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News » Interview » Campaign finance reforms essential – CMEV

Campaign finance reforms essential – CMEV

The hot topic these days is electoral reforms. Each and every political party is concerned with the electoral reforms and many proposals have been brought in. One of the major election monitoring bodies, Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) Technical Advisor D.M. Dissanayake, speaking to Ceylon Today, expressed views about these proposed electoral reforms.

During the interview, he noted that there are decisions taken based on the interest of political parties and individual politicians, instead of the best interest of the public. When an electoral system is created what should be considered are geographical factors, demographic factors and the political structure of the country, not the interest of political parties.

Ceylontoday, 2015-06-22 02:00:00

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Campaign finance reforms essential – CMEV

By Umesh Moramudali and Ruwan Laknath Jayakody

The hot topic these days is electoral reforms. Each and every political party is concerned with the electoral reforms and many proposals have been brought in. One of the major election monitoring bodies, Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) Technical Advisor D.M. Dissanayake, speaking to Ceylon Today, expressed views about these proposed electoral reforms.

During the interview, he noted that there are decisions taken based on the interest of political parties and individual politicians, instead of the best interest of the public. When an electoral system is created what should be considered are geographical factors, demographic factors and the political structure of the country, not the interest of political parties.

? There is much talk regarding electoral reforms and it has become the need of the hour. What is your view on this

A: The suggestion to change the electoral system is not a new idea. It has been there for a long period of time and there has been a lot of talk about the electoral reforms over the years. However, now it seems that it has become a real need.

Ever since Proportional Representation (PR) was introduced, there had been many criticisms against it. Although several amendments were brought to the electoral system, those had made the situation from bad to worse. There were concerns about the spreading violence due to the PR system.

The major issue of the PR system is the lack of electing people's representatives who represent electorates. It does not ensure that every electorate gets a representative in Parliament unlike in the First-Past-The-Post System. As a result of that the distance between the public and the people's representatives is very high.

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j.v.p leader takes Govt. to task (89-96273-news-detail-jvp-leader-takes-govt-to-task.html)

?: JVP shouldered the burden of bringing this government into power. Why do you openly and harshly criticize the government now? A: Our aim...

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The controversial ex-Minister of Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa arrested and

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Tpb to work with private sector (22-96263-news-detail-tpb-to-work-with-private-sector.html)

The Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau that has been dog with financial misappropriation to the value of Rs. 750 million the earlier regime that cut across

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Dutch and SL Dairy delegation meet (22-96260-news-detail-dutch-and-sl-dairy-delegation-meet.html)

Nearly 40 Sri Lankan firms and a visiting Dutch delegation too in a 'Business Matchmaking' which was managed by the CCC Solutions, a fully owned subsidiary

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However, there were good things about the PR system as well. For example, it ensured the representation of minorities and minor parties who are likely to get less chance in the F-P-T-P System.

Due to the consistent concerns of political parties and civil society to change the electoral system, a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) was appointed few years back. However, the talk of electoral reforms remerged with the President pledging to set up electoral reforms in his manifesto. Now it has come in the form of the 20th Amendment.

? There were several proposals regarding reforms. The one put to the Cabinet was a system which would increase the number of MPs up to 237. According to that there will be 140 MPs who would represent electorates while others will be selected based on the PR system. Earlier there were suggestions to increase the number of MPs to 255 as well. What is your stance on this

A: Actually we are very concerned as to how the system is created. This has an immense significance as it is the electoral system which links the public and the MPs. It is a huge issue if the electoral system does not match with public interest.

However, what we feel is that there are decisions taken based on the interest of political parties and individual politicians instead of the best interest of the public. When an electoral system is created what should be considered are geographical factors, demographic factors and the political structure of the country, not the interest of political parties.

It is not that simple to change the numbers according to the will of political parties. If there are only 140 MPs to represent electorates which mean that the number of electorates would be reduced to 140 from 160. Even under the F-P-T-P which divided the country into 160 electorates there were shortcomings. Because there were concerns about the area covered by electorates and certain people did not get representatives.

For example, Ampara is a huge electorate and as a result of that an area like Dehiattakandiya is often ignored by politicians. They visit the area only during the election period. Therefore, in our opinion 160 electorates are not enough. Another example is certain electorates from the Badulla District. There are electorates which cover vast areas located on two sides of mountains. It is difficult for the candidates as well as the public. Therefore, the reduction in number of electorates is not something that would benefit the people.

? If reducing the number of electorates is not the solution, what should be the alternative
 A: As I noted earlier, when deciding the number of electorates the geographical and demography factors should be considered along with the political structure and economical factors. In our opinion the numbers should not be decided first. According to demographic and geographical factors the number of electorates would be decided. Also the minority representation should be ensured through whatever the Amendments that are brought forward.

? The Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe suggested not to increase the number of MPs to more than 225, as it would increase the expenditure to maintain MPs. What do you say about this
 A: Well if we decide the number of MPs that should be in Parliament based on the expenditure to maintain them, it is a joke. We have a culture of making most of the MPs ministers which incurs a massive cost.

As long as we cannot reduce the number of ministers we cannot reduce the cost of maintaining ministers. Politicians cannot say that number of MPs selected cannot be increased despite the requirement. Always the people's representation would be ensured. Politicians can't decide what new electoral system would be. Politicians when they think of an electoral system, they focus on as to how a party can progress from the system. A delimitation committee suggested of increasing the number of electorates. However, political parties should not be involved in the process. When politicians get involved in the electoral system they create an electoral system which can be biased towards their party.

We must keep in mind about the minority representation also. It is the lack of minority representation in Parliament in the early post independent era that laid the foundation to a conflict.

? Amidst the discussions about electoral reforms there are suggestions to increase women participation in politics as well. What are your thoughts on it
 A: CMEV believes that women representation should be ensured at all levels. It is unfortunate that we have very limited number of women in Parliament, although the world's first woman Prime Minister is from Sri Lanka. We are in the view that 30 per cent of Parliament should be allocated to women. Over the years there have been claims demanding quotas for women, in Parliament and other political bodies. However, it was not considered seriously by any of the political parties. Also there should be a space for women in the national list.

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Social Services, Welfare and Livestock Development, Deputy Minister Ranjan Ramanayake's politics is no different to the characters he portray in...

Rides the fashion wave (89-95699-news-detail-rides-the-fashion-wave.html)

? Did you always want to be a designer
 A. Since grade 2, I knew I would be someone in the creative field. Even then I would make drawings ...

20th Amendment Concerned citizens shocked (89-95595-news-detail-20th-amendment-concerned-citizens-shocked.html)

Executive Director of Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE), Rajith Keerthi Tennakoon, spoke to Ceylon Today about the 20th Amendment, th...

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Indian fishermen ruthless to marine life Commercial (90-96272-news-detail-indian-fishermen-ruthless-to-marine-life-commercial-fishing-the-destroyer.html)

Northern Province Fisher People Unity Organization Secretary N.V.Subramaniam lambasted the intrusion of Indian fishermen Northern waters, as ruthless, saying

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- Maize mafia hits poultry food producers (90-96191-news-detail-maize-mafia-hits-poultry-food-producers.html)
- Spriti Spray and Cola Spray Criminal inebriation... (90-96102-news-detail-spriti-spray-and-cola-spray-criminal-inebriation-children.html)

Ranasinghe Premadasa The people's President (90-96274-news-detail-ranasinghe-premadasa-the-peoples-president.html)

Today we are commemorating the memory of the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa, a visionary of a leader of our time, who during his whole adult life worked indefatigably

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How to Hold Ministers responsible (90-96190-news-detail-how-to-hold-ministers-responsible.html)

? Speaking of the national list what should be the criteria to become a national list MP

A: The idea of national list was introduced with the aim of ensuring the representation of experts, professionals and academics with the aim of getting their contribution to policy making. The Government was unable to proceed with the Constitutional Council due to extreme ideas of certain MPs.

? Do you think that the educational qualification of A/L's is required to become an MP

A: We are of the view that people's representatives should be educated. However, we cannot call for laws as it would be a restriction of human rights. Everyone has right to represent the people. Yet, political parties have a responsibility to ensure that they put forward educated candidates. It is good for the party also.

? Along with the 20th Amendment there has been many talks about Campaign Finance Reforms. UPFA General Secretary Susil Premajayantha said that Campaign Finance Reforms will not be introduced along with the 20th Amendment, what is your view on that

A: Comparing with other countries, Sri Lanka is seriously lacking in integrity. Most of the countries are very transparent regarding election expenses.

In the case of Sri Lanka, we do not know where the money comes from to political parties. Most parties do not even present their annual financial reports. Campaign

Finance Reforms, are an essential reforms and it should be given prominence.

Campaign Finance Reforms are needed before 20th Amendment.

responsible.html)

Since 1956 financial power is exercised not by the Secretaries of the Heads of Departments as required in the Financial Regulations but surreptitiously by the ministers.

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Maize mafia hits poultry food producers (90-96191-news-detail-maize-mafia-hits-poultry-food-producers.html)

Maize harvest for this year has been very poor. As a result, the poultry producers in Sri Lanka are experiencing a hard time. However, at an international conference

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