

Palitha Thawarapperuma was a UNP leader who had in the past behaved rather outlandishly. I was under the impression he was a larrikin sort of guy who shoots off his mouth at will. In the days when the UNP was in opposition-and that wasn't a brief span in time- he is reported to have once tried to assault the leader (nayakathuma), Ranil Wickremasinghe. It is to Ranil's credit that he promoted Thawa as Deputy Minister of something or other in the yahapalanaya (YP) government. And, here and now, we observe Thawa blooming in redefined stature. Probably Ranil saw this potential in his former assailant.

Not only that, Palitha Thawarapperuma is an MP who didn't accept the special attendance bonus offered to other MPs. I like this. He is not a moneyed guy.

Now, what has Thawa done so much for us to talk about? Ceylon Today (30/12) reports an inter-view the Deputy Minister had given to Rasika Hemamali. Thawa has hit a few Ranjan Ramanayake- type 'one-shot,' punches at the so-called Joint Opposition (JO) trying to convert government proposals into imaginary public enemies and that

the interview, repudiating. He does so by picking at the JO of tilting at windmills.

The latest victim of such JO attacks is the proposal to create a Minister with special powers for the purpose of acting as a convenient one-stop-shop coordinating investment and development. JO cried foul about what they dubbed as a 'Super Minister.' Thawarapperuma gives a body blow that Muhammed Ali would have been proud of: "We saw," he retorted, "that there were super Ministers in the previous government. Basil Rajapaksa was a Minister with super powers. Development was in their hands. Projects were also in their hands. Even Commissions as well as Institutions were in their hands." And then Thawa came out with a classic expression straight from down-south coastal rurality: "This proposal has not even been presented in Parliament as yet. These people are tying on their amudes now itself although the tide is still a distance away from the beach."

Thawarapperuma pointed out how during the Rajapaksa regime these uninhibited and vociferous JO Members of Parliament



HITTING AT IMAGINARY PUBLIC ENEMIES

Palitha Thawarapperuma Punches Truth in the JO Face

even before the profile of the pro-proposals are made known. In doing so, Thawa took on a favourite and frequent tactic of the JO boys who are toiling to bring back Mahinda Rajapaksa in a 'Mahinda Sulanga,' (Mahinda storm). JO jumps to create a crisis of sorts by this manoeuvre with the objective of both killing the idea at birth and creating a demon out of it. The attack is incessant and relentless designed to make the people of the country to feel that nothing can ever be right about the YP government. The media

were so scared to protest: "They came to Parliament like kittens," Thawa said, those parliamentarians who raise a hue and cry over nothing today were like little kittens back then. Every one sat down when ordered to do so. They stood up when they were asked to stand up. That is how they acted, he said. "Such a post is required in order to create job opportunities for the youth in the country, in order to develop it."

JO's habit of tilting at windmills was on from day one of the YP government. An earlier example is the proposal for a trade agreement with India (ETCA), which is still being worked out between the two governments. JO MPs thumped their hands on table at Parliament. They stopped short of sleeping in Parliament after a few tots. Yet, the ETCA is not even outlined yet. Talks are ongoing between the two governments so that a workable arrangement is ready that benefits both India and Sri Lanka. As a product, the ETCA is yet a non-being. JO complains that the YP government was trying to repudiate China and get into the laps of rival, India.

When dealing with the project for a new constitution that is desperately required, JO seems to be having some special ability to predict what the constitution proposals are going to be. The project is still in the gestation period. Incoming ideas from the public are coming in. A steering committee of Parliament are studying these proposals and it will draft a Bill to be presented to Parliament for a two-third majority. Thereafter, the Bill has to be approved by the people at a referendum. Hence, this is a long procedure and a very transparent one. But for the MPs of the Joint Opposition the Bill exists and they keep lashing at it. Tamils are to get Eelam, they say. Buddhism is going to lose special place. This is yet another illustration of hitting at non-being.

Where will all this end? Mahinda Rajapaksa has announced that he will overthrow this government long before it has a chance of doing anything. He has given this year itself as deadline. However, attacking windmills wouldn't take him there. He has himself a long procedure to follow and let us remind him of that. First and foremost, he has to make a public expression of remorse for the

zero. When the new government was elected it was as if we had taken over an empty house. To rebuild this everyone needs to contribute."

Next, Mahinda Rajapaksa and the JO must present a policy framework and executive plan of how they are going to do what they didn't do, if they get into power. The targeted YP-government demolition year of 2017 is already on, and Mahinda and

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As Thawarapperuma eloquence explained, "People, media men, politicians and others were killed on our main roads while the sons of the politicians of this country used war heroes to pile up sand bags so that they could engage in motor racing while the country was heading for destruction. There was no itinerary or principle in that. Court cases were heard at Temple Trees! Under this system the economy of the country had fallen to

the JO had better cease hitting at non-being and enter the positive area of presenting plans for a national debt-recovery program and a reformed administration. The latter cannot expect the electorate to be enthused when they are trapped like this in a sterile and vacuous negative territory.

Mahinda Rajapaksa had a long, long innings of ten years. If he yearns for yet another a term he must, in sportsman-like fashion, and in honesty let the new government the mere four years it has earned by legitimate election and popular mandate do its job in a stable environment.

After all, we are Sri Lankans and the country and its democracy comes first-before self.

sjturaus@optusnet.com.au



with its new-won freedom has joined the JO chorus.

This JO strategy reminds me of the famous fictional character, Don Quixote, created by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes. Don Quixote sees some huge windmills and imagines they are enemy giants. He tries to destroy them with his sword. In the case of the JO, however, the tactic is comic all right; but it is also malicious. They premeditatedly misperceive some sound proposals of the Yahapalanaya government and try to paint a bad picture of them in the minds of the people.

In the Ceylon Today interview, Palitha Thawarapperuma, comes out of the shadow of non-entity to make an impressive rhetorical contribution to the work of the YP government. The UNP needs new leaders like this and leaders who can speak up for the progress of the government when sustained criticism by the Opposition and media is the order of the day. One wonders what the Deputy Leader of the party and other seniors are doing by observing silence when the battle is on. Thawa comes out impressively at