

Citizens' Committees, etc. freely ventilate issues relating to alleged violation of human rights;

- * A Committee of Parliamentarians has been active over the last two years highlighting issues relating to human rights.
- * A vigilant international community headed by Sri Lanka's aid donors regularly reflect their concerns to the Government;
- * The Supreme Court has initiated action to hear Fundamental Rights violation pleas of persons in detention camps. Habeas Corpus applications are today before the Court of Appeal. An amendment to the Constitution to expand and strengthen Fundamental Rights has been placed before Parliament last December;
- * A Human Rights Task Force composed of senior public officers is monitoring the prosecution of cases against those charged with excesses in the performance of security duties;
- * The ICRC, active in Sri Lanka since November 1989 is helping to trace missing persons. It also monitors those in detention by regular inspections of detention centres and Police Stations. The UNHCR also has a presence in the country.
- * In January, an Independent Commission of Inquiry of retired Supreme and Appeal Court Judges was appointed to look into cases of alleged disappearances;
- * Peace Committees have been set up throughout the country bringing together the Police, the Temple or Church and the School, so as to inculcate in people respect rather than fear of the law;
- * In 1991 the UN Working Group on Disappearances will visit Sri Lanka. The Government has also decided to invite the Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions to visit Sri Lanka during the course of this year.

My final point is about the situation in the North which has been referred to by several speakers. The conflict that is now on is not against the Tamil people but against the LTTE. This militant group well armed, well financed especially from abroad and committed to "Tamil Eelam", a mono-ethnic separate State, continues its guerrilla warfare against the Government. Following the temporary cease-fire at the beginning of the year, the Government has called upon the LTTE to resume talks with the Government :

- Such talks would be with the leader of the military wing of the LTTE.
- Talks should be preceded by a declaration against the possession and use of arms by any group or persons other than those authorized by law
- All political parties including the six Tamil parties now in the All Party Conference (APC) would be invited to participate in such talks.

If the invitation for talks on these terms is accepted by the LTTE, the Government has stated that it would be prepared to suspend offensive operations against the LTTE. The Government has also called upon the LTTE to release all hostages they are holding, to stop recruiting for combat young boys and girls, to stop acts of extortion and terrorisation of civilians as a means of obtaining their support, and to allow humanitarian access to all prisoners in their custody.

Unfortunately, the LTTE perhaps uncertain of the political support it can obtain prefers to pursue its goal through violent means.

In the meantime, within the APC, six Tamil parties and two Muslim parties representing the 32% Muslims in the East are working out proposals for power sharing in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. These arrangements also contain recommendations for increased devolution of powers to the Provincial Councils. So, along with the strategy of militarily weakening the LTTE, there is also unfolding a viable political option, whereby peace and normalcy may once again be restored in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

I am distributing an Aide-Memoire for the information of the Members of the Commission supplementing my comments.

Thank you.

Indien

– Indien vor der Wahl –

Forces of Change versus Forces of Status Quo

V.P. SINGH

You will remember that I told you this government (led by Chandra Shekhar—ed.) would not last long. It could not last. It was a political oddity. A minuscule government was being backed by a party that had a larger number of MPs but was not accountable to the people at all. It was an unstable arrangement and had to collapse—and collapse sooner rather than later. There was constant pressure from the outside on the government and the Janata Dal-S Government had to make a number of compromises during its tenure.

Now, the only way out of the political mess is to go to the people again. The people should express themselves once more. That is the only way out.

Any other arrangement that may be contrived will further vitiate the atmosphere, opening the way to defection and horse trading.

The crisis has a political basis. Ever since I was elected in 1989 I have repeatedly maintained that we are going through a period of political fluidity and a re-crystallisation of forces is taking place. The Congress, which keeps boasting that it provides stability, is fossilised and is cracking up. It may not be apparent from the surface, but its base is breaking up. What kind of stability will it provide? Stability cannot be provided only by numbers. The party had over 400 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Did that give it stability?

What we are seeing instead, is that new forces are emerging at the ground level and around us. These forces are exerting pressures on their leadership whether it is in Bihar or in Kerala, whether it is the BJP or the Muslim League which broke its relations with the UDF and the Congress. The situation is still fluid but there is growing pressure on every party that the deprived sections should also be accommodated. All this will create a situation of instability, there will be shifts and realignments and new equations will emerge to meet the demands of new situations until things come into sharper and clearer focus. All these changes are taking place at the subterranean level. Until it is politically expressed, many people would not even realise that such changes are occurring. The dynamics and the focus have moved to the masses although attention is still paid to what individual or parties do.

What I am trying is to create a much broader platform than the party so that it ultimately builds up to become a movement. In that case, it would not matter who is running the government. Whichever government is in power, it would have to address itself to the question of equity. It would no longer be linked to just electoral fortunes. What I am stressing is that the people have to be considered in their own right. They have to be taken as an entity. That is the correction I want to make.

The 60 per cent reservation has received the support from the rank and file of the party and is closely related to the party's thinking on equity. In the Janata Dal, there were many streams. People with a socialist background supported this cause. The Lok Dal has stood for the backwards. The Congress stream which joined the Janata Dal has supported the SC, ST and the minorities. And when they came together in one party, there was a commonality among them. It was the historical logic of the party. It is a recognition of the party's own historical identity. There is an integrative factor in our policy. Backwards and the minorities who clashed earlier do not do so now.

Our platform is positive. During my campaigns I saw people, particularly the poorer sections, come to our platform. It is not out of curiosity that they come. Why would a poor man come and lose out on a day's wage? If he comes, it is because he identifies himself with it. The sacrifice that he makes in giving up his day's wage is the basis of our support. That is why I say that we are on a positive platform.

Take what we did on the Mandal Report. The media made it out as if we wanted a confrontation. But the fact that we said, even at that time, that we wanted to accommodate the poor among the upper castes also into it, was not paid attention to. There was a deep political game behind it. There were agitations in Haryana. There were agitations in Delhi. The boys from Bihar who were close to our political opponents kept the agitation on. Then there was the reaction of the media.

Today, almost every party is swearing by the Mandal Commission. Those who, one year earlier, never mentioned the name of Dr Ambedkar are now eager to have themselves photographed besides his picture and see to it that it is published in the newspapers. The various political parties have woken up to the reality that these sections were neglected in the organisations and they are trying to accommodate them. I see this as a measure of success of the stands that we had taken. This has happened because of the pressure that we exerted by raising the issue of social justice.

NOW in the coming election, our basic plank will be the unity of the country, secularism, equity and social justice. The National Front and the Left parties have come together and they are spearheading the forces of change for those sections of society which have been deprived; while the BJP and the Congress represent the forces of status quo. The Congress represents the forces of political status quo and the BJP that of social and economic status quo.

But what is more important is what is happening at the ground level. Wherever I have travelled, the poorer and the socially deprived sections are coming together and uniting. I am sure this is going to express itself politically in the coming election. That will be the basis of victory for the National Front and the Left parties.

In between, various individuals will take their own decisions according to their subjective views that may make much news and people will analyse its impact. This will give an impression of instability as shifts take place from one party to the other. But what these analysts are missing here is the most important dimension: the people. If you add all the leaders and all the political parties they do not make the country. There is a consolidation taking place at the lower levels.

Ours is a much broader concept of equity. It includes political equity, economic equity, social equity and cultural equity. Now what happens to a citizen after he casts his vote is that he becomes redundant for five years. It is a situation similar to that when you put the sugar-cane in the expeller. Once the juice is extracted, the cane is used only for burning. Similarly, a citizen is of no consequence after he has voted. Politically, this is highly inequitable. Therefore, decentralisation of power is necessary so that democracy becomes a living experience for the citizens. This is a part of our equity plan.

In the Indian context the federal structure is an equity structure. Now this is sought to be destroyed. Therefore, strengthening this structure is part of our political equity. Similarly, freedom of the press and the electronic media, the judicial reforms and electoral reforms are on the agenda as part of political equity.

In economic equity the most important thing is unemployment. We will have to have a whole economic package so that idle hands get work—not necessarily government jobs, for that is not possible. Also, doles cannot be given. Then, 70 per cent of our population still lives in villages and resources have to be directed there. Today, the distribution of resources is not equitable.

As far as social equity is concerned, women have to be put on the top of the agenda. The whole system is very unfair to them. Therefore, we suggested that in panchayat raj they should have a share. They should have a greater share in the decision making. Of course the condition of women in the society as such is very bad. Then, the youth have to be involved. It is a productive social force

and it is the next generation. In the decision-making process we hardly involve them. We use them for political purposes. We tried to change this when we started the National Youth Council. Then again, on social equity we have to take steps to give respect to the Dalits. Similarly, Mandal is one aspect of the major concept of social equity.

Where cultural equity is concerned, the most significant point will be secularism—giving respect to all religions. We also have to remove the inequity in the education system.

EVERYONE has spoken about all this earlier but things have not percolated to the deprived sections of the society. It is because of the lack of political will of those who are in command. Now the question is: who will have the political will? The answer is: the affected people will have the genuine political will. Therefore, it is necessary to bring into the command system those who are affected and if we cannot bring them into the system, they should at least be able to have a major share.

Then, what is the command system? It is not only the Ministers, MPs and MLAs but also the bureaucracy which is the institutional power, and the political parties which are the vehicles of power. Therefore, the affected should have a share in all this. It is in this context that the Puri proposals have come. These proposals are not new. People have struggled and gone to jail for this. So this is going to be the main thrust of our argument in the coming election.

We are going to fight both the Congress and the BJP. Both are our adversaries. In the South, it will essentially be the Congress. In the North, where both the Congress and the BJP are present, we will fight both. In Bihar there will be no competition. In Uttar Pradesh again we will do much better than what we did last time when we got 51 out of 85 seats. But in States like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh there will be triangular contests.

I have always believed that there should be two Centrist options before the people—the Left-of-the-Centre option and the Centrist option. If these two choices are available to the people then they do not have to look to forces like the BJP. And if a Centrist option is destroyed, people start looking at extremes. I think the Congress is going to be mauled very badly. I can't help it. But, as I said, there will be realignment, re-crystallisation and polarisation. And preceding that will be a period of turbulence.

After independence, the Congress was at the very centre of politics and the Opposition at the periphery. Maybe that was needed for a new country, a developing country that had just acquired freedom. But as the years passed, the country realised that it does not have real political options. It had to either support the Congress or allow power to pass on to some splinter or breakaway group or the other. The Congress on its part seized the opportunity and tried to build a myth that there was no alternative to it. Since this myth persisted for a long time, it led to a degeneration of the democratic process. The ground was laid for personalised politics, which bred an authoritarian style of functioning. This had an impact on the whole political process and the country since the Congress was the dominant party. The country had to pay a heavy price for that.

In this context the emergence of the National Front, the Janata Dal and the Centrist forces was of great importance to our democratic functioning. It helped to shift the political equilibrium. □

(Courtesy: The Illustrated Weekly of India)

This is an article presenting the National Front-Left perspective in the coming elections. It is written by Vishwanath Pratap Singh, our former Prime Minister.