

## Voice of Shakthi Thursday 26 October 2000

Compilers of the Guinness Book of World Records, we understand, have advised President Chandrika Kumaranatunge how she could ensure her attempt to establish the largest ever Cabinet can remain in the [history books](#) for ever.

Only a mere twenty more appointments are needed to ensure that her entire Coalition is elevated to this high office and thus ensure a record which will never be broken, they have said.

The joke may be lost on the long-suffering people of Sri Lanka who will bear the cost of this ludicrous exercise. As she struggles to maintain an administration with which she can work, President Kumaranatunge is having to make the kind of compromises she would have detested in the heady days of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party which she launched with her late husband with so much optimism.

To give you an idea of the state to which these so-called negotiations have sunk here are some [statistics](#)

on the kind of government that the PA has cobbled together and its cost to the people of Sri Lanka.

With 44 ministers forming one of the biggest cabinets in the world, the country will have to provide public funds amounting to a colossal 1.3 million rupees a month for salaries alone. An equal number of deputies' salaries will mean another one million rupees a month in public funds. The ministers are also entitled to an entertainment allowance of Rs. 5,000 a month, unlimited fuel, two private telephones, a hand phone, [computers](#), typewriters, special loan facilities and unlimited stationary. In addition, there are other privileges such as duty-free vehicle permits, [liquor](#) permits, twelve personal staff and a pension at the end of five years. They are also entitled to two vehicles for private use and a security unit. The recently purchased eighteen luxury bullet-proof vehicles have cost a thumping Rs. 448 million in public funds.

With minor [parties](#) such as the National Unity Alliance and the EPDP virtually asking for the moon and getting it, the President seems to have run out of options so soon after the recent election. Hence these extravagance to those who support her.

Which is why the call from business leaders for a National government seems even more relevant than before. The demands put forward by the UNP for a working arrangement seems reasonable enough. Independent elections and police commissions and a guarantee of media freedom can go a long way towards repairing the enormous damage done to the country and

its people by those seeking power at all costs.

It will also put an end to the disgraceful horse-[trading](#) which has been going on in the past two weeks where two minor parties are virtually holding the country to ransom.

Hopefully, current talks between the two major parties will result in a binding agreement. Upto now, they have not distinguished themselves in genuinely seeking measures to bring peace to the country. Hopefully, the disgraceful exhibition of vote rigging, thuggery and intimidation by power-hungry politicians may at last bring realisation of the destruction they are causing to each other and most importantly, to the people of Sri Lanka.