

PA is a stable govt. - 'we back it'. (1994, August 28). *The Island*.

PA IS A STABLE GOVT. — 'WE BACK IT'

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Sunday Island Political Desk

Interview with the Leader of the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and MP for Wannai, D. Sitharthan.

People of Sri Lanka have faith in the new Prime Minister, Chandrika B. Kumaratunge, as evident in their verdict at the recent general election, and the PLOTE that has three MPs, has decided to continue their support to her government. Leader of the PLOTE and MP for Wannai, D. Sitharthan told 'The Island' Sunday edition yesterday.

He said people of the south (areas other than north and east) had rejected political parties like the MEP and the UNP that had hung their campaigns to communal slogans. "Chandrika came under fire from many quarters for her firm stand on the north and east crisis", said Sitharthan, "but she had the courage to stand up to a sinister campaign against her and the PA that had as an ally the SLMC. Therefore, now it is our turn to be grateful to that courageous woman and her government."

The following are excerpts from our interview with him:

Q: Last Thursday in Parliament 127 MPs supported the PA when it fielded its candidate for the post of Speaker. PA and SLMC have only 113 seats in Parliament who are the other 14 MPs who backed the new government? Did you vote with the PA?

A: All minority parties voted with the PA. They did so because the southerners wanted a change and they respect that verdict of their southern counterparts. People of the South voted against communal elements in politics. We appreciate their firm stand, which we think will help find a solution to the crisis. They rejected the MEP's policies and the HeLa Urumaya group is no more except for one or two members like Tilak Karunaratne.

We, the people of Sri Lanka must live in peace. Minority parties must respect the verdict of the majority of people. If we go against the new government, I think, our action will endanger the future of this country.

Time has come for minority political parties to prove that they respect the attitude of the Sinhala people. We must also support Chandrika because while others like President Wijetunga and Dinesh Gunawardane were whipping up communalism, Chandrika was talking sense. Therefore, we must all support her government.

Q: Is it correct to say that the PLOTE will continue to support the PA government?

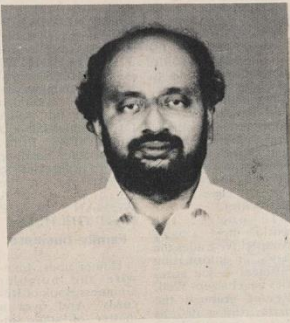
A: We will support the PA. We will support the government not only in the north and east question, but on other crucial issues as well. We will support all PA programmes that will benefit people of this country.

Q: There were reports that several politicians made overtures to you to form an alliance with the PA. What actually happened immediately after the election results were declared?

A: When the results were declared I was in Vavuniya & received many telephone calls from various people. Top bureaucrats, opposition politicians, ruling party members, were all calling me. And some UNP ministers at that time offered to send me helicopters to have myself and other PLOTE MPs transported to Colombo. There were also some people who tried to talk to me describing themselves as officers from intelligence agencies of the government & declined all these offers.

Q: Were there any financial offers from politicians?

A: No! We had stated very clearly before the



election that we will extend our support to the political party in power that will solve or is keen to solve the north and east problem.

Q: The PA and SLMC have only a razor thin majority in parliament.

A: It is a stable government. Don't undermine its strength. Without Thondaman's support the UNP would have been relegated to oblivion. He also has said the CWC will now support the government. All minority parties will back the government. We have faith in Chandrika and her government. The UNP has only 94 members. Therefore it will not be able to stand in the way of the PA.

Q: It is popularly believed that elections in Wannai and Jaffna were not free and fair because majority of people were deprived of their franchise and Tamil militant groups had entered the fray with weapons. Your comments?

A: The Observers have said that a vast majority of people in Wannai were denied their right to vote at this election. This fact was known to all IO parties that contested the election even before the election was declared. Over two thirds of the Wannai are under LTTE control. People have fled the area. And many of them are displaced. Out of 170,000 voters more than 100,000 voters are in the LTTE controlled areas where no election can be held. All knew that these people could not vote. But political parties decided to contest the election. Nobody complained about this at that time.

The Polls Observers too have said that these people could not vote. But they have not referred to any election malpractices, because in my opinion no such malpractices took place in Wannai. I don't think anything undemocratic happened in the cleared areas. There was no complaint.

Q: But didn't you carry weapons in your election campaign thus instilling fear into the minds of your political opponents and voters?

A: We were carrying weapons before the nominations. But we did not do so after the nominations. We were told by the authorities that we should not carry weapons in the cleared areas. We complied and made sure that our boys did not carry any weapons. But one or two incidents happened where our boys were caught with arms. But they were moving close to the Forward Defence Lines (FDLs) and had to do so as the LTTE is hunting for us in those areas. Without weapons you cannot survive in these areas where our cadres and the security forces constantly come under fire from the LTTE side. For self defence we must, or any one must for that matter carry weapons in these areas. Also we have to transport arms from our camps to the FDLs. On the way sometimes the police intercepted our boys. But we explained to them the nature of our operation. The police offered to transport our weapons and we agreed. We never used our arms against our opponents in the election

campaign. During the last Local government election also people complained about us carrying weapons. But not a single incident happened. We were not responsible for the See page 13

— PLOTE
Leader
D. Sitharthan

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two incidents that happened in the cleared areas. In one a hand grenade was thrown at the police and some were injured. It has been proved beyond doubt that it was done by a group of Sinhala people. The two men arrested on suspicion happened to be supporters of the UNP. One of our supporters, a young boy was killed, two days before the election. He was shot dead. If we carried weapons in our campaign and attacked our opponents, how come our boy was killed? We did not carry weapons during the campaign.

Q: How are your relations with other Tamil militant groups like the EROS and the TELO?

A: We contended as an alliance in the East. Our Alliance was named Tamil National United Front. But we could not secure a seat there. We won three seats in Wannai contesting on the DPLP ticket.

Q: The government's position is that it should have talks with the LTTE for a negotiated settlement. How have you taken this position of the PA?

A: I should say that rather than we are against the LTTE the LTTE is against us. It has killed a large number of our cadres and is still hunting for us. We are fighting alongside the army only to protect ourselves and restore peace. If the LTTE is willing to come to talks with the government, we have no objections. But the talks should be unlike the talks the previous government had with Tigers under

President Premadasa's stewardship. That government gave active support to the LTTE to annihilate us. This sort of things, I think will not happen. I do not lay down any conditions. But I should say that if the government and the LTTE agree to a ceasefire, that ceasefire should apply to us also. What the LTTE has done in the past is to cease hostilities with the government and continue to attack us, even during talks. There should be a real ceasefire.

Q: Have you submitted your proposals to the PA to solve the crisis or are you planning to do so?

A: Because the PA government does not have a two thirds majority in Parliament, it can't change the Constitution. Therefore we ask them to implement the 13th Amendment fully. We want powers devolved to the provincial councils in accordance with the Amendment. The previous government retained most of the powers the provincial councils had a right to have. Before that people in the war torn areas must be rehabilitated. Fishermen cannot go fishing and others cannot earn a living. We are aware that people in the southern parts too undergo hardships. But people in these areas suffer more because of the war. People must be resettled and given some means of earning a living. I believe Minister Ashraff, with whom we have very good relations, will see to this.

As for solution, we think the 13th Amendment has to be fully implemented first.