

07 January 2015

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa

President of Sri Lanka

Presidential Secretariat

Colombo 1

Dear Mr President,

The Importance of January 8th – Lasantha Wickrematunge’s murder

The irony of the presidential election being fixed for the sixth anniversary of the day on which my husband and your ‘friend’, Lasantha Wickrematunge, was assassinated, may have escaped you. It has not escaped me.

Lasantha was killed on 8 January 2009, in broad daylight, while driving to work. In the wake of his murder, you stated publicly that he was your friend and that you used to meet with him frequently. You also promised a swift and thorough inquiry. That was indeed generous of you, especially in view of the fact that Lasantha was arguably the biggest thorn in your side, right from the time his newspaper exposed the [‘Helping Hambantota’](#) scandal, where, like a stevedore loading a grange ship, you shoveled large sums of money donated to you for tsunami relief, into a private bank account controlled by you.

Despite your sanctimonious promise, now, six years after Lasantha’s murder, we all know that no inquiry ever materialized. Your brother Gotabhaya (who oversees the police), when asked about the inquiry by a BBC journalist, giggled and said (on camera), “Who is Lasantha?”

His ignorance is additionally bewildering, given that Lasantha was admittedly your ‘friend’ and in his capacity as a journalist, well known to all members of your family – who enjoy dozens of nepotistic government appointments made by you.

I was amused by the outrage you expressed, at the disloyalty demonstrated by your trusted confidante and health minister, Maithripala Sirisena, when he defected in November 2014, to challenge you at the presidential elections tomorrow.

This was a man, you gasped, who just before he defected as the common opposition candidate, partook of a hopper meal with you, in a spirit of camaraderie and trust.

You will no doubt recall, that many months before my husband was murdered, you requested a rapprochement with him, inviting him to Temple Trees for late night String Hopper meals. There, you discussed many matters –including your inability to go for walks and exercise in public, due to security concerns. Lasantha too, met you barely a month before he was murdered in broad daylight, and together you partook of a String Hopper meal.

Life Mr. President, is full of ironies.

In the run up to the presidential election of 2005, you and your government allegedly made a [deal with the LTTE](#), as widely reported in Lasantha's newspaper in great detail.

As a result, the LTTE with your alleged approval, prevented hundreds of thousands of Tamil voters from exercising their democratic right to vote.

Just this week, the media reported, that the 55-member panel of election monitors, had already received complaints, that the military had set up 400 roadblocks, to discourage minority Tamils from voting freely in former war zones.

Mr. president, these democratic violations continue to happen time and again with demonic repetition.

To justify continued militarization, you have recreated an enemy to instill fear and mistrust of the other. An enemy that you announced triumphantly, was eviscerated by you, in 2009.

You have embraced extremism as your political bedfellow, and Sri Lanka's once rich judiciary, has mutated into a dangerous tool in your hands.

The tragedy of your leadership is that you could have had it all. Not even your political enemies will seek to undermine your government's service to the nation in getting rid of the LTTE threat of terrorism in Sri Lanka.

But you are a Janus faced monster. Your unfettered control over the political, social and economic life of Sri Lankans, your refusal to acknowledge the loss suffered by the innocent people of the north, your continued intransigence in not seeking true reconciliation with dignity among the communities, your complete disregard for the rights of the ordinary people, your support of Nazi like supremacist groups like the BBS, and your blinding greed in favoring your own family over the people of Sri Lanka, has dulled the shine of your military achievements.

Your pretty roundabouts and soaring Lotus Towers will not make up for that thing we have lost as a nation.

You and your brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa, have encouraged a small group of extremists, to exclude and otherize a large number of people, who love Sri Lanka just as much as you do, and perhaps more.

You have excluded and forced into exile, persons whose beautiful memories of their motherland, possibly far exceed your own experiences in Medamulane.

You have shamelessly dared to write a false narrative of our recent history, and with disgusting arrogance, redefined patriotism to exclude those of us who truly love our country, and believe in justice and equality for all; and to include instead, members of a club of racist, self absorbed, self-serving, lascivious, gluttonous, self indulgent, self important people – a club no doubt where you, your kith and kin and the Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS), are foundation members.

As of June last year, hundreds of properties, including 17 mosques had been attacked, leaving four dead, 80 injured and thousands homeless, after your chauvinistic Buddhist Brigade (BBS), who by every action

they take, and every word they utter, violate the teachings of the Buddha, went on their characteristic rampage, with your tacit approval.

You have done nothing to stem this sweep of anti Muslim violence instigated by the BBS, and you have resisted all calls to ban the BBS for inciting racial and religious hatred.

The only rap on the knuckles to this group, came from the young American billionaire Mark Zuckerberg, whose company shut down the [BBS Facebook page](#), following a flood of complaints.

There are media reports that Muslims who went to police stations to report incidents of violence, have themselves been arrested on suspicion of being involved in the violence.

But minorities, dissidents and activists can expect little from a society led by you, when one considers that even a Buddhist monk, who openly spoke against the BBS and its message of hatred, was abducted and later found assaulted, naked and bloody on the side of a road, with his hands and legs tied, and lacerations in the lower part of his body from attempts to circumcise him with a knife. Like the Muslims, this [Buddhist monk too was arrested](#), for staging the attack himself, and self-inflicting his wounds.

It seems that in your Sri Lanka, there is nothing violent and horrendous done to its people, that is not self-inflicted. Mr.President, you must surely rule over a nation of masochists.

You have left Sri Lanka so soulless, that there was no response to any of these attacks either from the government, the opposition or the media.

You know full well, that if there was one person of character and stature, who would have responded, it would have been your 'friend' Lasantha. But he was conveniently put out of the way, during your watch.

It is therefore curious, that in one of your recent stump speeches, you made a point of referring to the horrendous killing over 23 years ago on 18 February 1990, of actor, writer, poet and journalist Richard Soyza under the watch of a former UNP government, while conveniently ignoring the killing of Lasantha, under yours. This mention was even more ironic, because, no sooner than Lasantha was killed on 08 January 2009, your officials called for the Richard De Soyza files, in order to peruse its contents for ideas, and find a way to cover up Lasantha's assassination, through obfuscation and subterfuge.

You have destroyed the fabric of society and brought the country so low, that even those who seemed once to embrace pluralism and justice, have started to flirt with Hitlerian ideology. You have empowered the evil that lurks in every human being, and given it a voice and a home.

Your brothers have unashamedly attended events organized by the BBS, given them airtime on television, and your cabinet ministers have echoed their rhetoric of fear and otherization, for no other purpose, than to consolidate power within a small elite group.

The BBS is nothing but the KKK in different colored robes.

Can you not see even now, that nurturing hate, protecting extremists, creating paranoia, and acting with impunity, has turned Sri Lanka from a paradise into a Gehenna? Do you think that your own grandchildren would want to live, in the poisonous society you have created?

You have only to read the vitriolic, asinine, racist, comments on websites and on Facebook, to understand that something is terribly wrong in Sri Lanka. Certainly, much of this is due to the nature of the internet itself, but I for one, remember a time, we respected our elders, spoke to each other with dignity, and did not hide behind anonymity.

A survey of social media conducted by the Center for Policy Alternatives has shown that racism runs deep in the Sinhala majority, especially among the young. Sinhala language comment pages online are awash with racial slurs, hate and violent diatribes.

[‘Groundviews’](#) recently monitored 35 Facebook fan pages and found the hate speech against Muslims has increased exponentially.

The study found that the bulk of the users are very young Sinhalese, many attending the leading schools of Colombo. Much of what is online in Sinhala chat pages is offensive, it is disrespectful to women and is replete with gutter language.

For a nation that repeatedly boasts a 2500-year culture, is this all we have to showcase?

Sri Lanka’s politics is bloody and distasteful, and perhaps a lot of what you do is informed by shrewd strategy, to cater to your most loyal constituents, the Sinhala Buddhists, by whipping up nationalist sentiment, that you hope will pay off at the polling booths tomorrow.

Perhaps you want to deflect attention from the U.N. inquiry into war crimes, and as some commentators have suggested, instigate a violent Muslim reaction that could be portrayed as an Islamic terror threat, that would resonate with the west, and help woo back western support. To this end, there have been suggestions by your ministers, of possible al-Qaeda infiltration into Sri Lanka.

You have also suggested in your campaign emails, one of which unfortunately made its way into my mailbox, that an opposition victory would mean, that the country will not only be plunged back into a civil war, but will be immediately divided. You conveniently illustrated your warning ,with a picture of Sri Lanka depicting the once LTTE proposed state of Eelam. If this is true Mr. President, you have been deceiving all of us quite abominably. Why did three wheelers adorned in national flags scoot around the city streets taking victory laps in May 2009, if not for the fact that the Sri Lanka army had defeated the LTTE? Come now, Mr. President, we all know that all the real LTTE men ,like Karuna and KP are in your government, and the phantoms merely appear during election time.

You have made several promises to hold free and fair elections sans violence. Yet in the past week, two rallies addressed by your opponent Maithripala Sirisena came under attack. Many complaints of election violence have been recorded, and in turn, election monitors have complained of police inaction.

Mr. President, impunity is rampant in Sri Lanka, and all it takes for criminals to walk free, is a nod and a wink from you. Lasantha was one of several journalists murdered/abducted/maimed/threatened in Sri Lanka after you became President in 2005. In not one of these cases have the murderers/perpetrators been brought to book. Indeed, Lasantha's himself observed that, "murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty..."

Lasantha's assassination was not investigated; neither were any of the several preceding commando-style attacks on him, his home and *The Sunday Leader's* press. Such an investigation should be all the more important to you given that you were reported in January 2006 (without contradiction, in the same newspaper) as having made a phone call to him in which you used the words "I will kill you."

It is no secret that several other journalists, myself included, have been attacked or otherwise threatened, resulting in their being forced to flee Sri Lanka. Yet others have been coerced into submission. At no time in the history of our country has the freedom of expression so brutally been repressed as it is now. Such media as do operate in the country, have been transformed either into propaganda mouthpieces for you and your brothers, or bullied into submission.

The Lasantha Wickrematunge assassination was the last nail in the coffin of Sri Lanka's media freedom. You owe it to the people of Sri Lanka to properly investigate not only Lasantha's death, but also the deaths of other journalists and activists.

In the final analysis, the outcome of tomorrow's election is immaterial. Sri Lanka needs to return to itself. If all our peoples stood together we could still do it. There is still hope for our nation.

As for you Mr. President, if you do get the third term you seek, I hope, that for the sake of your children's future and mine, you will seriously think about turning over a new leaf.

Yours faithfully,

Sonali Samarasinghe-Wickrematunge.