

HORIZON

SEE BEYOND



I am borrowing the phrase from the reputed Australian journalist Craig McGregor, who used this on two occasions. The

first turned out to be a prediction that came in real terms. It was even before Bob Hawke entered parliament that this prophet said he would become Prime Minister. Hawke at the time was only the president of ACTU, which of course exercised tremendous influence on the Labor party. McGregor perhaps read a lot into the popularity of this up and coming trade unionist, and foresaw the coming developments. Where this prophet failed was when he placed the young Labor party leader on the same level and predicted that Mark Latham would become the next P.M. All in all, he had fifty percent success as a forecaster in politics.

What I am forecasting may be really off the mark, for I possess neither the political maturity nor the analytical skills, required of one trying his hand at this type of game. Mine can be called more of a 'guestimation', which borders on a guess and a mere calculation. I may be, however, in a better position than the pro-UNP astrologer who predicted that, come September

in investing that hard earned capital. Instead of mustering all the forces available in the land, for the building of a united nation looking forward to a future with peace, harmony and unparalleled prosperity, he allowed self interest of individuals to dictate terms to the healing process. Whereas even the opponents of the government should have been taken into the fold, it became a case of



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9, Ranil Wickramasinghe would be stepping into the shoes of Ratnasiri Wickramanayake who was due to succeed Mahinda Rajapakse as President by that date. The famous astrologer, Chandrasiri Bandara, paid for his sin of making a rash statement by spending some time in the company of CID officers.

I am on safer grounds, because none of the intelligence sleuths would read what I write, and even if one did, they have no power over me. Now to come to the point after digressing to the point of harassing the reader, the next president of Sri Lanka is going to be the son of one-time president Ranasinghe Premadasa. How do I make this bold statement?, one may ask. For my statement to qualify to be a prediction of some sort, a number of pre-conditions have to be met. First and foremost, there has to be a contest between Mahinda Rajapakse and General Sarath Fonseka for presidency. At the time of writing this Gen.Fonseka has announced his candidature. (He did so on November 29) However, nominations have not yet closed. That will be just a routine. Second pre-condition is that Mahinda Rajapakse should win although it may be a tough contest. With all the declarations and jubilations that Mangala Samaraweera and co. are engaged in, I am pretty certain that the voters of Sri Lanka will not forget the man who was brave enough to call the bluff of Prabahakaran. That in itself was the reason for him to reach the zenith of his popularity, which he probably did not put to proper use. He failed

one-up-man-ship for many individuals.

Whoever was the culprit in driving a wedge between the C-in-C and the General, it was the last thing that should have happened at this juncture. It is no use now pontificating on the virtues of one or the other. The damage has already been done, and that is irreparable. With all this disadvantage, my gut feeling is that Mahinda Rajapakse will win in the end. But at what cost? This is the reason for my rather rash statement.

The third pre-condition has to take time to mature, but the groundwork is being prepared by parties who least expected this turn of events. That is what has happened throughout the recent past in Sri Lanka. Every party that came to power with over-whelming public support failed to win an election for a second time, excepting J.R's UNP that lasted an unprecedented seventeen years. Call it corruption, call it arrogance, or insensitivity, once in power, Sri Lankan politicians have a tendency to behave as if they are beyond the control of all legal and moral niceties and obligations. They feel that they can do whatever they wish and get away. I may be wrong, but I have a feeling that it is the tone of things already.

That is where my nominee or candidate steps in. Sajith Premadasa will not be playing a very active role in the forthcoming presidential election. Don't worry, he will be at election meetings and even address them. But that will be the minimum required to justify his

existence as a member of the party. He has other requirements to take care of. In other words, he has to build the base for his operation next time. He has two wishes, one harmless in a way. The other is a mere wish, the fulfillment of which is completely in the hands of the president and his men. My feeling is that they are quite capable of delivering the goods. They will unwillingly and unwittingly pave the way for the next UNP candidate to walk into the presidential palace unhindered.

This scenario will not eventuate if by some chance, the president or his advisors read the writing on the wall and take immediate action to right the wrongs already done and are being committed daily. This is highly unlikely. Not that

He also has been quietly cultivating the relationships and bonds with foreign dignitaries and organizations, hopefully without betraying the country like others in his party. He has earned the respect and admiration of everyone he met. His foreign tours are much more discreet and less ambulatory than the much publicized jaunts of his leader. Another advantage would be his quiet diplomacy, or in other words, his ability to mark his time without trying to outshine others like S.B. Dissanayake, another aspirant to the position.

If anyone wants proof of his approach and mode of operation, one has only to take a fresh look at the photograph showing the opening of the photographic exhibition by Sudath Silva, by

MAN WHO WOULD BE KING



everyone looks forward to this type of change, but hardly anyone can prevent the onslaught once it starts. While hoping against hope that it will not happen, one cannot help watching what is taking place before one's own eyes.

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If not openly, at least on the sly, he will do whatever possible to ensure the victory of the current one at the coming election. He would be looking forward not only to the success of Mahinda Rajapakse at the polls, but also to the eventual dismantling of his political base by his own men. Chances are that no one will notice the deterioration occurring under their very feet.

Sajith Premadasa so far has played his cards well. He was prepared to give the president the credit for defeating the terrorists, with no ifs or buts. In fact, he praised the President for this, which no other UNPer expressed so clearly and with no reservation. To his credit it must be said that he did not believe in what he said then. After all, we cannot forget that this is the son of Ranasinghe Premadasa whose love of the land was beyond question.

On the other hand, Sajith has been strengthening his political base in the South by involving himself in activities for the improvement of living conditions of people. He has been lavish in spending his money, which of course his father has left for him in ample measure. It is to his credit that he has built a strong political base in the South dominated by Rajapakses. No one will be able to push him out of this base.

the President. I am referring to one photograph in particular, in which His Excellency is shown in the company of Mrs. Hema Premadasa, wife of the Ex-President Premadasa. If body language is any indication of what one thinks and feelings, there is ample evidence of maternal approval of Sajith's approach to the issue. We cannot pretend not to know that the son would keep his mother informed of his intentions and plans. The smile on the face of the lady and the gentle touch on the hand she gives the President are unmistakable signs of her admiration of the leader and good wishes that she conveys to him. This stands out in contrast to the appearance of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga at the exhibition all by herself on a later occasion. The contrast is more marked when one considers the fact the current President represents the party her father founded and she herself led at one time.

Above all, Sajith Premadasa is in no hurry. He knows it is dangerous to jump the gun. He also knows that it is too early for him to try his luck before Mahinda Rajapakse completes his two terms, during which he would lay the ground for his own exit. If he did read this in the context of the recent success of the Sri Lankan military, that itself qualifies him for a Presidential award.

That the pre-condition required for Sajith's victory, i.e. the dismantling of the political base of the President is being gradually completed could be seen from the bold statement made by General Fonseka, even before announcing his candidacy officially. He has no qualms about taking on his former boss, as he is reported to have said that the defeat of President Rajapakse is inevitable if he were to contest him. Therefore one can safely assume that all the above preconditions are being met one by one.

Most important, of course, is the supreme position he would be placed in within the UNP hierarchy. All claimants to leadership in the party would, by then, have passed their use-by-date. Current leader Ranil Wickramasinghe will be too old for the job, and Karu Jayasuriya would be no better. Young guns that could have had a shot at the prize have all left the sinking ship. Age-wise too, Sajith will be just right by the time the next round of presidential elections are called. What better pre-conditions can one hope for? Everything will be tailor-made for the incoming President of Sri Lanka.

I do not, as so many others, wish this to occur, but against our hopes the next president to be elected some time after 2018, will be my choice or rather my nominee. He is the Man who would be King. That in short, is my reading of the planetary movements in the tiny universe of Sri Lankan politics.. .