Only 5 years for Sirisena

What is the issue?

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The Sri Lankan Supreme Court has categorically ruled that the incumbent president can’t stay beyond the present constitutional mandate of 5 years.

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What lead to the pronouncement?

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- Mr. Maithripala Sirisena won the Srilankan presidential elections in 2015.
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- At that time, the rules stipulated a 6 year executive presidency, but the constitution was amended subsequently.
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- The amendment reduced the reduced the presidential term to 5 years and also tilted the power balance in favour of a parliamentary setup from presidential.
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- Despite immediate effect being given to all new provisions, Mr. Sirisena sought clarification from the SC on continuing the current term for 6 years.
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- Hence, the SC clarified that the current term too can only be for 5 years.
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What can be read from the episode?

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- The current unity government that Mr.Sirisena is jointly heading with PM Ranil that had passed the amendments and explicitly made them applicable to the incumbents too.
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- Also, as Mr.Sirisena has been frequently asserting that he had voluntarily shortened his tenure, the current filing in the SC seems out of place.

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- This action is in line with the previous Lankan Presidents “Rajapaksha & Kumarathunga”, who too used various tactics for extending their tenures.
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- Hence, while supporters vouch that Mr. Sirisena was merely exercising his right of seeking SC clarification, there is a clear political angle involved.
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- If Sirisena secures the additional year in offices, he will remain president during the next parliamentary elections.
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- This will give him more head room for consolidating his position within his faction ridden SLFP and with his coalition partner Ranil’s UNP.
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- Notably, the previous president Mahinda Rajapaksha is also a member of SLFP but is currently heading the joint opposition in the parliament.
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Source: The Hindu

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