

NEWS

Fonseka resignation invigorates presidency speculation

GENERAL Sarath Fonseka resigned from the Sri Lankan Army on November 12, and in doing so, fuelled speculation that he intends to run for President at the next election.

Officially stepping down from his post on November 16, Fonseka said he would announce his decision on whether to enter politics soon.

"I gave my retirement papers," Gen. Fonseka told the media at a Buddhist temple at Keliniya on the outskirts of Colombo in the evening after sending in his resignation letter.

"I have been serving my country in the past and I will serve the country in future as well."

Asked whether he would join politics, the General said: "I can't comment as I am still in uniform. I will decide my future once my retirement comes into effect."

Soon after signing the official document to quit as Sri Lanka's top military officer, he repeated his statement.

"I expect to announce my future steps in two or three days. I will be serving the country in the future," he said.

"He is certainly entering poli-

tics. It is an irreversible process for him now," Sumanasiri Liyanage, a political science professor at the University of Peradeniya, told AFP.

"For the first time in 15 years, political developments have unfolded that threaten the dominance of Sri Lanka's ruling party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party," reported The National newspaper.

"Mr Rajapakse has until now faced little serious resistance from an opposition that has struggled to find ways of countering him. But this political hegemony has shown unprecedented cracks with the emergence of a new leader for opposition forces to rally around," the paper commented.

Fonseka is widely credited to be one of the three players in defeating the LTTE, along with Mahinda Rajapakse, and Gotabaya Rajapakse, Ashok Mehta, a political analyst who once led the Indian peacekeeping forces in Sri Lanka, told Al Jazeera.

If he decides to run for president, Fonseka could split Rajapakse's voter base by giving vot-

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Kicked out of office

FOLLOWING General Sarath Fonseka's resignation from the Sri Lankan Army on November 12, the government not only relieved him "with immediate effect, but also ordered him to vacate his official residence within a week.

Fonseka, the chief of defence staff, formerly Chief of the Sri Lanka Army, led country's military forces in the last stages of the war against the Liberation Tigers. With accusations of war crimes being committed in the final stages of the combat, Fonseka could potentially face charges if the allegations are proven.

Fonseka had requested permission to retire from December 1, and also requested protection including trained combat soldiers and bullet proof vehicles.

He further requested that "a suitable protected government resident be made available for me to live in", and went on to ask that "approval be granted for me to continue occupation of the present official residence of the Commander of the Army".

Responding on November 15, Secretary to the President Lalith Weerathunge informed Fonseka that he was not only retired "with immediate effect" but that he was also required to vacate his official residence by November 22.

The letter said that suitable accommodation would be found for him and that protection would be provided.

The letter from Weerathunga stated that he had already over-

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The Sri Lankan government denied General Fonseka permission to stay in post until the end of November, instead releasing him immediately and ordering him to vacate his residence within a week

Request to retire - Fonseka

GENERAL Sarath Fonseka, Sri Lanka Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), sent his letter of resignation to the Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapakse on November 12. His letter was accompanied by a 17 point Annex setting out the factors that led to his resignation.

These factors included his dissatisfaction at being stripped of his position as Army Chief to be appointed CDS with fewer powers and responsibilities, as well as the government allegedly putting Indian troops on high alert about the possibility of a coup in Sri Lanka.

The body of his letter, as published in the Sri Lankan Guardian, is reproduced below. The annex is reproduced separately on this page.:

Request to retire from the regular force of the Sri Lanka Army

1. I, General G S C Fonseka RWP RSP VSV USP rcds psc presently serving as the Chief of Defence Staff, was enlisted to the Ceylon Army on 05th Feb 1970 and was commissioned on the 01st June 1971. On the 6th Dec 2005 due to the trust and confidence placed on me, Your Excellency was kind enough to promote me to the rank of Lieutenant General and appoint me as the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army in an era when the Country was embroiled with the menace of terrorism and was in a stalemate state after having toiled for a solution politically or otherwise for over 25 years without a success.

2. During my command of 3 years and 7 months, the Sri Lanka Army managed to eradicate the terrorist movement having apprehended an unbelievable stock of arms and munitions and decisively defeating the LTTE and its

murderous leadership which Your Excellency is obviously aware of. I would not be exaggerating to state that I was instrumental in leading the Army to this historic victory, of course with Your Excellency's political support, which helped to materialize this heroic action. Though the field commanders, men and all members of the Army worked towards this common goal, it is with my vision, command and leadership that this yeomen task was achieved. I was determined to achieve this victory as I wanted to ensure that there is permanent peace and security for the future generation of the motherland.

3. I do appreciate the fact that the Country and Your Excellency did recognize my services which led to me being promoted to the first ever serving four star general to command the Army, nevertheless the courses of action which initiated subsequently greatly depressed me which I have enumerated in the Annex hereto.

4. Considering the facts mentioned in the Annex and more which I am privy to withhold, I am compelled to believe that Your Excellency and the Government has lost your trust and faith bestowed upon me for reasons only known to Your Excellency. Hence as the senior most serving military officer in the Country with 40 years of service, such a situation does not warrant a continuation of my duties any longer, thereby I have the honour to request that I be permitted to retire from the Regular Force of the Army with effect from 01st December 2009.

5. Furthermore I have the honour to request that on retirement Your Excellency would be kind enough to grant me sufficient security which includes trained

combat soldiers, a suitable vehicle with sufficient protection (Bullet proof), escort vehicles and dummy vehicles for my conveyances due to the fact that I am considered as one of the highest priority targets by the LTTE, which they are yet capable of achieving. Also, I wish to bring to Your Excellency's kind notice that over 100 men, six escort vehicles and a bullet proof vehicle have been placed at the convenience of the former Commander of the Navy who recently retired. Your Excellency, I do further request that a suitable protected government resident be made available for me to live in. Also it is requested that approval be granted for me to continue occupation of the present official residence of the Commander of the Army - "The General's House" in Bahudhaloka Mawatha until I am provided with a suitable married quarter. I presume that such arrangements would be made available to me, considering the threat factor I am facing, which Your Excellency is well aware of.

6. I would also wish to quote an example in the case of the former Indian Chief of Army Staff General A S Vadiya, instrumental in leading the Indian Army in Operation Blue Star against the Sheiks at the Golden Temple, Amristar in 1984, was assassinated whilst on retirement in 1986 purely in revenge of his victories achieved. I do not wish to experience a similar incident as I have already sustained serious injuries after the attempt on my life by a suicide cadre of the LTTE, in spite of I being injured twice previously during military operations. Though during the operations I conducted myself in a dar-

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