

A social revolution for peace in Lanka

Point of View

By Ameen Izzadeen

The dust raised in the hustings has now settled with the People's Alliance government in the saddle and the executive president showing early signs of accommodation and compromise. Nothing did become too important an issue than the war in the north and east at the campaign. The UNP said of the PA policy that it was aimed at dividing the country while the PA summed up the war as the wound of the beggar that helped UNP cronies fill their pockets and foreign bank accounts.

Many a post-mortem has been conducted on the polls. Some saw it as a verdict against Sinhala racism while others dismissing this theory said it was an indication of people's determination to defeat the UNP. Post-mortems apart, it now appears, the hawks are losing ground. The grassroots Sinhala man is talking of peace more than ever before. The question that haunts him today is when this war will end — the very question asked by his Tamil bretheren in the north and east. The war should end either by means military or peaceful. Nobody except for the arms dealer and the so-called megalomaniac rebel leaders will oppose peace.

In this context, it is sad to note the so-called Jathika Chinthanites, the Mahasammatha Bhumi Puthrites and the likes have already activated their propaganda machinery, going to the extreme of calling for a mass rebellion. Jathika Chinthanaya stalwart Gunadasa Amarasekera in an interview with the Irida Lanka-deepa said he saw the PA victory as the end of the Sinhala race.

"If the majority Sinhala race fails to realise the dangerous situation facing them and take some preventive steps, this country would be divided into two within the next two years and the Eelam of the Tamil racists will be created. It is now clear that the unitary Sri Lanka we inherited from our forefathers has seen its end. Neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils would be able to live in harmony in this country which would turn into a lake of blood. The country would eventually become a stronghold of imperialists," he said.

No right-minded person

would oppose the basic ideology of the Jathika Chinthanaya which envisages a Sri Lankan culture incorporating the cultures of other ethnic groups. For instance, the Buddhists ruins of Anuradhapura and the Hindu ruins of Trincomalee should be the heritage of all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. They point out at the pan-Indian culture, where the Kawali and Gazze music of the Muslims has become part and parcel of it. All that is good, but what is missing in the JC movement and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna is the principle of give and take. Their stand is similar to that of the LTTE.

A few years ago, in an article in the Frontline magazine, the late Newton Gunasekera, professor and social scientist, divided the Sinhala people into three groups according to the views they held. The first group, he said, held the view that this country belonged to the Sinhala Buddhists and other ethnic groups were living in the country owing to the mercy of the Sinhala people. Their presence in the country should in no way threaten the majority people.

Perhaps, the talk of creepers had its origin in such thinking.

The second group held the view that the Tamil people should enjoy certain rights but they denied the concept of traditional homeland of Tamils. All Sri Lankans should be free to be settled in any part of the country.

The third group's views reflected the thinking of the leftists and a section of the intelligentsia, who said the power should be devolved to Tamils and their right to self-determination should be recognised.

This categorization is helpful for the new government to act by knowing which of the three groups is gaining the upper hand.

Similar divisions along slightly different lines could also be found in the Tamil community as well. For instance, among Tamils, there are some who believe Eelam should be achieved at any

cost and some who are happy with a federal or provincial council system.

Yet there are some others who dream of a Sri Lanka where no ethnic group will enjoy a special position over the other groups, constitutionally or otherwise. This view is held also by a section of the Sinhala and Tamil intelligentsia who are branded by the Jathika Chinthanites as the agents of western imperialism.

However, it is interesting to note that among the Tamil intelligentsia there is a viewpoint which considers conceding some special position to the majority Sinhalese.

Meanwhile, the new Muslim leadership in the PA government too has a task in hand. Ugly scenes were witnessed wherever the Pakistani cricket team went. In some instances the tension was high with even words of national disharmony being hurled at each other. Ministers M.H.M. Ashraff and A.H.M. Fowze could coordinate and take steps to drill some sense of national unity into the heads of these so-called Lankan citizenized Pakistani Muslims.

At a time when Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is said to be inspired by a vision of a Nelson Mandela, is making peace overtures to the LTTE, what is now needed is the policies of give and take and forgive and forget to prevail. Let's not rock the boat and scuttle the peace efforts of Prime Minister Kumaratunga.

What is also needed is a social revolution which will sweep through all segments of all the ethnic groups of this country. The revolution should usher in a new era where each will respect the race, religion and culture of the other. The new era should see the withering away of the institution of racism and establish an enlightened society.

As the 1956 victory of the SLFP-led MEP was described by sons of soil as the real liberation from the colonialism, the 1994 PA victory should herald a liberation from the sins inherited from colonialism - national disunity. Let' all of us be sons and daughters of Sri Lanka.

SAT