

---

# THE CARNIVAL MAY GO ON

Jayadeva Uyangoda

The split which recently occurred within the Rajapakse administration is a significant political development that carries within it some of the inescapable contradictions of the policies being implemented by President Rajapakse and the power bloc which he seems to head. Managala Samaraweera, a powerful minister representing the old guard of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party--the main constituent party of the ruling UPFA coalition--has now formed a breakaway SLFP. Samaraweera was the campaign manager of Rajapakse during the Presidential election campaign of December 2005. He is also a close ally of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga who seems to be seeking a political role in Sri Lanka. The split has jolted the Rajapakse administration to some extent. It has also given a new impetus to the opposition UNP's campaign against the Rajapakse regime.

President Rajapakse seems to have invested quite a lot on the military campaign with the hope that military successes against the LTTE would bring immediate political dividends. The battle successes in the Eastern province have reinforced the view in government ranks that the LTTE could be wiped out in the North as well. These successes were also used by the government to justify continuing human rights violations, and humanitarian crises. The hostility repeatedly displayed by the government officials, advisors and spokespersons to even mild criticism demonstrated another dangerous trend in governance-- the erosion of democratic governance, weakening of democratic institutions and the government's disregard of the rule of law. The sudden appearance in the Colombo skies the so-called Eelam Air 'bombers', the continuing international criticism of the government for its disregard for human rights, and notably the war's negative impact on the economy that has fuelled inflation and dwindled foreign reserves, began to expose the government's stories of successes. Samaraweera's move to cross over and form a new party seems to have widened the space for a new alignment of oppositional forces. There can be stiff competition in the coming weeks and months between the UNP and the JVP to be the centre of the new opposition alliance.

Mangala Samaraweera's critique of the Rajapakse administration is slowly fading away from the media which is more interested in making speculations about his next political moves. Yet, it is important to recall what Samaraweera highlighted in that critique. Among the key points he made are the concentration of state power in the hands of a few rampant corruption, and the move away of the SLFP from its moderate policies.

Meanwhile, the Rajapakse administration has exposed its weaknesses to the world in a big way when it failed to positively respond to the international concerns for Sri Lanka's worsening human rights situation in the context of the on-going war. Japan, Sri Lanka's biggest foreign donor has broken its silence and joined the international outcry about the government's repeated failure to improve the human rights situation. The key figures in the regime--many of whom are unelected advisors or ex-UNPers who changed their political loyalties only after Rajapakse became the President--have been repeatedly demonstrating their incapacity to run a state in the dual context of globalization and protracted civil war. Their behaviour parallels the arrogant, short-sighted and self-destructive policies followed by people like Lalith Athulathmudali and Ranjan Wijeratne in the early and mid-1980s. But sadly, Sri Lanka has a new ruling bloc that does not seem to possess any institutional memory about governance, war and running the state.

It is in this context that the emerging opposition alliance does not seem to have much political depth. The first step towards a new political process is a thorough critique of the policies of the Rajapakse regime, which Samaraweera and the JVP helped to crystallize. These are policies formulated in a tunnel-vision of Sinhalese-nationalist militarism, middle-class desire for authoritarianism and an island mentality of isolationism. It might take some more time for the Sri Lankan people to realize the irreparable damage that these policies are causing to them, their country and their future. Until then, the carnival is most likely to go on.