

Implement the 13th Amendment, abolish the presidency

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The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna has taken the campaign to abolish the executive presidency as the most important political task of today. Everywhere, the walls are full of anti executive presidency posters, in dashing colours. Top ranking leaders of the JVP are scheduled to address meetings, to explain the terrible situation created by this black hole in the constitution. Pressure is brought on opposition parties to join them in their holy war against this devilish menace. It is a surprise and also somewhat ridiculous. Only a few years back, the JVP was telling the masses that the power of the president was a heaven sent gift for the war against the Tamil rebellion. In fact before that, they blamed President Chandrika for not using executive powers to undermine the activities of former Prime Minister Wickremesinghe. Wimal expressed his party's - the JVP - displeasure by calling Chandrika a Bibikkama. However, all that is changed now. Now Tilvin and Amarasinghe have found, that the presidency is at the centre of all the evil, that is affecting Lanka. So, the demand is that all citizens should support the white knights of the JVP in its spiritual struggle against the dictatorial constitution!

It was reported in one weekend newspaper that the opposition political parties recognize that the executive presidency, as the fountain of all ills that have plagued the country and is a threat to democracy. The indications from government ranks are that there is a possibility of holding an early presidential election, even by early next year, have prompted opposition political parties to join the JVP to oppose the holding of another presidential election. They claim that President Rajapaksa should honour the pledge which he had made during the 2005 presidential election campaign, where he said he would abolish the executive presidency. I am very happy that all opposition parties including the UNP accept that the dictatorial constitution of JR is the fountain of all ills of Lanka. On 4th Feb 1978 I was arrested for hoisting black flags against this constitution. The New Sama Samaja Party organized at that time an islandwide black flags campaign against this menace, and explained the disastrous consequences. No other party or organization protested at that stage, though later many were critical of the constitution. I was later remanded and had to taste the isolation of imprisonment at Bogambara. For the same crime I was thrown out of my job at the Peradeniya University and to date I have not received any relief for the violation of my fundamental rights.

Centralized power

However, when JR agreed to devolve power in 1986, we agreed that it was an attempt to dissolve the centralized power of the presidency. On the other hand, the presidential election is an islandwide affair with all citizens taken as one electorate. Hence in that election all small nationalities and communities get an opportunity to influence the candidates to look into minority rights. In a country where only 70 percent are Sinhala, no presidential candidate can dream of coming to power on the basis of Sinhala chauvinism. Therefore, one could say even though the presidency is flawed, the presidential election has a democratic dimension.

So it is clear that merely opposing the presidential elections without at the same time fighting for the 13th amendment, is not acceptable. I am surprised to see that the Muslim Congress, Democratic People's Front, and the TNA are named as collaborators of the campaign started by the JVP. Can

they agree to abolish the presidency and devolution together, and get back to a parliament under Sinhala chauvinist hegemony? They should not. No support could be given to the campaign of the JVP against presidential elections, unless they seriously commit themselves to devolution of power beyond the 13th amendment. It should be clear that the intention of chauvinists is to abolish both the presidency and devolution of power, in order to go back to a parliament with Sinhala chauvinist hegemony. All democratic forces should get together to counter this menace, which is by far the worst.

P.S.

* From lakbimanews column.