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The Village at the Mouth of the River: 
A Biography of Basil Fernando

Le Roy Robinson

VI

Basil Fernando, an attorney, is a poet and short story writer.

He was born in October 1944 at Palliyawatte, a village in Hendala, Wattala, Sri Lanka.

As a young boy he attended the village primary school.

He attended high school at St. Anthony's College, Wattala, and St. Benedict's College, Kotahena.

In 1972 he graduated from the Faculty of Law, the University of Ceylon, Colombo.

Until December 1981 he was a teacher of English as a second language in the Sub-Department of English, Sri Jayawardenapura University, Nugegoda.

In 1982 he began his legal practice.

In 1984 Basil Fernando started working as a human rights lawyer. He filed many writs of habeas corpus and handled other cases allegedly involving torture or extra-judicial killing by the security forces of his country.

In 1989 four of his immediate colleagues were killed within a period of six months, and he was warned by a police officer friendly to him that his safety could not be guaranteed.

In September 1989 he took up work as an appeals lawyer stationed in Hong
Kong by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. He reviewed cases of Vietnamese refugees.

He is now a senior Human Rights officer in charge of the Investigation and Monitoring Unit of the Human Rights Component of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.

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For the family of Basil Fernando the second half of June 1989 was a very hopeful time. Their little daughter was on her way to this world, as Basil puts it.

For Basil’s father it was a very happy moment since all he wanted was to see a child from Basil and his wife, Jacinta.

This was one of the worst times of their lives too because they were constantly reminded of the dangerous times they were living in by the spate of killings happening every day.

In Sri Lanka people consider it a bad omen for a pregnant woman to see dead bodies. Jacinta was prevented from joining the crowds that gathered at the banks of the canal in front of the Fernando house to see the dead bodies that were floating on the water.

Between July and September, about 75 bodies passed through that way. Many of them had bullet marks. Some were without heads. Many had their arms tied behind their backs. Some bodies carried by water to sideway canals got stuck in the bushes.

Bryan de Kretzer, who was running a home for mentally retarded children, telephoned the police once to inform them of this situation and asked them to bury these decomposing bodies. He got the shocking reply: “You can eat them if you like”.
Some of the bodies were buried only when a group of tourists staying in a hotel nearby started to take photographs.

A shrewd local resident telephoned the police and informed them that the unattended dead bodies were being photographed by some foreigners who might even be journalists and that this was not good for the image of the government.

Police rushed to the place and buried the bodies.

The local people had become too afraid and powerless to bury the bodies.

Basil Fernando wrote an editorial in the bulletin of the Hendala Lions Club stating there was a moral obligation to bury dead bodies.

He was later cautioned by some members of the club about writing that sort of stuff.

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No one knew the identity of any of these dead people or how they had been killed. But there were always rumors. Some said the killings were done by the military in some camps and then put into the river so as to frighten insurgents and other opponents of the government. Others said some of the killings had been done by the police.

Another version was that the dead people had been brought near the river and executed so their killers could avoid the trouble of having to dig graves.

The stories of how people were selected for killing also spread.

One story was about "Gonibilla". Gonibilla was a person covered in a way to prevent identification. There were only two little eye holes in the cloth covering him. When people were brought before him he would make a
signal, make a nod, indicating yes or no, which meant the person before him had some link with the insurgents or not. If Gonibilla’s answer was in the affirmative then the person was “lifted” — Ut–Sa–Na–Wa.

This word came to connote all ceremonies attached to killings and disposal of dead bodies.

Insurgents too had their “courts”. These were committees in various parts of the country whose members decided on the opponents and potential opponents to be eliminated.

These sentences were carried out by Alugosuwa, the executioner who would accompany a group of people assigned to the task. After a discussion with the victim, at times a negotiation but most of the time humiliation, the leader or the group signalled the executioner who then carried out the task in a ruthless way.

It was said that the executioner did not participate in any discussion.

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Besides the state-sponsored death squads and the insurgents’ death squads there were mercenaries who carried out killings on behalf of interested people.

Survival became a gamble.

The criminal law system of Sri Lanka had suffered a major setback in the early eighties and virtually collapsed in 1989.

In his book Militarization vs Modernization in Sri Lanka Basil has inquired into some of these matters.

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In September 1989 the Law Asia Conference was held in Hong Kong.
This provided Basil with a formal reason to leave. Sri Lanka for an extended period.

When Basil said goodbye to his father, who was still well, he had an intuition that he would not see him again. Basil kept a brave front, however, in order to avoid upsetting other members of the family. They all bade farewell to each other cheerfully.

Basil thinks it must be the influence of the Hindu-Buddhist heritage of Sri Lankans that helps them to keep an external calm and ignore suffering even in very harsh situations. “One could turn out to be emotionless and just cheerful”, he says. That was more or less the mood in which he left Sri Lanka.

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In the airplane he found himself thinking of one of the strange episodes he had once experienced in the Negombo high court.

His client was a man who had suffered from several attacks of insanity. The man’s moods were controlled by some strong drugs. Once when he did not have the drugs he killed his wife Ranjini, a young woman in her thirties. She was beautiful and loved her husband dearly.

The judge who heard the case was a merciful man and a very devoted Buddhist. He accepted a plea and handed down a merely formal sentence.

Basil Fernando had to make a speech in court for the purpose of the record to explain his client’s mental condition, Basil says he got carried away with his task and made as good a speech as he could about the nature of the mental disease of his client, who had become the victim of his own crime by having to live the rest of his life without the only woman who really loved him.
That evening Basil’s client visited him at home in a very relaxed mood. He told Basil that until he had heard Basil’s speech in court he had not known that the disease he was suffering from was so bad.

As Basil was crossing the Indian Ocean and getting close to Hong Kong, he realized to his own amusement that his own plight had something similar to his client’s. “In fact,” he says, “I have felt that way ever since.”


When Basil reached Hong Kong it was still afternoon. A Hong Kong customs officer saw his Sri Lankan passport and decided to carry out a thorough search of Basil’s luggage. Basil was more amused than angry about this harassment, which reminded him of the negative public image Sri Lanka had acquired.

When he looked outside from the airport he could not help feeling somewhat lost.

The friends that Basil had expected to meet him at the airport did not show up either. He later learned that his messages arrived after he did. By showing an address written in Cantonese to a taxi driver he managed to get to the Holy Carpenter Hotel.


To someone who came there with a state of mind like Basil’s Hong Kong proved to be a good place to live.

In place of the sense of paralysis and impotence recent events in Sri Lanka had created in him, the sheer massiveness of the activity and the urgency that exist in Hong Kong all the time created a positive feeling in him.
Some of his friends from developed countries have told him that Hong Kong had a negative effect on them because it is nothing more than a huge commercial center. But to someone coming from an underdeveloped country who is used to the slow movement of society, Hong Kong creates new prospects. Many mainland Chinese who had moved into Hong Kong told Basil that they had experienced a similar feeling. “The technology and machinery at work in this place is like thousands of giants working at the same time, lifting this or fixing that without ever feeling tired.”

At Holy Carpenter Hotel Basil tried to telephone James Hurley, a Jesuit priest whom he met twenty years before at a conference of students. Hurley, an Irishman, had made Hong Kong his home and was quite fluent in Cantonese. Basil was told that Father Hurley had returned to Ireland for a year of sabbatical leave.

The next day Basil met Jack Clancy, assistant to Hurley during the aforementioned conference. They had not met or heard from each other for at least ten years, but when Basil telephoned him Clancy recognized Basil immediately. This was the beginning of a strong friendship.

Basil also met James Tan, a Malaysian who was active in Hot Line, an Asian network devoted to the protection of human rights. Basil then met Sami Dorai, a Singaporean who worked for the international team of Young Christian workers, whom he had met at a human rights conference in the Philippines in 1987.

Sami Dorai offered Basil a place to stay as one of his colleagues was moving out to attend various meetings for about a month. Basil moved to the Young Christian Workers house near the airport. It was a convenient loca-
At this house Basil met Daicy, a young Filipina working for Asia Monitor, which later published Basil's book on militarization in Sri Lanka.

It was a flat in an old housing block with only four stories. Modern Hong Kong housing blocks go up to 40 stories.

The Young Christian Workers flat was situated in the midst of a marketing area. This made it easy for Basil to see a colorful aspect of open markets, which are now being rapidly transferred into supermarket shopping complexes.

Watching the sales activity in these open markets, Basil could not help but remember the Chinese merchants in Sri Lanka who used to come on bicycles to villages to sell clothing. They spoke Sinhala with a Chinese accent. They were loved by the villagers because of their good humor. Also they sold Chinese silk and other Chinese materials at very low prices. The older women of Basil's mother's generation loved those materials.

There was a popular rhyme that almost everybody knew those days about the Chinese merchants: Chi-na Boka Boka Chi-nare/Kola-bota yan-ne koi pa-re (Chinese man says something in Chinese language which means Which is the road to Colombo?)

On his first visit to Hong Kong Basil bought for his mother a cloth like those the Chinese merchants used to bring to his village. She liked it very much. She wore it for very special occasions. When she died, Basil's sisters dressed her in that cloth.

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At that time one of the things that was talked about quite often was the Tianenmon incident in July of that year when student demonstrators
were shot down. This led to demonstrations in Hong Kong in which hundreds of thousands of people participated.

Hong Kong is usually a rather apolitical place, but this incident had a traumatic effect on the population of Hong Kong most of whom are people who had fled from China during the war with Japan or after the Communist revolution.

Basil Fernando felt this situation had some affinity with the situation in Sri Lanka. In that mood he wrote a long poem entitled “From Tiananmon Square to Sri Lanka”. It is a “message poem”, written according to the style of poetry that originated in ancient Sanskrit literature and is celebrated in the classics by Kalidasa.

The messenger in Basil’s poem is a pigeon selected from Tiananmon Square. The pigeon is wise having seen revolutions and sad having seen the July killings.

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Basil’s friends in Hong Kong arranged a few meetings at which he talked about what was happening in Sri Lanka. One such meeting that led to his making new friendships was with the Kowloon branch of Amnesty International. Members of the audience later told him they were very shocked by what they had heard and they did not know whether to believe it or not.

One of the people that Basil got to know during this time was Robin Kilpatrick, a dedicated member of Amnesty International, who kept this Kowloon branch going.

Another meeting was organized at the Kowloon Y. M. C. A. by Asian Students Association. Basil met a number of persons who later undertook solidarity work for Sri Lanka.
One meeting that proved to be disappointing to Basil was the one in which a man once known in Sri Lanka as a radical leftist, was the speaker. He had been away from Sri Lanka for some time and had lost touch with what was going on there. He propounded a theory that in Sri Lanka the Indian Peace Keeping Force was killing Tamils and the Sinhalese Sri Lanka government forces were killing the Sinhalese, JVP. This, he theorized, was good for both Tamils and Sinhalese since through the painful experience both would overcome racism.

After the meeting Basil Fernando and the speaker argued for a long time. Basil was surprised by the support that he was expressing for the repression going on in Sri Lanka.

With much sadness Basil Fernando realized that it would not be an easy task to create international solidarity for Sri Lanka.

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The Law Asia Conference was held during this time. Basil participated in the human rights working group in particular. Despite many attempts to draw attention to the Sri Lankan situation, very little was achieved because, he says, most of the people who came from rather affluent backgrounds could not fathom the crisis that Sri Lankans were facing.

This was one of the many occasions on which Basil Fernando was forced to think of the vast cultural gap that exists between the people of developed countries and the people of undeveloped countries. The average citizen in a country where a comfortable life is almost guaranteed cannot understand the situation of people in another country where nothing is guaranteed. Basil puts it this way: the relationship is much like that between an overfed pig and a starving puppy; the pig will constantly remind
the puppy that there is really nothing to worry about and everyone has the duty to remain cheerful.

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After the conference Basil stayed on at the Young Christian Workers house.

His daily routine was to walk to the YCW regional office in the morning, engage in his own work until the evening, and then walk back to the house.

He was far too preoccupied with what was going on in Sri Lanka to be doing anything else but write notes and letters and sometimes poems about it.

He had not yet realized that he had to find paid employment. He did not know how long he could stay in Hong Kong. He had only a tourist visa for three months.

At the end of the first month he had to find another place to stay. Jack Clancy managed to find him a place in Tai Po Mei, a village close to the border with the Peoples Republic of China. This house belonged to a lecturer on communication who had moved to his family house elsewhere for a short time. This was a two story house in a very quiet area. In the field nearby an old Chinese couple cultivated vegetables. A former occupant had left his books in the house. Judging from the books Basil got the impression that he must have been a radical thinker or at least he had some interest in radical ideas for one reason or another.

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By this time Basil had established a good relationship with Sam
Cheung and his younger brother Lin Tak. Sam had visited Sri Lanka some time before to make a video film for a television corporation. He had a genuine liking for Sri Lanka. Cheung's father had been a soldier in the Chiang Kai Shek army before the revolution when he fled to Hong Kong.

Cheung's wife Mei had come from mainland China a few years before their marriage. Her parents were Indonesian Chinese who were brought back to China after the revolution. They had been promised many things but the promises had not been realized. After many years of hardship they managed to bribe a Chinese official who provided them the documents to migrate. Sam Cheung's family was a wonderful Chinese family, Basil says. Despite their adjustment to modern society "ancient China lives in them in a very marked way".

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While in Hong Kong Basil could not help but be influenced by computers. They are widely used and they are everywhere. So Basil too bought a small laptop computer, the cheapest one available in the market. He borrowed the money to pay for it from Lin Tak. He spent most of his time at Tai Po Mei learning to use this little computer by typing stories. He also started writing many essays on Sri Lanka, some of which were later included in his book on militarization in Sri Lanka.

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As the second month of his stay in Hong Kong was coming to an end, Basil had to find some way to extend his visa. His friends too were aware of

※ See Appendix for examples.
this. Jack Clancy then met Udo Yanez, who then worked for UNHCR Hong Kong. Clancy mentioned to Yanez that a Sri Lankan lawyer was in Hong Kong looking for work.

Udo Yanez had worked for Amnesty International and had an understanding of the political situation in many Asian countries.

He called Basil Fernando and within a few days Basil found himself working as an appeals lawyer for Vietnamese refugees.

When he first walked into the office of the Agency for Volunteer Service Basil had no idea at all of refugee law and no understanding of the post-revolutionary political situation in Vietnam.

The office itself was part of a flat, a very small overcrowded place, with several computers and three secretaries, who were extremely efficient.

Basil met David Simpson, a Scottish lawyer, and then Ron Poulton, a Canadian lawyer. Simpson explained the definition of a refugee to Basil and gave him a copy of the UNHCR Handbook, the basic tool for legal counseling.

One day Ron Poulton returned from a meeting with the Refugee Status Review Board looking rather worried and unhappy.

It did not take Basil very long to realize that a very sharp tension existed between the lawyers who wrote appeals on behalf of refugees (AVS) and the board that made final decisions (RSRB).

The marked characteristics of most of the AVS lawyers were a sense of commitment coming close to an ultimate moral commitment combined incongruously with a sense of futility.

The relationship between AVS and the Hong Kong branch of UNHCR was also very tense and even explosive.

The AVS reaction to the local UNHCR was very much like the one to
RSRB coupled with a fear of reprisals, as UNHCR was the unofficial employer.

In 1979 when the Indo-Chinese refugee issue exploded, Jean-Paul Sartre had said, "Some of them (Vietnamese refugees") have not always been on our side, but for the moment we are not interested in their politics, but in saving their lives. It's a moral issue, a question of morality between human beings".

But by 1989 the moral issue was very much forgotten and diverse forms of maneuvers were being tried by various parties to bring the matter to a close at the cost of whatever human suffering so long as a public scandal could be avoided.

Damage control against scandals, Basil says, had become the first concern of refugee policy as far as Vietnamese refugees were concerned.

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APPENDIX

A Cabinet Minister’s Death

It is amazing how five of us having Sri Lanka as our common background have different reactions and points of view regarding almost everything we commonly talk about.

Take for example the bomb explosion that recently killed the junior minister of defense, Ranjan Wijeratne.

First Kamal telephoned me to give me the news. He added that he did not much care about the minister himself but if the Tamils did this they must be punished.

I think he was trying to hurt me by his last remark. I have often
shown displeasure when remarks related to race are made.

The five of us have our own little disputes. It is characteristic of each of us to make use of every opportunity to tease the others about our views. Some take it to the point of saying something really hurting. But as for Kamal you never know when he really means something and when he does not.

Then I telephoned Wilbert to tell him the news. He asked me a few questions to make sure the story was really true. He is a journalist. I am sure he wanted to tell somebody else about it and that is why he wanted to be sure. He has a professional dislike for inaccuracies, and he shows this even when he talks about something on the phone.

Wilbert’s remark about the incident was that he really felt sorry about other innocent guys who were said to be dead. He called me back a half hour or so later after listening to the BBC news broadcast about the incident (I am sure that meanwhile he had not repeated what I had told him as he was not really sure) and told me that according to the BBC eighteen other persons had been killed.

Some time later Kuruna, a family friend, telephoned and said it was just one year after Richard De Zoysa’s murder. She has a tendency to turn everything into a religious debate by challenging the secular views of others.

Now her idea was to open an argument over Karma and retribution, which she thought be the same thing.

One of the thing I cannot resist is an invitation for debate. I said she did not seem to understand anything about politics. Her quick reply was “Of what use is it, even if you do? Was Wijeratne not a politician?” Then she said she had more important work to do and hung up the receiver. She does that
when she is certain that there is no real argument against her and that it is a waste of time talking to people who just cannot understand the obvious.

It is difficult to conduct an argument over the telephone since your opponent has the option of hanging up on you. No point telephoning back because the process can be repeated and what is more you may get an automatic response: At the signal kindly leave your message and telephone number and you will be contacted later.

Well, there was no point leaving a message about what she said because there was not going to be an answer. Only a secret laughter, meaning who cares what you want to say; just think about what I have said and when you do understand you will know the truth; you need not admit that I have in fact enlightened you. I know how proud you are; until then do not bark into my telephone. You can never convince me that I am wrong since I am not anyway.

So I left it at that.

A little later Ratnapala, a former prosecutor in Sri Lanka, telephoned. When he heard that I already knew the news he was a bit disappointed as one of his delights was to break the news to someone.

He still believed that he belonged to the elite and that he was privy to all first hand information. He said, “Anyway, though he was not innocent, he had a right to a plea. He was no real politician or statesman, but he tried to do the best he could.”

Ratnapala always turns any reference to others into a compliment for himself. He considers himself to be an informed and intelligent person, the best that any society could produce. He disdain ed “the politics of Sri Lanka today”, as he was fond of saying, implying that he would not even touch it. He lacks any capacity to listen, as he is convinced that he is better informed
than anyone else. The only time he listens to others is when he is a little drunk and when his inner defenses are down. Then he looks at you with a give me a hand don't let me drown look in his eyes.

This time was not such a moment so it was better to let him have his way and keep this too in mind until the next time you have a drink together.

We are a small group of people who left Sri Lanka not so long ago and now live in a busy capitol. Due to the easily available telephone we feel that we live close to each other.

Now and then we meet, rarely all together, usually two at a time. We do speak with each other over the telephone quite often, and each of us is now an expert in the art of pleasing, hurting, humiliating, teasing each other from a safe distance.

We have also come to the realization that of all of the skills of human beings teasing is one of the finest.

We have lost our worries about being misquoted and misrepresented because despite disagreements we know that none of us has any ulterior motive in holding on to his or her views.

Our communications are gratuitous. We watch gladly when any of us acquires a better skill in using language and presentation of ideas. We enjoy it when the timid learn to speak out, and we even become sarcastic. We celebrate when the proud give up at least a part of that pride and begin to loosen their tongues.

On a recent occasion Ratnapala, after a little drink that he had taken alone, called each of us to tell a story.

"I had a former colleague of mine, a senior state counsel, who was passing this way the other day. He was a serious sort of guy there in Lanka, a bit of a bully. But here he said he wanted to know where he could find a
woman. He said it in a funny way. I am no good at that sort of thing. But he has found the way himself and later told me this. One guy asked him what sort of a woman he wanted, tall, fat, thin, or what. He said someone really young. That guy replied anyone will be younger than him.”

This showed that Ratnapala’s claim that he knew the elite was not an idle boast and that he has begun to enjoy exposing them.

The only time we will be really unhappy will be if our telephones do not ring.

But that will never happen.

Adventures of Don Quixote of Sri Lanka

One day Don Quixote of Sri Lanka heard that the country’s armed forces were demoralized.

Having heard this DQSL could not sleep and could get no rest.

For a brave man like him it was a time for action. For a frank man like him it was the time to speak out, to stick his neck out.

DQSL’S imagination began to flow faster than the Kelani River during the rainy season. He thought of the brave young men of the armed forces suffering in their bunkers.

How could he sleep comfortably in his bed? He got up and tried to put his double bed out of his room. It was too big and too heavy for one man to carry.

But a call for help would not be fitting for a brave man like him.

And his opponents were everywhere, even in the toilets.

He imagined the headlines in the next day’s newspapers. DQSL CAN-
NOT CARRY OWN BED!

The implications of such a headline, of course, would damage his campaign to rescue the demoralized men of the armed forces.

How could DQSL save the armed forces when he could not even carry his own double bed?

He went to the back of his house and searched for his axe. He could not find it. Suddenly he thought that maybe the guy who was living next door, an army deserter, could have stolen the axe, since they might not have had enough weapons at the front.

Perhaps this deserter had returned to the front with DQSL’s axe.

For the time being, DQSL told himself, he would sleep on the floor. Even on the cement floor he felt he was living in luxury and he thought all the time about the poor guys in the bunkers.

Then what about the poor wives of these poor guys, wives who were sleeping night after night without their husbands? DQSL felt it was his duty to comfort them. He thought, right next door the ex-deserter’s wife must be feeling miserable.

He walked to the house next door and knocked on the door.

Suddenly the door opened. The ex-deserter’s wife, seeing him, took the ielapa. Soon it descended on him, causing him to feel a sharp pain.

Before he realized it, DQSL was on the cold cement floor of his own house.

Ah, these marvelous guys, he thought. They fight with whatever they have, and taught even their wives to do the same.

Determining to save the great armed forces the next day, he went back to bed in pain.
The next day Don Quixote of Sri Lanka got up rather late. The pain in his back reminded him of the great task he had set for himself — to raise the morale of the demoralized members of the armed forces serving in the bunkers.

DQSL began to think of ways to increase public awareness about the situation in the bunkers. He was reminded of what his grandfather had once told him, What you do not see, you forget.

Congratulating himself for the quick way his mind worked, he decided that the only way the people could be made to remember the men in the bunkers all the time was to ask that a bunker be dug near each house even if it was a small bunker.

Always quick to act, DQSL called the media to announce his plan. While he waited for the members of the press to arrive, he dug a bunker in front of his house.

This bunker was about six feet long and four feet deep.

The press people arrived in large numbers. DQSL held his press conference in front of his bunker. He suggested that a bunker should be dug everywhere in front of every house. Each man and each woman should spend at least one hour every day inside in such a bunker and reflect on the hardships of the great boys of the armed forces in the real bunkers.

The first question directed to him came from a young woman representing the Sinhala daily Mara Handa. “Would not your home bunkers be used by death squads as easy places for disposal of bodies?” But she did not wait for an answer and walked away.

Next rose a journalist from the bi-weekly Comfortable Woman. “Is it
morally objectionable if these home bunkers are used as alternative places for making love by candle light or moon light?” The journalist sat down thinking about the headline for the next issue’s lead article.

Then the editor of School Morality, the principal of a leading girls school, said that, while she lauded the good intentions of the great genius Don Quixote of Sri Lanka, she herself would lead a counter campaign against the home bunker plan because it would lead to a breakdown of the morality of the younger generation who would use the bunkers to take drugs, hide stolen articles and even to have illicit sex. And even younger children might use them for playing hide and seek during school hours. She further argued that the bunker plan was a degenerate Western concept alien to Sri Lanka.

The press conference was formally adjourned when DQSL replied that this would mean that a culturally acceptable alternative to bunkers should be found.

*****

The pain in his back and the mini-bunker in front of his house inflamed the passions of Don Quixote of Sri Lanka. Something inside him told him time is running out, time is running out.

Again he remembered one of his grandfather’s sayings. Money can do anything.

DQSL then called on his friend Sancho Bastian and told him that money should be immediately collected from everyone able to donate some.

Sancho, who was reading a book, had a better idea. He placed the book in DQSL’s hand. It was a report by the UN agency The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
Glancing through this report DQSL found that the top 20% income bracket in Sri Lanka received 56% of total national income. DQSL asked Sancho Bastian, "Shouldn’t the guys in the bunkers get most of it?"

DQSL immediately drafted a letter to the chief of taxes asking him to tax the top 20% mercilessly and help the guys in the bunkers. He further suggested that a bunker tax be initiated.

This letter was immediately dispatched through Sancho who soon returned with the tax chief’s reply: Mind your own...business!

Enraged DQSL immediately sent back another message challenging the tax chief to a duel the next day at 10:30 AM at the Galle Face Green.

The next morning DQSL was pacing up and down in Galle Face Green thinking of how he would blow out the brains of anyone who refused to help the boys in the bunkers. 10:30 became 10:45 and then 11:00. There was no sign of his opponent. It turned 12:00. Suddenly someone came up on a bicycle and handed him a parcel and a letter. "We congratulate you for your efforts". This message was signed by the commissioner for psychological warfare. The parcel contained a bottle of arrack. The note said: Share this with the guys in the bunkers.

Even if his mission was not fulfilled his efforts were recognized, Don Quixote of Sri Lanka told his friend Sancho Bastian. They shared the arrack.

What he did not tell Sancho was that in the letter the tax chief said that Don Quixote of Sri Lanka himself was getting closer to the top 20%.