

Our Election Manifesto November 12, 2001

The parliamentary elections scheduled for 5th December 2001 will be an important landmark in the political history of the Tamil nationality.

It is imperative that the present situation of drift and uncertainty be ended and that the Tamil national question be addressed with all the seriousness and urgency it deserves.

A brief reiteration of the political experiences and history of the Tamil nationality in the past fifty-two years since independence would be relevant.

The Citizenship and Franchise Laws deprived hundreds of thousands of Tamils of recent Indian origin, who were domiciled in Ceylon at independence, of their citizenship and franchise rights. Though subsequent efforts were made to remedy this grave injustice, more than three hundred thousand of these people have been compelled to leave the country, while almost a hundred thousand yet remain stateless. This has diminished the political strength and representation of the Tamil people.

State aided colonization of the Tamil homeland with Sinhala people, from the time of independence has continued unabated despite agreements entered into by successive prime ministers with the Tamil political leadership, which if implemented, would have brought to an end this pernicious practice, that diminished the political strength and representation of the Tamil nationality, in the Tamil homeland and also deprives them of vital resources in the areas of their historical habitation. Successive governments have through the activities of State-funded corporations and through the encouragement of unlawful occupation of State land by the Sinhala people contributed to the worsening of the situation.

The harmful impact of state-aided Sinhala colonization of the Tamil homeland is demonstrated by the inconvertible fact that while the natural increase of Sinhala population-country wide-between 1948 (the year of independence) and 1981 (the year of the last available census) was 238 percent, the Sinhala population in the eastern province increased during the same period by 883 percent. The position now in the year 2001 is far worse than what it was in 1981.

The enactment of the Sinhala Only legislation and the implementation of that policy for over three decades, gravely impinged upon the employment and other opportunities of the Tamil nationality in the administrative system and reduced the Tamil nationality to a position of second class citizenship.

The dubious provision, by which Tamil was purported to be elevated to the same status as Sinhala, remains a dead letter. The Sinhala language is yet the only language used, even in some parts of the Tamil homeland. The resulting position is that the status of the Tamil nationality in the administration yet continues to remain the same.

Standardization in admissions to university education in the 1970s embittered Tamil youth who were deprived of equal opportunity to higher education. The district-wise admission to university education now in force is weighted in favour of the Sinhala nationality, and does not accord merit its rightful place in the higher education system. Equal facilities are not provided to Tamil students in the matter of the educational infrastructure and services. There is much frustration within the Tamil nationality in the field of education. Non-recognition of

merit, deprivation of social development, and denial of economic opportunities, step-motherly treatment in the fields of industries, agriculture and fisheries, have led to social underdevelopment, and economic impoverishment of the Tamil nationality.

There is gross discrimination against Tamil youth in the field of public sector employment. The same practice is spreading to private sector employment. Not even three percent of the total employment is provided to the Tamil nationality in the public sector. Such blatant discrimination against the Tamil nationality, particularly Tamil youth, has continued for decades and successive governments have been utterly insensitive to the legitimate grievances of the Tamil nationality in this regard.

Racial pogroms against the Tamil nationality have been a regular phenomenon since the 1950's. The Tamil nationality has lost lives by the tens of thousands, many more have been grievously wounded and billions of rupees worth of property owned by Tamils has been destroyed in the northeast and other parts of the island. Places of religious worship, educational and cultural institutions including the public library of Jaffna were destroyed by the armed forces of the Sri Lankan State. The disappearances of Tamil people, particularly Tamil youths, and frequent sexual assault against Tamil females has been a continuing feature of the violence unleashed against the Tamil nationality: some governments have even collaborated with the perpetrators of violence.

Arbitrary and indiscriminate arrests of Tamil youth, prolonged detention under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Emergency Regulations without trial, physical and mental torture, the humiliation and insults inflicted on the Tamil nationality allegedly on grounds of security, have been a continuing feature. Aerial bombing and shelling both from land and sea into Tamil civilian settlements has resulted in death and injury and in the substantial dislocation of the Tamil civilian population, and the dreadful fear amongst non-combatant civilians that they could be the victims of such bombing and shelling.

Having failed to resolve the Tamil national question, through negotiations, and civil disobedience campaigns, such as the massive 'satyagraha' campaign in the northeast in 1961, when the repression of the armed forces was unleashed on the Tamil nationality, and the Tamil political leadership detained in an army camp, the Vaddukoddai resolution was adopted on 14th May 1976, for the restoration of the sovereignty of the Tamil nation.

The position today is much worse than it was in 1976.

It was in this background and in the context of the failure of successive governments to evolve a just solution to the Tamil national question, that Tamil youth - left with no alternative - were driven to resort to an armed struggle.

Even after the adoption of the Vaddukoddai resolution, and even after the commencement of an armed struggle, the Tamil political leadership had always been willing to, and has made every possible endeavour to negotiate a just solution to the Tamil national question. The opportunities that thus became available were not availed of by successive governments. There has thus been dismal failure on the part of successive governments, during the past fifty years, to evolve a just solution to the Tamil national question.

Consequently, it was inevitable, that the armed struggle gained in strength, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam came to occupy a paramount position, and play a pivotal role in the

struggle of the Tamil nationality to win their rights. It would be futile not to recognize this reality.

It would be relevant to recall the statement made by the widely representative delegation of the Tamil nationality on 13th July 1985 at talks with representatives of the Sri Lankan government at Thimpu, Bhutan.

'It is our considered view that any meaningful solution to the national question of the island must be based on the following four cardinal principles'.

1. Recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a distinct nationality.
2. Recognition of an identified Tamil homeland and guarantee of its territorial integrity.
3. Based on the above, recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation.
4. Recognition of the right to full citizenship and other fundamental democratic rights of all Tamils who look upon the island as their country.'

The statement went on to state - 'Different countries have fashioned different systems of governments to ensure these principles. We have demanded and struggled for an independent Tamil state as the answer to this problem arising out of the denial of these basic rights of our people...

In view of our earnest desire for peace, we are prepared to give consideration to any set of proposals in keeping with the above principles that the Sri Lanka government might place before us'.

The Sri Lankan State has lacked comprehension and consistency in its purported efforts to evolve a just solution to the Tamil national question. The sincerity of the commitment of the Sri Lankan State has thereby been called into serious question. By reason thereof, the Tamil nationality has encountered immense hardship and suffering, valuable lives have been lost on all sides, and the whole country has had to endure the multi-faceted adverse consequences of the continuing war.

The seriously flawed policies of the Sri Lankan State in the past six years, of claiming to 'conduct a war for peace' and claiming 'that the war is being conducted against the LTTE and not against the Tamil people' has aggravated the situation and made a just solution to the Tamil national question even more complex. We have consistently rejected these positions, and asserted that war can never bring about peace, and that peace can only be achieved through rational dialogue. We have also consistently asserted that any attempt to draw a distinction between the LTTE and the Tamil people was meaningless, when there was no aspect of Tamil civilian life which was not gravely impaired by the continuance of the war, and that the war should therefore be ended. The hollowness of these two slogans of the Sri Lankan State today stands fully exposed.

It is such misconceived thinking on the part of the Sri Lankan State, that resulted in tardiness in accepting an international third party role, in order to evolve a just solution to the Tamil national question and the failure after the acceptance of the Norwegian initiative to grasp opportunities that became available to terminate the war, and further the negotiation process; and thereafter in the stultification of the Norwegian initiative on frivolous pretexts and the consequent frustration of the peace process.

The above factors have made it imperative for the Tamil nationality to formulate a cohesive and coherent position in regard to their future political struggle.

The immediate aims and objectives of the Tamil Alliance comprising the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) are the following: -

- i) The immediate lifting of the economic embargo currently in force in parts of the northeast province
- ii) The withdrawal of the residential and travel restrictions foisted on the Tamil nationality
- iii) The immediate cessation of the war being currently waged in the northeast
- iv) The immediate commencement of the process of negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with international third party involvement.

This Alliance also states that unless meaningful negotiations are held with the L.T.T.E. no just solution can be found to the Tamil national question and that such negotiations should be held immediately only with the LTTE. This Alliance further states that in order to ensure that the negotiations are properly focussed and are purposeful and successful, no parallel negotiations should take place with any other Tamil political formation.

- v) That to facilitate the commencement of such negotiations, steps should be taken to lift the proscription imposed on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, and thereby ensure such proscription does not constitute an impediment to the free and full participation of the LTTE at such negotiations on behalf of the Tamil nationality.

The Alliance contests the forthcoming parliamentary elections in order to achieve the aims and objectives, outlined above, and will campaign both nationally and internationally for the achievement of the said aims and objectives.

This Alliance will mobilize the Tamil-speaking people of the northeast, in order to achieve the said aims and objectives.

The Tamil nationality is today at the crossroads, between despair as a result of their present pathetic plight, and hope for a better tomorrow.

We urge the Tamil speaking voters to repose faith in the hope for a better tomorrow, and extend their total support to the Tamil Alliance, by casting their votes for the rising sun, the common symbol of the Tamil Alliance.