



Learn it from elders

'Say it in English' is a programme to be commended.

If senior citizens are considered to man the work-force, may I also suggest that the able-bodied ones be considered and paid to work for a couple of hours in the midst of either when school children are at play or at their evening sports events and promote a 'Say it all in English'. More often parents standing clustered by the gates could take this opportunity to speak to their children in English more often than what is taught to them in class. Approach the senior citizens at their associations and seek their assistance. They will certainly support such a venture.

S. Bandara, Kandy.

Where are they now?

Trivia has always fascinated my grasshopper mind. In a ruminating mode I recall the period in the late 1940s to early 1950s, when London was yet an exotic destination and the doings of our fellow countrymen and women over there merited a weekly column in the Sunday papers. I jot down the names of some who starred in those columns and seem to have slipped from the screen. I wonder whatever happened to:

Marqueez Saldin, the exotic night club dancer 'circus' Pinah, who had left Ceylon as a young lad to join the Big Top in England. He paid a fleeting visit and performed here in the 1950s, C. P. de Silva - con-man extraordinary, whose 'pukka' accent and Savile Row suits conned a Rolls Royce agent to give him a Silver Wraith for a test run - which only ended in Paris, where he was nabbed by the gendarmes.

Victor Dhanapala, was a self-proclaimed guru/prophet, with a congregation of British starlets, whom he briefly installed at 'Mountain Rest' Diyatalawa. He later slipped back into Britain - and obscurity.

'Dr' Savundra, who shook the British establishment, is of course very well known and has been the subject of many articles and books.

Fascinating figures who lived on their looks and wits. I wonder what happened to these shooting stars that briefly shone over gloomy post-war London?

Disloyal DPLs

If the Guinness Book ever records this category, Sri Lanka will head the list of countries whose diplomats chose to 'defect' to the countries where they were assigned to, instead of returning to their home countries that sent them abroad to represent them. Some years ago, the UNP appointed a Canadian citizen as our Ambassador to the US. He never sighted Colombo when his term ended, but fled back to Toronto. Even more farcical is the US citizen the UNP appointed as our man in Washington. He, too, preferred to stay back there. Another UNP Ambassador to Sweden, went back to London from where he had come. Australia holds the record of providing sanctuary to a whole bunch of former High Commissioners. The lesser breeds - clerks, typists, drivers, peons and spouses - who have slipped in cosily into the 'host' country are too numerous to count. Canada is a close second.

It has been reported that we are maintaining this foul precedent by accrediting an envoy to the country of which he seems to be a passport holder. It is obvious where his loyalties will lie.

When will we ever learn?

Don Juan



Toronto

Minister GL Peiris refers to the wholesale massacre of innocent Koreans at the railway bridge at No Gun Ri, Korea on July 26th 1950, where U.S. troops slaughtered 300 Korean civilians and the US covered it up for over 50 years without even a casual investigation. Here is another specific example of US duplicity that Mr. Blake or Ms. Butenis will be unable to spin for propaganda purposes to show how righteous US war policy has been or is in comparison to other nations that have had prolonged conflicts with unconventional enemy forces. Oh by the way, Bush and Cheney still defend the use of "waterboarding" and other enhanced interrogation (torture) techniques to extract information from terrorists. Actually that is not wrong and I have no doubt Obama has to resort to such measures and rendition (the practice of holding terrorist suspects in third country locations where torture is not illegal) too. Blake first represented the Bush regime and I doubt if Bush would have wagged righteous fingers the way the current US administration is doing.

Retired Senator Bob Kerrey, a Democratic Senator from Nebraska, was one time considered even a Presidential contender in 1992. He is a war hero in the US. He was repeatedly elected from his state. Bob was a US Navy SEAL in Vietnam. On one of the raids he led his party attacked a small village and massacred innocent civilians. On 25 February 1969, Kerrey ordered the massacre of at least 13 to 20 civilians, primarily women and children, at Thanh Phong, a tiny peasant hamlet in the Mekong Delta. Kerrey confessed to it later in life only after he decided not to seek reelection or seek the Democratic Presidential candidacy. Not one person was

charged with war crimes. I quote a news article verbatim. "They ordered everybody out from the bunker and they lined them up and they shot them all from behind," testified a survivor, Pham Tri Lanh. In their "rural pacification" program, U.S. forces sought to herd the peasants of

massacre that made headlines was the My Lai rape and massacre of 1968. That was exposed only because of the brave Pulitzer prize winning journalist, Seymour Hersh's tireless investigation which suggested that even venerable US figures such as General Colin Powell were part of the

when combatants don't wear uniforms and where villagers organize and support the enemy it is very hard to distinguish between good guys and bad guys" said an amazing young US combatant who saw action in Fallujah to me.

Ms. Butenis who was key diplomat in the Bush-Cheney-Blair post invasion Iraq, could probably tell us how many civilians were killed and mistaken for 'Haj' and airstrikes called on people who just looked "suspicious" along the roads where US military convoys traveled. Most of the time the US didn't take chances in order to safeguard their troops and protecting troops is the right thing to do.

What Sri Lanka needs more than anything else is healing and reconciliation and a chance for suffering people to rebuild their lives and not busybodies from the west who don't practice what they preach to wag their self-righteous fingers when their (Blake's and Butenis government's) proverbial slip is showing. Did US/NATO bombs kill civilians in Libya as well? Look at how much expenditure struggling Sri Lanka has incurred to rehabilitate terrorists? Will the US do something like that? And oh well, the 'Gladstone report'? Nah, it will never see the light of day as long as the US dictates UN policy.

War does cruel things to the human psyche; God fearing or religious people of any faith in prolonged conflicts can surprise themselves by sinking to such levels of depravity they themselves cannot recognize in themselves. In such cases these human beings who were made victims of circumstances need lifetime psychiatric care and not judgment of the majority of the people who have never been put in harm's way the way these young people have but enjoy every bit of their creature comforts, their lives because other people had to sacrifice and do things that no one else can imagine possible.

Mano Ratwate, USA.



Uncle Sam's crimes

cover up. Hersh was roundly condemned by a lot of American politicians and called a 'Traitor'.

Only one officer (Lt. Calley) was found responsible for the heinous attack. He was found guilty and given a slap on the wrist. Lt. Calley was pardoned later by President Nixon while Captain Medina got away scot free. Many such incidents happened during the Vietnam war. In addition, the US's massive carpet bombing/air campaign using B-52s over Hanoi and other civilian areas killed tens of thousands of innocent Vietnamese. That was the nature of war. There is no need to point fingers and make judgments if one admits and acknowledges the cruel nature of war. Vietnamese are still suffering horrible effects of Agent Orange and babies born with birth deformities. One does not have to refer to Dresden or London of WW-2.

"in the cloud of war amidst cannon fire and smoke and the screaming, when the line between foe and friend is unclear, and

Vietnam into "strategic hamlets," akin to massive concentration camps. Gigantic areas outside these camps were designated "free-fire zones." Officers were ordered to take their men out and kill anything that moved - men, women, children, old people and livestock. Meanwhile, the CIA-designed "Operation Phoenix" sent death squads to murder suspected Viet Cong members and "VC sympys." As a SEAL commander Kerrey's mission was to lead assassination raids into the countryside, a key part of the U.S. government's dirty colonial war in Southeast Asia. There are survivors of that massacre. - end quote.

US military excesses were far worse during the Vietnam war. There were far more massacres of innocent civilians, and other excesses including wholesale rape that went unreported or were deliberately covered up by the US government. The only

by **Shobha Shukla** (CNS): Thirty years into the AIDS epidemic and on the occasion of the 10th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (10th ICAAP), being held at Busan, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released a new report on the HIV epidemic in the Asia-Pacific region. The report titled 'HIV in Asia and the Pacific: Getting to Zero', provides the latest regional and country-level data on the HIV epidemic and response, and offers perspectives on the situations, opportunities and challenges currently at play.

According to the report the AIDS epidemic in the Asia and Pacific is at a crossroad. Although there has been a 20% drop in new HIV infections since 2001 and a threefold increase in access to antiretroviral therapy (ART), the epidemic still outpaces the response - there are still almost two new HIV infections for every person who starts treatment. There is inadequate focus on most-at-risk-populations (MARPs) and insufficient funding from both domestic and international sources. "Getting to zero new HIV infections would demand national responses based on science and the best available evidence. HIV programmes must be sufficiently resourced and solidly focussed on

key populations. Investments made today will pay off many fold in the future," said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibe.

According to the report, there were an estimated 4.9 million people living with HIV (PLHIV) in this region in 2009 - which is almost the same as in 2005. A majority of these people are living in one of the 11 countries of the region - Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan,

Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Vietnam.

Not that there is nothing to celebrate about, with Cambodia, India, Myanmar and Thailand reducing their HIV infection rates significantly, and Cambodia being one of the just eight countries of the world providing antiretroviral therapy to more than 80% of the people eligible for it. But still more than 60% of the people of this region who are eligible for treatment are unable to access it. Then

again, although there is an estimated 15% decrease in new HIV infections among children, regional coverage of services to prevent new infections in children lags behind global averages, especially in South Asia.

Across the region, stigma and discrimination against PLHIV, and MARPs is still a way of life. Ironically, while new HIV infections in the region remain concentrated among sex workers and their clients; injecting drug users, men who

have sex with men; and transgender people, the punitive laws and policies retained by about 90% of the countries in the region prevent these key affected populations, to access life saving HIV services.

Another point of concern is the emergence of the epidemic in countries which earlier boasted of a low prevalence of HIV. A case in point is the Philippines, where after a 20 year low and slow epidemic, there has been a rapid increase in

the number of HIV infected cases. In the city of Cebu in the Philippines, HIV prevalence amongst injecting drug users has risen by almost 900%, from 0.6% in 2009 to 53% in 2011.

Data also suggest that a significant proportion of new HIV infections within key populations are among young people under the age of 25 years. In most settings, HIV prevention programmes are failing to sufficiently reach most at risk young people.

The report indicates that the AIDS response in Asia and the Pacific is underfunded, with only about an estimated total of US\$ 1.1 billion being spent across 30 countries of the region in 2009. This is almost just 33% of the actual funds needed to achieve universal access goals to HIV services.

Though China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Samoa and Thailand are funding the bulk of their HIV response from domestic resources, many countries in Asia and

the Pacific depend heavily on foreign funding, particularly for the provision of antiretroviral therapy. Funding cut backs from international donors is further aggravating the problem. So, increased investment of domestic resources, especially in middle-income countries, is critical for the ongoing regional response to HIV.

India accounts for nearly half of Asia's HIV epidemic, with 2.4 million people living with the disease, 140,000 new HIV infections and 170,000 AIDS related deaths estimated in 2009. Women account for 39% of all reported HIV cases. Prevalence remains high amongst men who have sex with men (7.3%) and injecting drug users (9.2%). There are 320,074 people receiving antiretroviral therapy.

In the words of Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General, "today we have a chance to end this epidemic once and for all. That is our goal: Zero new HIV infections; Zero discrimination; and Zero AIDS-related deaths."

This can happen only if we work together to make high-impact HIV prevention a top priority; speed up and sustain access to antiretroviral treatment; and advance human rights and gender equality.

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US welcomes lifting of emergency in SL

The statement by the US embassy in Colombo welcoming the proposal by the President of Sri Lanka to lift the emergency refers to the country "not experiencing any terrorist activities since the end of war."

It is heartening to note that at least belatedly the US has admitted that Sri Lanka is moving towards normalising life in the country. It is time for the US, as well as for all the European countries that had ganged up to pursue the President of Sri Lanka and the country's men and women in uniform on war crimes charges, to remember that peace and normalcy did not drop from the

skies: it is the resolve and the able direction of head of state of Sri Lanka and the immense sacrifices of its armed forces that ushered in the current environment of peace, which has allowed civilians to move about without the fear of being blown up to smithereens by LTTE bombs.

The 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2010' released by the US Department of State on 18th August stated that the LTTE continued to buy weapons in 2010 and that its international network of financial support may still be continuing. One of the foolproof measures to strengthen and hasten the progress of Sri Lanka towards normalcy and peace is to stop the LTTE and its supporters based in the US from continuing their anti-Sri Lankan activities, through forced monetary contributions that end up with illegal arms dealers and baseless allegations of war crimes that attempt to negate the good work of the armed forces, that gave back the right of life to over 20 million people. If the US is sincere and implements concrete steps in this direction, the peace-loving people in Sri Lanka will not only welcome the US action, but will be jubilant and continue dancing in the streets for weeks and months.

Gamini Premadasa

AIDS epidemic at a critical juncture in Asia-Pacific region

Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Vietnam.

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