

SOMETHING ROTTEN IN THE STATE

Quite evidently, no one appears to be satisfied and content with today, with the socio-political and socio-economic plight of the country after 50 years of gaining independence giving rise to the cogent question, as to whether not such socio-political and socio-economic plight of the country has been the direct result of political mismanagement of the country, by politicians, who had been at the helm of affairs of the country, since the gaining of independence 50 years back ?

The advent and growth in the country, since the gaining of independence 50 years back, of confrontational party politics, with further development of the presidential executive system, coupled with elections on proportionate representation and preferential voting, poses the cogent question, as to whether such confrontational party political system has essentially been a malignant cancer, stifling and stultifying the growth and development of the country and the nation and eroding social and moral values that ought to exist in a civilised and democratic society ?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PLIGHT ?

It is more than abundantly clear, that no one with any sanity and national interest at heart, from whatever quarter of society, could be happy and content with the present socio-political and socio-economic plight of the country, resulting today in the general disillusionment in such confrontational party political system, which has essentially caused the breeding of politicians, who evidently appear to take to politics, as a lucrative profession or business, devoid of personal and cohesive vision and commitment, to develop the country and the nation, in a planned and meaningful manner, for the prosperity of the future generations.

Even after 50 years of independence, other than such growth of cancerous confrontational party politics and such party political activities holding the national center stage and attracting the main national focus, what real and tangible socio-political and socio-economic development has the country achieved since gaining independence 50 years back, in comparison to an island nation, such as Singapore, which country was far less developed than this country, at the time of gaining of independence 50 years back and this country has fallen far back now ? Could the politicians, who held sway, at the helm of affairs in the country shirk responsibility for such present state of affairs ? Otherwise, who else could be so responsible and accountable ?

The socio-political plight today, is that the country for more than a decade, has now deteriorated and sunk into intense racial and communal strife, with full scale offensive by the massive build up of the armed forces, fighting terrorism given birth to in the country, which terrorism has now gained international recognition for its resourcefulness and ruthlessness. The time and energies of political management and the scarce resources of the country are focused upon and devoured by such national crisis, for which the responsibility would lie at the feet of the politicians at the helm of affairs of the country, since the gaining of independence 50 years back, for their short-sighted and/or opportunistic policies pursued, leading to the precipitation of such national debacle and catastrophe, affecting and threatening the day to day life of the people of the country today, with fear of security and a curb of personal freedoms.

INTEGRATED NATIONAL PLANNING ?

On the other hand, the economic development of the country has been totally devoid of any real and pragmatic integrated national planning for the country as a whole, co-ordinating all socio-economic sectors and involving public opinion. The planning secretariat and the separate planning service that had been envisaged to achieve such goal, has merely meandered its way, without the achievement of the goal of developing an integrated and comprehensive ongoing economic development plan for the country, optimising the use of the country's resources and available opportunities.

Economic development decisions of the country have, more often than not, been made ad-hoc, driven by influential donor agency interests and pressures, in the context of their own country agendas, peddled and pushed by suppliers' interests, which are not necessarily, the national interests of the country, with decision making politicians in power being quite susceptible to aggressive lobbying and thereby compromising on socio-economic decisions regardless of national interests.

Is it not the reality today, that the lucrative commission earnings from projects has been emerging, as the main factor whereby, interested parties are earnestly influencing decision making by politicians in power, regardless of national priorities and needs of the country; such socio-economic projects invariably being financed on the basis of conveniently arranged credit, committing future generations of the country to re-pay such debts ? Such phenomenon is widely acknowledged and decried internationally today as corruption - a malignant cancer to the national development and the growth of countries.

Is it not such corruption led economic development and ad-hoc investment decisions on the basis of such convenient credit, that has been the primary cause for the sudden debacles in the supposed miracle economies in South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank endeavouring to implement economic restructuring programmes, with conditionalities curbing such political mismanagement and corruption, whereas the cogent question also arises, as to what such institutions were doing in the past ?

Have not politicians cited these countries in the past, as examples of miraculous economic development, notwithstanding the scandalous corruption exposures that had been highlighted time and again in the international media, thereby endeavouring to tacitly justify corruption, as a necessary lubricant to facilitate economic development in the third world developing countries?

BUSINESS COMMUNITY ALSO RESPONSIBLE

It would not be fair and equitable to place the entire responsibility for the present socio-political and socio-economic plight of the country, exclusively at the feet of the politicians only. Is it not the social culture and system, supported by other sections of society, that has been germinated and has grown since the gaining of independence 50 years back, as a consequence of the confrontational party political system, that clearly has been the main malignant cancerous cause and impediment to the development of the country and the nation?

It is quite openly known, that business enterprises and those with business interests gainfully fertilise and exploit such situation, making very large investments in such confrontational party political system, thereby developing close alliances with politicians, which today has come to stay as a necessary strategy to dabble in business of certain sorts, particularly in relation to contracts with and supplies to the state sector and the promotion and development of socio-economic projects sponsored by the government, including programmes of privatisation of state owned enterprises.

Accordingly, the business world no doubt provide for such political investments and strategies in their corporate planning endeavours, to develop corporate negotiation strengths and abilities to be able to compete for such state sector business; and invariably, even leading to lucrative political and diplomatic appointments as rewards to such business leaders, after their retirement from the corporate business world.

The confrontational party political system with proportionate representation and preferential voting demands for political activity, the mobilisation of such large scale of financial resources, from the corporate business world and businessmen, thereby politicians not only being susceptible to, but also even soliciting such lobbying, and obligating themselves thereby to such business interests, and even sometimes lending to become pseudo partners of such business interests.

The magnetic abilities of politicians to raise financial resources from such corporate business world and businessmen is amply evidenced by invariably all sports bodies seeking ruling party politicians to head their respective sports bodies, primarily with the objective of raising financial resources. Obviously, it would appear that the corporate business world is only too willing to oblige, when such requests emanate from ruling party politicians, demonstrating their eagerness to cultivate political patronage and relationships, with politicians in power. If the motivation is purely and only to promote sports, then why such political factor ?

The irony and reality is that, the same circle of the corporate business world and businessmen would similarly cultivate, compromise and be able to influence, whatever political party in power, subjugating the broader interests of the country and the nation, to promote their own parochial business and personal interests, which is one of the real dimensions of this cancerous impediment to the socio-economic development of the country and the nation in a planned and meaningful manner.

CONDUCT OF PROFESSIONALS ?

It is not only the corporate business world and businessmen, that largely lend support, germinate and fertilise such confrontational party political system and politicians for the purposes of business and personal gains, but also quite tragically, even professionals and professional institutions appear at times, to be servile and subservient to such confrontational party political system and politicians, even at times compromising the autonomous independence of professions and professional institutions, regardless of the need to uphold unrighteously, independent and non-compromising professional standards in the interest of society at large and in the best public interest.

Ironically, professional institutions and professionals are invariably seen paying homage and patronage to politicians in power, sometimes even regardless of their relevance to their professions and professional institutions, quite evidently to cultivate relationships, associations and familiarity with politicians in power, seeking to be rewarded with political appointments. Professionals should command political appointments on the professional strengths of their prestige and professional standing, than lobby and seek political appointments to gain professional prestige and standing, sometimes even misusing and abusing official positions held in their respective professional institutions for such personal purposes.

Consequently, would it not be, even more serious when professional standards are compromised to accommodate political objectives and whims and fancies of politicians - a classic example being the instance of Puttalam Cement/Thawakkal case, where even cardinal and basic standards and principles of accounting and corporate law were blatantly breached in full public glare, clearly with the involvement of professionals, whilst the Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Bar Association, remaining silent thereon, thereby making belief in the public eye, the sanctification thereof, eroding moral and social values and public confidence that ought to exist in a civilised democratic society ?

Should professional institutions be silent on issues of public interest that affect their professions and thereby imply acquiescence and sanctification, when professional standards are blatantly compromised and subverted for political expediency, sometimes even with the connivance of professionals ? Ought not professional institutions have the courageous independence in such circumstances to denounce and stand up to politicians in keeping with norms of a civilised democracy in the greater interest of society at large and in the public interest ?

Has not political appointment of businessmen and professionals in the circumstances of such political patronage and lobby, to public bodies and institutions invariably led to the compromise of the objectives of such public bodies and institutions, as a result of being subservient and susceptible to sensitivities emanating from such confrontational party politics and politicians, compromising such public bodies and institutions from acting in the manner they ought to in the broader interests of society ? Would not classic examples of illustrations be the Securities & Exchange Commission, The Merchant Bank of Sri Lanka Ltd., Public Enterprises Reform Commission re - Kotagala Plantations Ltd. ? - *an analytical exposure of which is to follow.*

The irony today is that several professionals and businessmen from the corporate world have found it quite fashionable and trendy to preach and pontificate on high profile corporate governance and the responsibility of directors in the governance of companies, sometimes even contrary to their own track record and performance in the corporate world, with nary a word from them on the governance of the country by politicians and responsibilities of ministers. On the contrary, would not the very same professionals and businessmen be invariably seen standing in attendance in public, showering praise on the governance of the country by politicians and to pay homage and patronage to ministers and politicians, promoting not only a sense of complacency, but also a sense of euphoria of success, devoid of any criticism, whatsoever, of the politicians in power, thereby compromising public interest ?

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