

Swan song

It appears that General (Retired) Sarath Fonseka would contest under the symbol Swan at the forthcoming Presidential elections. We do not know who is behind selecting the party and the corresponding symbol but unfortunately for the general it's going to be a swan song. It is a tragedy that General (Retired) Sarath Fonseka has to be a pawn in the hands of people such as Ranil Wickremesinghe, Mangala Samaraweera, Rauf Hakeem, Tilwin Silva and Somawansa Amarasinghe none of whom can contest against the President Mahinda Rajapakse and become the President. Unfortunately for the General neither he would be the winner.

If the General thinks that the UNP would support him knowing that he has even a slight chance of winning then he is mistaken. The UNP is fielding him as the so called common candidate simply because the party knows that he will lose. The UNP would never think of fielding a candidate other than Ranil Wickremesinghe if there is even a slight chance of winning the Presidential election. General Sarath Fonseka has already had the maximum support of the electorate. On last Sunday when he walked into give his first press conference he had the maximum support and by the time he finished he had lost some of the potential voters who would have looked up to him the previous day. It will further decrease with time as he has nothing else to offer other than abolishing of the Presidency.

Even Ranil Wickremesinghe knows that in spite of his agreement with the General, the latter would not and could not abolish the Presidency on his own. There is a procedure that has to be followed in amending the constitution and the General having become the President cannot abolish on his own even if he wanted to do so. On the other hand over the years abolition of Presidency has been a condition that has been included in the agreements signed between political parties when they did not have anything else to agree on. The JVP has made use of this many a times and they more than any other political party know that it is merely a clause included in the agreements, which is never meant to be implemented. The political parties agree that the agreement on abolishing the Presidency could be broken having come into power. Nobody is fooled by these agreements on abolishing the Presidency and the General if elected would be the last person to abolish it. Neither the UNP nor the JVP, the other parties of the alliance being cohorts of the UNP, have any misgivings on abolishing of Presidency and they know that as in the previous Presidential elections the agreement to abolish Presidency gives them the opportunity not to contest the Presidential elections. The JVP has adopted this strategy over the years and now the UNP also has joined the JVP admitting that they also have no chance of winning the Presidential elections if they contest the elections on their own.

However, there is a problem this time as there are two parties who claim that General (Retired) Sarath Fonseka is their common candidate. The General is not the common candidate of an alliance but is supposed to be the common candidate of at least two parties that campaign separately. They may have a common Press conference but other than that it is very unlikely that they will have common public meetings. The JVP would

not like to be on the same platform as the UNP, and the General will have to address meetings on behalf of the UNP and the JVP separately. As long as the campaign centres around abolishing the Presidency all parties in the alliance could campaign separately. However, these election meetings cannot be worked out in advance and there will be some problems that the General will have to face.

It is very unlikely that the UNP would go all out in its campaign and finally the common candidate could appear to be the candidate of the JVP. However, the presence of the UNP will be felt and many JVPers would resent it and the General would find it extremely difficult to strike a balance. The JVP has had a number of discussions with the UNP already but it is clear that when it comes to formulating the policy it is the UNP that calls the tune. Though formally there is no alliance of the UNP and the JVP, the UPFA will present it as such and the JVP sympathisers will find it hard to swallow the political line of the leaders.

However, more than all these, what is disturbing from the nationalist point of view is the impending clash between the former commander of the army that defeated the LTTE after thirty years and his commander in chief. Undoubtedly both are heroes in the eyes of the public and unfortunately the General and the UPFA are already not giving the due credit to the other. The General has learnt his first lessons in politics, and at the press conference held on Sunday he showed that he is a fast learner of bad tactics. He in vain tried to defend the previous Presidents and governments by telling the public that they too gave the political leadership. In other words what he was trying to say was that he as the commander of the army was committed to the promise he had given to end the LTTE terrorism during his tenure. It was clear that he was trying to steal more credit for defeating the LTTE and by doing that he was doing a disservice to him.

It is true that some politicians in the UPFA had tried not to give the General the credit that he deserved but many people did not expect him to come down to the level of those politicians. However having entered politics General Sarath Fonseka is perhaps compelled to utter statements as such and naturally he should expect a response to his statement. The President Rajapakse should step in and discipline his followers from responding unnecessarily to these amateurish political statements by a Professional soldier, as otherwise both sides would be playing into the hands of Ranil Wickremesinghe, his cohorts and the western countries who are eagerly waiting to frame charges on war crimes against the President, the Defence Secretary and others.

The General mentioned that among others that he would go beyond the thirteenth amendment, which is obviously the policy of the UNP and he attempted in vain to correct a statement he is supposed to have made to the Canadian Post. However, it was not the only statement of such nature he had made while he was the commander of the army and it is clear that after beginning an association with those politicians without a future in the UNP led alliance as well as in the UNP, the General while trying to steal more credit than he deserves for defeating the LTTE is attempting to distance himself from his policies he had while he was the commander of the army. He is trying to attract votes but his contradictory positions will expose him perhaps to the satisfaction of the UNP that wants

to destroy his personality. The UNP with the other non national forces are trying to kill two birds with one stone. They want to destroy the character of the General and frame charges against the army making use of the “information” provided by the General.

Unfortunately during this short interval of time another Sarath F has already appeared on the horizon. It is not Sarath Fonseka the great General who showed that he was among the best army commanders in the whole world if not the best and who was deeply rooted in our culture and history. Now we see a Sarath Failed in the jargon of the western NGOs and pundits who does not want to accept the courageous political leadership given by the President, and who is now trying to move away from our culture in order to attract votes. The nationalist vote would go against him leaving him with some of the traditional die hard UNP vote. However much he tries he cannot win the votes of the majority of the Tamils and the Muslims and he is doomed to fail in his attempts to become the President of the country. It is only the non national forces who will win by wounding the spirit of the national forces, though their candidate would lose. The non national forces have no expectation to win the elections or to abolish the Presidency, and the national forces in the UPFA would have to take extra precautions in organising their campaign.