

LOW-INTENSITY FRUSTRATIONS AREN'T BEYOND REDEMPTION

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The country is headed for economic collapse according to the Opposition pundits. On the streets what are the grim portents of such a situation? That supermarkets have started selling firewood? That there are milk food shortages and other on and off shortages of essentials?

Or that the power goes off sporadically and comes back again perhaps due to Norochcholai or more likely, trade union action? All these issues are no doubt giving people anxious moments but do these incidents necessarily portend a disaster? Or are the issues more in the nature of low-intensity frustrations? And, is it possible that an accumulation of low-intensity frustrations would signal end times for a Government and a nation?

Also, why is it that low-intensity frustrations have created a media feeding frenzy of piling on — piling on about the apparent failings of the Government and the apparent terminal distaste that the people are supposed to be harbouring for the Government?

Somehow, looking at the issues and the serial low-intensity frustrations of queues and shortages, it seems that something does not quite add up. If there is a total rejection of this Government on the streets and inside households as some claim, how is it that the result of certain low intensity-frustrations? Surely, if there is power, fuel and food by and large for the people, barring a few inconveniences, how is it that the population is supposed to be so completely antsy? Is it all about a low tolerance level?

PULSE OF THE PEOPLE

Or is it that we do not understand the nature of the difficulties of the people? Does not anybody have a finger on the pulse of the people? Is that why there seems to be such a disconnection between how the rulers view low-intensity frustrations and how others see it?

Some of these low-intensity frustrations have to do with people's ingrained habits, and that is unfortunate. For example, many urban folk in particular find it extremely difficult to get rid of the milk food habit. Even when it is patently obvious to them that milk food or the tinned variety of powdered milk is not healthy for either them or their kids, they find it impossible to get rid of this lifestyle choice.

Perhaps the best way to break the habit of course is to ensure that there is a shortage. People would get used to healthier alternatives that are available readily such as *kola kenda* (herbal porridge) etc. and fresh milk whenever available.

This brings us to the fact that a great many low-intensity frustrations are due to mindsets. This does not necessarily hold for issues such as cooking gas (LP Gas) shortages and anxieties due to the risk of exploding LP Gas canisters.

It has also been difficult to change mindsets with regard to education and issues such as



There is a lot of media hype about the Omicron variant.

tuition etc. Many parents seemed to be willing to forego schooling for their kids during the pandemic, but viewed tuition as an imperative.

However, the main drawback in low-intensity frustration is the fact that people feel inconvenienced. Standing in a queue is a definite inconvenience but at least some seem too used to relying on certain commodities that they would rather stand in queues rather than look for alternatives.

Low-intensity frustration oftentimes has more to do with perception than reality. For example, the Dollar crisis has convinced some parents that there is no future in education and career advancement for their children in this country.

They feel they would in the future be unable to pay for foreign examinations for their kids or fund their education abroad even in the short term. These anxieties however fall squarely in the territory of imagined worries as there is no Government restriction on dollars for educational purposes.

CONSUMER DECISIONS

Uncertainty is the next contributor to low-intensity frustration. This cannot be underestimated because many consumer decisions on investment and purchases are made purely on the strength of perceptions.

For example, when there is a perception that high prices are indicative of quality, peo-



Kola Kenda is an alternative to powdered milk.

ple spend more than they could possibly afford even when there is no correlation between quality and the 'price cue'. Similarly, anxiety drives people to spend less, providing a dampener on the economy because less money circulation overall would of course stifle growth.

The greater worry is that the low-intensity frustrations caused by the pandemic have overall had the effect of creating a news media that thrives in speculative stories that scare people out of their wits. There is no room in those conditions for the economy to improve because stories about the next variant or possibly the next lockdown due to the next variant domi-



LP Gas issue has become controversial.



Fresh milk should be popularised.

nate the news cycle and tamp down growth.

This is a vicious cycle. The world has never seen such a period in which the news was so anxiety-driven as it has been during the pandemic. The virus and its effects on the human population it seems can be written about in various ways that scare people, and do not need any real solid backing from sources and from references.

For instance, the story about Omicron has been largely fact-less because nobody has had enough evidence to prove that the new variant is the most dangerous of them all.

But that has not prevented the media from coming up with speculative stories that predict Omicron related shutdowns and Omicron related calamities such as an increased death toll from the virus.

This is an ideal situation for economic atrophy in an already damaged economy. People are by and large afraid to take out loans and embark on new ventures when there is so much anxiety about the future.

But take note then that such results of low-

intensity frustration are based more on perception than reality. If the correct messages are disseminated and the anxiety can somehow be fought with positive messaging, the low-intensity nature of the current economic mess can be effectively addressed.

But combating disinformation with regard to the pandemic has been difficult for most governments as this is a health related issue, and people tend to be more circumspect than usual. Therefore, there seems to be a simmering discontent because the people feel they cannot really blame anybody least of all the Government, and have to grin and bear it.

It may be all well and good for the Government if it is not blamed unfairly, but that does not offer any solace if the people are by and large living scared and anxious lives where they are afraid to go shopping for non-essentials or invest etc. which makes it extremely difficult for the economy to move forward.

MESSAGING AND REALITY

How is an economy stimulated to grow under these circumstances? Perhaps, even more important than the messaging is the reality. Whenever people feel that they are free to move about and that there is little chance that they would have to endure a lockdown in the near future, that serves as a spur for more spending, investment and risk taking which is essential for the nation to dig itself out of the current rut.

Nothing succeeds like success and a perception that some people are able to succeed these days in new business would be a great stimulus.

It would ward off the malaise brought on by low-intensity frustrations and interestingly a malaise it is, because it is just that a certain perception of gloom and anxiety has set in due to the hardships induced by the pandemic.

This malaise is in part due to real reasons, but it is also in large part due to imagined anxieties. Therefore the real weapon against low-intensity frustrations that are a negative driving factor in the economy is to push things forward and maintain a forward looking economy and not look back. It requires a certain chutzpah and a mindset that does not take no for an answer.

Most of all it requires an upbeat mentality that does not stop to be setback by niggling problems. Just bulldoze the economy through — that should be the dictum. It can be done because low-intensity frustrations are like low-intensity conflicts. They do not endure if the correct diagnosis is made and accurate measures are taken to stem the rot at its source.