



PAFFREL

First Interim Report

Local Authorities Election 2025 – May 06, 2025

People's Action for a Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL)

April 21, 2025

Background

It was after 7 years that the Local Authorities Elections, to elect members for local government institutions: Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas in Sri Lanka are being held this year. So much so, the 17th Local Local Authorities Election is scheduled to be held on May 6, 2025.

The Local Authorities Elections are usually held every 04 years, and the last election was held in 2018. Accordingly, the next election was due to be held in 2022, but then, Janaka Bandara Tennakoon, Minister of Local Government suspended the local government elections due in 2022 for a period of one year from January 10, 2022, using the powers vested in him by the Local Government Act. Subsequently, a gazette notification was issued on January 30, 2023 to hold the local government elections, and the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) announced that it had decided to hold the Local Authorities Elections on March 09, 2023. Accordingly, 80,672 candidates, 59 recognized political parties and 329 independent groups submitted nominations to contest the election. In addition, 676,873 voters applied for postal voting at the Local Authorities Elections.

Although, nominations were called for the elections, the government in power at that moment used various tactics to postpone the election. Printing of postal voting ballot papers was in the final stages, but the Government Printer surprisingly announced on 23.02.2023 that the postal voting ballot papers could not be printed unless the funds required to print them were released. Consequently the ECSL announced on 07.03.2023 that the election which was scheduled to be held on 09.03.2023 had been postponed to 25.04.2023. However, the ECSL once again announced on 11.04.2023 that there would be no space to hold the election on 25.04.2023 as well.

Initiation of judicial action

The government in power had filed several cases in the Supreme Court seeking approval to postpone the elections. For example, the petition filed by Colonel R. M. Wijesundara (SC writ Application 1/23). PAFFREL also joined in this process as an intermediary party. More than 30



attempts had been made to postpone this election. So much so, there is no other election in recent election history of Sri Lanka where so much effort has been made to postpone an election. However, in the end, the ECSL was compelled to postpone the election due to non-provision of necessary funds to hold the election. Eventually, PAFFREL, National People's Power, National People's Power (NPP) and Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) jointly filed a fundamental rights petition under SE/FR/139/2023 against the continued postponement of the local government elections scheduled for March 9, 2023, seeking a ruling that the fundamental rights of citizens have been violated by not holding the local government elections as scheduled.

Accordingly, the relevant petition was heard before a bench consisted of Hon. Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya and three judges: Murudu Fernando, Gamini Amarasekara and Yasantha Kodagoda; the judgment was pronounced on August 22, 2024, stating that the failure to hold the election on time has violated the sovereignty of the people and the right to universal suffrage, and that, it is the responsibility of the ECSL to conduct the election on time, as scheduled, and that by not exercising those powers and not conducting the relevant election, the members of the ECSL have violated the fundamental rights enshrined in Article 14 (1) (a) of the Constitution, and accordingly, the ECSL, relying on the powers vested in it, should conduct the election as soon as possible by obtaining the assistance of the necessary government institutions. The judgment further stated that the President, as the Minister of Finance, has contributed to violation of fundamental rights. It was also ordered to pay a cost of Rs. 150,000 to the plaintiff.

Cancellation of Nominations

The Cabinet of Ministers approved the enactment of a special bill to cancel the nominations received for local government elections which was scheduled to be held in 2023 and to call for fresh nominations and instruct the Legal Draftsman to draft the bill (December 31, 2024). The bill was gazetted on January 1, 2025 and presented to the Parliament on January 9, 2025.

Subsequently, the General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Nizam Kariyapper (MP) and several other parties filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Local Government Elections (Special Provisions) Bill. The Supreme Court concluded the hearing of the petition on January 27, 2025 and forwarded its decision to the Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne and President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.



On February 14, 2025, the Speaker informed the Supreme Court's decision to the Parliament and stated that certain clauses of the Local Government Elections (Special Provisions) Bill were found to be unconstitutional and enactment of it requires a special majority of parliament. Accordingly, the Bill was debated on February 17, 2025 and passed without amendments by a special majority. On the same day, Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne endorsed the certificate on the Local Authorities Elections (Special Provisions) Bill and it came into force as the Local Government Elections (Special Provisions) Act, No. 01 of 2025.

Call for nominations

In accordance with the ruling of Supreme Court, the current government passed the relevant Special Provisions Act and released the necessary funds for the Local Government Elections and the relevant Gazette notification was published on 17.02.2025 to hold this year's Local Authorities Elections. Accordingly, Mr. Chandana Abeyratne, the Minister of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Local Government issued a very special notification specifying that the new term of 336 Local Government Institutions should commence on June 02, 2025. The relevant 336 Local Government Institutions consist of 28 Municipal Councils, 36 Urban Councils and 272 Pradeshiya Sabhas. By now, the elections have already been held for the Elpitiya Pradeshiya Sabha of Galle District; and the Supreme Court has issued an interim injunction on the Kalmunai Municipal Council over a delimitation issue thereby preventing it from conducting elections until the matter is fully resolved. Therefore, except for these two local bodies: Elpitiya Pradeshiya Sabha and Kalmunai Municipal Council, elections will be held for the remaining Local Government Institutions.

However, due to 03 pending court cases pertaining to nominations submitted for Local Authorities Elections 2023, nominations for three Local Government Institutions i.e. Dehiattakandiya Pradeshiya Sabha, Mannar Pradeshiya Sabha, and Kilinochchi Punakari Pradeshiya Sabha were not called on March 03, 2025.

However, the ECSL submitted a motion in this regard to the Supreme Court and those 03 cases were withdrawn and nominations were called again for Dehiattakandiya Pradeshiya Sabha, Mannar Pradeshiya Sabha and Kilinochchi Punakari Pradeshiya Sabha on March 10, 2025. The ECSL announced that nominations for these local government institutions will be accepted from March 24, 2025, until 12 PM on March 27, 2025.



Estimated cost of Rupees 11 Billion for the Local Authorities Elections

It is estimated that the Local Authorities Elections scheduled for May 6, 2025 will incur a cost of nearly Rupees 11 billion.

Women's and Youth's Quota

As per the Local Government Amendment Act No. 16 of 2017, all political parties and independent groups shall include a quota of 10% women in the list of candidates contesting the election in respect of each local government institution they contest. Also 50% of candidates nominated in the second list shall consist of women.

The quota of youth was removed by the Local Government Amendment Act 2012 and was reintroduced again, by Act No. 30 of 2023. The speciality of this quota is that it is meant for the purpose of nominations only.

Yet, it is mandatory to include 25% candidates from the age group of 18 to 35 years when nomination lists are prepared for relevant local government institutions. When considering the age for this year's youth representation, 18 years is reckoned as of February 2, 2024, the date on which the electoral roll to be used for this year's election begins, and 35 years is reckoned as of March 20, 2025, the date on which nominations closed.

Increase in the rejections of nomination

For the local government election scheduled to be held on May 6, 2025, by 12 noon on March 20, a total of more than 49 recognized political parties and 75 independent groups had submitted nominations, amounting to a total of 2,914 nomination papers. Of them 427 nomination papers have been rejected. That is 14% of the total number of nominations.

Compared to the year 2023, this is a significantly high figure. In 2023, 115 nominations from political parties were rejected, while 49 nominations from independent groups were also rejected. Out of the 339 local government institutions that accepted nominations, only 114 institutions had no rejected nominations — that is just 33%. This means that 66% of local government institutions had at least one rejected nomination. This is a matter that requires serious attention.



Even before the election was announced, the PAFFREL identified this risk and compiled a Manual with guidelines on how to submit nominations avoiding the risk of them being rejected. Although it was shared with the political parties, regrettably it had not received adequate attention. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the rejection of nominations.

1. Failure to submit nominations within the stipulated time
2. Not fulfilling the stipulated youth quota
3. Not fulfilling the stipulated Women's quota
4. Failure to produce a certified copy of the birth certificate as specified by the ECSL
5. Failure to submit affidavits
6. Failure to certify the signatures of party secretaries
7. Failure to mark the youth's quota and women's quota in the appropriate box or marking it in the wrong box.

Many reasons such as communication problems between political parties and the ECSL, failure to read the Local Government Acts and comprehend them correctly, negligence, failure of parties to finalize candidate lists promptly, last-minute submission of nominations, inability of political parties to verify the data and complexities and ambiguities in legal frameworks have contributed to this situation. PAFFREL has already held preliminary discussions with the ECSL to study this matter in a formal manner and introduce appropriate measures to prevent this situation in the future. We hope to hold discussions with political parties under the direction of the ECSL, soon after the ongoing election is over.

At present, 208 court cases have been filed regarding the rejection of nominations, and the courts have dismissed more than 80 of these petitions. One petition has been withdrawn. As a result, the court ordered the acceptance of 128 nomination papers that had been previously rejected by the returning officers. In addition, agreement was reached in 4 petitions.

As of April 19, 2025, a total of 132 previously rejected nomination papers have been accepted. With the dismissal of 60 cases by the courts on April 21, 2025, it has now become possible to hold the local government election in all 339 local government institutions on May 6.

The ECSL deserves PAFFREL's gratitude for successfully managing this challenging task.



Postal Voting

This time, a total of 663,499 applications have been received for postal voting and out of this number, 15,010 applications have been rejected. Accordingly, only 648,495 are eligible for postal voting. The Election Commission initially announced the dates for the postal voting as 22, 23, 24, 28 and 29 April. Meantime, certain political parties and independent groups whose nominations were rejected sought judicial assistance, and the Supreme Court instructed the Election Commission to accept the nominations of some of them. In this backdrop, the Election Commission issued a new gazette notification on 17.04.2025, changing the above dates so that the local government institutions where the voting was suspended could be included in the postal voting process. Accordingly, the dates for postal voting have now been fixed for 24, 25, 28 and 29 April. Also two special polling stations for postal voting which will operate on four days 24, 25, 28 and 29 April, have been established at the Kandy High School and the 2nd Sri Lanka Volunteer Sinha Regiment Camp, exclusively for the police and military personnel assigned for security duties in connection with the ongoing public display of sacred Tooth Relic. PAFFREL has deployed a team of experienced observers to monitor the postal voting at these two special stations.

Preparedness of PAFFREL

PAFFREL commenced its monitoring mission from the day of nominations. 160 observers are deployed on a long-term basis to cover all electoral districts. It is also planned to mobilise 200 observers to monitor the postal voting and 3000 people and 200 mobile observation vehicles to monitor on the Election Day. PAFFREL wish to place on record the service rendered by those joining this exercise voluntarily, as a mark of respect to them.

Apart from that, there are District Coordinators operating from District Offices. Also a Special Complaints Units are operated at the Head Office. Accordingly, separate telephone numbers have been allocated for complaints for each province.

Western Province-0704429625

North-Central Province- 0702633038

Central Province- 0704429269

Uva Province- 0702632759

Southern Province-0704428487

Eastern Province-0702632536

Sabaragamuwa Province-0702633562

Northen Province-0712577096

Northwestern Province-0702633259



A 24-hour emergency hotline is provided for women and youth

As more than thirty thousand female and youth candidates have come forward for the Local Authorities Election, the telephone number **0702630614** has been introduced to promptly intervene in issues they may face.

Monitoring of Social Media

As was the case with almost all past elections, PAFFREL is conducting social media monitoring in collaboration with the Hashtag Generation and the ECSL, and PAFFREL expect to monitor the posts published in social media which are derogatory to the election process and refer them to the relevant social media institutions through the ECSL. In this context, misinformation that may mislead individuals is being monitored. In addition, the PAFFREL has appointed 30 observers for 25 districts to monitor social media, with at least one person being assigned to each district.

Limiting Candidate's Expenditures

The enactment of the Election Expenditure Regulation Act No. 03 of 2023 is a turning point in the electoral and political history of Sri Lanka' wherein the social dialogue-that prevailed for almost two decades demanding that elections shall be conducted on a equal ground-has been recognised by granting legal status to this demand. The golden opportunity to exercise this act during the local government elections scheduled to be held on March 09, 2023 was lost due to power-hungry political decisions. However, the Election Expenditure Regulation Act was implemented in subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections. Also, legal action has already been initiated against 13 candidates who had failed to submit income and expenditure reports pertaining to the presidential election held on September 21, 2024. This time, more than 71,000 candidates have come forward for the local government elections, and we wish to remind that it is the responsibility of the candidates, political parties, and independent groups to submit accurate income and expenditure reports within the stipulated time frame after the election is over.

When submitting income reports the name, address and ID number of the person or institution that had provided the support, the amount contributed or the value of the property received should be included in the report. All expenses other than the cost of transportation and communication incurred by the candidate should be clearly indicated in the expense report.



Election related Complaints

Between March 20, 2025, when the acceptance of nominations began, and April 21, a total of 305 incidents were reported to PAFFREL. Of these, 219 have been confirmed, while 86 remain unconfirmed. A total of 260 violations of election laws have been reported, with 190 confirmed and 70 unconfirmed.

36 incidents of giving incentives with political objectives were reported during this period, of which 19 were confirmed. Of them, 07 complaints were against the candidates of the governing party and 12 were against opposition political parties. The complaints include: distribution of dry rations, perfumes, agricultural equipment, plants and also distribution of application forms for delivery of aid, as well as extending support for Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations.

Of these complaints 17 Acts of Violence have been confirmed, which include 04 incidents of assaults, 01 bomb attack, 06 incidents of damage to immovable property, threats and intimidation and 4 incidents of attacks on political party offices. Among these attacks, the attack on Mahinda Dharmaratne, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya candidate for the Deraniyagala Pradeshiya Sabha in Kegalle District, and another incident in which two people were hospitalized following a clash during a political meeting in the Samanthurai area are significant.

27 complaints have been reported regarding the Abuse of State Power, Resources and Employees, of which 12 have been confirmed. These include the provision of government subsidies for political purposes, the transfer of state officials and use of state development projects for political promotion. However, it is not observed to be a very serious situation when compared to the nature and extent of the incidents. However, the impact made on voters by certain statements made by the President cannot be ignored. Yet, it is still not a worse situation when considering the abuse of state power and property in previous elections.



Election Complaints Summary



Local Authorities Elections -2025 -Pre-election period
Violations of law under each category - Islandwide
2025-03-20T16:00 -2025-04-22T10:30

LABEL	TYPE OF VIOLATION	CONFIRMED	UNCONFIRMED	SUB TOTAL
1	Murders	0	0	0
2	Grievous Assaults	0	0	0
3	Assaults	4	0	4
4	Abductions	0	0	0
5	Attacks with Explosives	1	0	1
6	Shootings	0	0	0
7	Threats & Intimidation using Firearms	0	0	0
8	Damage to Immovable Property	1	0	1
9	Damage to Movable Property	0	0	0
10	Intimidation & Threats	6	1	7
11	Attacks on Political Party/ Candidate Offices	5	0	5
#	Acts of Violence	17	1	18
12	Misuse of state property	8	5	13
13	Use of State Vehicles for Election Campaign Purposes	0	2	2
14	Attempts/ influencing State Officials	0	0	0
15	Appointments, Transfers & Promotions for State Officials targeting the Election	1	4	5
16	Use of State Officials & Security Sources for Election Campaign Purposes	0	2	2
16-1	Provide government aid in political gain	3	2	5
#	Abuse of State Power, Resources & Employees	12	15	27
17	Destruction & sabotage decorations, posters & cutouts of political parties	4	0	4
18	Disrupting Campaign Activities of Opponents	0	0	0
19	Carrying out Illegal Election Propaganda	129	40	169
20	Threatening & Disrupting Work of Election Monitors	0	0	0
21	State Officers acting in Favor of Political Parties & in Breach of Official Duties	1	1	2
22	Carrying out Unlawful Meetings & Processions	1	0	1
23	Maintaining Illegal Party Offices	19	4	23
24	Giving Incentives with Political Objectives	19	17	36
25	Using Vehicles without Number Plates	0	0	0
26	Favouritism & Misuse of State & other Media	0	0	0
27	Attempts to Influence/ Influencing by Security Sources & State Officials	0	0	0
28	Spreading of fake news	1	1	2
29	Carrying out Election Campaign Activities Harassing & Inconveniencing the General Public	3	0	3
30	Influencing Voters	3	1	4
31	Irregularities relating to Ballot Papers	0	0	0
32	Transportation of voters	0	0	0
33	Giving incentives to voters	1	1	2
34	Obstructing election officials and activities	0	0	0
35	Assaulting voters/ using force to turn voters away from polling station	0	0	0
36	Casting votes illegally/ attempts to impersonate	0	0	0
37	Other Incidents	9	5	14
#	Violation of Election Laws	190	70	260
	TOTAL	219	86	305