

## NEWS

# We don't completely accept Fonseka or JVP policies - TNA

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Daily Mirror

HOURS after announcing the Party's decision to support the common Opposition candidate Gen Sarath Fonseka, Tamil National Alliance front liner Suresh Premachandran speaks to Hard Talk about the rationale behind the decision. He opines that although the Tamil people will not entirely be comfortable with the Opposition Candidate, and they have their reservations about how the orders were carried out by Gen. Fonseka, they support him on the grounds that 'he is the only one who can today challenge the President on how the war was won.

'Our point is if he is correcting himself then why not? We feel he is going in the correct path. We believe the parties supporting him will send him in the right path,' he stresses.

**Q:** What is the rationale behind the decision of the TNA to extend support for the Common Opposition candidate, Gen. Sarath Fonseka?

We decided to support the retired General because of the attitude of the present government towards the plight of the Tamil people over the last four years, as well as towards the elected representatives of the Tamil people in the North and the East. There are 22 members of Parliament in the TNA, but we have never been invited for the development meetings or any discussion on the displaced in the North and the East during the last four years. None of the MPs have been consulted on anything to do with our people. Our people have been in the displaced camps for over six months after the war ended but this government never let us visit the people despite many requests to do so. This was the attitude of the government towards us. There are many, many examples like this. In fact we couldn't think of a single reason why we should support the candidature of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

That is why we decided that there was no point in allowing this regime to go for a second term, because we fear the suffering of the Tamil people will continue, if we do that. The Tamil people lost a lot more than their lives to the war; they lost their land, endured much pain of mind and the damaging effects of the demerger of the North and the East. These are all reasons behind our decision. And the effects of this regime are not only affecting the Tamil people but the entire nation as a whole. The whole country needs a change, because

the government failed to put the country in the right path after the end of the war. And we realize that this government doesn't want to work with the international community, which is affecting funding to the country. So even the Sinhala people are having their reservations about this regime; they are also suffering. This is why we had to decide in this manner.

**Q:** But the question remains how comfortable the Tamil people would be with a person who could be argued to have been in the forefront of the plight of the Tamil people you speak of?

I won't say the Tamil people will be comfortable with the opposition candidate as such, given that situation, but it was the President as the Commander in Chief who gave the orders during the war. So as the Army Commander Gen. Fonseka merely followed his orders. We certainly have our reservations about how the orders were carried out, but he is the only one who can today challenge the President on how the war was won. But he is no longer the Army Commander and as a civilian he now says that Tamil people must enjoy equal rights. In fact at a recent meeting in Anuradapura he spoke about how the need for opportunities that allowed for a black President in the USA in Sri Lanka as well. Our point is if he is correcting himself then why not? We feel he is going in the correct path. We believe the parties supporting him will send him in the right path.

**Q:** Would you say your confidence extends towards the JVP as well, in directing the General in the right path, given their own declared approach towards the Tamil cause that you remain committed to?

Yes, we have our reservations with the JVP. They need to understand the Tamil people and their problems, and there must be greater understanding in the JVP about the need to allow the Tamil people their right to progress economically. They must also understand the need to allow for all communities to come together as a nation.

We don't accept either Sarath Fonseka's or the JVPs policies completely. But we think we can work out a plan and allow for a change of government to take place. And the Tamil vote in the North and the East can certainly play a role in that. It is because of that aspect that we decided on supporting the General.

**Q:** It is unlikely that there will be a significant voter turnout in the North, at least not in a way to influence the vote at the national level, while the Eastern Tamil vote will also prove bleak. How



Fonseka can be set on the 'right path' by the parties supporting him, suggests Suresh Premachandran

serious a situation is this in your opinion?

Definitely the people are very frustrated. It is mainly people from the Wannu that need a change. We are very concerned about how we can make room for the people to vote. We have to discuss with the Election's Commissioner who has mentioned that he will make all arrangements for the displaced to cast their vote. We will be discussing this with the Opposition parties as well. The Election's Commissioner has plans to put polling booths in the camps and the resettled areas. The problem is the thousands of people from the Wannu resettled in Jaffna and those from Vavuniya in Kilinochchi. We don't know what the logistics are in their voting and if many of them will be willing on the other hand in going such a distance to vote.

**Q:** How concerned are you of this number that will not vote which is expected to be considerable?

Many of these people are badly affected and want a change. The people feel that this government is responsible for their pain and hope that the incoming President will change their plight. We feel that these people are in that mindset to vote. But because of these logistical issues I don't know how many will go to the polls. And what happens to those votes?

**Q:** How influential would you

say India was in your decision?

India had nothing to do with our decision at all. There has been no influence or interference at all. We took our decision by ourselves. There was absolutely no pressure from anyone. This is the decision of the TNA alone.

**Q:** So is this how the TNA would be taking its decisions in the future as well, completely outside of the influence of the Indian political regime?

Well, we have strong doubts about the attitude of this government towards the plight of the Tamil people. If they continue with this attitude we might have to look at support from the third Party.

**Q:** What in your opinion would ensure the Tamil people through voting for Gen Sarath Fonseka as opposed to President Rajapaksa, given that neither candidate have approached some of the more crucial issues of the Tamil people, such as the IDPs, the HSZs revoke emergency or devolution of powers?

We had discussions with President Rajapaksa as well as Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe and Gen. Sarath Fonseka. But the President couldn't offer us any hope in even the immediate concerns of the Tamil people. We feel our concerns are not rightfully looked at by this government. He couldn't offer any change in the resettlement plans and allow for freedom of movement even after

the LTTE being defeated. However, Gen. Fonseka agreed that there was no longer a reason for the HSZs to continue now that the war is over and has promised that these will be changed after the elections. If he fails to do so however there will be another problem, with non violent methods adopted by the Tamil people. He has promised to look in to all these issues.

**Q:** Given that both candidates fear making any concrete promises to the Tamil community that would be termed as a betrayal of the Sinhala people, how is the Tamil leadership planning to ensure that there is active engagement of the community in national politics?

The issue is that if they try to speak on the issue, they face the problem of losing votes. Everyone wants to win the election. This is the tragic history of the last 60 years in this country. It is because of the abrogated pacts like the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam etc, that the Tamil youth were forced to take up arms. Even the present government is reluctant to come out with a political proposal because of this situation. What happened with the APRC? We don't know what the Opposition candidate's attitude is to the Tamil problem, but we're not such fools to believe that a President Fonseka

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