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Heartfelt plea over noise pollution

I refer to recent letters on noise pollution by Dr. Pradeep Karyawasam and D.M. Balasooriya. I fully agree with their views that we Sri Lankans should be grateful to the present government and Supreme Court for preparing legislation to curb noise pollution in Sri Lanka. These rules and regulations should have been put into effect long ago by previous regimes.

Every citizen has a right to have undisturbed sleep during the night and no religious organization has a right to take that away. I have been writing several articles against noise pollution for the past 15 years and no previous government had the courage to pass legislation against it.

In my previous articles to the news journals (both Sinhala and English) I have explained how noise pollution can cause deafness, stress, severe angina in heart patients and hypertension. Heart patients need about six hours of good undisturbed sleep and for heart patients who get nocturnal angina due to noise pollution, I have been prescribing sedatives and long-acting anti-anginal drugs in spite of which some of my coronary patients have developed acute myocardial infarction (heart attacks) and some of them have died because of noise pollution, due to 5 a.m. prayers and chanting of "pirith" using loudspeakers during late nights and early morning hours.

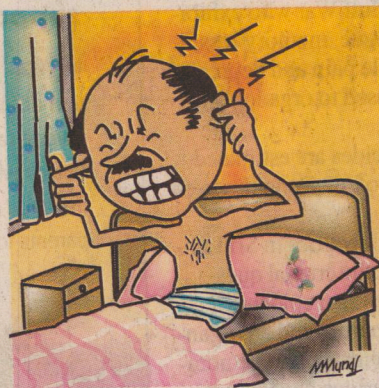
One of my very good friends who used to get 5 a.m. angina due to religious prayers which he used to call "5 a.m. curse" was frightened to go in for coronary artery surgery (CABG) in Sri Lanka as we had a very high surgical mortality in 1980. He developed a heart attack about 5.30 a.m. 15 years ago and by the time I got him admitted to a hospital he was dead.

It is common knowledge that the majority of heart attacks and strokes occur in the night and early morning. As far as I am aware land value is low near temples and mosques as people don't like to build houses near these religious institutions because of noise pollution.

Loud noise emanating from loud-

speakers especially at night is a great nuisance to those living in the proximity of some religious institutions. As mentioned earlier, noise pollution can cause severe stress and insomnia in some people who are "sensitive" to noise pollution whether it is due to chanting of "pirith" or religious prayers, using high sounding loudspeakers especially at night and early morning.

As mentioned by the Chief M.O.H. Colombo Municipality, noise pollution can cause sleep disturbances, irritability, high blood pressure, heart attacks and progressive loss of hearing ending in deafness. Insomnia can



cause severe fatigue and headache next morning.

Noise pollution has been legally banned in all the more developed countries and some of the Asian countries. As far as I am aware people don't like to build houses near the temples and mosques because of noise pollution. The majority of Buddhist temples don't contribute to noise pollution at night as far as I am aware. Noise pollution by religious organizations is a curse in the disguise of a blessing.

Although we Buddhists believe that listening to "pirith" chanting is helpful to get over stress and is soothing to the ears, when the same is chanted using high-sounding loudspeakers at night it can cause severe stress. The same is true of prayers using loudspeakers about 5 a.m. in the morning when most people like to sleep. One's food is another's poison. If a Muslim

wishes to listen to these 5 a.m. prayers, he or she can make use of a cassette without disturbing the neighbourhood. In the same way Buddhists who wish to listen to bana preachings and "pirith deshana" at the dead of night can use cassettes and listen to the cassettes as long as there is no noise pollution.

When my son and my daughter-in-law were working at Nagoda hospital, they did not have good sleep during the first month as the monks in the nearby temple were using loudspeakers to chant pirith at 5 a.m. daily. When my son wrote a strong letter to the chief monk of the temple against this noise pollution, the "pirith" chanting in the early hours of the morning came to a stop and all the other doctors, nurses and patients had been grateful to my son for the good deed he had done.

No civilized society will oppose laws to curb noise pollution. For all progressive steps taken by Sri Lankan governments in the past there has always been opposition. When the British started building railways and roads in Kandy there had been a major uprising by extremist "Radala" Sinhalese in Kandy. There had been severe opposition to the introduction of the Paddy Lands Bill by Mr. Philip Gunawardane. Similarly there was opposition by some interested parties for the introduction of the Free Education Bill.

Even in U.K., during the Industrial Revolution there had been severe opposition against the introduction of railways to Britain by elderly British men and women. Very recently, some Sinhalese politicians were carrying on a campaign against the present government's taking over of the Eastern Province from the terrorists.

The present government should leave no stone unturned in putting into effect, the new regulations against noise pollution, in spite of opposition by a very small group of selfish politicians and a few extremist religious leaders.

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