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Three-fold Failures of the Executive Presidential System

The failure of the Executive Presidential System and the chaos it can bring has been dramatically demonstrated

JR consciously and on his own will avoided making up a large cabinet. On the other hand, Mahinda utilised the opportunity to compose as large a cabinet as possible to satisfy the cravings of our individual MPs. Keep everybody happy. It became happier when the former President turned a blind eye to the serial corrupt practices of his men.

"Thathvaya," in Our Society.

The social and cultural reality is that Sri Lankans are a status-craving population. The Sinhala word for status is "thathvaya." From village level ordinary teachers want to become a headmaster or deputy; or even head of section may sometimes suffice. The government clerk has *thathvaya*; hence rural people prefer their children becoming clerks rather than turning into more profitable and useful business entrepreneurs. This is one reason why

giver.
Member of Parliament

The Member of Parliament and Minister were soon added into the pantheon of status-gods. This is why Ministers insist on having a fleet of cars and jeeps and a security ring even in circumstance where nobody will want to waste a bullet on the wretched fellow. *Manthriethuma* is the new god. The crucial thing is that he must be on the governing side. Hence, we have the jumping culture among politicians of our country. MPs do possess the wherewithal and the power to give and to take. They press their leaders to give them more and more such power.

Example of Range Bandara

Now, just take a look at the MP from Puttalam-Range Bandara. At a meeting a few days ago he is re-reported as having said that he is disappointed



back to him and that, too, is allowed. He will, in fact, have no objection in giving them a portfolio upon their return.

To Mahinda, there was no legal hindrance about cabinet numbers. Did he not go to town then? Rationality issues in allocation didn't concern Mahinda; ballooning public expenditure and fiscal imbalances didn't. It was hard to find any of his MPs sans a portfolio.

Free Car Permit System

This is also how the free car permit system became such a ridiculous and extravagant practice. When a MP gets a portfolio, he gets duty free car permits and government-paid fuel. They could go for any joy ride of their choice-*gedara yana gaman* or otherwise. The portfolio and the cars became a full package of *thathvaya*. If he gets an overseas trip that is compounded *thathvaya*.

New Challenge to Political Stability

I pity Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe for having to confront such momentous status issues among his men in addition to the problems he has with the crazy president. Under the 19th Amendment brought in by *yahapalanaya* in accordance with the goal of *yahapalanaya*, the number of cabinet Ministers became fixed at thirty. How is he going to keep his men soldily behind him? How is he and the party hierarchy going to prevent fractionalisation and break away?

'There is also the ever present danger of a section within the government forming a faction with a power broker. An impatient but ambitious MP or Minister, I am told, is trying to re-group with his own faction. The objective is to develop a new power centre within the United National Party.

In such circumstances, making decisions about a Presidential candidate or Prime Ministerial candidate is fraught with much political danger. The UNP leader and party hierarchy has to be on alert and turn their radars on this man.

Conclusion: Constitution Overhaul is a National Survival Necessity

It is clear from the above that we need a drastic overhaul of our constitution. That is a survival necessity for Sri Lanka. But how? When a 2/3 majority is needed? This is where a bipartisan decision must be agreed upon. If all parties are made to realize that Sri Lanka governance is impossible without it there shouldn't be any problem.



Status-craving (Thathva Pissuwa) and Demand for Cabinet Portfolios by Our Diyawannawe Lords

in a different manner over the Sirisena-Mahinda attempted coup that took place recently. Previously, Sri Lankans observed a different kind of failure in this institution, namely, failure due to the abuse of power that a constitutional arrangement which concentrates so much power in one individual can bring. What I am going to refer to here is a third kind of failure and this is the potentiality for dysfunctional instability, which that constitution can bring.

Thus we observe three kinds of failure in the Executive Presidential system that was brought in by former President JR Jayawardena-the first incumbent of that exalted chair-power abuse, failure when the President and Prime Minister gets locked in conflict, and chronic dysfunction within the parliamentary party in power.

19th Amendment

Actually, the third type came into work only after the 19th Amendment that limits cabinet to thirty members. Previously, there was no such limit.

government offices have become favourite locales for giving employment. If a child becomes a medical doctor or administrative official-or *agantha thuma* in the old Kachcheri-dominant era, the family gains *thathvaya*. Parents are identified as father or mother of so and so who has *thathvaya*. Caste became so important mainly because of *thathvaya*. A guy who has money or who owns a shop is a mere '*mudalali mahattaya*.' The latter didn't enjoy so much of *thathvaya* but villagers respected the *mudalali* because of the latter's money power. That is a respect-hate relationship. In turn, the *mudalali* tried to gain *thathvaya* by wearing a coat.

In time to come, the moneyed classes who did not generally have status gave their daughters in marriage to a government servant who did have all the *thathvaya* and the government servant, who was broke those days as now he is, gladly obliged; snatched the daughter with the dowry. The young man becomes a status-giver *thathva daanapathiya* to a status-less family. He is a poor God-though a status

he did not get a cabinet portfolio and that he will shortly take a decision with regard to that 'human rights denial.' **Yes, indeed, becoming a Minister is a fundamental human right for our MPs today. The UN will have to revise its list of human rights after such developments.** Ironically, our political leaders have adopted the practice of seeking courts intervention against a legally-immune President by claiming human rights denials and they file action against the state represented by the Attorney General. Now, that is an entirely different kettle of fish.

Barber Salon

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