

Isn't it a matter of very serious concern for Sri Lankans anywhere to observe how the government has repudiated the Private Member Bill that sought to pass a law in Parliament enabling a private citizen the right to informa-

cial and other dealings. Only such transparency can give the people the confidence that they are not being robbed or looted by the authorities.

But alas! The proposed RTI law was voted out. It is a law that should have been passed unanimously. Our big brother neighbour India has such a functioning law so much so that ordinary citizens have been utilising it to questions local bodies, State legislatures and the central legislature. Similar laws exist even in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

There is an active movement in India led by a Gandhian called Azari which is keeping a sharp watch over corrupt leaders by employing RTI law. Activists in India have been wounded or even killed as they tap the

power tend to abuse their power. When Lord Acton famously stated that "power abuses and absolute power abuses absolutely," he was commenting on a law of human nature. Our President downwards cannot be exempted from this behavioural law. One cannot have a misplaced sense of faith regarding this.

This is why we as Sri Lankans should be alarmed when steps are taken by the government to increase its powers by dissolving all checks and balances. Bringing the Attorney General's Department, the Auditor General's Department and what-not under the office of the President is not a good step as such steps dissolve the independence of such institutions.



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Unfortunately, Sri Lankan citizens are not alert to this danger and even our Diaspora ignored all these adverse developments. The government cannot defend its action by the argument that RTI should not apply to certain classes of information as all such classes including national security are exempt in this Bill. The Bill states: "Every citizen shall have a right of access to official information... The exceptions are disclosure of information that constitutes an invasion of privacy of any person, information that would cause harm to the defence of the State or its territorial integrity or national security, would cause danger of life or safety to any person, or be seriously prejudicial to Sri Lanka's relations with any State or international organisation, where the information given or obtained from such State or international organisation is in confidence.

"Also exempted is disclosure of information considered to be vital in the public interest, relates to the assessment or collection of revenue by the Department of Inland Revenue or would reveal any trade secrets or harm the commercial interests of any person...."

Hence, it is abundantly clear that the government does not want an exposure of misdoings and corruption, robbery and theft of public resources on the part of its high-ups, officials and agencies.

How does this state of affairs compare with the Mahinda Chinthanaya that stated, "my only aim is to eradicate corruption, fraud and wrongdoings that had engulfed this society for a long time, control all crimes and build a nation complete with rich social values. To that end, during the past four years, many steps were taken and all public finance was handled with total transparency." [Page/46 - translated from the



tion (RTI)?

In any functioning democracy it is a fundamental requirement that a private citizen could institute administrative or legal action to compel the government or any of its agencies to divulge details of a financial transaction-say the costs and estimates of the building of a road or of any public structure; whether tender procedure had been followed and if the lowest quote was not awarded the tender the reasons for that etc.

Government institutions spend billions of taxpayers' money and dispose of peoples' resources like land and building. The public has the inalienable right to know if any sale of public assets or any public construction has been done appropriately namely, following accepted financial rules and regulations. Lots of big government scandals are being alleged daily. The latest alleged big scandal relates to the sale of 22 acres of prime land in Galle Face to foreigners. Says an Island newspaper report: "The UNP National List MP Harsha de Silva lashed out in Parliament over the sale of 20 acres to two international buyers outside tender procedures. The MP alleges that the UPFA has privatized the best 20 acres of Sri Lanka even without a tender. The following is his full statement: The Deputy Minister of Economic Development Lakshman Yapa Abeywardene revealed in Parliament last evening (22 June 2011) that 20 acres of land opposite the Galle Face green has been privatized. He accepted that it sold outright 10 acres to Shangri La Asia Limited and 10



Graphics - Shanalee

Repudiation of the RTI Bill

THE ROAD IS OPEN FOR THE LOOT OF PUBLIC RESOURCES

more acres to China Aviation Technology Import Export Corporation (CATIC). This contradicts numerous previous statements that this land was given out on long lease as privatization was not the policy of Mahinda Chinthana.

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2005 Right to Information Act to expose government corruption said an article in the Christian Science Monitor in March last year. Some highlights: When Ajay Kumar asked New Delhi authorities last fall why a local politician had authorized the construction of private houses and shops on public land, he didn't imagine the question would land him in the hospital.

It is axiomatic that authorities invested with

Separation of powers is the hallmark of modern governments as this feature brings in checks and balances needed for good governance. On the other hand, the fusion of all powers under the President is a step toward national disaster. When we were able to win a war over the invincible-looking LTTE terrorists without any such power the citizens should question why such extra powers are now required.

Sinhala copy of Mahinda Chinthana - 2010] The Opposition has been virtually demolished by bribery, Parliament has been decimated, and with the blocking of RTI legislation the road to robbery and loot of public resources is wide open.

No wonder Sri Lanka occupies 29th place among top of the world's most failed states. This 29 includes Somalia, Chad, Sudan, and Rwanda!

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පුද්ගලයන්ට මෙන් මෙන් උසස් පෙළ ප්‍රවීණ ලෙස එහි සඳහන් වූයේ "බී" සාමාජිකයන්ගේ සහ එක් "සී" සාමාජිකයන්. මෙ වගම කාර්යයේ නිලධාරියා ව මේ බව කියවේ. මතු පවසා සිටියේ ඒ මෙන් නිරවද්‍යව තිබේ ප්‍රවීණ බවයි. මෙන් නැවත සම්පූර්ණ ඉල්ලීම සාර්ථක වී ව්‍යවහාරික ගණිතය සඳහා වූ ප්‍රවීණය "බී" සාමාජිකයන් ලෙස වෙනස් වී ඇති වන විට පෙර දින පාසලට දන්වා ඇති බව මට දැනගන්නට ලැබුණේ එවිටමය. ප්‍රවීණ නැවත සම්පූර්ණ කිරීම සඳහා මා හෙවු රුපියල් පණහන මුදල මට ආපසු ලැබුණි ද, තදින් යන්න පිළිබඳව නිරවද්‍ය ඇතුළත් මෙන් මතකයේ නැත. ඒ කෙසේ වුව ද මගේ ප්‍රවේ අම්මා විසින් සිදු කර ඇති හොඳම රුපියල් පණහන ආයෝජනය එය වන්නට ඇතැයි මට අද දී සිතේ.

මේ ආකාරයට සුභ ලකුණු දැක ගැනීමට ලැබීමේ-

ත් මා සිත අමතදනන්දයට පත් වූ බව අමුතුවෙන් කිව යුතු නැති වුවද මෙහි දිග නැති යුතුම ය. ලකුණු දෙසිය ගණනක් ගණන් ලැබීම යනු මා බලාපොරොත්තු වූ ආකාරයටම පේරාදෙණියේ ඉංජිනේරු පීඨයට ඇතුළත් වීමට මට හැකිවන බවට කෙරුණු සහතිකයි. ඊටත් වඩා මා උද්දමයට පත් වූ කාරණය නම්, මගේ නව ප්‍රවීණය වූ "බී" සාමාජිකයන්ගේ සහ "සී" සාමාජිකයන් සඳහා මට ලබාගත හැකි උපරිම ලකුණු ප්‍රමාණය වූ දෙසිය අසූ හයට වඩා මා ලබා තිබුණේ ලකුණු හමයක් පමණක් අඩුවෙන් වීමයි. විෂයයන් හතර අතර බෙදාහැරීමට එය ලකුණු දෙකක පමණ වෙනසක් පමණි. මේ දෙවැනි පනත දිනයෙන් මාස දෙකක් පමණ ඇතුළත මගේ ලකුණු ප්‍රමාණය සතොට වූ අතර, ඒ ප්‍රවීණ මත මගේ විශ්ව විද්‍යාල සිතිනය සැබවවේ. කොළඹ දිස්ත්‍රික්කයෙන් ඉංජිනේරු පීඨයට යාම සඳහා අවශ්‍ය වූ අවම ලකුණු ප්‍රමාණය දෙසිය හයට හමයක් බව අපට

දැනගන්නට ලැබුණි. මේ අතර, දෙවන වරට මා පෙනී සිටි උසස් පෙළ විභාගයේ ප්‍රවීණ ද කිකුත් වූ අතර බැඳු බැඳුමට වඩාත් හොඳ යැයි සිතෙන "ඒ" සාමාජිකයන් සහ "බී" සාමාජිකයන් සහ සාමාන්‍ය සාමාජිකයන් සඳහා මා ලබා තිබුණේ ලකුණු දෙසිය ගණනක් තුනක් පමණි. මා පේරාදෙණිය විශ්ව විද්‍යාලය වෙත යෑමට ලකුණු දෙකක පමණ වෙනසක් අඩුවෙන් හැටු අම්මා මෙද මා දෙස බලා සතුටින් සිතාපුතාය. තම රුපියල් පණහන ආයෝජනය මගින් සිදුවූ යහපත දැක සුනිතා ප්‍රවේ අම්මා ද සිතාපුතාය.