

The Sri Lanka Monitor

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Election triumph buys time for UNP

RANASINGHE PREMADASA, Sri Lanka's newly-installed President led the ruling United National Party (UNP) to a decisive victory on 15 February, winning 125 out of 225 seats in the country's first parliamentary election for 12 years.

The main opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Mrs Chandranaike gained 67 seats and a number of smaller groups gained a foothold in Parliament under the new proportional representation system which encouraged 6 million (64%) of Sri Lanka's 9.6 million voters to participate despite widespread disorder and violence.

In a notable upset in the North an Independent grouping closely associated with Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) won 8 out of 11 seats in Jaffna, to become

New government must now tackle economic crisis

the third largest political grouping in Parliament. Honours were more evenly distributed in the East, reflecting the delicate ethnic balance with the Provincial Council-backed Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) securing three out of five seats in Batticaloa.

In the Hill Country the UNP won eight of the 12 seats in Mahanuwara and four out of six in Nuwara Eliya. Despite Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) backing for the UNP in the plantation areas, none of the CWC/UNP candidates were returned.

The South fell to the UNP despite low polls (Hambantota 20%) and endemic violence. The *Sunday Times* (Colombo) says 70 people were killed in election-related violence on poll-

ing day, 433 died between 11 and 16 February and over 1,000 since the beginning of the year.

The proportional representation system has at least ensured a lively Opposition. Under the old first-past-the-post system the SLFP would have won only 5 seats - one less than in 1977 - and many of the smaller parties would not have entered Parliament. President Premadasa, naming a 22-member cabinet on 18 February, called for a period of austerity, hard work and national reconciliation.

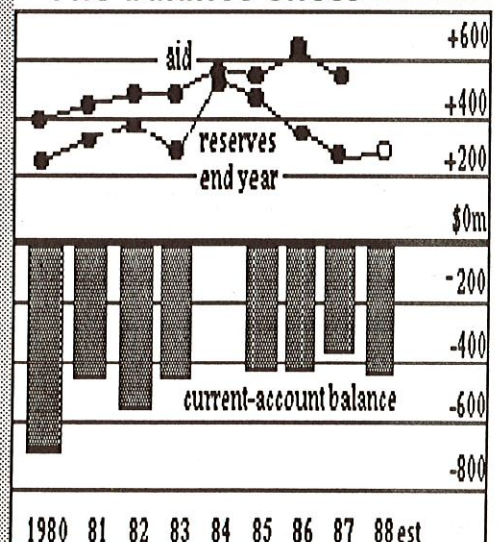
The new government faces formidable economic problems to add to the others. Projected expenditure for 1989 is Rs 122 billion (\$3.7 billion). Estimated revenue is around Rs50 billion. Some Rs32 billion can be found through new taxation, domestic borrowing and foreign aid - leaving a shortfall of Rs40 billion, a third of the budget.

With an IMF loan due in March and a vital World Bank meeting in June, Mr Premadasa may have to trade in some of his populist anti-poverty programmes to pay the bills.

Final Party Position

DISTRICT	UNP	SLFP	USA	TULF	SLMC	IND (one)	MEP
Gampaha	10	07	-	-	-	-	-
Kalutara	06	05	-	-	-	-	-
Gandy	08	04	-	-	-	-	-
Matale	04	01	-	-	-	-	-
Nuwara Eliya	04	02	-	-	-	-	-
Kurunegala	10	05	-	-	-	-	-
Anuradhapura	05	03	-	-	-	-	-
Polonnaruwa	04	01	-	-	-	-	-
Ratnapura	06	03	01	-	-	-	-
Kegalle	06	02	01	-	-	-	-
Batticaloa	-	-	-	03	01	01	-
Moneragala	03	02	-	-	-	-	-
Badulla	05	03	-	-	-	-	-
Jaffna	-	-	-	03	-	08	-
Colombo	12	06	-	-	-	-	02
Galle	06	05	-	-	-	-	-
Hambantota	05	02	-	-	-	-	-
Wanni	01	-	-	02	01	01	-
Trincomalee	01	01	-	-	01	02	-
Puttalam	05	02	-	-	-	-	-
Digamadulla	03	01	-	01	01	-	-
Matara	06	03	-	-	-	-	-
National List entitlement	110	58	02	09	03	12	02
TOTAL	125	67	03	10	04	13	03

The balance sheet



THE NORTH

EROS pays the price for electoral success

DEMOCRACY is still a double-edged sword in the Jaffna peninsula. Following their success in the Jaffna general elections where they took eight out of 11 seats, EROS supporters have gone into hiding following a wave of attacks on party workers, reportedly by units from the Indian-backed Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) who run the Provincial administration in the North and East.

EROS, who appear to retain LTTE support and sympathies, mounted an eleventh-hour house-to-house election campaign, claiming that they sought only to prevent "opportunists" from the TULF front being returned to Parliament. A spokesman in Colombo said on 19 February that the EROS victory was a vindication of its strength and popularity. What it also shows, notwithstanding the 45% electoral turnout, is the strength of feeling against the Indian occupation. Important lessons, after the November boycott of the Provincial Council elections, which surrendered the North-East administration to rivals

EPRLF, appear to have been learned by the militants. While the LTTE officially opposed the February elections, EROS have opened up a 'front' of their own that renews possibilities for negotiations to bring the Tigers back into the democratic process. The most pressing obstacle may be the present EPRLF administration - winners of the other three Jaffna seats - who will not give up their hold on the peninsula lightly.

In the Wannai (Kilinochi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya Districts) the two TULF seats went to EPRLF candidates while EROS, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the UNP each secured one - the UNP in an area dominated by Sinhalese and Plantation Tamils. None of the old-style moderates of the original TULF or the All Ceylon Tamil Congress won a seat in the North.

Clashes between Indian troops and militants continue on a daily basis. In the largest of these, 14 Indian soldiers and two Sinhalese were killed in a militant attack on the *Rupavahini* TV Transmission Centre in Vavuniya District on 9 February.

the last few months by Indian forces who claim militants are being harboured - unwillingly or otherwise - within their walls.

The University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) have recently produced a report cataloguing human rights violations by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), which includes similar incidents such as the killing of Jude Zacharias, organist at St Mary's Cathedral, Jaffna last November and IPKF raids on St Patrick's College and other student hostels.

The report also charts internecine killings by militant groups and terror tactics such as the assassination of civilians, often explained away as "mistaken identity". As the LTTE/EPRLF struggle continues to escalate and EROS' electoral success is cut down to size, one thing is evident. For those in Jaffna there is nowhere to run.

LTTE appeal

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva on 8 February, appealed for an immediate ceasefire in northern Sri Lanka, the withdrawal of Indian troops and the deployment of a United Nations Peace Keeping Force.

Habeas corpus

The Court of Appeal issued notice for a fourth time on Army Commander Hamilton Wanasinghe and Brigadier Lucky Algama of Joint Operations Command on 9 February, to produce Dr Kithsiri Kakunuwela in connection with a habeas corpus application brought by Attorney-at-Law Charitha Lankapura. Dr Kakunuwela, a medical practitioner from Galle has not been seen since his arrest by a group of armed men on 2 December last year.

Observers' statement

An interim statement issued on 17 February by an International Osbervers' team monitoring Sri Lanka's general election said that despite violence and intimidation adversely affecting voter turnout in a number of areas, the poll was "by and large" free and fair.

Hartal

Kandy, Matara and several other areas in the South were cut off by a *hartal* (general strike) called by the People's Liberation Front (JVP) on 21 February. Shops and schools were closed and a number of buses were burned by demonstrators.

Village massacre

In the third of a series of large-scale attacks on Sinhalese villages this month, suspected Tamil militants murdered 37 peasants in a raid on Welikanda in Polonnaruwa District on 27 February.

Colvin R de Silva

Dr Colvin R de Silva, veteran leader of the LSSP Party, due to return to Parliament on the national listings as a United Socialist Alliance nominee, died on 27 February, aged 82.

Jaffna University students,

N Sathyendra (24) and S Jeganathan (23), were shot dead and eight others seriously injured when Indian troops opened fire on a 2,000-strong demonstration at Thirunelveli Junction on 2 February. The students were protesting against an Indian attack on the campus the previous day - allegedly in pursuit of a fleeing militant - during which students were assaulted and another injured in an exchange of fire.

Hundreds of students, black bands tied across their mouths in silent protest, joined the funeral procession of their two colleagues a few days later as it wound through the deserted Jaffna streets. Schools in the peninsula were already closed indefinitely following the killing of a teacher in late January.

These attacks are only the most recent, observers say, in a series of assaults on churches and schools in

Eclipse of the old guard in the East

The toppling of TULF

WHILE the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) - once the dominant force in Tamil democratic politics - won ten seats in name throughout the North and East, for its traditional leadership the General Election was a massive vote of no confidence.

TULF Secretary General Appapillai Amirthalingam, the elder statesman of the Tamil cause, who has spent the last four years in exile in Madras, contested Batticaloa as part of an uneasy alliance

with the three ex-militant groups who now control the Provincial Council administration - EPRLF, ENDLF and TELO.

As in Jaffna, Mr Amirthalingam and the TULF old guard in the East failed to gain a single seat, losing out in the proportional representation stakes to local candidates with strong Citizens' Committee credentials. EPRLF took two of the three TULF seats in Batticaloa and TELO the other, as well as one in Amparai (Digamadulla).

Local opinion said that TULF had been too long away from the struggle and lacked a young leadership who understood the sacrifices made by many of the erstwhile militants. There were other surprises. Kalkudah's long-term UNP representative, former Minister, Mr K Devanayagam, was not returned.

In Trincomalee, it was the EROS Independent group who captured the Tamil vote, winning two out of four seats with one each going to the UNP and SLFP. Speculation is now rife that Mr Premadasa will ask EPRLF and EROS

to form a coalition government in recognition of the new realpolitik in the North and East.

This would also curb the deadly free-for-all of killings that has broken out between the two groups since the elections.

Mr Amirthalingam has further alienated himself from the EPRLF hierarchy by appointing himself the national list nominee to Parliament. EPRLF have protested vehemently and have petitioned Parliament's Secretary General to recognise EPRLF MPs as a separate political entity. The wheeling and dealing is far from over in the East.

The Muslim factor

THE ELECTION results in the East, observers say, show the Muslim community emerging as a distinct political force. For the year-old Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) to take one seat in each of the Vanni, Batticaloa and Digamadulla electoral districts, suggests that Muslims have put identity before party allegiance.

SLMC leader Mr MHM Ashraff, elected in Kalmunai, claims however that the proportional representation system has worked against Muslim interests, denying them seats in Kandy and Puttalam by the narrowest of margins.

In Digamadulla the UNP polled only 100 votes more than the SLMC, but secured three MPs to their one because of the bonus seat system. These anomalies continue to weigh heavily on a party who came third on the overall votes cast throughout the island.

In Batticaloa where Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils live nervously

side-by-side, a plethora of fundamentalist splinter groups like *Iqbal* - recruited largely from the Muslim component in Tamil militant groups - may yet pose a threat if they find the emerging SLMC platform too conciliatory.

Newly-elected MP Mr MLA Hisbullah from Kathankudy faces more immediate problems from TELO militants in the area anxious to preserve their dwindling power base on the eastern seaboard. He relies heavily on IPKF support, but a Government directive at the end of February, withdrawing arms issued to SLMC candidates after reported clashes in the area may isolate him further.

The SLMC politbureau was due to meet at the end of the month to decide whether to join in coalition with the UNP government. There are sections of the party who believe such an alliance may run counter to their popular mandate.

UNP candidate petitions for annulment of PC polls

THE COURT OF APPEAL has issued notice on 11 EPRLF and SLMC candidates at last November's Provincial Council (PC) elections in the Eastern Province, following a petition filed by Mr Poopalapillai Chandrakumar, UNP candidate in Batticaloa alleging intimidation and malpractice.

Mr Chandrakumar who also cites Batticaloa's Returning Officer Mr K Selvaratnam as respondent, contends that the PC elections should be declared null and void on the grounds of general intimidation. His petition maintains that unauthorised persons including IPKF and EPRLF units were allowed inside polling stations, preventing a section of the electorate voting for the party of their choice.

The complaint further alleges the wholesale short-staffing of polling stations, the non-application of indelible ink to voters' fingers - to signify that they have cast their votes - and the non-observance of a variety of other prescribed procedures.

EUROPE

Tamil refugee children seek a safe haven

POLICE and welfare agencies in West Germany have become increasingly concerned over large numbers of refugee children under 16 arriving unescorted at Frankfurt airport in the last year. Since 1987, over 2000 have arrived in West Germany as it is the only country in Europe allowing entry to under-16s without a visa. Some 1500 of these unaccompanied minors are said to be Sri Lankan Tamil children whose

Geneva declaration

DURING the latest in a series of regular inter-governmental consultations with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) held in Geneva on 16 and 17 February, the refugee agency cautioned government representatives against returning Tamils seeking asylum in Europe to Sri Lanka.

In the light of the recent Parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka and the prevailing unsettled conditions, UNHCR concluded that no returns of *groups* of Tamils from European countries should be contemplated for the foreseeable future, until the situation is re-evaluated. The forcible return of *individual* rejected Tamil asylum-seekers should in these circumstances, they say, be approached with special prudence.

UNHCR also indicated that movements of Tamil refugees from south India to Sri Lanka under its Special Programme of Limited Assistance were scheduled to recommence in mid-March. The UNHCR programme returned over 23,000 refugees to northern and eastern Sri Lanka in 1988 from Tamil Nadu.

A number of Sri Lankan families of Indian descent, resident in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, have recently been given cash loans to allow them to leave the camps and others have been found employment in the Nilgiris area. The Sri Lankan Tamil refugee population in south India is estimated at 100,000 of whom only 2,000 live in the camps.

parents have sold up property and possessions to send them out of the island's war zone in the North.

Around 300 children a month are now arriving in Frankfurt and are housed by the Youth Affairs Office in a children's home at Kronberg until they can be collected by relatives or friends of their parents. Many Tamil children have only addresses in unfamiliar towns in Germany where the relative is also an asylum-seeker living in poverty in hostel conditions and forbidden to have his family join him.

Other Tamil children have tried to cross frontiers illegally into Scandinavia or Switzerland, which retain generous welfare provisions for stateless minors, but they are often apprehended and returned to Kronberg. The Youth Affairs Office automatically becomes the guardian of children unclaimed by relatives and there are fears that the growing scale of the problem will cause the Bonn government to close the Frankfurt loophole and introduce visas for under 16s.

Legislation concerning aliens prevents foreign children without relatives remaining in Germany but in the case of refugee children this is overlooked. Article 16 of West Germany's constitution says asylum-seekers who reach the country cannot be turned away until their claim is examined but Bonn is becoming increasingly impatient with the reported abuse of these humanitarian provisions. Recently a plane landed at Frankfurt from Colombo with 34 young Tamils on board. Some 28 of them travelled on forged passports and, on admitting they were over 16, immediately claimed political asylum. Tamil refugee organisations who have seen the heartbreak of refugee children at first hand, fear that for many young people, their only present means of escape will be barred.

■ A Sri Lankan was killed and two others injured when they attempted to jump off an Air Lanka Colombo to Paris flight during a stopover at Frankfurt airport on 19 February.

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:

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3/9 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (01) 582 6922.

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Judgment at Alkmaar

HOLLAND has ordered the deportation of a Sri Lankan Tamil following the rejection of his claim for asylum by the County Court at Alkmaar on 7 February. The President of the Court in his decision acknowledged that young Tamils such as the applicant were victims of military repression by IPKF forces in northern Sri Lanka, but said that they had internal flight alternatives in other parts of the island, particularly Colombo.

The decision disregards a ruling by Holland's Supreme Court, the Council of State, last September which recognised that Sri Lankan Tamils might be subject to State persecution and therefore lacked an effective internal flight alternative. The Alkmaar judgment also denies that Tamils returned to Colombo without identification documents face harassment from police and army authorities. The decision is likely to be vigorously challenged in a number of cases due to come before the courts in March.

■ Sixteen Sri Lankans, held for a week in custody at Lisbon airport after arriving on 5 February, have requested political asylum in Portugal, official sources say.