

UNP TO PLAY LTTE CARD

In the topsy turvy week that was, Ms Srima Dissanayake who had preferred to be in the shadow of her husband who had been at the forefront of politics since 1970, became UNP's Presidential candidate. Most political analysts at the time of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake's tragic death viewed Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga as the edge in the Presidential race. Mr. Dissanayake who fought his way to become Presidential candidate only five weeks before his death was rallying his forces and attempting to heal rifts within the party.

The question now being asked is: What difference would Ms Srima Dissanayake make? It is open knowledge that Gamini Dissanayake loyalists such as Wickremesinghe, Rohan Pethiyagoda soon after his death were mapping out a strategy to make Srima Dissanayake the candidate whereas former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would have been the obvious choice. When the UNP executive committee met at Siri Kotha on October 25th with President D. B. Wijetunga in the chair, a nomination committee was appointed with the objective of making the choice unanimous and Mrs Srima Dissanayake's name had been proposed as the party candidate. This

met with strong opposition from some senior UNPers such as Mr Nanda Mathew who wanted Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe as the candidate. Among those backing Ms Dissanayake were Messrs M. H. Mohamed, Susil Moonesinghe, Festus Perera and Wiljeyapala Mendis. Mr Mathew had objected saying that some members of the nomination committee were canvassing on behalf of Ms Dissanayake. Among the party stalwarts who had remained neutral were Messrs Shau Hameed and Mr K. N. Choksy.

The pro Dissanayake group were seated in a separate room as negotiations for the candidature were going on and finally a compromise was arrived at. Ms Srima Dissanayake was to be the party candidate while Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe was to be appointed deputy leader of the party with effect from October 25. When President Wijetunga relinquishes office on November 10, he will be made the party leader. Mr Dham Wimalasena who succeeded Mr Gamini Wijesekera as General Secretary following the latter's death would relinquish his post of General Secretary in favour of pro-Ranil, Gamini Athukorale. Mr. Wickremesinghe it is understood had even on Monday been reluctant to be the UNP candidate but by Tuesday he

had made his mind to enter the fray. Sources say that he is not much concerned about his defeat because he had been nominated as party leader and his supporter Gamini Athukorale made the party general secretary. Thus, he had got control of the party machinery and in the event of defeat of the UNP he would have time to re-organise the party which had suffered much since Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa became the leader.

But what would happen in the event

remesinghe will stick by the party and in public support the candidature of Ms Dissanayake but it is obvious that there is a big rift in the party which would be disadvantageous to Ms Dissanayake's chances.

On the positive side Ms Dissanayake has the "sympathy vote" and going by the large crowds that had been flocking to the funeral she could be assured of such a vote.

Wrong foot

Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga has, in cricketing parlance,

not definitely established that the LTTE was behind the massacre. Sources say that Lake House journalists had received specific instructions not to state that the LTTE was behind the massacre. But the widespread belief, even among her cabinet colleagues, was that the LTTE had done it. The fact that she had to call off — or postpone negotiations — indicated that the public finger was being pointed at the LTTE.

The big question is whether all this is going to affect the slender majority of the PA — its 48.94 percent of the total vote to UNP's 44.04 percent.

According to informed sources, Ms Srima Dissanayake today (Sunday) after the funeral obsequies are over will hold a press conference where she will play the LTTE card. Sources say the UNP's slogan for the Presidential elections will be simple: If you endorse the action of the LTTE at Grandpass then vote for the PA. If you are against it vote for the UNP.

With eleven days to go for the elections this new factor which undoubtedly will be played with vigour by the UNP will have to be countered by the PA. The PA as stated earlier still does not concede that the Grandpass bombing was the work of the LTTE. With the election campaigns mainly confined to TV and radio whether this



Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunge



Mrs. Srima Dissanayake

Island politics

by Suminda

Ms Dissanayake wins the Presidential election? Analysts say that Mr. Wickremesinghe would then find it hard to keep control of the party.

Opposition to Mr. Wickremesinghe was apparent when the executive committee met at Siri Kotha. Busloads of Gamini's supporters had arrived at the party headquarters shouting slogans demanding the election of Ms Dissanayake as the candidate. Mr. Wickremesinghe's car too had been attacked which made him lodge an entry at the Mirihana police.

Political analysts say that Mr. Wick-

been caught on the wrong foot with this assassination. She had bravely gone ahead with negotiations with the LTTE knowing well that she may antagonise the Sinhala hardliners. Negotiations without calling for the surrender of arms or even a ceasefire came in for sharp criticism among Sinhala hardliners as well as the armed forces. The massacre at Grandpass where Gamini Dissanayake, General Secretary Gamini Wijesekera, former Minister Weerasinghe Mallimarachchi and other UNP stalwarts were killed was a stunning blow against her.

Ms Kumaratunga's position was that it was

new LTTE card would work is to be seen. On the other hand the theory put forward by many intellectuals that the electorate had rejected communalism as seen in the last parliamentary elections where both Tamil and Sinhalese candidates who played the communal card were defeated, too will be tested.

Lake House

Old habits die hard particularly in the house by the Lake when it comes to election time. Prime Minister Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga has shown a genuine desire to liberalise the state controlled media — Lake House, TV and radio. But her commissars apparently can't forget old habits and even the so called new

liberal press advisors want to dictate to journalists.

Sources say that the old China Wing gang which ran Lake House prior to the disastrous 1970 defeat is now back again in position and are bringing in the old boys and girls who were victimised by the UNP.

The party line is being pursued and last week as stated earlier journalists were told not to mention that the LTTE was responsible for the Grandpass blast. Now comes the news that another set of media consultants had taken upon themselves to monitor the Lake House papers, proof pages have to be sent to them. One liberal neophyte in press matters last week had ordered the provincial copies of Lake House newspapers not to be distributed because they did not carry the press conference given by the

Prime Minister on Thursday in Friday's provincial editions. Little had he known that the deadlines for the provincial editions could not have permitted taking in the press conference held on Thursday evening. Thousands of copies were held back and the City Edition had to be distributed in the provinces delaying the distribution of the papers by hours. Neither Ms Kumaratunga nor Information Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake had been aware of this and orders have come to stop interference. Meanwhile reports say that an actor had taken upon himself to thrust his views and opinions to professionals in state owned TV.

The Old Sinhala adage of the dogs in the Walauwa being more fierce than the 'Hamu' holds water even in this age of liberalism