

# Sri Lanka: The Birth Of A Movement

Thursday 22 August 2019, by [DAVID Kumar](#) (Date first published: 21 August 2019).

**I marched in the 1963 United Left Front May Day demonstration and was at the Galle Face rally jointly chaired by NM, Dr Wicks and Philip. I was also [at the 18 August 2019 Galle Face rally](#) which launched the national People's Power movement and named its presidential candidate. The latter drew about 150,000 people and was comparable in size. A political alternative has been born. More than 40 years after the 1977 election debacle left in tatters, finally a radical left-democratic option and mobilisation has emerged. This is not a bunch put together to prop up a JVP presidential candidate; it is an alliance of 30 self-thinking groups which have wholeheartedly thrown themselves into the task of building a radical, left-democratic third-force, untainted by corruption, as an alternative to the rotten two-party (UNP, SLFP/SLPP) farce. We are on the move; the structure has been formed and a national programme agreed at the broad level; now the task of fleshing it out with details and strategies.**

Received wisdom assiduously cultivated by the media is that both candidate-Gota and crown-prince Sajith have strong electoral positions. Their sponsors and promoters argue that their champion is a sure winner. The more I look at depth the more convinced I am that neither is true. Neither Sajith nor Gota will secure the requisite 50%+1 to circumvent second-choice counting. Gota is strong only in the Sinhala-Buddhist petty-bourgeois belt South and West of Colombo and the South coast. To draw out the village vote in the hinterland, the traditional blue base he is dependent on Mahinda and the old guard with whom he has not intermingled or interacted. As Defence Secretary he was an outsider not a true party man. The military ex-brass, his political Pretorian guard, could be a barrier between him and the true-blues.



Gota's dual-nationality complication remains murky. His spokesmen avoid full-frontal disclosure. Fraud cases in domestic courts and murder, torture and human rights violation cases in American courts create more tension. The challenge on dual-nationality will be after nomination when someone goes to court; the Election's Commission accepts nominations at face value. These are only complications. The big hurdle is that Tamils and Muslims to a man will not vote for him, and many Catholics, despite Malcolm Ranjit's pro-Rajapaksa prancing, will avoid him. This leaves the near superhuman task of winning 50% from the remaining 70% if he is to be elected prior to second-preference tallying. 50/70 is 0.71, so he needs 71% of the Sinhala-Buddhist vote. I don't see where my arithmetic is wrong so Gota has an impossible hill to climb, sans second-preference counting.

The popular notion is that Sajith is popular in the rural and suburban areas of the country. A Daily Mirror [piece](#) ('Choosing Right Candidate for UNP') by S. Samarasinghe is an eye-opener.

The crux is that: (a) While Sajith is popular in the UNP base, his performance in pulling votes from outside the UNP has been appalling. In Hambantota a 40% UNP poll in 2001 declined to 29% in 2010, 10 years after Sajith became an MP. In the 2015 General Election, which the UNF won, Sajith managed to lose Hambantota District (HD) as organiser and polled fewer personal votes than Namal Rajapaksa. In the 2018 LG elections the Sajith-led UNP polled only 25.5% in HD.

It is not my concern whether charmless-Ranil, clueless-Sajith or Janus-faced Karu is nominated. This brings me to my punch line. This time, for the first time, the game will go to second-preference tallying. If the third-force polls just 10% (all over the world they are doing much better), then if one of the main candidates is to secure more than 50% first-preferences the other will have to be pushed to below 40%. This is a very unlikely; too large a gap. A more rational early hypothesis at this time is that Gota and R-S-or-K will both poll in the mid-40s. Then the second-preferences of third-force voters will be the cliff-hanger.

But far more important than election arithmetic is that like elsewhere in the world the third-force has emerged as a credible fighting force. Gota, Sajith or Ranil, in the coming years any right-wing regime will swing to ever greater use of repression, probably in that order of brutality. This is where the mobilisation of a third force is an indispensable safeguard on its road to becoming the alternative.

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