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UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED

A close-up portrait of Rohan Gunaratna, a man with dark hair and glasses, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie. The background is a plain, light grey.

"The Church Now Realizes There's No Conspiracy in the Easter Attack, But They've Gone Too Far to Retract": Rohan Gunaratna

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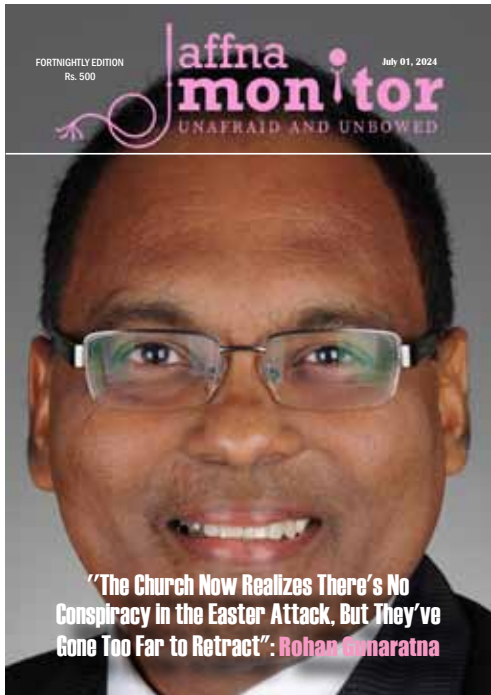
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Confronting Radicalization in Sri Lanka: A Multifaceted Approach



Five years have passed since the tragic Easter Sunday attacks, prompting an essential question: Are we any safer now? The recent arrest of four Sri Lankans by Gujarat's Anti-Terrorism Squad in May 2024 highlights ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of measures to combat community radicalization. To explore how the threat landscape has evolved and assess our current security status, We had an in-depth discussion with Professor Rohan Gunaratna, a leading expert on global security. His insights emphasize the urgent need for a nuanced and comprehensive approach to address the root causes of extremism, particularly among young Muslims.

Professor Gunaratna's analysis serves as a crucial guide for understanding the interplay of foreign ideologies, historical grievances, and socio-political dynamics that fuel radicalization. He traces the radicalization of a segment of Sri Lankan Muslims to the economic liberalization of 1977, which facilitated the infiltration of foreign ideologies from the Gulf and Pakistan. These ideologies supplanted the traditionally peaceful Sufi practices that characterized Sri Lankan Islam, creating a culture of exclusivism and puritanism. Over time, this shift prepared the ground for the adoption of radical views, which were further exacerbated by the emergence of ultra-Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist extremism. The expulsion of Muslims by the LTTE and subsequent massacres deepened the sense of alienation and resentment, driving some towards radical ideologies as a form of self-defense and identity assertion.

Professor Gunaratna emphasizes that combating terrorism requires more than tactical and operational measures; it necessitates addressing the ideological roots of extremism. This involves scrutinizing religious teachings, reforming madrasah syllabi, and monitoring online platforms that propagate hate.

Moreover, building a strong partnership with Muslim community leaders is essential. Religious and community leaders must play a proactive role in countering radicalization by promoting traditional forms of Islam that emphasize peace and coexistence. Additionally, fostering interfaith dialogue and community engagement programs is crucial for rebuilding trust and harmony among different religious groups.

Professor Gunaratna's recommendations are strategic. He suggests fully implementing the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Easter Sunday attacks, training clerics to engage with extremists in custody, establishing programs to enhance interfaith relations, and creating Harmony Committees and Clubs to encourage intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, he advocates for the establishment of a Joint Information Warfare Centre to monitor and counter radical ideologies and the involvement of influential Muslim leaders to promote a peaceful and inclusive form of Islam.

In addressing the persistent challenge of radicalization in Sri Lanka, education emerges as a pivotal strategy. Reforming the education system to incorporate robust programs on religious tolerance, critical thinking, and the history of coexistence among diverse communities can effectively immunize young minds against extremist ideologies. Equally crucial is economic empowerment, which offers alternative pathways for youth vulnerable to radical influences.

Moreover, the Sri Lankan government and the majority Sinhalese population must prevent chauvinistic elements from exacerbating the radicalization of Muslim youth. Recognizing their role as the majority, every Sinhalese citizen bears a responsibility to foster an

environment of inclusivity and reject divisive rhetoric that fuels extremism.

Reflecting on the lessons from the tragic events of 1983, where a handful of politically backed thugs instigated pogroms that led to widespread radicalization among the Tamil community, provides a critical historical perspective. This underscores the duty of every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, to actively oppose and counteract extremist elements within their own communities. As the majority, Sinhalese citizens, in particular, bear a significant responsibility to question and challenge chauvinistic elements and any atrocities committed in the name of their race. This commitment is essential for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka must strengthen its regional partnerships and cooperation with neighboring countries to enhance intelligence-sharing and bolster joint counter-terrorism efforts. Establishing a multi-agency counter-terrorism center and fostering collaborative security networks are critical to fortifying national resilience against terrorist threats.

By adopting a multifaceted approach that integrates education reform, economic empowerment, community engagement, and robust international cooperation, Sri Lanka can mitigate the risk of radicalization and foster a more secure and harmonious society. This comprehensive strategy, rooted in proactive measures and inclusive governance, is essential for safeguarding the future of all Sri Lankans amidst evolving security challenges.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

A Day of Diplomacy and Drama: Dr. Jaishankar Meets Sri Lankan Leaders and Witnesses ITAK Internal Dispute



By:
Our Political Correspondent

Dr. S. Jaishankar, the Indian External Affairs Minister, undertook an official visit to Sri Lanka on June 20, 2024, marking his first bilateral engagement since his reappointment. This visit came shortly after President Ranil Wickremesinghe visited India on June 9-10, during which he attended the swearing-in ceremony of the new Indian government following the General Elections. This trip is Dr. Jaishankar's fifth official visit to Sri Lanka, with previous visits recorded in January 2021, March 2022, January 2023, and October 2023.

During his visit, Dr. Jaishankar engaged with a broad spectrum of Sri Lankan leaders, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The Indian External Affairs Minister called on President Wickremesinghe at the President's House, where they held a one-on-one meeting followed by comprehensive delegation-level talks.



Dr. S. Jaishankar

These discussions saw the involvement of several prominent Sri Lankan ministers, including Minister of Ports, Shipping, and Aviation Nimal Siripala de Silva; Minister of Agriculture and Plantation Industries Mahinda Amaraweera; Minister of Foreign



Tamil MPs who attended the meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar

Affairs Ali Sabry; and Minister of Power and Energy Kanchana Wijesekera. In a whirlwind of diplomatic activity, Dr. Jaishankar met even more leaders, accomplishing all these engagements in just a single day, proving that diplomacy can be a marathon run at the speed of a sprint.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Dr. Jaishankar jointly handed over 48 houses under the Model Village Housing Project in the Colombo and Trincomalee districts, as well as 106 houses under Phase III of the Indian Housing Project in the Kandy, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya districts. Additionally, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), a critical hub for search and rescue operations at sea, established with an Indian grant of USD 6 million, was commissioned in a virtual ceremony.

In a press release, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated, "The interaction of Dr. Jaishankar with the leadership of the Government of Sri Lanka provided an opportunity to review and accelerate progress in the multifaceted India-Sri Lanka partnership. One of the key focus areas of discussion was the Vision Document adopted by President Wickremesinghe

and Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the former's visit to India in July 2023. The discussions added momentum to the ongoing projects and initiatives for promoting connectivity in all its dimensions, particularly in the domains of energy, physical infrastructure, and economic and people-to-people ties".

Dr. S. Jaishankar held separate meetings with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Sajith Premadasa, and leaders of various political parties from the North, East, and upcountry regions.

The session with our Tamil leaders from the North and East turned into quite a spectacle, thanks to a lively public disagreement between Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) 's two factional leaders, S. Shritharan and M. A. Sumanthiran.

Eight Tamil leaders attended the meeting. The lineup included Mavai Senathirajah, former ITAK leader; M. A. Sumanthiran, ITAK's one faction leader; S. Shritharan, another ITAK faction leader; Shanakiya Rasamanickam, ITAK's Batticaloa district MP; Dharmalingam Sithadthan, MP and Leader of the People's



Dr. S. Jaishankar with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe in a formal meeting, discussing bilateral relations and cooperation.

Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE); Selvam Adaikalanathan, Leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO); C.V. Vigneswaran, Leader of the Tamil People's National Alliance (TPNA); and Selvarajah Kajendren, general secretary of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF). Except for Mavai Senathirajah, the others are Members of Parliament.

Ironically, just days before this meeting, Kajendren had accused the Indian government under Modi of supporting "Buddhization" in the North and East and alleged that the Modi government acts against the wishes of Sri Lankan Tamils. Yet, in a twist of political theatre, Kajendren still attended the meeting, proving that in politics, sometimes you have to crash the party you just complained about.

Credible sources who attended the meeting told the Jaffna Monitor that it felt more like a casual courtesy call than a serious discussion of issues. They mentioned that the allotted time for the meeting was merely 30 minutes, and thanks to our leaders' non-stop talking, Indian Foreign Minister Dr. Jaishankar had little chance to speak.

"Jaishankar clearly told us that he chose Sri Lanka for his first foreign visit after being reappointed as the Foreign Minister of India because of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy," one MP shared with the Jaffna Monitor. He added, "In my opinion, it seemed he was compelled to meet us to show Tamil Nadu and others that he had also engaged with Tamil leaders from the North during his brief one-day trip to Sri Lanka." The MP chuckled as he recounted the meeting, saying, "We were told the meeting would last 30 minutes, but our MPs should have let Jaishankar get a word in. Honestly, Jaishankar didn't say much. Out of 30 minutes, our MPs talked for 32," he joked.

The highlight of the meeting was the all-too-familiar public disagreement between ITAK's two factions right in front of Jaishankar. One faction leader, Shritharan, confidently informed Jaishankar that they support a common Tamil candidate for the presidential election. This was immediately refuted by the other faction leader, Sumanthiran, who retorted, "We are opposing it." Jaishankar undoubtedly witnessed firsthand the dynamic



Dr. S. Jaishankar in deep discussion with former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

and often dramatic nature of ITAK politics.

Meanwhile, TNPF's Kajendran voluntarily chimed in, stating that they also oppose the idea of a common Tamil candidate and are advocating for a boycott of the election. Out of curiosity, Jaishankar asked what was happening with the common Tamil candidate and whether they were serious about it. In response, C. V. Vigneswaran mentioned that the matter was still being discussed and that some civil society groups were involved.

Another Member of Parliament from the Jaffna district spoke to the Jaffna Monitor about his discussion with Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar. He stated, "I requested the Indian government's assistance to enable the Provincial Council to function immediately. I also informed him that the three main presidential candidates in the upcoming Sri Lankan presidential election—Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sajith Premadasa, and Anura Kumara Disanayake—agreed to make the Provincial Council operational. Minister Jaishankar listened to me patiently."

He continued, "I raised the issue of illegal land grabbing occurring in the North and East. Whether it's Vedukkunaari Hill in Mullaitivu, Thaiyiddy in Jaffna, or Mayilathamadu in the East, these are all part of a master plan to seize

Sri Lankan Tamil lands. I emphasized this to Jaishankar, who has been a known friend of mine for more than two decades," he said.

Another Tamil leader we spoke with had quite the tale to tell. While he told Jaishankar that their party was backing a common Tamil candidate, his private chat with the Jaffna Monitor revealed a different story. "I see it as a joke," he chuckled. "Firstly, some so-called civil society groups can't dictate what political leaders should do—they have a different role to play. Secondly, if everyone agrees to nominate a common Tamil candidate, he must be a good one. While C. V. Vigneswaran is ready to contest, we all know he will end up being a joker, as always, in this election, too".

He went on to explain, "According to the constitution, anyone contesting the presidential election must be a former MP. These civil society leaders can't contest independently. If a civil society leader wants to run for president, they must do so under a party's banner. Suresh Premachandran, Leader of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), mentioned that a common Tamil candidate could contest from his party, but it's yet to be seen how serious he is about this claim."

Continuing his candid assessment, he said,



Dr. S. Jaishankar with Sri Lankan Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa

"If a Tamil candidate contests, he should at least secure 50% of the Tamil votes; otherwise, it will become a cruel joke. Currently, there is no universally accepted Tamil leader. For instance, Sampanthan, the Trinco MP of ITAK, could be a suitable candidate, but he is very old and fragile and will not contest."

Finally, he painted a vivid picture: "Assuming the Tamil voter base in the North and East is around ten lakhs, if eight lakhs of Tamils vote, the common Tamil candidate should secure at least half of those votes, which is four lakhs. However, there's no way a common Tamil candidate can garner that much support, and it will become a laughingstock."

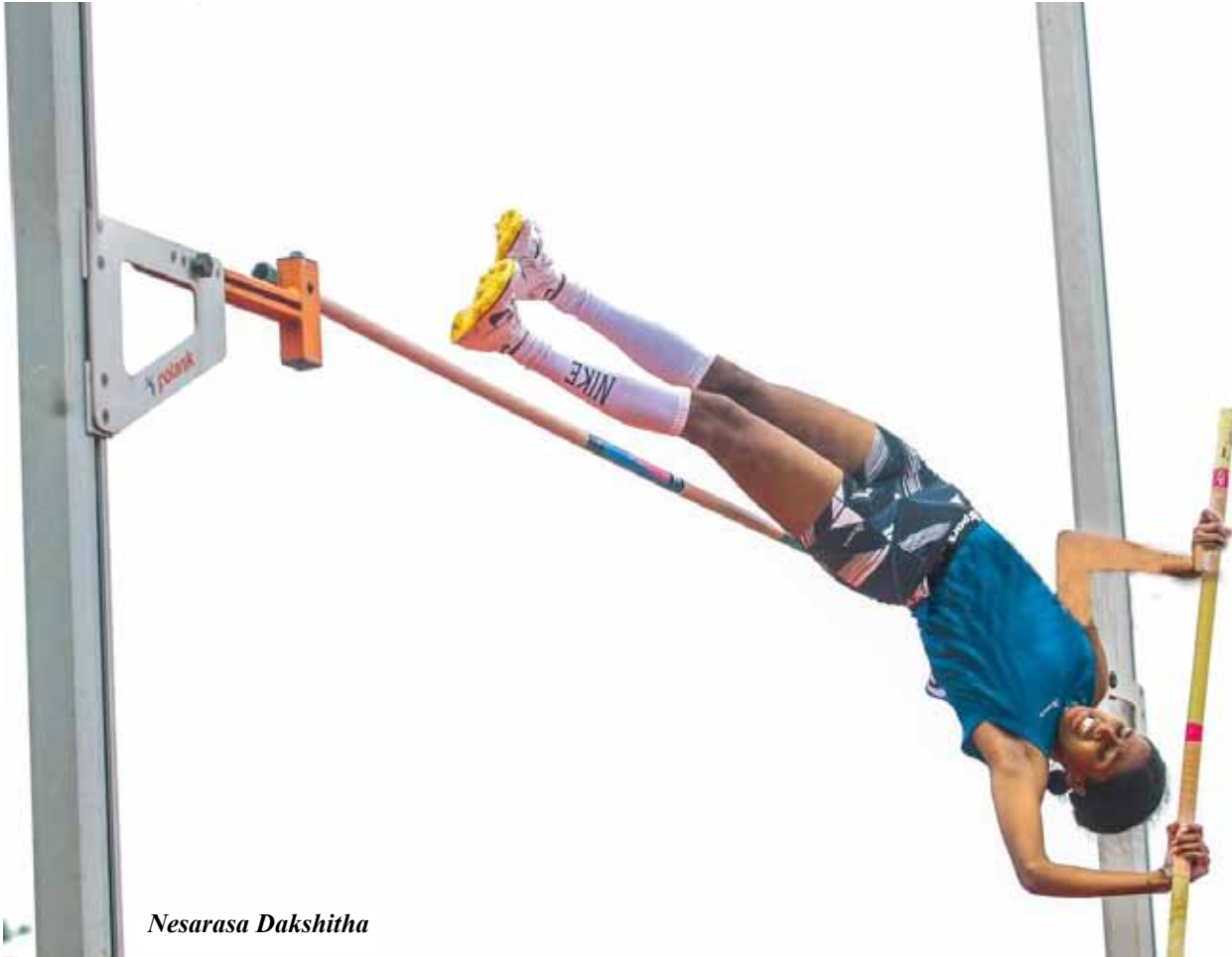
When contacted by the Jaffna Monitor, another MP mentioned that he raised several concerns with Jaishankar. He said, "I emphasized the need for India to pressure Sri Lanka to implement the 13th Amendment. When implemented, Tamils can protect provincial lands, and schools and hospitals will be nationalized." Interestingly, his party had opposed this Amendment for years due to the fear of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam), who were against any political solution that did not include a separate state.

He added that Prime Minister Modi's third-term victory significantly boosts Sri Lankan Tamils, creating unease among Sinhalese leaders. "The recent loose talks by hard-core Sinhala leaders like Wimal Weerawansa are a classic example of this unease," he noted.

We spoke with an Indian source close to Jaishankar regarding the Tamil MPs not letting Jaishankar speak. He remarked, "Jaishankar has been a diplomat for many years before assuming the role of External Affairs Minister of India. If anything needed to be conveyed, he is capable of doing so in just a few seconds or minutes. I don't know what happened inside the meeting as I was absent, but I'm very sure that if anything needed to be conveyed to the Tamil MPs, Jaishankar definitely would have done it. Also, he isn't unhappy about not getting much time to talk. In fact, the officer joked that it was a nice break for him from the usual diplomatic speeches, and he got to enjoy the show even if it was a bit of nonsense."

Jaffna Girl Sets New National Record in Pole Vault



Nesarasa Dakshitha

Nesarasa Dakshitha from Jaffna University has set a new national record in the pole vault with a leap of 3.72 meters at the 2024 National Athletics Championship. This achievement surpasses the previous record of 3.71 meters, set by female army soldier Sachini Perera in 2022.

Dakshitha, an alumna of Chavakachcheri Hindu College, broke the record on June 27th, continuing the tradition of excellence in pole vaulting from Northern Sri Lanka. Before Sachini Perera, Anitha Jegatheeswaran, also from Jaffna, held the national record.

In the men's category, Arunthavarasa Puvitharan secured the gold medal in the pole vault with an impressive height of 5.00 meters. Puvitharan, also an alumnus of Chavakachcheri Hindu College in Jaffna, is currently representing the Army Sports Club. Despite having set a national record of 5.17 meters during the Army Decathlon last March, he expressed his disappointment at not being able to set a new record in this competition due to inadequate lighting.

Puvitharan elaborated that the men's pole

vault event commenced at 2:30 PM and, due to insufficient lighting, extended until 6:30 PM. The inadequate illumination significantly impacted his performance, hindering his ability to surpass his previous national record.

He noted that the extended duration of the event, coupled with the suboptimal lighting conditions, created a challenging environment for all competitors.

Despite these obstacles, Puvitharan's achievement of 5.00 meters remains a remarkable accomplishment, highlighting his skill and determination.

Both Dakshitha and Puvitharan are currently coached by the talented Kanadheepan.



INTERVIEW



Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, member, advisory board, International Institute of Criminal Justice at its tenth anniversary celebrations in Malta.

"The Church Now Realizes There's No Conspiracy in the Easter Attack, But They've Gone Too Far to Retract": **Rohan Gunaratna**



By:

Our Special Correspondent

Five years have elapsed since the devastating Easter Sunday attacks, raising a critical question: Are we any safer today? The recent arrest of four Sri Lankans by the Anti-Terrorism Squad of Gujarat in May 2024 underscores concerns about the effectiveness of measures to curb ongoing community radicalization.

To delve into the evolving threat landscape from then to now, I engaged in a comprehensive discussion with Professor Rohan Gunaratna, a preeminent authority on national security issues. Professor Gunaratna's extensive research encompasses interviews with key fig-

ures in various armed groups, including Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and operatives at various levels within the Islamic State.

Professor Gunaratna is a renowned expert on national, regional, and global security. His latest book, "Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre: Lessons for the International Community," published by Penguin, provides vital insights into the escalating security threats and challenges at global, regional, national, and local levels.

"SWRD Bandaranaike's Sinhala Only Act Divided Communities, Damaged a Generation, and Destroyed 100,000 Lives."

In this exclusive interview with the Jaffna Monitor, Professor Gunaratna discusses Sri Lanka's transition into confronting new forms of threats that affect every citizen, and he outlines practical steps needed to enhance safety and security.

Based on your latest research into 'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre: Lessons for the International Community,' what are the primary motivations driving young Sri Lankan Muslims towards radicalization and joining groups like the Islamic State?

A tiny percentage of Sri Lankan Muslims are attracted by the narratives of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and like-minded groups. They were politicised and radicalised into embracing an ideology of separation from the larger Muslim community. During this period, two anti-Muslim ideologies—ultra-Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist exclusivism and extremism—also emerged. In two phases, the love and loyalty of a tiny percentage of Sri Lankan Muslims diminished. They became vulnerable and susceptible to embracing extremist and violent ideologies.

Phase One: It all started after Sri Lanka became an open economy in 1977. Sufism, a beautiful form of Islam, was gradually replaced. Sri Lankan Muslims that travelled to the Gulf countries and to Pakistan brought exclusivist foreign ideologies that transformed

the Sri Lankan Muslim landscape. They started to dress like Arabs and Pakistanis, and a few hundred attacked local and traditional Muslims, notably in Kathankudi.

Over a decade preceding the Easter attack, Jamaat-e-Islami, Salafi Wahhabism, and other foreign ideologies created a wedge between the Muslims from the non-Muslims. A tiny percentage of Muslims, especially in the Eastern Province, were indoctrinated to oppose local and traditional Islam that forms a part of Sri Lankan Muslim heritage. With religious radicalisation, they rejected and replaced the Sri Lankan Muslim heritage largely characterised by Sufism with their brand of Islam. A new social and cultural milieu prepared the ground to embrace vicious ideologies that would hurt and harm the larger Muslim community and then the non-Muslims.

Phase Two: With deepening religious radicalisation, a small percentage of Muslims started to believe that al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and similar groups are Islamic movements promoting puritanical Islam. According to the Islamic State, about 1,500 Muslims were influenced and indoctrinated by these foreign ideologies. They joined the rank and file of the Islamic State.

Jamaat-e-Islami student wing national organiser Sadiq Abdul Haq travelled to Iraq and trained with an al Qaeda associate group. After returning, he joined the Islamic State together with his brother Sadiq Abdul Haq,

and their followers attacked the Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian images. With two dozen followers and family members, Nilam, who married into a Salafi Wahhabi family, travelled to Iraq and Syria and died fighting. Nilam's father-in-law founded All Ceylon Tawheed Jamaat, another Salafi Wahhabi group that is still functioning in Colombo.

Not a single Sri Lankan Sufi joined either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. Operating both physically and virtually, these groups recruit Muslims radicalised by these foreign ideologies that have now taken root in Sri Lanka.

How are these radical groups still successfully recruiting members within Sri Lanka despite increased scrutiny and counter-terrorism efforts?

Sri Lankan security forces have developed competencies to fight terrorism at the operational and tactical levels. When confronted with religious exclusivism and extremism, the threat must be addressed at a strategic level. This means dismantling the ideologies by reviewing what the clerics preach, scrutinising the syllabi of the madrasahs, and monitoring the online platforms that radicalise Muslims to hate non-Muslims and vis-a-versa.

To address the threat at a strategic



level, the Government should build a partnership with Muslim political, religious, and community leaders. Religious violence and terrorism stem from the indoctrination of the community. As such, to protect the religious space, mainstream Muslim elders, elites, clerics, and leaders have a much bigger role to play than government security forces.

Without subscribing to conspiracy theories, Muslim leaders should do the following: **First**, implement the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Easter Sunday attacks. **Second**, identify, select, and train the best and the brightest clerics from All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) to visit the terrorists in custody and the extremists released on bail and start to mainstream their deviant thinking. **Third**, community engagement programs should be established to build and enhance relations between Mosques, churches, Buddhist temples, and kovils. **Fourth**, engage far-reaching Muslim religious leaders to protect their religious space, a precious treasure, by reintroducing local and traditional religion. **Fifth**, build Harmony Committee in every province, Harmony centres in every district, and harmony clubs in every University and school to



A relative of an Easter attack victim mourns during the funeral. The Easter Sunday attacks on April 21, 2019, were a series of coordinated bombings targeting churches and hotels across Sri Lanka, resulting in the tragic loss of over 270 lives and injuring more than 500 people.

promote intercultural relations. **Sixth**, create a dedicated Joint Information Warfare Centre to monitor and rebut the radical and violent ideologies coming from the misinterpretation of all faiths radicalising Sri Lankans. **Seventh**, build a Presidential Council of Religious leaders to promote moderation, tolerance, and coexistence within their communities.

In your opinion, has the Sri Lankan government effectively addressed the root causes of radicalisation? What gaps do you see in their current strategy?

The first step to preventing and counter-radicalisation is understanding the changing regional and global threats.

Before the introduction of virulent foreign ideologies, Sri Lankan Islam was described as

idyllic. Sri Lankan Islam coexisted with all the other communities until foreign ideologies with funds from the Gulf established a footprint in Sri Lanka. This has happened not only in Sri Lanka but in many countries. Instead of being an exception, Sri Lanka should address the ongoing drift away from Sri Lankan Islam.

There is a protocol to prevent and counter the radicalisation of Muslims. To curb violence and terrorism, the most intelligent approach is not to act after an attack happens. It is to prevent the radicalisation of innocent Muslims into exclusivism, extremism, violence, and terrorism. The strategy is to build social cohesion between Muslims and non-Muslims. The gap has widened between Muslims and non-Muslims after the introduction of Jamaat-e-Islami, Salafi Wahhabi, and other foreign ideologies.



"As National Security Was the Brand of the Previous Government, Yahapalanaya Leaders Did Not Take It Seriously."

Rohan Gunaratna moderated Dr Subramanian Swamy's address at the Ministry of Defence, October 14, 2021

The strategy is to get mainstream Muslims to rehabilitate the deviant Muslims in custody and those released back to society without correcting their belief. If governments and Muslim clerical bodies do not rehabilitate those with distorted views about their religion, they will pose a security threat, will infect others, and will be hailed as heroes.

There are three knowledge gaps. **First**, there is a lack of expertise and experience in dealing with Muslim religious exclusivism and extremism. As Muslim religious extremism is on the rise, the Government should establish a counter-terrorism research and training centre with expertise and experience in religious extremism and terrorism. **Second**, the Government should establish dedicated courts, educate and train judges and prosecutors in counter-terrorism, and build special prisons for terrorist and extremist prisoners.

Specialisation is key to manage the current and emerging threat. **Third**, ACJU leadership should train and certify every cleric to promote

moderation, tolerance, and coexistence. Anti-radicalisation and counter radicalisation should be the responsibility of the clerical body. The entire leadership of the group that staged the Easter attack were Muslim clerics. As such, mentoring, grooming, and supervising the clerics are vital. Fourth, the Government of Sri Lanka should send its best and brightest officers to study Arabic and how Muslim religious extremism is dealt with in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. These three countries' leaders and security and intelligence services have built significant knowledge and understanding of the threat.

Given your insights on Islam and the rise of religious extremism, what steps do you believe are essential for Muslim leaders, particularly in Sri Lanka, to take in order to address and counteract the radicalization within their communities?

"The Conspiracy Theories Surrounding the Easter Sunday Attack in Sri Lanka Have No Basis. How Could a Religious Fanatic Like Zahran Commit Suicide to Please a Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist Like Gotabhaya Rajapaksa?."

Islam is one of the great religions of this world. Except for one chapter, all the chapters of the Quran start with the word "mercy." As such, there is nothing wrong with Islam or the Quran, only its misinterpretation. Unfortunately, most Muslims are ignorant about Islamic history, including the Medina Charter, a covenant on coexistence crafted by Prophet Muhammad.

Like all the other religions, Islam, too, has assumed a political dimension. Islam is being misinterpreted by Muslims driven by politics. Due to historical developments and contemporary challenges, over 80% of the terrorist attacks worldwide are by Muslim threat groups, networks, cells, and personalities. Non-Muslims should work with mainstream Muslims to protect all communities.

Unfortunately, many Muslim leaders are not adequately addressing the distortion of their faith. A few bold and visionary Muslim leaders, such as Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (MBS) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ) of the UAE, the kings of Jordan and Morocco, and the sultans of Oman and Brunei, are taking decisive action. However, others do not address the threat as decisively and firmly as they should to turn the tide of violence.

Despite four fact-finding commissions after the Easter attack, some Muslim leaders

are still promoting conspiracy theories and disseminating fake news about the governments of Israel, India, or Sri Lanka being behind the Easter massacre. The greatest harm they are doing is denying the truth about the ongoing Muslim radicalization.

Likewise, madrasahs have not been reformed, the Muslim clerics have not been accredited, and most importantly, five years after the Easter Sunday attack, its perpetrators and supporters have not been rehabilitated.

For personal and political reasons, Sri Lankan Muslim leaders have not rejected the virulent ideologies that have damaged harmony. It is not too late for them to advocate for and establish a form of Islam that is suitable for Sri Lanka, a multicultural country.

Do you think the reports suggesting that the LTTE played a significant role in radicalizing Muslims by expelling them from their native places in northern Sri Lanka and through the rampant killing of innocent Muslims are accurate?

To create a mono-ethnic Tamil state, Prabhakaran wished to expel the Muslims and Sinhalese from Sri Lanka's north and east. The ethnic cleansing of the Muslims from the north and attacks, especially the

massacres in the east by the LTTE, radicalised the Muslims to rise. Tragically, 147 Muslims, including children, were killed on August 3, 1990, after 30 LTTE members attacked Meer Jummah Mosque, Kattankudy-01 & Hussainiyya Mosque, Mananthoduwai, where 300 Muslims prostrated in Isha prayers. To protect their loved ones, the Muslims formed a dozen armed groups supported by the Government. The idea of "Jihad," or holy war, was first introduced to fight the LTTE.

After his father, returning from Haj was killed by the LTTE, a former policeman, Mohomed Faiz from Kathankudi, formed one of the first groups to fight the LTTE. The head of the military wing of Zahran's group, Hyathu Mohammed Ahmed Milhan alias Abu Shila from Kathankudi, was trained by Faiz to fight the LTTE killing of Muslims. Milhan said to me that he regarded Faiz as his mentor. To build Zahran's armory, Milhan and an accomplice stabbed and shot to death the policemen in Vavunathivu on November 29, 2018.

A Tamil police officer, Dinesh Alagaratnam, 28, from the Kalmunai area, and a Sinhalese police officer, Niroshan Indika, 35, a father of one from Udugama in Galle, were killed at dawn while on duty at a police checkpoint in Vavunativu. Milhan used one of the weapons recovered to shoot Mohamed Razak Thaslim, coordinating secretary to the then Minister Kabir Hashim in Mawanella.



Prof Rohan Gunaratna with former Indian National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan

Thaslim helped the police to identify the two Jamaat-e-Islami leaders who vandalised the Buddha statues in the Mawanella, Peradeniya, and Velambada. To create a riot, the statues were attacked by Mohammed Ibrahim Sadiq Abdul Haq, who was the national organiser of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, and his brother Mohammed Ibrahim Shahid Abdul Haq.

Sadiq Abdul-Haq alias Abu Umair travelled to Syria in 2014 to receive training from an al Qaeda-associated group. Jamaat-e-Islami members helped Zahran to build a base for training and manufacturing explosives in Vanathavillu. Together with Sadiq and his father Ibrahim Mawlawi, Milhan conducted 17 terrorist training sessions, and each class had 30-35. The Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese should move forward from this dark phase of their history and live like one family.

"Sri Lanka should build a network with Indian police intelligence and counter-terrorism units, including Tamil Nadu's Q Branch and Gujarat's Anti-Terrorism Squad, to combat the Islamic State threat."

You have mentioned the need for community engagement and rehabilitation programs. What specific steps should Muslim community leaders take to combat radicalisation within their communities?

After the Easter Sunday attack on April 21, 2019, the rehabilitation program was disrupted by Muslim organizations filing cases against the rehabilitation of extremists. This should first be addressed by explaining what rehabilitation is and why it is necessary to mitigate recidivism, regeneration, and terrorist iconography. The methods of rehabilitation, developed and designed to reform the beneficiaries, should be conducted by Muslim bodies in partnership with the Sri Lankan government.

1. Religious and spiritual rehabilitation,
2. Educational rehabilitation,
3. Vocational and entrepreneurial rehabilitation,
4. Social, cultural, and family rehabilitation,
5. Creative and performance arts in rehabilitation,
6. Sports and recreational rehabilitation,

7. Psychological rehabilitation,

8. Financial rehabilitation

To build an effective rehabilitation program, each inmate should be assessed, categorised, engaged, and, transformed. In parallel, there should be a community engagement program in the physical and virtual space to address radicalisation. The approach is to detect and disrupt the cycle of suspicion, prejudice, resentment, hatred, anger, violence, and terrorism. In this regard, leaders of Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian communities should work closely with Muslim leaders to resolve any misunderstandings or disputes that can lead to hatred and violence.

Similarly, clerics, madrasahs, and mosques that radicalized Muslims to join the Islamic State group that staged the Easter Sunday attack should be identified and reformed. Muslim leaders should exercise leadership to secure the Muslim religious space by constantly alerting its community members to be vigilant of infiltration.

Why do you think there has been resistance or reluctance from some Muslim leaders to acknowledge and address the issue of radicalization?

After the Easter Sunday attack, both the Sri Lankan government and Muslim leaders



Prof Rohan Gunaratna with Ambassador PS Raghavan, Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board, the advisory body of India's National Security Council.

should have taken the threat of Muslim radicalisation seriously. The Government and community should have built a sustained partnership and addressed the threat at a national and community level. To build a safe and secure community for all, the Government first, banned foreign radical and violent preachers; second, removed the Salafi Wahhabi and Jamaat-e-Islami textbooks surreptitiously introduced to OL and AL syllabi; and third, designated Salafi Wahhabi groups and Jamaat-e-Islami student wing groups.

Ideally, the Government should have built an enduring partnership by creating trusted groups within the Muslim community. The Government should have shared information and intelligence about those in custody and those released on bail without rehabilitation.

Unfortunately, Muslims as a community was suspected by the Sinhalese and Tamils. Even the Muslim leaders were asked to step down by Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups. Most Sri Lankan Muslim leaders are mainstream - except a handful, they are not religious fanatics. They love Sri Lanka and non-Muslims.

Had the Muslims been taken into confidence by the Sri Lankan government, the outcome would have been to collectively build a safe and secure Sri Lanka for all communities. The Government should have permitted and facilitated mainstream Muslim leaders to visit the Easter Sunday attackers and supporters. Those detained were indoctrinated to erroneously believe that the attack was conducted to please Allah. In my view, most of the ideologues, perpetrators, and supporters still believe in ideology and will not lie. To me, they willingly and some proudly admitted to their role of indoctrinating, providing finance, and manufacturing explosives. There is an abundance of evidence that, as true believers, they perpetrated the Easter massacre. To me, they have admitted to their actions and thinking.

Such a rendezvous would have convinced Muslim leaders, the elite, and the community to realize how their faith was distorted to conduct a barbaric attack. In return, the Muslim political, clerical, and community leaders would have informed the community that there is a real problem of religious radicalization in the community and taken steps to curb religious exclusivism. This did not happen, unfortunately. As Muslim leaders did not understand the gravity of this challenge, many live in denial to date. Their ostrich-style approach has damaged Islam's image as a peaceful faith and the reputation of Muslims as a harmonious community.

It is high time for government and opposition leaders to develop a bipartisan approach to security threats. By continuously exploiting the Easter massacres as a political football to capture power and for their personal and political advantage, Sri Lanka will become like India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, where there are frequent riots against Muslims and attacks by Muslims.

The first step is to take the Muslims, especially their leaders, into confidence and for the Muslim leaders to reject conspiracy theories that the Easter attack was staged by the MOSSAD, RAW, or Sri Lankan intelligence. The Sri Lankan intelligence community is staffed at the apex and ground level by brilliant and patriotic Muslim rank and file, and they would never permit any senseless violence. If anyone has any doubt that the Easter massacre is not the work of religious fanatics, they should watch Zahran's farewell video and speak to Easter attack detainees and inmates.

My interview with Zahran's successor Noufer, military chief Milhan, wife Hadiya, and others published now in "Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre- Lessons for the International Community" gives details of how the attack was conceptualized, planned, prepared, and executed.

How can the Sri Lankan government and peace-loving Muslim leaders work together to prevent the spread of radical ideologies?

Salafi Wahhabi and Jamaat-e-Islami ideologies are politico-religious doctrines of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, respectively. Both countries experienced religious extremism that disrupted their social harmony, political stability, and

economic prosperity. Furthermore, wherever these ideologies traveled, they radicalized Muslims to attack mainstream Muslims and then attack non-Muslims.

The founder of Salafi-Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, taught "al Wala Wal Bara" as the central piece of his doctrine. "Al Wala" means "loyalty" to Muslims, and "Wal Bara" means "hatred" of non-Muslims. Using this doctrine, Zahran indoctrinated thousands of his followers to kill non-Muslims. Zahran's farewell video is the best evidence.

In a multicultural country like Sri Lanka, where Muslims and non-Muslims live, coexistence will be a challenge if Muslims are taught to "love" only Muslims and "hate" non-Muslims. That is what Zahran and his followers did, culminating in a dozen incidents, including the Easter Sunday attack. In the first place, the Sri Lankan government and peace-loving Muslim leaders should have never allowed Wahhabi ideology to enter and establish a presence in Sri Lanka. After 70-80 Saudi nationals joined al-Qaeda, Saudi leaders belatedly realized the danger of Wahhabism. Of the 19 al-Qaeda hijackers of the 9/11 attack, 15 were citizens of Saudi Arabia. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed from Pakistan was the attack coordinator now on trial in the US.

To keep religious extremism in check, the religious space should be tightly controlled to ensure that teachings are moderate and respect all faiths. In Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman decided to reform the religious space admirably. He placed 5000-6000 radical and violent clerics in the national security prisons that I visited.

Similarly, Jamaat-e-Islami is the Asian version of the Muslim Brotherhood or Ikhwanul Muslimeen. Not only Christians in Egypt and Pakistan but mainstream Muslims witnessed



Rohan Gunaratna visiting the hill country in Sri Lanka

the brunt of these movements. These Islamic movements aim to transform their target countries into Islamic states and govern them by Sharia law. They endorse "Jihad," or holy war, with devastating consequences the world has witnessed. After the far-reaching rulers of UAE and Saudi Arabia realized the threat posed by these ideologies, they proscribed them.

Sri Lankan Muslim clergy, community leaders, and politicians should have closely guarded Sufism, their local and traditional Islam that ensured peace between Muslims and non-Muslims for generations.

However, before and after the Easter massacre, these foreign ideologies started to replace Sri Lanka's rich Muslim cultural and religious heritage. Before the massacre, they accepted donations and facilitated the spread of these foreign ideologies in Sri Lanka. After the

Easter massacre, they did not learn. They unashamedly campaigned for the delisting of Salafi Wahhabi groups. The time is right to take firm action against these virulent ideologies or pay a heavy price in the coming years. The Sri Lankan government should ban these groups, confiscate their assets, and pay compensation to the victims of the Easter attack and other attacks.

There have been allegations of conspiracy theories surrounding the Easter attack. How important is transparency and accountability in counter-terrorism efforts to build public trust?

Today, a few Sri Lankan Muslim leaders believe in conspiracy theories. These theories are rampant in the Arab and Muslim world,

"Sri Lankan Muslim clergy, community leaders, and politicians should have protected Sufism, their traditional Islam that ensured peace between Muslims and non-Muslims for generations."



Professor Rohan Gunaratna in conversation with Noufer, the Islamic State theoretician and successor to Zaharan.

influencing their poorly educated masses. They think the 9/11 attack was staged by the CIA to justify the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and that the Hamas attack was orchestrated by MOSSAD to justify the Israeli occupation of Gaza.

Conspiracy theories surround almost all catastrophic attacks, from 9/11 to the Bali bombing. Regarding the Easter Sunday attack, the Sri Lankan government is also not without fault. Despite receiving comprehensive intelligence from India about a pending attack, Sri Lankan political leaders, defence officers, and law enforcement authorities did not act swiftly. They pandered to politics.

Intelligence on the enemy will never be complete, accurate, or up-to-date. Every

leader and commander must take action with partially available intelligence based on their intuition, maturity, expertise, and experience. Intelligence is not merely a job—it is a craft. Only the trained and experienced can accurately read the threat.

When they received intelligence of a pending attack, the Sri Lankan government should have deployed hunting teams to catch or kill Zahran and his team and protected the churches and hotels. At least, the Government should have made the threat information about the perpetrators and attack plans public. As national security was the brand of the previous Government, Yahapalanaya leaders did not take national security seriously. The country paid a heavy price for politics.

The conspiracy theories surrounding the Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka have no basis. I interviewed almost everyone detained, reviewed their debriefings, and examined their electronics. In addition to domestic law enforcement authorities investigating the Easter attack, international police and intelligence services, as well as INTERPOL, also investigated the attack. Over the past five years, New Scotland Yard, the FBI, CIA, AFP, RAW, IB, Mossad, and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies have not disputed the findings. Additionally, the US indicted the main accused. Four fact-finding reports concluded that the attack was driven by Muslim religious extremism, a global phenomenon.

Catholics questioned how God could allow the faithful to be killed in houses of worship. This caused a crisis in the Church and in the community. Despite the efforts of the Cardinal's legal advisor, Shammil Perera PC, a brilliant and farsighted leader, to educate the Church, the Easter attack was turned into a political tool. The misinformed and misguided believe that there is a conspiracy behind the Easter Sunday attack. How could a religious fanatic like Zahran commit suicide to please a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist like Gotabhaya Rajapaksa?

After all questions from the Church were answered by the investigators, the Cardinal requested all the volumes of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry led by Justice Janaka de Silva, a competent and hardworking legal expert. The Cardinal received the entire set of volumes, something another government might not have done. Without basis, the Church went too far in accusing the security forces of staging the attack to bring the Rajapaksas to power. Now, the Church has realized there is no conspiracy. However, the extent to which they went is too far to retract.

To buy indefinite time, the Church is now using different third parties to create new or renew old conspiracy theories each year as a getaway strategy. From the initial conspiracy theories, the Church has now deviated. All this has damaged the nation's security - it divided the Catholics and non-Catholics and stopped the rehabilitation plans.

My opinion is that an international investigation is not necessary as foreign governments have already concluded that the massacre was conducted by religious extremists. However, if the next Government wishes, we should constitute an independent investigative body with foreign and local experts. This is not to start a fresh investigation but to revisit and review the investigations conducted so far, find out any lapses, and then investigate those gaps. Then, the Government can come to a conclusion as to whether the investigations were conducted appropriately and determine what exactly happened.

The conspiracy theory surrounding the Easter Sunday attack was introduced by power-hungry Sinhala politicians. It was conveniently embraced by the Church, the grieving party. Not all Catholics believe in it. The damage to national security is huge - social cohesion was compromised and the counter radicalisation program was disrupted. When those in custody are released, they will harm others, inflict others, and will be hailed as heroes.

What long-term strategies do you believe are essential for Sri Lanka to implement to ensure the safety and security of its citizens while addressing the underlying issues of radicalization?

"Not a single Sri Lankan Sufi joined either Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State".



Mohammad Nusrath



Mohammad Nafran



Mohammad Rasdeen



Mohammad Faris

The long-term stability and security of Sri Lanka can be maintained by restoring its Sri Lankan identity. Politicians have created divided ethnic and religious identities for their own personal and political advantage.

We should ensure that all the communities are treated equally. Although rectified after the damage was done to the social fabric of the country, SWRD Bandaranaike's Sinhala Only Act divided the communities, damaged the minds of one generation, and destroyed 100,000 lives. To restore harmony, Sri Lanka should have a Sedition Act or Maintenance of Religious and Ethnic Harmony Act to deter, prevent and prosecute people from insulting people of different ethnic and religious groups.

I am very proud of the current Attorney General, Sanjay Rajaratnam, a Tamil, and the current Foreign Minister, Ali Sabry, a Muslim. They are both brilliant and patriotic. My most trusted friend is a Tamil, and my accountant is a Muslim. To address ethnic and religious discrimination, the Government should ensure that there are no exclusively Sinhalese, Tamil, or Muslim schools. It is suspicion that leads to

prejudice and resentment and resentment to anger, hatred, and violence. To defeat violence and terrorism, we must replace exclusivism with inclusivism and extremism with moderation.

Do you believe the Sri Lankan government's statement that the individuals arrested in Ahmedabad are drug dealers and not terrorists?

The Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) in Gujarat arrested four Sri Lankans on May 19, 2024: Mohamed Nusrath, 33, from Negombo; Mohamed Faris, 35, from Colombo 10; Mohamed Rasdeen, 43, from Colombo 13; and Mohamed Nafran, 27, from Colombo 14. These Islamic State suspects revealed that they were radicalised three to four months before traveling to India to attack Christian, Hindu, and Jewish targets.

The Sri Lankan investigation revealed that two of them engaged in crime, including trafficking drugs and smuggling other contraband items. To seek redemption and to atone for their past

"Sri Lanka should have a Sedition Act or Maintenance of Religious and Ethnic Harmony Act to prevent people from insulting people of different ethnic and religious groups."



Prof Rohan Gunaratna visiting the Verdala Palace in Malta

sins, they embraced the Islamic State ideology. The Indian and the Sri Lankan investigators are professionals. Their findings based on the evidence should be respected.

Nusrath was involved in selling imported telecommunication devices, phone accessories, and electrical equipment from Singapore, Malaysia, and Dubai and had a criminal history. In September 2020, Nusrath was arrested in Colombo for possession of heroin. Nafran was importing garments, shoes, and chocolates from India and Dubai.

The son of a notorious criminal, Mohamed Niyas Naufer, alias 'Potta Naufer,' Nafran was arrested by the Sri Lanka Police under the National Gem and Jewellery Authority Act in 2017. Although Nusrath and Nafran had traveled overseas over 100 times, including to India, Faris, a porter, and Rashdeen, a trishaw driver, were on their first visit to India. Nusrath had a valid visa for Pakistan.

According to ATS, Gujarat, the Sri Lankans were "active members of the proscribed terrorist organization Islamic State (IS)" and are "highly radicalised." ATS investigation revealed that "they have conspired to carry out a terrorist attack at some place in India under the banner of the Islamic State (IS)." They arrived from Colombo to Ahmedabad via Chennai. Police officers were deployed to arrest them at Ahmedabad Airport.

The would-be-perpetrators-possessed:

1. A video on Nusrath's mobile phone shows the four men standing in front of a black flag with an Arabic inscription. They pledged allegiance in Arabic and Tamil to the Islamic State, vowing to follow the path shown by Abu Bakr Baghdadi, the former leader of IS, to punish those who commit atrocities against the Muslim community and to target Jews, Christians, and members of the BJP-RSS.

2. Five photographs and one video were found on the Proton drive used by the would-be perpetrators. The photographs included (a) a water canal with a probable landmark, (b) a parcel in a pink bag under the cavity of a concrete boulder, (c) a parcel wrapped in a pink bag and packed with brown adhesive tape, (d) a flag with Arabic writing in the middle and three pistol-shaped parcels arranged side by side, and (e) three pistols and three magazines loaded with ammunition. The black flag had the inscription 'Mohammed is the Messenger of God, and there is no God but Allah' written in white and black Arabic letters, found during the discovery of these hidden articles.

3. A self-sent email was also found in Proton Mail, containing the grid reference with the latitude and longitude of a location. Investigators revealed that their handler, a leader of the Islamic State named Abu Pakistani, had informed them he would share photos of the weapons and the grid reference location, as well as photos of the place where the weapons would be hidden, through Proton Drive and Proton Mail. He instructed them to go to that location, retrieve the weapons, and await further instructions.

At the coordinates disclosed in the Proton Mail, the ATS immediately conducted a search in the presence of the suspects, where they found three pistols and one black flag in a parcel. All three pistols had star markings. Two pistols had seven rounds each



in their attached magazines, while the third had six rounds, totaling 20. The rounds were marked 'FATA,' and the serial numbers on the pistols had been deliberately scratched off to prevent tracking. Investigators identified the pistols as likely being Norinco Type 54 models, with the ammunition manufactured in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan.

After Abu Pakistani's indoctrination, they took the oath to the Islamic State, became members, and received Sri Lankan Rs. 400,000/- in currency and

communicated to their handler to receive weapons and ammunition upon landing in Gujarat for the terrorist attacks.

Given the recent arrests in India, do you think the Sri Lankan government is doing enough to monitor and prevent cross-border terrorist activities?

When it comes to the threat posed by the Islamic State, the threat to the subcontinent is common. The Islamic State threat in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, or Maldives can affect any country in the region. To address this common threat swiftly and efficiently, there should be an excellent relationship between Sri Lanka and India at a working level. The Sri Lankan Government failed to act on the threat intelligence on Easter attackers provided by the Tamil Nadu Intelligence through RAW and IB.

Had the Government of Sri Lanka enjoyed a relationship with Tamil Nadu Police before the Easter attack in 2019, the Easter Sunday massacre could have been preempted. The Sri Lankan Government has historically maintained liaison with RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) and IB (Intelligence Bureau). Given the rise of the Muslim threat in the subcontinent, especially in Pakistan and India, without further delay, Sri Lanka should build close relationships with the neighboring police intelligence and police counter-terrorism services.

Sri Lanka should advocate creating a network with the Indian state police intelligence, such as the Q Branch in Tamil Nadu, Counter-terrorism units within their state police, such as the Anti-Terrorism Squad of Gujarat, and other entities, such as the National Investigation Agency dealing with the Islamic

State and other threats.

It is too late to build relations after an incident. To monitor, prevent, preempt, and respond to cross-border terrorism, the Sri Lankan government should establish a dedicated multi-agency counter-terrorism center staffed by experts and specialists from the police, military, intelligence, central bank, and other relevant agencies. It is not too late to address emerging regional and global threats.

What role do you see international cooperation playing in preventing the spread of radical ideologies and terrorist activities in Sri Lanka and the broader region?

Governments working in cooperation, collaboration, and partnership are key to defeating the Islamic State, both a transnational movement and a pervasive ideology. To address the immediate threat, there should be a special relationship between India and Sri Lanka to jointly investigate terrorism. The intelligence relationship between the national agencies is excellent, but there should be a relationship built between the investigative authorities.

Historically, terrorists used Tamil Nadu to attack Sri Lanka, and today, it is the other way around. After Prabhakaran assassinated Alfred Duraiapph on July 27, 1975, he moved to Tamil Nadu and engaged the Indian Tamil separatists from Dravidar Kazhagam and, after the riots of 1983, infiltrated the two mainstream Tamil Nadu parties. After India turned against the LTTE, the Rajiv Gandhi murder was planned in Sri Lanka by Prabhakaran, Pottu Amman, and Sivarasan.

The assassin Kalaivani Rajaratnam alias

Thenmozhi alias Dhanu was recruited in India, trained in Dindugal, Tamil Nadu, in the dedicated women's batch, and fought against the IPKF. The team that assassinated Rajiv Gandhi travelled from Sri Lanka to India. Of the dozen attempts by LTTE remnants to mount attacks in Sri Lanka since the war ended in 2009, nearly half had links to Tamil Nadu.

Similarly, Salafi Wahhabi groups in Tamil Nadu, particularly the Tamil Nadu Tawhid Jamaat, influenced Zahran to create the National Tawhid Jamaat. Zahran's model was its leader, P. Jainulabideen, and he began to emulate his mentor. Intelligence cooperation preempted the return of PJ, a Salafi Wahhabi cleric in Tamil Nadu, to Sri Lanka. Additionally, Zahran's relative, deputy and ideologue Noufer maintained the largest Islamic State website in the Tamil language. The revival of the Islamic State in Tamil Nadu and Kerala should prompt the Sri Lankan police department to work directly with Indian state police departments. Therefore, intelligence services, law enforcement authorities, and military forces in Sri Lanka and India should move from counter-terrorism cooperation to collaboration and partnership. This should have occurred before or immediately after the Easter Sunday attack. It did not, and a multi-agency/multi-stakeholder approach is essential to prevent, preempt, and respond to incidents.



Professor Rohan Gunaratna in conversation with Hadiya, widow of Zahran, leader of the Islamic State, Sri Lanka Branch

Like ASEAN governments built ASEAN OUR EYES to share and exchange intelligence, the countries of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) should work together. IOR comprises of the Indian Ocean and the countries bordering it-- Australia, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Somalia, Tanzania, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The home to around 2.5 billion people (one-third of the global population), it is the third largest ocean in the world, covering around 20% of the Earth's water surface.

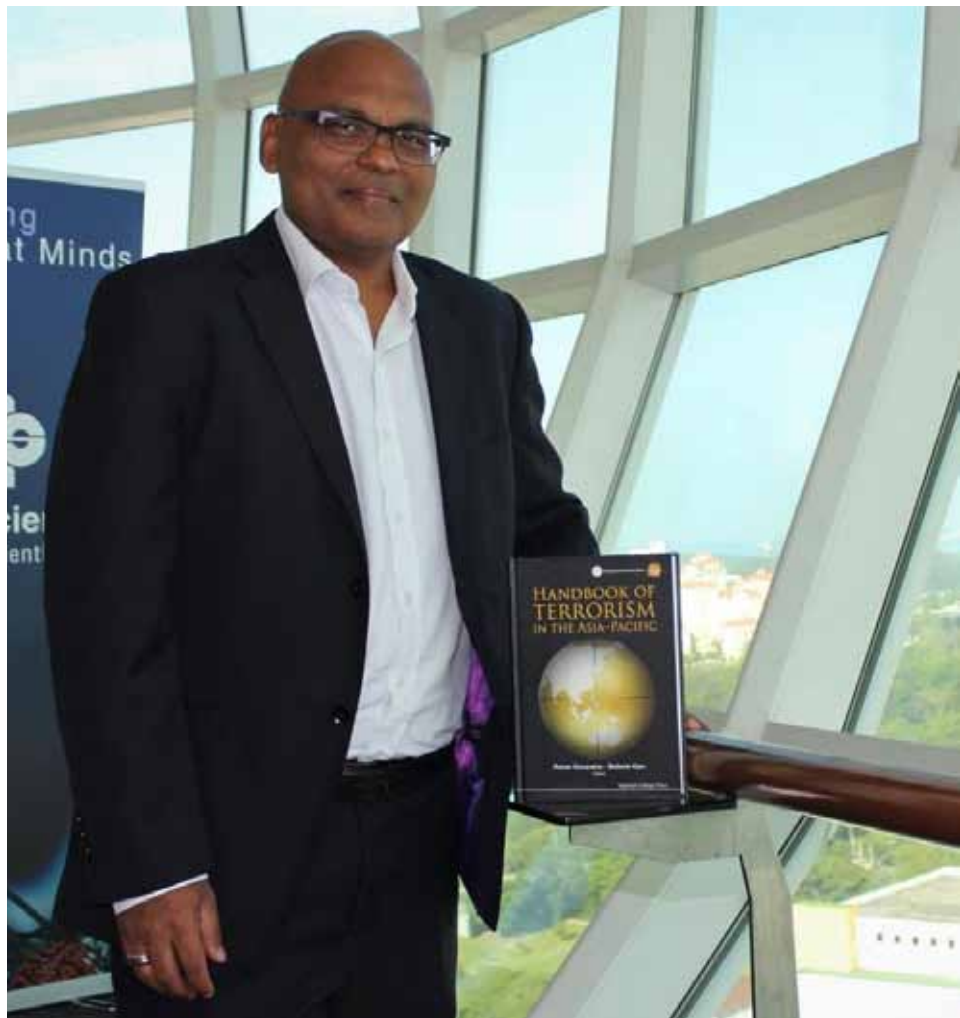
With the rise of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), governments should wake up to the challenge. Today, ISKP operates not only in Central and South Asia. In recent times, ISKP has mounted attacks in Turkey and Moscow and attempted to conduct attacks

in Europe and the US. ISKP is supplanting the Islamic State core that reached its territorial and ideological peak in Iraq and Syria in 2014-2018. The IOR leadership should build a counter-terrorism network and an alliance to detect, disrupt, and dismantle threat networks that harm the region and beyond.

The future of securing the IOR lies in intelligence, law enforcement, and the military working together. They need to shift from mere networking and cooperation to collaboration and partnership. To secure the IOR, they should invest in six streams of activity: 1) exchange of personnel, 2) common databases, 3) joint training, 4) joint operations, 5) sharing of resources and technology, and 6) sharing of experience and expertise.

What lessons can be drawn from the Easter Sunday attack and the recent arrests to prevent future terrorist activities in Sri Lanka?

I have outlined the lessons to be drawn from the Easter Sunday attack in my book, "Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre - Lessons for the International Community." Since then, the Easter Sunday attack has become a "political football" by power-hungry politicians. They are exploiting it without addressing



Prof. Rohan Gunaratna at the launch of the Handbook of Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific.

the threat. Today, the challenge is for the government and political opposition to develop a bipartisan approach to address all threats comprehensively.

In the ranking of preeminent security threats to Sri Lanka, the Government has rightly identified the following priority threats:

Religious extremism and terrorism

Separatism and terrorism

Organised crime, especially illicit drugs

Geopolitics

Cyber threats

As some of these domains are linked, the approach and strategy of the State should be to produce professionals

who are both specialists with deep expertise and generalists with a 360-degree helicopter view.

Significant developments have been made in building a robust security and intelligence community, including infrastructure to train the next generation of leaders. With the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world, a dedicated national security service should be established with expertise to protect the nation's economic and financial security, environmental and climate security, cyber and information security, and guard against foreign political interference.

As most of the threats originate from overseas, the Government should establish an external intelligence service to develop expertise in global and regional security threats, as well as geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geostrategy. Since national and international security is a spectrum, the foreign service, armed forces, and police should modernise by recruiting the best and brightest. They should be fluent in all three national languages and proficient in IT. Given their competence, the number of Tamil and Muslim officers in the ranks should be increased.

The Government should establish a degree-awarding institution similar to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, and the Elliott School of International Affairs to professionalise the Sri Lankan foreign service. The police should create a dedicated division for national security investigations. The existing legal and policy framework to investigate and prosecute those who engage in online falsehoods and manipulations should be operationalised.

There is a precedent to the recent arrest of

four Sri Lankans in Gujarat. It is not the first time that Sri Lankans and those of Sri Lankan heritage have been noted for their activities and actions. In New Zealand, Ahamed Aathill Mohamed Samsudeen from Kathankudi shouted 'Allahu akbar,' stabbing six people in the New Lynn supermarket in September 2021.

In London, Sudesh Amman, another Islamic State member of Sri Lankan heritage, wore a fake suicide belt and randomly stabbed the public, injuring two in south London in February 2020. In UAE, 33 Sri Lankan men and women linked to the suicide bomber Fathima Jiffry promoting a "deviant ideology" and raising funds were arrested, debriefed, and deported to Sri Lanka in 2019.

In Chennai, another Sri Lankan, Mohammed Zakir Husain, was arrested for surveilling the US Consulate in Chennai and the Israeli Consulate in Bengaluru in April 2014. In May 2014, Malaysia arrested his Sri Lankan associate Mohamed Hussain Mohamed Sulaiman, tasked to ferry two suicide terrorists from Maldives to strike the two diplomatic targets.

Sri Lankans should understand that there is ongoing radicalisation of all communities in the country, and it has spread beyond Sri Lankan shores. This requires both the State and the communities to reform their educational, religious, and informational spaces and institutions. Furthermore, there is a geopolitical dimension where foreign governments are recruiting Sri Lankans to advance their interests. In addition to addressing radicalisation, the Government should develop a legal and policy framework to deter, prevent, and counter a range of national security threats, from foreign interference to espionage.

Sri Lankan Tamil cricket prodigy Sharujan Shanmuganathan has been appointed vice-captain of the Sri Lanka U19 cricket team for their upcoming tour of England. A student at St. Benedict's College, Sharujan rose to prominence at a very early age due to his stroke-making abilities, which have

been compared to those of veteran former Sri Lankan wicketkeeper-batsman Kumar Sangakkara. This appointment recognizes his impressive performance over the past year as both a batsman and a wicketkeeper for the U19 team.

The upcoming England tour will feature three One Day Internationals (ODIs) and two Test matches, offering Sharujan and his teammates valuable international experience. This series is expected to be a pivotal development opportunity for Sharujan, who still has one more year of eligibility in the U19 category, potentially paving the way for future captaincy.

Sri Lankan Tamil Prodigy Sharujan Rises to U-19 Vice- Captaincy

Sharujan Shanmuganathan





Sharujan's cricket journey began at a young age, and his talent was recognized early on by the late cricket commentator Tony Greig, who nicknamed him "Little Sanga" in reference to Sri Lankan cricket legend Kumar Sangakkara. As Sharujan continues to grow and refine his skills, there is great optimism that he will follow in the footsteps of other U19 players who have gone on to achieve significant success at the national level.

The Sri Lanka U19 team, led by Dinura Kalupahana, includes players such as Pulindu Perera, Sadeep Samarasinghe, Hiran Jayasundara, Mahith Perera, Diniru Abeywickramasingha, Gayana Weerasinghe, and Thisara Ekanayake. The squad is 18-strong, showcasing a diverse array of talent and potential.

Sharujan is focused on performing well for the U19 team, with aspirations of breaking into

the national team. Consistent performances in domestic competitions and international youth tournaments will be key to achieving this goal. His dedication and potential suggest a bright future in Sri Lankan cricket.

In mid-February 2024, a reporter asked Sharujan Shanmuganathan about his thoughts on playing the big match between St. Benedict's College and Wesley College, considering his experience as an under-19 Sri Lankan player who has played a few international cricket matches.

The reporter inquired whether it felt like a step down to play school matches. Sharujan responded with poise: "In international matches, I react to the ball. In school matches, I react to the ball. It's all about how you respond to each delivery. The fundamentals remain the same, regardless of the level of play." This reply characterized Sharujan's mature and focused approach to the game.

Solidarity in Mourning: Jaffna Fishermen Pay Tribute to Fallen Sinhala Navy Hero



BY:

Our Reporter

In a tragic incident off the coast of Kankasanthurai, Jaffna, Senior Sailor Priyantha Rathnayake (41) of the Navy Special Boat Squadron lost his life during a special operation aimed at apprehending a group of Indian fishermen. The mission sought to intercept an Indian bottom trawler engaged in illegal fishing activities within Sri Lankan waters. During the operation, the aggressive maneuvers of the Indian trawler resulted in

critical injuries to Rathnayake. Despite being swiftly transported to the Teaching Hospital in Jaffna, he unfortunately succumbed to his injuries.

Following the incident, a post-mortem examination conducted by the Jaffna Magistrate determined that the sailor's death resulted from spinal cord damage. The seized Indian trawler and the ten fishermen on board were brought to the Kankesanthurai Harbour. The fishermen face charges of illegal fishing, causing the death of naval personnel, and damaging naval property.



The ten arrested Indian fishermen

Senior Sailor Priyantha Rathnayake was laid to rest in a solemn ceremony with full naval honors in Hippawwa, Ibbagamuwa. In a poignant display of solidarity, the Jaffna fishermen community made the journey to Kurunegala to pay their respects. One fisherman shared with the Jaffna Monitor, "He, a Sinhala Navy sailor, died for Tamil fishermen." Their presence and words underscored the deep respect and gratitude they felt. The Jaffna fishermen called on the Sri Lankan government and the Fisheries Minister to take decisive action against the persistent issue of Indian trawlers encroaching on their fishing grounds, damaging the seabed, and depleting fishing reserves. Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, in a poignant tribute, carried the coffin on his shoulders. Rathnayake, a father to a 6-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter, was posthumously promoted to the rank of Fleet Chief Petty Officer by the Commander of the Navy.



The Captured Fishing Boat.

In recent years, North-East fishermen have voiced their concerns about Indian trawlers using larger boats, which damage the seabed and carry larger catches, making it harder for Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen to obtain a catch. In March 2022, Eelam Tamil fishermen wrote to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin, seeking a progressive solution for the two Tamil fisherman communities on either side of the Palk Strait.

The illegal and encroaching fishing activities within Sri Lankan maritime waters, evidently orchestrated by the Tamil Nadu fishing mafia, are primarily aimed at exploiting marine resources. These bottom trawlers, employed by the mafia, are depleting the resources available to northern Sri Lankan fishermen and causing significant and often irreversible harm to the aquatic



People gathered at the funeral of Senior Sailor Priyantha Rathnayake in Hippawwa, Ibbagamuwa.

environment. The extensive damage inflicted on the seabed by these trawlers disrupts marine ecosystems, leading to a decline in fish populations and other marine life, thereby threatening the livelihood of local fishermen.

Furthermore, this illicit fishing activity is exacerbating tensions between Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil fishermen. The encroachment creates economic hardships and fosters distrust and conflict between the two communities.

Credible sources from Tamil Nadu indicate that Tamil Nadu politicians are directly involved in these activities, with many boat owners being political leaders from various main parties. Notably, a former central minister from the DMK is among the owners. These politicians' complicity and direct participation provide support and protection to the fishing mafia, enabling the

continuation of these destructive practices. The ramifications of such illegal operations extend beyond environmental degradation, undermining regional stability and inter-community relations.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has also written to Union Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar, requesting the convening of the Joint Working Group to secure the release of all the fishermen and their fishing boats from Sri Lankan custody. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar assured Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin of efforts to secure the release of 34 Indian fishermen from the southern state who have been in Sri Lanka's custody. Jaishankar said the Indian High Commission in Colombo and the Indian Consulate in Jaffna have been expeditiously and consistently taking up such cases for the early release of those detained.

LTTE Remains Banned in UK

The UK Proscribed Organisations Appeals Commission (POAC), an independent court established by Parliament and headed by a high court judge and two retired senior diplomats, has upheld the proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This decision rejects an appeal by the self-proclaimed Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) to remove the LTTE from the list of banned organizations under the Terrorism Act 2000. As a result, the LTTE remains classified as a terrorist organization in the UK.

The LTTE was initially proscribed on March 29, 2001. The Sri Lankan civil war ended in May 2009 with the death of LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran and the defeat of its military forces. Despite this military defeat, the POAC noted that the LTTE's international network remains active. According to the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), from 2012 to 2017, there were activities indicating attempts to revive the LTTE's violent operations.

The TGTE, which advocates for an independent Tamil state, sought to lift the ban on the LTTE, arguing that it no longer poses a terrorist threat. However, unlike the LTTE, the TGTE is not proscribed in the



UK, as it promotes its objectives through non-violent means.

The TGTE's appeal was based on four key arguments: the LTTE's current incapability of posing a threat, the surprising claim that there are no reasonable grounds to believe the LTTE is involved in terrorism, errors in the Secretary of State's discretion to maintain the proscription, and the contention that continued proscription violates freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

The Commission emphasized that even an organization that is currently inactive but intends to reactivate its military wing meets the criteria for proscription. JTAC's assessments confirmed that the LTTE's network has engaged in activities indicating an intent to revive the group. Incidents cited in the decision included an IED explosion by a former LTTE operative in July 2020, the arrest of individuals with a claymore mine in December 2020, and a cyber-attack on a Sri Lankan government website.

While the TGTE argued that evidence from Sri Lankan sources was unreliable, the POAC upheld the decision, stating that no significant legal flaws were found in the process. The Commission also noted that de-proscription could damage UK relations with India and Sri Lanka, aligning with the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy.



Sivasi Illam:

A Newly Established Sanctuary for Relatives of Patients at Jaffna Teaching Hospital

■
BY:
Our Reporter

Jaffna, Sri Lanka – For many, the journey to accompany loved ones admitted to Jaffna Teaching Hospital is fraught with challenges and exhaustion. It's a heart-wrenching sight to see numerous patients' relatives sleeping on the pavement or staying awake all night, deprived of even the most basic comforts due to the lack of proper facilities at the hospital. Recognizing these immense struggles, a group of compassionate Good Samaritans has stepped in to offer a glimmer of hope: Sivasi Illam, a newly

established sanctuary providing much-needed relief and support.

Recently inaugurated, Sivasi Illam serves as a haven for relatives and caregivers, providing essential facilities such as rest areas, showers, changing rooms, and sleeping quarters. This service center ensures that they can maintain their well-being while supporting their hospitalized loved ones. By addressing the critical need for proper accommodations, Sivasi Illam offers much-needed relief



Dr. S. Premakrishna (first from left), Consultant Anesthesiologist in Jaffna and Treasurer of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital Welfare Society, is seen at the opening ceremony of 'Sivasi Illam'

He further explained the operational details of the facility: "This house will be managed not by the hospital but by the Jaffna Teaching Hospital Welfare Society. We have appointed two staff members to run the house. No food is provided for those who stay, but we are considering offering meals in a few months once we have a sufficient budget. For now, we will provide tea and biscuits at night for the bystanders who arrive late."

Addressing future plans, Dr. Premakrishna stated, "Currently, we do not have precise data on the number of people needing accommodation. After running the facility for a few weeks, we will gather insights and plan to expand this service to other locations as needed. Based on this data, we will make informed decisions regarding the expansion."

He also emphasized a critical aspect of patient care: "Many patients from other districts need to return for follow-up check-ups within a week after discharge. Unfortunately, many of them lack the means to travel back and forth."

To address this issue, we are considering constructing a separate facility specifically for these patients in the future. This facility will need to be equipped with appropriate medical and nursing care services due to the specific requirements of these patients and will necessitate a higher budget. We are dedicated to addressing this need in the near future."

Reach Out for Assistance: Hospital Welfare Association: 0761000046

Sivasi Illam Coordinator: 0770054829

How to Avail the Free Service:

Obtain an application form from the Patients' Welfare Association office. Complete the form with the necessary details.

Submit the recommendation form to the responsible nursing staff at the hostels where the patients are admitted.

LTTE Must Justify Its Legality: Indian Tribunal



The Indian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal has recently issued a notice to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) demanding an explanation as to why it should not be declared unlawful. This action follows a notification by the Indian central government last month, which banned the LTTE, claiming that the organisation continued to engage in activities harmful to India's integrity and security. Given that the LTTE has been ultimately defeated, the method by which the panel sent this notice remains unclear.

On June 5, 2024, the Centre established the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal

under Section 5 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. This Tribunal, led by Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora of the Delhi High Court, is tasked with determining whether there is sufficient cause to declare the LTTE an unlawful association.

The Tribunal directed the LTTE to submit a written explanation by June 14, 2024, detailing why it should not be deemed unlawful and why the government's declaration should not be upheld. The LTTE was also given the opportunity to appear before the Tribunal in New Delhi on July 23, 2024, and was represented by authorized legal counsel.

Tamil Nadu Notifies Ban

On May 18, 2024, the Tamil Nadu government also issued a notification banning the LTTE. This notice stated that even after its military defeat in May 2009 in Sri Lanka, the LTTE had not abandoned the concept of 'Eelam' and continued to work towards this goal through fundraising and propaganda activities. Efforts by remaining LTTE leaders and cadres to regroup and resurrect the organisation both locally and internationally were also noted.

Separatist Tendency

The notification further explained that pro-LTTE groups and elements continue to encourage separatist sentiments among the population, particularly in Tamil Nadu. This growing support for the LTTE could ultimately threaten India's territorial integrity. Additionally, LTTE sympathisers abroad have been spreading anti-India propaganda, blaming the Indian government for the LTTE's defeat. This, if unchecked, could foster hatred towards the Central Government and the Indian Constitution among the Tamil populace.

MONITOR MEMO

TNA Leader R. Sampanthan Likely to Endorse Ranil Wickremesinghe in Presidential Race, Says UNP Chairman

United National Party (UNP) Chairman and Member of Parliament Vajira Abeywardena announced his firm belief that Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader R. Sampanthan will endorse President Ranil Wickremesinghe in the forthcoming presidential election. Abeywardena also expressed optimism that leaders of Tamil parties from the Northern and Eastern provinces will align with this decision, paving the way for unified Tamil support for Wickremesinghe.

"President Ranil Wickremesinghe stands out as one of the most politically experienced Sinhalese leaders in Sri Lanka, while R. Sampanthan is the most politically experienced Tamil leader with substantial political acumen,"



Abeywardena stated. "Their leadership and experience make them indispensable figures in the political landscape. We believe Sampanthan will support Wickremesinghe, and this decision will be backed by other Tamil party leaders from the North and East."

Abeywardena further emphasized the potential impact of Tamil votes in the upcoming election. "With the overwhelming support of Tamil voters from the Northern and Eastern regions, we are confident that Ranil Wickremesinghe will secure a decisive victory," he remarked.

He dismissed discussions about a Tamil common candidate as futile and a waste of time. "Our focus should be on pragmatic and strategic decisions that will lead to a historic victory for Ranil Wickremesinghe," he concluded.

Julian Assange:

WikiLeaks Founder and Maverick Who Revolutionized Investigative Journalism - Free After 12 Years



By:
**Our International
Correspondent**

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has finally returned to his homeland, Australia, after a U.S. judge approved an unexpected plea deal. "Julian Assange is free," WikiLeaks announced in a statement on X. "He left Belmarsh maximum security prison [in the U.K.] on the morning of June 24, after having spent 1901 days there." The co-founder of the whistleblowing website has agreed to plead guilty to one count

of conspiracy to obtain and disclose classified U.S. national defense documents, thus concluding his prolonged legal struggle against extradition to the United States. This marks the first time in 12 years that Assange is free. The decision, announced early Wednesday morning, has led to celebrations among his supporters worldwide.

Homecoming in Canberra

Assange landed at Canberra Airport in the Australian capital, where he was greeted by a cheering crowd of supporters. As he disembarked the aircraft, he waved to the crowd and shared an emotional reunion with his wife, Stella. The couple embraced on the tarmac, visibly moved by the moment.

"Julian wanted me to sincerely thank everyone," Stella said at a press conference. "He wanted to be here. But you have to understand what he's been through. He needs time, he needs to recuperate, and this is a process." With tears in her eyes, she requested privacy for their family as they adjust to their new life together.

The Plea Deal and Legal Proceedings

After formalizing his plea deal earlier that day, Assange walked out of a courtroom in Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, a remote U.S. Pacific territory. He pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to unlawfully obtain and disclose classified information. "I am, in fact, guilty of the charge," Assange told the court.

Assange's U.S. lawyer, Barry Pollack, highlighted the unprecedented nature of the case under the Espionage Act, emphasizing that Assange had revealed truthful, newsworthy information. "The prosecution of Julian Assange is unprecedented in the

100 years of the Espionage Act," Pollack said. "Mr. Assange revealed truthful, newsworthy information ... We firmly believe that Mr. Assange never should have been charged under the Espionage Act."

A Decade-Long Pursuit

Assange's release from London's high-security Belmarsh prison on Monday was pivotal in a legal saga that spanned over a decade. His arrest in 2019 came after Ecuador withdrew his asylum, ending his seven-year stay at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Since then, he has faced numerous legal challenges, including an extradition order signed by the U.K. Home Secretary in 2022, which he successfully appealed on mental health grounds.

In a surprising move, Assange was flown to the Northern Mariana Islands for the court proceedings, avoiding the continental U.S. due to his deep mistrust of the country. This location was chosen for its logistical convenience, being closer to Australia.

The Evolution of WikiLeaks: From Inception to Global Impact

WikiLeaks was established in 2006 by Julian Assange, who registered the domain name and set the foundation for what would become a groundbreaking platform. Initially designed as a disclosure portal modeled after Wikipedia, WikiLeaks allowed anonymous submissions that were edited by volunteers. However, it quickly evolved into a repository for anonymously sourced material, where news and classified information could be uploaded using the anonymity software Tor. This software ensured the uploader's identity remained protected from network surveillance, including WikiLeaks.

One of WikiLeaks' earliest and most significant revelations concerned the U.S. government's practices at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, which violated Geneva Convention protocols. It was the period when the site's anonymized submission system was fully operational that saw some of the most consequential leaks.

Among these were millions of classified files from the U.S. Department of Defense concerning the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as numerous State Department communiques. These documents were released by former U.S. soldier Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning.

A pivotal moment came on April 5, 2010, when WikiLeaks released a 39-minute video showing gun-sight footage from two U.S. AH-64 Apache helicopters during a 2007 incident in Iraq. The video depicted the helicopter crew firing indiscriminately, killing civilians and two Reuters war correspondents. Reuters had unsuccessfully sought access to this video for nearly three years through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

Impact and Legacy

The release of the war logs, published by a consortium of media organizations, exposed human rights abuses by occupation forces and highlighted the increased fatality counts in Iraq. These leaks provided significant public insight into the operations, lifestyles, and attitudes of elites in various countries, dramatically influencing global perceptions and discussions.

WikiLeaks' innovative use of cryptographic tools to safeguard sources and enable anonymous leaks of sensitive information has revolutionized investigative journalism. By



exposing the inner workings of governments and power structures, WikiLeaks has significantly impacted the field of journalism, advancing the global pursuit of transparency and accountability.

Returning Home

Australian officials, including Ambassador to Washington Kevin Rudd and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, played crucial roles in negotiating Assange's return. Upon his arrival, Albanese expressed his satisfaction with the outcome, highlighting the diplomatic efforts involved.

Assange's homecoming, however, comes with a significant financial burden. He owes \$520,000 for the charter flight back to Australia. To cover these expenses and support his recovery, an international campaign has been launched, appealing for donations from his supporters.

Future Prospects

As Julian Assange begins his new life in Australia, the impact of his work with WikiLeaks continues to resonate globally. His case has set a precedent for the protection of journalistic freedom and the role of the media in holding power to account. While WikiLeaks is now a shadow of its former self, its legacy of transparency and whistleblowing remains influential.

Historic Jungle Path to Kathirkamam Kandan Temple Opens for Annual **Aadi Vel Festival**





BY:

Our Batticaloa Reporter

The revered jungle path leading from the Ukanthamalai Murugan Kovil in Ukanthai, Ampara District of Eastern Sri Lanka, to the Katirkāmam Murugan Kōvil opened on June 30th, marking the beginning of the much-anticipated Aadi Vel festival of Katirkāmam. This sacred path, winding through dense jungle and home to diverse wildlife, will remain open until July 11th, allowing thousands of pilgrims to journey along this historic route to seek blessings at one of Sri Lanka's most esteemed religious sites.

Each year, the foot pilgrimage witnesses a remarkable convergence of pilgrims from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, creating a unique atmosphere of unity and reverence. This challenging journey through the jungle spans approximately





120 kilometers and attracts not only the able-bodied but also elders who can barely walk and children as young as three to four years old. This participation highlights the pilgrimage's profound spiritual commitment and the strength of its traditions.

Participants undertake this journey with immense dedication, driven by their faith and the desire to seek blessings at the sacred Katirkāmam Murugan Kōvil. The pilgrimage route, which winds through dense jungles teeming with wildlife, adds an element of adventure and unpredictability, further enriching the spiritual experience. The sight of diverse groups of people, irrespective of age or physical ability, embarking on this shared path of devotion underscores the festival's powerful impact on the collective consciousness of the community.

Numerous religious organizations coordinate the logistics of the Padha Yatra, facilitating





groups of pilgrims on their spiritual journey. Many devotees also choose to undertake this pilgrimage individually, driven by personal faith and the serene call of the jungle path.



"Kataragama" is synonymous with belief, faith, and devotion. It is a place where devotees from all corners of Sri Lanka, irrespective of pride or prejudice, come to ask Kataragama Deviyo, the Hindu war god Murugan, for favors, often bound by a promise to be repaid. During the peak season, hundreds of devotees pack all corners of the temple grounds, bearing offerings of fruit baskets laden with fruits. The sound of coconuts crashing to the ground and devotees chanting prayers is a common sight, with some extreme devotees putting their bodies through mortal pain, driven by the notion of immortal satisfaction from the gods.

A significant highlight of this devotion is the annual foot pilgrimage made by



devotees from hundreds of kilometers away, converging on the temple grounds after a quick wash in the river bordering the sacred grounds. Ordinary people who feel they have received a 'call' take part in this marathon walk, leaving behind everything but a bundle of essentials, experiencing the life of a poor or religious recluse.

The pilgrimage offers profound lessons about the paradoxes of life through a sustained act of self-denial.

Every year, a notable number of devotees from the Selva Sannidhi Murugan Temple in Thondaimanaru, Jaffna, undertake a long pilgrimage walk. This journey spans approximately 48 days and covers 815 kilometers, passing through the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces and the districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, and Monaragala. This pilgrimage is considered the longest holy journey in Sri Lanka, during which devotees visit hundreds of temples.

The devotees from Selva Sannidhi Murugan Temple join those at the Ukanthai Murugan Temple to continue their journey along the forest path. Among them is Murugenthiram, a 70-year-old regular Yatra participant, who shared with the Jaffna Monitor that this is his 15th time undertaking the pilgrimage. He emphasized the significance of the pilgrimage in Hindu beliefs, stating that undertaking a long Yatra at least once a year helps align the body and mind. Murugenthiram explained that his life changed dramatically after he started going on Yatras, as he now harbors only positive thoughts. Given the uncertainties that may arise, he elaborated that a tremendous amount of positive thinking is required for such a long journey.

"Whether it rains or not, you won't complain. Rather, you will see it as God's gift," he said. "Eventually, this mindset shifts your perspective entirely. You start seeing only positive things and generating positive thoughts, not just during the Yatra but also in everyday life," he concluded.



Humanitarian

Diaries

Part-3

A UN Worker's Exclusive Testimony to 'Jaffna Monitor' on the 15th Anniversary of Sri Lanka's Brutal War Conclusion



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Niththilan (name changed), a former courageous United Nations worker, witnessed the harrowing scenes of Sri Lanka's final war in 2009. Among the few living who can testify to the devastating atrocities committed by both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, he played a crucial role in the conflict's final stages. In September 2008, after the directive for the evacuation of UN and international humanitarian organizations from LTTE-controlled territories, Niththilan was appointed as the officer in charge of all UN operations in the region. He led the UN mission within LTTE-controlled areas, directing local staff in the absence of his

international colleagues. Currently residing in Europe, Niththilan has decided to break his silence and share his experiences with 'Jaffna Monitor' under the condition of anonymity.

How many shells landed inside the UN hub in the no-fire zone?

Based on my estimations, approximately 25 shells landed inside the UN hub on the first day. The following day, we left the no-fire zone, although food distribution continued at the UN hub. While people were lined up to receive food items, the government shelled the area, resulting in numerous casualties. Those standing in line were brutally killed.

Later, I met with a general whose name has been frequently associated with allegations of war crimes and confronted him by asking,

"Why did you shell the no-fire zone?" Initially, he denied it, but after much hesitation, he admitted it was true. He explained that they had no choice but to compel the people from the LTTE-controlled area to move into their territory. While making this admission, he showed no emotions; he was not happy but resolute in his justification.

Where and how did you end up meeting him?

"That's a long story..." Niththilan paused for a long moment, gathering his thoughts before continuing. "Before that, you should ask me how we, the UN workers, escaped the war zone."

Ok... How did UN workers finally escape from the war zone?

We were desperate to escape the war zone. In our plight, I wrote a heartfelt letter to Balasingham Nadesan, the head of the LTTE's political wing, pleading for our family members to be allowed to leave. At that time, all the UN staff in the LTTE-held area were men, and the thought of our families' safety weighed heavily on our minds. In my letter, I assured the LTTE that if they permitted our families to leave, we male UN staff members would remain with the LTTE until the end. Every male worker at the UN signed that letter, demonstrating our collective desperation and commitment.

However, the response we received was disheartening. "We cannot let your family members leave the war zone. It will set a bad precedent," Nadesan replied. His words shattered our hopes, leaving us to grapple with the harsh reality of our situation.

Managing my staff became immensely difficult due to the lack of proper





An injured Tamil civilian lies in a makeshift hospital, a victim of brutal shelling by the Sri Lankan government, highlighting the devastating impact on innocent lives.

bunkers, shelters, and adequate food. In the midst of this chaos, I managed to secretly send 15 of my staff members and their families on a ship under the guise of being wounded. However, I still had 115 UN staff members with me, and the responsibility for their safety weighed heavily on my shoulders.

We devised a plan for a 15-member team of men, women, and children to escape the war zone through the Nandikadal Lagoon. This was essentially a pilot program, and the head of this mission was a brave UN worker from Kilinochchi. He took the lead despite the uncertainty of reaching the army-controlled area amidst intense fighting.

There was a lady in the group whose infant child was gravely ill—they needed to leave the war zone urgently, or else the child would die. I had initially arranged for her to leave on one

of the ICRC ships and obtained the necessary pass from the LTTE office due to the child's critical condition.

However, near the ship, Varathan, an LTTE leader in charge of transport, stopped her and her child, accusing them of being traitors to Tamil Eelam. He shouted at her, citing the reason: her husband, a UN worker, had previously helped his brother escape from the LTTE-controlled area.

Varathan forcefully removed the mother and her gravely ill infant from the ship, proclaiming, "We show no mercy to traitors of Tamil Eelam." In the melee, he even labeled the infant as a traitor. The scene was heart-wrenching, as the mother's desperate pleas for her child's life fell on deaf ears.

I confronted Varathan, arguing that it was

unjust to punish this innocent child for the actions of his father. I implored him, saying, "If you don't allow this infant to leave on this ship, she will die." Varathan, with a chilling calmness, responded, "We have enough land to bury this child if it dies." His words pierce through me even today.

What was her husband's transgression?

He was a UN worker who, using a UN vehicle, covertly helped his brother escape from the LTTE-controlled area to the army-controlled area to avoid forced enlistment by the LTTE. He concealed his brother in the vehicle during this operation.

Did he come back again?

No, he did not return. Had he come back, the LTTE would have arrested him and forced him into enlistment.

What happened to Varathan?

I heard that he took his own life in the last days of the war in Mullivaikkal.

Returning to the main story, this woman and her child were part of a team of 15 members who were included in our pilot escape program from the LTTE-held area. We notified the army through our Vavuniya office about the group's escape attempt. Around 1:30 AM one night, they began their journey in complete secrecy. Suddenly, intense fighting erupted, and they found themselves caught in the crossfire with bombs falling heavily around them. I was terrified, fearing they had all perished.

The next morning, around 10 AM, I received

a call from my colleague who was in charge of the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) based in Vavunia, confirming the safe arrival of our group of UN workers. The team leader urged me to send another group and implored me to join them. I responded unequivocally, "I am the captain of this ship; I will only leave when every staff member has safely exited the war zone.

Later, I received a call from the woman's sister, who had been forced off the ship by Varathan. She, who was calling me from the UK, informed me that her sister was in the hospital. I later learned that during their escape, she had stepped on a landmine and lost her entire leg. Remarkably, their group leader carried her on his shoulders for three kilometers. When I asked my UNDSS Colleague why he had not informed me about the incident, he replied, "Had I told you, you would not have sent another batch of UN workers. That is why I did not tell you.

By the end of March 2009, I had successfully coordinated the evacuation of multiple groups of UN staff and their families in a manner similar to the initial deployment. Only my family, myself, and a few remaining personnel were left in the conflict area by this time.

How did you and the remaining UN workers finally escape from the LTTE-controlled area?

The Tigers had established forward defense positions along the shores of Nandikadal Lagoon specifically to prevent Tamil civilians from fleeing LTTE-held territories. The LTTE fighters manning these positions were ordered to shoot any civilians attempting to escape. Approaching the sea without being detected at these checkpoints was nearly impossible.



Fire engulfs a civilian area after it was hit by shells in early 2009,

We devised a strategy accordingly. Two of our local United Nations staff members approached one of these positions and gradually befriended the LTTE members guarding it. After several days of building rapport, we managed to bribe the LTTE fighters at that position with 25,000 rupees, securing their agreement to let us pass during the night. The Tigers, who prided themselves on never having accepted a bribe before, took the 25,000 rupees and allowed us to escape through Nandikadal Lagoon to the army-controlled area.

They informed us that a particular night would present the optimal opportunity for escape. I

personally funded the necessary bribe. At that time, even a single sovereign of jewelry in the Vanni region was valued at less than 3,000 rupees. The fighters likely needed the funds, perhaps even to plan their own eventual escape from the conflict zone. I do not blame the fighters who accepted the bribe under these circumstances.

Instead, I attribute responsibility to the leadership that placed them in such a precarious position. It is probable that these fighters were conscripted against their will. Who can say for certain?

To be continued...

Muttiah Muralitharan's Mega Investment: Why Not in Sri Lanka?



BY:
K. Kannapan

In a surprising move, Sri Lankan cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan has chosen to invest an astounding ₹1,400 crore INR (approximately 5105.12 crore SLR) in Karnataka, India, rather than in his homeland, Sri Lanka.

The ambitious project, named "Muttiah Beverages and Confectioneries," aims to establish a state-of-the-art beverage and confectionery manufacturing facility in Badanakuppe, Chamarajanagara district, Karnataka, with plans for further expansion in Dharwad.

Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries, M.B. Patil, announced this major investment following detailed discussions with Muttiah Muralitharan. The manufacturing unit, which will span 46 acres, is slated to commence operations by January 2025. This marks a significant milestone in Muralitharan's post-cricket entrepreneurial journey, transitioning from a legendary spinner to a strategic business magnate.



Minister M.B. Patil expressed optimism about the project, noting the allocation of 46 acres and the resolution of minor land issues to facilitate the venture. He highlighted that this investment would bring significant economic benefits to the region and create numerous job opportunities, further strengthening Karnataka's industrial landscape.

The Intriguing Question: Why Not Sri Lanka?

Muralitharan's iconic status in Sri Lanka has

Former Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan with Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries, M.B. Patil



made his recent decision to invest significant money abroad a topic of great curiosity and speculation. Some suggest that Sri Lanka's recent economic crisis might have influenced his decision. Additionally, the challenges faced by an Indian company's windmill project in Mannar, valued at approximately LKR 40,000 crore, might have served as a cautionary tale.

This project encountered numerous obstacles from local politicians, civil societies, and vested interests. In their eagerness to belittle the project, some politicians seemed to forget the sustainability and environmental friendliness of windmills, not to mention the potential reduction in electricity bills.

One Tamil politician, opposing the project for reasons known only to him, even claimed that the noise from the windmills would disrupt students' studies. Muralitharan, keen to avoid similar hindrances, may perceive India as a more welcoming and supportive environment for his business ventures.

Sri Lanka's loss is palpable, as the country has missed a major investment that could have spurred economic growth and development. Muralitharan's decision underscores the

broader issue of investor confidence in Sri Lanka, highlighting the need for a more stable and transparent business environment.

The recent economic turmoil in Sri Lanka has significantly influenced the decisions of prominent investors like Muttiah Muralitharan. His choice to invest abroad exemplifies a broader trend of investors wary of Sri Lanka's complexities and uncertainties. Muralitharan's decision underscores the urgent need for Sri Lanka to address its economic and political challenges, as well as the tendency of some individuals to oppose progress.

This decision reflects the country's challenging investment climate and represents a significant loss for Sri Lanka, both financially and in terms of missed opportunities for economic growth and international appeal. By opting to invest in India, Muralitharan highlights the necessity for reforms to attract and retain substantial investments in the future.

Note: The views expressed in this article are the writer's personal opinions

Gate Mudaliyar Arumugampillai Kumaraswamy:



By:
Sarawanan Komathi
Nadarasa

The First Parliamentary Representative of Sri Lankan Tamils

The British brought Sri Lanka completely under their control in 1815. The British needed a political system and a parliamentary administration to govern Sri Lanka. A commission was established in 1829 under the leadership of William Colebrooke and Charles Cameron to examine these arrangements. The system they proposed is known as the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms.

The First Indigenous Representatives

According to the Colebrooke Reforms, the Legislative Council, consisting of 15 members, was established. It included 9 official members and 6 unofficial members. Among the 6 unofficial members, there were 3 Europeans, 1 Sinhalese, 1 Tamil, and 1 Burgher. Based on that, Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy was appointed as the first Tamil representative in the legislative tradition of Sri Lanka, J.G. Phillips Panditeratne¹ (Johannes Godfried Phillipz Wijekoon Panditeratne) was appointed as the

¹ Phillips Panditaratne was a member from 14.05.1837 to 1843.



first Sinhalese member, and J.C. Hillebrand (J.G. Hillebrand) was appointed as the first Burgher member.²

At that time, Coomaraswamy was serving as the translator for the Commissioner of the Revenue Department. Phillips Panditeratne was serving as the Sinhalese translator for the Supreme Court.

² Lakshmi Kiran Daniel - Privilege And Policy: The Indigenous Elite And The Colonial Education System In Ceylon, 1912-1948 - Faculty of Modern History, Michaelmas Term, 1992



Interestingly, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, a significant political figure, descended from the lineage of J.G. Philipsz Panditaratne.

During this period, elections had not been introduced to Sri Lanka, so the Governor had the practice of selecting anyone he desired at his discretion. Governor Sir Robert Wilmot-Horton found it easy to appoint the 9 official members. However, finding and selecting the 6 unofficial members was challenging. He easily found the three Europeans and one Burgher. But, unable to find the remaining two representatives, the first meeting on 01.10.1833 convened without any Sri Lankan indigenous members.

The then Secretary of State for the Colonies rebuked this situation. Subsequently, in haste, the Governor retired his chief translators, Arumugampillai and Philipsz Panditharatne, with full pay and appointed them as unofficial members on 30.05.1835. Arumugampillai was the Chief Mudaliyar, and Philipsz Panditaratne was a Mudaliyar.³

Accordingly, he was the first representative of Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims.⁴ He can also

3 K.C.Kularatnam - "From North to Gopalla" (Tamil) Aaseervatham Press - Book Shop - Jaffna 1966
 4 T.Duraisingam - Politics and life in our times - Vol - II - Printed in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka at Unie Arts (Pvt) Limited - 2000
 -John H. Martyn - Notes On Jaffna- Chronological,

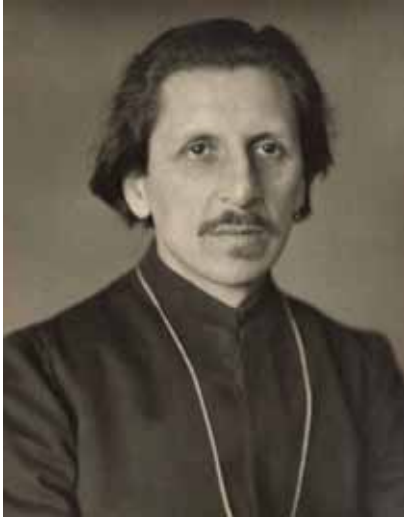
be considered the first Indigenous member in the parliamentary history of Sri Lanka. At that time, the Tamil and Muslim communities were represented under the identity of Tamils, so Arumugampillai served as the representative of the Muslims as well. Later, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who came from the same lineage, argued against the demand for separate representation for Muslims, which is another story altogether.

Name Confusion

It is observed that his name is called by various confusing names by many. In the famous book "North to Gopallawa" (1966) by K. C. Kularatnam, he is called Arumugatha Pillai. M. Vaithilingam, who wrote the biography of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan - 1971), refers to him as "Arumuganathapillai" in several places.⁵ In the books of A. J. Wilson, he is also called "Arumuganathapillai." In the "Dictionary of Biography of the Tamils of Ceylon" (1997) compiled by S. Arumugam, he is mentioned as Arumugampillai. V. Muthukumaraswamy, in his book "Founders of Modern Ceylon Eminent Tamils" (1973), also wrote a chapter

Historical, Biographical - etc. - American Ceylon Mission Press Tellippalai Ceylon - 1923.

5 A. J. Wilson - Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries - 2000)



referring to him as Arumugampillai. Let us also call him Arumugampillai Kumaraswamy.

Biography

Gate Mudaliar Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy was born in 1783 in the village of Kerudavil in Point Pedro (Paruthithurai), Sri Lanka. His elder brother, Variththampi, settled in the Chekkatti Street area of Colombo and became a prominent merchant. He then moved to Aamaithottam in the Mukhathuvaaram area and lived there.⁶ The Ponnambalam family, who later became influential political leaders centered in Colombo, started from here. At that time, areas like Kotahena, central Colombo, and Colombo North were centers where prominent aristocrats and merchants of Sri Lanka lived. Only later did the Kuruwatta area, today's Colombo 7, become a center for high-class influential aristocrats. The Ponnambalam family also moved to Colombo 7.

In 1795, the British captured the Trincomalee Fort from the Dutch. The forts in Jaffna, Kalpitiya, and Negombo also surrendered. Following this, the then-Dutch Governor was

⁶ V.Muttucumaraswamy - Founders of Modern Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Eminent Tamils - Vol I. Parts I & II The Pioneers - The Founders

prepared to hand over the forts in Kalutara, Galle, and Matara to the British. Finally, in 1796, Colombo naturally fell into the hands of the British. During the period when full control was being established in Sri Lanka, the Governor from Madras managed Sri Lanka's administration.

Variththampi was involved in identifying and importing numerous personnel from South India for administrative work. At that time, he brought 13-year-old Coomaraswamy to Colombo and cared for him.

By order of the King of England, it was decided to appoint a separate governor to manage Sri Lanka as a distinct colonial state. Accordingly, the King appointed Frederick North as the first governor in October 1798. However, until it was officially confirmed in 1802 that Sri Lanka was formally under the British Crown, Sri Lanka operated under the authority of the Governor of India.

Frederick North made several changes upon his arrival. There was an immediate need to establish a school for the education of the children of both the aristocrats and the English administrators. This school was established in Colombo on 28.10.1799. At the same time, the British recognized the long-term need to



during this struggle.⁷

For over a century, the descendants of Coomaraswamy, who had come from Jaffna, remained in Colombo and wielded influence in national politics. It was only after a century, having been disappointed by the Sinhalese leadership, that they returned to their ancestral land in Jaffna.

develop local talent for their administrative needs. A section was created with 18 Sinhalese students in the northeast corner of the Wolvendaal Church in Colombo. Although a Tamil section was also created by Father Schroter, only a few attended. Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy was admitted to the school within a year of its establishment. Coomaraswamy's exceptional abilities quickly led him to successive advancements.

Service Rendered

In 1805, he was appointed as a translator in the Colombo Fort Court. Three years later, Richard Plasket, then the Deputy Secretary of the Government, certified Coomaraswamy as a skilled talent. In 1808, Coomaraswamy was appointed as a translator for Governor Thomas Maitland. Later, in May 1810, he was promoted to the Chief Tamil Translator to the Governor and was awarded the title of Mudaliyar. At that time, he was only 26 years old.

During this period, many recorded a shadow conflict between the Chettiar community, which had migrated from South India, and the Saiva Vellala community of Jaffna. M. Vaithilingam, who wrote the biography of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, also recorded how Coomaraswamy maintained his position with the support of the Vellala community

This occurred around the 1920s, which is another story.

In the early 1800s, the influence of the Chettiar community, which had established itself as a trading community in Colombo, also grew. In 1830, Coomaraswamy was elected as the leader of the "non-Christian Tamils" in the capital city of Colombo. This election took place in the Provincial Secretariat. Thiyaagappa, a prominent figure in the arrack production industry and an influential member of the Chettiar community, competed against Coomaraswamy. This election was, in a way, a peaceful fight between the Saiva Vellalar and Saiva Chettiar communities.

In 1815, during the capture of King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha of Kandy by the British, Coomaraswamy played a significant role as a translator for the British. During this period, Arumugampillai was sent along with the army dispatched to capture Kandy as a direct officer of the Governor. In February 1815, he traveled with the army from Colombo for 14 days. When the King of Kandy, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha, was captured and sent to Colombo, Coomaraswamy was assigned to assist in exiling the king and his relatives to Vellore.

⁷ M. Vythilingam - The Life Of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan Vol.I, Ramanathan Commemoration Society - Colombo 1971

Abolition of Slavery

The slavery system, which had continued during the Portuguese and Dutch periods, persisted into the early period of British rule as well. Many individuals in the country owned slaves as property. Families were sold together, or children were separated from their fathers, children from their mothers, and husbands and wives were cruelly separated and sold individually. During this period, there were a total of 28,000 slaves on the island of Sri Lanka alone. Among them, 22,000 slaves were in Jaffna and Trincomalee. The price of a male slave was 17 rupees, and the price of a female slave was 34 rupees. It is also noteworthy that slavery was abolished in Mauritius and the West Indies in 1833.

In commemoration of the birthday of the Prince Regent of England, a large list of prominent Sri Lankans who signed in support of the abolition of slavery on 12.08.1816 can be found (Ceylon Ordinances - 1853).⁸ Notably, those who signed were divided according to

8 A Collection Of Legislative Acts Of The Ceylon Government From 1796: Colombo - William Skeen, Government printer, Ceylon - 1853

their castes. These groups included Vellalar, Karaiyar, Vannar, and Chettiar, among others. This list, which contains nearly a thousand signatures, was divided by region, caste, and ethnicity.⁹ Among the signatories in the list of Colombo Malabars (Colombo Tamils) is the name of Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy.

The details of the gradual liberation of slaves from various regions have also been published. In the late 1819s, the courts of that time intervened and liberated slaves belonging to the Pallars, Koviars, and Nalavars communities in the Jaffna and Trincomalee areas. These details are explained on the pages of the report as mentioned earlier.

Praise from the British

In recognition of Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy's service, Governor Robert Brownrigg awarded him a medal and a gold necklace in 1819. The inscription on the medal reads as follows: "This medal is presented

9 In this list, Tamils are referred to as Malabarais. You may be aware that during the Portuguese period and later during the Dutch period, Tamils were recorded as Malabarais in most places. Similarly, when they referred to the Sinhalese as Sinhalese, they did not refer to them as "Sinhalese" as they do today. "Cingalese."

Kumaraswamy family's political journey till date

| Name | Lifetime | In the power |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy | 1783 - 07.11.1836 | 30 May 1835 – 07.11.1836 until death |
| Ethirmannasingham | | 1846-1861 |
| Muthu Coomaraswamy | 23.01.1834 – 04.05.1879 | 1861–1879 until death |
| Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan | 06.04.1851 – 26.11.1930 | (1879–1930) |
| Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy | 07.12.1849 - 07.06.1906 | (1892-1898) |
| Ponnambalam Arunachalam | 14.09.1853 – 09.01.1924 | 1912-1913 |
| S.Nadesan | 21.05.1895 – 15.01.1965 | 1934–1947, 1952–1956 |
| Arunachalam Mahadeva | 05.10.1885 – 15.04.1966 | 1934–1947 |
| Sir S. Pararasingam | 25.06.1896- ?! | 1954 (Senator) |
| T.M.Swaminathan | 30.04.1945- | 2010- |
| C.V.Wigneswaran | 23.10.1939- | 2013 - Chief Minister (NP) |

to Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar by the Honorable Sir Robert Brownrigg, Governor, during his term of office, in appreciation of his distinguished and satisfactory public service as the Chief Translator of the Government."¹⁰

Coomaraswamy married Visalatchi, and they had two children, Muthu Coomaraswamy and Sellachi. Muthu Coomaraswamy was the father of Sir Ananda Coomaraswamy. Sellachi's children were Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, and Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam.

Arumugampillai also served under Governor Sir Edward Paget (1822-1824) and Governor Sir Edward Barnes (1824-1831).

Death

Although Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1835, he could not attend the subsequent session. He passed away on 07.11.1836.¹¹ Thus, he held the position for approximately one and a half years. The history of the political power structure of that time confirms that no member of that first Legislative Council could, or did, play a significant role as a political representative. However, he holds the honor and record of being the first Indigenous member. His contributions to civil service were notable and historically significant. Likewise, his successors continued to fill his place.

After his death, Governor Robert Horton delivered an emotional eulogy for him on 07.11.1836.¹² The Governor faced difficulties in selecting another person to fill his position. For one and a half years, Coomaraswamy's position remained vacant. Finally, the Governor appointed Simon Cassie Chitty, a distinguished civil service officer and scholar from Kalpitiya, who retired from his post to become the unofficial Tamil representative.¹³

After Coomaraswamy, Simon Cassie Chitty was appointed, followed by Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy's son-in-law, Edirmannasingham Mudaliyar. Subsequently, his son Muthukumaraswamy and later his son-in-law Ramanathan were appointed. After them, Coomaraswamy's descendants continued to be appointed. The Coomaraswamy family provided political representation in Sri Lanka from the time of the first political reform, the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms, to the period of the Donoughmore Reforms.

The seed that Coomaraswamy planted in the political history of Tamils in Sri Lanka is remarkable when considering the political milestones influenced by his family's impact over the past one and a half centuries. The political transformations brought about by their influence are astonishing. We do not know as much about those who came after him as we do about him.

10 M. Vythilingam - The Life Of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan Vol.I, Ramanathan Commemoration Society - Colombo 1971

11 This date can be obtained in V.Muttucumaraswamy - Some Eminent Tamils – Department of Hindu & Cultural Affairs (1992), while K.C. Kularatnam in North First Gopallawa states that his date of death is 14.05.1837.

12 S.Arumugam - Dictionary of Biography of the tamils of Sri Lanka – London - 1996

13 In those days the appointees were permanent members, no election, no term of membership, and the appointment and extension were at the pleasure of the Governor.



That FACE



Translated from the original Tamil short story *anta mukam* (அந்த முகம்) by **M. S. Kanakaratnam** which appeared in the July 1959 issue of the magazine *kalaimati* (கலைமதி)

Translated by:
Eluttukkinivan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

The melody of the harmonium blending with the rhythms of the percussion instrument *mridangam* wafted through the air.

The cacophonous voice of the background singer followed, over the loudspeaker.

These were the signs foretelling the imminent arrival of the popular *sinnamēlam* dance

performance. A sudden bustle started to sizzle among the temple-goers.

People who were bored by the *mēlaccamā*—the playful back-and-forth between the *thavil* drummers—and were lounging on their *sālvais* spread out on the sand, woke up abruptly and started to swarm towards the temple hall.

Commotion and cheering ensued.

What the crowd had been staying awake for in this cold weather until two in the morning, was about to begin.

The temple hall was filled within half a second. Crowds teemed everywhere.

The famous *Kamalā-Vimalā* dance troupe was set to perform that day. No wonder that the hall was full.

The sound of *salaṅkai*—the ankle ornament with little bells—drifted over. The entire crowd forgot to blink and turned their heads towards the direction whence the *salaṅkai* sound came.

Two dancers walked towards the center of the stage, elegantly like swans. Once they reached the center, they glanced around at the crowds surrounding the center stage and graced them with a smile.

The smile had the power to enchant every single person in the audience.

“*aalalai aalaip pārkkirār*,” the loudspeaker started blaring a popular cinema song.

The dance began. As the harmonium player kept the tune and the *mridangam* drummer showcased his skill, the two dancers twisted and swirled.

Their contortions captivated the hearts of the audience and enthralled them.

The crowd jostled expectantly, hoping to catch a glimpse of the *sinnamēḷam* dance.

Outside, under a tree a little distance away from the temple building, there was a crowd that had come to witness the festivities.

Surely, they, too, would want to enjoy the dance performance, wouldn't they?

They would, with all their heart. But ...

They could not step inside the temple with the others to participate in the festivities. They did not have that privilege.

They were dalits, people from the downtrodden, segregated, lower castes ...

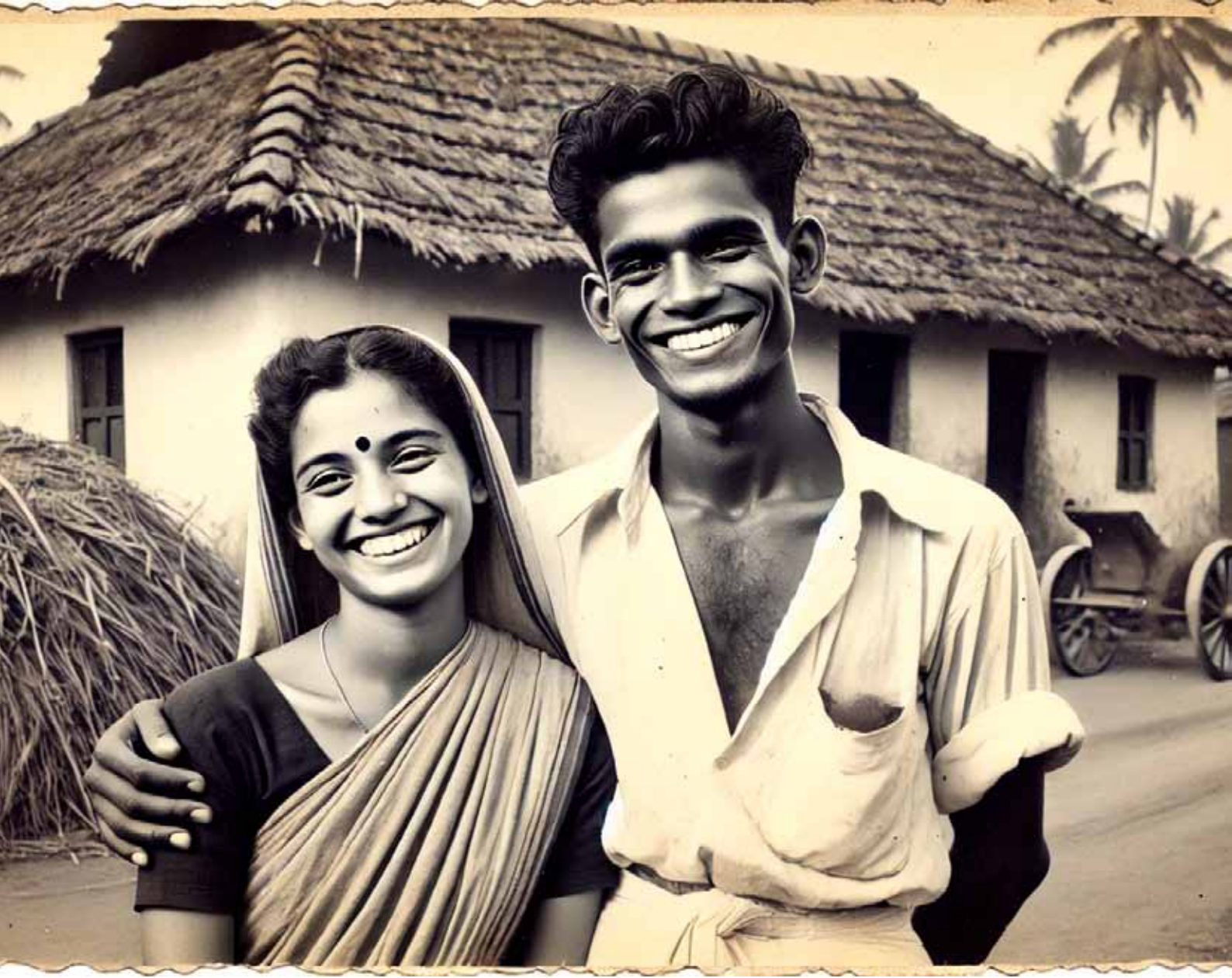
They could not see anything that was going on within the temple. They merely heard the songs and the sounds of *salaṅkai* over the loudspeakers. From the sounds, they had to fill in the gaps by imagining the dance performance.

2

Kandasāmi was dissatisfied. He had stayed up till two in the morning to watch the *sinnamēḷam* performance. How could he instead settle for merely watching the backs of the thronging masses from a distance?

He fumed at his mother Valli. He wanted to go near the temple to get a better look at the dance performance. But she had forbidden it, absolutely.

She, too, was angry at him. When all the poor souls under the tree were content to enjoy the festivities from a distance, why was he so impatient?



No one could fault him. He was just an eight-year-old tot who did not understand the intricacies and goresqueness of societal conventions.

Vaḷḷi had been very firm. He was not to move even an inch from where he was standing.

Kandasāmi was equally firm: he had resolved to himself that he would somehow give his mother the slip to go watch *sinnamēḷam*.

When Vaḷḷi dozed off momentarily, Kandasāmi saw his chance and made his move.

He rushed towards the temple and blended into the crowd that was enjoying the dance.

But no matter how he allowed himself to be crushed and trodden on, he could not see what was going on inside. He circled the crowd to no avail.

Frustrated, he was ready to give up and return back to where he came from, when he spotted a good vantage point.

There, in the women's section, on the side of the ceremonial temple flagpole.

Somehow, he reached that spot, climbing over some people, being trodden on by others, and squeezing himself through between yet others.

As he sat there and watched the dance, he marveled at its novelty and beauty.

He was thoroughly absorbed in enjoying the performance.

Then -

“Dēy, you low-caste scoundrel, who let you in. Get out at once, you dog...”

- This was the voice of *vithāṇaiyār*

Veluppillai, the government official in the village.

Kandasāmi did not remember what happened thereafter. He was dragged outside brutally. Everyone had a go at him. They beat him until he fainted.

Someone dragged Vaḷḷi by her wrist to where he lay.

- “Look at what your kid has done. He has stepped inside the temple.... The devil.....”

- “He has done something that no one has ever done before.....”

- “How can we continue the festival without a ritual atonement?.....”

Vaḷḷi’s world was spinning around her....

Kandasāmi lay unconscious on the ground, like a corpse. Blood was oozing out of his face and mouth, making his tender face look grotesque. No one sympathized with his situation. Instead, there was plenty of abuse, scorn, and swearing....

But it did not stop there.

-“Take him away, the devil, the dog...,”
vithāṇaiyār Veluppillai again kicked the curled up body of Kandasāmi.

Even after Kandasāmi was unconscious, oblivious to everything around him, *vithāṇaiyār*’s anger did not subside. “Vaḷḷi, I am letting him go just for your sake, just for

the sake of your face. Had he been anyone else’s child, he would be lying dead now for what he has done... I held myself back for your sake.... Mmm.. lift him up,” he growled.

Like a lifeless machine, Vaḷḷi lifted Kandasāmi over her shoulder without uttering a word, and walked away.

3

Kandasāmi lay on a torn straw mat, moaning. Vaḷḷi sat next to him, gently stroking his body.

They had no one to help them.... They only had each other. Vaḷḷi’s husband *Sinnathampi* had passed away two years earlier.

Vaḷḷi stared at Kandasāmi’s face.

That face....

-The memory brought out a surge of sadness in her. Tears streamed down her cheeks. The face rekindled long-forgotten memories.

The memories trampled on by time slowly raised their heads.

Her thoughts zoomed back to several years prior.

It must have been just a year or two after *Sinnathampi* married her. Her beauty and his masculinity entwined in each other. They led a happy life.

The livelihood of that family depended entirely on *vithāṇaiyār* Veluppillai. *Sinnathampi* worked his land. Vaḷḷi did his household chores. Veluppillai paid very little for their work. They were used to living their lives within that meager income.

That day, *vithāṇaiyār* had sent *Sinnathampi* off to another village on some errand.



Vaḷḷi would have had to sleep alone that night.

When she finished her chores and prepared to leave, *vithānaiyār* said, “Why don’t you sleep here, Vaḷḷi? How would you sleep at home, alone without anyone to help?”

“No, *sāmi*... why would I need any help... I can sleep alone.,” Vaḷḷi said as she left.

At around eleven that evening, Vaḷḷi shut her front door tight, put the lamp out, and was about to go to bed. She heard someone calling out her name.

“Vaḷḷi ... Vaḷḷi ...”

Who would that be? It sounded like the voice of *vithānaiyār*.

She opened the door a little. She was right, *vithānaiyār* Veluppillai stood outside.

“Why *sāmi*... at this hour?”

“Nothing. You were going to go to bed alone. I came to check if you were afraid...”

Vaḷḷi was overcome with joy. What a kindhearted person!

Vaḷḷi came out onto the front yard.

The blackness of the moonless night reigned supreme. It was then that it happened.

“Vaḷḷi,” Veluppillai said, as he grabbed her wrist.

She instantly understood the reason for his visit, and the hidden motive that lurked beneath his kindness.

She jerked her wrist free and ran inside the house.

Like lightning, he followed her inside.

Then?

She sobbed into her pillow until dawn. She wept until the sorrow within her heart was exhausted.

4

Kandasāmi’s moaning put an end to Vaḷḷi’s reverie.

She chastened herself for allowing her stray thoughts to confuse her mind.

Even in the middle of his unbearable pain, a gentle smile formed on Kandasāmi’s lips.

That face... that smile...

- It was as if *vithāṇaiyār* Veluppillai stood there smiling.

MONITOR MEMO

Arun Siddharth Switches Teams, Promises to Spill the UNP Tea



Arun Siddharth has been appointed as the chief organizer for the Jaffna district by the Mawbima Janatha Party. This appointment was made during a lively event held in Colombo under the leadership of the party's chairman, Dilith Jayaweera.

Arun Siddharth, who had recently joined the United National Party (UNP), decided to switch allegiances to the Mawbima Janatha Party. When asked about his decision, "The UNP party sidelined me based on caste," he claimed. "That is why I left. The decision to join the Mawbima Janatha Party was driven by the pursuit of effective resolutions to combat oppression."

Siddharth didn't mince words about his former party. He promised to reveal the caste-based elements within the UNP and said that he wouldn't spare anyone, not even Ranil Wickremesinghe, the President of Sri Lanka and leader of the UNP.

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At JaffnaMonitor, every voice matters — and every perspective is welcome. Whether it's a word of appreciation, a constructive critique, or a differing viewpoint, we believe in fostering a space where conversations thrive. We invite all to share their thoughts and engage in meaningful discourse regardless of political leanings or affiliations.

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