

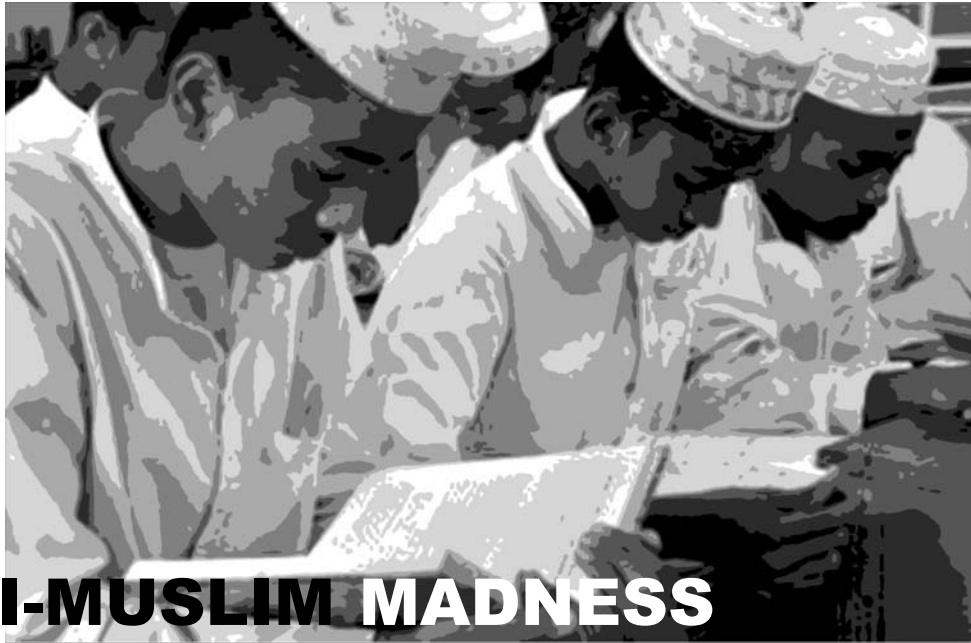
I wish my country, Sri Lanka, had less patriots. These days we are full of them both within the country and outside.

In the years since our political independence in 1948 until the watershed year 1956 patriotism had never been the fashion. Yet the people both at Colombo, in other urban areas and even in the remote villagers lived happily and peacefully without these assemblies of hatemongering narrowly-educated freaks. In 1956 SWRD Bandaranaike headed a burgeoning population of patriots and aroused racist feelings of antipathy toward the Tamil population who had thus far lived among us Sinhalese minding their own business.

A true consciousness of being a nation of Ceylonese or Lankans was gradually developing in our island despite a few catcalls by the Federal Party.

With the right leadership at the head of the Sinhala/Tamil spectrum this social consciousness of a Sri Lankan identity embodying different ethnic groups and religions could have grown and matured.

That was not to be as our politicians both among Sinhalese and Tamils got it into their heads that the ethnic gap should be kept yawning. Sinhala-Buddhist slogans became very handy to oust the



THIS ANTI-MUSLIM MADNESS

then monolithic United National Party. Perhaps DS Senanayake had been partly responsible for this. Had the Father of the Nation not appointed his son as successor, SWRD, a liberal Oxford-educated good man, could have taken over the mantle of leadership from DS and led the country further on the road toward nation-building. SWRD was denied his rightful position in the UNP leadership structure. He took off his English outfit and top hat and morphed into a passionate patriot adorned in national dress. He found a willing following of tribally-oriented people led by articulate and even vociferous Buddhist monks. The latter could find enough material around to build their election rhetoric into a victorious war cry.

That was the formal birth of Sinhala chauvinism that led to discriminatory policies and practices which humbled the Tamil population. Tamil terrorist militancy, based on Tamil chauvinistic ideology that had already taken root had been the rejoinder to Sinhala chauvinism.

With the crushing of the terrorist movement led by Prabhakaran the island was spared a break-up at least for the immediate future. However, the defeat of the LTTE had been carried out in such a ham-handed way that left behind sweltering embers of genuine discontent and disbelief on the part of the vanquished Tamils.

The Sri Lankan government has been pressured with the discomfiture about Channel four allegations of war crimes. Besides denying the charges the government has been unable to do anything to restore its credibility. If the pictures are real did a bull-headed haste at the last moment cause this unwanted situation? We know that until the last phase the war went on generally according to rule, led by a trained soldier well acquainted with the international law relating to war crimes. One never knows. Let us shut up.

However, the photo image of a mutilated little Balachandran, released recently by someone right at the time of the Geneva meeting is absolutely heart-rending and gives credence to the war crimes charge sheet. Unlike the other kids of Prabhakaran this kirisappaya was never involved in the war even under parental pressure because he was too young for that and too playful. Can any human being born out of a mother's womb not sob when he/she sees this horrific image of teenager Balachandran? Won't the average Sinhalese villager touched by Buddhist compassion not feel his heart cry out? Can we Sinhalese be silent in this regard and encourage those responsible for the Balachandran mutilation to go free? Are we so insensitive and callous and stone-cold?

Clearly, the Balachandra image gives life to the international protest of the LTTE and it makes

those who are bystanders in the debate take sides.

At least the government thinks it has done with the Tamil problem. It is a different problem that the government is fooling itself and the people by such an assumption. However, there are no thinkers in this government and the few who have some education are willing to be D and D. Our leadership is bereft of education, foresight and finesse. The regime simply bulldozes itself away when it sees an obstacle—that's what it has done thus far. No forethought.

However the lack of an enemy is no good for a government that is now distraught by a serious financial crisis and international wrath. Hence a new enemy has been found: the Muslims. For some reason the patriotic fire against the Christians have died down and we no more hear of the demolishing of churches. God must have intervened.

Why am I linking the government to the anti-Muslim arousal? Because the government has done nothing to stop it or nip it in the bud. It is just looking on. At best it is indirectly condoning it; at worst it is part of it. One of its Ministers, Champika Ranawaka of the Bhikkhu Party—the JHU—is named as a patriotic leader in this new phase of violence. I remember Ranawaka coming to Melbourne when he was a political babe and distributing cassettes of his recorded speeches that were plainly racist. Ranawaka's racist politics have paid him dividends when he rose to be Minister of Power and Energy. Ranawaka failed to measure up as the CEB kept losing over Rs 300 million a day.

Let's get back to the new enemy. Mosques have been attacked and now Muslim traders are being attacked. Sinhalese people are warned not to take lollies given to customers by some Muslim traders because the lollies may contain birth inhibiting pills. On the other hand Sinhalese are enjoined to produce more and more to outbid an alleged rabbit growth of the Muslim population. How the latter are to manage bigger families when they are starving to maintain the families they now have is a question unaddressed by these new patriots.

The new heroes in the war against the new enemy are the Bodu Bala Sena and the Sinhala Ravaya. These organisations have a close association with the Sinhala Urumaya. Welcome the new saviors, my countrymen. They had an incendiary meeting at Maharagama attended by quite a few thousand people. Emotional food takes the place

of real food for many of the Sinhalese.

The previous day this rabble had almost gone to bring down the Iranian Embassy, disregarding even the reality that Iran is one of our very few friends today. When the Iranian officials denied the rumor that they were going to remove Buddha statues in Iran our heroes realized that it was all a misunderstanding.

Dear readers it is not my view that there aren't any serious concerns about Muslim presence in Sri Lanka.

Unlike Buddhism Islam has shown aggression and proselytization. It wants to spread. Unlike the Buddhists the Muslims

have the resources to build their religious infrastructure. Mosques have come over all over. All this is true. On the other hand the solution for this is not that of the BBS. The government must revamp laws to restrain any inappropriate building of mosques and temples and churches. (If all these could be banned altogether and the country converted into a secular state the better that would be.) At least town planning laws should require consultation of local populations before a particular religious building is put up. Furthermore, mosques and temples should not be allowed to bellow out their prayer to residents outside. That is totally unwanted. In this way and other ways there should be a religious policy from the government to prevent tension and promote harmony.

As far as Buddhists are concerned village level temples and monks should be revamped up. Monks should be given a special education to bridge the adverse gap that now exists between them and the lay people. The Buddha Sasana Ministry is

more interested in delivering luxury cars to influential monks.

Above all rural and urban poverty should be alleviated. Rural Buddhist people are among the poorest in the island and poor Sinhala girls are enticed by the golden rings in the fingers of rich young Muslim men. I am aware of these developments in my late wife's village in Pilimathalawa.



Shyamon Jayasinghe

What about the real practice of Buddhism in our island? The BBS watches on when the governing regime goes morally haywire every day. The rule of law and justice is a daily casualty. Corruption has become a way of life and the good man is regarded as impotent whereas the man who waves currency is viewed as the model. Buddhist values are seriously undermined. Obviously BBS is more focused not on the real but on symbols. Hence more mosques will be cracked.

Finally, a warning to these new fascists or Talibans. We may have got away playing about with the Tamils. The Muslims are going to be a different story.

Hence, it is wiser to change course. When a country has different ethnic and religious groups within itself the only viable way of life is to learn to live and let live; to cooperate and accommodate. Government must have a comprehensive policy to make this happen. We have that here in Australia.