

Interview-Ceylon Today

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Attanayake still in the unip ?

What are you up to these days?

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BY LANKESH GOONARATHE

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? Do you regret the decision you made during the Presidential Election?

A. I made such a decision as a result of a conflict between members of the UNP and me when I was part of the UNP. I am not a member of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Even though I supported former President Mahinda Rajapaksa during the Presidential Election I did not accept the membership of the SLFP.

I still believe that I had to take a decision to leave the UNP because of the mental torture I faced when I was part of the UNP.

I was part of the UNP for 35 consecutive years and I am disappointed because the commitment I showed when I was in the UNP was wasted and not appreciated.

?You are veteran politician and an astute one, were you not able to accurately assess the political environment back then?

A. Actually I did not think about anything when I made this decision. When I was in the UNP I worked hard. I did not carry out an investigation of the political environment at the time when I made this decision.

This was a sudden decision I had to take as a result of the mental torture I had to undergo at the hands of several members of the UNP, as I mentioned before.

?Did you take the decision to leave the UNP because you were offered political benefits in return?

A. They accused many politicians who crossed over to the SLFP of having crossed over for political gain. When Dayasiri Jayasekara, Lakshman Seniviratne, Karu Jayasuriya and Rajitha Senaratne crossed over they too were accused in a similar manner.

When the former treasurer of the SLFP S.B. Nawinna crossed over to the UNP he also could have been accused for crossing over to gain ministerial portfolios and other benefits.

It is simple these are accusations from people who like to sling mud at others.

I can tell only one thing. I did not crossover to gain political or personal benefits. In the letter I sent to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in January 2014, I have elaborated on why I chose to cross over to the SLFP.

?You were once a major player in the political arena but today you don't even seem to be part of the audience in the gallery?

A. We all have to face these kinds of situations. My situation is no different from that of several individuals who have gone through the same fate. Not only politicians, even businessmen and other people too have to face these situations.

In the past former President J.R. Jayewardene, Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali also faced similar situations.

?Do you not think that if you had stuck on to the UNP, today you could have handled a major ministerial portfolio and had a successful political career?

A. Yes, I do think that if I was in the UNP, I would have been more successful as a politician but there is no point to speaking about being in the UNP because that is the past.

Now I should concentrate on my political future.

?What is your rightful

political party?

A. To be honest, I am still a member of the UNP because the current President Maithripala Sirisena also crossed over from the SLFP as the common candidate but he is a part of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).

Not only President Sirisena, but there are many more who did the same. One thing I made very clear to former President Mahinda Rajapaksa when I crossed over was that I cannot accept the membership of the SLFP.

Now I am a person without a political party.

?Have you received an invitation to rejoin the UNP?

A. I have not got any invitation from the senior party members as of yet but some members of the UNP have requested that I rejoin the Party.

I always communicate with the UNP members from provincial councillors to other members of the Party. It is an old habit of mine.

?When former President Rajapaksa needed support you were there. But when you are facing problems of your own today, you have nobody to come to your aid?

A. That is extremely correct. I faced the largest injustice after the Presidential election. I supported Rajapaksa at the Presidential election as well as at the General Election but while I was supporting Rajapaksa the current members of the SLFP made me face a major injustice.

The people of Kandy knew that even if I was to contest from the UNP or SLFP or any other party at the general election, I would have definitely emerged victorious.

I was told that I would be appointed to Parliament through the National List of the SLFP by former President Rajapaksa and other leaders of the SLFP.

Having risked my political career to support Rajapaksa, it was their responsibility to protect me but they failed to do so, I am extremely disappointed with my support for Rajapaksa.

?Why didn't you attend the rally of the Joint Opposition held at Viharamahadevi Park?

A. I am extremely disappointed with politics at the moment. I did my service when I was in the UNP and when the Party was in Opposition for 20 years. I had to keep the Party stable as well as protect the leader of the Party.

From the time Wickremesinghe announced that he would be the common candidate in 2015, I took steps to ensure his success in that direction. Firstly, I was able to bring back Sajith Premadasa who has been separated from the Party and make him Deputy Leader of the Party and to unite Premadasa and Wickremesinghe. Secondly, I built a mechanism to get support from the people at the grassroots.

I believe that these two factors were the main reasons why the UNP emerged victorious at the Presidential election as well as in the General election.

But the individuals who newly joined the UNP have no idea of this.

?A number of politicians bring in their children into politics to continue their political legacy. Will you do the same with your children?

A. None of my children are interested in Sri Lankan politics because they have seen politics in Sri Lanka through me. I did politics permanently not temporarily.

I did not have much time to take care of my children or spend time with my children because I was involved in politics permanently.

Because of that my children have rejected politics altogether.

?What is your opinion on the Facebook fan page called 'The Sons-in-Law's Association for Tissa Attanayake's Daughter'?

A. I actually consider that Facebook fan page as a positive thing because when I was arrested, they informed the social media of the injustice I had faced.

My daughter was mainly involved in the Sons-in-Law's fan page on Facebook.

To be honest that fan page was Sri Lanka's first ever fan page to become popular so quickly, it got 21,000 likes within 72 hours.

I do not take the Sons-in-Law's page as a joke or a page which criticizes me. Lastly, at the time I was arrested, the youngsters and middle age individuals who were involved in the fan page gave me support and strength needed to face the injustice I suffered.

?What have you decided in terms of your political future?

A. I have not decided to take any sides at this moment I am not taking any side and I am simply observing what is going on. The Yahapalanaya (good governance) Manifesto however has many flaws.

People are not getting what they were promised. People wanted to completely abolish the Executive Presidency but it was not.

But the government is new and in future they will learn better and make good political decisions.

As for myself, I have planned on taking a few big steps to continue with my political career, in the future.