

● Ethnic crisis a-view point

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A way out

Aren't we back to square one after prolonged and hectic manoeuvring? Will the Select committee put the issue on course? If it brings out the same old recommendations will the serious objections raised earlier re-surface?

Will there be any substance in the outcome even if such recommendations are submitted to the voters using the Provincial Council elections to serve as a referendum.

Nearly three years of disaster have gone since June 11, 1990, when battle lines were set-up on either side for the renewal of the war, a weary war on at times and off at times.

During this calamitous period various proposals were made on the assumption that only a political settlement arrived at, between political parties, both national and regional, would bring about salvation, so, it went on and on but the much talked of political settlement is as far away as ever.

Missed

Ominous was the missed opportunity to offer a "generous package" by the then President to Tigers just before fresh hostilities broke out. The President, according to reports, had apparently been in rather a disappointed mood when he mentioned to the Indian High Commissioner at a later date about the intended offer.

The revelation of a 100-day programme which was to culminate in a historic hand-shake shocked the readers of the "Frontline" in India and Sri Lanka and others as well.

The Hilton talks miserably failed despite the hand of co-operation and reconciliation extended by way of weapons, vehicles and material to the tune of several millions.

All party conference was a dismal failure.

The Select Committee is yet dragging its feet. The ruling UNP and wavering SLFP continue to remain dead ducks. It was a mockery of politics on the part of each of these two major parties to await an opportunity to pull the rug under the others carefully refraining from speaking their minds at least at the select committee.

A flow of formula ensued. The proposal that created a stir mostly among Sinhala sections led by Buddhist monks was the four-point programme put forward by Tamil parties with the blessings of no less a person than S. Thondaman, the extremely powerful minister in the then Premadasa Cabinet, who threatened to cross the battle lines to see his trusted ally Velupillai Prabhakaran. Nevertheless it all failed to go far enough.

The "Option Paper", the brain child of Mangala Moonasinghe, the Chairman of the select committee, finally opted to disappear.

Formulae

Interim recommendations of the committee agreed upon by the two major parties along with parties of the traditional left and a few MPs sans Tamil parties had to face vociferous opposition from both extremes. For Tamil parties, it was a recipe for the nullification of much hoped for Homeland merging the East with the North. And it was a hand out of even the power that should remain with the central government for the larger interest of the country as a whole, according to those on the other extreme.

All these formulae were significant for what they failed to underline, the ethnic unity within a single nation.

Thus the issue of the merger of the two provinces along with the question relating to the degree of debt to be devolved remained the most contentious central problem.

A political settlement between political parties (I repeat: between political parties) yet remains a day dream. And a much poisoned atmosphere where the focus of attention has intentionally been directed towards the painful birth of a "nationhood" in blood and tears continues to prevail.

The idea of virtually converting PC elections into a "referendum" in order to obtain a mandate to implement Select Committee recommendations would have been worthless in the context of that it would have deprived a basic right of the people of two provinces which in fact were crucial to the issue. Further, it would have been unrealistic as contending issues at the elections would have conversely overshadowed each other.

To paint a picture as simple as that of a many headed monster would suit simply a Utopian.

It is in this cross-situation in which the unfortunate is the innocent victim of vicious politics of opportunistic parties that this writer calls upon all concerned, particularly those who are well placed to undertake a task however challenging it would be, to take a bold step to find a way out.

The consensus sought for years long - yet seems to be beyond reach. If it does not come it must be compelled to submit. If it is not agreed upon it must be forced upon. This concept should underline the basic principle of the sacred exercise this writer suggests. However, justice and fairplay should underline the whole process which should serve all and save all as far as people's interests permit.

As everybody claims to fight for the cause of the people let's begin from the same point. To voice the voice of the voiceless one has to be genuine unlike those who pay only a lip-service to those whom they pretend to represent while riding rough-shod over them.

Neutral

In the first instance, our endeavour should be made to create neutral ground between us and the people of the grass-root level of the two provinces, i.e. peasants, workers, fisherfolk and the like who make the bulk of the population. This should give new momentum for them to speak their minds and voice their genuine desires.

The exercise so begun in earnest should reach upper strata of Tamil speaking communities. They who will occupy different levels of education and different positions in the economic ladder of the region will certainly be able to elaborate on the aspirations of their people. Among them, particularly in their civic organizations, cultural and religious, one would certainly find respected personalities of high intellect who would genuinely represent true aspirations of a people who had long been neglected by those in power.

There are sure to be difficult odds. For instance, the writer himself found recently in the Eastern province that Muslims who nearly made up one third of its population had been extorted of their wealth, 6000 acres of paddy lands alone had been plundered by Tigers. They had been cornered into three villages,

save for the protection provided by security forces. Those are matters which should and could be dealt with, with an open mind to reality without jumping into premature actions.

If one proceeds with checks and balances, these sections of people would certainly paint a picture that would depict not a demon but a deity, not a Tiger but a deer. "There is no hatred between us. We can live together like brothers and sisters. No one should try to dominate the other by devious means. All we want is unimpeded right to decide for ourselves in the general interest of all." So says the younger generation which prefers the gun to what they call the subjugation by those wielding ruling power.

The data so collected and comprehensively analysed would show up the bottom line of the wrangling. That would form the basic comprehension of their true aspirations on which all other claims, opinions and recommendations should rest.

This should, in the second instance, be enriched with the views of their ethnic kith and kins in other parts of the country, a cross section of whom would do for the purpose.

Expanded

The exercise now should be expanded to form sort of a data bank.

The next stages should be considered extremely indispensable whether or not the data so obtained in each such step go down with the aspirations of the people.

With extraordinary emphasis on the LTTE which claims complete sway over the Tamil society, all Tamil parties without exception should be called upon to come out precisely with what they are clamouring for, Muslim parties should be given a similar opportunity. In the backdrop of one being armed with a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the people's mind one would certainly be in a position of strength to draw the line between true objectives and propaganda ploys. They must be made to understand that time is not on their side and that bluff and double bluff would not do to cover up crimes with political trappings.

Zest and zeal would be decisive in filling the bank with invaluable data.

Despite being misinformed of the true situation, kept in the dark in regard to actual facts, taught a distorted history of events and deliberate wrong doings and misguided in order to be in the service of anti-national interests, Sinhala community in seven provinces is extremely important. Majority Sinhala Buddhists and Christians of different sects fully understand that most other urgent problems, the resolution of which hangs the future of the country, are waiting in the wings until the course of events are turned away from conflict. They do not want to swim in their own blood any more. Time is running out. They are ready to go the extra miles without being hostages of the misdeeds of their own leaders. Thoughtful sections fully understand that if the law of the jungle continues to prevail, writing on the wall for the nation will be imminent as the wrack and ruin is right on the door step.

Charismatic thinking would be an exception rather than the rule. If any such tendencies that may be there are set against similar ones on the part of a section of Tamil leadership, each would finish itself by swallowing the venom of communalism.

Views of the majority Sinhalese would form invaluable data.

Next, the main stream national political parties, the culprits, must be put on the deck. Despite their being guilty of creating all the chaos in the country, explanations of their deeds, rather misdeeds and accusations they try to hurl across against each other will certainly provide useful data, a thorough analysis of which should point to where the whole thing had gone wrong.

Advices

Views and advices of international human rights organizations such as the Amnesty International, UNHRC, the International Alert and the Asia Watch would undoubtedly be invaluable. They have to play a role in this process mainly in the context that the aspect of human rights in the war-torn North and the South as well as consistently drawn their serious attention. The necessity to ensure that the restoration of now perilously suppressed human rights goes hand in hand with universal standards too calls for their co-operation.

Our closest neighbour, India, without whose good will no settlement would stand the test of time comes next. Be sure that you don't confine yourself to the centre but will also get in touch with the ruling AIADMK and the DMK as well in Tamil Nadu. It might be necessary to look further down the road to reach to the bottom of relations, overt and covert, between the LTTE and the DMK and to comprehend the shocking state of affairs that prevailed when the latter during its rule went out of its way to strengthen with open arms the fighting capacity of its armed ally. Equally important would be the advent of a changed political climate there since the AIADMK and Congress (I) ended a period of political ties, ties that highlighted vows made by Jayalalitha to civilize the brutal beast after the killing of Rajiv Gandhi by a human bomb in the backlash of a record of failings on the part of the Congress (I) Government to hook the monster.

The facts that would emerge from this part of the exercise would indicate the direction to which brutal forces had led away a genuine struggle for common aspirations of a people.

Principal players in the international arena such as the US, Britain, Germany, France, Canada, Australia and China whose capacity to influence world opinion is crucial would readily welcome peace moves that would take root in this country in our interest and that of theirs as well. They will certainly strengthen our efforts.

Classification

Now it would be a task of classification, processing and analysing data which might at the first glance paint a picture of insurmountable contradictions. But underlying unity of purpose would solve major part of them.

In order to fully achieve the objectives of collecting and analysing data, the exercise should be handled by persons whose capacity and integrity cannot be questioned. They too should be always escorted.

As the driving force of every development of reality is its internal contradictions, the approach should be based on the analysis of them in order to understand the developing reality. External causes which are

secondary too should be studied with due attention paid to interdependence of contradictory aspects and conditions. In this exercise time tested law of the and struggle of opposites should be the key to the of taking the wind out of communalist atmosphere which might stand in the way of the emergence of a situation. Naturally moribund tendencies would be confined to dust bin of human history as a qualitative transformation of one situation to another takes in the process of the development of contradictions.

The truth will not emerge out of the void. Thoroughly going into concrete conditions, it must be found.

Different contradictions need different methods of solution. Aspects of universality and particular contradictions, principal contradictions and principal aspect of contradictions and also the relativity of contradictions - all these will point to the social nature of the problem. Different methods of resolution needed because each of these contradictions will lead to specific stratum of society.

The historical inevitability of arresting retrogressive tendencies as governed by the dialectical negation of the negation will lead to a situation where opportunities, completely new and progressive open up.

This process as one whole, but step by step should proceed from a carefully selected starting-point in the social character of the problem.

Contradictions

Contradictions of the two aspects, principal contradiction of each aspect and the principal aspect of contradiction along with the relativity of all contradictions analysed in depth, not superficially, an all-round approach to reach out to a solution, not one merely satisfy politics but one which permeates social fabric and lasts, to the ethnic problem, can as it is, will, without doubt, succeed.

However, it is a matter for the intelligent analysts.

The form of settlement thus extracted on the pile of data would certainly unravel a process of open-mindedness and openness on the part of all concerned. Knotty and sticky points could be left along with the worthless recent past that should be buried.

This new situation will amply suit present conditions because the problem yet remains within bounds of a national issue, a struggle for bourgeois democracy, a pre-requisite to the sharp development of the class struggle.

The final outcome of the exercise would be everyone a winner in the background of a fate as dust in the process of history, most of them poised to face.

To be a winner one has to be a loser too. One to give up some in return for what one gets. Winners are those who are genuine in their claims to champion the cause of the oppressed for whose sake the exercise has devoted itself.

The formula, realistic, objective, unbiased, scientific and down to earth, would stand in excellent upholding the sacred principle, ONE PEOPLE - ONE TAMIL.

Match

Majority Sinhalese inevitably be called upon to be little more altruistic in their outlook - for the sake of a secured future for their loved ones, at least.

Political parties will be required to match their words with deeds. Many of them among not only Tamil and Muslim parties, but also among national parties, may have to be