

## **Sajith beats Ravi in close contest Gamage knocks out Dayasiri**

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has the distinction of being the most maligned politician in the country, virtually rose from the ashes to deliver a crushing defeat to Karu Jayasuriya, his rival at yesterday's election for the leadership.

Sources said that the verdict of 72 to 24 votes in favour of Wickremesinghe, had disproved the contention by both Jayasuriya and Sajith Premadasa, that under the new party constitution they had a majority backing among the Working Committee and parliamentary group members.

Premadasa, who aspires to be the next UNP leader scraped through by a mere eight votes to become Deputy Leader. His rival Ravi Karunanayake had been written off even before the poll began, but surprised most people with a strong showing. The final vote count stood at 52 – 44.

Ranil loyalist Daya Gamage, who is fighting a legal battle against the Rajapaksa government over the acquisition of his business interests, defeated Dayasiri Jayasekera, also believed to be popular in the party, to become National Organiser. Here too the tally of 56-36 in Gamage's favour surprised many observers.

The poll commenced at the UNP headquarters 'Srikotha' around 12.30 p.m, with General Secretary Tissa Attanayake functioning as the Presiding Officer.

Even before the verdict was announced at about 3.30 p.m, a large number of Jayasuriya supporters had gathered outside the party headquarters demanding that he be appointed UNP leader.

Shortly after the results were released, the slogan chanting crowd broke into 'Srikotha' and caused damage to the buildings and some of the vehicles parked inside.

The police riot squad which was called in to control the unruly situation, had immediately closed the road between Pita Kotte and Ethul Kotte junctions.

~ www.island.lk ~by Zacki Jabbar