



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Mauritius Tamil community stops banknote alteration, 1998

18 October

1998

to: 18 November

1998

Country: Mauritius

Goals:

Reverse banknote alteration, restoring Tamil translation to its original position above the Hindi translation

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Many campaigners brought signs and banners to the protests
- 013. Deputations › Campaigners met with the President of Mauritius to discuss the issue
- 023. Destruction of own property › Members of the Mauritius Tamil community burned effegies of the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Thousands of Mauritius Tamil gathered in protest of the banknote alteration
- 113. Strike by resignation › Tamil members of the Mauritius Parliament threatened to resign if the banknotes were not changed back

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Mauritius Tamil Community

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Tamil Council leader Devarajen Kanaksabee, Tamil members of Parliament

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order not known

Segment Length: ~5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Mauritian central bank

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

This campaign grew very rapidly, spreading throughout the majority of the Mauritius Tamil community within days of the new banknotes being issued. Combined with the fact that the campaign fully met its goals of having the new banknotes withdrawn

without any sign of diminishing support, this campaign gets a full 10 points.

On the island nation of Mauritius, three languages appear on the banknotes. Traditionally, the languages are English, Tamil, and Hindi - in that order. On October 18, 1998, the Central Bank of Mauritius released a new series of banknotes upon which the order of the latter two languages were reversed, with Hindi appearing before Tamil.

Reportedly, the reason for the change in the order was because the Tamil text would have encroached on the portrait of Sir Moilin Jean Ah-Chuen on the 25-rupee note if it remained in its original position on the note; however, the Tamil community did not accept this explanation and within a few days of the new banknotes' release this community took up nonviolent actions in protest of the change. Although the Tamil community only represents about 10 percent of the Mauritius population (as opposed to the Hindu community, which makes up about 40 percent of the population), the Tamil community claimed precedence on the banknotes based on traditional practices and claims to having arrived on the island prior to the members of the Hindu community.

It is unclear who organized and led the campaign, and some sources called the events following the banknote release spontaneous; however, the likelihood of the campaign actually being spontaneous is slim. A number of protests took place at strategic locations, such as in front of the Central Bank of Mauritius. Thousands of members of the Mauritius Tamil community attended the gatherings, many carrying banners and signs with slogans on them. In addition to protests, the Mauritius Tamil community burned effigies of the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius and representations were made to the President of Mauritius. Tamil members of Parliament threatened to resign from their position if the new banknote design was not pulled out of circulation.

On November 18, one month after the initial release of the new banknotes, the government of Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam asked the central bank to withdraw the notes from circulation. The Bank of Mauritius complied, representing a victory for the Tamil. The reprinting of the banknotes cost more than 50 million rupees, or more than 2 billion USD.

Research Notes

Sources:

"Mauritian Tamils Rise up to Protect Tamil." Tamil Tribune. Aug. 2000. Web. 10 Apr. 2011.
<<http://www.tamiltribune.com/00/0801.html>>.

Symes, Peter. "Banknote Oddities." PJ Symes. Dec. 2001. Web. 10 Apr. 2011.
<<http://www.pjsymes.com.au/articles/oddities.htm>>.

Vellien, Clifford. "Mauritius Withdraws Banknotes After Tamil Protests." Windman. 19 Nov. 1998. Web. 10 Apr. 2011.
<<http://dypewlyplex.teleindia.com/list/1998-11/msg00362.html>>.

Additional Notes:

Photos:

Demonstrations in the Street (in front of the Bank of Mauritius) - <http://www.tamiltribune.com/00/20000801a.jpg>

Burning the Effigy of the Governor of Bank of Mauritius - <http://www.tamiltribune.com/00/20000801b.jpg>

Picture of Banknote with Hindi in Second Place and Tamil in Third Place (withdrawn after protest by Mauritian Tamils) - <http://www.tamiltribune.com/00/20000801c.jpg>

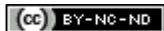
Picture of Banknote with Tamil in Second Place and Hindi in Third Place (issued after protest by Mauritian Tamils) - <http://www.tamiltribune.com/00/20000801d.jpg>

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