

Can Mauritians think?

By Samad Ramoly

To capture the ecstasy of surfing the perfect wave it is paramount to match its physical features with the technical skills of the surfer. But the timing to catch it in the first place will determine whether the ride will actually materialise. Which surfer will outshine the other is a question of attitude.

To diversify our economy the textile industry loaded with imported raw materials was set up to support the sugar and tourism industries. Conventional wisdom suggests that we consolidate the existing backbone by moving still higher in the market spectrum and creating the appropriate ambiance to kick productivity. And most importantly that we shift to a more knowledge-based economy.

There lies a big obstacle. Our educational system favours the memorisation of questions and answers, leaving no room for reasoning and creativity: attributes that must not be the exclusivity of the management or the yet-to-valorise research and development department. Asians are pondering whether they can think even if an efficient and disciplined workforce has burgeoned. Rather than acting like an ostrich and a peacock - that is shunning reality and boasting - they are implementing in-depth reforms. It is relevant after witnessing the understated mediocrity plaguing public and private sectors alike and browsing through so-called analyses of many of our "intellectuals" to ask the crucial question too. Apologies to those tainted eyes this acerbic prose might irritate!

Cynics pretend that there is a deliberate attempt somewhere among the elite to retard the process of sharpening the minds. The "chosen few" having escaped this lethal deed are either the ones schooled in pre-independence, private and foreign institutions or the ones self-taught and blessed by the tutoring of an iconoclastic teacher. When irrational extemporizations from various sirens inspire so many gullible souls, it can only comfort this perception which cannot be that far-fetched anyway. It is easier to accumulate power and squander national wealth when the risk-taking and achievement-oriented culture is lacking within the great majority.

In developed countries mighty non-governmental organisations and watchdogs shield the civil society. In that context, the urgency of larger-than-life leadership does not arise. When the appeal to vote for dedicated governments fades in countries like Mauritius where politicians are even less WYSIWYG*, the future is at stake. The individual cannot be the only one concerned by citizenship. Corporate citizenship captained by a win-win partnership with the community at large is the stepping stone to an egalitarian society. As those frustrated will naturally attempt to "equalise" most probably as unhealthily. Will two wrongs ever make it right?

Marketing people strive for quantified image benefit, finance people focus on return on capital while human resource people stress on a motivated and skilled workforce. Someone at the top will ultimately stew the right mix from an "outside-the-box" assessment to lead the way. Success will be tributary of the quality of inputs at every stage and a fourth element called flair. And it takes a hefty share of analytical aptitude, innovation, global exposure, common-sense, acumen, vision and so on which most of us cannot pride ourselves to have acquired under the prevailing environment. Unless we want to perpetuate the self-indulgent "pou-Maurice-li-bon" mentality.

In this shrinking world it is high time to get radical to sustain growth instead of delaying economic and educational reforms by sheltering behind a junk currency. If we do not want to get "machine-washed" by the merciless waves of globalisation we must irreversibly ban corruption, political interference, pettiness, procrastination and so on. We must act wisely and full-heartedly. It is a matter of survival.

(* WYSIWYG: What You See Is What You Get)