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Southern chaos threatens election countdown

AMID mounting chaos and confusion as the extremist People's Liberation Front (JVP) dramatically intensified its campaign of terror and intimidation in the South this month, Presidential candidates Ranasinghe Premadasa of the United National Party (UNP), Srimavo Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Ossie Abeygunesekera of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (SLMP) filed their nomination papers on 10 November with Election Commissioner Chandrananda de Silva at Colombo's Town Hall ringed by steel-helmeted servicemen and armoured cars.

Around 10,000 foreign tourists had been flown out of the island a few days earlier in specially chartered aircraft as the UNP government declared it could no longer guarantee their safety. Demonstrators would be shot on sight it was announced, and a series of emergency regulations were introduced by President J.R. Jayewardene on 9 November allowing security forces to dispose of bodies without inquest and making it a capital offence to distribute death-threat leaflets or to organise or join illegal gatherings. Rail and road transport services, the Colombo Port and the Petroleum Corporation were all declared Essential Services and employees were forced to sleep at their workplaces guarded by security forces.

Pressure has continued to mount from all sides of the political and religious spectrum for Parliament to be dissolved

and a caretaker government installed to ensure fair and free Presidential elections on 19 December and to appease the JVP insurgents in the South - although it remains doubtful that an interim administration could enforce either of these ideals at this late stage in what is now a national crisis.

If, as is widely predicted, the SLFP-dominated Alliance candidate Mrs Bandaranaike is elected President, the UNP will continue to control Parliament by a two-thirds majority in this French-style system until a General Election is held. Current Prime Minister Premadasa maintained during a meeting with senior Buddhist clergy on 14 November, that in terms of the Constitution the present Parliament could continue until July next year.

If Mrs Bandaranaike wins the day, no doubt she will seek an early dissolution but there remains a further hiatus until 4 February when she is formally inaugurated as President, during which time there is the potential for large-scale destabilisation of the incoming government. Some political observers say that even a general election will not totally reverse the bias built into this complex electoral system by its architects - the ruling UNP - and they are likely to retain Parliamentary control with a reduced majority.

The stage is thus set for continued long-term divisions at the highest levels of Government which the JVP, now alienated from the Opposition

Alliance and electoral participation, will be both willing and able to exploit.

The growing danger is that the south will descend into a full-scale inferno of open insurrection fuelled by the JVP. Since early this month acts of sabotage have multiplied and killings have become commonplace - the death toll is now between 20 and 50 a day. Electricity generators, railway bridges, banks, stores and police stations have been fire-bombed and much of the south is without water, electricity, transport, petrol and adequate food stocks. Much of Matara and Galle are now openly controlled by the JVP and areas such as Kamburugamuwa Akuressa, Urubokka and Deniyaya have become no-go areas for security forces, of whom observers say as many as 20% are already JVP members.

Mrs Bandaranaike's Opposition Alliance manifesto published in late November offers striking constitutional remedies for desperate times - abrogation of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, proportional representation and a devolution of state power to three administrative regions, one Tamil, one Muslim and one Sinhalese. On 3 December the President finally agreed to dissolve Parliament on 20 December and to hold General Elections on 15 February. Should Mrs. Bandaranaike gain the Presidency but miss out on a majority at the General Elections, then the Constitution will prevent her from dissolving Parliament for another year.

War-weary Jaffna fears further reprisals

IN THE UNEASY aftermath of the Provincial Council elections in the North, where representatives of two Indian-backed Tamil groups - the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) - were returned unopposed in early October, the hit-and-run war between the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is no nearer resolution.

The EPRLF leadership have set up headquarters at the Ashok hotel in Jaffna town, heavily guarded by IPKF contingents, while the LTTE are said to have increased their activities in outlying areas of the peninsula. The recent killing of a number of prominent citizens has increased fears that pressure will be stepped up by both sides to enforce allegiances old and new.

In the Vadamaratchchi area, long an LTTE stronghold, IPKF operations intensified after the LTTE attacked an IPKF camp at Nelliady on 9 November and IPKF units near Point Pedro the following day. In the ensuing bombardment by IPKF artillery in an action lasting five days, ten civilians were killed, 20 admitted to Point Pedro hospital and a large number of houses destroyed.

Further south in Vavuniya posters appeared in early November - allegedly at the behest of the EPRLF - asking all Sinhalese to leave Tamil areas. IPKF forces were said to have begun training of EPRLF and ENDLF units to perform police and paramilitary functions throughout the North and a separate police station for the

new force at Vavuniya town has been established.

In Kanagarayankulam, south of Mankulam, after six IPKF soldiers were killed by LTTE on 19 November, IPKF forces allegedly visited a series of reprisal actions on the civilian population killing six civilians and burning 34 houses and 23 shops. Some 278 families are said by relief agencies to have been displaced in the area.

Throughout the month, intermittent attacks on IPKF positions in Nallur, Mullaitivu and Mannar by the LTTE have generated other reports of reprisals by the IPKF allegedly aimed at the civilian population. Transport in and out of Mannar remains uncertain. The 72-mile journey to Anuradhapura is currently said to take six hours allowing for landmine craters and checkpoints.

Development work in the North has now come to a complete standstill in the continuing absence of office-bearers for local administrative bodies and the pressure placed on voluntary and Non-Government Organisations. The Jaffna Secretariat and the 13 Assistant Government Agent's offices in the peninsula have remained closed for the last two months. Pressure remains high on public utilities, food stocks and on primary health care facilities.

At the police unit in the Jaffna Municipal Hospital they continue to process some 250 to 300 applications per day for compensation for loss of property, life and limb. Each claimant is issued with a certificate registering their complaint by order of the Jaffna Superintendent of Police. For the moment there seems little else for them to receive.

Citizenship granted

The Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act ensuring Sri Lankan citizenship for some 250,000 Plantation Tamils was passed in Parliament on 9 November following an Opposition walk-out, after repeated calls for the dissolution of Parliament and an interim administration to oversee the Presidential elections.

Sinhalese massacred

Some 28 Sinhalese bus passengers were shot dead on the Gomarankadawala to Horowapotana road, 25 miles west of Trincomalee on 14 November by suspected Tamil militants.

Fatalities

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vincent Perera told Parliament on 24 November that 439 people had been killed in Sri Lanka in the month preceding 15 November. A few days earlier M.S.Amarasiri, Chief Minister for the Southern Province told a security conference at Galle that 800 people had died in the south between 27 July and the end of October.

Disappearances

The newly-formed human rights group, the Colombo District Citizens' Committee claims that at least 1000 people have disappeared in Sri Lanka during the year. Abductions and killings are said to have increased since new Emergency Regulations were introduced on 9 November. The Civil Rights Movement in a statement expressed concern that emergency regulations having such far-reaching effects should be promulgated without being published.

EPRLF triumph in North-Eastern polls

In a sudden shift in the see-saw battle for power in Sri Lanka's Eastern province the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) secured 17 seats each in the Provincial Council elections on 19 November, with the ruling United National Party (UNP) taking a solitary seat in the Ampara electoral district.

Initial reports pointed to a poor turnout of Sinhalese voters at the three districts' 363 polling booths. The UNP's Ampara victory was secured in a division where only 5.97% of the registered electorate voted.

In Batticaloa District 79% of the electorate voted while in Trincomalee and Ampara Districts where there is a strong Sinhalese and Muslim presence the figures dropped to 54 and 52% respectively in areas with a traditional turnout of around 80%.

UNP candidates did not stand in Trincomalee District after failing to meet the nomination deadline last month, some say deliberately after the large-scale exodus of Sinhalese refugees from the area. Local sources say the election boycott called by both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) was largely thwarted by an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) presence close on 65,000 throughout the three districts.

In the Tamil areas, observers say polling booths were held open till late evening and individuals coerced to vote by having their ID cards confiscated by IPKF units until they could show the requisite indelible ink mark on their finger to prove they had voted.

On paper (see figures 1 and 2 below) it would appear that the Tamil and Muslim vote split solidly along ethnic lines

whereas the Sinhalese vote did not turn out - either as a mark of abstention or as a vote of no confidence in the UNP. A leading Buddhist cleric maintained only a week before the election that as many as 100,000 Sinhalese refugees in the Province who remain displaced by the ethnic conflict would still be unable to vote. New Delhi was said to have expressed cautious optimism on the results of the poll as an indication that Sri Lanka Tamils in the East supported the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and favoured a return to the democratic process.

Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam however suggested earlier this month that the now apparent EPRLF/ENDLF majority in the merged North Eastern Provincial Council would result in an immediate call for a permanent IPKF presence in the North and East to eradicate the politico-military opposition of the LTTE and to consolidate India's strategic interest in the deep-water port of Trincomalee, now declared the new capital of the North Eastern Province.

According to All India Radio EPRLF leader Varadaraja Perumal, former lecturer at Jaffna Technical College, has been appointed Chief Minister for the North Eastern Province and Kirubakaran declared Finance Minister. With the inclusion of 36 uncontested seats in the North the EPRLF/ENDLF coalition will have 52 seats in the North Eastern Provincial Council to the 17 of the Muslim Congress. A solitary seat for the UNP will offer them little solace in the weeks to come.

| District | EPRLF | SLMC | UNP |
|--------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Batticaloa | | | |
| Vote | 126946 | 42100 | 756 |
| % | 73.58 | 24.40 | 0.44 |
| Seats | 8 | 3 | 0 |
| Ampara | | | |
| Vote | 45754 | 90436 | 7300 |
| % | 31.31 | 61.89 | 4.99 |
| Seats | 4 | 9 | 1 |
| Trincomalee | | | |
| Vote | 42530 | 35502 | Did |
| % | 52.89 | 44.15 | not |
| Seats | 5 | 5 | stand |

Fig. 1. Eastern Province registered voters by ethnic origin

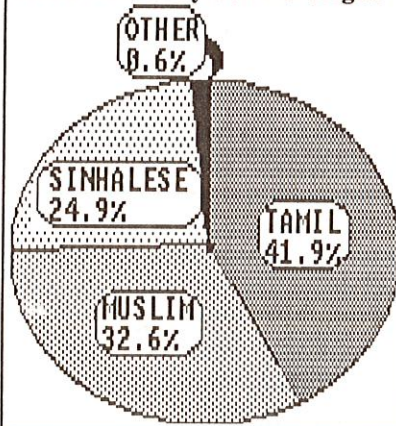
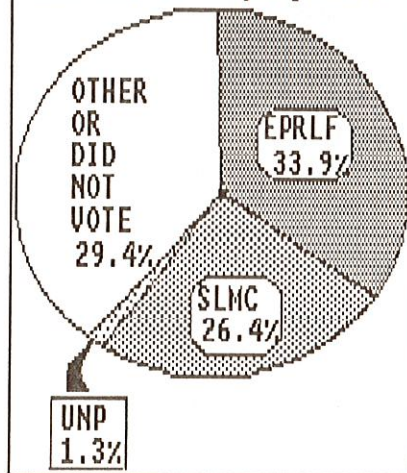


Fig. 2. Eastern Province votes cast for major parties



Colombo unnerved by invasion rumours

AFTER persistent rumours swept through Colombo early this month that Indian army units were being flown in to assist Sri Lanka's increasingly beleaguered security forces in the Southern Province, Joint Operations Command (JOC) gave journalists a guided tour of Ratmalana, Colombo's military airport on 11 November.

Indian forces had briefly used the airport, a JOC spokesman said, on a standby basis as India moved quickly to crush a

Tamil Nadu

INDIAN Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress (I) party machine completed a three-day electoral campaign through southern Tamil Nadu on 27 October in what is seen as a concerted attempt to wrest control of the State from Tamil regional parties, many of whom have supported Tamil militancy in northern Sri Lanka.

State Elections for the Tamil Nadu Assembly will take place on 2 January, Tamil Nadu Governor P.C. Alexander announced in New Delhi on 25 November, thus ending almost a year of President's rule. Political commentators say that if the Congress party returns to power after a lapse of two decades, Alexander's reign will be judged a success.

Some 70 Sri Lankan Tamil refugee families at one of the last occupied refugee camps in Tamil Nadu in Trichy town were instructed in mid-November to prepare to leave for Sri Lanka, despite a series of personal appeals to Rajiv Gandhi to allow them to stay. So far no action has been taken to forcibly deport them.

military coup on the Maldives staged by Tamil mercenaries on 3 November, and allegedly masterminded by the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). Uma Maheswaran, PLOTE's leader, told the Sri Lankan press on 17 November that he had relinquished his post as General Secretary and refused to comment on the group's involvement in the abortive coup.

Indian press reports maintained however that Indian Territorial Army units were being sent to Colombo to help the Sri Lankan authorities maintain essential services such as transport and electricity. National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali firmly denied that Sri Lanka had requested any additional military assistance from the Indian government but an Indian High Commission spokesperson in Colombo admitted that additional paramilitary personnel would be deployed in the Eastern Province during the PC elections. Other sources suggested that Indian advisers were already assisting security forces in the south.,

During a raid on the Moneragala Sugar Factory in the south-east on 23 November by 25 armed men in military uniforms, an Indian executive and two other Indian nationals were killed. As JVP-inspired death threats against Indian civilians working in the south continued to circulate, Indian High Commissioner J. N. Dixit announced in Colombo on 30 November that due to the deteriorating situation, all Indian nationals should make preparations to leave Sri Lanka immediately.

The SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

If you have any information you wish to share, or any enquiries you wish to make regarding developments in Sri Lanka, contact:

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Europe

FOLLOWING a visit by West German Economic Cooperation Minister Hans Klein to Sri Lanka early this month, Rural Industrial Development Minister S. Thondaman travelled to Bonn on 19 November, reportedly to brief the West German government on the prospects for the repatriation of Tamil asylum-seekers.

Three young Tamils in detention in Britain who were due to be removed to Colombo on 11 November were reprieved after appeals by a number of Tamil refugee organisations and relatives. Some 14 Tamils are said to be currently in detention in the UK, one for a period of over six months. Another three, suffering from depression and trauma, have asked to return to Sri Lanka rather than remain in prison. Another detainee who claims to have been tortured in Sri Lanka was examined recently by representatives of the London-based Medical Foundation for the Care of Torture Victims, who said that his injuries were consistent with such a claim.