

NEWS

99.33% of British Tamils say yes to independence

BRITISH Tamils made a united democratic call for the independence of Tamil Eelam in a nationwide referendum held over the weekend of January 30 and 31.

Inside the ballroom at the Park Lane Hotel in London, after two days of voting, the results were announced to a jubilant crowd: 64,256 of 64,692 voters said yes to Tamil Eelam (99.33%), whilst 185 voted against (0.29%) and 251 votes were void (0.39%).

This was the latest in a string of referendums taking place in Tamil Diaspora strongholds across the world, in countries such as Norway, France, Canada and Germany.

The referendums are a remandate of principles endorsed by the 1976 Vaddukoddai Resolution, where Tamils of Sri Lanka declared that they believed the only answer to the decades of discrimination and persecution was an independent, sovereign state of Tamil Eelam in the contiguous North and East parts of Sri Lanka.

The resolution, ratified through an electoral victory the following year, proved that the overwhelming majority of Tamils desired independence from Sinhala oppression.

This British referendum was conducted in 65 polling stations situated across the country's major towns and cities, with a heavy focus on the capital.

Outside of London polling stations, open on Saturday only, ran from Glasgow to Southampton. Eager voters remained undeterred by icy motorway conditions and set off in their thousands.

Polling stations reported an evening rush as those who had been at work or busy with their children at Saturday school during the day, arrived just in time to cast their votes.

Across the capital, polling stations were open both days of the weekend. Widespread engineering works on the tube and even a layer of snow did not stop Tamil Londoners getting out in force both days.

Organisers indicated that almost one thousand votes were cast within the first hour.

Observers at one polling station reported that a steady stream of cars, sometimes packed full with three generations of Tamils, pulled up outside the polling station.

At another polling booth, a grandmother dressed in a red and

yellow saree in the colours of Eelam was assisted out of the car by her grandson wearing a hoodie declaring "STOP the GENOCIDE of TAMILS".

At one booth, Mrs Sathyabhama Kumarasamy, now 89 years of age, spoke of her memories of voting in the 1976 referendum and remarked passionately "I love my country as I love my mother and that is why I have come to vote in the referendum".

Young Tamils, born and raised in Britain, made up a large proportion of voters.

A medical student with her first semester exams approaching took time out of her revision schedule to make an early morning visit to the polls. "This is my duty to my people," she explained.

Children wrapped up in woollen hats and scarves, although too young to vote, frequently accompanied their parents.

Holding their parents' hands, they watched eagerly as their parents had their identities verified and were given yellow ballot sheets.

One father, a social worker in North-West London, carried his young daughter in one arm as he filled the ballot paper, all the while talking to her about his belief in Tamil Eelam and why he was voting for it.

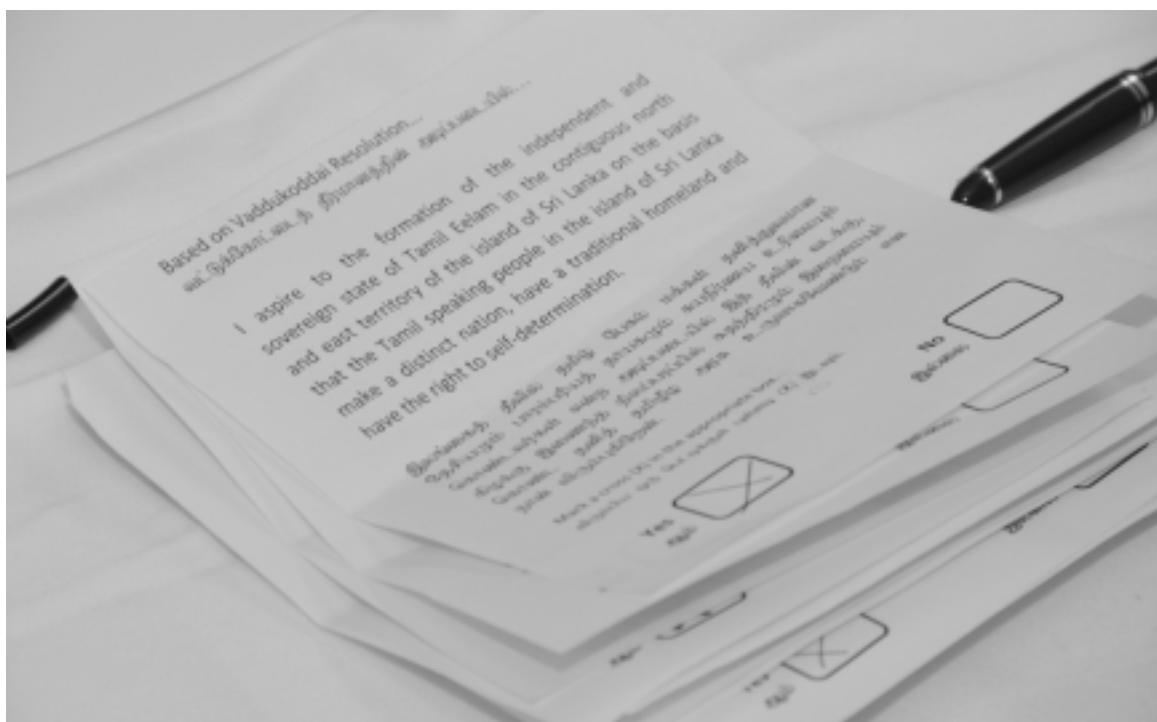
Both young and old had taken time to volunteer. Determined that no one should be denied the opportunity of democracy, volunteers arranged a makeshift transport service, driving elderly voters to and from the polling stations.

Due to the unexpected influx of voters at polling stations such as South Harrow, volunteers were drafted in from other areas to assist.

Independent observers declared that the referendum, organised by the Tamil National Council, and conducted with the cooperation of a number of British Tamil organisations, had run very smoothly.

As Sunday evening drew near, those who had been unable to vote earlier flocked to the polling stations. Queues were building up outside, as voters glanced nervously at their watches.

One shop keeper, visibly short of breath, spoke of how he had shut up shop ten minutes early and ran to make sure he had time to cast his vote.



Yellow ballots were poured out of secured boxes and the count for each polling booth was tallied

My vote for Eelam

Arani Kumaran

THE last weekend in January saw the British Tamil referendum on the independent state of Tamil Eelam.

Along with several other Tamils up and down the country, my weekend had revolved around it.

Most of my family and friends had left early on Saturday morning in their cars, ready to drive the elderly to and from the polling stations or they set off to assist at the polling stations themselves.

On Sunday morning I rummaged through my desk drawers, found my passport and set off to cast my vote.

Stood in the queue outside the polling station, I nodded and smiled as I caught the eyes of other Tamils.

We didn't know each other and it wasn't merely the mutual recognition of each other's undeniably Tamil face. This was different.

We were all there to play our part in the struggle for Tamil Eelam; to be the voice of our brothers and sisters imprisoned back at home. The nod was a mutual acknowledgement of our shared and united belief in Eelam and the smile, a reciprocal appreciation of each other's act of voting for our nation's freedom.

Before leaving home, I had found my Tamil Eelam red-yellow scarf and wrapped it proudly around my neck. Glancing around, I was pleased to see I wasn't the only one.

The man behind me wore a similar one, along with a badge reading 'Free Tamil Eelam'.

He was there with an elderly lady, most probably his mother, who wore an identical badge as well as a red saree with a yellow border.

The gentleman in front of me, who appeared to be in his 70s, greeted me with a warm smile and shook my hand. He told me how proud he was to see the younger

generation carrying on the struggle and shared his memories of accompanying his grandfather to the Satyagrahas of the 1950s-60s.

I asked him whether he had ever lost hope in the possibility of freedom. "Never" he replied.

Inside the polling stations, we were greeted by volunteers who guided us to the appropriate table.

Two independent officials, local councillors, sat in the corner watching over the volunteers, listening to the gentle hum of officials instructing voters of the procedure.

As I stood waiting for the official to flick through my passport, I sensed a buzz in the room.

Perhaps it was curiosity regarding the final results or anxiety over the possibility of a low voter turn-out.

The official handed my passport back to me and guided me to another table, where a man sat with a bottle of black ink and blotting paper.

A thick black mark was painted onto the tip of my finger and a yellow ballot paper given to me.

As we drove home from the polling station we compared the ink on our fingers.

Claims of the biggest, darkest and best were all rapidly put forward.

Our delight and zeal, was almost child-like in nature, as if we were comparing football cards in the playground.

We all wanted the pride of having the most prominent mark of our vote for Eelam.

Two hours to go till the polling stations close.

Pacing up and down with my mobile phone, I scrolled through my list of contacts, mentally dividing them into four categories: 'can't vote' (they're not Tamil), 'would have definitely voted', 'two hours is not long enough to convince them to vote' and 'may have voted'.

One by one I called the latter; convinced that a bit of encouragement is all they need.

"Have you voted?" There is a long silence, followed by a reluctant reply. "You won't like what I have to say. I'm at work and I'm too busy."

I try to hide my frustration and give directions to the nearest polling station, pointing out that it was less than 100m away.

After extracting a submission we say our goodbyes.

Thankfully, having gone through the rest of my phone book, such a conversation was not repeated.

Even members of my family who usually shy away from politics spoke enthusiastically about the idea of a democratic vote.

Later that night as the results started coming through there was a palpable sense of excitement.

Like with the ink on our fingers previously, once again my friends and I sat around and playfully boasted of our local area's high turn-out and percentages of 'Yes' votes.

Shortly after 11pm, there was an electrifying cheer from the crowd as the final results were announced.

Over 64,000 votes cast; 99.33% of which were in favour of independence; an outstanding result.

Surprisingly however, I did not feel the urge to celebrate.

Despite my previous enthusiasm, I was not jubilant or ecstatic.

Instead I had a feeling of immense satisfaction; content that the truth had prevailed.

It was then that it dawned on me – the buzz in the polling station earlier that morning was not anxiety or curiosity regarding the final result.

It was in fact the thrilling anticipation of what was to come.

As we voted that morning we had been excited, secure in the knowledge that today, the Tamil Diaspora in Britain would be able to prove to others what we have always known – the overwhelming majority of us want Tamil Eelam.

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