



President's coalition sweeps Sri Lanka polls

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP), a coalition that includes civil society groups and trade unions secured a landslide win in Sri Lanka's November 14 General Elections, shattering records of strong governments of the past and making history in the island's ethnic minorities-dominated north, east, and hill country.

Broadening the base

Set up in 2019, the National People's Power (NPP) is a broad social coalition rather than a conventional electoral alliance of different parties. The National People's Power (NPP) identifies as a "political movement", comprising 21

diverse groups, including political parties, youth and women's organisations, trade unions and civil society networks. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) remains its chief constituent, making up its political core.

Past vs. present

The JVP has seen considerable shifts in the last five decades. The party with Marxist-Leninist origins led two armed insurrections — in 1971 and in 1987-89. Its ideological emphasis changed from Marxism and redistributive justice in the 1970s to Sinhala chauvinism in the 1980s, when it resisted power-sharing with the Tamils.

The National People's Power (NPP) secured 141 seats, with around 6.87 million votes in 196 seats, bagged 18 more seats under the system of proportional representation, giving it 159 seats in total in the 225-member legislature, securing over two-thirds majority. The NPP has accomplished what former President Mahinda Rajapaksa could not get in the 2010 poll after the LTTE's defeat. The Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) secured 40 seats. Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, led by The formerly powerful Rajapaksas' was nearly wiped out, with its presence in the legislature shrinking to three seats from the 145 it won in the 2020 general elections. The poll outcome gives President Dissanayake ample power in the legislature to take forward his pledges on political and economic reform.

The vote share of the National People's Power (NPP) rose considerably across the island in the parliamentary polls, but especially remarkable mandate in the north and east that are home to Tamils and Muslims drew attention, compared to the September presidential election.

In Jaffna, the National People's Power (NPP) won three out of six seats, becoming the first mainstream party from the south to topple prominent northern Tamil parties, including the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK). The poll results in this region overturns the image of the NPP's chief constituent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna [JVP or People's Liberation Front] as an "anti-Tamil rights" party, based on the JVP's fierce opposition in the 1980s to Tamils' self-rule and the merger of the north and east.

Signalling a change

The election has demonstrated the NPP's growing appeal among all sections, who had in 2022, frustrated with economic hardships and the old political establishment, thrown out what they despised as a corrupt regime. Having elected JVP chief Anura Kumara Dissanayake as the country's President in September, the people have now provided the ruling alliance with a hard-to-get over two-thirds majority.

The significance of the poll also lies in the extent and geographic span of the NPP's victory. It has been a remarkable show in Jaffna and Vanni in the Northern Province, which is home to Tamils and the stronghold of the Illankai Tamil Arasu

Kadchi. Except for Batticaloa, the NPP emerged the top party in the east, with its sizeable population of Muslims, and in the Central Province's Nuwara Eliya district, with its majority hill-country Tamils. In its vote share, island-wide, the coalition outperformed Mr. Dissanayake, who touched the 50 % mark only in four electoral districts in the September poll. The rise of the coalition, from three seats with 3.84 % vote share in 2020, to a super majority now, is remarkable. Though Sajith Premadasa's Samagi Jana Balawegaya remains the principal Opposition party in Parliament, its vote share has dropped considerably. The parties backed by two former Presidents, Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mr. Rajapaksa, have performed miserably. While voters have spared Mr. Dissanayake the compulsion of seeking allies to pursue his reform agenda, he should still consult all sections. His promises at the time of the presidential poll, such as the abolition of executive presidency, a new Constitution, and the repeal of oppressive laws, cannot be fulfilled merely with support in the legislature. The big takeaway from the November 14 poll is that the country has voted for decisive change that it sought from the time of the citizen's uprising in 2022. Mr. Dissanayake, at the commencement of his innings, described the unity of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and all Sri Lankans as the bedrock of the new beginning.

Tamils and Muslims who voted for Mr. Dissanayake's political rivals — mainly former Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa — in the presidential election appear to have now voted for the NPP. In almost all districts, barring Batticaloa in the east, the NPP beat prominent regional parties, representing Tamils and Muslims, signalling that the call for change that dominated the Sinhala-majority south ahead of the September presidential election had found island-wide resonance more recently.

'Tamil parties suffering'

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which leads Sri Lanka's ruling National People's Power (NPP), that once vehemently opposed Tamils' political rights won three seats in Jaffna, outdoing traditional Tamil parties that were the community's main voice in national politics. In Nuwara Eliya district, in the central hill country that is home to Sri Lanka's famed tea estates and Malaiyaha Tamils who toil in them, the NPP won five seats and nearly 42 % of the vote share. Mr. Dissanayake's alliance also recorded big wins in the hill country across the island's Central, Southern and Uva provinces, outdoing traditional parties representing the Malaiyaha Tamils. This would be the first instance of a political party garnering a two-thirds majority in Parliament under Sri Lanka's proportional representation system.

700 kg meth seized off Gujarat coast, 8 arrested

INTERNAL SECURITY



CONTEXT: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), in coordination with the Navy and the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), on Friday seized 700 kg of methamphetamine off the coast of Porbandar and arrested eight foreigners, who claimed to be Iranian nationals.

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Deputy Director-General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh noted contraband found on a vessel in the territorial waters of India. The foreign nationals were not carrying any identification documents. The seizure and arrests were made as part of Operation Sagar Manthan launched earlier this year to target drug trafficking through maritime routes. Under Operation Sagar Manthan, a series of such maritime exercises have been undertaken and about 3,400 kg of various narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances have been seized. The

fourth Sagar Manthan operation was launched following inputs about an unregistered vessel, which did not have the automatic identification system installed on it, carrying drugs into the Indian territorial waters. The vessel was identified and intercepted by the Navy by mobilising its mission-deployed maritime patrol assets.

Investigations to identify the backward and forward linkages of the drug syndicate are on for which help of foreign Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (DLEAs) is being taken. Eleven Iranian and 14 Pakistani nationals have also been

arrested in three cases. These significant operational achievements in the Indian territorial waters are a testament to our resolve to eradicate the scourge of drugs from India to realise our vision of a Nasha Mukta Bharat by 2047.

Imports from the UAE rose 70 % in October to \$7.2 billion

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: India's imports from its free trade agreement partner United Arab Emirates (UAE) have jumped by 70.37 % year-on-year to \$ 7.2 billion in October, leaving a trade deficit of about \$ 3.5 billion during that month.

The India UAE trade recorded a deficit - the difference between imports and exports of \$ 2.47 billion in September. The imports from the UAE during April-October rose by 55.1 % to \$ 38.64 billion against \$ 24.91 billion in the same period previous fiscal, while exports were up by 15.86 % year-on-year to \$ 20.93 billion compared to \$ 18 billion in April-October 2023-24. The trade deficit during the seven-month period has widened to \$ 17.71 billion from \$ 6.85 billion in the same period a year ago. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the UAE came into effect in May 2022.

Rising imports

According to the data, India's imports from UAE rose by 49.22 % to \$ 5.38 billion in September and \$ 72.7 to \$ 6.38 billion in August. Exports, on the other hand, increased by 23.75 % to \$ 2.91 billion in September and 3.16 % to \$ 2.84 billion in August.

Major goods imported from the UAE include mineral oil, chemicals, essential oils and perfumes, precious and semi-precious stones, iron and steel products, copper, nickel and aluminium goods. India raised its concerns over the jump in imports of silver products, platinum alloy, and dry dates from the UAE and urged the country to ensure that the rules are not circumvented under the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The UAE is the third-largest trading partner of India with \$ 83.65 billion bilateral trade in 2023-24.

India says climate finance is not an 'investment goal'

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



CONTEXT: At the ongoing COP29 negotiations in Azerbaijan's Baku, India stated that climate finance — the money that's necessary to incentivise and facilitate developing countries' adoption of renewable energy sources over fossil fuels — should not be seen as "investment goals" by developed countries.

Climate finance cannot be changed into an investment goal when it is a unidirectional provision and mobilisation goal from the developed to the developing countries. The Paris Agreement is clear on who is to provide and mobilise the climate finance — it is the developed countries. The statement was formally made public by the Union Environment Ministry on Friday.

Currently, \$ 5-6.8 trillion worth of climate finance until 2030 is being mooted at Baku.

Several technical issues are being deliberated upon at Baku. The key moment, however, that the hundreds of negotiators are working upon is the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance. This is an estimate of the money that developing countries will collectively require from developed countries to adapt to climate change and shift to renewable sources without compromising on developmental needs. The existing estimate, agreed upon in 2009, was to mobilise and deliver \$100 billion annually from 2020-2025 but was fulfilled — not to universal agreement — only in 2022. However, in 2021, the countries collectively decided to increase it.

They decided to come up with a new number and make it operational by 2025. This is why the Baku COP is expected to deliver on a new number to make the COP a success. Intervening on behalf of a collective called 'Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), at the High-Level Ministerial on Climate Finance in Baku, India, highlighted that the impacts of climate change were increasingly becoming evident in the form of unfolding disasters. India's intervention reiterated that the developed countries need to commit to providing and mobilising at least \$1.3 trillion every year till 2030.

Vaccine sceptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head health department

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Donald Trump nominated anti-vaccine activist and conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as his Secretary of Health.

Personal attorneys

Mr. Kennedy, a scion of the famous political family who is popularly known as RFK Jr., is a long time environmental campaigner who abandoned a fringe bid for the presidency to endorse Mr. Trump against Democratic candidate Kamala Harris. If approved by the Senate, which Mr. Trump's Republican Party controls, 70-year-old Mr. Kennedy will take over the Health and Human Services Department, a mammoth institution with a budget of close to \$2 trillion.

Kennedy's history

The nomination could meet opposition, given Mr. Kennedy's history of promoting medical conspiracy theories — including the disproven claim that childhood vaccines cause autism — and saying that the COVID-19 vaccine was deadly.

Hamas hints at truce as Israel presses on with Gaza offensive

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Hamas hinted "ready for a ceasefire" in Gaza, urging U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to "pressure" Israel as it continued to pound the Palestinian territory.

Qatar, hosting much of the Palestinian group's Political Bureau, announced suspending its role as a mediator in the war and urging all parties to show "seriousness". Doha-based Hamas political bureau member Bassem Naim acknowledged ready to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip if a ceasefire proposal is presented and on the condition that it is respected" by Israel.

Qatar opts out

On Saturday, Qatar announced it was suspending its role as a mediator in indirect talks towards a ceasefire and hostage release deal in the Gaza war that has ground on for more than a year. Friday's announcement by Hamas came as Israel continued to strike Gaza, with residents of the central city of Deir el-Balah searching through the rubble of their destroyed homes after overnight strikes.

Hostage video

The war erupted with Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel which resulted in 1,206 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed 43,764 people in Gaza, most of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable. Militants also kidnapped 251 hostages during the attack, 97 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 34 whom the Israeli military says are dead.

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India voices dissent against trade barriers linked to emissions

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: India has voiced its disapproval of “protectionist” measures that link trade barriers and carbon emissions, at the ongoing climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan.

A week before the UN summit began, China had petitioned the Presidency of the 29th Conference of Parties (COP 29) to include a discussion on “climate change-related unilateral restrictive trade measures” as part of the formal conference agenda. According to India, a regime of unilateral trade measures on climate change imposes the cost of the transition to low-carbon economies on developing and low-income countries are discriminatory and detrimental to multi-lateral cooperation violating principles of equity.

China’s petition was put forward on behalf of a grouping of countries called BASIC, which includes Brazil, South Africa, India, and China. The petition is primarily directed against a European Union proposal called the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which imposes a tax on products imported into the EU that do not conform to its carbon emission norms. CBAM is currently operating in a “transitional phase” but will come into full effect from January 1, 2026. Neither the BASIC proposal nor India’s statement explicitly mention the CBAM; instead, they use the phrase “arbitrary and unjustifiable unilateral measures”.

Q2 indicators suggest steady momentum: Moody’s Ratings

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: Moody’s Ratings on Friday took a sanguine stance on India’s growth prospects for the quarter citing “steady economic momentum” and asserted that household consumption is “poised to grow” amid concerns about some slackening of the growth momentum with weakening urban demand and underwhelming corporate results in the July to September quarter or Q 2.

The global rating major’s assessment assumes significance coming ahead of the official Q2 GDP growth estimates that are scheduled to be released at the end of November. A recent article by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials in its October bulletin, had projected Q 2 GDP growth at 6.8 %, marginally higher than the 6.7 % rise in Q1 of 2024-25, based on an economic activity index. State Bank of India’s economic research team has pegged Q2 GDP growth at 6.5 % in a recent report.

India’s economy is growing robustly and has the potential to sustain high growth rates as strong private sector financial health reinforces a virtuous economic cycle. Moody’s Ratings said in its global macro outlook for 2025-26, noting that Q1 growth was driven by a revival in household consumption, robust investment and strong manufacturing activity. High-frequency indicators – including expanding manufacturing and services PMIs, robust credit growth and consumer optimism – signal steady economic momentum in Q3. Indeed, from a macroeconomic perspective, the Indian economy is in a sweet spot, with the mix of solid growth and moderating inflation. The agency has forecast a 7.2 % growth for India in the calendar year 2024, followed by 6.6 % in 2025 and 6.5 % in 2026.

On inflation and interest rates

Noting that the spike in India’s October retail inflation to 6.2% amid a sharp jump in vegetable prices marked the first breach of the RBI’s inflation tolerance band of 2% to 6% [with a median target of 4% inflation], Moody’s said “sporadic food price pressures continue to inject volatility” in India’s disinflation trajectory.

Despite the near-term uptick, inflation should moderate toward the RBI’s target in the coming months as food prices ease amid higher sowing and adequate food grain buffer stocks. Even so, potential risks to inflation from heightened geopolitical tensions and extreme weather events underscore the RBI’s cautious approach to policy easing. Although the central bank shifted its monetary policy stance to neutral while keeping the repo rate steady at 6.5% in October, it will likely retain relatively tight monetary policy settings into next year given the fairly healthy growth dynamics and inflation risks, indicating it believes an interest rate cut is off the cards in RBI’s December monetary policy review.

On the consumption front, the ratings agency expects it to grow thanks to higher spending in the ongoing festive season and a sustained pickup in rural demand on the back of an improved agricultural outlook. Additionally, rising capacity utilization, upbeat business sentiment and the government’s continued thrust on infrastructure spending should support

private investment. Sound economic fundamentals, including healthy corporate and bank balance sheets, a stronger external position and ample foreign exchange reserves also bode well for the growth outlook. For the G-20 economies that account for 78 % of global GDP Moody's expects growth to slow to 2.8 % this year from 3 % in 2023, before cooling further to 2.6 % and 2.5 %, over 2025 and 2026, respectively. G-20 emerging markets will grow by 4.3 % in 2024, down from 4.8 % in 2023, and decelerate to 3.9 % in 2025 and 3.8 % in 2026, it said, attributing the moderation largely to its expectation of a continuing slowdown in the Chinese economy amid "considerable external headwinds".





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