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to seek another term.

Premadasa is said to have created his own downfall after a self-inflicted "Raja Pissuwa." He made a throne for himself at the Gam Udawa and built a pretentious walawwe, which he claimed had been his father's. It is well-known that the artefacts for this Walawwe were collected from various private donors. Even Chandrika, a more liberal-minded President, tried to spin her way around to remain in office longer than required by the law. She engaged in hair-splitting about the date of swearing-in.

Wars such as the one we ended recently also seem to hearten dictatorial proclivities. The war gave the current President emergency powers on a huge scale. The PTA Act best symbolised this extraordinary power. Ministers also turned around the special powers that were available to government in order to aggrandise their own positions. The regime enjoyed great freedom to act arbitrarily.

A culture of unparalleled impunity followed. It is tempting for those who have enjoyed this amount of power to try and hold onto it. The press has been under systematic attack and many journalists have been kidnapped, killed or effectively banished. Nothing has ever been done to bring the culprits to book. President Rajapakse claimed that Lasantha Wickrematunge had been his buddy but he did nothing to catch his killers although the murder occurred in broad daylight and in held-up traffic.

While media suppression is a well-

known path to dictatorial rule cult-building is yet another. In cult-building the leader is presented to the people as someone without blemish and a unique messiah. "Maha Rajaneni," cardboard cut-outs, the honours given by each sect of the Sangha all play their role in cult-building.

Even our universities which represent the highest realm of the academe have joined the bandwagon of honour awards. Colombo University's Vice Chancellor wants to show what a good boy he is by offering Honorary doctorates to the President and the Defence Minister. This is a total abuse of the device of honorary doctorates as such awards are meant to constitute the university's recognition of an individual for the learning he has displayed or for some non-political achievement, for example in the cultural field. A good example that comes to mind is Senerath Paranawithana. In the end, our President might shrink at the realization that Mervin Silva also has an Honorary doctorate!

**Those who want to set up monarchies, life-long Presidencies, or simple dictators (they all, in essence, mean the same thing) must take a cue from Lord Acton's famous aphorism: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."** What Lord Acton has suggested here is that the true understanding of human nature alone would preclude the rational support for authoritarian rule whether of a monarch or a simple dictator. There are no perfect rulers and never will there be. Unless held accountable they tend to abuse their power.

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