

As predicted, the pardon for General Sarath Fonseka became a reality. The entire episode was so awkward and gauche that it looked unreal from the beginning. Perhaps Fonseka smelt its absurdity at the outset and this is one factor that helped the latter keep his cool and not breakdown.

An ordinary mortal would certainly have found the ordeal excruciating and would have cracked under the severe pressure. It is to the eternal credit of Sarath Fonseka that he possessed the insight to perceive what lay ahead, dig himself in and not collapse and kow tow before a harsh and relentless authority.

**Let us not be misunderstood: We are not interested in a political career for the former General. Nor do we conceive that a mere shift of power from Mahinda Rajapakse to Sarath Fonseka or to any other individual would by itself sort out the governance crisis which has engulfed our country. This crisis can be resolved only by a shift of systems; to put it cryptically, by a return journey to functioning democratic institutions and the myriad checks and balances, and accountability that such a system alone can bring.**

That said, I must emphasize that it is hard not to be impressed by the sheer force of character that Sarath Fonseka has exhibited before all Sri Lankans. To me, it gives relief that there is still hope in Sri Lanka as there are still men over there with steadfast character that are not willing to run the greedy race for power and position that selfish loyalty to the ruling regime can give. SF was asked to seek pardon. He flatly refused as he believed he had done no wrong. Overtures were next made to members of his grieving and distressed family to seek pardon on his behalf. He gave firm orders to the family not to do so.

If SF came to a deal with the regime he could have gone places—stopping short of the moon for the simple reason that he was potent material for the government side. Mahinda Rajapakse who has succeeded in forging deals with many domestic and foreign forces for various reasons just couldn't access Sarath Fonseka. Here was a man of steel amidst a sea of supplicant opportunistic self-seekers broadly spread through our society—from politicians in the Opposition who did the jumping act, to famed artists who prostituted their professionalism by drawing a lineage from the President to the Buddha, to Buddhist monks of archaeological reputation who argue that it is good for government to dig our invaluable treasures, to the Chief monk in the Kelaniya temple who commended Mervyn Silva to the public and so on. This is the poor stuff that has now surfaced in our once beautiful island. In place of gentlemen in Parliament now we have many 'habitual karayo', drug barons, and highway robbers. The latter should be in jail and not in Parliament. Right down the line in broad society everyone seems to be out for position and money, thus demeaning human life and human values. Head up above the polluted ocean of these

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venal characters we have one leader who has been tested by fire. To me this discovery is the happiest thing about the Sarath Fonseka episode.

To be sure Fonseka does have political ambitions. I remember having a chat with a local pro-government Lankan soon after

of honour and pension to SF. There is nowhere in pension law that a pension of a Public Officer can be taken away. A pension is earned for a life-time service to successive governments and it is palpably ille-



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gal and cruel to take that away. Clearly President Mahinda Rajapakse had let himself misdirected.

Even independent dailies like the Island, Daily Mirror, Divaina etc have been commenting on the flimsy grounds on which the SF court charges had been framed and the clumsy way in which SF



party approves the punishment. No good.

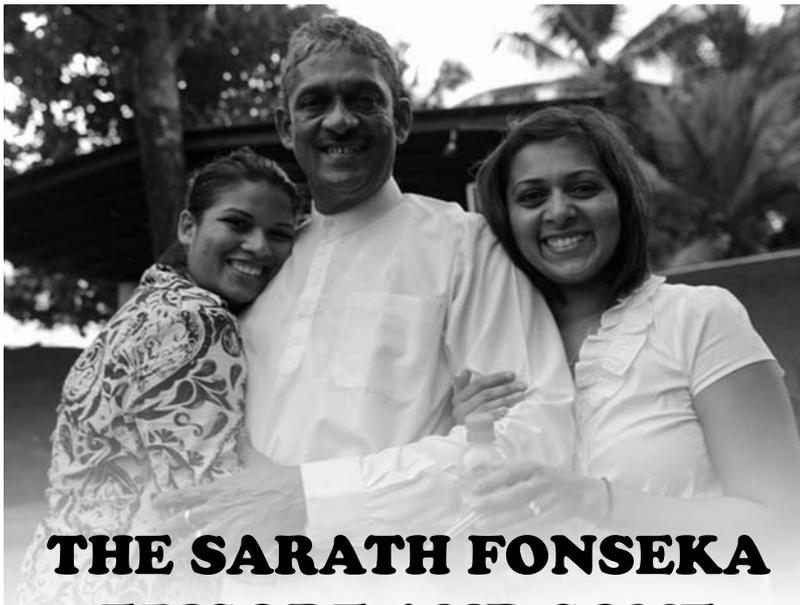
The poet Horace said 'mutato nomine de fabula narrator,' (Change only the name and this story is also about you). What happened to Sarath Fonseka can happen to a more humble person in multiplied measure. It can be you or me in a different context. This is the lurking danger of evil precedents.

Besides, note the punishment meted out: 3 years in jail! The primary charge related to some minor financial misappropriation that did not cause any loss to the national exchequer at all. This charge was that General had chaired the tender board. On this score how many of our politicians and officials should have gone to jail? Just one illustration: those guilty of the infamous CPC scandal that cost several billions to the country remain untouched. Then, what about the most recent NSB-scandal where the Chief Justice's husband is allegedly involved?

The fact is that this whole episode highlights the prevalence in our country of arbitrary rule and punishment-punishment at the whim of powers that be. Laws and procedures are violated. A judicial arm that should make decisions on wrong-doing is bypassed or that agency is effectively rendered pliant.

This arbitrary decision-making is reflected in the supplanting of judicial action by administrative action. What judges should do, those in administrative authority are doing right down to the police and Provincial Council levels. This is how Mervyn Silva tied a public Officer onto a tree. After the passing of the 18th Amendment this trend intensified.

It is doubtful that the pardon and release had been executed upon the exercise of freewill on the part of the authorities. The powers that be did not experience a sudden epiphany of the value of Buddhist compassion. It is no secret that US pressure had been brought to bear in this sudden decision. This also explains the reluctant and incomplete nature of the pardon. No wonder government has been propagating the evil of the "West". Governments the world-over that have abandoned democratic practices must have an external enemy for their survival. For the powerless citizens international intervention is welcome.



**THE SARATH FONSEKA EPISODE AND SOME IMPLICATIONS**

SF's jailing. "I agree," this guy stated, "this should not have been done by the President..... but then General should not have done politics."

"Isn't it a right for a man to engage in politics and present himself to the electorate as a presidential candidate?" I countered.

My pal shifted: "but he has no experience in politics," he stated.

I had to explain that the CEO role in a country demands, above all, leadership experience and managerial experience. As an eminently successful Commander-in-Chief SF had just that. On the other hand, what managerial experience do most of our political leaders possess? Their political experience has shown them the way to lie and to deceive, to placate and do really nothing; to hype and to bluff.

**The jailing of Sarath Fonseka and the removal of all his hard-earned medals and even the pension he earned is one of those compounded evils in Lanka's contemporary politics that should never have happened.** The regime could have defeated him politically and sent him to political limbo. That is fair political game. We wish the President would see sense even now and return the civic rights, medals

had been referred to a Military Court instead of a regular Court. When the verdict was announced these newspapers carried banner headlines to the effect that it was "sad day for our nation." In that court the accusing party decides the composition of those who sit on judgement and same

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