

the help of his financial ally Oleg Boiko of the firm OLBI, will profit the most in sharing out the multi-party pie.

In fact, neither Yakovlev nor Gaidar has a real party. These are small, artificial structures made up of people who are interested only in their wages as functionaries—they care for money, not ideas.

But there are many other would-be “wedding generals” in the theater. They have already lost their ability (if some of them had one) not only to come up with ideas, but even to proclaim them. They therefore need much money from officials, to build up party organizations in the regions, which will never work but only “represent.”

If examined not through the glasses of official statistics, but first-hand, the Russian multi-party pie has shrunk rapidly during the spring and summer of 1994. Russians are coming to the conclusion that political parties do not and cannot accomplish any good. (The turnout in local elections in many towns, including St. Petersburg, proved this.) The quantity of true political activists has decreased to such a degree that, after Gaidar, Ponomaryov, and Yakovlev have shared all the liberals and Zyuganov and Kuptsov divided the communists between them, leaving a certain crowd of disillusioned young people for radical chauvinists Zhirinovskiy and Limonov, there is almost nothing left.

Gorbachov is annoyed

That is probably why Mikhail Gorbachov looked so offended during a TV speech at the end of July. He even called his former close ally Yakovlev “a propagandist in any regime.” Actually, he is annoyed because Yakovlev has eaten up his piece of the pie. Gorbachov was trying to accumulate from the social-democratic portion, but Yakovlev, with Luzhkov’s support, carried off all the crumbs.

Now Gorbachov is attempting to attract some anti-liberal politicians. Recently the filmmaker Stanislav Govorukhin surprised his radical collaborators by apologizing to Gorbachov, saying he regretted the bad words he had said about the ex-U.S.S.R. President. But Govorukhin, being an author more than a politician, is unable to create any new political party in which Gorbachov would play the role of “wedding general.”

Gorbachov has already declared that he will not run for President in the next elections. Television under Yakovlev’s control commented upon this declaration with some statistics: It showed the results of a public poll where 31% of the respondents stated that Gorbachov personally was to blame for the destruction of the Russian economy and the people’s welfare.

Would-be wedding generals remain alone, sadly waiting until the political climate changes, being quite unable to change it themselves. But when new winds start blowing, they will rather bring waves of political terrorism, strikes, and military coup attempts, than any sort of western-like political activity.

A glimmer of hope shines in Sri Lanka

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

After 17 years of an uninterrupted and increasingly uninspiring reign in the Sri Lankan Parliament by the United National Party (UNP), Chandrika Kumaratunga, the 49-year-old daughter of two former prime ministers—S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike—led the People’s Alliance to a stunning victory in the parliamentary elections on Aug. 16. Though short of an absolute majority by one seat in a 225-member Parliament, Kumaratunga has since formed her cabinet, claiming a razor-thin majority.

The People’s Alliance, of which the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is by far the most powerful member, was led by Kumaratunga through the forging of a well-conceived alliance with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which dominates the Muslim-majority east coast and was once a political ally of the ruling UNP. Her campaign promise is to hold unconditional talks with the militant Tamils, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in particular, to seek an end to the decade-long civil war between the Tamils in the north and the Sinhala-dominated Colombo, the seat of administrative power in Sri Lanka. The conflict, which spread in the 1950s following the end of British rule in 1948, is the product of an overt Sinhala racism targeted against the native Tamils, and which resulted over the years in adoption of anti-Tamil legislation. The mistrust grew to a state of alienation and finally took a violent form in July 1983, when the Sinhalese massacred a large number of Tamil civilians in Colombo. Since then, the two ethnic groups have been locked in mortal combat with the Tamils, who dominate the northern peninsula of Jaffna, close to the Indian coast lines, demanding a separate country to be carved out of Sri Lanka.

A complex situation

The Tamil Tigers may not succeed in wrenching out a part of Sri Lanka to establish a new country. Still, the Tigers, who are linked to the merchants of guns and drugs internationally, can continue to be a major disruptive force, destroying human lives and jeopardizing the nation’s security as well as its economy.

Kumaratunga’s sudden rise to become prime minister is a new ray of hope. Prior to the elections, Kumaratunga,

besides forging an alliance with the Muslims, traditionally friends of the Tamils, had sent out the word that she would go to Jaffna and talk to the Tigers and to the Tamil people. She made it clear that she would do so with no strings attached and her package would include an extensive devolution of power, followed by demarcation of the boundary through a political dialogue. While the process will help the Tamils to enjoy a certain amount of autonomy in the north, Kumaratunga has said categorically that the army will remain in Jaffna and "if the Tigers continue to threaten our sovereignty, we will have very few choices."

Following the polls, first indications suggest that the Tamils in general are supportive of the change and hopeful of Kumaratunga. Even the Tigers, through their contacts based in London, have sent out the news that they welcome Kumaratunga's initiative and will cooperate in such unconditional talks to resolve the crisis. Similar notes of hope have also been issued by moderate Tamil groups active in the mainstream politics of Sri Lanka.

Elements of concern

Besides the Tamil-Sinhala conflict, Kumaratunga will have to encounter a number of other serious problems. First, the growing voice of the Sinhala chauvinists heard around the island, centered around the upper-caste Sinhala community and the Buddhist Sangha, could pose a serious threat to the new government. The reemergence of the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) in the recent elections, although they failed to win any seats, is a matter of concern, since it was the violent campaign of the JVP in the late-1980s that had hardened the anti-Tamil mentality among a large section of the Sinhala community. Any growth of the JVP may sabotage the new initiative to solve the ethnic crisis.

Second, Kumaratunga, whose parents were friends of such Indian leaders as Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi, has close links with neighboring India. She, in fact, was a guest lecturer with the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. She has already told newsmen that her government will have closer relations with India. "At least, I will not have India-phobia," she said.

In Sri Lankan politics today, particularly in the layer known as the *goigama*—the upper caste and westernized Sinhala families—anti-India feelings run high. It is this feeling among the powerful elites of Sri Lanka politics that the JVP had exploited and the Shangha had aligned with previously. The anti-India sentiments stem from the fact that there were definite indications that Indian intelligence had trained and armed the Tamil Tigers in the mid-1980s. This policy of Delhi was then changed under the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, but the antagonism toward India by the Sinhala chauvinists continues. Only recently this view was expressed by former President Junius Jayewardene to a newsman, urging India to "keep her hands off" of Sri Lanka.

Kumaratunga's ability to deal with difficulty is uncontest-

ed. In the middle of hectic political activities, Chandrika Kumaratunga left the SLFP and formed a left-of-center political party, Sri Lanka Mahajan Pakshya, with the help of her husband, Vijaya Kumaratunga. Vijaya Kumaratunga, an immensely popular movie actor and respected politician, was assassinated by the JVP for his and his party's opposition to Sinhala chauvinism. Since then, Mrs. Kumaratunga returned to the SLFP, ascended to the top of the party leadership, outmaneuvering her brother, Anura Bandaranaike, who has since joined the UNP; Kumaratunga has been able to lead the SLFP from the political wasteland to once again become the prime party in the country.

Her political acumen was the winning factor in the recent election. A true representative of the *goigama* community, Kumaratunga realized quickly that a change in the political climate has taken place since the slain President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who belonged to a lower social class and caste, had won his election by instituting programs for the poor and generating a mass movement through the slogan "All Things to All People." Premadasa's successor President Dingiri Wijetunga fell back on upper-caste politics.

The danger of economic liberalism

However, her expressed, unqualified support for the economic liberalization program, in progress for more than a decade, is her vulnerability. In 1977, when President Jayewardene almost obliterated the SLFP at the ballot box, he had moved the center of Sri Lankan political power from Parliament to the President, to push through demands of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Donning the mantle of a "Gaullist," President Jayewardene went on implementing privatization—termed "peoplisation" by the government. Foreign direct investment was heavily promoted and, to attract overseas black money for investment, nameless numbered accounts can now be opened in Sri Lanka with no questions asked about the source of funds.

That is not to say that the economy looks a disaster. In fact, despite necessarily high expenditures to upgrade the military, the GDP grew at a rate of 6.1% in 1993 and is expected to do about the same in 1994 and 1995.

But the danger signals are there. Sri Lanka's inflation has remained above 10% for years, and the overall employment did not increase substantially, because state sector employment continued to decline as privatization and rationalization of public enterprises proceeded, as the Asian Development Bank pointed out in its *Outlook 1994*. In addition, the country's foreign debt in absolute terms is growing, as is debt servicing. Also increasing is the trade imbalance, while the country's exports remain heavily dependent on tea and textiles, consumer products which lose value heavily during worldwide recession. These are just the signals, but what is palpable is that the inflation and lack of employment are affecting the poor the most. For an adroit politician like Kumaratunga, that message should be clear.