



THE UNPAID PEACE DIVIDEND FOR ORDINARY SHAREHOLDERS IN SRI LANKA

When I began writing, I had no illusions about "objectivity," if that meant avoiding a point of view. I knew that a historian (or a journalist, or anyone telling a story) is forced to choose, from an infinite number of facts, what to present and what to omit. And that decision inevitably would reflect, whether consciously or not, the interests of the public.

However, there is no such thing as a pure fact, divorced of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the reader by anyone, is a judgment. The judgment that has been made is that this fact is important, and that other facts are not important and so they are left out of the presentation. The repercussions of these omissions, has been not simply to give a distorted view of the past but, more importantly, to mislead us all



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about the present. I believe that Sri Lankans overseas must become aware, without prejudice.

There are several "debates" now being played out in Sri Lanka. They generally reveal that not only the protagonists but also the entire country is largely tuned out to most real problems and dangerous developments. For example, you would never know from mainstream media that citizens can now be imprisoned and executed without due process. All that is required to terminate the liberty and life of a citizen by his own government is an unaccountable decision somewhere in the executive branch.

No doubt that Sri Lankans, if they have the capacity to think of this at all, believe that it can only happen to terrorists, underworld figures or drug barons who "deserve" it. But as no evidence or due process is required, how would we know that it only happens to them? Can we really trust a government (or opposition for that matter) that has established themselves on the basis of falsehoods? Sri Lankans need a debate about how they can be made safer by removing

the constitutional protection of due process. If the power of government is not limited by the constitution, then what use is a constantly amended one? In the three years since the end of the war, acts of domestic terrorism have been minuscule if they even exist. What justifies the enormous and expensive defence budget? Why does the state have military-equipped machinery and personnel engaged as if under war conditions?

Who are the targets of these militarized units? If three years of post war government hasn't provoked massive acts of domestic terrorism, why is it creating a domestic armed force of its own? Why are there no hearings and no public discussion? How can a government whose budget is deep in the red afford a second military force with no defined and constitutionally legal purpose?

What is the Defence Ministry's motivation in creating a paramilitary force? Is the new militarisation a disguise for a more sinister purpose as many academics seem to suggest? How can so much be going on in front of their eyes with no questions asked?

Yet, the utterly irrational financial markets, which haven't a clue about anything, are operating freely. This can only be because what rules the equity market is propaganda, spin, and disinformation, not facts. The vaunted stock exchange is incapable of making any correct decision. The decisions are made by the fools on the market operating on a short-run basis. The only safe path to take is to run with the lemmings. This strategy insures that a broker is always in the middle of his peers and, therefore, he doesn't lose clients.

In this 21st century, Sri Lankan citizens have become nonentities. They are brutalized by the police whose incomes their taxes pay. They, for protesting some injustice or for no cause at all, are beaten, arrested, and even murdered. The police, paid by the public, beat up poor people, frame those who call them for help against criminals, sexually assault grandmothers and children, and sometimes shoot down in cold blood unarmed citizens who have done nothing except be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Brainwashed Sri Lankans pay at every level of government expenditure for protection against gratuitous violence, but what their money supports is gratuitous violence against themselves.

Every person, except for the small number of mega-rich who control the strings, can be arrested and dispossessed of both liberty and property, on the basis of nothing but an allegation of a member of the executive branch or network, who might want the accused's wife, girlfriend, property, or to settle a score, or to exterminate a rival, or to score against a school, club, sports team, or business rival.

The long-won war is still hyped up for propaganda. There cannot be real justification of the war if not to reconcile ethnic groups. Development is not a substitute for ethnic harmony, equal opportunity and respect.

There may be some who believe that the regime should not be changed easily because of its dedication towards the development drive. But it is regularly exposed to be more hoax than substance. When the people in the war areas first need basic infrastructure to support livelihood efforts, priority is given for major roads and tourist hotels. The rationale seems to be the opportunities for commissions, regardless of location. Development

may be measured by economic growth rates for a while. But the people should soon realise that the benefits mainly flow to a certain social class only. The income disparities are widening while the poor become worse off.

The fear of "terror" is used by governments to restrict people's freedoms, while exacerbating the enmity of those whose loved ones are lost in their thousands, with no acknowledgement or apology or restitution in compensation.

We should cease glorifying war and stop believing the myths that the politicians create, and the media disseminates.

There are scores of mature, developed countries which do not support the wars of aggression, and still manage to provide comforts and opportunities to their citizens regardless. We should follow their lead and align with noble countries which do not resort to bullying and hectoring, if Sri Lanka is to survive.

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