

Opinion Evaluation Committee

In the Prime Minister's appeal of October 2nd 1994, among other things, she wants the views of the public on "the establishment of a society free of discrimination on the basis of race, language, religion and caste, a society that would be clean, fair, just and disciplined, and of a prosperous land".

I consider her appeal so important that I am directing this letter to the paper that looks after the nation's interests, namely the "Island", rather than the PM's office where it may not get the same attention.

The Prime Minister's words are soothing for anybody to hear. The vast majority of all the people in this land, from among the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and any other minorities would dearly love to live in peace in a society where not one group, including the majority Sinhalese will have privileges over the other minorities, where all people are one without any distinction due to their race, religion, colour or their skin or whatever.

In other words, it is a realisation of the beautiful dream that the Prime Minister has described.

If a proper referendum were to be held on this the only people who would not want to live together with others as equals will be those who want to live in a carved out portion of the country where everybody but themselves is excluded, but keep to them selves their rights in the original country.

In other words, they must have the right of dual citizenship which will be denied to all others. This the government has made clear is out of the question and there will be no referendum on this, but the government must watch out that it will not be advised by her own advisers to undermine its own ideal of a "society free of discrimination", by giving favoured treatment to any one ethnic group.

If the government does that, it will not only be destroying its own ideals, but will lead the country on the one-way road to disaster. If such a special status is given to the LTTE, it will lead directly to a unilateral declaration of independence which will be immediately recognized by at least one nation for any one of several reasons of their own or it will be recognized by a nation that believes in the picture of brutality by the Sinhalese that the LTTE has so successfully painted, which the government has not denied because it is not aware of what the LTTE has said.

The negative picture painted by Thondaman as a cabinet minister would have only confirmed what the LTTE has been saying all along. The LTTE keeps repeating that there will be no military solution. Yes there will be no military solution for the LTTE, which they should by now have concluded because what was done to the armed forces by Jayawardene and Premadasa, as was vividly described in the editorial of the "Sunday Island" on 2/10/94 will never happen again. Having thus excluded separation, the only question that now

remains is discrimination.

In any society, discrimination is possible only by the powerful against the weak. It has always been so in every country in the world ever since the human species began to establish itself. Among the non-human species discrimination as we speak of does not exist. There it is the survival of the fittest.

Power to discriminate against is obtained in one of three ways. In one situation power automatically comes to the majority ethnic community by virtue of its strength in numbers and discrimination against those of a different community is practised. A good example of this is in Malaysia where the early Muslim settlers are a privileged society in the constitution itself in contrast to the Chinese late-comers.

These early Muslim settlers are called Bhumiputras. In spite of the apparent difficulty of managing such a law, they seem to have done it with remarkable success. In properties like flats, this law has been very easy to operate. Such discrimination has been possible only because Muslims as an ethnic group have remained united and cannot be influenced to undermine their ethnic position of privilege by inducements from the minorities by way of political support.

The Malaysian society where the Muslims have privileges over the other minorities has never been criticised either by the vociferous minorities in Sri-Lanka or by the world press. Translated to Sri-Lankan terms, it amounts to the following. Sinhalese are the Bhumiputras, the early

their rights and true evangelism will be acceptable as in most countries except those under Muslim control.

What the Buddhists expect from the government is in addition to the constitutional protection, it should protect Buddhism from the unethical conversions of Buddhists by all kinds of organizations. No government has done this and it will not be very long that the Buddhists realize that the PA which means the SLFP is not any different from the UNP.

What it seems is that both the UNP and the SLFP have been doing all along has been to call themselves Buddhist to get the votes of the Buddhists and had at no time the intention of protecting Buddhism. They never even want to know the fact that the Sinhalese Buddhist has been put in the present situation jointly by the British and the Christian Churches. If Buddhism is not protected there could very well be unrest among Buddhists and the government in power will be held responsible.

Now coming back to Malaysia, if on the other hand the Muslims had not been united, the minorities in Malaysia could have used the Muslim leaders to obtain privileges for themselves over and above what the Muslims have, at the expense of the Muslims by simply offering their political support even though common sense would state that the political support of the majority is, stronger than that of the minority.

In a situation like this the minorities become more powerful than the majority that has been abandoned by their leaders for their personal benefits, making them vulnerable to discrimination by the minorities. That would represent the second case.

The last case would be the situation in

the advice of those who advise the government seems to agree that the Sinhalese have discriminated against the minorities though they themselves do not seem to be sure of what those discriminations are. Such is the power the advisors have over any government.

The only ray of hope in the horizon is that the government announcement of opinion evaluation has been drafted personally by the Prime Minister to get to know the facts herself, after having had second thoughts about the advice she has received so far, but there are grave dangers in trying to assess true public opinion by the letters received at the Prime Minister's office.

The highly efficient and sophisticated propaganda machinery of the LTTE can inundate the Opinion Evaluation Committee with letters from "Sinhalese all across the country" stating that the LTTE demands are fair and that the government should accept them and have peace for all time.

If the government wants to find out what the bulk of the Sinhalese think, they should read the "Dinava" and the "Island". As quality papers they have always published the opposing views as well, and they have poured millions of words over the last 17 years that both the UNP and the PA have treated with contempt and have obviously never read.

The PA won only on the "hate vote" against the UNP. It could have done comparably better and could have had a working majority of its own if it received the correct advice on the North East issue and did not panic the Sinhalese who hated the corruption of the UNP to the extent of making them vote UNP to save the country.

The surest way how not to find out what discriminations the

It is my personal feeling that if the above procedure is followed, it will be apparent to the whole world that no discrimination is being practised by the majority Sinhalese against the minorities, but instead the minorities have been using the majority leaders to their advantage against the interests of the majority itself. The most glaring example of this is Thondaman.

As a result of this revelation the propaganda machinery of the LTTE would receive a crippling blow in the eyes of the world and as a bonus the hostility that some countries have towards us could turn to cooperation.

Only the most innocent and the most naive will believe that there can ever be peace with the LTTE. Let us hope the government understands the dangers of dealing with a ruthless gang that does not represent the Tamils to begin with, but only themselves. Has the government ever tried to find out what following the LTTE has among the Jaffna Tamils? If the answer is that they have no following, then they should be considered as rebels against the stability of the country and treated accordingly. If the answer is that they have a following, then this is an ethnic war.

Why not find the answers to these questions before we get bogged down in details which may be totally irrelevant? How can any solution emerge when we have not diagnosed the problem and do not know whether we are talking to the right party on the right issue? The consequences of talking to the wrong party on the wrong issue could be disastrous. That no one can deny.

Now that we have a cease fire, the army commanders should be allowed 24 hour access to the government and they should heed their advice. We cannot allow the loss of any

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settlers compared to the Tamil settlers who came later. If a Tamil sells a property to a Sinhalese, he will have to charge him 10% less.

Any Sinhalese is entitled to buy a flat at 10% discount from a Tamil. Preference will be given to Sinhalese for all government jobs, scholarships etc, and there will be a guaranteed minimum percentage of Sinhalese in all government departments.

What the Sinhalese Buddhist is asking today is not the privileges that the Muslim majority enjoys in Malaysia. They are begging the Sinhalese Buddhist government to protect Buddhism by Constitution and to ensure that a Sinhalese has the same rights as the minorities, one of which is the right to settle down any part of his own country, namely the Hill Country or Jaffna if he wants to. Protecting Buddhism is not anti any other religion. For the ignorant let it be stated that Buddhism is the only religion that has in all its history never attacked any other religion. All religions will have

which a minority ethnic group can have power over a larger ethnic group as it exists in Israel, where a minority has been practicing discrimination against the majority Muslims purely because of the availability of arms and personnel trained to use them against the Muslims. A similar situation prevailed in Apartheid South Africa.

Let us now examine the ethnic problem in Sri-Lanka in the light of the ethnic problems around the rest of the world.

The minorities in Sri-Lanka have been saying it loud and clear year after year that they have been discriminated against by the majority ethnic community, namely the Sinhalese 74%. Both the UNP and the PA seem to agree. What the Sinhalese have been asking the minorities year after year has been to tell them in what way they have discriminated against the minorities. They have never answered the question except with weird mental deviations such as 50 - 50.

Even the government, presumably on

majority practices against the minorities would be to ask the minorities verbally what they are. They will take the Prime Minister round and round the Mulberry bush without ever showing her where they are or what they are because they simply do not exist.

There is however a definite way to find out what these discriminations are, and that is for all the minorities to be asked to state them point by point in writing, with one such list from each minority group and to submit them officially to the Prime Minister. These should then be handed over to the local and international press.

The Sinhalese who stand as the accused, will then for the first time get to know what the charges against them are, but the world press has known these charges for years, and that is the reason why there is so much of hostility towards the Sinhalese from many nations. Let us for the first time allow the international press to have access to the response from the Sinhalese through the national press.

more personnel of the armed forces or yield one inch of ground due to not heeding the advice of the armed forces.

As the "Island" editorial of 2/10/94 said, it is our men who have kept the Tigers at bay for the past ten years or more despite the disaster brought on them by previous governments.

If they had not been government imagine what the position in the country today would be if the LTTE advanced its front line to join up with Thondaman territory? It is "our servants" as somebody put it who have sacrificed their lives and even worse, their limbs to save the so called Colombo intellectuals who refer to these men in disparaging language.

What these cretins would understand best would be that any other country would have done long ago, namely conscription into service of all able bodied men and women which includes the off-spring of the so called intellectuals to fight side by side with the "servants".
A Sinhalese
Matara