

"Sri Lanka is drowning in parochialism as the island people are being swayed by greedy politicians to avoid thinking, 'Sri Lankan.' As a community, our internal tribal differences are being exploited. Fear-mongering stories like the recent one in Ampara are being privately touted and dis-seminated by politicians."

Money, Power, Privilege & The Political Short-Cut

With money playing a more and more crucial role in the lives of people world over, the road to political power is being sought after as the short cut to personal achievement. Besides, power at the top brings with it an enormous hold over resources that are both public and private. Men and women are at your feet and if you know the art, you are in Nirvanic bliss. Life can never be better and abusing the right of a

nounced that the General who had won the war is "the greatest Army Commander in the world!" However, soon he realised he had blundered. With the help of his powerful brother Gotabhaya who had the Defence under his hold, Mahinda went about putting down the posters that a grateful public had put up hailing the General. Hey presto: in no time the narrative was changed: the war was won by the President's own effort; it would have been won sans Fonseka. His brother gave the strong supporting arm.

Our slave media men followed suit and history was re-written in a flick. Now it was "Gota's War." Story writers were engaged. Fonseka was put into prison jumpers and soon converted from being the greatest Army Commander to the lowliest jailbird. He stayed in a tiny cell for three years until international pressure helped have the poor devil released. Charges had been framed

Maitripala Sirisena

Maitripala Sirisena took over as President with a promise to demolish the executive Presidency. That did not happen. Just within three years of his incumbency, he had got a wonderful taste of the power he wielded. The crooked ones who had crossed over from Rajapakses had managed to do a mind-game on Maitri and make him have a go at an extension. The law of the 19th Amendment was clear. Yet, Maitri did have a shot at it-as



Minister Range Bandara and Wasantha Senanayake desires cabinet-level ranks. They are currently "State Ministers." Dayan Jayatilaka's source reference is this great grandson called Wasantha Senanayake. Morphing of the Power Experience What is revealed in the above incidents and episodes is a universal pattern of human behaviour, namely that the possession of power turns into an aphrodisiac that transforms the mere act of possession into an emotional clinging to power. In Buddhist parlance, it is both balaya vindeema (experience of power) and bala upadaana (clinging to power) that operates in situations like this. It is an imperceptible morphing of the power experience.

As is obvious, this is not something uniquely Sri Lankan but something that is universal human behaviour. World history is so replete with examples. We began this piece by mentioning the most recent experiences about Chinese Xi Jinping and America's Donald Trump. However, right through history and in every culture this transfer from balaya vindeema to bala upadaana can be seen.

Such leaders will necessarily develop an ideology and a suitable rhetoric to sell themselves to their gullible publics. This is for sure. Hitler and Mussolini's fascist regimes came up with their own versions of ideology, rhetoric and slogans. In Germany, the Jews were the target and the ordinary Germans' intrinsic dislike of the economically powerful Jews was played upon by Hitler. In Russia, Stalin carried out one of the world's most ruthless dictatorships in history chanting the idea of Marxist-Leninist socialism. In Sri Lanka we have the easy targets of the minority Tamil and Sinhala communities. "We must make America great again," cried Trump. Much before that, SWRD Bandaranaike and Mahinda Rajapakse suggested, "We must make Sinhalese proud again."

To Page 38

POLITICS: THE ROAD TO PRIVILEGE IN SRI LANKA AND EVERYWHERE

private individual to his own life and his own enjoyment becomes a trifle too easy. Politicians who get a taste of power don't want to leave off their hold. They clothe their intentions before the camera. "No politician should ever let himself be photographed in a bathing suit," said Adolf Hitler

Lesson: Have your critical faculties alive when listening to a politician.

Xi Jinping and Donald Trump

The above proposition has latest support in a story in the news outlet, "World," as cited by news.com.au (4/3/18). Here, it is: "After news of Chinese President Xi Jinping possibly ruling his country into the indefinite future, a transcript has surfaced of Donald Trump saying he might do the same. In closed-door remarks, a recording of which was obtained by CNN, Trump congratulated Xi for consolidating power, adding he wouldn't mind making such a move himself.

"He's now president for life. President for life. And he's great," Trump said. "And look, he was able to do that. I think

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it's great. Maybe we'll give that a shot some day."

Yes, indeed, maybe we can soon see the American President manoeuvring his way in Machiavellian style to reach this new goal. It is hard, though, given the American Constitution and the American people.

Our Own Mahinda

On the other hand, Sri Lanka's system has been fluid and flexible. And so it has had many recent experiences: the former President Mahinda Rajapakse humbly inhabited his position as President in the year 2005. Utilising the great coincidence of a thirty-year-old war ending during his time, Mahinda snapped at a grand ambition. By a Freudian slip of the tongue he an-

nounced that the General who had won the war is "the greatest Army Commander in the world!" However, soon he realised he had blundered. With the help of his powerful brother Gotabhaya who had the Defence under his hold, Mahinda went about putting down the posters that a grateful public had put up hailing the General. Hey presto: in no time the narrative was changed: the war was won by the President's own effort; it would have been won sans Fonseka. His brother gave the strong supporting arm.

Men and women are assessed by their doings and not by what they utter in public. Remember, Mohideen Baig's song: "Sinhawen ho kathawen behe maninnata minisa." (Judge not a person by the words from his mouth or the smile on his face). This malevolent deed is enough to unveil the quality of Mahinda Rajapakse and his brother as human beings.

Ten Years

Be that as it may, that episode was over. Mahinda ruled for ten years presiding over the mysterious murders and disappearances of the few dissenting journalists that had the courage to delve into abuses of that regime. Gotabhaya also kept watch over those dark episodes. The latter did nothing and, having been the Defence "Chief," what could he not have done? He once, arrogantly, told off the BBC interviewer, "Who is Lasantha Wickrematunge?" As if to say that Lasantha was a small man who can be forgotten. Small or big is not the question. It is all a question of respecting the right of an individual to live. If leaders don't respect human life, can one expect big things and noble things from them? Then came the notorious 18th Amendment to our constitution that would have had Mahinda and his family ruling Sri Lanka for the foreseeable future like Xi Jinping to be. Fortunately, good old Sumanananda, the astrologer, helped stymie that.

Trump, now, promises to do. He tried a hopeless misadventure by attempting to stake for monopoly power against his major coalition partner who had put him to his seat in the first place. The campaign killed the credibility of Maitripala, which he had gathered in the meantime through three years of cooperative rule with the Prime Minister and the Grand Old Party of the UNP. It nearly killed the UNP, too, and gave much needed oxygen to the Mahinda Sulanga.

Lesser Politicians

The lesser breed of political aspirants have also displayed the greed for power. Mahinda Rajapakse, who is quick on the pulse of people, initiated the idea of the jumbo cabinet. His cabinet had over hundred ministers, including one for sugar. This is to satisfy the power needs of the smaller fry. The Sirisena-Ranil government, despite their promise of thirty in a cabinet ended up with a number close to Mahinda. I don't think Sri Lanka can ever revert to the small-sized cabinet as the jumbo idea has come to stay. Hence, the chaos of excessive Ministries will continue. Government will continue to be expensive and a drain on public funds. A show of security is also given to these lesser fortunates who aren't exposed to any threat at all since no one would lose a bullet on them. Security presence gives the illusion of power. But all this costs needless taxpayer money and leaves less resources for services to the people.

The struggle for power of the lesser breed has impacted adversely to destabilise the UNP. The UNP's present mess is because

