

IN A CRISIS-RIDDEN COUNTRY, LOOKING FOR FINAL SOLUTIONS IS NONSENSE

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Cambodia

Let's realize our blessings: Sri Lankan politics isn't yet quite like the Cambodian. It nearly became so, when attempters were stopped in their track in the year 2015. Cambodian elections have just completed and the country's information minister said the ruling party won Sunday's (29/11) election, ensuring Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has led the country for 33 years, will serve another five year-term. Cambodia's Opposition leader, Sam Rainsy, remains exiled in France.

Speaking in Freteval, France, where he lives, Rainsy told The Associated Press that "it is a meaningless victory because [Hun Sen] won without any real challenger ... prior to the election he dissolved the only credible opposition party." Although 20 parties contested the election, the only one with the popularity and organisation to mount a credible challenge, Sam Rainsy's Cambodian National Rescue Party, was dissolved last year by the Supreme Court.

Apparently, Hun Sen rules in style. He will virtually be CEO for life, following China's model. Like our own Mahinda, he has got a head of judiciary who will deliver the verdict that is wanted. He loves the figure 'twenty in Opposition,' because it tells the world what a vibrant democracy he leads!

Extreme Example

Cambodia, and even Erdogan's Turkey where recent elections were "fought," with five opposition leaders contesting from jail are but extreme illustrations of how government dynamics go into action in a human society that is essentially not ready for democracy.

It is wrong to hold the impression that societal imperfections are devoid in the more advanced, modernised and literate societies of the West. If they were, we would not have witnessed Brexit or Donald Trump. In politics, let

Myth of Diyasena

Only a messianic leader can turn around a country to somewhat overcome imperfections. There is a myth lying in our collective consciousness that Sri Lanka will soon get its Messiah or Diyasena. We thought it was SWRD to be, but that man blew it all up and set alive much of the social pathogens that have seriously afflicted our nation since: ethnic and religious conflict, destruction of the English medium, paralysing the economy with unworkable socialism and so on.

JR wasn't ever thought of as a messiah although he did achieve something substantial for the economy by bring-



ing in the open economy. He blew up nevertheless by launching the Executive Presidency that has spelt evil to the country, attracting narcissistic leaders to don the mantle and go about displaying gold rings and charms on their fingers

Yes, that reference was to our High King, Mahinda. Not regarded as a messiah to begin with, Mahinda however, suddenly metamorphised into one after he was lucky enough to have Prabhakaran and his terrorist separatist outfit destroyed at Nandikadal during his regime. Despite the media hype that was more a coincidence that occurred as a result of a conglomeratoion of forces both internal and external. Yet, Mahinda and his powerful bro Gota managed the situation putting Machiavelli into the shade. And didn't the whole family and their cohorts go wild after that?

The downing of the LTTE presented

a Kalinga Moment for Mahinda but the latter let the country down and unleashed a regime that survived by franchising corruption right down the line-through individual Ministers, officials, and right down to Pradeshiya Sabha bigwigs. Hun Sen is not known to have done that much.

New Messiahs?

People are satiated and disgusted with the duopoly of the two big party components. Sri Lankan politics is looking to be fractured. Party loyalties are fluid. People keep looking for messiahs again. The desperate belief in some quarters is that a Hitler will be right. Others look for hope in some individual who might emerge independently of the political mainstream. We have some individuals trying to fit into the messiah role. Mr Pelawatte is one and Mr Nagananda Kodituwakku another. Pelawatte has somewhat lost the plot already because his association with Basil stands exposed. Will Nagananda make it? Like the man in France-Macron?

I doubt. The Sri Lankan scenario is different from that of France. Any putative leader needs a stabel and established political base. The exception is if a divine-like bloke is able to emerge. Maybe Sangakkara? Yet, even Sanga will need a base at ground level. The possibility of his joining the UNP is there. Imran Khan took 22 years to build his base and even then he would not have made it this far if not for military support.

These variously expressed hopes are derived from a lack of comprehension about the realities of politics. Against the broad canvas of soical and economic complexities that our island faces, the search for absolute positions like the above will be in vain.

Our Lesson

Human societies are riddled with contradictions and imperfections. In struggling countries like Sri Lanka, such faults and fractures get compounded. We are in pretty much a muddle. With mounting debts of over 51 billion built over the last ten years, with ethnic tensions, low per capita income and high cost of living, the pressures on policy makers are immense. Rationality and stream lining in public management is difficult. Above all the shortage of a workable majority for the major partner in government, the United National Party, had led its leader and his party men to compromise with creepy MPs of the Opposition. The common candidate experiment is barely working. The above are only a few of the major deformities. In such a context, it seems pointless to lecture on ideal models of managing this or that. In the circumstances, my own preference is to try and move even incrementally within the framework of a political terrain that cannot produce absolutes.

Building on what we have achieved

The above implies a political wisdom of building on what has been already achieved. Critics of the yahapalanaya government, including the mindless media, have been unfair about the government's progress. The concept of yahapalanaya or good governance contains a core element and an extended element. The core substance

of the goal of yahapalanaya is to install systems and practices that enthrone the operation of the law of the land above the heads of those in power and authority. The law must rule first; the governing leaders and officials next. Yahapalanaya is averse to any leader grandstanding above the law; it has no room for narcissistic men who throw about their weight over everybody and every institution. Leaders are servers and not lords. The regime that the people dumped did represent the diametrical opposite of this practice. We had a President going about like a Russian Tsar and his brothers behaving as lesser Tsars, with sons following suit assaulting rugger coaches and violating the sacred space of the Dalada maligawa with arrogance and unconcern to the sensitivities of the temple trustees and the Buddhist public. Eighty per cent of the national budget was run by the President and his family. The portfolio of Finance was kept under the President himself. While Yahapalanaya is underscored by checks and balances to power, the previous regime wasn't any concerned about checks. Accountability and transparency were thrown to the wind.

Within the last three plus years this government has succeeded in overturning that corrupt and outrageous governance system. The fact that the serious cases against many of the previous regime are still not adjudicated is itself an evidence that government meddling in the judicial process isn't there. We no longer have a Chief Justice who, like Barkis in the Dickensian novel, is willing. The law takes its course. There have been no cases of dissenters being murdered or driven out into exile. We have had elections sans any complaints of violence and maneuvering. Independent Commissions are at work. The promised Audit Act is through and that confirms the independence of the Auditor General who, during the previous regime had been virtually captive. The Freedom of Information Act has been passed giving any humble citizen the right to ask for information from a government agency. These and others are outstanding triumphs of the yahapalanaya government. Nobody in his good sense can deny these.

The wider meaning of yahapalanaya

It is the wider meaning of yahapalanaya that has to be achieved. Essentially, this area of activity involves work-in-progress. Among these, the economy takes first place. Sri Lanka has to transform the structure of its economy from a debt-led one to an investment-led export economy. The Prime Minister talks often of economics and of his plans. However, the people want to see them real. The other day, he announced plans to boost the economy of the Eastern Province. He rightly emphasised the need of air connectivity to transform the eastern region to an active tourist destination throughout the year. He has vision for such things. On the other hand, little progress on ground is observed.

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