



Supporters of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa cheer him in Colombo on January 27, 2010 after he was declared duly elected by the Elections Commissioner. Rajapaksa won a second term, defeating former army chief Sarath Fonseka with 57.9 percent of the popular vote. LAKRUWAN WANNIARACHCHI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

In a clash of former allies, Sri Lanka president wins elections

By JASPER FAKKERT
Epoch Times Staff

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa became his own successor on Wednesday after former army chief Sarath Fonseka failed to topple the president in the first post-war elections held in the country.

It had come as a surprise for Rajapaksa when Fonseka, one of his closest allies, became a presidential candidate, posing an unexpected challenge for the president who otherwise enjoyed no major political opponents.

The men, each of whom claimed responsibility for the defeat of the

Tamil Tigers in the North of Sri Lanka earlier this year, both touted the victory as the centrepiece of their campaigns.

"Thirty years we have suffered from war and he has ended it," said Saman Dankotuwa, a Sri Lankan entrepreneur, speaking about the president.

With the 25-year civil war over, a different battle was being fought—a political battle that saw the run-up to the election marked by violence. Four supporters of both the president and the opposition were killed and hundreds wounded. Just days before of the election, the home of an opposition supporter was

attacked with a petrol bomb.

While Rajapaksa has hailed his 57 percent majority victory, Fonseka, who won 40 percent of the votes, has rejected the result and vowed to challenge it in court.

"We will never accept this result. We will petition against it," Fonseka told reporters following the election. "The enthusiasm of the people we noticed during the campaign is not reflected in this result."

While voting went peacefully in most of the country, grenades exploded in different cities in the Northern Tamil part of the country, killing two.

The election drew a 70 percent

voter turnout, showing Sri Lankans were highly involved in the election campaign. Voter preference was widely discussed among the populous, with strangers asking each other who they were voting for.

However, voter turnout in the Tamil areas, which make up around 13 percent of the population, was less than 30 percent.

The conflict between the government and Tamil Tiger rebels has left around 100,000 people dead, with 7,000 killed in recent months.

With reporting by Upehshikka Dankotuwa and Lishanthi Caldera.

In State of Union, Obama promises focus on jobs

OBAMA CONTINUED FROM P1

Obama's response was to shift focus for the coming year away from the bitter debates that have surrounded health care reform.

"Jobs must be our number one focus in 2010, and that is why I am calling for a new jobs bill tonight," Obama said.

The President said Americans have "a deficit of trust — deep and corrosive doubts about how Washington works that have been growing for years," which he said must be overcome in order for his agenda to work.

Furthermore, the economy is still an issue on everyone's mind, even with the \$787 billion stimulus package. The overall unemployment rate in the United States is around 10 percent, and jobs are still hard to find for many Americans. According to Recovery.gov, approximately 640,000 jobs were created with the stimulus package.

"Because of the steps we took, there are about two million Americans working right now who would otherwise be unemployed," said the President. "200,000 work in construction and clean energy. 300,000 are teachers and other education workers."

Education investments were also on the president's agenda. The President proposed several reforms and changes to college education, including tax credits.

"I urge the Senate to follow the House and pass a bill that

will revitalize our community colleges, which are a career pathway to the children of so many working families," said Obama. "To make college more affordable, this bill will finally end the unwarranted taxpayer-subsidies that go to banks for student loans. Instead, let's take that money and give families a \$10,000 tax credit for four years of college and increase Pell Grants."

Obama also touched on the last week's Supreme Court decision that gives the right for unions and corporations — including foreign companies — to fund candidates without any restrictions. He urged Republicans and Democrats to pass a bill to reverse the decision.

And what of his opponents in Washington, the Republicans? Obama addressed Republicans who had criticized his policies directly, calling for them to work in tandem with Democrats, especially on health care and economic reforms.

After the President's speech, Republican Virginia Governor Bob McDowell addressed the President, saying his administration spends too much. "The amount of this debt is on pace to double in five years, and triple in ten," he said.

Gov. McDowell echoed statements and votes made by the Republican caucus on the health care package. "Most Americans do not want to turn over the best medical care system in the world to the federal government."

Coup threatens Nigeria in President's absence

NIGERIA CONTINUED FROM P1

Business circles have complained that important government business has been largely left undone over the past few months.

AN EVENTFUL TWO MONTHS

During the two months of President Yar'adua's absence, there occurred the failed terrorist attack by Nigerian "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk, who happens to be the son of a former Nigerian minister. The attack prompted U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to blame Nigerian leaders for their failure to curb the increasing "radicalization" among Nigerian youth.

"The world is probably taking a closer look at Nigeria now because of the terror plot by Umar Farouk. But over the years Nigeria has always had religious extremists who perpetuate terror and it was only a matter of time before they gained international status," said Nick Nwolisa of the International Eurasia Press Fund.

On Jan. 8 rebels attacked a Nigeria Chevron oil pipeline in the Niger Delta. A month before that the Dutch-British owned oil company Shell had already put its onshore oil fields in Nigeria up for sale, a move believed to be partly related to growing violence in the region.

Just last week, a violent religious clash between Christians and Muslims claimed the lives of some 450 people. And as the last bodies from the massacre were recovered from wells and sewer pits, a Nigerian naval helicopter crashed, killing four. This latest incident is also believed to be related to terrorism.

PREVENTING A MILITARY COUP

To prevent a coup, the Nigerian army ordered a restriction of movement for its soldiers on Monday. Soldiers need passes and valid reasons to go anywhere.

"We are aware of the fact that there is tension in the country. We know it's not a secret," Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Abdulrahman Danbazu told the Associated Press. "And we also got intelligence information that some people are trying to infiltrate our ranks."

Lt. Gen Danbazu warned that a military coup would drag Nigeria "back to the dark days of our nation's history."

Nwolisa thinks democracy could still work but that the system needs to be attuned to Nigeria's natural conditions. "Nigeria has a lot diversity. It is always very difficult to put people of different cultures, traditions, and beliefs to live together. This is the mistake the colonial masters made in most of the African nations."

Schwarzenegger wants to send illegal immigrant prisoners to Mexico

By JOSHUA PHILIPP
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California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has suggested building cheaper prisons in Mexico to house illegal immigrant prisoners now incarcerated in California as one way to help the state's struggling economy.

"It will halve the costs to build the prisons and halve the costs to run the prisons," Schwarzenegger said. "That is money—again, a billion dollars right there—that can go into higher education."

The comments were made during a Sacramento Press Club luncheon on Jan. 25, where Schwarzenegger noted that 20,000 inmates in the state are illegal immigrants.

In a letter to California's Congressional Delegation on Jan. 13, Schwarzenegger also brought up the issue of illegal immigrants in

Looking to cut costs to reduce the state's \$19.9 billion deficit has been an ongoing campaign for Schwarzenegger

California prisons and requested reimbursement for their incarceration from the federal government.

"California delegation members have issued scathing indictments of the federal government for its failure to reimburse states for the cost of incarcerating criminal aliens in state prisons," the letter said.

"California is forced to spend \$880 million this year alone to

pay for the cost of incarceration," he said, adding that, "In my proposed budget for next year, California is seeking reimbursement for those costs, and we need your help in continuing to press the federal government to live up to its responsibility."

Looking to cut costs to reduce the state's \$19.9 billion deficit has been an ongoing campaign for Schwarzenegger. California has

seen the highest levels of job loss in the country since the economic crisis began.

Improvements have been made from last year when the state faced a \$60 billion deficit, yet times are still tough.

During the Monday speech to the Sacramento Press Club, Schwarzenegger said he will not raise taxes for a second year and will instead find ways to cut costs.

The prison system has been a target of these cuts. Schwarzenegger plans to release up to 21,000 prisoners not imprisoned for violent crimes over the next two years. They will be granted "non-revocable parole."

Schwarzenegger also has a separate plan to release 40,000 inmates from state prisons, but the Supreme Court has that plan on hold.

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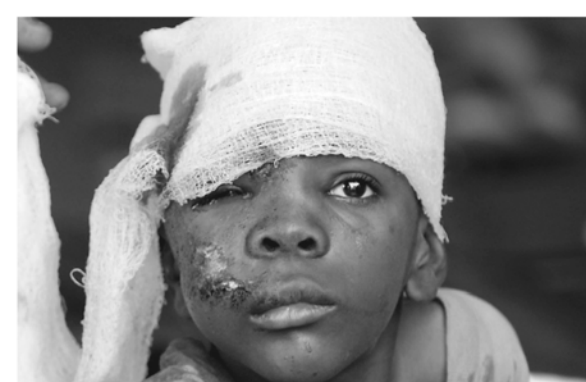
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