

The Island

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Rein in this Mee Haraka!

We thought lawlessness prevailed only in some areas in the North. But now we learn that even in some parts of the South, law has ceased to exist. A political crackpot with proclivity for violence has become a tinpot dictator, terrorising as he does even the police in Hambantota. This high muck-a-muck is a Southern Provincial Councillor (UNP) and his mission is to wipe out the traces of an ancient civilisation that once flourished in the Ruhuna.

He has already caused irreparable damage to the ancient Ramba Viharaya, one of the most precious archaeological sites in the South as well as the country. The Viharaya is also mentioned in the epic poems of Sri Lanka. The Director General of Archaeology has written to the Attorney General and several others seeking their intervention to put an end to the on-going unbridled destruction of the site.

None in the area—Hungama to be exact—including the OIC concerned, we learn, dare stand in the way of this local Al Capone for fear of reprisals. Hence, the Director General's desperate appeal. This is a damning indictment on the police, the UNP and the government. Destroying an archaeological site is a non-bailable offence, which carries a prison term and fine. The police would have beaten a lesser minion to death for carrying a can of *Kasippu*. How is it that an ordinary Provincial Councillor has become so powerful?

The political Mafioso, who obviously doesn't know archaeology from sociology, is, as we reported yesterday, using heavy machinery to excavate the site to unearth the artifacts under the pretext of sand mining. If we had ten more politicians like him, not even the Devas would be able to protect Sri Lanka's historical sites.

The Ruhuna, which prides itself on being the heartland of ancient kings' militancy—the Ramba Viharaya is said to be the place where King Parakkramabahu the Great raised his army—and patriotism, has produced two buffaloes (*Mee Harakas*), one Blue and the other Green. The blue one is busy demolishing night clubs in Colombo with his son breaking the noses of police drug busters and the green one is destroying archaeological sites.

In this Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, political thugs have become 'more equal' than the law abiding citizens! We hear of various grandiose plans of the police to deal with law breakers but even the police bigwigs wet their khaki pants at the mention of the names of violent politicians. They spring into action only when they are ordered to crush non violent protests, through brutal force. A few months ago we front-paged a picture of a group of policemen pursuing two Buddhist monks and assaulting them with umbrellas grabbed from them, after dispersing an anti P-TOMS protest in Colombo. Why can't those 'brave' policemen be sent to the South to make mince meat of the destroyer of temples as well?

It was only the other day that the Portuguese were hauled over the coals for, *inter alia*, the devastation they wreaked on our places of worship. The crimes that the petty potentate of Hambantota is committing are equally serious and pressure must be brought to bear on the government to stop him in his tracks before nothing is left of the Ramba Viharaya for posterity. Time is fast running out!

Those whom the Director General of Archaeology has appealed to are: Defence Secretary, Secretary to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and National Heritage, the IGP, the AG, DIG (Southern Range) and OIC Hungama. If they cannot get their act together and bring the culprit to book, it will mean that an ordinary Opposition Provincial Councillor is more powerful than all of them put together! On the other hand, if they cannot accomplish a simple task like dealing with a political buffalo in the South, how are they going to tame the ferocious Tigers in the North?

President Mahinda Rajapakse's *Kurahan Chitthanaya* has, as is widely believed, derived inspiration from the proud history of the Ruhuna. The ancient site being destroyed lies within his home district, Hambantota, and it is incumbent upon him to step in to protect it.

To him we say: "Rein in the *Mee Haraka* in councillor's garb!"

LTTE terror strengthens Mahinda's recipe for a new Sri Lanka

by Dr. M. A. Mohamed Saleem

The country witnessed on November 25 2005 another policy statement from a new President yearning for a new Sri Lanka. The President claims to have had no secret pact or agreement with anyone and only conditions he has set for himself are "to build a Sri Lanka and, to be honest" (*The Island, 26th Nov. 2005*). The Sri Lanka he envisions is one in which "all citizens will be equal before the law and no citizen will be discriminated on account of ethnicity, caste, religion, sex, political beliefs or place of birth". Every citizen from the north to the south, east to the west had believed that they were being led by D.S. Senanayake into such a country on February 4th 1948 when he took oath as the first Prime Minister to uphold the Donoughmore constitution. Everyone had joined in the chorus "namo namo Matha, ape Sri Lanka" on that day. Very soon it became clear that, for those who established the government, *ape Sri Lanka* meant only the Sinhalese as owners of the country and others as unequal bystanders. Although this probably was not the intention of the leaders who first formed the government there was no mechanism built into the system to prevent the widening of the ethnic divide.

Post-independence events clearly demonstrated that the Sinhalese-majority governments were systematically doing everything to marginalize the minority Tamils and the Muslims from the main stream of development. LTTE leader Prabhakaran speaking on the Mahaveerar's day on the 27th November 2005, two days after President's policy statement, charged that "the Sinhala nation continues to be in the ...legendary fiction that the Island of Sri Lanka is a divine gift to Theravada Buddhism, a holy land entitled to the Sinhalese race. We have come to the conclusion that President Rajapakse has not grasped the fundamentals, the basic concepts underlying the Tamil question... we will, next year, in solidarity with our people, intensify our struggle for self determination, our struggle for national liberation to establish self-government in our homeland".

Prabhakaran's renewed call for self-governing Tamil homeland struggle runs counter to Mahinda's intention for the "creation of a government infrastructure that will safeguard Sri Lanka's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unitary nature of state and people's national identity with participation of all sections of our society as positive shareholders in a pluralistic system." This sounds an admission that indeed the country so far had not created the right environment and infrastructure for all the people to participate and share the national identity and therefore, Mahinda is now eager to create the necessary



conditions. Irony is that Mahinda himself has been occupying very senior positions in Parliament for over thirty years, and therefore, he was a party to all the discriminatory policy decisions taken against the minorities. Mahinda is supposed to have been uncomfortable even with the CBK/LTTE P-TOMS arrangement to handle tsunami reconstruction that the international community praised as a major conciliatory step for rebuilding confidence between warring communities and for ushering in peace in this country. Hence, Mahinda as the President of this country certainly has an uphill task to convince the minorities of honesty of his intentions and commitment to create a pluralistic system within an undivided sovereign democratic republic.

Since the 1983 pogrom that prompted a mass exodus of Tamils to other countries there has been a growing international sympathy for the Tamil cause, and even when Tamil groups resorted to an armed struggle to champion their cause, the international community at large was prepared to turn a blind eye. As security forces and public places became targets for bombs, the Sri Lankan government woke up to the reality of the armed threat and was prepared to yield to the Tamils greater concessions than what had been demanded by their representatives in Parliament before 1983. The Tamils at last felt a sense of achievement and an urgency for solidarity behind those armed groups, and the one which had the capability of afflicting greater ferocity attracted the largest following. The initial euphoria, however, began to fade as every Tamil armed rival group fought for dominance by eliminating the others. The LTTE had the ability to do so better than others and to extract submission and compliance of masses, and therefore projected it

as the sole representatives of the Tamil people.

When Tamils themselves began to be victims of the violence of the militant groups, they in large numbers found refuge in the Sinhalese dominated areas, and killings have not stopped even after the ceasefire agreement signed between the LTTE and the Ranil Wickremesinghe government in February 2002. Scramble to buy any land and the large scale investment in industrial and housing projects in Colombo and the suburbs by the Tamils are pointers to their growing fear of living in the areas they claim as homeland and their lack of confidence in the armed group who claim to represent them.

It is argued that the government armed forces are weak and not prepared to confront the LTTE, and therefore negotiating with the LTTE is the only way to bring peace to this country. Since 1983, successive governments have been able to prevent a backlash in the face of LTTE provocations, which have caused heavy human and material losses to the state. The recent proliferation of hostilities against the security forces and the Muslims in the northern and the eastern provinces indicate a desperate attempt to provoke a backlash. With continuing indiscriminate brutal killings, blamed on the LTTE, the Tamils themselves are losing confidence and questioning their future if LTTE is given some sort of territorial control.

Coinciding with 2005 Prabhakaran's Mahaveerar day warning that the Tamil people had lost patience with the government and his threats to intensify the liberation struggle the one time LTTE high command eastern leader and current leader of Tamillelam Ikkiya Viduthalai Munnani (TIVM) Karuna claimed that "...our libera-

tion struggle has deteriorated into terrorism. We still have not achieved liberation because Prabhakaran's terrorism stands in the path of our liberation struggle blocking its advance. We should not forget the fact that the one single obstacle to our liberation is Prabhakaran". The Tamil Democratic Congress, an organization of expatriate Sri-Lankan Tamils has appealed to President Rajapakse "not to accept the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamils" by observing that "the Problems of the Tamils have to be viewed as distinctly separate from those issues of concern to the LTTE, where they diverge....most Tamils are proud to be Sri-Lankan and will like to continue to be Sri-Lankan" (*The Island 28th Nov. 2005*). Well respected veteran Tamil politician Anandasangaree is continuously appealing to the international community to liberate the Tamils from the increasing anarchy of the LTTE. The growing anti-LTTE sentiments among the Tamils were also articulated at the mass rally in the EU capital Brussels recently.

On the last Mahaveerar's day Prabhakaran boasted "Our administrative structure is formidable, consisting of our controlled territories with huge civilian populations protected by a powerful military force. We have a police force and a judicial system to maintain law and order. We have also developed a complex administrative infra-structure of a shadow government". Yet, it is difficult to understand why Tamils, particularly youth, are escaping in large numbers from such protected, just and lawful LTTE enclaves to the unjust, lawless and 'hostile Sinhalese-dominated' parts of the country at the risk of endangering their lives. Anandasangaree provides an answer when he says, "The civilians whatever community they belong to know very well that communalism is long dead in our country and the people neither want a repetition of what happened in 1983 nor do want to participate in enacting such a tragedy again...The Sri Lankan army too has tamed itself to such an extent that they now conduct themselves with restraint in spite of various provocative acts organized by the LTTE through its front organizations" (*The Island 10th Dec. 2005*).

Claymore mines and grenade attacks have claimed more than 30 innocent lives of the armed forces and civilian Muslims in the past two weeks. Although fingers are pointed at the LTTE, as usual, it has denied any part in these attacks. Assuming another dissident group is responsible for such attacks the LTTE must track down this group whose actions are tarnishing the LTTE image as the sole liberators of Tamils. The armed forces and the SLMM will also have to pursue this group before it can disrupt the peace efforts of government with the LTTE.

