



WHEN OUR MEDICOS MUDDLE, WHAT HOPE FOR THE NATION?

"In a pure and holy way, I will guard my life and my art and science-“ Hippocratic Oath

We do not know what really transpired between President Maitripala Sirisena and the powerful GMOA in the meeting today (30/9). But the doctors seem to have come out of it in a mood of satisfaction. Sirisena would have, presumably, managed the irksome gang with more soft talk; leaving an escape gate for the GMOA which had got tragically locked over the issue of demanding "good schools," for their kids. Had they met the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickreamesinghe, they would have got a mouthful. Remember how our Prime Minister had spoken unreservedly against them on the floor of Parliament when the doctors dared to leave their stethoscopes and fight the proposed ETCA trade deal with India, instead. That was the first indiscriminate and half-witted move by the body known as the GMOA.

The reason is simple: they were invading into a non-relevant territory taking upon themselves the onerous task of Parliament to do

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just that. It was plain and simple trespass by the Medics. They should have left that for good old Dinesh who has been an effective Rotweiller in that august assembly. On the other hand, even Dinesh is waiting for the Bill to arrive in Parliament. Nobody has yet seen the proposed legal deal as it is in the process of production. Our Medics appear to be in possession of extrasensory perception powers. To oppose the ETCA on principle is ridiculous in these times of international trade agreements. The Medics haven't heard of the science of economics and the hopelessness of protection in the context of opening markets happening all over the world. An economy simply cannot afford to lock itself from such developments and retract into protectionism. It would have been better for the doctors to train their own kind to confront competition. Having observed how one doctor had reportedly am-

puted on the wrong foot of a young woman there is a case for such internal betterment.

Having tripped once, these doctors tripped badly again. This time it was a worse and quixotic action to demand from our legislators that their kids be given favoured treatment of entry to "good schools." Why?



Because they are doctors. It was disaster this time because that was an intrinsically unpopular move. Medics should have realised that they had to work in a social environment that is given to them. Lakhs of parents keep coaching their hapless kids from even Kinder upwards to try and get the fellows through the Year Five Selection Test.

Even the nurses and attendants in the very hospitals the doctors work spend their hard-earned money and the tips they receive for tutoring their kids. In Sri Lanka, since entrepreneurship is lacking, education is the only catalyst for moving out of a wretched underclass. What happened to the brains of the GMOA personnel that made them so insensitive to possible popular backlashes? When the ego flies sky-high one mentally escapes reality. Suddenly, lo and behold we found the learned men and women of the GMOA losing their sense of presence in a society and acting in a different universe.

Besides the countless poor folk in towns and villages, what about other peer professionals? The Engineers, Science researchers, administrators, accountants, educationists and the long list? Why didn't it sound a pure

act of selfishness for the doctors when they kept demanding and threatening for privileged status while the other professionals had to grin and bear? I understand these doctors received a flood of anonymous letters and scurrilous pamphlets from the public who could not bear the culture shock of observing doctors

flexing their muscles against the government over this unethical demand? Did you see the images of these medics squatting on the floor of the office of the Minister of Education. They were all over Facebook and we had nonstop laughter. Men and women of the medical profession may think they have medicine for all ills. There isn't medicine for folly.

The subtext of the "trade union action" of Medicos was an attempted blackmail. Conscious of the power to heal that they received after years of schooling in the Medical Colleges at taxpayer expense the latter wanted to hold that power against an elected government: "You give us these demands or face the consequences of hospitals closing down." Nothing will ever close down if science researchers or accountants fold up. Now, this is not merely unethical but ugly. Who suffers but the poor patients who daily flock for relief from illness. Imagine cancer patients going through pain and agony clutching at their brittle lives and waiting for the next dose? Heart patients waiting for the bypass? Pregnant mothers waiting for a smooth delivery? Is it right to threaten to deny all these merely because the government is refusing to slash the trade deal or give "good schools" to the kids of Medics?

I have served over three decades in the Sri Lanka Public Service before I came to settle down in Australia. We always looked upon doctors with respect and the GMOA was regarded as a top professional body delinked from day-to-day politics. What an enormous come down now from that celestial pedestal?

Probably, the once high professional culture of our Medics has also been swallowed up by the wider vicious political culture that had been growing under the previous regime and enveloping our society. The rulers at the time kept many professionals happy by granting special perks and "santhosam." Every one important to the stay of the regime was given "something ekak." Professionals were not encouraged to improve on their professionalism and keep that ethical boundary intact. It is alleged that some doctors gave false verdicts about murders done by regime criminals. Body parts of the dead went missing, news stories say. A kidney transplant business was thriving. The stories one hears in recent times are shocking enough. We never had such gossip in the past. Cops and Docs go hand in hand to keep the political powerful in their positions. Cops and docs and Docs and Cops behave the same.

I remember while in Sri Lanka recently how at a TV panel discussion the GMOA rep was asked to explain why they should protest about the ETCA as the latter was all about a trade pact. The GMOA rep responded saying that they are also citizens and in that capacity they must fight for the country and the people. One guy from the opposite side then asked: "Why did your GMOA not fight against the state terror that went on during the last regime? When dissenting journalists were murdered or sent missing and so on. When white vans were circulating to catch "traitors" to the re-gime?"

The GMOA guy went dumbstruck and I saw him writhing and twisting and twitching before the TV audience.

Persons and organisations must learn from mistakes and rectify themselves. The GMOA, on the above account, is seen repeating its blunders over and over again. It has been so degraded, it seems, that it has lost the capacity to learn and to listen. When a professional body does reach such a pathological stage what is the solution? The rank and file should send the ruling leaders home. It is all clearly a matter of leadership. It seems the only solution is for the general membership to sack their leaders and give them a break.