

Sabotage of LG Elections Process in Sri Lanka

FACT SHEET

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Prelude

The last Local Government (LG) elections in Sri Lanka held in 2018. Rajapaksa family led Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) won a majority of the seats and local bodies, winning 40% of the votes. That result paved the way for Gotabaya Rajapaksa's victory in 2019.

Next local elections were due in March 2022. It was [postponed by then unpopular President Gotabaya Rajapaksa](#) government until March 2023. Incumbent [President Wickremesinghe](#) [opposed](#) LG elections being held. The Elections Commission (EC) waited four months without making a decision. Finally, EC called for nominations for the LG bodies from 04 -10 January and declared the elections to be held on 09th March. More than 16.6 million voters were eligible to elect 8,711 members to 340 local authorities comprising 24 Municipal Councils, 41 Urban Councils and 275 Divisional Councils. What is at stake now is the right to franchise of the people of Sri Lanka.

Since the LG election process started, the Government and officials made a number of unfounded roadblocks to sabotage the election process. At the end, on 17th February, Election Commission of Sri Lanka stated that Local Government Elections have to be postponed due to [ballot papers not being printed in time for unseen reasons](#).

The roadblocks and obstructions placed by the Government and officials to sabotage the LG elections are given below.

Deliberate Obstructions by the Government/Officials

1. On the 9th of January, during the time of nominations, the Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Government, Neil Bandara Hapuhinna [issued a circular ordering](#) all District Secretaries/Government Agents not to accept deposits from candidates for the Local Authorities election, until further notice. Later he apologised to the EC and withdrew the circular.
2. In mid-January [Secretary to the Finance Ministry](#), informed the SC that securing additional funds for an election at a time of an economic crisis will be extremely challenging. He provided an affidavit supporting a writ application filed by retired Army Colonel W.M.R.

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Wijesundara, .a political appointee of Ranil Wickremasinghe during 2015-2019, requesting a court order to defer the local government election due to economic crisis

3. During the last week of January [3 members of the EC received death threats](#) asking them not to proceed with the LG elections. Investigations to death threats had been very slow '[pointing finger to pro government groups](#)'. A member of the Election Commission, [P.S.M. Charles resigned](#) giving personal reasons.
4. On 29 January [DG of the Government Information Department](#) issued a press release saying that "the gazette notice with signatures of the Chairman and other members of the Election Commission required for the commencement of the Local Government election process has not been sent to the Government Press for printing." EC Chairperson Nimal Punchhewa refuted the press release as misleading.
5. On 31st January The President stated that the General Treasury has informed him that it finds it challenging to meet all expenditure at this moment except for payment of salaries, pensions, welfare, pharmaceuticals and debt servicing. This was an indirect prohibition to provide funds for LG elections.
6. On 10 February, [the Supreme Court gave the go ahead](#) for the LG polls scheduled for 9th March. The court said that it does not need to give an order on the polls as the National Elections Commission has given an undertaking the election will be conducted in accordance with the election laws.
7. On 12 February, [election monitoring and related organisations](#) made a written request to the Ministry of Finance for the release of funds required for the same, noting that it is the responsibility of all government officials to support the EC in holding the LG elections.
8. On 14th February, EC announced that the Postal Voting for the Local Government Election has been postponed indefinitely. The reason for the postponement was that funds required to print the ballot papers for the Postal Vote were not received in time. The postal voting was scheduled take place on 22nd, 23rd, and 24th of February 2023. [Government Printer's refusal to print ballot papers](#) until the Election Commission makes a payment to be absurd, said NPC.
9. On 16 February Government [Printer Gangani Liyanage](#) stated that the "main reason" for the delay in the printing of the ballot papers is that Government printing press was not given adequate police protection. This was despite many requests made to the Police Department, including to the IGP by both the EC and the Government Printing Department to provide security for the ballot printing process. "Initially, the EC wrote to the Senior

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Deputy Inspector General of Police of the Western Province [Deshabandu Tennakoon to provide security, but it was not provided.](#)”

10. On 18th February President Wickremesinghe stated that following the country's economic recovery, [next year it would be in a position to decide](#) on the future it wants, with the use of the ballot. President do not have any power to decide on election dates except the presidential election.
11. Police Spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police [Nihal Thalduwa told media](#) that the 65 officers requested by the Government Printing Department is comparatively more than those deployed at a police station. Although elections take place, other duties are carried out as it is.
12. On 20 February, EC informed the Supreme Court that obstacles have arisen with regard to conducting the Local Government Election on the 9th of March 2023 as planned.
13. The [EC in its motion to SC](#) also noted that the Inspector General of Police had failed to provide security to the process of printing ballot papers, and added that the IGP has indicated that he requires funds for the conduct of the election which are approximately three-fold of the funds previously provided to Sri Lanka Police during elections.
14. On 22 February President Ranil Wickremesinghe [making an indirect warning related to election funding](#) said that “the upcoming election is not a means to change the government. The court is expected to make a decision on the date for the Local Government election. However, the country’s economic problem is not something that can be resolved through legal action, even if all judges, including the Chief Justice, are involved. “
15. Meanwhile Speaker [Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana](#) stated that a letter submitted by a group of Parliamentarians stating that the National Election Commission violated their privileges, will be forwarded to the Committee on Parliamentary Business. He has not disclosed the contents of the letter.
16. Issuing a statement on government officials blocking necessary funds for the upcoming Local Government Election, the [Bar Association of Sri Lanka](#) says that it is of the view that all attempts to interfere with the electoral process must not only be defeated but all these responsible for such interference must be dealt with in accordance with the law.

(For more information, please visit our website <https://srilankabrief.org/> under the tag local government elections)