

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

A Monthly Magazine of IDN-InDepthNews in association with INPS Southeast Asia

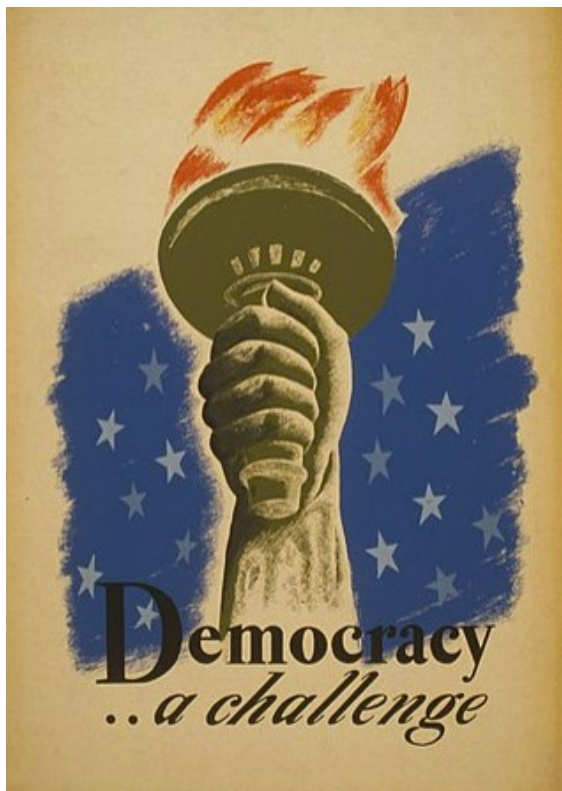
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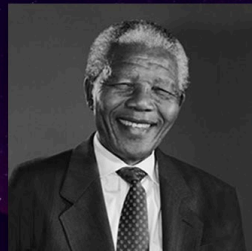


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER ISSUE 12 AUGUST 2022

WINDS OF DEMOCRATIC CHANGE WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF SDGS



**YES IT IS ELECTION
SEASON – ARE YOU**



An educated, enlightened and informed population is one of the surest ways of promoting the health of a democracy.

Nelson Mandela

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our 12th and the first anniversary issue of Sustainable Development Observer started with no funding and a lot of passion. The situation has not changed and it is your feedback and encouragement that keeps me (us) going.

This month, we address an important issue that is at the heart of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the state of democracy around the world. Multi-party democracy as a panacea to achieving development that is just - and latest buzzword ‘sustainable’ - has been held up for long as a gospel truth. As we become more enlightened and have the confidence to think freely gospels are always questioned and so should be democracy. In recent years we have seen how young people, having been brainwashed to rise up for such democratic change have seen their hopes dashed as soon as jaded (and corrupt) leaders are driven out. A decade ago we saw it with the Arab Spring, in 2014 In Ukraine and also in countries like Thailand and Hong Kong where these uprisings were quickly dosed out.

In this issue we bring you some insights into recent democratic change in different countries with different insights. In Latin American “leftish” democratic change is rising again with the latest being Colombia – would the USA allow “liberty” to flower in the continent this time around, so that SDGs may be achieved with a more social justice framework without American corporate interference?

There are interesting developments in Africa where coups rather than peaceful democratic change have been the norm in the post-independence era. We bring you some interesting perspectives on Kenya and Nigeria, also from Zimbabwe on why women shun politics.

Sri Lanka has been in the news for all the wrong reasons in the past few months and veteran journalist Neville de Silva takes a look at ironies of a failed “democratic” uprising in the island, which may have been precipitated from overseas to serve geo-political needs of powerful nations. Thus, we also bring you a perspective from a Sri Lankan peace activist on why political parties are the problem and democracy could be better served without them.

In the non-IDN story snippets, we alert you to the sad story of Libya where a misguided “democracy revolution” a decade ago has changed a prosperous state into a den of warlords and misery. From Brazil we alert you to how President Bolsonaro who came to power using the judiciary, now facing imminent defeat is trying to undermine the country’s judiciary. A story from Sri Lanka we are alerting you to focus on how the “regime change” uprising is creating a brain drain in a country that was well on the way to achieving many of the SDGs.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor

Issue 12 – August 2022

Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant
To Achieving The SDGs in The
Post-COVID Era

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Gustavo Petro's Election Promises a Major Change in Colombia

By Shastri Ramachandaran

NEW DELHI — The leftward shift in South America that gained momentum in 2021, with right-wing politicians being worsted in presidential elections in Peru, Chile and Honduras, continues its sweep in 2022.

Colombia, famous for its coffee and the novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, has long remained under right-wing regimes that enjoyed a cosy equation with Washington. Some of these regimes were terrible dictatorships which forced people like Marquez, best known for his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, to live in exile out of fear of being killed by state-sponsored mafia elements.



Inauguration of Gustavo Petro as president of Colombia in 2022. Source: Twitter Samantha Power, USAID.

(Even when Marquez accompanied Cuba's Fidel Castro to the Non-Aligned Summit in Delhi in 1983, he feared that public exposure could endanger his life. Reports were that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had wanted to meet Marquez and requested Castro to arrange it).

The new left wind now sweeping Latin America has brought to the fore the promise of radical change in Colombia with the election of Gustavo Petro as president. This marks the end of a long conservative era in Colombia, and this is the twelfth free and fair national election in the continent to have unseated incumbents in office. Colombia now joins the legion of South American states that are 'socialist', and socialist states, notably Venezuela, have been Washington's targets for regime change in recent years.

However, the war in Ukraine saw the US making overtures to countries to which it was hitherto hostile. Venezuela, where Washington has sought to oust President Nicolas Maduro since his election in 2019, is now being wooed for its petroleum.

Does this mean the US will hold off on regime change for a while, if only in Latin America?

How the US adapts to the change of political direction dictated by the growing inequality, economic breakdown and terrible deprivation inflicted by the Covid pandemic in large swathes of South America would be a matter of worldwide interest. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 14 August 2022]

Note: The author is an Editorial Consultant, WION TV, and Senior Editorial Consultant of IDN-INPS. This story first appeared as Spotlight in WION, and is being reproduced with the author's permission.



Some European Leaders Warn of the End of Western Hegemony

By Shastri Ramachandaran

NEW DELHI — Those who assert that western hegemony is no longer sustainable can take heart from the fact that movers and shakers on the world stage are also saying this.

French President Emmanuel Macron. Source: Spiegel

French President Emmanuel Macron has proclaimed that “Western hegemony is nearing its end”.

Perhaps, the most erudite among the heads of P-5 governments, Macron’s intellectual and diplomatic appeal extends beyond France and Europe, which explains his continued engagement with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the war in Ukraine.

At a closed-door meeting with France’s top diplomats, Macron said that “the international order is being upended in a whole new way. It is a transformation of the international order. I must admit that Western hegemony may be coming to an end”.

Among the gems Macron dropped at the meeting are:

We have become accustomed to an international order based on Western hegemony since the 18th century. France, the UK, and the US have made the West great for 300 years. We are used to this greatness that gives us absolute dominance over the global economy and politics.

The many wrong choices the US has made in the face of crises have deeply shaken our hegemony. This didn’t just start with Trump. Other presidents made other wrong choices long before Trump: Clinton’s China policy, Bush’s war policy, Obama’s world financial crisis and quantitative easing policy.

On the other hand, we have greatly underestimated the rise of emerging powers ... not just two years ago, but as early as ten or twenty years ago. We underestimated them from the beginning!

Under different leadership styles, China and Russia have achieved great success over the years. India is also rapidly emerging as an economic power and becoming a political power. China, Russia, and India, these countries (can) compare to the US, France and the UK.

Their political imagination is far stronger than (that of) today's Westerners. After they have strong economic power, they start to look for their own "philosophy and culture". They no longer believe in Western politics but begin to pursue their own "national culture".

When these emerging nations find their own national culture and begin to believe in it, they will gradually get rid of the "philosophical culture" that Western hegemony has instilled in them in the past. And this is the beginning of the end of Western hegemony!

A less cerebral and more popular take on this comes from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who says that the “Ukraine war will end Western prosperity”.

In an interview to a German magazine, Orbán said that the EU will be weaker than before after the end of the war in Ukraine, while other countries and regions will benefit. Firstly, the West could not win the Ukraine war militarily; secondly, the sanctions had in no way destabilised Russia; thirdly, their damage to Europe was immense; and, fourthly, the world had not lined up behind the US and Ukraine.

"A large part of the world demonstratively does not stand behind them: the Chinese, the Indians, the Brazilians, South Africa, the Arab world, Africa," Orbán elaborated. "It is easily possible that it will be this war that demonstratively puts an end to Western superiority”.

Leaders of New Europe and Old Europe, though of different ideological streams, appear to share the same perceptions on the US-led West, its coming decline and the emerging new world order. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 24 August 2022]

January 6 Attack on the Capitol: The Most Damning Hearing Yet

Analysis By Alon Ben-Meir

NEW YORK — Last Thursday's (July 21) hearing by the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 attack on the Capitol was nothing but shocking. If we were watching a movie based on a fictitious story portraying an American president who had done what Trump attempted to do it would have still been simply so far-fetched beyond what anyone could possibly fathom.

The House Select Committee investigating the January 6 attack on the Capitol held another hearing yesterday (July 25) which was, no less than all the previous hearings, of historic significance.

These are among the most important hearings in US's history, for they detail the unprecedented depravity and dishonor of an American president, and they are crucial to exposing the existential danger that his political presence still represents.

Thursday's hearing focused on what must be the darkest and most morally outrageous three hours in the annals of the American presidency: the 187 minutes in which Trump refused to take any action whatsoever to quell a violent insurrectionary mob as it stormed the Capitol building, thwarting the peaceful transfer of power and seeking to kill the Vice President of the United States, who took shelter just feet away from his would-be assassins.

The Committee revealed that Pence's security detail believed that the mob was likely to discover their location and that they were not going to survive its violent onslaught - so much so that some were making calls to say goodbye to family members in the event they did not make it home alive.

For three hours Trump watched the television as violence consumed the Capitol; and in all that time he did not make a single call to the Secretary of Defense, to the Attorney General, to the Secretary of Homeland Security, or to the Vice President for that matter. For three hours, against the unequivocal advice of his counsel, friends, and family, Trump purposefully and steadfastly declined to give the mob he had summoned any signal to disperse, to exit the building peacefully, or to simply cease threatening the life of his vice president or other members of Congress.

The president knew full well, and better than anyone, that his mob of supporters were hanging on every word he said or tweeted; he knew beyond any doubt that had he told them to leave the Capitol they would have complied - but he would not do so for the simple reason that he wanted the attack to continue.

Trump would not take any action to halt the insurrection because the attack served his unscrupulous designs: for while the mob held the Capitol, the Senate could not reconvene to certify the election result and had the vice president been maimed or murdered then he would no longer be in a position to preside over the proceedings as specified in the Constitution.

Indeed, after Trump knew the Capitol had been breached, he sent out a tweet at 2:24pm which served only to pour gasoline over the conflagration he had already ignited, describing Mike Pence as lacking the courage to do Trump's bidding; immediately following that disgraceful message to his fanatical followers the mob swelled in size, and grew more enraged and emboldened.



Photo shows President Donald Trump arriving at the "Stop The Steal" Rally on January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC. Source: wbur/Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images



Protestors outside the US Capitol building holding US flags and "Make America Great Again" flags. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Trump's inaction during those three pivotal hours was not merely a dereliction of duty: it was a deliberate, indefensible decision on his part to allow the mob to continue its desecration of the Capitol, its assault on our democracy, and its unbridled effort to impede the transfer of executive authority, all so that Trump could maintain power.

Only after it became clear that the insurrectionists would not be successful did the president finally stand before the TV cameras and tell the mob to leave the Capitol and return home. He did not condemn the violence, he did not issue any reprimand to those who had defiled the Capitol, he did not express a single word of support for those who valiantly fought against the insurrection and sought to protect this Republic from being overthrown by a violent swarm of his deluded supporters. Instead, he praised the mob as patriots and told them how much he loves them.

The former President of the United States, Donald Trump, betrayed this country and the American people - both Republicans and Democrats - in a manner so despicable and outrageous that the misdeeds of all his forty-four predecessors pale by comparison. He is the very embodiment of demagoguery: his lies are poisonous and his hollow vanity boundless.

He has brought this Republic to the brink of dissolution with his contempt for the rule of law and the institutions of democracy. He forfeited the public trust when he determined that his hold on power was more important than the oath he took before the country and before God to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, more important than honoring the sacrifice of countless Americans who gave their life so that the Republic could survive, more important than the very continuation of this noble experiment in popular government.

If he should ever hold office again, then the shame will be on our heads - for no one can say now that they did not know what this man was, or what he was capable of doing. Trump's lust for power is insatiable and as we have witnessed, he resorted to any means, however illegal, to stay in power regardless of the unimaginable damage he inflicts on the country. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 26 July 2022]

** The writer is a retired professor of international relations at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University.*

Newly Elected Kenyan Leader Ends Voting by Tribe, Analysts Say



William Samoei Ruto. Photo source: Citizen Digital

By Lisa Vives

NEW YORK — Is the two-party system a thing of the past? Low voter turnout in the US seems to reflect disenchantment with a single choice between Democrats and Republicans. Kenya is no different.

This month, Kenyans tossed the traditional toss-up between the Luo and Kikuyu ethnic groups to choose William Samoei Ruto, a Kalenjin. His party, the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and its allies, took the political

experts by surprise when he easily won all nine governorships of Mount Kenya—once considered a sure bet for a Luo.

Raila Odinga, son of a prominent Luo figure in Kenya's struggle for independence, was making his fifth attempt at the presidency and was expected to sweep in the Luo region. Support from the outgoing president, Uhuru Kenyatta, failed to put him over the top.

Meanwhile, "Ruto went to the remotest villages of Mount Kenya and talked to the lowest of market vendors," said Peter Kagwanja who campaigned for Odinga and is head of the Africa Policy Institute, a think-tank in Nairobi. "He took a strong populist approach and his populism won."

Margaret Njeri Mubuu, an elderly activist in the Kikuyu community, explained that she abandoned the party over its elitism to vote for Ruto. Meeting him at a campaign stop, she asked for help thwarting plans by the National Land Commission to evict villagers from their ancestral lands.

"The government that you voted for is not a government of breaching the law," Ruto replied. "No one will be evicted forcefully so long as you have the ownership documents."

"(Kenyatta) ignored the region, people were just fed up," said Justin Muturi, speaker of the National Assembly for Mount Kenya. "People resonated with Ruto's down-to-earth approach and economic message and concerns of the people. It has nothing to do with being Kikuyu or not anymore."

Elected member of parliament from the UDA, Gabriel Kagombe, offered this explanation: "People no longer vote on an ethnic basis... Ruto said this nonsense of people voting on a tribal basis, having no other consideration than tribe, must come to an end," he told the Guardian UK.

"Ruto has managed to kill tribalism in this country," Kagombe said. "It's the dawn of a new era."

Ruto's stump speech included vows to invest in agriculture which resonated among farmers in Mount Kenya facing higher food and fertilizer prices.

Although now a wealthy man, the 55-year-old Ruto stresses his early roots as a roadside food vendor selling local chicken to passing truck drivers. He walked long distances to school, shoeless, knocking his toes on rocks and leaving bloody toenails behind. But that was his past.

Many admire the politician able to go from being a hustler to a millionaire with an estimated net worth of over 41 billion Kenyan shillings (US\$333,899) and is ranked among the top 10 richest people in Kenya.

Meanwhile, Kenyan president-elect Ruto says that if there's a court challenge to the election results, "we will engage in those" as East Africa's most stable democracy awaits a likely petition from losing candidate Raila Odinga. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews - 22 August 2022]

Electoral Epic Of "Hustler Vs. Dynasty" in Kenya

Analysis by Azu Ishiekwene

ABUJA — One of the ironies of politics is how easily fiction becomes reality, and reality, precedent. Before our eyes, the president-elect of Kenya, William Ruto, who has played all sides of Kenya's politics for at least three decades, has just won an election by claiming to be an outsider.

Ruto's electoral epic of "hustler vs. dynasty" appears to have wiped off all memory of his 30-year involvement in the good and bad of Kenya's politics. This legend won him a razor-thin victory over Raila Odinga in the August 9 presidential election.

Legends still work. Ruto is proof. It's a tribute to the epic of this latter-day, PhD-possessing hustler that in many parts of the continent where the support of the incumbent is vital to the electoral success of a successor, especially if both are in the same party, he won in spite of the sitting president whose deputy he has been for 10 years.

This would be an improbable story in Nigeria. For example, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar also current flagbearer of the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) is running for the fifth time. Twice his electoral misery was spectacularly complicated and eventually ruined by President Olusegun Obasanjo, who as president and later as ex, swore that his deputy Atiku would only become president over his dead body.

In the case of Obasanjo's eventual successor, Umaru Yar'Adua, even after he had been confirmed dead, his deputy Goodluck Jonathan was so afraid to step in that it required the combined effort of the National Assembly and CSOs to persuade him to take over.

And in the recent party primaries of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), the failure of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo to emerge as the party's flagbearer has been widely attributed to President Muhammadu Buhari's embarrassing ambivalence.

Even if Osinbajo could have done a Ruto, and perhaps in his quiet moments asked himself why not, it is unthinkable that he would have jumped off the Buhari wagon without ending up worse off than Humpty Dumpty.

The boss is a small god. Even at state level where governors reign, not many deputies would dare challenge their governors to an open electoral contest and live to tell the story.

That is what makes the Ruto story a Nigerian, if not an African, dream. Ruto, who apart from being VP is also Minister of Agriculture, did not only run in defiance of Kenyatta. He has also actively opposed Kenyatta's policies, thumbing his nose against the president in March when the Supreme Court struck down the government's "bridge building" constitutional amendment that would have reintroduced the 2013 power-sharing arrangement between president and prime minister.

Ruto appears to have exceeded his own expectations by going into the race as an underdog and a first timer against a five-time veteran and serial loser, Raila Odinga, who ran in 1997, 2007, 2013, 2017 and now in 2022.

Defeating the dynastic alliance of the son of the first president and son of the first vice president of the country after independence was remarkable.

For Kenya, this year's polls are also a great improvement on previous ones that were marred by violence, which left 1,200 dead in 2007 and at least 37 dead in 2017 with thousands more fleeing their homes.

Along with Tanzania, Senegal, Zambia and few others, Kenya is one of the African countries that has not experienced a military coup in its 59-year history since independence from Britain. It has retained a reasonable level of stability despite the onslaught from extremist al Shabab in next door Somalia, and the internal upheavals in neighbouring countries of Uganda, Rwanda and Sudan. But it had to wage a guerilla and bloody uprising to force the British into conceding independence in 1963, two years after outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta was born. His father, Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister of Kenya named him Uhuru, which means "freedom" in anticipation of independence from Britain.

This story, however, is not about Uhuru. It is about how a man raised on the bread and water of mainstream politics managed to position himself as an “outsider” and still caught voter’s imagination. It is also, of course, about a leadership incubation process that has seen Kenya hold regular electoral contests and produce a more or less effective power transition system over the years.



Vote counting in Kenya. Photo source: United States Institute of Peace

Odinga who entered the race as favourite has had another near miss, which could well be his last. His 48.8 percent showing on the result sheets is as close as it could ever get and better than the 43.4 percent, he polled against Kenyatta in 2017. At 77, that’s how close Odinga came behind his major challenger, who is 21 years younger.

Kenya’s democratic journey is getting better, and hopefully, more resilient. It’s nearly out of the treacherous bend where incumbents in Africa cook up new constitutions anytime the end of their tenure is near.

The independence of the court would be put to the test again. Four of the seven electoral commissioners have rejected the results of the presidential election, while Odinga is asking the court to nullify the results and declare him winner.

He is saying that it was not Ruto’s hustler epic that was at play on August 9. Instead, he said, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) got in bed with Ruto, with testosterone supplied by the digital wizardry of three Venezuelan mercenaries named in Odinga’s suit. The result, the plaintiff said in his 15-point suit, is not a new Kenyan electoral prince, but a baby monster.

According to him the IEBC sabotaged the elections by discarding significant numbers of valid votes and tampering with materials, including electronic documents, devices and equipment for the election. He wants the court to authorise the commencement of criminal investigations against the Chairman of the IEBC and, above all, to declare him and his running mate winners of the election.

A civil society network, called Angaza Movement, that appears to be leaning toward Odinga, has also filed a petition at the Supreme Court. It is arguing, notably, that there had been systematic breaches in the electoral technology law and that the four-tier process of transmitting results from polling stations to the constituency tallying centres and then to the national tallying centre had been breached.

The last time, in 2017, the courts ruled in Odinga’s favour by annulling the election. But he boycotted the re-run and conceded the presidency to Uhuru. With Kenya’s institutions increasingly asserting their authority with transparency, the outcome of the current judicial tussle might prove even more interesting than the elections.

The result will test the remarkable public restraint since the announcement of the result of the election on August 15.

Was there something else Ruto might also have done right so far, apart from his salesmanship? He is 21 years younger than his rival and pitched his campaign on the generational gear. He sold himself to the electorate as a progressive, the poster boy, not of Kenya’s past, but of its future.

With a population of 48 million people and 22 million registered voters, about 40 percent of whom are young people, the general elections were very competitive with no clear leading contender after many days of vote counting.

William Ruto's marginal win is proof of how very competitive the process has been. But Kenyans are reaping the benefits of the 2010 amended constitution which limits presidential tenure to five years and two terms.

Ruto appears to have beaten his masters at their own game. In his first post-election speech where he promised to lead for God and country, he also declared Odinga's villain, the electoral commission chairman, a hero in the first round. But even Ruto knows that in Kenya's 59-year history no single election has been won or lost without knife-edge drama.

As the father of his rival and one of the dynastic patriarchs, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, might have said, "It is not yet uhuru." [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 25 August 2022]

** The writer is the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of LEADERSHIP newspaper based in Abuja, Nigeria.*



The long lines for kerosene, used in cooking, which is in short supply island wide. Photo Credit: Sunday Times

The Politics of Misfortune in Sri Lanka

By Neville de Silva

LONDON — Never in Sri Lanka's 74-year post-independence history has a democratically elected leader been forced to flee the country, running away from the economic shambles and social disarray he was largely responsible for creating.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa with 6.9 million votes under his belt was elected president at the butt end of 2019. Two and a half years later, one of the siblings of the most powerful political family in the country, was forced out of his private residence in the outskirts of the capital Colombo by angry crowds as essentials such as fuel, cooking gas, medicines ran out and some foods were hard to find. Daily interruptions to power, at times lasting 10 hours, exacerbated the mounting crisis with offices, factories, schools closing down and hospitals curtailing surgical operations.

On April 1 the country's president retreated to the over 200-year-old colonial building built by the last Dutch Governor Johan van Angelbeek somewhere in the 1790s. Later it was sold to the British who named it variously as "King's House" and "Queen's House" (depending on who was monarch), and for many decades as "Governor's House". That was until 1972 when Sri Lanka became a republic and shed the colonial appendage.

Since then, the opulent and majestic-looking building with sprawling gardens and manured lawns has been the official residence of Sri Lanka's head of state and came to be known as "President's House" though foreign journalists mistakenly call it "palace".

For almost four months President Rajapaksa, forced out of home, lived in this high security area, guarded by contingents of police and military and rarely seen in public.

Meanwhile, ever multiplying numbers of Sri Lankan citizenry, led mainly by educated youth, despondent, angry and increasingly frustrated at the nepotistic and corrupt system under which the rulers, their cronies and political acolytes fattened themselves at the expense of the people and the State, demanded their resignation and return of stolen state assets. Thousands set themselves up in the seaside promenade right opposite the Presidential Secretariat, another stately colonial building once the country's parliament.

From the early days of the protest movement this promenade where many thousands drawn from Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society pitched camp, was appropriately named "GotaGoGama" (gama meaning village).

The clarion call of the Aragalaya (struggle) was "GotaGoHome" -- the ouster of President Gotabaya and the rest of the Rajapaksa clan and his return to his Los Angeles home. This was an orderly, peaceful and non-violent movement that would surely be etched in the annals of modern Sri Lankan history until the later days when it was infiltrated by more politically-motivated and violence-prone youth.

The last days of Gotabaya Rajapaksa's rule, saw him escape by land, sea and air starting from President's House where he allegedly used a secret underground tunnel that led to the nearby Colombo port. Eventually he landed in Singapore via neighbouring Maldives with Singapore claiming he was on a visit visa.

Earlier he, his wife and entourage were reportedly to fly from Colombo to Dubai on a Sri Lankan Airlines commercial flight but its flight captain and crew refused to accommodate Gotabaya who was still the country's president, apparently after a passenger said he and his friends would manhandle the entourage if they were on board. So social media said.

All this seemed like something out of the pages of fiction, especially when the letter of resignation the President promised to send to the Speaker of parliament on July 13 had still not reached him that night.

Speculation was rife. Was this another sleight-of-hand to cling on to power, giving time to the Rajapaksas to regroup and re-enter politics with the help of the armed forces of which Gotabaya was still the chief? Multiple stories circulated as the hours ticked by.

What is ironical, however, was the coming change of guard at the very top even before Gotabaya Rajapaksa flew the coop and sent his belated resignation by email from Singapore.

It had been signed in the presence of Sri Lanka's High Commissioner there on July 14 who arranged for it to be flown to Colombo expeditiously by a diplomatic staffer from the Sri Lanka mission, reports said.

What would have been considered political comedy straight out of "Yes Prime Minister" had it not been so serious, are the events that followed the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa's elder brother Mahinda from the prime ministership on May 9.

After pro-government armed thugs attacked peaceful protesters opposite the Premier's official residence and later marched to "GotaGoGama" over a kilometre away attacking protesters there and destroying and burning their makeshift village of all its contents while the police stood by nonchalantly.

With Mahinda Rajapaksa, the two-term president's resignation, Gotabaya had to search for a prime minister from outside his Sri Lanka Peoples' Front (SLPP) party that dominated

parliament. While some he approached were consulting their respective parties, Gotabaya picked on Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Some suspect that this was a ruse to make Wickremesinghe - said to be a friend of the Rajapaksas which Wickremesinghe stoutly denies - 'hold the fort' and steer the country out of the economic mess until the Rajapaksa clan rebuilds its political base.

The problem is that the public appears to have even less faith in Ranil Wickremesinghe than they do in the Rajapaksas just now. They are seen as belonging to the same political elite that survives by scratching each other's back while the people bleed.

So, the public ire that kept ballooning against the Rajapaksas had turned against Wickremesinghe. He and his party are considered as lacking both political and moral legitimacy.

His sudden rise from zero to hero in two months and becoming the country's executive president without a peoples' mandate, is viewed with grave suspicion by a public which has lost faith in politicians.

Ideologically and politically the Rajapaksas and Wickremesinghe belong to opposing camps. So how and why the Rajapaksas chose Wickremesinghe to bear the cross. In the civic nostril it smelled like some kind of Faustian deal.

Ranil Wickremesinghe has been five times prime minister. Three months back President Gotabaya elevated him for the sixth time though Wickremesinghe has never completed a full term and twice lost the presidential election in 1999 and 2005.

But his most humiliating defeat was in 2020 when the United National Party (UNP), one of the country's oldest parties, which he has led for many years, was totally wiped out at the parliamentary election losing every seat it contested, including his own. His entry into parliament was in a way fortuitous. His party was entitled to one bonus seat for garnering 2% of the national vote at that election. He grabbed it but bided his time entering parliament

He did so only in June 2021 when much of the derision that would have greeted him as a publicly rejected leader creeping in through the back door, as it were, had died down and the Rajapaksa government was too busy trying to undo the economic and other policy foolhardiness that had brought the country to its knees.

Observers believe that the Rajapaksas were willing to have Wickremesinghe complete the rest of Gotabaya's presidential term which runs for another two-and-half years during which he would look after the Rajapaksa interests.

Secondly, Wickremesinghe has pro-US and pro-western proclivities which are critical to secure the assistance of the IMF and other international lending institutions and donor nations if the country is to emerge from the financial and economic shambles.

Though Wickremesinghe would strenuously deny any deal with the Rajapaksas, the truth is that the Rajapaksa-run SLPP with its parliamentary majority swung its support behind Wickremesinghe, a non-SLPP member.

When the MPs voted on July 20 to elect the new president - as stipulated by the constitution - Wickremesinghe won 134 votes in the 225-member parliament. His opponent a dissident SLPPer but still a party member, received 82. That was sufficient evidence to a sceptical public that a deal had been struck between them.

One of the first acts of President Wickremesinghe, the day after assuming office was to let loose the police and armed forces on protesters still occupying the presidential secretariat and the protest site. This after the protesters had announced earlier they would leave the former by

afternoon. Hours before dawn the armed police and military swooped down on the sleeping protesters including women and differently abled persons and beat them up. They attacked lawyers who went to their assistance and journalists, sending several to hospital.

Withing hours the UN, EU and diplomatic missions of several other western countries and human rights agencies condemned the brutal assault. Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission, the Bar Association and civic rights groups decried the use of brute force as "despicable".

What is difficult to fathom is why so soon after assuming office, the president who desperately needs international goodwill right now should let loose the dogs of war on the innocent.

Some believe that President Wickremesinghe is trying to prove to the Rajapaksas who propped him into the top job that has eluded him so long, that he is ready to crush those who dislodged the Rajapaksa family from the political edifice.

A quid pro quo, perhaps. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 10 August 2022]

** The writer is a veteran Sri Lankan journalist who held senior roles in Hong Kong at The Standard and worked in London for Gemini News Service. He has been a correspondent for the foreign media, including the New York Times and Le Monde. More recently, he was Sri Lanka's Deputy High Commissioner in London.*



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (left) and Fethullah Gülen. Photo Credit: Hayatin Kendisi Burada/Picasa.

For Erdoğan the Failed Coup was A “Gift from God”

Analysis by Alon Ben-Meir

NEW YORK — Perhaps nothing has changed Turkey's domestic and international trajectory since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 than the failed military coup of July 2016, which gave Erdoğan an unprecedented opportunity

to satisfy his insatiable lust for power.

On July 15, Turkey's President Erdoğan “celebrated” the sixth anniversary of a failed military coup - ‘a major victory’ that presumably protected the Turkish constitution and its democracy. Erdoğan himself characterized the coup as a “gift from God” because it provided him with the ‘justification’ to declare a national emergency; less than a year after the coup attempt, he held a referendum to transform Turkey's parliamentary democracy into an executive presidency, which he had been seeking for more than two decades. He mercilessly used his newly acquired, near-absolute power to ‘cleanse’ the country of its domestic enemies and rule largely by decree, with little or no opposition to stop him.

One of Erdoğan's biggest shortcomings is his sense of insecurity which led him to embark on the greatest purge in Turkey's modern history, while promoting Islam in order to cement his power without being challenged. Although he projects himself as self-assured and publicly exhibits confidence and assertiveness, his insecurity emanates from five different concerns:

He believed the military, which was assigned at the time the new Republic was created to safeguard Turkey's democracy, was a threat to his unrestrained rule. The military toppled three governments before Erdoğan's rise to power - in 1960, 1971, and 1980 - because they deviated

from the constitution, and Erdogan was determined to emasculate the military and subordinate it to his whims. It is no wonder then that following the coup, he prosecuted over 23,000 military personnel for their presumed part in the insurrection.

Political rivals have always been a major concern, and his chosen opponent is Fetullah Gülen, whom he accused of being behind the coup. He stopped short of nothing to dismiss more than 100,000 public sector workers, including nearly 4,000 judges and prosecutors, from their jobs; over 321,000 have been detained since 2016 on suspicion of being followers of Gülen. To this day, Erdogan is trying to extradite Fetullah Gülen from the US but to no avail, as he repeatedly failed to produce evidence to prove Gülen's culpability in the coup. Gülen sternly denies the charges against him and insists his Islamic Hizmet movement promotes peace and education.

The press was and still is one of Erdogan's main targets. He shut down just about every single newspaper that dared to question any of his policies. As a part of his purge, he arrested more than 300 journalists, accusing them of bogus offenses. Nearly 180 of them continue to languish in jail, not knowing when or if they will ever be released. Thousands of academics and lawyers who likewise had nothing to do with the coup attempt were also imprisoned.

The Kurdish community is another source of deep concern to Erdogan, which he has and continues to persecute while denying them much of their inherent right to live in accordance with their tradition. The failed coup only deepened Erdogan's concerns over the Kurdish community, as he remained fearful that the Kurds have never given up on their drive to seek autonomy, and incarcerated thousands of them as a part of his sweeping purge.

To this day he continues to wage a merciless war against the PKK, which he considers a terrorist organization, and vows to hunt every PKK member until the last one is captured or killed. He even invaded Syria in 2016 in an effort to prevent the Syrian Kurds from establishing their autonomous rule, killing hundreds of YPG militia members whom he accused of being supportive of the PKK.

Since the failed coup six years ago, Turkey continues to suffer greatly on a number of fronts:

Turkey suffers persistently from high inflation and the Turkish lira lost nearly two-thirds of its value against the US dollar in the first five years after the coup attempt. As a result, millions have joined the ranks of the very poor and the forecast for economic recovery in the foreseeable future remains dim at best.

The Turkish public remains extremely sceptical and deeply concerned about the future of the country as there seems to be no relief in sight from the pressure and the oppression that have become routine. The people are living in fear as they are being constantly watched and listened to by his intelligence and security apparatus.

The relationships between Turkey and the US and EU have not recovered as yet as the US in particular remains deeply concerned about Erdogan's conduct, especially his unabated human rights abuses and violation of the sanctions imposed on Iran. Furthermore, his purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system remains a bone of contention between Turkey and NATO.

The public's trust in the government, the courts, the execution of the laws, the absence of justice, the rampant corruption of top officials, the Islamic AK Party's devolution to being simply a rubber stamp for Erdogan's every whim, and the government's inability to address the people's needs, have reached its nadir.

Tens of thousands of young Turkish citizens, especially from the academia, who feel robbed of their dignity and unable to freely engage in scholarly discourse about domestic and foreign policy, are leaving the country in search of a better future.

And finally, Erdogan's stated objective to have zero problems with neighbours ended up with Turkey having problems with just about every neighbour—from Greece and Cyprus to Israel, Armenia, Iraq, Iran, and even Georgia. He is now desperately trying to improve relations with many countries that he has alienated with very limited success, as he remains reviled for his ruthlessness at home and untrustworthiness abroad.

To be sure, given how much power Erdogan has been able to amass, it also leaves him vulnerable because much of what is going wrong now is attributed to him, as by centralizing control he has no one else to blame for the public's suffering.

Next year, Erdogan will be presiding over the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. He is desperately trying to portray himself as a new Atatürk (father of Turkey) - who founded the Turkish Republic in 1923 with significant Western orientation. In fact, Erdogan did not create a "new Turkey" and a sound democracy as he claims, but an autocracy that does nothing but continue to suppress the people and rob them of their dignity and future. This is the legacy of the failed coup. But, Erdogan may still believe that the failed coup was a "gift from God." [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 21 July 2022]

** The writer is a retired professor of international relations at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University (NYU). He taught courses on international negotiation and Middle Eastern studies for over 20 years.*

This article was originally published in KOHA Ditore as "Për Erdoganin, dështimi i puçit ishte një "dhuratë nga Zoti".

Why Do Zimbabwean Women Shun Politics?

By Farai Shawn Matiashe

MUTARE, Zimbabwe — Cyberbullying and online sexual harassment are some dilemmas that young women trying to rise in Zimbabwe's patriarchal and male-dominated political space face.



Female lawmakers make up 34.57% of Zimbabwe's Ninth Parliament. Photo Credit: ZimFact

What started as a debate on the opposition party, Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), led by young and charismatic politician Nelson Chamisa not having structures, ended up with CCC spokesperson Fadzayi Mahere fighting cyberbullying from the ruling party, Zanu PF sympathisers in courts.

Former editor of the State-owned newspaper, Sunday Mail, Edmund Kudzayi, threatened to release nude pictures of Mahere and her alleged married men. Mahere's lawyers later sued Kudzayi for defamation demanding \$100 000 in damages at the High Court in Harare capital.

Her case replicates that of many women in Zimbabwean politics who are often called derogatory names and accused of having sex scandals with married men in an endeavour to silence them.

"Cyberbullying remains one of the reasons why women shun away from politics," says Sitabile Dewa, an executive director at Women Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence, an organisation that advocates for women's rights in politics.

"It has been used as a tool against women. Most women who occupy political leadership positions and those who aspire to take up leadership positions have had their personal information leaked online, their bodies shamed by their male counterparts to tarnish their image to citizens as a strategy to make them lose votes or withdraw from politics."

Dewa says hate speech on social media platforms, including microblogging site Twitter, messaging platforms Facebook and WhatsApp, have also been used to push women away from politics.

Barbara Gwangwara Tanyanyiwa, a caretaker spokesperson for CCC Women Champions, says young women and most married women shun politics because of the ill-treatment of women in the country. “Surprisingly, most male politicians including those that are our legislators, do not believe in 50/50 gender equality as they think it is giving women positions on a silver platter,” she argues. “On the other hand, people are now taking politics as a career, so men will not let women take up positions they think should be filled by them.”

Linda Masarira, a human rights defender and president of an opposition party Labour, Economists and African Democrats (LEAD), has been called derogatory names on various social media platforms. “What I have realised is that Zimbabweans are highly patriarchal,” she says. “The rise of characters like me in the Zimbabwean political economy made a lot of men uncomfortable. I also learnt in my political journey that an opinionated woman is a woman that everyone wants to silence because the men themselves know the power that women possess and the only way to silence a woman’s voice is by speaking ill about their own livelihoods.”

To promote gender equality in Parliament, Zimbabwe’s Constitution adopted in 2013 introduced proportional representation in the Senate, and as of 2020, 48 per cent were women in the total of 80 senators. After the 2018 general elections, female lawmakers constituted 34.57 per cent of Zimbabwe’s two houses of Parliament, the National Assembly and Senate, which have 350 seats¹.

Political climate to become more unfavourable for women in 2023

With just one year left before the country holds its harmonised elections slated for 2023, women in politics fear that the road will be bumpy for many young female politicians.

Women in politics in Zimbabwe also experience sexual harassment offline.

In May 2020, Cecilia Chimhiri, legislator Joanah Mamombe and Netsai Marova, three Zimbabwean activists, were abducted, allegedly sexually abused and tortured for demonstrating against the failure of the government to provide personal protective equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Instead of the State investigating the matter and arresting the perpetrators, the trio were arrested and charged with faking abduction. To date, they are still fighting the charges in court.

“Political violence and sexual harassment have been used against women in politics. A lot of cases of politically motivated violence and sexual harassment have been recorded over the years, and this has and still is a reason why women fear politics,” says Dewa.

Tanyanyiwa says women need a non-violent environment and in 2023 they are not likely going to participate in their huge numbers. “Heading towards 2023 elections I do not see the environment being favourable for women seeing the violence that is already being perpetrated by Zanu PF,” she says.

Dewa says as the nation heads toward the 2023 elections, the political environment is becoming volatile as political parties campaign across the country. “Cases of politically motivated violence targeting women leaders including social media attacks targeting their personal lives. Women leaders and female activists face victimisation and harassment that is politically motivated. This

¹ See <https://zimfact.org/factsheet-women-in-the-ninth-parliament/>

results in fewer women being actively involved in politics as they fear for their lives and that of their families,” she says.

Is the new Data Protection Act going to protect women in politics?

Zimbabwe enacted the Data Protection Act, which also has aspects relating to cybersecurity and cybercrimes in December last year. Some organisations that advocate for women’s rights in politics look up to the new Data Protection Act to protect them and to use it to sue those who bully them on social media.

To tackle cyberbullying, Dewa says, there is a need to raise awareness of the ills of cyberbullying. She says women in politics should undergo cyber security training to strengthen their resilience against cyberbullying and equip them with knowledge on how to handle such incidents. Dewa notes that if the political environment becomes conducive and violence-free, more women will be able to freely and actively participate in politics.

“It is the duty of political parties, civil society, government and other stakeholders to make sure that the political environment and conducive for women to take part in politics,” she says.

Tanyanyiwa says leaders of all political parties in the country should denounce cyberbullying. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 24 July 2022]

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Shaping Democracy. Picture Source: Wikimedia Commons



Abolish Political Parties in Impending New Sri Lankan Constitution

Viewpoint by P. Soma Palan

COLOMBO — I have advocated the abolition of political parties from contesting elections to form a government, in previous articles, both in the electronic and print media. In the present unprecedented political, economic, financial and social instability in the country, the need to revive this plea assumes greater relevance and importance.



Interactive Dialogue on “Revenue Generation as a Pathway to Sri Lanka’s Economic Recovery” held with the participation of Members of Parliament on August 10, 2022. Photo Source: Parliament of Sri Lanka @ParliamentLK

My proposal may be dismissed as an absurdity by politicians and others as an impractical, unrealistic and even eccentric idea.

Why do we need to abolish political parties?

- Firstly, political parties are the root cause of all ills and evils in governance and the country. Elections are monopolized by the political parties. Political parties nominate candidates for elections. That is, political parties have pre-decided the representatives the people should elect. The people merely vote for their candidates. It is the only choice.

In reality, people vote for a political party, not the candidate. This is not a true democracy. The political party, which garners a majority of candidates, forms a government. Those that fail to get a majority vote will not be in the Government but slumbering in the opposition in inane criticism of the Government, which is of no useful value. A government and opposition dichotomy is an innate feature of the political party-based elections.

- Political parties are divisive, religion and racist-based, either overtly or covertly. The people are fragmented into political factions. It leads to hostility and violence amongst the people.
- Political parties are family-centric and perpetuate family rule, and contesting elections is passed from father to children.
- The political party Government is open to bribery and corruption. The organized party solidarity facilitates corruption and concealing them; it promotes nepotism and favouritism in appointments to state institutions and overseas diplomatic missions.
- Crossing over of MPs from opposition to the Government is a common feature, enticed by financial inducement and offer of cabinet and state ministerial posts with perks. As a result, Governments carry a heavy load of ministers as passengers at the cost of public funds. The crossovers of MPs make a comedy of democracy.
- Political party interest supersedes that of the nation. Political parties invite funding from the business community in return for favours, and the latter have unseen power and influence over the Government.
- Many political parties have made the electoral process and procedure complicated, complex and cumbersome. During the early post-independence period, the electoral system was simple. The electoral unit was the constituency. Elections results were decided by the simple first past the post method. It was more democratic as there was a closer relationship between the people and their representatives to the Parliament. The

change to the existing district-based elections, proportional representation, preferential voting, and allocation of national list members to Parliament makes it cumbersome.

The alternative for the political party Government

The only alternative is that independent individuals should seek nomination for elections to represent the people in Parliament, subject to qualifications. A minimum education and age qualification is an absolute requirement. The minimum education should be degree from a university or equivalent professional qualification. The age should not exceed 65 years. This lack of education is reflected in the rowdy and uncultured behaviour of members of Parliament today.

Methodology of forming a government of independent individuals.

1. Independent individuals self-nominate themselves for Parliamentary elections. The number of nominations to each constituency should be limited relative to the density of the population. Currently, there would be 225 electoral constituencies in the country.
2. The election is conducted under the First-Past-the-Post method.
3. After the conclusion of the elections, all elected as members of Parliament shall assemble at an inaugural meeting of Parliament fixed by the secretary-general of the Parliament and chaired by him, pro term. The first task is appointing a Prime Minister, Speaker, and Deputy Speaker. The Chairman shall nominate three names for each position based on the highest number of votes polled by the voters at the election of a member. The selection of the Prime Minister, Speaker, and Deputy Speaker of the House, will be decided by the vote of all members of Parliament. Once the Speaker is chosen by vote, he shall take over the proceedings as Chairman.
4. The Prime Minister will have the discretion to choose his team of Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers from the rest of all Members based on their Personal Biodata, such as their Educational and/or professional qualifications and experience. The Ministerial Portfolios allocated should have an affinity, as far as possible, to their qualifications and experience.
5. The number of Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers should not exceed 25, respectively.
6. The position of State Ministers should be abolished. These are ambiguous and vague positions, with no exact clarity of their role and functions. It is used mainly to woo Opposition members to the Government side.
7. All the balance Members of Parliament (172) would serve as members in 25 Executive Committees corresponding to the Cabinet of Ministers, each headed by a Minister. Each Executive Committee may have 6 or 7 members based on the size of the Ministry. The members of each Executive Committee can oversee and administer allotted Departments and Institutions coming under each Ministry. With the abolition of political parties, the Opposition will become defunct. Thus, all members of Parliament will form the Government and participate in the Governance of the Country.
8. The non-existence of opposition does not mean the end of the debate, discussion and deliberation in the legislative business of Parliament. Differences on any issue will be settled by a majority vote.
9. The legislative process and procedures of Parliament will continue as they existed hitherto.
10. The life span of the Government will run its normal course for four-and-a-half or five years until the next election. If they wish, the ex-Members of Parliament belonging to the abolished political parties can seek election as Independent Individuals. The constituency's voters could affirm and re-elect their representatives or reject them if their performance and service to the constituency and/or to the country were found wanting and elect a new candidate as their representatives at periodic elections.

Benefits of a Government without political parties?

1. The simplification of the electoral process.

2. A direct and closer relationship between the constituency and their elected representatives.
3. Democratization of the electoral process. The people truly elect their representatives, not those nominated and thrust on them by the political parties.
4. A substantial reduction in the cost of campaigning a candidate. Canvassing and campaigning by placards, banners, display of personal pictures and holding public meetings, loudspeakers, crowd-attracting musical shows etc., will become superfluous. Canvassing will be confined to house-to-house visits and handouts of leaflets containing personal data, such as education, professional qualification and experience of the candidates etc.
5. Elimination of pre- and post-election violence and internecine party rivalry. Promote peace and order in the country.
6. A Government elected, sans political parties, will indeed be a National Government and not that of one political party or parties of a coalition. Political parties habitually refer to the Government as their political party Government. Without political parties, it would be rightly called the Government of Sri Lanka.
7. Without political parties, race and religion will not take centre stage. Even the minority communities' members can participate in the country's governance and have a sense of ownership in the country's government. This will promote the social integration of people of different races and religions.
8. The scope for bribery and corruption will be difficult as the Government is composed of disparate independent individuals. There will be a mutual check between all members of Parliament. Each member of Parliament would be a watchdog of the other. Therefore, more transparency will prevail, and clandestine corrupt deals will be impossible.
9. The conduct of the business of Parliament will be orderly and decorous. The debates and discussions would not be adversarial and confrontational, degenerating into physical violence since there is no Opposition.
10. The Government will be truly national and secular in character.
11. A political party manifesto is a precondition of a political party-based election to seek a mandate of the people. By its very nature, an election based on independent individuals cannot preconceive and present a manifesto. A party-less Government can only present a post-election Action Plan or Program of work to be done during its tenure. As representatives of the people, the Government has the delegated authority to do what is good, and in the best interest of the country and people.
12. The government will be more stable and run its normal course without any obstacles and ensure smoother governance and administration of the country.
13. A non-party Government is not subject to vagaries of change. There will be consistency and continuity of policies and positions, unlike a political party Government when there is a change of the political party. Internationally, countries will have more reliance and confidence in such a government.

Sri Lanka has a plethora of political parties. The political parties proliferate in proportion to the desires of individuals to be a Leader. All crave to be leaders. Political party-based Government is exclusive and not inclusive. It excludes a substantial part of the populace who did not vote for a government.

A strong argument against a government without a political party is that it is only theoretical and not practicable, pragmatic and realistic. The assumption is that Political parties and Democratic Government is inseparable and conjoined. Even in ancient Athens, the cradle of Democracy, political parties did not exist. The citizens directly ruled the country. But a direct Democracy is inconceivable and impossible in modern times. Hence, the people elect their representatives to rule the country. This gave rise to the emergence of political parties.

The abolition of political parties in a new Constitution seems impractical and non-achievable because a government born out of political parties will not self-annihilate itself. Therefore, the pragmatists hold that we have to live with that reality even if the system is defective. If there is a wide clamour for the abolition of the defective Executive Presidency in the Constitution, why cannot Political parties also be abolished in the Constitution?

If the larger interest of the country is paramount, Political parties should be abolished in a new Constitution. The Parliament does not frame a constitution. It is an extraneous body outside Parliament, composed of legal experts in constitutional law, intellectuals and academics who frame a constitution. Parliament's function is to adopt and ratify it.

Conclusion

The country is faced with severe political, economic and social instability. In the wake of mass protests, the President fled the country, preceded by the resignation of the Prime Minister. Parliament elected an Interim President and a Prime Minister. There are calls from various quarters for the formation of an All-Party Government. The new President has invited All Political parties to join an All Party

National Government

The keywords in the preceding statement are "All Parties" and "National Government". This means that all divergent Political parties have to set aside their Identities, Ideologies, and agendas and coalesce into one whole in Governing the country for an Interim limited period until a fresh election is held. In other words, it effectively means that Political parties are suspended, and such a Government will be National.

If this ad hoc arrangement is possible for an interim period, why not abolish political parties in the Constitution and have elections based on independent individuals? This vindicates that Political Party Government cannot be National. Conversely, a National Government cannot subsist with Political parties. This validates my thesis for abolishing political parties wholesale in the Constitution. Then, we can have a truly National Government for perpetuity.

Note: The writer, who describes himself as a world citizen, is a peace activist with an abiding interest in preserving Planet Earth. He has been influenced by spiritual celebrities like Swami Vivekananda, Sadh Guru, Jiddu Krishnamurti and others. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews - 18 August 2022]



A collage of pictures of the two leading presidential candidates for 2023 - Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) on the left and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) on the right. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Nigerian Presidential Elections: Politicians and the Jeopardy of Trial by Ordeal

Viewpoint by Azu Ishiekwene

ABUJA — "I'm going to waste my vote," a friend told me recently. "And don't argue with me," he added. "It's my right to do so."

I defied him. Regrettably, even though I also recruited help nearby to press home my point,

my unsolicited advice fell on deaf ears.

My friend's mind was made up, and nothing would stop him. What he intends to do, according to him, is to vote for a candidate in the 2023 presidential election that he knows would lose.

He did not name names, though in the countdown to next year's election, I have heard the suspect mentioned by many in this way. His main point was to let me know that he intended to express his civic duty as an act of defiance.

He's not alone. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), even though the number of countries that hold elections has increased over the years, there has also been a continued decline in voter interest.

In Nigeria, it's been around 50 per cent in the last six election cycles. Still, as the next election approaches, millions of Nigerians plan to abstain or vote for a potential loser.

It doesn't appear to make sense, but former Governor Donald Duke's recent viral video calling such contrarians fools doesn't explain their action either. What about the Contrarian Voter's psychology equates a simple civic task with electoral homicide?

They say that choosing between any of the two leading presidential candidates for February 25, 2023 - Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) - is like choosing between death by drinking acid and death by drinking hemlock. Either act, like Hobson's choice or Cornelia's dilemma, would lead to the same predictable outcome.

Isn't that what we say of most, if not all, of our politicians—that they are mostly old and feeble and perennially corrupt, greedy and bereft? If that is the trope politicians have canvassed of themselves and which the media has generously spread and reinforced over time, who can blame my friend, the Contrarian, for preferring political homicide?

And let no one pretend there's a last saint standing. If there were any left, the rose among the thorns has been crushed by politicians who outdo themselves in mudslinging before every election cycle. They call themselves crooks, bigots and incompetents, all of which have been adequately published in the press or logged in the bowels of search engines.

Pundits like me simply helped to finish off any virtue left to the point where my Contrarian voter friend is now unwilling to touch politicians with a ten-foot pole. He insisted that he would rather waste his vote than cast it for scoundrels.

There was no use asking him on whom he intended to waste it. Framing his choice as a wastebasket may be a shade more polite or comforting, but in a way, his wastebasket—whoever he is—is just a cousin of the perennially maligned lot.

My friend's position reminded me of an article by one of America's most outstanding psychiatrists and political columnists, Charles Krauthammer, published in May 1984 and entitled, "The Appeal of Ordeal."

Krauthammer, contemplating the decline of trust in politics, asked why anyone should worry about poor voter turnout or indifference when the standard fare every campaign season is that politicians are crooked, corrupt and useless.

Never mind that when the campaign is over and the day is done, the same politicians who dragged one another in the mud still get into office either in the executive or legislative branch. And yes, they still grant favours to their failed, maligned compatriots. They make the laws and enforce them and in-between even find time to banter and regale us on their follies.

Only on August 13, for example, in a rare moment of candour, former APC Chairman, Adams Oshiomhole, told former President Goodluck Jonathan that all the name-calling and thrashing didn't come from his heart. "I fought you," he said, "because of politics".

In what other vocation other than politics would subscribers still be expected to subscribe in large numbers after being warned repeatedly that the only choices before them are between crooks and that voting, either way, would have disastrous consequences?

To adapt Krauthammer, despite the troubling record of Dana Air, is it ever likely that rival airlines Ibom Air or Air Peace would cite the crashes of Dana in adverts to promote their own sales? Or that AIICO Insurance would mention by name the failures of any other leading insurance company to boost its own premium-honouring credentials? Not even in a blood sport as cruel as boxing is the fight promoter obsessed with the personal hubris of the contenders.

Yet in politics, all bets are off. It is expected of politicians in whose hands we entrust our lives each time we vote that their closet should be ransacked, their darkest secrets found and exposed, and every bit of their shenanigans brought to light as a rite of passage.

It doesn't stop there. Apart from stipulating that politicians must be fiddle-fit, we also insist that they must travel the 36 states, reach all local government areas, bow before every traditional ruler or local idol and dress like the locals.

Which was why a) President Muhammadu Buhari was dressed in a suit and a bow tie, it seems, for the first time in his life back in 2015, and b) Transport Minister Rotimi Amaechi ran around the Port Harcourt Stadium to prove his fitness for the APC presidential ticket when families of those kidnapped in the Abuja-Kaduna train attack were drowning in despair. We have seen, haven't we, that the circus always ends in tears!

But it doesn't matter. Being a very religious people, we also insist that politicians must be religious people too. Whatever they do at night or when no one is looking, all we care about is that they must carry one sectarian label, preferably Christian or Muslim. But again, haven't we seen it all—whether in the Oval Office of the Bill Clinton White House with Monica Lewinsky or in the nepotism of the Buhari years—that the hood doesn't make the monk?

I know I risk being accused of giving politicians a soft pass and advocating the lowest common denominator. Nonsense. I'm simply saying that in the obsession to find politicians walking where angels fear to tread, we have failed to accept that humans will, be well, humans—foibles, warts and all.

Those who insist that politics is a special sphere, unlike any other, say standards of conduct must be impeccably high. They prefer to apply the favourite Truman rejoinder that those who can't stand the heat must get out of the political kitchen.

We insist that only trial by ordeal can refine our politics. Fair enough. But also remember that the frenzy of the Truman era produced the red-baiting of McCarthyism, among other unenviable legacies of Truman's broth.

It doesn't make sense that we are searching for saints to elect or hoping for high voter turn-out when we spend cycle after cycle of campaign demonising politics and politicians only to moan about the hopelessly corrupt choices before voters.

By all means, let contenders be subject to the rules of the game that they have agreed to participate in. And sure, we also need to strengthen institutions as a safeguard. But in the end, they should be judged as humans and work in progress, like the rest of us. They should be judged on their record, not as irredeemable scoundrels or wastebaskets. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews - 18 August 2022]

** The writer is the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of LEADERSHIP newspaper based in Abuja, Nigeria*

UN Rights Chief Decries Bolsonaro Attacks On Brazil Judiciary

The outgoing UN rights chief has decried that President Jair Bolsonaro had stepped up his attacks on Brazil's judiciary and voting system ahead of October elections, warning of the threat to democracy.

Source: Daily Times (Pakistan) – 26 August 2022
<https://dailytimes.com.pk/987533/un-rights-chief-decries-bolsonaro-attacks-on-brazil-judiciary/>



UN voices concern over situation in Libya

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations on Thursday voiced concern over the situation in Libya after Fathi Bashagha, prime minister-designate of Libya's parliament-approved government, called on the Tripoli-based Prime Minister Abdul-Hamed Dbeibah to peacefully hand over power.

Source: Xinhua – 25 August 2022
<https://english.news.cn/20220826/8f135cdde86e4dda8bee87c62a122bdb/c.html>



No fuel, no hope: Sri Lankans flee crisis in mass brain drain

Colombo - Cost of living crisis fuels exodus of Sri Lanka professionals amid country's worst economic shortfall in seven decades.

Source: Eco-Business <https://www.eco-business.com/news/no-fuel-no-hope-sri-lankans-flee-crisis-in-mass-brain-drain/>

Covid – not climate change – has nudged Australians towards greener lifestyles: study

Australians have mostly ignored scientists' dire climate warnings, while the media has blamed catastrophic floods and bushfires on poor infrastructure. But the pandemic has jolted the country towards more sustainable lifestyle habits, research from the University of Queensland finds.



Source: Eco-Business <https://www.eco-business.com/news/covid-not-climate-change-has-nudged-australians-towards-greener-lifestyles-study/?sw-login=true>

'FAO in the Pacific: 2021 Annual Report'

Presents the results that FAO-led projects and programmes contributed to the timely and effective joint response by the United Nations family, governments and other partners under various thematic clusters including climate change, emergencies, in forestry, livestock, and nutrition and food safety work and highlights how statistics and policy programmes supported key data, reporting, planning and decision-making, including assisting several nations to develop various national censuses.

Downloadable from - <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0061en/>



New UN Report Calls on African Countries to Rethink Export Diversification

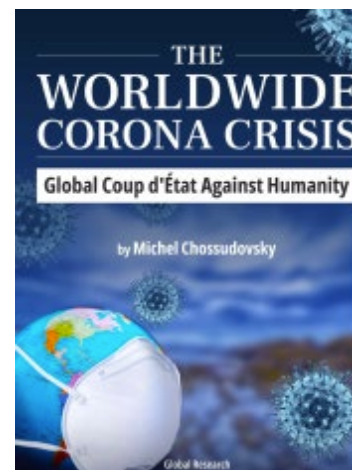
African countries must diversify their exports to survive economic shocks from global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, says the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In its Economic Development in Africa Report 2022, published on July 14, UNCTAD says African countries can diversify their economies through boosting exports of high-value services, expanding private businesses' access to financial services, tapping into new financial technologies and implementing effective policies.

Download Report from - <https://unctad.org/publication/economic-development-africa-report-2022>

The Worldwide Corona Crisis: Global Coup d'État Against Humanity

From the very outset in January 2020, people worldwide were led to believe and accept the existence of a rapidly progressing and dangerous epidemic. Media disinformation and the fear campaign were instrumental in sustaining the COVID-19 narrative. Scientific lies and falsehoods have been used to sustain the legitimacy of the COVID-19 policy mandates including lockdowns, the imposition of the face mask, social distancing and the suppression of fundamental human rights. People worldwide were led to believe that Big Pharma's COVID-19 vaccine injections were the "solution". This research based report is authored by Michel Chossudovsky of Global Research in Canada.

The pdf copy could be purchased from - <https://store.globalresearch.ca/store/the-worldwide-corona-crisis-global-coup-d%C3%A9tat-against-humanity/>





The LNG carrier Shahamah in Uruga Channel, Japan. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

UN Group Urges Support to Most Vulnerable Countries

By Jamshed Baruah

GENEVA — The UN Secretary-General’s Global Crisis Response Group (GCRG) on Food, Energy and Finance points out that skyrocketing energy prices are compounding an existential cost-of-living crisis for hundreds of millions of people. In fact, as the war in Ukraine continues to rage, the rising energy costs may cost many developing countries, especially the most vulnerable communities, from energy markets.

Despite this alarming situation, major oil and gas companies recently reported record profits, which Secretary-General António Guterres, who launched the brief on August 3, called “immoral.”

“The combined profits of the largest energy companies in the first quarter of this year are nearly US100 billion. I urge governments to tax these excessive profits and use the funds to support the most vulnerable people through these difficult times,” he said.

The situation for developing countries is critical, though they are already bearing the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, having experienced major setbacks in access to energy and progress on sustainable development since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, there could be a potential “scramble for fuel” whereby only countries paying the highest prices can access energy, warns the GCRG’s brief. Governments, therefore, need the fiscal space to support their most vulnerable populations to avoid worsening levels of energy poverty or losing energy access altogether, says the GCRG.

At the same time, there is a risk of short-term energy policies that might set developing countries on a course for a high-emission and expensive energy future. Therefore, policies that balance the need for urgency and sustainability are required. Besides, as the world charts its way forward, its plans must safeguard its commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

“Developing countries don’t lack reasons to invest in renewables. Many of them are living with the severe impacts of the climate crisis, including storms, wildfires, floods and droughts. What they lack are concrete, workable options,” said UN Chief António Guterres.

The GCRG's third brief recommends that governments find the most effective ways to fund energy solutions, such as publicly funded cash transfers and rebate policies, to protect vulnerable communities everywhere, including through windfall taxes on the largest oil and gas companies. At the same time, the brief urges a transition to renewables.

The brief comes on the heels of the landmark Black Sea Grain Initiative, which was agreed upon between Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, under the auspices of the United Nations, on July 22, paving the way for the first shipment of grains from Ukraine to leave the port of Odesa on August 1.

The brief makes it clear that the war in Ukraine and the global energy crisis that it has caused is a stark reminder of the need for energy resilience and a stronger push for the transition to renewable energy.

However, to accelerate the transition, as the Secretary-General outlined policies, including social protection measures for those affected, technology, subsidies, investments and materials to support renewables need to be in place and readily available.

The GCRG brief stresses that any short-term policies and protection measures must help mitigate the crisis, including efforts to promote energy efficiency and demand reduction, and not exacerbate it, such as blanket subsidies for fossil fuels.

In the medium-to-long term, the world needs to double down on renewables to meet net-zero goals, tackle energy poverty, and boost and diversify the global energy mix. To that end, the brief calls for the need to significantly increase global investment.

“Renewable energy is often the cheapest and most quick to deploy source of electricity for many countries. But this is only true if we ensure that supply chains work well and without bottlenecks; that the workforce has the right skills, and that enough funds will be made available for the initial investments,” said Rebeca Grynspan, the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), who coordinates and leads on the development of the GCRG's briefs.

“To meet these conditions we have to scale up financing and technology transfer for the developing countries and the energy poor of the world,” she added at the launch.

According to the brief, an ambitious renewable energy transition that includes skills training could create an additional 85 million jobs in renewable energy sources, efficiency, and other energy transition-related sectors by 2030.

Moreover, renewable energy production is often the least-cost energy production source with the shortest installation times. It provides countries with energy security, reducing future exposure to the volatility of oil, gas and coal prices. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 04 August 2022]

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Edited by Dr Kalinga Seneviratne Email: kalingasen@gmail.com