

Former UPFA Minister Karu

Jayasuriya's statement on the eve of his return to the Grand Old Party that he left two years ago is of more than ordinary interest. Karu has been known personally to many (like the writer) as a gentleman par excellence and so it was shocking to witness the way he left the UNP and equally shocking to notice how he got back. His statement on his return amounts to pure spin and reveals not the man but the political system that has come down on Sri Lanka.

Says Karu Jayasuriya: "I have taken historic decisions that proved beneficial to my country and the people." Here, Karu positions himself as someone spending his public life for the benefit of the people and the country. Of course he is right! All Lankan politicians keep telling us this. This is why if in government they must get a ministerial portfolio. Thus came into being the biggest cabinet in world history. The sixteen others who crossed over did so for "the benefit of the country" and so they were all patriots. Ministers get luxury vehicles and massive allowances. They travel overseas with their spouses, their family and their kith and kin—all housed in Five star hotels at taxpayers' expense. Besides, those among them who are entitled to official residence but do not have them get a monthly allowance of Rs 100,000 as rent while living in their own houses. This means renting out one's own house to one's self! One Minister who has to travel often gets his suits stitched in London at public expense.

How else can the President ensure patriotic support? These polities and their kin must also be given protection from law-enforcing agencies for their misbehaviour. One Provincial Council heavyweight is accused of raping a 15 year-old school girl and kidnapping a film star but police action has stalled. This man was previously in the UNP but switched over to the governing party reportedly to get his brother's radio channel back in place after it had been cancelled. He asserted that he joined the government in order to help the President to save the nation. It worked like magic for his brother got back the operating licence! Dr Mervyn Silva has been going on the rampage with his "kudu" boys, with the police looking away. One prominent minister's son, a student at Royal College, broke into the principal's office, stole some records and was suspended by the principal. An order from the top comes to the principal to reinstate the son! Numerous bizarre incidents like this are a nearly daily occurrence.

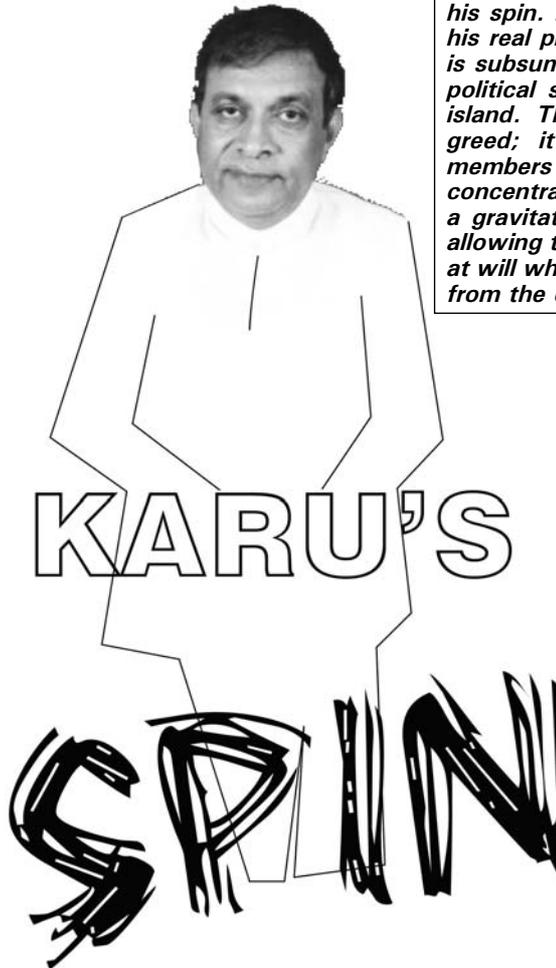
Karu next states "I have taken historic decisions... in support of sovereignty, good governance and lasting peace." He suggests that the decision to get back to the UNP is also one such historic decision. The government of President Rajapakse undoubtedly scores high on its war effort. Government sympathisers could justifiably argue that patriot Karu should have stayed with them to give support "to finish off the Tigers" in view of the fact that the sovereignty issue is fundamental to the survival of the nation. Karu states that he joined the Rajapakse government to help wipe out terrorism but, wait, terrorism has not yet been wiped out. Why did he not wait longer to help achieve that goal?

On the front of good governance, the rule of law, and human rights the regime of Rajapakse has a horrible record while with regard to "lasting peace" the government has been in deadlock unable to present a workable proposal to satisfy the Tamil community. Karu was part of the government when all this took place.

All norms of good government have been violated blatantly and with impunity. With a weak opposition sitting on the fringe the

public have resorted to judicial redress and now the joke is that the Supreme Court runs the government. Subtle attempts are underway to undermine the judges. Karu's concern is more about economic mismanagement than on basic issues of this sort. If he was so concerned on good governance and economic management he should have left ages ago. The high level corruption, violations of tender procedure, projects carried out without proper scrutiny and without cabinet approval, and

officials. Its adverse publicity over the Mumbai massacre alone compelled the ministers in charge to resign. This kind of democratic control no longer applies in Lanka as the government has effectively killed the media by threats of kidnapping or killing. In a most recent case, the editor of the government-controlled Sunday Observer was sacked for publishing an interview that General Fonseka had given where the latter had referred to Tamilnadu politicians as "jokers" paid by the



the stunning instances of profligate spending should have been enough for patriot Karu to take flight as quickly as he came.

The President is plainly not interested in bringing to effect the 17th amendment that would lay the ground for an independent Public Service, independent Police Service and independent Elections Commission. These services have now been so completely politicised that no law abiding citizen can expect fairness, justice and the rule of law. By way of contrast, it is appropriate to mention how the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) forms the backbone of good governance in the huge subcontinent. This is due to a great measure of insulation from political pressure. The IAS acts as a strong and capable body of decision makers where expertise and professionalism is allowed pride of place. Sri Lanka did have something similar for many decades after Independence. Since Felix Dias Bandaranaike, the history of our public administration has been a tragic story of servility to politicians. The current regime has almost completed the politicisation that Felix began.

The Press in India plays an effective role in creating a public conscience against corrupt and neglectful government ministers

Karu Jayasuriya evidently contradicts with his spin. His story of exit and re-entry conceals his real plight which is that of a good man who is subsumed and consumed by a claustrophobic political system that traps every citizen in our island. The political system is pegged around greed; it insulates party leaders from party members and rulers from the people; it over-concentrates authority in the centre and creates a gravitational pull toward the centre of power allowing those at the centre to abuse their power at will while at the same time leaving those away from the centre marginalised and helpless.

LTTE. I guess General Fonseka may have been telling the truth but it was not his business to make political speeches. What is pertinent here is that the messenger and not the offender was shot.

Karu probably doesn't see his contradictions: If, as he states, he rejoined the UNP with "the welfare of his people at heart" why in the first place did he leave the party? He says that only a government under Ranil Wickremasinghe can deliver the

left the UNP". What exactly did he do when he joined the ruling-party government?

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Shyamon Jayasinghe

To cap it all Karu states: "I have never

goods. Obviously he has lost of memory because he left the UNP because Ranil was "no good" as a leader.

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