

Alternate package for devolution

The All Religions Solidarity Alliance - a movement comprising Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims - has after meditation, prayer and dialogue proposed an alternate devolution package which it believes would be for the common good of all people of this country. We today publish excerpts from the proposals.

Sinhala

Ours is an island comprising 25000 sq. miles in area. Known by several names at different times, it was called 'Sinhala deepaya' - or 'Sinhale' inhabited by the Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims and the people were known as 'Sinhala' people. Even the kings be they Sinhala, Tamil or Dravidian were known as Kings of Sinhala, which name was multi ethnic in character. It is a pity that today the name 'Sinhala' has acquired an exclusivity to a particular ethnic group.

A decentralized administration

This country in the past was divided into three regions, Ruhunu, Pihiti and Maya. In the pre Christian era, Rata sabha and Oam sabha administrations were in practice. Within this administration the resource allocation was achieved fairly and equally. Even during the Indo invasions and after the 15th century during the European period unitary nature of the country was maintained though nominal in character.

The Wewa-Dagoba concept

Development of nations occurred around river basins. Peculiarity in our identity was that the nation grew up based on a river economy. Hence the Wewa-dagoba concept became the basis for community life. But culture and heritage has come to be built on this foundation.

Decline begins

Many are the theories for decline. Yet it runs as far back as 1815. The Colebrooke - Cameron reforms of 1833 tended to weaken the rights and powers so far enjoyed by the people. Land enjoyed by the people subject to royal ownership, were alienated to the landed. Thus those gentry thus creating a landless class in the country. Thus a plantation economy was

born necessitating new administrative systems that deprived the people of some of their birth-rights.

When the people rose up in rebellion, the English rulers put it down ruthlessly and devised a system of administration which had an ethnic base.

Missionary education

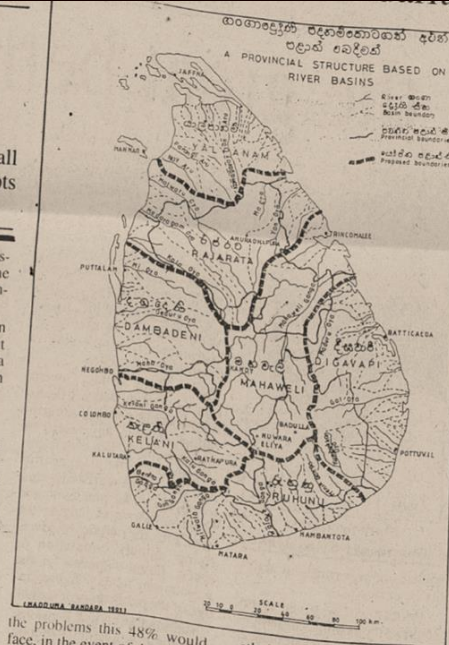
Missionary education was another contributory factor making the problems aggravate. The English educated thus became privileged groups. This group with the foreign ruler decided on selves as an ethnic group, apart in language, culture and homeland. The Sinhala people view the entire scenario as a move pregnant with separatist tendencies. The South Indian political factor has heightened the intensity of the problem, embracing all the Tamil people dispersed in all parts of the world into a movement identified as 'We Tamil' group. Thus the Sinhala and Tamil people live in distrust of each other.

Hence the Tamil leadership identified their problems as ethnic in origin. Even the political parties took on a communal name and aspect. Thereby problems instead of being solved gave rise to newer issues.

Need of the hour

Even though the Tamil people of the north have begun a call for a separate homeland, it has to be understood that they in general lend no support to such agitation. Hence the LTTE struggle cannot be identified as a move that rallies the support of the entire community.

Mention has to be made of a factor which cannot be overlooked here. Of the Tamil people 52% live in the North and East while 48% live in other parts of this island in harmony with their Sinhala counterparts. Who would be responsible for



the problems this 48% would face, in the event of devolution of power or division of land on the fate of the majority Sinhala and Tamil people.

Problem aggravates

This privileged group called upon the rulers to share power with them. Consequently Donoughmore and Soulbury Commissions proposed legislative and executive reforms which instead of concentrating power with the people did the contrary of handing over power to the privileged few.

When the need was communal amity and harmony this new ruling class began to instal a political structure which basically became ethnic.

While a feeling of alienation became manifest among the Tamil community by these moves, the Sinhala leadership began to strengthen their hold on power more and more.

This created a new dimension to the problem. Creation of an ethnic identity not available prior to the imperialist era. This has grown to the extent of the Tamil people identifying them-

ethnic proportions? Isn't the same argument fair by the Muslim community with devolution on the ethnic basis.

We appeal to you

Whatever the solution it should not be thrust on the Tamil people by force, forget not they lived together with us. Terrorism and the Tamil people need different yardsticks. Be in their boots and think of their problems realistically.

Tamil brethren

The basis for the present conflict is the homeland theory, which is totally unjustified. This is the creation of your political leadership that has come to power on your shoulders.

The imperialists carved out administrative entities to suit their plans. The resources were equally enjoyed by all before the break up into several units. The problems of the South are seen as common grievances while the problems of the North are identified as ethnic. Let us unite as one people in one country. Till then this country will not progress, the final victor will be the alien forces that guide us.

Beware of the apprehension of the Sinhala people about South Indian political spectre.

To the political leadership

Be more responsive to the political needs of the people and not to your personal glorification. Understand the history and aspirations of the land and its people. Hence we appeal to all political leadership to serve the country selflessly.

National political leadership

We understand that both main political parties have contributed to this debacle in large or small measure. Whatever the promises, no proper devolution machinery has been created thus plunging the country into a state of war. The youth, as a result have become a disillusioned segment in society.

Employment, development and education have all been Colombo centered. The people in the North and the people of Monaragala, Wellawaya Hambantota and Tangalle in the South have become dispossessed and distanced. This process needs to be reversed. The principle of 'rightful place to the rightful person' need to be strictly adhered to. Non-addressing of the various problems in the South brought on the 1971 insurrection and was called a political uprising. A similar movement since 1975 with armed participation is termed a liberation struggle. No end to the struggle is yet seen.

Power is concentrated in a few privileged hands till now. Populist struggles like Iranawila and Kandalama have been swept under the mat by this privileged political groupings. It is opportune to examine how opportunistic they have been.

All Religions Solidarity Alliance is of the understanding that the present devolution package of the PA Government would tend to divide the people on an ethnic and religious basis more than ever. The tendency is wrought with great calamity. Hence these proposals need amendment.

Alternative proposals

01. The proposals be divested from the colonial framework of administrative structure now in force.

02. We do not approve of devolution on an ethnic basis.

Devolution we propose be done with a view to ameliorate the burning issues that are faced by the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim peoples.

03. The devolution ought to embrace the following:

The dignity of all ethnic groups to be accepted.

The allocation of resources equally.

Co-existence of all inter-religious and inter-cultural groups to maintain their different identities and to provide for their natural growth;

To implement a process of all peoples being a party to political and national development as to ensure the integrity and unitary nature of the land so that devolution would take effect on a national development basis.

04. We propose political representation as Sri Lankans be accepted for recognition of political parties than on divisive trends like race, language and religion.

05. We propose that the present demarcation of administrative areas more suited for revenue collection and trade be replaced with units as indicated previously. A national commission to demarcate provinces hence needs to be set up. A provincial structure as suggested by Professor Madduma Bandara of the Peradeniya University is also submitted to the commission.

06. We accept Sinhala and Tamil as official languages and urge that necessary steps for its early implementation be made operative. We also propose the use of English in the administration as an international language.

07. Constitutionally though Sinhala and Tamil have been accepted as the national languages, in the provincial administration people are faced with problems. Lack of English education and the lack of other facilities which have made the people disillusioned have to be efficiently and expeditiously remedied.

This is our alternative package for devolution. A constitutional set of proposals would soon be submitted.

All Religions Solidarity Alliance

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