Indefinite strike over unresolved wage dispute cripples estate sector

The workers are demanding their basic daily wage be increased from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000.

– Sunday Times -09/12/2018
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Edited by Leela Isaac  Layout designed by Hashini Rajaratna
A COUNTRY IN TURMOIL

Since October 2018 the country has been in turmoil due to the political crisis caused by the difference of opinions between the two leaders of the National Unity government. Though it was named ‘yahapalanaya’ or Good governance, if ended up as ‘No governance’.

After the courts ruled that President Sirisena had violated the constitution of the country is appointing Rajapaksa the leader of the SLFP as the new PM and dissolving parliament, Ranil Wickramasinghe formed a fully UNP government without the support of the President’s party. Then it ceased to be a national government and the number of cabinet ministers had to be reduced to 30.

With this reduction in the number of cabinet ministers began the power struggle among the politicians which continues up to date. In their struggle to hold on to power, perks and positions they have become totally oblivious to the needs of the people. MPs from both parties clamour to get ministerial posts, using which they can amass more and more wealth, by way of commissions and bribes. Almost every Member of Parliament wants to be a minister of some sort, the latest category being non cabinet ministers! Soon we could have a cabinet of 225 ministers, doing nothing in the national interest but doing everything in their own self-interest.

In today’s parliament, almost all are corrupt, ignorant and inefficient. There are a few who may really want to serve the country but caught up in this den of thieves, they remain helpless. Though the parliament is supposed to be the law making assembly almost 80% of its members would have no idea of what they are supposed to do, many of them not having gone beyond grade nine or ten.

Many politicians today seem to have the support of the underworld of drug traffickers, bank robbers, murderers and criminals of all types. They help politicians to come to power and stay in power. At election times they provide the politicians with millions or billions if rupees, from their ill begotten wealth to buy votes. Therefore the candidates and the party that gets the most amounts of money gathers the majority of votes. There is no law in our country to monitor campaign funding. Over the years the people themselves have got used to this corrupt system and don’t hesitate to sell their votes to the highest bidder, even if he happens to be a criminal. Once in power he is expected to promote and protect the people who voted for him, even when they break the laws of the country.

Whatever party comes to power at the next elections the life of the ordinary citizens is not going to improve. The government members and the members of the opposition are both involved in corruption, therefore the opposition is totally ineffective. When in trouble they protect one another. There is no national policy or economic plan to take the country forward. While exports drop, imports keep increasing. The farmers, the plantation workers, those displaced during the war or the tsunami, parents and relatives of those who have been ‘disappeared’ during and after the war, the war widows, women who seek employment in the middle east, unemployed youth, university students, pensioners, all these groups face problems and express their grievances. But those in power have no time even to listen to the people, their discussions are all about the most important issue for them, that is how to win the next election.

With so many problems unsolved including the ethnic problem, the country could face anarchy and economic ruin. This ‘divided’ government is weak corrupt and inefficient. The people must realise the danger the country faces. Unless they give up their party loyalties, encourage and support men and women of integrity to enter politics, there is very little hope for this country, with this most corrupt parliament holding on to power forever.

Leela Isaac
March 2019
The Buddha’s Prophecy on Corruption

King Kosol of India had 16 strange dreams and he desired to find out whether they were good or bad or to what they meant. He approached the Buddha for clarification. As at today, corruption is the subject of the day and as such I quote Dream 9 and the Buddha’s Prophecy.

**The Dream**

King Kosol dreamt of a big pond. The water in the outer part of the pond was clean, clear and cool but the water in the middle was cloudy and muddy. Big and small animals fought to drink the muddy water but no animal ventured to drink the clean, clear and cool water.

**The Buddha’s Prophecy**

‘In the future people will be full of greed and desire. They would crave for more and more money and will never be satisfied. They will not want clean, honest low-paying jobs which will not satisfy their greed. They would seek political power and seats in National Assemblies so that they could rule the country and manage the finances of the countries. They would acquire large amounts of money regardless of how dirty the means were. That would occur all over the world. They would be tricky and corrupt without shame. It would become more and more severe resulting in disorder. There would be fights over positions in which they could gain more wealth. They would fight over who should get more money, who should get less and should get nothing.’

*(Reference: The Buddha’s 16 Prophecies)*

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**Extract from an article by Re. Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera**

On January 1 the ‘DAY OF PEACE’, Pope Francis had broached on this controversial subject for very good reasons in order to insist on politics as a service to peace based on ensuring social justice to all and respect for human dignity without any distinction and that, in the context of various political situations that are in vogue around the world at the moment as we enter the New Year.

To quote him directly: “Political office and political responsibility thus constantly challenge those called to the service of their country to make every effort to protect those who live there and to create the conditions for a worthy and just future. If exercised with basic respect for the life, freedom and dignity of persons, political life can indeed become an outstanding form of charity.

Going into specifics, the Pope states: ‘We think of corruption in its varied forms: the misappropriation of public resources, the exploitation of individuals, the denial of rights, the flaunting of community rules, dishonest gain, the justification of power by force or the arbitrary appeal to raison d’état and the refusal to relinquish power. To which we can add xenophobia, racism, lack of concern for the natural environment, the plundering of natural resources for the sake of quick profit and contempt for those forced into exile’. Thus he has given us the full litany of modern evils that scar politics and depriving thereby the people of the immensely large quantum of benefits and blessings that can be accrued from the just exercise of political power and authority as a genuine and noble service to society at large.

His peace letter begins with the following observation: "We know that the thirst for power at any price leads to abuses and injustice. Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction”. We know that politics calls for great sense of responsibility since it concerns the life of people and that for politicians, their genuine, sincere and authentic service is not only just a matter of duty but one of conscience and moral concern. Good politicians are an asset to the people as they journey towards social peace and material prosperity while bad politicians are the bane of the people for they will certainly fall short of the ideals and the hopes that people at large have placed in them.

It is a very serious and morally reprehensible breach of trust, the bad effects of which will disrupt the entire social fabric of a people or a country. If politicians are genuinely committed to the service of the people and be catalysts in their journey to economic prosperity, social cohesion working towards building political stability, the path to progress of a country is clearly assured. Bad politics will disrupt peace, create divisive conditions and stagnate growth. It is therefore the bounden duty of the people to choose good politicians to ensure their common good and all-round well-being. Pope Francis’s reflection on politics as a service to peace is a timely theme for all who are engaged in this noble profession to give it a serious thought.

-Daily Mirror- 14/01/2019
Killings of two PCs in Batticaloa: Ex-LTTE cadre arrested, three taken in for questioning

Three ex-LTTE cadres have been taken in for questioning in Batticaloa, by a seven-member special Police team over Friday morning’s killings of two Policemen at Vavunativu, in the Batticaloa District.

One ex-LTTE cadre, Rasanayagam Sarvanandam (48), has been arrested in Vattakatchi in Kilinochchi. Four other suspected ex-LTTE cadres were taken in for questioning. Two of them were known as K. Prabhakaran and Ajanthan both from the East.

Prabhakaran was taken in for questioning by the STF in Thambiluvil in Ampara.

Another two who were taken in for questioning were released yesterday after confirming that they had no link to the murders.

According to information, two Eastern Province senior most top political wing leaders, of the routed......Tamil Tigers, who survived the military onslaught had funded the Maveerar Day celebrations for the first time. One of them is living in South India and other in the UK, it is alleged.

The brutal killings of the two Policemen - Walpita Gamage Niroshan Indika Prasanna (34) and Ganesh Dinesh (28) was reported on Friday morning when another officer had gone on duty.

The dead Policemen’s pistols were also stolen, it was revealed.

The funerals are expected to take place in Kalmunai and Galle today (Sunday).

According to an inside source, the murderers are alleged to have links to the Maaveerar commemoration held in Thandiyadi in the Vavunativu Police Division on 27 November 2018.

Thandiyadi was an LTTE-controlled area and currently an STF camp is located in the area.

Since the STF camp is there, in the last three years, people of the area could not commemorate Maveerar Day.

Apparently, an unregistered organization called ‘Thesathin Vergal Amaippu’, led by K. Prabhakaran has been actively engaged in flood relief programmes etc in the last one year in the Eastern Province. This organization has also been collecting funds for the recently-held Maveerar Day celebrations. They have collected money from shops and business establishments in the area.

Prabhakaran was taken in for questioning by the STF in Thambiluvil in Ampara.

It is alleged that the last month’s Maveerar Day celebration was funded by the Tamil Diaspora.

It is also alleged that after the event the place had been unattended and flags and other items used at the event were scattered and not removed. Apparently these two policemen had ordered the people there to clear the place and this had irked some men who had been watching the two policemen.
Despite presidential order to release lands by 31 Dec

ARMY STILL HOLDS 14,769 ACRES

Despite President Maithripala Sirisena’s directives to the relevant authorities to release lands, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, to their original owners, before 31 December, the Sri Lanka Army still holds a total of 14,769 acres.

The Army has assured that 263.55 acres of lands to be released out of a total 14,769 acres being held.

According to statistics, the Army was occupying a total of 12,200 acres of State and 2,569 acres of private lands, in both Northern and Eastern Provinces, as of 25 November 2018.

Army Commander Lt. General Mahesh Senanayake, in a communiqué to the Northern Province Governor has emphasised that the Army will release another 1,099 acres of State lands, mainly in forest reserves of the Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar Districts, to the respective District Secretaries within the first two weeks of January 2019. The Sri Lanka Army alone had held a total of 84,524 acres of land (private and State) in the North and East by 18 May 2009 and had released a total of 69,754 acres by 25 November 2018.

Displaced persons, civil society activists and organizations including the People’s Alliance for the Right to Land, have written to President Sirisena urging him to fulfil his promise that all lands in the North and East would be released to their original owners before 31 December.

Copies of the letter were also sent to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and leaders of political parties.

On 4 October, the Presidential Media Division reported that President Sirisena had instructed the authorities to complete the process of releasing lands in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to their original owners, before 31 December, after resolving all the issues. The instructions according to the Media report had been given at a meeting of the Presidential Task Force to monitor development projects conducted in the two Provinces, the letter stated.

“We, whose lands have been taken away from us forcibly and are still suffering immensely nearly 10 years after the end of the war, demand that you keep this promise and ensure that the authorities abide by instructions you gave them several months ago. We also demand that the Prime Minister and leaders of all political parties and alliances support this fully and demand that the President implement this decision.

We are deeply disappointed that there has been inadequate resettlement assistance and other restrictions and obstructions they have been faced in this regard which have hampered their resettlement,” the letter further read.

Many of the displaced communities from the North, are also currently facing great hardship due to the recent floods, resulting in further displacement, damage to property and possessions and destruction of their paddy lands and thereby loss of livelihood.

Reported by Gagani Weerakoon

- Ceylon Today - 30/12/2018

Excerpts from an article by Ruki Fernando

Keppapulavu: Land Struggle Reaches Boiling Point after 700 days of protest

“We want to sleep, cook, eat in our own house and farm our own land”

700 days is a long time for a day and night protest outside an Army camp. Since March 1, 2017, the people of Keppapulavu, located in the Mullaitheevu district in Northern Sri Lanka, have been doing just that. They have had to brave intimidation and harassment from the Army, Police and intelligence agencies, and also brave the sun, rain, heat, cold and dust. They have faced challenges in continuing their livelihoods, sending children to school and caring for their elderly. It is the longest running community-led day and night continuous protest for land in Sri Lanka. They have also engaged in protests in Colombo and elsewhere, and have participated in meetings with government politicians, local Tamil politicians, government officials, the media, religious clergy, representatives of international community and others.

Their stand inspired similar protests. They tasted some success, when a part of the Army occupied Keppapulavu was released in December 2017. But the protest for the release of the full extent of their lands continued.

-Daly Mirror - 28/01/2019
Deprived of their dwelling places for nearly 10 years when will we get our lands back?

"Every year we observe a period of fasting for 21-days prior to holding a religious festival at our temple. Now, however for the past 10 years we have not observed any of these rituals. It is frustrating to have to live indefinitely in a makeshift shelter when we have our very own ancestral land. Please return our lands back to us. I’m only asking for my land. Why doesn’t the Army understand our plight? It is our land.

We are not forcibly asking for some other land. We have lived here for many years.

We need to go back home. Our President should release our lands. We have had enough of this agony!" A weeping Thangavelayutham Sivapathapushpam shared her plight with Ceylon Today.

Sivapathapushpam is one of the many lamenting residents of Keppapilavu-Mullaitivu awaiting the Security Forces release the remaining 171 acres of land in the heart of the city where an Army camp is currently situated.

"I wanted to live on my land. I did not just leave my land in 2008 to dwell on the streets. Why has the government neglected our demands? We are longing to return to our lands. We have visited Colombo on at least five occasions so far and have begged from many authorities to release our lands. We have waited agonisingly for ten years now. Some authorities give us assurances that our lands would soon be returned on a particular date. We turn back with hope and little happiness but when the date arrives we find that we were only duped and no further action was taken," she said.

People of Keppapilavu left the Menik Farm in 2012 for resettlement. Initially they had to live in temporary shelters as soon as they were released to Keppapilavu but later the security forces set up a model village for these people. Some families agreed to live in this village while the majority of them retorted against this decision and began to fight for their land rights on 1 March 2017.

"We are not against the government, reconciliation, the security forces, or the country’s peace. We are only asking them to return what rightfully belongs to us. Some families from our village, who are currently settled at the Keppapilavu model village, are now producing illicit liquor (Kasippu) as their livelihood. When their livelihood lands are under the control of security forces, these families did not have any choices. Students are now consuming illicit liquor and have skipped schooling," she stressed.

She further thanked the people from South for the solidarity they have extended for the struggle of Keppapilavu residents.

--Ceylon Today—27/01/2019

Excerpts from an article by Mirudhula Thambiah

Flash floods in North

Last week was horrifying to the people in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu as they experienced flash floods. Many families from both districts were affected by the unpredicted rainfall (370mm). The most affected were the people in Kilinochchi; their houses, paddy lands and other belongings went under water. People and some agricultural organisations were of the opinion that the calamity occurred since the spill gates of the Iranamadu Tank were opened.

The Iranamadu Tank which was built with sponsorship of the Asian Development Bank was opened by President Maithripala Sirisena on 7 December, post renovations. The capacity of the tank was raised from 34 feet to 36 feet during renovations.

The Tank was built to provide water to the Jaffna Peninsula and Kilinochchi District. However, some people were against this, therefore the water in the Iranamadu Tank is now only utilised for Kilinochchi.

Those affected by floods blamed the Authorities for not issuing warnings regarding floods. However, Kilinochchi District Irrigation Department Director, N. Suthakaran denied the allegations claiming that overflow of the Iranamadu Tank was not the only reason for heavy floods.

-Ceylon Today - 30/12/2018

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-Ceylon Today - 30/12/2018
Corruption: Past & Present

Excerpts from an article by Rajeewa Jayaweera

Executive Presidency Misconceptions

Regrettably, the chances of successfully implementing a system as in France for the greater good of the people of Sri Lanka is nonexistent due to the quality and caliber of our political leaders who make politics a family business. No Presidential or Parliamentary system of governance will succeed as long as such self-serving leaders are at the helm. They are also backed by equally self-serving lackeys.

One leader, without gracefully retiring after two tenures as Head of State tinkered with the Constitution to enable him to contest and remain in office till the baton could be passed to his offspring. Fortunately, the constitutional amendment (18A) he engineered was reserved by the government that followed.

Another leader simply refuses to fade away despite being repeatedly rejected by the people. He presides over his political party like a tin-pot dictator while making grandiose speeches on democracy. He too tinkered with the constitution (19A). Whereas the reintroduction of term limits for Presidents was welcome, there were other undesirable elements included for narrow political gain in the poorly drafted 19A.

Into the fray came a traditional backroom boy for nearly three decades who contested as a ‘Common Candidate.’ His inexpense in governance and newly developed craving to remain in office notwithstanding his undertaking given during his oath-taking ceremony not to contest the Presidency again has created the present imbroglio in the country.

Hardly material for the all-important office of Executive President.

How lawmakers prosper with taxpayers’ money

Drafting a new constitution with no perks and benefits for politicians : Kodituwakku

“People who are occupying office in the legislature and executive are required to hold public office for public good,” said Nagananda Kodituwakku, Attorney-at-Law and public litigation activist.

“Therefore nobody is expected to rob. Sri Lanka is a representative democracy. After October 26 it is very clear that all 225 representatives have robbed the nation with absolute impunity. When the Rs. 100,000 additional allowance was given, nobody refused it except for Ranjan Ramanayake. Even the members of the People’s Liberation Front (JVP) accepted it.”

Speaking further about the abuse of public funds Kodituwakku pointed out that when a minister takes office, his staff comprise entirely of family members.

“Then they get the car permit and allowances for petrol, diesel etc. Car permits come under Excise Duty (Special Provisions) Act Section 3 (c).

These are tax-free car permits and such tax exemptions are given for economic development. Therefore it cannot be abused for the import of vehicles. This has become a lawless land. They obtain permits to sell and abuse public funds. There are ministers who sell permits for millions of rupees simply because there’s no rule of law. Some of them don’t even know that selling a vehicle permit is unlawful.”

In his run-up to be the Presidential Candidate in 2020, Kodituwakku said he is in the process of drafting a new Constitution where there are no pensions, perks or benefits for politicians.

“We want people to attend Parliament to save the nation and not to rob public money. In fact all these unlawful events take place because the citizens are not concerned about their own rights.”

SL has a Rs. 10.5 trillion debt thanks to corrupt politicians : Ramanayake

Known to be the only Member of Parliament to have rejected an allowance, an official residence or vehicles, UNP Parliamentarian Ranjan Ramanayake has certainly set an example. “The salary is a very small aspect of their income,” he said airing his views about the exorbitant salaries of ministers and abuse of public funds. “They have ways and means of getting more income. Many of them have liquor and licences for sand (Continued on page 9)
Excerpts from an article by Nirmala Kannangara

Inside Story of the First Ever Foreign Indictment of A Lankan Ambassador

It was revealed last month that former Sri Lankan Ambassador to Washington D.C., Jaliya Chitran Wickramasuriya is facing criminal prosecution in the United States of America, according to an indictment and supporting documents unsealed on December 20, 2018 in the United States District Court for the District of Colombia.

The indictment, filed under seal on May 1, 2018, charges Wickramasuriya with two counts of wire fraud, two counts of money laundering and one count of visa fraud. The charges stem from allegations that in early 2013, Wickramasuriya and others embezzled about US $332,000 from the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in connection with a property purchased in Washington D.C. that was intended to serve as the new Sri Lankan embassy. He was also charged with committing immigration fraud in connection with an immigration application that he signed in the United States in 2014. The US Government has requested an arrest warrant for Wickramasuriya and intends to arraign him before court.

-Daily Mirror - 09/01/2019

“True equality means holding everyone accountable in the same way, regardless of race, gender, faith, ethnicity or political ideology”

-Monica Crowley -
More portfolios; a reward for protecting Govt. during crisis?

Two more non-Cabinet ministers and a deputy minister were sworn in on Friday bringing the number of non-Cabinet ministers to five. Earlier, in the wake of Ranil Wickremesinghe being reappointed Prime Minister last month, three non-Cabinet ministers had been appointed.

The new appointments must be a response to the grumbling by many ruling party MPs who had been sidelined when the UNF government was re-instituted last month due to the 30-member limit imposed on the Cabinet by the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Also there are new ministerial aspirants among the backbenchers of the ruling party as well. These grumbles have been contending that they were unable to serve the people without ministerial portfolios and had taken great pains in protecting the government during the recent political and Constitutional crises.

It is vividly clear that the portfolios of newly-introduced non-Cabinet ministers are a ploy by the government to increase the number of ministers at the expense of the tax-payers, as President Ranasinghe Premadasa introduced the posts of State Ministers. Earlier, the government was attempting to increase the number of Cabinet ministers by at least two, arguing that the 30-member Cabinet specified by the 19th Amendment did not include the President and the Prime Minister.

How cleverly has the government violated the 19th Amendment? You can’t increase the number of ministers to more than 30. But you can appoint any number of non-Cabinet ministers with same powers and privileges as the Cabinet ministers are vested with. The argument that Parliament members cannot serve the people without ministerial portfolios is ludicrous. It was in a way an admission that they were doing nothing for the people. According to their contention all 225, including the Speaker have to be ministers, so that they can serve the people.

Do all ministers serve the people? Can one cite a single decision taken by the Transport Ministers after 1957 to provide a decent, disciplined and efficient public transport service which has now become a nightmare to the commuters? We have ten transport ministers, including those at the provincial level. But have they ever thought about the millions of man-hours wasted on the roads due to the congestion and attitude of the operators of bus and train services which is hostile to the commuters? We had a very few education ministers who had attempted to transform the education on par with the economic needs of the country. How many agriculture ministers or irrigation ministers thought about the tens of thousands of abandoned lakes in the dry zone? How many of them thought about proper marketing facilities for the farmers?

Yet, a recent newspaper report said that the government spends Rs.7.5 million per month to maintain a minister! Hence, increasing the number of ministers without any justification is a national crime.

-The Daily Mirror - 15/01/2019

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The Eran report

State Minister of Finance Eran Wickremaratne was not expressing rocket science when he said last week that State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) need independent governance and 'fit and proper persons' appointed to run them. He has also recommended linking with a strategic partner, preferably non-competitive, to bring SriLankan Airlines into which tax money of the Lankan people have long been poured as if into a bottomless pit. The national carrier has been searching for long for such a partner without success. It is clear that no such partner will be found if the government does not agree to clean the airline’s balance sheet by writing off or absorbing the massive losses it carries in its books.

Given the present state of relations between President Maithripala Sirisena and the UNP, it is all to the good that Sirisena appointed a UNPer to head the committee which was charged with reporting within two weeks. It kept to this deadline. There is nobody better than Wickremaratne in the current political establishment to have undertaken this job. He had a fairly long career in banking and eventually rose to the position of Chief Executive Officer of the National Development Bank. At considerable personal financial sacrifice, he gave up this position to enter politics.

The Wickremaratne Committee has recommended that the government retains the white elephant carrier as it would be very expensive to wind it up. Its recommendation

(Continued on page 11)
is that the government and the local private sector hold 51% while the rest be sold under its proposal. Hopefully a foreign investment partner would come in although the long-running search thus far has found no takers. About two years ago, a San Francisco-based private equity firm, TPG, with a track record of turning round losing airlines after extensive had after extensive due diligence decided not to pursue its bid. Attracting fresh proposals will undoubtedly need sugar coating the pill.

Hardly a day passes without fresh scandals at Sri Lankan Airlines emerging before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry now investigating its affairs. These are highlighted in the media and the sorry state of affairs that was allowed to prevail for many years is constantly in the limelight. The former president who appointed his planter brother-in-law to chair the airline’s board, rather than hiding his head in shame about what happened during is kinsman’s watch is waxing eloquent about the doings of his successors who have too often been no better than their predecessors despite their being elected in 2015 on a lofty platform of good governance – yahapalana.

-Editorial
-Sunday Island- 3/02/2019

Is Customs Dept ‘Customised’ for some VIPs? Charles exposes corrupt cargo consignments

Ex-Sri Lanka Customs Director General (DG) Mrs. P. S. M. Charles, who was removed from her post on 30 January 2018, opines that one of the reasons for her removal from the post was due to her and her officers investigating several serious consignment scams, which had political links.

One of the biggest detections made recently was the Pepper “transshipment cargo” which is a BoI project under the Hub Operation. According to Assistant Secretary, Customs Staff Officers’ Union, Sudath de Silva, the pepper that was imported from India, is processed here and then exported as a Sri Lankan product without a single penny imposed on India under the Indo-Sri Lanka Trade Agreement.

“The entire service brings no revenue for Sri Lanka because it goes as Sri Lanka produced pepper and there is no Customs duty imposed on India because it is a ‘product originated from Sri Lanka’.

He also pointed out there is another scam within this scam, where the quota for this transshipment is 2,500MT per year and the 143 containers they have imported from India this time had a pepper transshipment exceeding the quota amounting to 2,800MT. “This is depriving the poor Sri Lankan farmers’ pepper produce”, he said.

“In another scam of beedi-wrapping leaves, container were detected to go as ‘controlled delivery’. He also endorses the beedi-wrapping leaves coming from India, was one of the highest duty recovering commodities duty stamped at Rs 4,200 per Kg.

“We found one of our officers also being involved. The team monitored this and detected it out of the Port and brought all the culprits to book excepting for one person. He has not come to Customs to give a statement. He is absconding and our team who want to arrest him have come under pressure not to arrest him. It is from a Cabinet Minister from a ‘different political party’.

“When the scam came to light, we found several political henchmen behind this. The DG was threatened to call off the investigation and also urging her to transfer officers investigating the transfer cargo of pepper.”

The Sri Lanka Customs that operates under the Finance Ministry found her to be inefficient unable to reach the Rs.1.69 trillion revenue target set by Finance Minister Managala Samaraweera.

She also emphasises another incident where 40 containers full of beedi-wrapping leaves from Tamil Nadu (mostly from Tuticorin) has gone unchecked through air cargo and she has recalled the files and currently investigations were in progress. “Normally, once we start investigations we don’t stop half way through.”

Another famous automobile company has been found of revenue fraudulence and under her that case has been revisited. Charles has also appointed a team to investigate the case.

She recalls an importer who brings down old vehicle spare parts and assembles it here before selling. “We have confiscated eight of his containers for investigations,” she said.
With her transfer to the Finance Ministry and the appointment of a new DG, all hell broke loose with Customs officials and several unions who are currently continuing on their go-slow, alleging that her transfer was also about the Department holding investigations.

“I took disciplinary actions on wrongdoers in the Customs, nearly 15 persons got caught. This was not done in the last 15 years or so,” she notes.

She also says that she abstained from politics influencing her work and that’s the reason why the Unions was in favour of what she was doing but some who have political affiliations did not approve of her.

By Sulochana Ramiah Mohan - Ceylon Today - 03/02/2019

Act quickly to deactivate the drug barons

Sri Lanka is a country that’s blessed four times over with the hallowed teachings and tenets of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. But sadly though, these four major world religions have not had that much of an impact when it came to liberating this country from the clutches of narcotics. There have been several awareness programmes and anti-narcotic marches organised by religious leaders while Narcotic Bureau officials assisted by Police, STF and Navy personnel continue to crack down hard on the smuggling, trafficking and distributing of narcotics such as Heroin, Marijuana, Cocaine, Ice and Ecstasy, but the use of these deadly drugs is seemingly spreading at an alarming rate making one wonder whether enough is being done to eliminate this menace.

- Editorial - Daily Mirror - 07/02/2019

FM should resign for removing Customs DG: Opposition

Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera should resign from his post for removing Customs Director General P. S. M Charles, the Opposition said yesterday.

MP Vasudeva Nanayakkara said Ms. Charles had been removed because she had continued to investigate incidents of smuggling at Customs, irritating some individuals.

"By reinstating Ms. Charles, Minister Samaraweera has admitted that it was wrong to remove her from the post of Customs Director General. The work-to-rule campaign launched by the Customs workers against this move resulted in a loss of over Rs.1,000 billion to the state,” he told a news briefing. Meanwhile, addressing the news briefing, MP Mahinda Yapa Abeywardane said all the conditions made before reinstating Ms. Charles should be withdrawn.

"These conditions had been placed only to scare off and threaten Ms. Charles. Already, containers full of spies such as pepper had been released without paying duty to the Customs by some higher-ups”, he said.

Reported by Lahiru Pothmulla - Daily Mirror - 07/02/2019

CHANGE IS VITAL

In the present context, change is absolutely vital, not just necessary but absolutely vital! ‘Country first’ should be everybody’s prerogative, very specially the politicians. When it is time to put the country first, it is time for all of you hypocrites we call politicians to go home. Taking into account what has been amassed, all of you have stashed away not just here in Sri Lanka but in foreign banks too; it should be a free ride for you with nothing to worry about.

There are countless ways in which our parliamentarians can become rich overnight. The goodies don’t end there though; he is entitled to a duty-free vehicle permit which can also be disposed of at an astronomical gain – the litany of gains gets better; their salaries are supplemented by numerous allowances and they are even paid to attend Parliament! What a gross understatement of amassing wealth when these poor, deprived morons make doubly certain they are included in every contract in their constituencies; fatten their bank accounts by giving out government contracts on which they get a kick back and when the load of money becomes an overload, it can be conveniently deposited in foreign banks. We now know why they won’t go home – they won’t unless we send them back by not voting for them! That is our sacred duty; do not vote for them and bring them back!

-Daily Mirror-
Excerpts from an article by Sanjeewa Fernando

Madush is the Tip the iceberg looks nothing like him

The filthy lucre from drug peddling, ransom collecting, kick-backs, abduction for money, commission from multi-billion projects, is not a flame that only Madush has been drawn in to; it is a common cause nowadays. Woe unto those who think that Madush and the like are men apart though they are hot and sumptuous in terms of news worthiness. More and more individuals are vying to stick a finger in the honey pot. It is not only those with tattoos, gold chains, funny haircuts and heroin peddling mistresses who are in the game.

No men apart

They are in national costumes, military uniform, priestly garbs and even professional attire. It is only when the more extreme and obnoxious figures like Madush get involved, the search light falls.

Such an overarching umbrella of black business, not in the fringe, but in the very core of institutions and agencies mandated with upholding the sovereign power of the citizens, do pose a formidable threat to our sovereignty. They influence people’s representatives, rig elections, bribe law enforcement, flaunt justice with ill gotten money, make an impact on policy making by virtue of their funding of politicians; they are at the disposal of corporate giants or big businessmen, most of whom are with murky origins. It is a conglomerate, an empire! They have usurped sovereignty of the people without realizing it. Their filthy money funds political parties from either sides of the divide. Whoever wins, they have little issue.

The likes of Madush are different to the Maru Siras, the Podi Wijes or the Cheenas, albeit all are uniformly violent. With incarceration or execution of the latter types, the threat to society is averted or at least diminished. They have no bunches of lawyers to run to courts to bail them out. They do not have politicians attending their funerals or political weddings being funded by their blood tainted money. They were not there doing business. Rather they were impetuous, emotionally driven, revengeful and extremely violent individuals. Yet the types such as Madush are like the film character ‘Terminator’ in the film by that name. They are interminable, tenacious, influential, well backed by power and therefore impenetrable by law. They are in big business unlike the Maru Sira and the ilk. Madush might be incarcerated for life or even executed. But like the ‘Terminator’, Madush is not the name of an individual. It is the reference to one unit in a long line of manufacture that produces them.

Just that this particular unit Madush has tinted hair, gaudy tattoos, stand out gold chains and funny haircuts! He is the tip of the iceberg; those who constitute the base, do not look like him at all!

They look very different and they pose a threat to the sovereignty of the country, from within!

-Daily Mirror - 20/02/2019

To mark the fourth anniversary of Bond scam JVP led VAC protest march on February 27

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) led Voice Against Corruption (VAC) is to stage a protest march from Galle Face to Presidential Secretariat on Wednesday February 27 to mark the fourth anniversary of the Bond scam.

JVP MP, Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) Chairman Sunil Handunetti and its (VAC) National Organiser Wasantha Samarasinghe told the media yesterday that suspicion is mounting gradually that more and more people are involved in it with the continuous delay in revealing every detail on it.

“There is no reason for the President to hide it anymore as we in the COPE and the Presidential Commission had found out all details on it,” Mr. Handunetti said.

Mr. Samarasinghe said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is also trying to avoid talking about it by merely saying the government had frozen Rs.12 billion belonging to Perpetual Treasuries (PTL) which is the prime suspect of the case.”

This Rs.12 billion is not an asset belonging to PTL but people’s money which PTL had used for its transactions. Also we find PTL Chief going to Opposition Leader’s son’s wedding.

(Continued on page 14)
He also called for the publication of the document which the Presidential Commission had come across. Mr. Samarasinghe said this document contains the names of politicians, other prominent persons to whom PTL had given cash.

"The objective our protest would be to question President as to why he had swept the bond issue under the carpet,” he said.

PAC also called for action against those who have been found guilty of various offences by the special presidential commission on serious crimes.

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**Bond scam no fault of mine, says Ranil**

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Parliament yesterday said that those who question him about the bond scam should read the report of the Presidential Commission which probed the issue as it had not faulted him for anything.

The Prime Minister said this while winding up the debate on his expenditure head in Parliament last evening. He was actually responding to few question raised by UPFA MP Vasudeva Nannayakka earlier during the day. "Has Mr. Nannayakka read the bond commission report yet?” he asked.

Responding to another question raised by Mr. Nanayakkara, whether Mr. Wickremesinghe was aware that he was the third respondent of the case he filed in the Supreme Courts against the privatization of Lanka Marine Services Ltd, Mr. Wickremesinghe said the transaction was done in 2000 and therefore it was not relevant as neither he nor Mr. Nanayakkara were ministers in that government.

He said the oil refinery in Hambantota would be commissioned in few weeks together with the industrial zone there. "More zones will come up in Milleniya, Trincomalee while we have already launched another zone in Bingiriya.”

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**Singapore rejects SL President’s claims on harbouring Mahendran**

Singapore today rejected Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena’s allegation it was sheltering a former central bank chief who was wanted for fraud, saying Colombo failed to provide documents to support its extradition request, AFP reported.

President Sirisena said he appealed to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in January to return Mahendran, who is believed to be in Singapore, but claimed nothing had been done. A spokesperson for Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said authorities in the city-state have been cooperating with their Sri Lankan counterparts on the case since January.

However, Sri Lanka’s request to return Mahendran "lacked certain information required under Singapore’s extradition laws" and the city-state has requested Colombo to provide them, the spokesperson told AFP.

"To date, Singapore has not received the requested supporting information and documents as yet. We look forward to receiving the requested information from Sri Lanka, so that we can consider the request further in accordance with our laws,” the spokesperson said.

Singapore can extradite fugitives to declared Commonwealth countries, which includes Sri Lanka.

In February last year, Mahendran was named a key suspect in the multi-million Dollar bond scam in Sri Lanka and fled abroad, failing to appear in court to respond to charges. A damning presidential report into the scandal accused Mahendran of insider trading and recommended the state recover its losses from Mahendran and his son-in-law.

Sri Lanka’s central bank also launched a forensic audit to ascertain the extent of insider trading during Mahendran’s tenure at the bank.

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Reported by Yohan Perera - Daily Mirror - 25/02/2019

Reported by Yohan Perera & Ajith Siriwardana - Daily Mirror – 15/03/2019

Reported by Yohan Perera - Daily Mirror - 21/03/2019
Less that 20% MPs use free laptops on their tables

ECO-NEXT - Less than 20 percent of Sri Lankan legislators use their official laptops or have registered e-mail addresses, and many opposed the government's digitalization attempts, a minister said.

"We have laptops on our parliament tables but less than 20 percent have used it," Telecommunication, Sport and Foreign Employment Minister Harin Fernando said.

He was speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies’ New Thinkers’ Symposium 2019 which was held under the theme ‘Technology and Economic Transformation’.

"I have the statistics, and I know they haven’t even registered an email address," he said.

Sri Lanka ministers are also opposing attempts at the use of advanced technology in the style of those who opposed new technology in an earlier age.

Fernando said he tried to bring in digital cabinet papers but senior ministers opposed it due to a lack of digital familiarity.

He said some senior ministers are against digital penetration in the country, and do not want children learning in digital classrooms.

"The older generation (of ministers) thinks it’s completely weird and wrong and it will completely corrupt," Fernando said.

Most Sri Lankan legislators innovation and are protecting legacy local industries which would be wiped out if faced with global competition.

-Sunday Island - 24/03/2019

PTL director now at Lake House – JVP

The JVP, yesterday (23), in Parliament, revealed that one of the directors of Perpetual Treasuries Limited (PTL) has been appointed as the finance director of Lake House.

"He is a defendant in the Central Bank Treasury Bonds scam. His passport has been impounded. This Government is under Arjuna Mahendran’s thumb," Anura Kumara Dissanayake said.

Responding, Minister Ruwan Wijewardene admitted that he has in fact, made the appointment, despite being aware that the individual was a director of Perpetual Treasuries.

"It is true that I have appointed him. I know that he was a director of Perpetual Treasuries. He hasn’t been convicted in the Bonds scam case as yet. The passport has been impounded due to Court procedure. I appointed him in gratitude to his grandfather’s contribution to the Lake House. In addition, he has the required qualifications too. I don’t want to steal from the Lake House. Now, I’m not connected to the Wijeya Newspapers Limited either,” he stated.

“Thank you very much Minister. In gratitude to Ranjan Hulugalle’s grandfather, you have appointed him as the finance director of Lake House. He has worked for Perpetual Treasuries in gratitude to his grandfather,” Dissanayake quipped.

-Reported by J.T. de Silva
-Ceylon Today - 24/03/2019

“When politics is no longer a mission but a profession, politicians become more self-serving than public servants”

- Emmanuel Macron -

15
Sri Lanka seeks divine help to end power crisis

Sri Lanka's state energy provider sought divine intervention Thursday to break a crippling power shortage, dispatching envoys to the country's north to offer holy water to a tree sacred to Buddhists.

The island nation has endured widespread energy shortages all week as a severe drought bites into hydro-electricity production, resulting in unpredictable blackouts and emergency measures to slash usage.

Some businesses were hoarding fuel for generators, fearing the situation would not improve, as hours-long rolling outages forced Sri Lankans to sleep outdoors to escape the heat.

In the hope of provoking much-needed rain, the Ceylon Electricity Board said it would offer alms to the Sri Maha Bodi, a tree in Anuradhapura revered by the island's Buddhists.

Pots of water blessed by monks were sent by motorcade to the Bodi, believed to have grown from a sapling of an older tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment more than 2,500 years ago.

"There will be several offerings at the bodi today and lunch will be offered to monks tomorrow after overnight religious ceremonies," a CEB official said Thursday.

The tree is so revered in the Buddhist-majority country of 21 million that it is guarded round-the-clock by heavily armed security forces.

The energy board this week abandoned efforts to stimulate rain through cloud seeding after earlier attempts failed.

About a quarter of the island's electricity is generated by hydro plants, but capacity is approaching zero after the monsoon failed to bring adequate rains.

The Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka said it would seek legal action against the state-owned Ceylon Electricity Board after receiving complaints about unscheduled power cuts being imposed across the country.

The capital, Colombo, has not been affected but daily restrictions are being imposed everywhere else in Sri Lanka and residents have complained of random periods of "load shedding" without warning for the better part of a week.

The shortages conjured up memories of the island's worst-ever power shortage in 1996, when the entire country went without electricity for four straight days.

Reported by Colombo AFP
-Sunday Island—31/03/2019

**Excerpts from an article by Niranjala Ariyawansha**

Power crisis worsens

All citizens, except for those in Colombo City, are literally in the dark from time to time for up to three, four and five hours, exposing the extent of a serious power and energy crisis. The reason is that no major power plants have been built in the country during the past several years and as a result the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) imposed 'unofficial scheduled power cuts' across the country to control discrepancies arising due to increasing demand. These had to be named 'unofficial scheduled power cuts', since no official approval has been received from either the Ministry of Power, Energy and Business Development or the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL).

**Entire power grid at risk**

Engineers pointed out that since maximum capacity power is being generated through all power plants, a breakdown could occur at any power plant at any moment. The reason is due to the lack of power plants and high demand, no power plant has been deactivated and maintenance carried out. Previously, as hydropower plants ran continuously during rainy seasons, thermal power plants were halted and repaired. But now, all Power Plants operate during both rainy and dry seasons. They pointed out that a breakdown could occur at any time.

The Minister is misleading the public on the prevailing power crisis, hiding the truth from the people and behaving jestingly at a moment when the crisis has gone so far. "The Minister thinks he will lose popularity if power cuts are announced publicly. But what he cannot understand is that when he is playing around with basic requirements of the people, any sort of popularity he did have would be completely destroyed," a top official of CEB said.

It has to be emphasised that politicians exist to subjectively manage a crisis and not to use it to build an image of themselves. However as all responsible parties did not carry out their job properly, the country is now in the dark.

-Ceylon Today-24/03/2019
Rebel cadre turned politician rules out re-emergence of war

K. Thulasi is a former LTTE cadre who had been well versed in handling firearms when LTTE activities were at its height in the north. However, he had given up the use of firearms during the final stage of separatist war that took place in Mulliwaikkal in Jaffna and surrendered to the Sri Lanka Army. Following rehabilitation, under the Sri Lanka Army, he entered politics and became the leader of a political party on behalf of militants. The political party he leads operates under the name ‘Liberation Campaigners of the North’. This is how he expressed his views about the war that concluded in the north in reply to questions asked by journalists. "According to the present political system in the country, I state with responsibility that no such war would erupt again in this country. If somebody thinks that a solution can be found by means of such a war, it is an act of sheer folly because I do not think that such a person has gained the experience in war like us. I can talk about the war with responsibility because I continued gaining experience as a militant and handled firearms until the finals hours of the war in Mulliwaikkal. All leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), including Prabhakaran, were killed in the presence of our eyes. After that incident, we surrendered to the Army for want of a leader," said Thulasi before answering a barrage of questions.

-Interviewed by Romesh Madushanka
-Daily Mirror - 13/12/2018

Reconciliation starts with the majority – Sritharan

Tamil National Alliance MP S. Sritharan, who is preparing to travel to Geneva to attend the United Nation Human Right Council (UNHRC) session, said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s attempting to bring about reconciliation based on ‘forgive and forget’ process, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa, should be decided by the Tamil community, because they are ‘still in the dark’ not knowing what happened to the people who surrendered during the war.

Sritharan, who will be attending the UNHRC session, where Sri Lanka would be taken for review on 20 March 2019, told Ceylon Today that the Government cannot introduce new strategies every time they find it difficult to address the issue.

"He was chief guest at the Kilinochchi event and he made such a statement and there was no time to discuss the matter during the event. After we spoke, he delivered his speech and we did not know what he would be saying at the meeting. We did not have a chance to respond, too,” Sritharan stated.

He also added that Northerners lack proper income and were devastated by the war. "So, the Premier cannot ask the Tamils to reconcile like the South Africans did, it makes no sense.” South Africans are 80 per cent native people and 20 per cent white people; where the minority suppressed the majority. But in Sri Lanka it’s the 72 per cent dominating the Tamils, so reconciliation and similar processes should begin from the majority. It is they who need to be advocated about reconciliation, he noted.

He added that land had not been returned in the last 10 years and people are still in prison under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). "And then urging the Tamils to reconcile and forget the past... Actually from what does he want us to forget and move forward?" Sritharan lashed out.

He pointed out there are more than a 100,000 Army personnel in the North and asking them to forget the past is not possible.

"Whatever the Cabinet Paper he is going to present or presented has nothing to do with the people who have been wounded. There is already a decision taken in Geneva urging Sri Lanka to probe those allegations.” Sritharan explained.

(Continued on page 18)
How can new strategy be introduced saying 'this is not good' or 'that is not right' and bring a closure on the ethnic issue? Isn’t it a whitewash? he lamented.

"If he is presenting a Cabinet Paper, let him go ahead with it and the affected people should have no say about it. When the culprits are from the majority whom will they ask forgiveness from? We are the ones who should decide. Not the oppressor, but the oppressed," he stressed.

"I will be in Geneva taking part in the sessions and will be talking about the Government’s progress on this subject. I have not heard about a Cabinet Paper being prepared on TRC or a similar process. He never discussed anything with the TNA about this. Let him talk and I can assure you that is not going to happen. If he says we have reconciled, ask him to show how we have moved forward all these years. There are scores of unattended matters and those have to be sorted and it’s not the time to talk about any TRC process for Sri Lanka," he noted.

Reported by Sulochana Ramiah Mohan
-Ceylon Today—17/02/2019

Approval for TRC mechanism Navi Pillay blasts Govt

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay came strong on the current Sri Lankan Government for trying to seek Cabinet approval for a truth and reconciliation mechanism, when its leaders accepted to address justice and accountability in post-war Sri Lanka.

"I am disappointed to learn that on the eve of the interactive dialogue on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights’(OHCHR) report on Sri Lanka in the UN Human Rights Council, the Government of Sri Lanka is resorting to yet another delaying tactic to escape ......implementation of Resolution 30/1," she told Ceylon Today.

On Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s recent call to the masses for a process of truth telling, regret and forgiveness, similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa, for a true reconciliation, Pillay said, “The key promises of justice and accountability are missing in the Prime Minister’s message.”

Pillay, while in Office had also been tough on Sri Lanka and continued to voice against the conduct of the local politicians’ time and again failing to work on a long-lasting reconciliation process for the people who have suffered from the bloodiest war in history.

Pillay, a famed judge and jurist of South Africa, said the Government accepted to address justice and accountability in post war Sri Lanka and appears, instead, to be retrogressing by seeking Cabinet approval for a truth and reconciliation mechanism alone.

She added that was a misrepresentation of the South African process; but in any event each TRC is unique and aimed to fit specific contexts. The South African TRC model she added embraced the above, including truth telling, prosecutions and reparations.

“It was by no means a perfect system, but was conceived as politically expedient in the context of the events there but that context cannot be compared with the massive killings, disappearances and atrocious crimes suffered by populations in Sri Lanka.”

She reiterated that the UN has promoted TRCs in conflict and post conflict contexts as part of transitional processes. Transitional justice is concerned with how societies emerging from conflict or from repressive rule address the legacy of past violations of International Humanitarian law and human rights, ensuring accountability, justice and reconciliation. The experience of those who suffered human rights violations must be central to shaping transitional justice responses. This means respect for rights of participation, gender perspective and implementation of the rights of victims to an effective remedy, she noted.

She pointed out that Transitional Justice (TJ) rests on four pillars: the right to the truth; the right to justice; the right to reparations and the duty of states to prevent the recurrence of violations.

“The goal is to restore and protect the rights of individuals and recreate bonds of trust between citizens and state, principally through respect for the rule of law.”

Out of experiences in the world, the UN Secretary General in his report of 2004, spells out transitional justice as the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability,

(Continued on page 19)
serve justice and achieve reconciliation. It consists of judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms, including truth seeking initiatives, prosecutions, and reparations programmed, institutional reforms and amnesty provisions.

"Contrary to what the Prime Minister said, South Africans did not stop filing cases arising from the conflict. In fact, just this past month, the family of the late Ahmed Timol, who died in Police detention, officially from suicide, charged a security policeman for his murder, after evidence, (That had not been brought forth at the TRC), was disclosed at a recent judicial inquest.

Contrary to what the Prime Minister is saying, reconciliation, in overcoming divisions and building trust, cannot be understood as a call for impunity or disregard of victims’ rights, she added.

“If Sri Lanka intends to establish a TRC, then it is important that the rulers follow what President Nelson Mandela did when he set up a TRC: comprehensive national consultations, broad based participation of civil society, protection of witnesses, independence of the commissioners exclusive of any political interference, she advised the nation that is struggling to formulate a process that is very much in need,” she said.

By Sulochana Ramiah Mohan
- Ceylon Today—24/02/2019

Expert opinion on Mannar mass grave clears Sri Lanka of war crime

A German interest group said that Scientific evidence based on the findings of Beta Analytic Institute of Florida, USA, had determined that the samples of skeletal remains sent from the Mannar mass grave site for carbon dating, goes back to a period between 1499 and 1719 AD, and it was a happy finding for many but not for those trying to pin Sri Lanka on war crime charges.

The statement said experts on the process of carbon dating have now expressed an opinion, which has come as a big relief to many. But, not everybody is happy about the findings of the experts as, perhaps, an opportunity was lost to shout themselves hoarse about alleged “war crimes”, the German Interest Group in Sri Lanka, said in a statement.

“It may be recalled that a section of the local and foreign media spearheaded a high-profile campaign on the Mannar mass grave site. Some Colombo-based diplomats also supported the project, the Group’s spokesman Dr. Dietmar Doering said.

The German Ambassador in Colombo, Joern Rohde was one of the first diplomats to inspect the site on November 27, 2018. He was accompanied by a big group of foreign and local journalists. The German Ambassador’s visit was followed by a British team on December 11, 2018, the statement recounted.

The British visit took place close on the heels of the discovery of two pieces of human bones bound by a cable on Dec 7, 2018. The recovery prompted some ‘experts’, as well as those engaged in excavating the mass grave, to speculate whether some of the people buried there had been tortured before being killed, it said.

The interest shown in the Mannar mass grave site by some countries pushing for full implementation of the Geneva Resolution, co-sponsored by Sri Lanka in October, 2015, strengthened the campaign directed against the Sri Lanka Army (SLA). A section of the Catholic clergy also toed the line that the SLA was to be blamed, the statement further noted.

The damage done to Sri Lanka as a result of the international exposure was considerable, particularly with some Heads of Missions in Sri Lanka, spearheaded by the German envoy, visiting the mass grave site, it said.

Not only in many Western countries, but also in Asia and Australia, the print and electronic media exposure led to speculation that Sri Lanka was again involved in atrocities on a genocidal scale, Mr. Doering said.

Whenever or wherever a head of a foreign mission, particularly from a leading European or Western country is actively involved, the media provides coverage. As a result, the damage caused to the image of a country, particularly on a matter of this nature, is enormous, the statement continued.

The expert opinion on the Mannar mass grave has cleared Sri Lanka of a crime, which had happened during a time period when Western colonial parties had a say in this country, it said.

Sadly, neither the German nor British envoys have so far acknowledged that the Mannar mass grave had nothing to do with Sri Lanka’s recent history, the statement noted.

-Daily Mirror - 18/03/2019
UN rights chief warns Sri Lanka of fresh conflict

GENEVA, AFP: The UN human rights chief yesterday warned Sri Lanka it could slip back to conflict unless it addressed the “worst crimes” during the final stages of its ethnic war.

Michelle Bachelet told the Human Rights Council that Sri Lanka was yet to set up the special judicial mechanism as promised four years ago to try war criminals.

Sri Lankan Government troops have been accused of killing at least 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians in the final months of the island’s 37-year guerrilla war that ended in May 2009.

Colombo had agreed to ensure an accountability mechanism by March, but Sri Lankan authorities have said they want another two years to deliver.

The Council is expected to decide on granting an extension, but Bachelet said Sri Lanka’s failure to address emblematic cases had led to a lack of confidence.

“Continuing impunity risks fuelling communal or interethnic violence, and instability,” she said. “Resolving these cases, and bringing the perpetrators of past crimes to justice, is necessary to restore the confidence of victims from all communities.”

She noted a “lack of progress in setting up a special judicial mechanism to deal with the worst crimes committed during the 2009 conflict”.

Delays were partly due to a power struggle between President Maithripala Sirisena and his estranged Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe late last year, she said.

Sirisena sacked the Government and called a snap election, but the Supreme Court restored the status quo after ruling that the President had violated the Constitution.

Sirisena and Wickremesinghe are also at odds over ensuring accountability. Earlier this month, Sirisena said he wanted the Rights Council to drop the demand to prosecute war criminals, but later retracted and agreed to the Government’s call to buy more time.

“A contributing factor to delays appears to be a lack of common vision among the country’s highest leadership,” Bachelet said.

“Deadlock on these important issues is an additional — and avoidable — problem, with damaging impact currently on victims from all ethnic and religious groups and on society as a whole,” she said.

A UNHRC resolution in October 2015 granted Sri Lanka 18 months to establish a credible investigation. The two-year extension to that expires this month and there have been no tangible results.

To implement strategy for transitional process UNHRC Chief calls for fixed timeline

Rights Michelle Bachelet presenting her report to UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka yesterday called on the government (Sri Lanka) to implement a detailed and comprehensive strategy for the transitional process with a fixed timeline.

“Legislation on the establishment of an independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission could be an important next step,” she said in her report.

The full statement as follows;

“I welcome this opportunity to discuss the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and to present my report pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 30/1 and 34/1. The Office has sent an advanced version of the report to the Government of Sri Lanka and has given due consideration to the comments received, further to our routine procedures.

My report acknowledges the Government’s open dialogue and sustained cooperation with my Office. Working closely with the UN Resident Coordinator and her Senior Human Rights Advisor, we have continued to provide technical support, including through the UN Peace-building Fund, for Sri Lanka to implement this Council’s resolutions 30/1 and 34/1.

I welcome the operationalization of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), following initial delays. The OMP plans to undertake the complex task of tracing the whereabouts of victims in a sensitive, thorough and objective manner, addressing the difficult situation of the victims’ families. I commend (Continued on page 21)
the establishment of the Office for Reparations, and look forward to the swift appointment of its Commissioners. My Office encourages the Government to enable these two institutions to function effectively and independently, and to link them to a broader approach aimed at justice, real accountability and truth-seeking.

Regarding the land occupied by the military in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, some progress has been noted, and further steps should be taken to complete this crucial process. The steps I have just indicated are elements of Sri Lanka’s commitment to broad institutional and reform measures made four years ago, in the context of implementing Human Rights Council resolution 30/1.

However, implementation of resolution 30/1 needs to be more consistent, comprehensive and accelerated. A contributing factor to delays appears to be a lack of common vision among the country’s highest leadership. Deadlock on these important issues is an additional – and avoidable – problem, with damaging impact currently on victims from all ethnic and religious groups and on society as a whole.

I appreciate the complexity of transitional processes. The events leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in March last year, and the constitutional crisis in October, created a political environment not conducive to the implementation of reform measures.

Today, my Office encourages the Government to implement a detailed and comprehensive strategy for the transitional process with a fixed timeline. Legislation on the establishment of an independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission could be an important next step.

As a former Minister of Defence who has worked in the context of a transition, I can highlight the importance of security sector reform as part of a transitional justice process. These reforms should include a vetting process to remove officers with questionable human rights records. The recent appointment to a senior position in the Sri Lankan Army of Maj. Gen. Shavendra Silva implicated in alleged serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, is a worrying development.

There has been minimal progress on accountability. My report details the steps taken over a lengthy period to address several emblematic cases, and the lack of progress in setting up a special judicial mechanism to deal with the worst crimes committed during the 2009 conflict. Continuing impunity risks fuelling communal or inter-ethnic violence, and instability. Resolving these cases, and bringing the perpetrators of past crimes to justice, is necessary to restore the confidence of victims from all communities. Replacement of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, has been on the Government’s agenda for four years. I encourage the completion of this process, with measures to strengthen the draft law’s safeguards and oversight elements, and to tighten the definition of terrorist acts, which is currently too broad. I note with concern that individuals continue to be held under the PTA. I am also troubled about continuing allegations of torture and other human rights violations by security forces, including sexual violence. Effective, transparent and independent investigations by the Government, as well as measures to prevent and end such practices, including through full implementation of the 2016 recommendations of the Committee Against Torture, would be positive. Another step in the right direction would be an end to the surveillance of human rights defenders, reprisals against them, as well as against victims. I am deeply concerned about the calls to reinstate the application of the death penalty after more than 40 years of moratorium.

My Office highlights the critical role of Sri Lanka’s independent commissions, particularly the National Human Rights Commission. Respect for their independence and implementation of the Commissions’ recommendations are needed to entrench the rule of law in Sri Lanka. Appropriate cooperation with the Human Rights Commission is also essential for the participation of Sri Lankan personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

This Council continues to have an essential role in accompanying the Government and people of Sri Lanka in their journey towards realizing the dignity, and rights of all members of society, irrespective of their sex, ethnic origin or belief.

In closing, I emphasise that in co-sponsoring resolutions 30/1 and 34/1, the Government recognized the need to address the past in order to build a future securely grounded in accountability, respect for human rights and the rule of law. For victims and for society, this need continues. There is an opportunity, now, to leave behind a past of violence and human rights violations, through bold determination and leadership at all levels of Government.”

-Daily Mirror - 21/03/2019
Eight deaths, 100 accidents a day: Questions over road safety measures

On an average eight people died in one hundred accidents every day on Sri Lanka’s roads this year also just as last year, showing no improvement with regard to road safety measures.

Police statistics shows 2,835 people died in 2,710 fatal accidents reported from January 1 to November 30. The accidents left 7,686 persons with severe injuries and 11,325 with minor injuries. The dead include 935 motorcyclists, 856 pedestrians, 218 drivers and 399 passengers.

The total number of accidents – fatal and non-fatal – for the first 11 months of the year was 32,560, according to the statistics.

"Negligence and drunk-driving are the main causes for fatal accidents,” Police Media Spokesman Ruwan Gunasekara said.

The National council for Road Safety said new regulations aimed at minimising road accidents would be introduced next year.

Meanwhile, SP Gunasekera said more Police officers had been deployed to crack down on drunk driving during the festive season.

-Human Rights - 01/01/2019

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

-Plato-
Lasantha Wickrematunge, founder and editor-in-chief of the The Sunday Leader was assassinated in broad daylight by two men on motorcycles in the midst of heavy traffic on 8 January 2009, while he was driving to office. But, as the 10th death anniversary of the slain editor-in-chief draws near, there’s been little progress in the ongoing case against his assassins and the killers still roam free.

While family, friends and former colleagues will gather at Wickrematunge’s grave-side this coming Tuesday (9) to pay their respects, his ex-wife Raine Wickrematunge and daughter Ahimsa Wickrematunge expressed their views on the assassination and the death anniversary to Ceylon Today. "In 2009, at the time Lasantha was murdered, there was almost no hope that the perpetrators would be caught and subjected to due process. Ten years down the road, the case still remains unsolved! Even though I had doubts that Lasantha’s murder would be solved, this is still demoralising. It is a clear indication of wheels within wheels which operate, when powerful personalities are being investigated for crimes."

While we are fed with stories about rehabilitation and prisoners paying their debt to society over crimes they committed, inmates are being subjected to crimes against humanity on a daily basis inside the prisons.

Within a sprawling plot of bare land near the beach at Kurukkalmadam in Batticaloa is a mass grave that has not been excavated. The bodies buried there are from 1990, according to the Muslim residents of the area. The deceased are members of their community, more than 150, some insist, massacred by the LTTE that year. They can point out the precise location of the site. In 2014, the Kaluwanchikudy courts ordered an exhumation after 66 relatives of the dead wanted the skeletons to give them a proper burial. But it never took place. Like the families of other Sinhalese and Tamil missing persons, these Muslims have gone from pillar to post pleading for closure.

The Kurukkalmadam example is just one instance of why Sri Lanka needs a permanent mechanism to tackle mass graves, their exhumation and related investigations. There isn’t one. And not a single body found in any of these graves has been identified in the recent past.

Not even from Matale, where the dead are said to be Sinhala victims. There were glaring shortcomings in that investigation, too, such as lack of independent supervision when bones were collected and sent for carbon dating. This led to allegations of sample switching. The process has stalled. And everything has now been brushed under the proverbial carpet.

While we are fed with stories about rehabilitation and prisoners paying their debt to society over crimes they committed, inmates are being subjected to crimes against humanity on a daily basis inside the prisons.

Angunakolapelessa Prison was established to provide remand prisoners and also convicted prisoners with facilities that meet international standards. But what happened instead was one of Sri Lanka’s prisons making international headlines last week. This was after a leaked sensational CCTV video footage, recorded on November 22, 2018, about a happening inside Angunakolapelessa ‘super prison’. The footage revealed how unarmed prisoners had been assaulted by prison officials using batons.

Not only were the inmates beaten, they were also made to crawl on their knees with their hands held high above their heads. In the video, inmates were seen running out of their ward with pillows, bed sheets and mats. Around 30 prison officials along with a person in civvies, who was later identified as the Prison Superintendent, were taking the inmates out of the ward and assaulting them. The video clip consists of footages from two camera fitted at different angles in the morning and afternoon of the same day. The assault occurred in November last year.
‘Prisoners are human beings’

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones,” - Nelson Mandela

When a suspect is taken into custody by a law enforcement officer or a law enforcement agency, the suspect’s safety and security are guaranteed under the law of the country. But often, this is not the case. We have come across several reports of suspects in custody being unmercifully beaten with some even losing their lives. The resultant backlash by the suspect’s relatives and the villagers has compelled the authorities to transfer or interdict the police personnel allegedly involved in the attack till the investigations are over. Often, in the course of time, the matter is forgotten or swept under the carpet and we are back to square one with little or no action known to be taken.

The latest case in point was the brutal attack unleashed on the remand inmates on November 22 last year at the Angunakolapelessa Prison, which has been described by the authorities as a ‘super prison’ built at an estimated cost of Rs.4,996 million on a land extent of 56 acres. The Committee to Protect Prisoners’ Rights told a news conference that trouble began when the prison authorities had mercilessly beaten up a group of prisoners, who launched a protest against the conduct of the Prison Superintendent and the constant searches carried out by STF personnel, whom the protesters claimed even strip-searched their relatives who visited them.

The committee released several video clips from CCTV camera footage showing the prison authorities and the police attacking the prisoners who were on their knees with their hands raised over their heads.

It was to prevent such appalling incidents that the UN General Assembly adopted its landmark resolution 70/75 titled, “United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules) on December 17, 2015 to honour the legacy of former South African President Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prisons in the course of his struggle for democracy and the promotion of a culture of peace and justice.

-To Daily Mirror - 31/01/2019

Tea stories which make us depressed

The breathtaking sceneries at tea estates would not be complete without the pluckers who know the art of choosing which two leaves and the bud should go into their baskets.

These pluckers have for generations smiled for photographs, appeared in television commercials and given the inspiration to writers and poets to come out with creative pieces of writing. But what we see and hear about them isn’t anywhere close to the real lives they are forced to live in tiny ramshackle rooms, called ‘line rooms’.

These pluckers also have survived miraculously on the pittance paid to them as their salary when others doing a little better than them have moved to using smart phones, full option vehicles and houses of their own.

Newspapers these days quite unusually have put the plight of the tea plucker under the spotlight. A humble demand of Rs 1000 a day as their wage hasn’t been met favourably by their paymasters. These workers have been promised a revised daily wage of Rs 700, made possible as a result of an agreement reached between the Estate Workers’ Union and Estate Employers’ Federation. It seems that the workers’ union that carries the voice of the workers to the authorities have let them down, because the workers maintain that they would not settle for anything less than what they demand.

These humble tea pluckers have been manipulated for years with the politicians and union reps often promoting their cause in the open, but benefiting from this whole exercise. Otherwise how could the two parties strike a deal that the workers don’t seem to fancy?

As the agitation campaigns by the estate workers continue the rest of the island will have the time and the frame of mind to sip their tea and munch their biscuits. News seekers picking up bits and pieces from conversations have heard people share a common view that “the tea pluckers’ problem is not our problem”.

-Editorial - Daily Mirror - 01/02/2019
Excerpts from an article by Sulochana Ramiah Mohan

A NATIONAL SHAME!

Tea industry workers and their plight

It could be said that the 200 and more years of servitude suffered by the estate workers are as bad as the 30-year war that all Sri Lankans suffered from. Ceylon Tea, a brand name that entertains the whole world with a smile under the slogan ‘Ceylon Tea: The trade that made the nation’, but under the surface, there is human misery behind each cup of tea; the very tea we take pride in.

Beneath the beauty of scenic hills and the valleys, rivers and dams and lush green tea bushes and fragrance of flowers filling the air in the chilly climate, there are dry, weak, and dirty hands plucking a ‘bud and two leaves’, with no way of solving their domestic and occupation’s plight for almost two centuries - once suffered in the hands of the British and still persisting in the present day.

Despite such setbacks, the tea industry continues to grow with its aged old brand conquering the world market-connecting Sri Lanka globally in the 21st Century.

Brief history of Tamil Nadu labourers

Soumyamoorthy Thondaman senior was originally from Tamil Nadu; he is considered the godfather of plantation workers and created that niche as a trade unionist. He was also considered as one of the shrewdest political leaders to ever come amidst political stalwarts of the country. In the initial stage, he made few blunders with regard to labourers, but later fought to rectify them.

He was a kingmaker because of his Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), one of the biggest trade unions in the country. It is said that he made the British happy when he struck a deal with them to import ‘labourers’ from Tamil Nadu. The labourers were brought in when the Sinhalese living around the hill stations found it a hard job to climb mountains and rejected labouring for the White man in general.

Impoverished South Indians came here and were kept under a scheme, sort of a memorandum of understanding that later turned to what is called the ‘collective agreement’-that they would only labour for and obey the Whites. Eventually the diligent labourers won the hearts of the Whites when ‘others’ were going about rejecting British rule.

- Ceylon Today - 10/02/2019

Spraying pesticides and weedicide

The unhygienic way of spraying weedicide, titled Basta, is in practice, many noted. This is sprayed to dry weeds and grass around the tea bushes. However, it does not kill insects. For insects, there is another kind of chemical sprayed, they noted.

Some of those who are employed as sprayers continue to go to the mountains without wearing safety gear such as masks, boots, jackets or gloves.

“We are the persons working with strong chemicals. We don’t have a place to wash or clean ourselves after returning from the mountains, some of them said.

The pesticides are kept open and we have to mix them with water. They show us the gloves and uniforms but they take them away once the auditors leave.

We saw them leave barefooted and many of them have been working in this field for nearly 11 years. He complains of eye burn and poor eyesight while his eyes are turning (Continued on page 26)
Concerns over social issues in the SP plantation community

The Indian origin plantation workers left their kith and kin in Southern India and migrated to Sri Lanka almost 200 years ago.

Since then they have contributed towards the development of the plantation industries in particular and Sri Lankan Nation at large. This marginalized and underprivileged community lags behind in all the aspects of life. They are increasingly becoming vulnerable to the cost of living rising at an alarming rate in the past years.

In the above scenario, all right-thinking persons of our motherland should understand the plight this community is undergoing with their hand to mouth existence in the plantations.

The cry for a just wage for the fruit of their labour is heard very loud in every corner of the Nation these days.

The worker’s labour is what allows him to ‘gain access to the goods of the earth.’

It is what allows him “the means to cultivate worthy his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents.”

“Failure to pay him a just wage shuts him out of this endeavour. It is for this reason that mere agreement between labourer and employer is not an assurance of a just wage.”

There is a rich Biblical Tradition which underlies the Church’s insistence that it is a grave injustice to refuse to pay a just wage or to refuse to give a just wage in due time and in due proportion to the work done. (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 302)

“You shall not defraud or rob your neighbour. You shall not withhold overnight the wages of your day labourer.” (Lev. 19:13)

I, as a religious leader from the Southern Province, wish to voice my concern over the prevailing social issues of this vulnerable community.

I call upon all those in the decision making and in responsible positions to hear the cry of this community so that their legitimate demands are looked into and met while at the same time, the industries in the Plantations are promoted and protected.

We, as the citizens of this country and as Christians have a moral right to stand by this just demand of these innocent/vulnerable people and be the voice of the voiceless.

I hope and pray that the efforts the Members of Trade Unions and the Regional Plantation Companies and all other stakeholders presently considering/discussing are sincere and realistic and thereby bring about a just solution to the long-awaited wage increase and other social problems of our plantation workers.

May God bless them all.

Rev.Dr. Raymond Wickramasinghe
-Daily Mirror - 29/01/2019

How can one find God?

“Sit perfectly still and dive into yourself, trying to find out who you are. To find your SELF means to find God, and to find God means to find your SELF”.

-Shri Anandamayee –January 1961
**MURDER IN THE FOREST RESERVE**

The mourning at two homes, in this isolated village of Rathanaudagama, in downtown Rathgama, started yesterday after the burnt remains of two young businessmen were discovered deep inside a forest reserve at Walasmulla, one day short of a month after they were handcuffed and taken away by a Police team from the Matara Division.

Kosma Rasin Chintaka, 31, a fish trader in Rathgama and his childhood mate Manju Asela 33, a meat shop owner, were taken at gun point, as they chatted on a verandah. They were later bundled into a van and taken away by a group of eight Policemen armed to the teeth with semi-automatic assault rifles.

The incident took place at approximately 10.05 a.m. on 23 January and thereafter their whereabouts remained unknown, despite frantic and desperate searches by relatives and friends and several visits to various Police stations and divisions.

For some two weeks after the businessmen disappeared, the regional local Police failed to come up with any information that could lead to the missing men and on more than one occasion they even opted to play the entire issue down, the relatives claimed.

Investigations have so far revealed that the two men were initially taken to an abandoned house in Akmeemana, in the Galle Division and one person had died during harsh interrogation.

In apparent panic the suspects had later opted to silence the other businessman fearing that he would leak the matter and therefore he too was killed.

Thereafter, their limp bodies were transported to a dense forest reserve in Walasmulla some 73 kilometres away from where the killing took place.

The bodies were later dumped into a dried up stream deep inside the forest and later burnt to ashes and the suspects stayed around for some three hours to make sure the job was properly done and that there would be traces of evidences.

The motive for the arrest of the men remains unclear, although there are several allegations doing the rounds in the village and elsewhere.

*Ceylon Today - 24/02/2019*

**Explosive find at Wanathawilluwa**

Police probing the massive explosive find at a location in Wanathawilluwa, Puttalam earlier this week are looking at several aspects including foreign terror links that are tied up with extremist organisations both in the country and overseas, a high ranking official on the investigation team said yesterday.

“This is a very deep and sensitive investigation and it would take a considerable period of time before we establish the true motive for the intent of the explosives,” the official said.

He added that this is the single largest explosive find since the end of the Tamil separatist insurgency and therefore it is being treated with the highest priority at all levels.

“We are looking at several aspects and these include foreign terrorist links, the origin of the explosives, the true intent, and whether the suspects currently in custody belong to any extreme group religious, political or whatever. Beyond that it is too early to come to any final conclusions since the investigations are at the preliminary stages,” he said.

However, he also did not rule out further arrests as the investigations into the matter continue adding that the cooperation of foreign law enforcement agencies may also be sought later on.

*Ceylon Today - 20/01/2019*
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