



Ban Ki-moon, Mahinda Rajapaksa, G. L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda - a possible puppet-mayor
“It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief...that mental lying has produced in society”.
Thomas Paine – (The Age of Reason)

Like Rip Van Winkle, did President Mahinda Rajapaksa wake up, after years of guileless-slumbering – in time for the CMC election?

The President avows his government had “no intention of evicting tenement dwellers from Colombo city but was focused on providing them with better living conditions” (Daily News – 12.9.2011).

Who then ordered the infamous-eviction of Mews Street residents in May 2010? Many evictees had legal titles; others were decades-long residents, rate-payers and voters. Yet all were dragged out of their homes by gun-toting soldiers. This April, in Wanatamulla, 154 houses were “bulldozed within one hour... Police riot squads, STF personnel and the Army stood guard as the houses were pulled down” (The Sunday Times – 17.4.2011). If President Rajapaksa is right and his government did not evict Colombo’s poor, who was responsible for these heinous deeds?

The Urban Development Authority (UDA) “has drawn up a mass eviction plan... Residents in Slave Island, most of them holding valid deeds... and living in the area for more than five decades, have been told to be prepared to move out” (The Sunday Times – 21.11.2010). According to the Director General of the UDA, “We have identified sites in Homagama, Gampaha and Kalutara for resettlement... We cannot allow them to live in the city any longer” (ibid). Is the UDA, which functions under Presidential Sibling and Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, a rogue agency, sabotaging the Presidential vision and writ?

The Mews Street-evictees are still homeless. When they sought legal-intervention to obtain the promised ‘alternate accommodation’, the AG informed the Supreme Court “that houses are being constructed” (Daily Mirror – 30.3.2011).

Most new housing units will be beyond the financial reach of Colombo's poor. "More than 1,500 houses in Wanathamulla... are being demolished to make way for a 'modern housing complex', but occupants will have to pay at least Rs 3 million to get a house back, or move out of the City into locations in Avissawella and Homagama" (The Sunday Times – 17.4.2011). The following statement by a resident encapsulates the brutal insensitivity of the authorities and the resultant human tragedy: "I have been a resident in a flat for the past 40 years. All our family members are working around this area, and their children are studying in schools close by. It will be difficult for us to adjust" (ibid).

This then is the ugly reality the Rajapaksas are hell-bent on denying and obfuscating with blatant lies and false assurances. The purpose is to hoodwink Colombo's poor into voting for the UPFA, so that the Siblings can implement their evict-and-sell plan with no hindrance from the CMC and with the obsequious-corporation of their Puppet-Mayor.

For those who are not hoodwinked, thinly-veiled threats are made. At an election-meeting, First Son Namal Rajapaksa repeated the blatant lie of non-eviction, and said, with a supercilious smile, "I told the President to dump these people somewhere if they do not vote for us. Why should we build houses if others get the votes? We do not evict. But do not forget the other thing I said..." (Please watch the video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-w1yHmrM_QQ and, perhaps, ask: Is this our Future?)

So Milinda Moragoda is a sop to Colombo's middle/upper classes. His task is to be an innocuous-façade for the anti-democratic intents and larcenous plans of the Siblings. An opposition-led CMC can seriously impede the Rajapaksa grand-design of installing an unelected authority (Colombo Metropolitan Corporation) above the CMC and five other councils. If the UPFA bags Colombo, its Puppet-Mayor can gift the city to the Rajapaksas with an ingratiating-smile.

Without an elected authority act as a break, Colombo's citizens will be at the mercy of an unmerciful and rapacious First Family. The Presidential-falsehoods about non-evictions are a warning to all Colombo residents, rich, middling and poor, that they can trust the regime only at their own peril.

... And to Rule

Hannah Arendt talks about the “strange and powerful influence mere ‘words’ have over the minds of men” (Responsibility and Judgement). The Rajapaksas are outstandingly dextrous at manipulating words to hide unpleasing realities and create pleasing-delusions.

The thorny issue of human rights was deflected by re-branding the war as a humanitarian operation with zero-civilian casualties. The President has decided to scrap the Resettlement Ministry; “He feels there is no need for a Ministry of Resettlement since most of the task has been completed” (The Sunday Times – 11.9.2011). Thus the regime can declare that every IDP is happily settled and the refugee-problem satisfactorily resolved. The President says the “name ‘prisons’ itself should be changed and measures... made to convert them into rehabilitation centres....” (Sri Lanka Mirror – 13.9.2011). So Sri Lanka can be anointed a crime-free, law-and-order-hub.

Based on this Rajapaksa-logic, any problem can be whizzed out-of-existence with the change of a name-board or the twisting of a statistic. The reality can be hidden from everyone other than those who directly experience the downside. Like the Rajapaksa traffic-plan which has rendered going against traffic into a dream while increasing congestion to nightmarish-levels the other way (plus, turning a series of tiny-byroads into hell-holes of vehicles, dust and emissions for their hapless residents). The Siblings have mastered the art of effacing the unpleasant and the outrageous from the public-space by pretending they do not exist and turning that pretence into an official policy.

Orwell would have found Rajapaksa-Sri Lanka endlessly fascinating.

Behind this governance-by-delusion, seeds of future conflicts too are being sown. For instance, a group led by “Sinhala Ravaya Organisation... the Bauddha Arakshaka Padanama and the Dhamma Vijaya Padanama...demolished a mosque near the Dakshina Seya in Anuradhapura (housing) the ashes of King Dutugemunu...” (Sri Lanka Mirror – 13.9.2011). The demolishers claimed the mosque was an unauthorised structure. Did the court or any official agency determine the structure was unauthorised? Was its demolition ordered by a court? If so, why did the police/an official agency not carry out the demolition? Why were ‘Buddhist organisations’ allowed to demolish a mosque, thereby turning a straightforward law-and-order issue into an ominous religious one? Incidentally those who took the law into their hands, illegally, have regime-connections; for instance, the head of Sinhala-Ravaya Organisation is former JHU parliamentarian Akmeemana Dayarathana Thero.

Last week this make-believe world of the Rajapaksas came into conflict with the real one and floundered. The UN Secretary General forwarded the Darusman Report to the UNHRC and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Explaining the decision the UN Spokesman said, “While the Secretary General had given time to the government of Sri Lanka to respond to the report, the government has declined to do so...” Yet, unfazed by this deadly error, the regime continues to deny and deceive. According to Minister-Professor G. L. Peiris, the UNHRC cannot discuss the Darusman Report, because of ‘the UN procedural requirements’. What will the Minister-Professor, who once used his argumentative-skills to prove the absolute necessity of appeasing the LTTE, say when the Report is discussed (and judged) by the UNHRC?

The ease with which they delude the South has propelled the Rajapaksas into a false sense of complacency. They forget that a better-informed world is harder to deceive; and that governance-by-sleight-of-hand is inherently unsustainable.