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**"Former LTTE Fighters Now Rely on
Government Help - Where Is the
So-Called Powerful Diaspora?"
asks Minister Ali Sabry**

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Dear Readers,

In this edition, we feature a timely interview with Ali Sabry on the day of his reappointment as Justice Minister. Conducted in his Colombo office, this conversation offers a nuanced exploration of Minister Sabry's perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Sri Lanka. Having navigated significant hurdles throughout his career, Minister Sabry shared his thoughts on the various roles he has undertaken, including his current responsibilities on the international stage as Foreign Minister.

We also present a detailed article by our special correspondent on the unfolding drama surrounding the Tamil Common Candidate. Titled "From East to Least: The Common Tamil Candidate Comedy Starring Ariyanethiran," the piece critically examines the recent political manoeuvring within the Tamil People's Assembly. It delves into the irony and contradictions of their candidate selection, providing a candid analysis of how these developments may impact the Tamil community and the broader political landscape in Sri Lanka.

This issue is filled with a rich variety of insightful content and compelling narratives that truly capture the pulse of our region. Despite the delay, we hope this edition continues to provide the depth of insight and engagement you've come to expect from the Jaffna Monitor. Our mission remains to reflect the voices and concerns of our community, offering a platform for the most important discussions. We deeply appreciate your patience and unwavering support as we navigate these challenging times together.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

From East to Least: The Common Tamil Candidate Comedy Starring Ariyanethiran!



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

The Tamil People's Assembly is throwing a grand party after finally convincing former MP P. Ariyanethiran to step up as their Tamil Common Candidate for the Presidential Election-probably because no one else was eager to take on the role! After what felt like endless hotel debates across the North and East, they've dubbed him the chosen one, celebrating as if they've just unlocked the secret to winning Tamil Eelam!

Pakkiyaselvam Ariyanethiran from Ambilanthurai, Paduvankarai, in Batticaloa, has become social media's latest meme sensation. As one witty political observer quipped, back in the LTTE days, it was always the Eastern fighters who got the short end of the stick-sent North to fight someone else's battles. Fast forward to today, and it seems Ariyanethiran is reprising that role, except now he's the East's official 'scapegoat' for a few

Northerners' grand ambitions!

But here's the twist-a political observer wrote that his family used to be die-hard supporters of the United National Party! Back in the day, especially during Thanthai Chelva's (S. J. V. Chelvanayakam) time, they'd say that leaning toward Tamil nationalist politics-particularly anything tied to the North-was a surefire way to invite bad luck. Now, irony's having a field day as someone from that very family is being paraded around as the new champion of Tamil nationalism! Talk about a plot twist!

Former EROS Member of the Parliament and writer Alagu Gunaseelan didn't hold back in his spicy piece for Arangam News, an East-based website known for embracing different voices and opinions. He pointed out that Ariyanethiran, born in 1955, was completely clueless about Tamil nationalist politics until 1985. His sudden interest in the cause only sparked during Kumarappa's era, the then LTTE chief of Batticaloa and Ampara districts, and it wasn't exactly out of passion-it was more



about protecting his family's property and wealth. The plot thickened when Kumarappa fell for one of Ariyanethiran's relatives, cementing their alliance.

Gunaseelan further revealed that Ariyanethiran's rise to fame continued under Karuna Amman, the then-powerful military chief of the LTTE, thanks to his cosy connections with locals and relatives from Paduvankarai, like David, Thambirasa, Thayamoorthy, Thurai, and Kausalyan. Gunaseelan didn't stop there, pointing out that Ariyanethiran practically swiped a media outlet in Batticaloa to reinvent himself as a journalist, serving the Tamil press during

Karuna's reign. According to Gunaseelan, whether it's media or politics, Ariyanethiran has mastered the art of "unethical behaviour." And as he cheekily put it, "birds of a feather flock together," with several Northern writers now jumping on the bandwagon to back him up without hesitation!

Ariyanethiran, who proudly thumps his chest, claiming he was brought into politics by LTTE supremo Prabhakaran, might want to add a little footnote explaining how that actually happened. After the LTTE formed the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), he ran in the 2004 parliamentary elections on the TNA ticket in Batticaloa District. But, in a dramatic



twist, the all-powerful LTTE split in two, with the Eastern fighters led by Karuna Amman breaking away.

In that election, Ariyanethiran-known for his unwavering support of the Northern Tigers - ranked fifth in the TNA based on preferential votes, where only the top four were elected, leaving him without a seat. One political observer noted that his blind allegiance to the Northern Tigers was a significant reason for his failure to secure a position.

The lucky ones who did get elected were Thambappillai Kanagasabai, Thangeswary Kathiraman, Senathirajah Jeyanandamoorth and Kingsley Rasanayagam. But here's where it gets even juicier: the Tigers, who were not so thrilled with Kingsley Rasanayagam's closeness to Karuna Amman, kidnapped him and pressured him into resigning his MP position. And who swoops in through the Tigers' backdoor? None other than Ariyanethiran sneaked his way into Parliament with the same finesse he used to become a journalist-showing neither political decency nor integrity!

The 2004 parliamentary election took place on April 2, and by May, Kingsley Rasanayagam had resigned, clearing the

path for Ariyanethiran, who eagerly took his oath in Parliament on May 18. But here's the real twist-Ariyanethiran won't soon forget that oath date, especially considering the eerie coincidence that exactly five years later, on May 18, 2009, the LTTE military was defeated at Mullivaikkal on the very same day. Coincidence? An Eastern writer couldn't help but wonder aloud.

Adding to the intrigue, even after resigning from his position as a Member of Parliament, Kingsley Rasanayagam was not spared by the LTTE; he was assassinated by the Tigers on October 19, 2004. Numerous hush-hush rumours are suggesting that Ariyanethiran may have had a hand in the assassination-not directly, of course. What's even more curious is that, to this day, Ariyanethiran has never spoken out against the killing of the man whose seat he unethically slipped into in Parliament.

The Tamil Common Candidate saga is unfolding with all the gravitas of a Shakespearean drama-yet, as one political observer noted, it's hard not to see it as more of a farce than a tragedy. An MoU was signed with great fanfare by seven political heavyweights-each representing their

respective parties-Selvam Adaikalanathan (TELO), C.V. Wigneswaran (Tamil People's Alliance), D. Siddharthan (PLOTE), N. Srikantha (Tamil Nationalist Party), Suresh Premachandran (EPRLF), P. Iyngaranesan (Tamil Nationalist Green Movement), and S. Venthan (Democratic Cadres Party). But here's where the plot takes a comedic turn-these seasoned politicians, with decades of experience in councils and Parliament (with the exception of the Democratic Cadres Party), have somehow found themselves sharing the stage with just seven individuals-civil society activists T. Vasantharajah, S.C. Jothilingam, Prof. K.T. Kanesalingam, Selwyn Irenaeus, and R. Wigneswaran, along with political analysts A. Jatheendra and M. Nilanthan-a motley crew dubbed the 'Tamil People's Assembly.

A political observer, in conversation with Jaffna Monitor, questioned the absurdity of these political parties signing an MoU with mere individuals. Is this making a mockery of democracy? Another political observer, in conversation with Jaffna Monitor, noted that it's almost as if the political veterans, who have spent decades navigating the choppy waters of Tamil politics, have suddenly agreed to a script where they're on equal footing with these seven individuals. The so-called Tamil People's Assembly, now being paraded as a grand civil body, is little more than a small ensemble tasked with 'managing' the very politicians who have been in the trenches of both armed struggle and democratic battles. As another political commentator quipped, this arrangement doesn't just blur the lines of democracy-it turns the whole play into a caricature.

Another observer pointed out that the Tamil People's Assembly is being hyped as a majestic civil body when, in reality, the majority of civil societies from the North and East were not included.

Let's dive into the swirling questions around these civil organization representatives-especially those individuals who've somehow been elevated to the same status as political parties. How ready are these seven politically motivated folks, who've been plucked from their day jobs in government service, teaching, and whatever else they do, to fully commit to public life? Are they really prepared to shoulder the same level of responsibility as the seasoned political party reps who signed this agreement?

And speaking of responsibility, where's the gender equality they've been preaching? These civil organizations have been so vocal about women's representation in politics, yet somehow didn't think to include even one female representative in this supposedly all-inclusive framework. Even after students from Jaffna and Southeastern universities and the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared threw their support behind the common candidate, they weren't given representative status. What's up with that?

And now, let's talk geography. Among the seven civil representatives, three hail from Trincomalee, Ampara, and Batticaloa, while the other four are from Jaffna. So, why aren't districts like Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Mannar, and Kilinochchi-areas that have seen war and cultural erasure and hold deep emotional significance-getting any representation? Are there really no civil representatives from Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, and Kilinochchi in the Tamil People's Assembly? Or, if there are, do they just not have enough clout to make it into this common framework? It makes you wonder, doesn't it?

It's almost comical that out of the fourteen stakeholders in this so-called 'Tamil Common Framework,' not a single one was willing to step up as the common candidate," a



political observer noted. Instead, they pushed Ariyanethiran-an Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) central committee member-into the spotlight as the common Tamil candidate. What's particularly telling is that none of the seven civil representatives dared to volunteer-probably sensing the potential fallout. And even if someone had mustered the courage to run, the others would likely have shot them down. So, what did these individuals and the parties behind this farce do? They returned and picked a candidate from Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), the party they've criticized in the most colourful, unparliamentary terms.

And to add insult to injury, the political parties supporting this joke didn't even give him a symbol to run under. The Tamil common candidate is standing in the election as an independent. Parties like Tamil People's Alliance, TELO, PLOTE, and EPRLF aren't about to risk their symbols on this experiment. Even the Democratic Tamil National Alliance hesitated to offer their 'Kuthuvilakku' (oil lamp) symbol, fearing it might come back

to haunt them in future elections if things go south. Ultimately, the common candidate had to settle for the 'Sangu' (conch) symbol, assigned by the election commission as an independent. It's like they're saying, 'Good luck, you're on your own!'

Credible sources told Jaffna Monitor that the Tamil Common Framework scoured the world, searching high and low for the perfect common candidate-someone who shouldn't belong to any party, should be from the East, should be a woman, and should gracefully exit politics after the election. But after all that effort, they were left with just two options: Ariyanethiran or K.V. Thavarasa-both full-time politicians and both central committee members of the same ITAK, the party they've been criticizing for ages. And who did they pick? Ariyanethiran-a full-time politician who checks none of those boxes, except for being from the East. Talk about missing the mark!

Adding to the comedy, there's a huge disconnect between the framework's representatives and Ariyanethiran. The

framework insists the candidate shouldn't re-enter politics after the election, but Ariyanethiran clearly missed the memo. He said he's just a 'symbol' until September 22 and won't be responsible for anything after that—basically, leaving the framework to clean up the mess, he indirectly hinted.

They claimed that by fielding a common Tamil candidate, they were demonstrating that the Tamils had united as a nation. But if that were the case, how should the announcement have been made? Instead of a grand reveal before a massive crowd from the Northern and Eastern provinces, it ended up being a low-key press conference at Thanthai Selva Hall—with hardly anyone in attendance. And guess who didn't show up? The leaders of the Tamil People's Alliance, TELO, and PLOTE. Their excuse? A parliamentary session. Some didn't even bother to send representatives. And let's be honest, even if they had planned a grand function, who would have attended? So, they safely confined themselves to a small hall, avoiding the embarrassment of empty seats. The announcement itself was a failure, and if this is what they call unity, it's off to a shaky start.

They also claimed they were sending a strong message to the international community that Tamils are standing together. But did the framework even consider discussing their grand plan with the local diplomatic community—the very first step in sending a strong message to the international stage? Did they at least check in with India, the country they often claim has a moral obligation to solve the Tamil issue? The answer, of course, is a resounding no.

These political leaders and civil society leaders seem to overlook that if this is being presented as the referendum of the Tamil people, yet

in reality, many Tamils remain indifferent to this so-called common Tamil candidate, the candidate is likely to face a significant defeat. In that context, wouldn't it appear to the international community that the Tamil referendum has failed? Could this ultimately harm the Tamil cause? This situation is also raising concerns among ordinary Tamils: is this part of a broader agenda aimed at weakening the Tamil voice?

Lastly, Ariyanethiran, who's quick to criticize the presidential candidates—Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sajith Premadasa, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, and Sarath Fonseka—for cheating the Tamils since 2009, might need a little history lesson. He should remember that his party backed Sarath Fonseka in the 2010 Sri Lankan presidential election. In the 2015 presidential election, they threw their support behind Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickremesinghe, becoming unofficial partners of the then 'Good Governance' alliance, with Sampanthan becoming the opposition leader with the blessings of Sinhala parties. Let's not forget how his party and his former boss, Sampanthan, were all smiles with Ranil during their 2015 political honeymoon. When Ranil's deputy, Sajith Premadasa, broke away from Ranil and ran in the 2019 presidential election, the TNA threw its support behind him unconditionally—despite Sajith promising in front of these TNA leaders to build a thousand viharas in the Tamil-speaking North and East.

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's party, the JVP, went to court and orchestrated the split of the North and East. Yet, Anura was still handed the opposition whip post, courtesy of the TNA's support—where ITAK, the very party in which Ariyanethiran is a central committee member, is the chief constituent. If that's not Ariyanethiran's selective memory at work, then what is?

"Former LTTE Fighters Now Rely on Government Help - Where Is the So-Called Powerful Diaspora?" asks Minister Ali Sabry



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

On the day Ali Sabry was reappointed as Justice Minister, we had the opportunity to sit down with him in his Colombo office for an in-depth interview. Sabry's journey is notable not just for his legal acumen, but for his rise from Sri Lanka's minority Muslim community to some of the highest echelons of power—a remarkable feat, especially in the wake of the systemic challenges faced by his community following the Easter attacks.



As one of the country's most prominent lawyers, Sabry has long been recognized for his ability to navigate complex legal terrains. Now, as the Foreign Minister, he represents Sri Lanka on the global stage, embodying the nation's face in international diplomacy. Our conversation delved into the multifaceted roles he plays and his perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Sri Lanka. Below are key

excerpts from our discussion, offering a glimpse into the mind of a leader who continues to shape the country's direction amidst complex dynamics.

Congratulations on your reappointment as Justice Minister. During your previous tenure, you made significant strides in addressing the concerns of Tamil families with missing loved ones

"Those who parted ways with the SLPP are now planning to form a new party and establish an alliance to face the upcoming elections, aiming to have it ready before the presidential election."

from the war, particularly through the establishment of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP). As you take on this role once again, could you elaborate on your plans to further support these families, especially in terms of compensation and other initiatives aimed at providing them with the justice and closure they desperately seek?

Thank you. We established the Office on Missing Persons to tackle these sensitive issues. According to the data we've collected, there were approximately 6,500 complaints of missing persons between 2000 and 2009. Of these, around 5,750 cases have been brought before the OMP. As a first step, families can request either a certificate of missing status or, if they prefer, a death certificate. We've also set up a dedicated tracing unit for those who insist on tracing their loved ones.

Compensation is another crucial aspect, and issuing the necessary certificates is essential. The key here is building trust in the institution, which is reflected in the substantial number of families who have approached the OMP. Unfortunately, many of these missing individuals were abducted by the LTTE and forced into combat, and many may have perished during the war. However, we are not making any assumptions about their fate, and the tracing unit will continue its work as long as relatives insist.

How do you plan to address the issue of missing persons from the war, especially in light of the significant number still unaccounted for?

During the last war, more than 80% of the missing were abducted and forcibly enlisted by the LTTE. In January 2022, when I was the Justice Minister, I personally went to Vavuniya and interviewed around 10 missing persons' parents on behalf of the OMP. Almost all the parents told me that their children were taken by the LTTE against their will. They all shared the same painful story.

During the final stages of the war, around 4,000 government soldiers also went missing, and we have not recovered their bodies. Initially, they were categorized as missing in action, but later, they were listed as killed in action. If we had 4,000 soldiers killed in action, it stands to reason that the LTTE suffered even greater losses. The vast majority of those now listed as missing were LTTE cadres, many of whom were abducted and forced to fight by the LTTE, including children as young as 11. We recovered many such children who were given just two weeks of training before being sent into battle.

What percentage of the relatives of missing persons have approached the OMP?

Out of 6,500 cases, approximately 5,750 have come to the OMP, which translates to about 90%. This high percentage reflects the great faith people have in our institution. The OMP is based in Kilinochchi, where the chairman and team are actively engaging with families who have lost their loved ones.

Minister Douglas Devananda has suggested that the government's compensation of 2 lakhs is inadequate and has called for it to be increased to one million rupees. What is your perspective on this proposal?

Yes, we are considering that proposal. Given that it's been over a decade since the end of the conflict, it's appropriate to revisit the compensation amount. While I'm not sure of the exact figure yet, we must certainly look into increasing it to offer something more substantial, depending on our capacity to pay.

As the Finance Minister, you played a crucial role in initiating talks with the IMF. Could you elaborate on the current steps and the progress being made?

The discussions with the IMF have been progressing well. We've successfully secured the first, second, and third tranches and are now preparing for the fourth. We must adhere strictly to the IMF program. If we don't stick to the program and attempt to renegotiate or make changes along the way, the IMF will halt their payments. If that happens, it won't just be the IMF withholding funds; the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank could follow suit. This would jeopardize around \$1.2 billion in funding expected towards the end

of this year and early next year, which would create significant challenges for the Sri Lankan economy.

It's important to note that this is our 17th time engaging with the IMF, and historically, we've struggled to see these programs through to completion. This time, it's crucial that we stay the course and complete the program without abandoning it halfway. If we manage to do this successfully, Sri Lanka could emerge from this cycle once and for all, and we may not have to turn to the IMF for assistance in the future.

As a national list MP of the SLPP, you're often seen as having been brought into politics by the Rajapaksa brothers. Now, your party is putting forward Namal Rajapaksa as a presidential candidate, yet you and the majority of the SLPP are siding with the incumbent President, Ranil Wickremesinghe. Do you feel a moral dilemma in opposing Namal?

In politics, there are three priorities that should guide your actions: first, the country; second, the party; and third, personal interests. For me, the country's needs must always take precedence over the party's. Right now, our focus must be on who is best equipped to steer Sri Lanka out of its economic challenges and ensure stability.

It's clear that among the potential candidates, Ranil Wickremesinghe possesses the necessary experience and proven ability. He has demonstrated this not once but twice. In 1999, when Sri Lanka faced its first recession since independence, he took charge and led us back to growth.



"Today, we no longer arrest individuals under the PTA unless they have a direct connection to terrorism."

Then, in 2022, when Sri Lanka faced an unprecedented economic crisis, he played a pivotal role in turning things around. The progress we've seen from where we were then to where we are now speaks for itself. He is a tried and tested leader, and when such a leader is available, it is our duty to support him. This is not the time for experiments.

With this perspective in mind, we strongly opposed the SLPP's decision to put forward another candidate. We urged the party to grant Ranil Wickremesinghe a further five-year term to consolidate the economy. Unfortunately, our voices were not heeded within the party, leaving us with no choice but to take this stance.

Is it true that the SLPP leaders backing Ranil Wickremesinghe are planning to start a new party?

Yes, about 90% of the leaders have parted ways with the SLPP to support Ranil Wickremesinghe. With the presidential election approaching and the need to prepare for the subsequent parliamentary election, we recognize the importance of having our own party. We are, therefore, planning to form a new party and establish an alliance to face the upcoming elections.

So, you're forming the party before the presidential election?

Yes, that's the plan.

You mentioned that your voice wasn't heard within the SLPP. Who ignored your concerns?

It appears that a small group, likely those in the political committee or similar bodies, were making all the key decisions. Out of 128 SLPP members of parliament, only 16 were included in the decision-making process. These members were selected and appointed without broader consultation. While the party constitution might grant them the authority to do this, it becomes problematic when they fail to consult cabinet ministers, parliamentary members, or even the party's organizational structure at the district and electoral levels. When such essential voices are excluded, the entire process becomes flawed. As a result, we had no choice but to resist.

Who was responsible for this? Can we say it was the Rajapaksa family?

There's no need to single out anyone specifically. However, the party's decision-making process has been concentrated within a small group. They formed a committee of 82 members, but only 16 of them were parliamentary members. We were excluded from this committee. Usually, a political party would consult its executive committee, then the district-level organizations, and finally the parliamentary group before making crucial decisions. But in this case, decisions were made by a select few, a so-called "kitchen cabinet." This approach doesn't reflect the aspirations of the people or the majority of the party members.



And, in your opinion, what are their true intentions?

They want to maintain control of the party for themselves.

But, the Rajapaksa brothers brought

you into politics, which was an unfamiliar territory for you. Given this context, some in the general public might feel that you should remain loyal to the Rajapaksa brothers. Is that the case?

"The Tamil common candidate is an unwise move."

I didn't enter politics to serve any individual or group. I came into politics to serve the country. Certainly not to serve the Rajapaksa brothers. When I entered politics, the country needed something, and I believed I could contribute. That's why I stepped into this arena. I can't even put myself before my country, so how could I place anyone else above it? My loyalty is, and always will be, to the nation first.

After the Easter attacks, a systematic wave of hate was unleashed on the Sri Lankan Muslim community. In the subsequent government led by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, you were the only Muslim MP from the SLPP and the sole Muslim minister. You faced massive criticism both from the majority for being a Muslim and from within the Muslim community for joining a Sinhala-majority government, especially under a president who openly declared that he was elected solely by Sinhala votes. How did you personally cope with this dual pressure?

The opposition wanted this issue to remain unresolved so they could exploit it for political gain. That was their objective. My objective, however, was to find a solution and resolve the issue. If I had stayed outside the government and simply criticized them, my concerns would have been dismissed, and I would have been viewed as an adversary. By being part of the government and its Cabinet, I had the opportunity to raise these issues directly in

cabinet meetings with key decision-makers.

When I was appointed Justice Minister, a section of Buddhist monks vehemently opposed it. They publicly stated that I should not be given the Justice Ministry. Even Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith expressed that I shouldn't be appointed. But why were they against me? Was I a criminal? Did I have any theft cases? No. They opposed me because I stood against the government's policy of forcibly cremating COVID-19 victims, a policy that deeply hurt the Muslim community's sentiments.

I gave an interview to Al Jazeera where I spoke out against the government's decision, and that angered them. I even obtained a stay against an influential Buddhist monk, Ven. Madille Pannaloka Thera of the "Sinhale" organization who labelled me a terrorist simply because I opposed the forced cremation policy. In court, he eventually stated that he would no longer make defamatory or insulting remarks against me.

I did what I could within the framework available to me. It's important to understand that the easiest thing to do is to walk away and then criticize from the outside. But I didn't do that. I became part of the system and tried to solve the problem. Finding a solution is the hardest thing to do, and that's what I aimed to achieve.

When you entered politics, you were one of the leading lawyers in the country, reportedly earning crores. Some political observers even joked that becoming a cabinet minister was

a financial loss for you. What motivated you to step into politics and take on the role of a cabinet minister? What were the reasons behind your decision?

There were two key factors at that time. Firstly, the Rajapaksa family, including Mahinda, Basil, and President Gotabaya, all requested my involvement. They acknowledged that although they were coming to power primarily with the Sinhala Buddhist vote, they didn't want to form a government solely based on that support. They wanted a balanced government. Douglas Devananda was there to represent the Tamils, and Thondaman would represent the upcountry Tamils. But without my participation, the Muslim community would be unrepresented. That was a crucial call I had to make, and I understood its importance.

Secondly, I was deeply committed to reforming the justice sector. That was one of my primary aims. These two motivations- contributing to national unity and development, as well as my desire to reform the justice system—drove me to step into the political arena and serve as a cabinet minister.



After the Easter attacks, the Sri Lankan Muslim community was unfairly targeted. While that is true, do you believe there is a systematic radicalization within the Muslim community? How do you view this issue, and if it exists, how do you plan to tackle it as a responsible representative of the Muslim community?

I wouldn't say there is a systematic radicalization within the Muslim community. However, there are individuals who become radicalized on their own, and in some cases, there are organized efforts to radicalize others. While most of these individuals do not resort to violence, there are elements of isolation and extremism among some. We need to address these issues.

"Ironically, it's sometimes sections of minorities in Sri Lanka who exhibit more racism than the majority."

But to be fair, from the perspective of the Muslim community, apart from those involved in the Easter Sunday attacks, the vast majority of Muslims supported the Sri Lankan authorities and provided crucial information. No one collaborated with or supported those murderous thugs and terrorists. The Muslim community stood with the government of Sri Lanka.

For instance, information about Zaharan's brother and his associates came from Muslims. Similarly, the tip-off about a female terrorist in Mawanella came from her own parents. These examples show that the Muslim community has been actively supporting efforts to counter terrorism.

It's crucial in any country to bring minority communities into the confidence of the majority and work together. The most valuable information often comes from within the community itself. If there is any radicalization among Muslim youth, it's easier for the Muslim community to identify and address it than for outsiders to do so.

This is why it's important to approach this issue as Sri Lankans, working together to create a country that is safe and prosperous for all its people.

There is a belief that extremist Islamic sects like Wahhabism should not be allowed in Sri Lanka. What is your view on this?

If we try to ban something forcefully, it often leads to its growth instead. This is a simple truth, and we've seen it unfold in our own country. Take, for example, the 1980s, when the government introduced the 6th Amendment, believing that expelling the TULF from Parliament would cause the Tamil struggle to subside. But what happened? The government's decision to suppress the TULF only pushed the Tamil struggle further toward extremism.

Similarly, in 1983, leftist parties like the JVP were not involved in the pogrom unleashed against the Tamil community. These parties were not racist, yet the government banned the JVP, claiming they were involved in the violence. The government thought that by banning the JVP, they could prevent its resurgence and halt its political activities entirely. But what happened? The JVP reemerged stronger than before, transforming into an armed movement within a few years.

The lesson here is that you can't simply ban an ideology and expect it to disappear. It will find other ways to spread. Instead of banning, we should give these groups leadership responsibilities, guiding them to operate legally, openly, and transparently. If they cross the line, they should be held accountable. I don't support the concept of banning because, in reality, it doesn't work. Instead, we must engage with these groups, closely monitor them, and set clear boundaries. When those boundaries are crossed, we must step in and take appropriate action.



There are also claims that Sri Lankan Muslims distancing themselves from the traditional Islamic sect, Sufism, is contributing to radicalization. Would you agree with this?

I don't fully agree with that. Times have changed, and the younger generation is very different from ours. When I was a child, if my father instructed me to do something, I did it without question. But I can't expect the same from my son—he will definitely ask for the reasons behind anything before following it.

Sufism is a positive tradition but has largely been based on practice rather than deep study.

It has been more of a cultural aspect for the older generation, who were content to follow it without questioning. However, the younger generation isn't satisfied with just following practices—they ask questions like, "Why should I follow this? How are these practices connected to Islam?" They seek understanding.

If we were to insist that everyone practice Sufism, very few would comply. Religious freedom isn't just about allowing people to follow different religions; it also means allowing them the freedom to choose within their religion. You can't force a particular practice or belief. Just as there are different sects within the Sinhala and Tamil communities, Muslims should have the freedom to choose which denomination

"We urged the SLPP to grant Ranil Wickremesinghe a further five-year term to consolidate the economy, but unfortunately, the party did not heed our advice."

of Islam they want to follow. If you want to encourage a particular tradition, it has to be done through engagement and effort, not by imposing laws. History has shown that whenever something is forced, it tends to fail—that's the reality.

The Sri Lankan government recently apologized for the forced cremation of COVID-19 victims, and some say you were the architect behind this apology. Did you influence the government to apologize to the Muslim community?

I was against the forced cremation policy from the very beginning. In fact, it wasn't just Muslims who were cremated against their wishes—anyone who died from COVID-19 was cremated, regardless of their religious beliefs. There are sects within both the Tamil and Sinhala communities that also oppose cremation. The government issued an apology to the families of those whose loved ones were forcefully cremated.

We also enacted a new law ensuring that individuals have the right to choose burial or cremation unless the WHO imposes specific restrictions.

What specific incidents or experiences drove you to amend the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), and how were you able to achieve these changes despite resistance?

Two incidents particularly shocked me and fueled my determination to amend the PTA. Before the Amendment, anyone arrested under the PTA couldn't apply for bail even after 50 years unless the Attorney General granted permission. The new Amendment now allows for a bail application after one year.

The first incident that shocked me occurred in Vavunathivu, where Zaharan's terrorist group killed a policeman. However, the police arrested two former LTTE guards and detained them under the PTA. They were imprisoned for three years, and the police even extracted confessions from them. When Zaharan's brother was later arrested, it was revealed that his group was responsible for the crime.

Another incident involved a hand grenade found at Lanka Hospital (formerly Apollo) in Narahenpita. Two youths were arrested and detained under the PTA. It was later discovered that the doctor arrested in connection with the hand grenade incident at All Saints' Church in Borella was the one who placed the grenade in the hospital. Yet, before this revelation, those innocent Tamil youths spent two years in jail under the PTA.

These cases deeply disturbed me, and I spoke with then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, arguing that in this day and age, it's a grave injustice for innocent youths with no connection to a case to be jailed under the PTA without even being able to go to court. He agreed with me, and we moved forward with amending the PTA. I was able to achieve this because I was part of the government and the Cabinet as Justice Minister.



There are politically motivated groups that constantly criticize those of us who choose to work with the government. I chose to be part of the government, which led to the Amendment of the PTA and numerous other initiatives that benefit minority communities. However, both Tamil and Muslim leadership often prefer to keep problems unresolved so they can exploit these issues for political gain rather than work toward genuine solutions.

This divisive mindset needs to be challenged

and put to an end.

In this context, I really admire the upcountry Tamils. A section of their leaders is with the government, while another section is with the opposition. This way, they can raise their voices regardless of who comes to power. Unfortunately, Tamils and Muslims don't do this. Rishad Bathiudeen was introduced to politics as an alternative to the Muslim Congress, but now both are in the same camp. It's ridiculous.

"If the diaspora truly cares about Sri Lankan Tamils and former fighters, they should help them directly if they don't trust the government. We're not creating any hurdles."

But there are still people detained under the PTA.

Yes, that's true. Under the previous PTA provisions, individuals arrested had to remain in jail until their cases were completed, as courts couldn't grant bail. Detainees had no option for bail, relying only on a presidential pardon. We released 27 PTA detainees, including one of the masterminds behind the Central Bank attack—though this is rarely mentioned. We also amended the PTA to allow bail applications after one year, which was previously impossible. Those still in jail under the PTA have ongoing court cases. We are addressing this issue systematically. If the courts decide to release them, they will be released. Today, we no longer arrest individuals under the PTA unless they have a direct connection to terrorism. People aren't detained under the PTA for holding a picture of Prabhakaran or expressing support for the LTTE anymore.

What is your opinion about the Tamil common candidate?

This is an unwise move. What change can a Tamil common candidate possibly bring? Can they even garner a few thousand votes? This is nothing more than a farce, a charade. If they genuinely care about the Tamil people, they should support a winnable candidate or at least back someone they believe should be in the opposition. You don't always have to be in power, but this so-called Tamil common

candidate will only serve to widen the divide between Tamils and Sinhalese. Those promoting a Tamil common candidate are fully aware that they can't win, and therefore, they won't offer any real solutions to Tamil issues. They are simply searching for problems. Opportunistic Tamil politicians once demanded a separate country, leading to a brutal war that consumed two generations. But what did they achieve?

A pragmatic Tamil leader should have sought a solution within the framework of the country, advocating for a power-sharing arrangement that ensures the dignity of the Tamil people. Even though I don't support federalism, Tamils have the right to advocate for it within Sri Lanka.

Minorities indeed have issues and should voice their concerns and fight for their rights. However, this must be done within the framework of the country.

This entire Tamil common candidate exercise is nothing but a replay of the Vaddukoddai Resolution, where those who declared it fled the war and now have their children thriving abroad in prominent positions. Meanwhile, it was the innocent Tamil youth who died due to the systematic indoctrination by Tamil leaders. They seem determined to recreate the scenario of 75 years ago, misleading the next generation and driving them to die for a cause while they live prosperously.

Visit Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, and other areas,

and you'll see that the youth who fought for the LTTE live in abject poverty. Who is supporting them financially? It's the government that provides them with 7,500 rupees per month as disability assistance.

Many former fighters have told me that they survive on the small aid the government provides. They fought against the government for 20 years, only to end up relying on the small help it offers. Where is the so-called powerful diaspora? Why can't they help? If the diaspora truly cares about Sri Lankan Tamils and the former fighters, they should help them directly if they don't trust the government. We are not creating any hurdles.

What is your request to the Tamil diaspora?

Just like some of our Tamil politicians, the diaspora also doesn't want these problems to be resolved because it allows them to continue applying for asylum in foreign countries and profiting from the situation. The majority of the diaspora knows they can't create a separate country, but they also know that by constantly stirring the pot, they can amass wealth.



What happened to the Tamil people in 1983 was an undeniable injustice, and nothing can justify it. However, it's crucial to understand that we cannot remain stuck in 1983. The diaspora, however, seems frozen in that time. Since then, many significant changes have taken place— provincial councils have been established, district councils have come into existence, and Tamil has been recognized as one of the national languages. Positive progress has been made. Now, whenever an injustice occurs against the Tamil people, it is often the Sinhala community that is the first to raise their voices against it. Yet, the diaspora remains disconnected from the reality in Sri Lanka, both in terms of distance and understanding of current events.

I want to tell the diaspora that what you're doing is not helping anyone. You are dividing people and perpetuating conflict. If you genuinely care about the Tamil people, come and help them. We have rehabilitated 12,197 former LTTE cadres,

"We've secured the first three IMF tranches and must adhere strictly to the program. Any deviation could jeopardize \$1.2 billion in funding. Successfully completing this program could finally break Sri Lanka's cycle of IMF dependence."

with around 5,000 of them being disabled. Help them. Create jobs for them. Support education. Establish schools, training colleges, or vocational education centers. If you don't trust the government, help them directly. Help the Tamils fight for devolution and respect within the country. Work to create a dignified place for Sri Lankan Tamils within Sri Lanka. If you can live in Canada, why can't you live in Sri Lanka? The people of Sri Lanka have changed—they are not the same as they were in 1956 or 1983. The Sinhala community has evolved too; many now believe that Tamils should have equal rights alongside the Sinhalese. Only a few Sinhala hardliners still cling to outdated racist views. Ironically, it's sometimes sections of minorities in Sri Lanka who exhibit more racism than the majority. But the vast majority of Sinhala people are genuinely good-hearted.

Even in the Cabinet, I worked alongside well-known Sinhala hardliners like Wimal Weerawansa, Udaya Gammanpila, and Sarath Weerasekera. When it came to making crucial decisions, they did not display racism. For instance, when we discussed compensation for missing persons, the question arose about whether we should compensate the families of LTTE members who fought against us. The entire Cabinet supported providing compensation, recognizing that these individuals fought for political reasons and that their families are now struggling.

The primary concern among the Sinhala

people is the fear that Tamils might divide the country and create a separate nation. I believe Tamils should accept the 13th Amendment and then work towards securing more powers within the framework of the country.

Is the Foreign Ministry taking steps to address what you believe to be misinformation being spread by the diaspora?

They are a vast group, and it's challenging for the Foreign Ministry, with only 200-300 people, to counter all the misinformation fully. But we do what we can within our capacity. For instance, we played a role in getting the LTTE banned as a terrorist organization in England, the EU, and most recently, in Canada.

LTTE's brutal child abductors, like Kannathasan and many others, later surrendered to the military and were released after rehabilitation. Why did the government not take any action against them, given their role in forcibly abducting children?

Around 12,197 LTTE cadres surrendered, and we did not file cases against them. We accepted it as a political conflict and recognized that the majority of them were misled. With that understanding, we released them. At the time,

"Tamils should accept the 13th Amendment and then work towards securing more powers within the framework of the country."

the government's approach was to avoid looking back. The government eliminated the LTTE leadership and sought ways to win the hearts of the Tamil people. We also expected the same reciprocation from the diaspora, but that did not happen.

Is there any plan to attract diaspora investment to the country?

We are not stopping anyone. Anyone can come to Sri Lanka and invest. Every day, we issue thousands of visas to diaspora Tamils. We are not declining them. The only visa we declined was that of Canada's Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Gary Anandasangaree. We didn't want to be a tool in his political play, which is why we declined it.

There are two other Tamil ministers in the Cabinet with you...



Yes, Douglas Devananda from the North and Jeevan Thondaman from the upcountry are both doing exceptionally well. Douglas Devananda is one of the most diligent members of the Cabinet. He meticulously studies the Cabinet papers and comes fully prepared, consistently advocating for the Tamil community and all minorities. His presence in the government is truly significant.

Jeevan Thondaman has also exceeded my expectations. He's a highly capable young leader— forward-thinking and deeply passionate about fighting for his people. His dedication and vision are commendable.

How do you feel about becoming the face of Sri Lanka as a minority Foreign Minister, following in the footsteps of Lakshman Kadirgamar? And how has your upbringing influenced the person you are today?

"We strongly opposed the SLPP's decision to put forward another candidate."

It's a great privilege to serve as a minority Foreign Minister, following in the footsteps of Lakshman Kadirgamar. I am, in many ways, a product of Sri Lanka's free education system. In the truest sense, the people of Sri Lanka funded my education through their tax money. I studied at Kalutara Muslim Central College, a government school, for 10 years in Sinhala medium.

My father, M.S.M. Uvais, was a staunch leftist. He held no trace of racism, and he raised me with the same values. I vividly remember a time in my childhood when I made a general statement against Tamil people during a conversation. My father asked which newspaper I had read, and when I mentioned the name of a hardline Sinhala newspaper, he advised me to broaden my perspective. He encouraged me to read Tamil newspapers, English newspapers, and Sinhala newspapers to understand different viewpoints. He explained that Tamil newspapers focus on Tamil issues, Sinhala newspapers on Sinhala issues, and English newspapers tend to offer a more balanced view. He taught me to read all three and then form my conclusions.

As a lawyer, I've been fortunate enough to earn well. I have a good home, some assets, and a decent bank balance. I've sent my sons to study at top universities around the world. My elder son graduated from the USA, and my second son is heading to the UK for his studies. I have one more son, and I'm confident that I can provide him with a top-class education as well. So, what more do I need? I believe it's time to serve my country. The most important thing for me is to make a meaningful difference in

Sri Lanka. I could easily settle abroad, but what will happen to the 22 million people of Sri Lanka? This question drives me. I want to contribute to my country, bring about peace, and see Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims live together in harmony like brothers and sisters. Achieving that requires hard work.

I am a devout Muslim, though I don't make it a point to advertise it. I have never smoked, nor have I ever tasted alcohol. I follow the principles of my religion because, for me, religion is about personal development and the relationship between oneself and God. It's not about imposing your values on others, and Islam itself teaches that there is no compulsion in religion. You can't force people to follow a religion. At the same time, it's important to support diversity. I've realized that different things matter to different people. For Muslims, it's their religion—if you touch their religion, they feel deeply hurt. For Tamils, their culture and language are crucial. The territorial integrity of the country is of utmost importance to the Sinhalese. We need to understand these differences and work accordingly. Not everyone can do everything, but everyone can do something. I try to do my part in promoting peace, just as my father taught me.

**Photos by
our photographer**

Want to Make a Candidate Lose? Go Ahead and Endorse Him, CVK Sivagnanam Tells ITAK



During a recent media conference at his office in Kalviyankadu, Jaffna, C.V.K. Sivagnanam, Chairman of the Northern Provincial Council and senior vice-president of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), outlined his cautious stance on the upcoming presidential election. Reflecting on a recent central committee meeting of the ITAK, he highlighted a rather inconvenient pattern: candidates backed by Tamil parties, especially the ITAK, have consistently faced defeat.

Sivagnanam explained, "Whenever we throw our weight behind a candidate, it sparks propaganda in the South, accusing the candidate of selling out the country for Tamil interests, which often seals their fate. A case in point is Sajith Premadasa's recent visit—

barely a day after he met with us, the racist rhetoric in the South went into overdrive."

He pointed out the dilemma of endorsing a candidate, only to be left out in the cold if they lose, making future negotiations awkward.

Sivagnanam also urged the party to refrain from endorsing a specific candidate, emphasizing that voting remains a democratic right and should not be boycotted. He added that the central committee would reconvene on the 18th, though reaching a unanimous decision seemed unlikely. "But, of course, in politics, you never know until the final bell rings," he added with a smile.

Rajapaksa Family Reunion: Namal Takes Center Stage in SLPP's Survival Show



■
BY:
Our Reporter

In a striking display of familial unity, the Rajapaksa brothers are rallying behind Namal Rajapaksa, the 38-year-old presidential candidate of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP). Despite swirling rumours of a rift among the siblings—complete with speculation that Basil and Gotabaya Rajapaksa were no longer on speaking terms—the senior Rajapaksas have banded together to throw their full weight behind Namal. This show of solidarity is not just a family affair; it's a calculated move to ensure that the Rajapaksa name continues to loom large in Sri Lankan politics.



Namal, the youngest candidate in the upcoming election, is stepping into the spotlight with the backing of his politically seasoned uncles. It's as if the brothers have dusted off their old playbook, set aside any differences, and decided to run a full-court press for the next generation. The Rajapaksas are known for their deep-rooted influence and strategic moves, and with their "win-at-any-cost" mentality, this latest manoeuvre is no different. After all, blood is bloody thicker than water.

Namal is receiving strong backing from his uncles—Gotabaya and Basil Rajapaksa—each of whom, an SLPP insider told Jaffna Monitor, will play a strategic role in the campaign. Mahinda Rajapaksa, Namal's father and the most politically experienced and charismatic of the Rajapaksas, is expected to spearhead public meetings across the country. His considerable influence and popularity are anticipated to galvanize the SLPP's base and attract crowds in every constituency.

However, the insider noted that due to Mahinda's advancing age and health concerns,

it's uncertain how many meetings he'll actually be able to attend. While his presence is undeniably powerful, the insider hinted that the former president might not have the stamina to make as many campaign stops as the party would hope. Despite this, Mahinda's involvement—whether in person or through his enduring legacy—remains a crucial element of the campaign, one that the SLPP is banking on to energize its supporters and sway undecided voters.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose presidency ended abruptly in disgrace amid widespread criticism and anger among the Sinhala people, will now shift his focus to leveraging his influence within the Buddhist clergy—where he still holds significant sway, an SLPP insider told Jaffna Monitor. His role in the campaign will be carefully managed, centring on visits to Buddhist viharas and engaging with the influential Buddhist monk community rather than making high-profile public appearances. This strategy aims to avoid reigniting the negative sentiments that still linger from his tenure while securing crucial votes from Sinhala-Buddhist hardliners.



It's important to note that the Sinhala hardliners, who were also among those protesting against him and played a role in his ousting as president, don't take issue with Gotabaya's policies on Sinhala nationalism; their discontent stems from his economic missteps that plunged the country into turmoil. By keeping his public presence low-key and focusing on his connections with the clergy, the campaign hopes to retain the support of this critical voter base without stirring up the economic grievances that led to his fall from grace.

An SLPP insider revealed that Basil Rajapaksa, the mastermind behind the SLPP's organizational structure, will be overseeing and coordinating the entire campaign from the party's Colombo headquarters. His role is pivotal, ensuring that every aspect of Namal's campaign is strategically executed with precision. Over the next five weeks, the

campaign is set to ramp up significantly, with Namal participating in rallies across at least 140 constituencies, making his presence felt in every corner of the country. The insider emphasized that Basil's meticulous planning and strategic oversight will be crucial in navigating the complexities of this high-stakes election. From the insider's point of view, Basil is the linchpin holding the campaign together, ensuring that every move is calculated and executed flawlessly as the SLPP gears up for an intense and widespread campaign effort.

The absence of former Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa from Namal's recent nomination event sparked speculation about a possible family feud. However, party insiders have clarified that Chamal's absence was due to ill health and dismissed any rumours of discord within the family. Both Chamal and his son, Shasheendra Rajapaksa, are expected to join the campaign trail as soon as health permits.



An SLPP insider revealed to Jaffna Monitor that winning isn't exactly the main course on Namal Rajapaksa's election menu. The real dish being served here is the survival of the party itself. According to the source, supporting Ranil Wickremesinghe would be like serving the SLPP its last supper. Instead, Namal was served up as the presidential candidate, even if his chances of winning are a bit undercooked. But, the insider confidently added, "Namal will still be one of the top three most-voted candidates in the election.

It's not about this election," the source declared with the confidence of a weather forecaster predicting sunshine during a monsoon, "but about the elections to come. In a few years, we'll be back, and this time, we'll bring the whole buffet." Namal, they explained, has nothing to lose here—he's like a contestant on a cooking show who's just happy to be in the kitchen. By throwing his chef's hat into the ring now, he's setting himself up as the only contender for future presidential elections and the future face of the SLPP's political feast.

An SLPP insider elaborated, explaining that while prominent figures within the SLPP are flocking to Ranil Wickremesinghe like moths to a flame, this unexpected migration has actually rolled out the red carpet for Namal. It's as if the party's heavyweights are clearing the dance floor, giving Namal the perfect opportunity to waltz in and build his own base of loyal supporters—people who'll cheer him on even if he's slightly offbeat.

According to the source, no matter how this election plays out, Namal is in a win-win situation. He's not just solidifying his position; he's setting himself up as the future headliner, with influence that's only going to grow stronger. Think of it as Namal laying down the foundation for a house party where, by the next election, he'll be the undisputed host everyone wants an invitation from.

The source concluded by saying, "Namal has nothing to lose—whatever the outcome, it's only gains for him. In fact, he's already gained a lot."



Do Not Export the Common Tamil Candidate: Warns Mano Ganesan

Mano Ganesan, leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance, has warned sternly about the push for a Tamil common candidate in the upcoming elections. "Keep this issue within the Northern and Eastern provinces; do not bring this demand outside of those areas. If it is brought outside, we will oppose it," he declared.

Sharing his thoughts on the matter, Ganesan added, "I had hoped the Tamil common candidate would be someone new, a fresh face. But it turns out we're getting the same old candidate. While I'm not officially opposing this attempt, it's clear that the Tamil nationalist parties have the right to nominate such a candidate, and the parties in those areas have the right to oppose it. We recognize both the opposition and the support for this initiative."

He continued with a cautionary note: "However, we are saying, do not bring that slogan outside the Northern and Eastern provinces. If that happens, we cannot accept it because it will not be a favourable matter for the people living outside of those regions." Interestingly, Ganesan did not elaborate on how this common Tamil candidate is beneficial for those within the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Adding a twist to the plot, Ganesan noted the rumours swirling in Colombo, "There have been accusations that President Ranil Wickremesinghe is behind the Tamil common candidate initiative. Now, I didn't say this—it's just what some media outlets are reporting," he said, leaving room for the reader to ponder who's really pulling the strings behind the scenes.



Bangladesh Does a Sri Lanka

■
By:
Our Foreign
Correspondent

After days of student protests that culminated in forcing long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to step down and flee to India, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has been sworn in as the head of Bangladesh's interim government following a dramatic

uprising reminiscent of Sri Lanka's own upheaval against then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Yunus, globally celebrated for his groundbreaking work in microfinance, now



faces the monumental task of restoring stability and steering the nation toward new elections after weeks of violent upheaval. The 84-year-old, often hailed as the "banker to the poor," was selected to lead the interim administration following a wave of student activism and civil society mobilization against Hasina's increasingly autocratic rule. What began as protests against a controversial job quota system swiftly morphed into a nationwide demand for the prime minister's resignation, culminating in a violent crackdown that tragically claimed the lives of over 300 people, predominantly students.

The scenes in Dhaka on the day of Hasina's escape could have been mistaken for a rerun of Colombo's chaos from two years ago. As demonstrators stormed her official residence, they wasted no time channelling their inner Sri Lankan protesters—holding mock meetings in the meeting rooms, sampling the snacks in the

official quarters, and even taking a power nap in the prime minister's bed. It was *déjà vu* with a dash of rebellion.

However, a stark contrast exists in this otherwise uncanny similarity: the death toll. While Sri Lanka's protests, despite incidents of arson and violence against ruling party MPs and ministers, remained largely bloodless—with no live bullets fired during the three months leading to Rajapaksa's resignation in July 2022—the crackdown in Bangladesh was brutal. Over 400 people were killed in just two weeks, including nearly 100 on the penultimate day of Hasina's departure alone.

Yunus took the oath of office at the presidential palace in Dhaka, with President Mohammed Shahabuddin—elected unopposed in 2023 under Hasina's Awami League—administering the ceremony. Yunus now leads a 16-member interim Cabinet, which notably includes two



student protest leaders who played pivotal roles in the uprising. The composition of the Cabinet reflects the outcome of negotiations among student leaders, civil society representatives, and the military, underscoring the broad coalition that has come together to steer Bangladesh through this critical transitional period.

From Nobel Laureate to Interim Leader Yunus, who won the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his pioneering work in microcredit and has long been a vocal critic of Sheikh Hasina's leadership, was in Paris for the 2024 Olympics when student leaders urgently summoned him back to Bangladesh to head the interim government. Upon his arrival in Dhaka, Yunus made it clear that his immediate priority was to restore order and unify the nation. "Bangladesh is a family. We must unite it," he declared. Acknowledging reports of targeted violence against the Hindu minority, Yunus

pledged that his interim government would urgently address this pressing issue.

Despite these assurances, tensions remain as high as the day we file this story, with reports of continued violence and unrest, particularly against Hindu minority communities, still emerging from various parts of the country.

Hasina's Fall and the Road Ahead
Sheikh Hasina's downfall came after years of mounting accusations of human rights abuses, corruption, and rigged elections. Her government was notorious for its brutal suppression of dissent, and the unrest that ultimately led to her resignation was fueled by widespread discontent with her increasingly authoritarian rule. Her departure has sparked concerns about the future of the Awami League, a party with deep roots in Bangladesh's political landscape.





Amid this political upheaval, Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, has vowed that his family and the Awami League will remain active in the country's politics, signalling that the party's influence may endure despite its significant challenges.

How did the protests begin?

The protests, which ignited in early July as peaceful calls from university students to dismantle quotas in civil service jobs—one-third of which were reserved for the kin of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence—rapidly escalated into a full-blown crisis.

Critics argued that the quota system was inherently discriminatory and urgently needed reform. While initial demands were partially addressed, the movement quickly morphed into a sweeping anti-government uprising. In retaliation, Hasina unleashed a series of

draconian measures, including recurrent internet blackouts across key regions, the imposition of a nationwide curfew, and the branding of protestors as "terrorists" bent on "destabilizing the nation." She even resorted to using the term "Razakar" to describe the protesting students—a deeply offensive label historically reserved for those accused of collaborating with Pakistan's army during the 1971 liberation war. As unrest intensified, violent confrontations erupted, resulting in the deaths of over 400 people under Hasina's directive.

The Seeds of Discontent: Why Students Were Enraged

For years, discontent had quietly simmered beneath the surface in Bangladesh, with recent protests erupting as a visible manifestation of deeper frustrations. Although Bangladesh had emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing economies—propelled by the ambitious



economic agenda of Hasina's administration—the country's transformation into a global powerhouse for ready-to-wear clothing exports, worth nearly \$40 billion annually masked underlying issues.

Hasina's tenure was also marked by significant infrastructure developments, including new roads, bridges, factories, and even a metro rail system. Bangladesh's economic prosperity was such that it extended a \$200 million loan to Sri Lanka during its economic crisis in 2021. Yet, these achievements were marred by widespread allegations of corruption.

According to the World Bank, under Hasina's rule, per capita income has tripled over the past decade, with more than 25 million people lifted out of poverty over the last two decades.

However, the fruits of this growth appeared to be disproportionately enjoyed by those aligned with the Prime Minister's Awami League. Hasina's pledges to combat corruption rang hollow against her own admission of dismissing a household aide for allegedly embezzling \$34 million in state funds, highlighting the endemic corruption within her administration.

Simultaneously, rights activists had long decried the shrinking space for democratic expression under Hasina's rule. Her government was frequently accused of suppressing dissent, gagging the media, and silencing critics, often through imprisonment or the enforced disappearance of its most vocal opponents.

Experts noted that while economic growth had surged, it had failed to generate sufficient employment opportunities for university graduates. Estimates suggested that around 18 million young Bangladeshis were actively seeking work, with university graduates facing higher unemployment rates than their less-educated peers. This growing disillusionment among the youth catalyzed their demand for the abolition of quotas in government jobs. They saw this as an essential step toward levelling the playing field and improving their chances in a job market that had left many feeling marginalized and disheartened.

The Flame of Protest: How Discontent Erupted into Nationwide Unrest

What began as a focused outcry against the government job quota system quickly transformed into a sweeping wave of national unrest.

On July 21, the Bangladesh Supreme Court moved to scale back the quota system, a decision that could have quelled the unrest. However, Sheikh Hasina's incendiary rhetoric and the ruthless police crackdown only fanned the flames of public anger. Attacks on protesters by groups aligned with the ruling Awami League further galvanized a mass movement that rapidly expanded beyond the student body.

The brutal suppression reached its zenith on August 4, when nearly 100 people were killed in a single day of police violence, provoking widespread outrage. The very next day, under immense pressure, Hasina was forced to resign and flee the country, ending her prolonged tenure abruptly.

The fury was so intense that even the statues of her father, the revered freedom icon Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, were toppled and defaced, signalling a profound rupture in the nation's

political and emotional fabric.

The Final Hours: How Sheikh Hasina's Reign Came to an End

On the eve of Sheikh Hasina's abrupt departure from Bangladesh, as the nation teetered on the brink of chaos, a crucial meeting took place within the upper ranks of the military—a meeting that would ultimately determine her fate. General Waker-Uz-Zaman, the army chief and a relative of Hasina by marriage, met with his top generals. In a significant decision, the military leadership resolved that they would not use force against civilians to enforce the curfew she had imposed.

General Waker-Uz-Zaman swiftly communicated this decision to Hasina's office, making it clear that his troops would not execute her draconian lockdown and shoot-at-sight orders. The message was unmistakable: Sheikh Hasina had lost the support of the military, the very institution that had been her bulwark of power.

By Monday, August 5, the first full day of the indefinite nationwide curfew, Sheikh Hasina was sequestered within the Ganabhaban, or "People's Palace," a heavily fortified complex in Dhaka that served as her official residence. Outside, the streets of the sprawling capital swarmed with tens of thousands of protesters who, defying the curfew, marched with the singular aim of ousting the embattled leader. Faced with the gravity of the situation, Hasina made the fateful decision to resign. According to reports, her decision to resign and flee to India was driven more by the advice of close family members than by her security advisors. Her escape was executed just in time—mere hours after her departure, the surging crowds breached the gates of her residence.



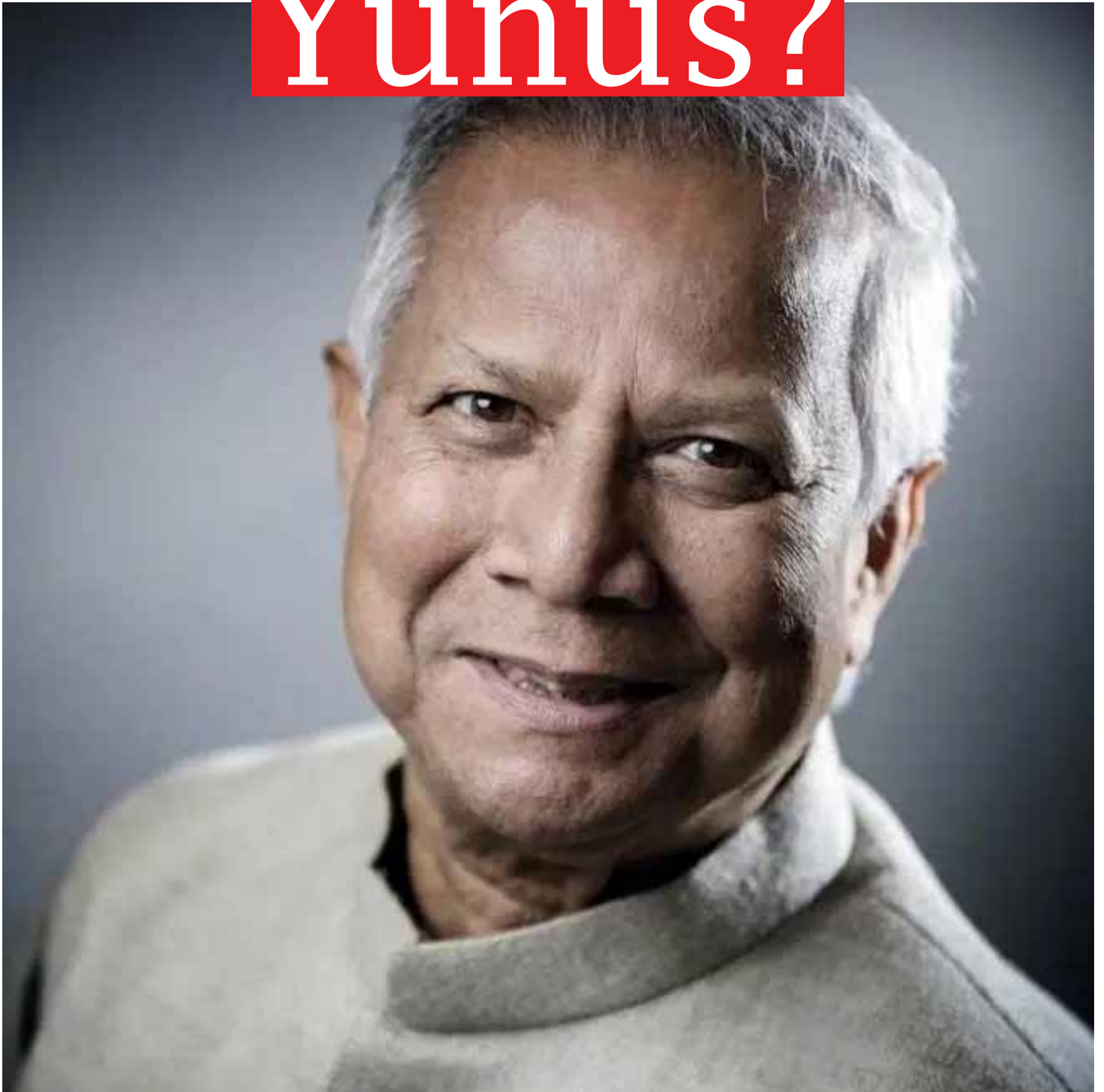
India, which had played a crucial role in the creation of Bangladesh out of East Pakistan in 1971, had long been a sanctuary for Hasina. Following the assassination of her father in 1975, she spent years in exile in India, forging deep ties with the country's political elite. When she eventually returned to Bangladesh and rose to power in 1996, Hasina was viewed as more attuned to India's security concerns than her political rivals. Her secular stance was also seen as a reassuring factor for the 13 million Hindus residing in the predominantly Muslim nation.

Yunus's Legal Battles and Political Frictions
 Muhammad Yunus's ascent to the interim leadership follows a protracted and bitter feud with Hasina. The former prime minister had

unjustly accused Yunus of exploiting the poor through his microfinance initiatives, a charge he has steadfastly denied. Their rivalry reached a peak in 2011 when Yunus was ousted from his role as managing director of Grameen Bank by Bangladesh's central bank, an action widely regarded as politically motivated.

Despite these obstacles, Yunus remains unwavering in his commitment to empowering the poor and advancing democracy in Bangladesh. His interim government now faces the formidable challenges of organizing free and fair elections, addressing the widespread human rights violations of the past decade, and deftly navigating the complex geopolitical landscape that involves balancing relationships with India, China, and the United States.

Who is Muhammad Yunus?



Muhammad Yunus, born in 1940 in Chittagong, Bangladesh, is a globally renowned economist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who has dedicated his life to addressing poverty and empowering the poor. Yunus, a pioneer in the field of microfinance, is best known for founding the Grameen Bank in 1983, an institution that revolutionized the concept of providing small loans to those without collateral, particularly to women, to foster economic independence.

Academic and Early Career

Yunus's academic journey began at Dhaka University in Bangladesh and continued in the United States, where he earned a Ph.D. in economics from Vanderbilt University in 1969 on a Fulbright scholarship. After a stint as an assistant professor at Middle Tennessee State University, Yunus returned to Bangladesh in 1972, shortly after its independence, to lead the economics department at Chittagong University.

The devastating famine of 1974 profoundly impacted Yunus, steering him away from academic theories and towards practical solutions for the impoverished. His response was to offer small loans to the destitute, a move that eventually led to the founding of the Grameen Bank, transforming microfinance into a global tool for poverty alleviation.

The Grameen Bank and Microfinance Movement

Established in 1983, the Grameen Bank was driven by Yunus's belief that "credit is a fundamental human right." The bank's innovative model provided micro-loans to the poor, helping them start small businesses and achieve financial self-sufficiency. The success of Grameen Bank not only uplifted millions

of Bangladeshis but also inspired similar initiatives in over 100 countries worldwide. Yunus's work earned him and the Grameen Bank the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Political Involvement and Challenges

Yunus's involvement in Bangladesh's political sphere has been marked by both ambition and controversy. In 2007, he attempted to enter politics by forming a political party, Nagorik Shakti (Citizen Power), amid a state of emergency and political turmoil in Bangladesh. However, he abandoned these efforts due to a lack of popular support.

In 2010, Yunus and the Grameen Bank faced scrutiny following the release of the documentary *Caught in Micro Debt*, which criticized microloans and alleged financial improprieties. Although Yunus and the bank were cleared by Norwegian authorities, the Bangladesh government initiated an investigation that led to Yunus's removal as managing director of Grameen Bank in 2011. Yunus contended that his dismissal was politically motivated, orchestrated by then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed, a longtime rival.

Literary Contributions and Global Recognition

Beyond his groundbreaking work in microfinance, Yunus is also a prolific author and thinker. His books, including *Building Social Business* and *A World of Three Zeroes*, outline his vision for a new kind of capitalism focused on social good rather than profit. Yunus has received numerous accolades for his contributions, including Bangladesh's Independence Day Award, the World Food Prize, and the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Loaf of Hope: Mannar Bakers Finally Slice Down Prices!

Good news for bread lovers in Mannar! The price of your daily loaf has been sliced down thanks to a complaint received by the Mannar District Government Agent. After hearing locals' grumbling stomachs and wallets, a swift action was taken following a discussion held on Monday (12th) at the Mannar District Secretariat with bakery owners across the district.

Mannar District Government Agent K. Kanageswaran explained the situation with a touch of concern, noting that bread—often dubbed the "food of the poor"—has been burning a bigger hole in the pockets of Mannar residents compared to other areas. While the price of bread in other districts hovers between Rs. 130 to Rs. 140, Mannar saw prices starting at Rs. 160. Clearly, bread was no longer the humble staple it once was!

This crusty situation had been causing quite a bit of discomfort to the district's residents, who had repeatedly raised the issue with the Government Agent. Taking the matter seriously, a meeting was called with all the bakery owners in Mannar, who, perhaps, after realizing that the dough they were making was a bit too much, agreed unanimously to lower the price of regular bread to Rs. 140.

Interestingly, until now, Mannar didn't have an organized bakery association to knead



out such issues. But that's no longer the case! A bakery association has been formed, and management has been appointed to ensure smoother operations and better decision-making regarding bakery products in the future.

To ensure that everyone is playing by the rules, authorities will be keeping a close eye on whether the price reduction sticks. If you catch a loaf being sold for more than it should be, you're encouraged to file a complaint with the Mannar District Secretariat at 023 222 2235—or, if you're in the neighbourhood, drop by in person to let them know.

So, go ahead and enjoy your bread now at a more palatable price!



Throwing Javelins, Not in War, But to Unite a Subcontinent



Reported by:
Our Sports Desk

The Indian subcontinent's Desi folks have fallen head over heels for the javelin, and it's not hard to see why! With Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem hurdling over childhood

poverty, injuries galore, and training challenges to snatch Olympic gold, and India's Neeraj Chopra spearing his way to silver after conquering his own set of obstacles, the recent Olympic Games turned into a javelin joyride. This newfound love for javelin isn't just about the shiny medals; it's a nod to the epic tales of the Indian subcontinent's Itihasa-Purana,



where mighty warriors once wielded javelins with legendary prowess. Thanks to Arshad and Neeraj, the subcontinent—including Sri Lanka—has thrust the javelin back into the spotlight, and it's catching on faster than you can say, "Throw that spear!"

Arshad Nadeem, the gentle giant from Lahore, standing tall at nearly 6'3" and tipping the scales at almost 15 stone, captured the hearts of his nation—and beyond—with a colossal throw of 92.97 meters at the Stade de France. This jaw-dropping feat not only secured him the gold but also shattered the Olympic javelin record, making him the country's first medalist in 32 years and its first-ever track and field gold medalist.

Norway's Andreas Thorkildsen had held the javelin record since the 2008 Games, but his distance of 90.57 meters was spectacularly outdone by more than two meters by Arshad. The crowd watched in awe as Arshad launched his javelin into the stratosphere, leaving the previous record in the dust and making history under the Parisian lights. It's safe to say, Arshad didn't just throw the javelin—he threw the rulebook out the window!

India's golden boy Neeraj Chopra, who claimed gold at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, took home the silver this time with a throw of 89.45 meters. Neeraj was the torchbearer when he won gold at the Olympics with an 87.58-meter throw, inspiring countless children and youth in India to take up the sport. This victory not only made him the first Indian athlete to win an Olympic gold medal in athletics and the first post-independence Indian Olympic medalist in the sport, but also the first Asian athlete to win Olympic gold in javelin throw. His triumph sparked a javelin craze, with young athletes embracing the sport like never before. And now, with Pakistan's Nadeem throwing down the gauntlet—or rather, the javelin—the sport's popularity is set to soar even higher across the Indian subcontinent. It looks like the youth of the region might just be swapping cricket bats for javelins, ready to aim high and throw farther!

Arshad Nadeem's hard-won glory certainly wasn't scripted in the stars during his childhood. Growing up in the humble surroundings of Mian Channu, a small village in Pakistan's Punjab province, Arshad was one



of eight children in a family where his father worked as a construction labourer. His early javelin adventures were largely bankrolled by kind-hearted villagers, who pitched in to cover his training, travel, and gear. Even today, reports from Pakistan reveal that his training routine involves practising in Lahore's scorching heat, with gym temperatures soaring above 45 degrees and no air conditioning in sight—just raw grit and determination.

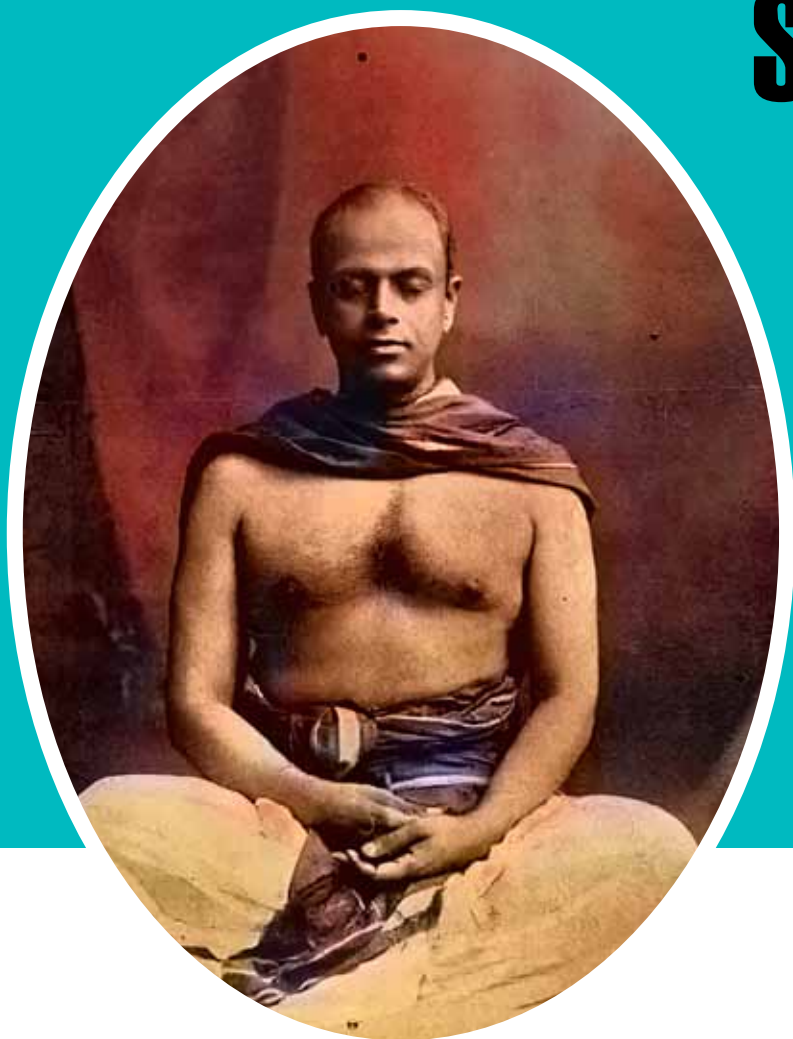
When Pakistan's national sports board was choosing which of their seven athletes bound for the Paris Olympics would receive funding, only Arshad Nadeem and his coach, Salman Fayyaz Butt, made the cut. They were the fortunate ones, with their air tickets financed by the Pakistan Sports Board. But luck had little to do with sponsorships; Arshad had none. Just months before the Paris Games, he took to social media, seeking help to replace his worn-out javelin.

In a show of sportsmanship that crossed borders, Neeraj Chopra, recognizing the challenges Arshad faced, promptly supported his appeal on social media. "People have no idea how Arshad got to this place today," his father, Muhammad Ashraf, shared. "In the early days, his fellow villagers and relatives

would pool together whatever money they could to send him to other cities for training and competitions." It's a story of perseverance, community spirit, and a bit of serendipity—all thrown together to create a champion.

Despite the fierce competition, the friendship between Arshad Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra has been a heartwarming reminder that sports can transcend borders. These two athletes, hailing from nations with a history of conflict since the Partition of India in 1947, have defied lingering tensions with their mutual respect and camaraderie. After claiming their medals, the pair were seen embracing and praising each other, a gesture that spoke volumes about their mutual admiration.

Their bond extends to their families as well. Both Nadeem and Chopra's mothers have expressed that they see their son's competitor as their own child. It's a touching sentiment that highlights the power of sports to bridge divides and foster connections, even between countries with a complex past. This display of friendship and sportsmanship not only warmed hearts but also offered a glimmer of hope that the spirit of competition can be a force for unity rather than division.



Sri Parananda Yogi, also known as **Sir Pon Ramanathan**

During his later years, Sir Pon Ramanathan became deeply involved in Shaiva religious activities. He began to use the name 'Sri Parananda.' Despite engaging in meditation, religious teachings, and building and reforming Shaiva temples, he did not stop his research, explorations, and writing. Under the name Sri Parananda Yogi, he taught yoga and meditation. One of the people who learned yoga from him was Allan Bennett.¹

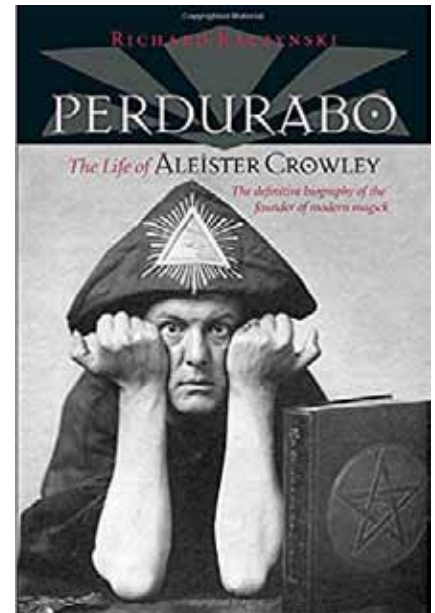
¹ In 1900, Sir Henry Allan Bennett (1872-1923) traveled to East Asia to treat asthma. Upon arriving in Sri Lanka, he developed an interest in Buddhism. He had worked under Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and learned about yoga and meditation. Bennett later shared these learnings with his friend Aleister Crowley. Crowley subsequently gained fame as a magician. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's brother-in-law, was involved in a well-known divorce from his wife, Ratan Devi. Bennett eventually



By:
**Sarawanan Komathi
Nadarasa**

In 1898, he published a 342-page book titled 'An Eastern Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus According to St. Matthew,' and in 1902, another 332-page book titled 'An Eastern Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus According to St. John.' These two books are considered the first comprehensive commentaries on the

became a Buddhist monk, adopting the name Ananda Metteyya. As the first Briton to do so, he is considered a pioneer in bringing Theravada Buddhism to England.



Bible to be published in an Asian country.² In addition to these, he submitted several other works on the Bible to an American university.³ Although some of these were prepared for publication, they were never released.⁴ The extent to which university scholars in America celebrated these two books during his visit to the United States is documented in the biography of Sir Pon Ramanathan, compiled by M. Vaithilingam.

He did not publish these two English books on Christianity under his own name but under the name 'Sri Parananda.' The publisher, KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & CO. Ltd., based in London, released the books. These works have not been translated into Tamil.⁵ Both books were edited by R.L.

2 Jesus in Asia By R. S. Sugirtharajah – Harvard University press – 2018 – P-68

3 The Spirit of the East Contrasted with the Spirit of the West (1905), The Culture of the Soul among Western Nations (1906)

4 The Exposition of the Psalms of David (I-XXX) According to Jnana Yoga; Lectures on the Sermon on the Mount; and Lectures on the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead, Being a Commentary on the XVth Chapter of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

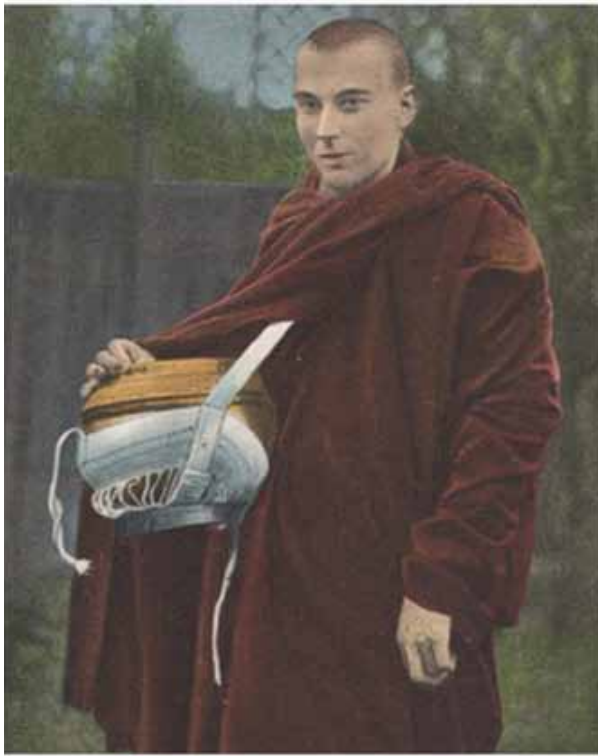
5 She arrived in Sri Lanka from Australia seeking spiritual enlightenment. Subsequently, she became Ramanathan's private secretary. Following the death of his first wife, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan married Ms. Harrison, who later adopted the name Leelavathi.

Harrison. The cover of the book on Matthew bears the inscription, 'From the Light of the Experience of God by Sri Parananda.' He used the name Parananda only as a pseudonym for these books and was not known as Parananda Yogi by anyone. Why did he use this name only for his Christian exegesis? Even when he translated and published the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita in 1914, he used his real name. These mysteries remain to be unravelled.

Ramanathan's Letter

I recently searched for and obtained the digital version of these two books. It is clear that the book belonged to Ramanathan. Inside is a handwritten letter by him addressed to Mr. Bridge. The letter, dated 02.09.1906 and addressed to the librarian at Cornell University, mentions that he has sent three of his research works for the university's approval. He also notes that he will be departing from New York to London on the 6th, providing a London address for correspondence.

As president of the Saiva Mangaiyar Sabha, founded by Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Leelavathi Ammaiyar engaged in significant public service. In recognition of his literary contributions, the University of Ceylon awarded Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.



Old Bridge. N.Y.
2nd Apr. 1906.

The Librarian,
Cornell University.

Dear Sir,
I have much
pleasure in forwarding in
a separate parcel three
of my works for the
acceptance of the Cornell
University.

I am leaving New
York for London on Friday
next 6th inst. Any letter
addressed to the care of
Messrs Richardson & Co, 25 Suffolk
St. Pall Mall, London,
will reach me.

Yours faithfully
P. Ramanathan
P.T.O.

At the end of the letter, he added a postscript (P.S.) stating, 'My full name is Ponnambalam Ramanathan,' suggesting that he sent this book to a new acquaintance unfamiliar with him. This could explain why he signed his name as 'P. Ramanathan' in English under the printed name 'Sri Parananda' on the book's cover.

Later, I found additional references to this in M. Vaithilingam's book. It mentions that during his visit to America, Ramanathan participated in the inaugural events of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C. While there, he discovered collections of his legal writings in a library. The librarian expressed a desire to obtain copies of his other books as well, and Ramanathan promised to send them upon his return to Sri Lanka. However, for this article, it was found that the book with Ramanathan's handwritten note had indeed been sent to Cornell University. It is possible that he might have sent copies separately to Congress as well.



Sir Pon Ramanathan



Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan

I downloaded both of these books for this article from the website <https://archive.org>. When I searched for who had uploaded these books, I discovered that it was the Cornell University Library. Among the over 76,000 books uploaded by this university on the Archive website, 77 are related to Sri Lanka, including the legal books compiled by Ramanathan.

The Parananda Secret

The content of these two books is essential for study in Tamil because Ramanathan's extensive research goes beyond biblical studies. It is clear that he analyzed these topics through the lens of the Saiva Siddhanta traditions he had learned. Ignoring these books would be a significant oversight for anyone attempting to study Ramanathan's Tamil-Saiva-Vellalar identity.

His writings on Christian topics may have been influenced by Navalar, who played a pioneering role in introducing him to politics. We are already aware of Navalar's involvement in translating the Bible into Tamil.

In the aforementioned book on "St. John," Ramanathan also mentions a publication titled "Mystery of Godliness," which he wrote

in 1895.⁶ The last page of this book lists the addresses of sales agents in the United States, Australia, India, and Sri Lanka.

Moreover, the preface to this book was not written by Ramanathan, who used the name Sri Parananda. Instead, it was written by his wife, Mrs. Harrison, who compiled the book. The preface is dated 'Good Friday, 1902,' and spans five pages. It's noteworthy that the preface for the earlier mentioned book on St. Matthew, published four years earlier, was also written by Mrs. Harrison, but it was a brief six-line paragraph on a single page.

It is both surprising and intriguing why Sri Parananda, or Ramanathan, did not write the prefaces for these two books. Apart from the cover, his name does not appear anywhere inside the books.

Ramanathan authored and compiled numerous books, most of which were primarily written for English readers. However, there are still some lingering scholarly doubts about whether all these works were indeed written by him.

Two years ago, at a book launch event in Oslo,

6 "An Eastern Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus According to St. John" – by Sri Parananda (Author), R. L. Harrison (Editor) - Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & CO. Ltd - 1902 - p70

I recall historian and professor Raghupathi mentioning, in response to one of my comments, that some of the books attributed to Sir Pon Ramanathan were not actually written by him. This is a point worth noting, and I have often wondered if this information could be true.

When exploring the origins of the name 'Parananda,' it becomes evident that Ramanathan's spiritual teacher was Sri La Sri Arul Parananda Desikar (also known as Arulparananda Swamigal). Both Ramanathan and his brother Arunachalam studied religion, philosophy, meditation, and yoga under Arul Parananda Desikar.

Sir Pon Ramanathan's spiritual mentor, Arul Parananda Swamigal, was a Brahmin from Thanjavur. It was after meeting Arul Parananda that Ramanathan began to immerse himself deeply in Saiva Siddhanta and spiritual matters, shifting away from his earlier focus on politics and social issues.⁷ Parananda Desikar was the spiritual guru to both Ramanathan and his brother.⁸

In 1930, S. Ponnambala Pillai wrote a historical account of Ramanathan titled 'Sri Ramanatha Maniyam' in poetic form, consisting of over a thousand verses. This work was written and published shortly after Ramanathan's death in the same year. The book also includes a photograph of Arul Parananda Desikar. Additionally, in the 331st verse of the book, S. Ponnambala Pillai did not forget to record the

⁷ Jesus in Asia By R. S. Sugirtharajah – Harvard University press – 2018 – P-67,68

⁸ The life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Volume 1, M. Vythilingam, Ramanathan Commemoration Society, 1971

contributions of Arul Parananda Desikar.

Sivakamisundari, Ramanathan's daughter, married Subbiah Nadesan, the grandson of Arul Parananda Desikar.



Ramanathan received his early education at Royal College, Colombo, under the guidance of Dr. Boake. He pursued further studies in Chennai under the mentorship of Dr. Thompson and C.V. Thamothersampillai. He studied law under Sir Richard Morgan and learned the intricacies of politics from his father-in-law, Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy. Additionally, he gained knowledge of spiritual matters from Arul Parananda

Swamigal.⁹

The Bhagavad Gita, translated from Sanskrit by Sir Pon Ramanathan (referred to as 'P. Ramanatha Thurai'), was published in 1914 at the Jaffna-Navalar Press. This rare and significant book features a preface written in Sanskrit by Srimath M. Sarveswara Sarma, which is quite remarkable. On one hand, Ramanathan had conflicts with Muslims, and on the other, he promoted Saiva activities, building Saiva schools and temples while also upholding Sanskrit. While he was deeply involved in Saiva religious writings, he also engaged in Christian studies.

To fully understand the Vaishnava background behind his Tamil-Jaffna-Saiva-Vellalar-educated-upper-class-patriarchal politics, it is essential to also understand Sri Parananda Yogi.

⁹ ibid



Silent Ballad

Translated from the original Tamil short story *mauṇa kītam* (மௌன கீதம்) from the 1976 collection of short stories titled *kōṭukaḷum kōlaṅkalum* (கோடுகளும் கோலங்களும்) by **Kuppilan Ai. Shanmugan**

Translated by:
Eluttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

The ceiling fans are spinning fast. Their shadows from the yellow light of the electric bulbs move like dark monsters. In that hauntingly beautiful setting, I stare past the closed glass window, transcending the chatter of my co-workers, losing myself in the feeling that a nameless emotion was rising up from the depths of my heart as a bewitchingly charming silent ballad.

Beyond the snaking road, one can see the uneven silhouette of tiled roofs. The tower of the Pillaiyār temple and the cross on St. Mary's church stand in attention next to each other in the northeast corner as if they were delivering a philosophical sermon. Further away, those three flags on the harbor flagpole flutter in the wind. The green leaves on the lone coconut tree towering above the tiled roofs sway in the wind. The flag poles on the ships in the harbor peek above the tiled rooftops.

The silent ballad titillates my heart. Like when one hears the rare sound of the violin in musical concerts that melts the heart, like all the musical energy entwined together into a lament, like a pure innocent damsel whimpering in a soft voice...

I keep looking outside.

A bevy of clouds envelop the earth into semi darkness. A light drizzle persists. At a distance, a movie theater's name glitters in its



red light. A middle-aged woman in a red sari, drawn up to cover her head, hurries along the road that curves out of sight.

I close my eyes to look within. My heart yearns for something. As if I am weary of this mundane existence, as if I am overcome with an urge to renounce this worldly life, as if I am being told to accept it with a smile if I suddenly encountered death... as if green, red, blue, and yellow hues swirl into one,... as if there is some connection between the silent ballad and the swirling hues, as if the silent ballad turns into a shade of yellow... *aiyō!* I open my eyes.

The world lies sprawled beyond the window with its exquisite beauty. A drizzle is falling

on the world half-immersed in darkness. The world outside resembles the description of the setting in the biography of the scientist Louis Pasteur, when he first left home for college on a coach. He held fast to his ideals and left, even as nature wept. He became a scientist. But I ...?

Am I weeping with nature?

Do suffering souls weep? Then, is the world immersed in suffering? Am I suffering? If so, is suffering charming? Is it bewitching? Will it lead to an indescribable yearning? Finally, finally ... will it lead to peace and joy? If nature weeps, will the world thrive afterwards?





Suddenly there is lightning; The world shines brilliantly and then darkens; Darkness; light; suffering – bliss; storm – calm; green – red — blue – yellow; One is not without the other. Does one depend on the other?

I weep; I laugh; I suffer; I rejoice.

Life! Darkness; light; suffering; joy.

The bell from St. Mary's church rings, ripping open the silence of silences. The sound

pervades everywhere, buzzing. Buzzing, buzzing, buzzing... as if the sound sweetens my ears.

I hear the silent ballad blending with a wondrous melody. My eyes moisten. Just like the sadness resulting from the seaside ballads rendered by Kōvalaṇ and Kaṇṇaki in the Tamil epic *cilappatikāram*, for me... for me ...

I closed my eyes again.

With a showy gait, swinging her arms that say, 'I am fearless, no matter what happens,' she arrives and smiles. Once upon a time, she entered my life's journey and took a permanent place in it. There is surely some connection between her, the yellow hue, and the silent ballad.

It was a day just like this ...

On a quiet, beautiful, drizzly day overcast with heart-wrenching clouds, I took refuge from the drizzle under the roofed porch in front of the Theatre of the Arts at the university and waited for my bus. She, too, was waiting. She stood like a statue wearing a yellow sari, her golden yellow skin shimmering. Her yellow form shone like a flame in my eyes. She stood murmuring a sad song, like a creeper leaning against its support.

Seconds dissolved. Minutes dissolved. Hours were born. Eyes met.

The bus arrived; we both boarded the bus. She climbed on board after me.

I bought tickets for both of us. She smiled and softly said "thank you." I responded, "You are welcome."

That was the first encounter.

Her form was engraved in my mind. She smiles in my mind's eye like a glittering yellow flame. The melody of that soft, sad, movie song as a silent ballad...

How many bewitching experiences in life!

Then...

Then what?



She and I became a couple. We blended into each other – and became one.

I trawl the bottom of my heart numbed by the sadness from the silent ballad.

We lived in our oneness. A magical life without sorrows or suffering – a life which made it impossible to imagine a greater paradise.

Mountain slopes draped in greenery, mountain streams gently rippling through, twisting and turning, trees bedecked with a riot of flowers, earth covered with lush meadows. The multi-floor library that stands as the repository of knowledge. Lecture halls. She and I were inseparable everywhere, inseparable, inseparable, ...

I daresay, "Life is when a man and a woman blend into one. Renouncing life is a lie. Literature that nudges one to hate life are lies. The argument that 'Life is an illusion' is a lie. Life is the truth. Truth is life. It is paradise. Just like the contrasts in hues, yellow–red–blue–green, life is a blend of happiness–suffering–sorrow–joy."



They were great experiences..

For a man and a woman to join, one need not look for compatibility in tribes, castes, beauty, or horoscopes; one only needs love. Love is tribe, love is beauty, love is compatibility.

I loved her. She loved me. We joined together; we became tight. I am not handsome. She is a beauty. She said I was handsome in her eyes; That there was none more handsome. I

laughed. I understood what love is.

I keep my eyes closed. That silent ballad is somehow affecting me.

One day

She and I had a tiff.

I was in the library, reading a book by the English poet Keats. She came to beseech and beg. I did not budge. She sat next to me and

mumbled, like all the musical energies joined in a soft, sad song...

I forgot myself and tried to embrace her. She laughed, her voice tinkles like a brass bell.

As far as I was concerned, she was a musical genius, a lover of the arts. Countless were the wonderful scenes of nature that she pointed out to me, describing their beauty. The mountain peaks north of the road, covered in mist, the mountain streams that shimmer like marble in the soft light of the morning sun, dew drops that glitter on the tips of blades of grass, leafless flower trees brimming with flowers, birds that fly in pairs in the dark silent sky...

We watched these scenes together, in our solitude. We forgot ourselves, engrossed in those scenes; we found joy in looking for our own meaning in them.

She would say, "You are an artist." My friends would say, "Instead of using your creative talent to describe the suffering and life struggles in our society, you lose yourself in describing unimportant topics like nature, love, and individual human emotions."

She would praise that my stories and poems were exquisite. I would report my friends' criticisms. She would point to the birds flying overhead, and ask, "Do they not have life struggles? Hunger? How do they joyfully sing their birdsongs, and rejoice in nature?" She would say that life struggles persist as long as life persists. "It is only through the fine arts that we can forget ourselves and feel true joy," she would declare.

I would nod in agreement. In complete agreement. When it came to life, art, and literature, we were of the same mind. Perhaps it was because of this that we could lose ourselves into completely becoming one.

For a man and a woman to become one, love alone is not enough. Their minds need to be aligned, too. True life is the joining of two minds, blending emotions, and, hence blending souls.

I thought deeply about human feelings, the social contexts, and their effects, and wrote a poem. In that poem, titled 'Life's breath,' I ended with the assertion, "Life is a collection of dreams."

She saw that poem. Her eyes shone in bliss. "Life is a mass of dreams," she said in Tamil first, and then translated the sentence into English, jumping with joy. She went overboard praising me.

"I did not write this poem by myself alone; you too became one with me and we wrote it together; this poem is nothing but my experience in blending with you."

She blushed and smiled.

For some reason, I remembered our first meeting, with the melody of the sad ballad and the yellow hue.

I remain with my eyes closed. I can hear the whirring of the ceiling fans.

From the perspective of the corporeal eyes of this world, we did part ways. The world was immersed in semi-darkness then. It was drizzling. She was wearing a yellow sari and mumbled that sad song. The train arrived, belching out thick black smoke. I was the one who bid her farewell. She did not cry, nor did I. There was no reason for us to cry. Why should we cry? We do not suffer. Even if we did, is there some law that says we must cry?

I did indeed cry once. She did, too. After our first encounter in the bus, when she and I met at the park – when I understood her and she



understood me – when she and I became one – we did cry then. For some reason, we felt the urge to cry. We cried until that urge was quenched.

Everyone says that we have broken up. But I do not believe that. We did not break up. No one can break us up. We are eternal lovers. She is within me and I would be within her; I would certainly be.

When we realized that we could not be together in this mundane earthly life – when we realized that we could not overcome the societal barriers, we did not launch a revolution against society. We are not revolutionaries. We are artists...

She then said, “We will live together forever. Only you will live in my heart forever; society is not capable of taking revenge on us. My soul will always seek yours. Society can do what it wants with my body. As long as I am alive, in some corner of this world, I will live

as a faithful wife to you in my mind.”

My understanding of her was complete. Tears ran down my cheeks.

In the overt external life, she is wife to someone else. But in truth, she will remain my wife forever.

I will remain her husband; the half-darkness that shrouds this world, the drizzle, the yellow hue, the silent ballad...

“*Thambi*, have you fallen asleep?” A voice calls out.

I open my eyes. The clock is at half past four.

I stare through the window.

It is drizzling. The world lies sprawled. The silent ballad plays in my heart. Green, red, blue, yellow ...

Voice of the Reader

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.

Our articles are penned with care, research, and dedication, but we acknowledge the diverse perspectives of our esteemed readership. If your submission equates to our quality, credibility, and relevance standards, we're more than happy to give it a platform.

Have something to say about what you've read? Do you feel a different pulse on an issue? We invite you to be a part of the dialogue. Your insights enrich our content and bridge the gap between the writer's desk and the reader's heart.

Reach out to us at hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com

Let's craft a narrative that resonates with every corner of our community.

Your Voice, Our Pages

Are you a budding writer with a story to tell? Perhaps an observant reader with a fresh perspective on a burning issue? Or a student eager to make your voice heard beyond the classroom walls? Whatever your background, JaffnaMonitor welcomes you.

We understand that the most vibrant ideas often come from unexpected places. That's why we're opening our pages to passionate contributors like you. Whether it's a piece of investigative journalism, a heartwarming personal essay, a thought-provoking opinion piece, or even a poetic reflection — we want to hear from you.

Every article we receive undergoes a careful review to ensure it aligns with our standards of quality and relevance. Remember, it's not about the stance but the substance. Irrespective of political leanings or backgrounds, if your work resonates with our values, there's a place for it in JaffnaMonitor.

Ready to make a mark? Submit your contributions or pitch your ideas to hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com. Dive into the exciting world of journalism and storytelling with us, and let's co-create content that matters.

CONTACT US

We value your feedback, questions, and insights. Feel free to get in touch with us via the methods below.

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