

## **BANDRANAIKES AND FIFTY SIX**

Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, according to a Sunday newspaper wants to be the Prime Minister as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs when Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse becomes the President, and is waiting for a written assurance from the latter to that effect. As the SLFP Central Committee has decided that Mr. Bandaranaike is the Prime Ministerial Candidate of the party, there is no necessity for a written assurance from Mr. Rajapakse that Mr. Bandaranaike would be appointed as the Prime Minister. Mr. Bandaranaike might think that once Mr. Rajapakse becomes the President the latter would get the central committee of the party to change the previous decision and nominate somebody else as the Prime Minister. However, even a written assurance would not make Mr. Bandaranaike happy, as even then Mr. Rajapakse, as a "true democrat", could get the central committee to overrule himself.

Even if Mr. Bandaranaike is not made the Prime Minister, he should be appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as he has shown that he has the qualities to hold that portfolio. It is said that since he was appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs he has been in foreign lands most of the time, and even at the time of writing, it is reported, that he is somewhere in Singapore. What I cannot understand is that if Mr. Rajapakse gives Mr. Bandaranaike a written assurance that the latter would be made the minister of Foreign Affairs, how he would campaign for Mr. Rajapakse while still being in foreign lands. If Mr. Bandaranaike decides to campaign for Mr. Rajapakse then somebody else will have to be appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, unless Mr. Bandaranaike sends CDs from abroad telling the public why they should vote for a non Bandaranaike.

Whether the Bandaranaiques who at various times had decided to join political parties opposed to the SLFP, campaign or not Mr. Rajapakse would become the President, and there is no reason why he should worry about issuing letters of assurance. Mr. Anura Bandaranaike is engaged in a losing battle for supremacy in the SLFP, and I doubt very much whether he could make an impact on the campaign of Mr. Rajapakse. It is a battle between the Children of Fifty Six (Panashaye Daruwo) and the others, and not a battle between the Children of Bandaranaiques and the others. It is unfortunate that the biological children of Bandaranaiques could not become Children of Fifty Six. For twelve long years people were made to understand that the biological children of Bandaranaiques were Children of Fifty Six as well, and the people are at last beginning to realise that they have had a very bad dream.

Mr. Anura Bandaranaike and the other Bandaranaiques should realise that it was not Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who initiated the "Fifty Six". It was lay people such as late Mr. L. H. Mettananda, the former principle of Ananda Vidyalyaya, who was hated by the Vijathika Balalavegaya as demonstrated by the cartoons of Collette, and the late Mr. N. Q. Dias the former civil servant, and the Bhikkus of the calibre of Ven. Baddegam Vimalavansa Thero and Ven. Henpitagedera Gnanaseeha Thero who initiated the "Fifty Six". In fact I would identify Mr. Mettananda as the "Father of Fifty Six", who was behind the official language demand as well as the report of the Buddha Sasana

Commission. The "Fifty Six" was looking for a political leader and it fell on Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike to provide that leadership. It is said that Mr. Dudley Senanayake who was first invited for the leadership of the movement did not give his consent. Mr. Dudley Senanayake had taken a back seat in politics after the "hartal" of fifty three, and was not in a mood to actively participate in politics. I wonder what would have happened if Mr. Dudley Senanayake accepted the invitation to give leadership to "fifty six".

It is time that the SLFP stopped the "tradition" of going after Bandaranaiques to give leadership to the party. Though Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike was not the father of "fifty six" he had the intuition to know what is needed by the country, and was humble enough to listen to others and admit his mistakes. He had no problem in grasping some of the essentials of the "fifty six" which was a continuation of the struggle against colonialism in the political, economic and cultural fields. "Fifty Six" cannot be understood in terms of western concepts, and when Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekera identified it as a continuation of the "Dharmapala Movement", he took the first step in looking at "fifty six" from a different angle. Today we have no problem in identifying "fifty six" with the 1817-18, first independence struggle of the Sinhala against the British, after the entire country became their colony. Both "Dharmapala Movement" and "fifty six" emphasised the cultural component of the anti colonialist struggle, and fifty years after fifty six we are witnessing another manifestation of the fight against colonialism, in the form of a Presidential election.

Unlike Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike, the biological children of Mr. and Mrs. Bandaranaike had no faith in the "common man" who did not get an Oxford or a Soborn education. The elder Bandaranaiques had an intuition to understand the common man, moving away from the western theories. However, their biological children who could not become children of fifty six, were not able to dissociate from the western theories which they studied while at school and the university. Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse should realise that the days of the biological children of Bandaranaiques are over, and that he is not going to lose by refusing to give a written undertaking to appoint Mr. Anura Bandaranaike as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. SLFP belongs to the children of fifty six, and not to the biological children of the Bandaranaiques.

Just a few days ago Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga and Mr. Anura were threatening to keep away from the Presidential election campaign. Though they had agreed at the central committee of the party to nominate Mr. Rajapakse as the Presidential candidate of the Party, they would have been much happy if Mr. Anura Bandaranaike contested the Presidential elections as the Party candidate. When the central committee took the decision the Presidential election, in the mind of Ms. Kumaratunga, was far away in 2006, and she would have thought that she could change the decision of the party before that. Unfortunately for her, the Supreme Court decided that the Presidential elections had to be held in 2005, and the Bandaranaiques were in a soup. Even then, until the nomination day one was not sure whether Mr. Rajapakse would become the Presidential candidate of the Party. If Ms. Kumaratunga had the power she would have changed the candidate, but it is clear that she does not have much power in the party now. Even the juniors, I mean the few junior ministers who supported her towards the end are now gradually

changing their loyalties, and very soon the present day Bandaranaiques would become strangers in the party that Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike formed. Ms. Kumaratunga has no choice other than supporting the candidature of Mr. Rajapakse.

The SLFP has begun to understand at last that it is the party of the children of fifty six and not that of the biological children of the Bandaranaiques. As we have said on number of occasions, the SLFP that was formed by Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike was a liberal party, and not a nationalistic party, though he had nationalistic feelings, unlike his offsprings. However, the struggle against colonialism, that was given leadership by Anagarika Dharmapala in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and that had been subdued by the "nationalists" (Olcott Buddhists -this has nothing to do with the products of the Buddhist schools) beginning with the second decade of the last century sprang up again in the early fifties. As mentioned earlier it was Mr. Mettananda who gave the intellectual leadership to this movement which did not have a political leadership at the beginning. When Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike pledged to implement the decisions of the Buddha Sasana Commission with Mr. Philip Gunawardane, the movement or the "fifty six" as we would refer to it today, had its political leadership as well. The SLFP went through a metamorphosis and became the party of the Sinhalese, and Mr. Mettananda has to be identified as the "father of fifty six".

All the non national forces spearheaded by the Lake House of Mr. Esmond Wickremesinghe, father of Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, turned against the "fifty six". The "editors" of both the English and the Sinhala newspapers published by the Lake House were mere paid servants of Mr. Esmond Wickremesinghe, and of course there were the "journalists" of the "calibre" of Collette who prostituted journalism on behalf of his masters in the colonial world. These agents of non national forces clearly understood what "fifty six" was and they knew it was the way that the Sinhalese who had been deprived of their leaders by the British, fought against colonialism. The intellectual and spiritual leaders, as well as the political leaders of "fifty six" were attacked by the non national forces and the "high standard journalism" of the Lake House that had portrayed Mr. Mettananda as a monkey, came to its own in the process.

However, after the formation of the "ape anduwa" the non national forces which knew how to manipulate, began to reverse the process. Mr. Philip Gunawardane was expelled from the cabinet, and soon after Mr. Bandaranaike was shot dead. The image of Bandaranaike became more important than the Bandaranaike policies or the policies of "fifty six". The movement was substituted by a personality and the SLFP gradually became the party of the Bandaranaiques and not of the children of "fifty six". Sixteen years after I gave the first Bandaranaike Memorial Lecture on the topic "Panashaye Daruwo" the term has come of age. It is not without nostalgia I remember the day Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse as the chairman of the Bandaranaike Memorial Committee invited me to deliver that first ever Bandaranaike Memorial Lecture.

While remembering Mr. and Mrs. Bandaranaike for all the services that they had rendered to the country, we have to remember that it is not the family name that matters but the policies. We have to identify the struggle against colonialism that was the theme

of "fifty six", and realise that so much has to be done in order to gain complete independence from colonialism. It has fell on Mr. Rajapakse to give leadership to the movement, fifty years after fifty six , and he should concentrate on the theme rather on the names. Mr. Anura Bandaranaike may keep on sending messages from abroad for written assurances. If I were Mr. Rajapakse I would have sent him a message requesting Mr. Bandaranaike to request in writing, a written assurance on making him the Minister of Foreign Affairs.