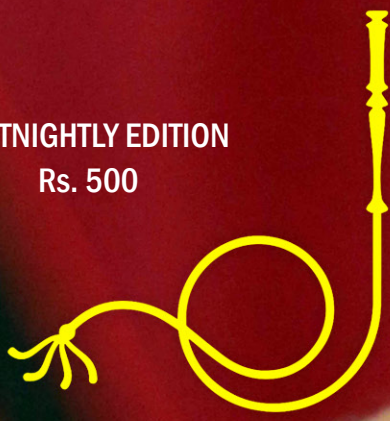


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UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED



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Your Vote, Your Voice: Don't Let This Election Pass You By



Dear Readers,

As Sri Lanka approaches the pivotal 2024 Presidential Election on September 21, our nation stands at a decisive juncture. This election holds the potential to fundamentally reshape the country's political landscape, marking it as one of the most consequential events in our democratic history. Unlike the commanding victories of the past, this year's contest is shrouded in uncertainty, with no clear frontrunner emerging. The stakes could not be higher, and the outcome remains far from predictable.

Historically, our presidential elections have often produced a decisive leader in the first round, with one candidate surpassing the 50% threshold. This time, however, with more than three candidates in the race, it's increasingly likely that no single candidate will secure an outright majority in the initial count. This opens the door for second and third preference votes to play a pivotal role in determining who will lead our nation. The importance of these preferences cannot be overstated—they could very well decide the future direction of Sri Lanka.

Your Vote Matters

At this critical moment, it is essential to understand the significance of every single vote. While you may support any candidate of your choice, it is crucial not to waste your valuable vote by boycotting the election, as some so-called Tamil nationalist parties are advocating. Remember, this is an election to choose the President of our country—a leader for all Sri Lankans.

We cannot afford to distance ourselves from the broader Sri Lankan narrative. As Tamils, we are an integral part of this nation, and our voices must be heard in the selection of our next leader. Voting for a common Tamil candidate who has no chance of winning, even if a miracle were to happen, is effectively equivalent to boycotting the election or marking your ballot

incorrectly. This strategy risks silencing our community in the national dialogue.

In our democratic society, both the majority and minority communities share responsibilities. Participating in this election is one such responsibility. We must ensure that our votes contribute meaningfully to the future of Sri Lanka—a future where we are all represented and heard.

How to Cast Your Vote

As we approach this crucial election, it's vital that every voter understands the voting process and casts their vote with clarity and purpose. Here's how to ensure your vote is counted:

- **Mark Your First Choice:** Place the number "1" in the box next to the name and symbol of the candidate you believe is best suited to lead our nation.
- **Second and Third Choices (Optional):** You have the option to indicate your second and third preferences by marking "2" and "3" next to the names of other candidates. However, marking only your first choice is sufficient for your vote to be counted.

The Election Commission has provided clear instructions: even if only the first preference is marked, the ballot remains valid. Additionally, if you choose to mark your first preference with an "X," as long as your intention is clear, your vote will still be counted.

Avoiding Common Mistakes

To ensure your vote is not invalidated, please be aware of the following key points:

- **Do Not Leave the Ballot Blank:** At a

minimum, ensure your first preference is marked.

- **Avoid Multiple First Choices:** Marking more than one candidate as your first choice or using an "X" alongside a numerical preference will lead to your vote being rejected.
- **Do Not Mark Only the Second or Third Preferences:** A ballot that lacks a first preference but includes second or third preferences will be invalidated.
- **Refrain from Using Identifying Marks:** Any writing or symbols that could reveal your identity will disqualify your ballot.
- **Correctly Mark Preferences:** Use only "1," "2," and "3" for your choices. Avoid any other symbols or numbers.
- **Stick to Three Preferences:** Marking more than three preferences or using numbers beyond "3" will invalidate your vote.

These guidelines are designed to safeguard the integrity of your vote, ensuring that it is counted accurately and fairly. In a race where every single vote—and every preference—could determine the outcome, it is your responsibility as a voter to be both informed and diligent.

At Jaffna Monitor, we urge every eligible voter to exercise their democratic rights. This election is more than just a choice—it is an opportunity to shape the future of our nation. Let your voice be heard, and let your aspirations be reflected in this pivotal election. Make your vote count.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

Ajit Doval Meets Tamil Leaders: A Crash Course in Strategy?



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Indian National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit K. Doval, the first NSA to be accorded the personal rank of a Cabinet Minister, touched down in Colombo on August 29, continuing his active role in the Colombo Security Conclave initiative. Doval, known as one of Prime Minister Modi's most powerful and trusted advisors, wields significant influence over India's national security and foreign affairs. That same day, he engaged in pivotal discussions with representatives of Tamil political parties. The meeting unfolded at the Indian House in Colombo, setting the stage for what many consider a crucial dialogue between Doval and Tamil nationalist leaders.

According to credible sources who spoke to Jaffna Monitor, the meeting involved in-depth discussions on various critical issues, including the common Tamil candidate proposed by some Tamil parties and the election boycott

advocated by the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF).

The sources further elaborated that during the meeting, Ajit Doval clarified that, as a foreign representative, he would refrain from advising Tamil political parties on their strategy for the upcoming presidential election. However, he reportedly emphasized the importance of unity and suggested that Tamil votes should be utilized in a way that would yield the most constructive outcomes—a strategy that many Tamil parties seem to overlook in favour of their own divisive agendas.

Invitations were extended to a selected group of Tamil political leaders, including Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) figures Mavai Senathirajah, MPs Sivagnanam Sritharan, and M.A. Sumanthiran; Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) leader and MP Selvam Adaikalanathan; and People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) leader, MP Dharmalingam Siddharthan. Also on the list were Selvarasa Kajendran, the General

Secretary of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) and MP, along with C.V. Wigneswaran, the leader of the Tamil People's Alliance and MP.

According to credible sources, while Sritharan, Sumanthiran, Selvam Adaikalanathan, and Kajendran attended the meeting, Meanwhile, Siddarthan, C.V. Wigneswaran, and Mavai Senathirajah chose to remain in Jaffna, their absence at the meeting sparking speculation about their motives.

Sources report that ITAK MP Sritharan did attend the meeting, but due to a slight delay, he couldn't stay for the entire session as his flight to London was on schedule. He managed to participate for about ten to fifteen minutes before informing Ajit Doval that it was time for him to catch his flight. Sritharan then headed directly from the Indian House to the airport.

Before departing, Sritharan reportedly shared his thoughts, expressing that after exhausting every avenue to resolve the ethnic issue without success, he and others, driven by frustration, had decided to field a common Tamil candidate. Ajit Doval, with his years of experience in national security, reportedly listened with his usual calm. After all, as a seasoned NSA, Doval is no stranger to hearing explanations that are more about personal agendas cleverly disguised as genuine grievances and solutions.

Sources reveal that during the discussion, MP Kajendran conveyed to Ajit Doval that the past 75 years since independence have made it painfully evident that the Tamil people cannot thrive under Sri Lanka's unitary state. He stressed that the 13th Amendment to the Constitution had been a complete failure, offering no viable path for Tamil progress.

Sources reveal that Gajendran declared his party's firm rejection of both the 13th Amendment and the 2015 constitutional draft, both of which uphold a unitary state system. He passionately urged India to support the creation of a federal system that would grant the Tamil people in the Northern and Eastern provinces the right to self-determination. This, he asserted, is the



driving force behind their decision to boycott the upcoming presidential election—an election they believe offers no meaningful change for their people.

However, what Gajendran conveniently omitted was why his party's inspiration, the LTTE, and its leader, Prabhakaran, outright dismissed the idea of a federal system and brutally silenced numerous individuals who advocated for it. It's a glaring contradiction that wasn't brought up in the conversation with Doval, leaving one to wonder about the selective memory at play.



and aspirations of local Tamils. As one critic aptly remarked, "It's almost as if TNPF's compass is guided more by the flow of dollars than by the actual needs on the ground."

After Sritharan departed mid-meeting for his flight to London, only Sumanthiran, Selvam Adaikalanathan, and Gajendran remained in the room. Sources reveal that Ajit Doval did bring up the decision of a few parties to field a common Tamil candidate, but Selvam Adaikalanathan, the TELO leader and supposed champion of this idea, seemed more interested in discussing the issue of Indian fishermen encroachment. He didn't utter a word about the common Tamil candidate, which only adds fuel to the speculation that as the election draws closer, his party might be leaning towards supporting President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Sources reveal that Sumanthiran outlined how ITAK is meticulously evaluating the stances of the three main presidential contenders. He emphasized that ITAK will announce its position to the Tamil people once the most suitable candidate has been identified. Interestingly, Sumanthiran also disclosed that the party has already sought explanations and initiated disciplinary action against Ariyanethiran, an ITAK Executive Committee Member who put himself forward as the common Tamil candidate.

Sources report that Ajit Doval, after inquiring about the differing stances and voting dynamics among the Tamil people, advised that the best course of action would be for everyone to unite and strategically use Tamil votes in the upcoming presidential election. While he refrained from dictating what decisions the Tamil parties should make, Doval emphasized the importance of carefully considering how the votes cast could impact democracy and ultimately benefit the Tamil community. If that advice was indeed given, it served as a much-needed schooling for our so-called Tamil leaders, who often seem more engrossed in political theatrics laced with their own agendas while their people continue to suffer.

Moreover, Gajendran also neglected to mention that the boycott decision isn't purely driven by principle—it's heavily influenced by the financial backing his party receives from the diaspora. Critics are quick to point out that his party often aligns more with the agenda of a troublesome segment of the diaspora, who seem intent on keeping the North and East of Sri Lanka in turmoil to justify their fundraising efforts abroad rather than genuinely representing the needs



C.V. Wigneswaran Blames One Individual for ITAK's Current Plight



by:

Our Reporter

Former Justice C.V. Wigneswaran, leader of the Tamil People's Alliance, has pointed the finger squarely at a single individual within the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), holding him solely responsible for its current unfortunate state. While Wigneswaran refrained from naming this person, political observers believe it's none other than

Sumanthiran- who, interestingly enough, was once his student.

During a recent press conference in Jaffna, Wigneswaran responded to a reporter's inquiry about rumours that some members are planning to break away from ITAK to form a new party. With a smirk, Wigneswaran remarked, "The once-strong Sri Lankan Tamil political party is now in a pitiable state thanks to one person. He's the reason the party has been pushed to the brink of breaking apart. I,

too, left the party because of him. So, if others decide to jump ship, it shouldn't come as a surprise."

Wigneswaran also took the opportunity to clarify that his party has not withdrawn its support for the common Tamil candidate, dismissing such claims as false. "Our party continues to offer its support. I've been out of the spotlight recently due to health issues, but that doesn't mean we've stepped back from our commitments. Since the deposit for the common candidate was paid, we've been actively involved in the campaign."



cause," Wigneswaran hinted.

He didn't shy away from addressing the current political landscape, particularly his take on President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Wigneswaran revealed his long-standing familiarity with Wickremesinghe, stating, "I've known President Ranil Wickremesinghe for many years. However, in politics, there are no permanent friends or enemies. While we had hoped for action on the devolution of powers under the 13th Amendment, the President has done nothing but disappoint us over the past year. It's now clear that mere talk is all we can expect from him—there's no real intention to deliver a solution for the Tamil people."

He also touched on the broader political dynamics, noting the internal divisions within ITAK, particularly the differences between members like Mavai Senathirajah and Shritharan, who continue to support the common candidate, and others like Sumanthiran and Shanakiyan, who seem to be aligning with Sinhala candidates, possibly even moving towards supporting Ranil Wickremesinghe. "It's a betrayal of the Tamil

Furthermore, Wigneswaran commented on Anura Kumara Dissanayake, suggesting that while his potential victory could see corrupt politicians jailed, there are doubts about his ability to steer the country economically, especially if he leans on Chinese support. "Economic progress under his leadership is uncertain, and his Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist tendencies make him a questionable ally for our people."

In a final jab, Wigneswaran alluded to the growing dissatisfaction within ITAK, hinting at the potential for a new faction to emerge. "It wouldn't be surprising if some members break away to form a new party. After all, it's largely due to one individual that the party finds itself in this sorry state."

Wigneswaran's remarks have undoubtedly stirred the pot, casting a spotlight on the internal strife within ITAK and the broader Tamil political landscape as the presidential election approaches.



Tamil Nationalist Politicians Live in Comfort in Colombo, Exploit Separatism in Jaffna to Secure Votes:

**Exclusive Interview with Speaker
Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena**



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

As we stepped into the Speaker's residence in Borella, we were immediately enveloped by a warm, inviting ambience. We were greeted by a man of such an unassuming demeanour that, were it not for his distinguished position, one might easily mistake him for a humble, ordinary gentleman.

With infectious enthusiasm, he welcomed us and began to recount his golden years as the Chairman of Paranthan Chemical Company—a little-known chapter in his storied life—from the close of 1977 until the end of 1983. During this period, he became deeply intertwined with the Tamil community in a region that pulsed with a Tamil heart.

Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, one of the oldest living statesmen in Sri Lanka, is a seasoned politician with a career spanning over four decades. As the current Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament, his journey through the political landscape has been marked by unwavering convictions and bold decisions.

First entering Parliament in 1983, Abeywardena quickly distinguished himself as a young and outspoken critic, most notably opposing the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord—a move that cost him his seat and led to him being labelled as a Sinhala hardliner by a section of Tamil leaders. However, it also solidified his reputation as a politician who places principles above party lines.

Over the years, he has held various significant roles, from Chief Minister of the Southern Provincial Council to Minister of Agriculture. His influence has been felt both domestically,

where he played a pivotal role in developing neglected infrastructures, and internationally, where he was recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for his contributions to global agricultural policy.

These are excerpts from an extended interview we conducted with him.

Sir, you are one of the oldest living politicians in Sri Lanka these days. How do you see the current situation in the country?

The current situation has become highly volatile. Centrist parties are losing ground, while extreme left-wing parties are gaining popularity. This trend is not limited to Sri Lanka alone; globally, centrist parties are losing support as more extreme right-wing and left-wing parties rise in prominence. We've witnessed this cycle before, though the younger generations may not have. This is a normal phenomenon when considering the political supercycle, which spans over a century. Political sentiment shifts from extremes to the center and then back to extremes in a cyclical pattern.

What do you mean by extremists?

Typically, I am referring to either extreme right or extreme left parties. In Sri Lanka's context, I refer specifically to the JVP. Since its inception, the JVP has been an extreme left-wing political party. Although they have recently rebranded and claim to have revised their policies to become more centre-left, many remain sceptical about the authenticity of these changes.

In its early years, the JVP was notorious for committing atrocities, including harassment and

"If I had been in Prabhakaran's shoes, I would have seized the opportunity to share power and form a government when President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga offered it "

the killing of opponents. Despite their current assertions of reform, there is little evidence to convince the nation of their transformation. Additionally, there are accusations that even within the party, they are two-faced.

The current political situation is volatile, largely because the JVP has exploited the mistakes of traditional politicians and center-left and center-right parties. Since the dawn of independence, these established political forces have made errors that eventually led to the Aragalaya (The Struggle), culminating in then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fleeing the country.

The suffering of the people during this period was immense, fueling their opposition to the government to the point of driving it out. This created an opportunity for the extreme left JVP to seize the moment quietly but effectively, gaining the public's confidence by asserting that the nation's problems stemmed from those in power misusing their authority.

Do you believe the JVP-led National People's Power (NPP) has a chance in this election?

It's an open election, as no clear winner has emerged, making it difficult to predict the outcome until the votes are counted. All main candidates have a chance.

What percentage chance do they have of securing a victory in this election?

It's hard to pinpoint with accuracy right now. There are three main candidates. Two of them have traditionally represented centrist parties, while one previously aligned with the extreme left but now claims to be more centrist. Historically, support for the extreme left hovered around 3 percent, but this time it's undeniably stronger and may even be the strongest in some areas. I prefer not to give specific figures, as that might influence public opinion.

When you say "some areas," are you referring to specific districts?

Not districts, but rather smaller regions, like AGA divisions.

Do you think the Sinhala people have forgotten the past atrocities committed by the JVP?

I wouldn't say they've completely forgotten, but a substantial number of people seem to have moved on. This shift is evident in the support the JVP is now receiving, especially from the younger generation who did not witness the JVP's violent past firsthand. While the older generation may have shared these stories, the impact isn't the same for those who didn't live through it. This lack of direct experience, combined with the perception that the NPP is more center-left than the JVP, is why many young people are now gravitating toward them.

"Provincial Councils are essential for development, and as a former Chief Minister, I believe they should be given even more power to serve the people effectively."

Can you shed light on a few of the atrocities committed by the JVP that you witnessed firsthand?

Oh my God, the memories are truly harrowing. I've witnessed countless beheaded bodies mercilessly killed by the JVP. People were hanged from lampposts in grotesque displays of their reign of terror. Some were shot, and their grieving families were denied even the basic dignity of a proper funeral. The JVP ordered their relatives to discard the bodies in the jungles, where they were left to be devoured by wild animals.

In comparison, who do you believe was more cruel, the LTTE or the JVP?

I believe both were equally cruel. I have witnessed firsthand the horrors inflicted by the LTTE. I saw how they mercilessly killed innocent civilians—Sinhala, Muslim, and Tamil alike—massacring entire communities. Some of the most chilling experiences were in Monaragala and Batticaloa, where the LTTE slaughtered entire villages. They didn't just kill; they butchered people in cold blood.

Are you certain that these extremist elements were the driving force behind the Aragalaya movement?

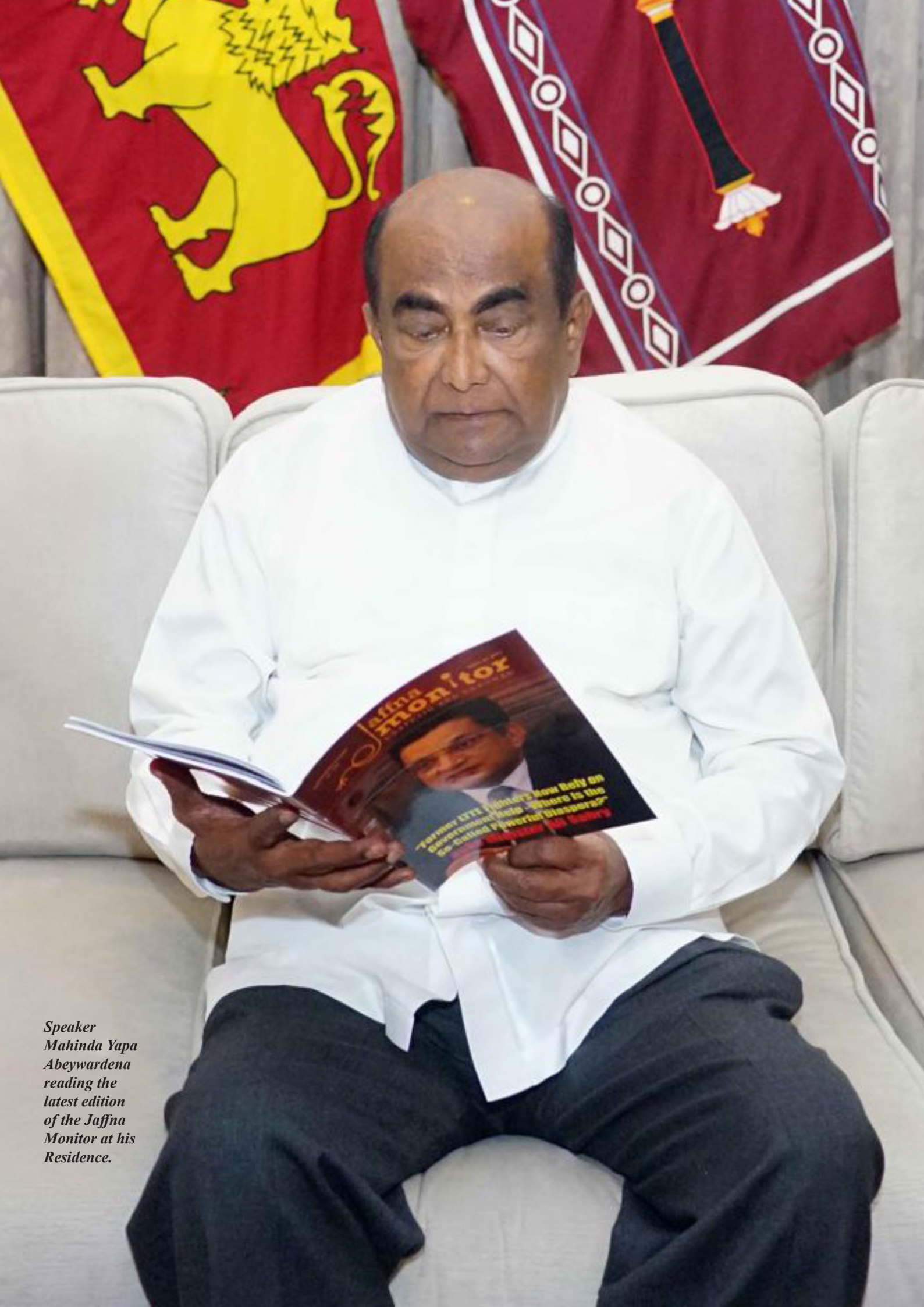
While there were genuinely affected members of the public who participated in the protests,

extremist elements sought to achieve their political objectives by exploiting these masses. This became evident when they attempted to attack the Parliament. Fortunately, the majority of genuinely affected individuals recognized that this was a step too far and resisted the call. As a result, the plan failed, and to this day, you can still hear some JVP members lamenting over it.

You've played a significant role in getting Gotabaya Rajapaksa elected as the President of Sri Lanka in the last presidential election. In your opinion, why did things go so wrong during his presidency?

To put it bluntly, he was completely inexperienced as a politician. When you're the leader of a country, you have to manage a multitude of people with conflicting interests—a talent that only comes with experience. Even a CEO must be adept at navigating internal politics; it's not just about running operations smoothly. His lack of real political experience became glaringly obvious once he took office, leaving him vulnerable to exploitation by various parties. Though he genuinely had the best interests of our country at heart, he simply couldn't deliver.

But weren't you and others there to advise him? Shouldn't that have helped mitigate his inexperience?



*Speaker
Mahinda Yapa
Abeywardena
reading the
latest edition
of the Jaffna
Monitor at his
Residence.*

"It's an Open Election, No Clear Winner Has Emerged"

Yes, we were there to advise him, but the problem was that he refused to listen. He couldn't discern who was giving sound advice and who was leading him astray. Instead of taking counsel from those who truly understood the political landscape, he surrounded himself with so-called pseudo-intellectuals who either had vested interests or lacked political acumen.

These individuals had no real political experience or connection to the general public. They lived in their own isolated worlds, detached from the realities faced by ordinary people. It was this same group who advised Gotabaya to cremate the bodies of Muslim COVID-19 victims despite our warnings. We explained that this was a deeply religious issue and that ignoring it could turn the entire society against us. But he chose to disregard our counsel and followed the recommendations of this insular group of intellectuals, who later appeared on stages to oust him.

In your view, what does this reveal about Gotabaya Rajapaksa's personality?

I believe that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was an incredibly effective Defence Secretary, and his success stemmed from operating in an environment where he could make decisions independently. He had the full backing of his brother, then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa, and together, they executed decisions with remarkable efficiency. However, when Gotabaya became President, he mistakenly believed that intellectuals should guide him in everything.

While these intellectuals may excel in their academic fields, they lack practical experience in dealing with the everyday issues that affect the people. They live in academic bubbles, far removed from the realities of the public, and this disconnect led to poor advice and, ultimately, disastrous decisions.

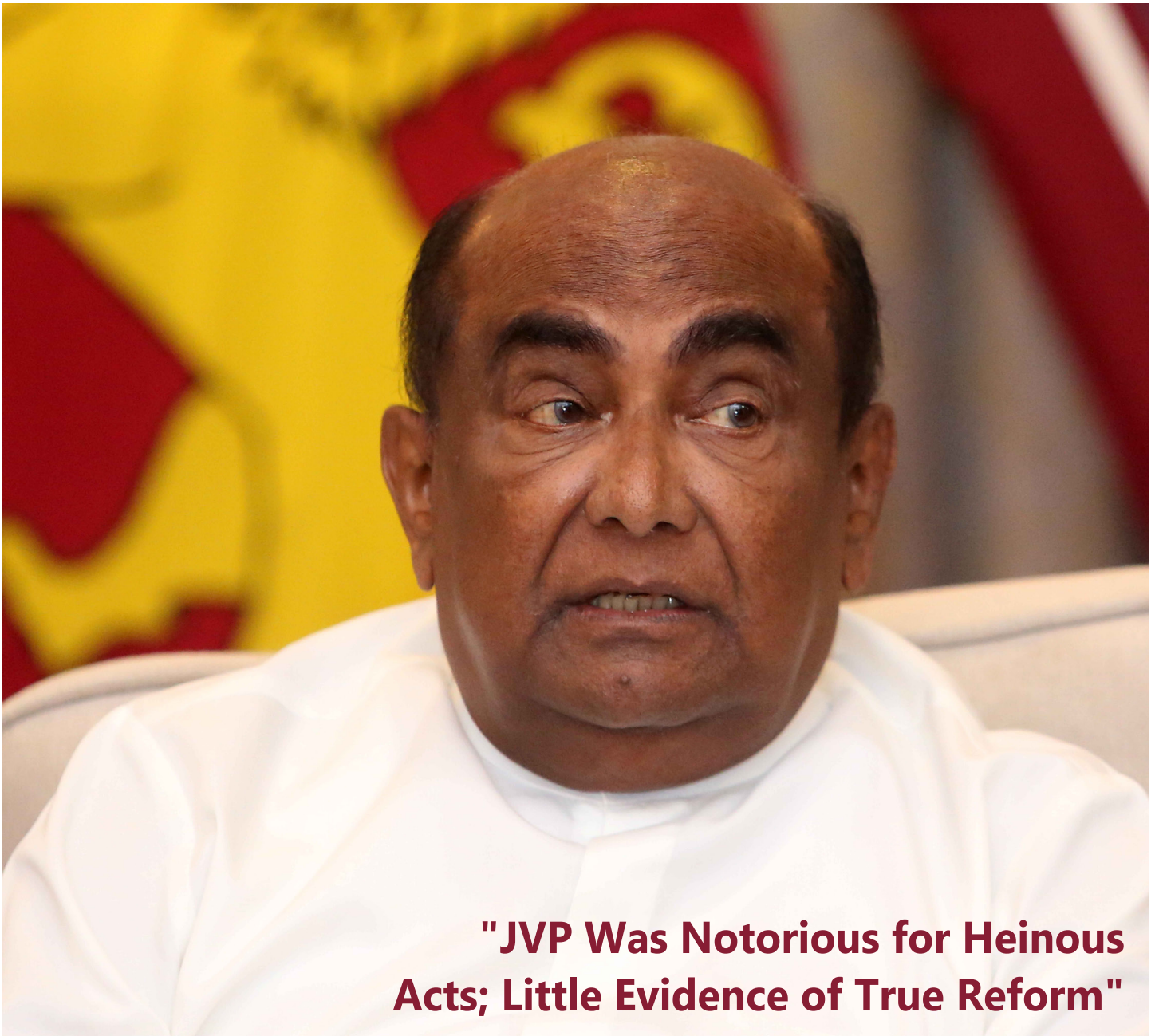
Could you name some of these intellectuals who misguided Gotabaya Rajapaksa?

I'd rather not name anyone specifically.

Do you think that if Gotabaya Rajapaksa had relied less on these intellectuals and more on his instincts, he could have been a successful President?

No single person can run a country alone; it's impossible. Any leader who tries to operate in isolation is destined to fail. Gotabaya had a political party deeply connected with the people, one that had evolved from grassroots movements. He should have relied on his party for political decisions, as the presidency is inherently a political position. Any political decision must be grounded in the party's ideology and supported by its base. Unfortunately, in my opinion, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa lacked a coherent political ideology, and that was one of his greatest downfalls.

He didn't even listen to his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa?



"JVP Was Notorious for Heinous Acts; Little Evidence of True Reform"

No, not at all. That was one of the major issues.

Why was that? Did he become arrogant?

He did exhibit a certain level of arrogance, but the situation is more complex than that. At his core, Gotabaya is a simple and straightforward gentleman. He was always willing to listen to those around him—he would consider different perspectives and take them into account. His intentions for the country were genuinely good. However, in the end, he consistently deferred to the advice of a small

group of intellectuals who had gained his trust.

He believed in them implicitly, almost as if they were delivering gospel truths. Unfortunately, this misplaced trust often led him astray. A leader should listen to a wide range of diverse opinions and then decide on the best course of action.

How did these intellectuals manage to gain so much respect and influence with him?

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was an efficient manager during his tenure as Defence Secretary, particularly during the war. When

"Extreme Left-Wing Parties Gaining Ground in Sri Lanka and Globally"

he decided to run for President, intellectuals rallied behind him, promoting the idea that this was the first time in Sri Lanka's history such a cadre of intellectuals had supported a presidential candidate—and there was some truth to that.

The problem arose when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa began to believe that his victory was largely due to the influence of these intellectuals.

While they may have contributed to his campaign, particularly among a specific educated class, I don't believe they were the primary reason he won. His victory was primarily due to the overwhelming support of the majority Sinhala population. He didn't feel the need to rely on the votes of the Muslim and Tamil communities, which is why, after his inauguration at Ruwanwelisaya in Anuradhapura, he made the ill-advised statement about winning solely with Sinhala votes.

Do you think that statement was a mistake?

Absolutely, it was a huge mistake. I know that both the Tamil and Muslim communities supported him to some extent, so I can't fathom why he made such a divisive statement. It alienated the very people he needed to bring together to heal the country. Instead of fostering unity, it only deepened the divisions. Once elected as a leader, you need to look after the interests of everyone, both those who voted for you and those who didn't. Even if you don't rely on their support, you must strive to be inclusive. That's how you reduce resistance

and build a stronger nation. The writers of that speech had an interest in keeping the President confined within their own agenda, and unfortunately, he fell prey to it.

Did you ever try to advise Gotabaya directly on any important issues?

Yes, I did. One particular instance that stands out was when I tried to advise him on the issue of banning chemical fertilizers. Having served as the Minister of Agriculture, I had a good understanding of the complexities involved. I approached him and said, 'Please, don't ban chemical fertilizers entirely and abruptly. This isn't practical.'

I emphasized that if he wanted to introduce organic fertilizers, it should be done gradually, starting with one district or a specific area. I suggested implementing organic farming through a pilot project in one district, involving local farmers and creating a specialized organic market in Colombo, similar to the 'Green Markets' in Germany.

I explained that you can't just switch from chemical fertilizers to organic overnight, especially since much of our agricultural research, particularly for paddy, has been based on chemical fertilizers. The seed varieties we currently use are specifically developed to respond well to these fertilizers. I urged him to consider a gradual transition over 5 to 10 years to maintain our self-sufficiency in rice production.

What was Gotabaya's response to your suggestions?

"I fully support the 13th Amendment and granting more rights to the Tamil community".

He responded by telling me to look at Japan, where he claimed everyone was using organic fertilizers. I had to explain that while some Japanese farmers might be using organic methods, their situation is very different from ours. In Japan, rice isn't consumed in the same quantities as it is here, where rice is a staple for all three meals. Moreover, our agricultural productivity is lower than that of Japan.

I pointed out that no country in the world has implemented organic farming overnight. I suggested using Gampaha District as a pilot area for organic farming, given its proximity to Colombo, which is a major market. I proposed providing all the necessary resources for organic farming in this district to ensure that the farmers could succeed. Gampaha's closeness to the capital also meant that we could easily monitor and support the project.

Why do you think Gotabaya didn't take your advice?



Unfortunately, he was too set in his ways, heavily influenced by those around him who lacked practical experience in the field. A Buddhist monk, along with other so-called intellectuals, played a significant role in convincing President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to abruptly ban chemical fertilizers. The irony is that neither the monk nor these intellectuals had any real understanding of agriculture.

Can you elaborate on the role of the Buddhist monk and the intellectuals in influencing Gotabaya's decision?

Someone had planted the idea in the monk's mind that banning chemical fertilizers would be the absolute solution to our agricultural issues, and he took this notion straight to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was already heavily

"LTTE and JVP Were Equally Cruel—Two Sides of the Same Coin"

influenced by these pseudo-intellectuals. I actually had an argument with this monk one day. I told him, "You can't make such a drastic change overnight; it's simply not practical." But instead of considering the complexities involved, he accused me of being under the influence of fertilizer companies, as if I had some ulterior motive.

How did you try to counter their influence and convince Gotabaya?

I explained to them that all the agricultural research conducted over the past 50-60 years has been based on the use of chemical fertilizers. For example, the famous Keeri Samba rice variety, a staple in Sri Lanka, was developed by our scientists at the Rice Research and Development Institute (RRDI) in Batalagoda. These Keeri Samba seeds were specifically engineered to be highly responsive to chemical fertilizers—that's the foundation on which they were created. I told him that ignoring these facts and expecting to suddenly switch to organic methods without serious repercussions was a recipe for disaster.

Despite all the facts I presented, the influence of this monk and the intellectuals was strong enough to sway President Gotabaya Rajapaksa into making one of the most ill-advised decisions of his presidency. It was a decision that lacked practical grounding and ultimately led to disastrous consequences.

Did you foresee that Gotabaya was going to mess everything up?

Well, about halfway through his term, we started to realize that things were heading in the wrong direction.

Who do you mean by "we"?

Everyone in the party saw it coming. Even President Mahinda Rajapaksa himself realized that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was on a path that could lead to disaster.

How long before Gotabaya fled did you sense this?

Probably about a year before he fled, by that time, everyone had tried their level best to steer him in the right direction. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, along with many others in the party and the government, tried to talk sense into him, but he just wouldn't listen. That's what I heard from those close to him.

Eventually, I took it upon myself to visit the eldest Rajapaksa brother, Chamal Rajapaksa, at his residence. This was well before the Aragalaya protests began. I told him plainly that the situation in the country was deteriorating rapidly. I said, 'As the eldest in the family, it's your duty to gather all your brothers together, maybe over dinner at your home, and have an honest discussion. Each of you needs to tell President Gotabaya Rajapaksa that the path he's on is not right and that he must change course.'

And did Chamal Rajapaksa take your concerns seriously?

Yes, he did. He also foresaw the disaster that was looming. He arranged a dinner at his house and got all the brothers together. They did discuss the situation with President

"Prabhakaran was an overestimated man".



Gotabaya Rajapaksa, but from what I've heard, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was stubborn and refused to listen to them. He was adamant about continuing on his chosen path, and nothing could sway him. Chamal didn't tell me directly how the meeting went, but that's what I've gathered from those who were in the know. It was a tragic situation where everyone saw the impending disaster, but no one could get through to him.

You've been Mahinda Rajapaksa's close friend and a key figure in the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP).

But now, you're aligned with Ranil Wickremesinghe. Is that the right move?

I'm not aligned with Ranil Wickremesinghe. As the Speaker, I must remain neutral and cannot be associated with any individual or party.

Then, in your opinion, who do you think would be the best presidential candidate to steer the country out of this economic crisis?

"I've witnessed the JVP's brutal atrocities firsthand, including beheaded bodies, people hanged from lampposts, and families forced to abandon their loved ones' remains in the jungle"

It's not right for me to give my opinion, as it may influence others. However, we should think very carefully, consider where the country currently stands, and choose the best person who can lead the country forward.

How did it happen that Namal was suddenly announced as the SLPP's presidential candidate? Who was behind that decision?

Namal likely made that decision with the support of others in the Central Committee.

But he had the backing of his father, uncles, and others, didn't he?

Ultimately, when Namal decided to step forward, it was difficult for his father or uncles to refuse. Family dynamics are complex, and in the end, they stood behind him.

Was Ranil Wickremesinghe ever willing to contest under the SLPP banner?

At one point, I believe he was open to the idea—not as the official SLPP candidate but as an independent candidate with SLPP support. From the beginning, President Ranil Wickremesinghe expressed his preference to run as an independent. He believed that running under an independent label would enable him to garner broader support, both

within and outside the party.

What's the reason behind the majority of SLPP members rallying behind Ranil Wickremesinghe? Is it because of the benefits they get from aligning with the President, or do they genuinely want to support him?

No, I don't think it's about benefits. The situation is far more complex than that. Consider the circumstances when President Ranil Wickremesinghe took over amidst the chaos of the Aragalaya protests. SLPP parliamentarian Amarakeerthi Athukorala was brutally beaten to death, and they were actively hunting down other SLPP parliamentarians as well.

A total of 84 houses belonging to SLPP members of Parliament were burnt to the ground. Out of 116 SLPP parliamentarians, 84 lost their homes entirely. The SLPP members were deeply traumatized and didn't even feel safe moving freely in public.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe restored normalcy and has brought the economy to where it is today. The majority of SLPP members support him for that reason and believe there is no one better suited to lead the country through these difficult times than Ranil Wickremesinghe.

So it's not about political advantages?

"My opposition to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord wasn't about devolution or the 13th Amendment; it was about rejecting the presence of a foreign army on Sri Lankan soil, which I saw as a violation of our sovereignty."

Running the country peacefully and without turmoil is, in itself, a significant advantage for the SLPP. Let's not forget that this is still an SLPP government, now led by President Ranil Wickremesinghe, with SLPP members holding the majority in Parliament.

If you can, sir, answer me in one word—though I know, as the Speaker, you can't openly endorse any candidate in the presidential race. But who would you prefer to be the next President?

Whoever leads the country must be capable of governing it peacefully and effectively, especially during a crisis of this magnitude.

Then what will happen to the SLPP? In his interview with the Jaffna Monitor, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry mentioned that SLPP members who support Ranil are forming a new party.

Yes, they have no other choice now. Since the party announced that they are suspending those who support President Ranil Wickramasinghe, forming a new party has become their only option.

How do you view the decision to sack SLPP members who are supporting

Ranil?

Initially, the party was leaning towards not fielding a candidate and instead supporting President Ranil Wickremesinghe. But then, out of the blue, they decided to field MP Namal Rajapaksa as their presidential candidate. By that time, many SLPP MPs and ministers had already thrown their support behind President Wickremesinghe, making it impossible for them to backtrack. The decision to sack members came from those who hadn't even stepped forward earlier to announce, 'We're fielding a candidate.' By that point, most of our people had already distanced themselves from the party.

Now, the party has made the mistake of alienating those who support President Ranil Wickramasinghe. I asked the party's General Secretary, Sagara Kariyawasam, 'If you chase away everyone in the party who supports Ranil, who will be left in the SLPP? Can you really run a political party like this?' I even gave him an example from President Ranasinghe Premadasa's era when he expelled Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali—two leaders who brought a million votes to the party. When they were sacked, the UNP lost the next election, and to this day, the UNP hasn't fully regained its footing.

Political parties should never expel people lightly. Once you cut ties, you can't engage with them anymore. They're forced to seek refuge elsewhere—either in another party, by forming their own, or by leaving politics

"Younger Generation Supporting JVP Did Not Witness Their Violent Past Firsthand"

altogether. It's a foolish decision, and the party should reconsider it. The SLPP needs to reach out, mend fences, and bring people back into the fold. Otherwise, it will struggle to rise again.

The SLPP has announced that Mahinda Rajapaksa will campaign nationwide for his son Namal. What's your take on that?

The SLPP owes much of its success to President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the leader who built the party into what it is today. But let's be realistic—The political landscape has shifted, and the younger generation, in particular, is unlikely to rally behind someone of his age. While his legacy is undeniable, the party must strategically consider its future. We can't rely on President Mahinda Rajapakse to achieve what he once did.

How much of the vote do you think Namal Rajapaksa might secure in the upcoming presidential election?

When it comes to elections, nothing is ever certain, so it's not wise to give specific numbers.

I heard an interesting story about you—that you were the Chairman of Paranthan Chemicals Company and that you had a close connection with the Tamil community during your tenure. Could you share your

experiences during that time?

Yes, I had the privilege of serving as the Chairman of Paranthan Chemicals Company for five and a half years. During that period, from the end of 1977 until the end of 1983, I was based in Paranthan and lived there. If someone were to ask me what the best period of my life was, I would say without hesitation that it was during those years. I was incredibly happy.

Could you share some memories?

When I took over the company, it was struggling, operating at a loss, and resources were scarce. We faced numerous challenges, but through the collective effort of our team, we managed to turn things around and transform it into a profit-making entity, albeit with modest gains.

What struck me the most was the unwavering dedication of our Tamil employees, who made up 99% of the workforce—I was the sole exception. Their commitment to the organization was profound, and they took immense pride in their work. I never had to worry about the well-being of the company because these employees were both responsible and cooperative, never doing anything to jeopardize the organization.

We did face a month-long strike, but it was a matter of principle for the workers. Unfortunately, the then-Minister, Cyril Mathew, disagreed with their demands, creating a significant challenge. Had I been granted the freedom to make independent

decisions, I would have resolved the situation in favour of the workers. Despite this, that period remains one of the most cherished in my life, thanks to the warmth and solidarity of the people I had the privilege to work with.

So, you had a few good Tamil friends?

Absolutely. Even today, when some of them come to Colombo, they make it a point to visit me.

Were you able to speak Tamil?

No, unfortunately, I never learned the language.

It seems you had strong ties with the Tamil community, both emotionally and in real life. However, you've been labelled a Sinhala hardliner by a section of Tamil leaders, particularly due to your fierce opposition to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987. It's also claimed that you're against the 13th Amendment. How do

"Despite our efforts to advise him, Gotabaya Rajapaksa often ignored sound counsel, instead relying on pseudo-intellectuals"



you respond to these accusations?

They misunderstood my stance. They assumed I was opposing the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement and the Provincial Councils, which indeed required the Sri Lankan government to devolve powers to the provinces. However, my opposition was never about devolution itself—I opposed the presence of a foreign army on our soil. I have never, in my life, endorsed the idea of the Indian army entering Sri Lanka. That was the core of my opposition.

When the Indian army was incorporated into the agreement,

"Gotabaya Rajapaksa's statement about winning with Sinhala votes alienated Tamil and Muslim communities, making it a significant mistake in uniting the country".

we rejected it. Let me be clear: I was not against the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, the 13th Amendment, or even the idea of giving more authority to Provincial Councils. However, I could not accept the deployment of Indian troops in Sri Lanka. Do you remember when the Indian Air Force dropped food parcels and rations in Jaffna? That was a step too far—a reckless decision by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It was wrong and caused us considerable distress. But sending an army into a sovereign country? That is something I could never tolerate. It goes against the fundamental sovereignty and ethics of a nation.

You were critical of the Indian army coming to Sri Lanka. How did you view the decision of the LTTE leadership to fight against the Indian army? Did you see Prabhakaran's decision as a brave one?

No, it was a foolish decision. He shouldn't have chosen to fight against them. Instead, he should have led a peaceful struggle. When you start a fight, you know you can't win; it's a futile effort. Yes, the LTTE may have killed thousands of Indian soldiers, and LTTE supporters might have taken pride in that, but who were those soldiers, and what was the purpose of killing them? The focus should have been on the struggle of supporting the aspirations of the Tamil people and using the solution offered to address their grievances, not on taking up arms against a massive force like the Indian army.

This situation reminds me of what we're seeing now with Ukraine against Russia—fighting a significantly stronger military force is not the solution and only leads to unnecessary destruction.

Are you in favor of the 13th Amendment and granting more rights to the Tamil community?

Absolutely, my dear, I fully support it. But let me correct something: the right that most people, both in the north and the south, are truly denied is the right to a good life, supported by economic and social development. For that purpose, Provincial Councils have been a valuable tool. People often claim that I oppose the 13th Amendment, but let me set the record straight—I served as the Chief Minister of the Southern Province for eight years. If I were truly against the 13th Amendment, which established Provincial Councils and devolved power to the provinces, how could I have represented one of those councils for such a long period?

The provinces have existed since the 19th century but didn't have any legal status until 1987, when the 13th Amendment came into effect. It's an administration I still hold in high regard. If you genuinely want to develop your area, the best institution to do so is the Provincial Council. In fact, I believe that Provincial Councils should be granted even more powers to fulfill their mandate effectively.

"As Chairman of Paranthan Chemicals, the dedication of our 99% Tamil workforce transformed the struggling company into a profit-making entity, marking the happiest years of my life."

What specific changes do you believe are necessary for Provincial Councils to function more effectively?

There needs to be a reliable system in place to ensure that funds are appropriately allocated from the central government's budget to the Provincial Councils. It should be mandatory for the government to allocate a certain percentage of the budget to these councils.

Can you give an example of how the current system of fund allocation is unfair?

Take, for instance, the Western Province—thanks to the Colombo Port and the Colombo Municipal Council, it's financially self-sufficient. They don't need additional funds from the central government because their income streams are substantial. On the other hand, provinces like the Southern, Eastern, or Uva are among the poorest. The central government has sometimes allocated funds equally across provinces, which is unjust. It should be an equitable distribution of funds, taking into account the development needs, the population, poverty levels, etc. Not an equal distribution.

What factors should be considered when allocating funds to the provinces?

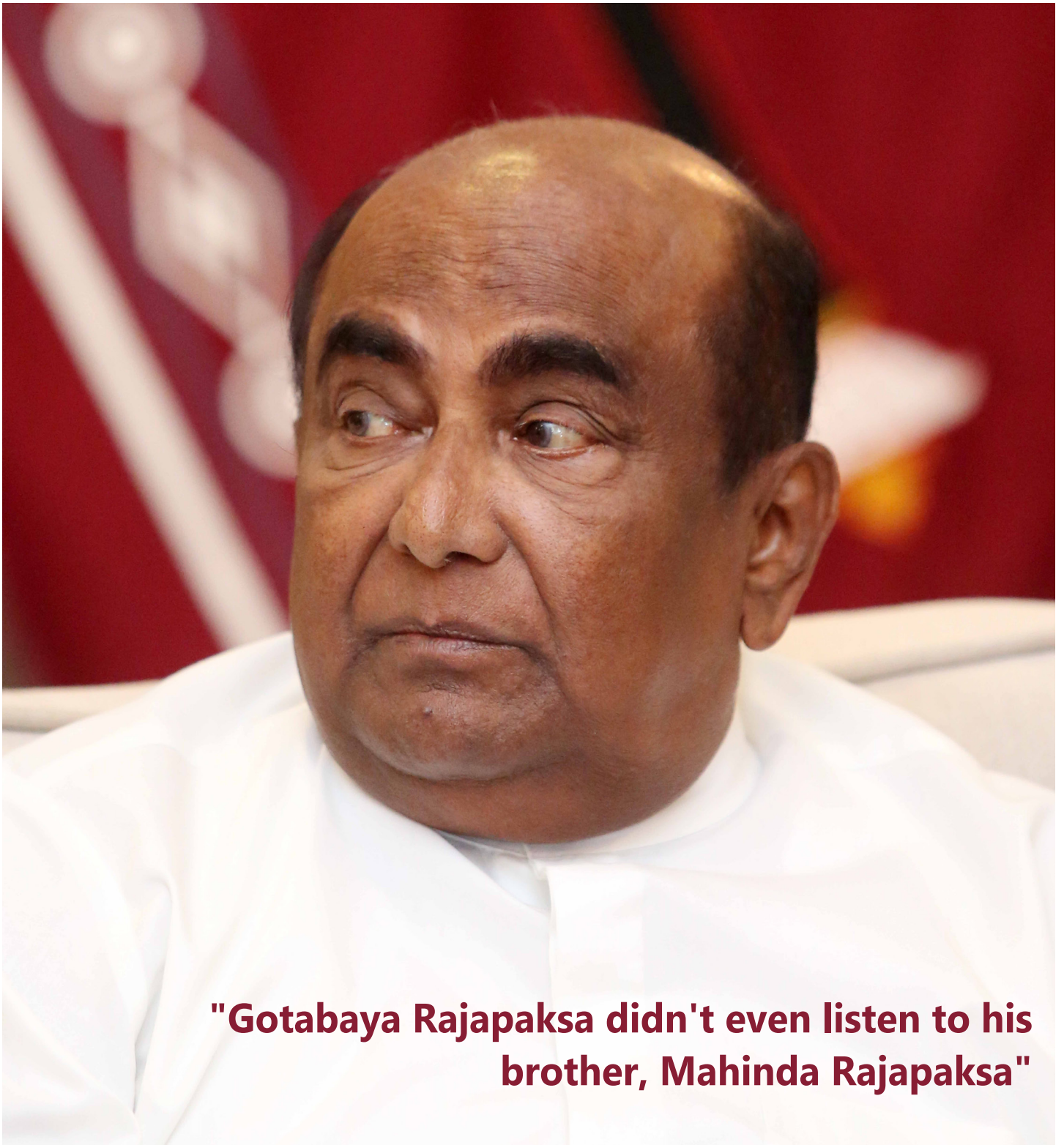
After some persistent advocacy, the government began considering population numbers for allocation. But it's not just about population—it's about the landscape, infrastructure, poverty, development needs, resources, etc. There are areas with no population because there are no roads to support settlements. The roads, schools, hospitals need to be built first; only then will people settle. The current system for allocating funds is far from practical. Too much money is funnelled into Colombo (Western Province), which already has all the facilities and revenue systems in place, while the other provinces are left struggling. This imbalance needs to be addressed for the Provincial Councils to truly serve their purpose.

What is the maximum power-sharing that you have, in principle, accepted for the Tamil community?

I believe that Provincial Councils should be granted full autonomy over their own development projects—not just the Northern Provincial Council, but all councils across the country. However, there must be coordination between the provinces and the central government to ensure consistency, alignment with national priorities, and practicality.

So, you support granting land and police powers to the provincial governments?

Land powers, yes—that's perfectly fine, and



"Gotabaya Rajapaksa didn't even listen to his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa"

there's no harm in it as long as there is proper coordination. For example, one province can't build a road that ends at the border of another province without connecting the intended cities because one province refuses access. But police powers? That's a different story. If police powers had been offered to me when I was the Chief Minister of the Southern Province, I would have refused them.

Security and the maintenance of law and order must be a central function. The provinces should not be burdened with that responsibility. However, if undue influence or corruption interferes with provincial administration, the provinces should have the authority to lodge a complaint with the central government and seek swift redress.

"Halfway through Gotabaya's term, it became clear that things were heading in the wrong direction."

So, would you support a federal system of power-sharing with the Tamil community?

Right now, federalism is working well in India, but you have to remember that one Indian state is five or six times bigger than the entire country of Sri Lanka. For a small country like ours, federalism isn't the main issue—money is. The real challenge is ensuring that a steady flow of funds is allocated for the development of all regions. If we can guarantee continuous financial support, the question of federalism becomes secondary. The focus should be on equitable and consistent development across the country.

A section of the Tamil community still fears that the kind of ethnic pogroms that happened in 1983 might repeat. What are your thoughts on this?

That will never happen again. People today are much more educated and aware. Just look at the Aragalaya movement—do you think people would have joined it if they weren't facing severe physical and economic hardships? Of course not. Times have changed, and so have people's mindsets. I can assure you that such horrific events will not be repeated.

Do you foresee Tamils and Sinhalese living together in harmony?

Absolutely. I believe in this wholeheartedly. Whether you visit Jaffna or travel down south, you'll notice the same culture, the same values,

and the same habits. The people are not divided, and their problems and needs are the same—it's the politicians who drive wedges between us for their electoral gain.

Don't you think the government should take steps to make the Tamil community feel they are a part of Sri Lanka? After all, there was a bloody 30-year war for a separate country, and many Sri Lankan Tamils still feel alienated from the mainstream. How do you think we can instill patriotism in them?

The government certainly has a role to play, but we must also acknowledge the dirty politics at work. Just look at what happens during elections in the South—Sinhala politicians raise caste issues and exploit regionalism among Sinhala voters, even when the candidates are all Sinhalese. They'll say, 'This man is from our area; we must support him.' It's the same tactic they use to divide people along ethnic lines. It's nothing but dirty politics.

When Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim people get to know you personally, they don't care about your caste, religion, or ethnicity. What we need is more mingling and more building of friendships. Take, for example, M. H. Mohamed, a Muslim, who was elected in Borella, a 95 percent Sinhala-majority area. Or M.L.M. Aboosally, also a Muslim, who was elected in Balangoda, which is 99.9 percent Sinhala.

"Before the Aragalaya protests began, I visited Chamal Rajapaksa and urged him to gather his brothers and tell President Gotabaya Rajapaksa that the path he was on was not right and that he needed to change course."

These leaders won the trust of the Sinhala people by being there for them and by developing deep connections and familiarity. A few hardliners tried to sway voters by instilling religious and ethnic divides, but it didn't work. This shows that our people are not inherently racist or divisive—it's the politicians who stir up trouble.

In Jaffna, it's a similar story. A few Tamil nationalist politicians keep problems unresolved. Many of these politicians, whether from the past or present, grew up, were educated, and live in Colombo. They lead affluent lives here, but when they go to Jaffna, they talk about separatism to secure votes. Some have even married Sinhalese, and their children have done the same—they're practically Sinhalese in every way. Yet, in Jaffna, they preach separatism to get elected to Parliament and then return to their comfortable lives in Colombo. The Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhala people need to see through these double standards.

Sri Lanka belongs to all of us. The rights I have as a Sinhalese are the same rights that Tamils and Muslims must have in this country. We need to focus on unity, not division, and see beyond the narrow agendas of politicians who seek to divide us for their own gain. That is my request.

As a Speaker, how do you view the performance of Tamil MPs in

Parliament?

None of them are troublemakers. They are a very disciplined group of people, and their attendance is actually better than that of some Sinhalese MPs. Sumanthiran and Shanakiyan, in particular, are very efficient parliamentarians. However, there are a few Tamil politicians who operate with a racist mindset, though I prefer not to name them.

The Tamil diaspora is considered a significant force. How do you see them?

I've met some members of the Tamil diaspora, and they're very nice people. Many of them want to return and invest in Sri Lanka, particularly in North and East areas. They've made their money abroad, and bringing that investment back home is a positive thing. However, there is another segment of the diaspora that's more troubling. This group seems intent on creating unrest in our country. They funnel money to Tamil hardliners here to stir up problems, often for their own financial gain. They thrive on keeping tensions alive so they can continue collecting money from abroad. The majority of these problem-causing individuals were either part of the LTTE or involved in its broader fundraising network. It's unfortunate because while some in the diaspora genuinely want to help, others seem only interested in perpetuating conflict.

"President Ranil Wickremesinghe was open to running with SLPP support, but he preferred to contest as an independent candidate to attract broader support."

What is your personal estimation of Prabhakaran?

Prabhakaran was an overestimated man. If I had been in his shoes when the opportunity arose to share power and form a government, I would have seized it. Former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga offered Prabhakaran a chance to establish a government and govern the region in an exemplary manner. If I were him, I would have taken that opportunity without hesitation.

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga even stated that she was prepared to hand over power after a decade. But Prabhakaran didn't listen. He missed the chance to establish his government, his policies, and his ideology in that region.

That's why I say he was overestimated. Instead of choosing the path of compromise and building something sustainable, he chose conflict. In doing so, he sacrificed not only himself but everyone who believed in him. He led many to their deaths, including his own family. In the end, he became a big zero.

How do you see Sri Lanka without the LTTE? For nearly 30 years, your life revolved around the LTTE. How do you view the last 15 years without them?

The peace we enjoy now is our most significant achievement, and it has paved the way for substantial development. Areas that once had no road access and no bridges—have mostly been built. People are embracing new

opportunities for growth. However, the Tamil leadership should have been more proactive in supporting and driving the development of their regions.

Take C.V. Wigneswaran, for example. When he was the Chief Minister of the Northern Province, he returned a substantial amount of money—around 600 crores, if I recall correctly—that his council had received from the central government for development. What a foolish and irresponsible decision! As a former Chief Minister of the Southern Province, I was outraged by his negligence. We constantly struggled to secure funds from the central government, and here he was, sending money back! This kind of behavior is typical of hardline Tamil politicians who refuse to develop Tamil-majority areas because they want to keep playing their dirty political games.

Why? If the area remains underdeveloped, these politicians can continue to manipulate people through their divisive politics. They don't want development because, if it takes place, Tamil grievances will be addressed more effectively, leading to closer ties with the government and the Sinhala and Muslim communities. And that's precisely what these so-called hardline Tamil politicians want to avoid. They thrive on division, not unity.

**Photos by
our photographer**

Vino's Great Escape: MP Distances from the 'Common Tamil Candidate' Farce



The upcoming presidential election is shaping up to be more of an escape room challenge than a political contest, at least for those Tamil Members of Parliament who've tied themselves to the common Tamil candidate. But it seems Vino Noharathalingam, the crafty MP from the Vanni District and a key figure in

the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), has already found the exit. While his party, led by Selvam Adaikalanathan, has pledged its loyalty to the common Tamil candidate, Vino has pulled off a Houdini-like escape, sidestepping the sinking ship with the finesse of a seasoned escapologist.

Speaking to the media after an event in Vavuniya, Noharathalingam made his position crystal clear. "There is no change in the decision I made earlier. While my party, TELO, may have taken a different path, my stance remains firm. I will not be campaigning in support of the common Tamil candidate. It's not just me; there are others within the party who share this sentiment."

Noharathalingam didn't mince words in expressing his disagreement with his party's decision. "Regardless of whether the party's decision is right or wrong, I do not personally align with it. I don't believe this is a choice that reflects the will of the people or one that truly resonates with them."

Looking ahead to the election results, Noharathalingam predicted a significant setback for the common Tamil candidate. "Once the results are in, it will become clear that this election has served as a wake-up call. It will undoubtedly push those involved to rethink their positions and adapt their methods moving forward," he stated confidently.

Without directly naming them, Noharathalingam subtly alluded to the three main candidates already etched



Vino Noharathalingam

into the public consciousness: Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sajith Premadasa, and Anura Kumara Disسانayake. He expressed hope that the Tamil people would make a wise and informed decision, pledging to

respect the choice made by the majority. "I will act in accordance with the decision made by the majority of Tamil people," he affirmed.

Noharathalingam also disclosed that, despite the ongoing election, he has had several meetings with President Ranil Wickremesinghe, with a focus on the development of his constituency. These discussions, he noted, primarily centred on the allocation of funds for development projects in the Vanni District.

Amidst swirling rumours that a few TNA MPs are quietly backing Ranil Wickremesinghe in the presidential election—regardless of their party's official stance—Noharathalingam has made a clear break from the common Tamil candidate. Adding to the intrigue, State Minister Suren Raghavan recently revealed that three Tamil Members of Parliament from the Northern and Eastern provinces have already pledged their support to President Wickremesinghe, stirring the political pot even further.

"Starting Our Campaign in Jaffna Was the Right Decision"

— Dilith Jayaweera



BY:
Our Reporter

Dilith Jayaweera, one of Sri Lanka's most prominent billionaires, media moguls, and successful entrepreneurs, and the president of the Mawbima Janatha Party has officially entered the presidential race as the candidate of the Sarvajana Balaya alliance—a coalition often characterized as an alliance of Sinhala hardliners. In a move that surprised many, Jayaweera, along with his coalition of seven parties—including the Mawbima Janatha Party led by Jayaweera himself, the National Freedom Front led by MP Wimal Weerawansa, Pivithuru Hela Urumaya led by MP Udaya Gammanpila, the Democratic Left Front led by MP Vasudewa Nanayakkara, the Communist Party led by G. Weerasinghe, the Yuthukama National Organisation led by MP Gevindu Kumaratunga, and the collective of Independent MPs represented by MP Channa Jayasumana—chose to launch his election campaign in the heart of Sri Lankan Tamil culture: Jaffna.



Dilith Jayaweera



Dilith Jayaweera, Wimal Weerawansa, Udaya Gammanpila, Anuradha Yahampath, and others in front of Nallur Kandaswamy Temple in Jaffna

During the visit, Dilith Jayaweera, along with Udaya Gammanpila and Wimal Weerawansa, paid a visit to the historic Nallur Temple in Jaffna, accompanied by Arun Siddharth, the Mawbima Janatha Party's Jaffna organizer. Siddharth, who has a controversial history with the Nallur Temple, added an intriguing layer to the visit. However, the bare-chested photos of the group in the temple vicinity quickly went viral on social media, sparking a meme frenzy.

Jayaweera's candidacy has attracted significant attention because of his pivotal role in Gotabaya Rajapaksa's 2019 presidential campaign, where his strategic media influence played a crucial part. We sat down with him in Jaffna to gain insights into his decision to enter the presidential race. Here are some excerpts from our conversation.

What motivated you to enter this presidential race?

The people of Sri Lanka have resoundingly articulated their demand for change—they've battled relentlessly for it. After enduring decades of stagnation with the same faces entrenched in Parliament, they're no longer content with empty promises. There is nothing truly

innovative among all the candidates except for me. The other contenders have wielded power before, yet they have failed to deliver the transformation our nation desperately needs. We're here to offer exactly that—a meticulously crafted plan designed to usher in meaningful, positive change for everyone.

Do you regret playing a key role in bringing Gotabaya Rajapaksa to power?

There are indeed certain decisions I profoundly regret. Chief among them was my failure to foresee the overwhelming influence of the Rajapaksa family over him, an influence that ultimately led to his downfall. I never anticipated that the family would wield such control, stifling his ability to execute his own vision. This was a significant misjudgment on my part, one I regret deeply.

In hindsight, it's clear how naive I was to believe he could navigate his role independently of his family's grip. That was my error. The harsh truth is that it was the family who orchestrated his downfall because he dared to diverge from their corrupt and self-serving path. When I speak of the family, I include Namal



From left to right: Udaya Gammanpila, Wimal Weerawansa, Dilith Jayaweera, and Mawbima Janatha Party's Jaffna organizer Arun Siddharth at the Sarvajana Balaya alliance's first campaign in Jaffna.

Rajapaksa, SLPP's current presidential candidate, in that assessment.

There are accusations from both the Tamil and Sinhala people that your alliance is bringing together Sinhala hardliners in support of your candidacy. How do you respond to this?

This is where the misunderstanding lies. Who exactly are these so-called Sinhala hardliners? Am I one of them? I am one of the most moderate people you'll meet, deeply rooted in the principles of Buddhism.

Buddhism teaches that one's worth is not determined by birth. As the Buddha said, "Not by birth is one a Brahmin or an outcast; by deeds is one a Brahmin, by deeds is one an outcast." I believe in this principle wholeheartedly, rejecting all forms of discrimination.

So, how can I be labelled a Sinhala hardliner? We are all human beings, and I believe Sri Lanka can rise above divisions and live in harmony. Guided by the principles of Buddhism, we are in a unique position to move forward together.

Are you a strong Buddhist simply because you were born into it?

No, not at all. Until I was about 16, I actually identified as a communist. My father was a communist, so I was influenced by those ideas. However, I wasn't truly an atheist because I was raised in a traditional Buddhist village environment. As I grew older, I became more of a nationalist, with my beliefs being strongly influenced by Buddhism. My journey to becoming a stronger Buddhist was a gradual process shaped by my experiences and evolving beliefs, not merely by the circumstances of my birth.

Why did you start your campaign in Jaffna, a place considered the heart of Sri Lankan Tamils?

It's crucial to make one thing clear: certain international parties seem intent on dividing this country along ethnic lines, which I strongly oppose. This divisive mindset is completely at odds with the philosophy of Buddhism, which rejects division based on caste, religion, ethnicity, or creed. If anyone attempts to divide us in such a way, I consider it profoundly unjust. You can distinguish us by height, weight, or wealth—those are superficial differences—but creating divisions based on the notion that some people are inherently superior due to their birth is something I cannot accept.

We chose to launch our campaign in Jaffna and stand alongside Arun Siddharth, our party's Jaffna organizer, because he genuinely believes in equality and has been a staunch opponent of the caste system. I want to



convey to the Tamil community—though I dislike the term "minority" as it implies division—that you are not a minority. We are all equal, part of one united nation.

I was genuinely pleased with how the campaign went. The warmth and affection I received from the people were truly heartening. It confirmed that starting our campaign in Jaffna was indeed the right decision.

If you don't see Tamils as a minority, how do you view them?

I see Tamils as an integral part of Sri Lanka's soul, woven into the very fabric of our national identity. When I visited the Nallur Temple, I felt a deep connection, as if it was very much a part of me. There was no sense of division or difference. Isn't that a beautiful feeling? This is the message I want to share—that we are all connected, part of the same whole, and that our strength as a nation lies in this unity.

Do you have any issues with the Tamil community?

Absolutely not. How could I possibly have a problem with Tamils? My concern is not with the Tamil community but with extremists—regardless of their ethnicity.

One of the core teachings of the Buddha is compassion. Without compassion, you cannot truly call yourself a Buddhist. Being born into Buddhism is not enough; you must live by its principles. As someone who firmly believes in Buddhism, if I don't have compassion for every single being—regardless of their ethnicity—then I am not living up to the true essence of Buddhism.

In this context, how could I possibly have an issue with Tamils? Compassion is central to my beliefs, and it guides my interactions with everyone. My focus is on fostering understanding and unity, not division. That's why I reject extremism in all its forms and why I am committed to building bridges between communities, not walls.

Will your decision to kickstart the election campaign in Jaffna resonate well with the Sinhala community?

Absolutely. The Sinhala community is incredibly open-minded and embracing. We are free thinkers with a liberal approach to life, deeply influenced by the inclusive philosophy of Buddhism, which encourages justice, compassion, and understanding. There are no restrictions on doing what is right and good, and reaching out to all corners of our nation aligns perfectly with these values.

The divisions we observe today are largely vestiges of historical interventions, particularly those orchestrated by Western colonial powers intent on creating deep fissures between the North and South, Tamils and Sinhalese, Hindus and Buddhists. Regrettably, there are still calculated efforts to perpetuate these divisions, using modern tools and tactics to manipulate and fracture our communities for ulterior motives.

But we have overcome this. Within our association, Tamils feel entirely at ease and deeply integrated. You can speak to them directly—they will affirm how comfortable and secure they are within our unified movement. When I visited Jaffna, I felt no sense of insecurity or threat; instead, I encountered warmth and a profound sense of unity.



That said, I have observed that some Tamil politicians exhibit racist tendencies. In the spirit of national unity and reconciliation, I won't name them—some are even my friends. It's important to note that this racism doesn't stem from genuine belief but is often a facade for their political gain. For example, certain Tamil MPs who were born and raised in Colombo, educated alongside diverse communities, travel to Jaffna to propagate divisive rhetoric. They utilize this form of political racism not out of true conviction but as a tool for ugly politics, aiming to stir emotions and secure votes by exploiting historical wounds.

By starting our campaign in Jaffna, we wanted to demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity and show that we stand against all forms of divisiveness, whether they come from external forces or internal politics. Our goal is to build a Sri Lanka where every community feels valued, respected, and integral to the nation's fabric.

How confident are you about winning?

I'm very confident. At this moment, 40% of the

electorate is still undecided—that's a significant portion of the vote. I recently spoke with some tuition masters, and they mentioned that when they asked their students, who are first-time voters, about their voting intentions, most of them said they haven't decided yet. I'm working hard to secure those undecided votes.

Your shirtless photos at the Nallur Temple went viral. What are your thoughts on that?

Those were some of the happiest moments of my life, and they sent a very powerful message. Udaya Gammanpila and Wimal Weerawansa have been unfairly labelled as racists, but I've always maintained that they are not. They accompanied me to the temple, and I believe those photos have helped shift the narrative. The images conveyed a strong message of unity and respect for all cultures. It was a moment of connection rather than division, and I'm glad it resonated with so many people.

Indigo Airlines Launches New Daily Flight Service Between Chennai and Jaffna



In a significant development for air travel between India and Sri Lanka, Indigo Airlines has announced the launch of a new daily flight service between Chennai and Jaffna, beginning today, September 1st. This marks the airline's entry into the Jaffna market, providing an additional option for travellers between the two cities.

The introduction of Indigo's daily service boosts the existing connectivity, which is currently provided by Alliance Air, an Indian airline that also operates daily flights to Jaffna. The competition between the two airlines is

expected to benefit passengers by offering greater flexibility and choice.

Further enhancing connectivity, there are reports that Jaffna International Airport is set to undergo upgrades to meet international standards, potentially paving the way for more airlines and routes in the future.

Another notable development is the passenger ferry service between Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai, which has also recently resumed, offering yet another travel option between India and Sri Lanka.

Hakeem Warns Tamil Common Candidate Move Could Undermine Autonomy Demands

Rauff Hakeem, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, has expressed concerns that the initiative to field a Tamil common candidate in the forthcoming presidential election could undermine the autonomy aspirations of the Tamil community. He further observed that even those initially supporting the Tamil common candidate might eventually shift their allegiance to Sajith Premadasa, the presidential candidate of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB).

Addressing an election campaign rally supporting Sajith Premadasa, Hakeem elaborated on the Tamil National Alliance's (TNA) cautious approach. "The TNA has always taken its time when making decisions regarding the presidential election. They are known for their deep thinking, and we respect that. We've allowed them the space to deliberate and decide," Hakeem remarked.

Hakeem also commented on the recent move by certain groups to independently field a Tamil common candidate. "I asked those supporting this candidate why there was a need for a separate candidate. Their response was that some individuals are troublemakers, compelling them to take this step. However, they also assured me that they would ultimately support Sajith. Prominent leaders mentioned this to me, though I prefer not to



name them," Hakeem disclosed.

He cautioned against the potential consequences of this move for Tamil aspirations. "This will weaken the autonomy demands of the Tamil people. It's crucial that the Tamil community does not become entangled in this strategy."

Hakeem emphasized the significance of the presidential election as a pivotal moment for the Tamil community to engage with national leaders. "The presidential election is one of the rare occasions when national leaders come to you. It is vital to make the most of this opportunity. Sajith Premadasa is a leader who stands against racism," Hakeem concluded.

Refurbished ‘Vadatharagai’ to Make Waves Again



A budget of 50 million rupees has been allocated for the refurbishment of the ‘Vadatharagai’ passenger boat, with its return to service expected within six months, as announced at the District Secretariat recently.

Originally acquired in 2017 for 150 million rupees under the North East Local Services Improvement Project (NELSIP) for the Provincial Council, the vessel was intended to facilitate transportation between Kurikattuwan and Neduntheevu. After several years in operation, the boat required repairs in 2023 and was subsequently handed over to the Navy for restoration.

The ‘Vadatharagai’ was transported to the Trincomalee Naval Base for the necessary refurbishment. On February 20, 2024, the Northern Provincial Department of Local Government transferred 51.481 million rupees to the Navy’s account via check to cover the repair expenses.

With the refurbishment now complete, the ‘Vadatharagai’ is set to resume operations. During the recent District Development Coordinating Committee meeting at the Jaffna District Secretariat, the successful restoration and the boat’s imminent return to service were officially announced by I. Ilangovan, Chief Secretary of the Northern Provincial Council.



First Punch of the Polls!

In a dramatic twist that could rival a wrestling match, the first punch (literally!) of the Presidential Election was thrown on live TV. A heated debate between breakaway MP Velu Kumar and MP Palani Thigambaram of the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) quickly escalated from verbal sparring to a full-blown scuffle. Velu Kumar, who recently defected from the TPA to support incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe, found himself in a rather physical disagreement with his former ally Digambaram.

What started as a war of words over political

loyalties soon turned into a clash of fists, with the MPs exchanging blows before the bewildered TV presenters and staff rushed in to separate them. As the nation watched in shock (and perhaps a little amusement), it seems election fever has officially kicked off with a bang—or, should we say, a punch!

This wild brawl might just be the first recorded instance of election violence in this heated race, setting the stage for what promises to be a nail-biting—and possibly bruising—campaign season.

Defamatory Posters Ignite Legal Boycott in Mannar: Lawyers Demand Justice



For the second consecutive day, as of August 30th, when this issue went to press, the legal community in Mannar has continued its boycott of court proceedings in response to defamatory posters anonymously posted in Colombo, targeting the Mannar High Court judge. The lawyers, united in their protest, are demanding the swift apprehension of those responsible, asserting that this act threatens the very integrity of the judiciary.

Led by Senior Attorney Emmanuel Caius Feldano, President of the Mannar Bar Association, the lawyers convened today in front of the Mannar High Court to express their unequivocal condemnation of the recent defamatory posters targeting the presiding

judge. The ongoing boycott has effectively brought all scheduled court proceedings to a halt, with cases being postponed until further notice.

Addressing the media during the protest, Emmanuel Caius Feldano highlighted the gravity of the situation, stating, "Twelve years ago, approximately 52 individuals were arrested in connection with the attack on the Mannar High Court. This case, which has been meticulously investigated over the past decade, reached its final stage recently. However, on the eve of this crucial trial, defamatory posters featuring the image of the Mannar High Court judge surfaced in Colombo, containing derogatory statements in Sinhala".



The timing of these posters has heightened tensions, with the legal community expressing deep concern over what they perceive as an attempt to intimidate or influence the judicial process. The Mannar Bar Association has made it clear that they will not stand by while the judiciary's integrity is threatened.

"This trial has been conducted with the utmost adherence to due process, yet these actions targeting the Mannar High Court judge are utterly unacceptable," Caius Feldano asserted. "Our boycott of court proceedings is a direct response to this affront, and we will persist in our protest until those responsible are apprehended and brought to justice. We call upon the authorities to act swiftly and decisively to protect the dignity of the judiciary and ensure that such acts do not go unpunished," he added.

This boycott has its roots in a long-standing case that has gripped the Mannar region for over a decade. The case dates back to 2012 when Muslim fishermen who had been displaced during the war and relocated to Puttalam returned to their homes near the coastal region of Konthaipitti in Mannar. Their

demand for the full return of the Konthaipitti fishing zone led to a series of legal disputes with Tamil fishermen, who were subsequently allotted an alternative area by the Mannar High Court.

However, this solution did not go uncontested, as another Muslim fisherman claimed ownership of the newly allotted area and sought a court injunction to prevent the Tamil fishermen from engaging in fishing activities there. The ensuing legal battles have been marked by significant tensions and protests, including an attack on the Mannar High Court 12 years ago.

As the case finally reached its concluding phase, the emergence of defamatory posters against the judge has reignited tensions and drawn widespread condemnation. The legal community in Mannar remains resolute in their demand for justice, making it clear that they will not relent until the perpetrators are held accountable.

The outcome of this situation is likely to have far-reaching implications for the ongoing case and the broader legal landscape in the region.



Mounting Frustration as Vavuniya Residents Endure Prolonged Wait for Passports

Residents of Vavuniya and neighbouring regions are grappling with mounting frustration as they face prolonged waits—some extending over five days—at the Vavuniya Regional Immigration and Emigration Department. Despite the extended queues, many have yet to receive their passports, resulting in a chaotic situation that recently required police intervention.

The department is structured to process 60 passport applications daily: 25 under the regular





service, 25 under the expedited one-day service, and an additional 10 for those whose applications have been delayed beyond the promised timeframe. However, glaring inefficiencies have surfaced as citizens wait in line daily, often leaving without their much-needed travel documents.

The affected individuals include those who applied for passports as early as March, as well as people with urgent travel needs for employment, education, or significant family events abroad. The department's failure to meet its daily processing quotas has created a severe backlog, forcing these residents to endure harsh conditions and uncertainty.

The situation reached a tipping point recently when a commotion, driven by the desperation of those who had been waiting for days, escalated to the extent that police were called in to restore order. This incident underscores the inefficiency within the department and the emotional and physical strain placed on the public.

In the wake of the unrest, department officials



addressed the gathered crowd, offering explanations for the delays and assurances of future improvements. However, these reassurances have done little to ease the frustration of those who have already endured multiple days of waiting, with no certainty of when they will receive their passports.

The growing public dissatisfaction highlights the urgent need for a more efficient and transparent process within the department. Immediate reforms are essential to ensure that citizens can obtain their essential travel documents in a timely manner, without the added burden of repeated visits and extended wait times.

What happened to the Tamil Maha Sabha's newspaper initiative a hundred years ago?

When the Tamil Maha Sabha was established, Arunachalam recognized the need and urgency for a dedicated newspaper. However, before he could fully plan it, he passed away within a few months. Ramanathan, on the other hand, started a newspaper called The Ceylonese in Colombo. The first issue of this newspaper was published



By:

**Sarawanan Komathi
Nadarasa**



on March 5, 1913, with Tom Wright, an American, serving as the inaugural editor. The newspaper's office operated from Maradana, and Arunachalam played a significant role in its establishment. Ramanathan initiated this newspaper, considering the necessity of a nationalist English media when he was elected as a Ceylonese representative to the Legislative Council. Those who supported him in launching this newspaper included lawyer Hector Jayewardene, Colonel D.G. Jayewardene, Dr. E.V. Ratnam, and lawyer Francis de Zoysa.

1911 - Govigama -Vellalar Alliance

There were some interesting political reasons behind the creation of this newspaper. Ramanathan entered politics in 1879 and served continuously in the Legislative Council for 13 years, until 1892. However, he did not hold this position through an election but served as a nominated member.

When his term ended in 1892, he was appointed as the Attorney General of Ceylon. He held that position for eight years until he retired in 1906. After retiring in 1907, he initiated the National Reform Movement and became involved in political activities. However, during this period, he was mostly immersed in spiritual duties. Meanwhile, in 1910, the number of members in the Legislative Council of Ceylon was increased from 18 to 21. Of these, 11 were official members, while 10 were elected as unofficial members as part of that reform.

Of the 11 unofficial members, the positions were distributed as follows: one European, one elected Burgher, one elected educated Ceylonese, two nominated Low-Country Sinhalese, two nominated Tamils, one nominated Kandyan Sinhalese and one nominated Moor. Among them, a system was introduced to elect one educated Ceylonese through an election.

This could be considered the first opportunity to elect a Ceylonese through an election. However, only the educated class was eligible to vote in this election, meaning that only around 3,000 people, or approximately 4% of the population, had the right to vote. Dr Marcus Fernando came forward to contest this election. However, the Sinhala-Buddhist-Govigama caste-educated and affluent elite did not want him to contest. This was



because Marcus Fernando, despite being a Sinhalese, was not from the elevated caste of the Sinhalese community. He belonged to the Sinhalese Karava (Karaiyar in Tamil) caste, which made it unacceptable for certain members of the community to see him elected.

At that time, the elite, who were influential even among the British rulers, pushed for someone from the Govigama caste or an equivalent caste to be put forward. Their first choice was Ramanathan, who belonged to the Tamil equivalent of the Sinhala Govigama caste, the Vellalar caste. Ramanathan accepted this. For them, it didn't matter if there were differences in ethnicity, religion, or language at this time. What mattered most was that someone of equal caste status should come to power, reflecting a caste supremacy mindset. This was a period when caste identity was given more importance than ethnic identity. It was in this way that Marcus Fernando was defeated.

In the first election held in 1911 for the Legislative Council of Ceylon, Ramanathan was elected as the sole representative for all Ceylonese. The primary reason the Sinhala elite defeated Marcus Fernando and ensured Ramanathan's victory was the belief that someone from a 'lower caste' should not become their representative. Despite Ramanathan being Tamil, the fact that he belonged to the elevated Vellalar caste made him the preferred choice.

Returning to the topic of the newspaper: During the 1911 election, The Morning Leader newspaper, run by the De Zoysa family, criticized Ramanathan and his supporters. Marcus Fernando was also from the De Zoysa family, so the newspaper worked in favor of his victory. However, the educated Sinhala-Buddhist-Govigama caste elite strategically defeated him. Ramanathan won the election with 1,645 votes, while Marcus Fernando managed to secure only 981 votes.

Ramanathan, along with the newly elected members of the Legislative Council, took the oath of office on January 16, 1912. It was from that point that he realized the necessity of a newspaper, leading to the creation of The Ceylonese. However, Ramanathan later had to step down from the board of directors of the newspaper.¹ This was due to a dispute between Ramanathan and the other board members, who were also shareholders.

This period coincided with the beginning of World War I, which saw a rise in the prices of paper, ink, and other materials, leading to an economic crisis that affected all sectors, including The Ceylonese. Additionally, this was a time when newspapers faced severe censorship, further impacting The Ceylonese.

1 M.Vythilingam, "Ramanathan of Ceylon: The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan", Volume II, 1977.

In this situation, the Senanayake brothers, who were part of the board, decided to sell the newspaper. In 1917, amid significant losses, F.R. Senanayake announced that the newspaper would be auctioned to pay off a debt of 21,000 rupees.²

Before purchasing it, their friend, who later rose to prominence as a giant in the newspaper industry, D.R. Wijewardene, stepped forward. However, the auction held in December 1917 did not reach the target of 21,000 rupees that they aimed for. After offering that amount, they asked Wijewardene to take over the responsibility, but he decided to proceed with the auction. The auction moved slowly, and after Wijewardene bid 15,000 rupees, no one else made an offer. Finally, out of goodwill, D.R. Wijewardene provided 16,000 rupees and purchased the newspaper.

D.R. Wijewardene, who became known as a giant in the Sri Lankan newspaper industry, bought the newspaper, renamed it The Ceylon Daily News, and began publishing it with a new look. The first issue under this new name was published on January 3, 1918, and it featured a speech by Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam. This newspaper is what continues today as the Daily News.

This was the period when the Ceylon National Congress was established and active. During this time, the need for an English newspaper was fully recognized. The efforts for this newspaper served as a bridge for dialogue between the nationalists and the British rulers. Simultaneously, Sinhala newspapers strongly opposed the proposals made by the Tamil side regarding the Manning Reforms, and they propagated racist sentiments. Anagarika Dharmapala, opposing proposals made by

2 Senanayakas in Sri Lanka's Politics (Sinhala version), Sun Publishing House, 2013

figures like Arunachalam, incited racial hatred and raised the slogan 'Sinhala country for Sinhalese only.'

In 1921, when Arunachalam was deceived by the Sinhala leaders and subsequently founded the Tamil Maha Sabha in the same year, he realized the necessity of a newspaper for the Tamil community. An article related to this was published in the Hindu Sadhana newspaper on September 20, 1923.

"It reported, 'Last Saturday, a meeting of the Ceylon Tamil Maha Sabha was held in Colombo under the presidency of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam. After reading a report on the objectives and efforts of the Sabha, prominent addresses were delivered by Mr. Nevins Selvadurai, the Principal of Jaffna Hindu College, and Director Sri K. Chidambaranathan. Several resolutions were passed at the meeting, with a special resolution being the establishment of a daily newspaper in Colombo for the Tamil cause.'³

From this report, it can be inferred that the meeting took place on September 15, 1923.

There is another important point to note. In the same newspaper, an extensive article was published under the title 'The World in Various Ways,' which emphasized the need for such a daily newspaper.⁴

Just four months after this news was published, on January 9, 1924, Arunachalam passed away.

3 T. Sabaratnam, The Sri Lankan Tamil Struggle, Chapter 16: The Arunachalam Factor, , November 26, 2010 (A journalist who reported Sri Lankan ethnic crisis for over 50 year)

4 The writer (M. V. Thirugnanasambanda Pillai) was the first assistant editor and later editor of The Hindu Sadhanam for forty years. He wrote a series of articles on the topic "The Diversity of the World." But it did not disclose who wrote the articles.

Let's first take a detailed look at that article.

The World in Various Ways:

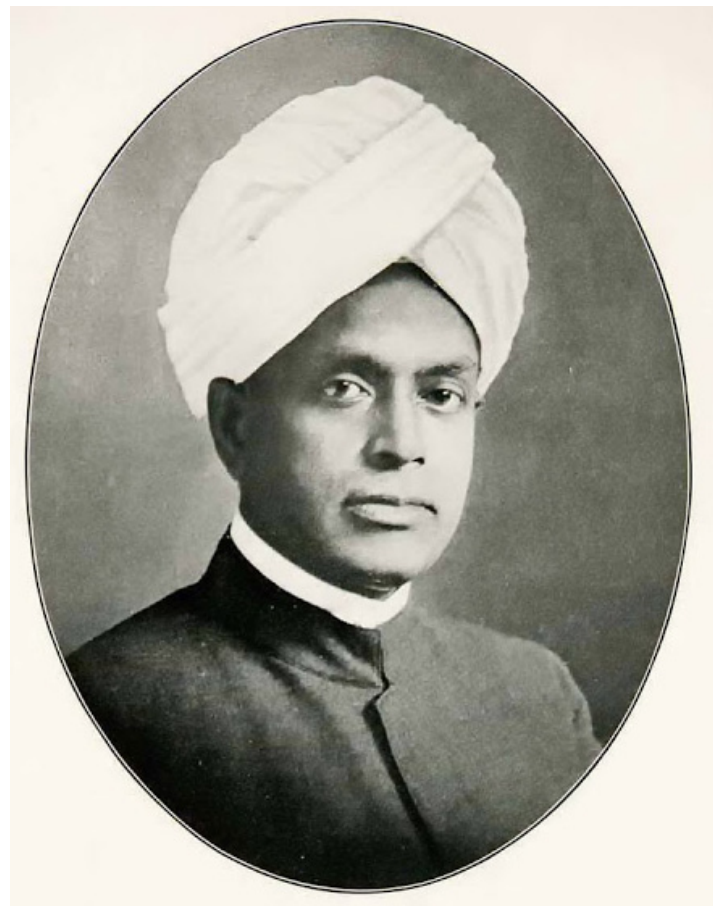
Last week, at the Tamil Maha Sabha meeting in Colombo, presided over by Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the topic of establishing a daily newspaper in both English and Tamil for the Tamil community in the capital was discussed. It was mentioned that, as Tamils, apart from our population, we are not inferior to the Sinhalese in any other aspect. We continue to discuss the need for various political rights and engage in debates with other communities and the government. However, when it comes to running a newspaper, we are the most disadvantaged among all communities. In Colombo, except for the Tamils, all other communities have newspapers to present their grievances to the government, to address their issues, to praise themselves, and to criticize other communities. But the fact that there is currently no newspaper for the Tamils in either English or Tamil in Colombo is a matter of great shame.

In Colombo, several newspapers have been started by Tamils in both Tamil and English, but they have only been run for a short period before being discontinued. What is the reason for this? Is it due to a lack of resources? Lack of wisdom? Or something else? Is there no readership? All these reasons exist. Many Tamils support newspapers run by other communities with money and effort, sustaining those newspapers, while the same Tamils collaborate with Sinhalese and other communities to undermine their own. Some Tamils, who align with the Sinhalese and others, work against their own community. So, if you ask what is lacking among Tamils, it is caste pride, unity, and consistency. If these existed among Tamils, they could run not just one but several Tamil and English newspapers in Colombo.

It is well known that while several daily newspapers have been long established and successfully run by the Sinhalese and other communities in Colombo, Tamil efforts to start newspapers have often been short-lived, frequently stopping after brief intervals. The reasons for these newspapers ceasing publication lie both with those who run them and those who read them.

Most of our Tamil people, when starting a newspaper, instead of focusing on the development of the Tamil community, tend to create divisions by criticizing one group and praising another, thus fostering internal conflicts. When a group comes together to run a newspaper, internal enmities often emerge among the members, leading them to use the newspaper to settle personal scores, which causes trouble for the editor. If the editor takes a firm stand, it angers one side, and if they try to be neutral, it angers the other side. Caught between these conflicting interests, the editor ends up in a precarious position, often having to leave the job, much like a beggar who, having faced many challenges, eventually needs to find a way out.

The great wind of greed often blows among us Tamils, bringing down all good deeds. On the other hand, the Sinhalese and other communities, despite any internal conflicts, have the quality of cooperating in public matters. This is why they find success in their endeavors, while we face obstacles in ours. Some newspapers are started with the sole purpose of criticizing someone. Once that person is criticized and the issue is settled, the newspaper often runs out of content and ceases publication. If a long-standing newspaper begins to struggle due to financial difficulties, some supporters, instead of assisting the newspaper in regaining stability, start their own newspapers for a few days, only to stop



them soon after, content with the title of being an 'editor' for a brief period.

Now, let's talk about the Tamil readers. I share these experiences not to offend anyone but to highlight the realities. A few of our Tamil people read newspapers with genuine interest and loyalty. Many others, however, subscribe to newspapers because they consider it part of modern civilization. Some subscribe just for appearances, while others do so to please their families. Some people subscribe to newspapers thinking that their family events, such as weddings, deaths, job changes, or promotions, will be published in them. Others subscribe with the intention of canceling the subscription later, saying, 'We didn't really need the newspaper anyway.'

For newspaper managers and editors, it's extremely difficult to deal with such readers. If a letter is sent to these readers asking for payment, they immediately respond with, 'Stop sending the newspaper.' If the editor fails to

publish news about a wedding or death in the reader's family, they quickly decide, 'We don't need your newspaper.' If a newspaper fails to publish a charitable act done by a supporter, they might say, 'What's the point of reading your newspaper? It doesn't even have a good story. Stop sending it.' Others, if the newspaper publishes something against their beliefs, immediately cancel their subscription. Some send letters filled with baseless arguments and errors, demanding they be published. If the editor refuses, they quickly stop their subscription. Some readers become hostile towards the editor, thinking that a general article was actually written about them. These are just some of the challenges faced by editors, and listing them all would be too bitter.

These are the reasons why we, as Tamil people, struggle to run newspapers properly. I am highlighting these issues out of a sense of Tamil pride, so I hope no one criticizes me for it. We must eliminate these problems, develop genuine pride and caste identity, and work towards unity. Because the Sinhalese have seen our lack of unity, they have no hesitation in criticizing our leaders in their newspapers. If an outsider criticizes a Tamil, other Tamils should unite and defend them, or at least sever ties with the critic. Unfortunately, when Sinhalese newspapers criticize leaders like Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan or Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, our Tamil people still read those newspapers without any shame.

We have read in newspapers that when an Indian newspaper criticized the great Lokmanya Tilak after his death, many Hindus burned copies of that newspaper on the banks of the Ganges, and the newspaper's circulation dropped significantly. Why can't such pride arise among the Tamil people of Sri Lanka? Though there are always people like the 'Koadalik Kaambu,' we should ignore them



and focus on eliminating our internal issues, so that soon we can establish a daily English and Tamil newspaper in the city of Colombo. Only after addressing these issues should the Tamil people engage in the struggle for their rights.

In this context, Thirugnanasambanthapillai mentions:

- The Sinhalese in southern Sri Lanka, in collaboration with other communities, are using Sinhalese newspapers to oppose Tamil leaders and Tamil interests. He emphasizes the need to find ways to counter this. He argues that their strength lies in unity, while our weakness is the lack of it. He points out that instead of focusing on development, we split into groups and attack each other.
- He mentions that some Tamils join forces with the Sinhalese to oppose our own Tamil people.

- He refers to the incident in India when people burned newspapers in the streets after an English newspaper wrote slanderous articles about Tilak following his death. He questions why we do not act similarly.
- He welcomes the proposal for a newspaper that can voice Tamil concerns in both Tamil and English and stresses its importance. He asserts that Tamils have the strength to run not just one but several newspapers.
- He explains the financial challenges faced in running Tamil newspapers.
- He describes how subscribers, driven by their own preferences, say they no longer want the newspapers, illustrating how the general mindset of the Tamil community operates.
- He emphasizes that such a newspaper must emerge in the capital, Colombo.

The emergence of Tamil newspapers in Sri Lanka dates back to the 19th century. The Udayatharakai was the first newspaper to be launched. However, it was not a daily newspaper. It was published by Christian missionaries and included both Christian propaganda and public issues. Subsequent newspapers were also either Christian-oriented or, in opposition, published by Saivite groups. This trend persisted for a long time.

Between 1900 and 1930, more newspapers were published between 1900 and 1915 than between 1915 and 1930. The Hindu Sadhana was particularly influential during this period.⁵ Meanwhile, the Udayatharakai was in decline. Therefore, when an experienced and influential

⁵ Rameez Abdullah, Sri Lankan Tamil Journals (1841 - 1950), Kumaran Book House, Colombo – Chennai - 2012.

journalist like Thirugnanasambanthapillai questioned why a Tamil newspaper couldn't be started in Colombo, his concern was entirely justified.

'Dravida Kokilam' newspaper, published in Colombo in 1902, used Chennai as its base and largely focused on issues related to Tamil Nadu. Following this, several other newspapers with titles such as Dravidan, Adi Dravidan, and Dravida Mitran were also published in Colombo, targeting readers of Indian descent.⁶ However, these too mainly covered topics related to Tamil Nadu. Despite the presence of some newspapers from Colombo during this period, it can be said that there was no stable mass-circulation daily until the publication of Virakesari in 1930. While Colombo Journal was the first newspaper in Sri Lanka, it took almost a century for Virakesari to emerge. Although Eelakesari also started in the same year, it did not become a national newspaper. Until then, there were no significant newspapers to counter the attacks launched by the Sinhalese press.

The following list will give you an idea of the number of Sinhalese newspapers published during this period.⁷ Among these, a significant number were nationalist newspapers that, over time, began to deny or oppose the aspirations of non-Sinhalese Buddhist communities. In this context, there was no strong Tamil newspaper in Colombo to respond to these actions.

In such a situation, there were many reasons and justifications for Arunachalam and the

⁶ Somesundari Krishnakumar, Newspapers in Jaffna (1900 - 1915), Kumaran Book House, Colombo – Chennai - 2016

⁷ Sinhala newspapers and trade advertisements. 1860-1916, PHD Media research paper, University of Sri Jayawardenapura, 2005

Tamil Maha Sabha's attempt to start a Tamil newspaper. However, this effort did not come to fruition. Following Arunachalam's death, this attempt was abandoned. Just as the Tamil Maha Sabha dwindled and faded away after him, so too did this newspaper initiative disappear into thin air.

Although Arunachalam established the Tamil Maha Sabha as a movement for the entire island of Sri Lanka, it was mainly the Tamils from the North who showed significant interest in it. However, its inaugural meeting took place in Colombo, and similarly, the newspaper was also planned to be published from Colombo. The plan was to publish it in both English and Tamil.

This clearly indicates that the initiative was aimed at raising awareness among the Tamil community in Tamil while also addressing the Sinhalese and English-speaking powers in English. If it had materialized, it could have provided a valuable platform for dialogue between the two sides from the very beginning, fostering political clarity and enabling meaningful exchanges between communities. Such a platform might have even mitigated or resolved certain conflicts. Had this effort succeeded from the start, it is possible that the ethnic issue might not have escalated into a 'national problem' as it did later on.

List of Sinhalese newspapers published between 1860 and 1916.

News Paper	Period
Lankalokaya	1860, 1886
Lakmini Pahana	1862,1864,1865,1881, 1883
Lakrivi Kirana	1883
Arunodaya	1863, 1895
Ruwath Malthama	1866. 1889
Gnanartha Pradeepaya	1866
Sathya Vinishvaya	1867
Satyamargaya	1867
Kavatta Kathigaya	1872
Satyalankara	1873
Sathya Samucchaya	1873, 1887
Sathyalankaraya	1874
Kanamethiriya	1876
Sidumini Ruwatha	1876
Lanka Kawattaya	1880, 1883
Sarasavi Chandraesa	1880
Lakmini Kirula	1881
Langopakaraya	1881
Satyalokaya	1881, 1893
Satyartha Prakashaya	1881
Sinhala Manawakaya	1881
Christianism Vibadathiya	1882
Kasaya	1883
Kavatta Dakshaya	1883
Kawatta Sangiraya	1883
Lak Viduraviya	1883
Welanda Mithraya	1884
Sathya Samya Darshanaya	1884
Sat Silumini	1884
Dinakara Prakashaya	1885
Thenumati Kawattaya	1885, 1895
Dinalangare	1886
Kavatta Agjanama	1886
Brothi Sangirawa	1886
Laknupamina	1887

Riviresa	1888, 1893, 1897
Piyamuduhara	1888
Helathiwi Ruwatha	1888
Kavatta Mithraya	1889
Satyelokaya	1889
Kavatta Dudaya	1889, 1890
Kavatta Dakshaya	1889
Christiani Mithraya	1889
Lanka Kawatta Patraya	1890
Lanka Kawatta Mithraya	1891
Kawatta Narendriah	1891
Hiruresa	1892
Sirilaka Sidumina	1893, 1894
Kalyanodaya	1893
Kavatta Ralaami	1893
Kalyanasheeya	1893
Paulae Mithraya	1893
Kavataya	1894
Sathyapriya	1894
Satsilumineres	1894
Kaviminidhana	1894
Vaidya Shastralankara	1894
Satyapradeepaya	1895
Sadayadaya	1895
Dinapatha Prorthi	1895, 1900
Lanka Pradeepaya	1895, 1909
Doodana Bete	1895, 1902
Sri Lankanathansaya	1895
Sathamina Kirula	1895
Lanka Mithraya	1895
Kavata Kathura	1895
Peptiste Prorthy	1895
Sat Sarasaviya	1896
Vidya Pradeepaya	1897
Choolalankara	1897
Sri Lankadaya	1897
Kalyanalogaya	1898
Satpasa	1899

Suvaritodaya	1899
Bhakti Prabodhaya	1899
Moratu Narendriah	1899
Methodist Prorthi	1900
Yudha Koshava	1900, 1904
Sidumini	1900
Simla Religion	1901
Sarasaviya	1902
Kavatta Angana	1902
Kavatta Raja	1903
Lanka Punchihewaya	1903
Abhinava Kavatta Angana	1903, 1910
Viduminiresa	1904
Sinhala Bauddhaya	1906
Vidhuliya	1907
TV Gran	1907
Vidyaharanaya	1907
Sinhalaya	1908
Lankathadaya	1908
Ira Udawa	1908
Kavatta Andare	1908
Satsanthagirana	1908
Sri Anurapura Puwatta	1909
Hithavadi	1909
Kavatta Tharunaya	1909
Dinamina	1909, 1915
Sinhala Kavataya	1910, 1913
Kavatta Rala	1910
Sinhala Jathiya	1910
Arya Singhala Vanshaya	1912
Lakmini	1912, 1915
Kawatta Thilaka	1912
Lak Ruwatha	1914
Sihala Kulangana	1916
Sarasavi Sandaresa Saha	1916
Sihala Samaya	
Sri Lanka Kawattaya	1916



RĀṆĪ MAHĀL

Translated from the
original Tamil short story
rāṇi mahāl (ராணி மஹால்)
by **Shobasakthi**

Translated by:
Eluttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

It was five in the morning. Although spring had already arrived, the damp air from the Seine was cold. Anṇarāṇi was walking along the footpath that hugged the riverbank. For the last thirty-eight years, she had walked this path every morning without exception. Anṇarāṇi took the small, paved road at the end of the footpath, opened the tall front gate, and walked past the small meadow. Decorative lights on the meadow shone brightly. Rāṇi Mahāl stood majestically in front of her.

This little commune called Mantes-la-Jolie has a storied history. The French King Philip II died here. Anṇarāṇi's husband Mariyanāyagam had bought this two-level six-roomed house a long time ago. He had removed the stone

plaque at the entrance bearing the name ‘Bella Villa’ and replaced it with a new one bearing the name of his wife, ‘Rāṇi Mahāl.’ Anṇarāṇi was thirty-three then, now seventy-one. Mariyanāyagam was four years older than her.

The entrance to Rāṇi Mahāl had four tall decorative steps. Only after she climbed the steps and approached the front door did Anṇarāṇi remember that she did not have the house key with her. She never had the house key. Her husband always carried it, which was now inside the pocket of his overcoat. Exhausted, Anṇarāṇi squatted down on the front step. After a minute of respite, she got up and left in search of the key.

Now she walked a little faster along the riverside footpath. The festive lights strung along the riverbank blended with the light of dawn setting up a dazzling light show on the waters of the Seine. The woods start where the footpath ends. Walking trails snaked through the protected woods. People usually came here after six for their morning walks. But Mariyanāyagam came here every day at half past four in the morning for his pre-dawn walk.

Anṇarāṇi entered the woods and walked forward along the trail. The first rays of the sun peeped through the dense foliage. She walked towards the wooden bench where Mariyanāyagam always paused for a rest break half-way through his walk. His lifeless body lay on the trail before the bench.

Blood had congealed on Mariyanāyagam’s face, head, and hands. His eyeglasses lay on the ground, broken right through the middle into two pieces. The middle of his forehead had been cracked open, and something that looked like yellow egg yolk had been oozing out disgustingly. Anṇarāṇi shut her eyes as soon as she saw this. Then she turned her head upwards towards the sun’s rays and knelt

beside her husband. She felt around gently in the red overcoat he was wearing. As soon as her fingers felt the bunch of keys stuffed into one of its pockets, she picked up the key bunch and started walk back towards Rāṇi Mahāl.

Now she found it difficult to climb the four steps. She climbed the stairs slowly, pausing on each step. The bunch of keys in her hand had ten or fifteen keys, confusing her as to which was the key to the front door. She tried them one by one, slowly. Eventually the sixth or seventh key opened the door.

She entered the house, turned the lights on, went into the bathroom, stripped, and washed her hands and feet. She then went into the bedroom, opened the closet, took out a blue sārī and put it on. Mariyanāyagam did not like her wearing sārīs. He insisted that she wore European clothes. She knotted her hair into a bun, applied moisturizing cream to her face and arms, and wore her black winter jacket over her saree. After locking the front door and securing the keys in her handbag, she climbed down the stairs to the street and started walking.

Bus traffic on this street started only after seven in the morning. It was now deserted and quiet. Only the corner bakery was open. As she passed the bakery, she was momentarily confused whether to turn left or right. She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts and concluded that her son’s house was towards the right. She turned right and continued walking.

Anṇarāṇi’s son Philip’s house was about a kilometer away, at the center of the village. The path towards his house kept lengthening as she walked. She started to doubt if she could in fact reach her son’s house. The only thing she remembered clearly was that her son’s house was in the green building between the fire station and the McDonald’s.



From time to time, she paused to lean against a wall to catch her breath. Her feet were freezing. She tutted at herself for the folly of venturing out without wearing socks. By the time she identified her son's house and pressed the buzzer, it was already seven o'clock.

Philip opened the door, still half asleep, and gaped at her. "Mummy, why at this time... you could have called me..."

Aṉnarāṇi hugged her son, kissed him on both cheeks, and sat down on the large armchair in the living room.

"Mummy... did Papa come with you? He would never let you go out alone ..."

Aṉnarāṇi nodded and looked around, asking, "Where is Rosa, son?"

Philip rubbed his eyes and dawned. "She has

night duty,” he said and looked at the wall clock, “she will be here in half an hour.”

“OK, you go back to sleep. I will sit here.”

Philip scratched his head and went back into the bedroom. Although Philip acted sluggishly, he was very sharp. He received accolades at school and university as a top student. Anṇarāṇi’s elder son Kennedy was just the opposite. He would not stay put in one place. He did not excel in studies either. Unlike her second son Philip, Kennedy was not born in France. He was born in Sri Lanka and came to France, along with Anṇarāṇi, when he was six.

Anṇarāṇi leaned back further. She felt very sleepy. But she was determined not to fall asleep. She kept one ear open for the ringtone of Philip’s home phone or mobile phone, and the other ear towards the front door. She closed her eyes gently. Kennedy called out to her, ‘ammā;’ He cried out in grief, “Papa.” Anṇarāṇi sank deeper into the armchair.
2

Anṇarāṇi was twenty-six when she got married, which was somewhat later than was typical. It was unusual in 1975 for a young woman to remain unmarried until twenty-six. The entire village would join in the effort of finding a match for such a woman.

The deacon at the St. Anthony’s church, Inṇāsimuttu and his wife Aruḷammā had two children. Thiyōgu, the older boy, died by drowning in the sea as he was traveling by boat for the Pālaitīvu church festival. Anṇarāṇi was three years younger than him.

Anṇarāṇi was tall like a coconut palm. She had a full physique to match her height. She was blessed with a sort of lemony complexion. It took forever to comb her thick, curly hair. People said that this village had never before seen such beauty or modesty. For

the girls growing up in every household in the village, Anṇarāṇi was held up as the exemplar.

Anṇarāṇi studied till grade eight in the village school. To study beyond that, one needed to go elsewhere. At that time, the village custom was not to send young girls outside the village alone. Anṇarāṇi did not ask to continue her education either. She was not particularly interested in studying. Reading a book gave her a headache. Her interest was in cooking and eating different types of delicious food. She would scour their yard in search of fruit trees like amla, guava, *jambu*, and mango. She was always chewing on something. If she sat down to eat boiled palmyra sprouts, she would not get up until she had eaten twenty. When the palmyra fruit season began, she would roast and eat a palmyra fruit every day.

Anṇarāṇi left the house only on Tuesdays to go to church services on Tuesdays to St. Anthony’s church and Sundays to St. John’s church. She always wore a long skirt that came down to her ankles, and long-sleeved tops. A white veil with a black lace border covered her head, as she tagged behind her parents to church with her head always down.

The days when she used to gossip for hours by the fence with girls her age from neighboring houses had come to an end. All the neighborhood girls were married. They no longer had time to gossip. Even on those rare occasions when she chatted with a neighborhood girl across a fence, Anṇarāṇi immediately ran away into the house if she spotted the girl’s husband come that way.

Inṇāsimuttu family were landowners. Their holdings spanned gardens, wells, and fields. They had no shortage of wealth. Nevertheless, a groom for Anṇarāṇi was not found until she was twenty-six. Even those rowdy Romeos who habitually chased after the young women of the village did not dare linger near

Aṉnarāṇi's house. The talk among the village boys was that Aṉnarāṇi was unapproachable for them. Her mother Aruḷammā worried that it was Aṉnarāṇi's height that kept her from finding a match. "Aṉnam was born with the likeness of the Dutch, something unheard of in our entire lineage," she said.

Aṉnarāṇi liked skipping. That was the time when shops didn't carry special skipping ropes. Village girls would cut ordinary fence rope to size and twist two rope stands together to construct a skipping rope. Back then it was a girls-only pastime. One day, when Aṉnarāṇi was skipping in the front yard, kicking up a cloud of dust, Iḷavālai māmi opened the front gate and walked in.

Iḷavālai māmi was Iṉnāsimumuttu's first cousin. Whenever she showed up at Iṉnāsimumuttu's house, there was always an underlying reason---pawning some jewelry, barter, church business, and so on. This time she brought along a marriage proposal for Aṉnarāṇi.

"*Kōdhāri* Thuraiyappā's eldest, they are in fact related to you through Uncle Joachim. A graduate



of the University of Peradeniya. Works at a foreign firm in Colombo. He is unlike his father. No drinking, chewing betel leaves, or smoking cigarettes. Everything you own is for your little girl, right? Why don't you give her this house and land as dowry. The boy has two sisters. You have to give ten thousand each as donation and twenty-five thousand as cash in *Kōdhāriyār's* hands. I know you will give at least thirty sovereigns of gold jewelry to your daughter."

Mariyanāyagam and his relatives hired a cab from Iḷavālai to come to see the potential bride. Aṉnarāṇi was seated on a chair in the middle of the living room. She sat there majestically like royalty. Her mother thought that Mariyanāyagam stood an inch shorter than Aṉnarāṇi. When Iṉnāsimumuttu popped into the kitchen, she whispered to him, "Short or tall, let us get her married off, without nitpicking. We cannot go on keeping her as a spinster at home."

The village had never seen such a grandiose wedding before. The celebration lasted three whole days. On the first day, the entire village prepared for the wedding. At six in the morning, two loudspeakers facing east, and west were installed on the

palmyra tree in the front yard, and they began blaring 'Ask, and it shall be given you' as the first song. The bishop was related to Mariyanāyagam. Therefore, the bishop himself came directly to the church to officiate at Mariyanāyagam's and Anṇarāṇi's wedding.

After the wedding, Mariyanāyagam moved into Anṇarāṇi's house which was now in his name. Anṇarāṇi's parents showered Mariyanāyagam with respect. The respect only grew with each passing day because Mariyanāyagam was related to the bishop.

After work on Friday evenings, Mariyanāyagam boarded the train at Colombo to arrive at Anṇarāṇi's house early in the morning on Saturdays. On Sunday evenings, he boarded the train back to Colombo.

As a Colombo resident, Mariyanāyagam stood out in the village. He was the one who introduced toothpaste and toothbrushes to Anṇarāṇi's household. Inṇāsimumuttu was, in fact, proud to watch his son-in-law brushing his teeth in the mornings, toothpaste foaming in his mouth, while Aruḷammā focused intently on brewing egg coffee for her son-in-law.

Mariyanāyagam went for walks along the village beach every morning and evening. People in the village usually went to the beach only to defecate. Therefore, it is understandable that the village folk looked on with suspicion as Mariyanāyagam wandered under the cover of screw pine bushes along the beach. "The deacon's son-in-law is weird," they whispered among themselves. Even Anṇarāṇi's family could not understand Mariyanāyagam's ways. What was the point of wandering about the beach every morning and evening for no apparent reason?

There was another problem. Mariyanāyagam insisted that Anṇarāṇi accompany him on

those walks. Anṇarāṇi did not like it one bit. The act of stepping out of the house disgusted her. She preferred her freedom within the house compared to being forced to walk outside with her head bowed down. Once when she was walking along the beach with Mariyanāyagam, she thought she heard someone heckle them from behind the screw pine bushes. Mariyanāyagam kept on walking nonchalantly. Anṇarāṇi could not help turning to look behind her a thousand times.

Mariyanāyagam liked to go into Jaffna town to watch movies. He only watched English movies. He compelled Anṇarāṇi to go with him. There were no women in movie theaters showing English movies. Anṇarāṇi would be the sole woman in the entire theater. When scantily clad figures appear on the screen, sometimes even completely naked ones, Anṇarāṇi's entire body will start to shiver. She felt that all the eyes in the theater were on her. But Mariyanāyagam would be totally engrossed in the movie. As they returned home Mariyanāyagam would talk to her about the movie. On those occasions, Anṇarāṇi, too, could not help thinking 'he is weird.'

Within three months of marriage Anṇarāṇi conceived Kennedy. After six months, Mariyanāyagam announced that he would be going abroad. His employer was sending him to Finland for further studies. He left for Finland saying that it was a two-year program and that he would come home on vacation once every six months. He never returned.

For the first six months, Anṇarāṇi received letters from him regularly. Thereafter, that, too, ceased. With an infant in her arms, Anṇarāṇi was distressed. Mariyanāyagam's parents had not receive any letters either. A year later, finally, a letter arrived from France.

It seemed that Finland did not agree with Mariyanāyagam. He said he could not stand

the solitary living in the cold northern latitudes, and therefore had moved on to France where he had friends. He was going to start a business in France with friends and would arrange for Anṇarāṇi to join him in France. He also wrote a few words inquiring about the health of baby Kennedy.

Anṇarāṇi's nervousness on being invited to join him in France surpassed her happiness of hearing from her husband after such a long gap. Inṇāsimuttu asked her to keep the news secret. He said that if the villagers learned that his daughter and grandchild were going abroad, their evil eye might disrupt their travel plans.

But Mariyanāyagam did not send for Anṇarāṇi right away. Although he sent letters and money regularly, it did not look as if he was taking any efforts to get her to France. Anṇarāṇi did not ask for it either. By now, she had started skipping with Kennedy. They arrived in France only when Kennedy was six.

3

At that time, they lived in an apartment block in Paris. Mariyanāyagam was running a cleaning business. Twenty-five Tamils worked for him. Business was brisk. He



had got contracts from exhibition halls and marketplaces. In his leisure, he socialized, taking Anṇarāṇi and his son to visit friends or having friends over.

Now Mariyanāyagam was drinking heavily. There was not a day when he did not drink. Anṇarāṇi was not concerned about his drinking. In fact, she liked it when she smelled alcohol on him in their bed. Inṇāsimuttu, too, drank toddy every morning and evening. When Anṇarāṇi was little, sometimes he gave her a little toddy in a coconut shell. "Palmyra toddy is good for the health, child," he said. Anṇarāṇi liked the sour sweetness of palmyra toddy. Until she grew up, she occasionally drank a coconut shell worth of toddy.

But Anṇarāṇi could not accept Mariyanāyagam's insistence on taking her and her child when he visited friends. She detested having to dress up for visits or being forced to welcome visitors with a forced smile. Similarly, she did not want to visit the homes of Mariyanāyagam's friends. At the time, Mariyanāyagam was the only married man in his circle of friends. In those gatherings, Anṇarāṇi struggled, being the lone female with a six-year-old in tow.

Mariyanāyagam kept nagging Anṇarāṇi to always freshen up, put on makeup, and wear nice clothes. If Anṇarāṇi was slow to do this, he scolded her, calling her “islander,” which is a mild derogatory term for people from the Jaffna archipelago. But he did not show any interest in his son, Kennedy. The child showed no attachment to him either. Mariyanāyagam fumed at the child far more often than he did at Anṇarāṇi. Kennedy was an active child. He was scolded often by his father. Mariyanāyagam refused to have another child. Squeezing her breasts, he would tell Anṇarāṇi, “Another child will hurt your body, Anṇam.”

Mariyanāyagam was immensely proud of his successful cleaning business and his luxury car. Anṇarāṇi thought he was also keen to show off his wife to the world with pride. Two years after she arrived in France, Mariyanāyagam bought Rāṇi Mahāl.

Now that they were in the suburbs at some distance from the center of Paris, Anṇarāṇi was looking forward to some peace and quiet, and solitude. But from time to time, Mariyanāyagam would suddenly decide to take Anṇarāṇi and their son to visit friends, or friends would visit Rāṇi Mahāl. A drunken revelry with music and singing would ensue. Anṇarāṇi could not bear these raucous parties. Even when Anṇarāṇi’s parents died one after the other, Mariyanāyagam did not agree to let her visit their village. “Now the fighting in Sri Lanka is severe,” he declared.

Mariyanāyagam never hit his wife. But he did not know how to talk to her without insulting her. As her youth and beauty waned with the years, these insults and sarcastic remarks were on the increase. Mariyanāyagam even ridiculed the child, Kennedy. But whenever he went to a party or event, he always took Anṇarāṇi with him. He did not even agree to let her go shopping by herself. He

hired an African nanny to take the child to school and back. Without Mariyanāyagam, Anṇarāṇi could not even go to church for Sunday service, or for Easter or Christmas. If Mariyanāyagam happened to be busy with work, then there would be no mass for Anṇarāṇi that Sunday.

Rāṇi Mahāl gradually transmogrified into a full-time interrogation chamber. Her ears were scorched by the scathing words of his incessant scolding. Once he gets drunk late at night, he would invent a reason to scold his wife and child non-stop: that her demeanor was not right, or that she did not respect him enough, or that the child was not doing well at school. He would sit on a chair in the middle of Rāṇi Mahāl’s expansive living room and demand, “Seek forgiveness, Anṇam.”

When she was a little girl, Anṇarāṇi had seen once or twice her mother Aruḷammā seeking forgiveness from her father Inṇāsimmuttu. But Mariyanāyagam demanded that she seek forgiveness every day.

Anṇarāṇi was supposed to stand on the side of the chair that Mariyanāyagam was sitting in, confess to her sins, and seek forgiveness. During those times, Anṇarāṇi struggled to find sins or faults that she could confess to. Mariyanāyagam expected her to confess to new sins every day. When Anṇarāṇi could not come up with suitable sins to confess to, Mariyanāyagam would push the mother and son out of Rāṇi Mahāl and shut all doors.

Countless were the nights when the mother and child sat shivering on the decorative front steps. Mariyanāyagam would open the door again only at half past four in the morning, when he was ready to go for his daily morning walk. Anṇarāṇi would take the child inside, put him on his bed, and join Mariyanāyagam on his walk. Mariyanāyagam never went for a walk without Anṇarāṇi.



As soon as the sun went down, An̄narāṇi would hide two woolen blankets and two water bottles under the decorative front steps. When they were thrown out of the house, she would cover herself and her child with those blankets and try to rock the child to sleep on her lap.

When the father was not home, the child Kennedy would go stand next to the high-backed chair in the middle of the living room. Then he would go outside and sit on the front steps. Sometimes he would go missing.

An̄narāṇi would search in room after room to finally find him.

Kennedy died just three days shy of his fourteenth birthday. That night, when Mariyanāyagam was scolding An̄narāṇi softly and asked her to seek forgiveness, Kennedy ran away to hide somewhere. Mariyanāyagam searched the entire house but failed to find Kennedy. Blind with anger, Mariyanāyagam pushed An̄narāṇi out of Rāṇi Mahāl and shut the door. An̄narāṇi sat on the front step with her ears open. Mariyanāyagam opened the

door at three in the morning. When Anṇarāṇi rushed inside, she found Kennedy's lifeless body on a skipping rope hanging from the roof tie beam in the kitchen.

"What sin did he commit to hang himself?" asked Mariyanāyagam as he hit his forehead with his palm.

After Kennedy's death Mariyanāyagam mellowed down a little. The police interrogated Mariyanāyagam and Anṇarāṇi thoroughly. Kennedy did leave enough tell-tale signs in the kitchen that he died by suicide.

The very next year, Mariyanāyagam got Anṇarāṇi pregnant again. He completely stopped the practice of demanding that she seeks forgiveness or throwing her out of the house at night. Mariyanāyagam was fond of the second child, Philip. When the twenty-year old Philip brought a French girl Rosa to Rāṇi Mahāl and introduced her as his girlfriend, Mariyanāyagam was all smiles. He welcomed her and kissed her on her cheeks. He took Anṇarāṇi with him to visit Rosa's parents at their home.

Occasionally Rosa would stop by at Rāṇi Mahāl to pick up Philip. At those times, Mariyanāyagam was visibly happy and chatted incessantly with her in French. Anṇarāṇi would stop at serving Rosa something to eat or drink. Anṇarāṇi did not know enough French to chat with Rosa. Rosa was not the gregarious type either. She did not talk much but would stay put like a doll wearing a slight smile.

Two years ago, Philip moved into Rosa's apartment. Thereafter, she came by Rāṇi Mahāl just two or three times. After Philip moved out of Rāṇi Mahāl, the huge house was still with silence. Mariyanāyagam had retired. He would go out to visit friends occasionally.

Even then Anṇarāṇi would have to correctly make herself up to accompany him.

Once Anṇarāṇi gently asked Mariyanāyagam if they could now sleep in separate rooms. Anṇarāṇi was hoping that at seventy years of age, the solitude she was longing for was within reach. But Mariyanāyagam did not agree. Even at seventy-five, he never went to bed without Anṇarāṇi next to him. He never went out without her either. If Anṇarāṇi hesitated, he berated and insulted her. Anṇarāṇi was certain that even when Mariyanāyagam died, he would take her with him.

4

Minutes after Philip went back to his room to resume his sleep, Anṇarāṇi heard his upset and confused voice from where she was sitting. Holding his cellphone in his left hand, with consternation on his face, Philip walked softly to her, and hugged her right shoulder. His voice faltering, he said:

"Mummy, you should not be upset. I got a message... I am not sure if it is true. The police just called me... they found Papa dead..." Unable to continue, he covered his mouth and started to weep. His tears fell on Anṇarāṇi's face. Anṇarāṇi stroked his hand and said:

"Philip.. You calm down a little. Let Rosa come."

"No Mummy. The Police have asked me to come right away.. I told them I would bring you along.. Get up slowly so that we can go.."

Anṇarāṇi said, "We can go Philip... sit on that chair for a few moments. Let Rosa come," and leaned back further into her chair and closed her eyes.

This morning at half past four, Mariyanāyagam left for his morning walk,

taking Anṇarāṇi as usual. Nowadays they rarely talked. Even if they did, Mariyanāyagam did the talking. His every word only served to tar Anṇarāṇi with insults.

After doing a round in the woods, they sat down on their usual bench. Mariyanāyagam had planted his walking stick on the ground, holding it with both his hands. He curved his back to lean on the walking stick, putting half his weight on it. He had bought that walking stick just last week in an antique market. It was carved from strong wood and adorned with a silver rim on its handle and a bronze ferrule. Mariyanāyagam murmured softly so that Anṇarāṇi could hear him, “We have to visit Rāsēndram this evening.. It is his seventieth birthday.. He would be offended if we didn’t visit.”

Anṇarāṇi murmured in response:

“I don’t feel well.. I am not coming.”

“Why what is wrong with you? Do you have an itch in your private parts?”

Anṇarāṇi did not respond. She stared at a distance, with folded hands. These kinds of barbs did not anger her. But the shame was eating into her for years. Once tall like a coconut tree, this 'islander' now had wrinkled skin, a bent back, and sagging flesh. She looked as frayed and damaged as a goatskin painting from a puppet show.

Mariyanāyagam was quiet and motionless for a while. Then shouting something in French, she lifted his walking stick and threw it away. Spittle splattered from his mouth. He stood up slowly and pointed to the walking stick with his index finger. He removed his glasses, wiped them on his chest, put them back on again, and glared at Anṇarāṇi. She walked up to the walking stick, picked it up, and was returning to hand it back to her husband.

Mariyanāyagam muttered:

“Why don’t you, too, hang like your elder son?”

Walking stick in her hand, Anṇarāṇi froze when she heard this. She felt the blood circulation within her forty-five-kilogram body come to a standstill. Her hands became rigid. Her legs moved forward. Eyes wide, looking at Mariyanāyagam’s face, she swung the walking stick and hit him on his face. The eyeglasses cracked with a pop. “What sin did I commit? Why are you hitting me?” asked Mariyanāyagam calmly.

Holding his forehead with his left hand, he extended his right hand to try to wrest the walking stick away from Anṇarāṇi. She swung the walking stick again and hit his hand. When Mariyanāyagam tried to say something, she hit him again on his head.

Stroking her shoulder, Philip said “Mummy.. I will go see what this is about.. Papa’s body is in the woods, it seems.”

“Philip, you can’t go now... when Rosa returns, you have to translate what I say into French for her!”

“What do you want to say Mummy... tell me, won’t you..”

She stroked Philip’s hand that was on her shoulder. She leaned back on the chair and said:

“No son... you would not understand!”

The sound of footsteps came from outside the front entrance. The mother and the son looked at the clock on the wall.

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

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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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Editorial Inquiries : For story pitches, press releases, and other editorial matters,
please email hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com

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