

From Horizon 2

of poor quality. From the beginning the advice given was to claim sole title to the great triumph, which he did in full measure. To the media it was all a Mahinda effort and the true sacrifice of soldiers took a second place. Particularly, the last push to capture Prabhakaran had been initially regarded as impossible. General Fonseka took the quick decision at the spur of the moment to go for it even against the possibility of sacrificing the lives of over 5000 soldiers. "It was not to question why; but to do or die." The General went for it; succeeded; but our soldiers died as they had virtually walked into the valley of death where the prize catch had been hiding.

That act alone said a great deal for the military strategy of Fonseka, the trained fighter. Fonseka became first known for his prowess when he joined the late General Janaka Perera in defence against the LTTE's "unceasing waves" campaign. Later, at Weligama and Alimankade. When Fonseka was bombed by a woman suicide bomber, despite serious wounds he got down from his burning vehicle and bravely walked out of danger. His motivation to fight until victory had been legendary and it was his optimism that had infected the President.

Such is this man! To find that within a short time General Fonseka had been surreptitiously sidelined by the government? What generosity and wisdom was

**"When the people start reasoning all is lost," Voltaire.**

that? The cut-outs of Fonseka put up by an adoring public had been removed and the President's cut outs put in. It was an SB Disnayake-type of impatience displayed by the government. The General was prevented from keeping his position until even the Army's 60th anniversary commemoration celebration. Military establishments all over the world are ruled by hierarchy where seniority and skills are reckoned. It is convention to give serious thought to the outgoing General's recommendation in appointing a successor. The military establishment is not like any government department. However, the President ignored the General's recommendation of Chandrasiri without even the courtesy of giving the General reasons. A relatively junior man has been put in place. Seniority is sacred in the army. Hence, this act of the President is damaging to military morale. Unlike even the police, attempts to politicize the military will ruin it. To cap it all, now the General has been unceremoniously ordered to quit his official residence. Government made a crude attempt to politicize the military triumph by having a string of elections to the Provincial Councils and winning them outright on the basis of sole war title claims. The objective was to oust the incumbent opposition Councilors and replace them with President's men and women. Provincial Councils are no threat to any government as they are concerned only with local and parochial matters of governance. Besides, they are without adequate resources and have in any case got to depend on government for their sustenance.

The result: Sri Lanka became known as "Election Country." For the last 18 months Ministers have been busy working at elections and government vehicles had been deployed for election work.

The message was clear: The government was not keen about good governance. The Police had been used in the electoral manipulation process. Cops vied with each other to impress political catchers in the government and government leaders, in turn, decided to overlook police abuse. Malabe, Anguulana, Bambalapitiya resulted.

Wise leaders heed dissent but to the government leaders dissenters were traitors. The nation watched in horror the brutal murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge in broad daylight in held-up traffic. Reportedly Lasantha's attackers took their cool time to hit him with iron bars kill him, collect their weapons and disappear.

In short, nothing has so far changed in our President's approach. Nor can the type of advisors he has picked offer him any advice. Victor Ivan mentions how President Premadasa had, as a first step, got good, clever and hard working persons to man key positions. How different would it all have been if Mahinda Rajapakse did just this instead of depending on his brothers so much! MR thought that he had to put a relative somewhere somehow to get work done.

Up to a point MR managed to go on in this fashion because of the war accomplishment. The war and MR became synonymous. The advent of the General rendered that the equation is no longer valid and that there is a distinct possibility of the people having both a deliverance from any more terrorism and good governance just from one source. "When the people start reasoning all is lost," said Voltaire.

**T**he oldest national organization of Sri Lanka, the National Congress is being reborn after a lapse of 53 years. It is ironic that the National Congress which died 53 years ago is being reincarnated as an ally of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA). It is of historic significance that the UPFA has more than dozen political parties in it together with the oldest political entities in Sri Lanka such as the Communist Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party and last but not the least the Ceylon National Congress, the yesteryear one and only national party.

Jayawardene. Although he wore the same dress as President of Sri Lanka from 1978, none of his 140 MPs cared to adapt that dress.

The CNC kept close contacts with the Indian Congress. When the Congress launched the 'Quit India' movement in August 1942 in Bombay (now Mumbai), a CNC delegation comprising of CNC President Siripala Samarakody and J R Jayawardene attended the Indian protest march. Another person I met at the Bombay rally was Dr Gamini Corea, the



even forgetting his top hat, which was a symbol of the British imperialism. In 1943, Chairman of the State Council Sir D B Jayathilake was appointed as High Commissioner to India and D S Senanayake succeeded him as Chairman. As Jayathilake had resigned from his Kelaniya seat to take up his assignment in New Delhi,

## Rebirth of National Congress which died giving birth to UNP 50 years back

I wish to recall the 1940-46 era of the National Congress in which some of the most significant political events of historical importance had taken place.

The Ceylon National Congress (CNC) was established in 1919 in the lines of the Indian National Congress launched by the stalwarts of the Indian national movement. Undoubtedly, the CNC was then recognized as the most powerful people's movement in Sri Lanka. As the Lakshminaharan, premier newspaper of that era has recorded, the CNC was launched by leaders like Sir D B Jayathilake, Sir James Peiris, F R Senanayake, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam because they felt the imperative need of such an organization after the ruthless suppressive measures taken by the colonial rulers during the 1915 unrest.

I took a personal interest in the Ceylon National Congress as a 18 year old student of the Calcutta University. I was then associated with the student's wing of the Indian Communist Party, which was proscribed by the British rulers. I have attended the annual convention of the Indian National Congress held at Ramghar in Bihar in March 1940 as a member of the university student's delegation.

Two delegations from Sri Lanka attended the Ramghar Session. While Phillip Gunawardene and Kusuma Gunawardene came as LSSP representatives, the Ceylon National Congress was represented by its Joint Secretary J R Jayawardene, P de S Jayasekera and J R Amarathunga.

As a young radical, I spent most of my time in Ramghar with the Gunawardenes. But I also spent some time with the CNC delegation. I was quite impressed with the socialist policies then followed by J R Jayawardene, though he was not a Marxist.

In December 1940, the Ceylon National Congress contested the Colombo Municipal Council elections and won 10 seats out of the total 20. While, popular young advocate J R Jayawardene got elected from Grandpass constituency, eminent physician Dr

Rathnayothi Saravanamuttu of CNC became the Mayor of Colombo. Following the Colombo electoral victory, the CNC annual conference was held at Meerigama and prominent politician E A P Wijerathne was elected as CNC President.

The young elected member from Dedigama, Dudley Senanayake and J R Jayawardene became the two joint secretaries.

In 1915 One of the interesting events at the CNC Meerigama Session was the selection of the national costume after a competition. Prior to that the national dress was the wetti, national banian and the long shawl as worn by the then leaders like C W W Kannangra, G P Mialasekera, P de S Kularathne and S W R D Bandaranaike.

However some Sinhalese leaders felt that was a Tamil dress and they preferred to wear the European suits. The national dress selected at CNC was a long national coat with tunic color of Indian Sherwani. The only leader who always wore that national dress until death was Mr J R

eminent economist who later became the Secretary General of UNCTAD. 1947 was a significant milestone of the history of Ceylon National Congress. The



annual session of CNC was held in Kelaniya in that year. Until then the main policy of the Congress was to demand the colonial rulers to grant Dominion status for Sri Lanka. However at the Kelaniya Session of the CNC, the demand for complete independence was proposed.

While Dudley Senanayake, Member for Mirigama electorate proposed that the Congress should demand total independence, it was seconded by the Grandpass Municipal Councillor J R Jayawardene. Jayawardene pointed out that the Indian National Congress too initially wanted more self governance through constitutional amendments. "But in 1929, at the Lahore Session they changed it to 'Poorna Swaraj' or total independence," he



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pointed out. "It is high time we too demanded the same".

The proposal has created quite a ripple at the Kelaniya session. Most vehement opposition came from non other than the Agriculture Minister D S Senanayake himself. Criticising his son's proposal, Senanayake said, "Dominion status for a country also means freedom to govern. Hence I am opposed to the demand for total independence. I am, therefore oppose this absolutely irrelevant proposal". However, Dudley's proposal was adopted by majority votes and furious D S Senanayake walked out of the session,

there was a by election and the two main contenders were J R Jayawardene and E W Perera. Jayawardene received the support from the trade unions of the Communist Party which enjoyed a substantial membership of workers at Hunupitiya Fertilizer Mills and several oil mills. However when the election campaign got heated up, there were allegations that Jayawardene supporters were urging the Buddhists not to vote for Perera who was a Christian, while Jayawardene was the grandson of Helena Wijewardene, chief disciple of Kelaniya temple. They also had cast certain aspersions on Perera's caste. As the Communist Party was against such communal politics, the Party advised its trade union workers not to openly canvass for Jayawardene, but they were asked to vote for him.

J R Jayawardene was elected with a comfortable 10,000 majority votes. In 1945 the Soulbury Constitution was adopted and there was a need for amalgamation of political parties to obtain the majority support to elect a Prime Minister. Main parties existed then were Ceylon National Congress (George E de Silva), Sinhala Maha Sabha (S W R D Bandaranaike), LSSP (Dr N M Perera), Bolshevik Communist Party (Dr Colvin R de Silva), Communist Party (Dr Sugeeswara A Wickramasinghe), Ceylon Indian Tamil Congress (Thondaman and Azis), Tamil Congress (G G Ponnambalam), Muslim Congress (M C M Khalil and T B Jayah) and Ceylon Moors Congress (A R A Rasik).

The Member for Galle, H W Amarasinghe proposed that a single party should be formed to establish a government of a single party. It was proposed to join CNC, Sinhala Maha Sabha, Muslim Congress and Ceylon Moors Congress to form a new political party and invite D S Senanayake to be its leader. Despite the opposition from the Communists and other leftists in the CNC, it was adopted by a majority vote at a special session of the CNC. Hence the United National Party was established with the demise of the Ceylon National Congress.

Today the National Congress has been revived and revitalized by a group of broad leadership including Minister Milinda Moragoda and former Minister B Sirisena Cooray.

Furthermore the CNC has been revived to be a member of the powerful ruling alliance, the UPFA, which has become a formidable force with a widely spread support base that include SLFP, LSSP, Communist Party, CWC, an important segment of the UNP and JVP and various other minor parties and groups. Today, the UPFA has Sinhala Maha Sabha in the form of SLFP and the leftist and UNP factions as the support base. Hence the revival of the National Congress as partner of the UPFA is a definite instance of history repeating itself to give the nation a powerful alliance that is needed for the progress of the country after the defeat of dreaded terrorism.