

OPINION

The UK Column



Tamils should vote in the referendum

Later on this month London will be fourth Diaspora centre to hold a referendum on the Vaddukoddai Resolution. The referendum will be a test of British Tamils' political attitudes and resolve. At this critical juncture for the Tamil struggle, having witnessed the full onslaught of Sri Lanka's genocidal campaign, British Tamils must give a resounding endorsement to the Tamil identity and homeland. By doing so we can demonstrate that Sri Lanka's violence has failed to cow the Tamil struggle into submission and that the British Tamils are prepared to continue the struggle for justice and freedom.

As British Tamils we must work together to ensure that as many of our friends and relatives as possible take part in the referendum and endorse the idea of Tamil Eelam. A successful outcome in London will reinforce the message that was given by the polls in Paris and Toronto. It will show the Sinhala polity that the Tamil liberation struggle was not destroyed by the artillery and aerial bombardment unleashed on the Vanni.

The British Tamils must also use the opportunity of these polls to speak to an influential section of British policy makers who have long argued that the majority of 'moderate' Tamils are happy to live under Sinhala domination and only a minority of 'extremist' Tamils support the Tamil liberation movement. British Tamils must use the polls to demolish this lazy view and ensure that future British policy is forced to take into account the mainstream of Tamil opinion, rather than the lunatic fringe.

Both the Sinhala polity and the sections of the international community have laboured for many years under a misapprehension of the Tamil struggle. Many Sinhalese, even the so called liberal elements, believed that if the conventional military strength of the LTTE was destroyed, the Tamils would simply accept their subordinate status on the island and give up all talk of homeland and rights. Having suffered an apparently catastrophic defeat the Sinhala establishment expected the Tamils to gratefully accept whatever 'concessions' the Sinhala people were willing to give them - though note that none were actually offered. The majority of the Sinhala polity now firmly believes that the Tamils must accept ongoing colonisation of the Tamil speaking areas and resign themselves to permanent and state sponsored discrimination in social, economic and cultural life. The Tamils are of course also expected to abandon all hope of meaningful self government.

The Sinhala expectation of Tamil capitulations rests on the mistaken assumption that the LTTE was the cause of Tamil defiance, when in fact armed

militancy itself was only the symptom.

Despite the heightened intensity of the Sinhala state's genocidal onslaught over 2009, the Tamil Diaspora has not wavered in its determination to struggle for freedom and justice. The poll being held in the UK later this month is an integral part of the ongoing struggle and British Tamils must participate in demonstrating the Tamil people's resolve. Each vote in support of the Vaddukoddai Resolution is a public declaration of support for the Tamil struggle and the Tamil people's right to live in peace and dignity in their own homeland.

Similarly many in the British policy establishment expected that with the defeat of the LTTE's conventional military capacity, the Tamil question would be much easier to resolve. Not only did these establishment figures hope that the Sinhalese would be more conciliatory, they also expected the Tamils to be more pliant. Faced with the irreconcilable chauvinism of the Sinhala state, some in the British establishment are turning to the Tamils and are trying to find 'moderate' Tamils prepared to accept Sinhala dictat in the interests of peace.

As an important state in the European Union and a member of the Security Council, Britain remains an important international actor in Sri Lanka. British Tamils must therefore use every opportunity of making their voices heard. By endorsing the the idea of Tamil Eelam at the polls, British Tamils can unequivocally demonstrate where the mainstream of Diaspora opinion is and show that it is completely in step with the now thirty year history of the Tamil liberation struggle.

The argument that all these referendums calling for a sovereign and independent state of Tamil Eelam is a waste of time because all hope of Tamil Eelam is now gone is simply facetious. Since the formation of the United Nations more than 60 years ago, over 140 states have been created. The formation of states and is an act of politics and politics never ends.

By voting in support of the referendum question, British Tamils can demonstrate to the world that the Tamil struggle remains a live political issue. A resounding British endorsement of Tamil Eelam will lend weight to the argument that Sri Lanka's conflict will only be resolved when the Tamil national identity and the Tamil homeland are recognized.

The Vaddukoddai Resolution referendum must not be written off as an empty or meaningless gesture. It is a concrete act of politics that can lend material weight to the Tamil struggle. The referendum demands our support and British Tamils must work together to ensure it is a success.



used as promised, it means not being afraid to cut them off until.

While there may not be much to choose between the candidates, the rift between General Fonseka and Mr. Rajapaksa - and the consequent divisions among Sinhalese nationalist parties and the renewed vigor of opposition parties - has at least put the possi-

bility of reforms on the agenda. International leverage, correctly applied, could help expand this small window for change, leading to the democratization and demilitarization of the country desperately needs to move finally beyond its horrific war and its bitter peace.

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These candidates are to blame for destroying our people

Suren Surendiran
The Independent

AS far as we Tamils are concerned, this is not the right time for any sort of election, regardless of who the candidates are.

Those in the traditional homeland are still recovering from the woes of the war; there has been no time for proper healing, rehabilitation or reconstruction. Most do not know where their loved ones are and whether they are still living or dead. They live in fear under a heavy military presence, with restricted freedom of movement.

Out in eastern Sri Lanka, Tamils suffer a continued armed paramilitary presence, and daily human rights violations that are perpetrated with impunity and with no independent investigation of these crimes. In the rest of the country, Tamils are forced to carry identity documents and are the only community compelled to register themselves with the local police.

If you were forced to choose between General Sarath Fonseka and President Mahinda Rajapaksa, then the former military chief is definitely the lesser of the two evils. But should the Tamils be backing him as their candidate in the upcoming election? I don't think so. General Fonseka, like the President, is implicated in war crimes and

crimes against humanity. These two men were largely responsible for the deaths of our Tamil kith and kin and for the destruction of our homeland in the island of Sri Lanka.

They should be brought to court to answer for their crimes and, given that, I believe it is morally and ethically impossible to throw one's support behind either of these candidates.

During the past 62 years since independence, successive governments of Sri Lanka have signed many pacts and agreements with Tamils with and without international sponsorship. All of them, without exception, have been abrogated unilaterally on the government side.

We Tamils want a candidate who accepts that the Tamils have legitimate grievances and political aspirations, stands for justice, and works for the resolution for the political problem through genuine negotiations. If someone meets these criteria, then we Tamils will support him or her, regardless of ethnicity.

Previous ballots have always been rigged by government sponsors, bringing injustices to the people of the island, particularly the Tamils. The international community should monitor this election closely.