

time, showing that the core of patronage-seeking voting is 'development' oriented, and that it is only a close second to 'rights-based' voting which is outside the patronage culture.

#### References

Chandra, Kanchan. 2004, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*. Cambridge University Press.

Downs, Anthony. 1957, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy," *The Journal of Political Economy*. Vol. 65, No. 2 (April), 135-50.

Salabdeen, M., 2010, "Naadolunandratk Therilhalil Kilakko Muslimkalin Theerpu," *Veerakesari*, 18 April.

Sartori, Giovanni, 2001, "The Party Effects of Electoral Systems," in L. Diamond and R. Gunther (eds), *Political Parties and Democracy*, Baltimore. John Hopkins University Press, 90-105. ■

Minaa Ishter is a Colombo-based researcher and consultant, currently following a postgraduate degree in Political Science at the University of Colombo.

## Emergency Relaxed – how far?

From our Legal Correspondent

The recent changes in the emergency regulations are limited to one set, the Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations, commonly known as the EMPPR. The Civil Rights Movement has listed some 18 or so additional emergency regulations that remain in force. These include provision for High Security Zones in Galle and Matara, restrictions on the use of outboard motors, restrictions on the procurement of certain items, and the "Anti Terrorism" regulations.

Many of the amendments made to the EMPPR on 2 May 2010 are to be welcomed. These include abolition of several offences, repeal of the provision for the disposal of dead bodies bypassing inquest proceedings, and repeal of the admissibility of confessions made to police officers above a certain rank. Regrettable however is the continuation of detention at the behest of the executive with restriction on the possibility of judicial intervention, and the failure to amend the provisions relating to "surrendees", which in effect provide for detention without trial. Disturbing is the reintroduction of certain provisions detrimental to trade union activity, which had been repealed earlier, but which have now inexplicably found their way back.

Making laws is normally the prerogative of Parliament, and the bypassing of the Legislature procedure by the President in special circumstances must ever be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and control. In the past MPs have been notoriously remiss in their sacred duty of familiarizing themselves with and monitoring the emergency regulations. They have never used their power to alter or revoke any regulation. Will the new MPs show any greater alacrity in protecting the interests of the people who elected them?

# CULT OF CELEBRITY & THE ELECTIONS

Maya

The world over, the preoccupation of people with the life histories, lifestyles and private lives of celebrities has become obsessive. Sri Lanka is no exception and the choice of celebrities as candidates for the 8 April election is revealing. Several celebrities are contestants as well as nominees on the National Lists of the two major political parties. The UPFA leads the way with a galaxy of 'stars' from the film and sports world including Malini Fonseka, Geetha Kumarasinghe, Susanthika Jayasinghe, Sanath Jayasuriya, and Someratne Dissanayake. The UNP has Upeksha Swarnamali (a.k.a Paba), Rosy Senanayake, and Ranjan Ramanayake.

What are we to make of this phenomenon of celebrities in politics, which is nothing new in South Asia or elsewhere. In India there have been film celebrities such as M.G. Ramachandran, Jayalalitha and Jaya Bacchan, and in Sri Lanka, Vijaya and Jeevan Kumaratunge, Gamini Fonseka, Ranjan Ramanayake and Anarkali have entered politics after successful film/teledrama careers.

M.S.S. Pandian, in his book *The Image Trap*, writes about M.G. Ramachandran's transition from Tamil films to politics, and how actors 'constructed biographies' out of their film personas. Playing celluloid stereotypes such as tough guys, good guys, gods or brave men, or even as women fighting injustice, they have projected these roles onto real life, constructing a favourable image for themselves for political advantage – so much so that it sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish the actual identity of the actor/actress from the fictitious one. Life imitating art, as they say!

## Alternative faces

We have had celebrity endorsements of politicians before. Every key election sees famous figures in the arts, business, sports, and academia co-opted to sanction politicians. The last presidential election also saw the phenomenon of key public servants endorsing the president, thereby compromising the integrity of their institutions. But while the celebrities added, at best, some glamour on the

stage, never before have they come forward in such large numbers to be nominated, or to contest the polls.

Why does the coming election in particular have this feature? Does the entrance of celebrities indicate that people are, by and large, fed up of the current lot of MPs – for their corruption, thuggery, inefficiency and self-serving interests? If so, this indicates that all political parties are aware of how unpopular their MPs are with the general public. But if there is a need for fresh faces, why celebrity faces?

## A quick fix

Having actors, actresses, beauty queens, businessmen, military figures, sports men and women contest elections is a quick fix in the face of unpopularity and uncertainty as to the outcome of the general election. They are the big guns parachuted to give leadership to a district. Under the PR and *manapa* system where everyone contests against everyone else, each contestant also needs a significant amount of money to run a campaign that has an impact on the whole district. Consequently, we see politicians with newly airbrushed, digitally enhanced faces that are part of a whole marketing package. Moreover, thanks to the media they are already household names. Given this 'professionalization' by the entry of marketing/advertising agencies, an election campaign is said to cost Rs. 6 million upwards per contestant. Given the shortage of cash, the media coverage that a cricketer, athlete, or award winner can already command, it is a tremendous advantage. It can be seen as half the campaign done and half its costs covered.

## Role of the media

The celebrity contestants in this election are certainly high achievers whether in the field of cinema, sports, or art. The media has played a significant part in popularizing their names, images, and achievements in their respective fields. But in which way? When it comes to the film stars and producers, we have been fed a regular diet of gossip and trivia about their lives. We are informed of their birthdays, favourite foods, and names of their pets. Once in a way there