



BIG QUESTIONS FOR RAJAPAKSE AS THE COUNTRY SLIDES TO HOOLIGANISM

Writing to the Island newspaper on the 23rd of November the respected and normally pro-government lawyer, SL Gunasekera, was constrained to express his displeasure at what's going on in Sri Lanka. SLG described current day Sri Lanka as "the age of the thug, the vagabond and the sycophant."

Popular columnist Nemini Wijedasa in the Lakbima of 27th of the same month elaborated what SLG captioned in a cryptic way: "Sure, terrorism was eradicated," states Nemini "but the erosion of democratic values, the culture of revenge, money laundering, drug trafficking, smuggling and arms dealing are your regular, everyday activities in Sri Lanka. Increasingly, we solve problems by insulting and defaming each other, beating each other up or killing each other. When police don't act, we pile onto the streets or carry out vigilante justice. Abductions are on the increase again. We have no respect for our MPs though we vote for them and we have no respect for each other."

We shall continue to quote from SLG as he will be, we hope, an acceptable critic from the perspective of the numerous uncritical supporters of this regime. This is how SLG refers to the appalling scene in Parliament on Budget Day when President Rajapakse, donning his hat as Minister of Finance, was making his speech: "It is heartening to note that the President's elder brother, the Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa, has stated that he would hold an inquiry into that incident. We do hope most sincerely that that inquiry will not turn out to be a colossal farce in the nature of the inquiries held into the internequine thuggery that was witnessed during the general elections in the Kandy District as well as the inquiry into the horrendous conduct of the synthetic 'doctor' from Kelaniya that was witnessed by one and all on television when that synthetic 'doctor', [now one of the multitude of Ministers with which we are afflicted] actually tied a public officer to a tree in the presence of police officers who, not surprisingly and most deplorably, did nothing." SLG added: "Since the Speaker himself was a witness to the incidents, I for one can see nothing to be gained by appointing a committee to inquire into the incident unless of course it is to gain time, or to let the matter die down which is something that may well happen having regard to the short memories of our people and the likelihood of some other equally or more disgraceful incident occurring before long to over-shadow the horrendous incident of the 21st."

Bad blow from an anti-UNP, anti-Ranil, eminent government backer!

For the benefit of readers who may not be knowing the details I will now go over to Nemini Wijedasa: "Mervyn Silva is contemporary Sri Lanka's chief moron. There is no

better punk in government than he. The man exists to create a spectacle. If he feels like boxing somebody's ears, he will. If he feels like spewing invective, he will. If he feels like tying a public official to a tree, he will. If he wants to plod around the country behaving like a prize bull merely because he feels like it, he will.

Meanwhile, the leaders of his party-and his government-sit back and snigger delightedly. Occasionally, they stroke his fur. There is nobody like a little Mervyn to divert attention from substantive issues.

Today, no longer does Mervyn hold a monopoly on boorishness. Other MPs are following suit. Indeed, they have been for some time but consider what happened in parliament on Monday. The UNP held up placards inside the chamber to protest the budget proposals that President Mahinda Rajapaksa was reading out. This was neither right nor proper. The UNP ought not to have done it. The UNP are idiots. They should have protested outside. Still, they were not violent.

The reaction of government MPs to the UNP protest is rather more priceless. Several of them-including Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Lalith Disasanayake and the inevitable Mervyn Silva-crossed the floor for a physical encounter with the opposition.

Reports say UNP MPs Harin Fernando and Ranjith Maddumabandara started arguing with government MPs Lohan Ratwatte, Roshan Ranasinghe, Uditha Lokubandara and Kanaka Herath. The government MPs assaulted the opposition MPs. They were hammering each other inside parliament. Being more numerous, ruling party clods prevailed over opposition clods.

It is reported that a book flung from the government benches hit Karu Jayasuriya He [Karu] later issued a statement saying that an honest and sincere government does not fling books or assault opposition members when they demonstrate peacefully. A water bottle, also from thrown from the ruling side, landed near President Rajapaksa. Sittings were in session. Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa should have heaved the whole caboodle out. He did not.... President Rajapaksa, in the meantime, was benignly indulgent. He even provoked the opposition by egging them on with pointed remarks. "I dissolve parliament and hold elections next year," he jeered, grinning broadly. "Go on, we too want a strong opposition." He eventually ordered his MPs [who he referred to as 'Ape Kattiya' or 'our side'] to sit down but not, it would seem, before enjoying himself immensely."

Continues Nemini: "When you stand by chucking as your MPs cross the floor of parliament and assault the opposition, you

are condoning the violation of a range of informal and formal rules and regulations. When the head of state sets such as example, others follow."

This incident illustrates the state of our politics today where the Head of State is condoning the breakdown of law and order which is in his charge.

This is not the first such occasion. There was the Duminda Silva episode where hundreds of wit-



less of individual decisions. However, we have never experienced a judge being berated by an angry public as "patta belli (damn bitch)."

It is to avoid such an unnecessary confrontation with the public that there is a guiding dictum: "Justice must not only be done but must manifestly be seen to be done."

It appears however that the President and the government are not interested in being seen to do justice. The announcement of the verdict should not have been timed for the President's Birthday since such timing suggests that the President would savour such a decision as a great Birthday gift. The inference here is that the President is vindictive. Double murderers, drug dealers, and public thieves have been let out and even released

from jail. On the other hand the treatment to General Fonseka is palpably unsustainable and is condoned by no one except poodles and ignorant people. Here in Australia a persons' circumstances are reckoned before a legal punishment is metered

out. His age, his state of health etc are important considerations. SF is not a healthy man, living as he does with Tiger shrapnel embedded in his body in his relentless and expertly commandeered war against the brutal forces of Prabhakaran. Yet, here he is thrown into a prison cell for six years dressed in prison jumpers and eating out of a tin plate.

In the Duminda case, in the Parliament brouhaha, in his weird acts of exonerating criminal offenders, in his indulgence to law breakers, in the SF case etc and the 'no care' impunity with which he has handled such cases President Rajapakse has to answer how they all fit into the scheme of good and compassionate governance.

People country-wide are now distrusting the law wielding agencies- the police, the judiciary, elections etc. The "patta belli" shout is the ugly climax where our highest judiciary had been insulted. In the perceived absence of justice from institutions that are meant to provide that it is not excusable that victims are seeking the intervention of supranational entities?

More than a few instances have occurred where the public have stoned and burnt police stations for failure to carry out the law due to interference of government politicians. When police stations are being attacked the government brings in the army; the people will next attack the army. The government will then have to seek divine grace via interventions of the Salvation Army!



Shyamon Jayasinghe

nesses were available to vouch for the fact that this roughly and alleged drug pedlar and alleged rapist had murdered Bharatha Lakshman-himself a rival government roughie and caused the death of three other men on the streets in broad daylight before a multitude of people on local elections day at Kolonnawa. Duminda was surreptitiously bundled away overseas in the dead of the night with government help. It took 14 days for a Court to order his arrest and that, too, after Duminda had disappeared.

The Duminda incident clearly showed government indulgence. Defense Minister, Gotabhaya, is said to have been at his bedside at Sri Jayawardenapura for several hours and the President himself had done the man the honour of a hospital visit. Nemini refers to vindictiveness. She obviously refers to the treatment of our war hero General Sarath Fonseka who had been dragged into jail, jailed under a Court Martial order that is under question, and later tried by a Trial at Bar and sentenced to a further three years jail. SF's jailing under hard labour thus adds up to six years. A criminal charge has to be proved beyond reasonable doubt unlike a civil charge and it is a logical puzzle as to how there cannot be reasonable doubt when one of the three judges on board had exonerated SF on all charges. This judgement will always be a talking point for reasons we are reluctant to discuss as we prefer to consider our judges as sacrosanct regard-

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