be reconvened.

“We have signed the document urging the Speaker to convene Parliament as soon as possible,” Parliamentarian Rajitha Senaratne said, speaking at a media briefing held in Temple Trees last evening.

The UNP strongman was confident of showing the numbers in support of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe when Parliament was reconvened. However, he was not able to reveal what the party would do if the President did not heed the requests made by parliamentarians.

Senaratne also said that the party had collected close to 80 signatures to impeach President Maithripala Sirisena.

Nevertheless, he emphasised that their focus now was to have Parliament reconvene to re-establish party leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's position as the Prime Minister.

Speculating that Sirisena had been misled by those giving him legal advice, he highlighted that the President had violated the Constitution by appointing former president Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister.

“You cannot do what they used to do after the 19th Amendment was introduced to the Constitution. What the President has done is throw the country into complete anarchy like never before. He was voted in before to bring in law and order and he has brought complete anarchy,” he said, insisting that the rightful Prime Minister of the country was Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Referring to the death of one person involved in the clash at the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation where parliamentarian Arjuna Ranatunga was held hostage by the ministry’s trade unionists, Senaratne said it was just the first sign of the times to come.

“Things will be even more difficult for people as days pass and there is complete chaos and confusion in the country. This crisis will throw the country and the people into a lot of hardship,” he warned.

Responding to comments made by President Sirisena, Senaratne claimed that the bond scam was not the first fraud that occurred in the country but it was the first time a sitting government had appointed a commission to investigate such an incident during its own term.

“It wasn’t the President who protested against Mahendran’s appointment, it was me. This is not the first bond fraud in Sri Lankan history. Earlier governments did not take proper action against previous frauds but during the bond fraud the Government took action, brought government ministers to the commission. The PM went to the commission as a sitting PM for the first time in Sri Lankan history,” he asserted.

Drawing examples from Germany and Austria, where national governments have been formed, Senaratne also highlighted that disagreements were a common feature of such partnerships but stressed the importance of working together, urging the President to heed the call to reconvene Parliament. .(Daily FT)

UN expresses concern

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has expressed concern over the latest political developments in Sri Lanka.

Following is the statement issued by the spokesman for the Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric, on the developments in Sri Lanka.

The Secretary-General is following the latest developments in Sri Lanka with great concern. He calls on the Government to respect democratic values and constitutional provisions and process, uphold the rule of law and ensure the safety and security of all Sri Lankans.

The Secretary-General urges all parties to exercise restraint and address the unfolding situation in a peaceful manner.(Daily FT)

Sri Lanka opposition leader asks Parliament to be summoned immediately

Sri Lanka's opposition leader Rajavaroatham Sampanthan has asked parliament to be summoned immediately, as a constitutional crisis deepened in to violence.

"Recognizing the necessity for upholding the supremacy of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and also, Recognizing the Supremacy of Parliament comprising of the democratically elected representatives of the people," Sampanthan said in a letter to Speaker Karu Jayasuriya.

"I hereby call upon yourself, Sir, to uphold the Rule of Law by summoning Parliament forthwith to enable Parliament to perform its legitimate functions.

Sri Lanka was plunged in to a constitutional crisis after President Maithripala Sirisena appointed Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister.

The incumbent, Ranil Wickremesinghe is insisting he is still the Prime Minister saying it was unconstitutional to remove him and appoint another.

President Sirisena suspended parliament Sunday. .(Economy Next)

Sri Lanka President says cannot work with Ranil, assassination allegations not taken seriously

Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena said he could not work with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who acted unilaterally, and he took the decision to sack him because allegations of a conspiracy to kill him were not taken seriously.

Amid charges that President Sirisena had violated the constitution, he said legal experts had advised him that the now controversial sacking was within the constitution.

President Sirisena said Wickremesinghe could not work in co-operation and there were policy and a cultural gulf between them.

Sirisena said a scam at the central bank went against the principles of the administration they formed.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe had also awarded contracts irregularly, which he wanted to probe further.

He said allegations by a person called Namal Kumara, was not taken seriously by police chief Pujitha Jayasundera.

President Sirisena said he then invited Mahinda Rajapaksa to be prime minister.

"I ask all members of the 225 parliament to support this decision," he said in Sinhalese.

He said he decided form a government with Mahinda Rajapaksa for the benefit of the country.

"We will reach this aim, strengthen democratic rule, strengthen the freedom of the people, human rights, fundamental rights, media freedom, all rights and priviledges strengthened and build a prosperous nation," he said.(Economy Next)