

Sri Lanka's Health Minister has thought of the health of the section of individuals most prone to numerous diseases in the land, i. e. the politicians. His discovery goes well beyond a diagnosis, and offers the necessary medicine too. That is the training of politicians for which he suggests the setting up of an institution. While congratulating the minister for thinking of curing the ailments of every citizen, I feel obliged to offer my own suggestions for its success.

I do not know why, but I cannot help referring to the new venture as 'Reformatory.' The only explanation I can give is that I may be influenced by reports of juvenile behavior by some members of this 'selected group of individuals.' I sincerely believe that such persons need a complete overhaul of their character or personality. Examples are not necessary to illustrate my point.

Then I can suggest a location for consideration by the minister, a location that carries an impressive title. It was the brain-child of another brilliant politician, perhaps more brilliant than the current one. It was established by the late President of Sri Lanka, when he was Prime Minister. ICTRL is the name, an institution situated in Embilipitiya, at the site where a Gam Uduwa exhibition was held. It contains a conference hall, accommodation for participants, a dagaba where participants can offer flowers and pray before sessions begin, and much more. The acronym has to 'de-coded' to start with. ICTRL stands for International Centre for the Training of Rural Leaders.

It did train quite a number of rural leaders (including members and chairmen of Urban Councils) who spent at times, a week in residence absorbing the wisdom and experience offered by experts, both local and foreign. That the adjective 'international' was justified at least by one group of participants can be proved by referring to the programs conducted there by the Urban Program Unit under the Ministry of Local Government in the eighties. There were at least some British,

inside of a politician's mind. I cannot think of anyone who can do that job better. He will no doubt advise his trainees as to the pitfalls to be avoided and strategies to adopt in case of a misdemeanor on the part of one of them.

Then there are the temptations. It is obvious that temptations that a politician is 'threatened or blessed with'. (It depends on the way one looks at them). Temptations can be either material or carnal, both proven strategies to persuade an unwilling individual, mainly a male. It may be useful to seek the help of some living



legends of the Sinhala screen, but I would rather play safe and recommend a few experts from among the laity as well as the clergy. From among the laity one or two names could be identified, but it is dangerous to name them as they are still in government. If the minister is keen on using them he would no doubt be able to speak to them since they are all colleagues of his.

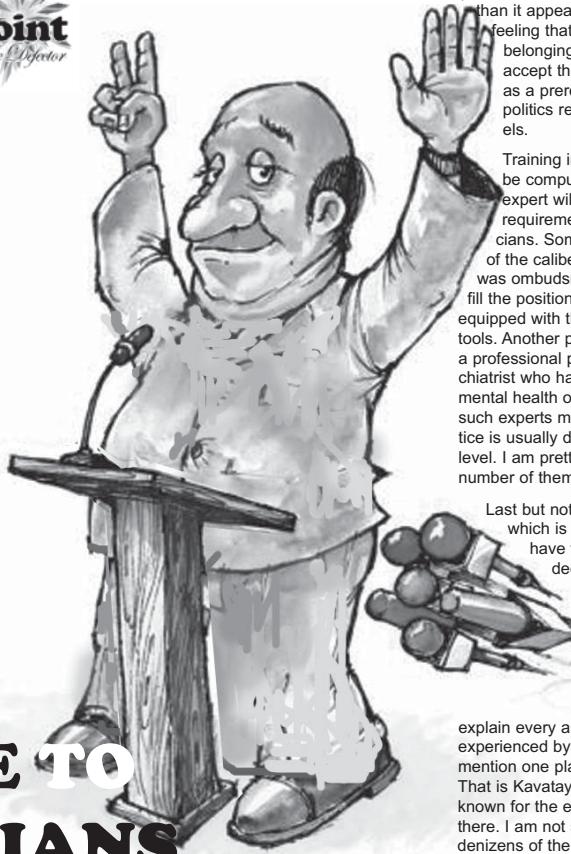
There is the most recent Sri Lankan creation of course, in the person of the criminal now in custody, i. e. Sakwithi. Why shouldn't the government think of making use of his extraordinary skills and experience before giving him long-term accommodation in Welikada or some other place? One thing can be assured: This expert is sure to turn his trainees into either better crooks or decent politicians vary of such deals and activities. It is a gamble inevitable in this game of politics.

Coming on to the other type of

areas I would just give simple examples of role play and case study.

1. Case study - A group of young men go to meet their M.P. whom they worked hard to get elected. M.P. by now has been elevated to the level of deputy minister. His wife, a school teacher, comes out to meet the visitors, and announces that her husband is still in bed. Her announcement goes like this: hamudurwo sapila. She has a new honorific to refer to the husband. Hamududuru is the term used to refer to a monk. The response irritates the men and their leader puts it into words. 'It is alright. Call him. We are the ones who put the robes on him.'

2. Role play: An M.P. ties a Samurdhi Officer to a tree with a rope and hangs a notice



around his neck announcing his guilt.

Both these have to be elaborated with sufficient details. An experienced trainer can easily take care of that.

Communication training is not complete without intensive training in public speaking. This may sound idiotic to the experienced practitioner,

but they too must be made to realize that it is the most appalling aspect of Sri Lankan politics. All Sri Lankan politicians are suffering from the common disease called 'verbal diarrhoea.' An exercise in precis-writing and competitions in short speeches might help a little. This is an area in which foreign experts could be employed if locals do not possess the skills.

They should be reminded of the fourth precept most of them recite like parrots each morning or at least in front of devout Buddhists. Politicians following other religions too have their own versions of the same requirement. They might even come

out with a credible excuse that politicians cannot always stick to the truth. This is a fallacy that has to be shattered for once and all. Not only that, I think the new institution ought to be empowered to develop a program and strategies to set up citizens' committees to monitor the utterances of politicians and recommend corrective action against errant behavior.

Training must in my view be preceded by a thorough psychological assessment of all participants. This should preferably be handled by a psychiatrist. It may be necessary to undertake a correctional program for at least a few of them. Apart from that training in psychology too is again a must for the politicians. This is an area more difficult than it appears on the surface. I have a feeling that eventually all governments belonging to the various parties will accept this psychological assessment as a prerequisite for entry into active politics representing people at all levels.

Training in psychology again should be compulsory for all. The normal expert will not measure up to the requirements of a trainer of politicians. Some experienced bureaucrats of the caliber of Sam Wijesinghe who was ombudsman some time back could fill the position only if he or she could be equipped with the required psychological tools. Another possibility is the discovery of a professional psychologist or even a psychiatrist who had been taking care of the mental health of politicians. Discovering such experts may not be easy as the practice is usually done on a highly confidential level. I am pretty sure one could discover a number of them.

Last but not least comes study tours, which is a subject expert trainers will have to seriously consider and decide as to the locations the trainees ought to be taken to and the specific areas to be covered in such visits. One thing I could emphasize is that tours must invariably be directed by persons qualified to

explain every aspect of what is seen and experienced by the trainees. Let me just mention one place that must be visited. That is Kavatayamune near Matale, well-known for the exhibition of the underworld there. I am not sure whether it contains denizens of the underworld who were politicians in their previous birth and found their way there because of using their positions to extort money, embezzle public funds or foreign aid, and to satisfy other personal needs at the expense of others' welfare or dignity. If this special feature is lacking immediate steps must be taken to rectify the position prior to such visits.

AN INSTITUTE TO TRAIN POLITICIANS

Indian, American and even Pakistani trainers visiting the center for these programs. In fact some of them were in residence during the training. If my suggestion finds favor with the Hon. Minister, this international aspect will have to be enlarged and encouraged, for Sri Lankan politicians no doubt would prefer to be trained by foreigners. There is another opportunity and possibility for expanding the centre's programs and facilities to attract foreign participants, i. e. to get down politicians from both developed and developing countries. That would at the end prove to be a good source of foreign exchange too. Then I have some serious ideas to offer the Minister in respect of the program content. Most important areas to be covered in any such activity, in my view, are not so much political theory and practice, but discipline and temptation. To put that in a more respectable way, let us say 'decorum and dignity.' I have a couple of resource persons too in mind. One is rather difficult to be traced and perhaps more difficult to get down. He is R. Paskaralingam, the very efficient lieutenant of President Premadasa. He played a bigger role than just being his secretary when he was P.M. and President. He is perhaps one of the very few Sri Lankan bureaucrats who knew the

temptations, I feel the minister has to select both clergy and laity for this expert job. More practical experience the trainer has the better trainer he or she will be. I have a few individuals in mind, but I do not want to prejudice the minister who is acquainted with all of them. The value of selecting them is that trainer's practical experience goes a long way in making the trainee a better practitioner. The moral aspect of the whole experience will have to be left in the care of religious leaders, i.e. monks or priests as the case may be. Discipline again must be entrusted to someone with experience. The man who headed the reformatory at Batalanda is available for the Minister to consult and empanel as a member of the professionals in charge of the actual training. Even the minister's own colleague of 'gus-bandina fame,' may be hired only if he could be handled by the boss.

Two other areas to be covered in the program are communication and public relations. There are quite a number of experts in the field, and selecting ones with political backgrounds could lead to problems. Two training tools must necessarily be used in both these areas. They are case studies and role plays. Trainee politicians should be made to play the role of the public while ordinary men are put in the role of politicians. Without elaborating on these key

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