

AN IDEAL PRESIDENTIAL MANIFESTO 2024



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SRI LANKA

This manifesto, grounded in the core principle of enlightening and empowering the entire population of Sri Lanka, has been meticulously crafted to advocate for the selection of an 'independent candidate', to reform laws and the constitution towards more democratic governance, to implement measures preventing the exploitation of opportunities for personal gain, and to establish norms for term limits. It is intricately linked to a public consultation process and a concrete action plan. Rooted in the fundamental belief in enabling voters to make well-informed decisions, it thoroughly delineates essential principles that must be integrated into our constitution to bring about crucial #System Changes and elucidate their underlying rationales. Complementing this document is a carefully devised, time-bound, realistic action plan. The active involvement of individuals, especially the vibrant engagement of young Sri Lankans, is crucial to advancing this national initiative. The manifesto aims to translate the shared vision outlined above into tangible reality, fostering an environmentally sustainable Sri Lanka characterised by unity, peace, integrity, and expanded opportunities for all.

Purpose

This pivotal public document stands as the collective agreement of a diverse assembly of committed Sri Lankan professionals who have volunteered their expertise. Our shared objective is to forge a positive impact, particularly for the youth of Sri Lanka, through the initiation of a transformative #System Change aimed at restoring the true essence of democracy. Emphasising the urgent need to eradicate the widespread issues of corruption, malpractice, and indiscipline resulting from political mismanagement, the manifesto provides unwavering support from factual evidence and supplementary links for comprehensive explanations in both Sinhala and Tamil languages.

At its core, this manifesto underscores the indispensable role that every Sri Lankan citizen plays in this collective endeavour, championing inclusivity without regard to gender, race, or religion. It calls for equal dedication from various societal sectors, including clergy, healthcare professionals, teachers, farmers, and individuals from all walks of life, irrespective of scale. The manifesto envisions a united commitment from diverse segments of society, working collaboratively to achieve a national mission that reshapes the political landscape for the benefit of all. This call to action seeks to foster a political environment that serves the greater good, embodying the unity of our nation as one indivisible entity, aiming to bring about transformative “#System Change.”

Background

This manifesto passionately calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of the current Executive Presidency, acknowledging its alarming shift towards autocracy and its contribution to Sri Lanka being labelled as a ‘flawed’ democracy. It advocates for the reinstatement of this crucial office through new legislation within the framework of a genuinely democratic government, aspiring to create an impartial, non-autocratic, and pro-democratic executive that upholds principles of just and equitable governance.

The document meticulously points out the current presidency as a significant hindrance to meaningful systemic transformation, tracing its devolution into an undemocratic force since its establishment in 1978. Despite initial intentions to fortify democratic governance with proportional representation, each officeholder has displayed autocratic tendencies, resulting in malpractices, cultural erosion, and atrocities undermining democratic values.

Founded on a commitment to democratic ideals, the manifesto urges a re-evaluation of the Executive Presidency, pushing for its integration into a democratic structure that reflects the people’s aspirations. The proposed changes aim to break away from autocratic patterns, ushering in an era of transparent, accountable, and democratic governance prioritising the nation and its citizens.

Simultaneously, the manifesto highlights the troubling evolution of the presidency into a dictatorship through 21 constitutional amendments, making the election system designed to make the opposition weak with no regard for equality of vote. Alarming norms such as manipulating the electoral system, dismantling checks and balances, and suppressing dissent have exacerbated a debt crisis and compromised recovery efforts. The manifesto contends that the existing presidency must be abolished through a constitutional amendment facilitated by a referendum to establish a parliament centred around the people's needs.

This radical shift is imperative for national recovery, elevating living standards, and preserving a non-aligned global stance. The manifesto emphasises that reversing the autocratic governance framework is crucial for arresting economic downturns, curbing human rights abuses, eradicating corruption, countering brain drain, and safeguarding cultural heritage. This comprehensive overhaul is seen not only as a political necessity but as a vital stride toward a future characterised by accountable leadership, sustained growth, and the preservation of national values.

The Independent Presidential candidate 2024

To implement the proposed action plan effectively, the candidate under consideration must steadfastly align with the essential eligibility criteria delineated in Appendix 1. Primary among these prerequisites is an unmistakable track record showcasing expertise and competence in public service and welfare. The ideal president should manifest a pragmatic and independent mindset, untethered from past political affiliations, and assume the role of a team leader, epitomising a national ethos.

Of paramount significance is the imperative for the candidate to operate with a selfless commitment devoid of personal ambitions or an inclination towards an extended political career for personal gain. This ensures that the candidate focuses on the nation's and its citizens' well-being. After a successful election, the candidate should commit to the predetermined time-bound action plan. Post-implementation, a pivotal step involves willingly stepping down from office, thereby facilitating the instigation of necessary electoral and structural changes that will fortify the democratic state parliament and curtail opportunities for malpractice.

This approach not only signifies a dedication to the principles of democratic governance but also acts as a safeguard against the concentration of power and potential abuse. By prioritising the nation's welfare over personal interests, the candidate

contributes to steering the country away from potential pitfalls, fostering unity, and propelling it towards becoming an autonomous, unified nation characterised by peace and prosperity. The successful candidate, therefore, adheres to indispensable eligibility criteria, embodying a proven track record of experience, competence, and an unwavering commitment to national welfare.

Action plan of the newly elected Independent President

1. ABOLITION OF PRESIDENCY WITHIN 6 MONTHS

The incoming president, as the singular representative of the nation, makes an unwavering commitment to kickstart a comprehensive constitutional reform process within the initial three months of assuming office. This transformative process encompasses an exhaustive public consultation, already underway and accessible to all Sri Lankan citizens (via <https://forms.office.com/r/ErryE9CLPt?origin=lprLink>), inviting them to express their preferences on crucial constitutional amendments. The ongoing public consultation ensures that the voice of every citizen is heard and considered in shaping the future of the nation.

A distinctive feature of this process is that any proposed amendment gaining a consensus of over 60% in the public consultation will undergo a national referendum within the first three months of the presidency. This referendum, employing a straightforward yes/no response format, serves as a direct expression of the will of the people. Amendments securing majority approval will then be officially incorporated into the constitution, with the president committing to initiating the process of abolishing the presidency within the subsequent three months.

This innovative approach guarantees a transparent and participatory constitutional reform process, empowering the citizens to directly shape the future of their governance. The ultimate goal is to transition away from the autocratic governance that has characterised the nation's past. By ensuring that the decisions are stamped by the will of the Sri Lankan citizens themselves, rather than solely relying on parliamentary representatives, this approach marks a significant departure from traditional methods and underscores a commitment to genuine democratic principles.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT VIA A PUBLIC REFERENDUM

In the earnest pursuit of a more just and accountable governance, it is confidently anticipated that the Sri Lankan public will empower the incoming president to initiate a draft of constitutional amendments, following the approval garnered through a referendum. These proposed amendments aim to shape the constitution in alignment with the will of the people, ensuring a steadfast commitment to fundamental principles and values that resonate with the diverse population. Critical to this process is the unwavering commitment to adhering to international standards of fairness, transparency, and legitimacy in conducting the referendum. The procedures will be meticulously designed to uphold democratic ideals, providing the citizens with a genuine opportunity to express their views on constitutional amendments.

The referendum will be characterised by:

1. **Fairness:** Ensuring equal access to information for all citizens, allowing them to make informed decisions. Measures will be in place to prevent any form of undue influence or manipulation.
2. **Transparency:** The entire process will be conducted transparently, from the formulation of the proposed amendments to the dissemination of information to the public. This includes clear communication of the implications and potential outcomes of each proposed amendment.

3. **Legitimacy:** The referendum will adhere to legal frameworks and constitutional procedures. The process will be conducted with the highest regard for legal standards, reinforcing the legitimacy of the entire exercise.

4. **Inclusivity:** Efforts will be made to ensure the inclusivity of all segments of the population, promoting participation from various demographic groups. No citizen will be marginalised, and avenues for participation will be accessible to everyone.

By upholding these international standards, the referendum process will not only reflect the genuine will of the Sri Lankan public but also reinforce the commitment to democratic governance. This approach seeks to cultivate a more just and accountable system that truly represents the aspirations and values of the people. The proposed constitutional amendments reflect a comprehensive and forward-thinking vision for Sri Lanka, emphasising fundamental principles of human rights, diversity, accountability, and social responsibility.

Here's a summary of the key points:

I. Enshrinement of UN Declared Basic Human Rights:

- Incorporating all 30 Basic **Human Rights** declared by the United Nations into the constitution.

II. Diversity and Merit-Based Appointments:

- Embracing diversity and **eliminating discrimination** in all public appointments based on race, gender, religion, or disability.

III. Establishment of Common ‘Sri Lankan’ Identity:

- Establishing a common ‘Sri Lankan’ identity to ensure **equal rights** for every citizen.

IV. Independent Judiciary and Police Services:

- Establishing independent Judiciary and Police services **free of political interference**.
- Ensuring **zero tolerance** for bribery and corruption, with severe punishment and asset recovery.

V. Establishment of Independent Commissions:

- Creating **Independent** Commissions for various sectors including Civil Administration, Central Bank, Elections Services, Judiciary Services, Bribery Prevention, and Government Auditing.
- Implement an independent **quality assurance** pathway to maintain standards and include public feedback in all public services.

VI. Maximum Tenure and Accountability:

- Limiting the maximum tenure to **4 years** for all elected public positions, including politicians.
- Implementing independent Public Service Commission control and **accountability** for politicians is also considered public servants.
- **Scrapping** the ‘duty-free’ concept for all, including politicians.
- Automatically **invalidating** the right to the elected seat for politicians involved in party crossovers.

VII. Legalised Social Responsibility:

- Making social responsibility a **duty of the state** for pregnant women, old-age people, children, and disabled individuals.
- Providing a one-year **accredited** apprenticeship for all working-class citizens to develop a skill of their choice.

VIII. Non-Aligned Secular Liberal Democracy:

- Affirming Sri Lanka as a **non-aligned** secular liberal democracy.

IX. Reactivation of People's 'Right to Call-Back':

- Reactivating the People's '**Right to Call-Back**' elected representatives with a minimum of 20% voter base for a by-election.

X. Reforming the electoral process to establish equality of the vote and honour meritocracy at regional and national levels.

- The **electoral reforms** necessary are listed in the appendix 2.

XI. Abolish Presidency:

- Vesting all powers of the President in the newly elected parliament to **redefine** the roles of the prime minister, ministers, and members of parliament.
- Making them service-oriented with minimal burden on public funds.

These proposals collectively aim to foster a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic governance system in Sri Lanka, addressing issues of discrimination, corruption, and political accountability while promoting human rights, diversity, and social responsibility.

Upon attaining a consensus of 50% or more on each item in the referendum, the president pledges to spearhead the revision of the constitution. This approach guarantees that the constitutional amendments accurately mirror the authentic aspirations and values of the people.

3. REFORM THE FLAWED ELECTORAL SYSTEM.

Implement the accepted constitutional amendments, incorporating the will of the people as expressed through the referendum results. This phase may involve drafting, legislative processes, and other necessary steps to enact the reforms. The outgoing president should now overlook implementation of all proposals advocated by the referendum including the comprehensive reform of the electoral system. The focus is on transitioning to a meritocratic approach at both regional and national levels listed in Appendix 2 . The reform aims to ensure vote equality and fairness in candidate selection and elections through proportional representation. This includes implementing stringent eligibility criteria such as age above 21, a clean criminal record, and proficiency in at least one national language. The overall goal is to establish a transparent, accountable, and representative political system that upholds the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and meritocracy.

4. DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT; APPOINT A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT TO HOLD THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION UNDER THE NEW REFORMED ELECTION SYSTEM

With our mission accomplished, we have embarked on the journey of #SystemsChange, aiming to transform into a fully democratic and peaceful nation. Our goal is to restore our glory and emerge as a developed, shining 'Pearl' in the Indian Ocean. The responsibility of steering this path lies in the hands of the people, particularly the youth.

5. ABOLISH PRESIDENCY AND QUIT IN DIGNITY.

The departing president will not be eligible to run in the upcoming parliamentary election.

6. A MISSION FOR THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARLIMENT

The vitality of democratic governance relies on the establishment of robust checks and balances, crucial for preventing those in power from exploiting their positions for personal gain, often to the detriment of the nation, its security, and valuable assets. Unfortunately, we have witnessed a regrettable lapse in this regard over the past 76 years, as our elected representatives shrewdly dismantled the checks and balances inherent in legitimate people's governance, transforming it into an autocratic and harmful structure. This transformation has proven disastrous for our resource-rich nation, pushing it into bankruptcy and subjecting our citizens to profound misery.

Consider, for example, the appointment of key positions, a process that should strictly adhere to the recommendations of the relevant department within an eligible cohort of three names. Notably, the President should be devoid of arbitrary powers to remove or dismiss appointed officials. The disqualification of an appointed official must follow an independent pathway, untainted by biases or undue influence. Government business is not business.

Since the 1970s, despite taking a solemn oath to uphold the Constitution, elected representatives have persistently violated its principles. It is paramount to institute a system of consequences for such transgressions, ranging from admonishments to measured punishments, and, in severe cases,

disqualification from elected positions. Our collective aspiration should be the cultivation of a nation that steadfastly upholds constitutionalism, with everyone dutifully adhering to the law, a sentiment underscored by both our police force and politicians.

Proposing a robust framework to safeguard our democratic processes from manipulation by political opportunists, we advocate for a comprehensive **five-pillar governance** structure. This structure, comprising The Constitution, The Legislature, The Judiciary, The Executive, and Independent Regulatory Oversight Commissions, holds immense potential to fortify our democratic foundations. To enhance this system, strategic measures such as reducing the size of the Parliament and reinstating the Senate are recommended. The envisaged roles for the Senate encompass reviewing and revising Parliament-approved bills, serving as the vigilant custodian of the Constitution to ensure strict compliance, guaranteeing checks and balances among the five pillars, enforcing dormant constitutional provisions and parliamentary regulations, acting as a watchdog for parliamentarism and constitutionalism, and ensuring limited, accountable, and responsible governance across all levels. This comprehensive approach aims to cultivate a resilient system that withstands the pitfalls of unchecked power while maintaining cleanliness, efficiency, and discipline at every echelon of governance..

The 'Five Pillar Governance'

The Constitution

THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND

Upheld and respected across the length and breadth of the country.

The Legislature

Reduce the composition of the Parliament and re-establish the Senate.

The Judiciary

Independent with Police with a inbuilt quality assurance process

The Executive

Redesign limiting the powers of the executive presidency.

The Independent Commissions

Elections
Central Bank
Judiciary and Police
Civil Administration

'Government Business is not Business'

Appendix 1 Selecting an ideal candidate: the qualities of the individual that should be considered in this process.

- Mature, Experienced, Politically unbranded.
- Sri Lankan citizen with a frugal living lifestyle.
- Well-versed in public service, connected with diverse communities.
- Understands people's lifestyles, challenges, and needs.
- Clean record for a decade, no convictions of bribery, corruption, or criminality.
- Resident in Sri Lanka and financially independent.
- Not politically aligned. Will abide by election rules to the tooth.
- Values consensus, disciplined, and has an honest track record.
- Pragmatic, unbiased, relies on facts, and mature opinions.
- Strategic listener with a global perspective. Understands the need for global connectivity as a country, its risks, advantages, and needs.
- Transparent about presidential candidacy requirements.
- Resilient to criticisms, promotes humanity and human rights passionately.
- Dedicated to a non-aligned Sri Lanka.
- Committed to law and order, discipline, and zero tolerance for corruption.

Appendix 2 Proposed Electoral Reforms following the referendum.

1. Adherence to Electoral Rules: ...

a. Mandate that political parties nominate candidates who are residents of the relevant districts.

Justification: ensures a stronger connection between candidates and their constituents, preventing the propagation of various 'dynasties' and reducing the risk of public exploitation, corruption, criminality, and violence associated with parachuting candidates into districts.

b. Establish a district electorate merit order to prevent the perpetuation of political dynasties.

Justification: This ensures meritocratic candidate selection at the regional level, promoting true allegiance with the local people and voter protection, ultimately enhancing the equality of the vote.

c. Application of strict voter eligibility criteria.

Justification: This includes selecting candidates who meet at least the minimum requirements to hold a job in the public sector, ensuring candidates' eligibility and competence, and preventing the appointment of individuals with criminal records

2. Declaration of Assets & Liabilities:

Introduce an affidavit to the Declaration of Assets & Liabilities for each candidate, following the successful model of the Election Commission of India.

Justification: This adds transparency to candidates' financial standings, curbs corruption, and provides voters with crucial information for an informed decision.

3. Bonus seat allocation:

Completely dispense with the allocation of bonus seats.

Justification: This ensures equitable distribution of votes and prevents disproportionate advantages to the winning party. This also promotes 'equality of vote,' improving election fairness and preventing the distortion of election results whilst weakening the opposition.

4. Vote Deletion Policy:

Withdraw the practice of discarding votes of Parties securing less < 5%

Justification: This promotes equality of votes and prevents the promotion of 'decoy candidates', reduces the risk of violence, and ensures equal recognition for valid votes in the electoral process.

5. Vote-Based Seat Allocation:

Advocate for basing election results and seat allocation on valid votes cast rather than the number of voters registered.

Justification: This promotes equality of vote, prevents inappropriate seat allocation, ensures representation based on actual votes, and discourages malpractices such as decoy candidates and voter intimidation.

6. Manifesto Accountability:

Persuade political parties to publish genuine manifestos with a clear accountability framework and a time-lined action plan.

Justification: This empowers voters with transparent information and holds political parties accountable for their promises.

These imperative changes are pivotal for upholding democratic principles and ensuring the welfare of our nation. Our primary mission is to achieve #'System Changes', steering away from mere rhetoric or false promises. It is your unwavering commitment that will transform this vision into a tangible reality for all citizens, fostering a fully democratic state grounded in transparency, accountability, and genuine representation.

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TEATIME



Scan here for Public Consultation
on Constitutional Changes

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