Presidential Election 2019

SLPP's presidential candidate
Gotabaya Rajapaksha

NPP's presidential candidate (JVP)
Anura Kumara Dissanayake

NDF's presidential candidate (UNP)
Sajith Premadasa
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Will there be a change or more of the same?

The power now rests with the people to change or not to change. They will decide whether to continue within the same corrupt political culture promoted not only by the present set of politicians but also by the previous Rajapaksha regime, or bring in a new set of leaders who are not only educated but also efficient and above all honest and sincere about the promises they make. It is only such a leadership that can redeem this country from the mess it has been pushed into; fast moving towards a failed state. The new parliament should have such capable leaders who can truly be our legislators.

What we have today is a corrupt set of leaders and a parliament full of uneducated, ignorant, inefficient, immoral, greedy, power hungry men and women, 225 of them (with a few exceptions) who are fattening themselves on the poor taxpayer’s money. Their antics, misdeeds and corruption have been so clearly exposed by the media that it is not necessary to list them. This is only a presidential election but the new president would have the power to initiate a change in the system, depending on the team that supports him.

Among the 3 main candidates Gotabaya Rajapaksha is being promoted by his family, friends and party loyalists, mainly Sinhala nationalists who believe that it is he who is responsible for the “war victory”. (Although he himself has recently admitted that it was not he but General Sarath Fonseka who defected the LTTE.) It is also announced that his brother ex-president Mahinda Rajapksha is their prime ministerial candidate. Under the 19th amendment, many of the president's powers have been curtailed and the executive prime minister's powers have been increased. But it may not lead to a tussle between the 2 brothers as it did between Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickramasinghe. However, with Gotabaya as president and Mahinda as the all-powerful executive prime minister, Ranil Wickramasinghe (a friend and protector of the Rajapakshas’) as the opposition leader, and almost the same set of corrupt ministers and MPs, is anything going to change? Wouldn’t it be the same regime that was rejected by more than 6 million people in 2015? Wouldn’t we have more of the same thing that we had between 2005 and 2015, including white vans, enforced disappearances, plus massive corruption with some development?

The UNP and the New Democratic Front candidate Sajith Premadasa has not had any corruption charges levelled against him, nor has he got anyone murdered or disappeared. There has also been greater freedom during the last four and a half years and the media has not been harassed unlike in the previous 10 years. But there has been massive corruption under this Yahapalanaya regime and Sajith is a part of this government. Can he now come forward as a “clean” candidate and erase all the sins of his party? It is his party leadership that used Arjuna Mahendran to rob the central bank and Sajith as the deputy leader of the party and cabinet minister remained a mere silent observer. Once he becomes president, will he try to sweep the Bond Scams under the carpet in order to protect the leadership of his party. Even today the UNP politicians some of whom are accused of being involved in the Bond Scam are enthusiastically cheering him and organizing his election campaign. He has to tell the voters how he
proposes to get rid of corruption and corrupt politicians. If not, his promises to clean up the corrupt system and usher in a new era maybe considered mere empty rhetoric. He should also talk more about his national policies and plans to develop the country rather than promising more and more handouts like Samurdi, Janasaviya, school uniforms etc. People should be helped to generate their own income, instead of remaining ‘beggars’ at the feet of their politicians.

The National People’s Movement (NPM) has put forward Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, the JVP leader as their presidential candidate. The JVP as a party has been able to do a lot of work being part of the opposition, especially in exposing corruption within the government. Although people flock to listen to them at their political meetings they fail to support them at elections. Anura Kumara has no corruption charges against him. He also cannot be held responsible for the “bloodbath” that the original leaders of his party indulged in. He does seem to have definite plans and policies that he promises to implement. Another factor in his favour is that he has a team of advisors from professional organisations to guide him. And yet there is a vague suspicion among voters that the JVP may end up supporting the UNP. However, at least during the next general elections one hopes that many of their members will enter parliament to form a strong opposition and Anura Kumara becomes the leader of the opposition.

Apart from these main candidates, there are another 32 independent candidates. Among these except for a few genuine ones like Dr. Rohan Pallewatta, Professor Rajiva Wijesinha, Dr. Ajantha Perera and former army commander Mahesh Senanayake, the rest seem to be mere dummies running for personal reasons. These few men and women who are not only educated and efficient but also sincere and committed. Having reached the top most level in their own respective fields, they do not have to run after money, power and perks. But as citizens who love this country, perhaps they do not want to stand aside and watch the country being destroyed by a corrupt set of politicians. At the moment there is no reason to doubt their sincerity and commitment to serve the country. Therefore the floating voters both young and old looking for a change may decide to vote for one of them.

These independent candidates are also supported and advised by groups of professionals and intellectuals, university teachers and some well-known lawyers. Some of them seem to have worked very hard for more than 3 years to formulate their national policies and plans which they now place before the people. These include ways and means of increasing our national economic growth (which at the moment stands at 2.6), constitutional and educational reforms, a solution to the ethnic problem through devolution of power, ways to maintain the independence of the judiciary and make the country secure in all spheres of life. They also promise an effective, efficient and transparent public service instead of the “bloated” and inefficient public service that we have today.

Most of their plans, if implemented could regain our “lost paradise”. For instance constitutional amendments could be made to bring in professionals and intellectuals into the cabinet from outside the parliament. A second chamber could be introduced and the number of parasitical “Professional Politicians” in the legislature reduced. Our economic growth has to be increased through production. And for this more than getting foreign investment, it is necessary to educate and empower our own farmers, industrial and plantation workers. The government has to help them to make their own money rather than offer them handouts. As the saying goes “Give the fisherman a fishing rod; not fish”. This
could be done through our universities by creating a link between them and the workers. Through this, our farmers and workers could learn to use modern methods and technology effectively and increase production, thus increasing our exports and reducing our imports. At the moment even sliced dried mangoes and pineapples are being imported while tons of homegrown fruits are dumped into garbage bins because our producers lack storage facilities. It would be a great pity if these men and women with such visions are denied political power.

Ours is a democracy and it is only the people who can vote them to power. It is said that “the cornerstone of democracy rests on the foundation of an educated electorate”. Is our electorate educated? No, because our politicians over the years have failed to educate the electorate or create political awareness among them, in their own self-interest. The plantation workers are the best example. For generations they have been kept in a state of semi-slavery, obediently voting for the candidate chosen by their leader. So will the masses give up their party loyalties and vote for an independent candidate at the presidential election? Very unlikely. But at least at the general election in March 2020 they should vote for these candidates to get them into parliament. If we do not bring about a change now and continue the same political system with the same old “Professional Politicians” clinging onto power, future generations may curse us for our failure.

Leela Isaac,
September 2019

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**Murder**

*M. A. Nuhman*

Last night
I dreamt
Buddha was shot dead
by the police,
guardians of the law.
His body drenched in blood
on the steps
of the Jaffna library!
Under cover of darkness
came the ministers.
"His name is not on our list,
why did you kill him?"
they asked angrily.

"No sir, no
there was no mistake.
Without killing him
it was impossible
to harm even a fly-
Therefore...,” they muttered

"Alright, then
hide the corpse.”
The ministers return.
The men in civies
dragged the corpse
into the library.
They heaped the books
ninety thousand in all,
And lit the pyre
with the Cikalokavadda
Sutta.
Thus the remains
of the Compassionate One
were burned to ashes
along with the
Dhammapada

*The Jaffna Public Library was
burned down during ethnic violence.

*Translated by S. Pathmanathan*
Death Penalty_ License for Judicial Killings

Last year, on October 2, Iran executed a 24-year-old woman, Zeinab Sekaanvand, who was a child at the time of her alleged offence. Under international law, she should have been excluded from the death penalty. She was also, like many child brides, a survivor of gender-based violence. Born into a poor and conservative family, she was married at the age of 15 to a man who had turned abusive and violent. She appealed to the authorities and her family to protect her from both her husband and her brother-in-law, who she claimed had sexually abused her repeatedly, but her pleas went unheard. When she was 17, her husband was found dead, and she confessed to the crime under police torture. At her trial hearing -- when she was finally appointed a lawyer -- she retracted her confession, but it was too late: the court sentenced her to death.

Alice Nungu, was a Malawian woman who was sentenced to death after killing her abusive husband while defending herself and her elderly mother from his drunken attack. In 2015, a court finally heard about the years of intense abuse that Alice endured before sentencing, and ordered her immediate release. She had languished on death row for over 12 years, fading from HIV, inhumane living conditions and lack of food. Only weeks after her release, Alice died, with her mother by her side.

Though there are women in death row in Sri Lanka, not much information is available about gender dimensions of those facing the death penalty. But international research indicates that women who are sentenced to death are subjected to multiple forms of gender bias. Those women who are seen as violating entrenched gender norms are more likely to be subject to the death penalty and that most women are sentenced to death for the crime of murder, often in relation to the killing of family members and in a context of gender-based violence.

In Jordan for example of 16 women on death row, all but one were convicted of killing a close family member who traditionally wields authority, creating the potential for abuse: a husband, a father, or a mother-in-law.

Sri Lanka’s new license for Judicial Killings

Sri Lanka’s last execution was in 1976 and since then, there has been a moratorium on the use of death penalty. Although death sentence remained in our laws and courts regularly imposed the death penalty, successive Presidents didn’t sign the death warrant.

But on June 26, the International day in support of Victims of Torture, media announced President Sirisena had brought back the death penalty, a cruel, inhumane and degrading punishment, breaking the 43 year long moratorium upheld by all Sri Lankan Presidents. Sri Lanka, a country notorious for extra-judicial executions for the last several decades, is on the verge of becoming notorious now for judicial executions.

The names of the four persons against whom the death warrant has been signed is yet to be announced. As of early this year, 1299 persons were reported to have been on death row. All those on the death row, and all of their families, must be in agony and trauma, not knowing whether they or their loved ones are among the first four to be executed or when their turn might come. Media quoted Prison officials as saying that most on the death row were stressed, not eating and feeling faint.

The Commission has also noted alleged prosecutorial misconduct leading to conviction of innocents in Sri Lanka. Like everywhere else, wrongful convictions are possible in Sri Lanka, especially given serious deficiencies in the criminal justice system, including a lack of easily accessible, quality, legal aid for the poor and vulnerable -- during trial and appeal. Thus, it is the poor that are more likely to face wrongful convictions. There is no evidence in Sri Lanka or any part of the world that the death penalty has prevented or reduced crimes.
It is possible and necessary to oppose the death penalty and support constructive measures to address crime, including drug related crime. It is crucial to work towards prevention of crime, by guaranteeing all human rights for all -- both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. If some detainees are engaged in drug-related offences from within prison grounds, security in prisons must be strengthened, including through the use of new technology and holding prison officials accountable for allowing drugs inside prison.

**International commitments and trends**

Last year December, Sri Lanka was among the 121 countries, the largest number ever, that endorsed a UNGA Resolution calling for a moratorium on the Death Penalty. Sri Lanka joined 120 other countries in noting that any miscarriage of justice in the implementation of death penalty is irreversible and irreparable and that there is no conclusive evidence of the deterrent value of the death penalty. Sri Lanka also joined the collective global expression of deep concern about the continuing application of death penalty and encouraged states which had moratoriums to maintain it. Six months later, Sri Lanka now appears to be on the verge of reversing the longest moratorium, instead of progressing to abolish death penalty. Death penalty for drug related offenses also violates Article 6 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, to which Sri Lanka is a party to and is considered to be unlawful killings under international law.

As a Roman Catholic, a fundamental precept I believe in is “Thou Shalt not Kill”. Pope Francis has been forthright and taken a consistently principled position that human life is sacred and the death penalty is “an inhuman measure that humiliates human dignity, in whatever form it is carried out” and that it is “contrary to the Gospel.”

The first precept of Buddhism in this Buddhist majority country is to abstain from killings (Pāṇātipātā veramaṇi sikkhāpadam samādhiyāmi).

The Death Penalty -- or Judicial Killings -- is against Sri Lanka’s international obligations and religious and spiritual values, which uphold sacredness of life. We must oppose it, demanding in the short term to maintain the moratorium, and in the long term to abolish the death penalty from domestic laws and ratify the second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that calls for the abolition of the death penalty.

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**Daily mirror- 01/07/2019**

**Extracts from an article by D. B. S. Jeyaraj**

**Gruesome killing of five Tamil students in Trinco 13 years ago**

Trincomalee town

January 2 of the New Year 2006 was a Monday. It was 5.30 in the evening when 20-year-old Manoharan Rajiharan set off from home on St. Mary’s road in the Trincomalee town. Both his father and mother were medical doctors jointly running the welcome medical clinic. He told his parents he would be going to worship at the Pillaiyar temple and the Pathragali Amman temple. Thereafter, he said he would chat for a while with friends at the beach and return. One of his friends, now an undergraduate at the engineering faculty in Moratuwa University, had come home for the New Year and was scheduled to go back the following day. Rajiharan said he would be back home by 7.30 p.m. Trincomalee had been tensed up for quite a while.

There had been much violence along with hartals paralyzing normal life. Police and security personnel along with civilians had been targeted. The civilian killings and in some cases reprisal killings cut across ethnic barriers.

In the prevailing security situation, Rajiharan’s parents too were concerned over their son staying out till dark. But they were not unduly worried because they knew their son was a decent, level-headed boy. He was very punctual and if he said he would be back at 7.30 they knew he would keep his word. Besides, the place he was going to was not very far from home. Also, they knew his friends. All of them were quiet, well-behaved youths with little interest in politics – let alone tiger politics. They were youths with glowing dreams of a bright future.
The parents had no worries about their son or his friends getting mixed up with the LTTE.

There were stone benches on the beachfront where people sat and took in the sea breeze. The seven close friends were now seated on those benches chatting gaily. They had been frisked and cleared at the check post before coming to the spot.

All of them had completed their A/Levels in 2004/5. Apart from Sivanantha, another too had gained entry to Katubedda. The others were hopeful of higher education or at least a good job in Colombo. Some had ideas of going abroad. They were good all-round students in both studies and extra-curricular activities. They were computer proficient too. Time just flew as the friends swapped stories and teased each other in good fun.

Green trishaw

It was about 7.15 when a green trishaw coming along Dockyard road slowed down. A grenade was thrown from the vehicle. It exploded yards away from where the seven friends were seated. The trishaw then sped away on Koneswarar-Fort Road towards the Fort. The dazed friends realised the situation was taking a turn for the worse and cut short their conversation. They speedily mounted their cycles and motorcycle and prepared to get away from the spot. That was not to be!

Almost as if on cue a security force truck trundled in quickly. Instead of giving chase to the trishaw, the occupants of the truck zoomed in on the seven Tamil youths. They surrounded them and forced them to kneel down. They started checking their ID cards. Thereafter, they began assaulting them. They were then put aboard the truck and repeatedly assaulted. Their explanations and protests were ignored. At this point, some more security personnel on motorcycles and in a land rover arrived. There was excited discussion in Sinhala among the new and old arrivals. The youths could only hear the noise. Suddenly, they were kicked and pushed out of the truck. Even as they fell, they found that the entire area was now pitch dark. The lights in the vicinity had been turned off. The youths were now hit again and forced to kneel down.

After some more rounds of assaulting, the youths were forced to kneel down again. Firearms were taken out and brandished. The youths were told they were going to be killed as a warning to the tigers in Trincomalee. The innocent youths began wailing and pleading. Their pathetic cries were heard far and wide.

There were more than a hundred people in the vicinity when all this started happening. But police and Navy personnel cordoned off the area and forced the people consisting of vendors and others relaxing on the beachfront to kneel down or squat or lie prostrate on the ground. Some could however see and/or hear partially what was going on. Almost everyone heard the report of the grenade explosion and the subsequent gunfire reports.

Assassins began firing

After playing cat and mouse for a while, the assassins now began firing. Two of the youths were shot behind the ear. One was shot in the back of the head. The other four then scrambled to their feet and made a desperate attempt to escape by running away. They were mowed down by gunfire. They were shot in the chest, abdomen, shoulders and thighs and then collapsed. A little while after the firing was over, a grenade was thrown at the still bodies. It proved a dud and did not explode.

The assassins were in no mood to take their victims to hospital. They delayed for nearly half an hour. The calculated delay presumably was to let the youths bleed to certain death. Finally, an ambulance was called and even the lights came back on "miraculously."

News began spreading and parents of the victims began converging at the hospital notwithstanding the security situation. Their long night of sorrow was made unbearable by the deliberate attempt to twist the truth.

The security forces who brought in the youths to the hospital had made a police entry that some tigers plotting to attack the security forces had
suffered casualties due to grenades exploding accidentally.

This then was the version hastily disseminated by the security propagandists. Given the tense situation in Trincomalee and the vain boasts of the LTTE that people were rising up against the armed forces, there were many takers for this story. Many newspapers and news agencies too carried the security version initially. The Defence Ministry spokesperson as well as other Army and police officers also stood by this story.

JMO Dr. Gamini Gunatunga

The truth however became known when the post-mortem and judicial inquiry were conducted. The Trincomalee Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) Dr. Gamini Gunatunga, himself a native from the district, conducted the post-mortem and ruled that all five dead victims had died due to gunshot injuries. Three had died of head injuries while the other two succumbed to abdomen and chest injuries. The JMO however observed that some of the victims had injuries other than gunshot wounds. But the fatal ones were from gunshots.

With the JMO report, the explanation provided by the security forces was blown to smithereens. Trincomalee Magistrate V. Ramakamalan recorded an interim verdict of gunshot injuries and instructed the bodies be handed over to the families. But there was a hitch. The police at the hospital refused to release the bodies. They insisted that the parents sign letters accepting their children were tigers. Otherwise the bodies would not be handed over, they threatened.

The parents of the victims were not prepared to do that. They had lost their innocent children. They were not prepared to sacrifice their reputation. They were not prepared to let them be stigmatised as “terrorists” when they were not. They simply refused to budge.

Overwhelmed with sorrow

Trincomalee was overwhelmed with sorrow. On January 3, 2006, there was a spontaneous closure of schools and boycott of classes by students. Students of all communities and faiths expressed solidarity with the victims. Realising the public mood was turning bitter; the authorities withdrew security personnel from check posts and sentry points in the Tamil neighbourhoods of Trincomalee. Some enraged people destroyed a few of these deserted places.

Trincomalee was grief-stricken. People flocked to the houses of the victims. Again those condoling with the families were not Tamils alone but many Sinhala and Muslim families. Everyone knew what had really happened and of the innocence of the victims. The student population turned up in large numbers. The certificates, cups and medals won by the victims were laid out by the coffins.

Inseparable in life and death

Trincomalee had not seen such a large funeral procession after the one for former Federal Party Parliamentarian N. R. Rajavarothayam. After last rites were performed, the five friends, inseparable in life and in death, were laid to rest.

Daily mirror - 06/07/2019

Reported by S. N. Nibojan

TNA opposes Army construction on LTTE cemetery

TNA politicians in Kilinochchi are up in arms against the purported construction of a building by the Army on a land which they said is a cemetery where LTTE cadres killed in the war had been buried.

TNA kilinochchi- Karachchci Pradeshiya Sabha member and social enthusiast Jeevarasa insisted in a media release yesterday the construction in the ‘Thuyilum Illam’ (abode of rest) be stopped immediately. He said that the Army was engaged in constructing a permanent building in the Visvamadu Theravil ‘Thuyilum Illam’ premises which was detrimental to the prevailing calm atmosphere in the region

“This should be stopped forthwith as we commemorate the war heroes annually in a peaceful manner. Our kith and kin are laid to rest in this sacred land and the army erecting a building
“This should be stopped forthwith as we commemorate the war heroes annually in a peaceful manner” only creates heartache to the people. The Army instead of imposing its presence should attempt to win over minds of the Tamil people. However, they are, on the contrary, widening the gap between the public and the security forces,” he said in his press release. “Further, we consider this burial ground similar to the temple and in the past we witnessed as how the tombs were bulldozed. Although, we had to bear such atrocity and are maintaining this place, the Army erecting a permanent building should be stopped. Failing which the people would be compelled to stage demonstrations to deter such activities,” he said.

*Daily Mirror- 14/08/2019*

**Australia moves Tamil toddlers to remote island detention center**

Melbourne, Australia | AFP A Tamil family of four — including two Australian-born toddlers — have been moved to a remote island off the coast of Indonesia, despite a court order blocking deportation, their lawyer said Saturday.

The family — who are fighting to remain in Australia because they fear persecution in Sri Lanka — were moved to Christmas Island detention facility overnight, lawyer Carina Ford said, speaking in Melbourne.

The island is a remote Australian territory around 350 kilometers (225 miles) south of Java. The detention center there had been closed for years.

"I don’t really understand the motive," Ford said, adding that it made adequate legal representation more difficult. "The family are obviously distressed."

The family’s case has become a new flashpoint over the Australian government’s hardline immigration policies, which include turning away refugees arriving by boat and de facto offshore detention, both measures condemned by the United Nations.

The family’s neighbors from rural Queensland have campaigned for them to stay.

The department of home affairs and Minister Peter Dutton’s office did not respond to request for comment.

Dutton had earlier ordered the family to be sent to Sri Lanka but a dramatic call from a judge grounded the aircraft they were travelling on before it left Australian airspace.

The two girls, Kopika, aged four, and Tharunicca, aged two, were born in Australia but do not have citizenship. They have never been to Sri Lanka.

*Sunday Island- 01/09/2019*

“The world as we have it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking”

-Albert Einstein
Large scale sand mining goes on unchecked in Kallaru

The people express concern over the large scale sand mining taking place at Kallaru in Kilinochchi. They said the forests in the area were being destroyed and sand mining was continuing on a large scale.

It is said that while the sand mining was continuing in an area belonging to Wildlife Department, where there was also a birds’ sanctuary in the vicinity. The people said that the place had been dug five feet deep to obtain sand illegally.

The people say that although relevant people had been notified about the illegal trade, no action had been taken to date. There was also the danger of sea water seeping into that area where sand mining was taking place, it was pointed out.

“This will affect the future generation as such, the relevant officials should take steps regarding this plunder,” the people said.

Daily mirror - 01/07/2019

Global waste trade Is Sri Lanka the newest waste dumping ground

When it comes to handling waste, Sri Lanka stands at a primitive level. Or so we think. Waste is not just waste for some. It is big money. This is why waste has converted into a global trade, thereby allowing developed countries to export their waste to developing countries for further treatment, disposal or recycling. Hence, the burden of the toxicity of wastes from Western countries falls predominantly onto developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. With China pulling out of this menace, which may come as a surprise to some, the rest of the countries in South Asia seem to be getting caught in the trap. Recently, Sri Lanka also witnessed an example of a rather smelly transaction that took place as a result of a Gazette notification passed back in 2013.

Smelly gift from the United Kingdom

According to the Customs Department, 240 garbage containers have arrived in the country since 2017. 111 of them imported from UK now lie at the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT), while another 130 are stationed at the Katunayake Free Trade Zone and 57 of them have been re-exported. Area residents claim that with the prevailing rains, the deteriorating waste would soon flow into the nearby canals while concerns have also been raised whether this liquid waste would reach Muthurajawela. If the waste reaches the estuary, it will eventually contaminate the Ocean, posing a threat to marine life. While Muthurajawela is already under threat of waste dumping purposes, this issue would add to its burden. According to Customs Department Media spokesperson Sunil Jayaratne, the 130 containers containing mattresses were sent in as a dummy operation. “The issue is with the 111 containers lying at the Port. They include various clinical waste including materials disposed from mortuaries, syringes and other material. Some of these materials have been liquidized and deteriorated to the point that we cannot even examine them and this waste is emitting a very bad odor. They have exchanged a lot of money during this transaction and since the Customs has been exempted from clearance as per the special gazette issued in 2013, we don’t have a way to clear such consignments.”

Strike not for cash but against climate change

With Sri Lanka’s presidential election to be held on November 16, the main party candidates need to give a pledge that they will give priority to climate change issues and we are happy to
reveal that worldwide it is the young people who are taking bold initiatives.

Yesterday, Friday September 20 was historic because in more than 150 countries, people came forward to support young climate strikers and demand an end to the age of fossil fuels. The youth leaders say, “The climate crisis won’t wait, so neither will we”. According to campaign websites young people have woken up much of the world with their powerful ‘Fridays for the Future’ school strikes for the climate. As we deal with devastating climate breakdown and hurtle towards dangerous tipping points, young people have called millions across the planet to disrupt business as usual by joining the global climate strikes on September 20, just ahead of a UN emergency climate summit and again on September 27. Together, we will sound the alarm and show our politicians that business as usual is no longer an option.

The urgency of the climate crisis requires a new approach and a just response centered on human rights, equity and justice. Follow the actions and join the movement. Millions of school climate strikers have been leaving their classrooms every Friday. Now they hope that others will join them in action. Going on climate strike means people everywhere walking out of their homes, their offices, their farms, and their factories. Everyone is needed to disrupt business as usual; from sports stars, actors and teachers to food industry workers, psychologists, delivery drivers and everything in between. We can all take part, whatever our circumstances, by refusing to accept the status quo. All over the world people have come forward to join the global climate strikes this month. Some will spend the day in protest against new pipelines and mines or the banks that fund them; some will highlight the oil companies fuelling this crisis and the politicians that enable them. Others will spend the day in action raising awareness in their communities and pushing for solutions to the climate crisis that has justice and equity at its heart. On a grossly unequal planet, not everyone will be able to take a day off or take part in the same way. But we can all take a stand and make our voices heard, the organizers say.

In Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena especially requested that he be given the environment ministry also when the new government took office in January 2015. Much work has been done but there is much more to do. We hope the new government gives top priority to it, especially encouraging young people to take the initiative because it is their world which will be worst affected. Yesterday in Colombo and Kandy there were marches and other events for effective action to curb climate change and we hope that it will be made part of the school syllabus from next year. Instead of strikes for pay hikes or other perks, adults should become responsible eco-friendly citizens and strike as part of the battle against climate change.

Editorial Daily Mirror- 21/09/2019

Research reveals devastating impact of micro plastic on marine life.

While plastic may be a necessary evil in certain manufacturing sectors, the ‘unethical use’ of it has today led to an array of environmental and health hazards, says the MEPA’s GM. "Today, plastic has invaded many unwanted spaces threatening many of our traditional industries such as pottery and reed for instance," observes Dr. Kumara, who cites plastic pots, tills and mats.

These, as he further notes, have not spared even religious places, "Gone is the traditional kalaya (clay pot) used in the temple to pay homage to the Bodhi, but plastic pots have become an eyesore. Home gardens are invaded by plastic flower pots. A dumbara pedura is an item of the past as plastic mats have replaced them," he told The Sunday Island.

Sunday Island- 21/07/2019
Missing MPs

Curiously, all these political greats who promise us the moon have failed to accomplish a very simple task. They cannot corral their MPs to ensure that they are in Parliament when it is in session. On Friday, parliamentary sittings had to be adjourned, yet again, for want of a quorum. The Opposition benches were virtually empty. Not even the MP who had moved the motion for Friday’s debate on allegations against Health Minister, was present, we are told. What we witnessed in Parliament was like a play without its title character. The situation is more or less the same on most sitting days.

MP Ashu Marasinghe, bringing the absence of the Opposition MPs to the notice of the chair, pointed out the futility of continuing the debate. He was right; it was the Opposition’s debate. The quorum bell was rung, but the 225-member House still did not have 20 MPs! Party leaders must hang their heads in shame.

We suggest that the number of sitting days of Parliament be reduced drastically and the Constitution amended to halve the number of MPs. The so-called legislators have, during the last several decades, proved that the country does not need a huge Parliament. Why should the public be made to cough up billions of rupees annually to maintain so many MPs when the need is for about one half of them?

The present administration has proved that the country can do without Provincial Councils, which, save one, have had no elected representatives for many months. The local government institutions were also without elections thereto for nearly one and a half years, and nobody felt the absence of elected councilors. So much for their usefulness!

Empowering citizens to fight corruption

Nigerian experience

One classic experience we can follow in handling corruption is from Nigeria. In Nigeria, Citizen Anti-Corruption Volunteer Corps (CACVC) is a leading organization in the movement against corruption to fight corruption. It’s a non-political organization. The CACVC maintains a strong grassroots focus, aiming to catalyze and strengthen anti-corruption participatory social movements from local platforms.

One of the successful ways that CACVC has engaged with communities is through appointing community leaders as Advocates of Good Governance. It engages with citizens to both bolster communities’ efforts to eradicate and prevent corruption and provide citizens with anti-corruption information and advice and responds to corruption concerns raised by the community and undertake collective monitoring activities. It also publicly reports on corruption problems and evidence of corruption obtained from monitoring exercises.

Its members are volunteers and come from a variety of professional groups including teachers, lawyers, journalists, physicians, business people, NGO workers, retired government officials, public representatives and community activists.
Supreme authority will be the people: - Nagananda Kodituwakku-

Many names have been proposed as potential candidates for the upcoming presidential election. Some from major political parties and also independent candidates have also made several statements. Attorney-at-law and public interest litigation activist Nagananda Kodituwakku is one of them. Mr. Kodituwakku has been instrumental in exposing frauds and illegal cases carried out by those in powerful positions including deforestation in Wilpattu and declaration of assets by MPs. He has come up with what is called an ‘Autochthony Constitution’ or ‘Homegrown Constitution’ and one of its highlights is the appointment of an independent judiciary. In a candid interview with Daily Mirror, Mr. Kodituwakku shared his plans for the country if he were elected President.

Q Why did you decide to contest for presidency?

I have been a public interest litigator since 2009 and have done about 20 cases. I left Sri Lanka in 2001 under unfortunate circumstances. I was granted international protection under the Geneva Convention and the Human Rights Act. As per our country’s democracy, the executive and legislator are expected to maintain and respect the public trust doctrine. Unfortunately, I don’t see that happening. It’s a kind of mafia. There’s no government and for namesake we have a judiciary which is absolutely impotent. I tried my level best and realized these people could do nothing. The best example was the car permit case and everyone from the President to Cabinet Ministers to Parliamentarians and the Attorney General were involved. Everyone appointed to positions of authority have let down the nation. So I thought the best way to solve this problem is to go before people. We have all resources and learned people but they don’t have wisdom. Therefore, I decided to come forward and contest for presidency.

Mahinda Rajapaksa in his Mahinda Chinthana said he would get rid of bribery and corruption. He pledged to restore judicial independence and uphold the sovereignty of people. But after he assumed presidency, he introduced the 18th Amendment and scrapped the Constitutional Council (CC). It was an independent body but he appointed all his yes-men to the judiciary. It was worse when the Yahapalana Government came into power.

Q What’s your plan to rescue SL from the debt trap?

It’s not a difficult task. The total debt liability is USD 60 billion. For instance, the US owes trillions of dollars to China. Therefore, this USD 60 billion isn’t a big amount. In the US and UK, there are individuals who owe these amounts of money. We have all resources. There are untouched natural reserves. In fact, a group of scientists based in Australia spoke to me, showed me the Sri Lankan map and where these deposits were. If we use nanotechnology and refine these products and start exporting value-added products, then we will be able to recover from this debt trap.

Q National economy, education, transport and health sectors should also be restored...

Our annual government revenue is Rs.1 trillion, out of that these people rob more than Rs.250 billion. Even in developed countries, you do have corruption but here they do it in a major scale. Unfortunately, we don’t have the law and the system in place to deal with this situation. When revenue is robbed, you can’t expect the due share to be allocated to education, transport, health, social security and other sectors. We have some 600 schools in this country without sanitary facilities. We still call them rural schools after 71 years of independence. If we go to a hospital, one person is on a bed and the other under the bed. We have everything and therefore we can restore these issues if we use our resources efficiently.

Daily Mirror- 17/07/2019

“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.

-Plato
The voter lost in a political quagmire

The Government continues to survive inside the closed doors of the parliament. Outside it the voices of dissent are loud and demand that the regime be thrown out. But as critics have pointed out the majority of the voters are ignorant about the laws of the country. They also seem to think that the Elections Commissioner is not using his powers and not pushing for elections. These thoughts are far removed from the truth; which boils down to the fact that Deshapriya doesn’t have a mandate to force the government to conduct elections. Deshapriya has said in an interview that the majority of the people don’t understand this.

The Elections Commissioner has aired his view as to why people are not seeking the assistance of the law, so that the Government will be forced to set the stage to conduct elections and thereby voters would get to exercise their franchise.

The Sri Lankan voter has voted largely by following his or her heart. When Mahinda Rajapaksa was voted in as president in 2005 there were some people who aired the view that they cast their votes for this man from the south because he was the only candidate with a mustache. The mustache is considered as a sign of manliness and surprisingly these little details take an elections candidate a very long way in a tiny nation like Sri Lanka. Even if the country conducts the presidential elections before any other election, the ‘war mentality’ that the people harbor is likely to make them vote for an aggressive leader who’d opt for a military style administrative system.

Without elections held for a long time, democracy has been already defeated to some extent. We have also heard firebrand monk Ven Gnanasara Thera affirming that a democratic approach to governance hasn’t served this country well. If the present regime is unable to conduct elections due to a legal snag and the people responded passively without demanding for an opportunity to exercise their franchise, it might give a dictator politician the idea that this nation can be controlled with an iron first if he assumes power. The manner in which Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe ruled his nation has not been erased from our minds.

This government’s motive of clinging to power is clear by acts such as offering tabs to school children, ensuring media freedom and catering to the interests of USA and India; the latter country is said to have the ability to influence who becomes our next head of state.

Democracy’s cornerstone at stake

The present government won the January 8, 2015 presidential elections largely on the promise that good governance would be restored and those involved in big frauds would be brought to justice. But more than four and a half years later not a single of these large scale fraudulent politicians has been brought to justice, convicted, jailed or fined. Instead we are told the investigations are being conducted by several agencies and even the three-judge high court benches appointed to expedite the cases have found it difficult to proceed, largely because of complex issues in the law. So much so that President Maithripala Sirisena -- known to be involved in an open political battle with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s United National Front (UNF) government appointed a Presidential Committee to probe alleged frauds by ministers, MPs or top officials of the current administration.

Tragically, less than two months after the good governance, no-frauds national government took office, Sri Lanka was hit by one of the biggest ever frauds -- the Central Bank bond scam where racketeers allegedly plundered more than Rs.11 billion in public funds. Unfortunately, despite objections from the President, the Prime Minister insisted on the appointment of his Arjuna Mahendran as the Central Bank Governor and he has now been indicted as the main suspect in this biggest-ever fraud. But Mr. Mahendran is still in Singapore where he is a dual-citizen and seems to be saying to the government, ‘catch me if you can’.

The problem is the lack of example with most of the political leaders allegedly involved in frauds...
acting like hypocrites and sanctimonious humbugs. The system is so rotten that some analysts believe that even the parliamentary process is at stake. Even when a public-service oriented person of integrity and honesty comes into this system he or she gets corrupted.

We hope the abolition of the executive presidency with more transparency and accountability in parliamentary democracy could be the first step in restoring the image and dignity of Parliament.

_Socialist_  
_Daily Mirror- 05/07/2019_

**Extracts from an article by Major General, Dr Boniface Perera**

**SRI LANKA Heading towards becoming a failed state**

Sri Lanka is in great danger of becoming a failed state if nothing is done. A failed state is one that has lost both effectiveness and legitimacy. Effectiveness means the capability to carry out state functions such as providing security. Legitimacy means the support of important groups of the population. According to J Goldstone, there are five pathways.

A failed state has several attributes. Common indicators include a state whose central government is so weak or ineffective; non-provision of public services; widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations; and sharp economic decline.

Failed states can no longer perform basic functions such as education, security, or governance, usually due to fractious violence or extreme poverty. One can understand where Sri Lanka is heading towards.

**SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka is wrought with political unrest stemming from rising prices, and unemployment. Government mismanagement and rampant corruption continue to diminish economic opportunities. Organized political parties are failing to respond to the needs of the people, continuously showing selfish attitudes and creating a vacuum. Global and regional interferences. High economic inequality, Uneven economic development, Severe economic decline. Deterioration of public services. Suspension or arbitrary application of law, Intervention of external political agents and foreign states. Two Heads in the Government, the president and prime minister fighting each other at the expense of country and her citizens. Easter Sunday bombings which killed more than 250 innocent civilians including 40 foreigners devastating the entire country is a classic example. People of the country are in anger and have lost confidence and faith in both president and prime minister. Therefore it can be factually argued that Sri Lanka is beginning to show all the signs of a failed state.

**BIGGEST PLANNED ROBBERY OF PUBLIC FUNDS**

The first bond scam, perpetrated 50 days after the last presidential election, is the mother of all problems for the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe Government. The new administration never really recovered from the unprecedented treasury bond scam, though President Sirisena went out of his way to protect the interests of the UNP, for about a year.

According to veteran banker and public activist Rusiripala Tennekoon, “The unprecedented two events which took place in February 2015, one by moving the Central Bank to the Prime Minister’s ministerial responsibility and second by appointing a non- citizen, Arjuna Mahendran as the Governor of the Central Bank on 27th Feb 2015, were crucial factors in the sordid story which unfolded. Mr Tennekoon drew the attention of the audience to another three dramatic, but calculated key issues, which were directly connected to the plot.

**COMMON MAN SUFFERS.**

According to professor Oliver A. Illeperuma,The rupee is crumbling and ordinary citizens are taxed to the hilt in consumer goods, fuel and
services. At the same time, what is squeezed from the common man is supporting expenses for the kith and kin of powerful politicians for sojourns abroad. The presidential entourage to New York last year is a case in point where 63 people joined the bandwagon for merry making in New York.

Was rampant during the previous regime where massive amounts of money went into politicians on useless grandiose projects. People voted for the Yahapalana Government hoping that such colossal wastages would not happen with the new Government. I wish to reiterate the Government failure and corruption in his own worlds, “However, people have been duped again with a worse den of thieves’ hell bent to rob the people of this country.

Let us consider the pathetic situation of our present Government. In 2016, parliament approved Rs. 1.6 billion to import luxury vehicles for ministers and deputy ministers, some costing over Rs. 70 million. One media spokesman had the audacity to say that they need better vehicles to travel to their electorates while they were still using luxury Benzes, BMWs for such travel. Is this what the people expect out of the parliament? Selling of MP tax-free car permit is obviously a measure introduced by the successive corrupt governments that abused the people’s sovereignty to facilitate the MPs to defraud the public funds.

The government incurs over 40 billion of revenue loss due to the abuse of these tax-free permits. A single day’s parliamentary sittings cost the Sri Lanka’s tax payer around Rs. 4.6 million and yet, when important policy decisions are taken only a handful of members are present.

Although, we boast of our literacy rate, in my personal opinion is that majority of our voters are not intelligent to select qualified and suitable personnel with character to the parliament. If the majority of the voters are intelligent how can drug lords, actors and actresses who have no education, no feelings to the sufferings of the common man go to the parliament. How can 94 members of parliament without GCE Ordinary Level sit in parliament? In other countries such as Finland, there are only 11 ministers and Holland has only 14 ministers. Yet their economies are booming and the citizens are happy.

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSIONS**

How many presidential commission of inquiries were held by president? What really happened to them? How much public money spent on each? What actions taken against culprits? These are the basic questions asked by general public. Majority feel that appointing presidential commission of inquiries are fake and well directed dramas. Public have completely lost confidence in these inquiries and the person who appoints commissions. No person with common sense willing to believe these fake inquiries.

**PUBLIC OPINION**

It is desirable and appropriate at this hour of need to mention some of the public opinions about Sri Lankan politicians.

Opinion one -When one would consider the tasks fulfilled by these men on the list above, they are no worth even to be offered bullock carts … these are tax payers funds, for what purpose, the state maintain these men even by offering the kind of cruisers for their transport.

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**HOLD GENERAL ELECTIONS**

Above explanations and examples are more than enough to logically prove the corruptions, misuse of authority along with public funds result in ineffectiveness and inefficiency of president, prime minister and cabinet preparing the country
towards a failed state. No further details or factual are required to suggest that the current leadership and the government has failed and they are slowly but surely heading toward a failed state. Only way forward and people in this country should awaken from their deep sleep and think of a better country for their children and grandchildren by forcing the government to hold election in order to select educated, patriotic, qualified and suitable candidates to the parliament to pull the country before it ends up as a failed state.

(The writer is the former security forces commander ( Wanni), The Competent Authority for Internally Displaced Personnel in North,The Colonel Commandant of the Sri Lanka Sinha Regiment, world top ten in National Defence Studies ( China), A Doctor in Economics and the Architect of Wanni Bogaswewa settlement with 36 years of Active Military Service. Presently working as International writer and International Researcher.)

Daily Mirror- 28/06/2019

Parliament is no longer a law-abiding institution: Nagananda Kodithuwakku

Parliament was no longer a law-abiding institution but had become a center for fraudulent businessmen and their clients, President of the “Vinivida” Foundation Attorney-at-Law Nagananda Kodithuwakku said yesterday. Speaking to the media at Thalawathugoda yesterday he said that the people could not expect anything from Parliament. “The parliament had been made up with a group of organized people who used it to plunder the country’s public resources. During the past 41 years, the country has collapsed and the dreams of the people were not fulfilled. Parliamentarians used to plunder the country’s public resources in a free manner,” he said.

“This country cannot be saved in this manner,” he said.

Daily Mirror- 15/08/2019

Enforced disappearances: Never again yesterday

With Sri Lanka still probing the hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances in the north, east and the south, yesterday’s United Nations international day of the victims of enforced disappearances, needs to draw the special attention of the authorities. Some Northern families have been at roadside protests for more than 900 days seeking the truth and justice for their loved ones who disappeared. Coinciding with this event they held a big protest yesterday morning with many Colombo activists also joining them. Even in the south the cases of enforced disappearances -- prominent among them being the case of cartoonist and writer Prageeth Ekneligoda -- are still at different stages of inquiry but substantial evidence has not being found for any convictions in courts of law.

In another case Mayuri Inoka, the wife of a disappeared husband Madushka Haris De Silva, was herself abducted on November 1, 2014 but later released. The brave woman is planning a protest campaign on Monday from 4.00 pm to 8.00 pm at the Galle Face Green. Hundreds of enforced disappearances and probably deaths during the 1987-1989 reign of terror, have virtually been forgotten except by the victims’ families and friends. But it was a horrifying page in Sri Lanka’s history.

According to the UN, enforced disappearance has frequently been used as a strategy to spread terror within society. The feeling of insecurity generated by this practice is not limited to the close relatives of the disappeared, but also affects their communities and society as a whole.

Editorial

Daily Mirror- 31/08/2019

Lack of Quorum: Dark days of Parliament

The accountability of Government Ministers in particular and Parliamentarians in general towards the voters, who elected them was once again well manifested last week.
On September 5, there was not a single Minister to answer the 15 oral questions that had been raised by the MPs and documented in the Parliament’s Order Paper of the day well in advance.

Next day, on September 6, Parliament was forced to be adjourned soon after the House was commenced for want of quorum.

According to the remark made by MEP leader Dinesh Gunawardane in the House only three out of 106 Government members had attended the meeting forcing the Government to withdraw an important Bill and an Order under another Act.

Speaking on the absence of Ministers to answer the oral questions, JVP MP Bimal Ratnayake had called the day “A black day in Parliament” citing that some of the questions had been handed over to be answered a year ago, he questioned as to what the use of holding Parliament sessions was if Ministers could not come and answer the questions raised by the MPs.

In fact, most of the oral questions are very important and it is a method that ensured the Right to Information of the people. Many a time, oral questions had led to startling revelations.

For instance, it was an answer given to an oral question that revealed that the Mattala Airport had earned only Rs. 16,000 in the month of May in 2014. Before the Right to Information Act (RTI) was introduced the strongest leverage people had to obtain the details of corruption, lethargy and wastage in public institutions was the oral questions raised through their representatives in Parliament and Provincial Councils.

Hence, evading answers to those questions in some cases might amount to defending corruption and wastage. This is not the first time Parliament experienced the lack of quorum. We have witnessed this situation so many times in the past years. We have heard Speakers advising the MPs of their duty towards the people when Parliament had to adjourn owing to low turnout of MPs, but to no avail.

Parliament meets only on eight days a month as two four-day sessions, with a ten-day interval in between.

And the MPs are sumptuously paid for it as salary and various perks apart from the pension they are entitled after ‘serving’ only five years.

According to Parliament sources they are paid a sitting allowance of Rs. 2,500, committee allowance of Rs. 2,500 and an office allowance of Rs. 100,000 apart from their salary, monthly allowances for telephone, driver, fuel (Depending on the distance from Colombo to their respective districts), entertainment.

And stamps amounting to a thumping Rs. 350,000 are also issued to them annually, while duty-free vehicle permits are provided and it is a well-known fact that many MPs sell them to outsiders.

It is said that some candidates spend over a hundred million rupees during their campaigns to be elected to Parliament.

It points to the income they would earn legally or illegally, after being elected. All these highlight the moral responsibility that elected representatives to Parliament down to Local Government bodies should have towards the masses, who voted them in and maintain their luxurious life.

Unlike in some other countries, the attendance to Parliament is not compulsory in Sri Lanka. According to The Parliamentary Mandate- A Global Comparative Study published in 2000 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva, in many countries including France, Spain, UK, US, Canada, Russia and Germany ‘compulsory attendance’ is a rule and in Canada Members of the Senate may be accused of insulting the House due to their non-attendance.

Editorial
Daily Mirror- 10/09/2019

SRI LANKA’S REALITIES!

Apart from all of the above, let’s take a look at the chaos the country is in today; people from all
walks of life, whether they are going to office or elsewhere are continually complaining about the difficulty of getting to their destinations because of the terrible traffic congestion!! Children going to school face the same dilemma; moreover, it is getting increasingly worse by the day not better!! Traffic has increased in leaps and bounds because of the ease of purchasing vehicles – cars, vans, lorries, motor cycles, you name it and it is available on a ‘buy now pay later basis’!!! In fact, one advertisement asks you to change your car as often as you change your clothes!!! Road repairs, storm water drains, all kinds of plumbing and other necessary roadwork is done on an ad hoc basis, with no planning and total disregard for the interruption to the smooth flow of traffic!! All this results in people being late to their places of work, children being late to school and people in general not being able to plan a journey anywhere without leaving some hours for the huge contingencies that occur on our roads causing so much disruption and leaving people stranded or in a desperately angry frame of mind!!! All this inconvenience to the people, who are the commuters, is of no consequence to the authorities; they will continue in their haphazard way of planning, road building and repairs!!! Try using a train instead of a vehicle and you are faced with another insurmountable problem – the trains are packed to the rafters, no lights, no fans, and no toilets, commuters hanging off footboards and sometimes even sitting on the roof of the train!! ARE THE POLITICIANS DOING ANYTHING ABOUT THIS MASSIVE INCONVENIENCE TO THE PEOPLE???

Daily Mirror- 18/09/2019

Public servants bribed to support government in power.

We have long known that our public sector is bloated; exactly how bloated we may not know. A recently published figure said that there are 1.5 million employees in nor public sector when as estimated 800,000 would suffice. In some offices there are four people to do a job when one would. All this means that the public sector salary and pension bill will top a trillion rupees for the first time next year. Despite these grim figures, do we have any of our politicians strutting the national stage and seeking election say how they would bring the situation under control?

On the contrary, we hear them say that they will increase employment. Reports of various ministers giving letters of appointment to people anointed with public service jobs, duly illustrated with photos of these tamashas which also cost the taxpayer another pretty penny, regularly fill our various newspapers with painful monotony. The smug expressions on the faces of those doing the honors imply that they are personally conferring this benefit – almost as though they will pay the salaries of the recruits out of their own pockets. Time was when a recruit public servant would get his/her letter of appointment by registered post. The letters would tell them when, where and at what time they should report to the head of department (or whoever) where they would work and that was that.

Railway engine drivers and guards take home fat monthly pay cheques with figures published during the recent railway strike that imposed unbelievable hardship on train commuters. It was reported that a railway engine driver took home a monthly Rs. 200,000. A CEB meter reader also does very well with a monthly pay packet of over a lakh of rupees. The present government which promised substantial public service salary increases in the run-up to the 2015 presidential election implemented these measures in phases. In that ‘auction,’ to borrow Prime Minister Lee’s words, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa also offered a pay hike but not as big as his rival. In fact bigwigs of his party kept attributing the country’s subsequent economic woes to the unaffordable impact of that salary increase.

We dare the main contenders to go on public record that MP’s will not get duty free vehicle import permits before the parliamentary election which will follow the presidential poll. These are a ready means of politicians raising campaign funds. There are other less savory means of filling war chests too.

Editorial

Sunday Island
Making ‘Black’ July ‘White’_ Can a Govt. be callous?

The so-called Sudu Juliya (White July) campaign initiated by the UNF government, could not have been named worse. Not only is the tag so insulting to the sensitivities of the Tamils who lost their loved ones, property, and homes and in some cases their motherland forever, due to that infamous Black July of 1983, but it automatically and ironically brings to mind the fact that the bloody Black July was under UNP watch back in 1983. Had this type of tag been used in Europe or the US, one could imagine the backlash it would have created. As to what goes through the minds of those advertising and public image ‘experts’ hired by the government, when they chose titles as this one is hard to fathom.

In any event the scope of this article lies elsewhere. It is July. Within the Sri Lankan political context the most common reference it is in relation to Black July. Much had been written on this topic, time and again yet there is always the feeling that not enough has been done to confront this dark patch in our history, mainly from the majority Sinhalese, by way of an apology to their Tamil brothers and sisters who became victims of the 1983 pogrom. Of course the Sinhala ultra-right will undoubtedly scream hoarse referring to many massacres carried out by the LTTE of many Sinhala as well as Muslim citizens such as the Kent Farm and Dollar Farm massacres, Kattankudy Mosquemassacre and the Kebithigollewa bus bomb.

Yet there is a marked difference between those acts of mass murder by the onetime most ruthless terror outfit in the world and the July 83 pogrom that took place in main cities including Colombo under the watch of the state and the security forces. It was not merely the element of omission, i.e. failing to take swift and resolute steps to thwart the pogrom from spreading island wide, but by commission where the rhetoric of some ministers as well as the non-apologetic tone of the first Executive President JR Jayewardena would, suggest.

The racial slur

When a government which came to power with the overwhelming majority support of the minorities, name their economic and enterprise initiative White July or Sudu Juliya, with the undeniable racial slur, it says a lot. It says that they either do not know or give a dam about the racial sensitivities of the minority Tamils who bore the brunt of Black July. Behind such naive but callous tags is the much more serious misconception that any injustice done, especially in the context of a community based on their ethnicity, could be washed away by economic development alone. That is the lesson the Rajapaksas learnt when they held the North PC election in 2013, after a massive, aggressive and much publicized economic and infrastructure development in the North. It was on the misguided conception that the entire issue of a disgruntled race could be solved by material and subsistence providence. It is far from that.

Every community with a separate ethnic identity has this thing called ethnic or religious aspirations and their pride based on them. What the pogrom of July robbed the Tamils was this dignity, their aspirations as a race. No amount of bridges, highways or factories would satisfy that urge.

We do indeed; need a white July to ease the deep and sordid scars of July 83, surely. Yet it is by introspective soul searching on the part of the majority. Blunders such as tags like ‘Sudu Juliya’ do not help at all.

Daily Mirror- 24/07/2019

Remembering July 83’ and moving forward

July 23 marks the 36th anniversary of Sri Lanka’s month of shame-- the month in which the then government of the country, permitted,
aided and abetted armed mobs to attack sections of its citizens--the Tamils.

What was more shocking was that unlike other countries in the South Asian region, where the literacy rates are low, and minorities are attacked regularly and with impunity, Sri Lanka boasts of a highly literate population, with over 85% being literate. At the same time (1983) in Pakistan, the literacy rate was below 30%. The literacy rate in India at the same period was between 41% to 48%, while the literacy rate in Bangladesh at the time stood at a little over 20%.

During those dark days, hundreds of Tamils were killed by government-supported mobs, thousands lost their homes and livelihood, and Tamil-owned businesses destroyed. The fact that the police and armed services though present, did very little to protect the victims, pointed to state involvement in the attacks. As though this was not bad enough, Ministers of State were seen egging the attackers on.

In this country, we have seen many riots we experienced the anti-Tamil riots in 1958, more recently we had anti-Muslim riots. But what we saw in 1983 was different, it was actually an anti-Tamil pogrom--where organized groups, with lists of Tamil-owned houses and businesses in hand, sought out and killed members of the Tamil community in cold blood. Exact statistics are not available, but it has been estimated several thousand Tamil civilians were killed and thousands of others injured, Tamil prisoners were targeted and killed in the country’s high-security prison, around 200,000 families were displaced and over 2,500 Tamil owned businesses--big and small--either damaged or destroyed. The exact number of homes destroyed is as yet unknown.

The events of July 1983 ultimately led to a near three-decade-long-civil war, during which thousands upon thousands more lost their lives. Every July reams are written on those atrocities and are published and re-published.

But what seems to be missing is that after that month’s terrible events, civilians (be they Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims) have been prime targets of armed attacks. Tamils militants of the LTTE have selectively attacked unarmed civilians and ethnic cleansing was practiced, unarmed Sinhalese, religious places of worship and religious dignitaries were targeted and killed.

Among the massacres which come to mind are:

The Massacres at Aranthalawa of 33 Buddhist monks, most of them young novice monks, on June 2, 1987.

The forcible expulsion on 72,000 strong Muslim populations from Northern Province in October 1990.

The Palliyagodella, including women and children by LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians armed with machetes on October 14, 1992. 45 children were among the victims.

The June 2006, targeted bombing of a bus carrying civilians at Kebethigollawa in the Anuradhapura district where 68 Sinhalese men, women and boys were killed in the attack.

The Kattankudy Mosque Massacre: over 147 Muslim men and boys were killed during a prayer in 1990.

In like-manner, the armed forces, to their shame, singled out civilian Tamils all over the country, with the worst attacks being during the closing stages of the war when as estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians lost their lives. Three decades-and-a-half, after the events of 'Black July', and a near decade after the civil war ended, how are we as Sri Lankans coping? How have these events affected the second generation of Sri Lankans? Have we as Sinhalese and Tamils truthfully and honestly confronted ourselves and taken responsibility for the atrocities committed during the civil war which followed? Or are we trying to sweep the events commencing 'July 1983' and the atrocities which followed, under the carpet?

We need, as Sinhalese and Tamils, to stop denying and making excuses for the atrocities committed on each other. We need to take responsibility, singly and severally, that by our silence, by our acquiescence we too are as guilty as those murderers who physically used machetes, knives, clubs, swords and guns to kill,
loot and murder. We need to apologize to the other, and not try to hide behind the words of Franz Fanon, who in a completely different context said "The atrocities of the oppressed cannot be compared to those of the oppressor."

Until such time, we will never be able to bring closure to the crimes of commission and omission we perpetrated on each other. It’s time to say ‘mea culpa’ and come together as fellow countrymen and women to build a better tomorrow. Or else, in another decade, we will still be writing negatively on ‘Black July’

**Editorial**

*Daily mirror* - 22/07/2019

**Extracts from an article by Malinda Seneviratne**

**ABOLITION: A bluff of presidential proportions**

Karu ought to know how constitutions are changed. The president is not the Legislative entirety of the country. Laws are made or amended by Parliament. Saying ‘I will abolish the executive presidency’ is therefore the claim of a political neophyte. When Karu says something like this, one can’t really decide whether to call it comic or tragic.

I have issues with those who propose the abolishing of the executive presidency and are dead silent about the 13th Amendment. Note: No one, not even the die-hard devolutionists, are calling for elections to be held to the now dissolved provincial councils. Devolution is dead, politically. It is resurrected only by Eelamists (open and closeted) to hoodwink Tamil voters who’ve been fed Eelamist historiography and duped on grand statehood dreams. The issue is that abolishing the executive presidency while keeping the 13th intact takes out an important safeguard against the 13th being used to facilitate the division of the country. Karu hasn’t uttered a word about the 13th Amendment. Neither do those, who have been vociferous about abolishing the executive presidency.

Now had he done so, i.e. called for the abolition of both, one might take him seriously. But this is a monumental bluff that is unbecoming of the man. We take it along with the noises made by other presidential hopefuls in his camp, Ranil Wickremesinghe and Sajith Premadasa. The former states he’s ready to bring in a new constitution (again something that Parliament has to handle, followed by a referendum). His backers commissioned to draft a constitution came up with a federal ‘solution’ all but in name. M.A. Sumanthiran is on record acknowledging that such subterfuge is necessary (for the Eelam project to be furthered). The latter talks of ‘maximum devolution’. What’s ‘maximum’? He has not spelled it out and one does not expect him to do so either. ‘Maximum devolution’ is as monumental a lie as ‘abolishing the executive presidency’. It’s the tired line tossed out to hook the Tamil voter.

He can say something though. He could answer the following questions. 1. What is the mechanism through which the executive presidency can be abolished (use two A4 papers, at least)? 2. What do you have to say about the 13th Amendment: was it legal, was it effective in terms of outcomes envisaged, does its existence threaten the unitary character of the state in the event the executive presidency is abolished, is it not a colossal waste of money and do people even want it (going by the absolute absence of agitation on account of the councils being non-functional)?

As things stand, this talk of abolishing the executive presidency is a bluff. A bluff of presidential proportions. Karu Jayasuriya, given his track record, does not deserve association with that kind of project. Some may be taking him for a ride. Maybe he wants the ride (I hope not!). Either way, ‘bluff’ is not something I believe he wants to be a part of. Let’s see.

*Daily mirror* - 19/09/2019

“To make democracy work, we must be a nation of participants, not simply observers. One who does not vote has no right to complain.”

- Louise L’amore

“A group of people that elect corrupt politicians, imposters, thieves and traitors are not victims... but accomplices”

- George Orwell
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