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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Ceylon Looks Toward Elections

Secret

No 45

17 October 1969

No. 0392/69A

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Approved For Release 2006/04/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A007400020002-9

Approved For Release 2006/04/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A007400020002-9

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CEYLON LOOKS TOWARD ELECTIONS

Elections for a new legislature to succeed the one whose term expires on 22 March 1970 will be important for the country's continued stability and development. The present government, in power since 1965 and dominated by Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake's United National Party, inherited a host of economic and social problems from the previous regime, a coalition led by Mrs. Bandaranaike and her leftist Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Senanayake's basically Western-oriented, moderate government has halted the drift to the left in both internal and foreign policies and has taken measures to put the country back on the road to economic recovery. Although Ceylon's financial outlook is still clouded by unsolved problems, it now appears to have emerged from the economic morass of the early 1960s with a measure of economic growth.

Senanayake has also given the country a period of relative domestic tranquility and has endeavored to unify its pluralistic society by reducing tensions between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil, Christian, and Muslim minorities. In the 1970 elections—for which no specific date has been set—Ceylon will either opt for a continuation of his moderate policies or will again bring to power a leftist coalition, which would include the pro-Soviet Ceylon Communist Party/Moscow (CCP/M).

Although economic issues will weigh heavily in the coming campaign, an important factor with emotional overtones will be the relationship between the Sinhalese and the minorities, especially the Tamils. Senanayake at this time appears to have a slightly better than even chance to win, but the task of appealing to the minority communities without antagonizing his Sinhalese supporters will be a difficult one. To add to his problems, the opposition is expected to attempt to heighten communal tensions still further as elections approach.

BACKGROUND



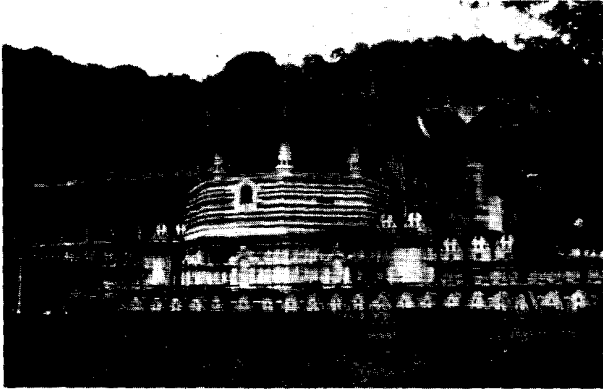
Prime Minister
Dudley Senanayake
Leader of the
United National Party

When Ceylon gained independence from Great Britain in 1948, the ruling United National Party (UNP), led by a Westernized elite with a common background and British education, faced only fragmented and ineffective opposition from a few small Marxist parties or those representing the Tamil minority. The nation's economy, bolstered by an abundance of foreign exchange earned by the major exports of tea, rubber, and coconut appeared relatively sound.

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Buddhist Temple at Kandy, Allegedly
the Repository of a Tooth of Buddha

By about 1952, however, prices for these exports had begun to fall, and foreign exchange earnings with which to buy needed imports declined. The Sinhalese, faced with a worsening economic situation and unable to influence the ruling elite, began to stir. A concomitant revival of interest in Sinhalese-Buddhist traditions added to discontent with the secular-oriented UNP rule. In 1951 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike bolted the UNP and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), ostensibly providing a choice between the UNP and the revolutionary socialism of the Marxist left.

Mildly socialist in outlook, Bandaranaike posed as the champion of traditional Sinhalese-Buddhist culture. His exploitation of popular sentiment in the election campaign of 1956 had the unintentional effect of placing the Tamil minority in the position of the "enemy." He won the election and pledged to fulfill the aspirations of the Sinhalese community.

Serious communal clashes broke out in 1958 when Bandaranaike, hemmed in by Sinhalese extremists, was unable to reach a compromise with

the Tamils, who were agitating for official recognition of their language, at least in the northern and eastern provinces where they predominate. The Buddhist clergy, disappointed that their share of political power was not commensurate with their expectations, also became dissatisfied. The period of violence unleashed during Bandaranaike's rule was climaxed in 1959, when he was assassinated by a disaffected Buddhist monk.

After a brief interim of UNP rule, the SLFP regained control in July 1960 under the leadership of the former prime minister's widow, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. She proved more aggressive than her husband in promoting Sinhalese interests, and Tamil agitation led to a declaration of a state of emergency from April 1961 to May 1963. In the economic sphere she extended state control by nationalizing some industries, freezing wages, and making trade in certain commodities a state monopoly. Such measures did not improve the deteriorating economic situation, however. Excessive deficit spending forced prices upward; the tax structure and investment climate discouraged foreign investors, and tight import controls created shortages of agricultural equipment and raw materials for industry.

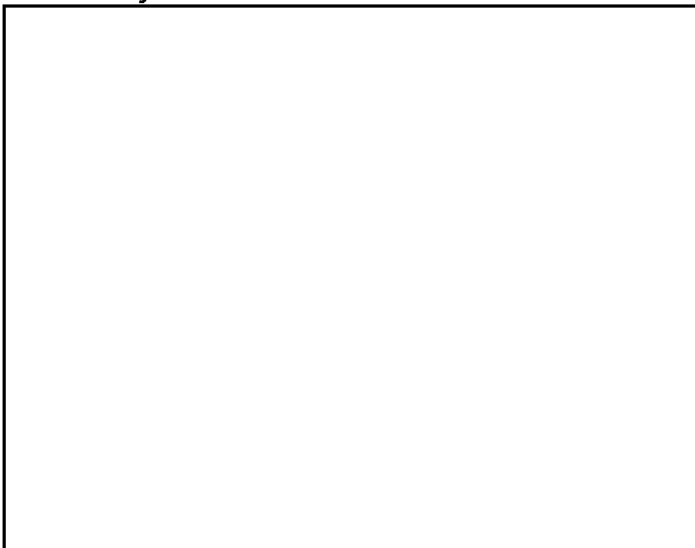
Her government fell in late 1964, when several SLFP members of Parliament, dissatisfied with their party's growing alliance with the leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), crossed to the opposition. In the 1965 election campaign, UNP leader Dudley Senanayake charged the SLFP with intensifying economic problems, allowing Marxist influence to grow, and attempting to control the press. The UNP did not win either a majority of the popular vote or enough seats to form an independent government, but Senanayake put together a workable coalition and moved to meet Ceylon's economic and social problems.

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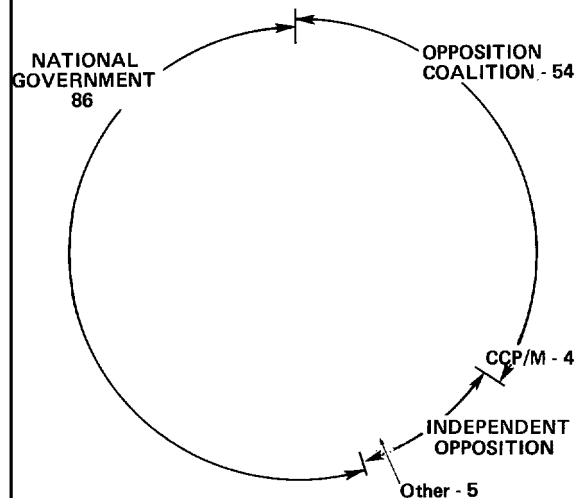
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Ceylon: Present Parliamentary Lineup



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PRESENT STATUS OF THE PARTIES

Senanayake's UNP now holds 73 of the 151 elective seats in the 157-man Parliament. Independents, appointed members, and representatives from a few small parties contribute approximately a dozen supporting votes. The UNP has gradually lost its earlier image as a Western-oriented instrument of foreign interests and the privileged classes. It has espoused "democratic socialism" and has posed as the defender of Sinhalese-Buddhist interests. Senanayake's party is basically moderate, however. Its version of socialism is in effect a call for a mixed economy, its policy of nonalignment is inclined toward the West, and its advocacy of Sinhalese-Buddhist goals is tempered by an understanding attitude toward Tamil aspirations.

Senanayake in 1965 designated national unity as the primary social goal of his new govern-

ment. Generally the country has enjoyed a period of order, although leftist-inspired riots broke out in early 1966 over proposed legislation—actually implementing earlier SLFP proposals—calling for limited official use of the Tamil language. Violence ended quickly, however, when a state of emergency was proclaimed. Although the proclamation was not lifted for almost a year, Senanayake made only limited use of his extraordinary powers. Under the present administration, Sinhalese-Tamil tensions have subsided somewhat, although animosities between the two communities are so deep-seated that a serious resurgence of communal violence is an ever-present danger.

In the 1965 elections, Senanayake's limited support for Tamil interests during the campaign won for the UNP parliamentary seats in 12 out of the 28 constituencies having significant Tamil populations. The independent Federal Party (FP), largest of the Tamil political parties in Ceylon,

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holds about a dozen more of these seats. The FP left the government in September 1968 when the prime minister decided it was politically impossible to implement proposed measures for giving Tamil districts a measure of autonomy. The defection of the FP was not a complete loss for Senanayake, however, because the opposition coalition was deprived of a potentially valuable campaign tactic in Sinhalese districts—alleging that a “secret pact” existed between Senanayake and the FP.

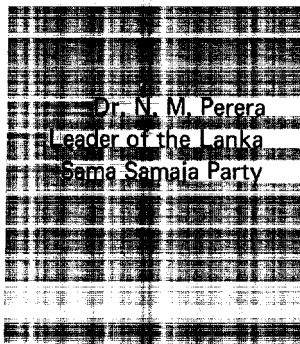
As of mid-summer 1969 Senanayake was described as generally optimistic about his party's chances in the coming elections, although he reportedly predicted they would be very close. Senanayake's chief lieutenant, Minister of State J. R. Jayewardene, has warned that the UNP could lose through party complacency at the local level despite apparent determination at the top for an all-out effort.

The opposition to the present government centers around a coalition of three parties—the SLFP, the LSSP, and the CCP/M; Mrs. Bandaranaike is the titular leader of the alliance. The SLFP is the largest component of the coalition, currently holding 41 seats in Parliament. The LSSP, a Trotskyite party founded in 1935 by upper-class intellectuals, is perhaps the largest element in Ceylon's small and divided Marxist movements and now has nine Parliamentary seats. The CCP/M, founded in 1943 by a group of dissidents from the LSSP, holds four seats.

This leftist alliance is an uneasy one. Although one wing of the SLFP favors closer cooperation with the Marxists, other elements within the party, including important financial backers, are strongly opposed. The LSSP suffers from an identity crisis, being midway between the more moderate SLFP and the more radical CCP/M. In the autumn of 1968 the LSSP sought to drive the CCP/M from the coalition, using as a pretext the Communist Party's initial failure to



Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike
Opposition Leader and
Head of the Sri Lanka
Freedom Party



Dr. N. M. Perera
Leader of the Lanka
Sama Samaja Party



Pieter Keuneman
Secretary General of
the Ceylon Communist
Party/Moscow



condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The persuasive efforts of Mrs. Bandaranaike, under heavy pressure from the more conservative elements within her own party, finally compelled the leader of the Communist Party to issue a mild condemnation of the Soviet action despite strong objections by a sizable element within the party's central committee. This episode damaged morale within the coalition, but differences have been gradually papered over as elections approach.

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Both the LSSP and the CCP/M realize that if they are to participate in the government, they will have to ride in on the coattails of the SLFP. In turn, the SLFP apparently needs the alliance with the two leftist parties if it is to win the margin of parliamentary strength necessary to form a government. Nevertheless, renewed dissension within the coalition is a continuing possibility. Even before the Czechoslovak issue arose, the partners suspected each other of building up their respective strengths at the expense of their colleagues. Furthermore, in addition to the group of SLFP members opposed to cooperation with the Marxists, there reportedly are small elements within the two leftist parties who resent what they view as their leaders' blind acceptance of SLFP domination. Although the three parties reportedly have agreed on the allocation of seats to be contested in 1970, such agreements in past by-elections have not prevented interparty clashes within the coalition. As a current example, a prominent member of the SLFP's Islamic Front plans—to the dismay of some SLFP leaders—to campaign in the coming election against Pieter Keuneman, Secretary General of the CCP/M, and there is a good chance that Keuneman may lose.

ISSUES

Economic problems will figure prominently among the issues in the elections. Despite attempts by Senanayake to bolster the nation's economy, the outlook is mixed. In 1968, the real gross national product (GNP), measured in 1959 prices, amounted to \$1,489.3 million, an 8.3 percent increase over that of 1967. Growth in 1967 over 1966 had been only 4.4 percent. Real per capita GNP was \$125, as compared with \$118 in 1967. Pent-up demand for consumer goods, however, has raised prices considerably. Although some Ceylonese view this spiraling cost of living as an unpleasant adjunct to economic development, the opposition coalition can be expected to stress rising living costs in the campaign.

Additionally, out of a labor force of approximately four million, more than 500,000 are unemployed. The presence of about 10,000 jobless university graduates in this group, mostly arts majors unable to find suitable jobs and prevented from doing menial labor because of the stratification of Ceylonese society, further aggravates the situation. Senanayake's government has drawn up numerous schemes to provide jobs, but the results have not been satisfactory. This large body of unemployed provides the opposition with a ready-made issue and raises the prospect that a sizable portion of the jobless will vote against the UNP. In an obvious attempt to lessen the odds, the UNP has recently pledged to employ 1,900 graduates by the end of 1969.

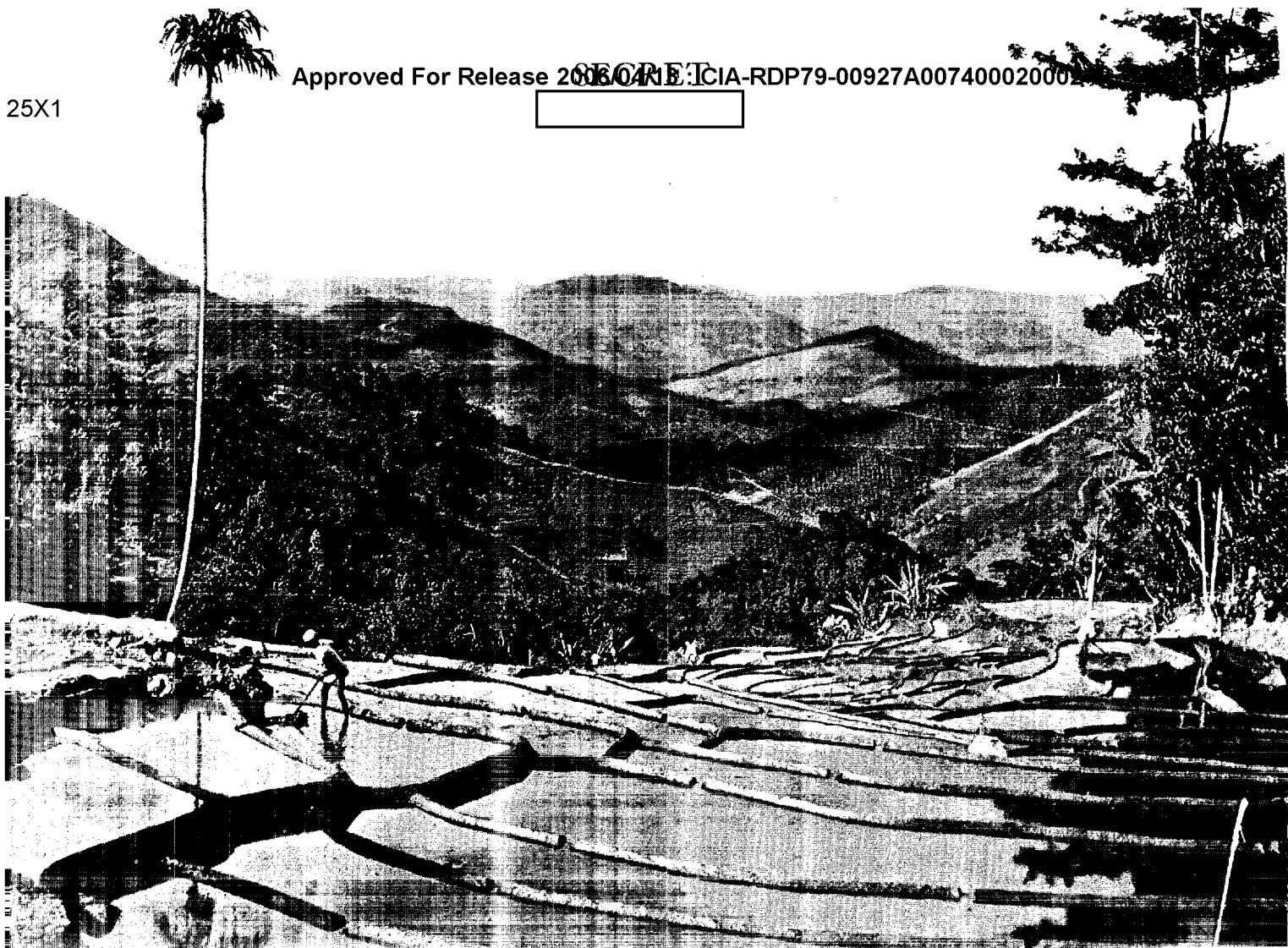
Government strategists plan to capitalize on Ceylon's substantial agricultural growth. Concerned that Ceylon was forced to import about half of the rice it consumed annually, Senanayake in 1966 launched a "Grow More Food" campaign, aiming for a 75-percent self-sufficiency in rice by 1970 and complete sufficiency by 1972. To attain these goals, the government raised the price of home-grown rice as an incentive to farmers to increase private production and at the same time cut in half the government-subsidized rice ration. It also issued at subsidized prices fertilizer, insecticides, and other aids; allocated on a 30-year lease basis large tracts of jungle land for growing foodstuffs, and used its Land Army—not unlike the US Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s—to clear additional land and produce subsidiary foodstuffs. Work will soon begin on the massive Mahaweli River diversion project, which over a 20-year period should double Ceylon's cultivatable acreage.

The results of these efforts in agriculture have been encouraging. In the 1966-67 crop year (August to August), Ceylon produced about 784,000 long tons of milled rice, and provisional

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Preparing Fields for Rice Seedlings

figures for the 1968-69 season predict 951,000 tons. This would be the largest harvest ever produced in Ceylon, but it would still fall below the target of a little over one million tons because of a prolonged drought. Ceylon's imports of rice have declined from about 494,000 tons in 1966 to a probable total of about 300,000 tons for the current year, representing a sizable saving in foreign exchange. Most of the imported rice is obtained from Communist China on favorable terms as part of a rice-rubber barter deal.

Ceylon's principal exports have been hard hit by declining world prices for tea, rubber, and

coconut. Although the volume of exports rose slightly in 1968 over 1967, earnings actually declined from \$347 million to \$332 million. Measures taken so far to improve the balance of payments picture—devaluation in 1967 and the establishment in 1968 of a special Foreign Exchange Entitlement Certificate Scheme to provide a floating multiple exchange rate—have been only partially successful. The increasing prices of imports and the declining prices and limited markets for Ceylon's major exports have therefore prevented the country's rapid growth in agricultural production from having as great an effect as might have been expected.

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Allied to economic issues is the role of organized labor. Although the labor vote controls election results in only a handful of urban constituencies, it holds the "swing" vote in at least two dozen others. Politically motivated strikes may be called by unions dominated by the opposition coalition in efforts to embarrass and weaken the UNP. The SLFP traditionally has lacked a strong trade-union base, however, and the coalition-affiliated unions have frequently been at odds with each other. A highly publicized strike at the end of 1968 fizzled partly through lack of coordination among the coalition's unions, and there have been open contests between coalition parties for control of unions—especially between the LSSP and the CCP/M.

The UNP does not have a strong trade-union base of its own, but a parliamentary ally is the once powerful Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), led by Minister of Fisheries and Industries Philip Gunawardene, an ex-Marxist and trade unionist of long standing. Although the MEP's union strength has declined in the past few years, it retains considerable influence in the important port area, and the MEP's participation in the government enhances the UNP's image among workers in general.

Another important trade union asset for the government is its relationship with the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the largest in Ceylon with over 350,000 members. Composed mostly of Indian Tamils, the CWC is led by S. Thondaman, an Indian Tamil who has acquired Ceylonese citizenship. Unlike "Ceylon Tamils," whose ancestors have lived in Ceylon for generations and who have full voting rights, the Indian Tamils' forebears were brought over from southern India in the second half of the 19th century to work on plantations. In 1948 approximately 90 percent of these people lost their franchise as a result of discriminatory legislation and have since remained

stateless. The CWC can influence political decisions by its power to disrupt the export of key products responsible for the crucial flow of foreign exchange. Furthermore, although the number of enfranchised Indian Tamils is small, they hold a pivotal vote in 17 or 18 upcountry constituencies where neither the SLFP nor the UNP can command an absolute majority. At one time a formal parliamentary ally of the SLFP, Thondaman abstained from an important vote of confidence in 1964 because of the SLFP's growing anti-Tamil program; Mrs. Bandaranaike lost by one vote, and her government fell. The CWC then cooperated with the UNP in the 1965 elections, and it will probably support the UNP in the approaching elections despite its increasing irritation with the UNP's policy on communal issues.

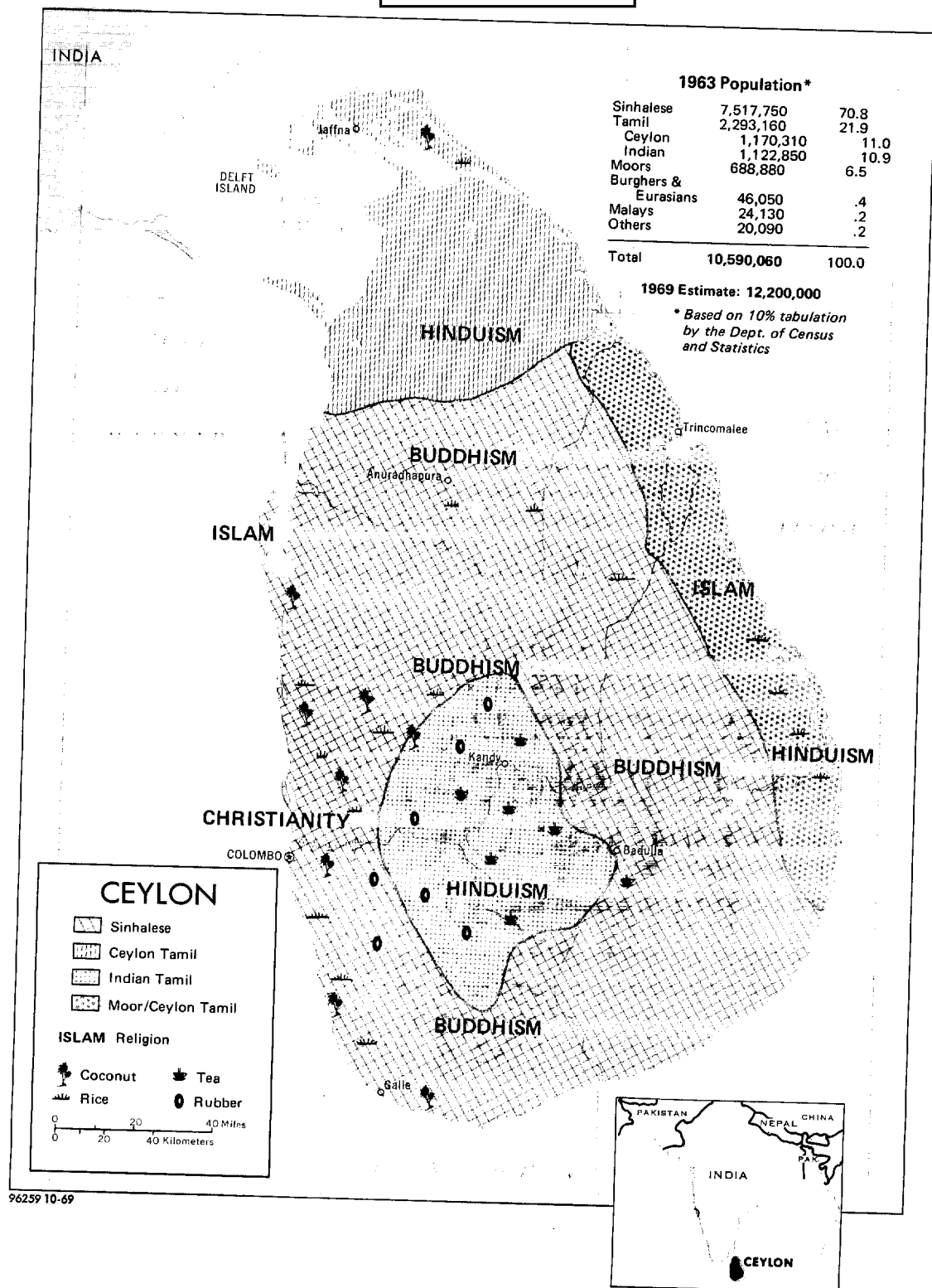
In order to counter the opposition's charges that the UNP is a capitalist party, the government has tried to create an image as the only party representing all interest groups in the country, including labor. Although refusing to bargain with what it considers "politically motivated" demands, it has displayed sympathy with legitimate demands of labor, while asking the workers to understand that wages cannot surpass the economy's ability to pay. The continuing high rate of unemployment, disenchantment within some Sinhalese public service unions over the government's slowness in compelling Tamil employees to learn Sinhala, and the increasing cost of living are issues that could lessen the government's vote-getting potential among workers in the 1970 elections. Recently announced increases in wages for public servants, however, might partially counteract some labor criticism of the government.

In addition to using select economic issues in the campaign, the opposition coalition intends to exploit the communal problem between Ceylon's

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Sinhalese majority (about 70 percent of the population) and its Tamil minority (about 22 percent). In order to retain power, Senanayake's UNP must win a number of Sinhalese-Buddhist seats and hold onto a substantial majority of seats decided by the minority groups. In the absence of unity among the dominant Sinhalese, the role of minority groups in the coming elections could be a determining factor. Tamils, Christians, and Muslims presently constitute at least 70 percent of the population in constituencies that elect 54 members of the 157-man Parliament. The national government presently holds 30 of these seats, the left-wing opposition coalition 10, and the independent opposition (the Federal Party) 14. Almost half of the government's strength in Parliament stems from constituencies in which minority groups form a significant bloc of voters.

The opposition therefore hopes to force the UNP into either risking the loss of its Sinhalese constituencies or alienating the UNP's supporters among minorities by forcing Senanayake to vie with the opposition in an emotional appeal for Sinhalese votes.



the communal issue poses an extremely difficult problem for Senanayake, touching as it does on centuries-old fears and animosities. The Sinhalese have not forgotten that Ceylon in the past has seen many incursions by Tamils from nearby India. They fear, moreover, that agitation for a federal Tamil state embracing Ceylon's northern and eastern provinces would lead to the disintegration of their island nation. The Tamils, on the other hand, resent the virtually exclusive cultural emphasis in recent years on Sinhalese traditions and the anti-Tamil discrimination resulting from the resurgence of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism.

Picking Tea on an Upcountry Estate

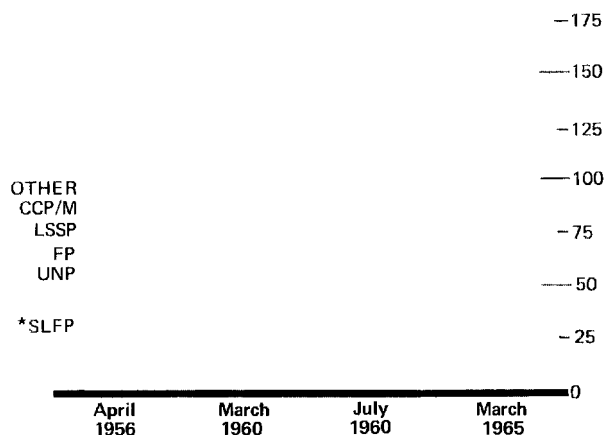


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Ceylon: Seats Won in Parliamentary Elections Since 1956



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Several violent incidents occurred in May, and Tamil support for the Ceylon Dravida Munnetra Kazaghham (CDMK)—an imitation of the Tamil nationalist party presently in control of India's Tamil Nadu State—was reportedly growing, creating a strong counterreaction among the Sinhalese. Many local government councils in Sinhalese areas had passed resolutions urging the national government to ban the CDMK.

Recent speeches by CDMK leaders allegedly urging the use of revolutionary tactics may compel a change in government policy toward the CDMK, however.

Senanayake would be in a better position to allay Sinhalese fears regarding the Tamils if more progress had been made toward implementing the Ceylon-Indian Tamil Repatriation Agreement of 1964, which aims at settling the problem of the million or so stateless Tamils in Ceylon. The agreement provided that India would accept 525,000 of these Tamils over 15 years, Ceylon would grant citizenship to 300,000 over the same period, and the future of the remainder would be resolved at a later date. As of mid-1969, India had granted Indian citizenship to only 44,000 Tamils, almost 10,000 of whom had reportedly left Ceylon, and Ceylonese citizenship had been granted to only about 1,000 stateless Tamils. Although the responsibility for some of the delay in repatriating Tamils to India lies with Tamil Nadu authorities, the Ceylonese Government has slowed the

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Senanayake gave three speeches strongly condemning attempts to capitalize on communal problems, and Minister of State Jayewardene warned that the government would not hesitate to use drastic action against politicians and religious agitators who incited communal incidents. In reply to opposition demands raised in Parliament that the CDMK be outlawed because it had foreign connections, Senanayake countered by saying that other political parties in Ceylon also had connections with foreign countries, and that these too would have to be banned if he were to proscribe the CDMK.

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process through bureaucratic mismanagement. The tempo of repatriation has picked up somewhat in the past few months and this will probably continue in the interval before the coming general elections as the UNP tries to prove to the Sinhalese that it is protecting their interests.

PROSPECTS

Despite some slippage in UNP popularity over the past four years, Senanayake's chances of retaining power in the 1970 elections appear at this moment to be slightly better than even. Parliamentary by-elections and local elections since 1965, however, instill a note of caution. The UNP did poorly in the by-elections held in the first half of its present term, but since the end of 1968 it appears to have held its own against the opposition coalition. The UNP has had even less success in local elections, however. In over 270 local elections held from the beginning of 1968 to mid-1969, 129 were won by the opposition coalition, 92 by the government and its supporters, and 56 by independents. In elections for local government bodies between late 1968 and May 1969, the opposition coalition emerged with control of 50 local councils, up from 43; the UNP won control of 15, down from 24; and independents held 28, an increase of 2. Such elections, however, are often determined by local factors including caste and family connections and may not be an accurate gauge of public sentiment for or against the national government. The UNP is understandably worried, however, by the absence in recent local elections of a substantial progovernment trend in those districts in which rice production has noticeably increased in recent years.

There are many intangible factors, often unrelated to the issues, which also cloud forecasting. The opposition coalition appears determined to make an all-out effort in the coming campaign, and a complacent attitude on the part of the UNP could more than offset some of the disadvantages

the opposition faces. Also, in the 21 years since independence, Ceylon has built up a pattern of alternating parties in power. In the 1965 election, about 70 percent of the seats were won with pluralities or majorities of less than 55 percent, and a relatively small increase in votes for the opposition in these swing districts could shift control of the next parliament. Finally, Mrs. Bandaranaike's personal popularity among the Ceylonese voters remains generally high in spite of her past failures and might have been enhanced by stories of an alleged assassination attempt against her in February.

If the UNP wins the election, it is likely the government will maintain its past economic policies favorable to economic growth. The island would also be likely to enjoy relative communal peace. Ceylon's policy of nonalignment, which has included friendly relations with the West, would almost certainly be continued.

On the other hand, a victory for Mrs. Bandaranaike's alliance presumably would mean a return to the left-of-center domestic and foreign policies that characterized her earlier rule and would revive prospects for renewed communal disturbances. Ceylon's foreign orientation would be basically anti-Western, a throwback to the early 1960s when Mrs. Bandaranaike used Asian-African forums to heap abuse on the US. One interesting aspect of a Bandaranaike victory would be the relationship that might then evolve within the coalition. In a Bandaranaike government, Communist influence could be significant, as the CCP/M has been promised that, for the first time, it would participate as a member of the national government. One CCP/M leader has stated, however, that the real struggle for a Marxist government will begin only after the opposition coalition returns to power. Mrs. Bandaranaike, nevertheless, remains confident that she can control her Marxist allies.

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