

Narrow win for the PA

In elections marked by violence, the ruling People's Alliance (PA) secured a slender victory on 6 April, in all five Provincial Councils, four of which were earlier controlled by the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

Over 2,400 nominees of 12 political parties and independent candidates contested 263 seats in the Central, North-Central, Sabragamuwa, Uva and Western provinces. Nearly 70% of the 7 million voters turned-out to vote. The PA gained 2.1 million votes (45.3%) winning 130 seats, while the UNP polled 1.9 million (42.6%) taking 112 seats. Despite winning the most number of seats in each of the five councils, the PA secured overall majority only in North-Central Province. Over 340,000 votes were spoiled, including 50,000 in Colombo District, indicating according to observers, a loss of public confidence in the electoral process.

Some 32,500 policemen were deployed, but there was widespread violence in the run-up to and during elections. The police received some 1,000 complaints, including 298 on election day. Murder, grievous injury, abduction and arson were reported. A man was killed in a bomb attack on the UNP office in Kegalle on 4 April. Another UNP supporter died in a clash in Matala on the same day. A PA member was shot dead in Udathumbura on 5 April.

An organised campaign of intimidation was directed against election monitors. Sources say that death threats from PA politicians in some areas forced monitors into hiding. Lands minister DM Jayaratne accused the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) of supporting the UNP and releasing false statistics. CMEV Director Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu said that the Centre was acting within the law. He has challenged the minister to have legal recourse if there is evidence of illegality.

The CMEV says that 911 polling stations were monitored and in 302 (33%) of them systematic impersonation, vote rigging and chasing out polling agents were observed. The CMEV has concluded

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ed that in 5.3% of the 5,942 polling stations, elections were not free and fair. Although this election was not as blatantly violent or overtly fraudulent as the election in the North-Western Province in January, the CMEV says the comparison does not make it respectable.

The People's Liberation Front (JVP), whose armed revolts in 1971 and 1988-89 cost thousands of lives, has surprised many. It gained 248,000 votes (5.4%) and secured 15 seats in the five councils. The JVP may become a crucial political factor, making it difficult for any candidate of the two major parties to obtain the mandatory 50% of the votes in the presidential elections. If the JVP is set to split the votes in the presidential and general elections in the year 2000, minority votes may become vital.

In the Hill Country, the coalition led by PA ally, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) won only nine seats. At the last provincial elections the CWC secured 17 seats following a pact with the UNP. Observers say internal conflicts and corruption have eroded CWC's standing among the plantation workers. That the UNP has received a large section of minority votes in the Hill Country and the Western Province is a disturbing factor in the electoral calculations of the PA. The close contest in the provinces

and lack of minority support may make it difficult for the PA to bring forward the dates of the national elections.

The Provincial Councils are elected under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, for the purpose of devolving power to the provinces, particularly to the Tamil-majority north-east, as a solution to the chronic ethnic conflict in the island. After ten years, there is lack of effective devolution and provincial elections are seen by some as glorified opinion polls for national elections. The North-East Provincial Council was dissolved in June 1990 and no election has since been held.

With no solution to the ethnic problem in sight and increasing problems for the Tamil community, the PA must do something drastic to win the elections. Tamil party EPRLF leader Varatharaja Perumal has already been brought in from exile in India, and now the PA has turned to the widow of former JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera. She is expected to campaign for the PA in the Southern Provincial election scheduled for 10 June.

Observers believe that the PA no longer represents the broad alliance of democratic forces in the island that enabled victory in the 1994 election. The PA coalition member LSSP's Vasudeva Nanayakkara crossed over in Parliament on 21 April to join the opposition ranks. Mr Nanayakkara says that the PA government has failed to deliver on its promises to the people, including a solution to the ethnic conflict.

Genuine attempts at peace and ethnic reconciliation, which would give confidence to the minorities, are lacking. The religious delegation which held talks in the Vanni in January with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were finally able to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunge on 26 April. The President told the delegation that the government's "war for peace" strategy will continue and the LTTE must renounce its call for a separate Tamil state if peace talks are to be considered.

JAFNA

The displaced

ADDRESSING Parliament in early April, Tamil MP R Sampanthan urged the government to allow over 67,900 families to return to their homes in Jaffna's western Valikamam. The families are worried that their lands may be acquired for a military expansion scheme. Former TULF MP Mavai Senathirajah says the Army has destroyed 75% of the houses in the security zone around Palaly airbase.

According to reports, naval officers have requested the Jaffna government secretariat to survey lands around the CEYNOR seafood factory on Karaitivu Island, west of the Jaffna peninsula. Local people believe that the survey is a prelude to acquisition of private lands for the extension of the naval base on the island. Reports also say civilians are being used as forced labour in the construction of a new military camp in Vadamaratchy.

The Jaffna Council of NGOs says that programmes of UN agencies in the peninsula are being used to strengthen the Sri Lankan government machinery and are not benefiting the people. The Council also complains that local NGOs have not been permitted involvement in development work.

The office of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Jaffna has received a number of complaints on arrests. K Alagendran and S Uthayakumar were arrested in Erlalai in early April. F Jeyakumar and S

Sasikumar of Jaffna town and Arani Chandran of Vasavilan were detained on 10 April. HRC officer Gowri Suntharalingam says 40 people are held at Kankesanthurai military camp. Among those detained are K Nagendrarani and her one year-old child. The Army shot dead student S Jegan on 4 April in Urumpirai following an LTTE attack. A 28 year-old woman says that soldiers gang-raped her at Atchuvelli South on 6 February.

Urumpirai resident N Nirmalakanthan, 17, is missing since 25 March. G Subashkaran, 15, of Anaikottai and Kopai resident R Sutharsan went missing on 25 April. Ms Suntharalingam has requested the Tamil groups operating in Jaffna - EPDP and PLOTE - to inform the HRC when recruiting Jaffna youths. The military has also begun a recruitment drive in the peninsula and has set-up recruiting centres.

Patrols and search operations where LTTE infiltration is suspected, have been intensified. Four soldiers were killed in a landmine attack at Thanmakerni, six miles north-west of Elephant Pass, on 3 April. Suspecting that the Tigers are using empty buildings, the Army has instructed all *Grama Sevakas* (Village Headman) in Valikamam West to make a list of all unoccupied houses. The Army has also sought the assistance of *Grama Sevakas* to investigate the disappearance of some 25,000 identity cards in Jaffna within the last two months.

Registration

The Presidential secretariat issued orders on 4 April that all local and international NGOs must register again with the NGO National Secretariat in the Social Service Ministry. NGOs receiving foreign aid must obtain clearance from Defence, Foreign and Plan Implementation ministries while declaring their funding sources and amounts received annually. NGOs are also expected to provide action plans indicating type of activities, locations of operation, target groups and number of employees.

Impunity

As Sri Lanka's envoy HMGS Palihakkara told the UN Human Rights Commission in April that there will be no pardon for human rights abusers, LSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara declared that human rights violators are being protected in the island.

Cleared

On 28 April, the Supreme Court quashed the decision of a Presidential Commission which found former UNP minister Wijeyapala Mendis guilty of abuse of power in deals with the Land Reform Commission. The Court said the Commission exceeded its power.

Abduction

Business firm Aitken Spence Director GC Wickremasinghe, abducted in Colombo on 30 March, was released after the family paid Rs 20 million ransom. A police officer and a Navy deserter are among six people arrested.

Tigers disrupt food supply

SECURITY forces stopped food transport and traffic to the Vanni on 16 April, after the LTTE shot dead three policemen inspecting lorries at the cross-loading Army checkpoint in Mannar District. At this checkpoint near Uyilankulam, food is transferred to lorries from Tiger-controlled Iluppaikadavai, 16 miles north.

Food supply to the Vanni was disrupted on 18 March when Madhu road was closed for military operation *Rana Gosha II* (Battle Cry), but resumed on 5 April on a new route from Uyilankulam through Iluppaikadavai. In mid-April, the ICRC agreed to escort food convoys on three days a week.

The Vanni Government Agents say there is acute shortage of food and have informed Colombo's Essential Services Commissioner that the people will face starvation if food supply is not resumed early. The Defence Ministry says that 1,950 tonnes of food is lying in Vavuniya to be transported to the Vanni.

Vanni Army Commander Maj. Gen. Lionel Balagalla has declared that there will be no food supply until the Tigers guarantee that no more attacks will be launched on the cross-loading checkpoint. At the end of April no agreement had been reached.

Over 2,000 people in Vavuniya from the Vanni are unable to return home.

Ambulance services between hospitals in the Vanni and Vavuniya were allowed only on 28 April. In a letter to the President, TULF leader Anandasangary says nine patients died when ambulance services were disrupted. Reports say 25 people died of disease in Kilinochchi hospital in the last two months.

The Army arrested Sri Lanka Red Cross coordinator Sivanathan Kishore in Vavuniya on 26 April, alleging LTTE links. Mr Kishore was involved in humanitarian work in the Tiger-held Vanni. The Vanni Citizens Committee has complained to the ICRC that 14 people are missing since *Operation Rana Gosha I* in March.

■ *LTTE execution in Batticaloa*

Indiscriminate attacks

FOLLOWING a Tiger assault on a police post on 25 April, the security forces shelled Eravur 5th Division village, seven miles north of Batticaloa town, killing S Selvi, 28, and S Rajeswary, 40. Ten other civilians were wounded. Eight houses and Eravur Veerapathirar Hindu temple were damaged. Local people say the police prevented them taking the injured immediately to the hospital.

In a letter to President Chandrika, Batticaloa MP Joseph Pararajasingham says, despite many written complaints to her, indiscriminate shelling of populated areas continues. According to reports, 75 civilians were killed and over 185 were injured in 1998 in security force attacks.

The Army shot dead V Sothimuthu

after a Tiger attack on Batticaloa Pillayarady camp on 11 April. The following day, the LTTE attacked a police post in Eravur wounding a policeman. In indiscriminate firing that followed, civilian K Suntharalingam, 55, was killed and two others were injured.

The LTTE continues its indiscriminate targeting in Batticaloa. The military found three powerful bombs in populated areas in Chenkalady and Kallady in early April. On 17 April, the Tigers shelled Kiran and Santhiveli Army camps. The Batticaloa Airforce base came under shell attack on 25 April.

The body of Thavarasan Kumar, 24 was found at Vantharumoolai on 19 April. The LTTE had abducted him two

months earlier. Tamil group TELO's Jamaldeen Anwar was shot dead by the LTTE's *Pistol group* at Kattankudy on 21 April. The Tigers carried out a public execution for the third time in two months. Kandiah Ravi, 35, was shot dead in public at Pankudaveli on 22 April.

Further south in Amparai District, policeman N Saleem was shot dead by LTTE gunmen at Sammanthurai on 9 April. Following the attack, the police arrested 15 youths and detained three. Many people in nearby Veeramunai fled to other areas in fear. Two Tigers attempting to attack a police checkpoint at Galgamuwa in Central Camp area on 19 April were shot dead.

In Trincomalee District, the *Pistol Group* shot dead Kumar, 25, on 7 April. The Navy shot and injured fisherman R Raheeb, 17, near Muthur on 16 April. Three Tigers died in an Army ambush three days later at Kadalkaraichenai.

Some 12,000 people are now registered with Trincomalee Regional Secretariat to return to Jaffna. Another 2,500 are in Mannar and a further 1,500 are registered in Vavuniya. Reports say the government may purchase two ships to transport refugees and other civilians.

Meanwhile, the Defence Ministry has denied permits to local shipping companies and the Navy has prohibited the ships *Ocean Success* and *Isuraveli* hired by private traders to take food to Jaffna. Press reports say that a senior government officer is behind the disruption of ship services to Jaffna.

Mass graves

IN the wake of mass graves in Jaffna, Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham has urged the Sri Lankan government to investigate the disappearance of 159 refugees from Vantharumoolai University camp and 160 villagers from Sathurukondan in Batticaloa District, rounded-up by the Sri Lankan security forces in 1990. After the People's Alliance gained power in 1994, Amnesty International, in two reports titled *When will justice be done?* and *Time for truth and justice*, called on the government to probe the disappearances. On 9 April, hundreds of people demonstrated in Colombo demanding the government and the LTTE to help to determine the fate of thousands of people disappeared in Sri Lanka.

In Jaffna, 24 skeletons were unearthed near Duraiappah stadium between 4 and 10 April. As Jaffna Additional magistrate SAE Ekanathan sought assistance from forensic experts, Ruhuna University's Professor N Chandrasiri declared that proper scientific methods were not used in the excavation and vital evidence may have been destroyed. Preliminary reports suggest that the site is around ten years old, placing the suspicion on the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the LTTE.

The excavation of mass graves at Chemmani is scheduled for 16 June. The police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) began interviewing relatives of the disappeared on 20 April, in Colombo and Jaffna, as a prelude to the excavation. But the magistrate appointed for the enquiry had left for the US on a two-year study leave, ten days earlier.

Workmen digging near Vallipuram Alvar Hindu temple in Vadamaratchy in mid-April found a woman's body in a shallow grave. The Army ordered the grave to be closed and investigations seem unlikely.

CONCERN is being expressed over arrests in Mannar District's Madhu area, captured by the Army in March. Soldiers took into custody S Kannathasan and M Vimalarajan on 15 April. On the same day, students R Sivakumar and R Sasikumar were arrested at their home. S Yugendran was also detained. The Army denied arrest, but on 22 April, three of them were released after Catholic Bishop Rayappu Joseph intervened. The youths had been interrogated at Vavuniya Joseph military camp and beaten-up.

On 21 April, 196 youths were interrogated and warned against links with the LTTE. The youths are in fear and have registered their names with the priests at the Madhu Church. Youths Balan and

Sriskaran were arrested on 27 April. On this occasion, the Army issued arrest receipts to the parents.

A number of international agencies are serving in Madhu area. There are around 20,000 refugees in the UNHCR-run refugee camps in Madhu and Thatchanamadu. Bishop Joseph continued to demand the removal of the Army from the Madhu Church sacred area. After a visit to Madhu on 30 April, Army Commander Srilal Weerasooriya announced that the Army will remain until the situation improves.

Further south-west in Puttalam District, six people were arrested at Nuraicholai. The police suspect that they were raising funds for the Tigers.

Mannar arrests

Army Commander warns against harassment

Kandy bus bomb

TWO people died and 14 others were wounded when a bomb exploded in a bus at Kandy bus stand on 11 April. One of the dead has been identified as Batticaloa resident Thangarajah Mathivanan, 21. The police suspect that Mr Mathivanan was a *Black Tiger* suicide bomber.

A Tamil woman bound for Vavuniya was arrested at the bus stand. Security in the run-up to the Sinhala-Tamil New Year on 14 April was tightened in Kandy and Kurunegala districts. Ten Tamil students from Peradeniya University, three miles south-west of Kandy, were taken into custody.

Sri Lanka's Army Commander Srilal Weerasooriya, warned in late April of disciplinary action against soldiers involved in harassment of people at military checkpoints and during search operations. Lt. Gen. Weerasooriya's warning followed a complaint by the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Detention (CIUAD) that Tamil civilians were continuing to be harshly treated.

On the night of 26 March, 43 Tamils were arrested at a lodge on Dickman's Road in Bambalapitiya, a suburb of Colombo. Six were detained and others were released. The CIUAD ordered the officer-in-charge of Bambalapitiya police station to submit explanations for arresting three women in the lodge without the presence of a female police officer. The CIUAD is dissatisfied with the police explanation that there were no women officers in Bambalapitiya police station at the time. The police claim that the arrests were made after a parcel containing explosives was thrown from the lodge into a nearby drain.

Political party NSSP says many Tamil youths are in detention for over four years without trial and proper action has not been taken despite a number of representations to the government. Nine detainees in Kalutara prison ended their protest fast on 1 April after they were promised again that their cases will be disposed of quickly.

S Nadesapillai, currently detained in Kalutara prison, alleges in a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court that following his arrest in Amparai on 9 December last year, a confession was extracted from him under torture. V Kulaveerasingham says his signature was obtained on a statement under duress, after arrest in Amparai on 17 December.

A bomb damaged an electricity installation in Colombo's Pettah suburb in early April. Over 20 Tamils were detained. Some 200 Tamils were arrested in Pettah lodges on 23 April and 27 were detained. A Batticaloa woman, arrested in a Colombo lodge in early April, is being interrogated at the Fourth Floor of the police headquarters, notorious for torture. Police suspect that she had links with an LTTE cadre now in custody.

The CIUAD says that Rajendran Amirtharaj, who was reported missing after being deported from Germany, is currently in detention at Welikada prison in Colombo.

Jayalalitha topples BJP government

THE Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government in India collapsed on 17 April, after a southern political party withdrew its support in Parliament. A confidence vote in Parliament was called when Tamil Nadu's AIADMK chief Jayalalitha announced on 6 April that she was pulling out her 18 MPs from the alliance. The government lost by one vote in the 545-member *Lok Sabha* or lower house of Parliament.

Ms Jayalalitha's two demands for continued support - the reinstatement of Navy chief Vishnu Bhagwat and transfer of Defence minister George Fernandes to a "less sensitive ministry" - were rejected by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Jayalalitha says that Mr Fernandes continued to support the LTTE after becoming India's Defence Minister in March last year. Mr Fernandes sacked Admiral Bhagwat in March allegedly to safeguard India's long-term security interests and accusing him of defying cabinet orders.

Observers say Ms Jayalalitha's real motive was to prop Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the Congress Party, to become Prime Minister. Ms Jayalalitha who faces

over 45 corruption charges, including money-laundering and income tax irregularities, had been demanding the BJP government to dissolve the ruling DMK state government in Tamil Nadu. If found

guilty, she would be disqualified for six years from contesting any election. The BJP refused to sack the DMK. An agreement with the Congress and the removal of the DMK may facilitate the burial of the corruption charges.

After the government fell, Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi sought support to form a new government. The left parties and Uttar Pradesh strongman Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party refused to join a Congress-led coalition. There was also reluctance to join an alliance which includes the AIADMK.

Sonia Gandhi informed President KR Narayanan on 25 April that Congress could not form an alternate government. Attempts to form a government led by the Marxist Communist Party leader Jyoti Basu also failed. President Narayanan dissolved the *Lok Sabha* on 26 April and called for national elections.

In the light of events in New Delhi realignment of political forces in Tamil Nadu now seem inevitable. Political changes in India will have their impact on Sri Lanka, particularly in view of India's regional strategic concerns.

THE SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information 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 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ Tel: (0171) 820 3100; Fax: (0171) 820 3107 E-mail: breslproject@gn.apc.org Internet: <http://www.gn.apc.org/breslproject>

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