



Our Army, Navy and Airforce did the great job of demolishing LTTE terrorism. Our police seem to be replacing that terror with their terror. As far as domestic rule is concerned the law enforcing agency is the Police Department. When the latter goes berserk so does law and order. It is important for expatriates like us to try and figure out what really is happening. In Sri Lanka the benign coexists with the venal. A Jekyll and Hyde situation. The official versions do not tell



us the real story. At the time of this piece going to press (mid-August) we have the two shocking cases of Malabe and Angulana. In both instances the law enforcers became law breakers. In both cases it was strong public protest that made the government act. The delay and indifference was palpable and troubling.

The editorial of the The Island of 15th August listed a great number of instances of police crime of the recent past. Respected former professional diplomat K Godage writing to The Island states, "There appears to be a complete breakdown of law and order in this country." The two recent shockers that came from Malabe and Angulana dramatise the situation enveloping the country. On August 12th Nipuna Ramanayake (22) an IT student from the Malabe Institute was kidnapped, abducted and brutally assaulted allegedly by Ravindu Gunawardena, son of SSP Vaas Gunawardena who is Director CCD, over a private dispute. Nipuna stated in court that The SSP had been in the Jeep that he was shoved into after abduction. After assault, Nipuna was taken by the police to a house where he was asked to sign a document of admittance that he had an underworld link, which he refused to do.

The Daily Mirror of the 18th August reported that the Kaduwela Magistrate asked the DIG of the Crimes and Organised Crimes Unit as to why the SSP was not arrested. This means that the magistrate saw a good prima facie case against Gunawardena which is enough to have the latter suspended from service. All that has happened to date is that the SSP has been transferred to Headquarters from where he could influence investigation proceedings! A few police officers have been interdicted.

If that incident was not enough, the following day, on August 13th a greater horror was reported from

Angulana. Two youngsters, Danushka Aponso and Dinesh Fernando were arrested and kept in custody by the Angulana police over an alleged incident where they had tried to fool around with a girl friend of one of the police officers. It is reported that when the parents of the boys came the following morning with coffee and food the latter had been asked to search the Ratmalana beach for the two boys. Low and behold only the dead bodies of the young men were lying on the beach! The police had tried to frame a charge of drug peddling on the two boys but they were soon forced to withdraw that charge against the overwhelming evidence of the community and the Buddhist monk in the temple. In the Angulana case the wrath of the community came upon the police station where thousands thronged to show their anger. Peoples' power alone forced the hand of the government to interdict the staff including the OIC. Whether the latter will be brought



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to book is left to be seen. However, the horrible stories of police brutality at Angulana are in the lips of everyone. According to one witness, Damith Kumara, an inmate in another cell, "the OIC Newton came around 11.30 p.m. and took the two boys into a room where I could hear them being beaten with belts. At one point I heard the OIC threatening to burn the two boys," Damith said. Damith said that around 1.30 a.m. the OIC along with four others tied up the two boys, put black cloth sacks over their heads and bundled them in to a jeep.

It is ironical that a government that claims it fought the LTTE to rid the country of terror plays low profile in the face of mounting criminal police misdemeanour. Is the government more interested in the political dividends of downing the Tigers than in the terror itself?

Why is President Rajapakse not using his huge popularity to set up good governance based on an iron rule of law? He alone, unlike any previous government CEO has the resources to take hard decisions and to bring everyone - big and small - under the law. It is an opportunity that any ruler would dream of that, taken at the tide, can make his rule immortal and productive for the country in a genuine sense. Is it that a feeling of invincibility

has gotten hold of him? But surely he has a moral fibre and a sense of responsibility? As the popular Gypsies sing, "I don't know why?"

For a few weeks in succession we noted how allegedly underworld figures had been pursued by the police and how almost all of the latter had been shot at and killed by police either in an "attempt to throw bombs" or in an "attempt to escape!" The whole episode appears suspicious. It was plainly wrong as the police had been allowed to undertake the task namely to determine guilt which in any civilised country is preserved for an independent judiciary that alone can convict an accused.

Again, the silence of high authority is something not done. The silence turned into evil mockery when during this police campaign a powerful ministerial thug escorted well-known underworld giant, Kudu Lal, through the VIP gates of the airport and out of the country!

The trouble is that when those in charge of supervising the police don't do that job the latter runs amok. The other side to this state of affairs is that people try to fill in the gap of government neglect by direct action as was seen at Angulana. It happened again when a mob of people mercilessly assaulted police officials recently at the National Hospital when these officers kept beating a pregnant woman over an exchange of words.

One of the reasons for this fall of the police is the extreme politicisation of that force that has happened over several governments. It is a great temptation for local politicians to have hold on the police and this has occurred at an exponential rate over the years. One sees a new low today.

If you want to study how politicisation has corrupted and ruined governance watch some popular tele-dramas like Paba, Sara etc that churn out of the mill in their hundreds. One of the best such screen dramas (good in quality, too) is Sadiis Tharanaya. This is more a cinema than a tele and it is a graphical presentation of state power and corruption that has blighted our country over the years.

It is imperative that the 17th amendment should be brought into effect immediately. This is a very important bit of legislation that has been enacted in Sri Lanka. If implemented, it would help significantly in restoring an independent police, judiciary, Public Service and Elections Commission in the country. It would cut back a lot of politicisation because even the President would have to make appointments only on the recommendations of the Constitutional Council which would also be in charge of disciplinary and promotion matters. The President is damaging the future of the country by not setting up the Constitutional Council just in order to keep his hold on these institutions.

It is indeed remarkable and impressive that employment of women in Sri Lanka has now reached a new horizon.

Traditionally, women were confined to their homes looking after their children and attending to household work, as Robert Knox, an English sea captain in the service of the British East India Company who was taken captive by the troops of the Kandyan king, Rajasingha II and remained over 20 years as a prisoner, in his book, An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon in the East Indies published in 1681, describes that women's household work, amongst others, was to beat the

Employment of women in Sri Lanka in new horizon.

rice out of the husk; to cook meals; fetch wood and water, and to fetch home the cattle.

Division of labour, in miniature form, appears to have existed even at the time as women took expressive and emotional supportive roles and men the instrumental and practical, both roles complementing each other to make the family self-reliant, happy and contented.

Circumstances have changed considerably since then and the gap between men and women's education at secondary and tertiary levels has been narrowed though there is still a paucity of women in decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, and a majority of them falling into the category of skilled and unskilled workers though their numbers compare favourably with the males. This is mainly due to the proliferation of opportunities in the labour-intensive industries that demand unskilled or semi-skilled labour at low rates of wages. The garment factories in free trade zones are a classic example of this trend. The other category is the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers such as domestic aides who work in the Middle-East countries, becoming the major foreign exchange earner.



Despite the global economic meltdown, which affected foreign exchange earnings of many countries in the world, foreign remittances from Sri Lankan expatriates working in many parts of the world (60 per cent from those working in the Middle East countries, 20 per cent from expatriates in Europe and the balance from those in other countries) recorded an increase of 5 per cent compared to 2008, according to the Central Bank. Foreign remittances during the first half of 2009 were US\$ 1.6 billion while the remittances during the corresponding period in 2008 were US\$ 1.5 billion - a 5 per cent growth.

It is interesting to note that women workers accounted for 60 to 90 per cent of the total workforce in Sri Lanka's top 3 foreign



earners, garment, migrant labour and tea. The garment sector accounted for 69 per cent of the total industrial exports with a foreign exchange earning equivalent to Rs. 159.3 billion in 1998; the tea sector 71 per cent of agricultural exports with a foreign exchange earning of Rs. 50.3 billion and the private remittances from migrant workers Rs. 64 billion. It could thus be concluded that women were the top earners

and their direct contribution to the economy was tremendous.

Equally interesting is the quick answer given by the former President of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to a Norwegian journalist at a press conference during a UN Social Development Summit in Copenhagen. To the question, "how she help to improve the sta-



tus of women in Sri Lanka?" she smilingly quipped, "What more do you want? We have a woman President, a woman Prime Minister and six other women Ministers in a Cabinet of 24. Women educate themselves as much as men. Job opportunities for women are not less than for men. However, more has to be done including domestic and social violence against women".

Dr Palitha Kohona, former Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, addressing the Annual General Meeting of the Sarvodaya Women's Movement in August 15, 2009, had said that the participation of women in positions of administrative decision making including the spheres of policy formulation and holding senior public office was steadily on the increase; their participation in professional services in the public and semi-government sector was also on the increase mainly due to the gender-neutral recruitment policy backed by Constitutional guarantees of equality; women continue to contribute to the development of Sri Lanka in different sectors; and the involvement of women in economic activities both in formal and informal sectors had been ahead of the rest of the South Asian region, and that trend was steadily on the rise.

Nevertheless, despite the assurances given and the various steps taken by governments to ameliorate the working conditions of women, only a dramatic change in the cherished ideology relating to the subordinated position of women in the society can be a lasting solution to this dilemma.