

SRI LANKAN YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF THE U S A AND LESSONS OF SRI LANKA

Both are democracies in the world. Are they same or worlds apart in terms of national unity, practising the democratic values, equal treatment of their citizen, freedom of expressions and media freedom?

Yes, inevitably a comparison has to be made to see how far Sri Lanka and the United States of America respect the democratic values. Though we have a democratically elected government in Sri Lanka, there are so many inspiring lessons to be learnt from America.

In a democratic country all are treated fairly, promised equality irrespective of their colour, race, and religion. Anyone can be a leader of a country if he/she has the ability, courage and charisma. Is it possible in Sri Lanka? 'No' is the answer. But the United States of America has sent a strong message right across the world on the 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2008 that, it is possible.

Until two years ago Senator Barack Obama, a courageous, charismatic, African American from Illinois was not known by anyone in the US, became the 44<sup>th</sup> President of America. This is a step forward in the history of America and the rest of the world. Doesn't this show the Americans believe in what they think is right and nothing else. Colour of the skin, religion, cast, minority and majority are not counted to get the most powerful job in the world but merit, merit and merit is the key element American people looked for electing their leader.

It is also noted with great admiration of the defeated candidate Senator John McCain's concession speech. Senator John McCain said, "He (Obama) was my former opponent but he will be my president. I urge all American who support me to join not just congratulating him but offering our next president our goodwill. It's natural to feel some disappointment to night, but tomorrow, we must move beyond it and work together to get our country moving again". Senator John McCain's generosity and leadership is very much appreciated.

But in Sri Lanka, I have never seen or heard any of defeated candidates giving a speech to the people who voted him/her to forget the differences of opinion with their opponent and work together to move the country again. Instead, the speech triggers unrest and violence all over the country.

In America, nearly 140 million people voted during the presidential election. No serious violence was reported. No one was killed. If it is in Sri Lanka, the situation would have been very different. The peaceful and violence-free election in America is an inspiration to all of us.

Moreover, America is a land of opportunities and hope .Many a Sri Lankan youths have a "Silicon Valley dream" in them. It is impossible to fulfil their dream in Sri Lanka as opportunities are limited to various reasons like finance and resources. Even talented, creative and enthusiastic individuals end up in fields they have less or no interest in. Anyone has to have an opportunity to choose his/her career path according

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to their interest in it. This is a basic human right. America respects human rights so that everyone in America enjoys them irrespective of colour race and gender.

Media freedom and freedom of expression are two of the most important factors in democracy. Many of the so called democratic countries have neither media freedom nor freedom of expression. Journalists are being abducted and killed is a common sight in many places in the world.

But in contrast, there are Hollywood blockbusters criticising the president of America. Anyone can say anything about the president or government in America. It's not a criminal activity. Once, the British comedian Russell Brand called the President George Bush a "retarded cowboy" at an MTV awards. It would never happen in Sri Lanka because it's a criminal offence here.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note a few lines which are an inspiring lesson to Sri Lanka, from the key note address to the Democratic Convention of July 27, 2004 by Mr Barack Obama.

"There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there is the United States of America. The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red states for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I have got news for them. We are one people, all of us defending the United States of America".

We sincerely hope, as the US ambassador to Sri Lanka Mr Robert Blake wished, there will be a time in the future a Tamil or a Muslim youth become the president of Sri Lanka and all live in peace in our beautiful island nation. God bless Sri Lanka. God bless America.

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**Entry Coupon**

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