

FEATURE

Election fever:

WILL THERE BE VIOLENCE AND VOTE RIGGING?

* Paffrel

"Grama Niladharis are involved in election campaigning" - PAFFREL *ku*

PAFFREL Executive Director Rohana Hettiaratchi "Already, there have been acts of violence and malpractices in many parts of the island. More than 290 cases have been reported within 2-3 weeks. There have been 61 cases of violence and 20 cases have also been reported from the North. Two days back, common candidate Maithripala Sirisena's stage was set ablaze, and there was also an attack in Gallewa. These people are abusing state power and we cannot imagine how serious they are. They go on to the extent of using government resources, bribing and the like".

"We have news coming in that through several

Pradeshiya Sabha Divisions, these campaigners have given dry rations, housing equipment, tractors and many other items to the people. The campaigners use government buildings and vehicles and there is enough proof available to show how much of malpractices are taking place. In another case in Ratnapura, some ministers had a meeting during a weekday with the Grama Niladharis and what is most surprising is that graduates and Samurahi workers were also invited for this meeting. Grama Niladharis are not political based, and especially, they cannot do such campaigns during the office hours on a weekday."

"Malpractices are everywhere and violence is the biggest issue. Due to political pressure, government officials also get involved and it is quite ironic to see these are happening in broad daylight. Our biggest concern is on abusing state power and resources. As a committee, we observe these malpractices and report to the Elections Commissioner Mahinda Deshapriya, the Police, Human Rights Commission (HRC) and also the Bribery Commission. We have also intervened in severe cases and stopped several other incidents that were to take place. In addition to that, we also have partnerships with private sector bodies such as the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC),

Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) and other recognised entities. Also we had discussions with a few religious dignitaries during the past few days and are trying our best to minimise violence and instill a fair election atmosphere."

