

Pravāda

Vol. 7 Nos. 10 & 11
DOUBLE ISSUE

Rs. 25.00

ISSN 1391-104X

THE PEACE PROCESS, PEOPLE AND CIVIL SOCIETY	03
<i>Jayadeva Uyangoda</i>	
PEACE IN SRI LANKA	07
<i>Jayadeva Uyangoda</i>	
MOU, SPOILERS AND THE INTERIM PROCESS	10
<i>Sumanasiri Liyanage</i>	
THE NAZIFICATION OF ISRAEL	12
<i>Aijaz Ahmad</i>	
PONGU THAMIZH	17
<i>Rajan Philips</i>	
SRI LANKA'S BUDGET 2002	20
<i>Muttukrishna Sarvananthan</i>	
FEMINISM, WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND CAT'S EYE	26
<i>Sumathy Sivamohan</i>	
WHAT IS POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY?	28
<i>Desmond Mallikarachchi</i>	
VILLAGE AS A CONSTRUCT IN DISCOURSES ON DEVELOPMENT	31
<i>Kalinga Tudor Silva</i>	
NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	36
<i>Osmund Boppearachchi</i>	
FEMININE SPEECH TRANSMISSIONS	42
<i>Maithree Wickremasinghe</i>	
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING	45

PEACE PROCESS AND ITS POLITICAL DILEMMAS

A key issue at the present moment of Sri Lanka's politics that should draw Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's urgent attention is the political management of the peace process. A properly managed peace process would stand a better chance of success with a capacity to withstand the pressures, contradictions and dilemmas that the conditions of no-war are certain to generate.

Already, fissures in the general political scene have begun to impact on the peace process. Attempts at forging an opposition alliance between the SLFP, JVP and MEP have been underway, indicating that opposition politics, in the absence of credible options in any other issue, are once again back to negative and destructive nationalist resistance. The context in which the SLFP's continuing political decline in the post-December phase too is characterized by a number of immediate issues. Internal squabbles over the future leadership of the party have made the SLFP a weakened entity. President Kumaratunga obviously feels angry and insecure over the UNP's pressure on her to either cohabit or capitulate, or in a worst-case scenario, abdicate. The ruling UNP's reported moves to induce a sizeable section of SLFP MPs to cross the floor have obviously resulted in limiting

President Kumaratunga's will to engage with Prime Minister Wickremasinghe in a constructive dialogue.

Meanwhile, the government-LTTE truce and the possibility of talks between the two sides, with international participation, have re-opened the political space for the negative politics of Sinhalese radicalism. In the current conjuncture the latter defines itself in a political discourse of fear and insecurity. The fear of the peace process is the clearest manifestation of this politics of negative nationalist imagination. It thrives on a tragic paradox in Sri Lanka's contemporary politics: a move by the government for peace can provoke resistance and violence in a Sinhalese society, the polity of the majority community. How is it that conditions of peace propel violence in society? One reason, perhaps, is that a sudden backdrop of peace without war and violence disrupts the political equilibrium that everybody is used to. In conditions of protracted armed conflict, war and violence are not only aspects of everyday life; they are also an integral component of a process with which political forces have come to terms. In this social psychology created by the conditions of protracted conflict,

Pravāda

Vol. 7 No. 10 & 11, 2002

Founder Co-Editor
the late Charles Abeysekera
Editors

Jayadeva Uyangoda
Kumari Jayawardena
Executive Editor and
Circulation Manager
Rasika Chandrasekera
Editorial Assistant
Morina Perera

Pravada is published monthly by:

Pravada Publications
425/15, Thimbirigasyaya Road,
Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Telephone. 501339, Fax. 595563
E-mail: ssa@eureka.lk
website:www.ssalanka.com

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs.	300
By Air mail:		
South Asia/Middle East	US \$	28
S.E. Asia/Far East	US \$	28
Europe/Africa	US \$	30
Americas/Pacific countries	US\$	40

only war is seen as possessing the quality of certainty and predictability.

Political forces in conditions of protracted war also learn to function under the illusion that war is controllable and insecurity manageable. Peace, on the contrary, is seen as a process with total unpredictability and uncertainty. It creates discomfort and unease, fear and insecurity. This fear is consistently articulated by the spokespersons of the Colombo-based Sinhalese elite. The fear of the Sinhalese majority, losing grip of the state in a twin process whose future trajectories are unpredictable—namely accommodation with the LTTE and economic globalization—appear to

further fuel the multiple anxieties among some of the urban Sinhalese elite. This is symptomatic of a state of disequilibrium that conditions of no-war could generate in a society that has treated war and violence as normal, legitimate dimensions of parliamentary democracy. One has only to recall the negative reactions that many people expressed to the removal of security barriers and checkpoints in Colombo early this year.

One emerging scenario against this backdrop is for a politically weakened SLFP, with no agenda of its own, to run the risk of once again capitulating before the JVP and MEP politics of “patriotic resistance,” as happened in 1987–88. In that period, the JVP’s violent campaign against the Indo-Lanka Accord derived much of its strength from the ranks of the SLFP since the JVP had infiltrated into its grassroots networks. Prime Minister Wickremasinghe ought to take steps to prevent the re-emergence of such a totally negative re-alignment and mobilization of political forces. He should do it by means of democratic interventions available within the rules of the parliamentary game, and not through repression as President Jayewardene did in the eighties.

Alliance-making is the best, and most rewarding option in times of crisis as well as decisive political moves. One strategic option Prime Minister Wickremasinghe might want to try out is to once again engage the SLFP leadership in a consensual approach to conflict management and political reform. The Sinhalese nationalist fear of government accommodation with the LTTE is to a great extent rooted in the belief that while the Tamil political forces are largely united, the Sinhalese polity is divided and fragmented. Managing the North-East conflict

through an understanding with the LTTE might also tempt the ruling party in the South to be arrogant and impudent towards its main counterpart in the parliamentary opposition. Meanwhile, President Kumaratunga needs to recall the gravity of the political mistake her mother made in 1987 when she allowed the radical Sinhalese racist forces to take over her party and its agenda. The SLFP at the moment is very much isolated from its two traditional allies, the LSSP and the CP, precisely on the question of peace with the LTTE. The party is also divided on a variety of issues. Its leadership crisis offers the threatening possibility of the present Bandaranaike family losing its control over the party founded and nurtured by the Bandaranaike parents. In order to keep the rank and file together, one faction of the SLFP leadership appears to believe in the utility of the plank of Sinhalese nationalism, which is pretty outdated. President Kumaratunga and her brother ought to realize that broad class interests, and not immediate intra-party politics, should define their party’s strategic political options concerning macro-political processes.

There is a cardinal lesson one should learn from decades of political crises in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese ruling class, however factionalized, it can ill afford to let another moment of crisis management be undermined by political forces of the Sinhalese intermediate classes whose negative political imagination has demonstrated no progressive thrust whatsoever. **P**

New website—Pravada/SSA

www.ssalanka.com