

Independence is a Farce

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WRITING FROM VANNI

The talk of the town, I mean the Sinhala town, from the beginning of the year was the 60th "Independence Day Celebrations." There were lots of preparations made, millions and millions of rupees were spent and what happened on the 4th of February it was "Pus vaanum" - a firecracker that died away silently. There were hardly any spectators and even those who had to be there on compulsion were terrified of a sabotage act by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Even the President, what ever he may be, one has to accept him as an eloquent orator, cut his normal lengthy deliveries to a few minutes and his voice was not the same as it used to be.

Peace and Amity

60 years back, when there was no racial animosity - not superficially at least - everyone the Muslims, the Burgers, the Sinhalese, the Malays and the Tamils participated with pride and hope in the celebrations of the 4th of February 1948. Of course the Sri Lankans did not shed even a drop of blood to achieve independence. To SL independence was virtually served on a silver plate for the mere asking. I was only 15 years old then. We were supplied with "Green" shirts free at our college and we all lined up along the road and waved our hands at the procession that passed by. Frankly I feel like kicking myself now for having donned that green attire and for not knowing then what it means now to us.

As I said above, this racial hatred had not crept into us at that time. But we started feeling the pinch of it in the 1950s. The United National Party was very popular among the Tamils even then. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party was not formed in 1948. It was the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) that held the monopoly one could say. Thanthai S.J.V.Chelvanayagam and others, who formed the Federal Party, were originally in the ACTC.

Unfortunately never in the history of Sri Lanka has Jaffna ever elected a leftist to the parliament. The only exception of course was Mr.P.Kandiah from Vadamardchchi. He was a communist and jewel of a fellow. He won his constituency definitely not because of his party affiliation but

simply because of his exceptional personal character. He was a symbol of honesty, sincerity and dedication.

The Good Old 1940s and the Downfall Thereafter

In the 1940s there was social harmony, political stability, prosperity in its own way and above all ethnic amity. Tamils and the Sinhalese lived all over Sri Lanka without the least amount of fear. The Sinhala Only bill sowed the first seed of racism in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately things began to tumble down and within 10 years the death knoll was rung. In 1956 a peaceful demonstration against the Sinhala Only bill was crushed with force in front of the parliament itself. It is ironical that this happened right in front of the parliament that is to make the legislatures for Law and Order in the country. Yet the young and old were beaten up by hired hooligans. And that culture was repeated in 1958; notoriously known as the Emergency 1958 and quite frequently there after culminating to the Black July of 1983. It gathered momentum like a snowball on a down slope. And now that is the rule of the day in the Tamil homeland and elsewhere where the Tamils live. Rape, Cold-blooded Murder, Abduction, Torture, Ransom and Burglary aided and abetted by the government forces are day today affairs.

Methodical and Planned discriminations

Disenfranchising almost one million Indian Tamils from the estates and the Sinhala only bill gave the start for the ethnic problems in this country. The divide was set in and the cancerous contamination of racism began to spread in leaps and bounds in arithmetical proportions. On election platform the prospective candidates both from the UNP and the SLFP thundered venom of hatred against the Tamils. Politicians changed their policies from time to time to suit the need of the hour. S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake proposed a Federal system to the North and East in the mid-forties. But he did not get enough support to have it implemented. But it was the same person who brought about the Sinhala Only bill in 1956.

Bandaranayake abrogated the Banda-Chelva pact, which was much inferior to the federal system he himself proposed in the forties.

In the forties J.R.Jeyawardene proposed the Sinhala only act and it was vehemently opposed by none other than the same S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) proposed the parity of status to the Tamils but its stalwart Dr. Colvin R.De Silva was the one who sculptured the constitution in 1972 depriving the rights of the Tamils.

Now after 60 years of the so called "independence", the plight of the Tamils is worse than anytime before. Those living in the "liberated areas" both in the north and east are leading a life in perpetual fear. Both the armed forces and the paramilitary groups are having a hay day in these areas. There the women are raped, people are killed without any provocation, houses are burgled under the cover of the curfew, and abductions and ransom demands are galore.

Embargo is imposed in the North and in Vanni. North is completely cut off from the rest of the island and the people are virtually held in an open prison. Only the rich and the privileged few can afford the price of the flight to Colombo. A travel that took only 7 hours by train from Jaffna to Colombo now takes more than three days by ship and train or bus provided one gets the pass and the tickets for the journey. They don't come cheap either.

Few Pertinent Questions to Rajapakse

Is this the "Independence" we are talking about? Who are enjoying the independence today? If it is for the Sinhalese why were there not a single Sinhalese civilian at the "Independence Celebrations" on the 4th February 2008? Why didn't the Prime Minister of India, who was invited to grace the occasion as the chief guest didn't turn up? Why were there thousands and thousands of army, navy, air force and police personnel at the celebrations? Why did the President, his brothers and some privileged ministers had to come in bullet proof vehicles? Why did you spend millions and millions on this *Tamasha* while the tsunami victims are still dwelling in makeshift huts?

Germany wants Sri Lanka to decide between war and aid

- German Minister Wieczorek-Zeul

German Economic Cooperation and Development Minister, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul Ms. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul has vowed to demand from the EU that it withdraws the General System of Preference Plus offered to Sri Lanka if the Sri Lankan government continues to insist on a military option to the ethnic issue.

Ms. Wieczorek-Zeul is a highly respected and powerful politician. Widely known as an influential politician with strong principles whose statement can be taken as she would lobby vigorously for causes she believes in. She was also one of the most outspoken politicians to press for the resignation of former World Bank boss Paul Wolfowitz.

We reproduce an English translation of the statements made by Ms. Wieczorek-Zeul to *Tages Spiegel*, a popular daily news paper in Germany. The English translation was made by the *Morning Leader*.

Q: In January the Government of Sri Lanka has withdrawn from the Ceasefire Agreement. What can Europe and the world do?

A: The international community must influence both parties to the conflict to seek a political solution and withdraw from the war which brings only suffering to the people. In the beginning of March a EU-Troika will travel to Sri Lanka. If the Sri Lankan government continues to insist on a military option, I will demand that the EU should withdraw the General System of Preference (GSP) offered to Sri Lanka. This concession enables Sri Lanka to export its goods and products to the EU at reduced or exempted tax and duty levies. This step will really bring economic pressure on the GoSL. For Sri Lanka a preference system plus is in place until the end of 2008 which, however, requires good governance.

If the EU continues to accept the present situation the plus is meaningless. The biggest portion of Sri Lanka's exports consists of textile exports. Only garment product exports to the EU markets are valued at US\$ 1-2 billion annually. The other part is exported to the United States.

It is also important to consult with the US which has also taken up a very critical position towards Sri Lanka in the past weeks.

Q: And development cooperation?

A: For the past two years we have not concluded any new agreements on cooperation as projects cannot be implemented due to the security situation. We are only engaged in completing what we have started earlier. We could make new agreements over 38 million, but we shall not do so at this point.

Q: How should the United Nations act?

A: It would be encouraging if the UN Security Council takes up this issue. However, it seems that it is difficult at the moment for the UN Security Council to act. However, what the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon can do without a formal decision of the Security Council is to send a special envoy to Sri Lanka.

After the departure of the Norwegian monitors who were in place since the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 there is nobody to document human rights violations. The war is now again in full swing.

Q: Why has Sri Lanka failed to achieve peace after the tsunami in 2004 as it has happened in the Aceh Province of Indonesia?

A: After the tsunami I had greater hopes of Sri Lanka achieving peace than in Indonesia. There were so many initiatives from people from around the world. But it turned out to be different. The reconstruction in Aceh is successful and there is a responsible government set up even in the province of Aceh.

Q: Should tourists travel to Sri Lanka?

A: It is up to the Federal Foreign Office of Germany to issue travel recommendations. However, we are withdrawing half of the personnel working in development cooperation and we will close the office of the German Development Bank (Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau), because the security situation is very critical.

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முன்னாள் இந்திய ஜனாதிபதி அப்துல் கலாம் அவர்களுக்கு சோதிடம் சொன்ன போது

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Spoken languages: Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, kannada & English.