

15.59 hrs.

STATEMENT RE: RECENT PROVINCIAL
COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN THE NORTH-
EASTERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA

[English]

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO): Sir, I rise to apprise the House of recent developments in Sri Lanka which have a bearing on the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. At the core of this agreement are the provisions for setting up of Provincial Councils with sufficient legislative and executive powers to give the Tamils of Sri Lanka greater autonomy in the running of their own affairs. Constitutional amendments and legislation to give effect to these provisions were passed by the Sri Lankan Parliament several months ago and Provincial Councils were set up and elections held in all provinces of Sri Lanka except the North and the East. It is ironic, indeed, that although these provisions were enacted primarily to meet the demands of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, the obduracy and intransigence of extremist elements have denied to them the benefits of these provisions when all other areas of Sri Lanka were enjoying these benefits.

The Central point of LTTE's intransigence was their insistence that we recognise their right to set themselves up as the sole representatives of the Tamils. They claimed the right to ban any other Tamil party or group that they did not approve of and they claimed the right to indulge in any amount of violence against those who did not follow their dictates. We repeatedly made attempts to persuade them to give up these unilateral demands and join the democratic process. But all these attempts failed and the electoral process had to be proceeded with.

Lanka had announced several measures which went a long way towards meeting the remaining demands of the Tamils, including the notification of the merger and release of the remaining political prisoners who supported the Agreement. The LTTE, its supporters and even some of our friends warned us against holding elections without LTTE's approval. But we had firm indications from the ground level that the Tamil people wanted peace, they wanted an end to the violence and strife and they wanted a chance to exercise their democratic rights.

Accordingly, the electoral process was initiated on 12th September. Even at this last stage we tried our best to invite the LTTE to join the process. We declared a unilateral cease-fire from September 15 which, with an extension, lasted a total of 10 days. Though we repeatedly urged the LTTE to take advantage of this opportunity, and though the citizens of the Northern and Eastern Provinces tried their best to persuade them, the LTTE persisted in their by now familiar, obduracy and intransigence.

It had been widely predicted that no Tamil candidates would have the courage to come forward and contest the elections. But this was proved wrong and enough candidates came forward for every single seat in the North Eastern Province. The electoral alliance of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) was the only group to file nominations in the Northern Province and were elected unopposed. In the Eastern Province there was a contest between the Tamil parties, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the United National Party. The electoral process was completed on November 19th and I am glad to report to the House that it was completed without any violence and with an overwhelming voter turnout.

Before the elections the President of Sri

I would like to share with the House the

[Sh. P.V. Narasimha Rao] details that have become available about the voting patterns and the results. An average of nearly 63% of the registered voters throughout the Eastern Province cast their franchise — one of the highest turnouts in the Provincial Council elections in Sri Lanka. This percentage went up as high as over 79% in the predominantly Tamil district of Batticaloa while it was about 53% in Trincomalee and 55% in Amparai. Reports indicate that many of the Sinhala voters stayed away due to threats from the JVP. If provision is made for this fact, it would appear that an overwhelmingly high proportion of the Tamil population — perhaps as high as 80-90% — ignored the threats and appeals of the LTTE and voted in favour of peace and democracy. Another manner in which voter in Sri Lanka have traditionally expressed their disapproval has been to spoil their ballots. But the average of invalid votes throughout the Province has been below 2% and in the predominantly Tamil district of Batticaloa it was only 1.6%. These elections were observed by representatives of the Indian, Sri Lankan and international media and have been widely reported. Members will agree that the unanimous verdict is that the elections were peaceful, they were completely free and fair and above all they were an overwhelming success. The combined result of the elections is that in the North-Eastern Province, after taking into account the two bonus seats, the Tamil parties (EPRLF and ENDLF) have together got 55 out of a total of 73 seats, giving them a three-fourths majority. The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress has 17 and the UNP has 1 seat.

The results, perhaps give us a clue to why the LTTE has consistently refused to submit to a popular verdict and preferred to seek their objectives by force of the gun. The Tamils have also signalled that they are in favour of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, that they would like to give it a try and that they want an end to violence and strife. I would

once again call upon the LTTE to heed the call of the people they claim to represent and to give up violence which has been causing untold suffering to the Tamil people.

Sir, I would like to commend the excellent security arrangement made by the IPKF which foiled all attempts by the LTTE to intimidate the candidates, to terrorise the voters and disrupt the elections. While ensuring security, their arrangements also ensured a completely free and fair election. I would also like to place on record our appreciation for the services of many Sri Lankan volunteers who braved threats to their personal security by volunteering to serve as election officers and making the elections possible. I am sure that this House would like to join me in congratulating the Tamil parties, specially the EPRLF and the ENDLF, who have shown tremendous courage and foresight in standing up for peace and democracy. Last, but perhaps most important, we should extend our felicitations to the Tamil people of Sri Lanka who are the real heroes of these elections.

16.05 hrs.

MONOPOLIES AND RESTRICTIVE
TRADE PRACTICES (AMENDMENT)
Bill—*CONTD.*

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now the hon. Minister may reply.

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI J. VENGAL RAO): Sir, I have carefully listened to the views expressed by the hon. Members. Some Members have pointed out that this Act was passed in 1969. It was already amended 7-8 times. We amended our Constitution also so many times. According to the changing times, we have to amend the Act to encourage industrial relations in this country and to give incentives to