Sincerity To The Fore



First entering the Provincial Council system in 2002, Manju Sri Arangala is the group leader of the United National Party (UNP) for the Western Provincial Council elections. He is confident that the people have not forgotten the achievements as well as the capabilities of the UNP. The campaign for this election is driven on the theme of good governance and providing relief to the high cost of living. Having been the Chairman of the Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha as well as the Opposition Leader of the Western Provincial Council, Manju Sri Arangala is expecting victory…

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara

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As the group leader of the UNP for the Western Provincial Council election, what are the areas in which the UNP is contesting this election?
There are several key areas that the UNP will be focusing on in this election. Firstly, we want this election to be a platform where there will be a discussion on the decisions and the path taken by the government. We want to give the ruling party a message that it is taking the wrong path and that they should rectify it.

The cost of living in the country is very high compared to the income of each household. Therefore, people are finding it very difficult to make ends meet.

Provincial Councils are a product of the 13th Amendment. Therefore, the governance of schools, hospitals, agricultural institutes, cooperatives and provincial level governing bodies in villages and cities fall under the purview of the Provincial Councils. Over the past five years these institutions have been functioning properly. Bribery, corruption and politicisation are major issues faced by these institutions. There were many instances where appointments of Acting Principals were made while the schools already had Principals. Talented as well as qualified people did not receive appointments. There are many government officials who are disappointed and discouraged. In this context the majority of people believe that they should vote for the UNP during this election.

We are gathering the people together and spearheading the drive for change while signalling to the government that the plan of action they have adopted is wrong. It is clear that the general public wants change; therefore we are positive that the UNP will secure a victory in this election.

Why should the people vote for the UNP?
We are well aware of the issues faced by the people that live in urbanised areas. During the war, massive expenses were incurred for weapons and troops. The government kept asking the people to be patient and promised to give them concessions once the war was over. Five years have passed since the end of the

war but the people are still struggling to live. This has had a greater impact on the people living in urbanised areas such as Colombo than those living in rural areas.

Prices have increased where the price of a gas cylinder, water and electricity bills, cost of other goods are considerably high.

We aim to address these issues and we hope that the people will realise the significance of the Western Provincial Council election.

We Conduct Our Election Campaign In A Fair Manner Without Breaking Election Laws. We Engage In Door To Door Canvassing To Educate People On Our Manifesto. There Is One Aspect That The People Have Forgotten; That The Provincial Councils Is A Product Of The 13th Amendment…

What approach is the UNP taking in its campaign?
We are conducting our election campaign in a fair manner without breaking election laws. We engage in door-to-door canvassing to educate the people on our manifesto. There is one aspect that the people have forgotten; that Provincial Councils is a product of the 13th Amendment, which followed the Indo-Lanka agreement between J R Jayawardene and Rajiv Gandhi in 1987.

When the first Provincial Council elections were held in 1988, the opposition anticipated that the country would be divided into eight states where people would have to get permits to travel between provinces. They said they would not contest. The then leader of the SLFP, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the current President Mahinda Rajapaksa conducted programmes of resistance in Fort, against the formation of Provincial Councils. They said they would not contest the elections because it will divide the country. The JVP argued that the 1988 election was a threat to the independence of the country and accused people who were willing to vote as traitors, punishable by death.

The UNP won the 1988 election. We won the election under the leadership of Ossie Abeygunasekera who was the founder and leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya. But then, in the next election it was the alliance spearheaded by the SLFP

together with the JVP that won the election.

We have to remind people that within five years, the people who called Provincial Council elections as a conspiracy to divide the country, that it is treachery and accused that this was an agreement between J R Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi who had ulterior motives, were now contesting the elections. They created a negative mindset in the general public that resulted in massive destruction. Public properties such as court complexes, agricultural institutes and buses were set on fire. Having done all of this, the SLFP still contested the elections. Since that election, the UPFA headed by the SLFP has been ruling the Provincial Councils.

It is the government's opinion that the UNP is asking the people to elect us to the Provincial Council so that the UNP can create a change. But the people themselves have realised the detrimental effects of UPFA governance, which has been prevalent for 21 years. There is large-scale corruption and the Provincial Councils have been weakened due to wrong decisions made by the people who govern them. The government is trying to weaken the Provincial Councils.

As the leader of the UNP group, our plan of action is to make the people realise these aspects that are currently prevalent in the country.

Will the UNP win this election?
Definitely. The reason for me to say that is because people are feeling the pressure of the rising cost of living. We are nearing five years after the completion of the war but the people have not received any concessions. Only a small section of the country is given concessions. Today what the government is doing in the name of development are shows and displays.

The UNP is the party that rendered a yeoman service to develop this country. It is the party that led the fight to gain Independence from the British. The UNP created free education and sustained it; it is the party that provided free school books and meals to children. The UNP established the Mahapola Scholarship scheme that helped university students to continue their studies by overcoming their hardships. It is the party that initiated projects such as the Mahaweli to develop the country's

agriculture. This is the party that also initiated the establishment of hydro power plants, developed the garment industry and introduced Free Trade Zones, which increased the country's revenue generating capacity. As such when we consider every aspect it is apparent that the UNP has done a massive service to this country, which is far greater than any development that this government has done so far.

Our Only Hope For The Future Is That Of The Party. We Want To Win This Election To Create A Better Way Of Life For The People, Where They Can Comfortably Live With What They Earned And Save For The Future.

Provincial Council election campaigns have become a very expensive affair, at times even more than National level elections. What are your thoughts on this?

Excessive spending is not the only issue. The current trend is such that contestants distribute various items to voters such as cups, mosquito nets, towels and bed sheets to obtain votes. This has become a donation campaign of the government. Then there are stalls giving free food and liquor. Such action degrades the value and importance of the people's vote.

We do not need new slogans to win the hearts of the people in this election. The people are very well aware of the hardships they face everyday and they want someone who can give them an alternative.

What lies ahead?

Our only hope for the future is that of the party. We want to win this election to create a better way of life for the people, where they can comfortably live with what they earned and save for the future. We want to create job opportunities for the youth. We want to create good governance in the country where the country will not depend on casinos and alcohol based business ventures.

Many Provincial Councils are in crisis today. There is corruption from top to bottom in these institutions and no measures have been taken to rectify these. When the top is corrupt then officers and the lower levels too want to earn some money for themselves. Today politics is no longer a way to serve the people but a business to earn for one's self.

What is your message to the people?
I served twice as the Chairman of the Pradeshiya Sabha of Homagama. I first entered the social service sector through the Gramodaya Mandalaya (Village Council). There was a competition under the Gramodaya concept of late President R Premadasa and I became the first from Colombo District. Then I was involved with the cooperatives and served twice as the Chairman of the cooperative of Homagama. While I was there, I contested in the Pradeshiya Sabha elections of 2002. I won this election and became the Chairman of the Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha winning the most number of votes gained in a Pradeshiya Sabha election. I have always worked to provide value for the people who voted for me. I can proudly say that I have never taken bribes or misused public funds.

In the Presidential election of 2005, President Mahinda Rajapaksa won the Homagama electorate by 24,000 votes. Many people advised me not to keep any hopes for the Provincial Council elections because the UPFA had already won the Presidential elections. The Provincial Council elections were held four months after that. Even I didn't expect to win. However, the majority of the people told me that they voted for President Rajapaksa in the Presidential elections because he ended the war, but they will definitely vote for me in the Provincial Council elections. That proved to be true. I won the election by 7,000 votes. I got 39,000 votes and became the most reputed Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman in the country.

Then after seven years, I was asked to contest in the Provincial Council elections in 2009. At that election, I became the fourth contestant to get the most number of votes with 94 percent from the Homagama electorate. Then I contested for the Homagama seat to enter Parliament, I was number eight in the order of the number of votes received however there were provisions for only the first seven. The people of the Homagama electorate had sent me to the doorstep of the Parliament but they didn't send me inside. Now I am waiting outside, hoping to enter Parliament.

I Am Not From A Political Family. My Father Was Not Engaged In Politics. We Are Not Rich People. I Have Come To This Position Through My Education And Hard Work…I Believe That I Will Have The Support Of The People Because I Have Never Done Anything Wrong.

The reason as to why I have been able to come a long way is because the people

know that I have always been true to them. They know that I will not steal and that I know the value of their votes. That’s is why they have continuously supported me.

I am not from a political family. My father was not engaged in politics. We are not rich people. I have come to this position through my education and hard work. I was a clerk at Bank of Ceylon before I joined politics.

I believe that I will have the support of the people because I have never done anything wrong. I am happy with the service I have done for the people so far. I was the Opposition Leader of the Western Provincial Council and today I am the group leader of the UNP for the Western Provincial Council elections. I believe that when the UNP wins this election, I will be given a responsible position.



