

It was no mean an achievement for Sri Lanka to have prevailed as the venue of choice for CHOGM 2013 despite calls to change the venue. The government did well to prepare and beautify the capital city and build the expressway from the International Airport. From all accounts Lankans all over the world can at last feel proud of their capital city.

For years Colombo had grown to be more and more a dump. President Premadasa was the first head of state to realize the need to beautify our capital. He started with pavements and roundabouts and acquired some cynical comments from his opponents. Cynicism has now given way to optimism. The main player is evidently Gotabhaya Rajapakse who appears to have an eye for beauty, whatever other reservations one may hold with regard to him. (Let's hope he next attends to the metro's sewerage facility that is hundred and twenty five years old and bursting at the seams.) However, what could have been unmitigated glory transformed into an avoidable ignominy during the CHOGM sessions that followed. A madness swept over CHOGM. The events were largely predictable but President Rajapakse and his team headed by Foreign Minister GL Peiris was caught napping and they were simply overwhelmed by the tide of hostility. Tony Abbott tried to douse the flames but everyone knew he did what he did to salvage himself from the daily nightmare of boat arrivals. Abbott sees dreadful dreams of boat people crashing into Australia.

To begin with, there was unfinished business that was foreshadowing the event. This related to allegations of human rights violations during the closing stages of the war that were before the United Nations. Our government plainly did nothing to assuage the international community that it would conduct its own independent investigations into the accusations of war crimes. It had its own LLRC appointed and this Lankan body of eminent persons, too, saw the need for a full scale enquiry besides presenting other ameliorating proposals all of which were ignored by the government.

Government arrogantly leaned on a false theory of sovereignty. Since the Second World War the notion of sovereignty has been regarded as not being absolute. Interdependence of governments, countries, economies and people has taken the lid off sovereignty. Global consciousness of the need for supra-national level protection of the fundamental rights of the human beings has come strongly to the fore ever since the horrible days of the holocaust. UN conventions were formulated and adopted to which Sri Lanka also was signatory; an International Tribunal at Hague was set up and so on. The rights of any human being living anywhere cannot be bartered away to individual ruling regimes of plastic Pol Pots or others in the country that he inhabits.

To see UN- level HR intervention in extreme instances is, therefore, not to see an enemy invasion of our 'sovereignty.' We allowed the UN Human Rights Commissioner Navy Pillai to be slandered and insulted when she came on legitimate business. It had been a non-existent notion of sovereignty propagated by the government that led to this. UN has a perfect right to intervene and we have a clear duty to obey. If we are to avoid such international intervention then we must avoid paving the way for HR allegations. The Commonwealth body also has a right to question any member state and we have a duty to obey. The Sri Lankan government had all the time being ducking both the UN and the Commonwealth body.

When the issue of war crimes was first raised our President stated unthinkingly that there were "zero civilian casualties" during the war. This was later amended to 5000 civilian killings and, next, to 10,000 killings. This kind of response cannot give confidence to the UN or anybody.

Under a cloud of suspicion our government should have been in best behavior with regard to HR concerns but it surely cared not. The arbitrary jailing of Sarath Fonseka, the valiant soldier who commanded the triumph over terrorism, and the grabbing of his hard-won medals of valour was a critical incident followed by several other incidents that raised question marks with regard to

invitees. The media was positioned for a kind of audience - brainwashing against the West that wasn't healthy or honest. That wasn't simply honest because Western powers had right along backed Sri Lanka's onslaught against terrorism with substantial material support. I wonder who wrote our President's speech. Whoever did that is not his ally as the speech was bad and poorly defensive. Throughout his address

President Rajapakse kept passing hints on Western Powers. This heated the tone further. The war against Britain and the West was on as far as our Head of State was concerned. Rajapakse's audience from now on was his electorate and not

This kind of incident taking place under the watch of the police didn't do well for our image. It is rumored that the BBS has government blessings. It is hard to imagine a Buddhist mafia; can you? That phrase is an oxymoron in connection with the world's most peaceful religion. Well, here in Lanka we have just that. At least the Taliban is founded on moral illusions. But these thugs break in to any place they want to-churches, meat stalls and so on and usurp legislative and executive powers that belong elsewhere. The government security just watches their antics. A tense background for CHOGM was in the making.

It was a background that inspired David Cameron and his men for what was to follow.

## THE MADNESS THAT TOOK OVER CHOGM



**Making Sense**  
**Shyamon Jayasinghe**

the government's HR performance. There was Lasantha Wickrematunge; there was Eknelyagoda and there was Shirani Bandaranayake and so on. Rapes and murders where government politicians were suspect

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were unaccounted for. In the North itself there were accusations of land grabbing and kidnapping that should have engaged more attention. Most recently there was Weliveriya.

In the face of this dubious background, government should have either taken pre-emptive steps in the nature of assurances etc. to the international community and CHOGM leaders or it should have let go its turn to host CHOGM and thus avoid rubbing a running wound. It decided to host CHOGM. To make the clichéd statement, one cannot have the cake and eat it.

Since that decision what we saw was a Sri Lankan government that virtually prepared the population for war against the Western

CHOGM participants. He was bent on a "heroic" speech to impress this electorate. Here was the country's President "giving it tight" to Britain and the big powers-the "enemies" of Sri Lanka.

The main Opposition party and other parties were also pre-cast into the lot of foreign enemies whereas a strategy of inclusiveness should have been adopted. When you don't enroll the Opposition onto your side you push them on to the other side of the fence and, in fact, make them behave as enemies. Bernard Shaw's play 'Pygmalion' (My Fair Lady) tells us that if one treats a woman as a mere flower girl she behaves as one.

From the inception of his long rule President Mahinda Rajapakse has always been confrontational with opposite forces in the country unable to take the latter along with him on any event of importance to the nation. In this important sense he lacks the grain of statesmanship that could have made a difference. He continues to be a political leader rather than a statesman who could rise above sectional interests.

Next, during the period of CHOGM itself we permitted extremist onslaughts on the democratic right of persons to gather. The raucous body of Buddhist monks called the BBS broke into the UNP organized exhibition and almsgiving and showed their muscle that was met with retaliation.

Next, we invited Channel Four and having invited them to go anywhere at will we blocked their journey with organized protests. The politician who organized this protest, Chandrasena, was immediately and without subtlety made a Minister of the jumbo cabinet soon after the event. Why on earth did we invite Channel Four to come at this particular time? They could have been restricted to the CHOGM meeting and be allowed to go to the North after the meeting. No sensible answer can be found. And having asked them to travel freely at will why did we organize protests blocking them? No sensible answer here, too.

We blame David Cameron, the British Prime Minister and call him all sorts of names. Didn't he announce in advance what he was going to do during CHOGM? So, what's the fuss about? We had every right to postpone his trip to the North for a day after CHOGM. We didn't. That was another blunder. Of course he did look detestably imperious and arrogant. Cameron was like a cyclone. He went right into the heartland of the Tamil people and heard their complaints-exaggerated, false or otherwise. Our all-powerful President and government just meekly watched by as Cameron's imperial brigade passed through. Did Sri Lanka journey back in time to Governor Caldecott's period?

Cameron topped it all up with a serious warning given with pointed finger. If anyone says that CHOGM was a success he is joking. It is true David Cameron didn't act with civilized British restraint. On the other hand, for us to blame others is to avoid acknowledging our own contribution to this totally preventable disaster. There's a Sinhala saying: "Illangkewa" (got the trouble we asked for)