

Eternal vigilance, the key to safety

Local manufacturers cheated

Industries Minister Wimal Weerawansa has urged President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to ensure that local suppliers are given priority in matters of procurement and purchases by the State authorities. Though this is a *sine qua non* and is guaranteed under the law in the State procurement guidelines, the fact is that various State bodies have found loopholes to somehow circumvent these provisions.

This should not happen but the existence of these loopholes is owed mostly to the fact that there is connivance by officialdom. Those in high positions in many Government institutions have been in connivance with foreign companies to flout the guidelines that generally call for priority to be given to local suppliers.

One way that compliance could be ensured is to tighten the existing laws. The entire rule book has to be rewritten in other words. There should be penalties for the senior Government officials who help any foreign companies that are not licensed in the country, for instance, to secure local procurements.

It is obvious that these State appointed officials are well 'looked after' by some foreign companies that operate here. Even when there are Court orders these have been flouted in certain instances just so that companies that operate from overseas with dubious credentials can get the lucrative contracts.

It is shocking that this type of corruption exists when we as a country can least afford it. But officials in the pay are too greedy and too involved with their foreign paymasters to care about the country's foreign exchange problems, and the need to support the local entrepreneurs.

The State cannot ask the citizens of the country to 'Buy Sri Lankan' if the national corporate entities do not abide by the call themselves. But this seems to be the norm — the citizens are expected to contribute their mite, but the State bureaucracy that is supposed to work for the people hold themselves to a different standard.

Our foreign reserves have been stretched to a point at which even car spare parts are not available, and this has according to the exporters association for automobiles led to an unhealthy situation of non-roadworthy vehicles plying the streets. The Government has however revisited these laws and ensured that only the most non-essential items are restricted when it comes to car maintenance and the automobile import business.

But the penchant among the State bureaucracy to exclude local suppliers even in the backdrop of all these dire circumstances is not just disturbing — it is almost an act of treachery in the light of the broader reality.

It is why there should be a zero-tolerance policy for those who flout State procurement guidelines with impunity. A State oversight body must ensure that there is compliance with the rules at all levels of the State apparatus, including law enforcement.

It has come to a point where the enforcers are also in tacit connivance at least with the unscrupulous elements that flout the procurement guidelines that ensure support for the local manufacturers.

National oversight bodies that already exist today are largely toothless. They may make recommendations but at some other level, there are unscrupulous elements that use another arm of the State machinery to sabotage the intent of the oversight bodies.

When the entire apparatus is hijacked in this way the only means by which local entrepreneurship could be supported under the circumstances is to undertake an overhaul of the entire system of procurement and procurement-oversight.

Even if it requires the input of international expertise, there should be a reappraisal of what ought to be done to recalibrate the workings of the procurement system. There have been several procurement guidelines issued in the past few decades that have lulled the policymakers into a state of complacency.

They think that if the rules are there in the rule book, they must be naturally being followed by and large with a few exceptions. But the rule and not the exception has been that the guidelines are regularly flouted.

The powers that be that are able to alter this reality have to be alert to this situation as a first measure. They must undertake a study of the number of instances in which procurement guidelines have been blatantly observed in the breach, just so that a foreign supplier with some dubious local connections gets precedence over the local manufacturers and service providers.

As things stand, local manufacturers lose faith in the system and quickly wind up operations when they feel that nobody looks after their interests. Then, we complain that there is a drain on our foreign exchange reserves. The State bureaucracy is largely to blame for this situation. People have been conditioned to believe that politicians are corrupt across the board, but very often the bureaucrats outdo the politicians in the area of financial irregularity and bribery.

When law enforcement also gets in on the act, the situation becomes hopeless. The only answer is for the people to order a 'reset' and that can be done through the agency of policymakers and politicians, and nobody else. Change is called for sooner rather than later.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The market economy may be good at wealth creation but not perfect at all about wealth distribution.
- Jonathan Sacks

Now & Then BY NADIRA GUNATILLEKE

Last week a lot of incidents were reported in the mainstream media and on social media but two of those incidents have a direct impact on us, especially on our readership. This is why we discuss those two incidents in this column today.

A camera was found in a toilet used by female students who attended a private tuition class conducted in the Gampaha district. The funniest part is when the female students complained about the incident to a responsible person who was in the tuition class, he had told the students that such incidents are very common, take place everywhere and therefore just ignore it. This answer by this person tells the entire story.

The second incident is the latest trick used by drug addicts to snatch money from all types of vehicle owners, especially car owners. We discuss those two topics today because we have to take care of ourselves and we have to be knowledgeable on what happens in society in order to take care of ourselves and our children. The Government or the Police cannot protect us all the time from everyone and everything. What the Government and the law enforcement officers can do is to enact tough laws and implement them swiftly.

Almost all parents send their children to private tuition classes and more than half of them are daughters. They need to use the toilet when they attend private tuition classes. It is a normal requirement of human beings. But the problem is not that. What if someone records what happens inside toilets used by female students? There are many people who blame the authorities, the Police, or put the blame on someone when an incident happens.

Modern technology and innovative methods

There are many things we can do after carefully examining the environments we or our loved ones visit. But first of all, we have to understand one thing. There is this simple truth. This is not the 1990s or even 2000. This is 2022. Almost all of us use modern technology and innovative methods to do things. Crimes are the same. Criminals use modern technology and innovative methods. The other most important thing is that unlike in the early days, they are not scared of circumstances and the law any longer.

Some may say why worry about this much about persons and things. Some may even try to name self-defence as some type of phobia. Some may say being pessimistic is a mental disorder. It is up to someone to decide whether to get protected or become vulnerable or a victim. It is the right of that person and not the business of another person. Therefore protecting ourselves is our right.

The very first thing we should do is not trust anyone, anything or any place. We have to be suspicious and we should not take for granted anyone, anything or any place. Especially parents, youngsters and females should be like this. This is the very first step that should be taken when it comes to ensuring personal safety in 2022.

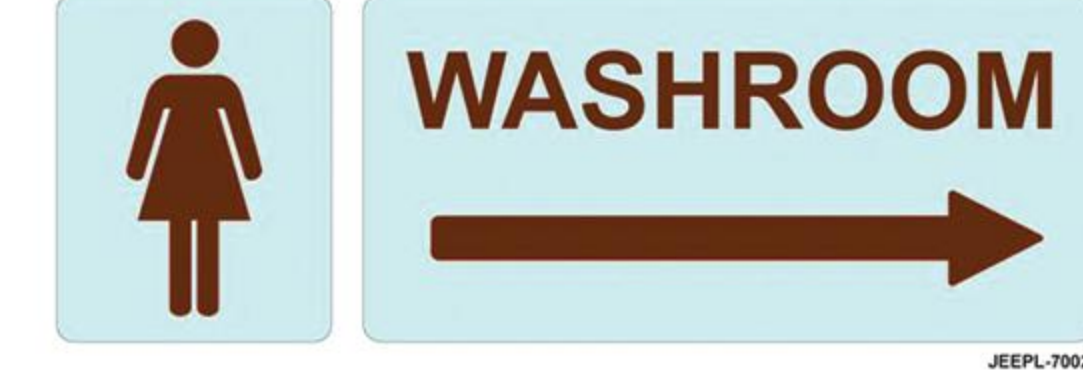
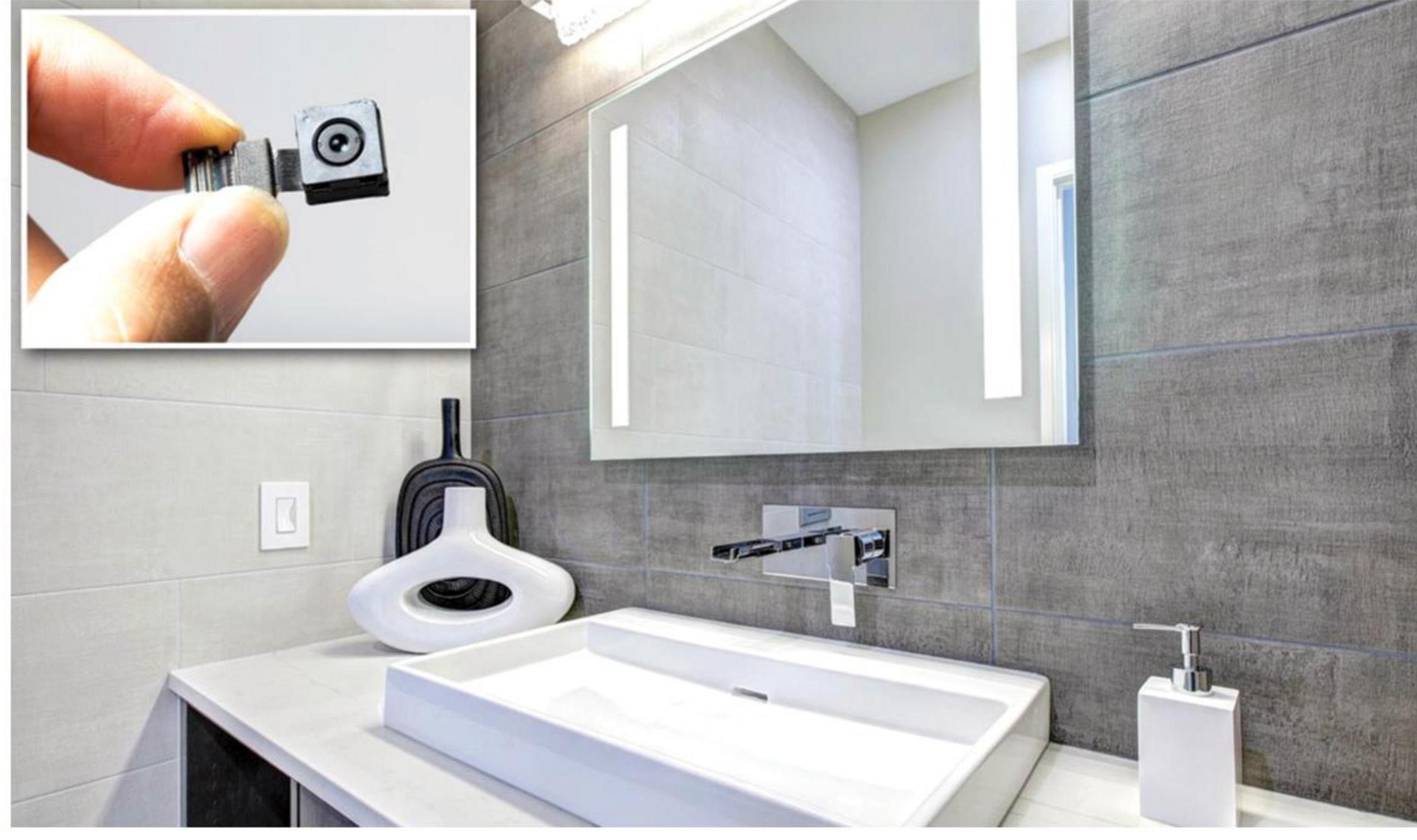
The second thing is very simple. That is advising your children to be mindful all the time and to be vigilant. This saves their lives and the lives of others around them. The girl child who was vigilant saw the camera inside the toilet. The other thing is advising them what to do when they face an incident. It can be an accident, facing a criminal or something else. The children should have a plan A and a plan B to face any possible situation. The parents know what type of 'incidents' their children may face when going out for tuition and after-school activities. It is the same with any other person who visits any place at any time for anything. He/she can guess the possible challenges.

If that girl child called her parents and went straight to the Police, the problem would have been solved by now. According to the media reports on the incident, the perpetrators had plenty of time and opportunities to destroy and hide evidence by the time the case went to the Police.

The other very pathetic situation is the type of culture promoted here in Sri Lanka by society towards such incidents. Schoolchildren do not need to use the internet for anything else other than educational purposes. Therefore they do not need Facebook and other social media. Certain social media such as WhatsApp can be used under certain restrictions. If this is practised by parents, teachers and schoolchildren, there is no need to worry about incidents such as described above because there is no way and no point of giving publicity to such visuals etc. by perpetrators.

The other very important factor is the negative culture developed in the minds of the children and parents on the outcome of such incidents. No one needs to commit suicide or hide from society if visuals of him/her recorded inside a toilet or changing room are circulated on the internet because any natural human being in this world uses toilets and changing rooms and nothing unnatural happens inside them when ordinary and normal people use them. All women experience menstruation during a certain timeframe in their lives. The entire world knows this. There is nothing unusual or abnormal in it. Changing a sanitary pad inside a toilet is perfectly normal too.

One may think of more drastic measures if visuals recorded inside a hotel room or any other room which shows indecent and illegal behaviour with another person are released. Married adults can be in trouble when they do this with persons other than their legal partner. If a person rapes another person inside a room and visuals start to circulate on the internet, the rapist should be in trouble and face the law. These are all shameful



and revolting acts which are not accepted by society. But using a toilet or washroom is not something to be ashamed of.

But this does not mean that anyone can record what happens inside toilets and changing rooms and use those recordings. It is totally illegal and violates the rights of the persons who use those places. Legal action should be taken against such perpetrators.

Blackmail victims

The negative and dangerous thoughts planted inside the minds of schoolchildren and all the other victims pave the way to other tragedies. Perpetrators use this mentality to blackmail their victims and to take sexual advantages. No matter whether the victim is a schoolchild or another individual, she should be able to tell the perpetrator that she is not scared of the footage because the entire world knows what happens inside toilets and she is not an alien with strange body parts which are different from other human beings.

The second incident reported in social media last

There are many things we can do after carefully examining the environments we or our loved ones visit. But first of all, we have to understand one thing. There is this simple truth. This is not the 1990s or even 2000. This is 2022. Almost all of us use modern technology and innovative methods to do things. Crimes are the same. Criminals use modern technology and innovative methods. The other most important thing is that unlike in the early days, they are not scared of circumstances and the law any longer.



week is connected to the latest method used by drug addicts to snatch money from all types of vehicle owners, especially car owners. This is the tactic they use. Maybe you have already become one of their victims or you will become one of their victims soon if you are not aware of what they do.

The drug addicts get hold of a three wheeler and organise another two or three drug addicts. They somehow manage to hit your car and get the paint of their three wheeler on the backside or front of your car. It depends on whether they hit the backside or front of your car. Then they stop your car by force and threaten you demanding Rs. 2,000, Rs. 2,500 or something. By this time two or three of their supporting drug addicts enter the scene created by one of them. By the time you will not notice how they arrive all of a sudden from nowhere without anyone apparently informing them.

When you say you want to go to the nearest Police station, they try to prevent that and may reduce the amount of money they demand from you. Maybe they will give up, scold you and leave when you assure them that first of all you need to go to the Police to settle the issue.

Sometimes they hit your vehicle when you park your vehicle inside the parking area of a large supermarket or a similar place. They make sure that the paint of their three wheeler is on your car front or rear bumpers or some other corner. You will realise what had happened only if you get the security cameras of that specific supermarket checked. Otherwise, you may think that it really hit your car without your knowledge.

It seems the gangs have all required equipment such as the instantly drying paints, sprayers etc. which are needed to put the three-wheeler into its original position in order to go and get another similar victim after snatching Rs. 2,500 or 3,000 from an innocent man or a woman who drives a car without expecting any unfortunate incident. The only way out is being vigilant all the time and not giving in to their demands without seeking the help of the Police.