

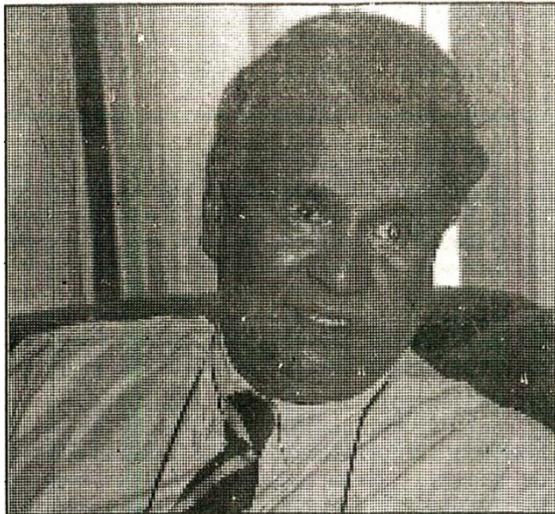
CLEAR THE CODES TO ADVANCE

Even though the government had asserted that the recent budget had laid the foundation for a very stable economy to be developed and fostered in this country, on the other hand, have not the business leaders by their recent actions patently conveyed to the public, that on the contrary, the economy of the country is sliding on a precipitous and perilous uncharted path ?

Doubtlessly, it is essentially in the context of economic considerations of the country, that the business leaders had taken the initiative, to endeavour to bring about a bi-partisan political approach, on several national issues, that had been set out in a 10-point agenda, they had put forward to pursue on such a bi-partisan political approach. The 10-point agenda, by itself, reflects the importance and emphasis placed on national economic issues, thereby putting in question, the very credibility of the government's claim, that a foundation had been laid for a very stable economy to be developed and fostered in this country !

The agenda put forward by the business leaders had indeed underscored the pointed issue of the necessity for the laying of a foundation for a very stable economy to be developed and fostered in this country, as evidenced by the final item 10 of the agenda which reads – " 10. Formulate and implement national economic plans in consultation with the chambers of commerce and industry, employers' organisations and trade associations". Quite evidently, the business leaders had thought it fit and wanting, to stress the necessity for formulating and implementing national economic plans, in consultation with the knowledgeable private sector, particularly when the private sector is looked upon to be the engine of future economic growth.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED



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Could it not be postulated, that the business leaders have come forward to endeavour to bring about a bi-partisan political approach, to lay a foundation for the economic development of the country, being propelled into action, obviously given the scenario of economic stagnation and/or deterioration, as a consequence of parochial confrontational politics, that has taken a stranglehold of this country since independence ? Furthermore, would not the initiative taken by the business leaders, at this particular point of time, no doubt, be reflective of the ad-hoc management of the national economy in the recent times, particularly as a consequence of the cognisable escalation of the North-East war and the fall out therefrom ?

Thus, the very first item on the agenda put forward by the business leaders underscores the immediate need for the effective resolution of the North-East conflict. The fact that Rs. 98,825 million, amounting to 50% of the total recurrent expenditure, has been budgeted for defence expenditure and interest payments alone, resulting in an average cost of Rs. 5952/- per person having been brought out, the cogent question was posed, as to whether the country could afford this ? The business leaders initiative, no doubt, sounds the loud and clear answer, that the country no longer could afford this.

Items 2, 3 and 4 of the agenda put forward by the business leaders had identified the following issues – " 2. Ensuring that there is no discrimination. Ensuring equality for all Sri Lankan citizens irrespective of race, gender, political affiliations, religion etc." – "3. Ensuring personal security and peace for all Sri Lankans." – "4. Introduce the use of English as a link language and legislate for English to also be an official language."

Leaving aside for the moment, the basic necessity to evolve, in consultation with the private sector, an ongoing process of national economic plan formulation and implementation, the first four items of the agenda put forward by the business leaders, no doubt, are the burning issues of immediate national concern. These issues consequentially have resulted in the neglect of national economic plan formulation and the diversion of valuable national resources and managerial time and efforts of governments towards the North-East conflict, to which also directly and/or indirectly pertains the items 2, 3 and 4 of the agenda put forward by the business leaders.

These agenda items have been identified after deliberation and consideration by proven business leaders of this country, as national issues of paramount importance, no doubt, with the yearning objective of seeking solutions for the resolution of whatever problems that pertain to and surround these issues that have been so identified by them. Prior to the resolution of whatever issue, one must necessarily be able to courageously and honestly, without any bias, whatsoever, be able to analyse and identify, the primary causes that have led to the present situation, giving rise to such issues, that had warranted identification, as items of the agenda put forward by the business leaders, themselves.

Have not these burning issues of national concern been precipitated by the very nature of politics that had hitherto been practised in this country ? Are they not issues given birth to and nurtured by parochial confrontational politics, that had been pursued since independence, endeavouring to adapt imported styles of political cultures, ideologies and governments ? To bite the "first" bullet as it were, had not the opportunistic and short-sighted ideological policy of endeavouring to make everything work in the Sinhala language, turned out to be, one of the core causes for the present pathetic circumstances, that the country has been plunged into, stifling and stultifying economic growth and development of the country and the socio-economic emancipation of the people ?

LANGUAGE POLICY

The Sinhala language was made the official language and official business was to be conducted in the Sinhala language. The medium of instruction for education became the Sinhala and Tamil languages, thereby dividing into two racial streams from the very childhood, the generations that have been subjected to such medium of educational instruction. An official languages department was set up to form, coin or create new words to facilitate the above ideological transformation, in the absence of the natural evolution of such terminology.

These language issues had been raised on the national political platforms and the people's fervours roused, leading to the implementation of the official and national language policies. In hindsight today, over 40 years since such policies had been adopted, what has been the success of such ideological linguistic attempt and what have been the beneficial results therefrom for the country and the people ? Do not the agenda put forward by the business leaders amply address these very questions ?

The stark reality is that, contrary to the wishful fantasies of political leaders, who espoused such language policies for whatever reasons, the country and its institutions do not appear to have eagerly embraced carte blanche such language policies. Nor for that matter have the youth of the country, who as plainly witnessed today, are seen flocking in all areas of the country to desperately learn English, to various tutorials conducting English classes, under a variety of descriptions such as – "spoken english", "business english", etc.

Commercial cases in Courts are invariably conducted in English. The Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court invariably conduct cases in English. The private sector essentially functions operating in English. Large government corporations and privatised state owned enterprises also function operating in English. Even cabinet memoranda are often formulated in English, but ofcourse translated into Sinhala. A multitude of educational institutions have sprung up all over the country conducting education in the medium of English. Ironically, these are patronised by the children of politicians, who have advocated/advocate the language policy as it is.

Discarding ideological terminology ardently developed by the official languages department, contemporary society of this country, more often than not, speak in Sinhala very much interspersed with English terminology. This is not only evident in urban society, but also rural community, perhaps influenced by the many of such community, who have sojourned overseas for short-time employment. This is amply reflected by the local dramas telecast by the electronic media. Not only in the cities, but also in the rural townships and villages, names boards of shops and restaurants invariably use English terminology !

The above is only an overall perspective of the ground realities even 40 years after the adoption of the ideological language policy. It would appear that in actual reality, that society is endeavouring to move and is moving in quite a different direction, where functioning and operating in English is sustainedly being developed. The youth of today realising this phenomenon are moving towards either pursuing education in the English medium, where they can afford it, whilst others are flocking to English teaching tutorials to acquire a working knowledge of English in whatever form.

Could it be postulated today, that the language policy politically espoused and pursued has not been in tune with the real needs of the people, who today, even 40 years later, are seen acting otherwise ? Ought not national policy formulation be geared to the real needs of the people and to provide for the socio-economic development of the country and for the socio-economic emancipation of the people ? Examples of the fall and failure of ideological political policy pursuits in several countries in the world have been quite evident at the turn of this century, where such countries that pursued ideological policies are comparatively in economic shambles in the contemporary world, with their people economically impoverished.

YOUNGER GENERATIONS HANDICAPPED

Today, 35,000 graduates are reported to be unemployed in this country. Would not the very business leaders prefer to take English educated ordinary level or advance level qualified youth to be trained into job opportunities in their private sector empires, in preference to Sinhala or Tamil educated graduates ? This, by no means, is a censure of the private sector, but is a stark reality. In fact, some private sector organisations have commenced conducting English classes, to develop a working knowledge of English for Sinhala and Tamil educated recruits. This is the reality and plight today.

Is it not such circumstances, that have led to youth insurrections time and again in this country ? Would not educating youth in a language medium, which is a setback for their employment and future prospects, no doubt, be a grave misadventure ? The factual ground reality is that important social sectors and institutions of this country have continued to function operating in English and thereby relegating those not competent to function in the English language. Admittedly, this is absolutely unfair by the several

thousands of unemployed graduates. Who has to take the responsibility for such situation ? Definitely not the graduates, who are consequently subjected to suffering ?

Regardless of and insensitive to such a scenario, the government in its recent budget identified the development of information technology as a key budget proposal. This is what the budget proposals propounded – "Information Technology Development: - The government has identified information technology as one of the major thrust areas with a view to encouraging the exploitation of IT for national development. Globalisation of economic and financial services and trade, together with the increasing use of electronic has already broken down traditional barriers and brought in new challenges. We have a talented and skilled human resource base. Their capabilities need to be directed to obtain the full benefit of the global demand for software development and IT services."

Is not the global information highway essentially in the English language ? By having educated intelligent and talented youth of this country in the Sinhala and Tamil languages are they not handicapped with a setback, when they are called upon to access the information highway, which essentially is in English ? Even acquiring a working knowledge of English would not develop their capability to comprehend, as they ought to, the vast knowledge now available on the global information network. Is not this a major setback to the younger generations of this country adventing into the next millenium ? On whom lies the responsibility for such disastrous national setback ? Would it not be the duty and responsibility of statesmen to give correct leadership to the country to achieve socio-economic development and the prosperity of the people ?

Whilst the government has rightfully placed such emphasis on the development of the talented and skilled human resource base of this country, ought not the above major setback have been taken cognisance of and appropriately dealt with ? A cogent question that necessarily has to be raised, is as to whether the student population in the various universities in this country have the facilities to have free and ready access to the internet ? Ought they not be afforded such facilities ? Let alone universities, are not collegiate students in other countries today enjoying facilities to access the internet to acquire knowledge ? Would this not be a major issue that would need addressing, if one were to honestly implement the budget proposal in relation to information technology ?

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, herself, on the historic and auspicious occasion of the 50th independence celebrations addressed the nation in the English language, on the premise of vital necessity to communicate with the international community. Does this not alone justify, that the same capability and opportunity to communicate with the international community, ought to have been afforded equally to all youth of this country alike ?

Perhaps it is in the background of the foregoing and the importance of English as a global language, that the business leaders had urged as item 4 of their agenda – "4. Introduce the use of English as a link language and legislate for English to also be an official language."

The very terminology of identifying English as a "link language", in itself patently implies, the linkage identified as necessary, to link two separated segments. Thus and thereby one concedes that the education process in the Sinhala and Tamil languages has created two separate segments that need to be linked today. Would not the bonding by all persons learning Sinhala and Tamil as languages, whilst being educated in English, be better than mere linkage, and also at the same time gear the future youth of the country to compete competently, without any handicap, whatsoever, in the global village of opportunities ?

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