

Thondaman tough talk annoys PA MPs

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Ceylon Workers Congress Leader and PA Minister Thondaman celebrated his 83rd birthday and flexed his muscles making statements like: he nor his party would yield to any powerful political party in power. This statement of Thondaman has annoyed many government MPs. Several Cabinet Ministers are unhappy over the conduct of Thondaman. They claim that Thondaman openly issues statements much to the embarrassment of the President and her government. Despite protests from government quarters they say that Thondaman still appears to be the unofficial spokesman for the LTTE.

The CWC hosted Thondaman for a dinner on Wednesday night at Hotel Taj Samudra to mark his 83rd birthday. Among those present were Opposition and UNP Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, Minister M. H. M. Ashraff and Acting Colombo Mayor K. Ganeshalingam.

In his address Thondaman commended President Chandrika Kumaratunga for courageously putting forward a reasonable devolution

package but, said that it was of no use as the President herself had prevented it from reaching the LTTE. He said that without the co-operation of the LTTE, no package would yield results. This statement of Thondaman is seen by government ministers and Parliamentarians as the voice of the Tigers. One Minister told this correspondent that Thondaman seeks to comment and criticise the President at the same time and questioned the right Thondaman has to violate Cabinet collective responsibility.

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe in his speech recalled the association of Thondaman with the UNP government's and praised him as a democratic minded leader in the annals of Sri Lankan politics. Minister Ashraff was full of praise for Thondaman. Ganeshalingam stressed that if the country is to return to peace Ranil, Thondaman and Ashraff should work together. Ganeshalingam a UNP still retains the position of Acting Mayor in the Colombo Municipality. He is much accused by UNPers for favouring the Peoples Alliance government in the Municipal business of the Council.

Last Tuesday Thondaman opened his new party office and boldly stated that he nor his party would yield to any powerful political party in power. This occasion was attended by Minister S. B. Dissanayake attired in a 'verti', Minister Richard Pathirana and Speaker K. B. Ratnayake. They all spoke in Tamil. The same night Thondaman was hosted to another dinner at Hotel Inter-Continental by the CWC. Parliamentarians from the UNP and the government were invited.

Ministers Dharmasiri Senanayake and Mahinda Rajapakse were present. Among the others were D. P. Wickremasinghe, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, Douglas Devananda, S. Sidharthan, Anura Bandaranaike, Rajitha Senaratne, Azwer, Harold Herat and Dr. Karunasena Kodituwakku. The party went on well with some PA Parliamentarians taking the floor to dance. Rajitha and Jeyaraj were seated in one table. Rajitha asked Jeyaraj why he cannot join in the dance.

'If I dance, it will appear in the Press', Jeyaraj quipped. The party went on till midnight and one by one wished Thondaman long life and dispersed.

The Galle Port Development Tender award was in choppy seas at the last cabinet meeting. Industrial Minister C. V. Gooneratne was very critical of the manner in which it was awarded to a firm backed by a VVIP in this government. Minister Gooneratne in the then opposition was the shadow minister of Trade and Shipping. He was eager to have that portfolio from his government but, President Kumaratunga decided to give it to Ashraff who extended his support to form the PA government in the present hung Parliament. Mr. Gooneratne was of the views that tender procedures had been violated in awarding this massive tender. Minister Ashraff argued that the tender was awarded in compliance with tender procedures.

Minister Gooneratne pointed out that the company which got it was initially rejected by Ministry Secretary M. N. Junaid. The two ministers clashed and Gooneratne known for his fiery attitude did not give up. Ashraff lost his cool and got up to leave the cabinet room. At this point President Kumaratunga intervened to settle the matter. Mr. Gooneratne still maintains the position that the ten-

der award has violated procedures.

The UNP led by Ranil Wickremasinghe has now decided on the venue to host a lunch to its former leader, President J. R. Jayewardene. The venue is the Hilton Hotel. The lunch will be on September 18, the day after former President celebrates his 89th birthday. All UNP Parliamentarians and Chief Ministers will attend this function. President and Madam Jayewardene will be received by Mr. Wickremasinghe on his arrival at the venue and Mr. Wickremasinghe will introduce the former President to all his Parliamentarians as there are new faces that the former President had not seen. This function is viewed by many UNPers as a move to have the grand old man as an Advisor to the party as Ranil had already launched a re-organisation drive to revive the party.

The government's decision to re-shuffle ministry secretaries is seen as a feature to have Finance Secretary A. S. Jayawardene shifted to another place. The re-shuffle got under way last Friday with Posts and Telecommunication Minister Mangala

Samaraweera moving out his Secretary Charlie Jayawardena. Finance Secretary A. S. Jayawardena is being accused of mishandling the Hilton Hotel settlement agreement which embarrassed the government. The matter was raised in Parliament by UNP's Mahinda Samarasinghe. Mr. Samarasinghe pursued the issue further by asking again why the government was not removing A. S. Jayawardene and Nihal Sri Amarasekera. The government wanted two weeks time to answer as Justice Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris was out of the country. This question will be answered when Parliament meets this week.

DUNLF

The Democratic United National Lalith Front was registered as a new political party with the Commissioner of Elections last Friday. The party led by Srimani Athulathmudali got the Swan as its symbol. The Elections Commissioner overruled the objections raised by the other DUNLF. Meanwhile, Ediriweera Premaratne who defected from the Lalith Front and joined the SLFP has been served a letter expelling him from the Lalith Front. The DUNLF has also

written to PA General Secretary D. M. Jayaratne to take necessary action to ensure Premaratne is expelled from Parliament as the Lalith Front maintains that he is no more their member and according to the agreement between the PA and the DUNLF, Premaratne cannot any more function as an MP.

Meanwhile the UNP has decided to challenge the Land Development (Amendment) Bill and the Vocational Training Authority Bill which were passed in Parliament recently. The two motions will be moved by A. C. S. Hameed and Ranil Wickremasinghe in Parliament. These two motions have been already listed for debate in the Order Paper.

Ranil Wickremasinghe last week urged his youth organisations to be more active as a survey conducted by the party has shown that these organisations were weak. In a bid to revamp them Mr. Wickremasinghe has undertaken a districtwise tour to meet youth leaders personally to give instructions. He was at Matara last Friday and is due in Eheliyagoda in the Ratnapura District today.