

CENTRE FOR MONITORING ELECTION VIOLENCE

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Presidential Election 2015

Postal Voting Communiqué 02

23rd December 2014 Colombo, Sri Lanka -

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) monitored the first day of postal votes across Sri Lanka and at the end of the day reported 47 incidents with 20 major incidents and 27 minor incidents. Major incidents include assault, threat and intimidation, misuse of state resources, incidents related to election officers and intimidatory presence. Minor incidents all related to election offences.

Process of Applications

CMEV notes a total of 541,831 voters are eligible for postal voting on the 23rd, 24th, 26th and 30th. CMEV noted several incidents on the day of the first postal vote raising concerns regarding the process used for registering postal voters that can impact the integrity of elections. At the outset, CMEV raises concerns with the applications for postal voting as the present practice entails the respective head of department sending the applications forms of all within his/her department for postal voting. Any delays and/or discrepancies from this particular individual can lead to a significant population being unable to vote. CMEV has been informed that a large number of the near 85,000 rejected postal votes are attributable to the delay in the application. A particular case reported to CMEV was at the Puttalm Zonal Education Office where 140 applications were made and 30 rejected citing delays. CMEV is concerned with the present process that entails a heavy reliance on one individual that may lead to the disenfranchisement of a significant number of citizens and calls for a review of the present process.

CMEV is also informed of several votes being unaccounted for in the present process. In the Mahawa Deport, Kurunagala, 56 applications were made with 39 being received and 4 rejected. 13 votes were unaccounted for. Similarly in the Mihintale Pradeshiya Sabha, Anuradhapura, 10 applications were made with 1 received and 1 rejected. 8 votes were unaccounted. CMEV raised this issue with the relevant district election officers who were unable to provide a satisfactory answer in terms of accounting for the missing votes and CMEV urges the Elections Commissioner to take immediate steps to look into this matter.

Factors Impacting Franchise

On the basis of incidents reported at the time of issuing this communiqué, CMEV is concerned with the role played by the military in some of the postal voting centres. Incidents reported below and in Communiqué 1 highlight incidents in Mullaitivu and Killinochchi districts that can impact the integrity of the vote.

CMEV is also informed of the low voter turnout today due to the bad weather in parts of Sri Lanka. Reports from the Eastern province and Mannar district indicate heavy rains and floods impacting voter turnout. If there is a continuation of the bad weather for the remainder of postal voting and possibly affecting election day, CMEV urges the Elections Commissioner to take necessary steps to ensure that voters are not deprived of their right to franchise.

In addition to the broader issues raised above, several incidents from the first day of postal votes are below-

23 December 2014, Kurunegala South SLTB Bus Depot, Kurunegala District

CMEV was informed that a group of people wearing T shirts with the slogan 'Nil Balakaya' were seen walking around at 10.45am in the premises outside the polling centre.

23 December 2014, Ceylon Electricity Board Head office - Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Colombo 02, Colombo District

A CMEV monitor was not allowed to enter the voting centre by the security officer on duty at the entrance. The security officer had informed the monitor that there is no voting in the premises. Upon CMEV contacting authorities at the Ceylon Electricity Board, the CMEV observer was permitted access.

23 December 2014, Gangawata Korale Divisional Secretariat - Kandy, Kandy District

A complaint was filed by a CMEV monitor of a large poster of President Mahinda Rajapaksa being displayed on the building near the polling station. This building belongs to the National Housing Development Authority and directly faces the polling station at the Division Secretariat Office.

23 December 2014, SLTB Depot, Vavuniya

A CMEV monitor reported that posters of President Mahinda Rajapaksa were displayed within the SLTB Depot premises which is a polling station.

23 December 2014, SLTB Depot Nawalapitiya, Kandy District

CMEV was informed that at the above location, voters had to mark their ballot and show it to the Senior Polling Officer before sealing it. CMEV contacted the Deputy Elections Commissioner – Kandy regarding this incident. The Deputy Elections Commissioner denied

the allegation stating that his representative was present at the said polling station and that no such incident took place.

23 December 2014, SLTB Depot Katharagama, Monaragala District

A CMEV mobile monitor reported that at the polling station mentioned above, polling agents (both UNP and UPFA) had an argument with the voters who had arrived to cast their vote using the identification document issued by the SLTB instead of their NICs. The UNP polling agents have said that voters can use the identification document issued by the SLTB while the UPFA agents argued that the NIC is compulsory. Two police officers were called in to settle the dispute.

23 December 2014, Nittambuwa Divisional Secretariat, Gampaha District

It was reported to CMEV that Deputy Minister Sarana Gunawardana with two other persons had entered the above premises and made inquiries about the number of postal votes cast at the polling centre from the polling officer.

23 December 2014, District Hospital Mawathagama, Kurunegala District

The speech made by President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the launch of his election manifesto and aired on the Independent Television Network (ITN) was broadcast on the first floor of the District Hospital Mawathagama when voting was taking place on the second floor of the same building.

23 December 2014, Gampola SLTB Depot

The posters of President Mahinda Rajapaksa displayed on the walls in the vicinity of the above location which is a polling station have not been removed as directed by the Election Commission.

23 December 2014, Kirillavala Zonal Education Office, Gampaha District

A CMEV reporter noted a 15 foot billboard of President Mahinda Rajapaksa fixed in the premises of the above location which is a polling station.

23 December 2014, Civil Defence Zonal Office Trincomalee, Trincomalee District

It was reported by a CMEV monitor that two buses belonging to the Trincomalee depot provided transport for Civil Defence Officers to cast their vote at the Zonal Civil Defence Office (the registration of one bus is NA3647). These buses had promotional material of President Mahinda Rajapaksa displayed on the sides. When the CMEV monitor inquired from the depot about these two buses, he was told that no buses had been released for such a purpose. Our monitor was also told that the manager of the depot was Mr Vijitha Dharmasiri who is a local council member representing the UPFA.

23 December 2014, Zonal Education Office – Kabithigollawa, Anuradhapura District

The CMEV monitor assigned to this centre was not permitted to enter until the District Election Commissioner informed the police officers at the entrance granting permission for the monitor to enter.

23 December, Zonal Educational office, Ambalangoda – Kalutara District

CMEV mobile monitor reported that a banner (1.5 x 2 feet) of President Mahinda Rajapaksa is prominently displayed within the premises of Ambalangoda zonal educational office which is a polling station. The CMEV monitor who raised this issue with Mrs. S.E Chandrawathi, zonal education director, was informed that it is the responsibility of the police to remove such banners and that no action can be taken by the zonal education office.

23rd December, The 591st Battalion Headquarters of the Sinha regiment Sri Lanka Army, Alampil – Mullativu District.

A CMEV mobile monitor reported that the designated place for voting within this polling station is not secure as the Government officials have a clear view of each ballot that is being marked. The CMEV monitor has taken up this issue with the certifying officer and officers from the elections department.

The CMEV monitor had also made a written complaint to the representatives of the Elections commission. Upon inquiry the certifying officer had informed the CMEV monitor that the arrangements were made as he needed a clear view of the voter. Alternative arrangements were subsequently made to rectify the situation. However at this point 154 of the 391 registered votes had already been cast.

CMEV was formed in 1997 by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), the Free Media Movement (FMM) and the Coalition Against Political Violence as an independent and non-partisan organisation to monitor the incidence of election related violence. Currently, CMEV is made up of CPA and INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre.

All CMEV reports and communiqués can be accessed online at www.cmev.org



Dr. P. Saravanamuttu

Co – Convener