

BASHING VIYATHMAGA- IT IS MUCH EASIER TO BE CRITICAL THAN TO BE CORRECT

By Niranjan Dissanayake

Last week Daily FT carried an article by former senior journalist Sarath de Alwis under the title 'Viyath Maga – Reverting to the dictator state' which was a reproduction of his contribution to the Colombo Telegraph website.

In fact there were three others articles on the same theme contributing to Colombo Telegraph. They have all been critical, cynical and defamatory of the recently concluded Viyath Maga Annual Convention. In fact the tone in all three contributions was derogatory in its agenda, compelling me to do a background check of the credentials of these three writers.

The journalist Sarath De Alwis seems to have a never-ending quarrel with the learned Dr. Dayan Jayatilake, perhaps due to some intellectual jealousy and envy of Dayan's high academic qualifications and professional achievements. The second writer Shyamon Jayasinghe graduated from University of Peradeniya in the late '50s and is a virtual octogenarian.

A beneficiary of the free education, Jayasinghe migrated to Australia long years ago and perhaps contributed to Australia much more than he ever did to Sri Lanka. Like most expatriates he seems to be completely out of touch with the political developments of this country and now pontificates to Sri Lankans how they should lead their lives.

Thushara Wanniarachchi is a known acolyte of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. In fact he proudly displays a picture of himself with Ranil Wickremesinghe on his Facebook profile. All three writers are clearly prejudiced against movements such as Viyath Maga due to own their political agendas and close links to Yahapalanaya.

Jayasinghe in his article disputes the attendance at the Viyath Maga

convention held at the Golden Rose, Boralesgamuwa. I am not sure whether he has ever been to Golden Rose as his preferred haunts must surely be the five star banquet hall circuits. The Golden Rose on the day of the event was packed to capacity. The corridors and walkways were all packed approximating an audience of about 2,000 predominantly young professionals, academics and businessmen, both male and female.

The excitement amongst the crowd was electrifying and the deliveries of the speakers were excellent. It clearly proves that within a short period of time Viyath Maga has made an impact on the public mindset providing independent professional input towards the much-needed political, sociological and economic policy formulation.

Jayasinghe also questions the professional credentials of the audience. He must be a doubting Thomas of diabolical proportions to make the following comment: "Scrutinising the pictures, I didn't spot any significant numbers of known professionals, entrepreneurs and educated people. There were no noteworthy formally educated persons in the audience."

Here we have to sympathise with Jayasinghe for not being able to recognise anyone in the audience. Most people of his vintage must be already dead and gone. The old gentleman is completely out of touch with millennial generation who belong to the age group of his grandchildren. To be specific, the attendance records of the event indicated that there were 185 doctors, 103 lawyers, 47 engineers, and 46 accountants and 57 university academics, not to mention the other categories such corporate executives, artists, marketers, IT professionals, architects, journalists, hoteliers, businessmen, school teachers and principals etc. who attended in large numbers.

A common complaint of the three writers was that most of the participants were politicians. They seem to have come to the conclusion looking at various photographs published on newspapers. Perhaps they have

forgotten that Sri Lankans usually reserve the front rows of any function for senior politicians, be they in power or out of power. There were not more than 10 politicians in a crowd of nearly 2,000. So looking at the front row and judging the quality of the audience is totally unacceptable.

Despite his claims of great knowledge and learning, Jayasinghe is obviously ignorant of the common practice where past presidents continued to be referred to as presidents. Surely he hasn't watched the inauguration of President Donald Trump, where the master of ceremonies introduced the past presidents attending the event as President Jimmy Carter, President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush. If only he had watched the inauguration, he wouldn't have been searching for a shadow of President Sirisena when Gotabaya Rajapaksa referred to Mahinda Rajapaksa as President Rajapaksa at the Viyath Marga convention. Reading such comments one would wonder whether Jayasinghe at best be a charlatan?

Both Jayasinghe and Wanniarachchi insult some of the participants who are currently facing litigation and pass judgment on them. Wanniarachchi in particular claims that most participants of the event should actually be in jail. These writers have forgotten that according to the basic principles of law anyone charged with an offence should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. They are so prejudiced they ignore the fact that there are many in the Yahapalana Government also who have been accused of worse crimes.

Think about crimes against humanity such as what happened in Batalanda in the late '80s. Isn't one of the main suspects now in power? What about the financial scandals of the current Government? If the multi-billion-rupee bond scam of the Central Bank is not fraud, then what is fraud? The writers conveniently forget about these issues whilst pointing fingers at others.

Is there any sensible person in this country who has not realised by now that all this drama about various investigations, arrests and indictments are all part of a political witch hunt unleashed by an incompetent Government

which doesn't know how to deliver any worthwhile result to the country other than occasional media shows?

Wanniarachchi should know better than anybody else how various key players of the previous Government are being singled out and harassed by his current masters. One must also remember that the wheels of fortune grinds slowly but surely and those who are hunting now may well become the hunted eventually. We sincerely hope and pray that future governments will not stoop to the low levels of Yahapalanaya so that people like Wanniarachchi will not face the same plight of those people whom he wants jailed.

An intelligent debate would have been possible if these writers had focused their energies to discuss the issues highlighted at the Viyath Maga Convention covering a range of political social and economic themes. It is quite evident when De Alwis calls a gathering of diverse and distinguished group of professionals discussing the future of Sri Lanka, nothing but a tribal war dance.

None of the writers have taken the trouble to understand the key message of the Viyath Maga Convention that the professionals of this country should play a more active role in planning and implementing the national policies. This was highlighted by speaker after speaker and finally endorsed even by the chief guest of the event.

Former President Rajapaksa who admired the willingness of the professionals to participate in the policy planning and administration of the Government must indeed be commended for his concluding remarks that politicians like him should learn from professionals what they don't understand.

Divisive party politics full of acrimony, hatred and revenge has been the bane of Sri Lankans society with tragic results for all of us. Movements such

as Viyath Maga attempt to move the country forward towards consensual politics at least in relation to the fundamentals of national policy framework and governance. The need of the hour is not to criticise that effort but to be part of it and make your own and meaningful contributions.

One is reminded of the famous saying of the great British statesman Benjamin Disraeli that “It is much easier to be critical than to be correct.” Perhaps Disraeli was referring to charlatans like Jayasinghe and the rest.

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