

RESTORATION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SRI LANKA'S RETURN TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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The [resignation of Sri Lanka's Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa as Member of Parliament](#) on Thursday did not come as a surprise, given the adverse public mood he and the rest of his family, including his brothers President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, have been facing. But what was surprising was that he took a month to quit after unprecedented violence in Sri Lanka. The violence was an outcome of the attack unleashed by supporters of the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) on peaceful anti-government protesters, who have been running the campaign "Go home Gota [Gotabaya Rajapaksa]" over the country's worst economic crisis. It needs no reiteration that Basil Rajapaksa, regarded as the livewire of the SLPP, was perceived in certain quarters as one of those responsible for the attack on the protesters. His political departure comes at a time when efforts are on to get [Cabinet clearance for the proposed 21st Constitutional Amendment](#), which is aimed at empowering Parliament over the executive President, apart from barring those holding dual citizenship from entering the legislature. Basil Rajapaksa, who holds American citizenship too, would have been affected and realisation may have dawned on him.

The development should provide a breather to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has been battling for significant changes in the Constitution. Needless to say, he would like the complete restoration of the 19th Amendment, which was adopted by Parliament in April 2015 when he was the PM; Maithripala Sirisena was the President. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who assured his country days after the violence that he would take steps to amend the Constitution to bring back the 19th Amendment, should honour his word. He should not be influenced by voices within the SLPP that the economic agenda should take precedence over the political agenda of constitutional amendments. The two agendas have become so intertwined that the government's performance in the context of the political agenda would create a conducive climate for the international community to consider investing in Sri Lanka in a big way. The President, who has said that he would like to complete his remaining term of two and a half years, should keep this in mind and facilitate the task of Mr. Wickremesinghe in reconstructing the beleaguered economy. One should not forget that the 19th Amendment, while in force, was no bar for then President Maithripala Sirisena to effect a constitutional coup. This is why the demand for the abolition of the office of executive President assumes significance. There may still be a long way to go for abolition but, in the event of the proposed 21st Amendment being passed, the experience gained should be used by all stakeholders constructively to pursue the goal of bringing back the parliamentary form of government, which was in existence in Sri Lanka for 30 years since Independence in 1948.

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