



This time it is a different strategic manipulation. The master stroke of picking Maitripala Sirisena as Common Candidate had an air of ethical quality: given that Maitri had to risk his neck and given that the then President must be stopped in his damaging track it had been a kind of relief operation. This time, the ethical air has to be evoked with some difficulty and amidst immense controversy.

Official sources urge that a National Government has been formed with the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party within

Mahinda had been a very sporty guy. With enormous power in his hands he morphed into something foreboding and frightful in possibility. The drive for controlling others pushed him forward prompting impatience all the way up-impatient with democratic procedure, with human rights and with the sense of right and wrong. He gave himself just two alternatives, namely, to keep going up or end in utter downfall. That was a drive that in the words of AC Grayling, "consumes other people, and veracity, and trust and eventually itself." Mahinda did one signal service: to bring to

other isolated JHU personnel did not realize that to begin with Mahinda Rajapakse had been content to occupy the lower end of the spectrum of power offered by the constitution. Seeing the opening available at the other end MR moved swiftly in that direction to enhance the power of his office and convert it to a plain absolutism. The larger than life image of the Absolute President that now presented itself suggested that he could make a criminal an innocent and an innocent



stance, the inducement was status or 'thatthwaya.' The chance for making something is not there.

In came the old pole-vaulters from the SLFP. Many of this lot of migrants do not have a salary track record. One individual famously stated that he would strip CBK naked and send her wailing in the streets! Another, under cover

THE 19th AMENDMENT NOW OR NEVER

one fold, under the President. The idea of National governments is both salutary and sine qua non in times of crises. War is the typical occasion. Sri Lanka has, for now at least, finished the war. The most imperative national duty is to eradicate the Executive President system. Revd. Maduluwawe Sobitha, Jayamapathi Wickremaratne and a host of others must be credited with having created the required social consciousness for the change. Left to the political parties, the latter would have preferred to engage in musical chairs for the office of (executive) President. The more educated classes, professionals, and writers had been quick to sniff the need for radical change. Revd. Sobitha's movement gave leadership, direction and strategy to achieve the need that was flourishing in demand.

The promise was made formal during election time that the new government under the common candidate will within 100 days exorcise the devil in the constitution. The demon may have been Mahinda Rajapakse then but given the inherent logic of the current constitution who knows who the next monster would be? The point is that there has been growing realization that it is the constitution that is the root cause. The constitution gives space and opportunity for even good men or women to turn into monsters. Before he became President,

the public notice this danger of our constitution. The danger was felt under its creator, JR, and under CBK and Premadasa; but that was not palpable danger. Under Rajapakse the danger came out into the open. MR carried the role to its logical and disastrous end like in a fated Greek tragedy.

Soon after Maitri's victory all opposition rallied round with promises of support for the 100-day program and the changes to the constitution that were spelled out. However, as time went on-not months but only days- that enthusiasm dropped and faded away. The possibility of a return of Rajapakse wearing the same stage costume became a live one. Even a government partner, the JHU, kept nudging that they never wanted the executive Presidential system to go and that all they wanted was for the "excessive powers" of the President to be pruned. Others kept pressing that both electoral reforms and the Executive Presidency must be repaired together as a package although there had been no mandate sought for such a combination. These myriad moves placed the government in a quandary and gave rise to suspicion that these demands were put forward merely to delay or damage the main move.

In so trying to call for a pruned Executive President Minister Champika Ranawaka and

a criminal overnight; the present, part of the disappeared; the living, part of the dead; the forthright and honest person, a cringing and servile person worshipping at his feet and asking for morsels. Sri Lanka became the land of the Absolute Star!

All sorts of sordid rumours spread. One, that Mahinda had a special punishment room at Temple Trees! Every rumour—true and false-seemed believable.

In the face of a desperate need for numbers to pass the amendment to the constitution sans modification the Maitri-Ranil government had to devise some ploy. The alternative had been frightening to conceive of, namely go to the polls after the 100 days still with the constitution unchanged and the possibility of a return of a devil at some future date. Maitri would most probably not be the devil. Somebody else after him? As the cliché states, the government was between the devil and the deep blue sea. The 'devil' in this case is literal.

"So let's play the devil's own game," would have been the thinking of the now duo buddies-Maitri and Ranil. They put their heads together and got a page off the former President. Induce the required numbers from the SLFP and then we are shaped! In this in-

of Parliamentary privilege, let off foul venom against Shiranee Bandaranayake our 43rd CJ. The good side is that these persons, except for just one cultured personality, were give innocuous portfolios. This is the merciful part of the operation.

It all shows what a lot it means to our polities to be deemed a Minister. In countries like Australia, where I live, there isn't this hankering after Ministerial portfolios. The answer is, I suppose, in the nature of the economy. Good jobs are available and good space for business is available to men and women who have some standing. In Sri Lanka there is the added possibility of milking portfolios for money and perks.

Be that as it may. The move by the government is bad and smelly when looked in isolation from context. But, then, one doesn't interpret events without the relevant context. In contextual terms the move can only have justification as a means to a noble end and as a temporary arrangement to get over a crisis. The Devil's Game can, surely, extract the devil from our constitution and cease operation thereafter.

From the snares of the devil in the constitution free us, Oh Lord!

