

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 broad-based 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 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 the 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 Sabir 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.

L Al. Bahadur Shastri was the last Congress prime minister who was uncomfortable 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 Nhar's charge that the Congress spent Rs 30 lakh in a byelection 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 his 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

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.

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

But the finance minister could have probably helped 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-

the departments?

What has galled the community — the opposition parties — 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.

By casting aside the report as a 'failure of the system' or by withdrawing it, the

Congress has made light of corruption: it has insulted the house because it was a unanimous report by all parties, including the Congress. The opposition is justified in its anger.

On the other hand, an unconcerned Centre has only given green signal to the states where the administrations are reeling under corruption. Now they will be encouraged in their malpractices. There are numerous examples to show how there is no limit to which organisations and ministers can go for their personal gain.

Take the grabbing of prime property in New Delhi. The late Satpal Mittal, MP, was given 2,000 square yards in 1984 for Rs. 1 lakh to build the Centre for Population Studies for parliamentarians. He put up a huge complex and rented portion of the four-storey building to Navodaya Vidyalaya, a subsidiary of Human Resources Ministry, the portfolio which Narasimha Rao held at one stage. Mittal died in 1992 and his son, Sunil, although not an MP, was nominated to the board of trustees. He has now privatised the complex and eased out former members of parliament Dharam Chand Jain and Mahendra Prasad.

In Punjab, Jagir Singh, minister for development and panchayats, and his son have forcibly occupied a 15-acre plot attached to a school in Khadoor Sahib, near Amritsar. They have not cared for the

court's stay order. Even a contempt notice has remained unheeded for one year because of their political clout. A human rights organisation, which visited the area one month ago, has said in its report 'that the police in Punjab has become a source of terror and horror and is accountable to none.'

At least three ministers in Orissa have been found involved in the Cuttack liquor tragedy of May 1992. In his statement before the Behera Commission, inquiring into the tragedy, Anadi Sahu, the then DiG of Police, has said that the main culprit of the crime, Surinder Das, had 'the explicit support of the powerful ministers of state cabinet and officers of the district administration in the expansion of the illegal hooch empire.' Lately, the three ministers have been putting pressure on police to scuttle the investigation. It is needless to add that the law and order portfolio is under chief minister Biju Patnaik.

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.

The scam was a test whether the ruling Congress, haunted by the Bofors, could retrieve the situation by taking action against the indicted. With what face can the Centre take action against a chief minister for being corrupt? He can turn back and say: 'physician heal thyself. Corruption is not a relative term. It does not become less reprehensible when ministers and top officials are involved.'

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 them. It dominates the electronic media and is painting every wall and rock in the nation with the name of its once-unknown candidate Ezemesto 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.

Rallies lack the spontaneity that marked the last months of the historic 1988 campaign when Cuauhtemoc, as he is universally addressed, finished last. The candidate himself seems fatigued, 'a historic weariness,' in the words of political analyst Jorge Casteneda.

To add to the opposition candidate's woes, Cardenas, who counted on the support of the Left in 1988 and even assumed the Mexican Socialist Party's registration to legalise the PRD, is attacked by a re-born Left stirred up by the success of the rebellion of the Zapatista National Liberation Front in the southern Chiapas state.

Although Cardenas' nationalist, state-oriented political stance has not altered much since 1988 when a fragmented Left was much more willing to overlook differences and jump on the winning bandwagon, the Zapatista uprising has offered

the Left an armed option, new revolutionary heroes, and opened old ideological wounds centring on the validity of participating in the electoral process.

Within the PRD hierarchy — a collection of former PRI members and several currents of the Left, including former guerrillas — the constant jousting for party positions has resulted in shifting allegiances and ill-defined positions.

Candidates are not selected by popular process but by agreements between various factions. The peasants and urban slum-dwellers who form the basis of the party have little role in decision-making and no real participation, except to attend Cardenas' campaign rallies.

More than 250 members of the PRD have been killed in political violence since 1988 and most of the victims have come from the party's rank and file.

Adding to Cardenas' woes was a May visit to rebel terri-

tory in Chiapas during which he was lambasted by popular Zapatista spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos as anti-democratic while his party was equated with the country's two main right-wing parties. The January rebel uprising has dogged Cardenas along the campaign trail with ski-masked Marcos look-alikes often appearing at his rallies along with rebel banners, and the rebels' slogan drawing more support cheers than Cardenas' speeches.

Despite the difficulties on the Left, however, Cardenas' fortunes may yet receive a boost from troubles on the Right.

In 1988, the surprise outpouring of votes for him came from a haemorrhaging PRI whose supporters, dissatisfied with rampant inflation and the party's lack of democracy, cast their ballots for Cardenas, himself a renegade PRI member.

This year, with the ruling party torn into factions by the Colosio assassination, a thwarted presidential bid by the man sent to negotiate with the rebels, and Zedillo's disputed candidacy, the conditions for a similar turn towards Cardenas are once again possible.

JOHN ROSS is an American poet-reporter-activist, with more than three decades experience of covering Mexico.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Students celebrate campus peace accord

Sir, It was heartening for the nation to see the smiling faces of Professor Emajuddin Ahmed, and the student leaders, in The Daily Star photo of August 14th. There was an accord, between the main student bodies on Friday, August 12. The VC deserves our thanks for his initiative in bringing in the student bodies together for a dialogue.

It is only a 'courageous step and not a giant stride'. But the accord signifies that much can be done if the channels of communication between the student bodies and the university authorities are kept free.

Every patriotic person has an important role to play in bringing peace in the university as well as in the nation as a whole.

The 'silent majority' must not remain silent, when our future is at stake.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
51 Siddheswari Road,
Dhaka-1217

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Sir, For the first time in decades sweets have been distributed and flowers exchanged among the students of Dhaka University on August 13, 1994 instead of bullets and bricks.

We rejoice the ebullient and enthusiastic celebrations and also welcome the historic role played by the Vice Chancellor Prof. Emajuddin Ahmed, Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League leaders for the peace accord which we feel is no less

important domestically than the international Arab-Israeli peace accord for peaceful co-existence.

Let sweets and flowers, love and peace, education and discipline be the guiding principles for the students of Dhaka University. We wish them all a happy and prosperous future and all success in life.

Bravo Dhaka University students. Perhaps you have proved that a pen is mightier than a sword.

O H Kabir
Dhaka

Coverage of Ctg incident

Sir, I am a regular reader of 'The Daily Star' and upto now have found the newspaper to be quite satisfactory. But the coverage of the sad and shocking clash between the APSU and the Jamaat in Chittagong on 26th July has surprised and disappointed me. In comparison to all other dailies, both English and Bengali, yours seemed to be the only paper that covered the incident in the minimum way. Also the photograph of the damaged car in Dhaka while many graphic pictures of Chittagong of that day were available, seemed biased.

Am I to conclude that your newspaper has shifted from its supposedly neutral ground and playing down the role of the Jamaat and Shibir in Chittagong?

I hope you will project a true and unbiased picture should such an occasion arise

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

Sharmeen Beg
H-17, Road 8, Dhanmandi,
Dhaka

Sale of jute mills

Sir, Due to persistent loss the government has decided to sell the losing nationalised jute mills. But it is difficult to find out buyers for these. Many of these mills were owned by Pakistani industrialists like Adamjee, Karim, etc. Since Government is encouraging foreigners to set up industries in the country, it may not be a bad idea to hand over these mills to their original owners, without any liability accumulated since independence of Bangladesh. Original owners, by virtue of their experience and expertise, are expected to run the mills efficiently.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

BAI teachers

Sir, The Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI) is a higher agricultural education institution situated at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka. At present it is offering only a four-year BSc Agriculture (Honours) Degree course. The teachers at BAI are always conscious about imparting latest practical knowledge to the students. In this regard, it would be highly appreciated if representatives from BAI are officially invited to attend different seminar, symposium, workshops etc on agriculture and development related issues frequently organized by government organisations as well as NGOs. If the teachers of BAI are given the opportunity to attend such functions, they will definitely learn about the latest developments in the various scientific fields related to agriculture. And this will

strengthen their teaching ability.

M Zahidul Haque
General Secretary, BAI
Teachers' Association

Fundamentalism and fundamentalists

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 no 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.

Mohammad Yusuf
4/2 Zikatala, Dhaka

OPINION

Garbage Collection: The Option is for Jute Bags

A M Alimuzzaman

Garbage stinks. Hence its storage, collection and carriage is quite a problem. In the developed countries garbage is stored into plastic bags and collected weekly by the local councils from the doorsteps of the citizens. In Dhaka too, garbage could be stored into jute bags, especially made for the purpose, and collected twice or thrice a week from the doorsteps/gate of each residence/residential block by the city corporation's waste disposal (conservancy) unit.

Thanks are already due to the Dhaka City Corporation for placing a demounted container for putting daily wastes at the corner of the Hatirpool Kutcha Bazar. It is a busy market on a busy road connecting many important areas and shopping plazas.

The overground waste bins present an awful look with litter scattered all around emitting foul smell and ravaged by pyre-dogs, crows, etc. To a man of joy life becomes suddenly useless and meaningless the moment he approaches the overground waste bins. Suddenly all the development efforts of the government seem meaningless. But this is a common sight in the cities and even a staunch critic of socialism will admit that it has succeeded in Dhaka at least on one point: litters are everywhere irrespective of whether it is Gulshan-Baridhara-Banani, or Dhanmondi-Paribagh-Elephant Road.

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 garbage could be collected twice a week. Considering the nature of the garbage, it cannot be stored for a week in the house.

One big question: who is going to pay for the gunny bags? Certainly no lunch is a free lunch. Someone has to pay for it. The payment has to be made by the beneficiaries. And here they are: the house owners/tenants, the Ministry of Jute and the Ministry of Local Government. The City Corporation might offer the special commission on the gunny bags especially made. The Local Government Ministry or the Ministry of Environment would make up the deficit by allotting some annual grants. This grant is necessary to keep the environment clean which will keep the citizens healthy and happy. There will be lesser pressure on the health system and lesser number of processions and damage of vehicles as citizens will become well-disposed.

(The writer is a former Chief Executive Officer of the Dhaka City Corporation.)