



Dr Lionel Bopage



A national day such as Australia Day needs to reflect upon their ideal social and moral values and contribute to educating the younger generations to appreciate and adhere to those ideals. It should be a day where those people could feel that the country belongs to them and their future generations; and in doing so to a feeling united and reconciled with each other. This poses a conceptual question. If a

ment; parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and equality under the law; merit-based equality of opportunity; a discrimination free environment regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or gender; and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need. These values are not a constant in the sense that some of those values are being degraded at the behest of vested parties.

For many of us, (i.e. expatriates) who

prior to the Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. This used to be a holiday that celebrated the foundation of Sydney. Australia Day has only been celebrated on January 26 since 1994.

Captain Arthur Phillip sailed the First British Fleet into Botany Bay in New South Wales (NSW) on January 26 in 1788. So, in NSW, January 26 was referred to as First Landing Day and in 1818, it was declared a public holiday. In 1988, all state and territory governments agreed to call this day, the Australia Day. The same year, the First People of Australia renamed this day as the Invasion Day. On January 26 1994, the official celebration of Australia Day began under Prime Minister Paul Keating of the Australian Labour Party (ALP). Since then,

form of peoples' freedom, social justice and protection of human and democratic rights.

Australia comprises of a spectrum of cultures representing more than 200 languages and dialects including 45 indigenous languages with English as its national language. More importantly, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples (the First Nations) are an important part of Australia's history, culture and national identity. They were the first inhabitants of Australia and have lived here for up to 60 000 years. The First Nations have their own unique beliefs, traditions and reverence of the land depending on where they lived. They have made valuable contributions including in the spheres of the arts, media, business and

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country had been subjected to colonial rule after armed subjugation and suppression, could the people of that country feel free with a sense of belonging and united, if the day of that subjugation of their country is being celebrated as the national day? Let us take an example close to our hearts.

Sri Lanka was a Portuguese colony since 1505, next a Dutch colony from 1640, and then a British colony in 1815. Would it be palatable for any of us, particularly those living in Sri Lanka, if they were asked to celebrate their national day on one of those days knowing that they had been subjugated on that day? Or would we want to celebrate the 10 March 1815, the day the Kandyan Convention was signed as the national day? I believe, the answer is a definite and resounding "no", because the people wouldn't feel free, united or reconciled. Yet, this could be done by compulsion and repression? Even now, questions are being raised in Sri Lanka about the 4th of February 1948 being celebrated as its National Day of Independence. This is because some feel that complete independence was achieved only in 1972 with the new constitution proclaiming the country a republic. Still there are others, particularly those of Tamil community concerned about the genuineness of such a proposal, as they feel that the very same constitution did stipulate them to be secondary citizens. Despite the fact that February 4th does not identify with any of the known days of colonial subjugation, the day continues to be a controversial subject.

The Australian values are conceptualised as inherent in the Australian way of life. Among those values are respect, dignity, individual freedom; freedom of speech, association and religion; secular govern-



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Sri Lanka, Australia Day and Australian Values

have migrated from diverse lands, nations and nationalities as professionals or asylum seekers, Australia and its peoples have offered us better freedoms, better opportunities and better equitable conditions than those in the countries from where we have come. To many of us this provides the feeling of better times of our lives and a better future, despite Australia's political system failing to deal with the deteriorating living standards of the people. So, no wonder, when "almost 80 per cent of new migrants and refugees and 70 per cent of the population in general believe January 26 is their national day which makes them feel more welcome in the new country.

Nevertheless, most of them apparently are not aware of the significance of January 26 as the date the First Fleet of British ships landed at Sydney Cove in 1788 and the ongoing controversy about that day being celebrated as Australia Day. The conversion of January 26, the day of arrival in Australia of colonialism to the Australia Day appears to be only a recent phenomenon. Australia Day was not considered a sacred day to be celebrated on January 26. It only became important

nationalism has surged in an extraordinary fashion, particularly since the time of Prime Minister John Howard of the Liberal National Party (LNP). Both the LNP and the ALP wish to stick to January 26 as the Australia Day on the grounds that this day is for all Australians. Despite this political impasse, the First Nations have continued to fight for recognition, respect and their rights.

Nationalism has been on the rise the world over in the form of patriotism parallel to the rising opposition to the socio-economic and cultural problems the neo-liberal phase of capitalist development has caused. With nationalism being increasingly used to cover up the neo-liberal economic project working for the benefit of the top end of society, the campaign for globalisation and against multiculturalism and refugees began in earnest during this period. With September 11 terror attacks, the US and Australia started developing ever more closer ties as the nationalist and neo-liberal rhetoric emanating from both countries closely resonated with each other. This nationalism has nothing to do with championing for a higher human cause in the

sport. So, in such a multicultural country, a national day such as Australia Day should be a day that all Australians can be proud of and celebrate together as a united and strong nation. However, for some of us migrants including those of Anglo-Saxon origins, this feeling may not be mutual. So, Australia Day can be hardly said to be a celebration for everyone resident in Australia.

230 years ago, when the lands of the First Nations were being invaded, their lives changed forever. For them, January 26 marks the end of their freedoms and the start of colonisation leading to hundreds of years of suffering and inequality marked with massacres, stolen land and wages. Their children have been taken away forcibly from their families and in the recent history, even the army was sent into their communities. The First Nations of Australia are the only natives in the Commonwealth without a treaty being signed leading to reconciliation. Other than this painful history, the predicament of that history continues to haunt them with the spectre of extremely high rate of