

Pseudo-academia at the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS), Ceylon Branch

I refer to Haris de Silva's (HdeS) commentary in the Sunday Island, August 1, p 13 (Features), and endorse all he said about the antics in the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. HdeS quotes from Nan's article on the 25th (same Journal) July that stated that attendees who ask questions at the RAS lectures and discussions must have a PhD. I just couldn't believe my eyes when reading HdeS's and Nan's comments on the RAS. HdeS mutes his words in writing that such a stipulation on the part of the RAS is "the height of absurdity". I would say that it is downright stupidity. Which of the following luminaries in the Arts and Humanities and Natural sciences in this country or contributors

to the RAS or other Journals have PhDs? - P. E. Peiris, R. L. Brohier, D. G. B. de Silva (former Ambassador), A. D. N. Fernando (Past President), John Still, R. Raven Hart, P. Ramanathan, D. B. Jayatileke, A. M. Hocart, Gaston Perera, Somasiri Devendra, Dr C.G. Uragoda (Past President), Anslam de Silva? Our doyen Senarat Paranavitana did not have a PhD when he did his early pioneering work. My personal experience of PhDs (from local or foreign universities) at their worst was the illiteracy of PhDs in the Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya, (ten of them), who couldn't even tell me why their degree is called a Doctorate in Philosophy. This sort of pseudo-intellectual pon-

tification by the office bearers of the RAS will serve only to destroy what is left of intellectualism in this country. In a lecture on Science in Sri Lanka I publicly stated that the greatest threat to the growth, and indeed the survival, of science in this country is "administrative vandalism" on the part of science-based administrators; that comment now holds for the RAS administrators as well; if their vandalism is perpetuated, they will only succeed in emasculating academia in Sri Lanka, and a most prestigious Society in the past.

Prof. S. N. Arseculeratne University of Peradeniya



Senarath Paranawithana

'Keheliya and King Kekille'

Congratulations to The Island editor on having the courage to write an excellent editorial on Keheliya Rambukwella (affectionately called "Kehelmal" by an adoring public)

Minister Rambukwella is indeed a court jester. He claims a royal lineage! He certainly has inherited a large proportion of King Kekille's genes! In the meantime, the citizenry must put up with his weekly bovine press briefings!

The powers that be and the IGP can take some action against tying up of the Samurdi officer.

Dr. Asoka Thenabadu



How do they sit together?



I wonder how people like Ven. Athuraliye Rathana, Tissa Witharana, Sarath Amunugama, G L Peiris, Rajiva Wijesinghe and Champika Ranawaka sit at meetings together with people like Mervyn.

There cannot be many reasons. May be they are power hungry; may be they are spineless, may be they are shameless. What is it? One, two or all three?

Deshapriya Rajapaksha Battaramulla

Food is right at the bottom of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and this is where most Sri Lankans still linger, unable to ascend to other personal security needs such as home ownership. Whilst westerners spend approximately 17/0 of their incomes on food, the average Sri Lankan spends more than 50,114 on food, often more, and with whatever is left they also have to struggle to pay utility bills such as electricity and water, electricity tariffs being the highest in the region. The most common cooking fuel, gas, is a phenomenal Rs. 1750/- a 12 kg cylinder. Even if one is really careful in gas usage, a family will need 1 cylinder a month. There is no money left over for (a) saving for old age, (b) saving for medical needs, (c) recreation and entertainment, (d) other important function like weddings and funerals.

High transportation costs and government taxes on food has made most nutritional food unattainable for the average family, resulting in anemic malnourished people, especially women and children. Out of their reach is the most basic health foods such as milk, butter, fish and moats, vitamins, even dhal which

used to be the poor man's source of protein. Whatever the pundits may say about vegetarianism in it's favour, a certain amount of animal protein is a necessary for brain cells to grow and remain healthy. If not we will have a nation of morons.

The high tax on vehicle fuel (more than its cost) adds to the burden our tax-weary citizens have to bear. If such tax is reduced to 10% of cost, all products will cost less. In fact, instead of all this hype about impending constitutional changes that simply benefit politicians, people must agitate for tax reforms. In my personal opinion, tax on any product or service should not exceed 10 to 15% Anything more than that is

a violation of people's right to (a) affordable food (b) affordable electricity gas, petroleum products, and (c) everything else a human being needs to survive, even enjoy life which many are unable to enjoy these days, so burdened are they with worries on just how to make ends meet.

These are the real human rights violation (let's forget about what ex General's have to say about "white Flags" etc). If we are to move forwards, we must remove unnecessary worries that people have about food security, shelter of their own, and how they will cope with old age. It is imperative that we then provide them with affordable food, fewer taxes, and a chance to better their lives with proper recreation and entertainment (not absolutely boring teledramas). Once these are achieved, they will aspire to higher aspects of the hierarchy of needs - spiri-

electricity, gas and a much-reduced tax on profits. Reducing interest on loans is not a palliative. If all of the aforesaid taxes are reduced, industries can become competitive and produce affordable products to consumers.

It is a human rights violation to wantonly waste taxes extorted from citizens to brazenly live the high life that politicians lead today, with monies wasted on running fleets of cars, helicopter rides to hold cabinet meetings in distant locations (is in Kilinochchi for example), mini armies to surround themselves with, unnecessary foreign tours and so on.

If we continue in this manner we will live upto the notion that we are in need a banana republic, with starving people and further money drained into hair-brained infrastructure schemes like new ports, new stadiums, roads going nowhere, and all with borrowed money (which the poor starving man, woman, child and unborn children for generations will have to struggle to repay). We have to stop "doing the grand" with borrowed money. We have even reached the point of no return with steadily emptying coffers, and a debit debt burden that this country has never experienced before.

What we have to bridge is the distance between the poor man's wallet and the hungry mouths he has to feed, shelter, clothe, educate, medicate, and entertain. "We don't need any more new bridges, ports, stadiums, airports, airlines. We need instead to give opportunities to human beings to provide their basic needs. We can't eat or drink infrastructure development.

Linda Van Schagen

Real fundamental rights violations

tual needs (at the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). We simply can't go on and lead decent, healthy lives, the way things are at present - dismal, bleak, and hopeless.

Despair and hopelessness is evidenced by (a) parents abandoning their children (a case in point is the abandoned little girl and her three male siblings), (b) the casting into rivers and cesspits of newborn children (c) the descending into prostitution of women and children (d) suicide, which is one of the highest rates in the world)

If entrepreneurs and present businesses are to survive and become competitive they must have access to cheaper, less-taxed waters,

Hurrah and a hosanna for your classic editorial of 6 August and Ira de Silva's painstaking analysis from Canada in the Saturday Island on 7 August.

Elders belong to two categories: Those who get old but, on the way, gather no wisdom worth passing on, and The Elders, whose vision and wisdom are a fountain of valuable experience and strength, which is the lamp that lights many more, before it is extinguished. Intelligence, evidently, is foundation of wisdom. Elders shower jewels of advice and fortune on parents, their children, and the children of their children. Quite many have had that good fortune, thus far.

A person with a high IQ, 110 or more as evinced in Mensa, can receive no guarantee that he will be a wise Elder later; for he can develop dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, which has struck a large numbers in many nations, including a President of a power-wielding country. An accomplished politician, an Elder of no mean repute, became the President of Sri Lanka in 1977, at the age of 72, with a parliamentary majority of five-sixths to back him to the hilt. He assured the masses that he would dismiss, in two years the members of his Cabinet who failed to perform to the nation's satisfaction and boon. When the time came to remind him of this promise, he meekly muttered: "I do not have the heart to kick out my senior and aged colleagues, who have stood by me and our party during the past 40 years". Sentimental reasoning is the prerogative of all who become senile. But, the detrimental impact of such emotions on decision making processes of governance has severe adverse effects on the economy, and the people who place their faith in a person they perceive as a great and promising leader; a Saviour. Running parallel, but contrary, with this situation was the likewise almost elderly leader of a garden state, whose consistency and visionary thinking had that country run by relentlessly competent, but relatively young and promising, Cabinet Ministers, and, Singapore reached the height that it has reached thus far.

Each Elder has two pathways: one to advise and guide the young, including his juniors, children and their children in the right direction, and the other to resist sentiments and prejudice taking command of his advisory and governing role. It is well known that children in the same family, at times, vie with their own siblings for favour and reward from aging parents who were best friend to all of them in the earlier years of family harmony. Later, they seek to grab what is only partly theirs, but should justly be

shared with their brothers and sisters. We cannot blame the poor senescent parent whose weakening mind succumbs to seemingly convincing coercion.

Having expressed a viewpoint, let us take up the remarkable editorial, at this point. The Elders alluded to therein consist of two categories: those who never had a clean balance sheet, and those who did. In the latter category are three or four who have had the love and respect of peace and democracy loving people. Ira de Silva (IdeS) on 7 August made the following comments about this category: "What Desmond Tutu knows about Sri Lanka illustrates his massive lack of knowledge, and ignorance, of Sri Lanka". I myself will never forget Desmond Tutu's most

African countries...He has no claim to infallibility and, although he wears a collar symbolizing Christianity, his views are un-Christian because they are based on lies."

Nelson Mandela has been respected in this country by his humble and enduring tolerance of White repression. But, (IdeS) says, "It was during his Presidency that of South African of Indian Tamil descent, provided funding to the Tamil terrorists in Sri Lanka, and the South African government turned a blind eye, as well as provided 'political backing' to the LTTE supporters in South Africa...These Elders are completely ignoring that it is not their business, as it is not the business of the UN, to interfere in the internal mat-

The world will not forget his role in the 'Oil for Food Program' in Iraq, the 10 billion dollar scam in which his own son took part".

As for Jimmy Carter (he) "represents the ever-interfering Americans, who talk of human rights, reconciliation, accountability and then ... (declare) illegal wars... (Britain's Deputy Foreign Minister stated in June 2010 that the Iraq war was illegal... torture, rendition, indefinite detention in Guantanamo incessant killing of civilians... collateral damages, - so long as it is the western countries that did the killing and the civilians were not westerners in Iraq and Afghanistan... use of toxic weapons... while claiming that the US is (preaching), spreading democra-

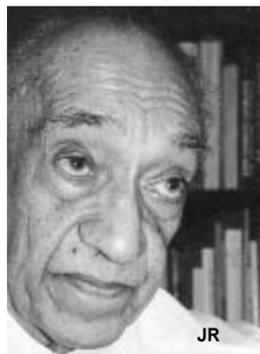
tion of ethnic minorities. Marginalization of Karuna, the Eastern Tamil Rambo, by the LTTE tyrant and supremo, for not being a Northern Tamil, and was therefore unfit for Leadership, probably saved us, all ethnic groups and Sri Lanka, from the cancer of terrorist hegemony.

A cry emanated from B D K Saldin, in the opinion column of The Island, opposite the editorial, on 6 August. He refers to the exclusion of Malay from the GCE O Level list of subjects. While serious cognizance of this representation is called for; it is the duty of the people of this country to recognize the multi-faceted role played by the Malays in the history of this country. King Vijayabahu I was succeeded in driving away the Cholas, and unified the country, with the able support of brave Malay or Ja soldiers. They enabled his army to chase away the Dravidian occupiers from the North of Lanka. In recognition, they were given titles, land and the right to live as one Nation with the inhabitants of Lanka. Their language and religion were given the rightful place. Later they embellished the Police service and held high office. The memory of T. B. Jayah and other Malay leaders cannot fail to come to mind. In recent years rumblings have been heard from this quarter which should emanate immediate empathy. Their places of worship should receive State patronage. The people of this country have been known not to neglect gratitude. There is no need for a reminder.

A final word on brainwashing, a word which is well entrenched in all English dictionaries as: "to effect a radical change in the ideas and belief, especially by conditioning". In plain English indoctrination is a better word, because washing usually needs water (for cleansing). One cannot use contaminated water to cleanse, as pollution is all that will be thereby achieved. Indoctrination is more brain-bashing than brain-washing. The expression brain-mending is more appropriate for cleansing doctrines and opinions. Brain-bending can be done in one of 2 directions: it can be bent either in the right direction or, regrettably, in the wrong direction. In the wrong direction - the result may be tantamount to brain-bashing. In the right direction, it would equate with brain-mending.

My final plea to all who get bolder as they grow older is to indulge in being a good Elder, to help younger people to understand, rather than misunderstand others and, embellish the world and country which we are fortunate to share!

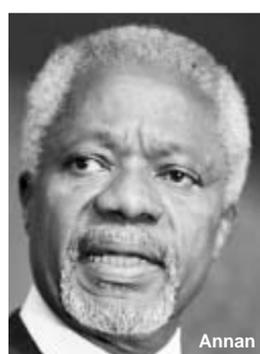
Dr. Lakshman Ranasinghe



JR



Mandala



Annan



Jimmy Carter

Elders and The Elders

memorable message, which was loud and clear: "There can never be peace without justice!" IdeS: "Therefore, by supporting these, he has aligned himself with Tamil terrorists. He is guilty of the murder atrocities on all Sri Lankans, regardless of ethnicity.... That he should rebuke Sri Lanka is a perverse joke That he should state 'it is doubtful that the President's Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission will help Sri Lankans to work towards lasting peace' indicates his bias, ignorance and judgments based on his experiences in South Africa. News from Africa today indicates a high level of violence, an average death toll of about 50 a day and that it heads the list when it comes to rapes, not to mention the incidence of HIV Aids.... South Africa, headed by a "black government", discriminates against immigrants from other

ters of a member State... Given Mandela's state of health... his name is just being used for credibility."

I de S says: "The most prominent 'retired United Nations Official' is ... Kofi Annan. During his term as Secretary General several of his envoys visited Sri Lanka, had meetings with terrorist leaders and issued statements that children would not be recruited to fight (the army), civilians would not be massacred, other act of terrorism would cease. The frequency of these increased brazenly... under the nose of UN Officials.... When he visited this country after the tsunami as Secretary General (he) made a statement of condolence on the death of an LTTE terrorist who had been killed by a rival Tamil When the Foreign Minister (of Sri Lanka)... a Tamil... was killed by the terrorists Annan had no sympathy

cy and humans rights".

The above brief recapitulation of IdeS's opinion - letter will convince all right - thinking people that The Elders have outlived their usefulness for equity, democracy and peace, and have regrettably drifted into the hazy realm of sleazy bigotry, while the yet pre-senile Blake is stealthily wading and waddling in the quagmire of "friendly" deceit. Blessed will be the intellectuals if this, our invitation: Ehipassiko - Come and Behold the Truth, is accepted, by visiting Sri Lanka. As for Ban Ki Moon, Russia and China have pointed out that the Secretary General is required to receive prior consent from the General Assembly or the Security Council for what he has done without obtaining such approval.

We cannot yet give up on that editorial. Let us take a quick look into marginaliza-