

05-07-2023

Secretary,
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
CPA Headquarters Secretariat
c/o Richmond House
Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 0AA
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A Grave Affront to the Rights and Privileges of the Parliament of Sri Lanka

We, the Leader of the Opposition and other Members of the Opposition in the Parliament of Sri Lanka, think it fit to address you on a matter adversely affecting the strength of our Parliamentary traditions which we regard as an integral aspect of our cherished democratic heritage.

As you are aware, Sri Lanka ranks among the oldest and most vibrant democracies in South and South East Asia. Our people enjoyed universal adult franchise even prior to the attainment of Independence. The abiding faith of our people in the tenets of democratic governance has survived numerous challenges and vicissitudes in our contemporary history.

The Legislative Council, the State Council, the National State Assembly and the Parliament of Sri Lanka have served, successively, as the repository of legislative power through a range of constitutional reforms spanning well over a century.

Parliament today represents the cornerstone of our constitutional architecture. The Legislature occupies pride of place in Chapter X of the country's Constitution.

We are deservedly proud of the depth and quality of the democratic values which pervade the entirety of our constitutional system. This is not a mere matter of legal form: it expresses the inherent beliefs and convictions of our people.

The pivotal features of our Parliamentary system have equipped us with the resolve to overcome crises of daunting complexity.

The essential balance between Government and Opposition, the entitlement of all Members of Parliament to equal dignity and consideration, opportunity for articulation of diverse points of view in Parliamentary debates, fairness in recourse to procedures, fidelity to commitments and an environment of comity and mutual respect are, in our view, necessary ingredients of a functioning Parliamentary democracy.

We believe that these are not ensured solely by legal provisions, be they contained in the Constitution or in delegated legislation such as the Standing Orders of Parliament.

No less important, we are convinced, are the concepts of equity, decency and fair dealing which inform the very core of the Parliamentary process.

The robust quality of this culture depends, principally, on the role of the Speaker of Parliament. His office has evolved, historically, as the custodian of the rights and privileges of Parliament and represents the ultimate bulwark against erosion of Parliamentary authority by the Executive or any other external agency.

The critical significance of this function is nowhere set out with greater emphasis than in the inspiring words of Speaker Lenthall of the House of Commons in England, addressed to King Charles I at the height of a Civil War. This classic assertion has resonated down the ages, and forms the wellspring of Parliamentary authority across the Commonwealth.

It is against this backdrop that we feel acute concern about some current developments regarding the behaviour and attitudes of the Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

A series of situations indicative of sustained bias and partisanship culminated in the deeply disturbing actions of the Speaker on the occasion of the debate in Parliament, on Saturday 01 July, on the Government's proposals in respect of domestic debt restructuring.

At a meeting of the Parliamentary Business Committee, consisting of Party Leaders, held on the preceding day, Friday 30 June, it was decided that the debate would commence at 9 a.m. on the following day and that the vote would be taken at 7.30 p.m., subject to the time being extended if the list of speakers on the published list submitted by the Government and Opposition Whips had not been exhausted at that time.

Taking the House by surprise, however, the Speaker, at the allotted hour, abruptly brought the proceedings to an end and called for the vote to be taken, dismissing in cavalier fashion vehement protests by the Leader of the Opposition and other Members of the House that the letter and spirit of the agreement arrived at on the previous day, was being flagrantly violated. Regrettably, their pleas fell upon deaf ears.

We look upon this lapse, very much in line with similar arbitrary and prejudiced decisions made by the Speaker consistently in recent months, as a grave infringement of the legitimate rights and privileges of the Opposition in Parliament.

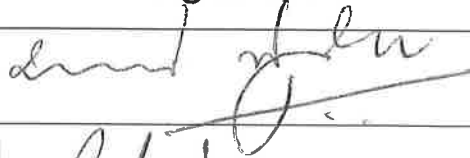



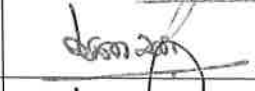


The substance of the debate, involving as it did the fate of superannuation funds and the monetary entitlements of hundreds of thousands of working people, was of the highest possible importance to the public.

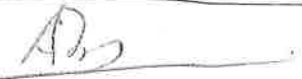


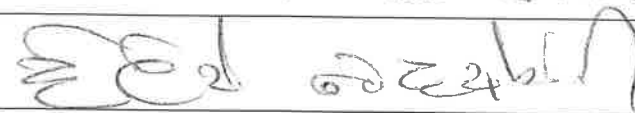






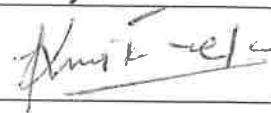




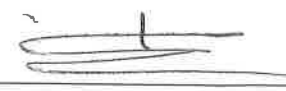



Sadly, these considerations received short shrift at the hands of the Speaker whose recurring conduct strikes at the root of objectivity and impartiality, and deprives the proceedings of Parliament of the gravitas which we have hitherto taken for granted.

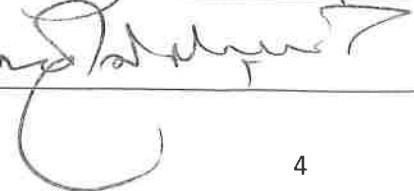
We consider it our duty to bring to your notice these unfortunate trends, destructive of seminal democratic values which have defined the foundations of our democratic way of life. They seriously diminish, in our view, the esteem of the public for the integrity and stature of the institution of Parliament.

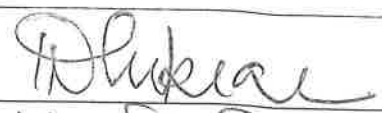
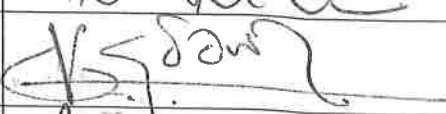

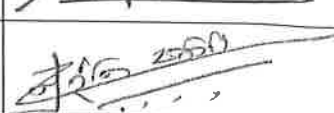
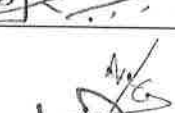




It is our hope and expectation that you will use your good offices, in an appropriate manner, to do all you can to ensure the survival, and hopefully the further strengthening, of sound Parliamentary traditions which, up to now, have been a source of amply deserved pride to us all.

Yours sincerely,

Name	Signature
SAJITH Praveen ADABA	
R. M. BANDARA	
Saikhunisa Kulkarni	
G. L. Perera	
Gayanthi Karunatilaka	
H.G. Weerasinghe Weerasinghe	
Previnde Kumaratunga	

Name	Signature
Ashoke Abeg Singh	
K. Sajith Sanjaya Perera	
Harshen de Silva	
	
Naloka Godahewa	
Imran Mahasool.	
W.H.M. 	
Charlaine Wendy	
Kings Nilsa	
W.M. Rohana Bandula Wisesundara	
Velu Kumar	
V. Radhakrishnan	
S.C. Atawathawala	
Dr. Kavinda Jayawardana	
M. Udayakumar.	
Hector Appuhamy	
Nalin Bandara	



Name	Signature
TRALATHA ATUKORALE	
Udaya Gammanpila	
S. M. Manikkar	
Buddhika Pathirana	
Kebir Hashim	
Vasudera Nanayakkara	
Waruna Liyanage.	
RAUF HAKKEM	
MANO GANESAN	
Lilayana Kirindigode	