

Lokniti Newsletter

10 / July 2005

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Source: cagle.slate.msn.com/news/INDIA-PAKISTAN/3.asp

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EDITORIAL

Namaste!

I hope that the new format of the newsletter has been a refreshing change and the cartoons, a welcome edition. This issue includes updates on the SDSA survey and summaries of Qualitative Assessment papers and a Dialogue on Democracy, in addition to the updates on the Lokniti network.

For further information on Lokniti and the projects mentioned here, log on to our website www.lokniti.org.

With best wishes,
Edzia Carvalho

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

Cross-national Survey

Country-wise data from all the five countries has been processed and preliminary tables have been generated. Further data analysis is in progress.

Qualitative Assessment

A brief summary of two Qualitative Assessment papers that have been received under the SDSA project follows.

Devanesan Nesiah, *Promise of Democracy in Sri Lanka*: The paper begins with a discussion on democracy in Sri Lanka with respect to universal adult franchise and governance. It traces important events in pre-independence Sri Lanka beginning with the origin of the concept of modern democracy in Sri Lanka which the British brought about through the unification of the administrative structure in Sri Lanka and major modernizing reforms. The major reforms of this period were the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms of 1832. They were socio-economic reforms aimed at undermining feudal institutions and were accompanied by political, administrative and constitutional reforms. They helped stimulate public interest in popular movements for democracy and radicalize the nationalist and labour movements. The paper also traces the rise and fall of the Jafna Youth Congress and the Donoughmore reforms and its consequences.

The author then proceeds to examine the events coinciding with independence and thereafter. The marginalisation of the Sri Lankan Tamils in society and politics and other ethnic and social divides is detailed. Also viewed is the role of the judiciary in resolving the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka.

Ambika Sathkunathan, *Working of Democracy in Sri Lanka*: This paper analyses the working of democracy in Sri Lanka and its impact on different groups in society. It examines whether local actors have influenced and shaped the democratic structures and processes and if so, the effects of this change on the working of democracy.

The author remarks that in Sri Lanka, constitutions have not only contributed to the erosion of the executive, legislature and

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judiciary but to the legitimacy of the constitution itself. Constitutional ideology has been usurped for purely partisan purposes. The provisions of the constitution serve to erode the independence of the Member of Parliament and subordinate him to the wishes of the party. The immense power vested in the office of the executive has been continuously abused to benefit the ruling party.

Provincial councils that were introduced in an attempt to resolve ethnic conflict suffer from excessive central interference, which undermines the authority of the councils and leaves them to function as mere administrative units of the center. The paper also details the challenges faced by the judiciary, the armed forces and the bureaucracy.

The author considers political parties in Sri Lanka as alliances rather than groups that represent social diversity and the aspirations of citizens. The executive presidency and proportional system have resulted in the erosion of unity within the party absence of inner party democracy and lack of space for dissent and insufficient participation of women in political life.

The paper also discusses the non-party political domain and the economic domain in the working of democracy in Sri Lanka.

Dialogues

A Dialogue on the *State of Democracy in Sri Lanka* was held on December 13, 2003 at the Marga Institute, Colombo. The dialogue was centred on three themes: the Promise of

Democracy, the Working of Democracy and the Outcomes and Futures of Democracy. The discussions at the dialogue focused on the issues summarized below:

- Majoritarianism that shaped the democratic experience and the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the spheres of governance, representation.
- Inadequacies of institutional designing that often excluded the marginalized social and ethnic groups who looked up to institutions of democracy for advancement and emancipation.
- The limitation of Sri Lanka's civil society to function as an effective mediatory agency between the state and the citizen. The civil society politics should be autonomous and independent from regime agendas. The failure of civil society groups to maintain such political autonomy would undermine the legitimacy of civil society interventions.
- The limited capacity of the Sri Lankan ruling elites to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in a decisive and constructive manner.
- The future trajectories of Sri Lanka's democracy are closely linked to the resolution of the ethnic conflict.
- Some of the absences of democracy in Sri Lanka may be linked to the specific nature of Sri Lankan society in which pre-capitalist social relations continue to exist.
- Democratization itself has given rise to patron-client linkages between political institutions and citizens.
- There has been a disjuncture between development and social justice issues. The patron-client relationship between political institutions and citizens may be seen as

a corrective mechanism of that deficit in democratic governance.

- Peace negotiations and a political settlement to the ethnic conflict will offer a historic opportunity for Sri Lankan people to imagine new political architecture of democratic governance.

LOKNITI NETWORK

Dr. Pushkar Raj, Lokniti's Delhi Coordinator undertook a study of the slum demolitions in Mumbai that displaced some 400,000 people. This study, which was conducted under the aegis of Prof. Peter R. deSouza, was carried out from the perspective of understanding the civil liberties issues involved in the state action.

For Further Information on this project, do visit our website at http://www.lokniti.org/slu_demo.htm

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Palshikar, Suhas, 'Advani's Karachi Speech Decoded', *The Hindu*, June 09, 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'The Winning Combination', *The Telegraph*, June 22, 2005

To read Prof. Palshikar's article on the web, visit the website of The Hindu at <http://www.hindu.com/2005/06/09/stories/2005060904701100.htm>

Presentations

- DeSouza, Peter Ronald, participated in the Second Annual Meeting of the Inter Parliamentary Union to prepare *A Global Guide to Practice on Parliaments and Democracy* at Geneva, Switzerland on 16 and 17 June 2005
- _____, 'Political Nomadism in India: The Struggle Between the Fence and the Field in a Representative Democracy', paper presented at the Democracy Club, Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD), University of Westminster, London on 21st June 2005
- _____, participated in the *National Conference on Democracy Development in Mongolia: Challenges and Opportunities* at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on 30 June and 1 July 2005.

Suggested Reading

Seabrook, Jeremy (2001), *Freedom Unfinished: Fundamentalism and Popular Resistance in Bangladesh Today*, London and New York: Zed Books in association with Proshika, Dhaka.

"A beautifully written account of the complex struggles over livelihood, identity and politics in Bangladesh. Through interviews with people across the country, the author vividly captures their hopes, fears, sorrows and spirit and brings alive the story of Bangladesh – the dream of the liberation war, the post-liberation cycle of frustrations and renewals, the emergence of a wealthy new elite, a leadership devoid of ideology, and the continuing battle between fundamentalist and secular forces over the interpretation of religion and culture."

-- Prof. Rounaq Jahan,
Columbia University,
New York
(from the blurb)

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Lokniti newsletter will be issued in August 2005.

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