When drought walks side by side with deluge

Severe drought in Anuradhapura

The value of water and paddy farmer continues to be eclipsed from the radar of policy makers as drought-parched fields in the dry zone waited for a drop of water while torrents of rain lashed the wet zone non-stop for nearly two weeks.
## EDITORIAL

### HUMAN RIGHTS

- Can’t recognize UNHRC resolution on SL: Gota
- AL urges candidates to prioritize HR issue
- An edited version of Thulasi Muttulingam’s article on developments of Jaffna
- SLMA urges presidential aspirants to give top priority to ending brutal ragging
- MP Anura Kumara Dissanayaka correctly quotes statutory rape statistics
- Junourno Nimalarajan Remembered on 19th Death Anniversary
- Abduction and Murder of 11 Youths AG Requests CJ for 3 Judge HC Bench
- Switzerland Tells SL: Urgently probe alleged abduction of Embassy employee
- Swiss quiz: Govt should act quickly

## ENVIRONMENT

- When drought walks side by side with deluge...
- Air Pollution: a silent killer

## POLITICIANS AND POLITICS-THE VOICE OF PEOPLE

- I Will Vote For....?
- Steel and Velvet
- Stunning Victory! Expression of Gratitude or Protest Vote?
- People Spoke Loud and Clear
- Questions awaiting answers …
- President’s Call for efficient Public Service: Can it be done?
- Quarter of the population condone bribes
The new government and the challenges it faces.

The new government that took over power after the presidential election in November 2019, is a minority government and it is an interim government which will end in April-May this year after the general election. It would have been better if this parliament had been dissolved in November and a new parliament elected soon after. The present parliament is considered the most corrupt and incompetent one that the country has ever had and continuing with the same parliament for four months is of no use to the people.

The president came to power mainly promising national security. The people wanted a strong leader who could protect the country from terrorist attacks like the April 21st bomb blast—which the previous government could have prevented with all the warnings it received, but failed to do so and sacrificed the lives of 250 people. Another promise was to eradicate corruption and wastage of public money and reform the public service that would really serve the people. In short a new era with a stable government that would promote economic growth, peace, prosperity and national harmony where all citizens would be treated as equals was promised.

Two months is a very short-period to achieve all this and yet certain positive measures have been taken by the president. His simplicity in attire and behaviour is something that could be emulated by his ministers and followers. Even the ceremonial inauguration of the parliament on Jan 3rd was carried out without the customary practices like the 21 gun salute and the ceremonial horse mounted cavalry. It was a simple event compared to all previous occasions when so much money was wasted.

The other positive is the president’s decision to limit the number of cabinet ministers to 15. The public have always been very critical of a bloated cabinet enjoying a life of luxury and doing almost nothing to improve the lives of the people. These bloated cabinets came into existence after the proportional representation system was introduced and coalition governments were formed. In a coalition government all the coalition parties demand seats in the cabinet, not to serve the people but to enjoy the perks that go with the post. At the moment the choice is very limited and the president can only choose the best out of the worst among his supporters in this parliament. Therefore most of his ministers happen to be those who have been tested over the years and proved to be failures.

In the new parliament to be elected in April-May, if the president wants to replace these ‘proven failures’ with young, educated, efficient, ‘clean’ men of honesty and integrity, who would observe parliamentary ethics unlike the present lot, he will have to take control of the nomination list. Sri lankan society still has any number of honest and efficient professionals, who would be willing to serve the country with dedication but they may not be party members. Therefore the president will have to look outside the political parties too, some of those who contested the presidential election, whose manifestoes were really impressive, could be considered.
Although the president tries very hard to bring down the cost of living and ease the burden on the people, it has not happened so far. The tax concessions given have only helped employers and businessmen—it has not been passed on to the employees and customers. The prices of consumer goods are on the rise, even today the price of a kilo of red onions is RS. 500 or more. There is no reduction in our utility bills either. Household expenses are soaring and the farmers are still waiting for the manure that was promised. But the protests are few and the people are waiting patiently. The government should protect them from falling preys to greedy hoarders and racketeers.

While the people wait for redress, the media keeps them entertained with the new ‘teledrama’—‘Ranjan gate or one shot leaks’, Ranjan Ramanayake a UNP minister in the previous government, has for some reason recorded the telephone conversations he had with several important figures in public life including police officers, judges, members of parliament, ministers and popular actresses. On January 4th police raided the minister’s house and seized his hoard of CDs which contain about 125,000 voice recordings. If they were seized and sealed to be produced in courts, how did they leak out? Did the police pass them onto their favourite politicians? Although Ranjan says he recorded these conversations as a part of his campaign against corruption—as evidence, no corrupt politician will be taken to task. People know that almost all 225 members of Parliament act as one family to protect one another. Finally, maybe only Ranjan will be punished. But the tapes provide a useful distraction.

How does the new president plan to bring about reconciliation and national unity? He has declared, “I am president of all Lankans—those who voted for me and those who did not”. Those who did not vote for him are minorities, mainly the tamils. But they did not vote on an ethnic basis, because the vast majority of them voted for Sajith Premadasa—another Sinhalese. To promote national unity, the grievances of the Tamils in the war affected areas have to be considered. Is economic development alone enough for reconciliation? What about the persons who were ‘disappeared’ after the war? Everyone of those women protestors continues to carry the picture of a loved one who went missing after she or he was handed over to a security officer when the war ended. Are they all making up these stories? The president in a recent interview is reported to have said that no one disappeared after the war. Some LTTE cadres and some of our soldiers went missing in the battlefield. And that is to be expected in a war. All those who surrendered were rehabilitated. No one was disappeared.

Mahinda Rajapaksha government claimed that ‘zero’ civilians died in the war. President Gotabaya Rajapaksha also sounds very firm regarding war crimes and reconciliation. He doesn’t recognise the UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka because it is illegal. While his party rejected it in public, the previous government went ahead and signed it. Although he would work with the UN and HR organisations in solving issues, he cannot recognise the Un resolution as anything legal. After the war many commissions were appointed to look into the grievances of the war affected people and recommend measures that could be taken to bring about reconciliation and prevent another such civil war. These commissions like the Paranagama commission and the LLRC (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission) in their reports made many recommendations. Should we now bury those in the past and go forward with the president’s new economic plans. It is only the war affected people
in the North and East who can decide whether they should give up the demand for justice and settle for material benefits or continue to struggle for justice.

The president has also declared (as reported in the papers) “Devolution will not happen. The 13th Amendment was forced on us. Devolution of power as proposed by the TNA cannot be granted as the majority of the people who are Sinhalese are opposed to it. But devolution is not separation which not only the Sinhalese but even the Tamil people reject. The pity is that when President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunga tried to grant devolution of power to the people of the North and East in the form of regional councils in 2000, the war-hungry LTTE leader Prabakaran rejected the offer. Tami leaders like Mr. Sampanthan who could have advised him to accept the offer remained silent through fear. So did the Tamil people. After the war, there has been so much bitterness on both sides that no leader has had the political will to solve the ethnic problem. Today even the word ‘Devolution’ like separation has become anathema to the Sinhala majority. No Sinhalese leader is prepared to convince the majority Sinhala community that devolution is necessary for national harmony. Therefore such a remark from the new president at this moment can only widen the division between the two communities, not unite them.

It is also reported that the National Anthem may be sung only in Sinhala at the 72nd Independence Day Celebrations. During the last four years it has been sung in Sinhala and Tamil, why leave out Tamil now? It can’t hurt anybody’s feelings and so far no astrologer has said that the Tamil version would bring bad luck to the country like the words ‘Namo Namo Mahatha’ in the original version. Perhaps it is these remarks regarding the UN Resolution, Devolution, Missing People and the

National anthem that have made the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees at the Mandabam camp in Tamil Nadu, apprehensive of returning to their homes in the North and East.

A strong government with a strong leader, without a strong opposition in parliament could turn out to be authoritarian as it happened during the Mahinda Rajapaksha regime of ten years Mr. Wickramasinghe who was as usual, the leader of the opposition, remained supportive of government most of the time, so much so that he did not even raise his hand against the notorious 18th Amendment intended to make Mahinda Rajapaksha president for life. With the power struggle going on within the UNP the same Mr. Wickramasinghe who according to Rajan Philips, “is not worth even a political obituary, after the yahapalanaya debacle that he presided over” could very well end up as the leader of the opposition at least for the next five years. It is the position he enjoys most and is unlikely to give it up, Paving the way for another authoritarian government of the Rajapakshas.

Leela Isaac,
Institute of Human Rights.
Can’t recognize UNHRC resolution on SL: Gota

SLPP presidential candidate and former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa said today said though he would work with the UN and human rights organisations in resolving contentious issues he could not recognize the UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka because it was ‘illegal’.

The 30/1 UN resolution titled, ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ was co-sponsored by the present Sri Lankan government and adopted in 2015.

As the SLPP presidential candidate, he told his maiden news briefing at Shangri-La Hotel in Colombo that he will always work with the UN but would not recognize what it had signed with different governments. Mr. Rajapaksa was flanked by SLPP Leader Mahinda Rajapaksa and other party leaders.

"It was not a government of mine. My personal view is that it is not a legal document,” Gotabaya Rajapaksa said when asked how he would follow up with commitments made through the UN resolution in 2015 and added that as a party they had already rejected that resolution in public and said everyone knew that there was a stark difference between their policies and that of the incumbent government.

“We will work with UN and Human Rights organisations as well in solving issues but the resolution is not something we signed,” Mr. Rajapaksa said.

Clarifying this matter, SLPP Chairman Professor G.L. Peiris said the present government itself has stated categorically that some of the commitments given to the UNHRC were contrary to Sri Lanka’s Constitution.

“They have said some of the commitments cannot be implemented because they are directly contrary to the constitution. No government, either the current or a future, can take action which are contrary to the Constitution," Professor Peiris said.

Mr. Rajapaksa said they had a system to promote accountability during the previous Rajapaksa government’s tenure but it was replaced by the incumbent government.

“We took many measures to promote accountability. We did a survey to record the number of people missing including the LTTErs. Correct numbers were produced but unfortunately, without even coming here, some produced their own numbers. There are ambiguous documents in this area. We will follow up and discuss,” Mr. Rajapaksa said.

He also rejected the allegations that surrendered people had gone missing during the war.

Q: What happened to the people who surrendered to the army since you were leading the army at that time? Could you please tell us what happened to the people who surrendered to the army? Where are they?

A: You are mistaken I think, I was not leading the army.

Q: Your brother was?

A: No! No! The army was led by the army commander

Q: You were the defence secretary, what will you tell the people who ask that question?

A: About 13,784 surrendered and they were rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. They were given employment in the Civil Security Force and some of them were recruited in the military as well. We had one of the most successful rehabilitation programmes. Even foreign observers commended our programmes.
Q: Does that mean that there are no missing persons?

A: Even in the military, over 4,000 officers and soldiers went missing during the war in the battlefield. Once, I went to Jaffna Fort and even we couldn't recover the bodies of the military personnel. People are missing. Similarly a number of soldiers are missing.

Q: Some say those who surrendered did not return? So are they lying?

A: No! Somebody can say that but that is an allegation. We had a commission on this. There were no cases like that.

Q: Even the Paranagama Commission of your time said there were such cases

A: I don't think so.

Q: It was said that various census and statistics were conducted which came out with numbers. What was the process that you had in mind to carry this forward?

A: You are talking all the time about the past. Ask about the future. If you concentrate on the future, it is better I think.

Q: But can you move on without addressing the past?

A: Yeah sure, can move on.

Meanwhile, former president Mahinda Rajapaksa responding to another question said the war crimes which allegedly took place during the Indian army’s occupancy should also be probed at this rate.

"Then we have to probe all, including the riots, and all incidents dated back towards Indian Army's occupancy in the country," the former president said.

SLPP candidate Gotabaya Rajapaksa meanwhile rejected the allegations of ‘white vans’ levelled against him. "I do not posses any white van and this ‘white van culture’ was something in the country way before our time,” he said.

When asked about the nature of his foreign policy if elected, he said he believed it has to be neutral. "We have to be realistic in maintaining our foreign policy. We can't get involved in power struggles of power houses," he said.

He also commented on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the Acquisition and Cross Services Agreement (ACSA) -- two agreements the incumbent government is trying to sign with the US.

"When we signed the agreements back then, we ensured that we benefited from them. This government does not have best interest of the country at heart. Any agreement will have to be negotiated with me, if I’m elected president,” Mr. Rajapaksa said.

By Lahiru Pothmulla
Daily mirror- 16/10/2019

AL URGES CANDIDATES TO PRIORITISE HR ISSUES

Ahead of next month’s presidential election in Sri Lanka, the Amnesty International yesterday urged the candidates to prioritize key human rights issues, including commitments on transitional justice made in the aftermath of the decades-long internal conflict.

"Human rights must be at the heart of the next Sri Lankan president's policies. The authorities have made slow and limited but important progress when it comes to addressing human rights violations and abuses including the areas of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. To move on, the wound of the past must be redressed. That is only possible if these gains are built upon,” said Biraj Patnaik, South Asia Director at Amnesty International.

"The families of the disappeared, the victims of torture and sexual violence, the people forced off their land, and others who have suffered grave human rights violations must not be forgotten. The suspected perpetrators must be held accountable.”

Amnesty International also calls on the candidates for elections to if elected commit to repealing repressive laws, protecting civic space, abolishing the death penalty and protecting
human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

In 2015, Sri Lanka made commitments to pursue truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence for victims of the 26 year long internal conflict that ended in 2009. There has been dismayingly slow progress on these commitments over the past four years, but there have been some key advances, including the operationalization of Office of Missing Persons, the Office for Reparations, and the return of some of the land occupied by the Sri Lankan Military.

“Human rights must be at the heart of the next Sri Lankan president’s policies.”

Amnesty International is calling on the next Sri Lankan president to build on these gains. The next president should push for repeal of the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act, one of the main drivers of human rights violations to this day. It should be replaced by a law that meets International Standards.

“While tracts of civilian owned land have been returned to their owners, many families are still protesting to get their lands back.”

While tracts of civilian owned land have been returned to their owners, many families are still protesting to get their lands back. The land that is still occupied by the Sri Lankan military should be returned and there should also be aid reparations for their decade-long dispossession.

“More than a decade since the end of the conflict, Sri Lanka has continues to live qith its legacy. The next president must commit to a decisive break with the past, starting by repealing the notorious Counter Terrorism Act that enabled so many violations and by returning land to the people who rightfully own it,” said Biraj Patnaik.

An edited version of Thulasi Muttulingam’s article on Developments in Jaffna.

Not everyone is happy about the new airport in Palaly. This is the story of one such person. He is a three wheeler driver who has lost his ancestral land in Palaly, and today lives in a rented house in Jaffna.

This poor elderly man has already been through so much in the war years, and he still doesn't see retirement in sight. He still has to work hard to support his family; his children are all grown up now and some of them operate their own three-wheelers too. But without land or homes of their own, survival is precarious at best. And so, he ferries people in his trusty three-wheeler from early morning till late at night to earn his keep.

A gentle, mild-mannered man, he doesn't like to talk much, especially of his past. They bring back too many traumatic memories for him. "What's the point of thinking of all that? It's best to move on," he says. Yet, I occasionally prod him for his stories.

Among the many things I managed to ferret out of him was: He once spent several years in jail, watching as many young men and women around him were brought in, tortured, and “disappeared”. He was sure he was going to end up with the same fate, but for unknown reasons was eventually released without charge.

How did he end up in jail? Was he a part of the LTTE? Far from it, actually.

He had been a driver of a private bus. A passenger one day had got into an argument with the conductor of the bus – he didn't even remember what their original tussle was about, it must have been something minor – who unceremoniously offloaded the passenger from the bus. The next thing they knew was that they were both arrested – the passenger had complained to the Army that these two men were LTTE aides. In those days, circa 1990s, that was enough to get one arrested without any kind of due procedure or investigation.

Wait a minute. Isn’t the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) still operational?

I was too hasty in saying “those days” then; it still could happen these days too.
Such was the malevolent spectre of the PTA then. I have seen it used as a threat among Tamils themselves: “Just you wait, I am going to report to the CID that you are LTTE.”

Needless to say, Tamils lived in fear of their non-Tamil fellow citizens at the time as even minor arguments could lead to spurious charges where one would easily vanish under the PTA, and many scores were settled exactly like that.

His young family had had to depend on relations’ goodwill to survive while he was incarcerated – something he still tears up about. He made it out eventually, and prefers to keep quiet about his experiences.

There’s something missing in all these gushing reports about the newly opened airport – were the private landowners of Palaly compensated or not?

I called my three-wheeler driver to check. He said: “They called us for a meeting recently, where they offered us alternatives of land or money. Some took the alternatives offered, but others like us are holding out, waiting for our own lands back,” he said.

Did the compensation offered actually compare to the value of the land taken? The Government is famous for offering peanuts as compensation in these parts.

“I don’t know, since we didn’t take that option; we didn’t ask how much was being given. Anyway, even those who agreed to receive compensation have not actually received anything yet. We’ll have to wait and see,” was his response. “My land is not directly in the airport’s way. I still hope for it back.”

While most people’s houses in these parts had been destroyed during the war, others found theirs standing – such as in Palaly. Many Palaly residents thought they would be able to resettle fairly easily because their houses were still standing after the war had ended, but then sometime in 2012-13, the Rajapaksa Government razed them, and never returned the land. Neither has this Government, which has at this last minute delivered an airport to show something for it.

Is this a good development? I don’t know. You tell me.

**SLMA urges presidential aspirants to give top priority to ending brutal ragging**

The Sri Lanka Medical Association, established in 1887 has written to all candidates at the forthcoming presidential election on ending physical, sexual and emotional violence currently taking place in all state universities in the country.

"The evidence collected by the University Grants Commission, inclusive of many disturbing photographs and personal letters written by students and parents, amply describes the depth of the crisis,” the letter signed by Dr. Anula Wijesundere, SLMA President and Dr. Tara de Mel says.

"Today it is no secret that ‘torture chambers’ exist in almost every state university. The fact that nearly 2,000 students who have qualified to enter university, with great difficulty, had to leave campus and that about 16 students have committed suicide over the years, triggered by incidents of violence at the hands of peers at university, bear some testimony to the gravity of the situation," the letter said.

"It is serious that about 270 students are presently receiving treatment for extreme stress, fear, anxiety and mental health conditions consequent to receiving inhuman treatment as freshers," it added.

Noting that every presidential aspirant speaks of major plans for advancement in education and higher education in this country, it points out that no one has touched on this grave humanitarian tragedy taking place in the state universities.

"As a potential leader who will be entrusted with the wellbeing of every citizen in Sri Lanka, this issue deserves urgent attention from you," the candidates have been told.

The Expert Committee from the SLMA urged the presidential aspirants to study this issue in depth and to take serious steps to stem the crisis in our university system.
"We suggest that elimination of violence at Universities is given top priority in your election manifesto," the letter said.

*Reported by Zaaki Jabbar*  
*The Sunday Island- 27/10/2019*

**MP Anura Kumara Dissanayaka correctly quotes statutory rape statistics**

To assess this claim, we used data from the Grave Crimes Abstract (GCA) from the Sri Lanka Police. Since the MP specified “girls”, we considered reported cases of rape of women under 16, which is classified as statutory rape.

GCA data records the number of statutory rape cases reported from 2015 to 2018 in a range from 1,438 to 1,686 per annum. The average reported cases of statutory rape during this period was 1,556. The MP’s claim of 1,600 aligns with the data.

Therefore, we classify the MP’s statement as TRUE.

**Exhibit 1: Reported cases of rape (2015 – 2018)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape of women over 16 years of age</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reported cases of statutory rape (under 16)</td>
<td>1,447</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>1,686</td>
<td>1,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reported cases of rape</td>
<td>1,792</td>
<td>1,732</td>
<td>2,036</td>
<td>2,033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Published prior to 2019*


The average number of all reported cases of rape (including women above 16 years of age) was 1,898 between 2015 and 2018. However, it must be noted that many people who experience sexual violence do not report or come forward about the incidents. A WHO report, ‘Understanding and addressing violence against women: sexual violence’, notes: “The best quality prevalence data on sexual violence come from population-based surveys. Other sources of data on sexual violence include police reports and studies from clinical settings and nongovernmental organizations; however, because only a small proportion of cases are reported in these settings, they produce underestimates of prevalence.” Therefore, it is possible that the number of cases of rape per year are much higher than the figures reported in the GCA, which is based on police statistics.

*Daily Mirror- 07/11/2019*

**Extracts from**

**Put HR at the heart of your policies- AI SA Director Biraj Patnaik tells SL’s president to be**

Amnesty International South Asia Director Biraj Patnaik calls on Sri Lanka’s next president to put human rights at the heart of their policies.

In the backdrop of Island Nation going for the presidential election in a couple of weeks a statement has been released by the human rights organization two days ago urging the presidential candidates to protect key human rights issues, repeal repressive laws such as the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), protect civic space, abolish the death penalty and protect religious and sexual minorities.

“The families of the disappeared, the victims of torture and sexual violence, and the people forced off their land, and others who have suffered grave human rights violations must not be forgotten. The suspected perpetrators must be held accountable,” said Biraj Patnaik, South Asia Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty’s statement also highlighted Sri Lanka’s “dismayingly slow progress” on their 2015 commitments to “pursue truth, Justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence for victims of the 26 year long internal conflict that ended in 2009.”

*Ceylon Today- 22/10/2019*

**JOURNO NIMALARAJAN REMEMBERED ON 19TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY**

The 19th death anniversary of Journalist Mykvaganam Nimalarajan, who was murdered, on 19 October, at his residence in Jaffna, was commemorated in Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Jaffna last week.

Along with journalists’, families of the involuntarily disappeared persons and the families of prisoners detained under Prevention
of Terrorism Act (PTA) for several years, also participated in the commemoration.

Nimalrajan was a senior journalist who contributed to the BBC Tamil and Sinhala services, the Tamil daily Virakesri and Sinhala weekly Ravaya. His Murders are still at large. The committee to protect Journalists, in a statement condemning Nimalarjan’s killing, said: “The assailants shot the journalist through the window of his study, where he was working on an article, and threw a grenade into the home before fleeing the premises. The attack occurred during curfew hours in a high- security zone in central Jaffna town.”

It is believed that Nimalarajan was killed for reporting on vote-rigging and intimidation in Jaffna during an election period at that time.

According to Nimalarajan’s father, Nimalarajans’s family still lives in agony without any breakthrough in the murder and identifying the perpetrators. “However I want his admirers to remember him as a courageous journalist who sacrificed his life for free and fair reporting.” He also appealed to the Government to Launch a fresh investigation Nimalrajan’s murder.

Reported by Ceylon Today- 22/10/2019

ABDUCTION AND MURDER OF 11 YOUTHS
AG REQUESTS CJ FOR 3 JUDGE HC BENCH

Attorney General Dappula De Livera yesterday (11) requested Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya to appoint a three- judge bench of the High court to hear the case in connection with the 2009 abduction and murder of 1 youths.

Senior state Counsel , Janaka Bandara said that the Attorney General had requested that the 14 suspects, including former Navy commander Wasnatha Kumara Jayadewa Karannagoda and Commodore D.K.P Dassanayake be tried before a High Court at Bar, for alleged conspiracy, abduction with intent to secretly and wrongfully confine a person for the purpose of extorting property from any person so interested in the person confined, wrongful confinement, conspiracy to extort, extortion, giving false information and conspiracy to commit murder.

The accused would be tried under section 450 (04) of the code of Criminal Procedure Act. No. 15 of 1979 as Amended by Act. No. 21of 1988. Information was also exhibited to the High court of Colombo in respect to the commission of offences including those punishable under section 102 , 113A, 356, 338, 333, 198,372,32 and 296 of the Penal code.

He said that the 11 youths had been abducted and confined in a building belonging to the Navy on Chaithya Road and later transferred to the Navy Fun site in Trincomalee. Evidence established by analyzing data received from mobile phone towers revealed that the youths had used mobile phones belonging to the Nval offices to make phone calls to their relatives.

Investigations also revealed that the abductors of these youth had demanded ransom from their relatives and that on two occasions the relatives had complied with their demands. There is no evidence to say that the 11 had either returned to their relatives or parents within the period of 25 August 2008 and 21 March 2009.

He said that the available evidence only showed that the 1 abductees had allegedly been killed.

He said that the Karannagoda had been in office at the time the incident had taken place. Evidence showed that he had ben informed of the abduction and the illegal confinement of the 11 youths. Former Minister Felix Perera had informed him verbally and in writing of five of the abductions conducted by the Navy from the Dehiwela area.

Investigations have also revealed that Karannagoda had been informed by a naval officer, serving in his staff, of what was happening. However, he had allegedly taken no action in an official capacity to initiate an investigation into the matter nor had he taken any practical or constructive action regarding it, he added.

Reported by Dilanthi Jayamanne
Ceylon Today- 12/11/2019

Switzerland tells SL: Urgently probe alleged abduction of Embassy employee

Attack considered “serious and unacceptable”

Switzerland has called upon Sri Lanka to immediately launch an investigation into the
illegal detention of one of its employees from the Swiss Embassy in Colombo.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland in a statement released late Wednesday night said Switzerland regarded this incident as a serious and unacceptable attack on one of its diplomatic representations and employees and demanded an immediate and complete investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident. 

“This message was conveyed yesterday (27) by the Swiss Ambassador to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Foreign Affairs Minister Dinesh Gunawardena together with a diplomatic demarche,” it said.

It also called for perpetrators to be brought to justice and for the guarantee of the security of Swiss representation in Colombo and its employees to be fully restored. A top government source told Daily Mirror that a CID investigation into the incident was already underway and the government was closely following the matter.

“The government is treating this matter as a priority and the premier has ordered for a complete, thorough and quick investigation into it. The perpetrators will be arrested,” the source said. The Sri Lankan Ambassador to Switzerland had been summoned over the incident.

Reported by Jamila Husain

Daily mirror- 28/11/2019

Swiss quiz: Govt should act quickly

Unfortunately, the new government led by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had to face a diplomatic crisis even before a fortnight of its election into power is over. The Swiss Embassy in Colombo has lodged an official complaint with the Foreign Ministry about an alleged abduction and questioning of one of its local employees by an unidentified group.

Prior to this incident a senior official of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Nishantha de Silva, who had been in charge of the investigations into the high profile crimes that had been committed during the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration had left for Switzerland with his family.

It is believed that he had left Sri Lanka fearing action against him by the new government and he had obtained political asylum in Switzerland.

It was also alleged that the female employee of the Swiss Embassy had been questioned by her abductors on the circumstances of Inspector Nishantha Silva leaving the country.

Despite the fact that what really happened involving the Swiss Embassy employee would come to light after a thorough investigation into it, the backdrop of the complaint unfortunately but naturally goes against the government.

After preliminary investigations, the Government authorities on Sunday said that the findings of those investigations did not tally with the information provided by the Swiss Embassy while claiming that the investigations were continuing.

Yet, there are still possibilities of the world opinion being unfavourable to the government. Firstly, the former Mahinda Rajapaksa Government had been accused of so many abductions and disappearances by the opposition political parties, civil society organizations, local as well as international human rights organizations and even the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Apart from this, there are several other factors as well that might go against the government. The Swiss Government has said that it had taken the incident very seriously, as its embassy in Colombo had claimed in a statement on Friday.
And one has to realize that Switzerland is not a country like Swaziland in Africa when it comes to creating world opinion. It has the capacity to influence the world opinion as a European country than what Sri Lanka can do in the world political and human rights arenas.

Sri Lanka would be the main topic again at the 43rd regular session of the UNHRC that is to be held in Geneva also in Switzerland, between February 24 and March 20 next year.

The UNHRC in its earlier resolutions on Sri Lanka and in the reports of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had expressed serious concerns over the alleged abductions during the war against the LTTE and after the end of it.

Even if the government is totally innocent in the alleged latest abduction case, it has to take into account the adverse impact on its image by these factors. If the government did not act swiftly and in a professional manner in this issue, it would be tantamount to giving its adversaries new opportunities to open the old wounds.

Hence, the duty of the government in this regard is twofold: one is to bring the truth about the alleged abduction to light and to take the culprits to task and the other is to clear its image, at the earliest.

It would be very essential for the government to be open in this regard and leave no room for suspicion on its stance and activities pertaining to the matter. Leaders of the government have to focus on addressing the international community, rather than their local constituency. In case of a conflict between the government’s version and that of the Swiss embassy, there is a possibility of many Western governments siding with the embassy.

Yet, the Swiss embassy has not so far accused the government over the incident. It had lodged the complaint with the very government. Hence, both parties must be on one side, rather than acting as the accuser and the accused.

The government should not leave room for any prior conclusion to be vindicated due to dragging feet by the investigating authorities. Finally, there could only be two scenarios; an incident of abduction or a canard of abduction.

The only way for the government to absolve itself from any allegation or suspicion is to swiftly bring the truth to light and take the culprits – abductors or canard makers - to the task, failing which government would have to take the responsibility to the alleged crime.

Editorial
Daily Mirror- 03/12/2019

“A group of people that elect corrupt politicians, imposters, thieves and traitors are not victims... but accomplices”
-George Orwell
When drought walks side by side with deluge...

While Colombo and suburbs were inundated by recent rains the Uva and Northern provinces, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa districts and even upper Kandy region with Victoria and Randenigala reservoirs remain ravaged by drought.

It appears that strategic diversion of waters of Kelani and Kalu rivers to dry zone has become a near impossibility for a nation which stunned the world with its irrigation feats accomplished more than one and half millennia ago. It’s indeed quite intriguing as to why successive governments have neglected this crucial factor on which the future food security of the country is largely dependent.

Political disputes and inconsistency in execution have delayed the construction of the canal that is supposed to take Kalu Ganga waters to North as per Moragahakanda-Kalu Ganga project to hydrate arid northern land. On the other hand the construction of two reservoirs to control flooding along Kelani River and provide drinking water to Colombo has come to a halt due to public protests allegedly backed by local politicians. It’s pathetic that some 5.5 billion cubic metres of water from the Kelani River flows to the sea annually while part of the country is turning drier. Besides after Ambatala not a single reservoir has been built to supply drinking water to Colombo despite the sharp rise in the demand for fresh water.

Air pollution: a silent killer

Last week, the authorities, especially those at the National Building Research Organisation (NBRO) warned of health hazards due to the air pollution mainly in Colombo and suburbs. At the same time, the US Embassy’s Air Quality Monitor in Colombo indicated unhealthy values of air quality with 167 Air Quality Index (AQI) recorded by 10.00 pm last Tuesday. By Wednesday morning, the AQI readings continued to rise to 173 by 8.30 am before declining to a 165 by 10 am. Despite the fluctuations, readings continued to indicate an unhealthy level of air quality throughout the week.

According to NBRO authorities and other relevant institutions, the standard level of air quality is measured at around 50 and the index level between 151 and 200 indicates possible health effects for everyone.

Though the authorities attributed the surge in air pollution in Colombo mainly to the winds coming from the highly polluted Indian Capital, Delhi where the pollution level stood at more than 500 last week, this was not the first time when the air quality declined to an unhealthy level in Colombo. The authorities at the NBRO, US embassy and the CEA occasionally inform the general public of this situation. However, the statistics indicated in these warnings do not make any sense to the ordinary people; they are just numbers to them.

The number of vehicles registered has increased by nearly 14 folds between 1990-2010 while the number of three wheelers and motorcycles increased by a whopping 600% during the last 20 years.

The lack of proper high quality public transport system has resulted in over 50% of the working population to use private vehicles to commute to work, according to Prof. Kumarage. Average speed for vehicles in Colombo was 22 km/hour in 2012 while it was 17 km/hour last year. Vehicles travelling in traffic jams produce more fine particles in the form of soot which adversely affects our health, he points out.

Though one of the main objectives of the proposed agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is said to be resolving of congestion on the roads in the Western Province, its political implications are not clear. Yet, Sri Lanka badly needs a master plan to resolve the issue.
I WILL VOTE FOR...

VOTER’S INSANITY
‘Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results’, is how Albert Einstein defined insanity. By this definition, we are an insane lot. For seven decades we enjoyed our sovereignty by voting UNP and SLFP or an alliance headed by either, expecting good governance. We are a failed state; our political and administrative systems have failed miserably. Can we, come out of this mess?

We come to the defining moment where a retired army officer is being challenged by a son of a former Executive President and the Deputy leader of the main political party. A benevolent dictator is an autocrat. We do not want strong individuals or working dynamos, but strong institutions. India, Japan, Australia and most Western nations, are lively democracies with strong economies.

Economic development in Sri Lanka for seven decades came with nepotism, family bandyism, and oppression of the rule of law and democracy. Vital issues have been downgraded into forgotten things. The voter has been compelled to believe promises, half-truths, and propaganda. Like in the past Presidential elections there is vituperative and slander by both the main candidate. After the election, the winner will run away with the idea that he has received a directive to do anything.

announces a cut in subsidized healthcare for the people who can afford to pay. Withdraw free education for children of parents who pay home visited tuition master 4000/- an hour. Ban single passenger vehicles entering the city during rush hours. Agree to politically distance the relationship between religious organizations and the state and create a secular state. (“From the secular point of view, religion is a hindrance to democracy as it enforces a set of legal and societal principles. Separation of religion and the state is required to protect freedom and ensure equality.” -- Erskine May)

Who declares the truth that we are a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society. Teach all students comparative religion as one subject instead of various religions, leaving it to the Daham pasal and parents to teach their preferences. Remove the Constitutional clause that grants special place for a selected religion [especially the foremost place is given to Buddhism which denounces Buddha dhamma.

[In December 1947, DS Senanayake taught the Mahanayake theros that “Buddha professed universal equality” when they wanted the clause enshrined 1948 Constitution because DS did not think of hoodwinking ‘Buddhists’ for votes. Finally, all agreed to drop it. Buddhism and all other religions prospered without it from 1948 to 1972].

Remove all State Administrative requirements in categorizing citizens on a racial basis and treat all as Sri Lankan nationals. I will vote for... Who has the STRENGTH to make these pledges, even if it affects his chances of
winning because he correctly realizes that the votes of such petty-minded racists are not worth at all. Who can initiate more vocational training and create employment so that they need no carrots from politicians? Who can introduce a plan of Career Paths, from O/L onwards, an idea of paths and options to schoolchildren? Who will not make unrealistic promises and increase Government debt which will further weaken the foundations of the economy? Who has the courage to name the corrupt among their cohorts who will not be included in a future Cabinet? Who pledges to place before Parliament and for public discussion, controversial pacts that are prejudicial to territorial integrity, national security, and sovereignty, [like the SOFA, MCC, and ACSA which are forced down the throats of the third world with great purpose by the so-called donors] before signing them. A benevolent dictator is an autocrat. We do not want strong individuals or working dynamos, but strong institutions. India, Japan, Australia and most Western nations, are lively democracies with strong economies .... Economic development in Sri Lanka for seven decades came with nepotism, family bandyism, and oppression of the rule of law and democracy.

*Daily Mirror- 07/11/2019*

**STEEL AND VELVET**

Our politicians must not seek and indulge in luxuries and lavish entertainments at the taxpayers’ expense; conversely, the plight of the poor, victims of 21/4 and other natural disasters like floods and pestilence, epidemics affecting mostly the poor, the marginalized, the down-trodden must be given high priority!!! Education and Health are both vital issues that have to be addressed in totality!!! Our politicians, if they are men of real grit and substance, must opt to voluntarily do away with their huge allowances, do away with them and show their true mettle!!! Do something worthwhile instead for the poor, the marginalized, and the handicapped and the aged of our country, not forgetting the War Heroes; something tangible, something which is going to bring them relief not just for a day but for all time!!! Most importantly, the independence of the Judiciary must be protected at all costs!!! That is sacred and has not been safeguarded and held sacrosanct as it should have been!!! A true Politician should show tenderness and bigheartedness demonstrating the qualities of ‘velvet;’ likewise, in the same manner, he should also be as firm and as resolute as ‘steel!!!!’ That is the true mettle not just of a politician but a statesman; a man for all seasons!!!

Any man aspiring to be President of a multiracial, multi religious and multicultural nation should be cognizant of what is expected of him; or else, if the ‘velvet’ is used when the ‘steel’ would have been better, he could end up with a colossal failure on his hands!!! The thrust of this election should evolve around democracy, and how crucially important it is for an educated people to vote for leaders who are not malevolent!!! If we have candidates who have no interest in democracy but claim to and we end up voting for them, it is indicative of the fact that we are really not an educated people!!! We need to acknowledge though, that part of what made Abraham Lincoln great was his ability to discern when to apply steel and when to use velvet!!! The yearning for strong men who are morally and ethically deficient is not unusual for people who are disappointed with the quality of leadership that they have had to endure so far!!! Unfortunately, our Sri Lankans have this terrible tendency to ignore
or forget what they have endured; it is something like a temporary lapse of reasoning that we Sri Lankans suffer from!!! It is just like getting intoxicated and getting up the next morning to realize that our circumstances have not changed and so we are bigger fools than the day before!!! This folly is so often practiced by the ordinary citizen that there ought to be some way someone could stop them from voting and making bigger fools of themselves!!!

Martin Luther King Jr. said: “We need leaders not in love with money but in love with justice. Not in love with publicity but in love with humanity” the burning question is ‘where do we find such leaders???’ We had President Jayawardena exercising ‘An Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove’ and we had President Premadasa who was ALL STEEL!!! What we need is a President who wakes up at dawn and shakes the country awake by its very foundation!!! The poor should be looked after, they should be able to bring their grievances to the President himself, their problems should be attended to; money or otherwise, they should not be shelved or thrown from pillar to post!!! In other words he should be an ideal PEOPLE’S PRESIDENT!!!

An extract from the "voice of the voiceless’ column
Daily Mirror- 20/11/2019

Stunning Victory! Expression of Gratitude or Protest Vote? People Spoke Loud and Clear

There is an inclination among many of us to think that ‘politics is a dirty game’ that one should not get seriously concerned with. Therefore it is not for the ‘educated and the respectable’ to engage in the affairs of politicians. They communicate their intentions at Board meetings to stick to the points and not to bring politics to bear on them. However, politics should NOT be left to the politicians. It is not a questionable field of activity. It should not earn a reputation of an evil field. Our politicians may be the worst in the world in terms of honesty, integrity and competence [they will compete with world’s best-known robbers/law breakers] unfortunately in a democracy we have little choice but to endeavor to change them, because, as Charles de Gaulle once said, ‘Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians’.

Daily Mirror- 18/11/2019

QUESTIONS AWAITING ANSWERS...

The majority Sri Lankans feel our Prime Minister is a loser – most of them fought hard to give him a second chance but he does not seem to have learnt a lesson, it is almost as though he is content to plod along with no initiatives, no get up and go attitude and continues to point a finger at others. After all, it was he who originally appointed Ravi, Finance Minister; it was he who brought in Arjun Mahendran, so does that not make him an accomplice? Was he not then aware of who and what they were? People are disillusioned, dissatisfied with what is going on; they expected more from you but you seem to be either unaware of their expectations or immune to them – which is it Mr. Prime Minister?

The country would benefit immensely if Sajith studied and contributed to the development of youth and made resources available for them to do so. He should also
inculcate in them the necessity to develop leadership, facilitate discussions on social justice and common human values.

Who do the people turn to now, whom do they vote for, whom do we place our unqualified trust in with our precious vote? This time you have given the country Sajith. Our country desperately needs new blood, new ideas, new people to lead them, to help them and the country in a forward thrust towards new horizons wisely. Most of the politicians today cannot relate to the needs of the people because they cannot and do not find time for the people! Ninety percent of their time is spent on trying to garner publicity; bigger and wider the publicity they get, the happier they are! They don’t seem capable of focusing on the needs of the people; unless they are splashed in the headlines: WE NEED A PRESIDENT WITH THE QUALITIES OF TRUE LEADERSHIP! WE HAVE POLITICIANS WHO ARE A DIME A DOZEN, WITH NOTHING UPSTAIRS – THEY CAN’T CLAIM LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. WE NEED A LEADER WHO CAN UNDERSTAND AND RELATE TO THE REAL ISSUES FACED BY THE PEOPLE IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES. TO PROPEL THE COUNTRY ON A FORWARD MARCH WITH A CRYSTAL CLEAR AWARENESS OF ITS BASIC URGENT PRIORITIES AND NECESSITIES!

Currently, Sajith functions and speaks clearly, he seems to have his own agenda and only the future will tell if he will bow to pressure.

**An extract from “the voice of the voiceless” column Daily Mirror- 09/10/2019**

### President’s Call for efficient Public Service: Can it be done?

There is no doubt that the yahapalana government failed miserably to govern; good or bad. The entire state apparatus became dysfunctional.

Many promises by the yahapalana mandate, in relation to an independent and vibrant public service were ignored, forgotten or forsaken. The promise of bringing to justice those officials who, with their former political masters, had engaged in humongous robbing of national wealth not only escaped justice but became inner circle of the officialdom of the government, making a mockery of the determination of those people who voted the government in.

The new President has set about restarting the State apparatus as well as kick starting the national economy in a way he believes best. Stamping his authority on all aspects of governance, he said on Monday that a good state apparatus mainly represented by the public service is a must for future progress. We agree whole-heartedly. He said this addressing the newly appointed State Ministries Secretaries at the Presidential Secretariat and going from what he said, his intentions were clear. Having a public sector that is around 1/7th of the entire working force is no easy going when most of the gains expected are not short or middle term but long term. In a headlong drive for development which the country needs right now, such a vast public service, dependent on the tax payers money and not yielding immediate results in terms of contribution to the national economy, is a burden, whether one likes to admit or not.

**Family rule**
If that was the case with yahapalanaya, what preceded it, during the ten year rule of current President’s elder siblings rule was much worse. The entire state apparatus including the civil service was used as a means of gratifying and glorifying the rulers and their henchmen. Systems, procedures, regulations and protocols were conveniently brushed aside and nepotism and personal favours became the order of the day in terms of the machinations of public institutions. The whim and the fancy of the President, his family or the inner circle became the law and the rule and ultimately, as it turned out, good public servants like Lalith Weeratunge, the former Secretary to the President had to pay the price.

If our President Gotabaya Rajapaksa intends to carry out what he declared i.e. revamp and revive the state institutions it would be important for him to avoid the mistakes of the yahapalana as well as Mahinda Rajapaksa government that preceded his. Being one of the very top officers of that regime in the capacity of Secretary of Defence he must be acutely aware of those weaknesses and should be better placed than most, to address them.

Executive Director of TISL, Asoka Obeysekere said that quarter of the local population habitually engages in bribing the government sector in order to obtain a quick service and to evade fines.

“When a survey was done to find out the most trustworthy State Institution, a majority of 73 per cent of the public selected the Judiciary. This is in stark contrast to the police (57%) and the Government (47%),” noted Obeysekere.

This survey was conducted in all the provinces in the first quarter of 2019 with a stratified sample (in this method of sampling, researchers separate the populous into separate groups known as strata and in turn obtain a sample from each such groups) of 1300 citizens aged 18-80 years from urban and rural settings.

“When women face a higher level of threat through sexual bribery. Compared to the rural areas, the urban areas had a much higher percentage of sexual bribery reports. Estate areas too were at a higher risk in this regard. The survey has also found out that 46% of the sexual bribery cases were reported from the Government sector.”

He added that the Government should adopt a zero tolerance policy towards corruption. He further added that the law should be enforced more strongly and also that an honest review of the resources and skills were required in order to fight against corruption.

**Quoted Source**

*Editorial*

_Daily Mirror_ - 11/12/2019

**Quotation**

**Quarter of Local Population Condone Bribes**

A quarter of Sri Lanka’s population does not consider bribery a crime, the Global Corruption Barometer 2019 Sri Lanka report launched yesterday (9) by Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) noted.

Reported by Nabiya Vaffoor and Buddhika

_Ceylon Today_ - 10/12/2019
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