

Election call too late, Jayewardene told. (1988, December 5). *The globe and mail.*

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# Election call too late, Jayewardene told

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Early elections called amid the most widespread unrest in Sri Lanka's 40 years of independence have come too late to defuse the violence, opposition leaders say.

President Junius Jayewardene announced on Saturday that parliament would be dissolved Dec. 20 and the island would hold its first general elections in more than 10 years on Feb. 15.

The president, besieged by Tamil separatist rebels in the north and radical Sinhalese in the south, also said he would retire after 11 years as ruler of the Indian Ocean island following a presidential election on Dec. 19.

"I feel that an opportunity should be given to the people to elect a new parliament so that the new president should have the benefit of the views of the present electorate," said Mr. Jayewardene, 82.

Opposition leaders generally welcomed the election announcement, but believed it was too late to halt the most wide-ranging unrest since the island's independence from Britain in 1948.

"It's a step in the right direction. It's a kind of sop to the opposition, but it's too late for that," said Anura Bandaranaike.

The opposition legislator's mother, Sirima Bandaranaike, is running against the ruling United National Party (UNP) presidential candidate, Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa.

The government has blamed the People's Liberation Front, drawn mostly from the majority Sinhalese community, for a spate of killings, strikes and demonstrations that have crippled most parts of the country in the past six weeks.

The Front wants to scrap an Indian-Sri Lankan pact signed by Mr. Jayewardene last year in an attempt to end a revolt by minority Tamils and had been demanding general elections before presidential poll.

G. G. Ponnambalam, leader of a minority Tamil party, said he expected the Front to be angered by the announcement that elections would be held after the presidential vote and to "go for blood."

"Jayewardene's announcement is an intellectual deception and shows clearly the UNP wanted to continue using the state machinery for the presidential elections. That's the whole idea."

Mr. Premadasa, chosen by Mr. Jayewardene as the UNP candidate, had said parliament would be dissolved only after the Dec. 19 vote.

In 1977, the ruling United National Party won 80 per cent of the 168 seats in parliament.