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**CEYLON
TODAY**

PAFFREL says PC Polls should be close to Presidential

By Buddhika Samaraweera

People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) Executive Director Rohana Hettiarachchi said, if the Provincial Council (PC) Poll was to be held according to the response of the Supreme Court (SC) to the inquiry made by President Maithripala Sirisena, it should be held on a day close to the upcoming Presidential Election, adding that if the Government does not do so, it would cause serious damage to the democratic rights of the people.

He also said, the results of the Presidential Election could have a direct impact on the outcome of the PC Polls, and therefore both Elections should be held on nearby days. Hettiarachchi further claimed that after the political parties win the PC Polls separately, the manner in which they would be organised would determine who would be the next President. He also said, the Government could save about Rs 2,000 million by holding the PC Polls and the Presidential Election on two nearby days.

Attending a press conference held in Colombo yesterday (14), he also said that although various parties had accused the Election Commission (EC) for postponing the PC Polls, it was the politicians including President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe who were responsible for it, emphasising that the EC had done everything possible to hold the PC Polls. Hettiarachchi claimed that it had been delayed for more than two years, due to the lack of support from politicians and political parties.

"The Legislature and the Legislators have disregarded the laws that are relevant to the PC Polls. The new election system was introduced as a tactic to postpone the Elections. Both the PC Polls and the Presidential Election should be held together.

Sirisena, Wickremesinghe and the entire political arena should be accountable. Instead of making arrangements for the people to have their right to vote, the rulers are using Elections for their own personal and party victories. If the Government really wants to hold the PC Polls, it can be carried out by a very small amendment. "

Speaking further, Hettiarachchi added, the Government and the Opposition should not play with public money, and added that public money should not be used to strengthen their own

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political structures.

Meanwhile, he claimed that it should be taken into serious consideration whether a candidate would be able to obtain 51 per cent of the votes in the upcoming Presidential Election. He recalled that in all Presidential Elections that had been held thus far, candidates had won a significant percentage of the votes only on two occasions, where former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga obtained the highest percentage of 62.28 per cent in the Election held in 1994.

"In the 2015 Presidential Election, there were 19 candidates. Of these, 17 received only 134,000 votes, so they were not able to influence the main candidates. Therefore, there was no need for the second and third preferential votes to be counted.

Accordingly, in addition to the main candidates, there are several candidates who can get a significant number of votes in the upcoming Election. People are talking about some strong candidates representing political parties, civil organisations and professionals, and in case they get 500,000 votes, the probability for a winning candidate to obtain 51 per cent of the vote will be low," Hettiarachchi said.

He claimed, the Presidential Election would be a decisive election and said the public should be made aware of the use of second and third preferences, as they had no experience in using the second and third preferences in the past.



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