

Lokniti Newsletter

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Title: 'Children of East Timor accompany a UN peacekeeper as he conducts a security patrol in Dili (1999).'

Credit: UN DPI Photo 203225C

Source: <http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/gallery-en.asp>.

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EDITORIAL

A warm welcome to another edition of the Lokniti newsletter.

We have altered the style of the newsletter to make it more compact and easy on the eye. This issue includes a report on the project on Political Parties that was undertaken by Lokniti in association with International IDEA, updates on the SDSA survey and case studies and summaries of Qualitative Assessment papers.

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

With best wishes,
Edzia Carvalho

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

Cross-national Survey

A booster sample survey of Sikhs and tribals outside the North Eastern States in India is in progress.

The data entry is in its final stages of completion in Sri Lanka and is in progress in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Qualitative Assessment

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

Mijarul Quayes, *Promise of Democracy in Bangladesh*: The paper presents an overview of the history of Bengal and Bangladesh and the impact of British rule on the land and its people. Of special importance are the two Partitions of Bengal, first in 1905 into West Bengal and East Bengal, and then in 1947 into West Bengal and East Pakistan. The paper focuses on East Pakistan’s insignificant place in the imagination and reality of Pakistan. This exclusion culminated in the movement for self-determination in East Pakistan. The movement, which began as an agitation by students against the attempt by the Pakistani elite to culturally subjugate the Bengalis, quickly became a nationalist movement for the protection of civil liberties and the attainment of autonomy.

The paper also charts the history of Bangladesh after its independence from Pakistan from the framing of the constitution in 1972 to the military coups of 1975 which established military rule in Bangladesh until 1990 when democracy was restored and multi-party parliamentary and municipal elections instituted representative government.

Shantanu Majumdar, *Outcomes of Democracy in Bangladesh*: The paper is woven around three themes: the major achievements in Bangladesh’s journey towards democracy, the reasons and evidence of the malfunctioning of liberal democracy in Bangladesh from two perspectives – party-political and socio-

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economic domain and the short-term initiatives to be undertaken in order to make liberal democracy effective in Bangladesh.

According to the author, among the major achievements of democracy in Bangladesh have been the improvement in the quality of the electorate and a movement towards the establishment of a two-party parliamentary system.

The paper looks at the deficiency in the functioning of democracy in Bangladesh in two spheres. In the party-political domain, the paper points to the failure of political parties to negotiate their differences peacefully and the intolerance of dissent by those in power. In the socio-economic domain, note is taken of the belief prevalent in civil society in Bangladesh that democracy is a system related solely to the apparatus of the state. It also refers to the marginalization of minorities and religious fundamentalism that is gaining ground in the country.

The author identifies several short-term initiatives to be undertaken in order to make liberal democracy effective in Bangladesh. These include the democratization of parties, the development of a sustainable structure of local government that will not be hampered by regime change and refining parliamentary culture in Bangladesh.

Case Studies

A. Bimol Akoijam, India ‘Production of the ‘Extraordinary’: Violent Self-Infliction of a Political Paranoia’: ‘Extraordinary laws’ cohabit with their ordinary counterparts in the statute books of many contemporary democracies. As instruments of the

state, these laws seek to restrict, suspend or deny the civil liberty of the individual citizens and are against the spirit and principles of democracy. But the undemocratic spirit of these laws is sought to be justified by claiming that these laws are ‘temporary measures’ to deal with certain ‘extraordinary’ situations. However, these laws tend to traverse a trajectory that makes them permanent rather than temporary.

In principle, the transformation of the ‘extraordinary’ into the ‘ordinary’ is often seen as a contradiction of democracy. However, as a real praxis embedded in the realities of the modern state, ‘extraordinary laws’ signify more of a ‘dilemma’ of actual political conduct rather than ‘contradiction’ of principles. Political actors in the modern state have to deal with contesting interests between the values of ‘national integrity’ and security of the state, and those of the individual’s dignity and civil liberty. In most states, the choice is the one that justifies the precedence of the state over that of the individual’s dignity and his or her liberty.

Hardly seven years after India declared itself as a democratic republic, the violent self-infliction of the post-colonial Indian state officially began when it legally sanctioned a disguised war on a section of its population by camouflaging its military as an instrument of restoring ‘law and order’ within the state. That legal sanction is the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (henceforth the AFSPA), which this case study explores.

Hari Prasad Bhattarai, Nepal ‘In a State of Statelessness: A Case Study of the Citizens without Citizenship in Nepal’: The citizenship problem in Nepal is not new and has become more

complex recently. The people from the plains specifically the poor, women and Dalits who have linguistic and ethnic ties to India have, over the years, found it difficult to obtain Nepali citizenship. It indicates that the prevailing concept of *Nepalipani* (the discourse of Nepali citizenship) is narrow and discriminatory against some Nepalese and favorable to others. There are three reasons for this difficulty: first, the Kathmandu elite have a deep fear of being overrun by Indians and they are rigorous when it comes to granting citizenship to those who look or sound like Indians; second, the existence of complex and, to some extent, discriminatory constitutional and legal provisions and; third, the dominance of the patriarchal social structure which has prevented citizenship being given to children in the name of their mother.

Following the restoration of the multiparty democracy in 1990, successive governments have made attempts to address the citizenship issue by forming investigation committees, citizenship teams and by introducing new laws and amending the existing acts and regulations. Their intention, however, appears to have been limited to gaining political benefits rather than addressing the issue effectively.

The high-level citizenship committee constituted under parliamentarian Dhanpati Upadhaya in 2052 (1995) estimated that 3.4 millions Nepalis above the age of 16 did not have citizenship of Nepal. There has not been an estimate of the exact number of eligible Nepali nationals without citizenship since then due to a lack of concrete data. However, from the discussion above, it can be asserted that a large section of Nepalis of Tarai origin specifically Dalits, women, and poor people have been

facing problems in getting citizenship certificates. This particular situation has contributed not only to landlessness, marginalization, and restriction in access to state, market and public resources but also in a state of statelessness in their own country.

EVENTS AT LOKNITI

Projects Undertaken

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the Lokniti-CSDS have undertaken a programme of research and dialogue on the regulation and functioning of political parties in India. This is part of IDEA's ongoing global research programme on political parties for the years 2004-2006. It is based on the belief that a strong and vibrant democracy is dependent on well-functioning political parties, which articulate and bring together diverse interests in society, develop policies and present them as a choice to the electorate through fair and free elections. But in reality, parties face several challenges in this process – both in terms of the external environment in which they take shape and operate as well as the way in which they function internally.

The objective of the programme is to assist in strengthening political parties so that they perform as effective actors in democratic development, trusted by people, representative and responsive to public concerns and needs, and equipped to run governments or provide constructive opposition.

For Further Information
On the Project on Political Parties, you can contact Dr. K. C. Suri at kcsuri@sancharnet.in

Mainly, the project focuses on two areas.

External environment and regulations: The overall political environment, the laws and regulations that govern the existence and functioning of political parties, how parties select and present candidates in elections, and formation of party alliances.

Internal organisation and functioning: The structure of the party organisation, decision-making, membership, interaction among members and leaders at different levels, composition of the leadership, electoral activities, and funding. The information will be collected through interviews with leaders of different political parties.

Based on the research results, Dialogue Workshops, drawing together party leaders, academics, social activists and others, will be held. They are primarily meant to discuss the status of political parties in India, the challenges they face, and the reforms that are necessary and possible to strengthen democratic political parties. Two such dialogues will take place in India during the last quarter of 2005.

Lokniti and International IDEA intend to bring out, in 2006, a volume, tentatively titled *Profiles of Political Parties in India*, with essays on all the National Parties and the major State Parties, contributed by individual researchers primarily based on research done as part of this project and issues that emerge in the Dialogue Workshops. The aim is to provide basic, reliable and objective information on political parties in India in a single volume for the benefit of researchers, rule-makers, party leaders and activists.

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NEXT ISSUE

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

Suggested Reading

Barkan, Elazar 2000 *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.

‘.... Barkan offers a sweeping look at the idea of restitution and its impact on both national and international politics through in-depth explorations of reparation demands for a wide variety of past wrongs: the Holocaust; Japanese enslavement of ‘comfort women’ in Korea and the Philippines; the oppression of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, etc. Barkan confronts the difficulties in determining victims and assigning blame in the aftermath of such events, understanding what might justly be restored through restitutions, and assessing how these morally and politically charged acknowledgements of guilt can redefine national histories and identities.’

-- The blurb

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