

Engineering consultancy services take wrong turn

We have come across inappropriate and poor designs and contract documents submitted by some so called international consultants. We also find that some expatriate consultants have sent incompetent and inexperienced staff to be in charge of the implementation of the projects. There have been numerous instances of this.

In my experience, I have come across incompetent and sometimes even unqualified persons being sent by expatriate consultants to be in charge of construction, supervision and management of contracts. The mistakes made by these men due to their ignorance and lack of common sense have cost our poor country in no small way. Yet some such expatriate consultants continue to be engaged in our projects when they should actually be blacklisted.

What is the cause of all this? Basically it is corruption! Corruption on the part of some officials in the lending organizations and corruption or ignorance (or both) of some of our own officials. If the work is to be entrusted to a particular consultant for good reasons, full details of such a firm or individual should be sent for approval by our organization concerned.

Ultimately our own officials are responsible if incompetent firms and men are engaged. Unfortunately there are some in authority who are prepared to sacrifice the interests of a project and of the country for their personal gain for a mess of pottage.

Some expatriate consultants are known to have their own way in Sri Lanka. Anything is good enough for the natives. When there was no provision in a recent road improvement project designed and supervised by expatriate consultants for drainage of storm water from the adjoining surroundings, they told the client that the storm water should be sent down to the road! These consultants would not dare to do this in their own country.

Consultants should provide what we need and what is suitable for our country. They should at least learn about these before they come here. Of course, they will say that they will engage local counterparts and that they will be duly advised. But that arrangement does not work. Local engineers are engaged as cheap labour to run errands. They are not consulted and have no role to play. A senior designs engineer was attached to an expatriate firm merely

to say that they have local engineers on the project. He had been told to run errands. He left in disgust.

It is the bounden duty of Lankan engineers to impress upon our government the need to use domestic consultants to the maximum, which will be cost-effective.

Unless our engineers wake up even at this late stage, the standard of engineering in our country will deteriorate further. We are training foreign engineers at our expense when our youthful engineers do not have sufficient opportunities. This is transfer of technology in reverse. The engineering fraternity should raise their voice on such sensitive issues which have to do with patriotism as well. Or else we will have to depend more and more on expatriates. This is, perhaps, what the foreign lending organizations hope for.

Our engineers must express their views to the government in no uncertain terms of the impending danger. It is unfortunate that our engineers and the engineering fraternity, as a whole, are dilly-dallying with burning issues affecting their profession.

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