

National List Newcomers

Career banker **Eran Wickramaratne** is one among the nine individuals nominated by the United National Party (UNP) for the seventh Parliament on the national list. Till recently, the 52-year-old Wickramaratne was CEO of the National Development Bank (NDB), a job he enjoyed very much, but adds he had "always been interested in larger issues concerning the country."



Since his post-graduation in economics from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, three decades ago, Wickramaratne has been working on enhancing banking infrastructure in this country.

While he may have been ideologically close to the UNP for many years, his association with the party became obvious in 2001 during UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's second premiership. Wickramaratne was an advisor to the then government on the application of information technology (IT) for development. "We launched the electronic governance programme for the country then. The idea was to create jobs in new technology sectors and build the IT communications infrastructure," Wickramaratne says. Bridging this country's digital divide has been of interest to him. "I worked hard to get global brands such as Microsoft to invest in this country a few years ago," he adds.

Although Wickramaratne by his own admission had "assisted the UNP leadership in organisational and management matters related to the party," he could still be considered a novice in parliamentary politics since he never contested elections. He had been a backroom boy in the UNP. But now he will be sharing Opposition space with his elected colleagues in Parliament. "I hope to contribute to (making) sensible legislation for

this country and participate in policy debates," he said. When the Sunday Times asked him how he would don the role of an MP he answered "we have the responsibility of holding the executive arm of the government accountable." Accountability on how public finances are utilised would be a key issue for him.

The UNP's national list released a few days ago had surprised many even from within the party.

"A lot of people may know you but it takes time for people to know what you stand for," says Wickramaratne when asked whether his lack of experience in electoral politics would impede his growth in the party. While Wickramaratne knows many senior UNP members and career politicians have been left out of the national list, he does not think this would spur tensions within UNP ranks. According to him, political parties should continue with the tradition of offering seats through the national list to people from non-political backgrounds.

While hailing the Lankan economy gets the post-war policy focus it deserves, Wickramaratne does not share the perception that the UNP should alone be blamed for its disastrous performance at the recent general elections. "You can't look at the UNP in isolation. It is the current political situation of the country after 30 years of conflict," he says while admitting that there has been a consolidation of "gratitude votes" in favour of the ruling party.

He was coy to mention his connection with the Assembly of God (AOG) Church in Sri Lanka playing down what he merely called was his "association" with it. He could not be drawn into elaborating on his role in its activities.

Tiran Alles has been nominated to Parliament on the national list by the Democratic National Alliance (DNA). Although the 50-year-old businessman does not have any previous experience in active politics, he had been associated with the campaigns of the JVP during last January's presidential elections. Educated at Royal College and Ananda College in Colombo, Alles had earlier served as Chairperson of the Airports and Aviation Services.



"During the Presidential elections I was involved in politics. I got involved with the Presidential election campaign. Thereafter automatically with the removal of Mangala Samaraweera as Minister, I was virtually pushed into politics," Alles told the Sunday Times when asked about his initiation in politics.

According to him, creation of the Opposition coalition the United National Front (UNF) and General (retired) Sarath Fonseka's entry in the fray during the last Presidential elections drew him further into politics. "Personally, I thought while General Fonseka was directly involved in politics, it would have been difficult for me to be in a different party. It was not correct, I thought it was wrong to go and do politics with a different party. Therefore, I thought I should go with the DNA. That's why I did it," he said when asked as to why he broke ranks with Samaraweera.

During Samaraweera's tenure as Telecommunications Minister a few years ago, Alles had been embroiled in a controversy over allegedly making money by securing exclusive rights for the sale of cellular telephones in the erstwhile LTTE-controlled areas. "I started my business in Jaffna in 2002. I started business during the ceasefire agreement. But it was not only me, even the big companies including all the blue chip companies started the business," he said when asked about the controversy, elaborating no further on the subject.

"I was neither a fund raiser for the DNA or the JVP, nor was I a campaign manager during the elections," Alles said when probed about whether he had offered financial support to the DNA-JVP combine during the recent Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

The new MP denied using any financial muscle to enter Parliament and instead said: "This is the first time I entered Parliament, I have not contested any election previously, not even for a local council or a provincial council but I was on the national list of the DNA and got into Parliament."

Finally, when asked if he agreed with the JVP economic policy that the state must control the "commanding heights of the economy," Alles said: "That's not exactly their policy. You will have to check with them."

Harsha De Silva hitherto was known as the man who had helped win the former Army Commander General (retired) Sarath Fonseka's election manifesto prior to the high profile presidential election of January 26. De Silva is an economist whose doctoral thesis in the early 90s from the University of Missouri in the US had dealt with a case study of Sri Lanka in the era of economic liberalisation.

But writing General Fonseka's manifesto would have been a tougher venture because the document had to reflect a middle path between two contradictory economic policies of the main protagonists – the relatively liberal UNP and the ultra-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

Prior to his nomination to Parliament this week from the UNP's national list, De Silva, 45, was careful not to be identified as being close to the party. "I was not a card holder of the UNP. It was just that my views were very close to those of the UNP," he says.

De Silva has been a chief economist for the Development Finance Corporation of Ceylon

(DFCC) and had co-founded a market research organisation earlier in the decade which was later sold to the Nielsen Company. Taking technology to villages, he says, has been one of his initiatives in recent times. "A lot of people in Sri Lanka's agricultural sector are poor. They need technological tools to increase efficiencies," De Silva says. He added as part of a new project in Dambulla, he has been able to help people monitor the prices of vegetables through cellular telephones. When the Sunday Times asked him as to why he opted to join politics given his engagements otherwise, his response was, "I was happy with whatever I was doing but I also realised that there is only so much you can do."

Now, with a seat in Parliament, De Silva aspires to influence policy making. As a strong votary of economic reforms he seems to think that protectionism with regard to the economy that may have been necessary during the war should now be set aside. The need for liberalisation and better fiscal management, according to him,



were urgent. "You cannot continue to have a 10 per cent budget deficit," he says referring to the 824 billion rupees interest and capital debt payment figure as against revenue earnings of 702 billion rupees in 2009. "I want to challenge people who are always saying things without evidence or data," he says hinting at his strategy for Parliamentary debates.

Apart from the economy, De Silva says, his attention would be focused on restructuring public institutions. "For democracy to flourish, we need to ensure that institutions work well."

When asked if his entry into Parliament had become a contentious issue for many within the UNP who had been hopeful of berths in the national list, he says, "The national list has traditionally been for people from non-political, under-represented groups. It is only in the last few years that this had become a route for backdoor entry into Parliament for those who lost at the polls."

Malani Fonseka - In a recent survey on actors in Asia, the American TV network CNN hailed Malani Fonseka as one of the continent's Top 25.

Educated at Gurukula Vidyalaya, Kelaniya and a career spanning 40 years in as many as 150 films, she is Sri Lanka's queen of the silver screen. This week, Malani was nominated to Parliament from the national list by the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). "I have been in the film field for over 40 years. I think I have reached the peak in that field. As a citizen I think I can do a better service. That's why I entered politics," she said when asked about her entering the political theatre. "I was invited earlier to enter into politics but I did not want to enter politics then," she told the Sunday Times.

According to her, Sri Lanka is a free country where she now is ready to take on "any responsibility and carry out any duty." "It depends on the responsibility given to me," she said adding that apart from the "field of arts," she would be willing to "take other responsibilities." One of

Malini's colleagues from the film world - Geetha Kumarasinghe - had contested the parliamentary elections but was defeated. On this subject, Malini's response was: "As an artiste if she came to politics it would have been better but it is difficult to assess the public. The people have decided on that and we cannot go beyond it we have to accept the verdict."

UNP parliamentarian from Gampaha and small screen actress Upeksha Swarnamali who made it to Parliament with a substantial number of preferential votes would be sharing the Parliamentary forum along with Malani. Swarnamali often referred to as 'Paba' after her TV name became famous with just that one tele-drama series before being elected to the new Parliament. "Unlike Paba, I came on the National list. I would not like to comment on the public opinion and about electing her but it is good if she can get more experience in the field of arts, before entering Parliament. I wish also to say



whether you contest or come on the National list it is obvious the parties put forward their best choice and it is the responsibility of those parties. I cannot assess the party decisions. It is up to them," Malani said when asked if the public would be really concerned about who is elected to Parliament.

Ronald Reagan was an actor before he became the President of the US. The Sunday Times asked Malani, "Do you think an actor will become the President of Sri Lanka someday" (or are you saying that Mahinda Rajapaksa is an actor because he acted in some film)? "It does not matter from which profession you come from. What matters is how you serve the people. You can be an engineer, a doctor or from any other profession, but as a politician you should serve the people. So in Sri Lanka too any person from any profession can rise to the top," she said.

Professor Rajiva Wijesingha nominated from the UPFA as one of its national list members is distinguished for his political analysis. An academic by profession he was senior Professor of Languages at the University of Sabaragamuwa. In 2007 he was Secretary General of the Secretariat for Co-ordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP). Professor Wijesingha was also Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights. He resigned from the Ministry, as he was a candidate on the National List of the United People's Freedom.

Speaking on his experiences in parliament where his father had been Secretary General for many years and now entering as an MP, "it's quite sentimental. For instance, when Mr. Chamal Rajapaksa was elected Speaker my mind went back to the first time I went there. Maybe it was the effect of the shawl. His father was Deputy Speaker at the time. There were some memories, seeing all those things. But of course it's very different. I have a sentimental affection for the old parliament and I think this building is a bit impersonal."

When we asked him if he was entering parliament as a member of the Liberal Party he said, "I'm a member of the UPFA National List. But of course this sprang up because the Liberal Party asked for some sort of understanding with the government." On his role in parliament Professor Wijesingha said "I hope to be particularly involved in constitutional reforms that are planned. One would be able to, in a sense, give ideas."

Speaking of the changes he would like to see Professor Wijesingha said there were three very important areas: Firstly electoral reform – a system that is fair to the minorities. Secondly the need for the Second Chamber.

Thirdly the unity of the country to ensure that there's a sense of togetherness and all parties feel adequately represented.



Speaking on allegations raised by the NFF leader at a recent held press briefing he said "I think the crux of the press conference was the disappointment his party member wasn't appointed. That's understandable. I don't necessarily see that as criticism as me."

According to Professor Wijesingha the manage system was terrible. He said it was very tough on people, not very fair on any politician really he said. "That's why I think it's very important to have electoral reform."

Referring to an occasion where a Liberal Party MP refused to abide by a party decision to stand down and hand his seat over to Chanaka Amarathunga Wijesingha said "He refused to stand by his own promise. I think that's the really sad part. It was unfortunate because the SLMC had agreed to nominate Chanaka as a Liberal Party MP. But there was a lot of pressure. The SLMC subsequently said that it had been President Kumaratunga.

New faces in Parliament

MATALE

UPFA
Lakshman Perera
Attorney-at-law
Chairman Hingurana Distilleries and Lak FM
Served as Laggala Electorate organiser and organiser Matale district

UNP
Wasantha Aluvihare
Born 1962
Former Chairman of the Central Provincial Council
Studied at Trinity College, Kandy

BADULLA

UPFA
Udith Lokubandara
Son of Former Speaker W. J. M. Lokubandara
SLFP Badulla District Organiser
Elected to parliament with 38,124 preferential votes
Read for a PhD in Marketing

Dr. Rohana Peshpakumara
A medical doctor by profession
Former Chairman of the Uva Provincial Council

Thenuka Vidanagama
Businessman
Hails from a political family
Faced an election for the first time

Chamika Buddhadasa
Born 1969
Businessman

Ajith Perera
Attorney-at-law
Chief Organiser Bandaragama
Elected to Western Provincial Council with 28,568 preferential votes
Elected to parliament with 48,588 preferential votes

UNP
Harin Fernando
Former member of the Uva Provincial Council
Elected to UPC on the UNP ticket with the highest preferential votes
Topped the UNP Badulla district preferential votes list at this year's General Elections

KALUTARA

UPFA
Vidura Wickramanayake
Son of former Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake
Horana SLFP Organiser
Elected to the Western Provincial Council on the UPFA ticket
Elected to parliament with 50,114 votes from the Kalutara district

UNP
Palitha Thewarapperuma
Matugama Organiser
Elected to parliament from the Kalutara district with 51,153 votes

Ajith Perera
Attorney-at-law
Chief Organiser Bandaragama
Elected to Western Provincial Council with 28,568 preferential votes
Elected to parliament with 48,588 preferential votes

MATARA

UPFA
Sanath Jayasuriya
Born 1969
Former Captain of the Sri Lanka cricket team
Holder of multiple world records
First time in politics
Topped the UPFA Matara district preferential votes list with 74352 votes to his name

Hemal Gunasekara
Former member of the Southern Provincial Council
Elected to parliament with 63,323 preferential votes
Organiser for Kamburipitya

Wijaya Dahanayaka
Former Deputy Chairman of the SPC
Elected to parliament with 44,463 preferential votes

UNP
Buddhika Pathirana
Media personality and former Leader of the Opposition SPC
Elected to SPC in 2009 where he topped the UNP preferential vote list with 57,802 votes
Enters parliament this year with 62,499 preferential votes – the highest in the UNP list

BATTICALOA

ITAK
S. Logeswaran
Elected to parliament from the ITAK ticket with 20,569 preferential votes

Compiled by Himel Kotelawala with the assistance of Anton Cruz in Batticaloa and Palitha Ariyawansa in Badulla

The full National List

- UPFA**
- Ratnasiri Wickramanayake
 - D. M. Jayaratne
 - Dalila Alahapperuma
 - Prof. G. L. Peiris
 - D. E. W. Gunasekara
 - Tissa Vittharana
 - Geethanjana Gunawardena
 - Ven. Elawala Medhananda Thera
 - Muththu Swalingam
 - Achala Jagoda
 - Vinayagamorthi Muralidaran
 - J. R. P. Sooriyapperuma
 - Janaka Priyantha Bandara
 - Rajiva Wijesingha
 - A. H. M. Azwer
 - Malani Fonseka
 - Kamala Ranathunga
- UNP**
- Tissa Attanayake
 - Joseph Michael Perera
 - Eran Wickramaratne
 - Harsha de Silva
 - D. M. Swaminadan
 - R. Yoganjan
 - Anoma Gamage
 - Hassan Ali
 - Aslam Mohomad Saleem Mohomad
- DNA**
- Anura Kumara Dissanayake
 - Tiran Alles
- TNA**
- Mathiaperanam Abraham Sumanthiran