

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 28 September 2000

"We don't ask for much. We need to live in peace. That's all"

This plea from a resident of Jaffna must surely be echoing in every Sri Lankan's mind as they face up to yet another general election on October 10.

Yet, what do we get from the representatives of the people who are supposed to govern for all Sri Lankans?

As of September 25th, 685 incidents have been reported to the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) in the run-up to the parliamentary election. Of these, 390 or 57% are major incidents which include 12 Murders, 09 Attempted Murders, 101 acts of Hurt, 16 reports of Grievous Hurt, 134 Assaults, 82 acts of Threat and Intimidation, 18 cases of Misuse of State Resources, 03 Robberies and 15 acts of Arson.

For the first time since local government elections in 1997, a single [party](#) is allegedly responsible for over 50% of the total number of incidents reported. The People's Alliance is the alleged perpetrator in 368 incidents or 53.7%, the UNP in 142 or 20.7%, the JVP in 06, and persons of unknown political affiliation in 144 or 21%.

The relative preponderance of major incidents marks this election campaign as being comparatively more violent than others in the recent past.

In the Jaffna peninsula, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has begun to train students in areas under their control to protest and march against the government. Those who resisted were prevented from sitting for their end of year examinations.

One of the Tamil [parties](#), the EPDP, which maintains that they have embraced the democratic path, is supposedly using its clout with the PA to intimidate sympathisers of its arch-rival, the TULF.

According to foreign polls observers, police inaction is a cause for serious concern in ensuring a violence free election. Yet, a Police Inspector in Mutwal who tried to uphold the law against People's Alliance goons have been served immediate transfer orders by the Government.

So welcome democracy, Sri Lankan style!

If any single factor can be attributed to the terrible economic, social and cultural morass in which Sri Lanka finds itself today, it must surely be the venality and corruption of the so-called leaders of our nation. Despite pious pronouncements to the contrary, it is a fact that that ever since we gained independence from our colonial masters, we have yet to identify a single leader who has genuinely worked for the good of the nation.

Either through sheer naivety, abysmal ignorance or Machiavellian manipulation, our so-called leaders have managed to pull down this once prosperous nation to the basket case it is today. And the wishes and aspirations of the ordinary people of Sri Lanka is the least of their concerns as they struggle to gain entry to Parliament and, with it, access to duty-free four-wheel drives, jobs for the nearest and dearest, and commissions galore over the dead bodies of poor villagers, young and old.

Ignoring the threats of armed groups, party henchmen, bombs, murders, bribes and promises, the people of Sri Lanka have gone to the polls everytime to exercise their democratic rights. What they have got in return is a set of jokers whose least concern is, it seems to us, the welfare of our motherland.