

umbrella of support for the peace process and this support must be maintained whilst expanding the base of that support in Asia. The role of the facilitator becomes crucial, and any outstanding issues should be sorted out immediately.

Everybody will keenly await the Martyrs Day speech by the leader of the LTTE. His speech will indicate the parameters

upon which the peace process is to be resumed new leader with proven qualities of leadership and patience and remarkable ability to build consensus has been elected in the South. All peace-loving people of this country will wish him well and give their highest level of cooperation in taking the country through these stormy waters. ■

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THE SINHALA PEOPLE HAVE NOT REJECTED A FEDERAL SOLUTION

Lal Wijenayake

Resumption of hostilities between the LTTE and the government forces soon after the election of a new President has stunned the country. But it was expected as the logical outcome of the communal politics that took centre stage in the run-up to the election.

The extremely communal campaign that was spearheaded by the JVP and the JHU has deeply divided the masses on ethnic lines and has led to the clear polarization of the masses on the basis of ethnicity, as evidenced by the events following the election, such as the stand taken by the parties representing the plantation Tamil community.

In essence the campaign designed and executed by the JVP and the JHU was to challenge the minorities on questions of political power. The most prominent slogan, also the one that attracted even the otherwise non-communal Sinhala voter, was the call to the Sinhala people to show the minorities that it is possible to have a government at the centre without the support of the minorities, so that the government would be free to govern without submitting to the 'unreasonable demands of the minorities'.

The extremely divisive propaganda that was carried on in the state media, especially the electronic media, unnerved the minorities while it meant to touch the hearts of the Sinhala people.

The direct challenge to the political power of the minorities was welcome fodder to the LTTE being from their point of view entrapped in a fragile ceasefire and a stalled peace process.

Finding itself unable to reach out due to the pressure exerted by the international community, the LTTE made use of this opportunity to break its shackles and move out challenge the government on the basis that the Sinhala people had rejected a federal solution to the ethnic problem and the framework set out in the Oslo communiqué to explore a solution.

The pressure brought on the LTTE by the international community was a direct result of the government led by Ranil Wickremasinghe offering a federal solution with the right to internal self-determination.

The isolation of the LTTE internationally was the outcome of the offer of a federal solution by Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremasinghe and not solely due to the clever diplomacy of our much-respected late Lakshaman Kadrigamar, as popularly believed.

In this background it is necessary to see whether in fact the Sinhala people have rejected a federal solution. The stand of the two main political parties UNP and SLFP on a federal solution remains unchanged and the traditional left parties, the LSSP and CP have stood firmly for a federal solution. Therefore it is not correct to say that the Sinhala people have rejected a federal solution.

Further, an analysis of the election results itself shows that the need for a federal solution has received broad acceptance in the south and especially among Sinhala people.

The UNP, which during the Presidential election, campaigned directly on the basis of a federal solution to the ethnic problem has increased its vote in relation to the 2004 general election. The total UNP vote has increased from 35,04,200, i.e, 37.83% of the total votes polled, to 47,06,366 or, 48.43% of total. That is an increase of 10.60%.

What is more significant is that the UNP vote in the predominantly Sinhala districts of Gampaha, Kegalle, Polonnaruwa, Kalutara, Matara, Kurunegala, Moneragala, Ratnapura and Anuradhapura has increased by 7.2%, 3.55%, 5.41%, 5.42%, 1.81%, 3.78%, 4.66%, 3.78% and 3.68%, respectively.

Therefore it is clearly seen that there is no basis for the claim that the Sinhala people have rejected a federal solution and / or that the Sinhala people have voted against the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and the peace process.

It is in fact significant that, in spite of the extremely communal campaign carried on against a federal solution and the peace process, the Sri Lankan electorate and the Sinhala electorate in particular has voted for a federal solution and for the continuance of the CFA and the peace process.

A look at the voting at the presidential election in some of the predominantly Sinhala Buddhist electorates, where over 95% voters are Sinhala shows that the UNP significantly increased its vote when compared with the 2004 General election.

For example see in the increases below:

Kolonnawa: 11.57%
Kotte: 2.93%
Kaduwellla: 10.13%

Avisawella: 5.34%
Homagama: 10.12%
Maharagama: 10.59%
Kesbawa: 12.81%
Moratuwa: 7.65%
Divulapitya: 7.24%
Mirigama: 7.70%
Minuwangoda: 6.93%
Attanagalla: 9.64%
Gampaha: 7.53%
Ja-Ela: 6.29%
Mahara: 8.38%
Dompe: 6.26%
Biyagama: 9.49%
Kelaniya: 9.65%
Polonnaruwa: 5.41%
Minneriya: 7.07%
Medirigiriya: 4.42%
Panadura: 9.01%
Senkadagala: 7.09%
Yatinuwara: 7.50%

This brings us to the most burning issue today, as to what should be done to save the CFA and the peace process, and most importantly to avoid another war.

The solution lies in the acceptance of the fact that the Sinhala people have not rejected a federal solution and on that basis to announce the willingness to continue the peace process from the point where it was stalled.

The government must be bold enough to announce this fact to the nation and the international community, so that the international community will be in a position to support the government's efforts to avoid a war and move towards peace.

Time is fast running out and this step has to be taken early. In this instance, if action is not taken immediately there may not be any stability. ■

Courtesy, *Daily Mirror*, 12 January, 2006

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