

Anura urges UNP-SLFP consensus on N-E problem

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MPs to decide on referendum

By Nicholas Candappa

The Parliamentary Select Committee on the Ethnic Issue (PSC) meets next Tuesday to decide on the holding of a referendum on the question of the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) National Organiser Anura Bandaranaike has said that the SLFP and the United National Party (UNP) should get together to find a lasting solution to the North-East problem.

He has added that the Tamil people in the North would not have confidence in a solution which does not have the backing of both the UNP and the SLFP.

Mr. Bandaranaike has also said that the majority of the people are against the merger of the North and the East.

However, the people in the East have the right to decide whether they should merge with the North or not.

The last meeting of the Parliamentary Select Committee adjourned after a decision had been taken to summon a meeting of the Service Chiefs and the Inspector General of Police in order to explore the feasibility of holding a referendum in the Eastern Province. A time frame was fixed to have the referendum four months from the date the decision was taken to hold it.

While the Tamil parties are meeting to decide whether they will participate in Tuesday's crucial meeting, the UNP, SLFP, MEP, USA and SLMC will take part in the meeting which will take place at the Parliamentary complex.

With the signing of the Indo-Lanka Agreement in 1987 and the temporary merger of the North and East was accompanied with a rider that a referendum will be held in

the Eastern Province to decide whether the merger should be made permanent.

The former President J.R. Jayewardene made an announcement that it was the people who will decide what their future is going to be.

Since the signing of the accord six years ago no elections could be held in the Eastern Province due to the unsettled conditions prevailing there.

The security forces have now cleared the area. Government has also set up civil administration. It is felt the climate is now right for a democratic decision to be taken by the people as to whether they in the east should remain amalgamated to the North or whether there should be a de-merger. Informed sources said that many matters will be discussed when the Committee meets on Tuesday. This will include the date when the referendum would be held, and how it would be held.

The two major parties, the UNP and the SLFP have reached consensus with the MEP too joining them that the referendum should decide the future of the North and East. As the merger took place by a gazette notification in 1987 after the signing of the Indo-Lanka Agreement, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress seems to think that the demerger should also take place by a gazette notification.

Tuesday's decision of the Select Committee will be conveyed to the Speaker and then the Government will be informed.