

17th May 2006

PRESS COMMUNIQUE

The Local Government Election 2006 Elections for 22 Local Authority Bodies – 20.05.2006

While the Sri Lankan polity went to the Local Government Elections, to elect their representatives for 266 local government bodies, on March 30th 2006, the elections were not held for some of institutes owing to legal and security reasons. On the rejection of nomination by respective Returning Officers of several Districts due to legal shortcomings of nomination papers, various political parties and groups, filed petitions with the Court of Appeals and District Courts challenging Returning Officers decisions. Ultimately, the Court of Appeal on March 24th 2006 dismissed the writ applications by the UNP and the UPFA to challenge the decision of the respective Returning Officers. These Court decisions paved the way to hold the postponed elections to elect 332 representatives out of 2,891 candidates for Local Government institutions of 4 Municipal Councils, 4 Urban Councils, and 14 Pradeshiya Sabhas in nine Districts.

Nevertheless, given the acute security problems that could arise, the Election Commissioner on 16.05.2006 decided to postpone the elections for Vavuniya Urban Council and Vavuniya South (Sinhala) Pradeshiya Sabha thus reducing the Local bodies from 22 to 20.

For this monitoring exercise, PAFFREL will deploy 1,500 Stationary Monitors and 70 vehicles with 175 Mobile Monitors on election day cover 883 Polling Stations.

A highlighted characteristic of this election is the political tactics adopted by various political parties to substitute the names of other persons in place of another candidates in the contest and to canvass for votes for one party or independent group in the name of another party or a group. PAFFREL has noted similar instances with regard to 7 Local Government Institutions. They are: Colombo Municipal Council, Gampaha Municipal Council, Galle Municipal Council, Gampola Urban council, Kobeigane Pradeshiya Sabha, Uda-Palatha Pradeshiya Sabha, and Elpitiya Pradeshiya Sabha. We thankfully note that Election Commissioner has issued a press release on 16.05.2006 clarifying the legal provisions in Local Authorities Elections ordinance to the effect of above issue.

The gross violations of election laws relating to the display of posters, cut-outs and banners emerge once again at this election as a bad omen which should be addressed by proper election law reforms, sooner than later. In addition, prevailing violence in the society is reflected in the election campaign too. Ten election related violence cases, confirmed by our sources, provide examples to the election violence.

- The assassination of TNA candidate for Vavuniya Urban Council – 26.04.2006
- Election Office of JVP Mayor candidate for Gampaha has been set fire by unidentified persons – 16.04.2006
- Two houses belonged to JVP supporters in Dankotuwa, Chilaw have been attacked by unknown party – 20.04.2006
- JVP organizer for Borella has been assaulted by unidentified persons while he was on election canvassing – 25.04.2006
- Election Office of JVP in Gampaha town area was attacked by unidentified persons on 05.05.2006
- Two JVP supporters were assaulted at Gampaha by unknown party in the early hours on 15.05.2006
- Due to a clash erupted between UPFA and UNP supporters at Thanampitiya, Galle, 3 UNP supporters were injured and admitted to Karapitiya hospital on 02.05.2006
- Two cut-outs in the premises of Election Office of a UPFA candidate for Galle have been demolished by unidentified persons on 30.04.2006
- A Jathika Hela Urumaya candidate for Gampola Urban Council was assaulted on 10.05.2006
- A hand grenade has been hurled at the supporters of Muslim Congress and nine of them were severely injured in Pattiadipitti at Akkaraipattu.

However, Postal Voting on 08th and 09th May 2006 went on with the absence of any violation of election laws, malpractices or violent acts in the postal voting centres.

The difficult and hard steps taken by the Election Commissioner to make the National Identity Card or any other identification issued by a competent government official, mandatory in establishing the identity of voters at the last election is commendable. For the forthcoming election too, he has emphasized the vitality of such an identification.

The pre-election is mainly peaceful in comparison to some of the past election in our history. However, the complacency will not be the order of the day. Therefore, PAFFREL urges the government, political parties, independent groups and civil society to do their best and, to be vigilant and watchful to conclude the forthcoming election in a calm, peaceful and democratic manner.

Thanking you
Yours sincerely

Kingsley Rodrigo
Chairman