Some 3,000 lined up for deportation

Govt. to provide relief package for returnees

The Government will allow thousands of Sri Lankan refugees, who failed their asylum bid in Europe and elsewhere, to enter the country provided they arrive on a voluntary basis, a high ranking official with the Foreign Ministry said on 24/02/2018.

-Ceylon Today - 25/02/2018
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*Edited by Leela Isaac*  
*Layout designed by Hashini Rajaratna*
The Local Government election results in February were quite unexpected. It plunged the country into a state of utter confusion and paralysed the government in power. Everything in the country came to a standstill, while those in power including the President and Prime minister lost interest in everything else and began frantically to plan how they should consolidate their hold on power, while keeping an eye on the next Presidential and General Elections. Surprised at the hostile verdict of the people they held numerous meetings, even midnight ones and planned how to save themselves and stay in power. Of course, it was only the local government elections and it couldn't dislodge the government in power. So they were safe for the moment, but the writing on the wall was clear. In their attempts to tighten their grip on power, the needs and grievances of the people, such as the cost of living, wealth and income inequality, unemployment and numerous other woes had to be set aside. In fact it is reported that in Sri Lanka household income inequality over the last decade is at very high levels relative to other countries. The disgruntled people who had expressed their dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in the government could only helplessly watch with disgust, the tomfoolery their representatives were indulging in. The two parties cannot work together but they need to cling together or lose their hold on power.

The ‘Yahapalanya’ (good governance) as it is practiced by the two coalition partners was definitely rejected at the local government elections. When the two leaders assumed power in 2015, they had pledged to end corruption and also punish all those found guilty of various crimes under the previous regime. They had even promised to recover the losses from the corrupt politicians of the previous regime who had stacked away their ill gotten money in foreign countries.

But to the great disappointment of the people, none of these happened. What happened was the opposite. Corruption was not eradicated. It simply increased and the first Central Bank robbery (The 1st Bond Scam) took place just a couple of months after the government came to power. The president himself admitted that those who came to power promising to eradicate corruption had turned out to be as bad if not worse than the previous set of rogues. But he did not or could not do anything about punishing the rouges within his own government or the previous regime.

Both parties, the UNP and the SLFP seemed to protect their own set of rogues and criminals. The UNP that is held responsible for the Bond Scam failed to take action against any of its members involved in this ‘great robbery’ including former Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake, in spite of the Special Presidential Commission report. So many committees and Commissions were appointed and the reports were left to collect dust, adding to the peoples’ frustration. Arjuna Mahendran, the prime architect of the ‘Bond Scam’ and a close friend of the Prime Minister is so far a free man enjoying life in Singapore.

Disappointed by the actions, inaction, inefficiency and corruption within the yahapalanaya regime which they had brought in with so much hope, just three years ago, the people voted against it at the Local Government elections. Whether they wanted to bring back the old equally corrupt Rajapaksa regime is not clear. It is difficult to believe that the people would have already forgotten the dreaded white vans that roamed the streets picking up and ‘disappearing’ journalists and dissidents - the ‘enemies’ of the state. They also would not want to lose the freedom of speech they enjoy under this yahapalanaya. But they definitely wanted a change in the present leadership. They expected the two leaders to introduce reforms and appoint efficient men and women of integrity from both parties to carry out these reforms at least within the next two years. The rank and file of the UNP also expected the Prime Minister to gracefully step down so that another member from the UNP could take his place and work towards winning the next general election. The Prime Minister refusing to step down will only further weaken the UNP voter base and help the Rajapaksas to regain power. As long as Ranil Wickramasinghe continues to lead the UNP it will be almost impossible for it to recapture power. It would be a tragic end for the Grand Old party that is sacrificing itself in its attempt to protect its leader. Once again the people are being taken for a ride. Instead of reforms and a change of leadership what they got was a ‘reshuffle’ - the same actors were asked to change places in a game of ‘musical chairs’ where not a single chair was removed. The next episode in the drama to be staged in

(Continued on page 4)
Parliament on the 4th of April, to distract the disgruntled people, is the ‘No Confidence Motion’ debate, which will end up as another farce. Whether the no confidence motion against the Prime Minister is won or lost is of no consequence to the people. They know that whatever the result may be, this same set of corrupt politician (with a few exceptions among them) will remain in power for the next two years and continue to enjoy life as usual with all the perks provided while the people suffer. It is said that of these 225 parliamentarians 94 don’t even have G.C.E. (O/L) qualification. And yet they represent the sovereign legislative power of the people!

Neither side wants to get rid of corruption. The Prime Minister may be involved in the Bond Scam by his actions (appointing Arjun Mahendran as the governor of the Central Bank, much against the advice of the President and some ministers) and by inaction (not taking any action against Arjun Mahendran even after he was found guilty). But the other side, the joint opposition is just as corrupt as the government. None of them is eager to rid the country of the corrupt political culture that is steadily destroying us. It is on this corrupt political culture that almost all our present set of politicians thrive. Why would they want to change it? Unless the people, using the ballot get rid of this set of rogue politicians, there is very little hope for the country.

The future seems bleak with no political party the people could turn to or vote for. The JVP seems to be the only party that has not been proved corrupt so far. But due to their violent past history people reject them at elections. They have to work hard and have a long way to go to win the confidence of the people.

**Leela Isaac**

March 2018

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_Speech made by Oliver Cromwell at the dissolution of the long parliament_  
_House of Commons 20th April 1653_

It is high time for me to put an end to your sitting in this place, which you have dishonored by your contempt of all virtue, and defiled by your practice of every vice; ye are a factious crew, and enemies to all good government; ye are a pack of mercenary wretches, and would like Esau sell your country for a mess of pottage, and like Judas betray your God for a few pieces of money.

Is there a single virtue now remaining amongst you? Is there one vice you do not possess? Ye have no more religion than my horse; gold is your God; which of you have not barter'd your conscience for bribes? Is there a man amongst you that has the least care for the good of the Commonwealth?

Ye sordid prostitutes have you not defil'd this sacred place, and turn'd the Lord's temple into a den of thieves, by your immoral principles and wicked practices? Ye are grown intolerably odious to the whole nation; you were deputed here by the people to get grievances redress'd, are yourselves gone! So! Take away that shining bauble there, and lock up the doors.

In the name of God, go!
The silent, suffering masses

People suffer, politicos travel in luxury

The burning question today seems to be transport!!! The trains and buses in our country are indeed a sorry sight.

Today’s ADA newspaper says the Government is thinking of raising the fare of train tickets. They want to increase the train fare for the poor people, who are forced to travel on the footboards risking their lives every day.

What about children

The Ceylon Daily News of March 13 carried banner headlines ‘AGE LIMIT RAISED FROM 8 TO 12. PUNISHMENT FOR OFFENCES COMMITTED BY CHILDREN in the name of all that is sacred in this country.

I ask, ‘WHAT ABOUT PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMES COMMITED AGAINST CHILDREN?? CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 5, 6, 7 YEARS AND IN SOME INSTANCES EVEN BABIES??? WHAT ABOUT BANNER HEADLINES OUTLINING PUNISHMENT FOR THESE MONSTERS?? CAN THE GOVERNMENT IGNORE THIS TREACHERY??'

The Prime Minister also said the people wanted things done fast. So what, don’t they have a right to ask that? It has taken them over two years to realize that they still have not delivered the goods. WE HAVE TO CREDIT OUR GOVERNMENT WITH REALLYSOUND MINDS FOR NOT REALIZING THIS ALL IMPORTANT FACT TILL NOW. SO LET’S SEE THEM DELIVER!!!

WHEN IT COMES TO FOOD, THE REALLY POOR PEOPLE OF OUR COUNTRY HAVE REALIZED THE FUTILITY OF DEPENDING ON GOVERNMENTS THAT DON’T DELIVER, SO CULTIVATION IS THEIR WEAPON AGAINST NOT HAVING FOOD TO EAT.

AS FOR SHELTER, NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THE GOVERNMENT WILL WAKE UP TO THE NEED FOR HOUSES FOR THE POOREST OF THE POOR.

Unsolved mysteries!

Sorry folks the promised EXPOSE cannot be exposed today as “The Voice” has quite a bit of exploring left to do. So, stay tuned to this page!!!

The Udayanga, Mahendran and other realities remain unfinished!!!

So, what else is new? Our Prime Minister was pushing a cartful of promises, saying the Government will soon correct itself and deliver the goods!!! Are we not entitled to ask, WHAT WERE THEY DOING ALL THIS TIME???

MORE THAN THAT, WE ARE LOOKING AT THE PRIME MINISTER OF OUR COUNTRY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT “THE GOVERNMENT WILL SOON CORRECT ITSELF” - WOW!!! MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA, MEA MAXIMA CULPA!!!

IT TOOK THE GOVERNMENT OVER TWO YEARS TO REALISE THEY HAD TO CORRECT THEMSELVES, TO ADDRESS THE BURNING ISSUES OF OUR COUNTRY INSTEAD OF ROAMING THE WORLD WITH THEIR ENTOURAGE!!! NOW LET US ASK WHAT ARE THE GOODS THEY ARE GOING TO DELIVER? WILL THEY ADDRESS THE BASIC ESSENTIALS LIKE FOOD, SHELTER, AND TRANSPORT???

Beggars and thugs

It is not possible to stop at a colour light without someone tapping and asking you to turn down your window. When you do, they have some pathetic story which is always a lie, for which they need money.

The Parliament Road and Water’s Edge are some of their favourite haunts. A woman asked the driver to put the glass down and then pleaded for 1,000/- which was all she needed to go for an operation. The gentleman gave her the 1,000/- but when he came back on the same road, she was still asking for money. When he stopped to question her, he was told very rudely by a gang who had been in hiding that it was none of his business and asked him to go away. So much for law and order in our country?

(Continued on page 6)
THE GOVERNMENT LAYS DOWN LAWS ON HOW TO TRANSPORT ANIMALS. BUT PEOPLE SEEM LESSER THAN THE ANIMALS, LOOKING AT THE MANNER IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO TRAVEL BY TRAINS!!!

THE TRAINS ARE FILTHY DIRTY, NO MATTER WHERE YOU STAND OR WHAT YOU HOLD ON TO AND IN THE NIGHT YOU HAVE COCKROACHES CRAWLING ALL OVER YOUR LEGS.

IS IT FOR THIS SUPER LUXURY THAT THE POOR TRAVEL IN THAT THEY ARE BEING ASKED TO PAY MORE?

OUR TRAIN FARES ARE BEING INCREASED FOR THEM TO PAY OFF THEIR DEBTS. WE ARE BEING ASKED TO PAY MORE FOR DOORS THAT DON'T CLOSE, FOR WATER THAT POURS DOWN ON US WHEN IT RAINS.

In addition, commuters have to put up with a terrible stench, body odour and all the filth that emanates from whatever part of the train you touch.

CLEANLINESS IS NIL, ABSOLUTELY NIL!! The long-distance trains that come from places like that have no room for a passenger to even get to the toilet and relieve himself or herself-it is so jam-packed.

WHEN BASIL WAS MINISTER THE LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS HAD TO STOP AT GAMPHAHA NOT FOR THE SAKE OF THE PASSENGERS, BUT FOR HIM TO COLLECT VOTES.

The Government has been talking about introducing Electric Trains but we are still operating as we did in the British era.

The buses are no better. The passengers, around 60 or more, are at the mercy of just two men— the driver and the conductor.

Like the trains, the buses are crowded beyond capacity. They have very loud music, constant honking of horns, absolutely no quality about anything.

Old people, pregnant mothers, children or mothers with babies, no one gets a seat if they don't already have one. There is absolutely no humanity or decency afforded to the passengers.

People say when they look out from the windows of the bus with all the dirt and filthy smells, they can see our Ministers travelling in their luxury cars with their wives, children, dogs and even mistresses, in super comfort.

That is when they think it is better for them to commit suicide than exist in the filth and discomfort of the buses, but what option have they got???

It is well known that recently a Minister paid 1.5 million to get a luxury car delivered to his mistress. While the poor man suffers, the Ministers, who we put there with our vote, go about in all the luxury with their families.

Leaving the horrific realities of the unfinished, let us return to the mundane everyday realities.

On Saturday, March 10 at Kiribathgoda Junction about 4 o'clock there was a terrible commotion. A POLICE CAR FOLLOWED BY AN STF JEEP WITH ABOUT SIX SOLDIERS IN IT, FOLLOWED BY A VEHICLE CARRIER CARRYING ONE EMPTY CAR AGAIN FOLLOWED BY A VAN, WAS HORNING AND HORNING WITH LIGHTS FLASHING FOR PEOPLE TO GET OUT OF THE WAY!!

All this for one empty car!! We criticized the Rajapaksa Government for doing that very same thing. What are we doing now? Isn't it our money, that is being spent on all this useless waste???

WE ARE GOING BACK TO THAT ERA BECAUSE THE UNDERWORLD (OR THE PATHALAYA) as it is known, is operational again and have started harassing the people.

-Daily Mirror - 21/03/2018
Unity Government Impaled By Bond Commission But
Sri Lanka’s track record on Commissions of Inquiry has been disappointing & dismal

Many past Commissions, as with the case of the Bond Commission, had made startling revelations during their proceedings, but ended up in flops.

Of around fifteen various Commissions that had been appointed by various governments since early 1960s, no justice has been meted out to anybody who had suffered due to the incidents that had prompted the appointment of those commissions.

Nor was the legal system of the country benefitted by the findings of those Commissions. The Commissions on the death of former Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, 1977 ethnic violence (The Sansoni Commission), killing of 67 civilians in Kokkattichcholai, in the Eastern Province in 1991, Batalanda Torture Chambers during JVP’s second insurrection in 1988/89, Killing of inmates of Bindunuuwewa Rehabilitation Centre in 2000, ethnic violence in 1981, several Commissions on disappearances of people during armed conflicts and the commission on the failure of the Cease Fire Agreement of 2002 (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission - LLRC) were the major Commissions appointed during the past 50 years in the country.

It is not clear as to what the direct impact of the findings of the report on the general voter would be given the intricacy of bond transactions in general and the findings of the report in particular to the voter.

The reports of all these Commissions were swept under the carpet by all Governments. The Commissions on disappearance of people during armed conflicts were the worst in respect of the findings and follow up remedial actions.

There have been nine commissions that inquired into the disappearances of people during the armed conflicts in the south as well as the north since 1991.

President R. Premadasa during whose tenure it was said that around 60,000 persons disappeared in the south, appointed three Commissions followed by another one by his successor President D.B. Wijetunga.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed four Commissions on the same matter and her successor Mahinda Rajapaksa appointed one, the recent Paranagama Commission.

But, none of these nine Commissions could help trace a single man or woman said to have disappeared.

However, the reports of two Commissions have been different from the others. The report of the LLRC appointed by President Rajapaksa was internationally accepted, though with reservations and four resolutions were adopted at the UNHRC in four consecutive years, based on it, pressing Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of that report. However, the Government is still dragging its feet.

And now the Central Bank Bond Commission has issued a serious report with unprecedented recommendations to take legal action even against the bigwigs of the ruling party, the UNP.

However, there is still a long way to go through a complex legal process and promulgation of new laws, as the President vowed to do, before the culprits are punished and lost moneys are recovered by the Central Bank.

-Daily Mirror - 05/01/2018

“Those who fight corruption should be clean themselves”

-Vladimir Putin-
A shameful saga of monumental corruption

Auspicious times or not, Sri Lanka certainly rang in 2018 singularly inauspiciously as damning revelations of the monumental financial scam right in the bowels of the nation’s Central Bank were revealed to a badly shell-struck public even as the New Year had scarce been allowed to draw its breath.

Fairy tales on battling corruption
The contrast could not be more grotesque. On the one hand, grizzled farmers stood in the scorching sun, pitifully roaring that they were being reduced to beggars as they could not farm their paddy lands without fertilizer. On the other hand, Colombo became the epicenter of a perfect example of how millions can be plundered by slick crooks in immaculate suits and designer watches.

Even as the revelations unfolded, who could be blamed for being cynical regarding promises to recover the loot of the Rajapaksas stashed away in foreign banks? What credibility, the reform of the law couched in abstract if not esoteric terms when even existing laws on gross corruption are deliberately undermined in order to serve selfish political agendas? Who believes these fairy tales?

Those in power may bluster that they will continue to hold on to power till 2020. But they have frittered away an enormous amount of goodwill with which the Government was elected into power. As each crisis unfolds on top of another, the cumulative impact is disastrous.

Cover-up bad as the scam itself
President Maithripala Sirisena’s summarizing of the final report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the issue of Treasury Bonds of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) this week illustrates one stage of an utterly disgraceful saga of events. Let us not forget that the attempted cover up of the scam was as bad as the scam itself. For that, the Government must take full responsibility, including those ‘talking heads’ of the United National Party who inserted ‘footnotes’ in the earlier report of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) headed by JVP parliamentarian Sunil Handunnetti on the Treasury bond matter.

At that time, unconvincing protests by these ‘talking heads’ on national television were that, at best, what had occurred between the father-in-law (former Governor of Central Bank, Arjuna Mahendran) and the son-in-law (head of Perpetual Treasuries Arjun Aloysius) was a petty conflict of interest. Outrage was expressed and scandalized eyebrows were raised at the very idea that financial skullduggery had been committed.

Well, now with the findings of the Commission out in the public domain, it is clear that these excuses were a weak cover-up for what had actually transpired. Let it be said that attempts to cover-up were equally as disgraceful as the behavior of those named by the Commission for being directly implicated in the scandal.

Enormity of the fraud
The enormity of the fraud that had been committed will no doubt, take time to sink into the nation’s consciousness. As the statement by the President reveals, the Commission’s findings were deadly. Its mandate was to inquire into the issuance of treasury bonds during 1st February 2015 to 31st March 2016, to ascertain the facts regarding allegations of corruption and mismanagement and to recommend steps to be implemented in the future.

Former Governor of Central Bank, Arjuna Mahendran was castigated for interfering into Treasury bond auctions ‘through a process of incorrect and unconventional methods.’ Affirming that he was responsible for providing internal information to outsiders, allowing his son-in-law of Perpetual Treasuries to obtain undue and illegal monetary gains of an extent that is monumental, CBSL officials and ‘some external parties’ were also held to be implicated.

The Commission recommended criminal and civil court action by the Criminal Investigations Department and the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption against the implicated individuals including against former Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake. This barefaced robbery of public funds was assessed as having started even earlier, from the time of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2008. It was recommended that the Central Bank of Sri Lanka conduct a forensic audit with regard to alleged fraud and corrupt practices from 2008 onwards with legal action to be taken consequentially. It is stated that it was during this time that funds of the Employment Provident Fund

(Continued on page 9)
(Continued from page 8)

No ‘political’ directions required
Meanwhile the question as to what legal consequences should follow from the Commission findings led to much scratching of confused heads, some of it engineered but some undoubtedly genuine. Should the President ‘direct’ the Attorney General to take action on the report? And what meanwhile of the Prime Minister whose response was that the report of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) headed by JVP parliamentarian Sunil Handunnetti on the Treasury bond matter had been referred to the Attorney General on October 31, 2016, (compromised footnotes and all, we would presume)?

The law itself is, of course, clear. The President or the Prime Minister is not required to ‘direct’ anything in terms of the law. Neither is the media required to speculate on that basis. Section 23 of the Commissions of Inquiry Amendment Act, No 16 of 2008 categorically states that ‘it shall be lawful for the Attorney-General to institute criminal proceedings in a court of law in respect of any offence based on material collected in the course of an investigation or inquiry or both an investigation and inquiry, as the case may be, by a Commission of Inquiry appointed under this Act.’ Importantly, this is affirmed as operating ‘notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the Code of Criminal Procedure Act, No. 15 of 1979 or any other law.’

It was precisely due to the impact of the Commission proceedings on an eventual criminal prosecution that the head of Perpetual Treasuries Arjun Aloysius was permitted by the Commission to plead the privilege against self-incrimination when an imaginative counsel advanced the same on his behalf before the Commission. Opinions may differ on whether Aloysius should have been allowed the benefit of that privilege or not as the case may be. But the fact that the law must now be activated is without a doubt.

Rascally politicians must not be allowed to escape
No doubt this is perhaps the very first Commission Report which took Sri Lanka metaphorically by its neck and forced it to see an ugly truth. But it must not end there. A hapless Attorney General must not be left to hold the blame with rascally politicians wriggling clear of the consequences.

The President cannot merely talk of corrupt politicians from both major parties and pledge that he ‘would not hesitate to take steps to recover the loss’ caused to the government and take legal action against the offenders.’ The reservoir of good faith with which promises were believed in the past has now run dry. There is a serious crisis of public confidence in both the Presidency and the Government. That must be addressed forthwith.

- The Sunday Times - 07/01/2018

President vows to recover the plundered Rs. 11.5 billion & punish the offenders

Here are highlights of the edited excerpts of President Maithripala Sirisena’s address to the nation delivered on Wednesday on the findings of the Commission of Inquiry that probed the Central Bank bond scandal.

The Commission was headed by Justice Kankanithanthri T. Chithrasiri, Supreme Court Judge, Justice Prasanna Sujeewa Jayawardena, Supreme Court Judge and Vellupillai Kandasamy, retired Deputy Auditor General.

“The Commission has submitted a full report covering the period 2015 and 2016, comprising 1257 pages and it is not an interim report. The Commission has taken 10 months for this task. I have already submitted this report to the Attorney General and the Commission recommends that the criminal and civil court action must be taken through the Criminal Investigations Department and the Bribery or Corruption Commission. “The Commission has clearly stated the structure of the Central Bank, the Public Debt Department, direct issuance of bonds and the pros and cons of the system of bond issues and bond auctions. The report stated that the Perpetual Treasuries Limited has made profits through illegal means with the involvement of Mr Arjuna Mahendran, Bank officials and some outside individuals.

In the auction held on 27th February 2015 alone the Perpetual Treasuries Limited has made a

(Continued on page 10)
The Commission referred to the misuse of funds of the Employees Provident Fund and stated that it should be investigated under a forensic audit examination to find out the losses. The report has recognized that, the dishonesty of a particular party had led to this kind of malpractice on EPF funds. The people responsible for these frauds have been identified and the Commission recommends legal action against them.

The report recommends that legal action against relevant persons and officials who are responsible for the fraud including Perpetual Treasuries Limited, Arjun Aloysius (son-in-law of former CBSL Governor Mahendran) and Kasun Palihena should be taken. Accordingly, the government is in consultation with legal authorities.

Recommendations

Members of the Monetary Board and the Central Bank Governor must be appointed by the Constitutional Council in concurrence with the members. The regulations must be amended accordingly.

There should be the highest levels of supervision over the Public Debt Department. As auditing at the Central Bank has not been conducted in a proper manner, the Commission recommends that the Audit Department must be reorganised completely. A Legal Department must be established in the Central Bank and ensure that the Legal Department functions efficiently.

The Commission recommends that the dealings with the Pan Asia Bank and the conduct of the Chairman must be investigated into. It also recommends that activities of the EPF must be looked into, and in order to bring the EPF into a proper order, steps must be taken to restructure the EPF. A code of conduct for the officials of the Central Bank must be introduced. The code of conduct for Primary Dealers must be revised and updated.

I would like to specifically state here that I would not hesitate to take steps to recover the loss of Rs 11,145 million to the government and take legal action against the offenders and punish them.

The sum of Rs 8529million of the total losses of Rs 11,145 million was the funds of the Employees Provident Fund, Mahapola Scholarship Fund, National Savings Bank and Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation. The balance was from private institutions. Hence the loss to the public sector - EPF, Mahapola, NSB and SLIC was over Rs 8.5 billion. The Perpetual Treasuries Limited has made this profit of Rs 11,145 million within a short period of 5 months.

Finally, especially I would like to mention that this final report must be presented to Parliament and through this initiative the report must be open to the public. In the future, necessary as well as legal steps in this regard will be taken expeditiously according to the advice from the Attorney General.

- The Sunday Times - 07/01/2018
Excerpts from an article by Rajan Philips

Two years are long enough time for the government to be born again or to die again

Born again government after bond fiasco

Objectively, it is in their self-interest for the President and the Prime Minister to work together on a positive agenda for the next two years. From the country’s standpoint there is no other worthwhile political alternative around for the next two years – other than the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe partnership. But no positive purpose will be served if the two leaders and their parties keep working separately and at cross-purposes as they have been for much of the last three years. Without fundamentally changing their ways, they will not be able to make the government to be born again, or prevent it from dying again.

To be born again in the post bond-inquiry universe means shedding all the baggage from the bond scam. To shed something there must be acknowledgement of what needs to be shed. So far the Prime Minister and the UNP have acknowledged nothing. The claim that this is the first government that has investigated its own misdoing is a spurious claim. Even if that is true, it is only because this is the first government that was specifically elected to stay clear of corruption and abuse of power. It is true that sections of the media are manifestly gleeful in lambasting the Prime Minister in stark contrast to their grave silence during the years of the Rajapaksa misdemeanours. Yet, it is a stretch for the Prime Minister and Ministerial colleagues to berate the press of abusing their freedom; and, worse, at least in the case of one particularly loquacious minister, to emulate Trump and accuse the media as fake media.

There wouldn’t have been anything offensive in the media if the Prime Minister had not usurped the Central Bank from the Ministry of Finance, handpicked Arjuna Mahendran as the Bank Governor over the objections of his cabinet colleagues, and assumed that Mr. Mahendran will insulate himself and the bank from the businesses of his son-in-law. For the government to be born again now, means that the Central Bank should be reverted to the Ministry of Finance, and institutional safeguards should be put in place at the Bank to make sure what the Bank the has been going through for the last ten years are never repeated again. On the legal front, the law enforcement agencies led by the Attorney General should be given the freedom and independence to complete the investigations and proceed with charges.

Being born again places obligations on the President as well. If he is to leave a positive legacy as President, Mr. Sirisena must primarily focus on his job as the President of Sri Lanka, and should not be overly pre-occupied with the leadership of the SLFP. Equally, he should preclude known thugs and criminals being given positions of authority in the government and in the party including party nominations as candidates. And he should avoid pandering to self-appointed custodians of culture and morality.

-Sunday Island - 21/01/2018

Excerpts from an interview with Malik Samarawickrama

“Nobody can find fault with how UNP ran economy”

Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade Malik Samarawickrama, in an interview with Daily mirror responds to the allegations about the scam.

Q : The UNP promised to establish a rule-based environment. But, the Central Bank bond scam took place under the UNP-led government. How has it affected your image?
A : The Commission’s report very clearly says that the UNP, as a party, is not involved. No one from the UNP is involved. We are for a rule-based structure. We are making a lot of changes as a result. We are making a lot of reforms in all fronts-on the monetary policy, fiscal policy, trade policy etc. All these will be done taking into account the best practices of the world.

-Interviewed by Kelum Bandara
-Daily Mirror - 30/01/2018
In matters of conscience the law of the majority has no place
- Mahatma Gandhi

Contrary to the above quote the law of the majority is all that matters in the Sri Lankan political culture. It is shrouded with appeals to the majority among the voter base, pampering their whims, shaping public opinion to acquiesce to the strategies put forward by politicians for their success. Success is measured by culling the vote base of a majority of individuals regardless of the morality of the issues concerned. Provision is not made any longer for a conscience vote in the constitution. Conscience driven choice is no longer an objective in a society encouraged to live bereft of ethics. Politics in Sri Lanka is therefore one of expediency, it relates to benefits and the advancement of the politician and the political party they belong to. There is no reference to any code of morality beneficial to society.

Value based decisions are not considered necessary or practical if it does not carry the majority with it. Moral values do prevail among large sections of the people influenced as they are by their respective religions. However what people think privately, if it be morally correct or not, is not relevant to politicians. All that matters is to have the thinking of the public to coincide with theirs. Such is the political environment within which politicians have shaped their past and continue to shape the present and the future. All politicians come within this barometer and changing one lot for the other does not make a significant difference.

-Sunday Island - 8/01/2018

Excerpts from an article by Gnana Moonesinghe

A question of ethics

Compromise on Audit Bill: Ministry Secretaries could impose surcharges

The power to impose a surcharge to recover losses caused due to fraud, negligence, misappropriation, or corruption from officials has been vested with the Chief Accounting Officer (CAO) — Ministry Secretaries or other officials of the relevant government institution — in the final version of the National Audit Bill.

The Chief Accounting Officer (CAO) of a Government institution varies depending on the nature of each institute. While in a Government Ministry it can be the Ministry Secretary, in Government institutions it can be the Chairman, General Manager or someone in a similar senior position.

The draft of the Bill, which will be presented to Parliament next month, was amended 22 times due to objections that the Bill granted too much power to the Auditor General. For almost four years, the Bill went to and fro between the Legal Draftsman’s Department and the Cabinet.

The final version of the Bill was published in the Gazette this week prior to its presentation to Parliament but the power that the AG sought to recover monies lost to the state has not been granted by this Bill. Instead the CAO (Ministry Secretaries) have been granted this authority while in cases where the CAO has caused or has been involved in causing any deficiency or loss due to fraud, negligence, misappropriation or corruption in a transaction made contrary to any written law, the power to impose the surcharge has been vested with the President who is also the appointing authority.

The National Audit Bill provides for the powers, duties and functions of the Audit Service Commission, the establishment of the National Audit Office and the Sri Lanka State Audit Service. It also specifies the role of the Auditor General over public finance. The surcharge provisions will be set in motion after the Audit Service Commission reports to the CAO the amount of any deficiency or loss in any transaction if it has reasonable grounds to believe that such transaction has been made contrary to any written law and has caused financial losses. The CAO can then impose the surcharge on the value of the deficiency or loss in every transaction.

The surcharge can be imposed against any person who is responsible for the deficiency or loss, either jointly or singly, followed by a formal disciplinary action by the Disciplinary Authority or a judicial process. The Bill also provides for the setting up of a Surcharge Appeal Committee that will be empowered to allow the appeal, amend, alter or vary

(Continued on page 13)
Excerpts from an article by Kusal Perera

That social mood which now threatens this Yahapalana Government cannot be covered by a Rajapaksa bogey however big it is blown.

The writing of this coming political Tsunami was glaring big on the wall and I wrote thus in my blog two days before elections.

"With Rajapaksa assumed to have another comeback, President Sirisena will have a harder time ahead than his ‘advisors’ had calculated."

"The ITAK leadership in TNA will, therefore, find themselves in troubled and deep in hot waters without any acceptable excuse for piggybacking the UNP for two long and unproductive years."

"In brief, the Unity Government after the LG elections will be left as fragile as no other coalition Government had ever been in mid-term before. Election campaigning by President Sirisena had already laid the ground for the political crises ahead despite how the people would vote on Saturday. What the EC would read out as official results will only add salt to the bitter pickle on the boil.”

What else does this catastrophic situation expose and prove? What is exposed and proved is more serious than the Rajapaksa bogey.

In fact, space for a Rajapaksa comeback is also due to this major reason that proves we don’t have any democracy the Colombo pundits want to save from Rajapaksa.

If a society is democratic, political parties in that society are also democratic. Here it is not as these major crises expose and prove. In functional democracies, these crises are not restricted to dinner parties and ‘closed door’ scheming.

All this week after LG elections, breaking news

(Continued from page 12)

(Continued on page 14)
provided was about different groups meeting at Pageat Street and Temple Trees proved none of these political parties are democratic and none have an active membership.

In democratic political parties with an active membership these issues are not discussed at dinner parties. They are discussed at Special Conventions of political party members. It is members who gather in special conventions to decide their next leader. Decide the future political line of the party. That was how the Lanka Sama-samaja Party (LSSP) decided their coalition with the SLFP in 1964 June.

The whole party discussed three different Political Resolutions at local party branches and elected their delegates for the special party conference.

At the special delegates’ conference, it was the political resolution campaigned for by Dr. N. M. Perera led group that won and allowed the LSSP to join the SLFP Government with ministries. That LSSP is long dead and no more.

Can any of the mainstream political parties hold anything that can be called a party conference of members to decide who their leader should be and what they should stand for on any national issue?

None of the political parties here in Sri Lanka are democratic.

Political parties today don’t have an actual membership either.

Here in Sri Lanka political decisions under party labels are taken by the leader with his own carefully selected group of henchmen amidst scheming and manipulations.

Most henchmen are either from the ‘Filthy Rich’ or directly in business with them. All political parties run with big money pumped at various times by wheeler-dealers.

Therefore decisions taken in the name of the people with promises for democratic reforms, never get translated into action.

If pressured to implement, the farthest we would go is to have them written and lie dormant in Statute books.

Bottom line is that these political leaders have no membership and no organised democratic party.

They therefore don’t decide for the benefit of the people and are not responsible for the people who elect them. People are there to endorse decisions taken by these political power groups and give them legitimacy. Same is happening now and nothing else. This Parliament and these political parties have no other purpose as well.

The crisis at hand is therefore not only about who would run the next Government but about the necessity to workout democratic alternatives for people.

-Daily Mirror - 16/02/2018

**Excerpts from an article by Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu**

**HEED THE MESSAGE OF THE ELECTORATE**

**...AND GET ON WITH GOVERNMENT !**

It is a February to remember and for the Government, one it would like to forget. The victorious populist backlash led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a Local Government election has put into serious question the political fortunes of the government, its constituent parties and their leadership to the extent that since the election results were announced on 11 February, the impression, if not the reality, is one of instability and uncertainty. In politics, perceptions matter and the dominant perception is that the Rajapaksas are on their way back to power. There are provincial council elections, a presidential election and a general election all within the space of the next two and half years with the presidential election due in November / December 2019.

Clearly, the national electorate has sent government a stern rebuke and a sharp wake-up call things cannot go on as they have, promises made have to be delivered upon, the electorate cannot be taken for granted. The message is not just to the Government, but the main political parties that constitute it, as well. It is pivotally important to see it as such and not to mistake rebuke, however scathing, for definitive repudiation.

This isn’t rocket science. In a functioning democracy any government elected, especially on a
Local Government Elections What went wrong?

The good governance agenda that was presented to the voters in 2015 represented a program that substantially deviated from the policies pursued by the previous regime. Key elements of the new agenda included (a) rejection of corruption, fraud and abuse of power, (b) restoration of human and civil rights, (c) constitutional reforms to address the grievances of ethnic minorities, (d) strengthening of democracy and political accountability by creating effective oversight bodies to bring about depoliticisation of State institutions, (e) establishment of mechanisms to promote reconciliation and national integration and (f) the adoption of policies to reduce economic and social pressure on low income groups.

In the run-up to the Parliamentary elections in 2015, a large group of intellectuals congregated in Colombo to point out the need to rationalise the government machinery in order to ensure evidence-based policy making in diverse sectors but political expediency prevented the leaders from adopting such an approach and this has eventually led to disastrous consequences in many sectors. Many examples to illustrate this point can be given.

An obvious one is the increasingly chaotic situation on our roads. An integrated transport system that gives priority to public transport while discouraging private transport would have reduced the number of private vehicles on the roads giving multiple benefits to the wider public. The lack of any interest on the part of our leaders in integrated development planning has resulted in similar or worse situations in many other areas such as education, health, energy and water. Much of the public and private investments continue to flow into urban infrastructure projects, further marginalising rural and estate areas where the living conditions and income opportunities lag far behind those in urban centres. No one has asked the question as to whether these are the priority areas of investment for a country where the productive sectors of the economy have been neglected for many years.

In other words, people in the country could not witness a significant improvement in the way the economic and social issues were managed under the new regime. If no attempt is made to arrest this trend, the situation can only get worse over time, leading to disastrous consequences. In this regard, it is absolutely necessary for the leaders to go beyond a small circle of friends and acquaintances and mobilise expertise around important issues on a rational basis so that effective remedies to pressing problems can be found within a reasonable period of time.

Conclusion

This is an area where intellectual leadership is critical but is sadly lacking today. There is also an urgent need to improve on constitutional and institutional reforms already commenced with the 19th amendment and other legislation.

In conclusion, it is necessary to point out (Continued from page 14)
that the country has reached a critical juncture in the difficult journey towards much desired sustainable and inclusive development, civility, human security and social justice.

Many people who have the voting rights do not necessarily seem to understand the need for progressive policies to guide the country forward, while many others are anxious to ensure that the leaders make every effort to go beyond their own whims and fancies, listen to rational voices and adopt evidence-based policies to deal with pressing issues in the country. It is hoped that the leaders rise above their parochial interests and live up to the expectations of the vast majority of people in the country.

-Daily Mirror- 19/02/2018

I. LG elections are over; it’s time to learn the lessons

The results at local government elections are shaped by national politics, and the results of the recently concluded LG elections, reinforced this truth -- with a near total rejection of the performance of the plethora of political parties and personalities who came together in the aftermath of the August 2015 general elections to form a so-called government of ‘national unity’ based on the principles of ‘good governance’.

Unfortunately the only thread uniting the politicians and individuals, who came together to form the coalition government -- some of whom who even failed to get elected -- was the common aim of clinging on to positions of power by any means whatsoever.

With the elections over, principles and election promises were conveniently forgotten. Among them were that of exposing major financial crimes, bringing to book politicians who stood accused of committing these crimes, prosecution of persons for attacks on minority communities, attacks on political opponents, killing of journalists and the elimination of persons on the basis of personal grudges and bringing down the cost of living. These promises are still to be fulfilled.

In the eyes of the people the government had failed and failed miserably. The local government election results are in fact a literal kick up the government’s behind not only for failing to tackle corruption, but also failing prey to the same.

In the North and East, the Tamil and Muslim people had a message for their political parties in power --the TNA and the SLMC.

The people are no longer ready to accept political quibbling. Economic development has been too slow. A few political leaders were also discarded

Yet, today events are ‘getting curious and curious-er’. Rather than seeing the local government elections for what it is -a wake up call to those in governance to change direction- some are attempting to portray the result as a mandate for regime change.

In the North and East the Tamil and Muslim people showed they are getting tired of the outdated isolationist politics by voting across the political divide and voting for the UNP, SLPP and the SLFP at least to some extent. But the TNA and the Muslim parties continued to maintain their traditional dominance.

The election results also revealed that the former president and opposition strongman was still nursing his anger with President Sirisena when in the initial euphoria of the LG election victory he crowed ‘over the defeat of those who ate hoppers. The ex-president should take note that he is yet to gain the confidence of the minority communities and the fact that he could do worse if he continued in the same vein. The message to the government is also equally clear - get your act together or face the wrath of the people at the next hustings.

-Editorial
-Daily Mirror- 22/02/2018

“A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user.”
-Theodore Roosevelt-
CB Governor makes clarion call for political stability

Sri Lanka cannot afford to deviate from the path it has embarked upon and ensuring political stability is of paramount importance to attain sustained economic growth for the country, according to Central Bank Governor Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy.

“The elephant in the room is the political situation in the country. I’m not aware of any country that has been able to make significant progress without political stability. So the restoration of political stability is of paramount importance,” Dr. Coomaraswamy said.

He was addressing the inaugural session of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy launch, which took place at the Hilton Hotel in Colombo, yesterday.

Sri Lanka’s current political landscape remains awfully toxic with the main two parties of the coalition government—the UNP and the SLFP—finding it difficult to work in unison due to political differences. At present, a no-confidence motion is being mooted against Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and several SLFP Cabinet ministers have openly supported the move.

-Daily Mirror - 21/03/2018

Excerpts from an article by Narada

Assistant Leader of the UNP and backbencher in Parliament Ravi Karunanayake has recently said that the Cabinet reshuffle was a joke and an eyewash.

Ravil Karunanayake should know. From his ‘Penthouse’ on top of ‘Monarch Residencies’ he has a bird’s eye, nay, a hawk’s eye view of people’s aspirations.

“The difference between the almost-right word and the right word is really a large matter.” It is as large as the contrast between the glow of a firefly and the flash of lightning.

He has used the almost-right word and not the right word. The real joke was when Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe made him Minister of Foreign Affairs and assigned the subject of State run lotteries to him. The most recent Cabinet reshuffle is not a joke. It is worse than a bad joke. It is a painfully funny, unfunny joke. In this case reshuffling is not the right word. It is a re shovelling of the ‘Yahapalanaya’ graveyard.

The Octopus Joke
There is a wise saying about people who profess to be clever economic strategists. "The inscrutability of economics is perhaps not unintentional. It gives endless employment to dialecticians who otherwise might become public charges or, at very worst, swindlers and tricksters." It is no accusation. It is no indictment of economic planners, policy pundits and development dinosaurs who inhabit the exclusive domain where we are told how we should behave now in order to live better tomorrow.

Malik Samarawickrama is the Minister of Development Strategies. Development is a multi-dimensional process. Strategy is equally multi-dimensional. Strategy is a plan. It can also be a ploy. It can devise a pattern. It can determine a position. It can shape perspective. In other words, Malik Samarawickrama is the octopus in the Cabinet. He has his tentacles spread far and wide.

There is a joke that is going around. How do you tickle an Octopus? Ten Tickles!

The moral of the story – Leadership is not position or power. Acceptable and exemplary behaviour would have made this government far more credible and popular.

People would have bought their words if they did not import luxury vehicles duty free for themselves, stopped going to Singapore for bypass surgery with money from the public purse, used the billions spent on the Rajagiriya flyway on improving public transport and asked former Minister of Higher Education S.B. Dissanayake on what he did with the furniture in the House which Dr. Siva Sinnathamby bequeathed to the Colombo University.

It is not too late to remedy at least the last mentioned. It may be some progress in the right direction and who knows people may be receptive at the next provincial polls. Words do not matter. Actions do.

-Ceylon Today - 01/03/2018
This week was quite emotional for all the relatives of missing persons as they commemorated the first anniversary of their struggle to find the whereabouts of their missing loved ones.

On Tuesday 20 February, the relatives of missing persons and civil societies from the North and East gathered at the Kilinochchi Kandasamy Temple premises to stage a silent protest to inform the entire world that their struggle to find the whereabouts of their loved ones have past 365 days. It was quite emotional to see a little daughter of a missing person holding a placard that read, 'Appa enge' - (Where is my father?). This was one of the highlights of the protest that was held in Kilinochchi last Tuesday.

Relatives of missing persons seemed thoroughly disappointed at the protest, as they were denied transitional justice for a longer period. They appealed to the international community to solve their grievances and claimed their only hope is the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Council sessions.

"I surrendered my daughter to the hands of the Security Forces. They even promised to send my daughter to the welfare centres at Omanthai, but she has never returned until today. What happened to her? I can't sleep or eat properly. My thoughts are with my dearest daughter. I want to see her, it has been nine years," Muneeswaran Selvanayagi wept.

My daughter Karthika was 16 years when she was surrendered to the Security Forces on 14, May 2009. We were heading towards the Army controlled area and they announced all those who were in the LTTE to surrender. Even if she was in the LTTE for one day, the Security Forces asked us to surrender her. She was taken into their office for investigations, but I was standing out for a long time thinking Karthika will return. After a while the security forces asked me to get into a bus that was heading to Omanthai to reach the welfare centre. I refused to get into the bus but they promised to send my daughter to Omanthai. I had no other choice than heading to the welfare centre, Selvanayagi wept.

Days past but Karthika never returned Selvanayagi began to search for the whereabouts of her daughter. She lodged complaints with the Human Rights Commission and other authorities. Later she received a letter from the Jaffna Children Probation Division informing that her daughter is receiving treatment at the Trincomalee Hospital for her injuries. "My daughter had a small injury near the knee when we walked towards the Army controlled area. I assume she was admitted to the hospital to treat that injury.

Although the letter said Trincomalee, I was directed to many other hospitals in the North. I had no money I sold my jewels to bear my transport cost. My situation was terrible. I pray to god, none of the mothers in this world should go through the same experience. I was only thinking of my daughter. I was worried if she was undergoing any sexual abuse. I was not ready to trust anyone. I was terrified," she said.

"President Sirisena treated us well. He understood our problems. However, just being a good human is not enough he should further address our problems to find a solution to this burning issue of the innocent mothers and fathers. If there aren't any secret camps, they should tell us if the missing persons are alive or not. A solid reply is needed than just dragging over the issue. Our only hope is the upcoming UNHRC sessions and one of our representatives may participate to explain our grievances to the UN representatives," she said.

Commitments must be fulfilled

Speaking to Ceylon Today, Head of Political, Trade and Communications of the Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka, Paul Godfrey said the commitments that were made by the government in the resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2015 must be fulfilled.
The Ilankai Thamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) welcomed the report of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. The party’s Central Committee, which met in Colombo yesterday welcomed the report, ITAK said in a statement.

“We urge the Government of Sri Lanka to strictly adhere to the commitments it has made to the International community in bringing lasting peace and political solution to the national question”, the statement noted.

“Furthermore, we appeal to the Government of Sri Lanka not to deviate from these commitments and deliver on the promises that the Government has made to both the people of Sri Lanka and the International Community”, it said.

The statement further said: "We strongly endorse the recommendations made by the High Commissioner of the United Nations Human Rights Council and urge upon the member states to ensure a close and constructive engagement with the Sri Lankan Government. The ITAK/and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has constantly raised the issues pertaining to the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, release of lands belonging to civilians, the issue of missing persons, release of political prisoners."

-Sunday Island - 25/02/2018

**Excerpts from an article by Kumar David**

**Containing Mahinda’s racist and kleptomaniacal neo-populism**  
Crisis of govt and latent crisis of state

_**Dead-end for Tamils**_

As for the national question, prospects are bleak. Political prisoners will not be released, return of military occupied land to owners will be at snail’s pace and fittings will be looted before return, rehabilitation at 5000 a year will take 20-30 years to complete, and what about devolution and the constitution? Rajapaksa chauvinism killed devolution, Sirisena was an accomplice. Race and religion, overt or subliminal, have been bigoted for 70 years; deep racial pathology changes very slowly, if at all. Even if the government contains pressure by addressing corruption and easing cost of living concerns, the one trump in the Rajapaksa-SLPP pack that can do much mischief is racism.

The Tamils and the TNA are up the gum tree; the poor sods have been taken for a ride for the fifth or sixth time. They are better off buying real-estate from Elon Musk to settle on planet Mars than to expect justice from the Sinhalese. Tamil nationalism will strengthen, overshadowing a progressive trend in Kilinochi (Chandrakumar) and pluralism in Mannar and Vavuniya.

There will be no devolution, constitutional amendments may scrap the executive presidency but not devolve power to minorities, no police powers, no release of political prisoners, minimal resettlement, inadequate reconciliation and aggravation of the psyche of alienation.

This is where a crisis of state power will ripen, slowly but surely; this is Lanka’s latent crisis of state.

The government will awaken to the tactical benefits of economic populism and it cannot evade the corruption quagmire any longer, but it cannot do anything about the Tamils. However, it is neither the government nor its supine leaders, but mobilisation of people – including of course the lower rungs of the UNP - that can be a bulwark against tyranny. Hey, any UNP Ministers ready to discard comfortable sinecures and come join and organise the real struggle? Welcome!

-Sunday Island - 25/02/2018

_“Human rights is a universal standard. It is a component of every religion and every civilization.”_  
- Shirin Ebadi -
Families pray for closure, Missing Person’s Office promises trust

The OMP which will be an independent permanent body answerable to Parliament will investigate and bring to closure cases of disappearances reported during two insurrections and the war against terrorism. The Sri Lanka Treasury also allocated Rs 1.3 billion in the last national budget for its operations.

With the OMP setup now, the commissioners aim to make this office a trustworthy institution acting on behalf of victims.

“As the OMP we are conscious of the doubts entertained by the families of the missing and disappeared who have long waited for answers on the fate of their loved ones. Given the number of commissions and committees set up under previous governments that were tasked with documenting individual cases, identifying patterns and making recommendations, we will try to ensure that we use as much material as possible in our work,” chairman of OMP Saliya Pieris told the Sunday Times.

He pointed out that the OMP is meant to be different in tracing the whereabouts and fate of the missing and disappeared. It is a permanent office that will focus on all disappearances throughout the country and from any conflict or major political upheaval. “We will try to ensure victim-centeredness through ensuring consultation and inclusion of the affected persons, and to ensure that people feel secure to seek relief from the OMP. We will endeavour to build trust among the victims’ relatives and we hope by building a strong institution that we will over time be able to build that trust,” he said.

A report compiled by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) indicates a caseload of 16,000 people reported as arrested, separated families and missing persons during the conflict since the establishment of its permanent presence in 1989. Some 5,100 cases among them are security forces personnel Missing in Action.

However, the number of complaints reached nearly 20,000 as the Presidential Commission to Investigate Complaints Regarding Missing Persons ceased its operations in the recent past.

The OMP said that it will reach out to families of missing persons, various groups, and relevant stakeholders to get their advice, insight, technical support and resources on how it should proceed to make the office as a credible and effective permanent institution. “Given the ICRC’s long history of working in Sri Lanka on disappearances and the missing, and its global experience, the OMP has much to learn from the ICRC. But at the end, it will be the OMP that has to decide as per its mandate and take responsibility on how it is to proceed.”

-The Sunday Times - 25/03/2018

“If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, the mother and the teacher.”

-A. P. J. Abdul Kalam -
Situated at Pooneryn in Kilinochchi, this tiny fishing hamlet is caught in a debt trap of massive proportions. Women have flocked towards microfinance loans chiefly to buy equipment for their fishermen husbands. The men are seasonal fishers. In the months they do not go out to sea, they scout for masonry work. Falling incomes have thrust large numbers of families into despair.

The debts have to be repaid every week. Each company has given out around 20 to 50 loans in the village. The collectors come on a particular day and set up in a house or front yard. Two women told researchers who studied the Karadikundu phenomenon last year that they had to stay with the collectors until everyone had paid up.

“A woman in the village with two or three loans must spend countless hours on two or three days of the week, just to make payments,” said Niyanthini Kadirgamar, one of the researchers. “The women are asked to form groups of five and are held liable by the finance companies if one in their group fails to pay back the loan. There are hefty penalties for all of them if there are delays. In addition to the harassment of finance company agents, we found this social pressure was damaging relations and village life.”

The villagers were displaced during the last phase of the conflict. They resettled after the war and received grants to build houses. They are now mortgaging their land and homes to private money lenders in Jaffna as a means of surmounting the pressure to pay back microfinance loans.

The interest rates for mortgaged houses were around 120 percent per year. But the war-affected women try their utmost to repay their loans, leading to low default rates for microfinance in the North. Fear of losing their homes has led to them cutting down on food.

“The tragedy is that having resettled quite recently and having lived in their newly built homes only for a few years, they are already vulnerable to becoming homeless and landless again,” Ms Kadirgamar remarked. “Home and land are the only assets they now possess. The jewellery, that many of the women had managed to safeguard even during the war, was lost now by selling them to make debt payments.”

The story of debt in former conflict areas, in all its starkness, has been repeated many times—but little has been done to alleviate the problem. This week, thousands of people marched from the Veerasingham Hall in Jaffna to the office of the Government Agent to draw public attention once again to the dire situation of those in the grip of microfinance loans. Among them were members of cooperative societies and hundreds of women.

The marchers presented a petition to the Government Agent that called for a ban on all microfinance companies using unethical and illegal practices. The petition also called for an interest rate cap with an effective annual interest rate not exceeding 25 percent so that “predatory loan schemes” are immediately stopped. It also urged the cancellation of existing “predatory microfinance loans” or a two-year moratorium on repayment, while calling for an expansion of low-interest Government credit schemes.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has set up a help desk at its regional office and sub-help desks in each of the four Divisional Secretariats. And it has reportedly urged banks and non-bank finance companies to grant a six-month moratorium on repayment of loans of Rs 50,000 or less (anything over six months is recorded as a non-performing loan).

“The idea is to buy six months in terms of repayment for those who took consumption loans and, in that time, to get some kind of livelihood support,” a senior CBSL official said. “We will have got the credit programmes going through Samurdhi banks and various thrift and credit co-operative societies.”

The official said the regulator had urged the banks and non-bank finance companies to grant this moratorium—and that they had agreed, even as recently as one week ago. But few, if any, of the indebted know about it. And the CBSL was unable to offer further information about whether such a freeze was in effect anywhere, for anyone.
Sri Lanka, which ranked 91st place in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2017, released by Transparency International (TI), has failed to show significant improvement in the Corruption Index, the Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) said.

The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption whereas Sri Lanka has moved up 4 places from 95th to 91st, far more importantly its CPI score has only risen by two points from 36 to 38, representing the slow rate of progress.

Asoka Obeyesekere, Executive Director of the TISL, told the media that Sri Lanka had failed to show significant improvement in the CPI 2017.

“Sri Lanka’s current CPI score of 38 was the same score that prevailed in 2014.” A close analysis of Sri Lanka’s positioning in the CPI from 2012 to 2017 shows that despite the institutional strengthening of anti-corruption agencies like Bribery Commission and other independent commissions the 19th amendment, consistent failure in implementation has led to very limited progress,” Mr. Obeyesekere said.

Sri Lanka has failed to show any significant progress in its CPI score year on year for the past 5 years, an increase or decrease of 6 points or more represents a significant change. Mr. Obeyesekere added.

It would seem that the anti-corruption drive has limited momentum. Citizens still face corruption when trying to avail of essential public services, ranging from waste collection to school enrolment. Therefore, the limited change in the perception of public sector corruption (CPI) reflects the limited change experienced by people in their everyday encounters with the State, he stressed.

Progressive legal reforms such as giving citizens the right to freely access asset declarations of public representatives and the passage of the essential National Audit Bill have also been stalled in Cabinet, which is indicative of a lack of bureaucratic and political will.

On global level, New Zealand and Denmark have been ranked first and second, with CPI scores of 89 and 88 respectively. The best performance is 10 marks.

This year, the index found that more than two-third of countries score below 50, with an average score of 43. Sri Lanka’s CPI score of 38 is well below the average score of 44 for the Asia-Pacific region. Among the SAARC members states Bhutan leads with a score of 67, followed by India (40), Sri Lanka (38), Maldives (33), Pakistan (32), Nepal (31), Bangladesh (28) and Afghanistan (15), Mr. Obeyesekere stressed.

Further strengthening of the Bribery Commission and expunging of the clause 17th of the Bribery Act are required to build up trust among the public in corruption busting by the government.

-Sandun Jayasekera
-Daily Mirror - 23/02/2018

**World Happiness Report**

This report is released by the sustainable development solutions network for the United Nations.

According to their report released on 14 March 2018, Finland is the happiest nation on earth.

Sri Lanka is in the 116th spot in the global happiness index. Sri Lanka has moved four places up compared to the previous report. We can compare our country to nations like Finland and find out what our lapses are. The Finish population is approx 5.5 million; much lower than ours. Finland is one of the best governed with least or zero corruption.

Finland police are the most trusted. Their GDP per capita is very high. On this point we are right at the bottom.

-F. Weeratunga, Nugegoda
-Daily Mirror - 19-03-2018
Excerpts from an article by Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu

“There is absolutely no substitute to a Constitutional Settlement”

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an expert in governance and peace. He has submitted research papers on the subjects in international conferences. He has been the Secretary of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation mechanism. In a candid interview with the Daily Mirror Dr. Saravanamuttu, shared his thoughts on the current constitution making process, reconciliation, transitional justice and good governance.

Q : The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Central Committee headed by President Maithripala Sirisena has come to a decision to continue with the Executive Presidential system of governance. But the President came to power pledging to do away with this system. What are your thoughts on this?
A : I think there is some confusion at the present moment. What we are being told now is that the President would like to prioritise Constitutional reform over everything else. That would involve all of these things we are talking about a new Constitution. Obviously there is some fluidity and perhaps, what is required for the president and for the party, is to come out and say very categorically as to what they intend to do as far as the new constitution is concerned, and whether they support a new Constitution.

There is concern about going for a referendum and the fear of losing the referendum, and therefore to do Constitutional reform which does not involve a referendum. But I don’t think you can do any meaningful Constitutional reform without involving a referendum. What perhaps is required is for a very clear, cogent, coherent statement from the president and the SLFP saying that they are pursuing a new Constitution, that would recognizably involve a referendum, and that they’re campaigning for the acceptance of that Constitution.

Q : Constitutional Amendments are supposed to bring a solution to ethnic conflicts. However our history includes ample instances where there has been strong opposition against such amendments and agreements. The Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact was not part of the Constitution. So the two parties - in terms of the coalition government and the TNA - need to get together and come up with a solution that will satisfy both sides. You have the concern about separation and cessation on the one side. And on the other side, you have the concern with regard to having a certain degree of autonomy to be able to manage one’s own affairs to ensure non-discrimination. So you need to be able to find a solution that meets both of those demands and a lot more in between.
A : There is absolutely no substitute to a Constitutional settlement. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact was not part of the Constitution. So the two parties - in terms of the coalition government and the TNA - need to get together and come up with a solution that will satisfy both sides. You have the concern about separation and cessation on the one side. And on the other side, you have the concern with regard to having a certain degree of autonomy to be able to manage one’s own affairs to ensure non-discrimination. So you need to be able to find a solution that meets both of those demands and a lot more in between.

In the debates, the discussions and the deliberations of the Constitutional assemblies, and if you look at the subcommittee reports too, I think there is ample potential for an excellent consensus.

-Daily Mirror -
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