



"All threats to his own authority he resists with absolute ferocity"- Machiavelli

When we observe Buddhist monks full of rage and lust for the exercise of physical power going about the country with a creed of hate and a call to arms against Muslims and other 'non-believers,' the sight of a sagely buddhaputracalmly, serenely, peacefully and intelligently campaigning for a change in the constitution that will benefit all and restore peace, it is much more than a breath of fresh air. It is the very embodiment of

try or the social contract between people and their rulers. From this systemic blemish all current evils flow. If this script is not discarded all political actors now and in the future, whatever the color, will dance the devil.

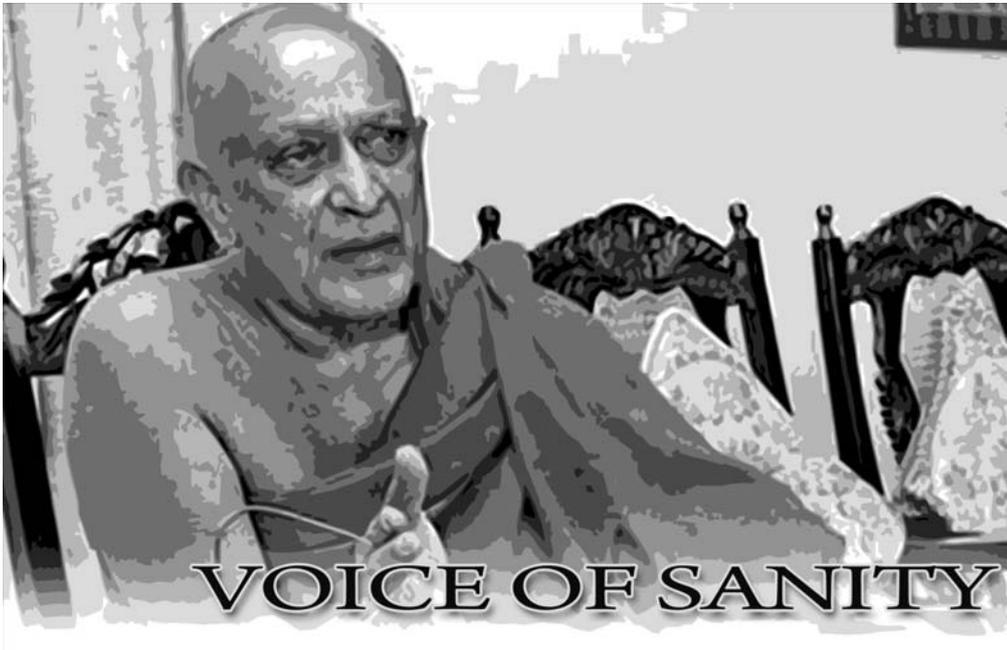
RevdSobitharallied around himsome eminent persons not tied to any political party,formed the National Movement for Social Justice and has now drafted proposals to amend the constitution of Sri Lanka. The drafting committee was headed by constitutional lawyer, JayampathyWickremaratne.

Chinese loans. In the same vein the center decides to nail and jail Sarath Fonseka, once described "the greatest army commander in the world," and Fonsekaconverted overnight from national hero to a jail-bird.Also, the center decides that the Chief Justice Dr Shiranee Bandaranayake must go home and it is done. No questions. MPs put your hands up! Hang due process and send the rule of law and natural justice on a holiday! Nobody checks the center and nobody dares check.

Westminster model of more collective decision-making. The Prime Minister in Britain is said to be primus inter pares or 'first among equals'. This has, however, not meant a weakening of the center in countries like Britain and Australia that follow the Westminster model. In effect, British Prime Ministers and Australian Prime Ministers have been virtual presidents and their election campaigns are done in presidential style. When Kevin Rudd led the Labor campaign in 2007 the slogan was "Kevin 07." How did that differ from Obama's campaign? On the other hand, the office of the president of Sri Lanka is something overpowering and capable of invading the whole government apparatus once parliamentary control is obtained. This appalling invasion is what discerning Lankans see taking place today.

Parliament, judiciary, elections, Attorney General, Auditor General, police and all institutions that are expected to keep an independent presence to check an executive that can go wrong are under the president's heel.

This is why RevdSobitha's proposals are also aimed at returning the independence of the judiciary, elections, Public Service etc so that the rule of law is restored. RevdSobitha, next, invokes the return to the First- Past- the Post- system of elections that Lanka had enjoyed pre-1978. Under the prevailing proportional representation (PR) system all that a candidate for parliamentary elections need do is to have his/her name put in the party list. He need not have an electoral base and he can be any bandit or drug dealer. The party bureaucracy (in effect, again the president) decides. Under the old system a potential candidate is tied to a particular electorate and he must always be accountable to that electorate. The



hope for a nation in an era of hopelessness; a beacon of value in times that are being stripped of values; a solid and noble sentry that's watching, concerned over a nation that is tearing itself away and drawing toward a perilous end.

While men and women in prominent positions-in the academia, in the Public Service, in business and in the NGO system have opted out of fear of possible gain to remain bystanders and while a good many of the Sinhala Diaspora are parroting the rhetoric of the Buddhist Taliban here is a Blessed One who has thrown in his lot with the future of our island and the long-term welfare of its people. RevdMadulawewaSobitha would unmistakably stand to gain in all material trappings like luxury cars, trips overseas and some financial deals to boot had he chosen to ignore his conscience and gone with the official line as some of his corrupted colleagues have done. Yet, he has put the nation and the people above himself. There is no agitation in him; no impatience with those who have chosen to prostitute the Dhamma. Yet, he keeps pressing softly and gently exuding a measure of the radiance of the Great Master. He knows he has found the solution.

In the CundaSutta the Buddha told Cunda, the smith: "there are four kinds of monks, not a fifth. One kind has won the path; one expounds the path; one lives the path and one defiles the path." It is a matter of serious concern for true Buddhists that there are such large numbers of defilers wearing the robes of the well-conducted monks. By their incendiary rhetoric the latter variety of monks are able to gather mobs around them that become destructive. One of the monks belonging to these raucous, Buddhist Taliban called upon every monk in every temple to act as a cop "on behalf of the Buddhists." Muslim traders are being intimidated; mosques and churches attacked. One media image of a raging monk was particularly disgusting.

RevdMadulawewaSobitha's mission is of a totally different kind. He was quick to diagnose that Sri Lanka's disease is a fault in the system or a systemic flaw. The root is the document that bares out the rules of the business of running the coun-

JR Jayawardena had introduced the 1978 constitution that prevails to this day in a self-hallucinatory moment when he thought he could be in power by a document until he dies. The pre-1978 Westminster-type constitution gave our island peace and genuine development without epithets like 'GamUdawa,' 'Divineguma,' 'DeyataKirula,' 'MathataThiitha,' and so on. It was under the Pre-1978 constitution that huge Sri Lankan infrastructure like the numerous irrigation networks had been built; that massive colonization schemes had been set up; that MadyaMahaVidyalayas and MahaVidyalas had been erected; that universities and Technical Colleges had been founded; that a vibrant healthcare system had been instituted and so on and so on. Sri Lanka had no pre-tending patriots those days; no claims of 'aascharyas'. DS Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake, SirimawoBandaranaika and JR himself for the first part of his rule, dealt with positive construction and positive development. Also, the great revolution of the liberalized economy, the Free Trade Zones, and the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Scheme etc-were all done before the bahu-boothavyawasthawa. Structural changes had been introduced and indeed the country was looking forward.

Alas! JR's madness came down on the nation and the country began a gradual drop to authoritarian and dictatorial rule where one man knows the truth and where one man takes the decisions for the people. Decision-making is at the center. The trend that JR's constitution led to has reached logical culmination innationally catastrophic proportions in the current regime. The new scenario is that the man in the center will decide that there must be a harbor in Hamabantota. No need for feasibility studies. The harbor must be built and so it was built. The ships are yet to sail in. Similarly, the center decides that an international airport must come up at Mattala and that an international sports stadium must come up in that area and, hey presto, these-hasty projects see the light of day with willing

Under this absolutist constitution all power is concentrated at the center. All government agencies are subsumed under the center and there is little space for institutional independence that alone can bring truly creative and productive decisions for the people. There is no space for the inputs of external experts because experts might interject with embarrassing queries at the center. Centralized decisionmaking is inherently flawed because by eliminating or discouraging inputs from independent external contributors the nation is put into a very vulnerable situation. The path is laid for a corrupt tyranny acting at its will and pleasure and consulting with only his favorite circle before making decisions that affect the welfare of people.

The central plank in RevdSobitha's proposals is the abolition of this absolutist constitution and its replacement by the



Shyamon Jayasinghe



accountability is lost under PR. MPs can behave any way they desire and even disregard the people that elected him as all they got to do is to please the party and the president.

The campaign of Revd MadulawewaSobitha and his National Movement for Social Justice has got to reach widespread popular appeal before it can succeed. The political ruling class-both those in office and those praying to get into office- have far too much to benefit by the current system and will not yield unless forced. The damage of absolutist rule has more to complete its course before people can awaken.

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