

# Thinking Beyond Borders - Provincial Elections and Nation Building

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The political agenda in Sri Lanka is witnessing a range of Provincial Council (PC) Elections at present. The government in power is making use of its popularity consequent to bringing the 26 year old the civil war to an end. It is within this euphoria that the PC Elections that were held in the Central Province and the North Western were all won by the government in power. The Uva PC Elections was held on 6<sup>th</sup> August while the Jaffna and the Vavuniya Municipal and the Urban council elections followed.

It is in this context that a war of words, assassination of characters, political violence and the waste of public and private property has begun to take place in the PC Elections. The character, the personalities, the issues at stake, the priorities, the waste of funds, corruption, and poor governance have to be stressed and this has made the author ponder whether the masses have truly understood the consequences and the context of the end of the civil war. The Sri Lankan citizenry should and have to develop a new culture of thinking that goes “beyond borders”<sup>1</sup> to unite a society which is very disparate in nature. This culture has to stress on unity amidst diversity. Different ethnicities, languages, religions, social and geographical differences have to now develop a culture of togetherness in order to help the political, economic and social development of the country. A peaceful co-existence between the ethnic groups is a vital pre-condition for the positive political and economic development from hereon

Since the internationalization of the conflict in the late 1980's, the international community (IC) has been observing the developments of the country. Power in the form of an international community has become the arbitrator in world conflicts.<sup>2</sup> It is no more the military power which the subject of International Relations stresses now, but the economic or the “soft power” of the world powers. In such a context, Sri Lanka should be careful and mindful of tinkering with narrow and homogenous identities that might discourage the international community from actively and positively getting involved in the country's development and well being.

How could we then think beyond selfish, narrow and harmful ideologies in the new political agenda that has to be established in Sri Lanka? How can the PC Elections and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment stress on the notion of an attempt to go beyond borders to stress a unity amidst diversity? Through that to strengthen the unity of the Sri Lankan polity in a diverse society should be the ultimate objective. Rather than parochial sentiments of the politicians of today, a new culture and a genuine devolution to the provinces has to be established now to confirm

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond borders is a concept that has been developed by Dr Ram Alagan of the Dept of Geography of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of power politics is the fundamental base in the study of International Relations.

the ultimate reality of the civil war having ended. Provincial and local governance should now play a major role in the political and economic governance of the country.

The devolution of power in a true sense or a federal type of governance has now been accepted for a country that is so very diverse in its society, but that needs to be united. The politicians and the governments that come into power in Sri Lanka should take this opportunity in proceeding towards such a goal and an objective. A wholesome effort that sees to the peoples immediate needs that cuts across ethnicities, religions, castes and classes have to be addressed at the earliest.

Have we witnessed any changes glancing at the opportunity given to us at the Provincial, Municipal and the Urban Council Elections held in The Uva Province, Jaffna Municipal Council and the Vavuniya Urban Council respectively? In the Uva Elections, while the United People's Freedom Alliance obtained 418,906 votes which is a 72.39% with 25 seats in the PC, the UNP bagged 129,144 votes which is a 22.32% with 7 seats in the PC. The People's Liberation Front has won 14,639 which is a 2.53% with just a seat on the PC. The Uva PC Election is then a repetition of the pattern of voting that was seen in the PC Elections that were held since of late. However, in the Jaffna Municipal Council Elections, the United People's Freedom Alliance has won the elections with 10,602 elections which is a 50.67% with 13 seats, while the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi has bagged 8,008 votes which is a 38.28% that has got them 8 seats in the MC. Yet, the total polled has been just 22,280 out of a registered electorate of 100,417. Even a worse situation is seen when the Vavuniya Urban Council Elections are observed. In it, the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi has won 4,279 votes which is a 34.81% that has got them 5 seats in the Council while the Democratic Peoples Liberation Front has obtained 4136 votes which is a 33.65% with 3 seats while the United People's Freedom Alliance has bagged only 3,035 votes with a 24.77% that has got them 2 seats in the Council. The total polled has been 12,850 out of a registered electorate of 24,626. All in all while the Sinhala-Buddhist majority have won in the Uva PC, in Jaffna too the government which is presently in power has won the elections, but of course with less than a one quarter of a voter turn out. In the Vavuniya elections, the Tamil nationalists have won in a voter turn out of approximately half. In such a scenario, will and can the Sri Lankan citizenry think of a mentality beyond borders? Is it still a utopia? How and what could and would the political party in power and the parties that are vying for power do in trying to justify their respective role as political power that seeks unity amidst diversity?

The economic and political irony that Sri Lanka is faced with at present is such that the international community is impatiently waiting to fund the country to progress and well being. But the reality is such that the politicians of the day have not realized this, and instead are towing their own lines of mentalities and objectives that do not impress the world at large. As a result the IC is not at all convinced of the fact that we have brought the tensions, pressures and the underlying conflict to a close. As a result, Sri Lanka is faced with a "no win" situation with the world economic recession. The ultimate result is that its economy is at its weakest when the world at large, even though it is going through a struggling process because of the recession is willingly waiting to see positive developments from occurring. This would reopen the floodgates of funding and Sri Lanka could then reap enormous benefits from such a

scenario. Why and how the politicians and the political parties have not understood this is the question of the day.

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