

What PA's land policy in the East

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UNP bashing seems to be the main pre-occupation not only by the present government which is understandable, but also from many sections of the media which before the 16th of August were singing the praises of the UNP. In fact before the 16th of August, the UNP could do no wrong.

"Victory has many fathers defeat almost always is an Orphan". I am a defeated candidate, who contested the Galle district from the United National Party. I was walking to the GA's Office on the day of the count, from the counting centre. One defeated PA candidate fell into stride with me. In conversation I told him "So you have won a good victory." He looked over his shoulders to see if anyone was listening and said "Mr. Gunaratne we are 2 parties, we got everyone of our votes and we only just made it. Your party is definitely the strongest political party in this country. We never imagined that after 17 years you will do so well."

This statement alone sums up the political situation in the country.

Whilst there may be truth in some of the statements made by the opposition, the fact of the matter is that, but for Mr. Ashraff and the Tamil parties, the UNP would still be in office.

Though elitist circles in Colombo sporting cellular telephones gold bracelets and driving luxury vehicles, find many virtues in the PA and are today extolling the virtues of the new government. The tack record of the UNP is hard to beat.

Let us take the industrial base of this country. Everyone talks glibly of NIC sta-

tus. Could we have gone anywhere near reaching this status but for the power generated by the Mahaweli.

Kotmale, Victoria, Randenigala, Ulhitiya, Rantambe - the big five reservoir schemes today have added over 500 megawatts of power to the national grid.

In 1976 this country was having all manner of power cuts. No rural electrification, no free trade zones, factories, industrial complexes. High rise buildings, could have come up but for power generated from the Mahaweli. Indeed industry would have collapsed without motive power. What of the Irrigation benefits? Kalawewa, Maduru Oya System C (Girandurukotte) the Ulhitiya plains are today thriving farming communities due to the Mahaweli waters flowing down to the plains from the Highlands.

It was Mervyn de Silva of the 'Lanka Guardian' following the UNP victory in 1983 who carried the lead story "How green was my Mahaweli". Today, however, all governments must realise, that developing the Mahaweli Delta would be an exercise in futility, if land settlement is sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

Words like Central Government, Border areas etc., have crept into the political lexicon of our country.

Every political party is bending over backwards to make peace with the LTTE. What does the LTTE want? In one simple word the answer is "Land."

The vast fertile but drought stricken eastern and northern provinces of this country have become fecund and arable due to the Mahaweli waters.

The ayowed policy of the UNP was to oppose the merger of the North and Eastern provinces.

Land settlement was going to be on the national ethnic ratio.

Today the PA must realise that they just do not have the jobs to give their supporters. All any government can now give is land - land irrigated by the Mahaweli waters in the Eastern and Northern-North Central Provinces.

Be it the UNP or the PA no Government has the mandate from the people of this country to barter away the land rights. Whilst it may be fashionable to talk of "Political settlements", one must realise that this word cannot be made an euphemism to trade away land settlement rights of the people.

What is going to be the policy of the PA government on land settlement in the North & eastern provinces? Will land settlements come under the purview of the

government or the provincial administration. Will Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil people from the Southern, Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces who do not have an inch of land be given land in the Mahaweli Delta.

Before the forthcoming Presidential Elections the PA leader who seems to be heading for "Peace at any Price" must make a declaration on the land settlement policy of the PA government.

The settlers, the soldiers, the generals of Sri Lanka all fell on the field of honour defending land rights of the people of this country.

The Northern Tamil parties, Mr. Ashraff from the Eastern Province all seem to be riding the Euphoria wave of political settlement. The Galle port loses priority to Oluvil in the east.

The Sinhala settlers in the Welio-Olya seem to be living a life of uncertainty. Food ships are being hijack-

ed by the LTTE is commandeered by the LTTE. Massive conscription goes on in the north. Military establishments all along the north and the east are being constantly probed by LTTE cadres.

A strong plea is made for withdrawal of Troops. Where is all this taking Sri Lanka. The answer seems to be quite evident. The LTTE is fighting for land.

It is this land, developed and irrigated by the Mahaweli waters and paid for by the whole country, that must be defended.

The UNP Government developed the Mahaweli mobilising funds and the resources from the international community. The fruits of the Mahaweli must flow to all. Not to one single community fighting to impose a racist rule in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

Maitri Gunaratne

Chief Organiser UNP
Habaraduwa Galle District.