



# ELECTION & CAMPAIGN WATCH

## 2024 Sri Lankan Elections

### 1 President RW confirms Presidential election in October and starts image building in Jaffna and Polonnaruwa, Namal Rajapaksa appointed SLPP national organiser

President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on 26 March that presidential elections will be held in October. The President visited Jaffna to release military-held lands and to meet youth in Polonnaruwa, vying for these voter bases. This is despite Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) coalition partners, Mahinda & Basil Rajapaksa, saying parliamentary elections must be held first. Meanwhile, MP Namal Rajapaksa was elevated as SLPP's national organiser, indicating SLPP's continuing family-centric strategy.

### 2 Former SLFP General Secretary Dayasiri Jayasekara launches 'Humane Peoples' Alliance'

A new 'Humane Peoples' Alliance' under the leadership of former Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) General Secretary MP Dayasiri Jayasekara was launched on 20 March. This alliance pitches itself as the non-NPP, left nationalist political force. This marks a regrouping of the break-away groups from SLPP, in the centre-right (with MPs Prasanna Ranatunga & Nimal Lansu) and center-left & far-left (with MP Dayasiri Jayasekara & Uththara Lanka Sabhagya).

### 3 Uththara Lanka Sabhagya holds public rally on anti-1977 open economy platform

Uththara Lanka Sabhagya, led by MPs Wimal Weerawansa, Udaya Gammanpila, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, and Ven. Athuraliye Rathana, held a rally called "Jana Pelagasma" on 23 March. Its most distinct feature is the attempt to broaden their platform on a far left, anti-'77 open economy narrative. Notable invitees who delivered speeches were MPs Dullas Alahapperuma, Dayasiri Jayasekara, and Roshan Ranasinghe.

### 4 No-Confidence Motion against speaker defeated

SJB moved a No-Confidence Motion (NCM) against Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena on 21 March, over his conduct in the appointment of the Police IG, and in passing the Online Safety Bill. The NCM was defeated with a majority of 42 votes and was an SLPP flex of its power, re-consolidating votes of the government. For the SJB, faced with the threat of party factionalism, the NCM provided a unifying opportunity.

### 5 NPP holds youth rally & international outreach in bid to broaden support base

The NPP launched a series of youth rallies across the country, starting with Matara on 18 March. NPP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake is also currently on a Canada visit. These developments indicate that the NPP is building momentum in its election campaign.

### 6 Sri Lanka's cabinet approves proposal to amend constitution for First-Past-the-Post election system

On 21 March, the Sri Lankan cabinet approved the drafting of electoral reforms for an FPTP system, where 160 of 225 MPs will be elected through votes from their respective election divisions, while the remaining 65 will be selected through proportional representation at the national or provincial level. The move is seen by some quarters as a ploy to postpone elections.

### 7 Former President Sirisena issues new statement on 2019 Easter Attacks

On 22 March, SLFP leader and former President Maithripala Sirisena, in an attention-grabbing move, claimed to have information about who was responsible for the 2019 Easter Sunday Bombings. Sirisena's remarks come in backdrop of SLFP declaring the formation of a new alliance, which is yet to materialise. Former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has stressed the need for a new alliance, which is likely to include SLFP as a major partner.

### 8 TNA MPs protest arrest of Tamil devotees in Vavuniya

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs staged a protest in Parliament on 19 March, opposing the arrest of eight Tamil devotees during Maha Shivaratri religious observances in Vavuniya. The MPs called on the Speaker to summon the Inspector General of Police and seek redress. These developments indicate room for increasing bargaining behaviour among the main political parties as elections approach.

### 9 Opposition MPs resign from COPE over integrity concerns of SLPP-backed chair

Seven opposition MPs stepped down from their positions in the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE). This decision was made due to concerns over the integrity of SLPP MP Rohitha Abeygunawardena's appointment as Chair of COPE, as he faced allegations of misusing public funds during the previous government. The resignations, led by an SJB member, indicate some of the platforms opposition groups are mobilising on.

### 10 China protests Sri Lankan government's dual responses on foreign research vessels

China has raised strong protests against the Sri Lankan government allowing a German research vessel for a port call, despite a one year ban on foreign research vessels. The ban is seen as part of India's alignment with the government. These tensions play out despite Sri Lankan PM Dinesh Gunawardena's state visit to China on Monday.