

WHY NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN SRI LANKA IS NOT POSSIBLE

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There is much talk of “National Reconciliation” in Sri Lanka – essentially between the Sinhalese-dominated Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil people. As a Sinhalese who has supported the struggle of the Tamil people to live with equality, dignity and without discrimination, and now, to live at all, in the country of their birth, I simply do not think that ‘national reconciliation’ is possible.

I have been closely involved with the problems faced by the Tamil people since 1948. This was when a million Plantation ‘Indian’ Tamils, (one seventh of the total population of Ceylon at that time), were disenfranchised and decitizenised in one of the most outrageous acts of political barbarism anywhere in the world. It was followed by a series of highly discriminatory measures adopted since 1956 by a succession of Sinhalese governments against the indigenous Sri Lankan Tamils. These included numerous Government organized pogroms of the Tamils. Having been a witness to all these and other major human rights violations of the Tamil people, I am convinced that ‘national reconciliation’ is totally unrealistic.

The most serious recent slaughter of Tamils (June 2006 – May 2009), with features of Genocide¹, and done under the guise of “wiping out ‘Tamil terrorism’”, has made national reconciliation impossible.

The necessary conditions

For national reconciliation to occur there are some fundamental requirements.

1. There must be a genuine **intention** to do so.
2. There must be **regret** for all that has happened to make national reconciliation necessary.
3. The **fundamental problems** that caused the rift must be addressed.
4. There must be a determination to wipe out all the **obstructions** to this process.

Since none of these are present in Sri Lanka, national reconciliation is not possible. It is as simple as that.

The *pretence* of ‘national reconciliation’ is nothing but a myth propagated by the GoSL with the sole intention of obtaining international support to keep a totalitarian regime going.

Before these fundamental requirements are discussed in detail, four crucial points must be appreciated.

1. There has been a complete dismantling of Democracy.
2. There is a clearly stated aim to make Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.
3. There is an international dimension with foreign governments getting involved for their own geopolitical and economic gains.
4. Sri Lanka is a British colonial construct, which has failed. Until this is reversed, there will be no prosperity, peace or reconciliation.

¹ Genocide is defined in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the crime of Genocide as an act committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group

A dismantling of Democracy

The “Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka”, as it likes to call itself, is neither democratic nor socialist. It is a ruthless fascist dictatorship which has created a ‘Crisis in Democracy’. In addition, there is a ‘Crisis in Capitalism’ in Sri Lanka.

It is arguable whether Democracy ever existed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon, or Lanka). What existed in pre-colonial Ceylon (before 1505) was Feudalism. This was replaced by Colonialism, which was replaced by Sinhalese Majoritarianism, and then a Presidential Dictatorship. This drifted into Politico-Military Fascism, and now, Totalitarianism under one family – essentially a return to Feudalism - under ‘President’ Mahinda Rajapaksa, his brothers, relatives and stooges.

Whatever vestige of Democracy that existed was constitutionally dismantled in 1978 by the then President, J.R.Jayawardene who established an Executive Presidency - with sweeping powers, above the Law and Parliament, and not answerable to Parliament or even the people.

This drifted (in 2005) into a politico-military fascist state, run by ‘President’ Rajapaksa, his brothers and the military. In 2010, it has now become a Rajapaksa Autocracy.

Mahinda Rajapaksa is (erroneously) referred to as the ‘President’. He has gone well beyond this. He is a ‘King’, appointed by himself and his brothers. He certainly sees himself as a King. The brown scarf worn by Rajapaksa (and his family) is the ‘crown’ worn by the ‘king’ and the ‘Royal family’. Colombo was plastered with cardboard cutouts (a photograph of which I have), of an ancient Sinhalese warrior, Dutugemunu, who, like Rajapaksa, came from the deep South. Dutugemunu fought the aging and just Tamil king, Ellala, and killed him. Rajapaksa fancies himself as the reincarnation of Dutugemunu, who fought the Tamils and ‘won’.

When the ruler is a king, there are no citizens; only subjects. Subjects are bound to obey the king unquestionably since monarchical infallibility was a belief that premised absolute monarchies.

The clear intention of this megalomaniac family is to rule Sri Lanka for decades. This will be achieved by manipulating the Constitution, by eliminating any opposition, silencing criticism, and unleashing whatever State violence is necessary on the populace, irrespective of ethnicity. National reconciliation is not even in the distant horizon of this smiling assassin of the Tamil people, his meaningless rhetoric notwithstanding. The rhetoric is only for foreign consumption. The reality is utter contempt for the Tamil people, which can sometimes break loose and be on public display (as it was when he lost his cool in Jaffna at a recent public meeting because too few Tamils were present to bow before him).

Making Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist country

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious, multilingual country and it on the understanding that that it remained so, that in 1948 Britain granted Independence to what was then colonial Ceylon. The country was handed over to Sinhalese politicians from the majority community on the assurance given by them that the minorities will be treated fairly without discrimination. The *only* Constitutional safeguard that protected the Tamils and other minorities from discrimination was Section 29(2). This critically important clause was dropped in the 1972 Constitution. Sinhala was made the Official Language and Buddhism given “pride of place”, which clearly discriminated against 30% of the population who were non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists.

In a famous case *Bribery Commissioner v Ranasinghe* which was taken to the (British) Privy Council in 1964, (which I will not detail here), the Privy Council declared that Section 29(2),

(a),(b),(c) and (d), which prohibited the making of any law discriminatory against any community or religion was an unalterable and entrenched provision in the Constitution i.e. it could not be altered. Dropping Section 29(2) was therefore unconstitutional and hence illegal.

The name of the country was changed (illegally – because the ‘Constitution’ itself was illegal), from “Ceylon” to the “Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka”. ‘Democratic’ it was not; ‘Sri’ a term of respect, it certainly did not deserve.

Amidst protests at obvious discrimination in the Official Language, the 6th Amendment to the Constitution was passed making Sinhala and Tamil the Official Languages of Sri Lanka. In reality, this is a farce. Sinhala remains the only Official language of Sri Lanka – whatever is stated in the Constitution or its Amendments.

Examples are just too numerous to recount. A couple will suffice. In a recent Court case in Colombo where some Tamils were tried, the entire proceedings were conducted in Sinhala, a language which none of the accused understood.

A Tamil friend of mine in Colombo was recently the attesting witness at a wedding where the bride and bridegroom were also Tamils. The official document to be signed and attested was in Sinhala. When my friend pointed out that the bride, the groom and the attesting witness could not understand what they were signing, he was told that the document was ‘not available’ in Tamil. So much for the 6th Amendment.

The Constitution is viewed by Sri Lankan politicians as a useful exhibit to be shown to the outside world as something that makes Sri Lanka a ‘Democracy’. In reality it is a play-thing for majoritarian politicians to ignore, bend, or break at will, to suit the political or ethno-religious chauvinism of those in power. Tamils politicians not being ‘majoritarian politicians’, have no say. They can take it or leave it, the Government (which has been, is, and will for ever be, Sinhalese), could not care less.

Constitutions can only achieve so much. They can specify a system of checks and balances, and what Governments can and cannot do. Constitutions cannot do these things. That is left to the decency, integrity, sincerity and commitment of those who wield power. If those who wield power are tyrants, tyranny will be the result, Constitution or no Constitution.

The most compelling evidence that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist nation came from Sarath Fonseka, then the Army Commander. In an interview to the *National Post* newspaper in Canada on 23rd September 2008, he said:-

“I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese but there are minority communities ... We being the majority of the country, 75%, we will never give in and we have the right to protect this country... They (the minorities) can live in this country with us. But they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things.”

If the country “belongs to the Sinhalese”, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is a joke. Incidentally, the Tamils do not need to be a minority as a “pretext”. They *are* a minority.

When Fonseka was running for the Presidency, and trying to woo Tamil votes in the Tamil areas (North and East), he was asked about this interview. He said he had been “misunderstood”. There was no misunderstanding. It was in straightforward English.

It can be argued that this was Fonseka speaking, and not President Rajapaksa. However, Fonseka was Rajapaksa's military commander. If Rajapaksa did not agree with this he should have ordered his army commander to withdraw the statement.

Moreover, Fonseka's immediate boss was Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Defence Secretary and the President's brother, and above him, the President himself, who is also the Minister of Defence and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Neither can now try to distance themselves from the statements clearly and emphatically made by Fonseka.

The *only* conclusion that can be drawn is that all of them agreed with what was said i.e. that Sri Lanka 'belongs' to the Sinhalese. If this is the belief of those who run the country, to talk of 'national reconciliation' is nonsense.

Much has been made of the fact that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been destroyed. The LTTE was not the problem but the *result* of the problem. The 'problem' was Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism – to make multiethnic, multireligious, multilingual, multicultural Sri Lanka, into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

What has been destroyed is not only the LTTE but the possibility of Peace with Justice. Some 40,000 Tamils in the North and East were slaughtered by the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) Armed Forces, international aid groups and observers having first been expelled from the area ("genocide without witnesses"). 280,000 Tamils who escaped the slaughter were locked up in concentration camps, in absolute contravention of several Human Rights Conventions, signed by Sri Lanka.

Under immense international pressure, some 200,000 were released, most of them to a land that was totally destroyed and heavily mined, making them internally Displaced People (IDPs ie refugees). 60,000 remain in the camps in June 2010, more than an year after they were put there. Thousands have been driven out of the country as asylum-seekers. So much for 'national reconciliation'.

If Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country (which it is – whatever the rhetoric), I cannot see how there can be 'national reconciliation', given the fact that some 30% of the people are not Sinhala-Buddhists. To talk of 'national reconciliation' in this setting is patently absurd.

Centralisation of power in Colombo

There is no doubt that the centralisation of administrative and developmental power in Colombo (by the British – the 1933 Colebrooke-Cameron 'Reforms') is by far the most serious and destructive act committed by the colonial British. It was done only for administrative ease, which is what colonialism is all about. The result has been a developmental neglect of the entire periphery, which includes the Tamil North and East, and the 'deep' Sinhalese South. It is not a coincidence that the two major uprisings that have occurred in Sri Lanka, that of the Sinhalese youths in 1971 and again in 1988, and that of the Tamil youths in 1972, were the direct result of the developmental neglect of these areas. If Sri Lanka is ever to have peace and prosperity, there must be a dismantling of this failed and highly destructive colonial construct (as was done, with spectacular results, in Malaya which split into Malaysia and Singapore shortly after the British left).

Let alone a Two-State division (into a Tamil State and a Sinhalese State), there is a case for a five-State division (the North, East, Centre, South and West) with regional capitals in each of these areas, with a full power to develop the particular area.

It is arrant nonsense to claim that Sri Lanka is too small to be divided in such a manner. On the contrary, it is this very fact that demands that every part of the country be developed, which is most unlikely to occur if developmental power remains in the hands of those in Colombo.

Australia is an excellent example. Sri Lanka has almost the same number of people as Australia (21 million). If 21 million Australians can have six near-separate States (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory), each with a parliament and a Premier or Chief Minister, so can Sri Lanka. The fact that Australia is several times larger than Sri Lanka is invalid. Most of this 'large country', Australia, is desert, and there is no great need to 'govern a desert'. If Australia had a centralised administration in Canberra, there would have been a serious neglect of most of this country.

It is on the absolute need for such a major devolution of power that as far back as 1984, I suggested a 5-State administrative set-up for Sri Lanka. This is not an absurd idea. Those who are familiar with history will know that in the mid 1800s, the entire island was divided into the 5 divisions (Northern, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern) each under a powerful "G.A." (Government Agent) who was effectively a Premier of the Province (State).

The greatest advantage of such a 5-state division is that it cannot be struck down by ethnoreligious chauvinists and bigots as a "*sell-out of a Sinhala-Buddhist nation to the Tamils*", something they have done with monotonous regularity whenever a 2-state solution (a Tamil State in the North&East, and a Sinhalese State in the rest of the country) has been suggested). With three 'Sinhala States' (South, Centre and West), any attempt to sabotage this will have no backing.

If Sri Lanka must have a 'Parliament', there is no difficulty in having a 'central talk-shop' with representatives from each of the States. They can talk till they are hoarse, shout as loud as they like, behave in as outrageous a manner as they want (in a recent malee in the Sri Lankan 'parliament, one MP squeezed the testicles of another in the 'well' of the House – the victim had to be admitted to hospital), and pass whatever "Bills" they chose to (which will be largely ignored by the States). Chairing this body will be a President with even less power. He can sit in his regalia in President's House as many British Governors did (this same building was called "Queens House" in colonial times), with no power whatsoever, except to dole out knighthoods to the stooges who stood around him. He/she will be the equivalent of the Chancellor of a University whose only function is to dress up in his robes once a year, present the degree certificates, smile, and be photographed.

International games

It is not possible to make sense of the mess in Sri Lanka and the absolute impossibility of "Peace and Reconciliation" or of "Peace with Justice" without an appreciation of the international games being played to keep a corrupt, incompetent, and ruthless regime in power.

Just as oil is the problem in the Middle East, the geographical position astride the Indian Ocean is the 'problem' in Sri Lanka. Just 36 km (20 miles) from India, it is in India's backyard. The Indian Ocean is not the largest ocean in the world but by far the busiest. 40% of the world's oil production occurs in countries which share *India's* Ocean. It carries 70% of the world's oil shipments and 50% of the container cargo. US Admiral Alfred Mahan said a hundred years ago, "*Whoever controls the Indian Ocean, dominates Asia*"

Trincomalee, in the Tamil North East, is the world's 4th largest natural harbour, and has attracted foreign powers for centuries. It continues to do so.

Sri Lanka is one of China's "String of Pearls", the chain of military bases to guard its oil supply from the Middle East and its exports to Europe. Rather than fight (India) to get a foothold in Trincomalee, China chose a small fishing port in Hambantota (in Mahinda Rajapaksa's home

area) in the deep South, to set up a major harbour (for China's use) and an international airport.

A delighted Rajapaksa used this as a bargaining chip to build his massive military machine to crush the Tamils. The violation of human rights has never been a problem for China which supplied all the military hardware requested by the ruthless Sinhala military.

America concerned with China's involvement, tried to woo Rajapaksa back to the western camp. The IMF² is not just *in* America, it **is** America. Sri Lanka is a peripheral but integral part of the global capitalist network, which now includes even supposedly 'Communist' China. This is why members of the US Foreign Policy Relations Committee warned that Washington could not 'lose' Sri Lanka, which is strategically located in the Indian Ocean.

India, concerned with Chinese and American involvement in its backyard, got into the act. Its agenda is, and has been, to make Sri Lanka into a colony of the Indian empire, keep China and the US out, and exploit the considerable resources in the country – as all colonial powers do. What happens to the Tamils in Sri Lanka is of little concern except to South Indians in Tamil Nadu with some 75 million ethnic Tamils. However, India is not run from Tamil Nadu. It is run by big business in Delhi in close collaboration with international capitalists. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is just a figurehead – a 'pretence leader'. That is why he told a visiting delegation of Tamil MPs from Sri Lanka who took their concern to him on July 8, 2010, that they should "continue to hold talks with the Lankan government in a constructive way."! If the expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil community is looking to India for help in getting justice for the Tamil people, they are not in the real world.

It is this international meddling in Sri Lanka that makes the outlook for the Tamils so poor, and 'national reconciliation' so impossible. I firmly believe that without this international meddling, the IMF included, left to the Sri Lankans, there might well have been a negotiated settlement and national reconciliation. The fact that this international powerplay and meddling will go on, and support for a brutal murderous chauvinistic regime in Colombo will continue, makes any hope of a 'Just Peace' or 'National Reconciliation' most unlikely.

It is now possible to set out in detail the essential requirements I listed for 'national reconciliation' to be possible.

1. There must be a genuine intention to do so.

Across the entire political spectrum, be it the Governing party or the Opposition, there is not the slightest intention, let alone a *genuine* intention, to include the Tamil people. In November 2005 I published an article, *The Political Ideology in Sri Lanka: Anti-Tamil*³, in which I pointed out that the entire Sinhala polity was anti-Tamil. It is far more politically rewarding to marginalize, exclude, and discriminate against the Tamils than to adopt an inclusive policy. There are simply too many votes to be lost if an inclusive policy is adopted. To embrace Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism is the vote-getter, in a country where 74% are Sinhalese and 70% are Buddhist. This has been the policy, admitted to or denied, by every Sinhalese government since 1956. This is not about to change.

The only, and I stress *only*, exception is the genuine Left, which I have detailed below. However, the negligible support they got at the 2010 Presidential and General Elections is clear evidence that ethnic tolerance – to be fair to the Tamils – has no place in Sri Lanka.

² International Monetary Fund

³<http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=133&id=3584>

Sri Lanka is a virulently polarized country – “**we** the Sinhalese, **they** the Tamils”. The Tamils are ‘the enemy’, even worse, ‘Tamils are ‘terrorists’ or people bent on dividing and destroying Sri Lanka. If this is the Sinhala mind-set, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is nonsense.

I will cite two examples. In April 1986, Lalith Athulathmudali, the Minister of National Security, in President J.R.Jayawardene’s government, addressing new (Sinhalese) recruits to the National Auxiliary Force said:-

“By joining the Security Forces to defend the nation in its biggest crisis in history, each one of you have secured a place in your country’s history, like your forefathers, who have shed their blood on this very soil, fighting against the foreign invaders”.

If the Minister for National Security sees the Tamils as ‘foreign invaders’, we should not have any illusions about a negotiated settlement coming from this group of politicians in Colombo. President Jayawardene’s statements were similar. In an interview with the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, when presented with Canada as a model of devolution of power, he said:-

“It is easy for Canada to settle its problems because all your people are Canadians”

If the President of Sri Lanka does not see the Tamils as Sri Lankans, what chance is there of a negotiated settlement or reconciliation with the Tamils? That was in 1986. The situation now is worse, *much* worse.

Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with the Sri Lankan scene, can recognize these statements as the authentic voice of Sinhala chauvinism which is the single factor that has prevented any meaningful offer being made to the Tamils. Statements such as this are evidence of a very strong current of ethnic chauvinism which is destroying Sri Lanka. In such a context, we cannot have any illusions of a negotiated settlement which makes a genuine accommodation of Tamil problems, or ‘reconciliation’ with the Tamils, taking place in the next year, ten years or fifty years.

This was back in the mid 1980s. Today the situation is far worse, the Sinhala rhetoric not withstanding. The evidence is presented below.

2. There must be genuine regret for what has happened

It has been erroneously claimed that there has been an ‘ethnic conflict’ in Sri Lanka. There has been no ‘ethnic conflict’. What there has been for five decades, are a series of increasingly virulent pogroms against the Tamil people by a succession of Sinhalese-dominated government, assisted by Sinhalese political opportunists and ethno-religious chauvinists, and conducted by the Sinhalese Armed Forces (99% Sinhalese), with a degeneracy of Sinhala society and its rapid descent to barbarism. These anti-Tamil pogroms have been to crush the Tamil people into submission – to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

I have maintained that unless/until the Sinhalese apologise to the Tamils for what has been done to them, there can neither be peace nor ‘normalcy, and certainly no ‘reconciliation’.

Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe, a Sinhalese like me and with the same view, put this better than I can. In his final Pastoral Letter (15 November 1983), deeply disturbed by the 1983 massacre of Tamils he wrote:-

“Shame and apology

The massive retaliation mainly by Sinhalese against defenceless Tamils in July 1983 cannot be justified on moral grounds. We must admit this and acknowledge our shame. We must be ashamed because what took place was a moral crime. We are ashamed as Sinhalese for the moral crime which other Sinhalese committed. We must not only acknowledge our shame, we must also make our apology to those Tamils who were unjustified victims of this massive retaliation.”

He goes on to state why this should be done.

“...when a section of the Sinhalese does what is morally wrong or bad, we share in it. As members of the whole group we share in the evil they have done....it is a mark of moral maturity to acknowledge a moral crime on behalf of those closely knit to us (he was a kinsman of President Jayawardene whose thugs committed this crime, as I am a kinsman of President Chandrika Kumaratunga who bombed Jaffna with half a million Tamils) who do not realize that they have done this and an apology on their behalf.....

It is only by an apology of this kind that we shall recover our proper moral and religious values. Then we can begin the process of what went wrong with our relationship with the Tamils.... The true basis of reconciliation is admission of wrong and an appeal for forgiveness”

That was written after the murder of some 3,000 Tamils just before his untimely death. I am not sure what he would have written today after the murder of some 40,000 Tamils.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu whom I met in Cape Town two years ago, should know all about reconciliation. He chaired the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in post-apartheid South Africa, at a time when there was an absolute need for reconciliation. He will testify that it is mandatory to have an open, honest and transparent process to deal with the past if there is to be national reconciliation. Not to have such a process is to throw away any possibility of moving forward. Unfortunately, the Sinhalese people, much less their politicians, are unable or unwilling to appreciate this. As such, the window of opportunity will close, if it has not done so already.

I, a Sinhalese, did not slit any Tamil throats, but I have a sense of collective responsibility for the insensitive and barbaric behaviour of my people – the Sinhalese, in military uniform and not in uniform.

That is why I protested when my Tamil people in Colombo were slaughtered in July 1983 and wrote an apology “*The 1983 Holocaust of Tamils: Unanswered questions*”, holding President Jayawardene’s government responsible. That is why, as a 16 year old kid, I protested in my school when my Plantation Tamil people were made non-citizens – my people who, by their sweat and toil put Sri Lanka on the map and continue to do so. That is why in 1972, when they were thrown out of their miserable ‘coolie lines’ by the thugs of my aunt, the Prime Minister, and were dying on the streets of Kandy, I took them into my ward so that they could die with dignity and love.

That is why when 400 of my Tamil children in the Sencholai orphanage were bombed I protested. That is why I have recorded and distributed a dozen dvds and given hundreds of talks to draw the world’s attention to the dreadful things that are being done to my Tamil people in the North and East. When someone asked me whether I knew any in the concentration camps, I said I knew them all since they were my people.

That is why when my Sinhalese people in the Colombo slums are having their shanties bulldozed, protest I must and will.

If to be critical of what is going on in Sri Lanka, makes me a traitor, so be it. I will not let my patriotism to Sri Lanka to be defined by how close I stand to the Sri Lankan flag, stained with the blood and tears of hundreds of thousands of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims - all of them my people. If I cannot be with them in their hour of need, I want them to know that my heart goes out to them and I weep with them. That is where I stand, and will continue to do so. Whether I 'succeed' or not is irrelevant. What matters to me is not what you achieve but where you stand and why.

The same holds for my adopted home – Australia. If Australia's handling of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka or Afghanistan or wherever, is outrageous (as it is), protest I must, and will.

At one of the anniversaries of the 1983 Tamil massacre in Colombo, Kumaratunga, then the President was asked about an apology to the Tamils. She said, "*We should all apologise to each other*". I could not figure this out. Why should the Tamils apologise to the Sinhalese – for what? For the crime they have committed being born Tamil so that the Sinhalese could murder them?

As for the Rajapaksa regime that followed Kumaratunga's 'bogus apology', let alone an apology, there was obscene rejoicing at the dreadful mass slaughter of people whose only crime was that they were born Tamil, and had a right to be were they were, the North and East of the island. The Rajapaksa regime demanded that the people in the South, Sinhalese, and even Tamils and Muslims, celebrate with them or be labeled 'terrorists' and be treated as such.

If this was not bad enough, the attitude and stance of President Rajapaksa a *year* later was worse. The first anniversary of the slaughter was declared a public holiday and the 'national victory' celebrated with greater fanfare than the day the country got its Independence from Britain. The triumphalistic tone and tenor of Rajapaksa's speech made no allowance for the collective human and material losses of the Tamil people, their present abysmal existence and their future uncertainties and fears.

Rajapaksa presided over the celebrations. His speech was a combination of militarist triumphalism, a whitewash of his government's war crimes, and a call to working people to "sacrifice" to build the nation. On show on Galle Face Green (opposite the old Parliament) was a huge array of artillery, tanks and multi-barrel rocket launchers; helicopter gunships and war planes flew overhead; warships were roaming off the coast. The invitees were foreign diplomats, MPs, Ministers and government officials.

Ordinary people facing deepening attacks on living standards and democratic rights, showed little interest. Nor were they impressed with Rajapaksa's demand from working people, already groaning with an astronomical cost of living, for a "sacrifice to build the nation". Public servants were specifically targeted. Here is what he said:-

"More than 200,000 in our armed forces have given Sri Lanka a victory through their commitment through day and night in good weather and bad. If our public servants make a commitment for four years similar to that by our heroic forces, we will make this country the Wonder of Asia.

Far from being a new Asian wonder, the country is heavily in debt, with more problems to follow. I will deal with the escalating economic problems later in this article, since it has the potential to do just the opposite of 'reconciliation'.

Getting into 'comedy mode', Rajapaksa absurdly declared:-

“Our armed forces comprise those who went to battle carrying a gun in one hand, the Declaration of Human Rights in the other, as well as taking food for the liberated people in the North and East and full of human kindness in their hearts. Our guns were not fired at a single civilian”.

Referring to the final months of the war, when the military mercilessly bombed a small pocket of land in which there were more than 300,000 Tamil civilians crammed, Rajapaksa said that it was *“a great humanitarian operation only to eliminate terrorism”*

As for his claim that not a single civilian was shot, the International Crisis Group had a different view. In a report published in May 2010, it stated that between 30,000 and 75,000 civilians had been killed, and accused the Sri Lankan military of deliberately targeting hospitals and aid supplies. I have recorded all this (and more) on a dvd which I will be glad to send disbelievers.

Gordon Weiss, an Australian, has been in the UN for 14 years, and was the UN Spokesman in Sri Lanka. In early 2010, he resigned and returned to Australia. Interviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 9 February 2010⁴ he said,

“The Sri Lankan government said may things which were either intentionally misleading or were lies”.

The important point is that the GoSL has absolutely no regret at what its Armed Forces did to the Tamils. Indeed, it boasts about it. As such, I cannot see how there can be ‘national reconciliation’.

A bogus Commission

Under international pressure, the GoSL announced a “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission”. Like all previous human rights investigations, it is certain to be a whitewash. Rajapaksa has bitterly opposed any international inquiry, no matter how limited, despite a call from the UN Secretary General, and the Head of the UN Human Rights Council.

With the White House welcoming this phony inquiry, two senior Obama officials - Samantha Power, Special Assistant to the President on Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, and David Pressman, National Security Council Director for War Crimes and Atrocities, visited Colombo. It was mainly to advise Rajapaksa how to make this phony Commission appear more credible, and more importantly, to cement closer ties between Washington and Colombo, and sideline rival China, which provided substantial financial and military support for Rajapaksa's genocidal war.

One thing is certain; there is absolutely no regret in the Sinhala South at what has been done to the Tamil people. The question is even being asked, *“why was this not done earlier?”*.

Worryingly, other tyrannical regimes are using Sri Lanka as a role model to settle political problems by unleashing State terrorism, the mass slaughter of civilians being just an ‘unavoidable feature’.

The United States should know all about this. Madeline Albright, then the US Ambassador to the UN, when asked by Leslie Stahl⁵, *“We have heard that half a million children have died [as a result of sanctions]. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know,*

⁴ <http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2009/s2811292.htm>

⁵ Leslie Stahl, “Punishing Saddam” CBS, *60 Minutes*, 12 May 1996

is the price worth it?" Albright replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it."

Albright did not lose her job – indeed the opposite. She went on to Co-Chair the "Genocide Prevention Task Force" created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the United States Institute for Peace! God forbid.

3. The fundamental problems must be addressed

There is absolutely no evidence that the fundamental problems that resulted in the conflict are being addressed or will be. Indeed there is a lot of evidence to the contrary i.e. very definite steps are being taken to increase the problem and create new and irreversible ones.

The initial problems are too well known to need expansion. A brief mention will suffice.

1. Centralisation of power in Colombo

The serious problem of a centralisation of power in Colombo initiated by the colonial British that has done so much damage by way of a developmental neglect the periphery *must* be reversed, as has been dealt with earlier. The Colebrooke-Cameron 'Reforms' of 1833, which has been such a disaster in Sri Lanka, must be reversed. I cannot over-emphasise the absolute need for this if Sri Lanka is to have any future, let alone 'national reconciliation'.

2. Discrimination against the Tamils in the status of their language (Tamil).

It has been claimed that the 1956 Sinhala Only Act (which clearly discriminated against the Tamils) has been reversed and that Sinhala and Tamil are the Official Languages of the country.

As I have gone into earlier, in practical terms, this is simply untrue. Whatever the legislation, official government business, for one, is in Sinhala. That is not an opinion, but a fact.

3. Discrimination in education is still very much there.

In 1972, the bar was set higher for Tamil students to enter the University – clear anti-Tamil discrimination. This might not be so now, but the damage done to education in the Tamil areas is worse.

For a start, the entire educational structure in the Tamil North and East has been destroyed by bombing schools, preventing children from going to school and a range of other measures. To claim that this is being corrected is not true. *That* is why as many Tamil parents who can afford to leave the country are taking their children abroad for their education. The vast majority who cannot afford to do so, can do nothing to give their children a proper education in the Tamil areas.

Major educational institutes which the Tamils have built up over decades, have not only been damaged, but have been partly occupied by the Armed Forces. The Sinhalese government knows full well that for the Tamils, education is the top priority in life. As such, if there was a genuine intention at national reconciliation, to restore the shattered education system in the Tamil areas, the Jaffna Peninsula, in particular, should have been the top priority. Let alone a priority, there is no evidence that there is even an intention to do so. Nor will it be, given the long held paranoia among the Sinhalese that the Tamil educational system was 'too good' and was the result of favored treatment given to the Tamils by the colonial British – however false this is.

In short, no meaningful steps are being taken to repair the extensive damage that has been done and restore what is so precious to the Tamils.

A recent absurdity was that with much fanfare, Rajapaksa announced a project to build a swimming pool in Jaffna Central College. He handed over the project to his son, Namal, a student, who had no idea of what he was doing. The result is that instead of a swimming pool, the students have been left with a huge mosquito breeding hole.

It is a warning to all people (Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims) what to expect from the Rajapaksa dynasty.

An even more absurd situation arose on 23 August 2010. Major General G.A.Chandrasiri, the Northern Province Governor, met with officials of the Northern Province Ministry of Education and the Vanni Education authorities. He issued an order to stop all educational activities in the schools in Vanni that were damaged or destroyed in the war until they were rebuilt or renovated (which, at the rate things are moving – or rather *not* moving – might take years. The education of children is given top priority by the resettled uprooted Tamils. Teachers have held classes under trees (for lack of a better place) with the children sitting on the ground (because there are neither tables nor chairs). Chandrasiri's orders will bring even this to a halt. So much for 'national reconciliation'.

3. Discrimination in **job opportunities** and employment in the government sector.

Employment in the government sector has been the forte of the Tamils for decades. They have been denied this for years. Merely *claiming* that this is not so now is not good enough. There has to be evidence, which is simply not there because it does not exist.

99% of the Armed Forces and 95% of the Police are Sinhalese. Has that changed a year after the end of the conflict? No it has not. Tamils are not being appointed to the Police force even in the Tamil areas.

Rehabilitation and re-settlement of the Tamil people in the North and East

The GoSL claims that rehabilitation and resettlement of the Tamils in the North and East are proceeding apace. There is overwhelming evidence from several sources, including from Sinhalese who have visited the area, that this is a downright lie.

The International Crisis Group (ICG)⁶ put this bluntly:- *“the resettlement process has failed to meet international standards for safe and dignified returns. There has been little or no consultation with the displaced and no independent monitoring; many returns have been to areas not cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance; inadequate financial resources have been provided for those returning home; and the military continues to control people’s movements.*

Sri Lanka has made little progress in reconstructing its battered democratic institutions or establishing conditions for a stable peace. Eight months later, the post-war policies of President Mahinda Rajapaksa have deepened rather than resolved the grievances that generated and sustained LTTE militancy.”

⁶ International Crisis Group, Update Briefing: Sri Lanka: A Bitter Peace, 11 January 2010, p. 1, http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/south_asia/sri_lanka/b99_sri_lanka_a_bitter_peace.pdf

More concerns were expressed by the **United States**⁷ about land seizures by the government:-

“...in the north and east. Significant amounts of land were seized during the war by the military to create security buffer zones around military bases and other high-value targets which the government called HSZ⁸. The declaration of HSZs resulted in a number of displaced persons, particularly in the Jaffna Peninsula, and rendered inactive approximately 40 square kilometers of agricultural lands. While the government discussed reducing the size of these HSZs towards the end of the year, there was no action taken by year's end.

Paramilitary actors were often cited as being responsible for other land seizures. While a legal process exists for private landowners to contest such seizures, in practice it proved very slow, and many victims did not take advantage of it for fear of violent reprisals by those who had seized the property in question.”

In one of the most irresponsible reports ever published by an important international organisation, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), has recently published an extensive report⁹ that the human rights situation in the Tamil areas had improved markedly. The Report, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs for Asylum – Seekers from Sri Lanka. 5 July 2010*. HRC/EG/SLK/10/03 is an outrageous document that is at variance with several reports from internationally credible human rights organisations across the world e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch etc all of whom have been denied access to Sri Lanka.

The UNHCR states that the Report was *“intended for the use of UNHCR and State adjudicators in the assessment of claims by Sri Lankan asylum-seekers.”*

It is a thoroughly irresponsible document which will do immense damage to already brutalised people. It is, in fact, a collection of half-truths, untruths and frank lies based on hearsay not from direct observation by visiting the Tamil areas and collecting reliable data. Almost every claim made can be challenged. This I will do when time permits.

The actual situation on the ground recently published by a group of journalists from the South, almost all of them Sinhalese, [The findings of Reporters from the World Socialist Web Site \(WSWS\) 2 June 2010](#)¹⁰ who took the trouble and the considerable risks to visit the North stated:-

“One year after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan government claims that life is returning to normal in the war-ravaged Vanni¹¹ region. But as our reporting team found during their recent visit to Kilinochchi, that is far from the case. Tens of thousands of civilians who lost everything during the fighting have been “resettled” in the area with little government assistance

Many of the resettled people live in 10-by-10 feet huts with tin sheets provided by some non-government organisations. Other people are living in tents that are the same size. There are no separate rooms for sleeping or getting dressed. The floors have been leveled with mud. As

⁷ US Department of State, 2009 Human Rights Report: Sri Lanka, 11 March 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136093.htm>

⁸ High Security Zones (so-called)

⁹ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c31a5b82.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/jun2010/sril-j02.shtml>

¹¹ Four large provinces in the North where the LTTE had set up a *de facto* State. An extensive study by a Norwegian, Kristian Stokke, Professor of Human Geography and Sociology, Oslo, documented how well it was running. *“Tamil Eelam – a De Facto State. Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas of Sri Lanka.*

there are no toilet facilities, people are using open spaces. Some families have used tin sheets to make roofs for their damaged houses.

The large Iranaimadu tank (artificial lake) mainly supplied irrigation for several thousand acres of agricultural land. The tank is now under the military's control. Water has not yet been fully released for farmers. A few farmers have begun cultivation but they do not have tractors or other basic equipment. Many do not have even a mamoty (a type of spade). Fishermen are not allowed to fish in the tank."

A summary of their findings was that the Sri Lankan government was lying.

This crucially important report is reproduced in full in Appendix 1. What is abundantly clear from this and other reports is that no national reconciliation or reconstruction in the Tamil areas is happening and what the government claims it is doing, is a diabolical lie to avoid international criticism.

Rehabilitation of the Tamil Tigers

The handling of the (former) LTTE cadre, fighters and non-fighters, is one of the most important problems in 'national reconciliation'. The GoSL is simply too stupid to realize this.

There are two crucial points. First, the parents, relatives and friends of these people are in the Tamil community in the North and East. Any ill-treatment of them will result in serious hostility against the government and make 'reconciliation' impossible.

Secondly, these are the people who were prepared to lay down their lives (as thousands did), for a 'cause'. Whether one accepts this 'cause' as legitimate or not, is irrelevant. Their absolute commitment is beyond doubt.

If they are now mistreated (as they are being), it is from this group and their sympathizers that will arise the next group of Tamil militants, even more determined to pursue the 'cause'.

The GoSL has learnt nothing from the militant *Sinhala* youth uprising in 1971 – the JVP¹² uprising of rural youths. They had a 'cause' – an entirely justifiable reason that they were being disadvantaged because they came from the rural poor. Instead of addressing the underlying problem, the Sinhala State unleashed massive violence on the Sinhala youths, slaughtering some 15,000, many in their teens.

Repression never makes a problem go away. The evidence for this is that in 1988 there was another uprising of the same group of Sinhala youths, which was even more serious than the one in 1971. This was crushed with even greater State violence. An estimate is that some 60,000 were slaughtered.

Despite this, they are back again, now in parliament (and the streets), stirring the pot again. It is more a question of 'when' rather than 'if' another revolt will take place. The Sinhala poor, facing grinding poverty, are a fertile breeding ground for a disaster waiting to happen.

The same *could* happen with the Tamil youths. I repeat, *suppression and repression never make a problem go away*. Those who do not know history (the GoSL), are destined to repeat it.

¹² Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) which started as a Marxist youth rebellion of disadvantaged Sinhalese rural youths.

I will now deal with this critical problem of the way the (former) LTTE are being treated – an abject lesson in stupidity.

Alleged Tamil Tiger (LTTE) ‘terrorists’ in a special camp

The government is currently detaining some 11,000 young Tamils, without trial as “LTTE¹³ suspects” at unknown locations. Here are the observations of Human Rights Watch¹⁴:-

“The government detained more than 10,000 displaced persons at checkpoints and from the camps on suspicion of LTTE involvement, in many cases citing vague and overbroad emergency laws still in force after the end of the war. Many arrests were carried out in violation of domestic and international law. The authorities failed to inform families of their relatives’ fate and whereabouts”.

Some of them are as young as 8 years. When a visiting (Sinhalese) MP asked the army officer why someone as young as that should be in detention, he was told that those were his orders. Sri Lanka has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child!

Slave labour under the guise of “Rehabilitation”

The GoSL has now announced plans to use these detainees as a cheap labour force under a program initiated by the Justice Minister to “rehabilitate” alleged Tamil Tiger cadres. A government-sanctioned newspaper reported on March 13, 2010, that more than 10,000 LTTE suspects will be “settled” in various prison labour camps including in the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Jaffna. According to the Justice Ministry, the spouses and children of the cadres will be free to move in and out of the camps, but the detainees will be subject to strict security measures to ensure the “smooth functioning of the facilities.”

The government has already announced the establishment of a dairy farm at Suriyawewa near Trincomalee, involving about 500 former “LTTE cadres.” Ceylon Cold Stores, a large company manufacturing beverages and milk products, will invest in the project, but the army will be in charge.

The involvement of the army and air force in these projects points to the further militarisation of all aspects of life in Sri Lanka, including the economy. Far from there being any demobilisation, the country’s huge military - one of the largest per capita in the world - is being kept in place and entrenched as a permanent feature, particularly in the North and East.

The Tamil people are his problem – claims Rajapakse

President Rajapaksa boasts that world does not need to be concerned about the Tamils because they are his problem. However, he did not show this concern when ‘his’ Tamil people were massacred, starved and denied medical help, or when those who survived (some 280,000 Tamil men, women and children) were illegally incarcerated in outrageous concentration camps which he laughably calls “welfare villages”.

The world does need to worry when data from a Demographic and Health Survey by Sri Lanka’s Health Ministry, published in the state-owned *Daily News* on 29 May 2010, revealed that acute malnutrition is rife among Sri Lanka children and women. Child malnutrition is more than 50% in the North and East, with a national figure at 29% (which itself is staggering). In Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai in the Tamil East, child malnutrition was 53%, 45% and 44%, in Vavuniya and Jaffna in the Tamil North, 51% and 43%.

¹³ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – Tamil Tigers.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2010, p. 350, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010>,

There are not only media reports but, what is more important, a well documented and thoroughly reliable report (which I have referred to – Appendix 1) from Sinhalese journalists from the South who visited the North and interviewed the ‘liberated’ Tamil people. They confirmed that food and assistance was being provided, not by the Rajapaksa government, but from WFP (World Food Program). I have other reports that housing and agriculture and other necessities are supplied by International NGOs such as Caritas.¹⁵

To deny these people, citizens of the country, essential help for them to survive, is bad enough. To lie about it is even more damaging to ethnic relations. Those who talk of ‘national reconciliation’ have no idea of the ground realities.

War mentality

What is going on right now is more serious than it has ever been. The war is over but the ‘war mentality’ dominates the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) rulers. The Tamil Tigers (the ‘enemy’) has been crushed, but the search for new ‘enemies’ continues apace. These include those of us who are critical of what this dreadful regime is doing, the European Union and even the UNHCR that has asked for an independent inquiry into the serious human rights violations that have occurred.

The Sea Tigers have been wiped but the Sri Lankan Navy is to be expanded. So is the Army that has dramatically *increased* from 170,000 during the war, to 230,000 after the war was over, with a demand to push it up to 300,000. The question is “Where is the enemy to justify the largest army, per capita, of any country in the world?”

This being the reality, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is absurd.

4. ‘**Sinhalisation**’ of the Tamil areas

This is more serious than it has ever been. The agenda of a series of Sinhalese governments since Independence has been to translocate Sinhalese from the South to the Tamil areas to make the Tamils a minority even in the areas where they are a majority. The electoral consequences are obvious.

The agenda and actions of the Rajapaksa regime are far more serious. Large areas of land belonging to the Tamil people have been taken away from them and given to the Sinhalese. This is being done on a massive scale. Using all sorts of excuses, “High Security Zones”, “Special Economic Zones”, Tamils have been denied access to the land they owned, depriving them of their homes and income.

Disturbingly, the Army commander has stated¹⁶ clearly and unequivocally that the (Sinhalese) army will be entrenched in the North and East permanently:- *“Army personnel arriving in those areas for duty will be provided permanent houses and allowed to engage in cultivation work”*. Unlike earlier, the Tamil North and East will be colonized, not by Sinhalese civilians but by Sinhalese soldiers.

4. A determination to wipeout (or even control) obstructions to national reconciliation

The major obstruction, indeed the most virulent ones are the politically active Buddhist clergy and Sinhalese ethno-religious chauvinists. There has been no action to control these disruptive elements that are now more vocal and virulent than they have ever been.

¹⁵ A Catholic agency for overseas aid and development

¹⁶ *Daily Mirror* 28.6.2010

If the Buddhist clergy are told clearly and unequivocally that their place is in Buddhist temples and not on the streets stirring up Sinhala supremacy and demanding the establishment of a Sinhala Buddhist country, then there might be some optimism of a national reconciliation. There has been no such move and these bigots are doing what they have done since Independence in 1948, destroying any possibility of a united country.

No government in the past, present or the foreseeable future, will have the courage to confront these dreadful people who are not only doing irreparable damage to the country and its future, but bringing disrepute to one of the greatest teachers of peace and nonviolence the world has ever known, Gautama Buddha. (My mother was a Buddhist –not that this matters).

So also the Sinhalese extremists and political opportunists, not only at large but even in government, in particular the all-powerful Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the power behind the throne. On 12 June 2007, he ordered the mass deportation of Tamils from Colombo to the Tamil North, claiming that they had “*No business to be there*”. He claimed that there was ‘insecurity’ in Colombo, and they were the suspects! Do those who talk of ‘national reconciliation’ know all this? I doubt it, despite the fact that I have recorded the evidence, including the eviction order, in the DVDs I have recorded and distributed widely.

The Christians

If Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country, there is no place for non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists. The same violence that has been unleashed on the Tamils, is being unleashed on Christians. Scores, if not hundreds, of Christian Churches have been attacked and destroyed by Sinhalese hooligans led by the Buddhist clergy. In their place, Buddhist temples are being constructed. My DVDs document a small, indeed a very small, amount of this. Just a month ago, a 25 year old Christian Church in Rajagiriya, Colombo, was declared an ‘unauthorised structure’ and destroyed on Poson Poya Day – a sacred day in the Buddhist calendar!

More than a dozen Christian clergy, mainly Tamils in the North and East, but also Sinhalese in the South, have been murdered, and many more beaten up. This being reality, I need hardly stress the absurdity of ‘national reconciliation’.

The Sinhalese divide

This article deals, as it should, with Sinhala-Tamil ethnic reconciliation. Unknown to many, there is an increasing divide among the Sinhalese – the ‘have everything’ and the ‘have nothing’. This division has already seen two armed uprisings (1971 and 1988) of disadvantaged rural Sinhalese youths which I have referred to. It is now not just in the rural areas, but across the entire South, including and especially, Colombo.

The divisions between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ in the Sinhala South is increasing. It is set to increase exponentially, once the IMF demands are implemented.

The GoSL that prosecuted the war using the young lives of the Sinhala poor, is now asking them to ‘tighten their belts even tighter, to ‘rebuild’ the nation.

The rich are most certainly getting richer; the poor are spiraling down to grinding poverty. I am talking of the *Sinhalese*, not just the Tamils.

Let alone national reconciliation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils being impossible, reconciliation between Rajapaksa’s dynastic (Sinhalese) government and the Sinhalese poor is equally impossible.

The responsibility for this must rest, not just with the ruling cabal, but with the IMF, India, China, the US and others that demand neither transparency nor good governance.

It is this that makes the long term (or even medium term) outlook for Sri Lanka so poor and what makes any suggestion of 'national reconciliation' a joke.

The economic crisis

The economic crisis and its flow through have a critical effect on 'National Reconciliation' – be it reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils, or the reconciliation between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' among the Sinhala people. It therefore merits careful scrutiny.

The country has been heavily in debt for years, with more problems to follow.

The Rajapaksa government (elected November 2005) went on a spending spree to finance the war on the LTTE, crushing it, and also slaughtering upward of 40,000 Tamil and Muslim civilians – a massacre that ended in May 2009, with the President announcing "victory" and the end of the war.

Despite this, a year later, (June 2010), as has been mentioned, the Armed Forces have gone from 175,000, to 230,000 with a declared intention of getting this up to 300,000. The question is why the military should be substantially increased when there is no war. The answer is that it is 'necessary' to crush *Sinhalese* if they protest at the escalating cost of living. That is what fascist dictatorships and totalitarian regimes have done over the ages. The Rajapaksa regime is no exception.

The Defence budget in 2010, a year after the end of the armed conflict, to 'defend' the country from a non-existent enemy, is Rs 202 billion (\$US 1.8 billion), 21 % of the total expenditure of Rs 974 billion to government ministries.

Last year (2009), government debt reached an incredible Rs 4.1 *trillion*, of which Rs 1.8 trillion was foreign debt, a 22% rise. Sri Lanka's Central Bank annual report stated: "*The ratio of debt service to government revenue increased further to 117.5% from 90.5%*". Total debt servicing rose by 39% to Rs 825.7 billion in 2009, including a massive interest payment of Rs 309.7 billion which comprised 26% of total expenditure.

There has been a marked increase in public debt with repayments in 2010 of Rs 767 billion, 44 % of the total budget expenditure of Rs 1,780 billion.

In July 2009, with the government facing bankruptcy, Sri Lanka was forced to beg for an IMF loan of \$US 2.6 billion, to ward off a balance of payments crisis, having earlier boasted that it never will! The IMF released two installments but withheld the third in February 2010 because the government failed to indicate how it would rein in the budget deficit, which reached 9.7% of GDP in 2009. The IMF demanded a reduction to 7% in 2009, 6% in 2010, and 5% in 2011.

Recently, (June 2010), Ernesto May, the World Bank Director of South Asia launching the *Economic Update 2010* in Colombo said that Sri Lanka's debt was the second highest¹⁷ in South Asia, increasing from 81% of GDP in 2008 to 86% in 2009.

The country's public debt rose to 86% of GDP last year – the second highest in any Asian country¹⁸. Debt repayments is 44% of overall expenditure. The largest budget allocation is, and has been for years, for debt service repayments. In 2010, interest payments alone account for Rs 337 *billion*, 26% of total expenditure. In addition, the government has to find

¹⁷ The highest being Maldives

¹⁸ Maldives being the highest

Rs 565 billion for debt repayments this year, raising its gross borrowings to Rs 980 billion (\$US 8.5 billion).

Unable to implement the IMF austerity measures without facing a massive anti-government backlash from voters, Rajapaksa repeatedly delayed the budget for 2010 (due in November 2009) till he was safely re-installed as President (January 2010), and his government re-elected (April 2010).

In May 2010, Sri Lanka gave an undertaking to the IMF that it would considerably reduce recurrent spending by cutting government subsidies to the Ceylon Electricity Board, Petroleum Corporation, Central Transport Board, Railways, and Postal services. This can be achieved only by axing jobs, cutting wage and increasing prices.

Finally in early June 2010, the government presented to Parliament the expenditure estimates as part of an Appropriation Bill for 2010. The two largest budget items were Defence and Debt repayment. The necessary cuts will be made elsewhere, in particular, a freeze on wages, cuts in pensions and welfare benefits, and a slashing of funds for health and education.

The budget was finally brought down on 29 June, 2010. The day before, a copy of the budget was sent to the IMF to show the massive assault on the working people that the government was going to unleash. The IMF was 'impressed' and released the third (suspended) installment of the \$US 2.6 billion loan.

The allocation for the Rehabilitation Ministry was slashed from Rs 4 billion to Rs 2 billion. The result will be that thousands of refugees in the North and East will continue to lack homes and essential services. As is obvious, national reconciliation with the Tamils in the North and East is simply impossible if they lack homes and essential services.

Allocations for Health and Education were Rs 52 and 46 billion respectively, a total of Rs 10 billion less than for 2009. (The allocation for 2009 was itself Rs 12 billion less than for 2008).

Well aware that such measures will provoke massive opposition and even strikes by working people, Rajapaksa has retained the huge Police State apparatus to crush any form of opposition. This is what a Police State does to its people irrespective of ethnicity.

In addition to the Government's fiscal profligacy, there is rampant corruption all the way to the very top, waste and absolute incompetence in governance.

Facing a massive debt servicing bill and economic collapse, large areas of Sri Lanka are 'up for sale' to foreign investors, especially from China and India. Most of these areas are in the Tamil North and East, whose rightful owners are in detention centres or are refugees, who are, as a consequence, unable to return home.

Sri Lanka, in particular the Tamil North and East, is being divided up and sold

Unknown to many, there is a 'fire-sale' in Sri Lanka, particularly the Tamil lands in the North and East which international economists have stated, has the highest developmental potential. This is exactly what is happening in India which the Indian activist Arundhati Roy, says in her outstanding book *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*:-

"The two arms of the Indian government have developed the perfect pincer action. While one arm is busy selling India off in chunks, the other, to divert attention, is orchestrating a howling, baying chorus of Hindu nationalism and religious fascism".

So also in Sri Lanka. While one arm is selling off the country or borrowing heavily from international lenders i.e. the IMF and China, getting the country deeper and deeper into debt,

the other is cheering the 'victory' over the Tamil militants and how the country has at last been freed from 'Tamil terrorism'.

Arundhati Roy goes on:-

"The dismantling of democracy is proceeding with the speed and efficiency of a Structural Adjustment Program. While the project of corporate globalization rips through people's lives in India, massive privatization and labour 'reforms' are pushing people off their land and out of their jobs. Hundreds of impoverished farmers are committing suicide by consuming pesticide. Reports of starvation deaths are coming in from all over the country.

While the elite journeys to their imaginary destination somewhere near the top of the world, the dispossessed are spiraling downwards into crime and chaos. This climate of frustration and national disillusionment is the perfect breeding ground, history tell us, for fascism"

That is precisely what is happening in Sri Lanka. Democracy is most certainly being dismantled at an alarming rate. What is left is barely recognizable. (Tamil) people are being pushed off their lands into concentration camps or just into the jungle, and out of their jobs (fishing and agriculture).

Hundreds (of Tamils) are committing suicide (I gather Sri Lanka has the 2nd highest rate of suicide in the world. Starvation (of Tamils in the North, and now the Sinhalese poor in the South) is being increasingly reported.

Shanties and slums in Colombo are being bulldozed so that the land can be sold to capitalists. The poor, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, are being evicted – to nowhere (see below).

The elite (in particular the Rajapaksa family) are journeying to the top of the world (it is not an imaginary destination), the rest are in grinding poverty with an inflation rate of nearly 30%, and fascism has already been established, proving that history repeats itself.

The less fortunate are certainly *"spiraling downwards into crime and chaos"*. Unfortunately, they do not have a powerful vocal expatriate community to jump up and down for them. That is the problem of being poor which I have seen, and sympathized with, for years.

Assault on the poor (in Colombo) in the Sinhala South

President Rajapaksa put the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the Reclamation of Land Development Corporation (RLDC) under the Defence Ministry(!) as part of the City of Colombo Development Plan to attract investors and tourists. On 28 June 2010, an order was issued for a survey of all shanties and huts on government land, reservations and waterways.

In an unbelievable violation of basic human rights, on 10 July 2010, the Sri Lankan military and police attacked thousands of slum dwellers – the poorest of the poor – in Colombo. More than 1,000 Security personnel, including soldiers and police riot squads, attacked, and later rounded up, thousands of residents in Mattakkuliya in northern Colombo. Next morning, some 8,000 residents were marched to an open field where hooded men pointed out more than 200 people, who were taken into police custody.

They had done nothing, except to be born poor, just as the Tamils in the North and East who were locked up in concentration camps had done nothing except to be born Tamil.

This and other military-police operations mark a new and very worrying stage of repressive measures against ordinary people, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, by Rajapaksa's

government – evidence of an emerging police-state in Sri Lanka. The capitalists, both local and foreign, will now move in to buy this dreadfully acquired land

Homes for the bulldozer (Colombo)
To free up land for investors



Filthy canal Apple Watta slums Colombo
(I have been there, it is 'home' to many)



Destructive capitalism, lack of accountability, rampant corruption and absolute power

It is the combination of destructive capitalism, a complete lack of accountability, thuggery, rampant corruption, and absolute power in the hands of one family, (Rajapaksas' today, preceded by members of my family, the Bandaranaiques, preceded by Jayawardene, and all the way back to the Senanayakes who took over from the British). This nepotism has now reached 'epidemic proportions' and unprecedented barbarism.

These irresponsible and increasingly ruthless 'leaders', if they can be called that, have been backed by foreign powers for their own geopolitical and economic gains, with money supplied by them and the IMF.

The role of the IMF

The IMF has never had a problem supporting and propping up some of the most ruthless dictators and those who have been guilty of extensive human rights violations. When the GoSL asked for a US\$ 1.8 billion loan to finance, among other things, a country with the largest army per capita in the world to murder and crush its people, the IMF gave more than what was requested – 'generously' lending US \$ 2.6 billion.

No IMF loan has ever been given without crippling conditions which have a disastrous impact on the living conditions of the people. It is those at the bottom of the pile who are crushed by the IMF conditions which include reducing budget deficits, overhauling the tax system and cuts in social spending and essentials such as food, oil prices and electricity.

To be specific, in Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka, the IMF had no problems financing a regime which maintained 'defence' expenditure at astronomical levels at the expense of social development and development projects. As would be expected of any capitalist set-up, the IMF had no objections to Rajapaksa having the world's largest Cabinet of Ministers, tax breaks for luxury vehicles, and wasteful extravaganza such as the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA)¹⁹ 'celebration', as long as there was a freeze on wages, and cuts on subsidies and essential commodities.

¹⁹ <http://www.srilanka.travel/iifa/>

The IMF has never interfered with regime's 'sovereign right' to violate democratic and human rights. In fact, the IMF knows full well that implementation of these loan conditions will result in just that.

All of the IMF conditions have been implemented by the GoSL, and more will be, depending on how ruthless the IMF decides to be. Any protests by those who are affected will be crushed by the government with the same ruthlessness with which the Tamils were crushed.

The media

The media are heavily censored or self-censored through fear. They merely regurgitate government propaganda. Those who dare to defy this are quickly silenced. The founder-editor of the *Sunday Leader* who dared to question the government using military force to settle a political problem, Lasantha Wickrematunga, a Sinhalese, was quickly silenced – murdered in broad daylight in a suburb of Colombo on 8 January 2009²⁰.

So have been nearly two dozen media people, Sinhalese and Tamils. Scores have fled the country. Sri Lanka was ranked 165 out of 173 countries in the *Reporters without Borders 2008* Press Freedom Index. This was the lowest ranking of any democratic country. It is one of the most dangerous places in the world for independent journalists.

A dreadful country

Victor Ivan, one of Sri Lanka's most respected journalists, a Sinhalese like me, has this to say in his 'must-read' book²¹. The first sentence in the Sinhalese version of the book reads:-

"I have never considered Sri Lanka to be particularly civilized country. It has instead appeared to me to be a particularly immoral country, whose leaders embodied iniquity and baseness".

It is these iniquitous and base people holding political power in Sri Lanka that Australia and the rest of the world support. In the earlier edition of the same book, published in Sinhala in 2006, Ivan wrote:-

"From now on, the People's Alliance (the Party led by President Rajapaksa) can no longer speak of democracy....It cannot speak of transparency, or claim to be a regime as pure as a white lotus (The previous President did). It has lost the right to speak of creating a society governed by benevolence and humanity."

Just four days before the 2010 General Election, the editorial in a leading Sri Lankan newspaper²², set out the options facing Sri Lankan voters. In one of the most accurate descriptions of the vast majority of Sri Lankan politicians, the editorial was blunt:-

"None of the individual contenders, political parties or opportunistic coalitions are worthy of our respect or our vote. Together they comprise the most mind-boggling array of crooks, thugs, conmen, hypocrites, unprincipled racists, rapists, drug dealers, money launderers, and general all-round scum that is without parallel elsewhere in the world. Other nations have their share of such undesirables, no doubt, but among them are a handful of honest, sincere, principled folk who have distanced themselves from the corrupt majority. Not so in miserable Sri Lanka."

²⁰ Four army officers have just been taken in for questioning, but it is certain that they were acting on the instructions of those in Rajapaksa's government.

²¹ *The Queen of Deceit* published in Sri Lanka in 2007

²² *The Sunday Leader* 4 April 2010. Editorial : "Let's not create a "Democratic" King".

One of them, “Colonel Karuna”, a former Tamil militant commander, who had assassinated 130 Sinhala policemen who had surrendered to him in the East, was appointed a Cabinet Minister in Rajapaksa’s government. Amnesty International in a press release²³ “*Sri Lanka: Karuna’s presence in Parliament is a travesty of justice*” wrote:-

“Karuna should stand trial, The fact that a suspected war criminal should be entering Parliament sends an appalling message – that war crimes, rather than being investigated and punished, are actually rewarded”.

Referring to President Rajapaksa, the editorial said:-

“To vote for a man who is in the process of establishing a dynasty is to vote for the replacement of democracy with monarchy”.

These are the people who are expected to deliver ‘national reconciliation’ in Sri Lanka.

The *only* politicians of integrity in Sri Lanka, **all** of them Sinhalese, who have campaigned for justice for the Tamils are those from the Left. They are the outstanding Wije Dias (Socialist Equality Party), Siritunga Jayasuriya (United Socialist Party), and Dr Vickremabahu Karunaratne (Left Front). All three were Presidential candidates at the Presidential election (26.1 2010). The fact that they got 0.04%, 0.08% and 0.07% of the votes cast, while two mass murderers, knee-deep in Tamil blood, Mahinda Rajapaksa, Executive President, Minister of Defence and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and Gen Sarath Fonseka, Army Commander who carried out the genocide, got 57.8% and 40.1% of the votes speaks volumes.

The General Election (8 April 2010) showed the same, with those who stood for justice for the Tamils getting less than 0.2% of the votes.

What this means is that the vast majority of Sri Lankans are in favour of the continuing injustice to the Tamils – some 18% of the population. In a country such as that, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is nonsense.

To clarify the ‘Left’ in Sri Lanka, I have said that the JVP were Sinhalese Marxist youths (in 1971). The JVP has long since abandoned any trace of Marxism and decided to go down the well-worn path of Sinhala ethno-religious chauvinism, with the current leader even declaring that Marx got it all wrong! Hypocritically, they still run around wearing a red cap with a hammer and a sickle in what can be best described as ‘pretence Marxism’. One of their leaders, a Minister in Rajapaksa’s government, has just gone on a fast demanding that the UN abandons any attempt to have an investigation into war crimes committed during the closing stages of the war.

The documented ability of these hoodlums and thugs, with their leaders in the Rajapaksa government, to block any ‘concessions’ offered to the Tamils, and to disrupt the country if necessary, makes any talk of ‘National reconciliation’ completely unrealistic.

“Returning to Normal”

If Sri Lanka is ‘returning to normal’ (as the GoSL, and even some international groups such as the UN Human Rights Commission, have claimed), then it is mandatory to ask why internationally renowned human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, are not allowed free access to all parts of the country.

²³ 7 October 2008

To focus on the 'here and now', the GoSL has just (7 July 2010) deported two members of a well-known NGO (non-government organization)²⁴, "Nonviolent Peaceforce", that has been working in Sri Lanka since 2003. On 24 June 2010, the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration informed Nonviolent Peaceforce – Sri Lanka (NPSL), that visas for Ms. Tiffany Easthom (Country Director, NPSL) and Mr. Ali Palh (Coordinator Human Rights Defenders Project, NPSL) were being cancelled and that they would have to leave the country on or before 7 July 2010.

Nonviolent Peaceforce is an international organisation that tries to improve security for civilians at risk of harm and to prevent attacks and other human rights violations. Their focus is on prevention and change rather than on investigation and the attribution of blame. There is only one conclusion that can be drawn – that the GoSL feels threatened by such activity.

The facts

Let us face some stark facts and not smudge them over with fiction and imagination. Sri Lanka is a pathetically polarized country. The problems are Sinhala majoritarianism, Sinhala-Buddhist ethnoreligious chauvinism, and after the end of the war, Sinhala triumphalism with no consideration of the (Tamil) civilian cost of achieving this 'victory'. This is not going to change, indeed there is every indication that it will get worse, despite international concerns. The arrogant GoSL could not care less.

The divisions between the Sinhala majority and the brutalized Tamil minority is deepening. So are the divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in the Sinhala South. This division is set to get worse as a totally corrupt, ruthless and despotic regime implements the inhuman conditions demanded by the IMF. Any protests by the helpless Sinhala poor will be crushed by the military and police in what is a Police State. There is neither any international pressure or any incentive to change its policies, its extravagant and limitless expenditure maintaining a massive and increasing Army and Police, abysmal governance by the Rajapaksas, of the Rajapaksas, for the Rajapaksas, for the foreseeable future, manipulating or ignoring the Constitution of the country and trampling on human rights of all its people – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Anyone who dares to challenge this can be prosecuted and persecuted as an enemy of the nation.

The future for Sri Lankans, irrespective of ethnicity, is bleak. The Sinhala poor will be second-class citizens, the Tamils in the North and East, non-citizens, as were the Plantation ('Indian') Tamils in 1948, disenfranchised and decitizenised by the first Government of the newly independent country. History is certainly repeating itself.

These are not opinions to be debated, but facts to be faced. The role of the expatriate Tamil community, now more than a million, is to get the facts across to the international community that the Sri Lankan government is lying and has no intention of national reconciliation. To do this, the facts must be known, which is why I have put these together in this publication.

Brian Senewiratne

Brisbane, Australia

28 August 2010

My Thanks.

It is with deep gratitude and admiration that I acknowledge the outstanding work done by my people, the Sinhala people in the South, who are reporters for the World Socialist Web Site. Without their invaluable work, done under the most dangerous and difficult conditions, much of the critical information in this paper would simply not have been there. It is with profound

²⁴ <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/our-work-sri-lanka-continues>

sadness that I am unable to stand with them or to shake their hand. For the first time in my life, I am proud to say that I am a Sinhalese and that it is my people who have made, and continue to make, this invaluable contribution.

As long as there are people like this in Sri Lanka, there is still some hope for a country fast becoming one with no hope or vision. I am sure they are aware of the risks they are taking with a regime that tolerates no criticism and to which 'truth' is synonymous with 'treason'.

I hope that those who read this, will contribute to the WSWS so that this vital work can go on. How you can do so, is on the net. Just go to Google and type "WSWS" and it is all there.

WSWS reporters visit the devastated Sri Lankan town of Kilinochchi

By our correspondents

2 June 2010

One year after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan government claims that life is returning to normal in the war-ravaged Vanni region. But as our reporting team found during their recent visit to Kilinochchi, that is far from the case. Tens of thousands of civilians who lost everything during the fighting have been "resettled" in the area with little government assistance.

Kilinochchi was the LTTE's administrative headquarters when its forces controlled most of the Vanni. It was the scene of months of bitter fighting in the final months of 2008 as the LTTE put up stiff resistance to repeated army offensives and sustained aerial and artillery bombardment. The entire civilian population had fled well before Sri Lankan troops finally entered what was a ghost town in early January 2009.

After the fall of Kilinochchi, the LTTE's resistance rapidly collapsed. The army tightened its noose around the LTTE and confined it to a small pocket of land on the northeast coast, which was pounded relentlessly killing thousands of civilians. When the area was finally overrun in May 2009, the army rounded up more than a quarter of a million civilians, many of whom were injured, sick and famished, and herded them into detention camps.

The internees were only released from last December onwards in response to international and domestic pressure. In the meantime, the military had turned Kilinochchi into an army town with plans for a permanent occupation and the construction of major permanent bases. Former residents found the town devastated and have been forced to eke out an existence as best they can.

Our reporters visited Kilinochchi town and the villages of Poonahari, 26 kilometres to the west, and Vattakachchi, 15 kilometres to the east. They conducted their work under difficult circumstances, as the media generally cannot operate freely in the town. The photos are taken from a bus, but give an indication of the makeshift conditions under which people are living in the Vanni.

The first thing that strikes you about the situation in Kilinochchi is that you find more soldiers than civilians in the town. They are in uniform and civvies, carrying weapons or just moving here and there. People can only travel to Kilinochchi, either from Jaffna to the north or from Vavuniya to the south, by passing through military camps, checkpoints and patrolling soldiers.

Soldiers might not question you as they would have six months ago but they keep a close eye on everyone's movements. Just after one of our correspondents went to a relative's house in a village, soldiers arrived at the house and asked why he was there. When he said he was

visiting a relative, they went away. But the same thing happens whenever a new person comes to a house.

The buildings in Kilinochchi town were destroyed last year. Heaps of debris have since been removed about 50 metres from the main road. The traders who have returned are renovating or rebuilding their shops, which were damaged during the war, at their own expense. These are small shops and there are only a few customers. Most of the eating houses are run by the army, catering for people travelling through the town.



Makeshift dwellings

People's land and buildings that were previously occupied by the LTTE are now occupied by the military. A vast area in the southern section of the town has been fenced with barbed wire. Residents think it will be used to erect a military complex. Meanwhile, the Kilinochchi bus stand still has no any shelter. Passengers must wait for buses, sometimes for hours, under trees in the hot sun or rain. No buses are running to some places still.

Former detainees have been sent here almost without any assistance. The government's attitude is one expression of its communal discrimination. Displaced people spoke angrily about the government's policy. One person explained: "We are living here abandoned by all. The government said it would provide us with houses, employment and other facilities. It has not even given us clean drinking water, apart from what the relief agencies have supplied. Nobody has come to see our plight. There is no difference between staying in the detention camps and living here. The conditions are the same in both places."

Many of the resettled people live in 10-by-10 feet huts with tin sheets provided by some non-government organisations. Other people are living in tents that are the same size. There are no separate rooms for sleeping or getting dressed. The floors have been leveled with mud. As there are no toilet facilities, people are using open spaces. Some families have used tin sheets to make roofs for their damaged houses.

People have been able to survive without going hungry only because the World Food Program (WFP) is providing food. Many people don't have even instruments like knives, equipment to clean their hands, or lamps for daily use. They have to look for bottles to make kerosene oil lamps, and search for water because the wells are not cleaned.

The Kilinochchi district was famous for agriculture and fishing. The large Iranaimadu tank (artificial lake) mainly supplied irrigation for several thousand acres of agricultural land. The tank is now under the military's control. Water has not yet been fully released for farmers. A few farmers have begun cultivation but they do not have tractors or other basic equipment.

Many do not have even a mamoty (a type of spade). Fishermen are not allowed to fish in the tank.

Poonahari village has been devastated, like other areas in the Vanni. The debris from destroyed houses, such as bricks and wood, has been used to erect military checkpoints that monitor the local coastline. One resident commented: "The military checkpoints are made out of the wood and sheets from our homes."



Small tents house some resettled families

Students are generally attending schools but there is a serious lack of teachers and equipment. Teachers have to travel a long distance from Jaffna or Vavuniya. At Poonahari, the Vikneswara School, which previously conducted classes up to the advanced level, is now occupied by the military, so students must walk to another school five kilometres away.

The military has also occupied Poonahari's government hospital. As there are no longer any hospital facilities, people have to beg someone in the army camps to take any seriously ill patients to Kilinochchi in a military vehicle for treatment. Patients with minor illnesses simply have to suffer.

In Vattakachchi village there is no hospital and no school, and the people live in tents. The houses were destroyed during the war. The local Vattakachchi and Ramanathapuram schools remain occupied by the military.

Many women have lost their husbands. They are struggling to survive, facing numerous difficulties, without proper clothes and education for their children. One woman explained: "The government did not give us any help. I don't have the money to search for my disappeared husband. Others like me face the same problems."

Billions of rupees are urgently needed to rebuild the Kilinochchi district for proper human habitation. But the Colombo government is not interested in rebuilding the conditions of ordinary people. Its treatment of war-devastated people is a continuation of decades of discrimination against Tamils.

