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PA rejects Tamil homeland, lifting ban on LTTE

AS voting day for Sri Lanka's Parliamentary elections approaches, the ruling People's Alliance (PA) concentrated on wooing the Sinhala nationalist vote, abandoning even nominal efforts to seek support amongst the island's Tamil or Muslim communities. Reinforcing its headline stance on the ethnic conflict, the PA this week categorically ruled out the lifting of the ban on the Liberation Tigers, a key impediment to negotiations, and rejected the concept of the Tamils having a homeland in Sri Lanka.

"We will not lift the ban as a pre-condition [for talks]," President Chandrika Kumaratunga said Tuesday. Speaking at the presentation of her ruling People's Alliance (PA) manifesto at her official residence, President Kumaratunga ruled out any truck with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the Island newspaper said Wednesday. "We are unwilling to betray our country for the sake of power," she said, rejecting the TNA's election platform, that includes promises to pressure future Sri Lankan governments to lift the ban

short period set up an interim administration for the north and eastern provinces", but did not specifically state the administrative arrangement would be made, until what period, and with whom. UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe has reiterated that he would open talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"It is no secret that the war in the North East has destroyed our economy as well as the social, political stability," Wickremasinghe told the press. "This curse has engulfed our entire nation and its social fabric."

Prime Minister Wickremasinghe also reiterated his People's Alliance (PA) government's opposition to the concept of a Tamil homeland, the state press reported Friday. "The PA Government has directly and indirectly opposed to accept the concept of Tamil homeland. Therefore our stand is clear," the Daily News quoted Wickremasinghe as saying while addressing a meeting in Katturata town hall.

"We should have a undivided country with a peaceful and united society," the Prime Minister said, adding that the countries world over are now supporting the efforts of President Kumaratunga to eliminate the LTTE. "It is rather feverish situation ahead. What ever it may be, we will not allow to break the country. We should completely sweep off terrorism in the country."

The Prime Minister's headline stance was blessed by Sri Lanka's Buddhist clergy the Daily News also reported Friday. "PA would get a clear-cut majority at the forthcoming elections, because it was that Party who had given an assurance that a division of country would be prevented, and its integrity protected," said the Most Ven. Galagana Athadassi Anunayake Thera of the Asgiriya Chapter, adding that it was the duty of all political parties to create an undivided country.

Commenting on reports of eroding support for the PA amongst the Tamil community, President Kumaratunga said the people of Jaffna were with her and the people under LTTE control were supporting the main opposition UNP. "As for the Tamils in Colombo they are really not part of the Tamil community as a whole. They promote what is best for business," she said in derision, the Island reported.



Two Tamil National Alliance candidates for Batticaloa, Indrakumar Prasanna (far right) and A.Selvendran (2nd from right) visited the Kakkaddicholai Thaanthondreesvarar temple on Monday while campaigning. The temple was built by the Chola Empire in the medieval period. Photo TamilNet

Alliance calls for Tamil voters' support

THE alliance of four Tamil parties that are jointly contesting the forthcoming Parliamentary elections on a platform of self-determination for the Tamil people and backing for the Liberation Tigers was this week traversing the north and east, urging Tamil voters to come out in support. Alliance leaders hailed the public response.

"This election is paving the way to win the liberation of Tamil nation. At this crucial period, Tamil people should come forward and be partners with us. The Tamil

National United Front the only party coming forward to resolve the ethnic conflict," said Selvam Adaikalanathan, leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO).

"Its not our objective to become ministers within a racist [Sinhala] government", Adaikalanathan said. "Our objective is to work towards national liberation but not to become ministers. There are parties that aim to destroy or harm us because we express our views openly in parliament. Within this hostile

environment we keep our voices heard."

"The main [Sinhala] parties have been cheating the Tamil people and Tamil parties for a long time. The Tamil people should give us the power to put pressure on these racist parties," he said.

"We shouldn't forget that in order to survive we should unite ourselves. We united with the four parties to break the oppressive regime of the government against us," the TELO leader said. The other parties in the alliance are the Tamil United Liberation Front

(TULF), the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) and the (Suresh faction of the) Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF)

Vice President of the TULF, V. Anandasangari, said this weekend that the Tamil community backed the alliance's objectives. "The pressure also emerged from foreign expatriates and locals here for us to join hands," he told the Sunday Leader.

"We have chosen the rising sun as our alliance's symbol as it also the symbol of Tamil peoples' liberation. We

have decided to use this election as a stage to show clearly our united struggle against the oppression," Adaikalanathan said. The TULF expressed disillusionment with the ruling People's Alliance. "At the beginning, the TULF was blamed by the Tamil community for taking a stand with the government," Anandasangari said. "We never wanted to go against her or throw her out. But now it is time. This is the worst period of governance."

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"It is all right to kill murderers," Kumaratunga advises supporters

SRI Lanka's main opposition Monday called for legal action against President Chandrika Kumaratunga after she publicly urged ruling party supporters to murder those who try to kill them.

The opposition United National Party (UNP) charged that Kumaratunga was responsible for inciting violence and provoking people to commit murder in the run-up to the December 5 parliamentary polls, the AFP reported.

The president said at a public meeting in the southern town of Tissamaharama that there was "nothing wrong in killing murderers" and warned the opposition that her party men could not be restrained as they had been in previous years.

"It is all right to kill murderers... I did not say such things in the past. We have behaved like we had attained enlightenment, but there is no need to tolerate attacks against us," Kumaratunga said in a speech broadcast over national television late Sunday.

Kumaratunga's former constitutional affairs and justice minister, G.L. Peiris, hurriedly summoned a press conference here Monday to denounce her remarks. Peiris, who defected to the opposition last month, said Kumaratunga could be prosecuted for aiding and abetting murder after her immunity from prosecution ends with her six-year presidential term in December 2005.

Kumaratunga claimed that supporters of her People's Alliance were becoming targets for opposition UNP men and called for retaliation.

But the opposition said the ruling party was trying to create trouble in several districts in a bid to delay the elections. An opposition candidate and three other people have been killed in poll-related violence since the one-week nomination period ended on October.

Kumaratunga and another dissident minister recently publicly traded charges that they tried to murder two newspaper editors who were critical of the government.

Opinion polls have given the main opposition an early lead in the approval ratings. Police and elections officials have expressed fears of more violence. Police last week sought army reinforcements to step up security in the country before the election.

EU monitors lament lack of electoral reform

ELECTION monitors from the European Union on Monday accused the Sri Lankan government of not executing electoral reforms and warned that the December 5 parliamentary elections may be violent, the Associated Press reported.

"Conscious of the level of violence that occurred during last year's campaign, and the fact that many recommendations we proposed were not acted upon, real fears have been expressed that the level of violence in this campaign could be higher," said John Cushnahan, chief of the election-monitoring group.

But Irish MEP Cushnahan also said that it was important that any losing parties in the election abide by the result. "When democracy speaks, it must be listened to and implemented," he said. Cush-

nahan feels that Sri Lanka's situation is similar to that in Northern Ireland. EU officials told Tamil Guardian this week. He and five other observers are in Colombo, as an advance team from the EU

Cushnahan said the government's action on the EU group's recommendations were "too disappointing." The group had expressed major concerns about the conduct of the election last year and had suggested several remedies, most of which have been ignored so far by the Sri Lankan government, he said. At least 71 people were killed during the election campaign in October last year, while balloting in at least 365 polling centers was flawed, according to the Center for Monitoring Election Violence, an independent poll watchdog.

However, countering allegations that the economy is in ruins President Chandrika Kumaratunga on state television last week said that some 800,000 persons now own three wheelers as against a mere 80,000 during the regime of the United National Party.

The President argued that the average person can today afford to eat chicken and run about in three-wheelers. She said this was in stark contrast to the political administration of the main opposition United National Party, during which time "only a mere 80,000 three wheelers were sold." The Sunday Leader found that in fact a total of only 105,000 three-wheelers are registered at the Department of the Registrar of Motor Vehicles (RMV). Officials at the RMV confirmed that an additional 25,000 three wheelers have been registered over the last seven years since 1994 and not 800,000.

Record layoffs amid negative growth

AS Sri Lanka's labour authorities were flooded with an "unprecedented" number of applications, seeking permission to lay off staff from private sector firms struggling against an economic downturn, weekend press reports said, quoting financial brokers' research said the country could hit negative growth for the first time in fifty years. "There is the high likelihood that the country could record a negative growth this year if things were to continue as they have for the past few months," NDBS Stockbrokers said in a report released in October.

NDBS has downgraded GDP growth predictions to 0.5% from 1%. "Considering poor GDP growth, especially during the 2nd quarter, and the fact that most economic fundamentals have deteriorated since and that political power has taken precedence over economic reforms, we are once again compelled to downgrade our GDP forecast," the report said.

Analysts have been downgrading GDP growth rates from the beginning of the year, the Sunday Leader said. "There has been an unprecedented number of applications seeking closures or to lay off workers," said Gamini Weerakoon, a retired labour commissioner told the Sunday Times, quoting officials from the Labour Commissioner's office.

Newspapers are filled with advertisements taken out by commercial banks seeking parate executions or seizing the property of private companies for failure to settle loans as Sri Lanka goes through one of the worst economic periods in recent times.

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