

Sannasa

HORIZON

SEE BEYOND

October 2009

Lipton's Tea Estate ?

Nowadays, Lipton's tea is advertised as coming from Kenya, not from the Lipton's Tea Estates that we knew of decades ago. That was the time Sri Lanka was known by its earlier name, Ceylon, a small colony under the British. It is through the tea plantations white rulers introduced into the country, that they made Ceylon tea popular in the world as coming from their Lipton's Tea Estates.

While draining those resources to fill the coffers of the empire, the British rulers introduced many things that Sri Lankans practice and value even today. One thing they discarded, thanks to the brains of the darling of the West, Junius Jaye Jayewardene, is the system of government, creating a monster a poor country like Sri Lanka can ill afford. Another thing was partially discarded, i.e. the dress they introduced. That has now become a big farce, a so-called national dress worn occasionally to fool the masses by politicians.

The most important and long-lasting gift by the White ruler came in the form of a new class of politicians ready to step into the shoes of the masters once they leave the land, and an equally obedient class of administrators. Both these groups were in a way brain-washed by the masters to speak their language and follow their behaviour in every facet of their lives. In short, the British Raj was unbelievably, successful in leaving behind an obedient set of "Brown Sahibs" to fill the vacuum to be created by them on leaving the colony.

The servile mentality instilled in their new class by the departing masters was so strong that it continued to hold sway even after the country became a sovereign republic. One need not be surprised if one comes across such 'Kalu Suddas' on and off. We could ignore this as a mere comic spectacle if not for the corresponding attitude adopted by some visiting white men and women. I did experience this superior attitude, displayed by one of my co-workers as late as nineteen eighties.

The organization I was working for had a number of Americans and English men. In fact, the head of my group was an American whom I found very easy to get along with. He treated me and my Sri Lankan co-workers with respect as equals. One of the Englishmen who was really afraid of his American boss, was more conscious of his former status as part of our rulers. While I had to step into sort out his problems with the amiable American boss, this man on a number of occasions tried to use his superior tone in dealing directly with me. Having no other source of income at the time, I had to swallow my pride and tolerate this ghost of white masters !

However, the memory of at least one such experience has stuck with me. In spite of the memory, I now take a dispassionate view of my dealings with my English colleagues. There may be others who have had a taste of this British Raj mentality.

Now it appears, the old masters are flexing their muscles even from their island in the North. The British immigration authorities are said to be asking a particular question from all prospective visitors to their homeland.

This attitude reflects not only the antagonistic disposition of the British Government towards Sri Lankan Government; it also underscores another mentality which the white rulers have been unable to erase from their minds. That is the attitude they adopt to Sri Lankans in general as coolies working in their former Lipton's Tea Estate.

"Have you been involved in war crimes ?" The wording may be different, but the intentions are clear. The British authorities look at Sri Lankans as possible war criminals. This from a country which had provided shelter to all types of people accused and harassed by the countries of their birth. The most noted of such people is none other than Karl

Marx who was buried in some cemetery North of London.

This appears to be not only the attitude of some old "fossilized" Englishmen, but the entire nation and its rulers. One has to question as to why this sudden change occurred in their immigration rules.

It is obvious, they are taking a thoroughly distorted view of the operation conducted by the Sri Lankan authorities and its army in defeating the most dreaded terrorist outfit in the world, the LTTE and eliminating its revered leader Prabhakaran.



The surprising thing is that this "Holier than Thou" stand is taken by a country which went after Saddam Hussein along with their ally, the U.S. That was after 9/11 for which the Iraqi leader had no connection what so ever. That did not deter George Bush, John Howard or Tony Blair. In the process of eliminating Saddam Hussein they have killed at least one hundred thousand Iraqi civilians, all in the name of defeating terrorism and introducing democracy to the former cradle of civilization. This was in addition to the thousands of American and hundreds of British soldiers sacrificed in a war that should never have taken place.

They blamed Osama Bin Laden for the attack on New York's Twin Towers. Having failed to find bin Laden in Iraq, now they are waging a war in Afghanistan, where their struggle should have started in the first place. They have still not discovered the illusive Al Qaeda Leader.

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, has destroyed the most ferocious terrorist leader without any assistance from the Western powers. All they offered was admonitions and threats to take action against the army and the government for Human Rights Violations. The universal peace-maker and confidant of Prabhakaran, Solheim, tried his best to enlist the support of David Milliband and Hilary Clinton and Co. to start an inquiry

on the issue. Having failed in this attempt, now they are ganging up against Sri Lanka to embarrass its army and the Government. It is the innocent citizen of Sri Lanka, who is made to suffer answering their silly and insulting query in his application for a British Visa.

This attitude reflects not only the antagonistic disposition of the British Government towards Sri Lankan Government; it also underscores another mentality which the white rulers have been unable to erase from their minds. That is the attitude they adopt to Sri Lankans in general as coolies working in their former Lipton's Tea Estate.

Sadly though, the blame for this unwelcome situation cannot be entirely placed at the door of British authorities. A major part of it has to be passed on to Sri Lankan authorities, operating within the island and also in the UK. This spreads from Ministers in charge of Foreign Relations, to the High Commissioners placed in London and their operatives. Some time back we heard of a situation where British education department considered Tamil to be the main language of the island, Sinhala talking an insignificant position. Apparently, Sri Lankan representatives operating in London had been sleeping at the wheel. The LTTE and its allies had been working hard to create a distorted picture of the country among the British public, and politicians.

That was why, even after the LTTE was banned as a terrorist organization, the British authorities allowed its supporters to demonstrate even in West Minister displaying the Tiger's flag openly. British MPs were defending the Tigers, in spite of their terrorist status.

Let us hope President Rajapaksa, having taken action against the LTTE terrorists in spite of warnings and threats from Western powers, will be able to send a clear message to Sri Lanka's erstwhile masters that Sri Lankans are more than coolies plucking tea in their so-called Lipton's estate, but self-respecting and confident people able to stand on their own feet.

Not that the Sri Lankan President has not done that already, but he has to put the correct men in place to deal with the British authorities in their own turf too.