

The evolving history of our planet has many striking similarities to the preceding centuries, in that the powerful are prepared to dispense with much insignificant blood in the relentless pursuit of political and economic advantage. However, unlike in earlier times, it is now fashionable to contrive a crisis in order to divert attention from com-

THE GAME OF DEMONISING STATES FOR ECONOMIC GAIN



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pellung domestic political malaise.

Strategic diversionary politics to relieve pressure on embattled and besieged world leaders by using deception and innuendo to mould public opinion that promotes either a political or social agenda has never been starker than at present. For example, in order to mobilize

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support for a war (however unjust or unfair) it seems acceptable to willfully distort and exaggerate reality.

Nations militarily less powerful but ethnically homogenous with the powerful nations have used such distortions to inflame majority emotions, while the powerful have attempted to ignite international condemnation and revulsion against a given minority which may in future seek to assert its will, at least in their own region.

The growing undertone of belligerence in political rhetoric regarding potential adversaries who are militarily insignificant but rich in scarce resources has been evident in the last decade. In spite of traditional military theory that "ground forces" are critical to an invasion, and a given power cannot afford to be involved in several theatres simultaneously, one needs to be aware that massive aerial and naval capabilities can wreak havoc in any part of the world, at a time of choice.

All that such an all-powerful and belligerent nation needs is a certain domestic issue to become unmanageable, for escalating existing simmering tensions into full-scale war. Terrorising entire nations and their millions of innocent people has a politely different definition from a small turbaned and bearded gang which decides to defy the odds and give some of it back, at great personal sacrifice.

In this scheme of things, what we know as diplomacy and foreign relations are first transformed into a diplomatic assault, which sets the scene for the barbarism to follow. For example, a state can be branded as a pariah or outlaw with the overt assistance of the media as an accessory. The intent of the diplomatic aggression is not in any way designed to reach a peaceful resolution, rather to antagonise a chosen enemy and put the world on edge.

The modus operandi is akin to cornering an animal living in its habitat, overpowering it and restricting it, putting it into a wholly unfamiliar and oppressive environment like a cage, tempting it with morsels of food if it performs at your command, and then from time to time rat-

ting the cage at random. The reactions of the animal, now "beast" are portrayed as vicious, and a danger to all if allowed to escape, blares the media. While the animal would have been harmless to us in the bush, for all intents and purposes it now evokes fear and revulsion in the public's eye.

This provocative stance entails maintaining relentless pressure on a given regime or group, compelling it to make humiliating concessions to the powerful aggressor, thus weakening its leaders' image domestically, with the threat of increasingly severe reprisals or sanctions from the bullies and its allies. The public face of this humiliating assault is termed a diplomatic effort. The backstage campaign can be anything from raiding the proposed adversary's territory and planting seeds of dissent, espionage, sabotage of essential facilities like communications and water. If a public explanation is somehow required due to a "WikiLeaked" operation, it can be anything from thwarting an underwear terror attack on Christmas eve, to impending insurgent infiltration that threatens the security of fissile material in "the wrong hands".

Such provocation is also cruelly designed to goad the now captive regime to react, which then only provides a justification for further escalation. Meanwhile, the world, via the aggressor's media accessory sees what appears to be the evil, repugnant and abhorrent side of an otherwise ordinary regime, which had hitherto ruled its own patch, however problematically.

A remarkable aspect of this game is that once a standoff has been ratcheted up to dangerous levels requiring a "remedy", the United Nations "appeals" to the neighbours to stay calm and not get involved, while preparing to help those who may need humanitarian aid in the crisis ahead. While atrocities are planned and perpetrated in the name of justice for the long-suffering masses (ie freedom from an evil dictator) or to preserve our way of life from fundamentalist, extremist, fanatic, suicidal maniacs who hate our freedoms, the domestic approval ratings of the beleaguered politician begin to soar once again, amid cheering and much flag-waving.

Woe unto the hapless refugees, economic migrants and holders of "acquired" citizenship in the countries of the bullies and allies! Calls to forget their identity, to "assimilate", tolerate discrimination as second-class citizens or go back home where they belong, come through rather loudly. Only those ready and pliant nonentities can then hope for any peace.

Within the broader and generationally strategic imperatives of globalisation, and the protective power of nation-states is weakened, while corporate control of entire economies is strengthened. Whole societies are forced into the global

Sri Lanka is predominantly an agricultural country. Its staple food is rice and paddy cultivation is the lifeline of the nation.

On the eve of independence in 1948, eighty five per cent (85%) of the people were living in villages engaged in agriculture mainly in the production of paddy, cottage industries and a variety of traditional agro-based service activities.

The number of villagers working for modern factories was negligible, and they too came from the villages close to urban industrial locations.

Not surprisingly, this led to the rise of unauthorised, crowded settlements or slums along the riverbanks and lakes running across the Colombo city and the suburbs. They not only spoiled the beauty of the city and other towns but also caused immense misery and socio-economic problems by seasonal flooding of the main rivers and their tributaries. No sooner the floods receded, the squatters would return to their former habitats. It was a vicious circle and the successive governments found no permanent solution to the problem.



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both socially economically.

The Paddy Lands Act s of 1953 and 1958 eased the problems faced by the farmers to a great extent by removing the absentee landlords and regulating the authority that landlords could exercise over tenants and the rents, and providing security of tenure of a permanent and her-

Paddy Cultivation in Sri Lanka: Nation's Lifeblood

Plans are now under way to demolish these temporary huts and resettle the squatters elsewhere; a commendable effort though belated perhaps due to the civil disturbances that occurred over the years.

Rural subsistence agriculture was largely



paddy monoculture. The farmers whether owner-cultivators or sharecroppers worked on small and uneconomical land holdings.

Others worked in tea, rubber and coconut plantations as wage earners and were economically better off than the farmers.

The average land holding in paddy was small due to visible or shady fragmentation of land over decades.

The peasantry and agriculture, the two strong pillars of the centralized government, received special attention of successive governments from the post-colonial times in devising development projects.

Land became the hottest issue followed by land settlement programs.

The Land Commission established in 1927, the Land Development Ordinance and the Crown Land Ordinance, which were enacted in 1935 and 1947 respectively, gave

itable nature, preventing a further fragmentation of paddy lands and encouraging the consolidation of small-sized holdings.

A new Department of Agrarian Services was also established to oversee marketing, crop insurance and land reform tenure with village-level farmer organizations.

The significant characteristic of the agricultural sector is that it has the capacity to absorb unskilled labour. Generally, peasants in rural, agricultural areas have not received a high level of education, especially the older generation. They have no other avenues of employment except in farming and allied agro-based activities.

The younger generation should, therefore, be encouraged to take to farming, as it is the noblest occupation. The President's recent call to the young to take to farming is indeed timely and inspiring.

Such a move could also put an end to the urban-crawl in search of jobs, which are almost non-existent.

Agriculture up to recent times has been utility-oriented and not profit-oriented, providing a case for subsistence agriculture. The horror of subsistence agriculture is that its production level is low and that it will have a great impact on the food security and poverty.

It is extremely important to educate farmers in diversification and rotation of crops, correct use of agricultural implements, selection of proper and healthy seeds, use of fertilizers, and pest and disease controlling methods.

Marketing of products is yet another baffling problem for farmers. Construction of new or repairing infrastructure including roads is not only the answer but it is also equally important to provide an efficient and dependable transportation system to