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Manik Sandrasagra

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Four books - essential reading for every Sri Lankan who wants to know why our national institutions from Parliament and Bureaucracy to Universities and the economy are in a state of dysfunction if not crisis.

- ***Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*** by K M de Silva (editor), G H Peiris and Radhika Coomaraswamy, 1993. (Rs 850/=)

The authors try to answer the question "Why has post-independence Sri Lanka not lived up to the promise of its early years of independence?" The political system and political economy of the country, civil liberties, language and religion, defence and external affairs are among the wide range of themes that are dealt with in this publication.

- ***The University System of Sri Lanka: Vision and Reality*** edited by K M de Silva & G H Peiris, 1995. (Rs 600/=)

Written at the time when Peradeniya University celebrated its 50th anniversary, the monograph appraises the achievements and failures of the University System in general, and Peradeniya University in particular, and its contribution to Sri Lanka's development. Contributing authors: Professors Asoka Ekanayake, K N O Dharmadasa, S A Kulasooriya, S N Arseculeratne, B L Panditharatne, Drs. Wijaya Jayatilake, Neelan Tiruchelvam, Messrs. D L O Mendis and W M A Wijeratna Banda.

- ***Development and Change in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Geographical Perspectives*** by G H Peiris, 1996. (Rs 850/=)

This is the most comprehensive analysis of post-independence socio-economic development available today. The author presents a rich variety of quantitative and qualitative data, much of it not readily accessible to the average reader, to support the discussions on a large number of major themes ranging from, Physical Resources Base, Environmental Hazards, Development of Peasant Settlements in the Dry Zone, Plantation Crop Production and Social Welfare Services to Macro-Economic Change: Problems and Prospects.

- ***Regional Powers and Small State Security: India and Sri Lanka 1977-90*** by K M de Silva, 1996. (Rs 850/=)

This is a comprehensive and incisive case study of international relations in a cold-war/post-cold war context. It provides an authoritative study of India's relations with Sri Lanka since the 1970s, and especially of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. This book is largely based on a study of unpublished documents relating to the Indian intervention. The author has also interviewed most of the principal figures involved in policy-making at the highest levels at that time in India and Sri Lanka, including Rajiv Gandhi, J R Jayewardene and J N Dixit.

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THAT WAS THE BILL THAT WAS

Mervyn de Silva

Whatever happened to Mr. Dharmasiri Senanayake, the Media Minister, the mildest of men and friend of the Sri Lankan media? On the way to his office one morning he was suddenly struck down, the press reported, by a "mild attack of authoritarianitis". He must have "caught it" from one of his colleagues at a Cabinet meeting was the popular explanation. But long before he had recovered fully, his ministry had drafted the Broadcasting Authority Bill and submitted it to Parliament. The journalists protested; their unions took to the street, the Opposition Leader pledged that the UNP will not allow the Broadcasting Authority Bill to become law, and several individuals and organisations, political and non-political, raised the issue in court. The petitioners included Dinesh Gunawardena, MEP leader, the Maharajah organisation, one of Sri Lanka's biggest business houses, the Free Media Movement, the DIVAINA editor, Upali Tennekoon, the UNP the TELSHAN network and several others.

On May 6th, there was pandemonium in Parliament when the Speaker, the Hon. K.B. Ratnayake, a SLFP stalwart, announced that the Supreme Court had held that the "Bill as a whole was" inconsistent with the constitution". It had to be passed by a two-thirds majority in the House. The constitution also required a referendum. Chief Justice GPA de Silva, Justice Dr. A.R.B. Amerasinghe and Justice P.Ramanathan comprised the Supreme Court bench.

In a clumsy attempt to dodge the main issue - the ruling PA's commitment to press freedom - Media Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake had told a deputation of the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association that if "any amendments were necessary he was prepared to accommodate them as the Minister in charge". Though trapped, the Minister, an otherwise honest man, tried to wriggle out of the situation by offering to amend the bill to accommodate the views of the profession. A good try.

But too little too late.

An administration that perceives an independent press as a "threat" is almost certain to impose restriction or threaten or harass the editors, journalists and finally the publishers. Censorship is the first step. "The point that needs to be stressed in the context of any society which values the democratic way of life is that the occasions when censorship is regarded as legitimate and appropriate must be treated very much as the exception rather than the rule" advised Prof. G.L.Pieris, at a seminar on "Censorship and Society" in 1991, when he was Colombo University's Vice Chancellor.

In practice, the Broadcasting Authority Bill could mean self-censorship and the self-protective response of publishers, editor, broadcaster or TV producer.

"The title of the Bill is somewhat deceptive in that it catches up not only broadcasting services but also television services as well" argued DYNAVISION BROADCASTING CO. LTD in written submissions to the Supreme Court.

The student of politics has to ask himself some questions. Why is the PA which won a famous victory at the local government election, alienating public opinion, pro-PA constituencies included? The answer is a commonplace. The messenger, the media is bringing bad news rather than good news, three-four-five days a week, including Sundays! Then the old rule is the average ruler's instinctive response. If you cannot make bad news good, the only option is to muzzle the messenger, or occasionally throw him in to jail.

What surprises the observer is that this quite familiar behaviour pattern has become the PA's choice so early... so early that the Policy Statement of the SLFP (2.9.1993) mocks Big Brother/Sister today:

"Independence to be guaranteed to all

forms of media. All newspaper establishments and electronic media such as Rupavahini and Radio shall be made independent. It is proposed to formulate schemes to ensure the protection of media personnel, guarantee security of their employment, adopt a just package of remuneration as well as make training facilities available to them".



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THE IDEAS MAGAZINE

UNP: NO PROMISES, UNPROMISING

Tisarane Gunasekara

J.R.Jayewardene's greatest achievement (as Prof. K.M. de Silva has suggested in the last issue of this magazine) was probably neither the open economy nor the 1978 Constitution. It was the defamilisation of the United National Party. He inherited a party which was led by a father-son duo since its inception (except for a brief interregnum) and turned it into a modern bourgeois - democratic party.

The magnitude of Jayewardene's achievement can only be understood when one looks at the current state of the second largest political party in Sri Lanka. The SLFP commemorated its 45th anniversary this year and party's official anniversary poster said it all ; it contained photographs of three individuals who happened to be members of one nuclear family: papa, mama and daughter! That poster was symbolic of what is most retrogressive and archaic in our society and polity. The curse of familial politics is not limited to Sri Lanka; its ominous presence can be seen in the whole of South Asia. The South Asian political arena is littered with widows, sons and daughters who aspire, more or less successfully, to step into the shoes - or chappals or sandals - of various dead leaders. The utter ludicrousness of this practice of family succession in South Asian politics became obvious when some elements wanted an Italian born woman with no political experience whatsoever to become the Prime Minister of India. Such a thing has not happened even in the supposedly more backward and underdeveloped African countries.

"Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" Marx asked at the conclusion of his 'The British rule in India'. The Asia Marx

was talking about there was really South Asia - that is, the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon. The craze for family succession in South Asian politics, is perhaps the best evidence that the social revolution in Asia that Marx so eagerly awaited is far from complete. In this sense South Asia is the most backward region in the world.

WHY THE UNP SHOULD GOVERN

The UNP, a modern bourgeois - democratic party, is thus a rarity in South Asia. Both J.R.Jayewardene and his successor Ranasinghe Premadasa abhorred familial politics and were supremely contemptuous of and implacably opposed to that exclusive property of one feudal family, the SLFP. Both men were committed to keeping the UNP out of the mire of familial politics. Jayewardene proudly claimed that he had no crown princes or princesses. Premadasa put an abrupt stop to an attempt by some members of the UNP to launch one of his offsprings into politics. (That is why any accommodation with the feudal dominated PA or any claims to leadership based on kinship is not only a distortion but also a betrayal of Premadasa and Premadasaism).

The UNP of today seems uncomfortable with not only Premadasa's radical popular legacy but also with its long, well-established and entrenched *pre*-Premadasa welfarist past. The UNP of today has *also* failed to put forward any new, exciting, innovative ideas on how to address the burning issues of underdevelopment and poverty. In short the UNP of today, compared to both its Premadasaist and much longer pre-Premadasaist past, seems dull and vacuous.

Despite all these obvious weaknesses, it has one great merit which puts it ahead of all the competition. Though thanks to Velupillai Prabhakaran, the UNP today has its share of widows and offsprings who believe that they are the political heirs and heiress of various dead leaders, it still remains a modern bourgeois democratic party - and its leader is neither the widow nor the offspring of a dead predecessor. *Those two facts alone* make the UNP the only party that is fit enough to lead this country into the new century and the new millennium.

If the government goes ahead with its proposed constitutional reforms, a parliamentary election may take place far earlier than scheduled, either this year or next. Even without that, a major electoral contest is due next year in the form of Provincial/Regional council elections. The UNP therefore has a window of opportunity. But is it capable of successfully accepting the challenge?

LEARN FROM SIS

In a post election piece commenting on the future fate of the Conservative party, the prestigious Economist (London) warned: "If they want to give Mr. Blair more victories, the Tories will boldly go where no party has gone before Voters are unlikely to follow" (The Economist 3.5.97). That is precisely what the UNP is doing today - going where no serious political party desirous of winning a multi - party election has gone before (not just in Sri Lanka but also in the world): **vowing that it will not make voters any promises!** A very bold and daring stand indeed - but as the old saying goes, fools dance where angels fear to tread.

The thinking behind this policy probably goes like this: 'the PA will mess up the economy badly and get downright unpopular sooner or later. Then we can win an election automatically -without bothering too much with promises, propaganda and campaigning - and can thus govern untrammelled by welfarist constraints'. The UNP has obviously forgotten its own past. **Despite** the harsh and manifest economic deprivations of '70-'77, **despite** the extreme unpopularity and repressiveness of the SLFP/UF regime and the Bandaranaike family, **the UNP had to make a Herculean effort in order to win in 1977.** There was nothing automatic about that victory ; it was the result of years of hard work and dedication. The

biographers of J.R.Jayewardene record how the government of Mrs. B managed to seize the political initiative as late as 1974 and how "from June 1974 to July/August 1975 when the LSSP was expelled from the government, JR and the UNP were under relentless pressure". The success of the UF government's own political counter campaign was such that "Soon UNP parliamentarians and potential candidates were negotiating with the SLFP to cross over to the government!" If JR and the UNP waited passively for governmental power to fall into their laps, the historic 1977 victory may never have happened. Therefore, the Economist's word of warning to the UNP's newly proclaimed 'sister party' in Britain is equally applicable to the UNP in Sri Lanka: "If the Tories want power back in five, ten or fifteen years, they too will have to earn it.... It means providing a *competent opposition* with sensible *alternative policies...*" (Economist May 3rd'97 - my italics - T.G).

'Alternative policies' (sensible or otherwise) is just what the UNP doesn't have today. Forget promises (if there's such irrational antipathy towards them); let's concentrate on principles. O.k, so what is the UNP's *principled* stand on the government's Package? What is the UNP's *principled* stand on burning issues such as cost of living or poverty or homelessness? However dissatisfied and unhappy the voters may be about the PA's (disastrous) performance in these areas, they would still want to know what *alternatives* the UNP is proposing, before they make up their minds. If the UNP does not give them that opportunity, then they may decide to 'hold their noses' and vote with the status quo.

The UNP fought one election without making any official promises or proposing any alternatives - and the outcome is hardly encouraging. Political parties, not just in the Third World where there are more needy people who expect deliverance from the state, but also in the First World, make promises during elections. This is as true of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair as it is of Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl. The challenge is to make promises which are not only attractive and but also viable and realistic. Gone are the days that a political party could promise to bring rice even from the moon. Such promises, which insult the intelligence of the voters should be avoided at all costs.

But the alternative is *not* to do a pendulum swing and stubbornly refuse to make *any* promises. Economists can wax eloquent on the virtues of a lean state; but political parties intent on winning elections cannot do a Pontius Pilate and wash their hands off the responsibility of working actively to ensure the well being of their people... and leave everything to the market. In fact *the Economist warns the Tory Party that it should avoid resorting to "pledges of huge tax cuts and promises not just of less spending and limits to government but of the utopia of a minimalist state"* (Ibid.). *And with good reason. According to the latest Economist - MOR1 poll, 76% of the British people want to extend health, education and welfare services even if it means some tax increases (compared to 64% in 1991). In other words more government spending and more government commitment on welfare and other social issues. This in a first world country and at a time of an economic upturn! How much more applicable this would be to a poor, underdeveloped Third World country like Sri Lanka which is in the throes of an economic crisis?*

If the UNP does not understand this reality what happened to the British Liberal Party in the early years of this Century may happen to the UNP: "*There was no compelling set of issues and no overwhelming set of social forces that made the death of the Liberals inevitable. They just managed to screw up*" (Ibid.).

ANOTHER ELECTORAL DEFEAT?

Elections are battles - sometimes (lamentably) violent and sometimes (laudably) non violent - but battles nevertheless. And battles cannot be won without plans, manifestos, promises (made either to the civilian populace or the combatants or both), organisation and propaganda. J.R.Jayewardene's biography records how "Throughout 1975 JR had *kept the party machinery ready for immediate action in case the government called or was compelled to call a general election ... Candidates have been chosen for each parliamentary constituency; district co-ordinators, generally senior parliamentarians, had been picked and committees of the party had been selected to provide candidates with legal advice, propaganda material and where and when necessary, with money to sustain their local campaigns and campaign workers*".

The new UNP however seem to be
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extending its antipathy to economic planning, and its naïve belief in the free play of market forces, to the arena of electoral politics as well!

President Chandrika on the other hand seems to be looking ahead and preparing for the coming battles. Recently she approved a massive pay hike to Samurdhi co-ordinators - obviously with the intention of using them as an 'advance guard' at any upcoming election. The PA's show of strength on May 1st was also aimed at the electoral battles to come. The UNP's failure to tie up the regime in litigation over the PA perpetrated malpractices and violence at the local government polls (apart from a couple of statements and isolated petitions in the immediate aftermath) is likely to make the PA think that they can follow a similar procedure at the next election too and get away with it.

The UNP has to get its act together fast if it is to avoid another debacle. The PA and Chandrika are formidable enemies because (and only because) of their single minded determination to win and keep on winning all elections. The UNP cannot hope to defeat such an opponent without a programme (i.e. promises) and without proper party organisation. (The party could not even handle the nomination process properly - as evidenced by the large number of rejections at the local government polls). Without attractive and viable slogans and policy platforms, without an effective party machinery, how and with what can the UNP fight the upcoming electoral battles?

Another electoral defeat for the UNP will be disastrous for both the party and the country. If the PA is in the saddle for another six years it will ruin the economy (see Prof. Buddhadasa Hewavitharana's remarks in this magazine) and thus probably pave the way for another JVP insurrection. And if the UNP suffers another defeat it will strengthen those backward elements within the party which would either want 'our own' Bandaranaike to lead the fight against 'their' Bandaranaike or press the claims of this or that widow/offspring. And if the UNP succumbs to that unspeakable evil of familial politics, all that J.R.Jayewardene built and Ranasinghe Premadasa defended would be lost.

Mahen Vaithianathan

SOCIAL TERRORIST

Manik Sandrasagra

A strange silence grips the circus. The sound of mirth and laughter is no more. The chief clown passed away 4 days after his 67th birthday on the 22nd of April. Happy Birthdays were sung, a cake consumed, a flicker of a smile for a few close friends, and he never returned.

Mahen now becomes legend. Colombo can never be the same again. We have lost our finest iconoclast, who suffered pseudo-intellectuals badly and lived life practicing a sort of social terrorism in Colombo's intellectual circuit. A sort of terrorism best described by the Swiss Nobel Prize winner, Canetti, in a book he subsequently hid from me having first introduced me to it.

Our fathers attended the same schools at the same time. Our families were friends. However, nothing prepared me for the man Mike Wilson introduced to me in 1971 and who later became my friend, and fellow traveller.

Mahen as I know him was a practicing tantric. His pooja was life itself. Like a comet he blazed his way through life burning away all the dross, much misunderstood because of his sparkling intellect which was way ahead of all his colleagues. Having no respect for the inferior philosophers of our age, Mahen championed Newton Gunasinghe, Ranjit Fernando, Bruce Kapferrer and Siran Deraniyagala, all of whom in turn knew, respected and admired him both as a friend and an important catalyst in intellectual activity both here and abroad.

Mahen used the English Language like a sword. His range of interests was large and yet he had instant recall of

any subject or author among the many books on his shelves. Always finding the time to explain a point to whosoever was seriously interested, Mahen showed great compassion for those he cared for. He was also a lover of everything 'female' - a Shakta; hence women were spared his vitriolic sarcasm.

I have sat many times in his home, and, in various parts of the island, sometimes in his battered Ford Consul, watching him destroy so-called experts with his cutting remarks, incisive wit, wisdom and insight. Mahen, as Mike Wilson described him was "The Dravidian Showcase".

Yes, Mahen was a Dravidian to boot but no Eelamist, since he had transcended such things as race and class and when inebriated he participated in the eternal 'Dance of the Siddhas'. No name, no caste, no family, no friends - just aspects of Siva - the cosmic dancer.

He carried much paternal baggage on his shoulders, wherein Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan, independent Lanka's first Foreign Secretary, ended up in retirement as a Sannyasi in Tirukethiswaram in Mannar, sleeping in railway waiting rooms and carrying cement on his back to re-build this ancient shrine to Shiva. Mahen however, lived his life creating his own niche independent of his illustrious father. Yet there was a question reserved for those he met for the first time. "My family builds temples. What do you do?"

Dancing and ranting like a mad man,

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having broken the bonds of middle class existence, tutored by that great Siddha Swami Gauribala, all from the lineage of Yogaswami of Jaffna, who his dearly beloved mother Lady Vaithianathan immortalized with a sketch that now adorns her living room : Mahen was the ring master, pacing his living room looking like a tiger with a cigarette in his hand, smoking, drinking and talking endlessly, drawing from Guenon and Coomaraswamy to Andy Capp - with equal intensity and clarity. Colombo was once described as the '*Mecca of Mediocrity*' but Mahen proved it otherwise.

I was in New Delhi when I heard the news of his passing. I had sat with him each day prior to my departure, knowing very well that I will never see him again. I am the next in line of seniority in this ancient lineage that celebrates death not mourns it, yet I am grateful for the distance that separated us, for naturally I would have had tears to shed for a man whose mind and tastes I admired and loved.

The Capri, Otters and the Rowing Club, snobbish bastions of a westernized urban middle class, were also his stage. One year ago, on his birthday, I accompanied him with Chitrasena to two of these clubs and we made the Press both here and abroad. We were declared '*persona non grata*' for wearing simple sarongs !

Mahen cried for the suffering he saw around him. He was finally a 'softy'. Mental breakdown, divorce, social chaos and further conflict was what he saw as the future. Deeply passionate, having gone against the stream

Contd on page 14

THE LANKAN LEFT : SOCIAL CHANGE OR PARTISAN REVANCHISM?

H. L. D. Mahindapala

Once upon a recent time, so begins a fable in the local lore, the Sri Lankan President went to inaugurate Parliament and in her opening sentence she declared: "Honourable members of the House, as you all know when I took over the country the economy was on the edge of a dangerous brink. Now, I am proud to say, that we have taken the great leap forward!"

This piquant story has a moral to it: it points once again to the stark reality that the SLFP-Left Coalitions have never been good managers of the economy. Their political rhetoric is not matched with the delivery of the essential goods and services that can uplift the nation as a whole. Besides, the "socialism" introduced by the 'Marxist' Coalitionists — particularly the Trotskyites who are the main focus of this essay — failed to transform Sri Lanka, or the Marxist movements, in any meaningful way into the higher stage they envisaged. As the Trotskyites moved away from their early idealism they lurched from one end of the political spectrum to another, playing only a subservient role to their "class enemies" who finally crushed them.

VOODOO ECONOMICS

Their various alliances with the SLFP bred a kind of "socialism" which was more related to naked vindictiveness than to Marxism. The Marxists hailed the take over of the private bus companies in the name of socialism but in their eyes it was essentially meant to be another attack on pro-UNPers — e.g. Gamini Bus Company of S. De. S. Jayasinghe, UNP MP for Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia. The bus companies were

nationalised ostensibly to improve the transport system which, of course, never occurred. Lake House was seen as the bastion of pro-UNP politics and it was nationalised to undermine what they thought was the power base of the 'right-wing'. Ceylon Insurance which was owned by Justin Kotelawela, brother of Sir John Kotelawela, too was taken over because they accused that its nation-wide network of insurance agents were lobbying against the SLFP-Left coalition. The Business Acquisition Act, though dressed up as an anti-capitalist move, was essentially a political tool which came in handy for the Coalition to threaten the business community in case they stepped out of their political line.

To the Coalitionists nationalisation was not an innovative means of planning the economy or restructuring society. Nor was it aimed directly at taking over the commanding heights of the economy for distributive justice. In their eyes, the nationalisation of viable economic centres was a political weapon to undermine the financial base of the UNP. The destruction of the UNP — the primary "class enemy" — and those allied to the UNP, was the main thrust of their politics. Though the Left crowed about nationalisation as a progressive, socialistic movement that would take the nation to the higher stage of their ultimate revolution, the basic thinking of the Coalitionists was that if they destroyed the economic strongholds which tended to be pro-UNP then the political trends would automatically turn in their favour. Their ideological fixations made them believe that the workers — and under certain conditions even the peasants — would turn into socialists

and carry them into the seats of power. They, of course, had no reason to doubt this because they thought that their guru, Marx, had predicted this as an inevitable trend in history.

What they failed to realise was that the UNP, founded on the national personalities of the Senanayakes and the liberalism of their economic and democratic policies, had established a solid base in the political culture. While the Left focused on the cities the Senanayakes threw all their energies on the neglected peasantry, opening up land and creating new growth centres for the people and the nation as a whole. Their pragmatism was based on the traditional tank, temple and hydraulic engineering. Dudley Senanayake's philosophy was that any industrial growth must be built on a solid agricultural base. The left, however, went for imported doctrines of urban revolutions, or sporadic sprees of nationalisation, which never turned up trumps either for them or for the nation. The reversal of all their policies by their "progressive" allies in the SLFP and the return to UNP capitalism, with the backing of the 'Marxists', will, in due course, reduce all their labours to a few tragic footnotes in Sri Lankan history.

The centre stage of history, no doubt, will be captured by the 'right-wing'. The UNP which remained as their bitter "class enemy" will occupy a more glorious place than the left. The interplay of the so-called class forces will merit as much consideration as Marxism in Dr. De Silva's history of *Ceylon Under the British*. The triumph of the 'right' over the 'left' in this century is a story that will be told in greater detail by later historians. A common thread that will

run through this historical narrative will undoubtedly be how the Leftists took on the UNP as their primary target and failed to make any lasting damage. Unable to beat the UNP at the mass level, the left-wing Coalitionists opted for vindictive "socialism" which failed to take the nation in the leftward direction, or to any other higher stage they were expecting. On the contrary, their brand of "socialism" blocked progress and pushed the nation into the dark ages where children could not find milk, where the movement of rice — for the first time in this nation's history — was controlled by the police guarding rice barriers and where rice consumption was limited to three days of week. The socialists who promised to bring rice even from the moon and give two measures free had no compunction in substituting manioc and *bathala* for rice.

The mass migration of Sri Lankans to greener pastures abroad gathered momentum in the sixties and seventies when the SLFP-Left Coalitionists were enforcing double standards which, for instance, gave special "socialist" privileges for a Bandaranaike offspring to leap straight from Bridget's Convent to Sorbonne — a privilege not granted to other Sri Lankan children even if their parents were prepared to finance their children's education abroad. Mahagama Sekera wrote one the most moving poems of the seventies when he addressed Lord Buddha and told him, with a touch of irony, that it was possible for him to renounce the world because his child, Prince Rahula, was ensconced comfortably in the palace whereas, "me — a poor man who cannot even find a sip of milk for my kids — how can I leave them and follow you, My Lord?" (This is a totally inadequate and very loose summary of his long poem, retrieved from memory.) The bitter grief in Mahagama Sekera's lines captured the suffering endured by the people under the SLFP-Left policies which drove the people to near starvation levels.

Those were grim, dark days when the Marxist rhetoric was a mask to cover their vindictive politics. It took a long time for these pseudo-socialists to accept that liberal economic policies were superior to their hog-wash. Those left-wingers who lived long enough saw

their socialist structures collapse like the Berlin Wall. Their Marxism was more of a virus that debilitated the minds of the rebellious youth. Those who found places in western academia were more prone to catch the virus than those who stayed at home. For instance, some returned home from France only to march into estates waving the red banner and ejecting the legitimate owners who were the mainstay of the economy. Today the nation is paying dearly for their failure to rise above ill-conceived politics of nationalisation, rationalised by a veneer of imported ideological ravings that neither served them nor the nation as a whole. In fact, it was their brand of "socialism" that throttled the economy in its infancy.

ETHNICITY, NATIONALISM

What is more, it was their "socialist" policies — some of which were authored and implemented by the Marxist "golden brains" — that led to deterioration of inter-ethnic relations. The massive expansion of the state sector created a phobia among the minority Tamils. They felt that their future was under threat by the state-controlled economy. Under colonial rule the state bureaucracy was the biggest employer that gave them secure job opportunities. In the absence of the growth of the private sector, the Tamils, who depended solely on the public service for their job security, felt that 'socialism' was expanding the public sector without a commensurate increase of their chances within it.

It was a time when the left intellectuals, whether they belong to Stalinist, Maoist, Castroist or Trotskyist varieties, were driven by their misguided romance with utopianism. They swayed with the prevailing intellectual winds of the time. Returning home from the west, carrying with them the intellectual Marxist baggage collected mostly in London and Paris, they argued that they could improve the conditions of the dispossessed if their socialist principles were implemented. The first generation of Marxists who returned home in the thirties had a more vital ingredient in their politics than abstract Marxism: their anti-imperialist role gave them an additional impetus to their Marxism. This made it easier for the masses who were not so politicised during the last phase

of colonialism to identify themselves with the left. Their jail-break on the night of April 7, 1942 and their escape into India gave them with an aura of heroism. It was a phase in which the public identified them as nationalists rather than as Marxists.

But in India and in Sri Lanka grass-root nationalist movements, rising from traditional cultures, overtook the left and marginalised them. D. S. Senanayake spearheaded the first wave of nationalism when he freed Sri Lanka from nearly five centuries of colonialism. With that the local Marxists lost the edge that Mao and Ho Chi Minh had of mobilising the masses on a nationalistic front to make a two-pronged attack: (1) wage war against foreign imperialists and (2) simultaneously dethrone the local agents of colonial masters. Mao fighting the Japanese imperialists in Manchuria and Ho Chi Minh fighting the French and the American rallied the masses under the red banner of anti-imperialism, together with anti-feudalism and sailed to power on the seas of rising nationalism. Marxist theoreticians hailed the red sails and disregarded the strong currents of nationalism. Marxists read it as the irreversible tide of the promised revolution and not as tsunamic movements of anti-imperialism carrying Marxist leaders on the crest of the sweeping waves of nationalism. They failed to recognise Mao, Castro and Ho Chi Minh as nation-builders using Marxist ideology to unify the diverse groups together.

The post-World War II waves of nationalism manifested itself in many forms. In India nationalism emerged as non-violent Gandhism and in China it was revolutionary Maoism all the way after the enlightened nationalism of Sun Yat-sen failed under the corrupt regime of Chiang Kai-shek. The failure to export revolution to the Third World was basically because the nationalist forces outside China and Vietnam were led by non-Marxists. In other words, Marxism developed into a grass-root movement only when it allied itself with the local nationalist movements. Marxism without nationalism had no guaranteed future. The Sri Lankan left was beaten hollow by the nationalist elite who grasped the dynamics of their time far better than the dogmatic Marxists.

ANTI "ANTI-OBITUARY"

Rejoinder to D. L. O. Mendis - Part 2

K M de Silva

(PhD. London, D. Litt. London).

Even less credible than his charges of nepotism against J R Jayewardene is the accusation, boldly made that:

"Although mention is made of the riots of August 1977, no mention is made of J R's action as the new Prime Minister after the unprecedented July 1977 electoral victory, in sending police personnel on leave and allowing his supporters to run riot. Those riots though directed mainly at political opponents of his party, also affected Tamils in many areas.."

The only point at which this statement reaches anything approaching accuracy or authenticity is that there were attacks by UNP supporters on their opponents in some parts of the country in the wake of their success at these elections. Every other statement in this passage has no basis in fact. *The claim that J R sent "police personnel on leave" in order to allow his supporters to attack their opponents, can only be described as being blatantly untrue; it is a figment of Mr Mendis's imagination. Nothing of the sort happened; on the contrary, curfew was declared in many trouble spots and the police and the army were sent in to restore order.* The curfew was imposed on 23 July 1977 in the Assistant Government Agent's (AGA's) divisions of Divulapitiya, Nittambuwa and Minuwangoda, and the Districts of Kegalla, Matale and Kandy. (Mr Mendis, as we know, has been a resident of Kandy for 25 years or more.) Nor is there any truth in Mr Mendis's claim that any Tamils were attacked in the course of the post-election violence in July 1977. *Perhaps Mr Mendis was confusing this with what happened in May 1970 in the aftermath of the victory of the United Front, when UF mobs ran riot for several days with no effort on the part of the government to bring them under con-*

trol. (Even on that occasion no Tamils were attacked.)

JR, THE SLFP AND THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

Insofar as one could pick central themes, or a central theme in the second part of Mr Mendis's disjointed essay, there is, first of all, an attempt to absolve the Bandaranaike husband and wife, of any responsibility for the origins of Sri Lanka's present ethnic conflict, and secondly to attach all the blame for it on J R Jayewardene. Second, there is a persistent attempt to deny him any credit for the attempts he made to resolve the conflict.

Let me repeat that the essay I wrote in the *Lanka Guardian* was a lengthy obituary on J R Jayewardene, not a study of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. In the course of that essay I did make some reference to the role of Mrs Bandaranaike, in particular, in aggravating an already difficult situation, and these brief references have become a take-off point for D L O Mendis's own political commentary on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, some aspects or episodes of which he deals with in great detail, and with a cavalier disregard for facts. I have written about the origins of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in a number of articles and monographs and after years of study of the problem the inevitable conclusion was that in any assessment of responsibility for the origins of the problem the Bandaranaike, husband and wife, who ruled the country from 1956 to 1977, except for the years 1965-1970, would top the list of those most culpable.

Rather than make this point in detail here myself, let me quote an extract from a review article on Sri Lanka written by an American political scientist, Donald

Horowitz who has earned an international reputation for his classic work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (published in 1985) and, more to the point, someone who has a sound understanding of Sri Lanka's politics, having written a book on the attempted *coup d'etat* of 1962. The three books on Sri Lanka he reviewed on 23 February 1987 in the well-known American journal, *The New Republic*, were Yasmine Gooneratne's *Relative Merits: A Personal View of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka*; S J Tambiah's *Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy in Sri Lanka* and Mick Moore's *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka*. This is what he has to say about the Bandaranaike and the origins of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict:

"The conflict is better understood in terms of developments over the last 30 years. Bandaranaike's attacks on his own class were soon overtaken by his attack on the Tamils. The first thing Bandaranaike did in 1956 was to push legislation through Parliament making Sinhala the official language and ignoring Tamil. Soon there were anti-Tamil riots. They were followed by much bigger riots in 1958..."

"Discrimination against Tamils in government employment began with the regime of S W R D Bandaranaike, but his widow and successor as Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, turned the preference for Sinhala-Buddhists into a fine art. Still, the Tamils remained committed to a united Sri Lanka. Mrs Bandaranaike returned to power in 1970, after five years in opposition, during which time the Tamils enjoyed a respite from her policies. Upon her return, two crushing blows fell on the Tamils. The first was the constitution of 1972... The second was "standardization of marks", a euphemism for adding points to Sinhalese ex-

amination grades... Standardization of marks applied at the gateway to university education, and its results were immediately felt in the dramatic declines in Tamil university enrollment. Those Tamils who began to argue in the late 1970s for a violent solution had half a generation of disappointed students to draw upon for recruits."

Horowitz does not absolve others from part at least of the responsibility, - nor would I, contrary to Mr Mendis's assumption throughout his essay - but he is surely right in putting *most* of the blame on the Bandaranaiques and in identifying them as *initiators of the three policies which precipitated and aggravated the conflict. These were: the language policy of the Bandaranaiques; the constitution of 1972; and the policy of standardization of marks.* Let me turn to Mr Mendis's version of things.

"S W R D Bandaranaike who had won that election [of 1956] with the support of the "Sinhalese masses", and introduced the "Sinhala only" bill, had made sincere attempts to appease the Tamils thereafter. Firstly he qualified the "Sinhala only" with "Tamil also".... Next he tried to negotiate the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, but this was abrogated on account of the opposition led by none other than J R himself, who was in fact in the political wilderness at that time ... Professor K M de Silva makes no reference at all to J R's disruption of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, but tries instead to show that Bandaranaike policies had antagonised the Tamils, and that J R had to make amends."

This extract has all the characteristics of D L O Mendis's style of writing: getting the facts wrong, twisting known facts, and ignoring others when they do not support his tendentious contentions. To argue that I have made no reference to J R's disruption of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact is a half-truth. Certainly I made no reference to it in the essay that has provoked this choleric response from Mr Mendis, but if he had only turned to the J R biography he would have found a detailed study of J R's march to Kandy the only such study so far. He has either not read the biography or having read it has still decided to make the accusation that I had not referred to it.

D L O Mendis repeats the old myth that it was J R's opposition that compelled

Bandaranaike to abruptly abandon his pact with Chelvanayakam. Let us look at the dates and facts. J R's march began on 3 October 1957; it faced government sponsored violence all the way from Colombo and had no police protection; it was over by 5 October 1957, stopped at Imbulgoda by the intervention of a crowd led by a government MP, S D Bandaranaike, a kinsman of S W R D Bandaranaike (D L O Mendis may have called him a "nephew"). Thus it covered just 15 miles in two days, and was called off - he was compelled to call it off by the police acting on the instructions of the government - 57 miles from its destination. In short J R's "march" was stopped by Bandaranaike with consummate ease. Yet the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact was repudiated on 4 April 1958, i.e. *about 9 months later, and its abrogation had nothing to do with J R's opposition. Bandaranaike had succumbed to pressure from the bhikkhus who had been so largely responsible for winning him mass support in his election campaign of 1955-1956, through the ad-hoc organisation known as the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP).*

A large group of bhikkhus led by many of the prominent members of the EBP squatted on the lawn of his private residence in Rosmead Place, and just refused to move until the pact with Chelvanayakam was abandoned. The Prime Minister succumbed to the pressure, literally and metaphorically tore up the pact, and what is worse, got the national radio, Radio Ceylon as it was then called, to announce the abrogation.

Mr D L O Mendis's statements, quoted earlier by me in this essay, on the "Sinhala Only bill", are nothing short of jejune. He talks of the "Sinhala Only bill" - as though it was a rather innocuous item of legislation when it was the central piece of the political programme of Bandaranaike's government, the one on which he fought the election promising "Sinhala Only" in 24 hours, the one on which a whole army of *bhikkhus* and other language enthusiasts had toured the electorates, and conducted a house to house campaign on his behalf. That bill publicly repudiated the agreement on language reached in the State Council in 1943-44, the essence of which was that English would be replaced by Sinhalese and Tamil as the country's official languages by the mid-1950s. In arguing that Bandaranaike "... made sincere attempts to appease the Tamils thereafter" Mr Mendis is completely oblivious to the irony in the juxtaposition

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of the words "sincere" and "appease". Moreover the "appeasement" came after two sets of riots, one in 1956 and one in 1958. Mr Mendis ignores the background against which the *Reasonable Use of Tamil Act* of 1958 was passed by Parliament - with the Federal Party MPs under house arrest, along with the Jatika Vimukti Peramuna MP, K M P Rajaratna. Again, although this piece of legislation was approved by Parliament, the regulations that were essential to make them legally effective were not submitted for parliamentary approval in Bandaranaike's life-time. *Nor did his successor* - his widow Sirimavo Bandaranaike - undertake this task. *Eventually it was left to a UNP-led coalition government to do this* - in 1966. Mr D L O Mendis may remember that it was J R Jayewardene who moved the resolution on these regulations in parliament, and he did it against the background of a mass agitation against the regulations led by Mrs Bandaranaike's SLFP and the parties of the left, the LSSP and the Communist Party (Moscow wing).

Virtually every paragraph of Mr D L O Mendis's essay contains examples of misreporting, ignorance if not concealment of known facts and data, and glib statements for which no evidence is provided. It would be a tiresome exercise to deal with them all. I will confine myself to just three.

The first of these is his reference to two episodes in the aftermath of the July 1983 riots.

"One other item may be mentioned - the slaughter of Tamil political prisoners in Welikade jail on two separate occasions. Government simply disclaimed responsibility, saying that it was the result of prison riots (interestingly when there was a jail-break by Tamil prisoners from Batticoloa jail sometime later, the Minister in charge resigned - and proceeded to take up a UN appointment in Paris which had obviously been negotiated over a long period of time, earlier. The jail-break came at the right moment to be used as an apparent cause for resignation on principle. It deceived nobody, because it was well-known that the Minister suffered from an almost incurable disease for he was desperately anxious to seek treatment abroad - at state expense. The whole sordid episode did not cause comment because there were far more dreadful things happening on a day to day basis under J R's self-styled *dharmishta* regime."

This is an unbelievable mixture of jumbled chronology and misstatements and sheer invention with a few indisputable facts thrown in. There are two undisputed facts in the statement quoted above: the two prisons massacres at Welikade in the aftermath of the riots of July 1983; and some time later in September 1983, a jail break of Tamil prisoners at Batticaloa. No Minister resigned in 1983 acknowledging responsibility for the prison massacre or the Batticaloa jail break. There was, however, the resignation of the then Minister of Justice (Nissanka Wijeyaratne) in 1988 i.e. over 4 years later, at the time of the JVP-inspired prison disturbances at the tail-end of J R Jayewardene's administration. Moreover, Nissanka Wijeyaratne neither sought, nor obtained, an UN appointment. He was appointed Sri Lanka's Ambassador to France during the presidency of R Premadasa (1989-1993). The only connection of such an appointment with the UN was a peripheral one, in the sense that Sri Lanka's Ambassador to France sometimes also held the post of Ambassador to UNESCO whose headquarters were in Paris. D L O Mendis's egotistical assertions that the Minister "suffered from an almost incurable disease for which he was desperately anxious to seek treatment abroad - at state expense" and that the appointment "had obviously been negotiated over a long period of time" are nothing more than a retailing of scurrilous bazaar gossip. That however, is in keeping with the essence of Mr D L O Mendis's political commentary in this article, written in the style of *The National Enquirer*, the well-known (or notorious, as some would have it) US news magazine, generally sold in supermarkets, which carries reportage of this sort. Apart from all this, a glib reference to a person's "incurable disease" in an article of this nature when the person concerned is alive and well and living in the same town as D L O Mendis himself, is in every poor taste.

The second item I wish to refer also deals with the riots of 1983. Here is a series of statements for which Mr Mendis provides no supporting evidence at all. On the contrary such evidence as is available in published sources, would contradict every sentence in this extract and yet he sets it all out in the most confident tone, like some pontifical assertion for which no proof is required.

"Several facts concerning this violence [of

July 1983] have therefore to be mentioned here. For example, the possibility of an outbreak of violence on July 21, had been anticipated by police intelligence in Colombo, but the message was not well received by higher authority. A request to cancel the burials scheduled to take place at the general cemetery, Kanatte, on July 21 morning, when the arrival of the remains from Jaffna was being delayed, and to disperse the funerals to the respective villages of the thirteen dead soldiers, was negated, presumably by J R as Supreme Commander of the Sri Lanka forces."

Finally, there is the third extract from part II of D L O Mendis's essay:

"Where is the evidence" he asks, "that the SLFP, in association with the JVP organised street demonstrations against the Indo-Sri Lanka treaty? On the contrary, one may recall that unorganised and spontaneous resentment against the treaty erupted all over the country outside the north and east, because it was sprung on the nation without discussion even in parliament."

Here is a characteristic D L O Mendis technique - to deny the obvious and to do the denial in style. During this period many people, and I myself, saw important SLFP MPs marching along Dalada Vidiya in Kandy urging people to come out against the agreement; inciting them to acts of violence. Mr Mendis must have been living in another country at the time, perhaps in another planet, if he missed what virtually every body else in Kandy saw as an organised effort to rouse the people to violence against the Accord. Nor was Kandy exceptional in this regard. On the contrary the campaign was better organised and more violent in and around Colombo and its suburbs. I have provided a great deal of evidence - including documentary sources - in the J R Jayewardene biography to support the fact that the opposition to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was organised by the SLFP and JVP acting *in tandem*. In addition, I have in my possession a copy of the handbill issued by Mrs Bandaranaike from 65 Rosmead Place (it carried no date) calling on people to gather at Vihara Maha Devi Park to compel the government to abandon the Accord, at 8 a m on 29 July, 1987. The venue was changed to the Fort Railway Station, and the handbill was altered with a sentence written in ink to that effect. Later on the venue was shifted to the bo-tree near the Pettah bus-stand.

The events of that week attracted the world's press. The anti-accord campaign was front cover news in both *Time* and *Newsweek*. Let me quote from the report carried by the *New York Times* (the report was written by Seth Mydans on 29 July 1987).

"The rioting began in the early morning when thousands political supporters of a former Prime Minister, Sirima Bandaranaike, carrying small black plastic flags, joined 150 monks in orange robes who sat in the shade of a sacred Bo-Tree near the market place.

The men with black flags stopped passing buses and forced their passengers to join them. Speaking into a hand-held microphone, the monks urged the crowd to protect the nation from division and warned of an eventual take-over by India"

I could quote several similar accounts of the day's - indeed the week's - events. But this should suffice to refute Mr Mendis's fanciful claim of a spontaneous outburst, or spontaneous and uncoordinated outbursts, in Colombo and various parts of the island directed against the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

In concluding this long response to Mr D L O Mendis's criticisms of my tribute to J R Jayewardene on the latter's death, let me repeat what I said earlier, that he has set a new style in political journalism by using somebody else's essay as the occasion for a rather uncoordinated, bitterly vituperative attack on the author of the essay and the person to whom the essay paid a posthumous tribute. He could have done better by writing a piece on J R Jayewardene himself - he announces that he intends to do so " ... it should be stated that an even more extensive body of facts may be drawn upon for a more comprehensive critique at a later time." If and when he writes that "more comprehensive critique" I hope the "extensive body of facts" will not be of the kind he resorted to in his present essay. He might even try his hand at doing the basic research, i.e. checking his facts, before he writes another piece of political commentary. As it is, his "anti-obituary" brings to mind a line from Byron: "As he knew not what to say, he swore."

(This correspondence is now closed - Ed).

WEAKENING GROWTH :

THE PACKAGE AND SUBNATIONAL GOVTS

Buddhadasa Hewavitharana

Prof. Hewavitharana, was advisor to Dr. N.M.Perera when te latter was the Finance Minister).

He was interviewed exclusively for the Lanka Guardian by S.H.A. Mohamed, Senaratne Ponnampereuma and Hasantha Srilal Hettiaarachchi.

Q: Going back to my earlier question about what appeared to be a contradiction between a strengthening of the state and the required reducing of the state, could you explain to me how these two can be reconciled and how the devolution package affects these two aspects?

A: The foregoing has made clear what is meant by strengthening the state for pursuing growth through adjustment. It means that policy making should be centralised and that it should be flexible. It was shown that the devolution package would affect both. Sharing of powers for policy making would weaken the centre's powers and dilute policy making and at the same time deprive the centre of the ability to respond to challenger with the required swiftness in policy changes. This applies not only to policy making but also to implementation.

This is what is meant by strengthening the state in policy making. It does not contradict a reduction of the state or a rolling back of the state. Structural adjustment visualises a shift to an economy driven by market forces and economic growth led by private sector enterprise and initiatives. The

consensus here is that the role of the state that is appropriate for promoting growth is one of facilitator and promoter of private sector led growth. Direct involvement of the state in production and related economic matters is to be reduced to the minimum possible. The state is rolled back. Playing the role of facilitator and promoter necessarily implies good governance. In this context there aren't any of the contradictions that you mentioned. Policy making is centralised and the centre possesses the necessarily flexibility to adjust, adapt or improve its policies and their implementation while the state is rolled back away from direct involvement in production and interference or intervention in economic affairs to remain at a position of facilitator and promoter practising good governance.

If the state must necessarily be rolled back for it to successfully pursue the growth objective then the devolution package is one that would impede the state from playing such role.

The package would instead of enabling a rolling back of the state, increase the size of the government because to the central government would be added several new sub-national governments and the total size of the government will increase. That would impede private initiative and not promote it. It would deprive the private sector of resources that could be used by it rather than facilitate investment by the private sector.

Q: Can you explain the second point

above - about the resources being diverted to the public sector?

A: I explained earlier how the state got into difficulties because of a continued playing of the role of provider/distributor. The pursuit of growth through structural adjustment requires that the state shifts from provider/distributor role to one of facilitator and promoter of new wealth and new opportunities creation by the private sector. Here I see the devolution package working as an impediment to this shift in the role of the state and its transformation. It would rather promote a continuation at a higher level of that ruinous role of provider/distributor.

Let me explain. The package would not only enable a continuation of the provider/distributor role but would also strengthen it by creating eight or nine new sub-national governments cast in the mould of provider/distributor. Their expenditure areas are clearly identified. These are the subjects which involve expenditures but the development and growth roles of these sub-national governments are not so clearly identified. Now, we know that in the political culture that prevails in our country the building of political power bases by politicians is linked intimately with the traditional provider/distributor role of the state. Parliamentary politicians typically make promises to build up their vote banks. With the proposed eight or nine powerful regional councils the number of politicians making such promises on the lines of the provider/

distributor role will increase several fold.

There is another angle to this. It is known that many of the promises made are politically popular but economically irrational. It then follows that with the creation of new sub-national governments, politically popular but economically irrational expenditures can increase. No estimates are available for Sri Lanka regarding such economically irrational expenditures. For India it is estimated that some Rs. 40,000 crores, equal to one third of the union budget, can be considered as being politically popular but economically irrational expenditures. Given our political culture of patronage and revenge it is this role of provider/distributor entailing economically irrational expenditures that would get perpetuated at an enhanced level with the emergence of the new powerful regional councils.

As I tried to explain earlier my depiction of the state as a pursuer of the growth objective through adjustment is a state rolled back and lean with the excess fat of unnecessary involvements taken off, *one minded (centralised) in policy* and decision making for promoting and facilitating, highly sensitive to challenges whether from outside or inside and flexible and vibrant enough when needed to adjust, adapt or improve its policy responses. It is the development of these attributes that could be impeded by the devolution package. Instead of enabling the state to shift to the new role of promoter/facilitator of creation of new wealth and opportunities the devolution package would lead the state on further afield in the provider/distributor role to end up in the same quagmire as before.

Q: You mentioned good governance which implies fair mindness and transparency among other things. How do you see the devolution package in relation to these aspects?

A: The devolution package will have adverse effects on these aspects of good governance because it will lead to an increase in the involvement and

interference of politicians in economic affairs. There have been complaints from some Integrated Rural Development Projects that after the creation of provincial councils, the number of politicians interfering with their rural development programmes had increased. This became a problem for the professionals in implementing the programmes that they had designed because the interference was for gaining political credit for themselves and were often on the lines of the political culture of patronage and revenge. These interferences, therefore, tended to degrade the objectivity in development that the professionals were trained to promote and thereby tended to reduce the efficiency of the projects.

Good governance is also likely to be affected in another way. There will now emerge a large number of powerful politicians in each region who will have the opportunity in a physical sense of interacting very closely with the citizens and the officers. Such close personal contacts among these three parties can become the breeding grounds for corruption, favouritism, patronage and revenge and all the practices that can be listed under "sleaze". This defeats good governance. In place of rolling back the state and practising good governance what would then emerge is more government, less good governance and more politicisation of economic decision making.

Q: You spoke about an adverse impact on growth due to the constraints on choosing an appropriate policy-mix that can result from the devolution package. In what specific areas do you see the likelihood of such dangers?

A: I see lurking dangers in the area of stabilisation which is very important for effecting growth with a reasonable degree of stability. This is very much linked with the question of prudent fiscal and budgetary management. What I mean here is that in countries like ours, there is the chronic problem of a structural budget deficit. This problem is of a

structural nature because the revenue base or the tax base is too narrow and is not expanding rapidly enough because growth is slow, but the expenditures are expanding rapidly because of the energetic provider/distributor role of the state. So they end up with structural budget deficits and the ability to successfully pursue growth depends on how able the macro economic policies would be in minimising disruptive instability.

Let us consider what will happen if the budget deficit gets out of hand or is allowed to develop into unmanageable proportions. It will create inflation; inflation will discourage savings; inflation will induce wage-cost-price spirals - wages will rise, the cost of production will rise and that will reduce the competitiveness. Inflation will compel postponement of adjustment of exchange rate, because of the fear that devaluation will add to the inflation and make it worse. Inflation will also compel the state to increase the rate of interest as a control measure and that will discourage investment.

Thus, it is a prudent management of the budget deficit that becomes the key to a successful pursuit of the growth objective. Having said that we may consider what impact the devolution package is *likely to have on the management of the budget deficit. We have already seen how it will strengthen the expenditure* orientation of the state by multiplying the number of politicians making political promises and the perpetuation thereby of the provider/distributor role of the state at an enhanced level. Take the establishment costs of the new political institutions, the proposed Regional Councils. If the experiences with the existing Provincial Councils are of any guidance, the costs of these new institutions can be expected to rise to very high levels. The Provincial Councils were originally meant to be lean and dynamic institutions with small but high quality staff to engineer the development of the province. But we see how they have departed from this

model to become fat and clumsy with a multiplication of trappings and paraphernalia. It is the show of power and status that seems to have become important and not service with an economy of the resources. These proclivities cannot be curbed easily and they are likely to gain in strength under the Regional Councils which will have more of the power to be displayed and more of the status to be embellished.

There are other built-in tendencies for expenditure to increase and cause problems for the management of the structural budget deficit. In the devolution package it is the expenditure areas that are very clearly identified. As things stand at present, the Provincial Councils account for more than 40% of the government expenditure. With the proposed Regional Councils endowed with more powers, the expenditure by sub-national governments is likely to exceed the above estimate for Provincial Councils. A noteworthy fact is that the expenditure autonomy of such magnitudes that has been given to the Regional Councils has not been matched by a proportionate revenue autonomy. Although they have been given the autonomy to spend so much the autonomy given to them to raise the revenue required for such expenditure is very little. It is believed that the revenue from sales taxes and the excise duties may at best account for Rs. 1 out of every Rs. 10 spent by them. Thus they will have to depend on massive transfers from the central government's budget that could go up to more than 90% of their expenditures. Given the natural tendency of the Regional Councils to obtain as much as possible, it is easy to imagine how the pressures will increase on the centre's budget and how difficult would become the management of the structural budget deficit.

One of the parameters in the structural budget deficit is a slowly expanding narrow tax base. While it would tend to increase expenditure, can the devolution package be expected to improve the other parameter by widening and increasing proportionately the tax

base, if as suggested above, it is likely to weaken growth, not strengthen it?

Another factor that would create pressures on the budget deficit is the power that are to be given to the Regional Councils to establish their own credit institutions and to negotiate foreign loans, grants and assistance. This is fraught with dangers because Regional Councils can raise their expenditure targets high and even tend to act in an irresponsible manner in loan financing knowing that the centre will have to bail them out in case of default on foreign loans. These are the likely new and additional pressures on the structural budget deficit that the centre will have to cope with.

Q: Are there any actual experiences that could point to the problem you mention?

A: Problems have already arisen regarding accounting for the expenditures of Provincial Councils because of a lack of data and information. Also, where similar federal structures are found as in Argentina, Brazil and Yugoslavia, this type of problem with the sub-national governments always tending towards high spending has proved to be detrimental to economic stability. The real problem here is that the sub-national governments are spending other people's money transferred to them and for which they are not directly politically accountable. In the case of Regional Councils whose expenditure would depend on outside resources up to 90%, they can be quite liberal-handed in their expenditures or even irresponsible, bordering upon profligacy.

Q: Is it not possible to introduce safeguards or controls? What about surveillance by the Finance Commission?

A: As we know from past experience the government has not always been successful, one might say often unsuccessful, in keeping to its own expenditure limits. Budget deficits have often exceeded the proposed limits due to supplementary expenditure proposals and/or failures

on the revenue side. There have also been experiences of the government's failure to enforce budgetary discipline even on parastatals which are run by professionals or politicised administrators. What chances could be there for the centre to enforce budgetary discipline on the Regional Councils against the backdrop of the numerous political pressures that could come into play?

Basically, one way of inculcating budgetary discipline in the Regional Councils is for them to develop a sense of political accountability to their constituencies regarding their expenditures. There is not much chance for this as long as their dependence on local revenue is not more than 10% of their expenditures. The other method is to enforce strict financial accountability of the Regional Councils to the centre. As things stand there is not much chance for this because no Regional Council can be dissolved for financial or budgetary mismanagement.

Q: You mentioned that transfers have to be made by the centre to the Regional Councils. From where does the centre get the resources to transfer?

A: This is another problem that the devolution package will have to face. *75% of the indirect tax revenue of the government originates in the Western Province*, and the transfers would depend on the government's ability to distribute from this among the other regions. *What could happen if the Western Province were to turn back and say; why should revenues generated by us be given to other regions?* When "regionalism" gets stimulated by the proposed devolution, it would be natural for such parochial-minded questions to arise. In such event the crest-fallen regions could feel compelled to resort to increased local and foreign borrowing to keep up their expenditures. This is a potential source of pressure on the centre's budget.

- TO BE CONTINUED -

THE NATIONAL CRISIS : IS CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM THE ANSWER?

Prof. Lakshman Jayatilleke

With the intention of resolving the ethnic problem the Government has proposed a package of constitutional reforms. There is much public debate on the constitutional reforms themselves and on broader national issues. These issues emerge from a complex web of perceptions, motivations and transactions. The issues as such are clearly symptomatic. But when they are left unattended for some time they in turn influence people's thinking, thus giving rise to fresh problems. The next wave of problems are very likely to be coloured with much ill-feeling and even hatred. Therefore it will be advantageous to attend to the issues without undue delay.

Legislators, persons in authority, leaders, followers and everyone else are all seeing the issues in their own peculiar way and subject to their own limitations. There is no view that is more complete or can be considered as being better because of the position, academic specialisation or educational qualifications of the holder. The only basis for superiority is the ability to see the ground situation in a detached manner and with enlightened self-interest. It is only then we can act with the due sensitivity and positive feelings towards others.

In evolving a political solution to the immediate national problem of effectively sharing the power and responsibility for conducting matters of public concern and public importance, the following issues have to be addressed with priority. Any legislation and constitutional reform have to be done with them in view. Deficiencies of the Constitution are clearly not the critical issues of the day. Even if reforms are to be introduced, they have to be aimed at resolving the following critical issues.

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THE PROBLEMS

1. *Deterioration of the environment and the resources for supporting life and the community such as ground water, vegetation, forest cover, and soil nutrients.*
2. *Increasing brackishness of the ground-water in the Jaffna peninsula, submerging of fertile valleys in the hill country, deforestation of river catchments.*
3. *Insufficient diffusion of wealth and effects of wealth into the less developed areas.*
4. *Increasing isolation from the mainstreams of economic and social activity.*
5. *Increasing impotence in dealing with the administrative and commercial mechanisms, devices and processes that are affecting the general population.*
6. *Communication problems that affect each individual critically in the spheres of health, education, justice, financial matters, employment.*
7. *Frustrations in coping with life needs with means at one's disposal due to:*

** Lack of support in times of high stress*

** Creation of needs which are unrealistic and not sustainable;*

** Perceptions of unfairness of the distribution and access to means for coping;*

** Ignorance of how to attain some degree of contentment and peace of mind.*

8. *Rising expectations due to higher levels of education and advertising, without a corresponding improvement in the means of fulfilment and even perceived restrictions access to fulfilment, especially through crossing the rural-urban divide.*
9. *Ineffectiveness in law enforcement and a resulting sense of insecurity.*
10. *Delays in the judicial process and unaffordability of legal redress.*

The means of addressing these issues are not necessarily constitutional. In fact, the history of constitutional reform in our country amply demonstrates the impotence of constitutional and statutory mechanisms in improving the lot of the common people. They simply cannot afford the redress offered through such mechanisms. On the other hand, even without a written Constitution, people have the capacity to find ways and means of living and working with each other in mutually supportive and peaceful fashion. Being caring and sharing is an attitude of mind which cannot be captured in the mere words of a document.

This is not to argue against having a better Constitution. We wish only to emphasise that the reforms must necessarily match the actions we need to address the burning issues. The Constitution has to be a device that empowers people to improve themselves by tapping the resources of the entire nation through more effective links and channels of communication. It

must be supportive of effective execution and better management at all levels. The government interventions must be patently benign, and aimed at strengthening those who are moved by duty consciousness and patriotism.

It must be clearly remembered that a **majority of Sri Lankans**, and not only one particular ethnic group, suffer from the disadvantages indicated above. The social welfare measures since independence, including the spread of education, have in many ways contributed to their aggravation. The advantages have continued to accrue to those who are already privileged. The disparities have worsened except during periods when there were specifically targeted management and executive actions.

THE NEEDS

The national income does not flow down to the low income groups in a manner that can motivate and enhance their productivity. It is blocked by more influential higher income groups to be used for maintaining a level of consumption and opulence which the country cannot sustain. The concept of an open economy does not preclude state interventions that are intended to enhance the potential of the weaker ones to compete in the marketplace. This is clearly different from perpetuating backwardness by rewarding and protecting it.

Very specific and operational interventions which directly impinge on agriculture and food processing are most likely to reduce the unrest in the people in all the provinces of our country. These are urgently needed to redress an imbalance that prevails now. With the focusing of attention on industrial development mostly linked to the urban economy, the rural community has been relatively weakened. It is quickly reaching a state in which it does not create and retain a surplus for feeding the unemployed youth and to improving their potential to earn a decent living.

It is urgently necessary to improve the viability and sustainability of life in the rural areas by -

- a. Making more arable land available;
- b. Making irrigation water available
- c. Introducing agricultural and animal husbandry practices which are less demanding for water and other

resources;

- d. Introducing other means of livelihood which do not directly depend on availability of land and water;
- e. Giving incentives to service industries and industries which add value agricultural produce;

Education, health services, transport, communication, entertainment and various technological fixes which are needed by the public, require interventions by competent persons and institutions at affordable costs.

The services need not be extraordinary and need not be up to European/American standards. However, reliability, timeliness and effectiveness are of utmost importance. Operationally the facilities should be sustainable and maintainable.

The services have to meet human needs which are of **four basic types**. These are:

- i. needs connected with survival and maintaining a steady level of existence.
- ii. needs connected with adaptation to new and emerging conditions.
- iii. needs for relaxation, recreation, pleasure, joy, release, catharsis, ecstasy.
- iv. needs for transcendence.

It is possible to identify and to devise strategies for satisfying these four-fold needs in the context of the Sri Lankan Nation.

The implementation of the required strategies clearly needs a management thrust which cannot be provided by centrally located, strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic government offices which are fossilised remnants of former colonial machines. Their operation has mostly degenerated to the 'management of forms' and the preparation of impressive looking reports for the Parliament. The regulations and procedures as entrenched in the system are intended to impede the flow of resources into the country for its development. They help to strengthen the extractive process which in turn maintain the general population at a subsistence level, and are most inappropriate for a free nation.

- TO BE CONTINUED -
NEXT : THE SOLUTIONS

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from birth, he could not face the decline that society and culture was undergoing.

Mahen spoke for a small but important elite. To all those lost in the confusion of trying to interpret ancient cultures in terms of the modern world, Mahen was an eternal guide. Had he lived in an earlier age, he would have been treated like a Rishi, but in Colombo, Mahen was a lonely man, very often isolated with his vast intellect, except when a fellow traveller walked in. Haro Hara, it was party time !

He loved his mother with a passion. "All she knows now is Four No Trumps" he said with a smile on his deathbed. Of his immediate family, he was closest only to his sister Amirthi and her children, especially Ishu, whom he described as the 'divine child'. From the 1st to the 5th of April I watched him, marvelling at his composure, not complaining once. He had his trusted Manager, Farouk, and *aide-de-camp* Harry Logan-Smith to accompany him to the other shore. He was not alone.

Knowing that his illness was due to smoking he continued to hold a brief for the joys of tobacco ! When he discovered that his liver was normal, he exclaimed "That's Scotch Whisky for you. Damn arrack would have killed me years ago !"

Finally, as I pen these memories as a tribute to my '*kalyana mithra*', I cannot but end by quoting Hafiz, the Persian poet from Shiraz. Mahen did not have this book in his library. He didn't have to. He himself had become it's content.

" O Saki, give me that imperial bowl
which opens the heart, exhilarates
the soul ;
By 'bowl' I image the eternal wine,
By 'wine' I signify the trance
divine."

Ulpotha, 29th April, 1997.

SLAVERY AND SAMIR AMIN: IGNORING UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT

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EXTRA-ECONOMIC MEANS

As for his first characteristic - that of non-economic means or extra economic mechanisms of extracting surplus production - it can be said to be correct of Classical Athens when one considers the labour of the slaves in the important productive sectors. For example, in mining and (if we are to take Finley's reasoning) in the larger agricultural estates. Not only these but in every productive enterprise which resorted to the use of slave labour, one could say the means adopted in the extraction of surplus were indeed other than straightforward economic means. To Amin, however, the exploited labour in the tributary mode is not that of the slaves but of the peasant producers⁸. Therefore the extra-economic exploitation of the labour power and person of the slave is not taken into consideration, even though he recognises Classical Athens to have been a state where the 'slave mode' exists within the dominant tributary mode.

Amin's argumentation however could be taken to apply to *tenant farmers* in Classical Attica. *Yet this latter category does not seem to have been a numerous lot in Athens of the 5th Century BC. The small land-holding farming families* seem to have been the more common feature for Classical Attica. This position is held by Alison

Buford Cooper, who accepts the view held by V.N. Andreyev, of the typical farm which was 40-60 *plethra* in extent, farmed with family labour which kept the family self-sufficient⁹. Finley draws our attention to the fact that nearly two thirds of the citizen population lived in rural districts in 430 BC. This, coupled with the evidence in Dionysius of Halicarnassus of the proposal which was made and rejected in 403 BC. to restrict political rights in Athens to land-holders - which if carried out would have affected 5,000 citizens - means that only a small percent, 20 or 25 percent of Athenian citizens, owned no land¹⁰. Therefore the majority of farmers existing at barely subsistence levels would still have worked the land they owned for themselves and their families. *Thus, it can hardly be said that extra economic pressure or forcible domination extracted the surplus of his labour.*

Apart from the peasant, Classical Athens also had artisans and traders among the small independent producers who lived by their own labour to a very great extent. These persons would hardly have been subject to severe exploitation or exploitation which was extra-economic in character. Accordingly these small independent producers - peasants, artisans and traders - who were very numerous in Athens of this period, paid nothing as tribute to any exploiter of the age. Thus the first of Amin's characteristics of the tributary stage cannot be said to apply to Classical Athens without remarkable and important exceptions, which his

scheme has failed to take into consideration.

This however, does not mean that the surplus extracted through coercive means from the labour of slaves was of little account. Certainly the revenue from the mines, which were operated almost exclusively with slave labour, was chiefly responsible for the might of the Delian League, which established the empire for Athens and helped to maintain it, thereby providing for Athens a source of tribute - her subject allies. Therefore what became of greater and more immediate importance to Athens in the 5th century BC. was her *external* tribute - *over and above the tribute extracted by internal coercion of citizen-peasant, if any. This fact has hardly figured in Amin's scheme, when he lodged Classical Antiquity within the tributary stage* - for the characteristics Amin provides for his tributary stage are very much the *internal* characteristics of a given society. Any provision is hardly made within this thesis to understand the exceptional situations such as that which existed in Athens, when identifying that society too as a tributary one.

When considering the specificities of Athens, the *only* exception that is made for Classical Athens is on the grounds that "this must be considered only as it being part of a larger area with which they traded"¹¹. But Amin himself fails to do so. Neither does he provide for possible exceptions to his central thesis upon such a consideration as he advocates. Further, when discussing this aspect of the

Classical Greek society, what must be considered is *not the "areas with which they traded", but the areas which came under Athens' or Sparta's political and military hegemony.*

AMIN'S CONTRADICTIONS

Considering the specificity of Classical Greek society, Amin seems to contradict his own second basic characteristic of the tributary mode. According to his scheme, its second characteristic is that production is based on *use* value and not on *exchange* value. *He certainly refutes this when he says that "slavery always yields a commodity (marketable product)". The first example of this to Amin is Classical Antiquity*¹². *If he takes production based on use value and not on exchange value to be a basic characteristic of the tributary mode, then his subsequent statement that slavery always yields a commodity would be to deny the applicability of this particular characteristic of the tributary stage to Classical Greece.*

However, as mentioned above, even his statement "slavery always yields a commodity" needs to be modified even to be valid for Classical Athens. Slaves who were engaged in productive work did produce a marketable product. This however does not mean that all slave labour produced similar results. Neither does it mean that the majority of the slaves or slavery in general always produced commodities even in Athens of the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Of the slaves, those great numbers of them whose task was to perform the menial household chores could hardly be said to have produced commodities. It is this belief, that slavery always produced a commodity, which causes him to categorise the slave mode as an exceptional mode. But since Amin's line of argumentation is at variance with the facts of slavery which are known today, we have a further problem of accepting his conclusions based on these arguments.

FAILURE

The "dominance of the superstructure" is the third characteristic he recognised in the tributary mode. The dominance of the

superstructure is also (quite rightly) taken as the first sequence of the dominance of use value in the economic base¹³. As the preceding arguments demonstrate, the dominance of use value in the economic base of Classical Athens is hardly proven. However, considering the third characteristic itself, the vehicle of this dominance is the dominant ideology. Within the tributary mode Amin identifies this dominance as taking the form of great religions. The ones here mentioned are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and so forth. Even though ancient Greek religion is not mentioned here, Amin does speak of the dominance of the state religions of the tributary mode in contrast to the local religions of the previous communal mode¹⁴. While religion in Classical Athens was indeed incorporated into and propagated by the state, all Greek states shared a common religion. In the 5th century BC., following the Persian War and also following the victory of the Greeks in that war, the dominance of religious ideology was more inter-state than intra-state, with Athens as the dominant power. The argument in Herodotus' *Histories*, which chronicled this war in the 5th century BC., is the best example of this fact. His portrayal of Athens as the liberator of the Greek world and as God's chosen instrument to punish the *hybris* of the Persian King is what the Athenian state itself projected in all its temple-building etc. in the Periclean age. The concept which Athens attempted to forge and legitimise was that of a pan-Hellenism with Athens as its leader. Athens' political and military dominance in the post-Persian era was thus expressed through religion and exercised through the exploitation of Athens' allies. *Therefore, in Classical Athens the dominance of religious ideology assisted her more in the exploitation of her subject allies than her citizen-peasant. Within the Athenian state this ideological dominance is extended towards the foreign chattel slave rather than towards the Athenian citizen.* For, as Finley observed, the presence of the foreign chattel slave formed the basis for the Athenian citizen's realisation of individual freedom. Therefore the

application of this characteristic of the tributary mode to Classical Athens can be made only with regard to its specific and exceptional nature which Amin fails to take into account.

STAGNATIONISM

Appearance of stability and even of stagnation is the final defining characteristic attributed by Samir Amin to his tributary mode. If anything, ancient Greek society, especially Classical Athenian society never gave the appearance of stability. However, by "stability" or "stagnation" Amin seems to mean that, while there was social progress in the productive forces, this did not cause a qualitative change in the tributary relations of production¹⁵. *In the first place, the 'progress' in productive forces of the Classical era was not considerable. For us to witness such a progress of the productive forces, we should be able to point out to improvements in the instruments of labour, a rise in the productivity of labour etc. As has been observed by George Thomson and also Perry Anderson, there was a considerable lack of development in the invention of machinery or tools, in the Classical period of Greek antiquity. Aristotle's comment that the slave was a tool that replaced many tools provides the reason for this*¹⁶. As Michael Jameson argues, even when a greater output in agricultural produce was in demand owing to rises in population in Classical Athens, apart from the state responding with colonisation, the farmer responded with "intensification, diversification and specialisation" all of which was *labour intensive*. The labour was provided chiefly by the slaves¹⁷. The other factor was of course *Athens' empire*, of which higher and higher tribute was demanded.

Thus, not only are we unable to locate noteworthy improvements in the instruments of labour, but it is also difficult to see a considerable rise in the productivity of labour within the state itself; and this chiefly owing to the fact of Athens' exploitation of her allied subject states. So, the appearance of "stability and even stagnation" in accordance with Amin's meaning of the term, would seem

inapplicable even to Athens of the 5th century BC.

A closer examination of Classical society itself demonstrates the inapplicability of his tributary stage thesis for that civilisation in that historical period. In the passage quoted above, *his chosen example for this mode of production is Classical Antiquity*. His method here has been to regard slavery in classical Greece as an exceptional mode. Two defining qualities about Classical slavery makes it so for him. The first is his belief that slavery always produced a commodity for the masters. The other is that "it barely reproduces its labour forces". These features make slavery an exceptional mode because they are recognised as exceptions in the pre-capitalist world¹⁸. But when he lodges this 'exceptional mode' within a tributary mode of production, the defining characteristics as stated by him cannot be so identified within Classical Greek society, and his thesis remains inapplicable for that particular social formation.

However, having recognised some of the specificities of Classical slavery and categorised the system, he then says that owing to these very characteristics, "the area where slavery prevailed cannot be understood by themselves; they were only dependent parts of a much greater whole. Athenian slavery can be understood only by considering the Greek cities as part of a whole area with which they traded"¹⁹. Unfortunately for us, Amin fails to record the process of argumentation following from his ideas stated above, to the position he adopts concerning Classical slavery i.e. that it was a mode of production situated within a tributary mode of production which was dominant. Yet, this dominant mode, the tributary mode, with which he identifies Classical Greek society, has been found to be *inapplicable in every one of its characteristics, to Classical antiquity and especially Athens*.

Amin also fails to explain his definition of Classical slavery as a 'political concept' and as a 'type of domination' while also being a mode of production.

Even though he identifies Classical slavery as a mode of production, he fails to discuss whether he also viewed the slaves as a class. To him the class struggle in the tributary mode is between peasant producers and their tributary exploiters. This feature was also an universal one which "spans the ensure history of tributary formations, in Asia and Africa as well as in Europe"²⁰. Equating slave societies in China, Egypt and Greece is the main weakness in Amin's thesis. This would mean that *the unequal development of productive forces* within ancient societies have not been taken into account. This particular factor would also make an equation of Greek slavery with the system that was in Rome, an unfair comparison. It would be so even to do this concerning the several *poleis* of the Greek world in the 5th century BC. without taking into account their *unequal development*.

Footnotes

8. op.cit.p.67
9. Alison Buford Cooper, op.cit.
10. M.I.Finley, 'Land, debt And The Man Of Property In Classical Athens' in Economy And Society In Ancient Greece, p.165.
11. Samir Amin, op.cit.p.60
12. *ibid*.
13. op.cit.p.52
14. *ibid*.
15. op.cit.p.54
16. See discussion in Ch.IV of this study.
17. Michael Jameson, op.cit.
18. Samir Amin. Op.cit.p.60
19. *ibid*.
20. op.cit.p.54.

Waiting - 38

Anuradhapura

Faint in the memory, the lines of song
But crystal in the minds eye, the image
Of a legend lit by moon across man-made waters
Seared pure by this sacred Dome.

Following on two millennia of War and Peace
The night of relic re-enshrinement
The night this Stupa wombed us within.
Children puzzled by the echoing cry of a grown up
Who had seen a relic floating down
To the lotus on her open palms in the candle-light
As we climbed within what is now sealed
And mirrored white in Wewa waters
For the far delight of the Devas
On their arrivals and departures.

Of our own human journey
Our arrivals and departures through all this life time
We can say, Own,
That childhood held us once together
Within that great Dome.

U. Karunatilake

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLL OF 1997 WITHIN A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT OF A DECADE OF ELECTIONS

Prakshepana

Elections for Local Authorities are never meant to make or break governments. But increasingly they are being viewed as a potent litmus test or even as a referendum on the government in power. As such, the hustings are played out for much higher stakes than what is actually on offer. Accordingly, tempers flare-up at the minutest of provocation, violence in varying degrees of graduation is perpetrated, infringements committed and violations on the fair exercise of universal suffrage commissioned that tend to mar the validity and the reliability of the peoples verdict. While noting herein that the poll of 1997 may have varied from the other six elections conducted during the past decade only in the degree of commitment of the aforementioned, analysts such as the writer take refuge in the fact that the figures promulgated by the Commissioner of Elections constitutes the best approximation of the 'true' reflection of the verdict of the people.

It is the bane of our times that during the greater part of the past decade, elections of a national nature had to be restricted to the 17 districts outside the north-east of the country where relative social order has prevailed. As such, the current analysis will pertain to these 17 districts unless otherwise specifically stated that it is applicable to the entire country. Although 28 months had lapsed since the conduct of the Presidential Poll in November 1994, the registered voter base had increased by a mere 3.5 percent (or 333,739 voters) by March 1997. The percent casting their ballot at the two elections was marginally

lower at the Presidential election (75.9 percent) in comparison to the 77.2 percent in March 1997. However, when it comes to the actually cast valid vote, the absolute number of 6,997,398 at the Presidential ballot is higher than the 6,971,136 valid votes cast in March. This is due to the much higher rate of rejection (7.3 percent) at the LG poll in comparison to the under 2 percent rejection at the preceding poll.

This unacceptably high rate of rejection has constantly been harped on by this writer in previous post-facto analyses of polls where we have linked it to a 'functioning system of apartheid uncommonly known as voter illiteracy'. At the March election, over half-million voters (548,868) who came to the polling booth were effectively disenfranchised by the ballot paper. They just could not manage to place a single cross on the top part of the ballot paper where it could have been allocated to one party/group with certainty. While the national average of rejection was 7.3 percent, at the district level it ranged between 5.1 in Colombo to 11.8 percent in Nuwara Eliya. When descending to the next level of LG area, the performance is even more appalling where Ambagamuwa Pradeshiya Sabha area in Nuwara Eliya District rejected 14.8 percent of its voters' ballot papers. To bring in some historical focus on the issue one might add that this is an improved performance over what prevailed at the LG election of 1991; Ambagamuwa rejected 17.9 percent voters at the last LG poll when the national average of rejected votes recorded a shameful high water mark

of 9.4 percent! Obviously, the ballot paper with the preferential voting system as operant today is crying out for an urgent overhauling.

It would be a suitable study for an enterprising educational psychologist to pursue why nearly the same voter base fumbled more than three times-over (2 percent vs. 7.3 percent) 28 months apart (between the last Presidential and recent LG polls) when the top part of the ballot paper was almost identical to what was presented to the voter at the Presidential Election. It must be related to the disturbing cacophony of sound that is created whenever there is a preferential vote in the offing in addition to the vote proper. Either the marginally literate and/or excitable voter gets carried away by marking three crosses against impersonal numbers s/he has to memorise and forgets to mark the all important vote against the party/group or else marks the three (or multiple) crosses against the party/group and invalidates his/her vote. It is high time that the Election Commissioner's Department undertook a serious study on the causation of high vote rejection and undertake remedial measures to enfranchise the overwhelming majority of half a million voters whose human rights were violated by being disenfranchised through incomprehensible instrumentation!

BI - PARTISAN POLITICS

The entrenchment of the bi-party stranglehold on the Sri Lankan electorate appears to have been reinforced on yet another occasion at the March LG poll.

In spite of this reality, more than a half a million voters (522,554 or 7.5 percent of cast valid votes) cast their ballot for a non-UNP or non-PA (or non-UNP/PA supported) candidate, probably knowing very well that one's candidate and his/her party/group had no chance of capturing power in the LG area of one's residence. Viewed in this perspective, this vote can be construed as a substantial 'protest' vote, culled from a base of frustration, idealism and apathy, *inter alia*. Six years ago, during the preceding LG poll of 1991, a similar proportion (7.3 percent) opted to follow the same route and this appears to be the pattern established at the LG polls. During the past decade, only on two occasions has the non-UNP and non-PA vote exceeded this proportion; i.e., during the Parliamentary Election of 1989 and the Provincial Council Election of 1993. In 1989, the SLFP (the main constituent party of the PA) had been deserted by its leftist coalition partners and the votes received by the latter were classified as belonging to the 'Other' parties who received 8.5 percent of the national vote. At the 1993 poll, the meteoric rise of the DUNF - during the immediate aftermath of the assassination of its charismatic leader Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali - saw it grabbing a unique 14.5 percent of the national vote for a first-timer entering the fray and accounted for the bulk of the 17 percent of the votes received by the 'Other' parties. The remaining three polls have attracted a subdued 3.8, 2.9 and 1.7 percent at the 1988, 1994 and 1994 Presidential poll to the 'Other' parties.

But what of the performance of the two main contenders? When the PA-supported independent groups' votes as well as that of CWC votes are legitimately categorised within the PA, the proportionate national vote received by PA is 51.1 to the 41.4 percent received by the UNP; the balance 7.5 being collected by the 'Other' parties and/or independent groups. At the district level, the PA won 15 out of the 17 districts, the two lost being that of Nuwara Eliya and Badulla, both having a disproportionately high share of estate workers who were originally of Indian descent and hitherto predominantly

controlled by Minister Thondaman's CWC. When Mr. Thondaman was in the UNP Cabinet he delivered his flock's vote to the UNP at 62.0, 63.3, 60.1, 59.2 and 58.1 percent at the '88, '89, '91, '93 and '94 Parliamentary polls, respectively. During the latter when Mrs. Kumaratunga was first swept into power with the PA obtaining a 51.5 percent national mandate (winning 13 out of the 17 districts), the Nuwara Eliya and Badulla Districts were lost by the PA, gaining only 32.3 and 43.5 percent of the vote, respectively. But three months later when Mr. Thondaman was a Cabinet Minister of the PA Government, he was capable of delivering Nuwara Eliya and Badulla Districts to the fold of PA with 57.1 and 55.3 percent. But 28 months later while still being a Cabinet Minister of PA he has failed to deliver both these districts to PA, Nuwara Eliya collecting only 39.5 percent and Badulla 43.1 percent. Obviously, Mr. Thondaman has either lost his stranglehold on his constituency (perhaps with his former colleague and current rival, Mr. Sellasamy making significant in-roads into his base on behalf of the UNP) or he has been rather lukewarm in exhorting his flock to rally round the PA. Perhaps, it is a combination of both, as well. However, Mr. Thondaman's failure to deliver on his usual promise may stand as the most unexpected occurrence of a significant kind in the conduct of the 1997 LG poll.

But how does one assess the relative performance of the two main contenders? What criteria are to be mustered in projecting a rational argument? Obviously, there are many a competing argument which have already been voiced by the two main parties. If we take it merely as a legitimate LG poll, the fact that the PA captured power in 194 of 238 LG Areas would constitute a 'landslide' victory. But then, six years ago, we had a similar situation with the UNP holding almost the exact numbers of LG Areas. The commonality between the two polls are conspicuous with the Presidency (and governmental power) being controlled by each of the winning parties at the two occasion. In fact, both LG polls were held within the third year of the ascension of the new Presidency and one would like to propose that what

is most conspicuous is the pragmatism of the voter who knows that it is much easier to get something done in one's locality if one's LG Area is controlled by the same hue as is controlling the country. Looking at the national figures one hardly finds a difference of any significance; the UNP in power obtained 52.2 percent in 1991 while the PA in power amassed 51.1 percent in 1997. Similarly the losing PA got 40.5 in 1991 and the losing UNP received 41.4 percent in 1997.

A counter-argument by the opposition is that the PA has dwindled in popularity because the 61.0 percent mandate received by President Kumaratunga (this is within 17 districts and the figure for the entire country was 62.3 percent) could not be sustained in 1997, declining by almost 10 percentage points. Complementarily, the UNP gained from 37.3 percent in 1994, the lowest proportion polled during the last decade, to 41.4 percent. While there is some statistical credibility to this argument, socio-politically and contextually, a Presidential and a LG poll cannot be equated the meaningful issues thrown into relief are monumentally dissimilar.

METHODOLOGY

In order to resolve these competing arguments, the writer, prior to the holding of the 1997 poll, proposed a methodology to assess the relative performance of the two main contenders at the district and national levels. The proposed performance categories can be viewed as somewhat 'unbiased' since they were based on each party's performance at the last six elections (i.e., beginning with the Presidential Election of 1988, the Parliamentary Elections of 1989, the Local Government Election of 1991, the Provincial Council Elections of 1993, the Parliamentary Elections of 1994 followed by the Presidential Elections in November 1994) held during the past decade.

The mean and standard deviation calculated on the proportionate vote received by each party in each district and at the national level (17 districts) provided the basis for demarcation of performance categories. If a party obtains a percent of the cast valid vote

TABLE 1
Proposed Performance Assessment Categories (Percent) and Scores
for the Local Government Poll to be held on 21st March 1997
in respect of PA and UNP based on past decade of Election Performance

Electoral District	Poor Performance Score= -3		Below Average Score= -2		Modestly Below Ave. Score= -1		Average Performance Score= 0		Modestly Above Ave. Score= +1		Above Average Score= +2		Good Performance Score= +3	
	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP
Anuradhapura	< 35.7	< 38.8	35.8 - 41.7	38.7 - 42.9	41.8 - 46.7	43.0 - 46.2	46.8 - 48.8	46.3 - 48.3	48.9 - 53.8	48.4 - 51.6	51.7 - 55.9	59.9>	56.0>	
Polonnaruwa	< 33.5	< 43.9	33.6 - 38.6	44.0 - 47.8	38.7 - 42.7	47.9 - 50.7	42.8 - 44.8	50.8 - 52.8	44.9 - 47.9	52.9 - 55.7	48.0 - 53.0	55.8 - 59.6	59.7>	
Monaragala	< 33.2	< 40.4	33.3 - 38.7	40.5 - 45.6	38.8 - 43.2	45.7 - 49.8	43.3 - 45.3	49.9 - 51.9		52.0 - 56.1	49.9 - 55.3	56.2 - 61.3	55.4>	
Badulla	< 27.6	< 48.4	27.7 - 32.8	48.5 - 52.2	32.9 - 37.0	52.3 - 55.0	37.1 - 39.1	55.1 - 57.1		57.2 - 59.9	43.4 - 48.5	60.0 - 63.7	48.6>	
Ratnapura	< 37.4	< 43.9	37.5 - 41.6	44.0 - 46.8	41.7 - 44.8	46.9 - 48.7	44.9 - 46.9	48.8 - 50.8	47.0 - 50.1	50.9 - 52.7	50.2 - 54.3	52.8 - 55.6	55.7>	
Kegalle	< 28.7	< 45.9	28.8 - 34.1	46.0 - 49.2	34.2 - 38.5	49.3 - 51.5	38.6 - 40.6	51.6 - 53.6	40.7 - 45.0	53.7 - 55.9	58.0 - 59.2	50.5>	59.3>	
Kandy	< 30.7	< 46.1	30.8 - 35.7	46.2 - 49.5	35.8 - 39.7	49.6 - 51.9	39.8 - 41.8	52.0 - 54.0	41.9 - 45.8	54.1 - 56.4	45.9 - 50.8	56.5 - 59.8	59.9>	
Kurunegala	< 35.0	< 41.7	35.1 - 39.8	41.8 - 45.1	39.9 - 43.6	45.2 - 47.5	43.7 - 45.7	47.6 - 49.6	45.8 - 49.5	49.7 - 52.0	52.1 - 55.4	54.4>	55.5>	
Matale	< 27.3	< 43.5	27.4 - 33.8	43.6 - 48.2	33.9 - 39.3	48.3 - 51.9	39.4 - 41.4	52.0 - 54.0	41.5 - 46.9	54.1 - 57.7	47.0 - 53.4	57.8 - 62.4	62.5>	
Nuwara Eliya	< 21.0	< 48.2	21.1 - 27.4	48.3 - 52.6	27.5 - 32.8	52.7 - 56.0	32.9 - 34.9	56.1 - 58.1		58.2 - 61.5	40.4 - 46.7	61.6 - 65.9	46.8>	
Puttalam	< 33.1	< 41.5	33.2 - 38.8	41.6 - 46.1	38.9 - 43.5	46.2 - 49.7	43.6 - 45.6	49.8 - 51.8	45.7 - 50.3	51.9 - 55.4	50.4 - 56.0	55.5 - 60.0	60.1>	
Gampaha	< 42.0	< 37.5	42.0 - 46.2	37.6 - 41.2	46.3 - 49.5	41.3 - 43.9	49.6 - 51.6	44.0 - 46.0	51.7 - 54.9	46.1 - 48.7	48.8 - 52.4	59.3>	52.5>	
Colombo	< 32.7	< 36.3	32.8 - 38.9	36.4 - 39.9	39.0 - 44.1	40.0 - 42.5		42.6 - 44.6	46.3 - 51.4	44.7 - 47.2	51.5 - 57.6	47.3 - 50.8	57.7>	
Kalutara	< 38.9	< 40.3	39.0 - 43.3	40.4 - 42.5	43.4 - 46.7	42.6 - 43.7	46.8 - 48.8	43.8 - 45.8		45.9 - 47.0	52.3 - 56.6	47.1 - 49.2	56.7>	
Galle	< 40.8	< 39.5	40.9 - 45.1	39.6 - 41.9	45.2 - 48.4	42.0 - 43.3	48.5 - 50.5	43.4 - 45.4		45.5 - 46.8	53.9 - 58.1	46.9 - 49.2	58.2>	
Matara	< 38.3	< 35.9	38.4 - 44.1	36.0 - 40.2	44.2 - 48.9	40.3 - 43.5	49.0 - 51.0	43.6 - 45.6		45.7 - 48.9	55.9 - 61.6	49.0 - 53.2	61.7>	
Hambantota	< 35.7	< 38.7	35.8 - 41.0	38.8 - 42.5	41.1 - 45.3	42.6 - 45.3	45.4 - 47.4	45.4 - 47.4		47.5 - 50.2	51.8 - 57.0	50.3 - 54.0	57.1>	
Sri Lanka	< 35.0	< 41.4	35.1 - 40.0	41.5 - 44.7	40.1 - 44.0	44.8 - 47.0	44.1 - 46.1	47.1 - 49.1	46.2 - 50.1	49.2 - 51.4	51.5 - 54.7	55.2>	54.8>	
(17 Districts)														

Poor Performance - Outside -1 standard deviation from mean
Below Average - Between -1/2 and -1 standard deviation from mean
Modestly Below Average - Between -1 percent from mean and within -1/2 standard deviation from mean
Average Performance - Between -1 and +1 percent of mean
Modestly Above Average - Between +1 percent from mean and within +1/2 standard deviation from mean
Above Average - Between +1/2 and +1 standard deviation from mean
Good Performance - Outside +1 standard deviation from mean

NB:
Highlighted categories depict the actual incidence of the performance of the two main parties at the March 1997 poll.

UNP PA

TABLE 2
Performance Scores Based on the Proposed Performance Categories
(as given in Table 1) by the Two Main Parties
at the Last Seven Elections During Past Decade

Electoral District	1988		1989		1991		1993		1994		1994		1997		Expected *Average Perform. at 97 poll		Cumulated perform. of 7 polls	
	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP	PA	UNP
Anuradhapura	2	-2	-2	3	-2	2	-3	2	2	-1	3	-3	2	-3	0	0.16	2	-2
Polonnaruwa	-1	1	-3	3	0	1	-3	0	2	-2	3	-3	3	-3	-0.5	0	1	-3
Monaragala	-2	3	0	1	-1	2	-2	1	2	-2	3	-3	1	-2	0	0.33	1	0
Badulla	0	2	-1	1	-2	2	-3	1	2	-1	3	-3	1	-2	-0.16	0.33	0	0
Ratnapura	0	1	-3	3	1	0	-3	1	2	-1	3	-3	3	-3	0	0.16	3	-2
Kegalle	0	2	-3	3	-2	1	-2	-1	2	-1	3	-3	2	-3	-0.5	0.16	0	-2
Kandy	1	1	-2	3	-1	2	-3	-1	2	0	3	-3	3	-3	0	0.33	3	-1
Kurunegala	1	1	-2	3	-2	2	-2	-2	1	-1	3	-3	2	-3	-0.33	0	1	-3
Matale	0	2	-2	3	-2	2	-3	0	2	-1	3	-3	3	-3	-0.33	0.5	1	0
Nuwara Eliya	1	2	-2	2	-1	1	-3	1	-1	0	3	-3	1	-2	-0.5	0.5	-2	1
Puttalam	-1	2	-3	3	-1	1	-2	0	2	-2	3	-3	3	-3	-0.33	0.16	1	-2
Gampaha	-1	1	-3	3	-2	2	-2	-1	2	-1	3	-3	2	-2	-0.5	0.16	-1	-1
Colombo	0	2	-3	3	-1	2	-2	-2	1	-1	3	-3	0	-1	-0.33	0.16	-2	0
Kalutara	1	1	-2	3	-2	1	-2	0	2	0	3	-3	1	-2	0	0.33	1	0
Galle	1	0	-2	3	-3	2	-1	0	2	-2	3	-3	1	-2	0	0	1	-2
Matara	1	-1	-3	3	-1	2	-2	0	2	-2	3	-3	1	-2	0	-0.16	1	-3
Hambantota	0	1	-2	3	0	1	-3	1	2	-3	3	-3	1	-2	0	0	1	-2
Sri Lanka (sum)	3	19	-38	46	-22	26	-41	0	29	-21	51	-51	30	-41	----	----	12	-22
(average score)	0.18	1.12	-2.23	2.71	-1.29	1.53	-2.41	0	1.71	-1.24	3.0	-3.0	1.76	-2.41	----	----	0.71	-1.29

Score

-3 Poor Performance - Outside -1 standard deviation from mean
-2 Below Average - Between -1/2 and -1 standard deviation from mean
-1 Modestly Below Average - Between -1 percent from mean and within -1/2 standard deviation from mean
0 Average Performance - Between -1 and +1 percent of mean
1 Modestly Above Average - Between +1 percent from mean and within +1/2 standard deviation from mean
2 Above Average - Between +1/2 and +1 standard deviation from mean
3 Good Performance - Outside +1 standard deviation from mean

* Expected average performance score is obtained by summing the district specific scores of each party during the first six elections and dividing by 6.

that is falling between plus or minus one percentage point of its average performance over the six past elections, such a performance would be categorised as 'average' and allocated a score of zero.

A 'modestly below average' performance and a score of -1 would constitute a percentage between -1 of the mean and minus half a standard deviation. A 'below average' performance earning a score of -2 would constitute a percentage between minus half and minus one standard deviation. A percent falling outside minus one standard deviation will earn a 'poor' performance and scored -3. A similar procedure is adopted for the three categories of the positive side of performance. By summing the scores across electoral districts and dividing by 17, a single score between -3 and +3 could be obtained that would provide a summary assessment of each of the party's performance at the Local Government Elections of March, 1997.

Table 1 reveals the performance assessment categories depicted as a range in percent in respect of each district and the nation. The performance categories of the two parties are at a maximal level of discrepancy in Nuwara Eliya and minimal at Anuradhapura. This is because the UNP obtained 62.0, 63.3, 60.1, 59.2, 58.1 and 39.6 percent of the votes at each of the previous six successive elections yielding an average of 57.1 percent and the PA obtained 35.9, 27.2, 32.0, 18.7, 32.3 and 57.1 percent providing a mean of 33.9 percent. As a result, the expected 'average performance' category earning a score of zero in respect of Nuwara Eliya District for the UNP was between 56.1 and 58.1 while the same category for the PA was between 32.9 and 34.9 percent. In Anuradhapura, the difference between the expected 'average performance' categories of the two parties were almost non-existent; between 46.3 and 48.3 in the case of the UNP and 46.8 and 48.8 percent for the PA. The better and more consistently one performed in a given district, the higher is the expected performance target set and vice versa.

The highlighted cells in Table 1 indicate the actual incidence of the electoral performance of the two major parties at the 1997 LG Election. What is visually apparent at first glance is that UNP's performance are on the lesser than average or minus side and the PA's performances are on the better than average side. Compared to the UNP's own electoral performance during the past decade, in eight out of the 17 districts (i.e., in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matale and Puttalam) UNP produced a 'poor' performance earning a score of -3 in each district. The best performance by the UNP was in Colombo where it still orchestrated a 'modestly below average' performance, earning a score of -1. In all other districts it gave a below average performance earning a score of -2. Nationally, the UNP positioned itself right on the critical edge of the 'poor performance' category (i.e. 41.4 percent).

The PA, in comparison reveals 'good performances' in 5 districts (i.e., Polonnaruwa, Ratnapura, Kandy, Matale and Puttalam) earning a score of +3 in each district. In 4 other districts (i.e., Anuradhapura, Kegalle, Kurunegala and Gampaha) it has performed 'above average' and earned a score of +2 per district. The PA performed worst in Colombo District but it was still and 'average performance' according to its six-election performance standard it had set itself and received a score of zero. In the remaining 6 districts the PA's performance was 'modestly above average' earning a score of +1 per district. Nationally, the PA's performance of obtaining 51.1 percent of the cast valid vote was 'above average'.

When the two main contenders' performances are scored and summed across districts, the UNP has obtained a total score of -41 while the PA received a score of +30. When divided by 17 to obtain a summary national figure, the UNP's performance is -2.41 while the PA's is +1.76.

In Table 2, the same performance categories are applied to each of the electoral district performances of the

two main parties at each of the seven elections held between 1988 and 1997 and the relevant scores are revealed in addition to the national scores and revealed in addition to the national scores and summary means. Although the 1988 Presidential Election was an extremely close tussle between Mr. Premadasa and Mrs. Bandaranaike, measured against the performance standard of the two parties in the first six elections, the UNP has obtained +19 points of the PA's +3 (penultimate row). The situation deteriorated drastically within the next two months at the 1989 Parliamentary Elections when even the coalition partners deserted the PA which actually fought a lone battle as the SLFP with disastrous results collecting a score of -38 while the UNP increased its performance to +46 (+ or - 51 being the maximum score range attainable by each party). However, even at this lowest ebb of PA's electoral performance within the last decade, it is worth noting that it still secured 35.2 percent of the national mandate (although the total voter turnout was at a depressed level of 64 percent of the electoral register). Two years later, the Premadasa Presidency was beginning to show a relative decline by the 1991 LG poll when the UNP was able to score only +26, still maintaining an appreciable advantage over a modestly resurgent PA (with the coalition partners) which managed only -22 points. It is somewhat symbolic that the UNP's sway over the political landscape registered a zero, two weeks after the assassination of its leader at the Provincial Council Poll of May 1993. The PA put up its worst performance by scoring -41 points (still securing a 36.1 percent of the national mandate for itself). This is the only occasion during this decade of elections that the sum of scores registered a negative -41, indicating the phenomenal success registered by that residual category of 'Other' parties which grabbed 17.0 percent of the national mandate, thanks to the superlative performance of the DUNF which captured 14.5 percent of the vote.

- TO BE CONTINUED -
NEXT : THE CHANDRIKA FACTOR

AFTER PREMADASA !

CAN A POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME LIKE THE JSP BE MADE TO WORK WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF PREMADASA OR A LEADER LIKE PREMADASA ?

Premadasa was more than the architect of the JSP. He was the force which turned Janasaviya from a lifeless idea and a blueprint into a living reality. It would be correct to say he breathed life into an idea called Janasaviya. Premadasa was wholeheartedly committed to the JSP and was forceful, untiring and perhaps even ruthless in his efforts to make it work. Without his omnipresence, bureaucrats may have, (after the initial burst of enthusiasm on the part of the political leaders), gone back to playing the same old game of paying lip service to the programme, regaling the rulers with beautiful (but tall) tales of success, all the while short changing the poor. In the case of the JSP, it was more difficult to follow this practice (it was not completely absent even from the JSP) because of Premadasa's abiding personal interest in the JSP, his legendary habit of paying attention to the smallest of details and his unsettling and somewhat unorthodox

practice of visiting every nook and cranny of the country to 'see things for himself'. Finally, his understanding of the poor and poverty was so phenomenal, it would have been difficult to deceive him even if (and when) an attempt was made. He was not above getting humble JSP recipients to lecture to the most powerful and influential bureaucrats in the land. Without Premadasa, the JSP would have ended up as one more, not very effective welfare programme. Janasaviya as we have discovered it (through the Research Programme) became possible because of the presence of Premadasa⁴².

How will the absence of Premadasa affect the success of future efforts at poverty alleviation? If the presence of Premadasa was crucial for the success of the JSP, would it mean that a reactivation of the JSP (albeit in an improved form) is an impossibility? Should we conclude that we should abandon ambitious efforts at poverty alleviation and simply revert to welfare programmes such as the food stamp scheme perhaps in augmented form?

It is undeniable that Premadasa's

absence will adversely affect any future attempt at implementing a simultaneously consumption cum production oriented poverty alleviation programme like the JSP. On the other hand reverting to a system of handouts is not a desirable option for two reasons. Firstly governments may be under increasing pressure (particularly externally) to curb spending on purely consumption oriented poverty alleviation programmes (such as food stamps). Such programmes could be stigmatised as 'welfare' and frowned upon. Since these programmes do not tackle the root causes of poverty, they will have to be continued, ad infinitum: and sooner or later pressure will build up to slash such 'anti growth/inflationary/wasteful subsidies'. We must also bear in mind that food stamp scheme was **not successful** in alleviating poverty or arresting the process of povertisation, despite being in effect for almost a decade⁴³.

If we revert to a food stamp - like scheme (a lean subsidy) the outcome will be similar to what happened during the '77 - '88 period i.e. high growth (at least initially) coupled with fast growing poverty and inequality (with all attendant social ills), impacting adversely on social and political stability, which will in turn be inimical to investment and growth. The need to break this vicious and dangerous cycle was one of the factors which motivated Premadasa into implementing the JSP - because a consumption cum production oriented poverty alleviation programme is more cost effective in the medium term than a 'lean subsidy' like the food stamps scheme.

Secondly the poor may not be content with a reversion to the earlier regimen

This research report was produced by the Premadasa Centre. The research was conducted by a team comprising U.G.Tilakaratne, Hasantha Srilal Hettiaarachchi, Senaratne Ponnampuruma and S.H.A.Mohamed, under the direction of Tisarane Gunasekara and Dayan Jayatilleka. The work was carried out with the advice and assistance of the Research Subcommittee Centre. The Subcommittee consisted of Bradman Weerakoon (Chairman), Desmond Fernando, P.C., Susil Sirivardhana, Dayan Jayatilleka and Tisarane Gunasekara. The research projects is the first of three completed by the Centre. The other two research projects deal with the 200 Garment Factories Programme and the 1.5 Million Houses Programme. The three comprehensive reports constitute an overall research programme launched by the Chairman of the Premadasa Centre, B.Sirisena Cooray and the Board of Directors. The Janasaviya research report, which we conclude, was written by Tisarane Gunasekara and Dayan Jayatilleka.

of meagre handouts (fiscal and external pressures are likely to make the handouts even more meagre). The JSP gave the poor a sense of self confidence and self esteem and dignity. It made them realise that poverty is not their unalterable fate but an economic and social condition which can and should be remedied, if the political motivation, commitment and will exist to do so.

Therefore any attempt to revert to grudging and not very generous charity (which is demeaning to the poor) may cause disappointment, disillusionment, suspicion and bitterness - all of which can have political repercussions. (Incidentally it should be emphasised once again that even not very generous charity would be better than nothing. The poor should not be left to fend for themselves).

Poverty and the poor cannot therefore be left alone. The issue of poverty has to be addressed and the poor have to be helped. The only question is what form this assistance should take? Should it be purely consumption oriented handouts (such as food stamps); or should it be a consumption cum production oriented programme which seek to strengthen and empower the poor, thereby enabling them to integrate into the development process?

PEOPLE-IZE POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Which brings us back to the main point - can a consumption cum production oriented programme like the JSP succeed without the presence of Premadasa?

Why was the presence of Premadasa so crucial for the success of the JSP? Because of his exceptional understanding of poverty and the poor and his commitment to the struggle against poverty. Those were the special qualities he brought into the JSP - without which it's success would have been unlikely. And these are essential ingredients for the success of any future effort at poverty alleviation as well.

The question therefore is: in the absence of Premadasa who will have the most complete understanding of poverty and be most committed to its eradication? The answer can be only be - the poor themselves. That then is the solution to the dilemma Premadasa's absence has placed us in : hand over the anti poverty programme to those who have the greatest vested interest in making it work - the poor. Empower the poor through appropriate institution building, thereby enabling them to be both the programme's driving force and its guardians. It should be emphasised that we are not talking about creating more NGOs or using the existing NGOs to act as a transmission belt between the state and the poor. That was tried under the JTF and was an abysmal failure. We are talking about institutions of the poor, by the poor, for the poor which deal directly with the state. In other words a direct partnership between the state and the poor.

Democratise the programme quantitatively and qualitatively by introducing the salient features of participatory democracy and representative democracy into it. Create the necessary structures which will enable the poor to participate in decision making, implementation and monitoring directly and indirectly (via elected representatives). In other words turn the future effort at poverty alleviation into a genuine, democratic peoples movement : Peopleize poverty alleviation. This is the only way of offsetting the absence of Premadasa and ensuring the success of any future effort at poverty alleviation.

THE GREAT BREAKTHROUGH : WHAT JANASAVIYA REALLY MEANT

"The strange thing is : when one is suffering from poverty, one has no interest in anything: one does not even feel like returning a smile or going to a temple. We led such terrible, unfortunate lives. It was after Janasaviya we felt like taking a bath or took an interest in cleanliness. After that we love going into society, mixing with people, and taking part in common activities. So we go looking for

volunteer community work projects". (R. Sunil - Bulathsinhala).

"Those days we used to think about how we are going to get the next meal. Even if you meet someone on the road the talk would be on what we don't have, and we did not even feel like thinking about school children. Now it is different. All around we hear talk about whether the children went to school ; how school work is progressing. This way we feel we have gone forward considerably. We could live with a smile on our faces". (B. Mendis Jayatunga - Bulathsinhala).

"Not many people in our area are educated. Those days they used to get together new the stream; or sit on the bridge, smoking and spitting into the water. All this changed with Janasaviya. All these people got together and started talking about the income generating ventures they could start with the help of Janasaviya. They would talk about how to get ahead, how to get bank loans. This was a big thing. This was the victory". (W.Mendis, Karadeniya)

The above testimonies by 5 Janasaviya recipients say it all. Janasaviya caused a psychological revolution, a revolution in the attitudes, outlook and expectations of the poor; it also laid the foundation for a change in economic and social relations, particularly in the rural sector, a change in favour of the poor and the oppressed.

Policy makers on both sides of the traditional policy divide see the poor as being dependent and apathetic - a burden on the economy and society. Their only difference is how they regard this burden - kindly and charitably or unkindly, and with intolerance.

The social democrats use this 'poor are dependent and helpless' argument to justify welfare entitlements while neo liberals and neo conservatives use it to discredit welfare. But both sides see the psychological condition as a permanent state which can never really be changed, certainly in the short term.

The greatest merit of Janasaviya is that

it debunked this myth by showing that a well conceived poverty alleviation programme (far from breeding more apathy and dependency) can cause a radical psychological upliftment of the poor, making them both desirous and capable of standing on their own feet and taking charge of their lives and destinies. The fact that this 'psychological revolution' took place in less than 4 years is also of crucial significance. The poor have finally been awakened from centuries old coma of hopelessness and despair into an awareness of their capabilities and rights.

What policy makers and economists saw as the greatest socio-psychological and socio-cultural obstacle, the biggest intangible barrier to the struggle against poverty has thus been removed, precisely during and as a result of a massive struggle against poverty. The great breakthrough has been made. The poor are ready and willing to take their place in the development effort.

Only one thing remains to be seen. Whether policy makers (both political and bureaucratic/technocratic) are willing to adopt the correct approach to poverty and poverty alleviation. **Today the greatest obstacle to the struggle against poverty is the unchanged psychological condition of the policy makers, technocrats and professional economists;** their refusal/reluctance to accept the need for a consumption cum production oriented poverty alleviation programme based on the experience of the JSP i.e. a programme which brings the poor into the production process by strengthening them economically, socially, physically and psychologically.

The poor would prefer a peaceful, democratic, broadly 'systemic' solution to their problems (along the lines of the JSP). But if such a solution is not forthcoming, they - especially the youth - will not hesitate to seek solutions beyond the confines of the System. The question is whether the policy makers will succeed in overcoming their self imposed psychological barriers and come up with a growth oriented multi-faceted poverty alleviation programme,

voluntarily, of their own volition, or whether they will need an external (and violent) stimulus in the form of yet another destructive anti-systemic rebellion.

CONCLUDED

Footnotes

⁴² The PA regime's own poverty alleviation programme "Samurdhi" is an excellent case in point. Samurdhi is a weak copy of the JSP's outward form minus the content. Families living below a poverty line are given a monthly grant. There is supposed to be a loan scheme as well as a public works programme and both too limited to have a real impact.

Government propagandists make much of the fact that Samurdhi unlike the JSP is being implemented simultaneously in the entire country and that its not a time bound programme like the JSP. The JSP had to be implemented on a staggered basis because it was not a handout, a mere consumption oriented poverty alleviation effort. Such a multi faceted programme could not have been implemented successfully simultaneously in the entire country. The JSP was time bound in order to destroy the dependency syndrome and encourage the recipients to stand on their own feet.

Samurdhi is more akin to J.R.Jayewardene's Stamp Scheme. That too was implemented in the entire country simultaneously and was not time bound. However the Food Stamp Scheme is superior to Samurdhi in two respects the number of families entitled to Food Stamps was far larger than the number of families entitled to Samurdhi; and the value of Food Stamps was higher in the 80's than the general Samurdhi entitlement of today: Rs.700/- per family per month compared to Samurdhi's Rs.800/- per month.

⁴³ The change to food stamps of declining real value at a time when the purchasing power of the poor was falling, removed the earlier security of a guaranteed minimum consumption level provided by the free rice ration. Thus while wage rates kept ahead of price increases up to 1979, nutrition levels improved and stunting among pre-school children fell to 37%. However after 1979 (food stamp scheme was introduced in September 1979 - editors), the sharp fall in purchasing power was not cushioned adequately by the food stamp scheme. The daily calorie consumption of the lowest deciles fell to 1558 and 1181 calories per capita respectively in 1981/82 (lower than it was in 1973). The incidence of wasting increased to 13% among pre-school children of the country as a whole, while in four of the 24 districts of Sri Lanka, wasting was above 1.5% (UNICEF study).

Contd from page 6

In the second wave of nationalism that swept the nation S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike led the *pancha maha bala vegaya* - the *govi, kamkaru, sangha, veda, guru* - pushing the doctrinaire left further into the doldrums. Their chances of being the alternative to the UNP was robbed when Bandaranaike rose to power as the guardian of the Sinhala nationalist forces. Having lost the race to the nationalist forces the left withdrew into the role of being 'moral' critics of the UNP. But their moral posturing stood in stark contrast to their own bourgeois life styles and their myopic commitment to a revolution which was never going to materialise as long as they invested in the share market, upmarket flats for renting and lucrative professions. They were completely out of touch with the ground realities of the day. They were essentially either middle-class intellectuals, (Dr. N.M. Perera, Pieter Keuneman, Dr. Colvin R. De Silva, Bernard Soysa) or were the regional lords of the plantocracy (William Silva, Reggie Perera, Leslie Goonewardena.) Despite the grandiose rhetoric of the Sri Lankan left, this class of left intellectuals never took positive steps to go down the path of the revolution that was to precede their Marxist millennium. Their limited trade union politics, ignoring the peasantry, was combined with grand standing in Parliament and public platforms. Beyond that they never organised any revolutionary movement that would seriously challenge their "class enemy". Their political ambivalence made them run with parliamentary democracy at the national level and hunt with the revolution in the back streets. Neither tactic brought them the fruits of their labour. Later, on the eve of joining the SLFP in 1960, Dr. N.M. Perera pronounced that no electorate empowered with universal franchise had ever opted for revolution. This virtually vanquished the revolutionary wing of the LSSP led somewhat half-heartedly by its leading theoretician Dr. Colvin R. De Silva.

**- TO BE CONTINUED -
NEXT : WHO ARE THE
REACTIONARIES?**



Privatization will in no way dilute or reduce the powers and rights of your union. British Airways was privatized in 1987, and the unions remain to protect worker interests just as before. Some of the world's largest, most powerful and vocal unions exist in the private sector. For example, the United Auto Workers (UAW) represent over 100,000 workers at the three biggest American car companies, none of which are state owned. In fact, there is every likelihood that working conditions will actually improve in privatized companies, since there will be substantial investments made to upgrade facilities and training. You can look forward to representing a considerably more prosperous union.

It is important to realize privatization is a means to an end. It is a means to improve our living standards, foster technological progress, create employment and take our nation into a more prosperous tomorrow. In order to achieve these aims, privatization has to be executed in the appropriate manner.

That is the task of the Public Enterprise Reform Commission (PERC). Its mandate is to make privatization work for Sri Lankans today, and for generations to come.

Every privatization is a carefully considered decision that takes into account the interests of all sectors of society; the general public, the state employees, the consumers, the suppliers, as well as the country's overall economic vision.

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**Will privatization mean
the end of the union
I represent?
How will the interests
of my members be
protected?**

- Trade Unionist

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