

General election: Political parties urged not to nominate undesirables

'No harm in accommodating those who have been unseated by SC on disciplinary grounds'

BY SHAMINDRA FERDINANDO

The March 12 Movement, which consists of election monitoring groups and civil society outfits, has asked political parties not to field those who have been found guilty by courts on corruption charges and other criminal offences, at the parliamentary election scheduled to be held on 14 Nov.

Executive Director of PAF-FREL (People's Action for Free and Fair Elections) Rohana Hettiarachchi, who is also the co-convenor of the March 12 Movement, said that if those facing legal proceedings were included in nomination lists, political parties concerned would be answerable to the public.

Against the backdrop of the peaceful presidential election and incident-free post-poll environment, tangible measures could be taken to clean up political parties, Hettiarachchi said. Responding to *The Island* queries, the civil society activist said political parties had to hand-pick suitable persons as National List nominees.

"The inclusion of one undesirable character in a particular list can be dis-

astrous for the entire party," Hettiarachchi said, urging the electorate to exercise their franchise to stop re-entry of disreputable politicians regardless of the party they represented.



Rohana Hettiarachchi

Hettiarachchi referred to the Colombo High Court imposing a two-year RI sentence on Minister Prasanna Ranatunga in June 2022 over the Meethotamulla land dispute case and his subsequent appeal against the HC decision as well as Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva's resignation in July 2022 in the wake of bribery allegations and reinstatement in the following month.

Hettiarachchi underscored the need for a drastic change in political parties' approach towards transparency.

Responding to another query, Hettiarachchi said that those who had been unseated by the Supreme Court on disciplinary grounds couldn't be deprived of nominations on corruption accusations. Hettiarachchi was referring to SC decision to unseat Batticaloa District MP Nazeer Ahamed in Oct 2023 and

General ...

From Page 1

removal of Manusha Nanayakkara and Harin Fernando in August 2024.

Hettiarachchi asserted that former State Minister Diana Gamage's situation couldn't be compared with previously mentioned cases as she was deprived of her National List slot for failing to prove her Sri Lankan citizenship.

The arrest of gold smuggling Muslim National Alliance (MNA) MP Ali Sabry Raheem at the BIA in March 2023 and the failure on the part of Parliament and his party to deal with him emphasized the responsibility on the part of the voters to elect suitable people.

Over 17.1 million people are eli-

gible to vote at the general election.

Hettiarachchi said that the March 12 Movement would go all out to encourage the electorate to keep undesirable elements out of parliament.

The civil society activist pointed out how Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, arrested on corruption charges, had been cleared by Parliament in the second week of Sept. 2023. Following a three-day debate, 113 MPs voted against the no-faith motion directed at Rambukwella whereas 73 supported it.

Hettiarachchi said that those who stood by the former minister owed the public an explanation