

by Analyst

The debacle in Elephant Pass should once again show us that it is not possible to win a war or carry out any organized activity by the government unless the government gives up feudal methods where the government was run on the basis of exercising political patronage. This canker began in 1956 when SWRD allowed the ministers and MPs to use the administrative machinery for giving ad hoc benefits to their supporters instead of following the modern bureaucratic methods of impersonal government according to written rules and regulations.

Administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Administration is about what happens when people have to be brought together to get a job done. How well it is done has nothing to do with politics but all to do with certain principles that should govern cooperative behavior. Administration has to do with getting things done; with the accomplishment of defined objectives.

There was always the danger that in a democracy where people are poor and impatient for better living standards their representatives, the MPs would intervene directly in the administration to make things happen. The politicians in their impatience began imputing motives, calling public officers saboteurs owing to their sticking to rules and regulations which is a sine qua non of any extensive permanent activity as pointed out by Max Weber.

Minister Ilangaratne openly proclaimed that he wanted his officials to be loyal to him and that, that was the prime consideration for his choice of officials, not whether they were competent. So began the politicization of the top ranks of the public service. The same practice has been applied to the armed forces. Hence this type of debacle is to be expected.

Military men as well as public officials are sent abroad for training in modern methods of governing and administration; but they cannot apply them in practice because decisions are taken on a political basis. Decisions have to be based on science, be it economics, medicine, mathematics or any other science. If the decision is not taken on the relevant scientific facts but on the whim of an ignorant politician who happens to be a minister because of his political influence or his seniority in the ruling party, then such decision is unscientific and will not achieve the objectives of the organization but only the political objective of the minister.

Micro management does not concern the World Bank or the I.M.F. These institutions confine their attention to macro-economics. So they don't bother when politicians use their power to exercise patronage, appointing party supporters instead of selecting persons to jobs on merit. Nor are they concerned when politicians wreck public enterprises by over-staffing them or misuse their resources to carry out their election campaigns. Nor do they object when they appropriate funds of the government for their personal or party use.

It's only civil society that must take action against politicians who cheat or rob public funds. But the people do not understand what is involved in economic micro management of government agencies. They do not mind such abuse

as long as they benefit personally. So political patronage in appointments, transfers, discipline of teachers and principals will continue. Thousands of unqualified teachers, clerks, nurses, etc. have been appointed by governments and this practice is continuing. Such a state cannot wage a war successfully.

There is also the question of ideology. Is the State fighting for a Sri Lankan identity? Nation states in the modern sense were all born of war as seen from the European experience in Germany, Italy in the 19th century. In Asia, Vietnam won its independence after fighting wars against France & USA. The LTTE knows that a Tamil nation State can be established only by war. A government that sought to show that it stood for a Sri Lankan identity should have made the constitutional changes to provide for minority rights while fighting the war to stop secession. It should have explained the ideology to the people & the soldiers.

Now there is a party which stands clearly for a Sinhala national identity encompassing the whole island and not for a Sri Lankan identity. To say that we had a unitary state in the past is to betray ignorance of both history and constitutionalism.

Unitary state is a concept arising from constitutionalism, while the State under feudalism was not a constitutional state but involved indirect rule through sub rulers and chieftains.

It is useful to speculate what would have been the structure of the state, if the British had not unified the country with a single centralized administration. Would we have evolved the present state structure or would the feudal state structures have continued? Anyway war requires dynamic, competent leaders like Churchill. As Machiavelli pointed out no amount of good advice will help a stupid prince who doesn't have the competence to understand and act on such advice.

Dependency Culture

Will this ever stop. No, not in an imperfect facade of a democracy where people have been bought over by politically determined welfare benefits from the state coffers. We have free education, free health care and Samurdhi, which is nothing but an outright bribe to party supporters to retain their patronage. The gullible voters care for nothing in life except to get their livelihood from the government. They have become totally dependent, lacking in any incentive to stand on their feet.

Development is the capacity for self-sustaining growth. And it requires a new type of individual, a rational human being, not a dependent serf who expects everything from the government. The achievement motive has been stressed as one of the important factors promoting development. The white colonies like Australia,

Canada, South Africa and New Zealand had no difficulty in growing economically both during and after colonialism unlike all the other colonies in Asia & Africa.

Michael Novak, author of "The Spirit of Capitalism Will it Liberate?" has argued that democratic institutions and the free market economy can only be sustained by moral virtues like self reliance and community building, creativity & competitiveness. Different virtues have been stressed in different cultures, temperance, wisdom, fortitude, justice are some such virtues stressed in different societies. A modern democratic state requires self reliant individuals who have a sense of personal responsibility. It also requires personal enterprise, particularly in economic activity.

Development means the economy must register advances which in turn will promote further

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progress. One of the features associated with technological advance is the spirit of scientific inquiry closely related to the process of production. This leads to inventiveness & innovation. During the period of capitalist development this was very much the case in Europe. Apart from inventiveness, when a society finds that it is technologically trailing behind others, it catches up not so much by inventiveness as by borrowing technology. Once a principle or tool is known it spreads to other peoples. The only non-European country that borrowed effectively from Europe and became capitalist is Japan. The Japanese gave up many feudal ways and actively copied the methods of the West. Thousands of Japanese were sent to Europe in the 19 century to learn the new ways and to come back and modernize their economy and the State.

Although the colonialists left behind an efficient public service, we proceeded to dismantle it through the political process. The Opposition has now realized that it is not possible to have free and fair elections any more. It requires a bureaucracy to ensure it. We no longer have a bureaucracy in the sense that Max Weber used and which he called efficient.

Patronage politics and politicization of decisions will not do in an age of technological specialization. General Park Chung Hee in South Korea saw the need for technical considerations to determine decisions and so did Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. Unfortunately our leaders have turned their back on this consideration. There is little doubt that unless we become technically modern in our decision-making instead of prac-

ticating "spoils" politics there is no hope for us.

Indecision & Inaction

An Island correspondent, Dr. Anna Konda, refers to a principle of least action which operates in our country in the fields of politics, administration and warfare. She refers to the habit of our authorities who are weak in the head, to refer matters to committees either to procrastinate or to dodge issues altogether. How very true. Indecisiveness, the tendency to hum and haw and then to say that the decision is put off, has invariably been the style of this government. If they do make changes they are often cosmetic.

Decision making is the most important function of a leader or boss who is in charge. Very sophisticated techniques now exist for problem solving like mathematical programming using stochastic models, simulation, operations research, etc. It is not that there are no people in the country who are not versed in such techniques. But alas there is room at the top only for stooges and sycophants. Potty leaders who have neither brains nor ability, do not want any more competent officials or advisers to have access to the powers that be.

It is the concept of loyalty enunciated above by a previous minister. So we have doctors advising on education, amateur generals deciding strategies of war, which in USA are carried out through computer simulations, analyzing every alternative and every counter action of the enemy. Instead, decisions are made by hunches, for political purposes, they are not timely or are postponed or delayed until they lose their relevance in a fast changing environment.

It is not realized that there is a cost to inaction. The pavements are taken over by the hawkers, the newly constructed roads are used for free parking by three-wheelers. Massive expenditure is incurred on road construction for relieving traffic congestion, but such actions defeat the purpose. Nobody, not the Police, not the Municipality, not the UDA, will do their job.

Most big cities restrict the number of three wheelers because they cause traffic congestion. So they issue licenses which are freely transferable but which limit the number. But nobody will act. It doesn't pay for them to do their public duty for which they are paid. In other countries they would be compelled to do their job by higher authorities. Not here where the policy is no work no trouble. It pays not to do one's duty. So no one does.

Management Gurus

This is perhaps the only country where there are management experts who preach without ever having practiced management. There is much talk of TQM - total quality management; of the Japanese five S, Re-engineering etc. But of what use are these techniques when there is no basic discipline in the work place, when the macro environment is lax with innumerable paid holi-

days, pay without work, where there are no proper budgets, where discipline cannot be enforced owing to the employer or manager having to follow a disciplinary procedure similar to a court with full panoply of prosecuting & defense counsels, etc.

The private sector is supposed to work under the ultimate sanction of bankruptcy; but the bankrolling of insolvent companies goes on and on, with a perpetual debt hangover over the banking system. As for the public sector they are supposed to be under the control of their political bosses.

But what does it mean in practice. It means nothing. It permits public servants to report late, work little, have extended tea breaks and scoot off home in an early train. Who cares? Not their bosses. If the public are keen about getting their work attended to, they will have to grease the palm of the official concerned, never mind that he is liable to be charged for giving a gratification.

The ministers have never run any organization, not even a tea kiosk which would give them some experience in the art of managing. Yet they have taken over the function of internal management of public organizations from those professionals who should be doing so. There are of course the frustrating rules and regulations which make the public servants task almost impossible. So, to placate the public and give a semblance of action, miscreants are interdicted, which invariably means they are at home on a paid holiday with a high probability of coming back to work when the incident is forgotten.

Justice has never been a consideration in determining the actions of our rulers. It is only the foolish Westerners who go after Libyan bombers for years on end to mete out justice. Here we have no reward, no punishment, although these are the only motivators of human behavior. The good, bad and indifferent are all treated the same.

Our administrators and policy makers are more enthusiastic than sophisticated in their use of management ideas. They are eager consumers of management fads. Yet they fail to realize their irrelevance to our current management environment. They also fail to realize that some such fashions - downsizing, re-engineering and TQM - may be not just awkward partners but mutually contradictory.

Downsizing supposes that workers are expendable, TQM that they are a valuable resource. TQM is a doctrine of continuous, incremental improvement. Management reform in the West, in UK, in USA have proved successful because they built on systems that ensured some degree of orderly management, with a sufficient degree of discipline.

Discipline in our country has become a four letter word. Nobody likes to talk about it, least of all the management experts. The greatest misfortune is the breakdown in social discipline which has occurred since 1956, which has been aggravated by faulty welfarish (populist policies).

No subsequent leader except President Premadasa, has sought to restore social discipline. They prefer populism instead, damning the nation and the economy but ensuring they come back to power. They are not leaders but demagogues whom the Athenians used to ostracise.