

Sambuddha Jayanthi year marks the dawn of a new era for Higher Education in the country too. This coincidence is not something planned by anyone, but due to the arrival on the scene of a new visionary with a magic wand, a wand that has the ability of producing a new breed of super leaders who will revolutionize the entire Higher Education Sector.

This new visionary is none other than the ever enthusiastic Minister of Higher Education. He has at last hit upon the root cause of all ills now affecting the body of higher education in the country. To put it in simple terms, it is the lack or the absence of true leadership. Once the upcoming generation of new graduates are equipped with this supreme ability we will no longer be exposed to what has been so far described as indiscipline or unruly behavior of university students or for that matter even what has been called strikes or resignations of university dons.

To start with, let us look at this mysterious quality called leadership a little closely. A leader is a person responsible for anything and everything happening under his or her care, i.e. the organization that has been placed under his or her stewardship. This sounds rather a tall order. However, in the modern world context an organization is known to embrace all aspects of operations its shareholders or owners expect it to perform in order to get the results envisaged by them. In case the functioning of the organization fails to achieve its set objectives, the responsibility for such failure is placed squarely on the shoulders of its leader who

normally is referred to as the chief executive. We come across situations in Australia when chief executives are been sacked for such failures. It is true that an organization



ure. Taking the Higher Education Sector in Sri Lanka as a separate organization one has to place the minister in charge at its head and call him the chief executive.

Whatever organization would have a number of levels at which more leaders are placed under its chief executive in a hierarchical order. Each of these leaders is responsible for a particular aspect of performance and answerable to the top man or woman. In the case of the Sri Lankan Higher Education Sector, the minister in charge would normally be supported by the ministerial bureaucracy plus a number of Vice Chancellors who in turn become heads at the apex of that individual unit called the Campus or the particular university. He or she too is supported by heads of sections such as deans etc. It becomes the responsibility of the chief executive to ensure that all levels of that hierarchy are geared to function as planned for the achievement of set objectives.

What do we see in the functioning of this organization right now? Is it smooth functioning or utter chaos? Who has to bell the cat? It is to this simple question that the minister has now come out with his magic solution which is to begin a mass production process for the purpose of providing the country with enough and more leaders, well in

duties in protest over pay.

The list is not complete and can be added to. However, it is sufficient for us to look at the overall picture to see what really is bothering the Sri Lankan Higher Education Sector. To start with, let us ask a simple question. Will the new force of youthful leaders resolve the situation? Will any sensible person find something helpful in the minister's recipe to give him any respite?

Hopefully the newly minted leaders will descend on the assigned campuses full of enthusiasm and dedicated to their institutions which they no doubt are going to protect. With all the goodwill and determination to change the Higher Education Sector into a wonderful place to study and get ahead in life, what really can they do in order to sort out the current mess in the campuses?



1. Are they competent to make the lecturers give up their demands for higher pay and go back to lecture halls?
2. Are they competent enough to change the behavior of their seniors so that no ragging or misbehavior occurs in campuses?
3. Can they prevail upon the mischievous students union to give up their aggressive approach and discuss issues with administra-

MASS PRODUCTION OF LEADERS

functions by the combined effort of a vast number of employees placed at various levels in it. However, it is considered the duty and responsibility of the person in charge, i.e. the chief executive or leader to take control of the situation and take whatever corrective action necessary to arrest that fail-

advance so that they need not wait for graduation to start solving the problems that the current leader has failed to tackle. What a brilliant idea coming from a leader who has so far failed to deliver the goods?

What is surprising and rather intriguing is that instead of addressing the systemic ills that affect the body of the higher education sector, the minister has decided on a blood transfusion into that body, hoping against hope that now at last universities are going to be rejuvenated so that we can look forward to a strike-free era of prosperity for the nation. The vital question is whether this enthusiastic minister's pious hopes will ever materialize? Leaving aside the minister's hopes and ambitions let us take a look at the ailments affecting the body of the university system. There are a number of ailments any sensible person can detect easily.

1. There is an inter-university students' organization apparently beholden to JVP, out to create problems for the administration.
2. This organization wants to dictate terms to the student population and demand their loyalty in all matters.
3. Ragging of new entrants to the university is controlled and directed by them in order to embarrass the authorities.
4. Lecturers and deans are not free to conduct their affairs as they want and must get the consent of the union on key matters.
5. Discipline at halls of residence is not maintained as the students are not amenable to the rules applicable to them.
6. Even Buddhist monks who are generally a disciplined lot have taken to drastic methods at times assaulting security personnel too. (this happened at J'Pura University)
7. Monkish indiscipline is seen more aggressively at the separate Bhikkhu university in Anuradhapura where they ragged the fresh students in an in-humane fashion.
8. Students clash with their own fellows displaying another disturbing tendency typical of an undisciplined group. Student deaths are not rare in such instances.
9. Students boycott their examinations en masse fore-fitting their own future prospects.
10. On top of all that, university lecturers have take strike action demanding higher pay. Government is refusing to consider that. This was after heads of sections relinquished their

tors in harmony?

4. Are they competent to solve current issues of accommodation and facilities available for undergraduates?
5. Can they rectify the position about lack of communication and the startlingly poor ability of authorities to handle simple communication problems in solving student issues?
6. Above all, can they make sure that their own presence within the campuses is not creating more problems with the rest of the student population?

Out of the above matters, one can safely say that the new group of leaders will certainly ensure that seniors are not going to use the usual tactics in handling new entrants and ragging will be reduced to a minimum if at all they occur. Another salutary feature would be the absence of unnecessary boycotts and strikes on the part of these new entrants.

Let us give them full credit for this salutary new feature in campus life. Apart from that what really can the minister or the authorities derive from this expensive exercise? I say expensive for the simple reason that an operation of such a vast scale cannot go ahead without spending big money for accommodating and feeding the young men and women so that they go out at least satisfied with the novel experience. I that good money well spent or poured down the drain just to satisfy the whims of an individual? Isn't that money that could have been utilized to do so much for the provision of facilities and a better environment within the campuses? What one sees in this whole exercise is a singular lack of appreciation of what a leader ought to do and not do. A leader in a crisis situation, first and foremost, ought to accept that he is facing a real crisis. As far as the Sri Lankan situation is concerned, no one appears to appreciate the severity of the problem. That is exactly what happens when people try to be too smart and pretend to be maestros capable of handling any complicated problem with ease. The first mistake they make is to start from the wrong end. i.e. They begin to look at the problem with a ready-made solution in mind. That makes the whole exercise utterly meaningless, because all the goodwill and brilliant ideas will fail to get across to his or her mind which is already closed to all new angles or sugges-

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