

state-reform perspective for a pluralistic polity. The Tamil federalist demand, if we detach it from its avowedly ethnic overtones, can be seen as the most important political intervention in making the post-colonial Sri Lankan state modern, more democratic and pluralistic. But, the federalist demand touched the very essence of the question of the state and it could only further strengthen the unitarist impulses of Sinhala nationalist politics. Given the fact that post-colonial Sri Lanka's ruling class has been an ethnic Sinhalese ruling class, the task of reforming the state still remains an incomplete project. The whole experience of the 1972 and 1978 constitutions was one of institution-wrecking and not institution-building — in essence, counter-reformist. The puzzle of ethnicized democracy in Sri Lanka is that even a purely legislative attempt towards a pluralistic reform measure would either require and generate generalized political violence as witnessed in 1987-88. Or, if violence is not resorted to by a reform-minded regime, as is the case today in Sri Lanka, the reform process will have to go through a long journey and might even run the risk of ending in futility.

Looking back at the past fifty years through the prism of Sri Lanka's crisis today, one may realize with amazement that political institu-

tion-building, in order to facilitate the management of ethnic relations, has not entered the thinking of the ruling elites for almost forty years. Almost all legislative and constitutional attempts made during those four decades in the sphere of ethnic relations by all regimes have resulted in destroying the space for pluralistic institution-building. The blame should be shared by both Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders whose short-term visions, however just they may have appeared at one time or another for their own ethnic communities, could not create or inspire a collective and sustainable long-term vision for Sri Lanka. The first meaningful framework of institution-building was introduced in 1987 with the establishment of provincial councils. The irony there was that even that measure was forced on the Jayewardene regime by the Indian state amidst much resistance from the majority of political forces.

Why this hard-headed political conservatism in Sri Lanka? Why such a monumental blindness to the future? Is it because Sri Lanka lost her sight in childhood? In its blindness to future, the Sri Lankan state has grown up during the past fifty years in a self-made political culture of resistance to reform.

LOOKING AHEAD WITH ANXIETY

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It was as though God had been angry with us. The much awaited -golden jubilee turned to ashes in 1997. Even by Pakistani standards this was a year of sustained losses from which country may take decades to recover. 1998 is therefore a year to anticipate anxiously.

Despite the instability and periodic crises, the frequent changes in government, the rampant corruption, the social and political violence, continuous warfare in Karachi, the proliferation of drugs and guns, we made significant gains in the preceding decade. The following come to mind: One, as parliamentary government was restored, the polity had developed a two-party system, a condition which normally contributes to the making of stable democracy. Two, given some freedom, a lively press had emerged not only, significantly, in English but also in Urdu. During the decade constant progress was made with new dailies, monthlies and weeklies appearing to represent different outlooks and orientations so that few third world countries could match the variety, independence and engagement of Pakistan's press. Three, civil society had been enlivened by concerned citizens and non-governmental organizations addressing social and economic development and social change, the rights of minorities, and the welfare of the neglected majority. Four, together the press and citizen-activists had succeeded in putting out an agenda for reform - of state and society, land and labor, health and education. Corruption was exposed and

confronted; accountability was demanded as never before. Five, signs of hope for Pakistan's judiciary appeared: that it would achieve a degree of genuine autonomy and also exercise the powers of judicial review, thereby contributing towards the separation of powers which is essential to a functioning democracy. Six, a relationship marked by healthy, dialectical patterns of antagonism and collaboration, dissent and assent had begun to grow between state and civil society, another *sine qua non* of democratic and civic political order. Seven, partly as a consequence of these developments there has been a certain diminishment in Pakistan's crisis of integration. No significant separatist movement emerged to question the legitimacy of Pakistani statehood. While religious sectarianism and violence did raise their ugly heads, no conflicts erupted along ethnic or linguistic divides. Even the violent, protracted confrontation between the MQM and the state did not acquire a Mohajir-Sindhi aspect.

At the start of 1998, all these gains appear to be in jeopardy. In the aftermath of the February elections, the discovery of the Swiss accounts, and consequent demoralization of the family-centered Peoples Party, Pakistan has reverted effectively to becoming a one party, one province, one-man polity. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's decision to hold the local bodies as -partyless elections is but one unfortunate reflection of this fact. The nomination, and election as President by an overwhelming vote, of a man lacking in national stature or appeal, is another. In the coming year or two a meaningful

revival of the Peoples Party appears unlikely. Equally unlikely are the prospects of another viable opposition party in a reasonable time frame.

Democracy rarely functions without pluralism. Only countervailing institutions can ensure checks and balances in the exercises of power. Since, a viable opposition party has ceased to exist in Pakistan - hopefully it is a temporary aberration - and the government party commands absolute majority in federal and provincial parliaments, we need look elsewhere for the balancing mechanisms and moderating influences. The first place to look is within the state. Two civil institutions - the bureaucracy and the judiciary - normally perform the moderators and the watchmans role. Unlike the judiciary, bureaucracy does not enjoy independence; it is subordinated to the executive. But its subordination ought to be regulated strictly by rules - of law, established procedures, security of service, and the right to appeal against punitive treatment to neutral and independent bodies. The bureaucracy which we inherited from the British had many of these attributes. As a result, with all its colonial defects it had a certain ethos and generally observed rules even when a political superior wished otherwise. The bureaucracy has, for all practical purposes, disintegrated in Pakistan. Barring a quirky honest official here or a true musliman there, the Pakistani bureaucracy can only play a moderating role against misuses of power or misguided policies.

That leaves the judiciary. For decades it has been under assault. Democrats in power no less than dictators attempted to tame and misuse it. They succeeded though not entirely. Some sparks were always left in the higher judiciary, and occasionally it lit up our dimmed horizon. Today it is a greatly emaciated institution - divided, confused, and demoralized. It has just been put through a wringer. It must feel drained. It is, nevertheless, too early to write it off. It may yet respond to its constitutional and legal obligations. The Chief Justice is reputed to be a judicious judge with integrity and legal acumen. But he leads an obvious divided court, and confronts a potential roller coaster. Normally, when power hits a rulers head, old rules are amended and new laws are enhanced to suit

contemporary convenience, without a thought given to precedence or posterity. One must hope and pray that this will not happen here; and if it does that the judges will do their duty.

My anxieties are based on the logic of power more than on an assessment of the Prime Ministers personality. !Power, Lord Acton had once said, such !corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This logic applies with greater rigor feudal and authoritarian in cultures as ours certainly is. This unfortunate land has been ruled by Ghulam Mohammed, Iskander Mirza, Ayub Khan, Ziaul Haq and Z.A. Bhutto. The latter fancied himself a democrat and was elected prime minister. The 1973 Constitution was his gift to this country. Yet, the ink had barely dried on the document when he proceeded to violate it and amend it, each time to augment his own power, and not the interests of the country. Mr. Nawaz Sharif is also a human being, a Pakistani, the product of an authoritarian political milieu. Above all, he wields nearly absolute power, leads a cabinet of prudent men and women, as he showed by enacting the anti-terrorism law and by sticking with his presidential nominee, he is not inclined to heed public opinion. I shall be happily surprised if the constitutional amendments he promised reduce the Bhutto-inflated powers of the prime minister, or if his new broaden the margins of our rights and liberties.

There is, of course, always reason for hope. History does hold examples of rulers who in the fullness of their power promoted progress with democracy. Next door, Jawaharal Nehru ruled India unchallenged for 18 years without imposing draconian laws, without gagging the press, and without rigging the courts. His legacy still holds India together and has kept the military in its barracks. But men like Nehru are exceptions, not the rule. We can hope that Mr. Sharif will be an exception but shall do well to expect that he may not. In which case the press is likely to be the first on the firing range. For its relation to power is, and ought to remain, inherently adversarial. In an environment of weak parliamentary opposition, the press shall serve the national interest if it reports and comments more rigorously on the deeds and misdeeds of those in power.

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කර්තෘ - කාලෝ පොත්පේකා**

“සමාජවාදය තමන් හඳුන්වනු ලබන සමාජ ආර්ථික පරමාදර්ශය නිෂ්ප්‍රභ වී ඇතැයි නිගමනය කිරීම මුළාවකි. භාරතයෙන් බුදු සමය අතුරුදහන් වී ගිය නිසා බුදු දහම නිෂ්ප්‍රභ වූයේ නැති බව සිහි පත් කිරීම මෙහිලා අදළ යි”.

“බොහෝ සමාජ-ආර්ථික-දේශපාලන ප්‍රශ්නවලට සඳහනික අවසාන විසඳුම් නැත. අපට ප්‍රායෝගික ව කළ හැක්කේ මිනිසුන් විඳින දුක හැකි තාක් අඩු කිරීමට යත්න දැරීමයි. ඒ සීමිත වැදගත් අරමුණ කරා පියමන් කිරීමට උපයෝගී කර ගත හැකි එක් මාර්ගයක සෛද්ධාන්තික පදනම මේ කෘතියෙන් අනාවරණය කොට තිබේ. යටත් පිරිසෙයින් එක් සුවිශේෂ අර්ථයකින් එය කාලෝචිත දර්ශනයකි”.

සමාජ විද්‍යාඥයින්ගේ සංගමය
425/15, නිඹරිගස්සාය පාර, කොළඹ 05. දුරක: 501339
දැන් සංගමයේ පොත්හලින් හෝ
ප්‍රධාන පොත්හල් වලින් ලබාගත හැකිය.