

Houdini flummoxed!



Master magician Houdini's ghost must be green with envy at the recent tricks of two amateurs in Sri Lanka, now much in the news.

[1] Ariyawathie who [according to the Saudis] nailed herself many times

[2] The unnamed Samurahi Officer who [according to the SLFP] tied himself to a tree - knotting the rope from behind with his hands already tied.

Shouldn't we send them both to the Magicians' Olympics at Monte Carlo?

'Gogia Pasha'

Animal sacrifices in Chilaw

Once again, we read in the media of the horrible killing of thousands of goats and chickens at a shrine dedicated to Kali. Over two thousand and five hundred years ago the Buddha protested against cru-

elty to animals and animal slaughter. We are now far advanced in the 21st century. It is nonsensical to sacrifice innocent animals in the name of God. Every year this ritual sacrifice goes on in Chilaw.

This year the police got a court order to stop a group of people who wanted to have a protest march near that shrine. If the police had had sense and kindness, they would have got a court order to stop

the brutal killings. It devotees want to make a sensible and useful sacrifice they should donate their wealth. The shrine then can use that money to help the poor, the aged, the sick and the dis-

abled people in Chilaw. I request President Mahinda Rajapaksa to stop these senseless and cruel killings
Dr. Eileen Petiyagoda, Kandy.

According to newspaper reports, the proposed Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution intends to retain the communal differentiation of the Seventeenth. The fourth and the fifth members of the new Constitutional Advisory Committee are said to be nominated by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition from among racial groups in Parliament, not represented by the PM, the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition. As all these three dignitaries are Sinhalese in the present context, the obvious intention is to make the other two Tamil and Muslim - a very laudable provision on the face of it.

But what will happen when the happy day dawns with political maturity, making these three dignitaries Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim? The selectors will then be bound to run out of candidates for nomination, unless they chance upon a Burgher or a Veddha in the Chamber. Otherwise they may have to resort to importing MPs to fill the two vacancies. In addition, they will have to



MPs to be imported?

amend the Parliamentary Elections Act to accommodate the imports in the House.

The Constitution of a country has to be its most durable law. It is not made

for the fleeting moment; it should be broad enough to accommodate the widest possible variety of future situations. That mission calls for vision, insight and erudition. It cannot be accom-

plished in a rush without, circumspection, reflection, review and deliberation.

Somapala Gunadheera

Constitutional reforms and wrong opinions

I read the news item, in *The Island* of 26.08.2010, under the caption "Ex-AG says people aren't interested in Constitutional Reforms". He shamelessly states "99% of the people of this country are not interested in constitutional reforms and executive presidency and those who had suffered during the war wanted equality and basic rights."

This seems to be a comment from someone alien to this country. Ex AG is not a representative of the people except for a few around him. Such unrealistic assumptions serve only to praise the powers that be perhaps expecting more posts at the betrayal of the general public who foot the salaries and pensions of the public servants. Former AGs have really no experience at grass root level and common touch to grasp the views of the majority of the people. Academics, professionals and the political parties clamour for reform of the Constitution. Why not hold a Referendum to ascertain the views of the people? The 1978 Constitution keeps the Executive President above the law and it has denied democratic rights to the parties and the people affiliated to such political parties and the Rule of Law - the cornerstone of democracy. In a democracy no one can be above the law. The maxim "masses are asses" appears to be true in this context as masses do not understand the intricacies of Constitutions. There were and there are occasions that even justice is twisted according to the political power of one person. Persons in the know are well aware about how justice is meted out in several cases. Those who take oaths to safeguard the Constitution do act in violation of the very provisions with impunity as there is no punishment for such violations. Ordinary people who have no contacts are at the receiving end of injustice.

Moral sense seems to be fast disappearing. Similarly moral duty to obey the law is fast diminishing as the moral majority seems to be morally wrong. Selective justice is no justice. Hypocrisy is widely seen. Newspapers honestly exhort for the betterment of the society but it is time for the good people to raise their voice rather than giving passive resistance.

Jayantha Rodrigo, Wadduwa.

The pathetic conditions at the Kandy Hospital

With reference to the letter by Rev. Sydney Knight in your newspaper last week on the above subject, I also would like to recount my experience at this hospital last week. I do hope the authorities will take note of the shortcomings and take remedial action.

I accompanied an elderly friend with heart problems to the Centre for Sight to get an injection into her eye. Apparently a limited number of patients are given this injection on a particular day and they are informed by telephone to be present on this day. This treatment is available only in government hospitals. My friend needed three injections and I am recounting my experiences on the last day which was the 26th of August. She told me we had to go early to get a number, and we went there at 4.00 AM. Even at that time her position in the queue was 22. All patients had to STAND OUTSIDE the Waiting Hall which was locked up. That Hall could accommodate about 200, but I repeat, was locked! These patients had to wait in the cold and the pouring rain with umbrellas opened out and water dripping on to the next person in the queue. Obviously they had to be in their wet clothes



Kandy hospital

and footwear till they got back home. Most of them were elderly and with poor vision. They could not move anywhere to a sheltered area because then they would lose their place in the queue. Is this kind of punishment necessary in addition to being ill? There were benches but they were all wet and in any case one would lose one's place in the queue if one was to use them. The caregivers of the patients including me wandered

around the hospital premises and managed to find sheltered areas to avoid the rain. The patients stood thus till a little after 7.00 AM when the doors of the Waiting Hall opened after three hours of standing in the rain!

Isn't it possible to have a better arrangement for the convenience of patients? At least, to be able to SIT without getting WET IN THE RAIN for three long hours? Can't the Hall be opened for this purpose and

sitting arrangements done in queue style?

I thought that there was no toilet in that area for the benefit of the waiting patients but later I heard there was one somewhere in the building. Shouldn't there be a notice to indicate its location? I still do not know if one had to wait till the Hall opened at 7.00 AM to use it! This matter has to be looked into urgently.

Should patients (like my friend) who were asked to come on that day need to wait in the queue? Most of them are elderly feeble and visually impaired. Can't they come at 7.00 or 8.00 AM? This can easily be done at the time they are called on the phone giving the date of the injection.

My purpose in writing this is to make this country a better place for its citizens. We should move forward and start working towards reaching standards found in the advanced countries.

We should make hospitals more patient-friendly. Let us all work towards making our country truly the miracle of Asia!!

Pat Jayatileke Kandy



Alcoholism

Minister Maithripala Sirisena, when he was the Minister for Agriculture, successfully handled idling agricultural officials. The Minister for Transport has told employees 'Work or Depart'. A welcome admonition, if our country is to progress., Minister Sirisena's plan to merge the State Pharmaceutical Corporation and the Manufacturing Corporation, will help eliminate the shortage of drugs. The problem of surplus staff too could be handled with time. Alcoholics having to foot their medical bills will help save the State a tidy sum of money. However, the problem of alcoholism is a subject that should be meticulously pondered over by a

Committee that includes two psychologists of repute, for smoking and heavy drinking cannot be cured by imposing financial penalties on boozers and smokers. The Mahinda Chintanaya economic plan will see a steady increase in abstainers, for heavy boozing is a failing of the helpless despondent.

Ivor Samarasinghe

Sigiriya Frescoes and the role of experts

Propos his letter on Sept. 01, I fully agree with Mr. Ariyawansa Ranaweera on lack of experts for the conservation of ancient paintings. It is also distressing to see that the expert committee appointed to investigate this matter has architects, engineers and archaeologists but no one with knowledge of chemistry. Paints are chemicals and so is the limestone base on which the paints are applied is also a chemical. Fading of colours and blotching of the

plaster are all chemical reactions. In particular, the lime paste is particularly sensitive to acids or acidic gases and only a thorough investigation will prove whether what was applied to restore the frescoes had an adverse effect on the plaster. This is the reason why a person with a thorough knowledge of chemistry should be included in the expert panel. Archaeology Department in the past was headed by a chemist, Dr. Raja de Silva, who was involved in the restoration work follow-

ing a vandal attack on the frescoes. The service of a senior chemist with advanced training in restoration is essential for the Archaeology Department.

In my own research, I have studied some of the natural dyes, some of them apparently used for painting frescoes, extracted from the bark of a tree which grows in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. With the input of chemistry different shades of colours can be produced from this dye and a lot more is needed to

see if these dyes can be used for restoration. If at all, these paintings are to be restored, such natural dyes will be the best choice. Some of these dyes developed here at the University of Peradeniya are currently used by the traditional Dumbara mat weavers. There are also temple painters who still use century old traditional dyes from plants and minerals. Their services and advice should be obtained in the restoration process.
Prof. O. A. Illeperuma

