

## **Mahinda Rajapaksa Architect of His Own Misfortunes**

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In an article I wrote to the Tamil Mirror (December issue) titled "For the incumbent president Rajapaksa, this election is a do or die battle" I claimed that a majority of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are likely to deny a third term to President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This has proved prophetic, albeit, the Sinhalese voters preferred Mahinda Rajapaksa by a narrow margin.

In the same article I predicted "The Tamils will take revenge on Mahinda Rajapaksa like goddess Kannagi for treating them shabbily and robbing them of their self respect and dignity. Thousands of mothers whose children have disappeared after arrest by the armed forces will not vote for Mahinda Rajapaksa. He cannot buy their votes by cheap gimmicks like handing over jewellery, on the eve of an election that rightly belonged to them in the first place" has been proved right.

In the same issue there was another article captioned "Mahinda or Maithri? Neutrality the Best Option for the TNA and Tamils" authored by my friend Thambu Kanagasabai. Apparently he is looking at the problem as an academic and not as a politician. There is no difference between boycotting the elections and maintaining neutrality both are revisionist theories too risky to practice. What would have happened if the Tamils boycotted the elections or remained neutral? Rajapaksa would have won the elections and remained in power for another 7 years till 2022. Unfortunately, this was also the stand of BTF, TGTE, ICET, USTPAC and few other Diaspora outfits. Only the GTF asked the people to exercise their franchise carefully, an indirect way of telling the people to vote against Rajapaksa. CTC also came out forcibly asking people to exercise their democratic right to vote.

In a long winding press release the ICET stated "Therefore, regarding the upcoming election, our request is that each Eelam Tamil should act in keeping our long-term goal in mind, and express to the international community a stance based on only the Tamil nation's existence and security in mind" which ignored the pathetic existence of a majority of our people struggling day to day survival. This was neither fish nor fowl!

TGTE of course took a very pessimistic stand about the elections. In a statement issued by the Hon. Prime Minister of TGTE he said "whichever of the two main candidates wins the election will rule as President of the hegemonic state of Sri Lanka. Tamils can only expect more calamities to befall them than any respite from either of these two candidates.

"If Mahinda Rajapaksa succeeds, the Tamils could expect a worsening of their situation in the short term and perhaps a better one in the long term. If Maithripala Sirisena prevails, there is a possibility of an immediate respite but in the long term a worsening of the situation. On the

whole, Tamils could only expect negative outcomes from these elections." The question is how long the "long term" and how short is the "short term"? One year, 2 years, 10 years down the road?

At this juncture I will like to give credit to Dr. Brian Senewiratne the Sinhalese crusader for Tamil rights. He stated "Being a contest between two Sinhalese politicians to elect what in effect is a Sinhalese president, there has been some speculation whether this is of any consequence to the Tamil people in the north and east – the suggestion being that they should boycott the election as they did in 2005. However, the feeling today is very different. Many Tamils in the north and east want to vote...." Obviously, the learned Doctor was more pragmatist than many leading Tamil activists living in Diaspora.

I have always opposed to the idea of boycotting elections, any elections, and maintained any such boycott will tantamount to political suicide for the Tamils citing past history. This apart boycott of election process is against the spirit of democracy. Political participation of national minorities is a must in democratic process. The ill advised and unwarranted boycott of the State Councils in 1931 by the Jaffna Students Congress led to the formation of the Pan Sinhala Board of Ministers. Later, the boycott by the LTTE the parliamentary elections held in 1994 ended in disaster. By winning 9 seats in Jaffna electoral district with a paltry 10,077 votes, Douglas Devananda and his party became a thorn in the flesh or a pain in the neck in Tamil politics for the last 21 years. He served as a Quisling to both the UNP and the SLFP for the crumbs that fell from the master's table. His boast of federal government at the centre and autonomy at provincial level remained empty rhetoric. Next was the suicidal boycott of the presidential election held in 2005 by LTTE. It was an honest mistake but turned out to be a monumental blunder of giant proportions when the LTTE lost the war. It paved the way for Mahinda Rajapaksa to emerge victorious and become the President by a razor thin majority. Only 8,524 (1.21%) voters in the Jaffna electoral district voted out of 701,938 registered voters.

The TNA which is the authentic (not sole) representative of the Tamil people issued its manifesto on December 30, 2014 declaring unequivocal support to Maithripala Sirisena. There were no prevarications, no conditions, and no foot-dragging. "After earnest consultation with the Tamil people and others in the north and the east, the TNA has unanimously decided to give its fullest support to common opposition candidate Mr. Maithripala Sirisena at the upcoming presidential elections." Continuing the manifesto stated "The experience of our people has been that the struggle for democracy over dictatorship is inextricably linked to the pursuit of our most cherished values: equality, justice, dignity and freedom. **We therefore call on all citizens to turn out in great numbers and defeat the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime by casting their vote in favour of the Common Opposition Candidate Maithripala Sirisena and the Swan symbol.**"

**It was an open and frank appeal to the Tamil voters to defeat Mahinda Rajapaksa's regime and elect Maithripala Sirisena by voting for Swan symbol. The forthrightness of the**

**manifesto took many by surprise. It was a categorical call end Rajapaksa's dictatorial rule without taking refuge under subterfuges.**

Rajapaksa's ten year rule was an unmitigated disaster for the Tamil people. It is the tears shed by the Tamil people unable to endure the oppression they suffered at the hands of an unjust ruler that become a file to waste away his wealth and power.

As stated above Tamils did indeed took revenge against Mahinda Rajapaksa with a vengeance. Rajapaksa vented his anger and frustration publically as soon as the two helicopters, courtesy of Ranil Wickremasinghe, took him and his entourage from Temple Trees during the wee hours of January 9 to Medamulana in Hambantota.

Addressing to a large gathering of supporters who came to console him following his ignominious defeat just a few hours earlier he gave an emotional speech as follows:

“The Prime reason for the defeat in the Presidential Election is caused by the Vote banks of the Tamils from North, East and from the Upcountry, therefore, I cannot accept this defeat, which has been caused by the Tamils by voting against me. **Therefore, I am not at all accepting this as a defeat. Even now the Power has not gone out of Sinhalese from the government.** Because of my defeat, the Tamil community is not going to get any benefit at all”.

But, to any outsider it will be plain Rajapaksa was the architect of his own misfortune. To him Tamil voters did not exist at all. Their problems, trials and tribulations were of no concern to him. He gave the Sinhala army a free hand to grab acres and acres of private lands to build military bases, cantonments, luxury hotels, presidential palaces in the North. He was like the proverbial king residing in his palace thought the every citizen is also like him!

In blaming the Tamil voters Rajapaksa spoke only half the truth. The other half of the truth is he lost support among his traditional Sinhala - Buddhist voters on whom he relied heavily to the exclusion of Tamil and Muslim voters. Like in 2010 he calculated that his Sinhala - Buddhist constituency he assiduously nursed is enough to win the elections. In 2010 he won all 16 electorates in the South with a staggering 1,842,749 vote majority. Rajapaksa polled 6,015,934 (57.88%) votes against 4,173,185 (40.15%) polled by Sarath Fonseka.

A study of the voting pattern reveals that in 2010 too Rajapaksa lost the North and East and Nuwara Eliya heavily. What is remarkable is the high turn out due to some increased political space in the North. In contrast to 2010, however, Rajapaksa lost support in 6 key districts in the South in 2015.

The following Table shows who won and who lost in the 16 electoral districts in the south excluding the 6 electoral districts in the North, East and Nuwara Eliya.

### **Voting pattern in 16 Electoral Districts in the South in 2015 and 2010 Presidential Elections**

**Table 1**

<b>Electoral</b>	<b>Rajapaksa</b>		<b>Sirisen</b>		<b>Others</b>		<b>Valid</b>	<b>Rajapaksa</b>		<b>Fonseka</b>		
<b>District</b>	2015		2015		2015		2015	2010		2010		<b>T/Out</b>
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	Votes	%	Votes	%	%
Anuradhapura	<b>281,161</b>	53.59	238,407	45.44	5,065	0.973	524,633	<b>298,448</b>	66.32	143,761	31.34	78.35
Badulla	249,243	49.15	249,524	49.21	8,303	1.640	507,070	<b>237,579</b>	52.23	198,835	44.55	78.7
Colombo	562,614	43.43	<b>725,073</b>	55.93	8,673	0.67	1,296,360	<b>614,740</b>	52.93	533,022	45.9	77.06
Galle	<b>377,126</b>	55.64	293,994	43.37	6,691	0.991	677,811	<b>386,971</b>	63.69	211,633	34.83	80.25
Gampaha	664,347	49.49	669,007	49.83	9,142	0.68	1,342,496	<b>718,716</b>	61.66	434,506	37.28	79.66
Hambantota	<b>243,295</b>	63.02	138,708	35.93	4,073	1.056	386,076	<b>226,887</b>	67.21	105,336	31.2	80.67
Kalutara	<b>395,890</b>	52.65	349,404	46.46	6,690	0.894	751,984	<b>412,562</b>	63.06	231,807	35.43	81.01
Kandy	378,585	44.23	<b>466,994</b>	54.56	10,329	1.218	855,908	<b>406,636</b>	54.16	329,492	43.89	78.26
Kegalle	<b>278,130</b>	51.82	252,533	47.05	6,108	1.141	536,771	<b>296,639</b>	61.8	174,877		78.76
Kurunagala	<b>556,868</b>	53.46	476,602	45.76	8,154	0.78	1,041,624	<b>582,784</b>	63.08	327,594	35.46	78.62

Matara	297,823	57.81	212,435	41.24	4,892	0.950	515,150	296,155	65.53	148,510	32.86	78.6
Matala	158,880	51.41	145,928	47.22	4,214	1.362	309,022	157,953	59.74	100,513	38.01	77.94
Monaragala	172,745	61.45	105,276	37.45	3,095	1.16	281,116	158,435	69.01	66,803	29.1	77.12
Nuwara Eliya	145,339	34.06	272,605	63.88	8,822	2.076	426,766	151,604	43.77	180,604	52.14	77.19
Polonnaruwa	105,640	41.27	147,974	57.8	2,382	0.936	255,996	144,889	64.92	75,026	33.62	80.13
Puttalam	197,751	48.97	202,073	50.04	4,026	1	403,850	201,981	58.7	136,233	35.59	70.02
Ratnapura	379,053	55.74	292,514	43.01	8,517	1.254	680,084	377,734	63.76	203,566	34.36	81.24
16 Districts	5,299,151	50.64	4,996,446	48.38	100,354	0.98	10,365,951	5,519,109	61.73	3,421,514	38.26	
All 22 districts	5,768,090	47.58	6,217,162	51.28	138,200	1.14	12,123,452	6,015,934	57.88	4,173,185	40.15	
Valid Votes	12,123,452									10,393,613	99.03	
Rejected Voters	140,925									101,838	0.97	
Total Polled	12,264,377	81.52								10,495,451		74.5
Registered Voters	15,044,490									140,885		
Majority							449,072			1,842,749		

In the entire 22 districts Sirisena won 10 and lost marginally in 12 other districts won by Rajapaksa. Sirisena polled 4,996,446 (48.38) as compared to 5,299,151 votes secured by Rajapaksa a difference of 302,705 (1.26%) votes.

Taking the 6 electoral districts of Northern, Eastern and Central provinces Sirisena secured 1,250,716 (84.27) compared to 468,939 (31.64) votes to Rajapaksa. This gave Sirisena a majority of 781,777 votes more than enough to off set the deficit of 302,705 in the 16 electoral districts plus giving a majority of 449,072 votes.

### Voting pattern in 6 Electoral Districts in the North, East and Nuwara Eliya Districts in 2015 and 2010 Presidential Elections

Table 2

Electoral District	Province	Rajapaksa 2015		Sirisena 2015		Others 2015		Valid Votes 2015	Rajapaksa 2010		Fonseka 2010		T/O ut
		Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	Votes	%	Votes	%	%
Batticaloa	Eastern	41,631	16.22	209,422	81.62	5,533	2.16	256,586	55,663	26.27	146,057	68.93	64.83
Digamadulla	Northern	121,027	33.82	233,360	65.22	3,430	0.96	357,817	146,912	47.92	153,105	49.94	73.54
Trincomalee	Eastern	52,111	26.67	140,338	71.84	2,907	1.49	195,356	69,752	43.04	87,661	54.09	68.22
<b>Eastern</b>		<b>214,869</b>	<b>26.54</b>	<b>583,120</b>	<b>72.01</b>	<b>11,780</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>809,739</b>	<b>272,327</b>	<b>41.31</b>	<b>386,823</b>	<b>58.68</b>	<b>68.87</b>
Jaffna	Northern	74,454	21.85	253,574	74.42	12,723	3.73	340,751	44,154	24.75	113,877	63.84	25.66
Vanni	Northern	34,377	19.07	141,417	78.47	4,431	2.46	180,225	28,740	27.31	70,367	66.86	40.33

<b>Northern</b>		108831	20.89	394,991	75.82	17154	3.29	520976	728944	28.34	184244	71.66	33.00
<b>Northern+Eastern</b>		323,600	24.32	978,111	72.01	29,024	1.45	1,330,735	345,221	37.66	571,067	62.34	50.90
<b>Nuwar Eliya</b>	Central	145,339	34.06	272,605	63.88	8,822	2.07	426766	151604	45.64	180,604	54.36	77.19
<b>Northern+Eastern+Central</b>		468,939	31.64	1,250,716	84.37	37,846	2.56	1,482,339	345,372	31.48	751,671	68.60	62.78
<b>16 Districts</b>		5,299,151	50.64	4,996,446	48.38	100,354	0.98	10365,951	5,519,109	61.73	3,421,514	38.26	
<b>All 22 districts</b>		5,768,090	47.58	6,217,162	51.28	138,200	1.14	12,123,452	6,015,934	57.88	4,173,185	40.15	
<b>Valid Votes</b>		3,578,731											
<b>Rejected</b>		140,925									101,838	0.97	
<b>Total Polled</b>		12,264,377	81.52								10,495,451		74.49
<b>Registered Voters</b>		15,044,490									14,088,500		
<b>Majority</b>			449,072							1,842,749			

(Department of Elections 2015, 2010)

Compared to 751,671 (68.60) votes polled by Sarath Fonseka in 2010, Sirisena secured 1,250,716 (84.37) votes an increase of 499,145 votes. This is partly explained by increased turnout in Jaffna electorate from 25.66% in 2010 to 74.42% in 2015. Similarly in Vanni electorate the turnout increased from 40.23% in 2010 to 78.47% in 2015. In the north immediately after the war ended in 2009, there were several thousand people who could not vote due to internal displacement.

In the 2010 elections, Mahinda Rajapakse received a total of 6,015,934 votes (57.88%) and Sarath Fonseka 4,173,185 votes (40.15%). A difference of 17.73% points between the two. The total polled was 74.49%/ (Department of Elections 2010).

It could be observed Rajapaksa's over all votes were reduced from 6,015,934 in 2010 to 5,768,090 in 2015 a difference of 247,844 votes despite an increase of registered voters from 14,088,500 to 15,044,490, that is an increase of 955,990 voters. There was also a significant 7.02 % increase in the voter turnout from 74.5% in 2010 to 81.52% in 2015.

Although Maithripala Sirisena won 84.37% votes in the Tamil and Muslim dominated 6 electorates compared to 31.64 % to Rajapaksa, Sirisena managed only 48.54% from the balance 16 electorates. Rajapaksa secured 50.64 % in all 22 electoral districts of the country.

While Mahinda Rajapaksa has managed to get 24.32% of the North and East votes, over half of the Sinhala dominated electorate has voted to give him a third term in office.

So Rajapaksa lost the election not entirely due to Tamil and Muslim votes cast against him, but due to decreased support of the Sinhala - Buddhist votes in the 16 electoral districts in the south.

The TNA must be congratulated for their open support and throwing their weight behind Maithripala Sirisena. They could have just asked the Tamil voters to vote against Rajapaksa and not ask them to vote for Sirisena. But they explicitly asked the Tamil voters to cast their vote in favour of the Common Opposition Candidate Maithripala Sirisena and the Swan symbol. The TNA has always from Chelvanayakam days stood for principle "we might lose everything, but let us keep our honour intact" irrespective of the consequences.

Today, the Tamil people living in the North/East as well as in other parts of the island are breathing freely. There is whiff of fresh air blowing through North/East. The military governor C.A. Chandrasri who openly campaigned for the UPFA has already lost his job. Along with him the Chief Secretary Wijayalakshmi Ramesh who took the Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran to the Supreme Court has been given the marching orders.

On the macro political front the government has promised to devolve more powers to all the Provincial Councils, demilitarise the Northern Province, order a domestic probe into the excesses reportedly committed during the last phase of the so-called Eelam War IV in 2009, and take



suitable steps to provide relief and justice to victims of the civil war that tore the country apart for nearly three decades.

The Tamil people are happy they helped Maithripala Sirisena to topple a powerful but corrupt family dictatorship. Mahinda Rajapaksa's excessive lust for power and intolerance was the cause of his own downfall from power. In many ways his rise and fall mirrors that of another elected dictator and WW II hero Ferdinand E. Marcos of Philippines.