

## **Voice of Shakthi Thursday 01 November 2001**

Many sins, it seems, are conducted in the name of democracy these days. In Sri Lanka, where a general election is scheduled for December 5, the cycle of violence which greets any election has already begun. One senior Minister in the caretaker Government, Reggie Ranatunge, has been accused of murder of a political opponent and over 100 cases of election violence reported in the lead-up to the election. Many more will be surely killed and maimed in this latest exercise in so-called democracy.

Right here in Australia a "khaki-election" is underway. Appealing to the xenophobic fears of its Anglo majority, leaders of the two main political parties are playing the race-card for all its worth to convince voters in marginal seats that the country is under threat from alien hordes.

In a party launch dominated by and appealing to the ill-founded fears of its Anglo members, Prime Minister John Howard holds out the spectre of Arab terrorism enveloping this multicultural nation if he is not returned to power. In a game of cheap politicking, Opposition Leader Kim Beazely, instead of taking a principled stand on the plight of victims displaced and seeking shelter from persecution and injustice, jumps on the band wagon too.

The fact that they are adopting the racist policies of Pauline Hanson, who they vociferously condemned not so long ago, seems of little concern to these leaders as long as they win those important marginal seats. Their stance may deprive Ms Hanson of the support she garnered at the last general election but the dogs of war and hate they unleash must surely come back to haunt them very soon.

In Sri Lanka too, a similar game is being played by the current President, Ms Kumaranatunge. Capitalising on current fears in the world about terrorism, she will no doubt succeed in attracting many of the votes which went to racist groups such as Sihala Urumaya in the last election.

So where does all this lead the thoughtful, reasoning public of both these countries? The people who see the injustices being perpetrated against people who are not of their own colour, race or creed? The ones who cry out for a more just world, for a social order that will allow all of us, regardless of our background, to share in the wealth, happiness and prosperity of this earth?

They are surely the majority in both these countries. But will their hopes and aspirations be reflected in the results of these elections? Going by the conduct of all these political leaders, it would be a very brave person indeed who will say yes.