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பாராளுமன்றம்

PARLIAMENT

Prof Rajiva Wijesinha, MP

3rd December 2012

Hon S B Dissanayake
Minister of Higher Education
No 18, Ward Place
Colombo 7

Dear Hon Minister

My attention has been drawn to a recent article in 'Mawbima' which makes several claims about me which are clearly part of the general approach of that newspaper to sow distrust. One assertion in particular however upset me, and I thought I should clarify matters with you.

It was claimed that the President had said I had asked him that I be appointed Minister of Higher Education. This is absolutely nonsense, and I am sure the President said no such thing. On the contrary, whenever we have discussed the subject, I have commented on your courage and the initiatives you have taken up, and he too has spoken highly of you. More recently, I have noted the problems caused by the failure of the relevant authorities to pursue the Act you had prepared, until it now seems too late for reform.

I have indeed never suggested that I be appointed to Executive Office except once when, in agreeing with me that change was needed at the Ministry of External Affairs, the President said he had no one to appoint. I said there were plenty of potential Ministers but, when he seemed unconvinced, I said that he could even make me a Deputy. He then accused me of being like anyone else, and seeking positions, which I found deeply hurtful, and I told him so. His Secretary has since reassured me that he did not mean what he had said, and I do appreciate that he must have such pressures constantly.

I also realize that the suggestion was silly, because no one except a saintly person like Neomal Perera could function as a Deputy in that Ministry in its present condition. In any case, it is now clear that one would be better able to support the President to fulfill his vision – which I find admirable, though this is not being pursued coherently and intelligently in many areas – by remaining independent.

The President did, once, when I was making suggestions about Education, ask why I had not applied to be appointed Monitoring MP for Education. I said I had not realized one needed to apply, and he told me that he had circulated a notice to this effect amongst all members of parliament. Other ordinary members have indicated to me that they did not get such a notice, and I believe it only went to those who had some reason to believe their claims would be satisfied.

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However I did send such a request, but a couple of days later Mr Grero was appointed, a move I much welcomed, so it was clear the matter need not be pursued. With regard to Higher Education, where I felt that you and your Secretary were clearly moving in the right direction, I have been more worried recently, but it is only to the UGC Chairman that I have suggested that I would be happy to advise and assist on policy matters. I am certainly sorry that the step we advised at COPE, to compile a register of lecture hours of all university academics, was not followed up. The statement of the Chairman of the UGC that he was waiting for us to advise made me realize that such advice needs to be on a formal basis, and I am happy to volunteer for this, but I must assure you that this is not because I seek positions. I should add that, way back in 2005, the President suggested I take on the post of UGC Chairman, but I did not accept, in part because I had been critical of the then Chairman, and I believe stepping into the shoes of someone one criticizes, even with regard to a thankless task such as Chairmanship of the UGC, takes away from the objectivity of that criticism.

I should add that, for greater effectiveness in areas in which government is suffering problems, I have suggested streamlining policy and reforms and training by having Ministers in the President's Office, who would concentrate on these and leave the existing Ministers more time to work on administration, which is falling to pieces in many areas. I identified three areas, for each of which I identified candidates.

The three areas were Education, Justice and External Affairs. For Education I suggested Mr Grero, precisely because I think you and your Secretary are perfectly able to handle policy and reform if you only had sufficient support from other agencies whereas, given its massive portfolio, Education itself has difficulties. For Justice I suggested Mr Janaka Bandara, and for External Affairs I suggested Mr Dilan Perera, who is both remarkably efficient and has universal credibility. For that area I also suggested three young Members of Parliament (Wasantha Senanayake, Kanaka Herath and Eric Weerawardhana), who have been identified as high flyers by other countries, even though our own country does not recognize and nurture young talent.

I made many of these points in an interview to the 'Dinamina', before I was even aware of the 'Mawbima' article, and I hope that paper puts the position clearly.

With continuing good wishes for your work, and the initiatives you have so courageously taken on.

Yours sincerely


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