

## Voice of Shakthi Thursday 24 August 2000

The stage has been set for another general election in Sri Lanka for October 10. In the finest traditions of democracy, which has been a notable feature of our motherland in recent times, the horse [trading](#) has begun too.

While the ordinary man and woman in Sri Lanka continues to contribute to the war effort through their hard-earned wages, their representatives in Parliament has been involved in a disgraceful exhibition of looking after their own hides.

As the country plunges into an ever-growing abyss of social and financial collapse, these guardians of our democratic traditions have been quite busy too making sure permits for their duty-free [luxury vehicles](#) are finalised before they are forced to face the voters. Among this lot, it is reported, were five MPs who had been appointed to Parliament only two weeks ago.

The goodies have been laid out for the long-suffering people of Jaffna too. In a fit of generosity never seen during two full terms of office, the Government, we are told, has decided to spend 750 million rupees for the reconstruction and [rehabilitation](#) of battle-scarred Jaffna. With their constitutional amendments now gathering dust in a corner and their credibility in tatters, it seems incredible that the Government can believe that dangling this carrot before the Tamil people can attract the minority votes yet again.

Then again, this presupposes the Government's commitment to a free and fair election. And what an illusion that will be! Already the violence has begun, forcing Buddhist leaders to appeal to the highest standards of Ahimsa. Two people has died in election related violence already and there is no doubt many more will lose their lives in this mad scramble for power at all costs. The supporters of Sports Minister S B Dissanayake is suspected to have carried out the first killing. Mr Dissanayake of course is one of President Kumaranatunge's most trusted lieutenants. If a person so close to the Executive President of the country is involved in this type of violence, as it is alleged, what hope is there of a free and fair election?

But Mr Dissanayake is not going to have things all his way, it seems. Senior ministers in the Government are reported to be extremely upset over the sudden elevation of Mr Dissanayake to the powerful position of General Secretary of the SLFP. His only qualification for the position, according to political analysts, is his capacity to win elections without much thought to the norms of democracy.

On another front, sudden promotions seems to have caused a lot of heartburn within the military establishment too. The President's decision to recall Major General Balagalle from retirement to take up the Army's top post of Chief of Staff has created a furore in defence circles, it seems. As we report in our [news](#), two senior Army men, Major Generals Janaka Perera and Neil Dias are so disillusioned over General Balagalle's appointment that they are now planning on retiring early. Taking up arms, in a figurative sense of course, on

behalf of Major General Perera is the ultra-nationalist Sihala Urumaya which preaches war from the sidelines.

Adding to this rich farce of course is the esteemed Leader of the Opposition, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe. Make me your President, he says, and I will bring about a settlement to the ethnic crisis with the agreement of the LTTE and the Buddhist clergy. All it needs, he says, is intelligent leadership. No mention of why he was unable to provide this intelligent leadership when he was a senior member of the former UNP Government which ruled the country for 17 years. Is he talking of his leadership style then which helped escalate the crisis to unimaginable proportions in the first place?

The antics of both the Government and the main Opposition illustrate only one fact which Sri Lankans both at home and abroad have come to realize many years ago. This is a naked grab for power by both [parties](#). As for the people whose destiny these our political master are supposed to charter, well, that has been the least of their problems for a long time, hasn't it?