

Vote for Change in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan electorate have voted for change. Not just for a change of guard after 17 years of the United National Party (UNP) rule. But for opening a new phase of national reconciliation for that battle-weary nation. This adds a distinct quality to the people's verdict in Tuesday's parliamentary elections. The Socialist people's Alliance, a conglomerate of leftist groups, with its plank for negotiating peace with the still rebellious LTTE, even has an ally in the Muslim Congress, let alone some Tamil groups. It is thus prospectively broadbased cutting across ethnic, ideological and religious lines. Chances are it can forge unity in the polity.

Numerically, the verdict is not a clear-cut one. The key to the balance of power between the People's Alliance, which has captured 105 seats, and the hitherto ruling United National Party, that has bagged 94 seats, in a 205-member Parliament, is obviously held by the smaller parties. But three points must be made in all fairness to the election results. First, natural allies of the People's Alliance have come out successful in the polls, so that they readily add as a factor in the formation of a coalition. It can be intrinsically a stronger formation than what the PA's adversary, the UNP, could hope for: a loose coalition in an alternative scenario. Secondly, the UNP's centrist character could not work to their benefit in the election campaign as against the leftist orientation of the PA because the latter intelligently kept from stretching its socialist fervour by asking for a shift in the on-going economic liberalisation programme. How could they ignore the foreign investments it brought to the country? Thirdly, what perhaps turned the table was the PA's asking for a mandate from the people to negotiate with the LTTE which has been in a running war with the government since 1982 for a separate ethnic homeland in the north and the east. This was in sharp contrast to the UNP's reported refusal to do so. It so happens that the People's Alliance's holding out of the promise to actually have such negotiations with the rebel Tamils has resulted in their obtaining the critical support of the Tamil groups.

The Sri Lankan President, who is a UNP appointee, has already called the leader of the single majority party, i.e. the People's Alliance, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to form the new government. So, we are going to have another woman as the head of government in the SAARC region, after Bangladesh and Pakistan. This is women's leadership at the top, as a complement to their empowerment at the grassroots level. Bangladesh completes the cycle by having a woman as the leader of the opposition.

The completion of Sri Lankan parliamentary polls goes down very well with us as a mark of political maturity of the country. Despite there being 3400 clashes during the campaign and a Tamil boycott of the polls in Jaffna, there was 75 per cent turn-out in the elections in the rest of the country. The returns are not smeared by widespread allegations of rigging or false voting either. Credit goes to the ruling party in no small measure for the precautions it took to complete the electoral process. The clamping of emergency and curfew to avert clashes over the poll results spoke of the government's seriousness.

At the same time it depicted the inner tension of the society. This is what we hope Sri Lanka will put behind her in due course. For the present, we look forward to the right kind of working equation developing between the new Prime Minister and the constitutionally powerful President, who belong to rival political parties.

Stop Soccer Hooliganism

The infamous British soccer hooliganism seems to have invaded our stadiums. Yesterday the Dhaka Stadium was not just the venue of a football match but also one of the ugliest of soccer violence that left its frenzied trail far beyond the playing ground. Mercifully though one of the rival teams commands a small following and the rivalry of the fans stopped short of reaching the intensity it does if the big teams of the Dhaka League are involved in the fray. Mostly clashes between the police and the disgruntled fans of a team, they however left as many as 100 hurt, cars and various other property damaged. Some lottery tickets and cash were also looted by the fans who went berserk.

Evidently the supporters gave vent to their anger and disappointment on everything they came across in the absence of any worthy opponent. It has spared the supporters grievous bodily wounds but at the same time letting loose of their frenzy has once again brought to the fore the question whether on a day something goes wrong somewhere it will be possible to lead a civilized and somewhat secured life in the city. There is a growing tendency among political activists, factory workers, football fans and even students of educational institutions to unleash their wrath on unsuspecting people either passing by or engaged in their daily business having no connection with the dispute.

This unpredictable aggressive behaviour of groups of people at the busy city centre or thereabouts is posing a direct threat to life and property. The hooligans complain against one thing but themselves commit a crime on innocent ones without remorse. That the entire Gulistan, Purana Paltan and Nawabpur turned into a battle zone yesterday owes to one single incident on the soccer field. It was the injury to Mohammedan skipper Rumman bin Wali Sabbir and the subsequent refusal by the referee to stop the proceeding. Hell broke loose. The fans clashed with the men in uniform who were desperately trying to restore order in the stadium.

However it is not quite reasonable to lay all the blame at the fans' door. The players and the team officials behave no less irresponsibly. Their irresponsible act on the field ignites the fuse to spread the fury in the stadium proper and off the field. Football after all is not just a game, nor is it any ordinary form of entertainment nor a public show. It has the ability to teach a moral lesson or two even to some of the illuminating minds. To educate the fans, the players and the team officials must first of all show what football means. Discipline, courage and fortitude are the hallmark of this most popular game.

AL Bahadur Shastri was the last Congress prime minister who was unequivocal with corruption. He made Finance Minister T T Krishnamachari at the Centre and Chief Minister Pratap Singh Kairon in the state of Punjab quit because he found them lacking integrity. At that time the party made it obligatory for every minister, after assuming office, to declare the assets and to update the information annually.

This practice was not followed during Indira Gandhi's tenure, since she was more concerned with politics than morality. Corruption did not disturb her, lack of loyalty did. Elections became a big business in her time. When Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhian, told her about the then West Bengal minister Bijoy Nath Nihar's charge that the Congress spent Rs 30 lakh in a by-election in Orissa, she said: "We have no money." Subsequently, she was so oblivious to charges of corruption that she came to rationalise it as a world phenomenon.

Modern in outlook, Rajiv Gandhi was interested more in results than methods. He began as Mr Clean but ended up with worse reputation than his mother's. Corruption during his prime ministership transcended the party and reached its Italian scion. It is already public that one of the beneficiaries of the kickbacks from the Bofors gun deal is an Italian.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is pragmatic even in the matters of corruption. It all depends on whose toes he has to tread. Chidambaram had to resign from the council of ministers in the initial stage of inquiry into the security scam because he is a lightweight in

politics. Others, although indicted by the joint parliamentary committee (JPC), have not been touched because any action against them might disturb the balance which has helped Rao survive as prime minister for the last three years.

True, he is not happy over the phraseology of the 'Action Taken Report' on the JPC findings because his style is not to rub the people on the wrong side unnecessarily. But even before the 'Action Taken Report' was written, he had made it clear that he did not want to punish any minister. Once the bureaucrats found that the indicated ministers would go scot-free, they saw to it that their compatriots too were not harmed. The discussion on the 'Action Taken Report' in the cabinet was only a routine matter because no minister said anything.

Had Rao stuck to his earlier resolve to reshuffle the cabinet on July 20 and to drop some ministers, he would have avoided the storm in parliament. But he could not keep the reshuffle a secret — thanks to the story leaked — and found that he was vulnerable to pressure. The controversial deals of Gold Star Steel and Alloys Limited in which Rao's son is a director, also weakened his resolve.

The prime minister could not visualise his government without Manmohan Singh who has been named by the JPC for showing 'relative unconcern'.

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On the stump recently in Morelos state, the 60-year-old son of "Tata" Lazaro Cardenas, President of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, appraised his chances: "We are more organised than in 1988. We have a greater capacity for mobilisation. Most of all, we know our adversaries much better this time around."

But if Cardenas' Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) knows its foes better in 1994, its foes — the 65-years-in-power Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the PRI's sometimes-ally, the right-of-centre National Action or PAN — also know Cardenas and his opposition forces much better.

As the three-way race enters its final phase with no clear winner yet in sight, Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, PAN's brash, bristle-bearded candidate, slashes at Cardenas from the right with the kind of fierce, mocking attack that caused him to be judged the winner of Mexico's first-ever televised presidential debate.

At the same time, the ruling party attacks Cardenas from on top, outspending the PRD \$42 million to \$2 million on the

Insensitivity Makes Light of Scam

When ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour become generally dim and beyond the mental grasp of those who occupy high positions, the nation faces a serious situation. But when the captain of the nation's ship, the prime minister, stops differentiating between wrong and right the nation is in peril.

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But the finance minister could have probably galled the prime minister by apologising to the nation when the scam story broke out that he had not realised the gravity of the scandal. Instead, he made flippant remarks like "he would not lose his sleep" over the abnormal rise in share prices. In fact, he wanted to show that the boom was because of his liberal economic policies, which were being attacked.

None doubts the integrity of Singh but he has not re-

stricted the departments?

What has galled the community — the opposition parties have only reflected the sentiment — is that there is no minister or top official who has been held accountable. The scam has crossed the figure of Rs 9,000 crore. It is the biggest scandal since independence. The people expected some ministers and officers punished. But the prime minister is not allowing the wheels of justice to move for political and other considerations.

Strictures by the JPC

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

alised that politics demands discretion, not the badge of honesty which he flaunts all the time. He unnecessarily defended his former colleague Venkitaraman, the Reserve Bank governor, when the scam hit the headlines and threatened to resign if Venkitaraman was asked to go. Manmohan Singh should not take the credit of unearthing the scam because he came to know of it only after the press had reported on it extensively.

It was amusing to read in his defence that it was not humanly possible for the finance minister to personally supervise the working of all departments of his ministry. If it is not humanly possible, then why should he retain all

should have been enough for the indicted to quit. Would they have stayed back if the some remarks had been made by the Supreme Court? Why has the JPC, the highest body of parliament, been treated shabbily? Ministers in the past have been asked to resign even when their responsibility was only moral. In the case of scam, they have violated every rule and have played havoc with the funds. Why none has the sensitivity to resign on his own? Rajesh Pilot's proposal to all ministers to submit their resignation to make the job of Rao easy was an honourable way out.

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The Tied-up Donkey Takes on the Tiger

John Ross writes from Morelos, Mexico

Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, Mexico's main opposition politician, is taking another run at ending the governing party's 65-year hold on power. But Gemini News Service reports that the man many Mexicans believe won the 1988 poll is being attacked from the established Right and a re-born Left.



Mexican presidential contender: 'Better organised'

books and probably five-to-ten times that amount off the shelf. It dominates the electronic media and is painting every wall and rock in the nation with the name of its once-unknown candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, the

replacement for President Carlos Salinas' assassinated first choice, Luis Donaldo Colosio.

When Cardenas draws 30,000 to a rally at the National Autonomous University (UNAM), the nation's number one newscaster ignores the event and instead interviews Zedillo for 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, Salinas travels the country, dispensing funds from government give-away programmes to the poor. The PRI pays for polls that "demonstrate" that Cardenas' popularity has shrunk to 11 per cent.

Mexican elections are like a fight between a tiger and a tied-up donkey, says historian Antonio Garcia Leon, and the one-sidedness of the contest is taking its toll on the beleaguered opposition leader. After seven years of relentless barnstorming, the Cardenas campaign seems to be running out of fuel.

Again, as is expected of your newspaper irrespective of your political affiliations, if any, I hope you will indulge me by printing this letter.

M Zahidul Haque
General Secretary, BAI
Teachers' Association

Strengthen their teaching ability.

Sharmin Beg

H-17, Road 8, Dhanmandi,

Dhaka

Salah Ahmed Chowdhury

Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury

Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

BAI teachers

Sir, Mr Abdul Bayes, in his article under the caption "Time to Turn the Tarnished Image" published in The Daily Star on August 13, 1994, denounced fundamentalism and fundamentalists in Bangladesh.

During the last three years, statements, utterances, comments and views of various groups and individuals have been published in Bangladesh newspapers making such denunciations. Some political leaders are not record saying "We will not allow fundamentalism to grow in Bangladesh."

I had written letters to several prominent dailies of Dhaka which carried the news of denunciation, requesting the people concerned to explain or provide clarifications as to what fundamentalism is.

My letters were published in the Letters Columns of the dailies. But till today I have not seen any explanation or clarification or any write-up to that effect.

It is very easy to denounce something but it is not that easy to provide any evidence or argument for the action.

I would not have bothered a damn about the term. But I presume you are aware that there is a street effect of every hullabaloo published in the newspapers of a country like Bangladesh. Very often a man with beard and cap is taunted in the streets as a fundamentalist.

It would appear that every practising Muslim is to be regarded as a fundamentalist.

As such it is in the fitness of social order that they provide explanation as to what is fundamentalism and who are to be regarded as fundamentalists.

It is good that the corporation has put 20 such containers at different points. The City Corporation may also consider collecting the garbage from the doorsteps/gates of the residents in these areas during specified hours when residents will arrange to place

their garbage in gunny bags to be picked up by the City Corporation conservancy service.

The City Corporation can initially supply the gunny bags in collaboration with the Jute Ministry.

Gunny bags are our own products, they are environment friendly and will help our jute industry when used in bulk. And since the bags are expected to be used on a large scale and the use eventually extended to other cities, the jute mills might agree to offer special reduction price.

To reduce cost of collection from the doorsteps/gates/gates of each residence/residential block by the city corporation's waste disposal (conservancy) unit.

Thanks are already due to the Dhaka City