

# CHANDRIKA CLEARS FIRST HURDLE

Chandrika Kumaranatunga's People's Alliance cleared the first hurdle last Thursday when the government nominee the gentle giant from Anuradhapura Mr. K. B. Ratnayake was elected Speaker with 127 members of the 225 member parliament voting for him as against the Opposition candidate Mr. Anura Bandaranaike who polled the UNP vote of 93. The PA had been able to increase its one vote majority in parliament by 14 votes.

— had overcome the opposition and pledged his full support to the PA. The meeting with Mr. Siddharthan and Mrs. Kumaranatunga had been brought about by a Colombo based international journalist and the journalist of a tabloid paper. According to PA sources Mr. Siddharthan had told the PA leader that they would not be making any major political demands such as constitutional changes but would request for



Rs. 8 million to three and later auction them. The ministers of her cabinet would go in for much more modest vehicles she had ruled. Meanwhile PA sources say that they have been intrigued by the discovery of a suite of air conditioned rooms with double beds-attached to the offices of a top UNP official. State television may be called in to show the public these suite of rooms which has intrigued the PA they say.

## Indian Special Envoy

Indian Prime Minister's Special Envoy Mr. A. N. Varma, who called on Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaranatunga at Temple Trees had conveyed to her that the Indian Government was prepared to help the new government and would respond to requests for financial assistance, informed sources said. Political analysts however were speculating whether the visit of the special envoy was also related to pronouncements by the new government that they were open to talks with the LTTE. Since the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE, India has been most concerned about Colombo's contact with the LTTE. LTTE leader and his son called intelligence Chief Pottu Amman wanted for questioning by the Indian authorities for the murder of Rajiv Gandhi.

## Ranil — Chandrika talks

Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaranatunga and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe met and had talks which lasted over one hour the evening before Mrs. Kumaranatunga was sworn in as Prime Minister, well informed sources said.

Apparently this came about because of the support extended to it by the minority Tamil parties — the DPLF, EPDP and the TULF.

Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunga's approach to the Tamil problem in contrast to that of President D. B. Wijetunga's stance had swung these votes in favour of the PA. The DPLF which is the political wing of PLOT and the EPDP it should be kept in mind were supporters of the UNP government particularly during the Premadasa presidency which armed these groups to fight alongside government forces. They continued to do so after Mr. Wijetunga became incumbent president. Mrs. Kumaranatunga at her first press conference reiterated her commitment to solving the ethnic problem and this would undoubtedly have enabled the Tamil parties to overcome resistance within their groups to support the PA.

There had been some reluctance particularly within the DPLF to extend its support but its DPLF leader Mr. Dharmalingam Siddharthan — son of former popular TULF front liner Mr. V. Dharmalingam who was assassinated by the LTTE

protection to farmers in the Wann and fishermen in the North. The DPLF had been offered a deputy ministership in the government but this had been turned down sources said. The brokerage for the EPDP support for the PA had been brought about by the tabloid journalist, sources said. Douglas Devananda too had extended his unqualified support. However the EPDP wanted to play its role of providing armed support to the government forces operating against the LTTE.

## Thondaman

The most encouraging factor for the PA has been the somersault of the CWC and its leader Mr. Saumyamoorthis Thondaman. Mr. Thondaman had been no lover of the SLEP the main constituent party of the PA. In 1965 he was an appointed MP of the SLEP government but he voted against it in the Press Bill bringing down the government by one vote. Since then he has been a very strong ally of the UNP and was largely responsible for the UNP's clean sweep of the hill country — the CWC having con-

tested the last elections under the colours of the UNP.

Mr. Thondaman, however maintains that the CWC belongs to no political party and is independent. "My interests are for my people. We are a trade union and I will act according to the interests of our people" is his stand.

Mr. Thondaman, sources said has wanted to join the PA government but certain snags in the memorandum of understanding he signed with President Wijetunga prior to the parliamentary elections would prevent such an alliance. He is likely to extend his support to the PA from the ranks of the Opposition.

Sources say that despite Mr. Thondaman

still having enough clout to swing the electorates in the hill country for the party he backs, his clout is overestimated. In the 1989 elections the CWC made a very poor showing and two candidates he canvassed for in the Nuwara Eliya District lost. At the recent elections his grandson considered heir to the CWC leadership came a third in the Nuwara Eliya district. Mr. Thondaman's arch rival the youthful Mr. Chandrasekera who had been taken into custody by the UNP government under the Prevention of Terrorism Act had won as an independent. Mr. Chandrasekera is a challenge to the aging patriarch of the plantations and if he

could demonstrate to the plantation workers that he could get things done Mr. Thondaman would lose the hold he has had for so long. This is the prime reason for his somersault, observers say. But it should be noted that Mr. Thondaman makes no bones that his support would be on a quid-pro-quo basis, and his demands are great.

## Austerity

In a demonstration of PA's austerity as against the overt affluence of the UNP, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunga has decided to stage a public exhibition of the UNP top notchers' official BMWs, Volvos, Mercedes Benz whose prices range from around

not necessary and the Government group had gone along with him. President Wijetunga, when the election ended reimposed the emergency under the powers vested in him. However such an emergency declared by the President has to be approved by Parliament within a period of ten days. With the government deciding not to go ahead with the emergency it would lapse on August 27.

While the first test of strength of the PA government was the election of the Speaker, the tussle for the post of the Leader of the Opposition between old Royalist Ranil Wickremesinghe and old Trinitian Gamage Disanayake which a wag termed as

## Emergency

The emergency is likely to end on August 27 with the government deciding not to continue with it. At a meeting of the government group held on Tuesday at Temple Trees presided over by Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunga a veteran Samasamajist parliamentarian Mr. Bernard Soysa had strongly argued that the continuation with the emergency was

the first Leg of the Brady Shield also generated much interest.

Trinity won by a mere three points. Mr. Disanayake managed it by getting the support of some of the National List sources said.

The question now arises on who would be the UNP's candidate for the scheduled Presidential election which has to be held before December. President Wijetunga has already been selected by the party as Presidential candidate and Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike the leader of the PA as their candidate. But some say that both may bow out. If Mrs. Bandaranaike declines — her health will not permit her according to SLEP insiders — daughter Chandrika would be the obvious choice. But the UNP's Premier Stakes are not yet over. Mr. Disanayake winning the contest for the post of Leader of the Opposition as the wag said was only the first leg of the Brady Shield and there is a second leg. The party constitution UNP sources say calls for the election of the presidential candidate by the Central Committee.

Meanwhile there is the question whether the presidential election would be held. The Peoples Alliance is pledged to abolish the presidential system of government while the UNP though it said just before the elections that it would retain the system now seems to be willing or at least a section of the UNP is willing to abolish it. Prof. L. Peiris at a press conference held last week has said that the PA if it got enough support — the required two third majority in parliament — would abolish it. Political analysts however say that would not be in favour of the PA to away with the presidential form of government just now. The PA by itself is only a wafer thin majority and one way it could consolidate power is to win the presidential election. With the tremendous powers vested in the president the PA would be able to implement much of its promises and then go for another parliamentary election. The PA does abolish the Presidential system then it would have to govern with the support of the minority Tamil parties. It is not a happy position to be in. Analysts point out the UNP on the other hand does not have much of a chance of winning the Presidential elections if it is held as scheduled with the swing against them. Thus the abolition of the presidency they say will be in position to keep the PA on tenterhooks and attempt to topple the government at the moment there is a breakdown in relations with the PA's new supporters.

# Island politics

by Suminda