

NEWS

'Lesser of two evils' gets TNA support

SRI Lanka's largest Tamil political party, the Tamil National Alliance, has announced that it will support former army general Sarath Fonseka in forthcoming presidential elections.

TNA Parliamentary group leader and Trincomalee district MP Rajavarotheyam Sampanthan on Wednesday January 6 said majority of 18 members of the alliance who were present at lengthy deliberations were of the view that the "only meaningful way" to thwart the desire of the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to seek a mandate to hold office for a further term would be urging the Tamils to vote for the joint opposition candidate General (retd.) Sarath Fonseka.

Sampanthan further added Sarath Fonseka had given "satisfactory" assurances about finding a political resolution to Sri Lanka's ethnic question and promised to consider Tamil demands for a meaningful devolution of power to the provinces, according to the BBC.

"The Tamil people have been itching for a change of regime and the Tamil National Alliance decision is reflective of that desire," Sampanthan told BBC Tamil.

Following TNA's announcement of support for Fonseka, the Sri Lankan government accused Fonseka of signing a secret pact with the Tamil political party in return for its backing in the upcoming election.

Sri Lanka's Media Minister Lakshman Yapa Abeywardene said according to the information they received that agreement contains several conditions such as releasing hardcore LTTE terrorists in the custody, removing all high security zones in North & East, reducing the number of military camps and Police Stations in both provinces, re-merging of North and East provinces and closing of State Intelligence Unit.

Abeywardene said those conditions are very harmful to country's national security and therefore it is the utmost duty of the Gen. Fonseka to make public that agreement completely, if he is a "clean man" as described by his own camp.

Reinforcing government accusations, one TNA Member of Parliament acknowledged the existence of an agreement in an interview with the state media, claiming that TNA's support for opposition presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka was extended only after getting him to agree to those conditions.

K. Thurairetnasingam told the

state-owned Vasanthan FM, a Tamil Radio channel, that Fonseka had agreed to comply with all their conditions and the party signed an agreement with him covering these issues.

However, speaking to reporters, Sambandan said that neither he nor anyone else from their alliance signed any agreement with General Fonseka or with any of his representative.

Whether a secret pact exist or not, neither candidate has detailed their approach to resolving the decades long Tamil national question in their manifesto.

Mahinda Rajapaksa's manifesto promises an undivided state with honorable peace. Rajapaksa's promise of a honorable peace in his 2006 manifesto led to death of tens of thousands Tamils.

According to his allies, devolution of powers under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution would be Rajapaksa's political solution to the national problem.

Like Rajapaksa, Fonseka also has stayed away from offering political solution and focused normalization, which he labels as "process of national reconciliation"

"I will help all Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese affected by the war. A program of immediate relief measures for war affected persons and areas will be implemented which will also address the burning problems of Tamil speaking persons. All remaining IDPs will be immediately re-settled and the grant for resettlement will be increased to a minimum of Rs. 100,000 per family and assessed upwards based on need."

"Within the first month I will take steps to register all other persons displaced due to the war and see that they are re-settled without further delay. All detainees in relation to terrorism will be prosecuted, rehabilitated or released. I will promote and foster our Sri Lankan identity based on our ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. I will ensure the freedom of worship without any hindrance or discrimination" states Fonseka's manifesto.

Although Fonseka's manifesto details concrete steps to return the war ravaged North-East to some semblance of normalcy, it also proposes continued investment in the Sinhala security the apparatus.

On national security, despite the LTTE being defeated as a conventional fighting force, Fonseka's manifesto promises to create a state of the art, highly disci-

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Fonseka and his allies addressed political rallies in Jaffna a few days before Rajapakse followed suit

'Autonomous rule' for Tamils asks TNA

A pro-LTTE parliamentarian has underlined his party's resolve for an "autonomous rule" for Tamils in Sri Lanka, claiming that TNA's support for opposition presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka was extended only after getting him to agree to those conditions.

K. Thurairetnasingam, a senior leader of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance, said his party had "no confidence" in the devolution of powers in the North based on the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution.

He said his party will not deviate from its demand for an autonomous rule for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

"We do not want the 13th

Amendment. We have no confidence in the 13th Amendment," Thurairetnasingam said, adding the party wanted an autonomous regime with all powers.

He said TNA was extending its support to the opposition Presidential candidate Fonseka for the January 26 polls only after getting him to agree those conditions, according to the state-run Daily News.

Thurairetnasingam told the state-owned Vasanthan FM, a Tamil Radio channel, that Fonseka had agreed to comply with all their conditions and the party signed an agreement with him covering these issues.

Thurairetnasingam claimed

Fonseka and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe had signed this agreement and their copies were sent to foreign representatives too, the state-run daily reported.

"We have already informed about this agreement to diplomats and the foreign governments," he was quoted as saying by the radio channel.

"The President did not comply with our conditions and therefore this government should be overthrown," the TNA leader said.

The Sri Lankan lawmaker said TNA had asked the president to halt the military operations during the last phase of the civil war, but he had refused to do so.

Sinhala ultra-nationalist monk backs General Fonseka

THE Sinhala Buddhist extreme nationalist organisation, Patriotic National Centre (PNC) led by Buddhist Monk Venerable Dhambara Amila Thero, on Thursday December 24, announced that it has decided to support General (retd) Sarath Fonseka, contesting in the forthcoming Sri Lankan presidential elections.

Dhambara Amila Thero has been opposed to outside influence, both the Western and the Indian, since the Norwegian brokered Ceasefire Agreement in 2002 and his movement has been a key opinion maker of the Sinhala nationalism, exercising

the pressure on the Sri Lankan state to nullify the Norwegian brokered P-TOMS in 2005 and to unilaterally withdrew from the Ceasefire Agreement in 2008. Ven. Dhambara Amila Thero was formerly the leader of the National Bhikku Front (NBF), an ultra Sinhala nationalist organisation of Buddhist monks.

The PNC leader Dhambara Amila Thero at a media briefing held Thursday at Colombo National Library Auditorium said that his organization supported General Sarath Fonseka who achieved the country's 'main goal', by 'defeating terrorism.'

The extremist monk who pre-

ferred Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005 has commented that Fonseka, whom he met recently, knew more about politics than the individuals who had succeeded in politics in recent times.

Rajapaksa's dependency on certain powers and his family-centered politics has caused certain sections of extreme Sinhala Buddhists to prefer Sarath Fonseka, said a newspaper editor in Colombo commenting that the move by the Sinhala nationalist monk also demonstrated that the Sinhala nationalists were confident in taking forward their agenda facing any eventuality at the elections.