CHAPTER IV

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1988: ALLIANCE, ISSUES AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES
Introduction

The importance of the second Presidential election held in December 1988 lay in several factors. It saw the end of J.R. Jayewardene's twelve year long rule, which witnessed many important events in the political history of Sri Lanka. The Westminster model of Parliamentary system was replaced by the Presidential form of government in 1978. The government was faced with large-scale violence all over the island due to the ethnic conflict. The 1988 Presidential election was held under a violent atmosphere. The United National Party (UNP) nominated Prime Minister R. Premadasa as its candidate. It was for the first time in the political history of Sri Lanka that a person from a caste other than that of the Goigamma led a party at the election. In the opposition, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who re-entered politics after a six-year ban on her civic rights, contested as the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) candidate. This made the election more competitive. In this chapter, an attempt would be made to analyse the political realignments, issues and the campaign strategies of different political parties in the 1988 Presidential election.

Background

Sri Lanka's strongly rooted democratic institutions were an example to the democratic world. However, the referendum that was held in December 1982 to extend the term
of the parliament to another six years raised apprehensions about the future of elections in Sri Lanka. The referendum was held amidst large-scale intimidation and violence which was unknown in the electoral history of Sri Lanka.¹

This was followed by the anti-Tamil riots, which rocked the little nation during the last week of July 1983.² Though it appeared to be a spontaneous communal riot, it was well organised and backed up by the police, the army and a section of ruling party members.³ Ever since the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils has been violent with the Tamil militant groups especially the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), taking on the Sri Lankan armed forces in a guerilla war.

An ethnic conflict is prone to external interference if


². The immediate cause for the riot was the killing of thirteen soldiers by the Tamil militants. For more information see S.J. Tambiah, Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, (London, 1986).

either of the parties has cross-boundary ethnic linkages.\textsuperscript{4} This happened in the case of Sri Lanka too. In the wake of the 1983 violence, Tamils in India came out in support of their Sri Lankan counterparts and pressurised the Indian government to protect the latter's interests in the island.\textsuperscript{5} Moreover, the Sri Lankan government pursued a military solution to the conflict with the help of external forces inimical to India's security interests in the region.\textsuperscript{6} Consequently India expressed its concern over the situation and offered to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamils to find a peaceful solution. After initial hesitations, the Sri Lankan government accepted India's offer.

Under India's guidance, attempts were made to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict through


\textsuperscript{6} Israel, Pakistan, China and British mercenaries played an active role by training Sri Lankan soldiers and providing modern weapons to Sri Lanka. S.D. Muni, "Indo-Sri Lanka relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict" in K.M. de Silva and R.J. May, n.4, p.118.
1983-1986. But due to the unyielding postures of the parties involved, especially that of the UNP government, any solution became distinctly impossible in the immediate future. The situation became worse in the beginning of 1987. The Sri Lankan government imposed an economic blockade and stepped up its military campaign in retaliation to the LTTE's decision to take-over the civil administration of the Northern province. This resulted in heavy civilian casualties which forced India to warn Colombo to stop the offensive and lift the economic blockade. The Indian warning was not heeded by the Sri Lankan President. This led India to intervene directly on 4 June 1987 when it


8. One of the major obstacles to President J.R. Jayewardene's attempts at a compromise with the Tamils was the opposition of the SLFP. It refused to participate in any negotiations with the Tamils and criticised any moves by the government to concede the demands of the Tamils. Robert N. Kearney, "Ethnic Conflict and the Tamil Separatist Movement in Sri Lanka", Asian Survey, (Berkeley), vol.25, no.9 (September 1985), p.915.


10. ibid., p.432.
para-dropped food in the North by violating Sri Lanka's air space.\textsuperscript{11} This forced the Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict.\textsuperscript{12} The outcome was the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement and the arrival of an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to assist the Sri Lankan government in implementing the agreement.

However, the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement and the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka brought more trouble than peace to the island nation. On the one hand, Sinhala extremist forces rose against the UNP government and President J.R. Jayewardene for what they called the legalisation of India's intervention. Earlier, only the North and East were considered disturbed areas. After the agreement, the South was also affected by a violent campaign of the Sinhala extremist forces. 

\textsuperscript{11} For more information see Frontline, (Madras), 30 May-12 June and 13-28 June 1987.

\textsuperscript{12} President J.R. Jayewardene was forced to co-operate with India in finding a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict because of internal and external compulsions. While the Sri Lankan government failed to gain any international support against India's intervention, it was pressurised by aid-donor countries to end the conflict. Moreover, on the domestic front, the JVP, banned for its suspected role in the July 1983 riots, re-emerged in the beginning of 1987 and engaged in a violent campaign against the government. For more information see S.D. Muni, n.3, and also Bryan Pfaffenger, "Sri Lanka in 1987: India's Intervention and Resurgence of JVP", Asian Survey, vol.28, n.2 (February 1988), pp.137-147.
militant group the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) against the accord. The major opposition party, the SLFP, seems to have supported the JVP. While the JVP organised a number of anti-accord agitations all over the country, it also killed members, supporters and leaders of the UNP and the constituent members of the United Socialist Alliance (USA) who supported the accord. The agreement also led to dissension within the UNP. Prominent members of the UNP - Prime Minister Premadasa, Lalith Athulathmudali, the Minister for National Security, and the Minister for Agriculture, Gamini Jayasuriya, were against it. On the other hand, the LTTE which reluctantly accepted the agreement went back on its commitment. This forced India militarily disarm the LTTE.


14. When the accord was signed, both Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Jayasuriya were kept away from the official ceremony, though they were in Colombo. Prime Minister R. Premadasa was in Japan.

15. Under the terms of the accord, India was committed to the protection of unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. S.D. Muni, n.6, p.122.
Meanwhile, despite opposition, the UNP government went ahead in implementing the accord. It enacted the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution on 14 November 1987 which envisaged the formation of Provincial Councils. 16 The government also conducted elections to all but the North and Eastern Provincial Councils between May and June 1988. While the SLFP boycotted the provincial council elections, the JVP was involved in unprecedented violence targeting Provincial Council candidates and their supporters. 17 Consequently, the Provincial Council elections that were held amidst large-scale violence and intimidation saw a poor voter turn-out. 18 The UNP won by a comfortable majority in all seven provinces. The newly formed USA performed well to become the main opposition to the UNP. As regards the North and the East, the government temporarily merged these two provinces and the election was held, amidst the LTTE's threat, on 19th November 1988. The pro-accord militant


group, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) contested the election and won a majority to form the government in the North-East.\textsuperscript{19}

**Economy Under Crisis**

The introduction of an open economy made considerable progress in different sectors like agriculture, tourism and industrial promotion zone within a short period of five years i.e. from 1978 to 1982. However, this could not continue after July 1983 due to the outbreak of the ethnic conflict which arrested the growth of the Sri Lankan economy.

The devastating impact of the ethnic conflict on the economy can be understood better if one looks at different spheres of the economy. Tourism, one of the major foreign exchange earner's for Sri Lanka, was affected badly by the conflict. The flow of incoming tourists showed a sharp decline. According to the statistics furnished by the Ceylon Tourist Board, the tourist arrivals fell by 17 per cent in 1983 compared to the previous year.\textsuperscript{20} In 1984, it further dropped to 6 per cent against the 1983 record, and


\textsuperscript{20} *India Today*, (New Delhi), 15 March 1985, p.84.
in 1985 plunged to 19 per cent below the 1984 level.\textsuperscript{21} In 1988, only 183,000 tourists visited Sri Lanka against 410,000 in 1982. It was estimated that between 1983 and 1988, the downfall in tourism led to a loss of Rs.17.3 billion for the government.\textsuperscript{22}

Escalation of the ethnic conflict also led to a drop in foreign investment. In contrast to the $66 million which came into the country in 1982, foreign investment in 1983 dropped to $39 million. In 1986 it touched the lowest point of $22 million.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, some of the foreign investors went back on their earlier commitments to invest in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{24} This could be attributed to the warning issued by EROS that foreign firms would severely be damaged, if they

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23. ibid., p.203.

24. Agrico, a US agricultural chemical company, withdrew its $300 million superphosphate plant project estimated to earn $100 million a year in foreign exchange. Two other US companies engaged in electronics, Motorola and Harris Electronics, also went back on their earlier commitments. \textit{India Today}, n.20. p.88.
failed to withdraw their investment from the island.\textsuperscript{25}

One of the major fall-outs of the ethnic conflict was the phenomenal increase in defense expenditure. Instead of investing in development projects, the government began allocating a major portion of available resources to the military. In 1982, the government spent only Rs.1.54 billion on defence (amounting to 4.9 per cent of the total budget of that year). This was increased to Rs. 9.1 billion in 1987, which was 20.7 per cent of the total budget.\textsuperscript{26}

Another immediate fall-out was in the realm of employment: around 15,000 factory workers, 3,500 plantation workers and about 10,000 self-employed persons lost their jobs, as a result of the July riots.\textsuperscript{27} This problem was further aggravated by the decline in the flow of incoming tourists, foreign investments and other growth-oriented development projects.\textsuperscript{28}

The conflict had an adverse impact on other important sectors like agriculture, fisheries and transport. Social welfare programmes were also affected. As a result, Sri

\textsuperscript{25} Lee Ann Ross and Tilak Samaranayake, n.21, p.1247.
\textsuperscript{26} John M. Richardson, Jr., S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, n.22, p.206.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid., p.202.
\textsuperscript{28} Lee Ann Ross and Tilak Samaranayake, n.21, p.1252.
Lanka experienced a low level of economic growth between 1983 and 1987. The economic situation further worsened as a result of continuous workers' strikes organised by the JVP. This brought the country to a standstill. 29

Presidential Election of 1988

In this worsening climate, President J.R. Jayewardene announced scheduling of the Presidential election for December. However, opposition parties demanded that Parliament be dissolved immediately and that Presidential and Parliamentary elections be held under a caretaker government. 30 Their demands gained strength when the Mahanayake Theras came out with a similar proposal in their memorandum to the President. 31 Though the President seemed to have agreed to the demands, he insisted that it would succeed only if the JVP consented to participate in the caretaker government. 32 However, the opposition parties failed in their attempt to prevail upon the JVP to accept


the condition put forward by the President. Hence, amidst large scale violence, President J.R. Jayewardene went on to hold Presidential election without acceding to the demands of the Opposition.

The Presidential election was notified by the Commissioner of Elections on 21 October 1988. Under the Constitution, a new President has to be elected not less than one month and not more than two months before the incumbent President's term comes to an end. Since President Jayewardene's term was due to expire on 4th February 1989, the election for the new President had to take place on or before 3 January 1989 and not earlier than 3 December 1988. Moreover, under Section 2 of the Presidential Elections Act No. 15 of 1981, the date for the filing of nominations by the candidates had to be fixed between sixteen days to one month from the date of announcement of the Presidential election. Further, the date for the election, should be fixed within a month or not


more than two months from the date of nominations. So the Commissioner of Elections declared that the filing of nominations for the Presidential election would be on 10th of November and that the election would take place on 19 December 1988.

Presidential Candidates

Three candidates contested the Presidential election of 1988. In the case of the UNP, there was speculation whether President Jayewardene would seek a third term. This was strengthened by the appointment of a committee to examine whether the President could contest for a third term. The Committee observed in its report that this could be possible if Article 31(2) of the Constitution was amended. The speculation ended when the President himself decided against contesting the election. This left the UNP to choose among three of its stalwarts - Prime Minister R. Premadasa, the National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake, the Minister for Mahaveli Development

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The UNP members anticipated an election within the party to choose their presidential candidate.\(^4^1\) Since there was a competition for the selection of the party's candidate, Premadasa insisted that the issue be decided by the Working Committee of the Party, if necessary by a vote. When the Working Committee of the Party was summoned for this purpose, President Jayewardene proposed the name of Premadasa. Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake jointly seconded this proposal. However, Premadasa further insisted that a special National Convention of the Party be summoned to ratify his nomination. Accordingly, his nomination was ratified at the national convention of the party.\(^4^2\) Premadasa was thus unanimously selected as the UNP candidate for the presidential election.

The SLFP chose former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike as its candidate. The third candidate in the contest was Ossie Abeygunasekera of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP). It was suspected that he had a tacit understanding with Premadasa. Sydney Vanasinghe, former

\(^4^0\) Lanka Guardian, (Colombo), 15 August 1988, p.4:


\(^4^2\) This was revealed to the author by K.N. Chosky, a leading UNP member, on 25 October 1995.
trade union leader and an LSSP activist, was of the opinion that "Ossie Abeygunasekera was sponsored by the UNP because they very well know that unless the opposition is divided, Premadasa could not win the election."\(^{43}\) This was, however, denied by Y.P. de Silva, the General Secretary of the SLMP who argued that "the SLMP took a decision to contest the presidential election when our leader Vijaya Kumaratunga was alive. He was our presidential candidate. However, after Vijaya Kumaratunga's death, the party had chosen Ossie Abeygunasekera as its candidate. So the allegations that he had a deal with Premadasa is not politically valid."\(^{44}\) Even though there is no evidence to suggest that Ossie Abeygunasekera had an understanding with Premadasa, the former's close association with the latter after the elections indicates that there might have been some kind of an understanding between the two.

Re-alignment of Political Forces

All the three presidential candidates tried to secure the support of those parties which were not in the fray. The UNP candidate, R. Premadasa had the support of his party's long-term ally, the Ceylon Workers' Congress. He also courted the JVP in order to gain their support. Though it

\(^{43}\) Interview with Sydney Vanasinghe on 15 October 1995.

\(^{44}\) Interview with Y.P. de Silva on 24 October 1995.
was a known fact that the JVP was behind the unprecedented violence, Premadasa insisted that the JVP, being a recognised political party, could not be accused of violence unless it was proved in the Court.\(^45\) He blamed the SLFP for the violence\(^46\) and assured the JVP that he would guarantee their security if they came forward to participate in the democratic process.\(^47\) Although Premadasa's soft line towards the JVP did not benefit his candidature, it did minimise the JVP's antagonism towards him. This is evident from the fact that Premadasa was not named in the JVP's list of national traitors. Instead, he was regarded as a patriot for opposing the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement.\(^48\)

The major opposition party, the SLFP, made a consistent effort to form an eight-party alliance. The other seven parties were the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), Eksath Lanka Janatha Party (ELJP), All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Democratic Workers Congress (DWC), Liberal Party and the JVP (which participated along with its student-wing the Inter-Universities Students' Federation). The basic aim of the...

proposed eight party-alliance was to form a People's Democratic Alliance and put forward a candidate agreeable to all the parties. The alliance's candidate was to contest the Presidential election on the basis of a common programme under a common symbol. 49

One of the significant achievements of the SLFP lay in bringing the JVP to its side. By associating with the SLFP, the JVP tried to gain credibility as a political party. 50

In the beginning, the JVP participated in the negotiations with all seriousness and was represented by one of its top leaders Somawansa Amarasinghe. 51 But the proposed alliance did not materialise because of the JVP's extraordinary demands. The first of these was regarding the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. The SLFP's stand was that it would re-negotiate the accord once it came to power. The JVP demanded the

49. Initially, five parties - the SLFP, MEP, Liberal Party, Tamil Congress and the SLMC came together to discuss human rights violations. They were later joined by the JVP, ELJP and Inter-University Students' Federation. When the Presidential election was announced, the discussion was extended to form an eight party alliance against the UNP. Interview with Dinesh Gunewardene, the MEP leader, on 17 October 1995.


51. Interview with one of the SLFP's leader Haleem Ishak on 23 October 1995. According to one leading SLFP member involved in managing Sirimavo Bandaranaike's campaign, JVP members wore masks to attend these meetings. This was revealed to the author in an interview on 18 October 1995.
abrogation of the agreement, withdrawal of the IPKF, and abolition of the provincial council system. Although the SLFP could not afford openly to take an anti-India stand, in order to keep the alliance intact, it accepted the JVP's demands. 52 Secondly, the JVP insisted that a candidate acceptable to all the coalition parties should contest the Presidential election as an independent and not as a candidate of any particular party. Moreover, they had also taken the position that such a candidate should contest the election on a common symbol and colour. The JVP even proposed the name of the Supreme Court Judge, Raja Vanasinghe, as a candidate of the eight-party alliance. However, when the SLFP opposed this, the JVP accepted SLFP leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike as the candidate. But it continued to stress that she should contest as an independent. 53 The SLFP agreed to do away with its symbol and colour and accepted to put forward Sirimavo Bandaranaike as an independent candidate under a common symbol and colour. 54


53. Interview with Haleem Ishak, n.51.

Though the SLFP accepted all these terms, it was unable to reach an agreement with the JVP regarding electoral arrangements for the forthcoming parliamentary election. It appears that the JVP had demanded twenty-five per cent of seats for itself. Had the SLFP accepted this demand, it would have been left with seventy-five per cent of the seats after conceding a few more to the other constituent parties of the alliance. The JVP also emphasised that, in the event of a split in the alliance after the formation of the government, Parliament had to be dissolved and fresh elections held. Further, the JVP apparently claimed crucial cabinet posts like defence and foreign affairs in the government. But the SLFP found the above demands unacceptable and refused to concede them. 55

Another area in which both the SLFP and the JVP differed was over the future of the economy. While the JVP wanted to go back to a state-controlled economy, the SLFP chose to go ahead with open economy introduced by the UNP. 56 While these differences brought the negotiations to a standstill, the JVP, which was then engaged in violent campaign's against the supporters of the UNP and the USA, turned its guns towards the SLFP too. The JVP banned the

55. Arun Weerasuriya, n.52, p.33.
56. ibid.
proposed public meetings of the SLFP in Southern, Uva and other Provinces and threatened to attack those who disobeyed their orders.\textsuperscript{57} Meanwhile, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who had earlier agreed to contest as an independent, decided to contest as an SLFP candidate under the hand symbol. This put the possibility of an eight-party alliance in the dock.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, the meeting between President Jayewardene and Sirimavo Bandaranaike (on 5 November 1988) at the instance of Mahanayake Theras' initiative was suspected by the JVP. The JVP felt that some kind of agreement has been reached against it. This was denied by the SLFP. Under these circumstances, the JVP withdrew from the eight-party alliance on the ground that Sirimavo Bandaranaike was not contesting as an independent candidate under a common symbol.\textsuperscript{59} Though Sirisena Cooray, a strong supporter of R.\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Forward}, 5 November 1988.\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Weekend}, 6 November 1988.\textsuperscript{59} President Jayawardane met Sirimavo Bandaranaike to find a solution to diffuse the violent situation. The outcome of the meeting was that President Jayawardane accepted Sirimavo Bandaranaike's suggestion to dissolve the Parliament and appoint an interim government consisting of members of both government and the opposition, which would oversee the holding of free and fair election. However, within two hours after the meeting, he called Sirimavo Bandaranaike on phone and informed her of his inability to stand by his commitment unless the JVP accepted to be a part of it. Interview with Dinesh Gunewardene, n.49.
Premadasa, maintained close links with the JVP through his relative, who happened to be one of its leaders, it was not clear whether the UNP was in anyway responsible for the withdrawal of the JVP from the eight-party alliance. However, the JVP seems to have held the view that it would be advantageous for them if the present government continued in power rather than an entirely new government taking over the administration of the country.

The JVP's withdrawal was followed by that of the ELJP, which had that the alliance candidate contest on a new symbol and colour. It criticised that the SLFP has lost its credibility by going back on its earlier commitment. Notwithstanding the withdrawal of JVP and ELJP, the SLFP and the remaining five parties - MEP, ACTC, SLMC, DWC and the Liberal Party formed a six-party alliance, called as Democratic People's Alliance. Nevertheless, differences continued to exist between the alliance partners on the electoral arrangements among them for the forthcoming Parliamentary election. The SLMC claimed that any Muslim

63. ibid, 25 November 1988.
candidate contesting the Colombo Urban Zone, Puttalam and Kalutara should be under its control. The SLFP initially agreed to this. But because of strong resistance from Muslim leaders within the party, it refused to concede the demands of the SLMC on the ground that the SLFP was not a communal party. The differences between the SLFP and the SLMC were well-exploited by the UNP candidate R. Premadasa. The SLMC leaders met Premadasa on three different occasions and put forward the problems that affected the Muslim community, especially the 12.5 per cent cut-off point for the Parliamentary election and the zonal electoral system. Premadasa immediately responded by reducing the cut-off point from 12.5 to 5 per cent and abolishing the Zonal electoral system through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. The SLMC was overwhelmed by the UNP's response and decided to withdraw from the DPA, leaving the

64. ibid, 28 November 1988.

65. According to M.H.M. Ashraff, the leader of the SLMC, the SLFP agreed to the SLMC's demand in the presence of its leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Anura Bandaranaike and the leader of the other alliance parties on 23 November 1988. However, the SLFP went back on its commitment on the very next day. The Sunday Observer, (Colombo), 18 December 1988.

66. ibid.

alliance with only five parties. The SLMC asked the Muslims to vote according to their conscience. Thus, it helped the UNP candidate to secure the support of the Muslims.

The Left parties, the LSSP, CP and the NSSP took a formal decision to support Ossie Abeygunasekera, notwithstanding the fact that it would indirectly contribute to the UNP's victory. According to Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the differences between the SLFP and the Left parties over the issue of provincial councils led the latter to support the SLMP candidate. He also argued that the UNP "represented a more enlightened position at that time by supporting the provincial councils system, which made us to extend a critical support to the UNP indirectly." However, the other two Left parties, the LSSP and the CP did not support Ossie wholeheartedly. According to Betty Weerakoon, though the LSSP decided to vote for Ossie Abeygunasekera, it did not extend open support for him. Thus, the SLMP candidate secured the support of only the NSSP and a section of the LSSP and CP members. Apart from the support of the Left

68. Interview with A.R.M. Hakeem, General Secretary SLMC on 15 October 1995.

69. Interview with Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the leader of the NSSP, on 23 October 1995.

70. Interview with Betty Weerakoon, the leader of the LSSP, on 18 October 1995.
parties, Ossie Abeygunasekera also secured the support of the Tamil parties like Eelam People's Revolutionary Organization (EPRLF), Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO).

**Issues**

In the Presidential election, four major issues acquired prominence. They were the economy, the controversial Indo-Sri Lanka agreement along with the presence of the IPKF, the law and order situation and lastly, the constitutional changes. All three parties presented detailed manifestoes explaining their programmes and policies. The UNP's manifesto was titled "The New Vision and the New Deal". The New Vision was "To restore peace, enforce discipline and alleviate poverty". And the New Deal was to ensure:

- Peace through consultation, compromise consensus;
- discipline through strictly applying the rule of law, restoring moral values and enforcing a code of ethics for all holding public office;
- poverty alleviation through restructuring the political, economic, social and administrative machinery.

In its manifesto, the SLFP-led DPA stressed more on political and constitutional developments. It also promised

to resolve the ethnic conflict that was facing the country. At the same time, the manifesto of the SLMP presented a programme based on socialist ideology.

The Economy

On the economic front, the UNP made much publicity by projecting the development programmes it introduced and implemented during its rule. Besides, the UNP reminded the people of food shortages and long queues that were the phenomena of the SLFP's government during 1970-1977. While highlighting the economic failures of the SLFP, R. Premadasa ridiculed its promise to distribute two free measures of rice which he said would have to be brought from the moon. He further pointed out that the SLFP, in fact, had even removed the one free measure of rice provided to people by the Dudley Senanayake government and made them eat rice only on Tuesdays and Fridays. Further, people were forced to stand in queues for hours to buy a loaf of bread due to the severe shortage of consumer goods. In contrast during the last eleven years, the UNP has pulled the country out of those dark days and has made available in plenty the basic

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72. For more details see Programme of the Democratic People's Alliance, (Colombo, November 24 1988).

73. For more details, see SLMP Manifesto - Our Programme to Construct the Nation, (Colombo, November 30 1988).

needs of the people. In its manifesto the UNP claimed that, in the last ten years of its rule, the country has experienced growth, progress and economic development. It further stated that while the UNP made consumer goods available without shortages and queues, it had also initiated a number of development projects like the Mahaweli Development Programme, Gam Udawa or Village Re-awakening programme, Free Trade Zones and Housing Programme which have benefitted the people. Premadasa asserted that the UNP has laid a firm economic foundation during the last eleven years and now with this as a base, he wanted to alleviate poverty.

The SLFP candidate Sirimavo Bandaranaike argued that the UNP's economic policies had led only to the uncontrollable balance of payment situation, budget deficit, unendurable public debt resulting in high inflation, unbearable cost of living and excessive corruption. She also pointed out that the malnutrition rate has shot up from

76. UNP's Manifesto, no.72, p.1.
77. *ibid*.
from 7 to 50 per cent during the UNP's rule. 80 She asserted that all these developments only suggest that the economic policies of the UNP ultimately failed to benefit the poor in general. 81 However, the SLFP was defensive about its unimpressive record in the past which precipitated the severe economic crisis. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's defence was that it was not deliberately created but that the situation prevailing at that time led to shortages of consumer goods. 82 She assured the people that there would not be any shortages of consumer goods in the future. 83 More interestingly, the SLFP which stood for a state-controlled economy in the past, chose to follow a mixed economy by giving equal importance to state, private and cooperative sectors in economic development. 84 Sirimavo Bandaranaike assured the trading community that the SLFP would not impose restrictions or controls on trade, commerce, imports and exports. 85

In its manifesto the SLMP stated that it would pull the

84. The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.2.
country out of the imperialist clutch and develop the economy on the basis of socialist ideology. It further added that with the help of state, cooperative and private sectors, it would utilize the human resources of the country to the maximum extent to develop the economy. The SLMP candidate Ossie Abeygoonasekera said that his party would follow the examples of the recent socio-economic changes in the Soviet Union and re-organize the country's administrative structure on the path to development. The SLMP also pledged that it would free the country from foreign debts and reduce the amount allocated to repay foreign loans from 35 per cent of the GNP to 10 per cent. Ossie Abeygoonasekera stated that the main aim of the SLMP was to restructure the economy to fulfill the basic needs of the common man.

Poverty Alleviation

The UNP made poverty alleviation a central issue of its economic policy. It presented a well-planned poverty alleviation programme to the people. Under this programme

86. The SLMP Manifesto, n.73, p.12.
89. Weekend, 4 December 1988.
food stamp holders would be provided with Rs.2,500 per month for a period of two years. Out of this amount, Rs.1,042 would be deposited every month in the bank which would enable a family to get more than Rs.25,000 by the end of two years. This amount could be invested by the respective families in a self-employment scheme which would help them to cross the poverty line. The remaining Rs.1,458 would be utilized for consumption by these families and thus help them get rid of the food stamps. Premadasa stated that there were around 7.5 million people living under the poverty line and surviving on food stamps. He added that the UNP's first priority would be to improve the living conditions of these people so that they enjoy dignity and self-respect.

However, Sirimavo Bandaranaike ridiculed Premadasa for seeking the people's mandate to eradicate poverty which he could not accomplish in eleven long years as Prime Minister. She further questioned where Premadasa would find resources for the impossible task of providing money to about 2 million families who were eligible for the food

92. Sun, 19 October 1988.
93. ibid, 12 November 1988.
Premadasa's explanation was that he was not able to implement his poverty alleviation programme in the past because of lack of infrastructure. But now that the UNP government has laid the infrastructure by completing projects like Mahaweli development, undertaking housing and village re-awakening programmes setting up power-generation projects and making available consumer goods to people under the open economy it was possible to implement the proposed poverty alleviation programme. He further said that if Rs. 50 billion could be raised for military expenditure to counter terrorism, it would not be difficult to raise money to eradicate poverty.

Although the SLFP raised serious doubts about the implementation of the UNP's poverty alleviation programme, it could not come out with any meaningful solution except for an unimpressive measure to overcome the problems of the poor. Anura Bandaranaike proposed that the SLFP would provide funds for the poor to involve in low-level schemes like poultry breeding, goat keeping and milk cows that would enable them to overcome their basic problems.

96. ibid, 21 October 1988.
The SLMP candidate Ossie Abeygoonasekera criticized both the UNP and SLFP for being responsible for the present hardships of the masses. He also claimed that they are incapable of eradicating poverty. Further, he said that while the SLMP would not deceive the people by giving false promises, he assured the people that his party would take steps to eliminate the prevailing disparity in the living standards of the people. He also said that to achieve this, the SLMP would take examples and aid from socialist countries and other friendly nations.98

Cost of Living

The cost of living was one issue on which the SLFP tried to push the UNP onto the defensive. Sirimavo Bandaranaike said that while in power the SLFP made sure that the people had been given at least half a measure of rice free and another one and a half measure was distributed at a subsidised rate of Rs.2.50 per measure.99 This was done inspite of the pressure of international economic crisis. But when the UNP came to power in 1977, it withdrew the rice ration book in its first budget itself.100 She


100. ibid, 5 December 1988.
further said that during the SLFP rule, the milk food was sold at Rs.4.90\(^\text{101}\) and the price of a loaf of bread and a pound of sugar were only 72 cents.\(^\text{102}\) While sugar did cost only Rs.11 in the world market, it was sold in Sri Lanka for Rs.20.\(^\text{103}\) The SLFP assured the people that it would reduce the prices of consumer goods with immediate effect\(^\text{104}\) and make available essential household items like the rice, flour and milk powder at a reasonable price without shortages.\(^\text{105}\) Sirimavo Bandaranaike promised to the farmers that they would be exempted from water tax and the repayment of cultivation loans would be waived.\(^\text{106}\) She also said that school books and uniforms would be made available at reasonable prices and that the government which would introduce a scheme to provide a mid-day meal for children.\(^\text{107}\)

The UNP's defence was that the income levels of the people had increased along with the rising cost of living.

101. ibid, 3 December 1988.
103. ibid.
107. ibid, 6 December 1988.
It also put a brave front by presenting a solution to confront the rising cost of living. The UNP stated that if the prices of food crops were reduced then the producers of these goods would give up their work and join the ranks of the unemployed. Hence, the only way that the cost of living could be met was by raising the income level of the people. It further stated that when income increases the purchasing power of the people would also increase and this would enable them to pay the prices demanded by producers.108

Premadasa said that the incomes of the private sector, corporation, local government and co-operative sector employees were increased from time to time to meet the rising cost of living. The government also exempted them from taxation.109

The SLMP promised that consumer goods like rice, milk, sugar and medicines would be provided at a subsidised price.110 Further, it pledged that it would restore the ration books that were taken away by the UNP government.111

It also assured the people that tax-evaders and smugglers

108. UNP Manifesto, n.71, p.4.
111. The SLMP Manifesto, n.73, p.13.
would not be allowed to exploit the Sri Lankan workers.\textsuperscript{112} The NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara criticised the UNP for its failure to reduce the cost of living that was soaring to an unreachable height. He further said that the economy was ruined by the UNP's free trade policy.\textsuperscript{113} The SLMP undertook to provide land to every family that was involved in agriculture by taking away the land allotted to multi-national agricultural business companies.\textsuperscript{114}

**Unemployment**

Another major issue that was prominent during the Presidential election was the unemployment problem. The UNP projected its achievements in reducing the unemployment problem and it also proposed to generate more employment in the years to come. But the SLFP made only a passing reference to this problem in its manifesto as well as in its campaign. The SLMP did not give importance to this issue at all. The UNP promised to provide jobs for 3.7 million by the year 2000 A.D. It further stated that to achieve this target, it would initiate development programmes that could generate employment.\textsuperscript{115} While highlighting the success of

\textsuperscript{112}. *Weekend*, 4 December 1988.


\textsuperscript{114}. ibid, 8 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{115}. The UNP Manifesto, n.71, p.8.

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the UNP, Premadasa said that the unemployment problem was reduced from 26 per cent in 1977 to 11 per cent in 1983 under its rule.\textsuperscript{116} He further pointed out that unlike the previous SLFP government the UNP paved the way for even poor masons and carpenters to find jobs abroad.\textsuperscript{117} Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed said that there were 1,868,140 Sri Lankans holding passports in contrast to only 140,000 in January 1977. He further claimed that around one million people secured jobs in Gulf countries after the UNP came back to power in 1977.\textsuperscript{118} The UNP came out with the statistics that there were around 2,38,000 Sri Lankans who had been able to earn foreign exchange worth Rs.10,243 million which enabled them to overcome poverty.\textsuperscript{119} Moreover, National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali said that the Free Trade Zone established under the open economy alone generated direct and indirect employment for over 1,80,000 persons.\textsuperscript{120} Premadasa warned the people that those employed under the Free Trade Zone would lose their

\textsuperscript{116}. The UNP's Pamphlet named \textit{For Peace, Discipline and Prosperity}, n. 91, p.11.

\textsuperscript{117}. \textit{The Island}, 20 October 1988.


\textsuperscript{119}. The UNP Manifesto, n.71, p.5.

\textsuperscript{120}. \textit{Daily News}, 12 December 1988.
jobs if the SLFP came to power because it was opposed to the new economic policy.121 He further said that the UNP had already prepared a plan to provide employment to 115,000 persons within the next four months, to 428,250 persons in 1989 and 472,500 persons in 1990.122

The SFLP promised that it would be the responsibility of its government to provide employment or financial assistance to those attaining working age. It assured the people that employment would be provided without any political influence, nepotism or favouritism.123 Sirimavo Bandaranaike denied the allegation that the SLFP would close the Free Trade Zone. Instead she said, the Free Trade Zone would be retained and service conditions of the workers improved.124 She criticised the UNP for issuing job cards to the youth with the promise of jobs, but only providing a few of them with jobs. She cautioned the people that Premadasa's promises were made with a view to winning the election.125 Sirimavo Bandaranaike promised the people that the SLFP would provide employment for over one million

123. The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.2.
people under a long term and short term employment plan.\textsuperscript{126} She further claimed that it was the SLFP government that paved the way for the Sri Lankans to secure jobs in the Middle-East countries in 1976.\textsuperscript{127} Anura Bandaranaike promised that the SLFP would create more employment opportunities in West Asian countries.\textsuperscript{128}

**Housing Programme**

Housing was one of the prominent issues that figured in the campaign and all the three candidates pledged to solve this problem. The one who exploited this issue to the maximum extent was undoubtedly the UNP candidate R. Premadasa who claimed that his one million housing programme had been implemented to a large extent. Further, the International Housing Competition Award for 1987 was presented for his one million houses programme.\textsuperscript{129} This came in handy during his election campaign. Premadasa the fact highlighted that unlike the SLFP that built only 453 houses during its seven year rule,\textsuperscript{130} around eight lakh houses had

\textsuperscript{126} ibid, 7 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{127} Sun, 28 November 1988.
\textsuperscript{128} ibid, 2 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{129} The Journal, 14 October 1988.
\textsuperscript{130} The Island, 24 November 1988.
been constructed under the UNP government.\textsuperscript{131} He stated that the UNP would complete the one million houses programme by 1989. He proposed to construct a further 1.5 million houses to meet the needs of the homeless.\textsuperscript{132} The UNP confidently stated that Sri Lanka would achieve the United Nations Global Shelter target of 'shelter for all' by the year 2000.\textsuperscript{133} While disputing the figures provided by the UNP, Sirimavo Bandaranaike claimed that only 47,000 houses were constructed.\textsuperscript{134} The SLFP proposed that it would establish a National Housing Bank and provide credit for the construction of private houses. It would provide a housing loan of Rs.25,000 without interest for the poor people and Rs.100,000 at a low interest rate.\textsuperscript{135} Sirimavo Bandaranaike promised that houses for the benefit of plantation workers and low-cost urban housing complexes for the poor urban masses would be constructed.\textsuperscript{136} Premadasa expressed surprise at these SLFP promises and doubted that whether Sirimavo Bandaranaike was so ignorant of the fact that all these

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{131} The UNP's Pamphlet, n.91, p.8.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} UNP Manifesto, n.71, p.2.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} The Island, 5 October 1988.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} The Island, 13 December 1988.
\end{itemize}
proposals have already been implemented by him.137

Ethnic Crisis

After a gap of three decades the ethnic crisis took a centre stage in the electoral politics of Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, the UNP government signed an agreement with India with the aim of solving the ethnic crisis and the Indian army was also brought in to assist the Sri Lankan government in implementing the accord. However, it took a different turn due to the LTTE's refusal to abide by the accord. Moreover, the accord and the presence of the IPKF was strongly opposed by the major opposition party, the SLFP and the Sinhala militant organization, the JVP. Consequently, the ethnic crisis emerged as a major issue during the Presidential election. All three Presidential candidates presented their proposals on the accord, the presence of IPKF, Provincial Councils and solution to the ethnic crisis.

Regarding the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement and the presence of IPKF, the UNP was on the defensive due to the breakdown of the accord it signed. This was neutralised by Premadasa's known resentment against the accord and the IPKF. Premadasa said that though the Indian Prime Minister claimed that peace would be established within 24 hours, 137. ibid, 17 December 1988.

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nothing has been achieved even after one and half years. Premadasa further said that he had opposed the accord because he had realised this. He could not however succeed because he was only a party member and a minister in the government.138 He pledged that he would replace the accord by signing a friendship treaty with India and ensure the withdrawal of the IPKF.139 He further pointed out that he did not invite IPKF to Sri Lanka and also that he did not have the power to send it back.140 Premadasa said that he would reach a solution to the ethnic crisis by consultation, compromise and consensus.141 He also expressed that he would make all efforts for the de-merger of the North and the East with the consent of the people of the Eastern province through a referendum.142

But Sirimavo Bandaranaike argued that the UNP's proposed 'Friendship Treaty' concerned only bilateral issues between Sri Lanka and India and not the agreement which failed to solve the ethnic crisis.143 Moreover, she claimed

140. The Island, 22 October 1988.
141. The UNP's Pamphlet, n. 91, p.9.
that the UNP has surrendered Sri Lanka's sovereignty to India to the extent that even the Presidential candidate had to secure permission of the Indian High Commission to campaign in the North and East.\textsuperscript{144} The Indian High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit, strongly refuted this allegation.\textsuperscript{145} Opposition leader Anura Bandaranaike said that though Premadasa gave the impression that he was not in favour of the accord, he was the one who introduced the Provincial Council Bill in Parliament and gave his consent to it.\textsuperscript{146} Sirimavo Bandaranaike pledged to abrogate the accord, withdraw the IPKF immediately and abolish the Provincial Council system.\textsuperscript{147} On the resolution of the ethnic crisis, she proposed that the SLFP would create two regional units by demarcating the North and Eastern Province. They were the Tamil regional units which would be formed by merging the Tamil-dominated areas in the East with the Northern Province and a Muslim regional unit by merging all the Muslim-dominated areas in the East.\textsuperscript{148} Sirimavo Bandaranaike hoped that the solution presented by the

\textsuperscript{144.} The Island, 2 November 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{145.} The Journal, 2 November 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{146.} The Island, 22 October 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{147.} The Sunday Times, 4 December 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{148.} The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.6.
Democratic People's Alliance would be acceptable to the Tamils and Muslims in the North-East and result in lasting peace in Sri Lanka. She further added that the SLFP would directly talk to the people and the groups concerned rather than negotiate with external powers to solve the ethnic problem. But the solution put forward by DPA was widely criticised by UNP. Premadasa called it a political fraud and said that those who pledged to abolish the provincial council system were proposing regional councils with more powers which would be like their promise of bringing rice from the moon. Ranjan Wijeratne said that the proposal to create Tamil and Muslim regional units would only lead to a division of the country on the basis of communities. Moreover, Gamini Dissanayake accused SLFP of having a secret pact with the LTTE. He said that Anura Bandaranaike and Kumar Ponnambalam met LTTE Deputy Leader Mahatya in the jungles of Vavuniya to secure LTTE's support for Sirimavo Bandaranaike. He further said that the SLFP had promised to provide more concessions than those were granted under the

150. ibid., 16 December 1988.
151. ibid., 6 December 1988.
153. ibid., 1 December 1988.
Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Anura Bandaranaike acknowledged the fact that he had met an LTTE representative but denied that there was any pact with LTTE. He challenged Gamini Dissanayake to prove his allegation.

The SLMP candidate Ossie Abeygunasekara asserted that in the absence of any other alternative proposal, the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement would serve as a better solution to solve the ethnic conflict. He claimed that the SLMP was not in favour of the presence of IPKF. He, however, endorsed its presence by saying that it should not be withdrawn unless the safety of the Tamil people was ensured. Further, he said that the SLMP would be ready to offer more than the accord if that could bring a lasting solution to the prolonged ethnic crisis.

**Constitutional Changes**

While both the SLFP and SLMP were committed to frame a new constitution and scrap the executive Presidency, the UNP expressed its commitment to the present constitution. The UNP stated that the executive Presidency was provided with

two strong institutions - Parliament and the Judiciary which would ensure the proper functioning of the government.\textsuperscript{159} It also announced that the existing Select Committees would be reconstituted in a way which would enable the participation of members of Parliament belonging to both ruling and opposition parties, executive, public, professional bodies, media, trade unions and any citizen who could help to find a meaningful solution to the existing problems.\textsuperscript{160} Moreover, the UNP stated that the Parliament would be given more powers which would ensure its active role in all issues of national importance.\textsuperscript{161}

The SLFP pledged to frame a new constitution that would guarantee the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, fair democratic system, fundamental human rights and peace.\textsuperscript{162} The Party also stood for the abolition of the existing Presidential system and re-establishment of the parliamentary form of government with a new proportional representation system to elect members of Parliament.\textsuperscript{163} In response to this, Premadasa warned the people that their

\textsuperscript{159} The UNP Manifesto, n.71, p.2.
\textsuperscript{160} ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.1.
\textsuperscript{163} The Island, 26 November 1988.
right to elect the President would be removed if Sirimavo Bandaranaike came to power who would place it in the hands of members of Parliament. He assured people that he would protect the privilege of people to elect the President. The UNP Chairman, Ranjan Wijeratne ridiculed Sirimavo Bandaranaike for pledging to abolish the executive presidency while at the same time seeking people's mandate for the very same institution. The SLFP spelt out that Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution which safeguards rights of the minorities would also be included in the proposed new Constitution. Garnini Dissanayaka, Minister for Lands and Mahaveli Development, questioned Sirimavo Bandaranaike on her decision to re-introduce Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution. He reminded people that it was the SLFP that repealed this clause from the Constitution in 1972. Garnini Dissanayake further added that when it was included in the Constitution in 1948, people from all walks of life protested against it because it impeded the true functioning of the legislature, and also prevented Buddhism from being given a place of prominence.

164. ibid, 5 November 1988.
166. The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.1.
Like the SLFP, the SLMP also asserted that it would abolish the executive Presidency, and scrap the present Constitution that has taken away the democratic rights of the people.\textsuperscript{168} It further said that the SLMP would frame a new constitution that would distribute powers between various institutions like the Presidency, the Parliament, the Provincial Councils and the Judiciary.\textsuperscript{169} The SLMP also stated that people would not only be provided with the power to elect their representatives but also to recall them.\textsuperscript{170}

**Foreign Policy**

The foreign policy presented by all the three parties - the UNP, SLFP and SLMP were identical. There were differences in tone but the contents were the same. The UNP stated that it would follow an independent foreign policy that would guarantee the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{171} While the UNP reiterated its support to the principles of non-alignment, it intended to maintain friendly relations with Sri Lanka's immediate

\begin{verbatim}
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168. The SLMP Manifesto, n.73, p.10.
170. The SLMP Manifesto, n.73, p.10.
\end{verbatim}
neighbours. The UNP declared that it would extend all help to achieve greater co-operation between the South Asian countries through the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) of which Sri Lanka was a member. Further, the UNP said that it was known for its unqualified support to Third World countries in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Like in the past the UNP would continue to support the people of South Africa in their fight against the racist government and the demand for independence of the people of Namibia. Premadasa said that it was the UNP government which recognised the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat's declaration of an independent State of Palestine. He also pledged that the forces that were acting against the interests of the Muslims would be sent out of Sri Lanka.

Sirimavo Bandaranaike accused the UNP for its negative approach to foreign policy which had led to the presence of a foreign army in Sri Lanka. Anti-India activities were encouraged by the UNP government by involving American agencies, Israeli agents and other forces that were

172. ibid.
173. ibid.
174. ibid.
considered inimical to India's security interests. This led to strains in Indo-Sri Lanka relations and precipitated the present situation. She expressed her confidence that on becoming President, India would withdraw its army from Sri Lanka because there would not be any security threat to it under the SLFP government.\textsuperscript{176} The SLFP stated that it would follow a policy of non-alignment which would guarantee Sri Lanka's independence and territorial integrity.\textsuperscript{177} It further said that the SLFP would sever Sri Lanka's relationship with both Israel and the racist South African government, while at the same time extending its support to the independence movement of the Namibian people.\textsuperscript{178}

The SLMP candidate Ossie Abeygunasekara said that his party's foreign policy would be centered around non-alignment.\textsuperscript{179} The SLMP stated that while it was opposed to imperialism, neo-colonialism, racism and fascism, it would support all those countries fighting for their independence.\textsuperscript{180} It further said that the SLMP would recognise the establishment of a new independent Palestinian

\textsuperscript{176} ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} The DPA Manifesto, n.72, p.5.
\textsuperscript{178} ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} The Sunday Times, November 27 1988.
\textsuperscript{180} The SLMP Manifesto, n.73, p.22.
State and extend all help to achieve this goal. It also promised that the SLMP would close down the Israeli interest section in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{181} It proposed that it would contribute positively to stop the arms-race in the world and bring about complete disarmament which would ensure peace all over the world.\textsuperscript{182}

\textbf{Law and Order}

The opposition parties made all possible efforts to discredit the UNP for its failure to restore law and order. Sirimavo Bandaranaike said that while law and order had completely broken down, thousands of people especially the youth were disappearing from homes and many of them were detained by security forces without being charged.\textsuperscript{183} She further said that when the SLFP handed over power to the UNP in 1977, people lived without fear but now it was not sure whether a person walking out of his house would return safely or not.\textsuperscript{184} Moreover, she said that the government was terrorising the people through its security personnel and the political terror gangs armed at state expense which has led the people of south and the north to continue to

\textsuperscript{181} ibid.

\textsuperscript{182} ibid.

\textsuperscript{183} The Island, 23 November 1988.

\textsuperscript{184} The Sun, 29 November 1988.
engage in violence.\textsuperscript{185} While taking credit for crushing the JVP insurgency of 1971, she said that even though there were queues, people were safe under the SLFP government.\textsuperscript{186} She said that people could not be deceived by Premadasa who was now asking for people's mandate to restore law and order which he could not do for the past eleven years as Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{187} She also said that the only solution to the present situation was the dissolution of Parliament. "The SLFP strongly believes that once the Parliament was dissolved, it would put an end to the continued strikes and disturbances all over the country."\textsuperscript{188}

Although the SLFP went all out against the government on this issue, its association with the JVP in the early part of its campaign and its failure to condemn the violence left enough space for the UNP to come out of its defensive posture and retaliate against the opposition. The UNP accused that the SLFP was responsible for the violence. Premadasa said that the opposition was engaged in threatening shopkeepers to close their shops, disrupting

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{185} The Island, 23 November 1988.
\textsuperscript{186} Weekend, 30 October 1988.
\textsuperscript{187} Sun, 2 November 1988.
\textsuperscript{188} ibid., 29 November 1988.
\end{flushleft}
transport services and blocking roads.\textsuperscript{189} The people knew the SLFP's ploy to make the government unpopular by creating artificial scarcities, work stoppages, issuing threats to the people and provoking the students only to win the election. But this would only remind people of their sufferings during the SLFP government.\textsuperscript{190} Gamini Dissanayake accused the opposition that it was the SLFP that brought the students to streets and encouraged them to demonstrate against the government which led to the closure of schools and universities.\textsuperscript{191} Premadasa assured parents that he would wipe out those who engaged in these unlawful activities and subsequently all schools and universities would be opened and all the other services would start functioning normally.\textsuperscript{192}

Sirimavo Bandaranaike challenged Premadasa to prove that the SLFP was responsible for violence. She said that the SLFP was a party that safeguarded democracy and would not engage in violent methods to come to power.\textsuperscript{193} She pointed out that even the President himself said that he

\textsuperscript{189}. Sun, 8 November 1988.
\textsuperscript{190}. Daily News, 8 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{192}. ibid., 12 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{193}. Sun, 15 November 1988.
could not provide security to all people. Rather they had to protect themselves. She questioned that if the government could not provide security to people who elected them, then what was the use of that government. Sirimavo Bandaranaike said that she was not contesting the election because she was power hungry but to save people and the country from the worst situation it had fallen into. She warned the UNP of 'drastic consequences if Parliament was not dissolved and accused Premadasa for preventing the President from dissolving the Parliament and exploiting the state machinery for his narrow political advantage'. She also said that in the past, people used to vote for those who promised more food and employment but today people were yearning for peace. She promised the people that her first priority would be to restore law and order and bring peace to the country. She also said that if she became President, the Parliament would be dissolved and election would be held to enable the people to choose their

199. ibid., 3 October 1988.
representatives after a gap of eleven years. She, however, cautioned the people that 'if Premadasa became President, instead of dissolving the Parliament and holding elections, he would extend the life of Parliament through a referendum'.

She also warned the people that if the situation continued, the Indian army which was now controlling the North and the East would also rule the rest of the country. Hence the only way to restore peace was to vote the UNP out of power.

Premadasa criticised Sirimavo Bandaranaike that her threat to organise anti-government agitation if Parliament was not dissolved was nothing but going back from her commitment to cooperate with the election commissioner for the conduct of a peaceful poll. He said that she had now come to the conclusion that she could not win the election. Premadasa defended his opposition to the dissolution of Parliament by explaining that he needed the help of the present Parliament to ratify his development programmes for the benefit of the poor masses. While he

203. ibid.
asserted that it would be he who would dissolve the Parliament,\textsuperscript{205} he assured the people that they would be given an opportunity to elect their representatives to the Parliament at the earliest.\textsuperscript{206} Lalith Athulathmudali argued that it would be disastrous to the country if the Parliament was dissolved without ensuring peace.\textsuperscript{207}

The SLMP accused both the UNP and the SLFP as responsible for the present violent situation. The NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara said that it was the UNP that was responsible for the present situation where there was no peace and people had to live in fear. Further, he criticised that the government was not dissolving Parliament because they wanted to misuse the state machinery to win the election.\textsuperscript{208} Ossie Abeygunasekera promised that the SLMP would restore law and order and create an environment that would enable the people to live without fear.\textsuperscript{209}

**Campaign Strategies**

In Sri Lanka, ever since the introduction of universal franchise, election campaigns primarily became a source of

\textsuperscript{205} ibid.

\textsuperscript{206} *The Island*, 13 November 1988.

\textsuperscript{207} *Sun*, 26 November 1988.

\textsuperscript{208} *Daily News*, 9 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{209} *Sunday Times*, 4 December 1988.
political education as well as entertainment for the people who listened to the promises and programmes presented by the political parties and their leaders at public meetings.  

However, the second presidential election campaign was marred by violence, threats and collapse of law and order situation all over the country.  

Election meetings that used to continue late into the night were made virtually impossible because of the prevailing violent situation and curfews that were imposed.  

Hence, very few people attended the public meetings organised by political parties.  

People were threatened against participating in the electoral process especially in South, Uva, North-Central and Northern Provinces.  

All three candidates suffered from this unusually violent situation and a large number of their sympathisers and party workers were killed and election meetings were disrupted.  

As a


211. ibid., 17 December 1988.


213. The Second Presidential Election, n.29, p.3.


215. ibid.
result the holding of election meetings became difficult. Under this situation parties largely used mass media - television, radio, newspapers and wall posters to communicate their programmes to the people. In this context, the electronic media - radio and television, played a crucial role in the campaign of the political parties. In the 1982 Presidential election, the time limit allotted to parties was 45 minutes each over radio and television. However, in the 1988 Presidential election this was increased to 90 minutes each. In addition to this, another 45 minutes was allotted in compliance with the request made by the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party highlighting the difficulty faced by the political parties in organising public meetings due to the prevailing violent situation. Overall, the time limit allotted to political parties was 2 hours and 15 minutes.

Political parties organised their public meetings through their campaign committees appointed for the purpose along with the coordination of their local branches. Even though all three candidates suffered from the violence, the UNP candidate R. Premadasa was largely successful in holding


his election meetings as scheduled despite the poor presence of people. This was evident from the number of public meetings organised by the political parties. The UNP held around 165 meetings and the SLFP had over 100 meetings. But the SLMP could conduct only around 70 meetings. Premadasa could not run his campaign more efficiently because he was the candidate of the ruling party with its well-organised party machinery and he was alleged to have misused the services of the government servants, vehicles and media. Moreover, popular UNP leaders like Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake, Ranjan Wijeratne, all capable of drawing crowds by their impressive oratory campaigned for Premadasa. This gave further boost to his campaign. More interestingly, President J.R. Jayewardene addressed very few UNP election meetings. This made the opposition leader Anura Bandaranaike to raise a question as to why the President was not actively involved in campaigning. Though the UNP Chairman Ranjan Wijeratne

218. ibid., 11 December 1988.


221. The Island, 30 November 1988.
defended the President saying that he wanted to give a free hand to Premadasa to run his own campaign, yet it was evident that the UNP and Premadasa did not want to identify themselves with the unpopular President. Moreover, both President Jayewardene and Premadasa contradicted each other on the role of JVP. While President Jayewardene openly denounced the JVP for its violent campaign, Premadasa was of the view that until it was proved guilty the JVP could not be held responsible.

The SLFP candidate Sirimavo Bandaranaike on her part had to confront numerous hurdles in conducting public meetings. As mentioned earlier, initially she was made to believe that JVP would be supporting her candidature and become part of the proposed eight-party alliance. However the JVP dissociated itself from any alliance with the SLFP and was subsequently engaged in attacking and disrupting Sirimavo Bandaranaike's election meetings. Moreover, the SLFP's campaign was affected to a large extent by the frequent promulgation of curfews by the government and


unofficially by the JVP.\textsuperscript{225} It was alleged that the government was engaged in scuttling the election meetings of the SLFP on a number of occasions either by imposing curfew on the day of its public meeting or by advancing the curfew to the day the SLFP was supposed to hold its election meetings.\textsuperscript{226}

However, it was the SLMP candidate Ossie Abeygunasekera who was the one to be adversely affected by the JVP's violent campaign. On two occasions, SLMP's public meetings were disrupted by major bomb blasts that resulted in the killing of a large number of its supporters, including its Vice-President, Devabandara Senaratne.\textsuperscript{227} This made the SLMP cancel its public meetings and campaign more by way of wall posters, distributing pamphlets and using the electronic and print media to a maximum extent.\textsuperscript{228}

In the campaign, all three parties focussed their attention on those issues through which they could muster popular support for their candidates. While the UNP emphasized more on its economic policies, the SLFP laid

\textsuperscript{225} Vasantha Amerasinghe, n.220, p.348.
\textsuperscript{226} People's Action for Fair and Free Election, n.212, p.11.
\textsuperscript{227} Sun, 6 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{228} Interview with Y.P. de Silva, n.44.
stress on political and constitutional changes. Whereas the SLMP presented itself as an alternative to both the UNP and the SLFP. Apart from the issues that were discussed, the campaign also witnessed personal slander of candidates, their background and their life style. Premadasa who projected himself as a candidate of the common man, stated that being a common man himself he would understand the problems of those living below the poverty line. He explained that after realising the sufferings of the poor, he had initiated a number of welfare programmes like the Gam Udawa or Village reawakening programme because it was his conviction that once the village was developed the country would automatically get developed. Further, he said that as a common man he would like to become the President instead of leaving that to shift between the waluwwa's. He also said that the day he became the President, sixteen million people of this country also would consider themselves as President because he was one among them. But Sirimavo Bandaranaike disputed his claim to be a common man and went to the extent of criticising him at the

personal level. She argued that Premadasa might have been a common man, but now he followed the path of capitalist politics and he could not be compared with the masses. Moreover, she said that neither does Premadasa's wife dress like an ordinary woman nor were his children educated in Sri Lankan schools. She added that when the children of a common man could not continue their education owing to the existing violent situation Premadasa's son was studying abroad without any problem.

Premadasa reacted that before he had been chosen as a UNP candidate Sirimavo Bandaranaike had praised him as a patriot and a good man. But once he secured his nomination as a UNP candidate, overnight he had to confront unfounded criticism from the SLFP. Further, he accused the SLFP that instead of presenting a programme that would benefit the people they had been engaged in abusing him and his family. President J.R. Jayewardene claimed that by nominating Premadasa as its candidate, the UNP proved itself

236. ibid., 15 November 1988.
that it was no longer a 'Uncle-Nephew party'.

Premadasa argued that the SLFP by appointing Sirimavo Bandaranaike's brothers Mackie Ratwatte and Sivali Ratwatte as the campaign manager and propaganda in-charge respectively and her cousin Anurudha Ratwatte for the security proved that still it was under the family bandyism. Further, he said that there was no future for the common man under the SLFP.

However, Sirimavo Bandaranaike claimed that it was due to the efforts made by the SLFP under the leadership of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike that today a common man was able to become a member of parliament and a poor student could go for higher studies at the university level.

UNP Chairman Ranjan Wijeratne said that to solve the present situation the country needed an energetic leader who could stand on his own without much assistance from others. He said "Sirimavo Bandaranaike needs the help of others even to speak on television. People should consider age also as an important factor because the election was held not for electing a ceremonial president but for an executive

239. Sun, 10 October 1988.


The political parties also went all out to woo the support of the minorities whose votes were considered crucial because of the fifty per cent margin set by the constitution for any one to become President.244

One controversial aspect of the election campaign was the alleged statement made by Indian High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit, in an interview to Sun, a daily newspaper in Sri Lanka. J.N. Dixit said that "neither the SLFP leader Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike nor the Leader of the Opposition, Anura Bandaranaike, told him that the SLFP would abrogate the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and abolish Provincial Councils during 'several' discussions he had with them. The matters in dispute were the letters in the annexure to the Agreement and these, Mrs. Bandaranaike said, would not be needed as she would take a series of policy decisions if she wins, which would make those conditions unnecessary." Further he said that "he had also had one meeting with Prime Minister R. Premadasa, which he described as a "good meeting". Mr. Premadasa's approach, practical and constructive and he said he wanted greater reciprocity in the Agreement, on the lines


244. The political parties effort to woo the support of the minorities are discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter.
of a friendship treaty."\textsuperscript{245}

However, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, strongly came out against J.N. Dixit for his statements and said that there was no need for her to discuss the policies of the SLFP with a foreign diplomat.\textsuperscript{246} Anura Bandaranaike accused J.N. Dixit that it was a crude and vulgar attempt to directly interfere in the political affairs of Sri Lanka. Further, he said that it was not necessary to discuss the stand of the SLFP because it was a known fact that his party would abrogate the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, send back the IPKF and abolish the provincial council system.\textsuperscript{247} He also warned that once the SLFP came to power J.N. Dixit would cease to be the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{248} While commenting on the episode, Ranjan Wijeratne argued that though it was not conventional for ambassadors of foreign countries to issue statements contradicting the views of national leaders, J.N. Dixit had to correct his position by denying the statements attributed to him. He also said that national leaders should be cautious about making such vulnerable remarks which could arouse communal and

\textsuperscript{245} Quoted in \textit{Sun}, 10 October 1988.

\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Weekend}, 16 October 1988.

\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Sun}, 12 October 1988.

\textsuperscript{248} \textit{Weekend}, 16 October 1988.
Conclusion

The Presidential election of 1988 was held in Sri Lanka when the country was facing political and economic stress. The Militant groups like the JVP and the LTTE were engaged in an armed conflict with the state and made every effort to disrupt the electoral process. Among the three political parties that contested the election, the UNP choose Prime Minister R. Premadasa as its candidate and shed its image as a 'Uncle-Nephew' party. This resulted in a change of leadership in UNP. But the SLFP nominated Sirimavo Bandaranaike and had to face criticisms that it was dominated by a single family ever since its formation. The third candidate Ossie Abeygunasekera represented an entirely new political party the SLMP.

On the eve of election, all three parties made every effort to secure the support of friendly parties to strengthen their candidate's chances. The UNP continued to enjoy the support of the CWC which had a sizeable support base among plantation Tamils. It also succeeded in wooing the SLMC which supported the UNP indirectly by withdrawing from the DPA. The SLFP failed in its bid to form an eight party alliance and had the support of only smaller parties.

the MEP, ACTC, Liberal Party, and D.W.C., which did not have any reasonable support base among the people. Although Left parties like LSSP, CP and the NSSP declared formal support to the SLMP candidate, except for the NSSP, the other two parties did not extend all out support to him. But the SLMP secured the support of Tamil parties like TULF, TELO and EPRLF by taking a pro-accord stand.

The Presidential election was dominated by issues like economy, ethnic conflict and the deteriorating law and order situation. Although the UNP could have been defensive on issues like the Indo-Sri Lanka accord and the presence of IPKF, it got neutralised once Premadasa, known for his resentment against his own party's stand on this issue, became its candidate. The UNP followed an aggressive strategy on all issues. It followed this approach even for issues on which it had to be defensive like the law and order situation. Moreover, it came with a well-planned programme to overcome socio-economic problems like poverty, unemployment, housing and rising cost of living.

In contrast the SLFP relied rather heavily on issues like ethnic conflict and law and order situation. But even on these issues it could not claim any credibility. Firstly on ethnic conflict, the SLFP proposed such a package that could be hardly believed by the people because of its anti-devolution stand in the past. Secondly, on law and
order situation though the SLFP went all out to criticise the UNP, it was at the receiving end because of its brief association with the JVP. Moreover, the SLFP failed to present a viable economic programme to erase the unpleasant memories among the people of scarcities and long queues for essential items during its rule. Whereas the SLMP came out in support of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement and the presence of IPKF and thus found favour among the Tamil parties. While it went all out to denounce the JVP for its violent campaign, it accused both the UNP and the SLFP for the present chaos.

Unlike in the past the campaign during the Presidential election was marred by violence which prevented political parties to freely communicate with the people. This however affected the opposition parties more than the ruling UNP. The UNP, with the support of government machinery, was able to conduct its campaign to a maximum extent.