



Has President Sirisena woken up from his slumber and shown up ticker at last? He has unequivocally made a statement that he will bring before the law all those suspected of violations of human rights not connected to national security. We are jubilant over the following story appearing in The Ceylon Daily News of Thursday, 30/3/17:

"President Maithripala Sirisena said today he was not prepared to make any war hero a suspect in the charges leveled against the armed forces and the government on the alleged violations of human rights during the war against terrorism.



**Making Sense**  
Shyamon Jayasinghe

However, he said he was unable to protect those found guilty of acts not connected to national security and those guilty of killing media persons or sportsmen.

He made this statement at the opening of the newly constructed three-storeyed building at the Defence Services School in Kurunegala today."

What is important is that President Sirisena has specifically mentioned the killing of media personnel and sports persons. This is an obvious reference to the brutal murders of Sunday Leader Editor, Lasantha Wickrematunge and ruggerite Thajudeen.

These two murders stand out today in very high profile not only because of the personalities involved. Lasantha was a prominent and outspoken editor of a

mainstream newspaper. Thajudeen wasn't anywhere near that kind of an elevated public personality. What listed these two murders in the priority list of public attention were reasons other than the high profile. In Lasantha's case, he had evidently been strongly persona non grata with both the former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa and his powerful brother, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who had been none less than the Defence Secretary officially and 'Minister' of Defence in virtual reality. The murder occurred upon the heels of the newspaper's investigation report about the purchase of MIG planes made by the Defence Ministry. That was a very big deal by any standards and Lasantha's report suggested that Gotbhaya had been behind a racket. Apparently, there had been a verbal altercation between Lasantha and both the brothers where foul words had poured forth. Secondly, it has now been revealed that there had been an apparent over-up in the nature of attributing

Lasantha's death to gunshots. On the other hand, current postmortem investigations on the exhumed body have clearly indicated that Lasantha had been stabbed brutally on his head several times.

Thajudeen's murder derives special public attention because, according to story, he had incurred the wrath of the former President's siblings. In a situation like this immediate public sympathy is drawn toward a perceived injustice done by the high and mighty of political power. In addition, Thajudeen was an innocent and friendly guy with a small kid in hand. The public's sense of foul play got intensified. Again, current post-mortem investigations have unveiled that the murder of the young man had been carefully covered up after dismissing it as a case of motor accident. Courts gave the order that it had, in fact, been a murder.

In both these cases what is clear is that

## IS PRESIDENT SIRISENA SHOWING TICKER?

the Defence Ministry evinced little motivation to pursue action. I remember Gotabhaya going before BBC and angrily suggesting, upon questioning, that Lasantha could have been killed by "one of the numerous" enemies he had made. There it all ended. The President and the virtual Minister of Defence should have thought it their responsibility to treat this case seriously as it had been the murder of one of Sri Lanka's leading newspaper editors that would attract world attention. Particularly, they should have realised that they would get implicated if care and caution hadn't been exercised. But, then, they were enconced in power with such apparent safety that it appeared they would never fall.

Why bother? This is the central problem of power that Lord Acton famously enunciated as a behavioural principle when he said that, "power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It is now a cliched truth.

It is poor imagination not to suspect that the President and Gotabhaya were unaware of the background to both major assassinations. This is not to mention the covering up that had been done in both instances. On a minimum, Gotabhaya, being in charge of law and order and police, should have made it his prime duty to pursue both these murders until the perpetrators were caught. On the other hand, by bringing into the Defence Ministry as supervising MP for Defence a man like the jailbird Duminda, then suspected of murder and

drug-dealing, both the President and brother Gotabhaya demonstrated an appalling and outrageous callousness over responsibilities for the subject of law and order. Pardon me, former Excellency, for uttering this unpalatable truth. When you behave like that we say like this.

The Acton's behavioural theory is correct and it tells the world about the necessity of avoiding power sans checks and balances. It also explains the central fault line of the constitutional position of an Executive Presidency. Although the US President is restricted by checks and balances to a significant extent still we witness how Donald Trump is playing ducks and drakes. Trump has recently appointed his son-in-law to a powerfully created position of overseeing others of the executive.

Persons in politics, anywhere in the world, would try to live on the largesse of funds provided by taxpayers. Today's Herald Sun, Australia, gives the recent story of Australia's former Foreign Minister Brownwyn Bishop (according to report) rorting public funds in this way over foreign and local travel. Detail statistics are given. Australians are lucky to have a free Press like this and to have journalists who aren't afraid to expose. These are part of the total system of checks and balances available in Australia and the whole Western

political system. I believe, this is what we expect 'yahapalanaya,' to achieve in Sri Lanka. Right now, our MPs loot the public largesse or treasury-buying and selling luxury car permits and engaging in all manner of questionable deals. Those in power will rob and sort at will if they can find the loophole.

In the Sri Lanka part of the world, politicians typically go beyond financial crimes and abuse. They will murder their opponents if the opening was there.

Catching the culprits and bringing them to law without fear or fervour is what President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had publicly promised. If offenders are let off the hook it would all be open sesame for any future offenders. Hence, President Sirisena must carry out his declared intention to bring to account the perpetrators of crime under the previous regime-whoever they may have been. The above mentioned two illustrations of major crime had nothing to do with national security and nothing to do with the war. One cannot use the 'war hero,' slogan to protect such offenders.

Let's hope, therefore, that our President's above expressed intention is a serious one and that it signals a hope for the movement of good governance. The Sri Lankan public have had enough of despair about the slow progress of investigations.

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