

Fresh Thinking for a new Generation - An Agenda

Vision

- We as a nation must face the reality that a large number of our leaders at all levels and sectors of our society are outdated and ill-equipped to make the paradigm shifts necessary to lead us through a technology-driven 21st century. Owing to a sense of hopelessness and frustration, over the years some of the best and brightest Sri Lankans have left and continue to leave our shores. It is unlikely that this trend will be reversed if there is no radical change in attitudes within our society. Inward-looking and parochial politics and their consequences, have held our youth back, stymied their development and have prevented them from making a meaningful contribution to the development of our country. Our true potential can only be realised if we have the courage to modernise our society, government, politics and economy.
- The cycle of acrimony and the politics of hate that have defined our political culture for nearly five decades must be brought to an end.
- An inclusive national project to define and forge a Sri Lankan identity must be devised.
- A new generation of Sri Lankan political, business, media and civil society leaders with a shared national vision and a strong public-service ethic must be nurtured.
- A disciplined society where the rule of law holds supreme must be built.
- The present reconciliation process is ill-conceived and not inclusive. It thus lacks legitimacy at a national level, and is only worsening long-unaddressed injustices, ethnic, class and religious divisions. Reopening the traumas of the past without being cognisant of Sri Lanka's fragile and complex societal realities will only aggravate resentments and continuing divisions, and as history has shown us, could have dangerous repercussions.
- Our society has become increasingly deeply divided along ethnic, religious, class, language, geographic and political lines. These deep-seated fault lines have been the root cause of the spectre of incomprehensible violence that has haunted us during the Post-Independence period. An inclusive, home-grown, non-politicised reconciliation process has to be put into place in order to tackle this issue.
- At present, Sri Lanka has a rare opportunity to start afresh and to follow an enlightened, outward-looking development strategy within the framework of a strong national identity. It is time to reassess all of our government and political struc-

tures, economic and social policies, and development strategies in order to get the “basics” right and move forward. After almost 70 years of Independence and a 30-year war which traumatised our society, it is critical for us to set aside our differences to meet the challenges of an increasingly uncertain world.

Values & Society

- We must recognise the important role our spiritual leaders play in our society. A National Sangha Advisory Council and a separate Interfaith Advisory Council to provide spiritual guidance and advice to the country and its leadership should be constitutionally mandated.
- Education is key to the process of creating good citizens. Moral and ethical elements must be compulsorily incorporated into our education system, with emphasis on: i) compassion, ii) respect for the humanity of the others, iii) the absolute rejection of aggressive, abusive and lewd speech and behaviour, and iv) the promotion of polite, respectful and conciliatory behaviour. This will be done under the guidance of both the National Sangha Advisory Council and the Interfaith Advisory Council.
- To foster national unity and discipline, a compulsory National Service scheme shall be implemented for all Sri Lankans once they reach 18 years of age.
- Today, we are living at a time in Sri Lanka where the price of a meal for one person at a wedding in a five-star hotel is equivalent to the cost of feeding 50 ordinary people. We need to create a system that will ensure that these unconscionable inequities are addressed, not through empty rhetoric and false political promises, but through decisive and pragmatic economic and social policies.
- One of the main causes for the systemic corruption in our country is the patronage-based political, social and economic system that has been the bane of our society in the post-Independence period. This has in turn led to the entrenchment and domination of special interest groups in virtually every facet of society. This phenomenon has to be rooted out in its entirety so that citizens’ interests - rather than vested interests - prevail in our society.
- There shall be a complete overhaul of the judicial system to accelerate the delivery of justice. Measures should include the creation of a Director of Public Prosecutions, setting up pre-trial procedures to expedite the judicial process and radical prison reforms.

- It is important that we create a society where leaders lead by example. Many older Sri Lankans can remember a time when the Prime Minister would travel on economy class for official visits abroad. The era when politicians and public officials lead an unconscionably lavish lifestyle at the expense of the long-suffering ordinary citizen has to come to an end. Official perks have spiralled out of control. These need to be reevaluated and reined in — from the use of official luxury vehicles, granting of duty-free car vehicle permits, excessive unwarranted official foreign travel, and luxurious official residences, etc.
- With the end of the war, VIP security has become more a frivolous badge of status and creates unnecessary inconvenience to the public and a waste of public funds. With the end of the war, it is no longer needed to the extent it had before. As is the case in other countries, an independent panel should assess security risks and grant protection to VIPs purely on a threat assessment basis.
- Maximum space for civil society organisations and movements must be made. Proactive civil society watch dogs, together with an alert media provide the best checks against corruption.
- A combined public and private education system at all levels with stringent standards and transparent regulations must be implemented. State-guaranteed loan assistance schemes for students should be made widely available.
- A combined public and private healthcare system with strict regulatory standards and patient-protection standards must be developed. State-sponsored health insurance schemes shall be available on a targeted basis.
- All social welfare schemes shall be radically restructured to meet the needs of an ageing middle-income society.
- An inclusive national dialogue shall be promoted on issues related to the environment and climate-change, including droughts and floods; and practical emergency measures to address these critical challenges on a proactive rather than reactive basis shall be developed. All future development activities should be viewed through a green, environmentally-friendly prism.
- As a policy, the Government shall promote sport and leisure activities over the entire country to promote well-being and create opportunities for social mobility. All serving politicians and officials will be barred from holding office in sports bodies. A special National Sports Authority shall be set up with qualified experts to independently regulate sports organisations in the country.

Government and Governance

- Through legislation political party reform must be brought about. This should include provisions for inner party democracy, campaign finance transparency, and mandatory costing as well as accountability for promises made by political parties in their election manifestos. With the strengthening of inner party democracy and accountability, strict measures can be put into place against crossovers in Parliament and local bodies.
- A directly elected Presidency is important as it is the sole institution in which all Sri Lankan citizens have a shared stake.
- The President will be held accountable to Parliament and have clearly defined powers and responsibilities to intervene into issues connected with national harmony (including interfaith and interethnic issues), national security, economic stability, social equity and maintaining a balanced foreign policy. The President's authority will also include a custodial role over the integrity of the public service and a check against abuse of power by the Government.
- There will be a President and two Vice Presidents and together they will be responsible for giving leadership to a comprehensive national reconciliation process.
- Presidential candidates will run on a slate which will include two Vice Presidential candidates. Once elected, the President and Vice Presidents shall cease to be members of any political party.
- Newly delineated specific roles and responsibilities of the President, Vice Presidents, Prime Minister, and the Cabinet of Ministers shall be set out in the Constitution. The Cabinet membership shall be restricted to 30 members and an equal number of deputies. The President and Vice Presidents will hold no Cabinet portfolios.
- Parliament will be elected on a mixed proportional representation and first-past-the-post electoral system. However, safeguards should be put into place to ensure the formation of stable governments. A by-election mechanism should be instituted to fill ad-hoc first-past-the-post vacancies.
- A Senate directly elected by the People shall be established in such a manner that this institution will act as an effective check and balance against majoritarianism in matters pertaining to ethnic, religious, and regional equity.
- A select elite cadre of public servants trained to meet the challenges of the 21st century will be created and nurtured. In addition, a policy-advisory council consisting of experienced experts and specialists will be appointed to advise and support the Cabinet in its decision-making process.

- Provincial Councils, an ineffective system which costs us Rs 250 billion rupees annually, shall be abolished, while the powers and scope of Local Government institutions (Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas) shall be increased. If necessary, a larger number of these units can be created. Fiscal decentralisation through a system of empowered local authorities will increase the annual budgetary resources available for these entities to implement large-scale community development and public investment programmes.
- The Central Government will ensure service delivery and fair distribution of resources through District-level administrative mechanisms.
- Maximum use of new technologies should be made in public service delivery and government procurement. The transparency and disintermediation created through such processes will reduce opportunities for corruption.
- All outdated legislation and regulations should be repealed and obsolete Government departments closed as part of a complete overhaul of Government aimed at improving service delivery to the People. Whenever a new piece of legislation is introduced, every effort shall be made to identify and repeal an obsolete piece of existing legislation.
- The performance and functioning of all independent commissions will be re-examined and reviewed from the point of view of effectiveness. Where necessary, existing line institutions will be strengthened rather than duplicated with the creation of additional structures.
- Legislation should be passed to ban all political activities on campuses and within the university system.

Economy

- The Government will completely stay out of all commercial activities. In keeping with international best practices, Sri Lanka should open out its utilities and infrastructure sectors to private investment. Regulations and regulatory frameworks should replace public ownership of commercial assets. Impediments to private investment and business activity should be identified and removed on an urgent basis.
- The Fiscal Responsibility Act should be amended to ensure that the Government balances the National Budget. Once a budget is passed by Parliament, proposals

for any new government expenditure should be accompanied by offsetting expenditure cuts, except in the case of national emergencies.

- The Central Bank shall be made fully independent with an empowered and accountable Monetary Board. The role of the Central Bank will be to ensure that low single-digit inflation and a market-based exchange-rate regime is maintained. The stability of the financial system, too, would be the responsibility of the independent Central Bank.
- A principal responsibility of the Prime Minister will be to head a Ministry for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Competitiveness. This Ministry will have wide-ranging powers to ensure the rapid implementation of policies designed to modernise the economy, create economic growth and employment, and to integrate Sri Lanka into the global marketplace. Sri Lanka's strategic location, human resource base, scenic beauty, culture and natural resources presents us with unique opportunities in many economic sectors such as tourism, niche manufacturing, information and communications technology, logistics, etc. What is required is a relentless drive and a national focus to realise our potential.
- Existing land policies shall be reformulated and will include well thought out land-use planning, where ownership limits for Sri Lankan citizens and laws and regulations connected with agrarian development are radically reformed. Simultaneously, the Government should guarantee a block of land for residential purposes for every citizen living outside the urban areas.
- Sri Lanka's food security can be assured through an enlightened export and domestic market-oriented strategy for agriculture (fruits, vegetables, grains), aquaculture (fisheries, fish-farming) and animal husbandry (poultry, dairy). These policies should ensure that the rural, agro-based, micro-enterprise economy is seamlessly integrated into the established processing and distribution sector on fair and just terms.
- The plantation economy, which has been stagnating since our independence, should be modernized. Scope for diversified export crop cultivation should be explored and a special focus placed on value-added agricultural exports.
- A nationwide human-resource base that is productivity driven and internationally competitive must be developed. To this end, Sri Lanka's labour laws and regulations should be benchmarked to match that of the most competitive economies in the world. This will require radical reforms to the existing laws, regulations and practices.
- An accelerated time-bound programme will be put into place to convert Sri Lanka's energy sector into a clean and alternate energy driven network.

- An accelerated time-bound investment programme shall be devised to develop high-speed electrically powered national rail and mass-transit system. A date for the phasing out of diesel- and petrol-powered vehicles should be announced and the infrastructure necessary for electrically powered and driverless vehicles shall be prepared.
- Sri Lanka's public transport system shall be radically reformed and modernised to meet the needs and expectations of a middle income society. International best practices have convincingly demonstrated that this can be successfully achieved through well regulated Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). The political decisions in this regard should be taken swiftly and decisively.

- **Milinda Moragoda**