

Can the ministerial secretaries wash their hands off building the nation?

It is questionable whether the past 51 days of conspiracy left anything of importance for the country. Even though a clear cut end to this unfortunate season is not at vicinity yet, the composition of the cabinet built upon 19th amendment is better in quantitative comparison. However to someone who would do a structural elaboration on this scenario, it might appear as a mere satisfaction given to the elderly politicians and no scientific basis would be found. At the same time, it must be mentioned that the final ace in the hole that the president could have used to seek a silver lining in the dark clouds too has vanished.

Even though the president has been blowing his own trumpet stating that he will not allow the United National Party to do as their whims and fancies what he has been doing for the past 40 years is sharpening his own sword using the help of gamblers.

Margret Hilda Thatcher is the Iron Lady who became the Prime Minister of the Great Britain in 1979. She directed the well-known political party the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990. The early period of the 80th decade in which her political career inaugurated, was an unfortunate era where a decadence of the economy of that country prevailed.

The way the Iron Lady saved the Great Britain from the economic decadence is still a preferred field of study by the university community of that country. The miraculous intervention of the Iron Lady is still in the air of the community. For instance, once she came to power she organized a party for all the permanent secretaries and other high class officials. She observed how the invitees enjoyed the party with food and beverages amidst endless chats and conversations. Then she made it an opportunity to address the party before the end. The following is the summary of her short speech.

“I saw how you enjoyed the party with immense pleasure among songs, dances and food. But I was surprised at the way you all acted as a set of blind and insensitive people who have not even heard about the economic catastrophe our country is facing at the moment. No one of you made use of this golden opportunity to build up a conversation on how to overcome the tragic economic calamity. I think it is a timely requirement that we keep full stop to this episode.”

Later it was said that even though Thatcher left the party premises after that speech, the other high class officials had been at the premises for hours with amazement on their faces. Just as she said, she put it into practicality by placing official announcements on the tables of the aforementioned officials on the first day of the following week. The announcement said that the government privileges will be allocated not only considering the seniority of the officers but also the dimensions of the effectiveness and efficiency of the workload done by them.

It is not an exaggeration to state that even the politicians of the opposing parties accept that the access taken by Thatcher is among the foremost reasons which uplifted the Great Britain to where it stands today. While the situation is as such in the Great Britain, the scenario in Sri Lanka is quite contrasting. When the Iron Lady had the confidence to undermine the dictatorship of men of her country and do a righteous reign of ruling, the former Sri Lankan president Chandrika Bandaranayake who came to executive presidency with immense popularity among the citizens and with a distinctively noticeable higher number of votes had to leave the presidency with a moniker as the queen of corruption. The Galle Face is still with opened eyes till she comes back to execute the guilty parties who supported bribery and corruption during her reign.

The appreciation about the non-native Iron Lady was done to revive a factor which would enlighten the country. That is to ponder about the virtues and morality of the newly appointed secretaries to the ministries. The Chief Accountant Gamini Wijesinghe who is well reputed as a government official with a rigid backbone and a person who is willing to make use of it, recently confirmed a statement which everyone of us knows. That is "if the secretaries to the ministries act collectively and in unity, the ministers cannot engage in their corruptive activities anymore". The problem remains unsolved not only due to the lack of unity among ministerial secretaries, but also the malfunctioning of regulatory bodies like the Sri Lanka Administrative Service Association (SASA) which allows the corruptive actions of the minority of faulty officials.

There is one fact which has to be noted by everyone who is ever ready to criticize the politicians upon each word said by them. That is, it is not solely owing to the misconduct of the politicians that our country is facing these drawbacks. The fingers should also be pointed at the subordinate officers who unconditionally agree to each and every decision taken by the ministers disregarding the scope of disaster those decisions can bring about.

Have you ever seen at least one officer who has raised his voice to reveal the tragic facet of the enormous debts which infect the country? Have you ever seen anybody who tells the consequences to an official who is pulling the legs of a fellow official? The answer is undoubtedly no. Even though the country is consistently moving towards a disaster, the authorities of the country are a group of people who are ready to mind their own business. Conforming to the view of Thatcher, it is a misery that at least one leader has not been found in the country, who would pioneer the molding of a set of young officials who would not deny to fight against the parasitic behaviors of the senior officials. It implies the pathetic fate the country is going to face.

It is in this context that the president of the country, who has the executive power of appointing ministerial secretaries has wasted the enticement. Even though the president made statements at the time of appointment of the ministerial secretaries that the secretaries should be of clean hands, there are two points which we should not forget at this scenario. First point is that the person who is alleged to

have enjoyed the largest bribe throughout the history of Sri Lanka is the head of his subordinate officials. The other point is that there are some other alleged people among the already appointed secretaries.

It must be mentioned that there is a lot of officials who are willing to and are already doing their duty with their fullest potential and decency. But it is so unfortunate that there is no political character who is confident enough to give a challenging duty for those skillful officials. For that we need politicians with strong and free mentality. At the same time, we need senior officers who do not hold grudge or ego.

There is a Tamil proverb which says that the one who eats salt, has to drink water too. In simplified terms it means that the one who commits crimes will suffer the consequences of it. In comparison to that the political scenario of the country can be assessed. There are a lot of corrupted politicians and high class officials who exploit the government wealth for their personal wellbeing. However it is pitiful to see that no attempt has been taken by the society to enact the law against these corruptions and even to create a strong conversation regarding the matter. This lethargy of our society makes us realize that the one who eats salt is eating sweets and not water, which means there is no punishment for the wrong doers in our society.

Sri Lanka is a country well known for the nourished land with fruits and the pleasant climate throughout the year. Despite those favorable factors, is there a favorable atmosphere in the country which enables a consumer to go to the market and buy a fruit at a reasonable price? Even though one would buy, those fruits are doubtlessly bathed with toxic chemicals and preservatives. Although one might not suffocate severe short term effects of the consumption of toxic rich fruits, it is obvious that the country will suffer from the lack of nutrition resulting a weak and lethargic future generation in the long run. Should we wait until our executive president appears on the stage to eradicate this menace? Cannot the relevant minister and other heads of the authoritative departments and cooperation take an initiative to keep a full stop to this?

The majority of the population makes use of the public bus service for their travel and transport as the train service is not satisfactorily functioning. In case you get an observational sense of mind, just step into a restaurant at which the long distance buses stop for refreshment. You might not need to wait for more than a few minutes to comprehend that starting from the standards of pricing, to the standards of kitchen premises, there are numerous shortcomings. Who is responsible for the correct monitoring and eradication of this sort of death holes? Once the then Minister of Transport Shreemani Athulathmudali cleaned the Fort railway station by herself. Should we go back to an era where the relevant minister has to run all the way to control these irregularities? No. The responsibility of controlling these provincial level officers who take bribe from the restaurants every month, is upon the ministerial secretaries. Have you so far seen such efficient secretaries? Even if you have, that must be very rare.

Not only that, it is evident that no proper action is taken against the alleged secretaries. It is proved as one such alleged secretary has been reappointed as the secretary of a very powerful ministry. In addition another official who has remained in the higher levels of administration while his administrative decisions are quite criticizing, has been capable of snatching another secretariat this time too. It is questionable why the politicians too are blind stricken at the appointment of the corrupted officials into the higher posts, while the politicians are quite capable of appointing skillful young personnel for these important posts of secretariats.

It does not need to be repeated that it is the responsibility of the secretaries to guide the country along the path of success without merely satisfying the needs of the politicians.

The number of grama niladharis in the country is a bit more than 14 000. They are a set of officers who are capable of carrying out the government services in close association of the general public. Since 2011 these officers have been consistently doing one progressive request which in turn benefits the country. The request is to formulate a service constitution for the gramaniladharis of the country. None of the ministers who believe that the aforementioned constitution would hinder their political reign over the grama niladharis, have not taken any concern to give the necessary recommendation for this process. Every secretary who has been appointed to the administrative ministry or the ministry of home affairs have just been postponing the action on the aforementioned constitution as desired by the politicians. It is obvious that the country will head nowhere as long as this sort of secretaries run the ministries.

However, there is a small number of secretaries who have been doing their service in their fullest possible level. Quantitatively the number is even less than five. The reason why the precise functionality of the secretaries is made tough is that the ministers sometimes lack the required technical knowledge relevant to their ministries and other responsibilities. Even though some of the secretaries are evidently experts in their relevant fields, the lack of knowledge and ability of the ministers to utilize them can result in drawbacks and failures.

There is another unforgettable factor. That is the unsolved question why the politicians are interested in appointing secretaries from outside while neglecting the qualified and skillful officials who are already competent in administrative or other ministerial actions. The reason should undoubtedly be the convenience the politicians enjoy when they have the officers on their own wish.

The second factor is the absence of any progress or change irrespective of the appointment of a large number of government officials. How miserable it is that these valuable and capable officials end their professional career without having the opportunity to perform any noticeable change in the country?

Not only that, one of the secretaries who got retired a few years ago is now spending the twilight of his life leisurely in Australia. There has been no investigation results which revealed the amount of wealth he has collected illegally.

There is a collective program carried out by the World Bank and the United Nations in order to investigate about these corruptive people. The name of that program is "The Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative". Even though a set of officers from the Commission to investigate Bribery and Corruption and Sri Lankan Police have represented the annual conference, the actions taken by them to stop the corruptions are still unknown. Such topics are labeled as taboo subjects for the citizens of this country. They are as if forbidden topics. When analyzed there is no much difference between the two set of officials.

If someone questions on how we can safeguard the country from this, one clear cut answer is the creation and molding of a set of creative and competent officers. But it should also be mentioned that aforementioned set of officers should not contain any of the thirty appointed officials so far.

It is a commonly shared saying among the villagers that even the withered and shrunken twigs will reawake upon appreciations and admirations. Some of the secretaries who know this saying apply the same theory to deceive the ministers. They might collect consequences to be paid off even in their next birth as well.

The timely requirement of the country is a set of officials who would lead a simple life while being conscious about the future of the country. We are keenly waiting to see how many of the appointed 30 secretaries will strive to save the country based upon a good policy.

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