

S's misrule a necessary condition for the conduct of the war with the LTTE? Reports of serious misdemeanour on the part of Ministers and public officials, of corruption in high places, and of the apparent insouciance with which the President of the country appears to look upon all these seems to paint a gloomy picture of a government that has put aside good management for another day; perhaps someday after the war is won and the LTTE annihilated.

It need not and should not. Most of these acts of misrule are completely within control. Good governance will only serve to enlist more support for the governing regime and give it strength. It will help transform the President from a political leader, which he is today, to a statesman.

There are largely uncontrollable variables that are the opportunity costs of war. Neglect of development in areas such as power, water supply, irrigation, land development, roads,

inflation on the 'loka welenda pola' as the Sirma Bandaranaike government infamously did. Loka welenda pola became a joke and a spot in Pettah was hilariously named after that abstract institution. It is true that global prices of food and necessities have gone up. Petrol went up steeply to create another 'oil shock'. This is only part of the story. The other part is wasteful profligacy on the part of the government. Maintaining a 100- odd sized cabinet of Ministers with attendant staff, vehicles, fuel allowances etc is one thing. Lavish expenditure on whimsical Sancho Panza projects like Mihin Air that sent nearly 300 billion Rupees down the drain is another. Presidential jaunts have been openly extravagant. The trip to China took over 150 delegates. A good part of the inflation has been caused by a huge Budget deficit. In order to soften the impact, government has resorted to borrowing on commercial terms of credit for the first time in Lankan history. Governor of the Central Bank, a political implant, boasts of a healthy Balance of Payments and a

before the Supreme Court, stating that they were transferred from the Commission mala fide and for the collateral purpose of discontinuing an investigation against a minister who has never declared his assets.According to the Petition, at present, a large number of investigations of Bribery are pending against Cabinet members, Members of Parliament, Military and Police officers and public officials.

And another: "It is learnt that among the officials accompanying the President will be Treasury Secretary Dr. P.B. Jayasundara who featured prominently in a recent landmark Supreme Court ruling over his role as PERC Chairman with regard to the privatisation of Lanka Marine Services. A fortnight ago Dr. Jayasundara wrote to the President, who is also Minister of Finance to "relieve him of his duties", following the Supreme Court judgment, which also imposed a fine of Rs. 500,000 on the Treasury Secretary". No action has been taken by the President against this



when the latter was taking photographs at the flyover - laying ceremony in Kelaniya, which he and not the electorate thinks is his pocket borough. Senior Minister Sirisena remarked the other day that he was waiting for God to punish Mervyn. Why wait for divinity when the earthly President is there?

Following Mervyn's lead the assault on media personnel is seen widely prevalent. Even Gotabhaya has not spared the jourms. Such fear of independent media men cannot be understood when the government does control

SHOULD THE WAR COST US ALL THIS?

rails, hospitals, schools, and communication are among these. On the other hand, the misrule we refer to here is something that can be effectively remedied.

Few would deny that the annihilation of the LTTE is indeed of paramount concern. It is not that this will be the end of a long and deepened crisis in our relations with the Tamil people; nevertheless, it is necessary surgery. To my own mind the watershed of our traditional tolerance for the Tiger insurgents was the defeat of Ranil Wickremasinghe at the bidding of the LTTE. To begin with, even the new President, a man of peaceful disposition, did not opt for war. The latter continued with "peace efforts", went to talks, and kept the Wickramasinghe Peace Accord for an even a longer time than its author did although legal provision was available in the Accord to do away with it after two weeks' notice. To President Rajapakse it was the Mawil Aru incident that tolled the bell. Aided by his capable brother Gotabhaya President Rajapakse went to war not relenting ever after. Defence Ministry reports appear to indicate definite progress in the war although it is unlikely that Prabhakaran will fall in a hurry.

However, the question on numerous lips these days is: need misrule and anarchy be the big price for success in the battlefield? The mismanagement of the economy is at the root of a lot of problems. Government supporters try to put the blame for catapulting

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good growth rate concealing the fact that an unprecedented foreign debt is behind these two "healthy" developments. Our debt has gone above our GDP!

Let's get back to the easily controllable public misconduct that makes nonsense of the rule of law:

One news story said: "Mowlana garlands OIC of Bambalapitiya Police after he verbally assaulted UNP MPs Chandrani Bandara and Rosy Senanayake". No action was taken at government level to bring Mowlana under control.

Here's another story: "Two Investigating Officers (IO) of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, yesterday filed a Fundamental Rights (FR) Application

official.

Another: "President ready to grant pardon to Minister Thondaman who had been guilty of contempt of court". SB Dissnayanyake got into jail for that and is still without pardon.

Next, we've seen recurrent stories relating to the adventures of Dr Mervyn Silva who like Tan Tan never fails to amuse us: Dr Mervyn Silva, Labour Minister, invaded the Rupavahini office and allegedly assaulted the Director for not giving him adequate publicity over a ceremony. Trade Union and other leaders of the Corporation locked him up and gave him some treatment. No action against Mervyn. A few days ago, Mervyn was at it again when he allegedly assaulted a journalist-cameraman belonging to Sirasa

the major part of media in the country.

Much earlier in the current regime, Minister Jeevan Kumaratunge figured in a manpower recruitment controversy involving millions of dollars. No action taken.

Minister Keheliya Rambukwella is said to have compelled the Principal of Royal College to withdraw punishment meted to his son who had been guilty of serious misconduct in college. The son is back in school and the Principal turned a joker.

President Rajapakse avoids bringing into effect the 17th amendment that would significantly help relieve the ugly politicisation of the Public Service. The other day, Elections Commissioner stated that he cannot find impartial Public Servants for election work.

The fear of shame is fast evaporating from public life in Sri Lanka. This development is trickling down to a whole population that is getting geared to a way of life where might is right.



Shyamon Jayasinghe

