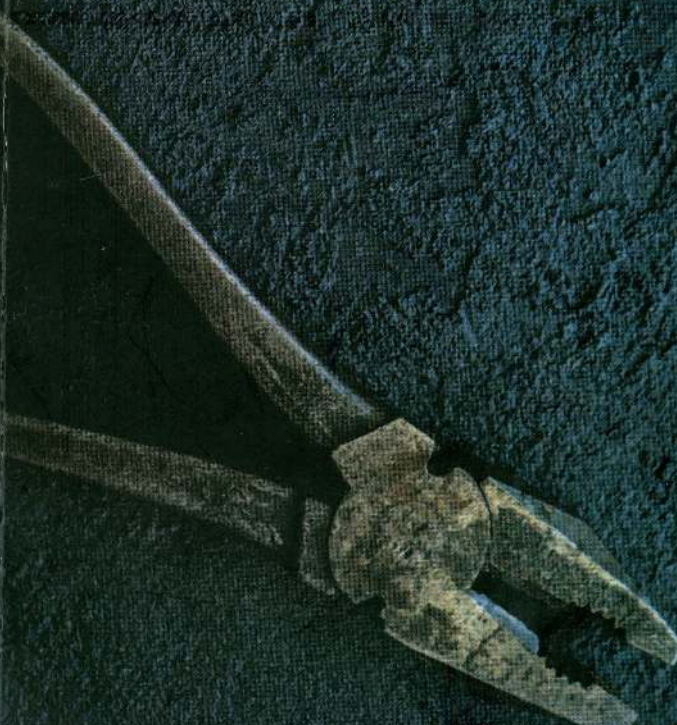


The Criminal History of

Ranil Wickremesinghe 1977-1997

AN INVESTIGATION
NANDANA WEERARATNE



**THE CRIMINAL HISTORY OF
RANIL WICKREMESINGHE 1977-1997**

VOL 1

**This book is dedicated to Wijedasa Liyanaarachchi,
Attorney at Law and other lawyers who perished at
the hands of the 'executioners' at Batalanda Torture
Chambers, whose only fault was their commitment to
upholding human rights and justice for others...**

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RANIL WICKREMESINGHE 1977-1997**

VOL 1

Nandana Weeraratne



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THE CRIMINAL HISTORY OF
RANIL WICKREMESINGHE 1977-1997

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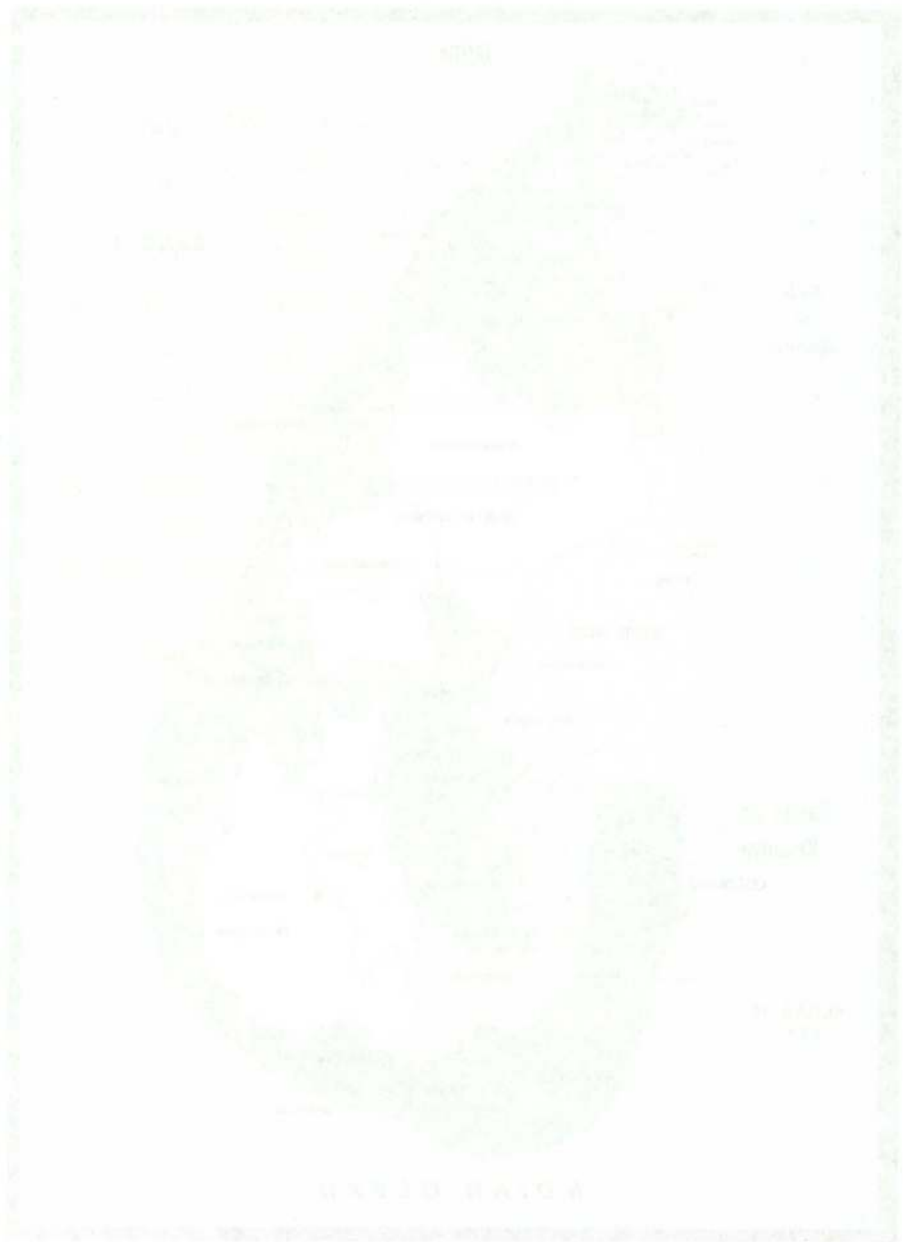
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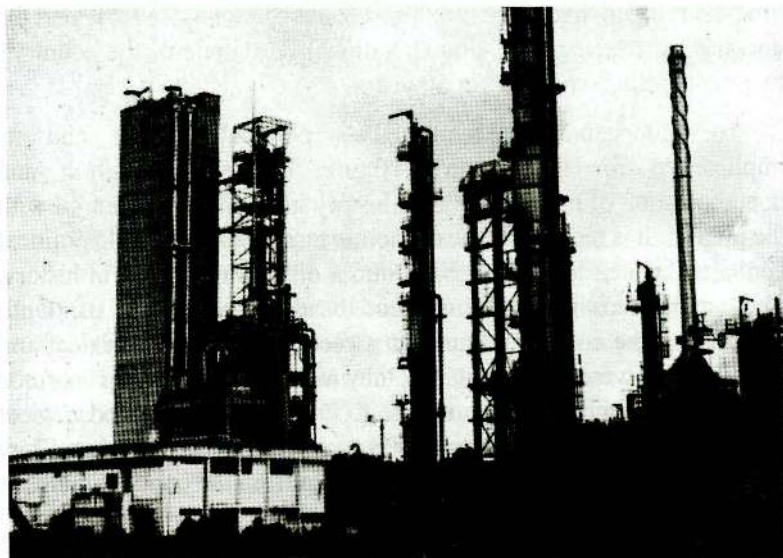
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MAP



INTRODUCTION

WICKREMESINGHE, JAYAWARDENA AND THE UREA PLANT



Urea plant at Batalanda, photo taken after the factory was closed down, circa 1984

This book is based on a series of media reports following investigations initiated by a team 25 years ago. However, the effort was abandoned after Ranil Wickramasinghe lost the presidential elections in 1999 due to his uncertain political future. In the wake of the downfall of a regime by people's power, in 2022, this 'bonus' MP, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was elevated to the presidency instantly via a glitch in the present Constitution of Sri Lanka. By now, Wickremesinghe who is also associated with the bankruptcy of the country, is actively engaged in oppressing the people using the Emergency Law and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, so that he could stay in the saddle, having entered through the back door! This was aptly facilitated by a move by Wickremesinghe to self nominate him for the only parliamentary seat allocated to his party after the general elections in 2020.

In 2022, Wickremesinghe hosted a grand gala commemorating 50 years at the bar. He served as a Member of Parliament for 45 of those 50 years and held influential ministerial positions for nearly 25 years. Additionally, from 1993 to 2022 he was appointed Prime Minister six times, serving in that office for almost 9 years in total. He remained the uncontested leader of the United National Party, one of the country's two main political parties, for 30 years.

To understand Wickremesinghe's political journey and its implications for the country's future, continual revisiting and documentation of modern political history is essential, aligning it with the present. It is more so as the economic turmoil and resulting political conflicts threaten to push us back into a distressing period in history. These politicians who rule us seem to adopt the attitude of, 'Until we develop the country at our own sweet pace, you remain deaf and dumb!' If this were not their stance, they wouldn't be detaining unarmed peaceful protesters, who are unable to endure starvation and neglect -indefinitely under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act. They now look on with sarcasm at the cry of pain from the common man.

Today, Ranil Wickramasinghe, who has served as a minister for 25 years, presents himself as the saviour of a heartless mob of rulers, who ruled the country with an iron fist. Moreover, he has held the position of Prime Minister on six occasions(!) and we have not seen any meaningful steps taken by him to change the course of the country during any of his tenure. In fact, he has displayed a style of governance that involved cronyism, nepotism and criminality.

The beginning and end of the inanimate object called UREA FACTORY are significant to us for two reasons. Firstly, because they mark the end of one political culture and the beginning of another. Secondly, the premises of the housing complex of this factory that initially provided a livelihood to the people later turned into a torture camp where they ended their lives.



J R Jayawardena and Ranil Wickremesinghe (uncle and nephew)

Since J.R. Jayawardene and Ranil Wickramasinghe were prominent political figures in the 1980s of the last century, we shall start this story with the less known urea plant. In 1975, the foundation stone for the construction of a urea plant for the production of fertiliser essential for the country's agriculture was laid in Sapugaskanda. Mr.T.B. Subasinghe was the minister for industries of the then Samagi Peramuna (United Front) government. The Subasinghes were the pioneers of the famous Sandalanka Cooperative movement in Narammala, the North West of the country. They dedicated themselves to uplifting local industries. T. B. Subasinghe's elder brother, Vincent Subasinghe, popularly known as Sandalanka Gandhi, was the founding chairman of the People's Bank of Sri Lanka

The main loan for the factory to produce urea was obtained from the Asian Development Bank, due to the unavailability of foreign exchange in the country. Several government agencies also joined to invest in the urea project, that was carried out by the Ministry of Industries. The investment made into this project was second only to the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program. The plant was located in Sapugaskanda, in the Western Province, as the petroleum by-product used to manufacture urea was sourced from the oil refinery situated there. The foundation stone was laid for the construction of the factory in 1975. But it took four years to install the machines and start production. For the benefit of all workers of the factory quarters

were built to a high standard complete with swimming pools and other luxury amenities on this government land.

The Samagi Peramuna government [1970-1977] ruled mercilessly, suppressing popular protests over poverty and unemployment. It was popularly known as 'Tun Haula' due to the three-party coalition. However, one of its coalition parties, the Sama Samaja Party, left the government in 1975 and in 1976, another partner, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, withdrew from the coalition. By the end of 1976, although it was called 'Samagi Peramuna,' only the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led by Sirima Bandaranaike was left.

By 1977, the United Front government, which had extended its rule without public approval, was deteriorating to the extreme. The United National Party, under the leadership of J. R. Jayawardene, presented an alternative political system and open economic policies, appealing to the masses that were fed up with the economic hardships for 7 years. It introduced political slogans and election promises aimed at attracting the masses. UNP leader Jayawardena promised to provide every resident with 'eight pounds of grains' at a subsidised price every week. He also pledged to create a 'righteous society' in the country after the upcoming general elections.

After the General Election, Sirima Bandaranaike's United Front regime [1970-1977] was branded as a seven-year curse, which easily captured the people's minds. Likewise, the cruelty of the family tree (Bandaranayake - Ratwatte) was deeply felt by the people. Jayawardena went around the country, proclaiming, "I neither have a generation nor a family to protect! The outcome of this was that the UNP won a huge majority of five-sixths at the 1977 general election. It was a complete washout for the Samagi Peramuna, which only won eight seats. After the political upheaval in the 1977 general election, not only Samagi Peramuna but its industries minister, T.B. Subasinghe also lost his Katugampola seat.

Jayawardena, who kept saying that he neither had a family nor a generation to protect, nominated his nephew Ranil Wickramasinghe as a candidate at the 1977 election for the Biyagama electorate. Ranil won

that seat, and he, who was a novice to the political world, was given the post of junior foreign minister of the new UNP regime. After the lapse of another year, while Jayawardena became president under the new Constitution he brought in the young apprentice Ranil as the cabinet minister of Youth Affairs and Employment.

In 1980, President Jayawardene presented another ministry to his nephew; the Ministry of Education thereby elevating Wickremesinghe to become a powerful minister, holding three important portfolios: youth affairs, employment, and education.

In 1977, Kaluwadewage Cyril Mathew became the Minister of Industry in the UNP government. He was the party's trade union leader as well as the self-appointed leader of the Deva clan [caste]. Coincidentally, the urea plant came under the Ministry of Industries and the urea factory was also in the Kelaniya seat, represented by Minister Mathew. The urea plant started production in 1979. However, the local indigenous urea production was not compatible with the Jayawardene government's open economic policies. Moreover, it was more profitable to import urea at a lower price than to produce it locally. Because of this, the newly elected Jayawardene government was in a great urgency to close this factory. In 1984, Minister Cyril Mathew was instructed by the party leader to retire from politics due to his alleged violation of cabinet unity. The first action taken by the new Industry Minister, Denzil Fernando, upon assuming office was to close down the urea plant. Consequently, the urea plant was shut down five years after commencing production.

In 1987, Ranil Wickramasinghe was appointed the Minister of Industries. His first act as the new Minister was to liquidate the factory. One Asoka Senanayake, the grandson of former Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake was entrusted with the task of liquidating and selling the massive factory. Subsequently, tenders were called, and the valuable machinery was sold for scrap metal. The factory's communication system was auctioned at the old wire price. The plant was purchased for scrap metal by an Indian company named S.P.I.C., which was the lowest bidder. The Indian company dismantled the factory and relocated it to

the 'Jabael Ali' Investment Zone in the United Arab Emirates. There, they began producing urea and selling it to Sri Lanka. In 1975, Sri Lanka had invested 6,000 million rupees in the urea plant. Today, the country spends the same amount annually on fertiliser imports. Thus, the story of Sri Lanka's first and only urea plant (1975-1991) concludes in this manner, leaving its mark on political history in a unique way.

Minister Wickremesinghe, assigned to liquidate the factory, utilised his political influence to secure the modern quarters built for the factory in Batalanda, for his use. He converted the luxury tourist bungalow there into his official residence and allocated empty office buildings among his political allies and loyal police officers. The Batalanda housing complex also accommodated the police and underworld 'criminal gang', known as the 'Subversive Activities Suppression Unit' of the Peliyagoda Police. [See Chapter 26] The Minister opted to set up the UNP headquarters in the Biyagama electorate within a house located in this Batalanda housing complex. Subsequently, a section of this complex was designated for a military camp.

As such, President Jayawardena's influential nephew emerged as a key figure in supporting the struggling UNP government. Wickremesinghe held vital ministerial roles, including youth affairs, employment and education within the UNP government for nearly a decade. His primary task was to quell the conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese youth who had taken up arms against the government. To address this, Wickremesinghe established additional military training camps under the 'Manpower Utilisation Ministry' to suppress Tamil youths and organised criminal gangs to suppress Sinhalese youth. Some of the infamous groups that emerged in this era, the 'PRRA' [People's Revolutionary Red Army] Black Cats and Yellow Cats, were initiated on Minister Ranil's orders.

According to the affidavit of the former Senior Superintendent of Police referred in Chapter 16, it was Minister Wickremesinghe who supplied these gangs with weapons from the government forces. The headquarters of these criminal gangs were situated within the Batalanda housing complex. Subsequently, the 'Batalanda Camp' became the

central hub for political terror in the Gampaha district, in the Western Province.

By 1988, a torture chamber was established in Batalanda to suppress the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) following the killing of his former political ally, Gonawala Sunil [see Chapter 15]. At the end of 1987, an Indian army of about 200,000 soldiers occupied the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Alongside this, the JVP and the UNP government were clashing face-to-face. Sons of political enemies in the Gampaha district and Biyagama electorate, as well as JVP suspects, were brought to this torture chamber to be dealt with and eliminated. According to international research publications, by the end of 1990, around 67,000 youth were massacred due to state terror.

Why did Minister Wickramasinghe start his own torture chamber in the Sapugaskande, Batalanda housing complex? There are many reasons for that. Wickremesinghe, who won amidst the landslide general election in 1977, was conscious that he would not be able to secure this seat again in any subsequent election. Traditionally, the Gampaha district where Biyagama is located is a political territory of the Bandaranaiques who led the main opposing political party. Even in the 1956 general election, Wickremesinghe's uncle, J.R. Jayawardene, lost in the Kelaniya electorate, which belonged to the Biyagama electorate at the time. Consequently, Minister Wickramasinghe used this period of terror to suppress all the political enemies in the Gampaha district.

In January 1995, the 'Raavaya' investigative journalists entered the Batalanda torture chamber, which was under the protection of a military camp. Subsequently, the author of this book published an investigative report about torture, titled 'Sapugaskanda Torture House of Pure Gentlemen,' in 'Raavaya'. The same month, Criminal Investigations Department (CID) obtained a statement from the author regarding this report. It culminated in the appointment of the 'Batalanda Commission' to investigate the crimes committed in the Batalanda torture camp.

The Batalanda Commission, as the only large scale inquiry held in Sri Lanka into torture and extrajudicial killings, carried out a great service for the future. It taught the politicians the lesson that committing

crimes and offering patronage to criminals would carry consequences for them one day. Furthermore, it created awareness among the voters as to how important it is to know the history of the prospective candidates before voting them into power.

Ranil Wickramasinghe faced defeat in both the 1999 and 2005 presidential elections. His party contested the 2010 and 2015 presidential elections, fielding candidates from other parties. In the August 2020 general election, the grand old United National Party, under his leadership, failed to win any seats, securing only one bonus parliamentary seat. From this alone, you will understand the importance of Batalanda “ghosts” crying out for justice. Nevertheless, he served as the Prime Minister in two governments that came to power in 2002 and 2015. In 2022, he became the executive president with the support of the majority of parliamentarians. It's important to note that he is potentially the candidate of the 'UNP and Rajapaksa camp' in the 2024 presidential election.

But the most powerful irony in this political history is that C.A. Chandraprema, who led the 'PRRA' criminal gang, is now the chief ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva under the government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The year 2022 is a pivotal year in the history of modern Sri Lanka. Due to popular unrest, the elected president was forced to flee the country, and the prime minister had to resign. The cabinet changed three times, and around 75 houses of ministers and ruling party MPs were burned and destroyed. According to police reports, nearly 5 Million frustrated people joined the protests across the country. This sets a new record not only for Sri Lanka but also in world political history. Therefore, this long researched investigative report is to engrave the powerful history of the criminals behind heinous political crimes against humanity of an era.

Despite being the author of the first report that was published of the Batalanda torture chamber that led to the setting up of a Commission, when the Commission commenced operations, the author of this book was not summoned to testify. However, without any assistance from either the government or the commission, the author arrived in Colombo

from London (where he was serving for the BBC Sinhala Service at the time], to testify. Manjula Pathiraja, who was a junior lawyer at that time and a personal friend was retained to represent his interests . The author concluded our session of evidence on the first day and was to be cross-examined the following day. However, due to a grave personal reason and an order issued that night by the Editor to report to work (BBC World Service) immediately, he was forced to return to London without continuing the evidence. The person who was most embarrassed due to this incident was the lawyer Manjula Pathiraja. Moreover, the author's evidence was not included in the commission. However, the "Batalanda Torture Chamber" investigation led by him, proved to be the only matter that was taken up for public inquiry amidst hundreds of similar state run "Torture Chambers." at the time. However no one has so far been found guilty or punished by a court of law as per the recommendations of the commission.

The only publisher who bravely agreed to publish this book section by section, was the chief editor of "Lanka e News," Sandaruwan Senadeera who has been living in exile for the past 13 years. The former President Maithripala Sirisena made attempts to bring down Sandaruwan to Sri Lanka, to no avail. The British Government did not agree to send him to Sri Lanka as he was under the protection of the United Nations Organization, thereby saving his life. The other individuals who contributed and assisted in many ways will not have their names disclosed for their own safety. They however deserve the respect of the readers. The fellow investigators of the original expedition in 1995 are not named so that they do not suffer the fate of "Vincent Fernando."

There is another important fact that Wickremesinghe and his criminal accomplices should not forget. In order to seek justice for these crimes, which the commission has confined to a mere report, the affidavits of eight people who survived the torture chamber of Batalanda from as far back as 1998 are safely in the custody of two International Human Rights Organizations. Therefore, the immunity enjoyed by these criminals and their accomplices will be territorial. One day, these culprits will not be able to escape the law of natural justice.

The only hope and expectation of the author of this book is to see this work serve as an inspirational handbook for all the defiant defenders of rights and protesters who take to the streets against cruel regimes, in time to come.

The rule of terror is not eternal.

Therefore, do not abandon the fight.

Nandana Weeraratne

June 2024

BATALANDA ON FIRE



Aerial view of Batalanda complex

In the year 1993, we were engaged in a research activity in the village of Vihara Halmillaweve in Anuradhapura. The residents of these villages are from Bodhi clan, and they are traditionally responsible for the protection of Jaya siri maha Bodhi (the main Bo tree in Anuradhapura revered by the Buddhists in the country). Our aim was to find the reason for these people being ranked at the bottom of the Sinhalese caste hierarchy, even though they are engaged in such a valuable religious service. We saw an unusual sight while going from house to house in search of this caste group living in seven villages that came under the area controlled by the Mahavihara. It was a strong, bare-chested young man with an assault rifle slung over his shoulder, riding a motorcycle resembling a horse rider. The author immediately felt an urge to see this arrogant looking man who lives in a caste-oppressed village once again and talk to him. As the author and the team were walking on the broken tarred gravel road, they saw the compound he entered in the distance, which increased their urge.

After assigning the other members of the group to visit other houses, the author followed the young man to find the house this armed man entered. He was in his garden when the author arrived. The rifle was nowhere to be seen. He looked at the author suspiciously. However, the author approached with a smile with friendliness and started a chit chat.

After the author explained the purpose of his visit with a brief introduction, the young man introduced himself as 'Ranasinghe,' an army soldier. Resorting to the usual hospitality of the villagers, he invited the author to sit in the open veranda of the small house. While tea was being prepared in the kitchen, he started to narrate the most significant incident of his life. That was the tragic killing of his elderly parents by an unknown gang.

The author's curiosity increased. Such deaths are usually common in the villages due to land disputes that arise from time to time. It puzzled him as to what kind of 'land dispute' could arise in a large rural village like this.

Now Ranasinghe's story in his own words...

"It was early 1989. I worked in Trincomalee. One morning, the chief of the camp called me and said, 'There is a serious situation at home. Leave immediately'. Nothing more was said, and I didn't even ask. I went straight home. When I arrived, my mother and father were placed in two coffins in the middle of the house. The assassin was unknown. He had gotten inside the house in the night and killed my parents. The villagers said, "Patriots" must have killed them because I was serving in the army." ('patriots' was a term used to refer to the JVP insurgents at the time)

"Those two innocent people were killed without any warning or notice. I don't know if it's the 'Patriots' or someone else. But we didn't have any enemies in the village. All these are of the same caste and have the same relatives. I finished all the funeral related work. The army, too, helped me a lot. When all the work was over, my superior told me to report directly to the Colombo headquarters instead of the camp where I was based."

"About a week later, I went to Colombo to report for my duty. There, I was referred to a special unit, and they asked me in detail about the crime that happened to our family. Finally, he asked me, 'Would you like to take revenge for that?' I really wanted to seek revenge, and I said, 'Yes, I want to take revenge.'

Afterwards, I was sent to a special unit in Sapugaskanda. There, all those who were identified as "patriots" were given the same punishment that was given to my mother and father."

The author was familiar with Sapugaskanda as he had resided in the area. "Ranasinghe, where was that camp in Sapugaskanda? Is it the Batalanda camp?"

"Yes, it was in the staff quarters of the old urea factory. That place is called Batalanda Camp."

At the beginning of the year 1989, the Patriotic People's Movement was a mass organization of the JVP that got involved in an armed conflict with the Jayawardana regime. The organisation took a bold decision to uplift their struggle. The leaders of the movement would have thought it to be a psychological strategy of war at the time. Accordingly, they appealed to the members of the government forces to join hands with their "patriotic struggle." They were seeking the help of the government forces to help evict the Indian forces and remove the Indian elite that were residing in Colombo.

They issued a time frame for the government forces to resign their posts or face the consequences of the death of their family members. No sooner these letters were issued, the then State Minister of Defense, Lt. Col. Ranjan Wijeratna realised the strategic implications of these letters and used them for their own benefit. He was the nephew of D.S. Senanayake, who was the first prime minister of the country, and a member of the ruling elite.

Being a former Estate Superintendent, he tried to manage the armed forces as he managed the estate workers. He started work before the "patriots". A murderous gang formed by him, killed the families of chosen members of military personnel, in order to initiate a gang

of liquidators to save the government, thus elevating the level of oppression of the people to new alarming heights. It is highly probable that, Ranasinghe's parents of Vihara Halmilla Wewa were killed by these thugs of Ranjan Wijeratna.

The only urea plant in Sri Lanka that started in the 1970s was an investment worth Rs. 6000 million at that time. As mentioned before, a luxury housing complex was built to provide accommodation to local and foreign engineers who came to work there. As soon as Ranil Wickramasinghe became the Minister of Industries, the official quarters were distributed among UNP's political allies, thugs and Peliyagoda police officers. [Chapter 26: Who are the residents of Batalanda?]. There was also an office and an official residence of Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was the organiser of the Biyagama electorate as well as the Minister of Education and Youth Affairs at that time. All the officers of the Subversive Activities Suppression Unit of the Kelaniya Police Division in Peliyagoda were provided quarters within this housing complex. The official residence of the Senior Superintendent of Police of Peliyagoda Police Division, Douglas Peiris and Senior Superintendent of Police Nalin Delgoda were also in this housing complex. An army unit was stationed there to spice up the torture camp!

Ranasinghe's narration struck the author, the chief of the "Raavaya" investigative team, who had resided in Batalanda (1985-1989). He was reminded of the past incidents and stories surrounding the torture chambers of Batalanda that he had heard from villagers at the time. This was the first time an eye witness of the torture chambers of Batalanda surfaced. The story that emerged from the village of Vihara Halmillawa, along with the past memories, diverted the minds of the investigators in another direction.

Entrance to Batalanda Army camp today, that is situated on the former Batalanda Housing Complex



Chapter 2

NOTORIOUS CRIMINAL IS A BODYGUARD OF THE S.S.P.



Young Douglas Peiris

“It is reported that Sudu Hakuru Hewage Raasendra, who was a notorious criminal in Karadeniya, is retained as the private assistant of the Senior Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris. ‘Raavaya’ journalists who were reporting the general election from Batticaloa met ‘Raasendra’ when he was guarding the office of the Senior Superintendent of Police”. [‘Raavaya’ newspaper on 28th August 1994]

The investigative team led by the author was compelled to dig deeper into the history of both Peiris and Wickramasinghe, when researching the cruel political journeys of them. It is to find the background of the ironic state of how Wickramasinghe became the ‘selected’ president, while Peiris was relegated to the position of a mere retired policeman. Hence, the history of this narrative goes back as far as the general election of August 1994.

At the heat of the 1994 general elections a rumour was spreading among political groups.

“The police thug of Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Douglas Peiris has been appointed as the coordinating officer of UNP - Batticaloa. This has been done in

order to compensate for the votes that may be lost here, by means of fair and foul. Do or die attitude!”

This rumour was later confirmed when Senior Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris, who was a close ally of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, was appointed as the Senior Superintendent of Police of Batticaloa. It was not an easy task to stop the election corruption in the Batticaloa district, when the area was only under police and military control. In the local council elections held last March, the ruling UNP government won Batticaloa by casting hundreds of thousands of fraudulent votes. Also, the activities of the Tamil militant groups P.L.O.T. E, T.E.L.O, E.P.R.L.F. And E.N.D.L.F, who resided in the province and were supporting the government, could not be easily controlled. Additionally, we must not forget the presence of armed Muslim Jihadists who had formed alliances with the government forces.

The journalists had been looking for a way to prevent election corruption in Batticaloa for weeks. Pursuant to a highly confidential agreement, two reporters from Raavaya, the author Nandana Weeraratne and Lester Rupasingha, were disguised as guides and translators for the Batticaloa election monitoring team of the European Human Rights Commission. This arrangement was orchestrated by a Catholic priest with a strong interest in human rights in Sri Lanka, who worked discreetly with both European and Sri Lankan officials. The secrecy stemmed from the fact that these election monitors were not officially invited by the government, and Batticaloa was considered a restricted area for foreigners, second only to Jaffna.

The team, which included the two journalists from Raavaya , consisted of a German youth, two young women, and three Americans: Brad Adams, Edie Meidav (now a professor of creative writing at an American university), and Stuart Karlan. The team embarked on the journey to Batticaloa on the night of 14th August, travelling in a van provided for election monitors. The accommodation was at the Lake View Hotel in Batticaloa, unbeknown to them, it was managed by a former Tamil police officer.

On the 15th, they spent the day sightseeing in Batticaloa and

exploring the district. However, when they returned to the hotel in the evening, the two journalists were met with an unexpected encounter. At the front desk, they received two messages. One was an 'order' from the SSP Batticaloa, requesting the two individuals from 'Raavaya' to report immediately to him. The second message indicated that Professor Rama Krishna from Eastern University was hoping to meet the journalists at his home that evening. His home phone number was attached too.

The situation became clear to the journalists: they had been exposed to the police 'informants at the hotel. This was a result of the Raavaya editor, Victor Ivan, informing his friend, Professor Rama Krishna about the visit of Raavaya journalists to Batticaloa. Professor Rama Krishna innocently called the hotel to invite the journalists to his house, likely with the intention of discussing a potential political alliance to form a common government front after the general election. It didn't take much for the Batticaloa Police to identify the two Sinhalese members of the election monitoring team as 'newspaper spies.'

The police, who had been friendly and cooperating until the evening of the 15th of August, became enemies of the observers. It was when they realised that two reporters from an 'anti UNP' newspaper had been secretly included in the team of observers. In this backdrop, the members of the international observers in Batticaloa were apprehensive. They were also refused permission to carry out monitoring in the district on the 16th August by the Assistant Superintendent of Police Ganegoda. It was clear to us that Douglas Peiris was behind this. In this background the international observers and their support team grew anxious. They discussed this situation with us on the 15th evening.

The police ordered that the two Sinhala names among the names of the observers should be removed immediately. If that was not possible, an order came that those two with Sinhala names should immediately report to the Senior Superintendent of Police of Batticaloa, Douglas Peiris. But the journalists continued to refuse to meet the SSP Batticaloa. The main reason was that they had a strong desire to be impartial observers... [The full related story appears in the author's book 'The days of Tamil Eelam']

There was no escape from the Batticaloa police chief. Finally, the journalists decided to meet the Assistant Superintendent of Police Ganegoda at the Lakeview Hotel and swore that they were not "reporters from Raavaya". They tried to convince the ASP that they are only freelance writers who write an occasional article or two for newspapers, and that they were there for a temporary job. But it was not easy to convince him. However, it was explained that they did not need a police permit to stay in Batticaloa as they are citizens of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, allowing the foreign election observers to carry out their duties, they took on the responsibility as reporters on a hired motorcycle.

On the 16th August, curfew was imposed throughout the country following the election. On the morning of 17th when curfew came into effect, it became mandatory that they obtained a curfew pass to carry on "their work". The journalists decided to change their tactics in keeping with the situation.

They spoke to the 'governor' in effect of Batticaloa at the time, Senior Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris by phone. He immediately sent a vehicle to their residence and invited them to visit him. They were escorted to his office. Douglas Peiris appeared victorious in receiving them and invited to enjoy a drink of their choice from his 'mini bar'. They very kindly rejected that offer, but their attention was focused on the 'bodyguard' who was with him in a camouflage t-shirt. He appeared familiar. After some time, the author was shocked to recall that he was none other than Raasendra, a well-known criminal in Uragaha of Karadeniya in Galle District. He was a known contract killer. The author began to sweat. Is it not strange to have a notorious criminal alongside the SSP Batticaloa in his office, standing right next to him?

Raasendra's residence was situated on Aluthgama Road, approximately two to three hundred metres from the four-way junction at Uragasmanhandiya. For anyone who had spent a few days in Uragasmanhandiya, Raasendra would be a familiar figure. What's particularly noteworthy is the presence of a well-known criminal in the

official office of the Batticaloa Police Chief. To better understand the situation, it's necessary to provide an introduction to who Raasendra is.

Sudu Hakuru Hewa Raasendra was a strong and brave young man who lived at Uragasmanhandiya in Karandeniya in the 1970s. He was educated at Yatagala Maha Vidyalaya. Among the youths who joined the rebellion in 1971 was not only Raasendra, but also the principal of his school, Dharmadasa Jayasinghe. Among the nearly 500 'April rebels' imprisoned from Karandeniya, 'Raasendra' was a different person. After the political rebels were released from prison, they became either politically silent or active JVP supporters. Soon after his release, Raasendra's first crime was to kill a neighbouring relative who had quarrelled with his father. He used a sword to do the foul deed! He did not stop after killing his family's enemy. He cut off his head and brought it to his father who was working in the field...!

When he came out on bail from Galle remand prison where he was remanded for this crime he was a close associate of professional criminals in the southern province. He automatically earned the crown of the mob leader of the province for the way he committed the first crime. It is after this that Raasendra chose the new job of being a hired criminal. How is it that this contract killer is a close aide of Batticaloa Senior Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris and seen in his Batticaloa office? When the journalists returned to Colombo from Batticaloa, this was the question that bothered them. The situation became serious when Raasendra visited the 'Raavaya' office on Pirivena Road Ratmalana when the news of his presence in Batticaloa was published by 'Raavaya'.

Editor-in-Chief Victor Ivan and Raasendra had a close acquaintance from their time as political prisoners during the 71' April revolt. The purpose of their meeting was to personally convey to Victor that Raasendra's relationship with Douglas Peiris, as reported in Raavaya, was not as described. Fortunately, Victor did not contact the author nor did he introduce him to Raasendra to request a correction while Raasendra was in the room. Victor did not ask to amend the news. The

author is grateful to Victor for not subjecting him to such a situation with a known criminal in the country.

It was evident that a distinct underworld existed in Batalanda. The author was resolute in his determination to somehow unveil it. Subsequently, his suspicions were verified during the proceedings before the Batalanda Commission, where the transaction involving SSP Peiris and Raasendra was documented in the report, as follows:

"At this point, Jayasinghe observed the Peliyagoda CSU van (which has been described in chapter V) parked behind ASP peiris's car. Several officers attached to the Peliyagoda CSU were also near-by. They were PS Jayaratne, PS Lakshman, PS Ranatunga, PS Rathnayake and Raasendra. According to the evidence of Jayasinghe, Raasendra who hailed from Uragasmanhandiya in the deep South, had been an associate of ASP Peiris, who was used by Peiris in the operations against the subversives." [Pages 94-95, Batalanda Commission Report]

As revealed by Police Sub-Inspector Ajith Jayasinghe in his testimony before the Batalanda Commission, since 1988, Douglas Peiris has 'employed' Raasendra, a mercenary criminal, as a member of his Police Unit. According to Jayasinghe's testimony, Raasendra was seen with the 'Counter Subversive Unit' (CSU) of Peliyagoda in February 1990. He recalls that while he was working as an ASP in the Ja-ela police station, Raasendra was a member of the team which came from Peliyagoda to abduct a man called Gamini Hettiarachchi who was arrested. These events fueled a strong determination in the author to investigate how politicians who gain power through public votes, officials funded by public money and invisible parasitic criminals collectively shape the fate of the others, all within a single framework or under one roof.

(See pages 58, 95 and 117 of the English version of Batalanda Commission Report)

Chapter 3

THE RULERS AND THE UNDERWORLD GOVERNMENT



J R Jayawardena, K.L. Dharmasiri, Maapitigama Buddharakkita and Wimala Wijewardena

“This was not an attack on Sarathchandra [Professor Ediriweera Sarathchandra]. It was an attack on the country. This episode neither marked the beginning nor the end of government-sponsored terror. When the U.N.P. government came to power in 1977 and initiated its work, it unleashed a wave of terror across the country. The initial actions included burning houses, destroying shops, burning factories, incidents of rape and murder.

Subsequently, the government seemed to endorse the use of thugs as a means of enforcing its agenda. In December 1977, government-sponsored thugs disrupted an S.L.F.P. meeting at Hyde Park and justified their actions by citing disruptions in meetings by Sirima in the past.

Acts of violence included attacks on picketing bank employees by thugs associated with the government who arrived in C.T.B. buses, stabbing a trade union leader, assaulting others with bicycle chains, the killing of Comrade Somapala in July 1980, bombings, the use of Colombo Municipal Council employees dressed in yellow clothes with weapons to intimidate the streets, invasions and attacks on Vidyalayankaraya and Vidyodaya students, assaults on the Aesthetic

College, dragging Colombo University students to Sirikotha, disruption of the Kekirawa JVP meeting and assaults on youth (resulting in an injured provincial councilor), an attack on a Christian priest and other fasting individuals during a protest in Galle, organized attacks during the Anamaduwā by-election, the burning of Jaffna during the Development Council election, attacks, arson, rape, and murder in Ratnapura twice under the guise of racial disharmony, bombing of the Government Nurses Association meeting in Narahenpita, invasions and vandalism of a meeting held at the Borella Youth Buddhist Association hall by artists from various fields, and a brutal attack on university students at Galle Face concerning the white paper issue. These crimes were committed with the explicit support of the government.

As they continued to take place the government did not come forward to stop them. The President and the Prime Minister justified these events as natural responses to the actions of the previous administration. When picketers were attacked, the President even mocked the word 'picketing'. This encouragement led to notorious criminals across the island engaging in thuggery to support the government and profit from it.

Additionally, the government released some criminals from prisons during this period. A specific minister became overly confident and positioned himself as the 'boss' of the thugs."

[*'Aththa'* editorial 23/07/1982]

The editorial from the *'Aththa'* paper on July 23, 1982, draws a parallel between the period of discord in Germany during the Nazi Party's rule under Hitler and the state of affairs in the country at the time, suggesting that there was little difference between the two.

The text highlights the bravery of B.A. Siriwardena, the editor of the *'Aththa'* newspaper, known as *'Aththe Sira,'* during that period. Professor Ediriweera Sarathchandra was the most prominent cultural influencer of the last century in Sri Lanka. His enormous contribution expanded to drama, literature and cultural politics. This exquisite literary giant wrote a book to help fellow countrymen understand the unrighteousness of a

man ruling under a regime disguised as 'righteous' called 'Dharmishta Society'. On 21 July 1982, a few days after publishing this book, he was delivering a public lecture at the auditorium of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress at Baudhaloka Mawatha in Colombo. An organized group of U.N.P. thugs entered the hall and brutally assaulted Prof Sarathchandra and various individuals, including Reverend Maduluwawe Sobitha, head of Kotte Naga Viharaya, T.B. Kangahaarachi, Colombo Youth Buddhist Association Chief Chairman, President's Counsel Siri Perera, the organizer of the 'Sinhala Bala Mandalaya', Gamini Kirthichandra, and people who attended the Sinhala Bala Mandalaya meeting. This is another example of how the 'uncle-nephew' combination started to silence cultural and religious leaders who sought to enlighten the people and sent shivers through the society. Following this attack, B. A. Siriwardena penned the above editorial, listing the political crimes committed up until 23rd July 1982 by the UNP government that had come to power in 1977.

The author of this book, who was a regular reader of the 'Aththa' newspaper at that time, began to take a keen interest in uncovering the crimes of the UNP regime by reading such reports. The author intended to commence writing this leftist history from a crime he witnessed.

In the second week of November 1982, Gairika Perusinghe, a sub-editor of the newspaper 'Divaina,' and photographer Nihal Chandra Kumaara went to the seventh floor of 'Transvaal Mandir' on Chitthampalam A. Gardner Road, as part of their routine news gathering. At that time, Perusinghe was responsible for covering news related to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment for the 'Divaina' newspaper. On that particular day, not only was Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe present, but also the Ministry's Secretary and the Director General of Youth Affairs, Charitha Ratwatte, were seated in their official rooms.

However, Perusinghe and Chandra Kumaara noticed a difference in these officials that they had not observed before. They discussed this issue because Bernard Perera, a youth service officer who was present, unexpectedly enquired about an article that had appeared in

the 'Ukussa' column previous weekend in the 'Irida Divaina' edition. Perusinghe recalled the contents of the column, where 'Ukussa' had indirectly referred to the 'sexual bribery' taking place in the 'Belwood' television village, which was under the control of the National Youth Service Council. The column revealed the sexual advances experienced by a well-known young female singer and another person at the village. The column had suggested that two high-ranking officials in charge of the youth service were involved in this sexual bribery scheme. Both Gairika Perusinghe and Nihal Chandra Kumara were aware that Dayasena Gunasinghe, the Chief Editor of the 'Irida Divaina' at the time, was writing the 'Ukussa' column based on credible information. However, they chose to maintain silence and did not disclose this information. They claimed not to know the identity of the columnist of the 'Ukussa'.

On the seventh floor, nothing further happened, and once they had completed their tasks, Perusinghe and Chandra Kumara prepared to leave. As they were heading towards the elevator to exit, Bernard Perera, a youth services officer, hurried to the elevator accompanied by two other rough-looking youngsters, who served as office assistants. Unbeknown to Gairika and Nihal, these three individuals were Minister Wickremesinghe's thugs. They entered the elevator without exchanging words with the two from the 'Divaina' paper. As soon as the elevator doors closed, the three thugs launched an attack on Gairika and Nihal. During stops on other floors, Bernard Perera repeatedly pressed the door close button on the keypad, allowing the other two to continue their relentless assault on Gairika and Nihal until they reached the second floor. At the second floor, they opened the door and exited. While leaving, Bernard Perera issued a warning:

"There is no point in going to the police station. There is no evidence of us beating you. However, from now on, you will not attack our minister or the ministry. But if you continue to write against our minister or the ministry, we won't just hit you; we will kill you. Remember that."

'Divaina' newspaper was owned by Upali Wijewardena at that time, who was a close relative of Minister Wickramasinghe. The newspaper's

management published a story about the attack on Perusinghe and Chandra Kumara but remained silent on the issue. Youth Service Officer Bernard Perera later rose to the position of an Assistant Director at the National Youth Service Council. The two office assistant thugs, who came from a slum in Kollupitiya, continued to loiter at the National Youth Service Council headquarters in Maharagama as official 'gangsters' on the official payroll.

It was the month of September 1983. The venue was the main hall of the B.M.I.C.H. The young men and women who hailed from various parts of the country, were gazing at the stage impatiently to see the winners of the Youth Award Festival held annually.

The author of this book who was also the main investigator of the Batalanda series, was seated close to the stage, as he had won an award for the 'best short story of the year'. The winner of the 'Mrs. World' contest of that year Mrs. Rosie Senanayake was the chief guest at this ceremony.

Devalegama Sunanda Ranasinghe had won an award for the best collection of poetry of the year. Sunanda who got on to the stage to receive the award, turned her back on Rosie Senanayake who was holding the award and greeted the audience.

Astonishingly, the dozens of flashes that should have lit up capturing the moment, were absent. Only a single flash of a camera lit up to dispel the gloom. Sunanda, smiled at the surprised audience and climbed down from the stage. At once Ranil Wickramasinghe's voice was heard. "Who is he? Apprehend him and remove the film role."

With this order, some thugs were seen capturing the cameraman. A young actress started to scream. It was actress Deepani Silva who had come to receive the award for the best actress. The author set aside our desire to receive the award and ran behind the thugs who were taking the cameraman away. The minister's thugs dragged the cameraman away from the hall, along the corridor and assaulted him mercilessly. They grabbed his camera which he was clutching hard. While he was shouting "don't, don't," one thug opened the camera, removed the film

and handed it to another accomplice and said, "Give this to the Minister. Tell him everything is under control."

By this time, the rest of the journalists who had come to record the event, had come out of the hall, as a protest against this brutality. Wickramasinghe had no option but to stop harassing the press. The thugs set the reporter free. At the end of this chaos, the author approached the cameraman concerned, down the corridor.

"What newspaper are you from? What's your name?"

"I am Gamini Silva. I work for 'Aththa' newspaper. This is a historic photo. They destroyed it. That's how it is. "Gamini Silva, a teacher who lost his job due to the July 1980 general strikes, worked as a photojournalist for 'Aththa' newspaper at the time. He was a prominent militant teacher union leader in the 60s. He was the son of D. Peter Silva and the nephew of Pohowaddaramulla Pemaloka Thero, a famous political monk of that era. He was also the brother of popular actress Deepani Silva.

It was after this incident that the author began to actively seek information about the minister who attacked a journalist from a politically powerful family and ordered the confiscation of his camera. This marks the beginning of the historical account of this period of violent politics. We will now delve into the first era of political violence and subsequently explore the second era again.

As mentioned earlier, the general election held in July 1977, the United National Party led by Jayawardene, won five-sixths of the power. Controversially, soon after the election results were released, the new Prime Minister Jayawardena announced a week's holiday for the police. It was to allow his supporters a free reign to bully the defeated political enemies. UNP followers in other electorates as well as Sunil Perera from Biyagama electorate enjoyed the tremendous political freedom that was created for the first time in the country. Throughout this week, political enemies were attacked, robbed and set on fire in all parts of the country. Prime Minister Jayawardene was reputed to have had a hearty laugh watching these atrocities.

Thereafter, from 13th August to 15th September 1977, political violence was directed against the Tamil community. President Jayawardena later took the step of appointing a commission to investigate the violent incidents that had lasted for more than a month to appease the international community. This commission, appointed on 09th November 1977, under No. N 143/177, was led by retired Supreme Court judge M. C. Sansoni and came to be known as the 'Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the events that took place between August 13th and September 15th 1977'.

According to the reports released by the 'Sansoni Commission' in July 1980, these violent anti-Tamil acts were carried out with the full support of the new government led by President Jayawardena. The appointment of this 'Sansoni Commission' by Jayawardene himself reflects his political strategy. Armed gangsters, operating under the protection of the government, forcibly stopped the Jaffna-Colombo night mail train at Anuradhapura railway station. Tamil passengers on the train were subjected to attacks, and their belongings were looted. A few hours later, organized mobs targeted Tamils residing in areas including Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Ratmalana, Badulla, Colombo, and nearby regions, looting their possessions as well.

According to the 'Sansoni Commission' report, these violent attacks resulted in the deaths of over 300 Tamil individuals, with many others sustaining injuries. The attackers employed various weapons, including knives and firearms, to perpetrate this violence. The report further reveals that a significant number of the deceased individuals died from cuts and burns, and it held that the army and police were responsible for these attacks.

In July 1980, the Commission's report was presented to the President. However, rather than following the recommendations made by the commission appointed by the President himself, he decided to release the accused army and police personnel at his own discretion. This decision deviated from the findings and recommendations of the commission.

Now, we need to explore the history of the Jayawardene government's underworld politics in the Gampaha district, specifically the Kelaniya area and Siane Korale. The history of political conflicts in Kelaniya, which has a historical legacy spanning more than 2,500 years, is unmatched in the context of 20th-century political disputes. The history of political strife in Kelaniya, which goes back 2500 years, is second to none in the 20th century.

The popular Buddhist saying, "All your sins from birth will be erased if you visit Kelaniya once" is rooted in the belief that Gautama Buddha visited Kelaniya around 500 BC. This is based upon the Sangha scripted chronicles Mahavamsa (verses 65-68) which claims that Buddha's third visit to Sri Lanka was to mediate the dispute between siblings Chulodara and Mahodara Naga Kings.

The Mahavamsa recounts another significant event in the political and religious history of Kelaniya in the 2nd century A.D. At that time, it is said that King Kelanitissa ruled the Kelani kingdom. Prince Ariya Uththiya, the king's brother, had a clandestine relationship with his Queen. When their affair was discovered, Ariya Uththiya fled from the kingdom. Subsequently, he sent a secret love letter through a monk who visited the king's palace for alms. Upon learning of the letter, the king suspected that it had been sent by a monk from the Kelaniya temple. As a punishment, the monk was executed by being drowned in heated oil. No sooner this sentence was carried out, a tsunami struck the island, causing the sea to flood. There was a belief that this natural disaster was a consequence of the punishment meted out by the king to the "Rahath Bhikkhu," and that the sea had become enraged. In an attempt to appease the sea, the king's daughter, Devi, was offered to sacrifice her life to the sea to stop the tsunami. She was placed in a boat and sent out to sea. Later, this daughter of King Kalanitissa, who landed in the south of the country, became the queen of Kawantissa (the ruler of Ruhuna), as Vihara Maha Devi, the mother of Dutugamunu, the celebrated war hero of the Mahavamsa.

Owing to this history, despite the disputes with the ruling elite and the monks, the Kelani temple continued to hold the status of a

'Rajamaha Vihara' until the end of the Kotte era. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Kelani Rajamaha Vihara fell into disrepair after being plundered and destroyed by the Portuguese. Its revival came during the reign of King Keerthi Sri Rajasingha of the Telugu Nayakkar dynasty in Kandy, but despite royal patronage, the temple did not regain its former glory.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the temple once again attracted the attention of the elite, particularly when Helena Wijewardena became the main patron. Don Philip Tudugala Wijewardena, a wealthy timber merchant residing in Sedawatte, Kelaniya, married Helena, who was originally a Christian. After their marriage, Helena converted to Buddhism and used her wealth to establish a large temple. This wealth served as an investment, and it granted the Wijewardena family the influence to control the temple and in return a path to join the ruling political elite. In 1927, Don Walter Wijewardene, son of Helena, assumed the position of chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Kelaniya temple. In that same year, he also dressed up as a Basnayaka Nilame during the Duruthu Perahera, a significant religious procession and cultural event.

Following Walter, the 'position' of Basnayaka Nilame went to another son of Helena, Don Charles Wijewardene. By this time, the Wijewardene family had acquired significant influence and control, even extending to the appointment of viharadhipatis (temple heads). In 1947, when the head of the Kelaniya Vihara, Mapitigama Dhammarakkita, passed away, the rightful inheritance should have gone to Mapitigama Sangharakkhita. However, Mapitigama Buddharakkhita, a 26-year-old who was a "close acquaintance" of the Wijewardene family, was appointed as the vihara's chief monk after Sangharakkhita was expelled from the temple.

In 1953, Don Charles wrote about the political role of Buddhist monks in a book titled 'The Revival of the Temple.' At that time, Kelani Vihara Chief monk Buddharakkhita was the leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's 'United Monk Front,' which had strong ties to the Bandaranaike family. Additionally, similar to the historical story of a

monk falling in love with a royal queen during the time of Kelanitissa, this Buddharakkhita was known for his romantic involvement with Don Charles's young wife, Wimala Wijewardhana.

The legacy of political power in the Kelaniya electoral division was intertwined with the influence of the Wijewardena family, who held power over the Kelani Vihara in Sedawatta. To understand this legacy, let's explore how the power of governance was handed down through generations. Sir Don Baron Jayatilaka, commonly known as D.B. Jayatilaka, was born in Waragoda, Kelaniya. He was a prominent Buddhist leader in the early 20th century and played a key role in the Ceylon National Union, which later evolved into the United National Party (UNP). In 1919, Sir Baron became the president of the Ceylon National Union, and from 1923, he served as a member of the Legislative Council, representing the Colombo District.

Following constitutional reforms, Sir Baron Jayatilaka was elected unopposed to the newly formed State Council of Ceylon from Kelaniya in 1931. He assumed the position of Minister of Health in that government. Sir Baron was re-elected unopposed in 1936 and continued in his role until 1942, when he was compelled to resign by Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake. This provides insight into the historical political landscape of the Kelaniya region and its connections to influential leaders.

After Sir Baron Jayatilaka 'retired from politics,' Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake aimed to position his son, Dudley Senanayake, for a prominent role in the political succession. Following the vacancy created by Sir Baron's retirement, a by-election took place in 1943 in the Kelaniya electorate.

In this by-election, the candidate from the Ceylon National Union was J.R. Jayawardena, the grandson of Helena Wijewardena. Helena, the daughter of Don Philip Tudugala Wijewardena, held a significant position in the Wijewardene family. The monks of the Kelaniya temple expressed a preference for a representative from this influential family, which was a substantial donor to the temple, to represent the Kelaniya electorate.

J.R. Jayawardena's relationship to Helena Wijewardena was publicly announced on Poya days on the radio during his candidacy. At this time, the monks in Kelaniya were divided in their support in different directions, possibly reflecting the complex political landscape and alliances of the period.

Under the leadership of the Wijewardena family, the Kelani Vihara was aligned with the United National Party (UNP) which was leaning towards the political right. During this period, the Vidyalkara Pirivena, an innovative Buddhist institution, leaned more towards socialist ideals. The chief monk at Vidyalkara Pirivena, Ven. Yakkaduwe Pannarama, was a well-known scholar who held socialist views. Sir Don Baron Jayatilaka, who had previously studied at Vidyalkara Pirivena and was a prominent Buddhist leader in the country, played a crucial role in resolving the political conflicts between Kelani Vihara and Vidyalkara Pirivena during his political leadership in Kelaniya. However, when Sir Baron Jayatilaka retired from politics, the Kelaniya Member of Parliament was J.R. Jayawardena, who had different political approaches and inclinations.

J.R. Jayawardena was often portrayed as a power-hungry politician, diverging significantly from Sir Baron's political and ideological leanings. The monks of Vidyalkara, influenced by socialist ideals, staunchly criticised the Ceylon National Congress, which later evolved into the United National Party (UNP). A primary point of contention was the perceived pro-imperialistic stance of the UNP leaders.

During the struggle for independence from colonial rule, while the political monks at Vidyalkara Pirivena advocated for full independence for the country, the UNP leaders were perceived as aiming for joint rule with the British rather than pushing for absolute independence. This ideological contrast notably contributed to the divide between the Vidyalkara monks and the UNP leadership.

In this backdrop, under the leadership of J.R. Jayawardena, the political conflicts between Kelani Vihara and Vidyalkara Pirivena escalated to the point where the monks of Vidyalkara launched

a campaign to boycott the alms offered to them. This rift was not limited to the monks but extended to the donors and supporters of both institutions. There was a significant deterioration in the relationship between the monks and donors, and this divide deepened during J.R.'s era.

During this time, D.B. Dhanapala, the principal of Dharmaloka Vidyalaya in Kelaniya, which was under the authority of Vidyalkara Pirivena, was labelled as a socialist and J.R. Jayawardena played a role in D.B. Dhanapala's expulsion from his position. As part of this political conflict Mapiitigama Dhammarakkita, who was seen as pro-Vidyalkara and the rightful heir to the leadership of the Kelaniya temple, was expelled by J.R. Jayawardena and the Wijewardena family.

During this period, the ruling elite of the country began to use religious politics more powerfully as a tool to influence and mobilize the Sinhalese-Buddhists for their political purposes. The division between Kelani Vihara and Vidyalkara Pirivena, fueled by political and ideological differences, had a significant impact on religious and political dynamics.

In the years following, the strong opposition faced by J.R. Jayawardena and other leaders of the Ceylon National Congress (later United National Party) culminated in a book titled 'Heritage of Buddhist Monks' in 1946. This book, authored by Walpola Rahula (who later became Professor Walpola Rahula), aimed to provide a counterpoint to the political ideologies and actions of the UNP leaders.

The 1947 general election marked a significant turning point in Sri Lankan politics. After winning the election, Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake appointed his 36-year-old son Dudley Senanayake as the Minister of Lands and Agriculture, a position he had held until then, a step towards promoting his own son. At the same time, he appointed Dudley's friend J.R. Jayawardena, who was 41 years old, as the Minister of Finance. This solidified what would be later referred to as 'the political legacy of the second generation of the UNP' or the 'their relatives' party' (Unge Neyange Party).

These appointments within the UNP leadership essentially concentrated political power within a few elite families, and this pattern continued for decades, influencing the political landscape of the country thereafter.

The saying 'When peace rises, the country rises - when peace falls, the country also falls' was a point of pride in Sri Lanka until the assassination of Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1959. The tragic events in the country's modern political history, particularly in the area surrounding the Kelaniya Rajamaha Vihara, tell a chilling tale. The religious influence held by the Wijewardana family over the temple eventually transformed into political power when J.R. Jayawardena emerged as a leader in the United National Party (UNP) and the political figure in Kelaniya.

In September 1959, Talduwe Somarama, a Buddhist monk, shot and killed the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. Another suspect in the assassination case was Wimala Wijewardana, who was a cabinet minister in the Bandaranaike government and also happened to be J.R. Jayawardena's aunt. The second suspect in the Prime Minister's assassination was Kelaniya Rajamaha temple chief, Mapitigama Buddharakkhita. Buddharakkhita had purchased a pistol and trained alongside the shooter, Somarama, to assassinate the prime minister by practising on a banana plant in the temple's courtyard. The assassination of Prime Minister Bandaranaike stands as a stark illustration of the considerable extent to which the political influence of the Kelaniya temple and its monks had expanded.

These events highlight the intertwined nature of religion, politics, and violence in Sri Lanka's history during that period. The Gampaha district was the ancestral home of several prominent political families in Sri Lanka, and it served as a center of power struggles among these influential families. Families like the Senanayakes (Botale walauwa in Mirigama), Bandaranayakas (Horagolla walauwa in Attanagalla), Jayakodys (Jayakody walauwa in Ganemulla), and Wijewardanas (Sedawatta walauwa in Kelaniya) were deeply involved in politics in this region, and their political influence extended beyond.

During the 1947 general election, disputes over property caused tension between the Wijewardena uncles and the Jayawardena nephews. This tension came to a head during the 1952 general election when Wimala Wijewardena contested against J.R. Jayawardena in the Kelaniya seat, turning it into a political battle within the family.

In the 1956 general election, J.R. was defeated in the Kelaniya seat by R.G. Senanayake, who was the son of F. R. Senanayake, older brother of the country's first Prime Minister, D.S. Senanayake. This result underscored the official political territory of Kelaniya, shared by both the Jayawardena and Wijewardena families. Despite his defeat, J.R. continued to maintain his presence in that seat until the July 1960 election. He remained persistent and patient, holding onto his political influence for another 17 years until 1977, when he eventually passed on that political legacy to the next generation.

Walpita Kankanamalage Martin Perera, a tavern owner residing on Church Road in Gonawala, Kelaniya, was the father of eight sons (Piyadasa, Sammy, Harold, Vincent, Cyril, Shelton, Sunil, and Tudor) and one daughter. His connection to J.R. Jayawardene began during the 1943 by-election for the Kelaniya seat in the State Legislative Assembly, which had become vacant after Sir Jayathilaka's withdrawal. Martin Perera quickly aligned himself with Jayawardene, who was closely related to the Wijewardana family, a wealthy and influential Buddhist family in Sedawatte, Kelaniya. In this political conflict, Martin Perera sided with Jayawardene. Following the establishment of the United National Party (UNP) in 1946, Martin and his family were known as ardent UNP supporters. J.R. Jayawardene, a devotee of Kelaniya Rajamaha Vihara, thereby had close ties with a group of thugs in the area. After losing the Kelaniya seat in 1956, he was determined to regain it and worked tirelessly to maintain his political power there. He successfully won the Kelaniya seat again in the March 1960 elections, with Martin Perera's family playing a significant role in his victory.

This political alliance led to the Jayawardene and Perera families putting aside their class differences and becoming close personal friends. In the meantime, Ranil Wickremesinghe, born in Kuruduwatte,

Colombo 07 in 1949, attended Royal College, Colombo, for his basic education, earned a law degree from the University of Colombo, and became a young lawyer. In contrast, Sunil Perera, the seventh son of bar owner and UNP supporter Martin Perera in Kelaniya, studied up to the ordinary level at Kelanitissa College in Gonawala and left school to become a local thug.

Indeed, Ranil Wickremesinghe chose a career in law and entered the court as a lawyer, while Sunil Perera entered the court as a criminal suspect due to his involvement in illegal activities. These two individuals took very different paths in life, one working within the legal system and the other finding himself on the wrong side of the law. Despite their different backgrounds, however, both shared a common goal: gaining social power, through hook or crook.

In 1976, during the delimitation of electoral divisions, the Kelaniya electorate was separated, and a new electorate named Biyagama was created. J.R. Jayawardena was nearing the goal he had patiently waited for for 17 years. In 1976, UNP leader Jayawardena appointed his nephew Ranil Wickramasinghe as the leader of the Biyagama electorate. Furthermore, he campaigned alongside his nephew and urged his followers to support him. It was during these campaigns that the political friendship between J.R. Jayawardene and Martin Perera extended to include Ranil Wickramasinghe and Sunil Perera at the request of J.R. When the political leadership of the electorate passed down to the next generation, it was followed by the thug leadership of the area.

Sunil being accused of leading a retaliatory attack following the killing of his elder brother, Harold Perera, who resided in Ampara, was considered an added qualification for his reputation. Subsequently, Sunil Perera became known as 'Gonawala Sunil' and was also deemed a 'UNP thug' in his hometown.

After winning the general election in 1977, he seized the opportunity provided by the leadership to celebrate the victory. His target was those who lost the election. Biyagama, which is also situated in the Gampaha district, was a stronghold of the defeated Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP). This was not only because it was the birthplace of the Bandaranaiques, but also because the Horagolla Walauwa and its properties were located in this district. He demonstrated the power of mob violence to his leaders by leading post-election violence aimed at undermining the influence of the Bandaranaiques.

Prime Minister Jayawardena introduced a new constitution in 1978, which introduced the office of an all powerful Executive President. He then declared himself the first executive president of the country.

His nephew, Ranil Wickramasinghe, was given the cabinet portfolio of Minister of Youth Affairs and Employment in that government. When Ranil was entrusted with the role of Minister of Youth Affairs and Employment, his close political follower and bodyguard, Sunil Perera, was elevated as a political thug who struck fear into the entire country and stood above the law. J.R. and Ranil's political influence stood behind him.

Let's delve into the Wijewardena-Jayawardena-Wickramasinghe family tree, which had a significant presence across the country's political landscape, and established its roots in the realm of violent politics. As mentioned earlier, Vidyalankara Pirivena was the home of the modern radical 'political monk,' causing headaches for traditional political powers in the Gampaha district and at the national level. Founded in 1875, Vidyalankara Pirivena became Vidyalankara University in 1959. In 1978, it changed its name to Kelaniya University. Since then, not only 'political monks' but also radical political students came to 'reside' in Kelaniya. The university student protests became a concern for Youth Affairs and Employment Minister Ranil and his leader. Minister Ranil, who was a prominent political leader in the newly formed 'Egalitarian Students Union' (Samavadi Shishya Sangamaya) of the UNP, especially felt its impact. The UNP government did not receive the same support from the university community as it did from the country's voters. In particular, the 'egalitarians' were disliked by the university community because they were considered 'government bootlickers' who obtained political appointments after graduation.

Politics within the university was challenging for the 'egalitarians'. As a result, Minister Ranil became increasingly frustrated with

political students. In addition to student issues, university students also participated in nationwide protests on various national matters. Protests by Kelani University students were a common sight for those travelling on the Kandy road. Because of this, UNP thugs were frequently deployed to disrupt peaceful student protests. This exposed the government's false commitment to 'good governance' to the public.

On 16th March 1978, a mob led by Gonawala Sunil came to attack the protesting students at Kelaniya University. One of the attackers was Christopher Jayathilake. Christopher incited the students, entered the university gate, and attempted to attack them. The student demonstrators united and fought back against the thugs. During the counterattack, Christopher was seriously injured and died. Christopher's colleagues, who managed to escape, claimed during the autopsy that they had gone in search of a university canteen to 'have a cup of inexpensive tea.'

There was information that on the night of 15th March, Minister Ranil had met with Gonawala Sunil to discuss how to lead this attack. This was confirmed when two special guests attended Christopher's funeral on 18th March to pay their respects. The guests were the country's head of state, J.R. Jayawardena and his nephew, Biyagama MP and Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. Addressing the funeral gathering, the President said, 'This person who has been killed is a national hero...!'

Gonawala Sunil, who wielded considerable political influence, demonstrated his thuggish power not only in Kelaniya but also in Colombo. Sunil received payment for providing security to the capital's nightclubs and acted as a mediator in conflicts between underworld groups and land disputes. He relentlessly exploited the 'political power' of the Jayawardene-Wickramasinghe family, which eventually led to a grave crime. On the other hand, it was the latest 'thug gift' to his young political friend, Ranil. This crime was a rape that shocked the country in 1979. Sunil, along with his thug friends, was a suspect in the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl.

Dr. Paul, a resident of Borella was of a Christian- Tamil origin. His daughter Sandra Paul was a 17 year old carefree girl, a socialite. One night Sunil was attracted to Sandra at a nightclub. She politely

rejected his invitation to dance. She did not imagine that turning down an invitation to dance would be the beginning of a cruel retaliation. As usual she went to the night club situated at the 'Ahas Kade' at the top floor of the Ceylinco building in Fort, Colombo. At the end of an enjoyable night, her friends called a yellow morris minor taxi parked outside for her and saw that she was dispatched home safely.

Sandra realised her mistake when the taxi was stopped by a group of thugs in the deserted Galle Face grounds. Thugs including Gonawala Sunil and Bokkawala Sunil sexually assaulted her and repeatedly raped her. Sandra realised how terrible his revenge was when she saw Gonawala Sunil among these unknown perpetrators. Because of this, she immediately recognized Gonawala Sunil in the identification parade related to the crime. You will get to read in the next chapter how a well-known criminal case of the country, i.e suspect Sunil Perera's abduction and rape of a young woman, being heard in the High Court led to great emotional distress for the President uncle and the minister nephew.

On the 5th June 1980, government and public sector workers held a national protest day across the country. They staged a protest during the lunch break, demanding a salary increase of Rs.300 per month (Rs. 10 per day) in keeping with the rising cost of living. While one group of these four hundred thousand agitators were engaged in a peaceful protest opposite the Government Supplies Department on Chittampalam Gardiner Mawatha, Agalawatta UNP members broke into the protesters with a group of thugs. The thugs were armed with bicycle chains and iron rods, led by a notorious gangster named Aluthkade Pala. On Minister Merrill's order, they attacked the protesters. This inhumane attack ended with a hand grenade. It killed Dedduvage Somapala, a worker in the supplies department. The Jayawardene government did this as a serious warning. "This is the solution to the agitations, strikes and threats under our government" was the message.

The First Development Council election was held on 04th June 1981. It was evident that the ruling UNP would not be able to secure a victory in the Jaffna electoral district (which included Kilinochchi

at that time) regardless of which other area of the country it won. Its full momentum was shifting towards the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). President JR was prepared in advance to counter this political change and sent a 500-strong 'political police force' to Jaffna beforehand. UNP leader Jayawardena sent four cabinet ministers Ranil Wickramasinghe, Cyril Mathew, Gamini Dissanayake and Festus Perera to Jaffna on 30th May. Two district ministers and two deputy ministers were also dispatched for support. On 3rd June the UNP sent a group of nearly 1500 individuals disguised as 'election officers' to Jaffna.

The arson in Jaffna began with the burning of the Jaffna library, which contained 97,000 books and was located near the government-owned inn where the four government ministers were staying. Subsequently, they set fire to and destroyed the TULF party head office, Jaffna MP Yogeswaran's house, and the office and printing press of the 'Elanadu' printing press. By Election Day, hundreds of shops in Jaffna had been looted and destroyed. In addition to this, many unarmed children, youth and elders were killed. [Read the author's book 'Jaffna Set on Fire 1981']. On 4th June, 17 ballot boxes in Kilinochchi were not received by the Jaffna DS office; they were found floating in the Elephant Pass sea. However, when the votes were counted, the Tamil United Liberation Front had won all 10 'Development Council' seats. As President Jayawardena's 'agents' left for Colombo, the flames in Jaffna city continued to burn.

Since Minister Ranil was actively engaged in violent politics, the President appointed him as Minister of Education in 1980. It was akin to aiding a jumping monkey by providing ladders. The new Education Minister, Ranil, aimed to unite students from all universities under his 'Egalitarian student Union.' To achieve this, 'egalitarian' representatives in the universities were supported by members of the UNP-affiliated National Employees' Union (Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya). As a result, conflicts among students in universities became a regular occurrence.

During one of these clashes, a group of thugs arrived in a CTB bus and a jeep and forcibly entered the student union office of the Aesthetic

College (currently Aesthetic University), where they attacked the students and vandalised the student union office. In a similar incident at Jayawardene Pura University, outsiders armed with swords injured students during a dispute between 'egalitarian students' and 'general students'(podu shishayo). In a confrontation between the 'egalitarian students' and 'general students' at Colombo University, leaders of the general students were abducted to Sirikota (the UNP headquarters) by thugs and subjected to physical assaults. Education Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe was implicated in all of these incidents.

Ranil Wickremesinghe was compelled to implement 'neo-liberal' reforms in the country's free education system within a year of assuming office as the Minister of Education. To do this, he introduced an Education Reform Proposal famously known as the 'Education White Paper' in 1981. One of the central proposals in the 'white paper' was the establishment of private universities, with a particular urgency to

create private medical colleges. Before this, only a very small percentage of students who had studied biology and passed their A-level (AL) examinations could secure admission to the two existing medical colleges. However, the 'white paper' allowed individuals who had passed three advanced subjects to gain admission to the proposed private medical colleges, provided they had the financial means. This 'white paper' was viewed as the death knell for 'free education,' not only by university students but also by school students and their parents.

On 21st August 1981, Minister Ranil presented the 'Education White Paper' to the Parliament for approval. At that time, the Parliament convened in the building currently housing the President's Secretariat, near Galle Face. On that day, tens of thousands of students, accompanied by their parents, gathered at Galle Face under the leadership of Inter

-University Student Union to encircle Parliament and oppose the White Paper proposal. Similar to today, Ranil Wickremesinghe was resolute in advancing his political agenda at any cost. As a result, he called in the cavalry and police armed with batons to disperse the anti-White Paper protesters who had assembled at Galle Face. Following the minister's orders, the police launched a brutal attack on the unarmed

students, even attempting to trample the crowd with their horses. The author of this book also participated as a protester on that day, and what is written reflects what he personally witnessed.

In 2002, Malinda Seneviratne, a well-known journalist and poet, wrote about the 'Education White Paper Protest' as follows:

"The then Education Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, presented the Education White Paper to Parliament when the opposition was almost non-existent. The students fought against it, and the UNP government had to publicly withdraw the white paper. I consider it a victory for the students, although its proposals were implemented secretly. Furthermore, this student struggle movement was fully encapsulated by the slogan 'Kolambata Kiri, Apata Kekiri,' which resonated with our youth in the late 1980s. We are all aware of the sacrifices made by the geniuses of our youth in the name of politics."

[From 'Kolambata Kiri, Apata Kekiri: Neoliberalism and the 1981 Education Reforms,' by Dr. Prabha Manuratne], courtesy of 'Research Gate'.

In 1989, when Ranil Wickremesinghe transferred from the position of Minister of Education to the role of Minister of Industry, Technology, and Science, his 'Colombata Kiri Apita Kekiri' education policy was costing the lives of thousands of Sinhala and Tamil students in the country.

On the 10th of June 1983, the Supreme Court of Colombo announced the decision of a human rights case that didn't garner much attention in the country. The primary complainant was Vivian Gunawardena, a leader of the Ceylon Samasamaja Party, as well as its female leader. Elderly Vivian is a descendant of a prominent rebel political family in Sri Lanka. Under her leadership, on 08th March 1983, they were en route to deliver a memorandum to the American Embassy in Kollupitiya, in celebration of International Women's Day. The demand in their memorandum was to remove the American military base on the Diego Garcia Islands near Sri Lanka and establish the Indian Ocean as a peace zone.

This request was a common plea from countries around the Indian Ocean, dating back to when the British government leased this group of islands to the United States in the late 1960s. In particular, they were constructing the largest naval base outside of America on the Diego Garcia Islands. There were suspicions that America had nuclear weapons stored there. Consequently, the inhabitants of countries bordering the Indian Ocean always harboured a fear of becoming victims in any potential nuclear conflict between the global powers.

The Kollupitiya police not only stopped these peaceful demonstrators but also attacked them, confiscating the banners, signs, and megaphones they were carrying. It was Vivian who went to the police to explain that the intervention was illegal. When the police could not provide satisfactory answers to Vivian's enquiries, she was physically attacked by a sub-inspector who was a 'police puppet' of the government. These were the Reserve Police Junta members who were recruited into the police through the ruling UNP's branches in 1978.

This police junta struck Vivian on the chest and pushed her, even though she was an elderly woman. The author vividly recalls the question Vivian posed to the police junta as she fell to the ground: 'Do you have a mother?'

The police arrested the female protestors and took them to the Kollupitiya police station. A high-ranking police officer who arrived there publicly berated the demonstrators, including Vivian. At that time, there was no requirement for the public to obtain permission from the police or the courts for demonstrations. It was evident that the police engaged in this unlawful act while carrying out the orders of their political employers. The demonstrators filed a petition and sought the assistance of the Supreme Court, alleging a violation of fundamental rights.

Three Supreme Court judges heard the petition and announced their verdict on Friday, the 10th June of that year. Their unanimous decision was that the police had violated the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution to the demonstrators. They ordered that the petitioners should be reimbursed the petition fee and receive compensation from

the responsible officials. This decision appeared to be a rebuke from the court to the police, who had bent the law to serve their political employers.

However, only the politicians and their henchmen who had instructed the police knew that something unprecedented in the legal history of Sri Lanka was about to unfold the next day. The Supreme Court Judges, B. S. C. Ratwatte, Percy Colin-Thomé, and J. F. A. Soza, who had presided over Vivian's case and were residing in the quarters of Kuruduwatte, Colombo, woke up on the morning of 11th June to the sounds of a great commotion outside their homes. For the first time in history, they were alarmed by the sound of stones being thrown at their residences. They were terrified by the mob shouting their names and hurling obscenities. In their quest for safety, they attempted to contact the Kuruduwatte police station, but the phone went unanswered. When they called the Police emergency number, it was switched off.

A joint statement signed by 11 judges of the Supreme Court under the leadership of Chief Justice Neville Samarakoon dated 14th June became the headline in the newspaper 'Divaina' on 15th June. The statement included the following declaration:

"No one can intimidate the judiciary, prevent it from making independent decisions, or undermine the independence of the judiciary through these events while it is carrying out its duties."

However, on the same day, the same newspaper also published a report on the attack stating that the individuals who participated in the demonstration and attacked in front of the Supreme Court judges had used buses belonging to government-owned Ceylon Transport Board depots in Ratmalana, Moratuwa, Kabewa, Avissawella, and Udahamulla. The registration numbers of the buses were also disclosed. But there was no record of who the leader or leaders were in the report.

'Divaina' reported on 23rd June on the front page that on 22nd June, exactly after 11 days after this attack, a man had visited 'Divaina' office and presented a document stating that he would personally accept the responsibility for the attack that took place in front of the residences of the judges.

'Divina' further reported that the person who had visited the office was one Lakshman Chandrasena Fernando a resident of 10/196, Old Kottawa Road, Mirihana, Nugegoda.

"Our government protects the independence of the judiciary more than any previous government." Following this statement, the newspaper provided a report on the right side, disclosing the history and identity of P. Lakshman Chandrasena Fernando. According to that report, P. Lakshman Chandrasena Fernando, also known as 'Black Lucky,' was the 29th suspect in the Criminal Justice Commission trial case, famously known as the 1971 rebellion case. After the trial, he was sentenced to 5 years of hard labor. Following his release from prison, 'Kalu Lucky' joined the United National Party (UNP). Since his release, he had been a popular speaker at UNP meetings during every election.

To support this, 'Sun' reporters posted a wedding photograph of Lakshman and Patmalatha Fernando, with the two chief guests of the wedding on November 19, 1982. Minister of Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs Ranil Wickremesinghe was on the right of the bride and groom in this picture, and Justice Minister Nishanka Wijeratne was on the left.

Sometime later, the chief investigator met P. Lakshman Chandrasena Fernando, also known as Kalu Lucky, at a friend's house. As soon as he was recognized, the investigator asked him, 'Who really advised you to do that? Didn't you know it was a historical mistake?'

"I did know. I did it because I couldn't ignore a friend's request...!"
 "Who was that friend? There's nothing wrong with saying it now...?"

"When I was in prison, he came voluntarily and provided legal advice for my case. He didn't take money. Later, when I was released from prison, I considered getting involved in politics with him."

"Who was he? Ranil Wickremesinghe?"

P. Lakshman Chandrasena Fernando, alias 'Kalu Lucky,' only nodded his head and did not speak. Perhaps, it was because he felt the 'debt' of receiving legal advice from lawyer Ranil Wickremesinghe,

even though he couldn't secure his release from the capital case without facing consequences...

On 23rd July 1983, thirteen government soldiers were killed by a landmine planted by Eelamists in Jaffna. The standard procedure when a soldier is killed in action is to hand over the body to the next of kin, and the funeral is conducted in the soldier's village with military honours. However, by order of the President, who was also the Commander-in-Chief, the bodies of the 13 soldiers who died in Jaffna were brought to the Borella cemetery in Colombo on the 24th, and a mass funeral was organized. Jayawardene's 'mass funeral' at Borella ultimately sparked a major riot.

Minister Cyril Mathew's National Workers Union thugs exploited the situation, looting shops belonging to Tamil people and subsequently setting the buildings on fire. Tragically, Tamil individuals were burned alive, and women were subjected to rape. This violence spread throughout the country. Within two days, fifty-three Tamil political prisoners in Welikada jail were brutally killed. As confirmed by Camilla Lakmali Perera (WANESA TV, youtube, refer to Chapter 11), her father Gonawala Sunil, a henchman of Minister Ranil, also participated in the killing of these prisoners.

It is crucial to note that while these robberies, rapes, arsons, and murders were occurring across the country for a week, President J.R. was 'watching' the destruction from his residence without calling upon the security forces of the country to control the situation. As Sarath Amunugama, who was the secretary of his ministry at that time and later became a minister, wrote in his autobiography, foreign investors in this country left, and potential investors chose not to come due to the impact of this 'Black July.'

Ranil Wickramasinghe, the country's Youth Affairs Minister, now had a serious challenge. The physical ruler of his Biyagama electorate, the most powerful supporter and traditional party member is the second accused in a rape case that shocked the country. He must be saved somehow for the future! No matter how much help is received from his political patron, Sunil had no escape from the law. In 1981, the High

Court found Gonawala Sunil guilty of rape and sentenced him to 15 years imprisonment. On the advice of Minister Wickramasinghe, Sunil submitted an appeal, but it was rejected. Now the biggest challenge of the UNP leadership was to free Gonawala Sunil.

DHARMISHTA'S 'GONAWALA PARDON' TO A CRIMINAL



Photo taken at Gonawala Sunil's child's birthday party, with Ranil Wickremesinghe

“On the occasion of Sri Lanka's 50th anniversary of universal suffrage, a highly tense situation arose among prisoners in several island prisons regarding the procedures followed by the Ministry of Justice in pardoning 1000 prisoners on the 7th. This pardon is referred to as the ‘Gonawala Pardon’.

Although there were hundreds of prisoners who were already serving seven to eight years in jail and serving sentences of 10-15 years after being convicted in cases of murder, attacks, etc. criminals who were convicted of rape, theft and other crimes and sentenced to more than 10 years in prison had been released without releasing them. According to the report, on the 8th July, 1981 a group of Mahara Prison inmates climbed the trees within the prison grounds to protest against the amnesty system.

Gonawala Sunil, who was sentenced to 7 years in prison, convicted of rape and charged with hard labor, had served his sentence for less than two months. According to an order of the Ministry of Justice, he was also released. Because of this, the pardoning and release of these

prisoners has started to be known as 'Gonawala Pardon' by fellow prisoners. Individuals convicted of theft, rape, robbery, assault, etc., have been released under this system. However, the surprising aspect is that hundreds who were in prison due to failure to pay maintenance have not been released based on this pardon, causing astonishment among prison officials themselves."

[Aththa front page, Wednesday 15 July 1981].

Although the 'Aththa' newspaper reported that Walpita Kankanamalage Sunil Perera received a special pardon from the President, slightly different information related to this "rescue" is found in the report of the Batalanda Commission.

"Apart from his political activities, Gonawala Sunil seems to have had a criminal record. In the late 1970s, he raped the daughter of one Dr Paul. After trial Gonawala Sunil had been convicted and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. In the appeal too, his conviction had been affirmed, and the appeal had been dismissed. However, soon after the hearing of the appeal, Gonawela Sunil had received a pardon from the Government of that day, and accordingly he had been released from prison. The circumstances under which he received the pardon is still in doubt. Apart from this incident, Gonawela Sunil is said to have been involved in the pilferage of oil which was been transmitted through an underground pipe from Kolonnawa to Sapugaskanda. However, it appears that no criminal action had been instituted against him. Notwithstanding his criminal record, Gonawela Sunil had been appointed an All Island Justice of the Peace.

From all the evidence which was placed before this Commission and all other material to which this Commission had access to, it is quite clear that, Gonawela Sunil was a person who had the blessings of the powers that be."

[Page 80, Batalanda Commission Report]

Both these reports confirm that Gonawala Sunil Perera, who was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for rape, received a special pardon from the President.

But there is a discrepancy between the reports about the duration of his imprisonment and of his fellow prisoners, who were released with him. Before presenting our conclusion about this, let's weigh the political "weight" of Gonawala Sunil at that time.

The fate of Gonawala Sunil, who had been sentenced to imprisonment with hard labor, appeared to the President Uncle, as a great disaster for Martin Perera's 'naughty son,' who had been a loyal henchman throughout his political career. Sunil, on the other hand, was an indispensable figure in the President's future 'political projects' at the national level. For nephew Ranil, Sunil's imprisonment meant a long-term loss of a 'combatant' in future politics, someone who was going to fight shoulder to shoulder in upcoming political battles. It was also a loss of the most powerful supporter in the Biyagama electorate. So far, the only goal of both the uncle and the nephew was to somehow secure this criminal's release from jail to lead future politics to victory.

At this time, a celebration was on schedule, to enable their entire progeny to enjoy the benefits of the political power comfortably achieved by the government. It was the silver jubilee of the universal franchise which was introduced to Sri Lanka on 7th July 1931. During 35 years out of the 50 years after receiving universal franchise, the country was ruled by the Jayawardane family and their relatives. While winning the majority of the country's popular vote, the ruling gang was well supported by thugs like 'Gonawala Sunil'. Both President Jayawardane and Minister Wickramasinghe had a strong desire to express gratitude for this symbolically. For this, Jayawardane had included a powerful weapon in the 1978 Constitution. That is the power of the Executive President to pardon a person convicted by any court of the country under Article 34[1] of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. It appeared that both of them had agreed to use the special powers of the executive president of the country for this purpose in July 1981.

To divert the public's attention, the government made preparations for the entire country to celebrate the 'Universal Golden Jubilee' well in advance. The UNP government invited the entire country to celebrate

50 years of independence, ordering government institutions to mark this Golden Jubilee in a festive manner. While the people of the country were enjoying the aftermath of universal franchise, uncle President and Nephew Ranil prepared to issue a very special order to the court for the first time in the legal history of the country. This order was to exercise the power of the executive president to release any criminal in the country.

However this power could not be exercised arbitrarily. Before granting this 'Presidential Pardon' to a convicted criminal, the President must call for a report from the judge who tried the criminal case.

Thereafter, the report should be sent to the Attorney General for advice. Afterwards the report should be forwarded to the Minister of Justice. Only after this tedious process can the president pardon the criminal of his choice.

President Jayawardene announced that to give more meaning to the jubilee celebrations he will be pardoning selected prisoners. He categorised the eligibility for the pardon as follows:

“Those who had received short sentences and those in the last stages of their sentences will be pardoned on the 7th July”. However, a special group of prisoners outside this category were also designated. “Those convicted of rape for the first time and had received a 15 or less years imprisonment”.

Only one prisoner in Sri Lanka's prisons qualified to receive this awesome 'presidential pardon' and that was Sunil Perera alias Gonawala Sunil who resided at Palliya Road, Gonawala, Kelaniya. Because it was an apology specifically made for Gonawala Sunil, it still has a nickname "Sunil Pardon" in the legal community!

Now, let's examine the differences between the 'Aththa paper' report and the Batalanda commission report. According to the 'Aththa paper,' Sunil Perera was sentenced to 7 years in prison, while the Batalanda report stated it was 15 years. Here, we believe that the term of imprisonment in the Batalanda report was more accurate. This is because most of the senior police officers who assisted the Batalanda

Commission were well aware of this well-known rape case, and the commission reported the information provided by these police officers. Unfortunately, the Batalanda report failed to include information about the other prisoners released on 7th July 1981, or about the prisoners who opposed the "Sunil Pardon" by staging protests inside the prisons. Only 'Aththa' on 15th July reported regarding the fellow prisoners' protests. The author's attempts to find the court records of this matter was unsuccessful as no records pertaining to this case were said to be available. Apart from 'Aththa,' the rest of the media gave only a lukewarm response to the country's president pardoning a known criminal. However, the victims of the criminal, the entire family of Sandra Paul, were scared to death and fled the country.

Those engaged in anti-UNP politics in Biyagama sought divine intervention. But Biyagama MP and Cabinet Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe ordered celebrations to welcome Sunil, who was released from prison. The necessary facilities were provided through their respective ministries. While the silver jubilee of universal suffrage was being celebrated across the country, the UNP party members of Gonawala were preparing to welcome their hero by waving flags and displaying banners throughout the village.

After 13 years of this incident, i.e. a day in 1994, the editorial board of 'Raavaya' in a discussion decided to question the founder of the Supreme Executive, the legality of the infamously known "Sunil Pardon"! How was it possible to grant a presidential pardon to a country's criminal without any scrutiny etc? Accordingly the retired president J. R. Jayawardene was requested for a news interview. The then 92-year-old political rogue, who was hopefully waiting for nirvana answered the questions of 'Raavaya' as follows:

The journalist: Why did you pardon Gonawala Sunil?

Former President J. R. Jayawardane: What's wrong with that?

The journalist: He is convicted of rape. Why was he forgiven?

Former President Jayawardane: Because I had the power to forgive!

The journalist: Yes. You have the power from the constitution.

Former President Jayawardane: So what did I do wrong? I had the power. I exercised that power.

[From Nelson S. Perera's interview with the former President J.R. Jayawardane - 'Raavaya' in 1994]

Chapter 5

THE CRIMINAL ARRIVES FROM THE PRISON ON AN ELEPHANT'S BACK

The concept of Dharmishta Samajaya (righteous society) could be interpreted in many ways.

A society is righteous if justice is done to all who belong to it. Making human rights available to everyone is considered as fulfilling social justice. There is a general consensus on what human rights are although there is a difference of opinion about the way to create a just society.

[Dharmishta Samajaya, Ediriweera Sarathchandra, 1982 print]

A grand tamasha was organised all around Kelaniya to welcome 'Sunil Aiya' who was returning home after being granted a special presidential pardon. 'Welcoming celebrations' were organised in every junction in the area where there were tables placed with soft drink bottles and flower pots. In addition, there were banners and posters in some places with the inscription, "We warmly welcome the freed hero of Gonawala" but there was a secret behind this reception. It is the fact that the UNP party members in the area had known about Sunil's release for a long time and that the party leader of Biyagama seat had provided necessary funds for it. In short, it was an organised 'release carnival' with political patronage..

Another secret came out as a result of the hurried organisation of festivities that all the UNP members of the Biyagama electorate knew about. Minister Ranil had conveyed them in advance the message that "no matter what crimes are committed by our party supporters, a presidential pardon will be granted in a few months". One of the

highlights of the welcome ceremony was 'Brother Sunil' riding an elephant from Gonawala Junction to the village. The man riding the elephant was sending a message to Sri Lanka, "I am the elephant's man. I am as powerful as the political elephant. No matter what I do, I am a man who lives like an elephant." How much pride must he have felt with the way he was treated being a well-known criminal of a country? Will he not think of sacrificing his life for his party and leaders in the future?

However, Sunil Perera's daughter denied the story that her father came on an elephant when he was released from jail during a discussion on 'Venasa TV'.

"It is true that there was a village festival to welcome my father. The people of the village love and respect him so much. It is a lie that he came on an elephant." (Camila Lakmali Perera: Venasa TV, You Tube).

The author's conclusion is that Camila's memories of the ceremonies held to welcome her father were fading, as she was a little girl at the time. According to the villagers of Sapugaskanda the author spoke to in 1986, on the day Sunil Perera was released from prison, he rode the biggest elephant from near the Kelani temple to the village. When examining the subsequent political decision taken by the villagers, it is clear that he was accepted by the villagers of Gonawala as a great hero. Making a rapist a national hero is not something a politician can do alone; it requires public support as well as media support.

The UNP leader of the electorate suggested that Sunil should be appointed as the Chairman of Gonawala Gramodaya Mandalaya to restore Sunil's reputation after being freed. The party members of the Biyagama electorate raised their hands and approved the leader's proposal. He made this proposal to inform the country that 'Sunil's Pardon' was a fair and justified political decision. It aimed to erase the stain on a man who committed rape and several crimes, preventing him from being labeled a criminal forever.

Wickramasinghe was well aware that bringing Sunil into public politics would pose no danger to himself or the party leadership. He

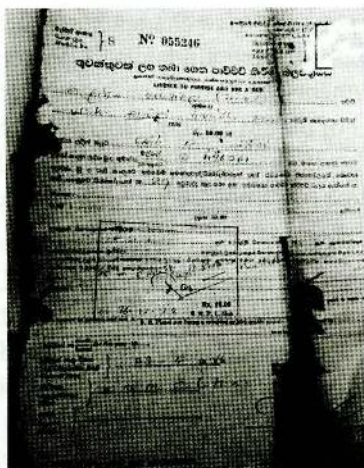
knew too well that the son of a bar owner, who was educated up to the G.C.S.E. level at Kelanitissa College in Gonawala, will never contest against him in the Biyagama seat. Accordingly, Gonawala Gramodaya Mandalaya, which met in July 1981, 'unanimously appointed the great philanthropist, Sunil Perera alias Gonawala Sunil as its chairman.' The village representative who suggested Sunil for the post said that there is no person as suitable as 'Sunil Aiya' in the area, let alone in the country, to pressure the government to allocate funds for the village development. He also warned that if his proposal was not passed, he will resign and that it is then inevitable that the other members of the Board will become 'rice- eating cattle'. The representative who confirmed the proposal said that he has taken a historic decision and that all should obey the party leadership keeping in mind that this personal request is not only from the party leader of Biyagama seat but also from the country's executive president!

No sooner had Sunil Perera assumed office as the Honourable Chairman of Gonawala Gramodaya Mandalaya, he officially became a 'Justice of Peace' (an honorary appointment made by the Minister of Justice to a particular jurisdiction under the judicature act No.2 of 1978), for the entire island! It was then that the opposition parties of Gonawala realized the political manoeuvre of the UNP leaders. Sunil, who was a criminal, not only had the power to give character certificates to the other people of the country but attesting affidavits, documents, photos and such other official documents that are submitted by the general public. He was also a member of the "Mediation Board" which resolves minor complaints and disputes in the area. There is no doubt that the people of Gonawala at this time remembered the idiom judge, jury and executioner.

Now Gonawala Sunil is not a criminal in appearance. Dressed in white, he is the special guest for the opening of stalls in the temples of the area. The indispensable 'chief guest' at church feasts. He was the provider of free coffins or funds for seventh day alms-giving conducted at funeral homes of the poor in the village, as well as the 'guest of honour' where Buddhist sermons were delivered. The Gramodaya Chairman's public day was held in the morning for 6 days a week.

Sunday was the day when members of the United National Party met their leader of the area.

He dedicated himself to public service even foregoing his meals, as these meetings went on from dawn to dusk. Appointments, transfers, obtaining government contracts, admitting children to popular schools were all done by the Chairman Sunil Perera. One telephone call and presto! Job done! For this public service, he received medium-sized construction contracts from the government. In particular, all the contracts of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Employment and Education, where his closest 'boss' held ministerial positions. Everything had to go through Gonawala Sunil. In addition, the boss also gave him government transport contracts. For this he started a transport service called 'Camilla Transport Service' in the name of his daughter. A hotel by the name "Samanala Hotel" was opened in Kiribathgoda town. With the help of the 'boss', four lorries were bought for that purpose. For all this help and patronage, the party only expected from him that somehow J.R Jayawardene would be the executive president again in the upcoming presidential election in October 1982. Whenever Sunil was reminded about this, he swore more than a hundred times in the name of his beloved mother that he would dedicate his life to it.



Copy of Gun licence
issued to Gonawala Sunil

Chapter 6

RANIL IN JAFFNA



Jaffna Public Library after it was burnt

“The destroyed library building stands as alarming evidence of the magnitude and cruelty of the racial riots. The heartless destruction of the library deeply wounded the sentiments of our brethren in the north. Every citizen of this country, regardless of politics, nationality, or religion, should unite to denounce such atrocities.”

(‘Remembering the burning of Jaffna public library’, Counter Currents, Kumarathasan Rasingam 25 May 2022)

The above extract is from a private letter penned by H.A.I. Ian Gunathilaka, the esteemed Librarian of the Peradeniya University, a few days after the torching of the Jaffna Library to a friend residing in Jaffna. He was considered an icon in the history of libraries in Sri Lanka and is internationally renowned for his expertise. Gunathilaka was involved as an advisor during the library's initial stages of establishment. Despite his anger following the library's burning, he chose to channel it constructively by becoming an advisor in the rebuilding process.

For two weeks starting from 31st May 1981, the political authorities and UNP- affiliated thugs from Kurunegala committed horrific crimes in the North. Among these, the most despicable act was the destruction of the library, which housed rare Ola leaf books and around 97,000 other invaluable volumes. This heinous act significantly damaged the country's global reputation and served as a primary catalyst for the commencement of the war. Following this event, the leader of the LTTE capitalised on it to garner international sympathy and solicit support from Tamils living abroad. During that time, only Gamini Disanayaka, Minister of Lands, Land Development, and Mahaweli, along with Cyril Matthew, Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs, were implicated as the perpetrators of this crime.

The author's investigation into the burning of the library commenced in August 1993 while operating as a war reporter for 'Raavaya' in areas held by the LTTE. While stationed in Jaffna, as detailed in the report by the author's investigation titled 'The Burning of Jaffna 1981,' he obtained eyewitness testimonies outlining how lawmakers and law enforcers dispatched from Colombo orchestrated the library's arson. Crucial evidence emerged indicating that during the library's conflagration, four ministers holding significant portfolios were present at the nearby rest house. Alongside the previously mentioned individuals, Ranil Wickramasinghe (Education and Youth Affairs) and Festus Perera (Fisheries) were reportedly in the vicinity, though no official reports substantiate these claims. President Ranasinghe Premadasa, upon assuming leadership of the UNP, in a public speech hinted about the culprits responsible for the wanton act.. Speaking at a Muslim Collage in Puttalam in October 1991 in the aftermath of the impeachment against him sponsored by UNP dissidents Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Disanayake reportedly stated in 1991 at a meeting in Chilaw that members of his own party were responsible for setting the Jaffna Library ablaze in 1981.

“In 1981, during the district development council elections, several members of our party accompanied by a large crowd from various regions of the country engaged in unspeakable crimes in the north, disrupting the election process. Now, these same individuals pose a

hindrance to our progress. To discern those responsible for destroying the invaluable book collection and the library, one might find clues by examining the faces of our opponents within the party.”

[Who Burnt the Jaffna Library? 18/07/2021, The Island]

However, despite this acknowledgment, no apology was issued for the crimes committed by his colleagues. Upon assuming power in 2006 from Podu Jana Peramuna, President Mahinda Rajapakse made the following statement:

“For all the atrocities, murders committed in the North, rigging of elections, and setting the Jaffna library on fire in 1981, the UNP government is to be held responsible.” He referenced a renowned Tamil poet, Prof. M.A. Nuhuman, and quoted a line from his poem addressing the torching of the library: “Destruction of the Jaffna library, held in veneration by the citizens of Jaffna, is like shooting Lord Buddha.”

06, In December 2016, the then Prime Minister, Ranil Wickramasinghe, asked expressed regrets for the burning of the Jaffna Library 35 years ago, attributing it to the UNP, which he headed. However, he did not specifically acknowledge his contribution to those events. The Hansard 3092 of 6 December 2016 records it as; 06, Desember 2016, page number 3092.

“...during our time the library was set on fire. We regret that. We have apologised. You too stand up and apologise for the wrongdoings of you...”

Retired Senior DIG Tassie Seneviratne wrote in 2014 as follows: “While I was working in Colombo, a Police Sergeant, who had worked alongside me, confessed that he set the library on fire by pouring petrol from a barrel and igniting it with a match. At that time, he was stationed at the Jaffna Police Station. Over time, the weight of this unfortunate incident became unbearable for him. He recognized that he had been led astray and carried the burden of guilt. He confided in me, trusting that I would understand. Recently, I discovered that he had also confided in another Senior Police Officer, a friend of mine, who is now a retired DIG. I didn't pressure the sergeant to reveal the names of

those responsible. It was widely known that the individuals behind the burning of the Jaffna Library during the development council elections, and the resulting complications, were members of parliament and ministers sent on election duty.”

(‘Burning of the Jaffna Public Library: Whodunit?’, Tassie Seneviratne, 01 June 2014, Colombo Telegraph)

It is highly noteworthy that retired SSP Tassie Seneviratne disclosed these facts, even after a lapse of 35 years. However, as an experienced police officer, he overlooked several crucial enquiries when speaking with the sergeant. Firstly, who ordered you to set fire to the library? Secondly, which senior officials were present at the time of the incident? Thirdly, did any politicians order you or others to carry out this task? Fourthly, were there any politicians present at the scene? These are vital questions that demand answers. However during June 1981, while the library was set ablaze, and while the Jaffna town was on fire, the Hansard of 10 June 1981 recorded the 4 ministers who were present.

“Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the chance to go to Jaffna on the advice of the party leader Srimavo Bandaranaike. There I met the chief incumbent of the Naga Vihara, the Bishop of Jaffna and some civilians. While the district council elections were in progress, Cyril Mathew, Gamini Dissanayaka, Festus Perera and Ranil Wickramasinghe were present. This was disclosed by the religious leaders and the citizens. They also divulged that close to 150 trained election officers were ordered out of the district by these 4 Ministers.”

(10th June Hansard of the parliamentary meeting held at 3.00 pm.)

During the parliamentary session on June 9th, when the above allegation was made by MP for Gampaha S. D. Bandaranayaka, all four relevant ministers were present in Parliament. Minister Gamini Dissanayaka, on that day, acknowledged and apologised solely for the burning of Jaffna parliamentarian Yogeswaran's house. A two-day parliamentary debate unfolded on the atrocities committed in Jaffna. The then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Amirthalingam, and other MPs extensively detailed the nature of these atrocities, specifically

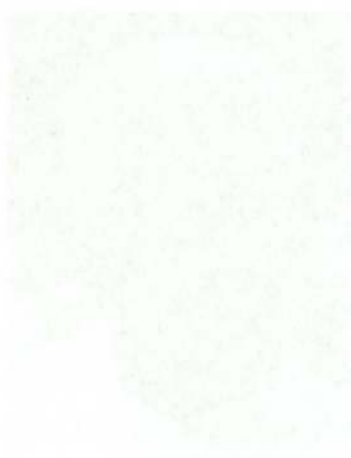
highlighting that two children and four adults had been murdered. It is on record that while these MPs were addressing the house, UNP Ministers and parliamentarians disrupted the proceedings and directed insults at them. It is also noteworthy that during this time there was a censorship that prevented the media reporting these incidents to the people of the south.

As the accusations of leading criminal activities were directed at them, none of the Ministers, including Ranil Wickramasinghe, refuted any of the claims, as verified by the Hansards. Among the four Ministers implicated in leading these actions, only Ranil Wickramasinghe is still alive. The act of setting ablaze the Jaffna Library should be considered as one of the most heinous crimes on an extensive list attributed to him.



S. D. Bandaranayake, former MP
for Gampaha (1952-70, 1977-89)

The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be a paragraph of text, possibly a chapter heading or a section introduction, but the specific words and sentences cannot be discerned.



AN ATTACK ON WIJEWEEERA'S DELGODA RALLY



Rohana Wijeweera, leader of the JVP addressing a gathering

"When we were getting ready to organise the Delgoda rally, messages were received from the UNP members of the village saying that we could not engage in politics as we pleased in the Biyagama electorate and that instead we should choose another area. They gave a very daring impression to us when they said 'even if we do nothing, the seat 'boss' [Ranil Wickramasinghe] and thug [Gonawala Sunil] will not allow' Wijeweera to conduct meetings. But we went ahead with the meeting having prepared for the challenge. I took the chair at the meeting. We were prepared with stones and clubs under the platform."

(From a video interview with JVP founding member Delgoda Raja in 2008)

One of the main responsibilities of Gonawala Sunil, who received the presidential pardon [Sunil Pardon], was to suppress and intimidate the enemies of the UNP government. Nominations were accepted on 17th September 1982, a month before the first presidential election to be held in Sri Lanka. It was 14 months after Sunil Perera received

'Sunil Pardon'. Even before Jayawardene took office for the second time, he made Sirima Ratwatte Dias Bandaranayake, who was the prime minister of the country twice and the world's first female prime minister, a political prisoner by depriving her of her civic rights for 7 years.

Jayawardene was well aware that it would be no easy task finding a successor to be the candidate, once Sirima Bandaranaike lost her civic rights. To replace Sirima Bandaranaike, her family put in a lot of effort to find a trustworthy and popular family member like her. Finally Hector Kobbekaduwa, a former Minister of Agriculture and a close relative of the Ratwatta family was chosen.

Other prominent candidates in this presidential election were Colvin R de Silva of the Sama Samaja Party, Vasudeva Nanayakkara of the New Sama Samaja Party and Rohana Wijeweera who represented the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. Out of these three, Wijeweera was the only candidate who could have reduced Jayawardane's expanding vote base. He was leading his party in a huge campaign. The UNP leadership responded to this with political thuggery. By then there was a psychosis of fear developing in the country with the way thuggery was used during the District Council Elections in 1981. The ballot boxes were stolen by storming into the Jaffna Kachcheri and the Jaffna library was set alight. The main opposition in the country, the SLFP, did not have the strength to face any of this. It too was divided within the Bandaranaike family at that time.

The JVP had considerable power in the Gampaha district. During that period not only the JVP head office but also the national education camps were held near Gampaha city. A large number of full-time members gathered from Gampaha district were scattered all over the country and engaged in JVP politics. Ranil Wickramasinghe, the UNP leader in Gampaha district, was aware of this. He wanted to teach Wijeweera a lesson in Gampaha District. He was waiting for presidential candidate Rohana Wijeweera to come to a meeting in Biyagama seat in Gampaha District, where his most capable criminal gang leader for the task lived.

In just one night in the first week of October 1982, JVP posters were put up not only all over Delgoda city but also in the Biyagama seat. They announced, 'Wijeweera, Vaas, Gamanayake will address you in Delgoda'. These posters were torn down en masse at many places in the seat and new posters from the UNP were stuck over them. The JVP was also prepared to face the attacks. Their supporters were called for security, not only from the Gampaha district but also from the Colombo district. On the morning of the meeting, a group of Jeeps were roaming around the city of Delgoda. They were moving in a threatening manner to instil fear into the minds of JVP supporters who were dressed in red and were canvassing from house to house. At the same time, rumours spread that 'Gonawala Sunil' would come to "watch" Wijeweera's meeting. In the evening, frightened by the news, the traders closed their shops early. Electricity was also cut off in the city. All these were warnings that the meeting would be attacked. However, JVP leaders sent an assault team to Delgoda under the leadership of 'Ragama So-me'. After being released from prison for taking part in the 1971 rebellion, 'Ragama So-me' chose full-time politics in the JVP and became the leader of its combat battalion. He became a 'hero' for breaking jails and releasing JVP prisoners while they were being transported. He was also a close friend of Wijeweera.

The organisers started the meeting at 04.00 pm. There was no specific time when Wijeweera would come to address the meeting. As he addressed about two dozen meetings a day, the speakers continued their speeches one after the other in order to 'drag' the meeting until he arrived. However, only the JVP members were around the stage due to fear for their lives. The rest of the people were waiting impatiently from a distance to see what would happen in the next moment, more than being interested in the speeches.

Around 7 p.m., the motorcycle parade escorting Wijeweera entered the premises, followed by the red Mitsubishi cab carrying the group led by Matara Amare who was providing security for him. No sooner the motorcade neared the stage, the speaker stopped his speech and started chanting slogans. After getting out of the vehicle, Wijeweera got on the stage and went straight to the microphone. He commenced his speech,

talking as fast as he came. He could only speak for a few minutes, a storm of bricks aimed at the stage were pelted from the side of the road. Then the attackers entered the street and directly attacked the platform. While his bodyguards protected him from the attack, Wijeweera continued his speech by challenging Ranil [Wickramasinghe] and Sunil [Gonawala]. His followers, who were well prepared near the stage, carried stones and clubs and went forward to face the attackers. Their leader 'Ragama So-me' was leading the counter-attacks. The thugs who had joined Gonawala Sunil did not expect this organized counter attack at all. They had no choice but to flee.

The attack stopped after a few minutes. Instead, the sound of speeding jeeps was heard. "Not only Gonawala Sunil but even if his biggest boss's (J. R. Jayawardane's) entire thug army comes, we will not stop this meeting, leave alone our political journey," said Wijeweera excitedly. Yet, it was around five years later that Gonawela Sunil realised that this horrendous act was to be accrued to his "karmic record of crimes"!



J R Jayawardena, Gonawala Sunil and others

Chapter 8

VIJAYA KUMARATUNGA JAILED TO PROTECT THE DYNASTY

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Hangman, go ahead and hang,
Hang us on the thorny tree

Screaming for justice
Is the sin that we committed
For which we were shoved into a torture chamber
But remember this;
When you gag and murder one,
A countless number will be born

It is those who love the country and a people
Who will raise arms against wrong(doing)
And they who adhere to notions of nonviolence
Are those who are spineless, stupid cowards.

If the punishment in the torture chamber is too soft
hangman, hang us
Hang us on the tree of thorns in hell.

Singer : Vijaya Kumaratunge
Composer : Gunadasa Kapuge
Lyrics : Sunil Ariyaratne
(Translated by Malinda Seneviratne)



Vijaya Kumaratunge

A new political drama was being planned by the powerful uncle and nephew immediately after the October '82 presidential election, imprisoning prominent leaders of the defeated Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Jayawardena, uncle and nephew Ranil wanted to perpetuate the power of the Jayawardene family so ensure that the UNP continued to retain power somehow. These two wanted to wipe out the politics of the SLFP, which had already been severely undermined but then a group of people who were not from the Bandaranaike family were coming forward to energize the SLFP, which was severely wounded and was bleeding. They were not part of the country's traditional elite but from a left-wing political background. For Jayawardena, the first element to be destroyed now, was this radical leadership of the SLFP. Vijaya Kumaratunga, who had joined the SLFP, started politics from the Samasamaja Party, was married to Chandrika, the younger daughter of the Bandaranaike family. Jayawardena was suspicious of his political motives. He believed that this popular actor could be an obstacle to his political goal of 'wiping out socialism' from Sri Lanka.

This situation was more prominent during the presidential election in 1982. A group outside the Bandaranaike family were going all out to ensure the victory of Hector Kobbekaduwa. They made a serious effort to bring the winning SLFP candidate Hector Kobbekaduwa to power. Its leader was Vijaya Kumaratunga. At that time he was the national organizer of the party. However, Anura Bandaranaike, who was part of this group, held a strong grudge against Kumaratunge. Factors like caste (Vijaya - Durawa caste, Chandrika -Govi caste), class (Vijaya was from a poor family in Katana), and his suitability to hold the leadership of the party would have contributed towards this.

Perhaps the close friendship between nephew Ranil and Anura who was a close friend during school days, may have mattered. Political critics suspected that based on this 'Royal College old-boy ties', Anura might have written the dialogue for the new political drama of uncle and nephew, based on the political teaching that 'the enemy of the enemy is a precious friend'.

“Mr. Vijaya Kumaratunge was arrested yesterday evening by the Secret Police and the Army.”

A senior officer from the CID informed 'Divaina' that Kumaratunga was arrested based on orders received from high-ranking authorities. This action was in response to statements purportedly made on public platforms during the presidential election and also regarding the circulation of a rice ration book among the public during that period.

Yesterday, at approximately 2:00 pm, a considerable contingent of army, secret police, and police vehicles assembled in front of Vijaya Kumaratunga's residence on Rosemead Place, Colombo. Armed forces then entered Mr. Kumaratunga's house.

Undercover police officers conducted a search of the residence that lasted for over two hours before preparing to take him away. ['Divaina' newspaper, 20th November 1982]

No sooner the presidential election was over, Ranil and J.R. announced that a coup was in the air to topple the government unlawfully and to grab the power of the UNP by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. A pledge was made to arrest the suspects immediately and brought before the law. Accordingly, on 20th October 1982, a special military team was deployed and Vijaya Kumaratunga was arrested. At the same time, hundreds of Vijaya's followers, including Ratnasiri Wickramanayake [later Prime Minister] Ossie Abeygunasekara, Felix Perera and Marvin Senaratne, were arrested by the military and police.

There are many accounts about the fate of Vijaya who was arrested by the army. But the author has chosen the most credible method to inform the reader about this as he is confident about the veracity of this account. When Vijaya Kumaratunga was sent to Welikada prison from military custody, the prison superintendent was Edither G. Perera. After 26 years of this incident, he wrote his memory in the 'Lanka Guardian' magazine as follows;

“In 1982, I was in charge of Welikada prisons. One day, during the latter part of the year, Hr. L.P. Delgoda, Commissioner of Prisons, telephoned about 12.30 p.m. and told me that he was coming to my

office. When he came, he informed me that Vijaya Kumaratunga, who was classified as a detainee, would be brought, by the Army, to be held at the Welikada prison and was to be kept incommunicado. He was not allowed to communicate with other prisoners.”

In a prison where there were over 3,000 persons, both convicted and unconvicted, this was a stupendous task. After much discussion Mr. Delgoda and I decided to locate him in ‘S’ Ward, which was situated behind the young offenders’ section. It had been renovated recently. The chief jailor was promptly instructed to get this ward cleaned and ready.

At 2.00 p.m., Mr. Delgoda informed me that the army had brought Vijaya to Prison Headquarters and that he was to be sent to Welikada Prison. By the time Vijaya was brought to the Welikada gate, the news had spread and both the staff at prison headquarters and prisoners had congregated to see this popular, charismatic film idol and politician with a bright future, who was the son-in-law of Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Due to this situation I avoided the normal routine of an admission and instructed the staff to finalise all formalities in the main office.

As the ‘S’ Ward was being cleaned I decided to locate Vijaya temporarily on the floor of ‘H’ Ward and took precautions to keep the doors locked, since he had to be held incommunicado. Felix Perera and Ossie Abeygunasekera were already at the Welikada Prison. At about 4.00 p.m. Felix Perera was transferred to Colombo remand prison. At about 5.30 p.m. when the ‘S’ Ward was ready, Vijaya was taken to this ward.

“When I asked him whether he wanted his dinner, he said no. He was somewhat apprehensive to have food served in the prisons. Vijaya was tense when he was brought by the Army, but in the prison he was relaxed. He told me that he could not sleep when he was in Army custody and he was disturbed since the Army officers were constantly walking up and down the corridor. Nevertheless, after a few days, I observed that Vijaya was feeling the effects of solitary confinement.”

The government dubbed him a Naxalite and issued a special gazette Notification, stating the following conditions of detention.

1. He should be kept incommunicado.
2. All incoming and outgoing letters had to be channelled through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence.
3. Approval had to be sought for visits from the Secretary, Ministry of Defence.
4. Conversation at visits was tape recorded by two officers from the CID.

Such draconian conditions have never been implemented for any prisoner, including Rohana Wijeweera or Kuttimuni. Even the prisoners sympathised with the plight of Vijaya. Sections 71 and 72 of the Prisons Ordinance and Section 227 of the Prison Rules vest all authority in respect of letters, visits, petitions and all correspondence of prisoners with the Superintendent.

Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was permitted one visit a day. The visit was at 10.00 a.m. and allowed in an enclosure opposite the main office. A jailer supervised the visit and two CID officers, who were present at all visits, tape-recorded the conversation. Mrs. Kumaratunga was punctual at these visits and brought food for him for the day. Despite the stress, trauma and anxiety she was going through she bore this predicament with fortitude.

The only other person who visited Vijaya was Madam Sirimavo Dias Bandaranaike. When she came to the Welikada prison, I took her to my office. The first question she asked me was where is Lionel, an old faithful who was in charge of the Training School for Youthful Offenders at Wathupitiwela when Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike passed away.

Her visit with Vijaya was allowed in my office. She commented on the special conditions under which Vijaya was detained. Nonetheless she said: "You are a government servant, you have to carry out the instructions of the government." Such was the magnanimity of this lady.

Her visit, which was scheduled for 9.00 a.m. commenced half an hour late and this provided an opportunity for her to speak to me on the ethnic issue. Mrs. Bandaranaike, who is very particular in regard to punctuality, admonished both CID officers for getting late.”

“The press was critical of the facilities for Vijaya at the Welikada prison. There was speculation and insinuations in this respect, which were not correct. I was amused when I read them. As a public servant, I maintained a deafening silence. After about three months detention at the Welikada prison, Vijaya was released, without any charges preferred against him in Court.

The words of an eminent politician that; "the only thing he cannot do, is to make a man a woman or a woman a man," could be aptly applied to the incarceration of Vijaya Kumaratunga.”

(Edither G. Perera, retired Superintendent of Prison, Sri Lanka Guardian, 19th February 2008, Colombo)

The song mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was sung by Vijaya Kumaratunge after his release from prison. He was a popular singer after playback singing in the film ‘Ganga Addara’, and reached the pinnacle of fame after singing this song which included his personal experiences in the prison. However, it is evident when analysing the ‘Naxalite’ charge, that the Jayawardena regime was sceptical about Kumaratunge’s political friends and their aspirations.

The word ‘Naxalite or Naxel’ was borrowed from neighbouring India. In Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and West Bengal in the Western part of India, the ‘Maoist’ armed groups that fought against the regime in villages and jungles were known by this name. It was very seldom that these ‘Naxels’ get involved in fights in urban areas. They mainly consisted of caste oppressed people of India. During a long period of time, they fought against the aristocracy of India. Why did the political group of Wickramasinghe and Jayawardena, confer this name on Kumaratunge and his politics which bears no resemblance to that of the Indian terrorists?

There are several probable answers to this question. One direct assumption would be that Kumaratune was of an under-privileged caste and was emerging as the leader of the SLFP which may have seemed to Jayawardena as a threat to the class they shared with the Bandaranaiques. This may have appeared as a rebellion by an under-privileged caste against the authority of the ruling class. On the other hand, at this time, the Jayawardana regime was embroiled in a Cold War with the central government of India, led by Indira Gandhi who was seen as a prominent post colonial anti-west leader in South Asia. The Jayawardena government was pro-west. The Indian government was sceptical about the fact that 'Voice of America' Radio had been granted permission to build a transmitting station in Iranawila, close to the Indian border. In the book 'Assignment Colombo' by the then High Commissioner of India in Colombo (1984-89), Mr J.N. Dixit, he clearly states that the Indian rulers were very suspicious about the visits of the American State Officials to Colombo. At that time Sri Lanka was embroiled in a "proxy war" facing an attack being launched by a foreign power. It was mainly due to India publicly supporting the Tamil Terrorists by offering weapons training, allowing use of their land and offering weapons and money. In this context, the sympathy Vijaya displayed towards the Eelam fighters would have angered the Jayawardana regime.

In this context, the name 'Naxalite' would have been conferred upon Kumaratunge, as he was a close friend of the Indian delegates of Colombo. This friendship was later confirmed, when Kumaratunge sought permission in 1984 to meet the Eelam leaders in Chennai. Subsequently in 1986, he managed to meet them in areas controlled by them in the North. This journey was arranged by India who were friends of the Tamil Tigers at the time. During this time Jayawardena and his chief advisor Esmond Wickremesinghe (Ranil's father) who considered India as a foe would have tried to implicate Kumaratunge's connection with India as a treacherous act.

After a lapse of 4 years the idiom "there are no eternal friends or foes in politics" was becoming a reality. In 1987, after signing of the Indo -Lanka pact, the Indian forces were arriving in Sri Lanka and

Kumaratunge had forgotten the past and was becoming a friend of the Jayawardane regime. He unconditionally supported the Indo -Lanka pact and the establishment of provincial councils. Kumaratunge further planned to launch a united socialist alliance and his Tamil partner in this proposal was the EPRLF. In the meantime he also prepared his newly formed party, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party to contest the elections. The enemies of the Indo- Lanka pact were the JVP and its popular front 'Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya' (Patriotic People's Movement).

VIOLATION OF KOBBEKADUWA'S FRANCHISE



Hector Kobbekaduwa, Sirima Bandaranayake

"On the 22nd December 1982, the country also witnessed the first ever Referendum. The question posed by the Government was, as to whether the people wished to extend the life of the then Parliament without proceeding to a General Election. This Referendum was keenly contested by all political forces. Whilst the ruling United National Party campaigned for the extension of the term of office of the parliament, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and the left parties such as the Communist Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna campaigned against the extension. By a narrow majority (54.7% 'for' and 45.3% 'against' with [75.8% of the registered voters voting) it was decided that the term of office of the then Parliament be extended without holding a general election."

[Page 15-16, Batalanda Commission Report]

Jayawardane had a secret agenda up his sleeve. In order to stay in power indefinitely, 'the election map' of Sri Lanka was rolled up for 7 years. That was to continue to hold power through a referendum without holding a general election. He extended the period of the

government for six years by holding the infamous referendum called 'Lampu- Kalagedi game' (Lamps and pots game) Voters were asked to vote either "yes" or "no". A "yes" vote was signified by a lamp, and a "no" vote by a pot) on 22nd December 1982, which gave the people of Sri Lanka the option to extend the life of the parliament.

On the morning of 22nd December 1982, voting in the referendum began. Hector Kobbekaduwa, the former Minister of Lands and Agriculture and the defeated presidential candidate of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party at the October '82 presidential election, arrived at the polling station early in the morning to cast his vote.

His polling station was Lindsay Girls' College, Kollupitiya, Colombo 04. What unfolded was a great surprise! Kobbekaduwa, who had secured second place in the presidential election just two months prior with 2.5 Million of votes, discovered that someone had impersonated him and already cast his vote.

Questioning the state of the country's democracy, he addressed the media at that very moment. However, the following day, the news of this 'fraudulent vote' was treated as another news item. Amidst the widespread fraudulent voting and vote tampering occurring across the country, Kobbekaduwa's loss of vote was just one more incident.

"Kobbekaduwa's vote was also tampered with."

Hector Kobbekaduwa, a former minister and the Sri Lankan National Party's presidential candidate in the last election, went to the polling station yesterday to cast his vote in the referendum. Shockingly, he discovered that someone else had already voted using his name.

Mr. Kobbekaduwa informed 'Divaina' that he arrived at the Lindsay Girls' College polling station in Kollupitiya around 11 in the afternoon. The polling officer informed him that his vote had already been cast. Subsequently, Mr. Kobbekaduwa marked the blue ballot paper meant for the voter which had to be marked in the event when the vote had already been used by someone else, and then returned it to the ballot box." ['Divaina' on Friday 24th December 1982]

This casting of a fake vote at the polling station near the Kollupitiya police station, where the Colombo elite reside is not a mere issue to be shrugged off asking 'is it such a big issue?'. Hector Kobbekaduwa was not just another common man of the country. He was an aristocrat from Kandy (up country of the island where the last set of aristocrats mainly came from, prior to the colonisation by the Europeans) residing in Colombo 7. He was a close relative of Bandaranaike family, who had held the title of Prime Minister of the country three times. He was the most trusted representative put forward as the presidential candidate for his party as Sirima Bandaranaike, the leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party at that time, was deprived of her civic rights. On the other hand, the biggest 'land reform' in the history of Sri Lanka took place when Hector Kobbekaduwa was the Minister of Lands [1970- 1977]. He was a blood relative of Major General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, who was blown up by a landmine later in the war.

How was the individual attempting to manipulate the vote of Hector Kobbekaduwa, a candidate who received 2.5 million votes just two months prior, not identified by the police officers stationed near the Kollupitiya police station, the party representatives overseeing the polling station to verify voters, and the government officials responsible for a free and fair election process? Understanding the political backdrop at the time isn't solely achievable through the quoted letter by Rohana Wijeweera to the Elections Commissioner. It's imperative to ascertain whose interests the individual and his associates, entrusted with managing the Colombo Referendum movement for the ruling UNP at that time, were serving.

The economic reforms that took place in Sri Lanka during the 1970-77 era were seen by the western countries led by the USA as an implementation of 'socialist principles'. Because of this, the Jayawardene government that came to power in 1977 made a promise. That was, that he would ensure that socialism would be removed from Sri Lanka no sooner he assumed power. The most influential of these "socialist policies" was the Ministry of Lands under Minister Hector Kobbekaduwa. The 'Land Reform Commission' under him acquired hundreds of thousands of acres owned by foreign companies

to the government without compensation. All the lands owned by the local landowners of more than 50 acres were also taken over to the government. The UNP leaders wanted to publicly punish the person who committed this 'crime'.

On the other hand, J.R.Jayawardane who won the election at that time was boasting that he would "roll up the electoral map for 7 years". For this purpose, he orchestrated a referendum instead of the general election that was due. To win it, not only the political power and mob power but also voter rigging and voter swindling were planned in advance. Here it was not only winning the public opinion by hook or by crook, President Jayawardane also wanted his past and present opponents humiliated.

For that, he handed over the West Colombo seat to his close relative, the then Youth and Employment Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. Wickramasinghe set up his operational headquarters at his house at Cambridge Terrace, Colombo 7 and entrusted the running of this place to the children of the Gonawala Perera family of Kelaniya, who were then supporting the Jayawardane-Wickramasinghe family with underworld politics. Gonawala Sunil was prominent among them. He was ready to pay the debt of 'Sunil Pardon'. Gonawala Sunil whom even the police saluted owing to the political strength of the Jayawardane family, appeared at the polling station at Lindsey College with a group of armed henchmen early in the morning of 22nd December. While the police men looked on aghast, they threatened all the representatives who were not of the ruling party.

"I am Gonawala Sunil. You know very well who I am? I want to cast the vote of Hector Kobbekaduwa. Give the polling card. If there is anyone who opposes, leave without getting killed"

While the policemen and polling station officials looked on with cowardly grins, the Returning Officer hastily unbuttoned his pants and rushed to the toilet, citing an 'emergency.' Meanwhile, Sunil's associates were observed collecting bundles of ballot papers and stuffing them into the ballot boxes.

The politician arrived at the polling station carrying a revolver. There were reports of thuggery committed by a politician and his thugs at a polling station. The incident unfolded at the Colombo Ladies College Polling Station for the Referendum around 10:10 in the morning when an individual arrived to cast their vote but was flagged by duty officials, questioning his eligibility. He was directed to the centre's officer in charge for further investigations.

The officer once again asked for the individual's name and the chief occupant's name. Upon being questioned, the individual claimed to be a lodger and that he was unaware of the chief occupant's identity. Despite several inquiries, when asked for the name again, he claimed to have forgotten his own name. The officer, realising the attempt at deception and impersonation, denied the opportunity to cast a vote. Subsequently, the individual quietly left the premises.

A moment passed. A group of thugs, accompanied by a politician, initiated an assault on the officer in charge, using offensive language. Upon the officer's attempt to rise from the chair, the thugs revealed concealed bombs. At this point, the police officers stationed at the polling centre also arrived. One officer, armed with a rifle, stood ready to confront the thugs. However, the politician acted swiftly, brandishing a modern revolver and aiming it at the police officer. In response, the officer reluctantly lowered his rifle. The thugs, given orders by their political figure, ceased their assault and departed from the centre.

While the police officer and other officials were in a state of panic, unable to reach the telephone due to the presence of the thugs, a police jeep arrived. The police officer at the polling centre narrated the entire incident to a police inspector who arrived in the jeep. After recording the details, the inspector questioned the referendum officials about the facts. He left, pondering where this situation would lead if they continued to engage in such work."

['Divaina' on Friday, 24 December, 1982]

The Divaina newspaper, owned by another 'Wijewardana' [Upali], refrained from directly naming the political figure involved, who was

Ranil Wickramasinghe. This is how the thuggish Wickramasinghe behaved at the Ladies College, Colombo 7 polling station with his disciple Sunil.

Despite Sri Lanka's 'free' media portraying this incident as whistleblowing news, it is conceivable that President Jayawardena might have taken pride in his nephew's actions.

IT WAS NOT A REFERENDUM BUT A LOOTING OF PUBLIC OPINION

Unfortunately for these parties, Rohana Wijeweera filed an election petition complaining to the court about the corruption and fraud that took place at the referendum. His lawyers were former minister Prince Gunasekara and former justice minister Felix Dias Bandaranaike. Although Wijeweera and Felix were serious political opponents, they joined hands in this, in order to change this violent political culture that was developing in the country. It was a winning petition. Fraudulent casting of Kobbekaduwa's vote alone was enough to prove electoral fraud. This is an excerpt from Wijeweera's complaint to the Elections Commissioner about vote corruption during the referendum.

- [e] The polling cards of voters who they thought would vote for the "Pot" sign (against postponing elections) were forcibly taken away to prevent them voting!
- [f] Threatening and harassing voters with deadly weapons;
- [g] Harassment of poll observers of parties favouring the 'Pot' sign;
- [h] Forcibly obstructing the activities of poll observers appointed by recognized political parties who favoured the 'Pot' sign;
- [i] In many parts of the country, highly organized, large-scale, fraudulent voting;
- [j] Harassing and interfering with polling observers appointed by recognized political parties who preferred the 'Pot' sign;

- [k] Intimidating the voters with promises of bribes and jobs, thus suppressing the will of the voter to vote for what they liked.
- [l] While the supporters of the government were committing crimes and intimidating political opponents, all the police officers and state employees were led to turn a blind eye.
- [m] Although these fraudulent activities were brought to the notice of the Commissioner of elections, his staff and other law enforcement officers, either they were unable to take corrective action, decided to ignore them or failed to educate themselves not
- [n] Not only the state vehicles, but vehicles belonging to state corporations and vehicles belonging to state owned businesses too were being forcibly used.
- [o] State owned newspapers and other media were being used to spread falsehoods against the political opponents and to forcibly obtain the public to vote for the government'.

[Letter from Rohana Wijeweera, 13th February 1983, to Election Commissioner, Chandananda de Silva, 'Report on Sri Lanka's First Referendum', September 1987, Government Press]

Wijeweera produced the election petition in February 1983. Prior to the case being heard, in July 1983, the Jayawardene government outlawed the JVP, blaming them for the 'black July'. The leader of the JVP hid in the jungle of Kataragama. Lawyer Prince Gunasekara was arrested. Felix Dias Bandaranayake left the country due to fear. J.R. Jayawardane continued to be in power for 6 more years. "Heroic" nephew Ranil was appointed Minister of Education.

VIJAYA KUMARATUNGE ESCAPES DEATH BY A WHISKER



Aththa news on J R Jayawardena summoning Kumaratunge, 21-22 May 1983

President J.R. Jayawardena summoned Vijaya Kumaratunga to the Presidential Palace yesterday afternoon to enquire about the events that transpired during the Mahara electorate by-elections. The summons, received at 10:20 am on 20th May, led Mr. Vijaya Kumaratunga to meet with the President at 12 noon at the President's House, where he detailed the occurrences in the Mahara electorate. When 'Aththa' paper enquired about the meeting, Mr. Kumaratunga detailed that during the meeting with the President, he revealed that the UNP candidate for the Mahara electorate, Kamalavarna Jayakodi, his supporters, government and corporation officials, and police officers shielded thugs while intimidating ordinary voters. He further warned about potential unrest in the electorate in the upcoming days. Mr. Kumaratunga also mentioned that he was advised to submit written complaints about the incidents, and the President assured an investigation and preventive measures to avert similar unfortunate incidents"

[Aththa' front Page, Saturday and Sunday Weekend Issue, 21-22 May 1983]

This report confirms President Jayawardena's crafty behaviour when the wolf is in the sheep's clothing. Ironically, Vijaya Kumaratunga visited the presidential palace to 'lodge a complaint' about the crimes committed by an individual released through the 'Sunil Pardon' by President Jayawardena himself. This individual was also under the patronage of his nephew. A few months before that incident, Vijaya was imprisoned under the charge of being a 'Naxalite terrorist,' by Jayawardena's government, a charge unprecedented in this country and associated only with India.

What heinous crime occurred during the Mahara by-election?

On Election Day, two leaders of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party were travelling in Gampaha, Keenagama, and Bulathpitiya, accompanied by their followers. They were the Vice Chairman of the SLFP, Vijaya Kumaratunga and the deputy secretary, Nimalsiri Jayasinghe, also known as Loku Athula. Suddenly, several shots were fired at the front line of this group. Among the followers was Nimal Premasiri, a young father of two from Varapalana village, Vathurugama, who was travelling next to Vijaya Kumaratunga. Tragically, Nimal Premasiri lost his life due to these gunshots. The suspected shooter, Henegama Jayantha Rajapaksa, was a henchman of Gonawala Sunil. It remains unknown whether the shooter aimed to kill Nimal Premasiri or Vijaya Kumaratunga.

The curious political connection arises from the murder suspect, Jayantha Rajapakse, surrendering to the Gampaha police on the 18th and being promptly admitted to Gampaha General Hospital due to 'poor health.' Despite Vijaya Kumaratunga's stardom in cinema, he was relatively inexperienced in politics. This was evident when he went to the President to raise complaints about the crimes committed by associates of the same President, who allegedly orchestrated these political crimes. Vijaya visited the President without testifying in the inquiry into the murder of Nimal Premasiri. As reported by the 'Divaina' Gampaha reporter on 21st May, the investigation into Nimal Premasiri's death, scheduled for the 20th, had to be postponed

due to Vijaya Kumaratunga's absence, the primary witness. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this narrative, let's shift focus to the elections in Mahara.

Background to the shooting -

On 18 May 1983, by-elections were held in 18 seats in the country. The reason for this was the defeat of the ruling United National Party in these 18 seats at the referendum held in December 1982 for the postponement of the general elections. One of these electorates was Mahara of Gampaha District. In place of Tudor Gunasekara who won the 1977 general election from Mahara, the UNP leader Jayawardena nominated a new candidate. He was a member of a powerful family in the province, called Kamalavarna Jayakody. The SLFP, the second largest party in the country, nominated popular actor Vijaya Kumaratunga to defeat him. At that time J.R. Jayawardene for whatever reason, detested the politician Vijaya Kumaratunga. Because of this, Jayawardena decided to stop Vijaya from coming to the Parliament at any cost. Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was the leader of the UNP in the district, was assigned to stop Vijaya, the popular actor and hero of the young generation at the time from being elected.

Minister Wickramasinghe moved to Mahara electorate from the day he submitted nominations, not alone, but with Gonawala Sunil and his gang. Due to this, a fear- psychosis was spreading not only in Mahara electorate but throughout the Gampaha district. While returning from handing over the nominations, Minister Wickramasinghe went to Kadawatha police station accompanied by Gonawala Sunil and his gang. Newspapers reported ('Divaina' and 'Aththa') that the minister then sat on the headquarter police inspector's chair and instructed the police on how the election should be conducted.

The main point of these instructions to the police was that complaints against UNP supporters should not be accepted. In pointing at Sunil, he told the police officers "Sunil Perera who is a Justice of peace for the entire island and the Chairman of the Gramodaya Mandala has been appointed as the UNP leader of the area." The minister instructed the police to take his advice and provide security for the by-election(!).

Since then, every time Sunil visited the Kadawatha police station during the by-elections, he was offered the O.I.C's seat to please the 'boss'. The way the police officers in these police stations saluted Sunil when they saw him, was an interesting gossip of the local reporters at that time. Sunil also considered this as an honour to the 'big boss' and engaged in all types of election malpractices, to ensure the victory of Jayakody. Jayakody The SLFP leaders who had lost the opposition leadership and were limited to eight seats, could not do anything against these. Vijaya Kumaratunge, who was a resident of Katana was powerless against this thuggery but he may have relied on the young hearts he won as an actor.

On the day of the election [18th May], the Mahara electorate resembled a 'devil's dance floor. Gonawala Sunil, accompanied by his colleagues, broke into the polling stations belonging to villages favourable to the SLFP and overturned the ballot boxes. Prominent Sri Lanka Freedom Party supporters who came to vote were driven away. Their polling stations were set on fire. Candidate Vijaya Kumaratunge travelled around the electorate with his supporters pacifying the voters.

Suddenly, Gonawala Sunil appeared accompanied by vehicles and armed with weapons. Kumaratunge, who was engaged in a peaceful election campaign, went ahead despite their presence. Little did he know that the thugs had received special advice from their leaders. A thug on Sunil's order targets Vijaya firing from a T-56 assault rifle. The shots aimed at this popular actor who was fortunate enough to live for a few more years, were received by a supporter who was walking alongside providing security. Gonawala Sunil took off in the vehicles that he came with the entourage, thinking his mission was successful. Although Kumaratunge rushed to send the shot supporter to a hospital, he was found dead on the spot. Hundreds of Kumaratunge's supporters were hospitalised due to the attacks that took place that day alone.

The police ignored all these incidents. Wickramasinghe was reading the reports sent by the 'deputy chief' and was reporting the progress to his 'big boss'. By evening it was reported Jayakody and Kumaratunge were on par with each other but the final count would be the deciding factor.

The ballot boxes were arriving at the Gampaha kachcheri by evening. The SLFP supporters were impatiently awaiting the final result. Counting of the votes was finished by midnight. The Chief Election Officer was getting ready to announce the results. Minister Wickramasinghe and his henchmen interfered with his task and wanted to know the results privately, before being announced saying that "it is essential that we inform the president about this". At this point he was compelled to divulge the unofficial results. Vijaya Kumarathunga had won the Mahara electorate by a majority of 249 votes. This information was conveyed at once to President Jayawardene, who was impatiently spending sleepless nights at the Ward Place. The following was his advice.

"Ask for recounts till we win. Do not let that actor enter the parliament. It has to be prevented somehow."

There was a recount of the votes. Vijaya Kumarathunga was still in the lead.

Surprisingly there was a power cut in the Gampaha Kachcheri. The generator could not be started.

When the power was restored, there was a third recount. This time, Jayakody had won by a majority of 45 votes. It was later revealed that Kumaratunge's majority was reduced by Sunil's thugs stealing, chewing and swallowing ballot papers. This was carried out on Wickramasinghe's instructions.

AN OIL WELL EMERGES FROM GONAWALA, KELANIYA



Aththa news titled 'Ranil burning in Gonawala oil',

“Ranil burning in Gonawala oil...!”

Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, Minister of Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs, expressed concern about the media's attention to the significant petrol theft at Gonawala. His statements, delivered yesterday in the presence of newspaper representatives, indicated his strong sentiments about the widespread coverage of this major theft. Additionally, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe briefed the newspaper representatives on the Cabinet meeting's decisions from the previous day.

When questioned by newspaper reporters about the extensive petrol theft, the minister responded with a somewhat annoyed attitude. He remarked that the newspapers were publishing numerous articles about the incident, including claims such as 'The suspects are in hiding' and 'there is undue influence,' which exceeded the information disclosed in

the ongoing police investigations. Furthermore, he added that the police themselves have stated that they hold no sway over the newspapers. In response to a reporter inquiring about the source within the police affirming the lack of influence, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe answered, 'I assert that the police have stated so.'

The oils are transported from Sapugaskanda to Kollonawa. The Ministry of Industry should ascertain their destination, track any disappearances, and identify the recipients.

The minister emphasised the gravity of the situation, stating that such an issue required thorough investigation by the CID. He stressed that circulating unnecessary details through newspapers without proper investigation serves no purpose. He also highlighted that the incident's particulars were made public before the suspects were apprehended."

(The 'Aththa' headline: Thursday 23rd August 1984)

Minister Wickramasinghe sought to halt the publication of reports on the 'Great Petrol Robbery' in newspapers. He aimed to transfer the investigations from the Kelaniya Police to the CID to restrict media access to information. Consequently, on the same day [23/08/1984], 'Divaina' newspaper featured two reports. The first of which questioned, 'How did the newspapers acquire the oil theft information sheets? - Ranil.' During a press briefing after the Cabinet meeting, Minister of Education Ranil Wickramasinghe stated that publication of details of police investigations into the Sapugaskanda Petroleum Corporation's oil pipeline theft in newspapers hindered the investigations.

'The minister also insisted on deploying the CID to trace how information about the theft reached the newspapers. Mr. Wickramasinghe referred to rumours in some newspapers regarding attempts to suppress police investigations related to the oil theft. He stated that the Inspector General of Police, the Deputy Inspector General of Police overseeing the Colombo area, and the Superintendent of Police assured him that external influence had no impact on these investigations.'

(From page 2 of 'Divaina' Newspaper, Thursday, 23rd August 1984)"

Minister Wickramasinghe, who is a lawyer by profession, spoke of this mass patrol robbery as a "game" of his thug Gonawala Sunil, but on the same day, the newspaper 'Divaina' reported the great danger that can occur by tapping an oil pipe and obtaining oil, quoting an industrial expert as follows.

"If Sapugaskanda catches fire, the Colombo port would be at serious risk!"

The technical expert from the Petroleum Corporation, discussing the hazards of oil transportation from the Sapugaskanda Refinery to the Kolonnawa Oil Complex, highlighted the potential for a significant catastrophe if a fire were to break out during welding work on the bored pipeline taps. "A fire at the Sapugaskanda Oil Refinery could lead to the destruction of several square miles in its vicinity, potentially impacting an area of around seven to eight miles."

He believed that in the event of any fire occurring at the oil-tapped storage facility in Gonawala, the petrol pipeline could have ignited, potentially leading to the destruction of the Kolonnawa oil complex and the city of Colombo.

The expert also mentioned that had a fire broken out at Sapugaskanda, the pipeline transporting crude oil from the Colombo port would likely have suffered damage.

(From Page Two of 'Divaina' Newspaper, Thursday, 23rd August 1984)

What if a criminal, sheltered by the highest authorities in the country, not only devastated the commercial hub but also the primary port to line his own pockets? Let's delve into the details of this major crime, from its occurrence, the apprehension of the culprits, and ultimately, the outcome for the suspects involved.

Inspector Norton Silva, stationed at the Kelaniya Police Headquarters, was known for his unwavering dedication to upholding the law, regardless of political pressures. Norton arrested Sunil Perera with four of his aides. However, he was not the notorious Sunil Perera

from Gonawala. He was well versed in the behaviour of politicians and their stooges. When he raided the site of the crime, there were no suspects left. However, when the case was filed, there was a 'Sunil Perera' as a suspect. This police officer was well aware that although a 'Sunil Perera' had been apprehended, the real culprit behind this was none other than Gonawala Sunil. The investigation was very risky, as Ranil Wickramasinghe has been appointed the new Minister of Industries. Norton was well aware of the Sunil-Ranil deal. That is why he gave instructions to the telephone operator not to say that he is present to any calls.

The private secretary of the Minister of Industries had called the police several times and had sought Norton Silva, but he kept his whereabouts a secret until the investigation was completed.

A person named 'Sunil Perera' from Kelaniya and four others were prosecuted in the Gampaha Magistrate's courts for stealing oil by piercing a pipe carrying diesel from the oil refinery in Sapugaskanda to the oil depot in Kolonnawa. The defendants claimed they were not guilty but the defense lawyers argued that drilling an oil pipeline is a dangerous and extremely difficult task. The prosecution proved that the piercing of the pipeline, and removing of the oil was carried out after extensively studying the process of the flow of oil, and the times the oil would be released into the pipes. The prosecution also alleged that the higher ups at the refinery gave the information to the thieves regarding the entire process, but it was obvious that the Sapugaskanda refinery, which belonged to the Petroleum Corporation came under the Industries minister and that he was in toe with the rogues. That was because neither the ministry nor the police made any effort to find out who shared this sensitive information with the thieves.

Moreover, the leader of these thieves, Gonawala Sunil, was the bodyguard of the Minister of Education, Employment and Youth Affairs at that time and had obstructed such an investigation. During the hearing of the case, Dhaham Wimalasena, the then Chairman of the Petroleum Corporation and the Chairman of the ruling United National Party, gave a bizarre testimony in favour of the Corporation.

“It is a pipeline of the Corporation that had been pierced. It is a pipeline that sends oil from Sapugaskanda to Kolonnawa. Although the police accused that the oil had been dug up and taken, there was no shortage of the oil we sent to Kolonnawa from Sapugaskanda. There is no difference between the figures for the oil output from Sapugaskanda and the oil distribution figures in Kolonnawa. We cannot accept that such an incident has occurred.”

The defendants in the oil case were acquitted. Police Inspector Norton Silva retired from the position shortly afterwards. Dhaham Wimalasena held the presidency of the UNP until the end of Jayawardena's regime. Gonawala Sunil vowed that he was ready even to lay down his life, for his friend Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe and the UNP.

After the verdict in the oil case was announced, a press conference was called to say that the leaders of the government had nothing to do with it. It was chaired by Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was the spokesperson of the government at that time. Stanley Samarasinghe of “Aththa” newspaper came to cover this press conference. He questioned at length the connection between the Minister of Industries Ranil Wickramasinghe and Gonawala Sunil and the knowledge of the government about these goings on. Minister Ranil lost his cool, and reprimanded not only “Aththa” newspaper but also its owners, the Communist Party. The headline in the ‘Aththa Newspaper’ at the beginning of the article was written for that news story!

Chapter 12

AN UNDERWORLD LEADERS' CONFERENCE IN GONAWALA



Camilla Lakmali Perera

“Our father [Sunil Perera of Valpita Kankanamala alias Gonawala Sunil] once invited thugs from all over Sri Lanka to our house. His intention was to remove any disharmony between those guys and make them friends. I don't remember all the names of those who came but I remember one or two. One was Sotthi Upali, another was Pala (Aluthkade)”.

[Camilla Lakmali Perera, Venasa TV, YouTube]

This is why Camilla Lakmali Perera's letter discussing the 'Conference of Underworld Leaders' held at Sunil Perera's house in Kelaniya, Gonawala in late 1985, is important to us. The Jayawardane government was building a new armed force to face the challenge of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which was by then, arming itself. It was an underworld army. By this time, President Jayawardene had assigned the triformes, the police force and other para military forces to combat the LTTE in the North and the East. Owing to this situation, it was this paramilitary of underworld thugs that was planned to be used to suppress the JVP.

Prior to that, in the early 1980s, national and provincial level gang leaders were organized to protect the UNP rule. Kaluwadewa Cyril Mathew was the Labour leader of the party in the early 80s. Under the UNP employment policy, the vacancies of minor employees in government and affiliated institutions were filled under Mathew's leadership. As the UNP henchmen in the urban estates [slums] were recruited into the public service on a mass scale, a separate army of thugs under Mathew was deployed to suppress the opposition parties. This underworld army was sent to repress strikes and other labour disputes. Critics called it the 'UNP junta'. The name 'junta' was used in international politics at that time to describe the military regimes in South and Central American countries.

Apart from this, the leaders of the ruling United National Party were breaking up into groups at the national and provincial levels and were dealing with the underworld thugs. At that time, there were two main factions of the ruling United National Party. One was the party leader and President Junius Richard Jayawardane's team comprising of Ranil Wickramasinghe, Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali. The second team was under Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. Its deputy leader was Sirisena Cooray coordinating the country's underworld leaders. The representative of Cooray's underworld thugs was Soththi Upali of Narahenpita, Mahawatta slum. Underworld leaders of J.R's team were coordinated under Ranil Wickramasinghe. His underworld agent was Gonawala Sunil.

This is how the gangs were used at the provincial and district levels.

MP	Area
H. R. Piyasiri - Matara	
Jinadasa Weerasinghe (aka Ganja Hutang)	Hambantota
Dharmadasa Banda (uncle of the present Bibila MP Sunanda Madduma Bandara)	Monaragala
Percy Samaraweera	Badulla
C P J Seneviratne	Mahiyangana
Minister H G P Nelson	Polonnaruwa

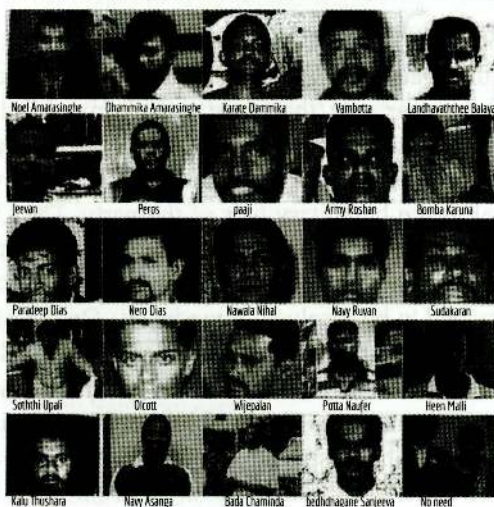
J D Mahindasoma	Anuradhapura
Minister Festus Perera	Chilaw
Minister Gamini Jayawickrama Perera	Kurunegala
Minister Wijepala Mendis	Negombo
Minister Paul Perera	Kelaniya
Minister M S Amarasiri	Galle
Deputy Minister G V PUNCHINILAME (father of Susantha PUNCHINILAME)	Ratnapura

These Ministers and members of parliament took it upon themselves to maintain this army of thugs at government expense. Prime Minister Premadasa, in addition to his premiership, also held the title of Minister of Local Government, Housing and Construction. Sirisena Cooray, was the Mayor of Colombo. The contracts for the supply of grass and soil required by the ministry and its annual 'Gam Udawa' (Village Awakening program) celebrations went to Soththi Upali, who was the underworld gang leader from this camp. Ranil Wickramasinghe's Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs' annual festival was called 'Yovun Pura'. Its transport contracts and the racket of admitting children to popular schools were solely under Gonawala Sunil.

By the end of 1985, a power struggle was going on to become the party leader, and the leader of the country after Jayawardane. The second leader of that party at that time was Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. The second and third leaders of the party were Gamini [Dissanayake] and Lalith [Athulathmudali]. There was Ranil [Wickramasinghe] as the hereditary heir of the party. The UNP government which was facing the Eelam war on one side was looking at ways and means of maintaining the state power. For this, the factional disputes within the party had to be resolved immediately. On the other hand, their underworld representatives were as divided as the leaders. President Jayawardane saw the need to reconcile the underworld who were divided more than the leaders. He entrusted his nephew, Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with the responsibility of reconciling and coordinating the disunited underworld gang leaders. Ranil entrusted it to

Gonawala Sunil, who hails from a traditional UNP family in Kelaniya. As quoted above, Camilla Lakmali Perera, Gonawala Sunil's only daughter, who was only 8 years at that time, recalls the 'underworld mob leaders conference' held at her home in Gonawala. She however, cannot remember the names of all the underworld leaders who came to this "meeting" but we are able to complete the list with the names she had forgotten. Among the underworld leaders who must have been present were Arambage Don Ranjith Upali alias Soththi Upali alias Pidali Upali, Rashendra of Uragasmansandiya, Anil of Rajagiriya, Dencil of Kohuwala, Nihal and Noel Amarasinghe of Nawala, as they were the main underworld leaders at the time.

The most important thing about her memory was that for the first time in history, a summit of 'underworld thug leaders' was convened with the blessings and patronage of a ruling party. When closely examined, this is a good indicator to gauge the direction in which Sri Lankan politics was heading. Unfortunately, at that time only the ruling party and thug leaders of the country knew this information. Of those who were involved, only President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Rashendra are alive today. Other underworld leaders and political leaders are sleeping peacefully under six feet of earth.



possible participants of the 'conference' of underworld leaders

Chapter 13

BY-ELECTION AT MULKIRIGALA, A 'BATTLEGROUND'



Photo of Ananda Kularatne addressing the gathering while J R Jayawardena is looking on, during Mulkirigala by- election

“I nominated a young man from 'Wahumpura' caste for this election for you people. If I am from this province, I will give two votes to Ananda Kularatne. Govi caste people have nothing to fear, the president of this country is from Govi caste.

Therefore, send this child to the parliament with your vote.”
[President JR. Jayawardane at UNP rally in Middeniya, ‘Divaina’, 18 May 1983]

The Mulkirigala by-election held on 12 September 1985 is one of the most infamous by-elections in history. The UNP candidate was Ananda Kularatne. Nirupama Rajapakse was the SLFP candidate. It was a by-election that UNP leaders had to win somehow. The 'caste factor' came to the forefront as part of the effort to somehow win the seat of Mulkirigala, where the Govi and Vahumpura castes [Deva clan] live together. The above speech made by President Jayawardane in this election meeting led to a huge controversy at that time. It was the first

time a state leader of the country spoke openly about 'caste politics' in a public meeting. The UNP leader did not stop at dragging the caste issue into politics.

A cabinet minister or a state minister was appointed in charge of each polling station in MulKirigala electorate. In addition, the UNP thugs were also preparing to win by 'hook or crook'. MulKirigala being the stronghold of the Rajapakses, they called in the local thugs to face the UNP thugs but UNP had brought in members of the underworld from all over the country.

On Wickramasinghe's orders, many representatives of the 'Underworld Leaders' Summit at Sunil's house in Gonawala attended the 'Giravapattu Invasion'. Their leader was Gonawala Sunil alias Sunil Perera who had received 'Sunil Pardon' from Jayawardene four years earlier. On 11th September 1985 evening, a group led by Gonawala Sunil chased a van Mahinda Rajapaksa was travelling in also accompanied by a mob, to retaliate against the UNP. The van in which Rajapakse and the group travelled was driving towards Kirama on the Walasmulla - Katuwana road. Knowing that a group including Gonawala Sunil was chasing him, Mahinda went to Kirama, the place where Minister of Food and Cooperatives, Sarathchandra Rajakaruna was camping after arriving from Dompe. Mahinda sought protection from him. Rajakaruna diverted Mahinda and supporters in another direction and came to Kirama junction to await Sunil and others who were mostly from his hometown. Just as he thought, Sunil who came in two jeeps full of thugs and weapons stopped when he saw Minister Rajakaruna. He enquired of the whereabouts of the van carrying Mahinda and thugs.

Minister Rajakaruna is a person who has mastered the art of pleasing thugs and protecting politicians. He did not answer the question and thanked 'brother Sunil' and his people from the adjacent electorate for their sacrifice for the 'Victory'. He was then invited for tea. Whether it's an underworld mob leader or an out-and-out thug, the politicians know very well that they are all foolishly brave. Just as a thug cannot exist without an association, both the politicians and thugs need each other for their own survival.

(a description of Mahinda Rajapakse's escape from Gonawala Sunil is included in the biography of Rajapakse by Mahinda Illeperuma titled 'Kurahan Saatakaya')

From the morning of the Mulkirigala by-election day, on 12th September, the gang led by 'Gonawala Sunil' of the JR-Ranil team was in a race to spread terror. It was with the underworld gang led by 'Soththi Upali' alias Arambewelage Don Upali Ranjith, who had been invited to Mulkirigala by Prime Minister Premadasa and the Mayor of Colombo Sirisena Cooray. They competed with each other to assault people in polling stations where the majority were SLFP supporters. The polling stations were set on fire. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party members, divided by the political dispute with Chandrika [Bandaranayake] and brother [Anura [Bandaranayake], had no means or plans to face this horror. They were very weak.

Their regional leader, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was fearfully avoiding the terror after the chase of 'Gonawala Sunil' on 11th September. Even more significant was the fact that Mahinda's own brother Basil (Rajapakse), was in the UNP and was involved in spreading terror. In this backdrop, on the morning of 13th September, Nirupama Rajapaksa left the Hambantota Kachcheri before the election results were released. Only the UNP leaders and their thug leaders were there to listen to the election results. When the results came, it was evident the caste factor as well as the thug factor they used, had worked perfectly. Ananda Kularatne won by around 3,000 votes. The thugs, who celebrated the victory at the Hambantota Kachcheri itself with crackers and liquor, started to leave for Colombo. That evening, they were returning to Colombo by Matara-Kataragama road in an unruly manner.

A very unfortunate incident occurred when they were 14 kilometres away from Matara. One of the jeeps in which the thugs led by Gonawala Sunil were travelling met with an accident, seriously injuring a villager in the fishing village of Kottegoda. Kottegoda villagers took to the road as they always do in the event of such an accident. Not only the accident, but the high handed behaviour of the owner of the vehicle, increased the number of people gathered at the scene. When the convoy

of escort jeeps also joined it, the locals poured onto the roads armed with swords!

When the villagers started the 'road trial', someone who broke in tried to bend the justice by force, claiming to be 'Sunil of Gonawala'. The villagers were restless. To control the mob, Sunil drew a pistol from his waist and shot into the air! That led to a riot. The villagers attacked the thugs and not stopping at that, they damaged the vehicles. Even though the weapons were in the vehicles, these thugs forgot the guns when the boss [Gonawala Sunila] was attacked. Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was his immediate leader, was called to save lives. Minister Wickramasinghe immediately sent a force from Dickwella Police to Kottegoda. The helicopter was sent to Matara to bring the injured Gonawala Sunil to Colombo.

Gonawala Sunil was admitted to the newly built Nawaloka Hospital, for emergency treatment. His condition was stable. Gonawala Sunil's thug reputation was tarnished by the Kottegoda attack. But there was no one to be the hero. Heroism was shared among the villagers of Kottegoda. This was a fact that Sunil did not know. Kottegoda where he and the mob got attacked, is the birth place of Rohana Wijeweera, who contested in the 1982 presidential election. In October 1982, Sunil went with his entourage to the JVP rally held at Delgoda in Biyagama electorate, in which Wijeweera participated. That day too he had a similar experience. Furthermore, neither Gonawala Sunil nor his political sponsors President Jayawardene and Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe knew that in two years time, they would have to confront these people once more.



Mahinda Rajapakse
campaigning during the
MulKirigala by-election

Chapter 14

TWO CID OFFICERS KILLED WITH SUNIL'S FAMILY



Gonawala Sunil's funeral

"The president of the Gramodaya Mandalaya, Sunil Perera, his wife Chandi Perera and two CID officers were shot dead in Gonawala, Kelaniya last night.

Further investigations are in progress in this regard. Sapugaskanda police announced that these four were murdered by a gunman who broke into the house at night.

According to the police, further investigations are being conducted in this regard."

[‘Divaina’, 26 June 1987]

In mid 1987 preparations were under-way to sign the ‘Indo-Ceylon Agreement’ enabling thousands of Indian troops to occupy the North and East of Sri Lanka. Surprisingly, weeks before signing this agreement in a haste, the Jayawardana government started rounding up ‘suspects’ who might be its enemies. The main goal of these arrests, which began in the third week of June that year, was to imprison leaders

and activists of the JVP who were involved in politics publicly before the ban [July 1983]. About 200 of these suspects were detained in the Colombo Magazine Prison. The JVP leadership which was engaged in politics surreptitiously, saw these arrests as an indication of suppression in future. The fact that the JVP leadership suspected that there could be a two-way crackdown by the Jayawardane government is confirmed by looking closely at the activities of the JVP in the last week of June 1987. At that time, JVP, or the Patriotic People's Movement led by that party was not a serious armed movement. But the JVP leaders were giving instructions for an attack targeting a house on bus route 230 in Gonawala, Kelaniya on the evening of 25th June.

The target was a licensed gun toting underworld leader with political clout. Also he was to be the commander to lead the underworld cadres, who were to attack the JVP on two fronts of state terrorism. Because of the political power of President Jayawardena and Minister Ranil, he was able to provide government jobs for the youth of the area and help obtain government contracts. He was a "Robin Hood of Gonawala" who distributed the money he earned with the help of the government. Therefore, a special mission had to be planned to eliminate him. A strong team had to be used, so that they would not be attacked in retaliation by the government henchmen.

That evening special advice was given to a loyal friend of JVP who resides in Kelaniya. Accordingly, he was asked to show to a group arriving in a Jeep, the house of a regional leader of the UNP and the chief occupant who was an underworld leader of national level. For this, what he had to do was to dress up as a 'poor beggar' and go to that house to ask for help for his mother's death and meet the head of the house. After this introduction, he was advised to stay out of the village for several weeks for future safety. Even though this JVP supporter knew the extent of the danger, he is a person who had been well beaten by gangster politics in Gampaha district and had experienced it thoroughly. Therefore, he was ready to fulfil his responsibility quite creatively.

At dusk, on 25th June, a Jeep belonging to Katunayaka Air Force Base came towards Kelaniya on an unofficial mission. Four Air Force

personnel were included in this armed group. They came to Kelaniya without much conversation because they were political friends rather than social friends. Their guide was at the appointed place exactly at the promised time. After picking him up from the back of the Jeep, the vehicle moved towards Gonawala. It was the guide who stopped the jeep about 100m away from the targeted house and signalled it to turn off the lights.

The leader of the shooters took the lead. The driver was instructed to be ready. The other two armed men stayed on both sides of the road for security. The "beggar" and the chief shooter entered the premises through the front gate. While the shooter took aim through the window, the beggar stood on the threshold. In the living room of the house, the householder was having a pleasant conversation with a group of people.

Loud laughter could also be heard from time to time. The 'beggar' asked for a contribution for his mother's funeral. The chief occupant, in his usual arrogant manner, questioned the beggar about his mother's death.

He did all this without getting up. There were four adults and children in the living room. The shooter must be shown correctly who the target was.

The beggar evolved a plan for this. In order to single out the political stooge who had offered one hundred rupees for the 'death of his mother', he pleaded with him to bring the money to the threshold of the door pretending that his intention was not to soil the floor with his muddy feet.

This powerful man who had been the cause of death for several others, without knowing that it was 'death' that was calling him, came to the threshold and offered a hundred rupee note. Without waiting for the beggar to express his gratitude, he went back to his seat to join the company. Immediately, the whole area thundered with the sound of gunshots. The sound of lamentation started to rise.

The shooter had completed the target without witnesses. No immediate retaliation was forthcoming. He killed all the adults in the

target area! Perhaps it must have been a skill from his military training. The firing squad, having successfully completed the mission, departed silently.

The next morning there was a special story on the front pages of the daily newspapers. This news was that two members of the CID were killed along with Gonawala Sunil and his wife. It was also reported that Gonawala Sunil's daughter and another child were seriously injured in this shooting. What is surprising is that two CID officers were killed along with the famous Sri Lankan underworld thug and his wife. One of those officers was Inspector Jagath who was the brother-in-law of the then Deputy Inspector General of Police Ganegama. The other was Kosgoda Rajapaksa who was a sergeant in the CID. Newspapers reported that Police Inspector Jagath accompanied Sergeant Rajapaksa to obtain a favour from Sunil to admit the sergeant's two sons enrolled in the Royal College through his recommendation! Was Gonawala Sunil the Minister of Education in Sri Lanka at that time, to be able to perform this? No. Ranil Wickramasinghe, Sunil's political leader and protector, was the minister of education in the country at that time. In order to get the Minister of Education to do a job at the time Gonawala Sunil, the leader of the underworld, had to be met!

Another important incident happened on the night of the first day when the bodies of Sunil and his wife Chandi were brought home. As midnight approached, in addition to the police security that had been deployed at the house until then, a security cordon of the Police Special Task Force was provided. Everyone in the funeral house was subject to intense scrutiny by this special police team. After some time, Sunil's political mentor or Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, accompanied by security guards, arrived at the funeral house. The minister's face was filled with fear and anxiety.

He stayed at Sunil's house for a few minutes looking around. Within half an hour of his departure, another special visitor showed signs of coming to Gonawala. In addition to the special task force, a commando unit belonging to the state security forces had been deployed. After a few more inspections the "foster father" of politics to Sunil, the

Executive President J.R. Jayawardene alighted from a vehicle wearing a pure white national dress. Apart from all these security personnel, Ravi Jayawardene who was the son of the President and security advisor to the government was also present to ensure his father's safety. Did the founder of the Police Special Task Force, arrive to pay his last respects to the slain underworld leader, armed with his rifle as he had no faith in the Task Force that he himself established?

That same night, the UNP leadership seemed to be panicking because the police began to sweep the country to arrest JVP members. Uncle Jayawardene and nephew Wickramasinghe saw this attack as a personal attack on them. The shooting on 25th June 1987 in Gonawala, Kelaniya will go down in history as the day the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna declared war against the Jayawardena regime.



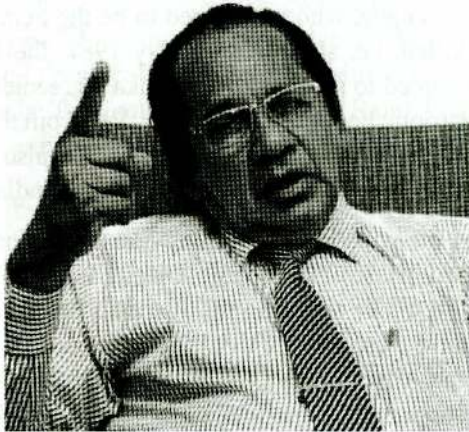
Photo of Gonawala Sunil and his wife Chandi Perera at their wedding

Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.



Chapter 15

POLICE CONSTABLE PEIRIS REWARDED WITH PROMOTIONS



Douglas Peiris as a civilian

“According to several witnesses, this was an unprecedented move. As a result of the series of promotions Douglas Peiris received overnight, he rose in seniority over 130 Gazetted Police Officers. No other Police Officer, in the history of the Police Department had received such a promotion. It prompted Senior DIG (Administration) Dr. Dharmadasa Silva to agree with counsel that ‘it was the longest jump ever in the Police’. Finally, in 1993, SP Douglas Peiris was promoted to the rank of Superintendent of Police [Grade 01]. He was thereafter interdicted from service in 1995, on the basis of there being investigations into serious offences said to have been committed by him.”

“As mentioned in the introductory chapter, ASP Peiris suddenly went missing from the Commission. Since he was under no obligation to appear before the Commission regularly, the Commission did not cause any investigation into the matter. However, Investigations conducted in

this regard by the Criminal Investigations Department revealed that, on 20th July 1996, Douglas Peiris had left the country."

[Page 10, Batalanda Commission Report]

It was not easy for Minister Ranil to fill the void left by the killing of Gonawala Sunil. At the time of his killing, Sunil was the leader of the 'United National Party's thug front'. He was also the confidante of Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was tipped to be the heir. Four weeks after Sunil was killed, i.e. at the end of July 1987, the Jayawardene government was forced to sign the 'Indo-Lanka Agreement'. This was opposed by the Patriotic People's Movement [JVP] from the beginning. Shortly after the signing of the agreement, the LTTE also opposed the agreement and started military operations against the Indian forces.

By this time, the government, burning like a torch on fire at both ends, was at the final phase of its lifetime. On one side was the Eelamist L.T.T.E. and on the other side was the Patriotic People's Movement (Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya/ JVP). The Jayawardena government assigned the Indian Army to fight the LTTE in the North. He took it upon himself to suppress the 'patriots' of the South. In addition to the official forces, the provincial and district UNP leaders were assigned to build armed paramilitary forces. The responsibility of the Western Province was assigned to Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. He decided to set up his headquarters in the more convenient Gampaha district, as the Batalanda government housing complex had been handed over to the Ministry of Utilisation of Manpower which was under him. He then prepared to establish an official police unit under him to fight political enemies.

By then, a policeman who would carry out politicians' instructions to the letter was being transferred to the Kelaniya Police Division. He had a history of private extortions. Due to the political clout he was promoted to the rank of Inspector of Police from being a Constable within 12 years. This policeman Douglas Peiris was an asset to Ranil Wickramasinghe.

Vidanalage Joseph Douglas of Panawala, better known as Douglas Peiris, studied at St. Mary's College, Kegalle and joined the police

force in 1967 as a constable. In January 1985, when he came to the Peliyagoda Police as the Headquarters Police Inspector, he knew the taste of political promotions very well. He became acquainted with the UNP organizer of Biyagama electorate and the then Minister of Education and Youth Affairs Ranil Wickramasinghe with the transfer to 'Peliyagoda'. In Peliyagoda, Peiris fulfilled any order to please the Minister. In return Police Pieris was rewarded with promotions. Despite being unsuccessful at exams, he was able to rise to the last promotion of SSP through political intervention of Minister Wickramasinghe. He recalls how he first got acquainted with Ranil Wickramasinghe and how he was entrusted with responsibilities.

11. "I met Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe in January 1987 on the instructions received from Police Inspector Gunasekara, who was Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe's security officer. At that time I was holding the post of Police Inspector at Peliyagoda Police Headquarters. I was told that if I perform my duties as the Police Inspector at Police Headquarters at Peliyagoda as per instructions of Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, I would not face any problems."

12. During the terror era of 1988/89, I was given a house in the Batalanda Fertilizer Corporation housing complex, so I moved there for security. While Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe was residing in the guest [tourist] bungalow of the said housing complex, he held discussions with the senior police officers and me."

[an extract from Affidavit submitted by Douglas Peiris to the Negombo Magistrate's Court in August 2010 through his lawyer Remy Piyadasa]

Despite benefiting from political promotions, he failed to pass the necessary exam required for the role of Acting Assistant Superintendent of Police within the stipulated three years. Nevertheless, the Batalanda report suggests that not only Minister Ranil but also Ministers John Amaratunga, Joseph Michael Perera, and President Ranasinghe Premadasa facilitated Douglas Peiris' ascent to the position of Senior Superintendent of Police by providing political patronage.

DIG Merrill Gunaratne made a recommendation regarding Assistant Superintendent of Police Peiris on 12th December 1989, and forwarded it to the Inspector General of Police (IGP). A copy of this recommendation, marked X 88, was presented before the Commission. DIG Gunaratne clarified that even though this recommendation wasn't officially confirmed, he drafted and submitted it to the IGP as per the IGP's request. Attached to this recommendation was the endorsement sent to him by Senior Superintendent of Police Delgoda concerning Assistant Superintendent of Police Peiris. He was finally promoted to the ASP post in 1990.

It was noted that Assistant Superintendent of Police(ASP) Peiris, alongside ASP Gamini Silva from the Gampaha division, served as "motivators" during the offensive operations against the JVP movement. They played a significant role initially in destabilising the JVP and subsequently contributing to its decline. DIG Gunaratne further emphasized that Honourable Ranil Wickramasinghe, Honourable Joseph Michael Perera, and Honourable John Amaratunga were well aware of the substantial contributions made by these two officers. DIG Gunaratne clarified before the Commission that in making the recommendation, his primary intention was to secure two salary increments for Assistant Superintendent of Police Peiris.

"Having received the aforementioned two recommendations, the IGP forwarded a communication on this matter to the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence. This communication, which is dated 21st December 1989, was produced before the Commission marked X 42. It appears that, based on the recommendation made, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence had prepared a Cabinet Paper on this matter, which was presented to the Cabinet of Ministers by the former President Ranasinghe Premadasa, on the 6th of February 1990. Based on the recommendations contained in the cabinet paper, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to,

- [a] exempt ASP Peiris from passing the required confirmation examination,

- [b] confirm him in the rank with retrospective effect from the 20 July 1988, and
- [c] promoting him to the rank of Superintendent of Police [Grade II], with effect from the 1st February 1990..."

[Page 10, Batalanda Commission Report]

When the UNP came into power in 1977, Douglas Peiris, initially a police constable, ascended to the position of Senior Superintendent of Police by the time the party's 17- year reign concluded in 1994. His promotions were seemingly facilitated by his compliance with illegal directives from politicians and his involvement in unlawful killings.

This police officer Douglas Peiris, not only wore the uniform and carried official weapons but also oversaw torture chambers within official premises. This is reminiscent of Deputy Inspector General of Police Ganendra Vas Gunawardena, presently sentenced to death.

The fear and unwavering loyalty displayed by not only the police officers above Peiris but also by the Inspector General of Police towards him was rooted in his political influence. How did he amass this 'political strength'?

By the beginning of 1988, the government was establishing a 'Counter Subversive Unit' in every police division. Additionally, District Security Coordination Committees were appointed. Police Inspector Douglas Peiris assumed the role of supervisor and head of the unit within the Kelani Police Division. Assisting him was Police Inspector Ranjith Wickramasinghe. The team comprised of Inspector Jayawardene, Sub-Inspector Sunil Bandara Nissanka, Sergeants Ratnayake, Ranatunga, Upali Lakhewa, and Kappagoda, as well as Constables Laxman Dias, Heen Banda, and female police constables Pathmini Premalatha, Sepalika, and Kanthi. Furthermore, police driver Ranjith was also part of this team.

By this time, apart from the additional quarters and party office that Minister Wickramasinghe had allocated to himself in Batalanda, rest of the houses had been 'gifted' to close political allies and police security

personnel. Now another new requirement was to provide housing to the police team engaged in 'suppression of subversive activities' in the Kelani Police Division. Senior Superintendent of Police Nalin Delgoda and the entire team were given houses in Batalanda by Ranil. Acquiring houses in this manner is contrary to the police housing regulations. But the police chiefs did not see this because it was all happening at the behest and whims of Wickramasinghe and Douglas Peiris.

Not only this, Minister Wickramasinghe convened the top police officers of Gampaha district and District Security Committees in Batalanda. This is not only a breach of tradition but a coercion. Normally a District Security Coordination Committee should have the Governor of the province and the Minister of State Security or Deputy Minister of State Security shall be present. Minister Ranil did not hold any ministerial position related to the country's security but the police chiefs who testified before the Batalanda Commission admitted that he used the power of the 'Uncle President' to call police officers and preside over the Batalanda district security committees.

The then Inspector General of Police, Deputy Inspectors and Senior Superintendents of police, who testified before the Commission stated that Douglas Pieris overstepped his position and used Ranil Wickramasinghe's power to take the law into his own hands. Pieris was so powerful that on one occasion, a relative of the then Inspector General of Police Ernest Perera was abducted by Peiris's murder gang. (Read the chapter on Batalanda becoming a land of extortions). The ransom demanded for the release of this young man was 50,000.00 rupees. When this was brought to the notice of IGP Perera, he did not even bother to enquire about it, let alone give instructions.

After making arrangements for the police officers of his choice to settle in Batalanda, it appeared that 'Batalanda' seemed like 'my land' to Minister Wickramasinghe. It is a land surrounded by paddy land on three sides. In short it is a very secure secret kingdom. No one from the outside world was allowed to enter it without permission. The surrounding villages did not hear a sound from it. Only the faithful were

there, so there was no way any secrets could be leaked. A clandestine camp of this nature was ideal to punish political opponents.

In other words, during that time, a police force was stationed in Batalanda, drawing salaries from the public and executing politicians' orders without scrutiny. In such an era and within such a camp, is it strange that Minister Wickramasinghe, Superintendent of Police Peiris, and their henchmen established their unofficial headquarters there?

Chapter 16

TORTURE HEADQUARTERS IN BATALANDA ...!



Photo of Douglas Perris's two sons carrying weapons and a detainee at the Batalanda camp, photographer unknown but this was passed on to journalists

"On the advice of Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, the gang headed by 'Thadi Priyantha' killed the following people I know;

01. a person named Perera who worked at Kelaniya Tyre Corporation,
02. lawyer Daya [Charitha] Lankapura,
03. lawyer Kanchana Abeypala of Hulfsdorp Courts [Aluthkade],
04. Nissanka, a lawyer in Gampaha.

I know that army lieutenants Nissanka and Senanayake, being close associates of Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, were engaged in operations in Gampaha district on Ranil's instructions. Lieutenant Senanayake is now deceased.

I cannot give full details about the special operations carried out by this said gang. However, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe knew the operations of this gang intimately. Furthermore, I know that DIG Meryl Gunaratne and Senior Superintendent of Police Nalin Delgoda were aware of the operations carried out by this gang on the instructions of Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe."

[Affidavit of former SSP Douglas Peiris, August 2010]

Until the beginning of 1988, the 'Counter Subversive Unit' of the Kelaniya Police Division, which was under the direct control of Ranil Wickramasinghe, was in the Peliyagoda Police station. Later it was taken to Sapugaskanda without the permission of the Inspector General of Police.

According to the commission report, the 'subversive action oppression unit' or 'Counter Subversive Unit' that was said to have been moved to the Sapugaskanda Police, was actually in the Batalanda Housing Complex. This was confirmed when the lawyer Wijedasa Liyanarachchi was taken to the National Hospital on the verge of death after being arrested by the police. [Read chapter on Lawyer abducted in court killed in Batalanda] This criminal gang killed a number of lawyers: Charitha Lankapura on 7th July 1989, Kanchana Abeypala on 28th August 1989 and Neville Nissanka on 3rd October 1989.

The 'crime' these three young lawyers had committed was submitting 'habeas corpus' petitions and appearing on behalf of the suspects arrested by the police and state forces. By this time it was clear from the above extract, that Batalanda was becoming the headquarters of the murderous gangs operating under the auspices of the government. These groups operated as follows.

The University of Colombo was a hub of student politics. Situated in the centre of Colombo, the students there were taking the lead in political activities, and were soon emulated by the students of the rest of the universities. This, enabled the JVP to take over the power of student politics in other universities as well. Politics of university students became a remarkable phenomenon in the history of Sri Lanka in the

mid-60s. In this era, the student unions of these universities were led by Samasamaja (Socialist Equality Party) and Communist Party of Sri Lanka.

By the end of 70s, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna was largely engaged as an underground movement. As a result, the power of university student politics was obtained by the student leadership represented by JVP. Although it happened gradually after the rebellion of 1971, the JVP, which entered the mainstream politics again in 1977, naturally took the leadership of the university students' politics. IUSU or the Inter- University Student Union is formed in this background.

Although the JVP was the official leader of student politics during this era, student groups of other small parties were organised too. At this time, a student group that did not belong to a political party was organised at the University of Colombo. They named their organisation as 'Independent Students Union'. At first its leader was Deepthi Lamahewa and afterwards Daya Pathirana took the leadership. Although he was a supporter of JVP during his school days he joined the Independent Students Union after entering the university. According to Pathirana the cause of this division was JVP's opposition to the policy regarding the Eelam struggle in the north. It was the JVP and the independent group that directly clashed physically for student politics at the University of Colombo. In these clashes, not only the students were injured but also the university buildings were damaged.

During these conflicts, Daya Pathirana took the leadership of the independent group's physical combat front. In December 1986, Daya Pathirana and his colleague Somasiri Punchirala were kidnapped. Later Daya Pathirana was killed and Somasiri was fatally wounded. The independents blamed the enemy student union for killing their leader. These incidents between two student unions escalated into an armed conflict. Only the independents managed to physically attack the leadership of the socialists. This conflict led by a small group of students limited to one university seemed like the politics of killing.

This was the starting point of the battle between the Socialist Students' Union and the Independent Students' Union. In this battle

the leaders of the Independent Students' Union sought state protection. Then its leader was K.L. Dharmasiri. (In 1990, Dharmasiri, who was armed and carrying a police ID card, was killed.) Dharmasiri's second in command was C.A. Chandraprema or 'Thadi Priyantha'. (Nephew of former Defence Secretary C.A. Dharmapala). The leaders of the Independent Student Union entered into an unofficial agreement with the government. The government representative was Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. Accordingly, student groups were formed to destroy the JVP. Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe secretly gave them government houses in Kelaniya and Batalanda. According to Douglas Peiris (in his aforementioned affidavit in 2010), Minister Ranil had given this People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA) a government house near the Kelaniya Rest house [Kandy Road]. According to the affidavit filed in court by Sarath Silva [Podi Silva], the captain of the PRRA team, Ranil Wickramasinghe brought Uma Prakash (who was in a breakaway faction of PLOTE) from Tamil Nadu and merged him with the organization after People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (P.L.O.T.E) after the PLOTE leader Uma Maheshwaran was killed in 1989. Minister Festus Perera provided them with headquarters. They were operating from the residence given by Festus in Wennappuwa and were hunting JVP members in Puttalam district.

Among the leaders of the Independent Students' Union and the armed group People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA), one figure who remains prominent is C. A. Chandraprema. In August 2020, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed Chandraprema as Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Upon assuming his new position in Geneva, Brad Adams, Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, a significant global human rights advocacy movement, authored a report.

"Ambassadors to the United Nations Human Rights Council typically do not anticipate having among their colleagues someone accused of ties to a violent group. However, since Sri Lanka's new Permanent Representative, C.A Chandraprema, presented his credentials in November, officials in Geneva are confronting a challenging situation. The upcoming Council session, commencing

at the end of February, signifies a pivotal opportunity to address the longstanding impunity that has hindered the administration of justice in Sri Lanka.

Chandraprema is notably described as a veteran newspaper columnist and writer. However, for many decades, he was recognized by the alias 'Thadi Priyantha.' 'Thadi

Priyantha' was alleged to be a member of the People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA), purportedly operating as a pro-government armed hit squad, combating a leftist youth insurgency in the southern regions of Sri Lanka during the late 1980s. The PRRA organization faced accusations of coordinating with the Sri Lankan security forces, reportedly carrying out numerous killings, specifically targeting young individuals, students, journalists, and lawyers in the south. The group often placed posters claiming responsibility for these killings next to the victims' bodies. In 2000, Sri Lankan authorities arrested Chandraprema regarding the murder of two human rights lawyers, Charitha Lankapura and Kanchana Abhayapala in 1989. The arrest followed a former senior police officer's testimony, alleging Chandraprema's responsibility for four murders. Subsequently, he was released after the Attorney General concluded there was insufficient evidence.

Allegations surfaced suggesting that due to the involvement of senior politicians in the killings, Chandraprema was not prosecuted to shield them. Earlier this year, a 'police character certificate' was presented to a parliamentary committee responsible for evaluating appointments to high-ranking government positions. The certificate stated that Chandraprema had not faced any criminal charges. This further raised interest in the matter.”

[Brad Adams, Asia Director, Human Rights Watch, 3 February 2021]

As a columnist and writer, Chandraprema penned justifications for state violence and criminal killings. In his book 'Gota's War,' he repeatedly portrayed Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the country's sole president who fled the country, as the sole leader in the civil war. The book notably

details the account of the killing of approximately 600 unarmed youths under Gotabhaya Rajapakse's military command in the Matale district during 1988/89. During the composition of this book, Chandraprema served as the permanent representative in Geneva under the governance of his former political leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe's government.

Vijaya Kumaratunga who engaged in controversial politics of linking left and right was killed in February 1988. The responsibility of this suspicious killing was assigned to the Premadasa group as well as the JVP by the society. After Vijaya, the leadership of the Sri Lanka People's Party (Sri Lanka Mahajana Party) was taken over by Y.P. Silva. The People's Party which was arming itself with government weapons under Vijaya supported the "PRRA" team after his assassination. It was represented by Dr. Rajitha Senaratne [later Minister] on behalf of the People's Party. Defence Minister of State Ranjan Wijeratne supplied them with weapons. They were given weapon training by the T.E.L.O, an Eelamist organization. Suresh (possibly Selvam Adaikalanathan) was its leader at that time. However, the power of the North East Provincial Council was with E.P. R.L.F. organization. Dayan Jayathilaka, who was an adviser and friend of the Independent Students' Union, was named as its first Minister of Youth Affairs. Jayathilake was known to be the coordinator of this student union and the Eelamist organizations. Because this armed group was an auxiliary force of the Indian forces occupying the North, they were protected by the state forces on both sides.

There is little information about the 'Political union' of the 'Old Left' and Right wing UNP. However, the life story of Siritunga Jayasuriya, who was a former Samasamaja leader as well as the leader of the 'Waama Samasamajaya' (Left and Life- 2022) provides a powerful light on this 'Dark Age'. Siritunga is the current leader of the United Socialist Party. In the history of presidential elections Siritunga was also the candidate who contested the most number of times. While writing his autobiography, he records the 'secrets' of this corrupt political alliance. Accordingly, since 1987, United Socialist Front was an unofficial member in the Jayawardene government. Its stakeholders were: Communist Party, Samasamaja Party, New Samasamaja Party

and Sri Lanka People's Party. The 13th constitutional amendment came under the Indo-Lanka treaty. Provincial council elections come under this amendment. The Indian government has shown as much interest in this as its own state elections.

The United National Party under Jayawardena, used government resources for the provincial council election campaign. The United Socialist Front was funded by the Indian High Commission in Colombo. The funds came through the People's Party and Ossie Abeygunasekara, the then leader of that party, distributed the money to other parties. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna led an armed battle against this provincial council election. Jayawardena provided the necessary weapons to the United Left Front to face the JVP through Ranjan Wijeratne who was Jayawardena's representative. According to Siritunga, D.E.W Gunasekara was the representative who accepted arms on behalf of the United Left Front. Black Cats and Green Tiger armed gangs got weapons and money from this corrupt political deal.

In this background, to take revenge for the killing of the leader of the Independent Students' Union, the rest of them joined forces with the armed groups 'PRRA', 'Black Cats' and 'Yellow Cats' to kill activists and friends of the Socialist Students' Union in the universities or they became spies of the government forces. What is interesting about this is, how the Independent Students Union was used for the government's ends by Ranil Wickramasinghe. Thus, most of the leaders of the independent students union who joined the state repression were members of the socialist students union at the beginning. People like Daya Pathirana, K.L. Dharmasiri and C.A. Chandraprema was active in the student movement before entering Colombo University. Later they separated from that union and joined the Independent Students' Union. Thereafter joined the government to destroy their own student organisations!

In the above context, the country was politically divided as those in favour of the Indo-Lanka Accord and those opposed to it. While the JVP and the LTTE were opposed to it, the government, the United Socialist Alliance and the Independent Students Union were in favour. The camp

that was in favour of it had the political, monetary and military backing of the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. 200,000 soldiers of the Indian Army occupied the North and East of Sri Lanka. An 'invasion by invitation'. The groups that were supporting the government were indirectly affiliated with the torture and repression carried out by the Batalanda and other torture camps around the country.

According to the testimony given by Minister Wickramasinghe's 'Bungalow Caretaker', Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando, at the Batalanda Commission, there was a second torture chamber in Batalanda. It was next to Police Inspector Sudath Chandrasekara's house in Batalanda, who was the head of the security unit of Minister Wickramasinghe. The way they were hung and the torture they were subject to were revealed in the testimonies of Sub-Inspector Ajith Jayasinghe, Tissa Palipana and Thaleratne Mudalige Bandula, who escaped while imprisoned in Batalanda. Ayurvedic doctor Athuranage Wimal Ratnayake, who was brought to treat the suspects who were injured by torture, explained to the commission their fate as well as the nature of their injuries.

He also revealed the way arrested suspects were hung by their feet. Unfortunately, much of Fernando's testimony was presented in secret. The media was not allowed to hear or report it. As written in the Batalanda Commission report the commission made the main part of Fernando's testimony a secret testimony for the "good" of Ranil Wickramasinghe. [Refer chapter 27]

Not only according to the affidavit of Douglas Peiris in 2010, but also as revealed in Batalanda Commission inquiries, torture and killings were rampant at the Batalanda camp under the watch and command of Wickremesinghe, where both university students of the same university Wickramesinghe attended and colleagues of his legal profession were subject to a similar fate. To enable him to accomplish these easily, in addition to the official army and police groups, armed student groups were also maintained. The sole purpose of all this was to hold on to the political power held for several generations continuously.

SEPALIKA AND SON TAKEN TO BATALANDA



Kannangarage Sandya Sepali (Sepalika Kannangara), copy of her National Identity Card

"Uncle, are you looking for houses in this area? There are two closed houses in the row of houses at the edge of that swamp which are covered with overgrown shrubs.

No one goes inside those two houses. They say there are ghosts. We are also afraid to go. Shall I show..?"

When the search team of journalists left the Batalanda Housing Complex B 21 [the house where Sergeant Laxman Dias of Peliyagoda Counter Subversive Unit resided], an eager skinny boy of around 10 years of age followed us and asked.

Sepalika Kannangarage was the wife of Randuwa Ranasinghe Mudiyanalage Ajith Kumara alias 'the Parliament Bomber'. On 18th August 1987, two grenades were thrown at the meeting of the parliamentary group of the ruling party chaired by President Jayawardena. In this grenade attack, a state minister and a parliament

worker were killed, while the state minister for state security, Lalith Athulathmudali, was seriously injured and several ministers including the Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa suffered minor injuries. The only employee of the parliament who could not be located by the investigators was Ajith Kumara.

Wimal Weerawansa (Wimalasiri Gamlath) who was a JVP leader and later switched parties to become a minister in the Mahinda Rajapakse regime, married Ajith Kumara's sister, Sashi Randuwa Ranasinghe (Weerawansa). Ajith's school days sweetheart was Sandhya Sepalika Kannangarage, who was educated in Gampaha Ratnavali Vidyalaya. It was Sepalika who introduced Ajith Kumara to JVP politics. Ajith Kumara, a graduate of the University of Kelaniya, had joined the Parliament staff as a minor employee. Soon after getting the job, he married Sepalika. By this time the JVP which was organising themselves for an armed conflict, opposed the Jayawardene government for signing the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and was in enmity with the government. The banning of the party too contributed towards this.

He, being obsessed with hatred, took it upon himself to bomb the meeting of the ruling party in the parliament, disregarding the consequences for his family. At the time of this incident, his son Roshan Sanjeeva Madhushanka was three years of age. After his unanimous decision, fearing repercussions, Ajith Kumara disappeared with his family and could not be traced. The police offered a reward of Rs.10 lakhs to anyone who would find Ajith Kumara but it took eight months to find the whereabouts of Ajith Kumar, his wife and child. It also happens by chance. On 8th April 1988, the Na-ula Police raided a moonshine farm in Akaraduwe located in the Bowathenna reservoir. There the police apprehended a person who was trying to escape. The police however, ignored the two people who might have been his wife and child who were seen trying to get away in a boat. During questioning, he admitted that he was Randuwa Ranasinghe Mudiyanseelage Ajith Kumara. On 11th April a police team from Colombo brought Ajith Kumara to Colombo for questioning and handed him over to the secret police.

The fugitive Sepalika and Madhushanka reappear in the city of Kottawa. There they were trapped by the 'Rapid Deployment Force' led by Major Mutalif. Sepalika managed to hoodwink them and ran away with her son. Unfortunately on 6th April 1990, she emerged from a pineapple plantation in Pallewela, Mirigama, in the Gampaha district when the Gampaha police raided the place.

First, these two are brought to the torture chamber of the Gampaha police barracks, where young women involved in dubious politics were raped and killed as punishment. Although this mother and son had not committed a crime, they were handed over to the infamous Counter Subversion Unit in Kelaniya, as their father was a suspect and in police custody! At that time Batalanda was famous as the place where most intimate evidence could be extracted from political suspects.

In the alternative this order to bring her to Batalanda may have been from the same Minister of Industries Ranil Wickramasinghe who ordered lawyer Wijedasa Liyanarachchi to be brought to Batalanda two months later. It seems he may have decided to teach a lesson to these married men who had taken up arms by giving an execution order to his criminal gang.

The fate of Sepalika who was brought to Batalanda is unknown. All we have are rumours and remnants of boastful utterances of the policemen who raped her, sexually abused her and inhumanely killed her. Consequent to the acquittal and release of Ajith Kumara a few years later, a sub-inspector who had frequented Batalanda, met Ajith Kumara and revealed the fate of his wife and child. He came with a list of names of the police criminals who raped and killed Sepalika. This amazing police officer, having described the brutal killing, asked Ajith Kumara to punish them without waiting for nature to do so. But Ajith Kumara, who was a famous regional leader of the JVP in the Gampaha district at that time, did not fulfil this request.

A remarkable fact that deserves mention here is that no evidence was presented to the Batalanda Commission about the rape and murder of this woman. She became one of the many who were despatched to the next life numbered in the hundreds, or more likely thousands! A

mere name on a list. Acting on the information supplied by the chief investigator (he had just joined the BBC and was based in London) about the boy, a second investigative team stormed the house (looking for this boy who led us to the abandoned house earlier), where Sergeant Laxman Dias was residing, without prior notice. The residents said that there was no such child in the house..!



Photo of dead bodies lying around, 1988-89, a common occurrence during that era

LAWYER KIDNAPPED IN COURT, KILLED IN BATALANDA



Wijedasa Liyanarachchi, Attorney at Law

“It was not revealed who caused Liyanarachchi’s death because no investigation or inquiry was conducted. However, DIG Udugampola was forced to retire, the reason for that was the influence of the donor countries to Sri Lanka. Later, Udugampola accused the killing squads formed by the government of having carried out the illegal killings that took place this time. The government [under President Ranasinghe Premadasa] did not take action against these allegations under ‘criminal defamation’. The former DIG fled the country. Later, from exile, he accused President J.R. Jayawardene and Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa of utilising ‘black cats and ‘PRRA’ for carrying out killings.”

[The Lost Generation, The Untold Story: Prince Gunasekara: 1998 Godage Publications]

Wijedasa Liyanarachchi who was born in Buddhuyagama, Weeraketiya, of Hambantota District, received his primary education from Weeraketiya Madhya Maha Vidyalaya. Being a bright student, he entered Richmond College, Galle to study for Advance Level in

mathematics. In 1981 he contested Development Council elections from the Hambantota district as a candidate of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. Later he joined the Sri Lanka Law College. Among his contemporaries were Yasantha Kodagoda (Judge of the Supreme Court), Pavitra Vanniarachchi (former Minister and MP), J.C. Weliamuna, PC (senior lawyer and former Director, Transparency International) and Ananda Gunathilake (long-time president of the China - Sri Lanka Friendship Association).

In 1984, he was called to the bar as a lawyer of the Supreme Court. He joined chamber of Ranjit Abeysuriya, a criminal lawyer, as an apprentice. Lasantha Wickramathunga, lawyer and chief editor of 'Sunday Leader', who was killed in 2009 by a group under the patronage of the then government, was a contemporary of Liyanarachchi at the same chambers of Abeysuriya. By this time, it was a common scenario in the country to have mysteriously killed people's bodies burning on tires along the roads. Extrajudicial executions were rampant and people were abducted from all over the country. Therefore, Ranjith Abeysuriya, appeared for many 'Habeas Corpus' applications. His juniors including Liyanaarachchi were assisting Abeysuriya who represented the defendants in the cases of the theft of weapons from the Katunayake Air Force base, the theft of weapons from the Pallekele military base and the assassination of the Chairman of UNP, Harsha Abeywardena. On the afternoon of 25th August 1988, Liyanaarachi was abducted while exiting the courts complex in Hulftsdorp after appearing for a similar case.

As revealed in the investigation into the abduction and killing of Liyanarachchi, the script writer and director of the final episode of this killing was none other than Ranil Wickramasinghe. Liyanarachchi's senior, Ranjith Abeysuriya, was the former Director of Public Prosecutions at the Attorney General's Department. He left the government service and joined the private bar as a criminal lawyer due to political victimisation by the Jayawardena government (in connection with his appearance in the prosecution against Lalith Athulathmudali, a senior minister of that government). Upon hearing of Liyanaarachchi's abduction, Abeysuriya immediately called the

Inspector General of Police Ernest Perera who stated that according to his knowledge the police did not abduct Liyanarachchi but the IGP promised to make further enquiries. Lawyer Abeysuriya also rang up the Secretary of the Defence Ministry, General Sepala Atigala and enquired of Liyanarachchi's safety. While all this was taking place, President Jayawardene's security advisor, his son Ravi Jayawardene had stated that lawyer Wijedasa 'could' be in police custody. IGP Perera who got suspicious of this story, called DIG Premadasa Udugampola and asked if Liyanarachchi was in his custody. When this was denied by Udugampola, the IGP rang up Superintendent of Police Tangalle Division, Karavitage Dharmadasa, to confirm his suspicion. During this enquiry, he indirectly admitted that Liyanarachchi was under his arrest.

After receiving this information, General D.S Artigala contacted Udugampola and advised him to make Liyanarachchi's arrest on a legal basis. However, lawyer Abeysuriya feared for his junior's life. He called General Artigala again and requested that Liyanarachchi be transferred to Colombo, in order to safeguard his life. General Artigala agreed to this request. Accordingly, Liyanarachchi was ready to be brought to Colombo on the 1st of September. In the meantime, Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, called IGP Perera and requested him to hand over Liyanarachchi to the 'Counter Subversive Unit' in Kelaniya, after being brought to Colombo. Accordingly, on September 1st, Liyanarachchi was brought to Colombo under the custody of Police Inspector Kularatne of the Matara Police. Thereafter, Kularatne took Liyanarachchi to Sapugaskanda and handed him over to Inspector Ranjith Wickramasinghe, who was the head of that unit.

On the afternoon of September 2nd, Liyanarachchi, who was on the verge of death, was admitted to the Colombo National Hospital. He died two hours after admission. The report of the Judicial Medical Officer, Dr. L. B. Alwis who conducted the investigation stated that he had 207 external injuries, over 100 internal injuries and 17 broken ribs. The conclusion of Dr. Alwis was that the cause of death was internal and external bleeding due to assault with blunt instruments.

Why did Minister Ranil order Liyanarachchi to be taken to Batalanda? The most probable conclusion is that Wickramasinghe thought harsher 'punishments' and 'treatment' at Batalanda would make it easier to extract what they needed to find out from Liyanarachchi. He must have had confidence that Douglas Peiris's group in Batalanda could do what Udugampola and Dharmadasa could not do for 5 days. Liyanarachchi's death within 24 hours after he was taken to Batalanda confirms how the suspects were "nursed" in the torture chambers of Batalanda at that time.

Wijedasa Liyanarachchi was the first lawyer to die in police custody. Professional colleagues started massive campaigns for him. They immediately demanded a special trial for this murder. The then Premadasa government could not avoid it. The trial for the abduction and killing of Wijedasa Liyanarachchi began before a trial at bar (tripartite bench). Superintendent of Police of Tangalla and two other policemen were the suspects. Near the end of the trial, the defendants admitted that they were guilty of kidnapping but not guilty of killing. Accordingly, the accused were found guilty of kidnapping and ordered to pay compensation of Rs. 80,000 along with a suspended sentence. No suspect was ever arrested or prosecuted for the killing of lawyer Wijedasa Liyanarachchi...! No one was ever accused from the Batalanda torture chamber although that was where he was last. Wickramasinghe was never questioned about his orders to send Liyanarachchi there.

Ratna Sri Wijesinghe, an acclaimed poet in Sri Lanka, wrote this for his school friend Liyanarachchi in the week of his death.

My first brother!

A bloom withers
 Yet others will follow!
 A river dries up
 Yet the springs that gave it life

will gush out again!
 Unlike that! A son like you

not in a day nor in an year nor in a century
will come! Mother Lanka will weep, weep and weep!

In days gone by as friends!
wrapped in the bosom of friendly
academy we looked at a world
riddled with wants
You my brother showed me
the way to the waterway across the valley!

Nestlings go their own way scattered in the air!
Where you fly now we do not know!
When elders tell us fell you did
from where you flew!

It is blood that flows from the quill
that writes your skill!
Clipped were your wings silence
your song of free will They can never do!

Lies they can scribble in gold
Truth can never emerge!
In our minds you go to sleep
to awaken every day!

පළමු සොහොයුරා

මලක් නම් පරවී ගියත්
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(Sal Gaha Yata, Ratna Sri Wijesinghe, Godage Publications 1996. This poem was published in the second week of September 1988 in the magazine of 'Irida Divaina')

Having learnt a lesson from this murder, Minister Wickramasinghe and his gang of murderers did not kidnap the lawyers who represented the suspects of the Patriotic People's Movement. Instead went straight to the houses and shot them dead. Accordingly, lawyer Charitha Lankapura was shot dead on 7th July 1989, lawyer Kanchana Abeypala on 28th August, 1989 and lawyer Neville Nishanka on 3rd October 1989.

Chapter 19

POLICEMEN TOO WERE KILLED IN THE "TORTURE LAND"



Sub Inspector Rohitha Priyadarshana

“The family of Sub Inspector of Police Mr. Rohitha Priyadarshana, claimed that a fair investigation was not carried out by the authorities including the ruling party regarding his mysterious disappearance while on duty at the Sapugaskanda Police Station during the reign of terror. Mr. Keerthi Athapattu, who was the H.Q.I. of the Sapugaskanda Police station at that time, called Priyadarshana from Biyagama village hotel on 20th February 1990, when he was on night duty. Through this message he advised Priyadarshana to come in civilian clothes to the Biyagama Village Inn, by the vehicle provided by him. The sub-inspector had left in the vehicle sent by Mr. Athapattu, after making a note of this at the police station and assigning duties to Sergeant Nandasena. According to the report Mr. Priyadarshana has been missing until now.”

[‘Raavaya’, Sunday March 8th, 1995]

Within a week of the publication of the report on the Batalanda’s torture chamber, another amazing encounter took place. A young macho man on a trailer bike came to the ‘Raavaya’ office (at Pirivena Road, Ratmalana) and requested to meet the reporter (the author) dealing

with the Batalanda matter. At that time, 'Peiris Aiya', who was the "gatekeeper" there, was a 'sharp' and sensible man beyond an ordinary security guard. Peiris, who was suspicious of this young visitor, turned him down saying "that reporter doesn't come to the newspaper often". This young man was not one to withdraw easily. He came again and again for a few days; made the usual request. Peiris, who is suspicious of everything, gave the usual answer, but the young man insisted that he had to meet the reporter anyway "to give information about a serious matter". Unable to ignore this persistent young man, Peiris informed the author who was upstairs at the time of this complex situation. He emphasised that although he looked suspicious, he did not have any weapons with him. While Peiris looked on with angst, the author spoke to the visitor at the area allocated to guests.

"I have a serious story to tell. Can't talk here. If they catch me now, they will kill me. Let's go to my place and talk. I have two helmets." Ignoring the look of apprehension in the eyes of Peiris, the author accompanied the young man to a house in the interior Katubedde. "I am an S.I. who was in the police, Ajith Jayasinghe. I have a serious story to tell you about Batalanda. I am also someone who was kept in Batalanda torture chambers. My best friend since school days was also in the police. He was also killed. I want to tell you my story. But my life must be protected. I have already escaped death once, and have been in prison for about two years. I think I'm the only guy who escaped from Douglas Peiris. So don't tell anyone about my movements. I trust you."

Even then, Ajith was in grave fear for his life. When Douglas Peiris and his criminal police gang attempted to abduct him on 25th February 1990, in a densely populated Dematagoda, he attempted to save himself by clinging on to a light post as he was able to resist since he was a former STF official and a well-known athlete of the Nalanda College. He tried to avoid them by using his official revolver and a hand grenade. While this struggle continued, an army vehicle stopped by to inquire into what was going on. If not for the army vehicle, his fate would have been different. Jayasinghe was taken by the army to Peliyagoda police station and handed over to the Counter Subversive Unit. Thereafter he was transferred to several places before being detained from 27th

October 1990 to 7 January 1992 at Pelawatte detention centre where most JVP suspects were held. This was purely due to the involvement of the army personnel on the day he was abducted. The reason for Douglas Peiris and his team to come after him was his persistence to go in search of the abductors and killers of his bosom friend, Rohitha Priyadarshana who was the chief of the crime unit of the Sapugaskanda police, and stating in public that his death would be avenged. He also operated alone. After obtaining leave from his job he went to look for Priyadarshana's killers. For this 'mistake', the police seniors including Douglas Peiris and other officers at the 'Counter Subversive Unit' tried to annihilate him. Finally, he was apprehended, tortured and detained at the Pelawatte camp without a court case.

Two other police colleagues of Priyadarshana were looking for his killers. They were sub-inspectors Vedasinghe and Subasinghe. Out of frustration, one day they angrily announced that they would 'raze the Peliyagoda police station to the ground' if they did not find Priyadarshana's killers. Hearing this, DIG Merrill Gunaratne called these two a side and said "Priyadarshana will come soon from where he is hiding". Then Douglas Peiris called them and threatened saying "If you try to find out what happened to Priyadarshana, you will be sent there too".

Ajith Jayasinghe was released in January 1992 under undisclosed conditions. Thilanga Sumathipala (the well known businessman, politician and cricket administrator), one of his school friends, sent Ajith to the United Kingdom for a while and later to Egypt, to protect his life. He returned to Sri Lanka in 1994 after Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNP government was defeated.

Police Sub-Inspector Rohitha Priyadarshana joined the police and was trained with his school-day friend Ajith Jayasinghe. Both served as Police Special Task Force [STF] officers in the Eastern Province during the Eelam War. Later they were assigned to the general police service. As a competent and honest police officer, Priyadarshana was praised by higher officials. Soon after he joined the Sapugaskanda police, he became the head of the crime division. His honesty was getting in the

way of the Perera family [Gonawala Sunil's], the main gangsters in the province who had political patronage. Priyadarshana was looking for the criminals who attacked the Sapugaskanda police station, killed three police officers and exploded a bomb inside the station. [This is detailed in Chapter 20]. If he were to complete this criminal investigation, the strange reason why a gang led by a powerful minister of the country attacked a police station and killed the officers would have been found out. But this criminal gang killed him before that. The Batalanda Commission records how Priyadarshana was brought to be killed.

“...Rohitha Priyadarshana who was originally dressed in his uniform, had returned clad in a shirt and trouser to the area in which the ‘reserve officer’ was on duty, and had placed an entry in the relevant official record (Routine Information Book). It is in evidence that Priyadarshana did have in his custody his official service revolver. He had then proceeded to where Bandula Dinapurna and the other visitors were, and had bid them good bye. Dinapurna had followed Priyadarshana to the main entrance to the station. While going out, Priyadarshana had invited Dinapurna also to come along with him to go to the Biyagama Village Hotel. This is also indicative of the fact that the aforementioned entry made by Priyadarshana was made in the normal course of events to justify and account for his departure from the Station. Police witnesses stated that in police parlance, such entries are referred to as ‘bata outs’. This type of entry is made to claim subsistence, and also to give an official account to the outing. Bandula Dinapurna had refused to go with Priyadarshana. However Dinapurna had seen a white coloured car parked outside the Station. One person had been standing outside the car. This person had not been known to Dinapurna earlier. Priyadarshana had proceeded up to the car, and had got into the front seat of the vehicle. Thereafter, the car had proceeded in the direction of the Biyagama Village Hotel, driven by the earlier mentioned person. By the time the car left, the time had been around 8.30pm. This was the last occasion anybody claimed before the Commission that he or she saw Priyadarshana alive. Not even the family members of the Priyadarshana family had heard of Priyadarshana’s existence, from this point onwards.” (Page 87, Batalanda Commission Report)

Had Bandula Dinapurna joined Priyadarshana on that journey, things may have taken a different turn. At that time, Dinapurna was a member of the editorial board at the 'Divaina' newspaper of the Upali Newspaper Company. As he was a journalist and Priyadarshana had company, the killers may not have targeted him that day. As Priyadarshana's body was recovered from the Kelani river after a few days and he had left with an unknown person prior to that, his death was not a mystery. Although he was summoned to the Biyagama Village Hotel, killed and the body was dumped in the river, it was identified when it floated and eerily surfaced from the river behind the Peliyagoda police station where his killers were...! After the body was identified, it was tied up behind the police station for further investigations but to everyone's astonishment the body disappeared from where it was tied up. Rohitha Priyadarshana was killed in February 1990, after several months of the wiping out of the Patriotic Movement.

Police Constable P.A. Sisira Kumara [27339] was an officer serving in Kelaniya Police station. He was on duty on 23rd December 1989 with Police officer Bodhi. Suddenly, a group of people who came in a white van kidnapped Sisira Kumara. It was suspected that he was abducted by the 'Counter Subversive Unit' in Kelaniya Police Division. A few days after this abduction, one of his friends, P.O. Manjula Thushara Thenuwara saw his friend Sisira Kumara detained at the Peliyagoda police station.

Later he saw Sisira Kumara being taken to the Sapugaskanda police station. After that, neither his wife nor his family received any news about Sisira Kumara. He disappeared forever. P.A. Sisira Kumara's relatives and friends are still unaware of the reason behind his abduction or disappearance. During the 'Raavaya' investigation on Batalanda, Sisira Kumara's relatives as well as police friends revealed information about him. However, the attention of the Batalanda Commission was not focused on Sisira Kumara. The fate of Madduma Hetti Vidanalage, a minor police officer who worked at the Sapugaskanda Police station, was a different one.

One of the 'scenarios' of the attack on the Sapugaskanda police station in July 1989 was the detonation of a bomb on the upper floor of the police station. [See Chapter 20]. Shantilal was the suspect who was thought to have brought the bomb inside the police station.

It was read in a testimony given before the commission that he escaped when he was taken to arrest the suspended police constable Wijethilaka who gave him the 'parcel bomb'. However, after this "escape", there is no record of Shantilal being alive.

More important than the killing of fellow officers without any trial in this way are the murderers used for the crime. Here our focus was back again on Rasendra of Uragasmansandhiya, a notorious criminal who was one of the civilians in the criminal police gang of Douglas Peiris. The strong evidence given about the kidnappings of this group by Sub Inspector of Police Ajith Jayasinghe proves that this criminal police gang used this hired criminal to kill their fellow officers. At the time, police using a criminal to kill their fellow officers was not even part of an American horror movie. Yet, this was actually happening in Sri Lanka. If Sub-Inspector Ajith Jayasinghe did not come in search of 'Raavaya', Batalanda Commission would neither have been appointed nor would have had a strong witness.

The editorial board of 'Raavaya' took a serious decision and published Ajith Jayasinghe's story in parts. It was written as a special feature during this time of terror by Gunasinghe Hettiarachchi. Also, Jayasinghe accompanied the author to meet Manori Muttettuwegama, who headed one of the commissions appointed by President Chandrika Kumaratunge to trace the missing persons in 1988/89 and recorded the information. Before Ajith Jayasingha, who was later reinstated in service could testify before the Batalanda Commission, Douglas Pieris fled to Switzerland..! After reinstatement, Sub-Inspector Jayasinghe, was assigned to the ministerial security unit of the police. In 2002, when Ranil Wickremesinghe became the Prime Minister again, he moved to a foreign country for his protection.

Chapter 20

MINISTER'S UNDERWORLD THUGS ATTACK THE POLICE STATION

"On the morning of this attack itself, Inspector Wickramasinghe himself had also arrested the wife of Sumith Perera alias Kaluwa, Shirani Perera alias Lalani Renuka. She had been living at No. 50, Jayaweera Mawatha, Gonawala. At the time of arrest, Wickramasinghe had informed her that her husband, Kaluwa, had died when he was attacking Sapugaskanda Police Station. Having arrested her, she had been brought to the Sapugaskanda Police Station where she had identified the body of Kaluwa. She too had been detained at the Sapugaskanda Police Station on a detention order. On 10th August 1989, she had been produced before a magistrate and she had been discharged from further proceedings.

"Under these circumstances, the Commission proceeded to ascertain who Sumith Perera alias Kaluwa was. Sumith Perera was the son of Piyadasa Perera of Gonawela. Piyadasa Perera had seven brothers. They were Sammy Perera, Harold Perera, Vincent Perera, Cyril Perera, Shelton Perera, Sunil Perera alias Gonawala Sunil and Tudor Perera. Sumith Perera had been working at a private company named Burgen Lanka, as a supervisor. He had got married to Shirani Perera alias Lalani Renuka in 1985."

[Page 79, Batalanda Commission Report]

On 16th July 1989, at 2.20 in the morning, a bomb exploded on the upper floor of the Sapugaskanda police station. At the same time, an attack was launched from the right side, and the attackers stormed the police station. Officer in charge of the station Lalith Mahanama was shot dead, while Sub Constable Sarath Kumara, (6584) and Dayananda (12336) were seriously injured. All these three died after being admitted

to the hospital. Several people, including police constable Rupananda, were injured and received treatment. Two attackers also died in front of the police station.

Rohitha Priyadarshana, OIC crime branch, who had gone out with a group of officers on official duty, returned to the station upon hearing the sound of the bomb. The injured were sent to hospitals. Senior Superintendent of Police Nalin Delgoda, Assistant Superintendent of Police Raja Dias and Deputy Inspector General of Police Meryl Gunaratne arrived there in the morning. The investigation into the attack on the police was entrusted to Raja Dias and Inspector Ranjith Wickramasinghe who was under him as the head of the 'Counter Subversive Unit' in Kelaniya division. His supervisor was Douglas Peiris. However, Rohitha Priyadarshana's inquiring eye was focused towards these attackers. The members of the Gonawala Perera family were involved in many of his criminal investigations even at that time.

The attackers had stolen three weapons from the police. These were type 84S semi- automatic rifle, Lalith Mahanama's duty revolver and Sarath Kumara's repeater gun. As revealed in the Batalanda Commission, even though the bullets were scattered all over the police station and three officers were killed, these police bosses did not call the government analyst. They were conducting their own separate "investigation". One of them was easily identified, while searching for the identity of the attackers' bodies. He was Sumith Perera alias 'Kaluwa' and he was no stranger to the police. He was the brother-in-law of Sujeeva Dhammika [27388] who was a Police Constable in Biyagama Police, was called to identify the body in addition to the wife of the deceased Shirani Perera.

Police Officer Sujeeva Dhammika was produced in court and released shortly afterwards. Shirani Perera was detained at the Sapugaskanda police station for some time on a detention order but later produced in court and released.

During the police investigation, Madduma Hettavidanilage Shantilal, who was a minor employee, came under suspicion. Under continuous questioning, he admitted that in the evening of the day of

the explosion he had brought a parcel to the police station and left it in the toilet upstairs. He said the parcel was given to him by constable Wijethilaka who at that time was interdicted from the same police station.

It was revealed in the Commission that Sergeant Ratnayake of the 'Counter Subversive Unit' went to arrest Wijethilaka guided by Shanthilal. They had shot someone they suspected to be Wijethilaka. However, Wijethilaka had taken flight. Sergeant Ratnayake told the commission that Shanthilal, the other suspect, was not there when they went looking for him..! On 17th February 1990, DIG Nalin Delgoda appointed Wijethilaka to the police service without any trial. Shanthilal disappeared forever.

Shelton Perera, one of Kaluwa's uncles, was also arrested on suspicion of being an accomplice. His wife Munasinghe Kankanamge Ranjani complained to Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe about this arrest. Later, the police released Shelton Perera on the orders of Minister Wickremesinghe. The police failed to carry out any further investigations into detonating a bomb inside the police station, attacking and killing three police officers and stealing weapons. What was the purpose of the attack on Sapugaskanda Police? The Batalanda Commission also did not find out who its planners were. It was not within the scope of the task of the commission. It was left for the future researchers.

The Sapugaskanda Police was deployed to provide external security to Sri Lanka's only petroleum refinery which was nearby. The Petroleum Corporation had a separate service for internal security. The other special duty that was added to the daily duties of this police station was to provide security to Minister Ranil when he was at his Batalanda residence and also to provide security when he visited the Biyagama electorate. In 1989, Sapugaskanda Police was a Grade C Police. According to the testimony given before the commission by Inspector General of Police, Ernest Perera, requests were made by Minister Ranil to promote the said police station to Grade A. Was this the underlying purpose of attacking the police station?

Kaluwa alias Sumith Perera was the underworld boss of Biyagama after his uncle Sunil was killed. He was following the family's 'legacy' conniving with the murderous companions of his 'Underworld uncle'. As revealed in the commission, he was a close friend of Soththi Upali and other underworld leaders. The fact that he was a close confidante of the Minister Wickremesinghe was revealed by his job at the Biyagama Trade Zone and by the way he intervened to free his relatives. If so, did they attack the police to get weapons for this underworld gang? These are still unanswered questions. However, it was clear that Minister Wickremesinghe is the screenwriter as well as the director of this political drama. In all these political crime dramas such as Gampaha Security Board, Sunil's pardon, voter rigging and Mulkirigala election, Minister Ranil was the screenwriter and director.

Chapter 21

RANSOM MAFIA IN BATALANDA

'After several days, whilst Patrick Perera was in the lottery ticket counter at the Kiribathgoda junction, an unknown person approached him, gave a chit of paper, and said that 'you will be able to trace your son, go and meet this gentleman.' Thereafter, this unknown person left. Patric Perera examined the chit. It contained the name "Attorney Lakshman Ranasinghe" and had two telephone (502850 and 24853) numbers. A copy of piece of this paper was produced marked X27. Patrick Perera went to a telephone and took a call to one of the numbers. A lady who answered the telephone said that Attorney Lakshman Ranasinghe was not in and that he had gone for work. Upon inquiring where Lakshman Ranasinghe had gone to, the lady had said that it was to the State Pharmaceutical Corporation situated at Gaffoor Building, Colombo Fort. Hence, Patrick Perera went to the Corporation and made inquiries. Inquiries so made revealed that Attorney Ranasinghe was the Chairman of that corporation. He then went to the Chairman's office and met Lakshman Ranasinghe. He showed the chit to Ranasinghe and explained to him, what had happened to Earl Suggy. Patrick Perera pleaded with Ranasinghe to secure the release of his son. Ranasinghe said that the matter was a very complicated and difficult job. He said that it would cost a lot of money. Ranasinghe inquired whether he could give Rupees fifty thousand [Rs.50,000/=] Patrick pleaded with Ranasinghe to reduce the amount. Ranasinghe had replied that he was not in a position to reduce the amount. Finally Patric Perera agreed to give Ranasinghe the required amount, by even selling a land."

[Pages 44-45, Batalanda Commission Report]

Earl Sugi Perera's fate changed because he was related to Inspector General of Police Ernest Perera. Other "suspects" brought to Batalanda

were not so lucky. One thing was clear from Earl Sugi's story. The involvement of the lawyers related to the country's ruling party having links with the killer gang. Wasala, a clerk at People's Bank Kelaniya branch, too presented another important proof to this. In 1989, this bank was robbed. Wasala was taken to Batalanda by the Kelaniya 'Counter Subversive Unit' without the Bank's security officers and the manager. While he was detained there and subjected to torture, his father too got a note. The note was handed over by Police Sergeant Upali. The ransom to save Wasala's life was Rs 50,000. The message said that when the amount was given to Anil Gunawardena, a lawyer residing in Waragoda, Kelaniya, 'Wasala would be released after being presented to court'. Accordingly, the ransom was paid and Wasala Jayasekara was lucky to survive.

Born in Baddegama, Majuane, Danangodage Hemachandra alias Heme was a JVP [1978-1984] leader in Galle district. At the age of 16, he was imprisoned as a suspect in the April 1971 uprising. Raasendra, who was sent to prison from Uragasmansandhi, meets Hemachandra while living in the 'big tiled house'. After Hemachandra was released from prison, he joined politics again. His jail mate Raasendra was a provincial 'thug' and a hired criminal. This however, did not hinder the friendship of the two. A father of six, Hemachandra became politically inactive in July 1983 when the Jayawardene government banned the JVP. But his political loyalties remained the same.

Even though he did not engage in politics, being a former leader of a banned party, Hemachandra did not live in his familiar villages of Baddegama, Sandaravala and Dodangoda but sought safety elsewhere. He was constantly hanging around with his chummery buddies in Colombo. He was a middleman in the 'buying and selling' trade to support his family. He had to travel around the suburbs near Colombo to grapple with this lifestyle. During one of these trips in Kiribathgoda, towards the end of 1988, he meets his old political colleague, the prison mate Raasendra who was with him in the food queue. Immediately after meeting, he narrated his struggle for survival to Raasendra. Knowing his friend's "ways of life" very well, he made sure not to ask what the old friend was doing.

"Okay Heme, you find the money. A friend of mine brings saris from India. I will get you the saris at a nominal rate. You can sell the at a profit."

Raasendra offered to help Heme at this first meeting. They said goodbye, fixing a date and time to meet very soon. Heme immediately went to Sapugaskanda and there he met Saman Vaidyanatha, an old political friend who worked in the oil refinery. Heme said that he was going to start a new business with Raasendra, who happens to be known to Saman too. A date was fixed to borrow Rs. 5000 and Saman's motorcycle for one day.

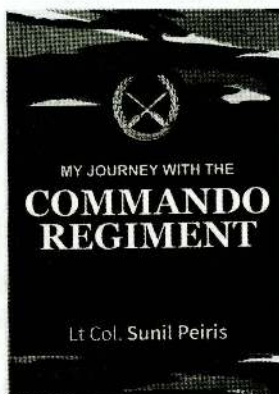
On the appointed day he went to Saman's lodging in Batalanda [Sapugaskanda], obtained the loan and the motorcycle. Then he left for Pettah to meet Raasendra who was with the Sari businessman. The journey associated with Heme's new business halted in front of the Peliyagoda police station. A group of 'black cats' who were waiting for him jumped in front of the motorcycle and took him to the police station along with the motorcycle. Heme's destiny was in the direction of Batalanda torture chambers.

That evening, before Saman Vaidyanatha could arrive at his shelter at Batalanda, he received information that armed "black cats" members were surrounding his shelter. He immediately went into hiding saying goodbye to work and family and fled the country to save his life. He returned to Sri Lanka from Japan after five years. In such a political environment, abductions and collecting ransoms by 'official' gangs continued all throughout. As the rulers were well aware of these official gangster "operations" the reports ended in the trash basket or were covered up.

Hemachandra Danangoda was not among the living to testify at the commission. Saman Vaidyanatha too was not present in Sri Lanka. There were hundreds of similar stories connected to the 'ransom mafia at Batalanda'. They were buried by the sands of time.

Chapter 22

THE COMMONADO BOSS WHO REFUSED TO KILL INNOCENTS



Lieutenant Colonel Sunil Peiris / Cover page of Lt Col Peiris's book

"Good morning sir"

"Is that Colonel Peiris?" he asked. "Yes, that's me," I said.

Then he said, "I just sent a bus load of 26 boys to the camp. They must have arrived by now. Do you know what to do with them?"

"Sorry, I don't know What to do?" I asked.

"What? ..Don't know? Everyone knows what to do when people like them are sent, only you don't know. If you don't know why are you sitting there?" he said harshly.

Totally puzzled, I thought this was all nonsense, I was also angry. No one has spoken to me like this before. The morning wasn't a good one.

As I was offended, I asked "So what should be done? Shall I offer them jobs at the camp?...Or keep them next to each other near the guard room and interrogate them?"

This conversation got very heated. I firmly thought that I would not let this man harass me. Being a former Estate Superintendent, he used the same uncouth language being used in the plantation sector to address me.

"I say, do you know that I am also a lieutenant colonel and can do what I want better than you?".

"Yes, you are a member of the Rifle Corps. And someone who does not know the army and its traditions and ethics" I replied back.

The altercation that ensued cannot be documented here. My wife stared open-mouthed.

The official hung up the phone saying, "See what I will do to you."

[Pages 178 – 179, My Journey with the Commando Regiment, Lt. Col. Sunil Peiris, Translator, Lt. Col. Pradeep Kekulavala, First Edition 2022]

Lt. Col. Sunil Peiris was a distinguished officer in the Army [August 1969 - May 1998]. The eldest son of a principal, during his school days he was the head prefect of St. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. He was the founder of the Commando Force, its founding leader and nicknamed 'Napoleon' in the army. Wing Commander Eksith Peiris (1951-1985) who laid down his life in the Eelam war was the founder member of the Air Commando unit of the Air Force. These two brothers were brave in the war. They were honest and did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the country. They also did not think twice to refuse to carry out unlawful orders.

Thirteen years after the Eelam War, Lt. Col. Peiris wrote an autobiography about his military career. He ends the biography with the chapter 'The end of my dream'. We start this chapter with a few sections taken from his last chapter.

Sunil Peiris in his memoirs does not divulge to the reader who the 'higher officer' was, who gave him this illegal order to kill 26 young men on a day in May 1988, who were loaded into a bus and sent to the headquarters of the commando force in Ganemulla, Gampaha, without

any accountability. We do not see this as covering up the truth about the country's military history. Often it happens because government officials are bound to keep 'official information' even after the service. Yet, after 24 years of his untimely farewell to the military life he loved so much, this honest officer left enough clues for us to guess who this 'high official' was.

Dudley Shelton Senanayake, who was the hereditary leader of the United National Party, died in April 1972. Even then its second leader

J. R. Jayawardene and Dudley had a strong dispute for the leadership of the party. Dudley's untimely death ended the feud and allowed JR to take the party leadership unopposed. Right from the beginning, the UNP was nicknamed 'the party of the relatives'. Jayawardena took this opportunity to make the UNP, which was a 'family fortune' of Senanayake's close relatives since birth, a 'family fortune' of the Jayawardena family. He started an operation to oust Senanayake's close relatives from the party leadership. For that, a blood relative who was an enemy of the Senanayake family was used as a 'puppet'. He is none other than Ranjan Wijeratne.

Ranjan Wijeratne, like other elite youths of his generation, climbed the ladder of a planter at the end of his schooling. For a long time he helped the British Plantations to carry out the semi military rule that existed at that time. As part of this military rule, all those who were prepared to join plantation authorities of the British plantation companies were recruited into the government's voluntary force. The commanding officer post of the plantation division was awarded after basic military training. Later, they were promoted in the military ranks parallel to the rise in the rank of the plantation company. By giving these military training and positions of authority, it was expected that Plantation workers could be subjected to military control. On the other hand, when the government called in the voluntary forces in emergency situations, its leadership ranks too were given to the plantation chiefs.

It was none other than Ranjan Wijeratna, a Lieutenant Colonel in the voluntary force and the then General Secretary of the UNP who ordered Lt. Col. Sunil Peiris of the Commando Force to kill 26 youths

sent to the camp by speaking in the above manner. Ranjan Wijeratne, who was the puppet after Senanayake's expulsion from UNP in the 70s, in the 80s, was committed to making the party a Jayawardene family's estate. During this time, the UNP leader in Gampaha district was Ranil Wickramasinghe, the political heir of the Jayawardene family. Ranjan Wijeratne went personally to aid him to maintain political power in Gampaha district and to suppress his enemies. The information of the Gampaha District Security Board and the reports of the 'Batalanda Commission' confirmed that 'Gampaha Defence Chair' was always held by one of these two.

Whose political wish did Ranjan Wijeratne seek to fulfil when he ordered Lt. Col. Sunil Peiris to kill 26 young men in the morning of May 1988? Ranil Wickramasinghe, who was already operating the torture chambers and destroying his political enemies, felt the need to start a second torture camp because the 'capacity' of the Batalanda had already exceeded. The nearest alternative was the commando headquarters at Ganemulla. Fortunately for Ranil Wickremesinghe's political enemies, the military leader there was a distinguished professional soldier. He received his advanced training at Royal College of Military Science at Shrivenham Staff Training College, Camberley in UK. Britain was one of the three main leaders of the Allied forces in World War II. Not only did the British play a decisive role in defeating the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler in Germany, British legal experts also took the lead in setting up the 'Nuremberg' military court to punish war criminals. The Nuremberg Tribunal made a powerful influence on the history of human rights law. It is the basic doctrine that even if it is an order from above, if it is illegal, the military officer who acted on the order is responsible for the crime committed by following the order. Lt. Col. Sunil Pieris, disobeying Ranjan Wijeratne's order without hesitation, resigned from his job the same day bidding goodbye to his military career.

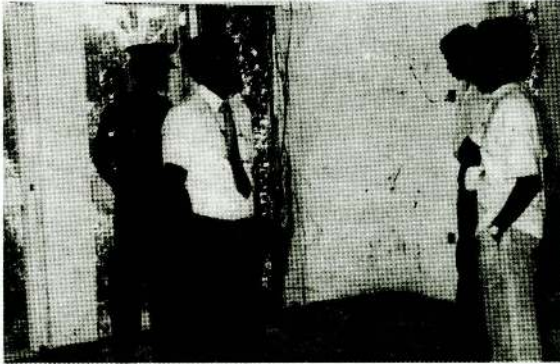
How did the conflict between Peiris and Wijeratne end? Both were lieutenant colonels. Both were alumni of St. Thomas College in Mt. Lavinia. However, their training was twofold. Because of this, the 'plantation soldier' did not look like a hero to the professional soldier. Sunil Peiris went home satisfied with the rank he got without killing

people illegally and wrongfully. Even today, he is living his autumn years happily. Ranjan Wijeratne joined the Premadasa regime after the Jayawardene regime and became the Minister of State for State Security. In the 1988/89 era, he became the second in command who sent nearly 60,000 young people in the southern provinces to their deaths. In 1991, he was killed in a bomb blast.

Sunil Peiris was the only military officer in the history of the modern Sri Lankan war who resisted the execution of an illegal order by preserving the 'Nuremberg' legacy. Sunil Peiris was also the only military officer who recorded it in history. Although the military history is such, the political history is completely different. Even after being rejected twice by the public, Ranil Wickramasinghe, who followed the path shown by Ranjan Wijeratne over the bodies of innocents, became the president of the country through a shortcut.

Chapter 23

'RAVAYA' INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS DISCOVER THE TORTURE CHAMBER



The author Nandana Weeraratne at Batalanda torture chamber with the investigators from the Government Analyst's Department during the investigations

Batalanda and the Political Narrative Surrounding Ranil Wickremesinghe.

'It is indeed true that a courageous and daring group of journalists from Raavaya infiltrated the Batalanda torture chamber. Raavaya published a comprehensive report on this event. However, during that time, there was no backing from the government-controlled media. Moreover, our journalists did not directly accuse Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe of overseeing this torture chamber. Their primary inquiry concerning Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe was how, given the clear evidence of numerous individuals, both affiliated and unaffiliated with the JVP, being killed in this torture chamber, he, residing in close proximity, could have been unaware of its existence. After our reporters' raid and subsequent widespread publication, a false police investigation ensued. By that time, all blood stains in the torture chamber had been erased.

It is equally true that we have not accused the government secretly, but rather publicly, of failing to conduct a comprehensive investigation into this particular issue. Regrettably, we are compelled to accuse a government that ascended to power promising to address the realities of all torture chambers, only to adopt a different approach once in office. When we discussed Batalanda or any other torture chamber, our intent was not to slander anyone but to advocate for the eradication of the entrenched culture of political violence that still persists in this country. Despite a year passing since the new government assumed power, we are yet to witness significant strides in this direction.

[Portrayal of Batalanda and Ranil, 'Raavaya' editorial, Victor Ivan],
01 October 1995]

The memories of the Batalanda torture chambers, where 'Ranasinghe' from Anuradhapura and 'Raasendra' from Uragasmansandiya once resided for a while, have haunted the author for several years. Situated approximately two kilometres from the Kiribathgoda junction, off the Colombo-Kandy road, along the Biyagama road to the south, lies the Batalanda junction. The official housing complex of the urea plant was built in an isolated area, about 600m from the main road, comprising of sixty-two houses categorized into three types. However, by 1995, three-quarters of the housing system had been occupied by a military base. Since 1988, only members of the military camp, police officers, and politicians living there were permitted access to this housing complex. It's believed that around 5000 youths perished in this compound, which served as the primary torture chamber in the Gampaha district during the period of terror. However, due to the prohibition of entry to outsiders, it remained a continuously concealed location.

On one hand, Batalanda was a place that laughed at the ironic fate of Sri Lankan youth. The youth training centre belonging to the National Youth Service Council in Heiyanthuduwa was separated from this housing complex by a narrow field. The National Youth Service Council was the main government-owned institution for the youth welfare in Sri Lanka. Ever since the 'State Youth Council' started in 1969, it was a pawn of the ruling political party. During 1970-77,

its power was with the famous 'Janavega' group. This group was led by Sunetra Bandaranaike and her then husband Kumar Rupasingha. They were maintaining a policy of inheritance of 'keeping politics for themselves and farming for others'. For this purpose, they ran a "collective farm" in Ridigama, Eraminiyaya, in Hambantota District and trained 'poor youths to farm instead of rebelling'.

Since 1977, its power has been with, Ranil Wickramasinghe - Charitha Ratwatte duo. All these State youth leaders came from elite political families in Sri Lanka. Their duty was to protect the elite political heritage of their elders. For that, they parked the rest of the country's youth to the National Youth Service Council to create 'yes people'. Not only government jobs in the powerful repressive UNP government, even the newly created Free Trade Zones provided employment to their supporters. This functioned in addition to the Job Bank system which was in place. During this time it was mandatory for a graduate to submit a letter of recommendation by the UNP member of parliament or the electorate organiser when applying for a job. These practices gradually contaminated all arms of government, changing the nature of all the State services to one rampant with cronyism, nepotism and corruption. It became the norm of the day and contributed towards creating a culture where such practices are openly accepted and seen as the only way to access State employment, promotions within services and other perks.

The youth who detested this state youth movement and its politics joined an alternative political movement: the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The government trained the youth by keeping them in official institutions while Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna gave youth training in secret locations in the jungle. By giving jobs only to its party members the government was persecuting the youth who were not members of the UNP. As a result the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna organised the victimised youth politically. They rallied against the government. In July 1987, after the signing of the Indo-Ceylon Agreement by the Jayawardene regime, an Indian army of about 200,000 occupied the North-Eastern provinces. Taking the political advantage at this time, JVP laid the patriotic slogan 'FIGHTING AGAINST INJUSTICES' to the oppressed youth.

After this reign of terror, the Batalanda housing complex was turned into a military base, making it hard to enter there. Especially for a 'Raavaya' reporter, let alone investigating it, even entering it was a nightmare. Ranil Wickramasinghe was the prime minister of the country (1993-94) especially after that deadly period of 88/89. As mentioned before, during Ranil Wickremesinghe's early period in power [1977- 1994], this housing complex was used as his regional political office. Initially, these houses were known as 'Ali Wadiya' in Batalanda. In 1988, with the start of the terror era, it became famous as 'Batalanda torture chambers' (Batalanda Wadakaagaraya).

In 1994, Chandrika Kumaratunge's united front government came to power, putting an end to the 17-year UNP rule. However, despite their promise to end the culture of political killings and restore democracy, this united front carefully guarded the secrets of Batalanda, even after five months in office. As time passed, the author's determination to investigate this matter persisted. Under the new regime, the author and his team spent months seeking a way to enter Batalanda. At that time, the Batalanda housing complex functioned as a semi-military base, perceived to be even more secure than before. It was inconceivable for a reporter from an alternative newspaper like 'Raavaya' to gain entry. During that period, the editor of 'Raavaya,' Victor Ivan (also known as 'Podi Atula' from his days with the JVP uprising in 1971), held a close friendship with President Chandrika Kumaratunga. He advised the reporters to craft reports aimed at steering the Peoples' Alliance government towards 'taking the country in the right direction.'

Utilising this opportunity, the author sought permission from 'Raavaya' to cover the closed 'Urea Factory' in Sapugaskanda. The author showed significant interest in exploring the fate of that investment, which ranked second only to the Mahaweli accelerated program. Victor Ivan encouraged this research at the time because this factory was a legitimate industrial brainchild of the United Front government (1970-1977). However, the author's underlying goal was to investigate the Batalanda torture chambers.

While a 'Raavaya' media identity pass could facilitate entry into the 'Urea factory,' it was insufficient for access to the housing complex, which operated as a semi-military base. To navigate this challenge, the 'Presidential Media Unit' had to be involved, which was facilitated by the fact that the author's close friend, Wasantha Kulatunga, was the main producer there.

A day in January 1995 was used for this. A video crew from the Presidential Media Unit also joined the journey. The group first went to see the 'Urea Factory' in Sapugaskanda. By that time, the Indian company had scooped out the factory completely. Only a giant crane was visible. The security guards there did not allow us to enter. When Samaratunga, the 70-year-old administrative authority of the factory, was approached, he refused to provide information, citing its illegality due to the classification as 'state secrets.' The group then dialled Asoka Senanayake, the liquidator of the factory and chairman of Lanka Ashok Leyland Company, using Samaratunga's telephone.

Asoka answered the call but declined to share the list of civil houses in the housing complex, asserting his obligation to safeguard, again the 'state secrets.'

"Although the government has transitioned from the UNP to the People's Alliance, industrial control remained unchanged. If there is permission from the Minister of Industry, consideration can be given. Nevertheless, there is no factory there anymore. Therefore, it is advised to return to your place of origin."

The first prime minister's grandson arrogantly conveyed the political tension over the phone. We were compelled to devise a covert plan. Ashoka Senanayake made this process easier. Consequently, the author suggested to the group, a visit to the 'Batalanda Fertilizer Houses.' The new president's video team was notably incensed by the insult. Our proposal was promptly approved, and we proceeded directly to the housing complex. However, we were halted at the entry checkpoint.

We were directed to the camp's head. At that moment, we needed valid reasons to enter a military camp. It was then that Lord Ganesh's

wisdom descended upon us. Instead of using 'Raavaya' media passes, we presented the President's Office identification cards.

"We have arrived to identify the civilians residing within this military camp. The president intends to relocate the civilians and transition this area entirely to a military camp. Therefore, please assist us in locating houses designated for the army."

The trainee military officer present seemed eager to evade the group of political henchmen and police gangs lingering about, as he seemed more cooperative and resourceful than we had initially anticipated.

"Yes, huge nuisance. We can't fulfil our duties. Vehicles arrive one by one to meet this one and that one 24 hours a day. This doesn't align with the purpose of a military base... This is very good work" he claimed.

We recognized the peril of entering houses unarmed where a police killing gang resided, with only notebooks, carbon pens, and pencils. What protection did we have? Once more, Lord Ganesh seemed to come to our aid.

We politely requested ... "To facilitate this task, could you provide us with the army's assistance? Assign two soldiers to guide us to the houses owned by the army. This will expedite our record-keeping."

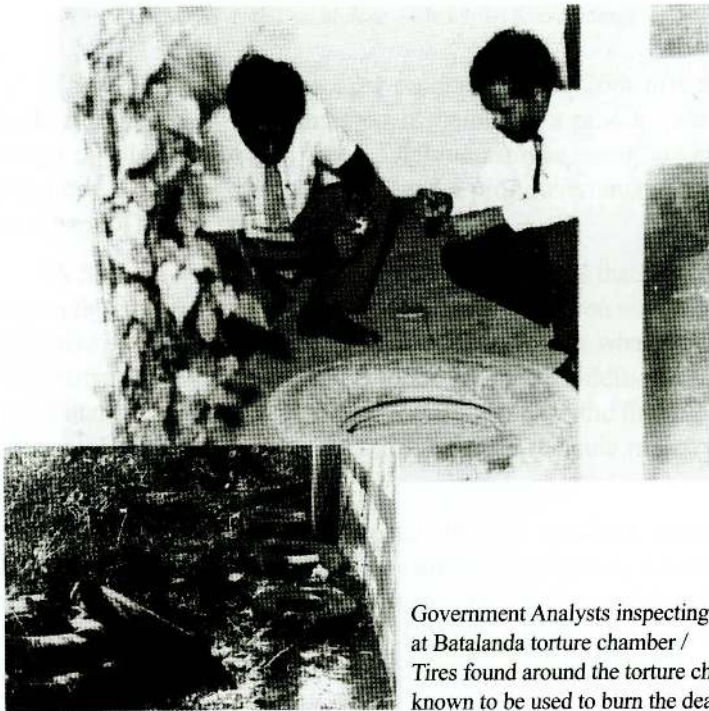
From then on, we navigated the 'Fertiliser housing complex' under the protection of two armed soldiers...! We began our search for civilians inhabiting the area and the previous owners of those houses. The boy mentioned in Chapter 17 joined our group as we entered the Batalanda housing complex, searching the initial few houses for occupants.

Indeed, we might have overlooked two abandoned and closed houses if not for this child. As we went from house to house in search of the torture chambers, a well-built man in shorts and a shirt emerged from an opulent house in the midst of a small zoo.

'Why? Are you searching for torture chambers?' he asked.

Surprisingly, Douglas Peiris was still residing there when we arrived. He expressed his doubts about us in that sarcastic manner. It

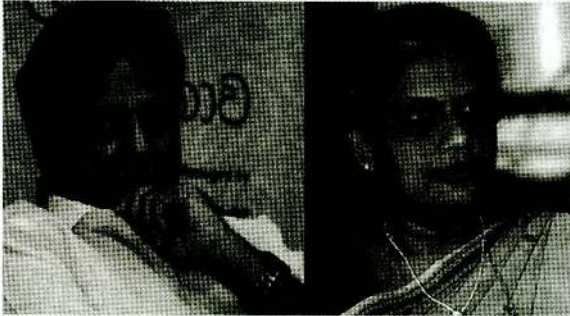
was Douglas Peiris, the leader of the torturers, speaking as if he was aware that his crimes would catch up to him. This encounter was also captured on video. The author immediately recognized the Senior Superintendent of Police Peiris, as they had met earlier when he visited the Eastern Province to oversee the 1994 general election. However, Pieris did not recognize him. The group pacified Pieris' curiosity and proceeded with their work. However, the group didn't trust that the People's Alliance government, despite boasting about its election promises, would take legal action against these criminals. Nonetheless, the author's ultimate goal was to ensure justice and accountability for the young generation who lost their lives due to various forms of torture in this chamber and their parents. It is only then that a society can lay down a way forward to prevent another chapter of such repression, torture and extra judicial killings taking place within them in the future.



*Government Analysts inspecting further
at Batalanda torture chamber /
Tires found around the torture chambers,
known to be used to burn the dead bodies*

Chapter 24

ENEMIES AND FRIENDS IN THE TORTURE CHAMBER



Sanath Gunathileke | Chandrika Kumaratunge

“The 'Lankadeepa' newspaper reported on the 26th that Sirikota made a statement to 'Lankadeepa,' revealing of a plan to tarnish the image of UNP leader Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe using government resources, government newspapers, and a pro- government alternative newspaper. The newspaper further stated:

“A Sirikota spokesperson informed 'Lankadeepa' that as the initial step in this smear campaign, the government's intention was to conduct extensive investigations in the Biyagama electorate, where Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe served as an electorate organizer. Additionally, it was noted that the government aims to widely publicise the findings of the subsequent digging and investigations at the Batalanda military camp for the second time.”

Later, on the 28th, 'Dinapati,' in the political column of 'Lankadeepa,' reported about this. We are not surprised by 'Lankadeepa' report, published by Vijaya Newspaper', that has a special inclination towards Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe. Family members naturally warrant favouritism and in times of crisis, they should be protected. However, facts cannot be twisted in the name of kinship.

To date, the government has not initiated any investigation into the Batalanda torture chamber. Not only Batalanda but no inquiries have been made into alleged torture centers in Dikwella or Akurassa. It is an outright falsehood that the government has conducted extensive inspections and investigations in the housing complex."

[Portrayal of Batalanda and Ranil, Raavaya Editorial 10/01/1995]
In that era, it was not easy to expose fraud and corruption in the media,

let alone the political crimes of the established ruling class of our country.

All major newspapers in the country were run by the Jayawardena-Wijewardena-Wickramasinghe family. They implemented a method of

taming other newspapers that they had no ownership of. In the state media, the situation was even worse. There were government-owned television channels, radio and two editorial committees at Lake House. When these parties ruled, these sham writers (Liyana Appula) fulfilled the needs of their political employers by inflating their leaders. Because of this, in the media of each government, there was a section called "Jurassic Park" where there were Journalists who got paid without working. So it is up to you, the reader, to include these "dinosaurs" in the relevant category according to the positions they held during their government.

However, it is important to note that Victor Ivan's editorial was written not as a response to a newspaper of a media organization of this government. This was because 'Lankadeepaya' of the 'Vijaya Newspapers', owned by the then opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's Uncle Ranjith Wijewardene, was ready to shamelessly engage in any underhand work of the UNP. In the author's belief, this 'destiny' of the country's media has not changed yet. But let's return to the exploration of Batalanda.

The 'Raavaya' investigators first entered the Batalanda torture chamber on 17 January 1995. The investigative article, titled 'Sapugaskanda Torture House of Pure Gentlemen,' was prepared in the third week of January 1995. The general policy of the 'Raavaya'

newspaper dictated that if journalistic research reports for the newspaper were finalised before Wednesday, they would be printed as the middle two pages of the newspaper of the subsequent Sunday. This policy aimed to respect the time value of both independent journalists and the permanent staff and prevent a backlog of articles. In cases where there was a significant feature of national importance, it was prioritised for immediate printing.

Even though the report on this torture chamber investigation was handed over to the lead editor [Victor Ivan], it was lying unattended on his big desk for several weeks. The investigative team was wondering about the fate of this document which questioned the role Ranil Wickramasinghe played in the Batalanda torture chambers, which was in the housing complex where he lived. As the then Leader of the opposition, who was aspiring to be the future leader of the country through his family heritage, he had much to answer. Whenever questions were raised about this, the main editor's answer came out as follows.

"Will do, will do, Why this hurry..? Don't you know that there is an art of attacking a national leader..?"

Fortunately, there was also a second investigation conducted by this group during this period. It is the story of the famous film actor Kamal Addararachchi who raped a girl and got away with it 'in the first round'. It was also an explosive story that shook the country, which would be detrimental to some judges. The chief editor, who had launched a fierce battle for the independence of the judiciary by then, wanted the report on the case against Addararachchi published as soon as possible. This is where the bargaining between the chief editor and the author's team began.

The chief editor said "Aladdin, give me the lamp."

"Take us if you want the lamp" replied the author's team.

Finally, he agreed to take both "Aladdin and the lamp." By then, the president's media adviser, Sanath Gunathilaka was making plans to hunt the officers of the presidential media unit who helped to carry out the Batalanda investigation. He was a popular actor and a staunch

UNP supporter who had managed to land in President Kumaratunge's camp. Previously, Gunathilaka had held positions in the Mahaweli Ministry under Gamini Dissanayake as well as in the National Youth Service Council under Ranil Wickramasinghe. In 1994, travelling with the 'winds' he did a political somersault and became the chief media 'macho' of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Apart from this, he earned a reputation as the 'lover boy of the palace'. Just like what happened to more popular movie stars, acting was not the main source of life for Sanath Gunathilaka.

Because of this, like other actors and actresses of his generation, he entered politics. What he wanted was not to enter parliament through politics, but to 'fish in troubled waters' from afar to earn a living and to wield power. Those who enter politics for this purpose do not make political enemies but rather enjoy the 'harvest' of all alliances. They are prepared to say 'hurrah' to the winning party when necessary.

Sanath was facing serious trouble due to the 'Batalanda Investigation'. Not only the camera crew of the presidential media unit, but also its official vehicle had been used for the Batalanda investigation. His brain was in turmoil. He chose to take revenge from the group in order to convince his former political colleagues, the future leader and as well as the then leader of the opposition that he was not with the party that revealed the information about the torture chamber. His first mission was to send a copy of the video containing evidence of the torture to the opposition leader's office. Secondly he disbanded the video group which acted without his knowledge. Thirdly, his mission was to give Ranil Wickramasinghe the impression that from that time onwards he was a "neutral party" in the media campaign aimed at taking political advantage from 'Batalanda' by the Peoples' Alliance government. His aim was clear. He wanted to preserve future political benefits. He always found his 'political victims' not among politicians but among artists and journalists. His other life as an actor had given him enough insight into the field to engage in this efficiently. His sole aim was to flourish under any government irrespective of the party in power. Because of this, Sanath Gunathilakata always maintained a 'green flash' relationship when engaging in politics.

On the other hand, Sanath Gunathilake and Nihal Karunaratne [Senior Superintendent of Police, Presidential Security Unit], were now eyeing to become heads in Chandrika's 'kitchen cabinet'. For this purpose, they recruited the underworld criminal, 'Beddegane Sanjeeva', to the Presidential Security Unit. One of their criminal arms was a hired killer named 'Thara Ajith'. Later, there were many victims of this 'official' political criminal mob. Among the prominent victims were Anoja Weerasinghe [internationally acclaimed actress] Rukantha and Chandralekha Gunathilaka [popular singer couple] Rohana Kumara

[editor of 'Satana' newspaper] and Lasantha Wickramatunga [editor of Sunday Leader].

In December 1999, an attack targeted Anoja Weerasinghe's house in Hitikula, Monaragala. Within a month of this first attack, in January 2000, Anoja's house was burnt down and destroyed. Both these attacks were caused due to criticism of Kumaratunge's government by Anoja. When these crimes were committed she was a single mother and was contributing to film productions but these crimes were not merely because she was a critic of the government. It was to display the power and jealousy of Sanath Gunathilaka, who was a political actor in the palace at that time.

Rukantha and Chandralekha lived in 'Pinro' houses in Mattegoda. In January 2000, an official mob broke into their home and attacked the Gunathilaka couple while their two young daughters were watching. They cut their hair and disfigured their appearance. Then they got ready to pour kerosene on their heads to set them on fire and burn alive. The couple had to face these inhumane, threatening and degrading treatment because they sang on the platforms of the 1999 presidential election, where Ranil Wickremesinghe was a candidate. It was apparent that during this time Sanath Gunathilaka who was the advisor to the presidential security gang was hunting artists.

On 7 September 1999, the editor of the 'Satana' paper, Rohana Kumara, was shot dead. He had to pay with his life because he was a critic of the Chandrika Kumaratunge government and also a reporter on Sanath-Chandrika's love affair. To kill Rohana Kumara, the president's

gang used 'Thara Ajith' of the Thara garden on Bauddaloka Mawatha. After he was freed from this crime, he was sent to France.

Lasantha Wickramatunga, the editor of 'Sunday Leader', was subjected to constant harassment by this gang that operated from the President's House. On 7 February 1995, the vehicle in which Lasantha and his wife Rene were travelling was stopped, they were pulled out of the vehicle and were seriously beaten up with impaled clubs. Media adviser of the presidential palace had ordered this punishment to him because Lasantha was a critic of the government and reported that the 'media advisor' was making commissions from large government contracts.

In June 1998, Lasantha Wickramatunga was having dinner with his family when the home was shot at. The suspects in these crimes and those who were found guilty in the courts were the police officers of the Presidential Security Unit of that era.

Due to these political cowards, there was internal opposition within the government to investigate the 'Batalanda torture chamber.' One of the consequences was Wasantha Kulatunga losing his job. However, the spectres of those who perished at Batalanda were already haunting various parts of the country.

Chapter 25

OCCUPANTS OF BATALANDA HOUSING COMPLEX

“According to Mr. Delgoda it was Mr. Douglas Peiris who had requested Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe to release some houses of the Batalanda Housing Scheme to the police officers of the area. Prior to making the request Mr. Peiris had not sought his permission, even though he (Mr Delgoda) was Mr Peiris’s Superior Officer. At no point had Mr Peiris discussed the need to obtain houses in a secured place, for the use of Police Officers of the area. Having obtained the approval from Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, Mr Peiris received the houses from the Liquidator of the Corporation. Having secured houses from the Scheme, Mr Peiris allocated the houses to fellow Officers arbitrarily. Even at that stage, he (Mr. Delgoda) had not been consulted.

Mr Delgoda added that, Mr Peiris was not officially entrusted the task in securing houses for fellow Officers. In spite of that, Mr Peiris had proceeded to make this request to Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe. Neither Mr Wickremesinghe nor the Liquidator of the Corporation sought his observations or views on the matter either before or after the release of houses to Mr Douglas Peiris.”

[Page 30-31, Batalanda Commission Report]

The 'Sapugaskanda torture' report published in the 'Raavaya' newspaper on 26th February 1995, pointed a finger directly at the newly appointed People's Alliance government. Exposing its information, the investigation report questioned the government as follows.

"Why is it that the United Alliance government not investigating this "BLACK CAT- PRRA" torture chamber even today? Why has the

Minister of Industries allowed a group of people who do not work in a formal government institution, to live in these houses?"

Thus questioning, the report reveals the names of the current and former residents of the housing complex.

"In this fertiliser housing complex only 11 houses are occupied by civilians. Four more have been closed and covered by the jungle. The main torture chamber was in house number A1/8. The distance from this place to other 'civilian' houses is not more than 200 metres.

Didn't these neighbours know when the whole country knew that there was a torture chamber here?

Did the current opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe, who used houses Nos. A2/2 and No. A2/1 at that time, know about this?"

"House number A1/8 that we investigated is still full of blood stains and old tires. Allowing it to be covered by dense shrubs is seriously questionable.

Why is the Ministry of Industry or the Criminal Investigation Department not investigating these? Who gave Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris two houses in this housing complex, when the police officers were suffering from a housing shortage? Also, who allowed him to keep a small zoo with deer and other wild animals? Don't these questions make us think that there is a powerful political hand behind this torture chamber? We now have doubts as to whether the torturers are getting the support of the United Alliance government."

"Now the United Alliance Government has a golden opportunity to show its integrity. It is to appoint a commission to find information about this torture chamber. Secondly, an investigation should be conducted on how the houses in this housing complex were acquired by these people. The people of Gampaha district will be watching better than us for the action taken by the United Alliance government. They gave nearly 5 lakhs of votes to Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge to do justice for these issues."

"Who tortured and sent about 2000 young men and women to death in the Sapugaskanda torture chamber? By the Sri Lanka Army? Or by another murderous political gang? This is an issue for many people who respect human rights in Sri Lanka. The best place to find answers for this is the torture chamber. Were those killed here JVP suspects, political opponents or personal enemies?"

'Raavaya' of 26th February 1995 published the list of names of the occupants of the Batalanda housing complex.

RESIDENTS AROUND SAPUGASKANDA
TORTURE CHAMBER

Resident's Name	House No	Current occupation and period of residence
T. Bevan Perera	A 1/5	A Director of Ceylon Tire Corporation during the UNP regime. A director of the company owned by the corporation under the new Government. Living in the same apartment complex since 1987.
B. Wijeratne	B14	Director Electricity, Ceylon Electricity Board. Has resided here since 1988.
S. S Kahanda	A 2/9	Electrical Engineer, Sri Lanka Electricity Board. Has resided here since 1988.
Samarasinghe	A 2/8	Electrical Engineer, Ceylon Electricity Board has been residing here since 1988.

Ranil Wickramasinghe	A 2/2	This was used as a residence when he was the Minister of Industries and when he was the Prime Minister. After the 1994 election defeat, he vacated. He has been using this house since 1988. Now this house is sealed.
Ranil Wickramasinghe	A 2/1	Same
J S Sunil Premasiri	B 3	An official of the liquidated fertilizer company. Has been living here since 1985.
Douglas Pieris	B 8	It has been used since 1989 as an additional residence by the Senior Superintendent of Police.
L.M Jayasekara	B9	The former executive director of the liquidated fertilizer company. Has resided here since 1985.
L. Harishchandra	A 1/7	Information about him could not be obtained. But there is evidence that the person with this name is the resident of the house.
There is a resident.		
Cannot be identified	A 1/1	NA
There is a resident.		
Cannot be identified	A 2/6	NA

The torture chamber and houses neglected with overgrown shrubs

Resident's Name	House No	Current occupation and period of residence
none	A 1/6	This house is surrounded by forest. Unable to enter as the doors are locked. There is information that arrested youth were detained here before killing.
none	A 2/4	This house is closed and cannot be entered. There is evidence that it was a place of detention used to hold youths.
none	A 1/8	This was the 'slaughterhouse' of the torture chamber. Now covered with jungle.
none	A 2/3	It is closed and cannot be entered. It seems to be a place used to hold the youth.

At the end of the report the investigators had raised some questions for the then Leader of the Opposition, Ranil Wickramasinghe,

01. Were you residing at No. A2/2 and A2/1 premises at the Sapugaskanda Fertilizer Housing Complex during 1989-90 period?
02. Are you aware of premises No. A1/8 that is 100m away from the two houses you evidently resided in?
03. Have you heard that there was a torture chamber at No. A1/8? Or did you hear the screams and howling that came from this house during 1989-90?

04. As the Minister responsible for what was going on there, did you take any legal action about them? If not, why?
05. Do you support the current investigation into the torture chamber in the Sapugaskande housing complex? If not, why?

These questions were also asked from the then Minister of Industries.

01. Who owns the fertilizer housing complex?
02. On what basis were those houses allocated for the occupants?
03. Are you aware that there was a torture chamber in this housing complex and that the leaders of it are still beneficiaries of these houses?
04. Why aren't you allocating the houses that do not belong to the Sri Lanka Army to other government servants of the country who do not have houses?
05. Why aren't you allocating the closed down houses to government servants?

In 1997, the investigators of the Batalanda commission also submitted a report on the residents at Batalanda.

Chapter 26

THE AUTHOR IS CONTACTED BY BOTH KUMARATUNGA AND WICKREMASINGHE

"Under Sri Lanka's elite democracy, elite princes and princesses often make world political records. These records are made by them being young members of parliament, young prime ministers and young presidents. Ranil Wickremesinghe, a political heir of the prominent Jayawardena-Wijewardena family, became the Minister of Youth Affairs and Employment at the age of 28. Charitha Ratwatte, a political heir of the Ratwatte family, was appointed to the position of Secretary to the above ministry at the age of 28. Isn't it a matter of concern that eighty thousand youths in the country have been sent to their graves in a country where the political elites set national and world records and became navigators of Sri Lanka's youth welfare for 11 years?"

(Batalanda Torture House of Clean Genetlemen: Investigative Report by Nandana Weeraratne, Published in 'Raavaya' on Sunday, 26th February 1995)

The article 'Sapugaskanda [Battalanda] Torture Chamber of Clean Gentlemen' was published in 'Raavaya' newspaper in the last week of February 1995, after the investigative report 'roamed' on the chief editor's desk for 5 weeks...! On the same day the paper was released to the market [at the time, the weekend 'Raavaya' newspaper would hit the market on Friday morning] an agent of President Kumaratunga called 'Raavaya'. He said that the President wants to meet the leader of the 'Battalanda Investigation Team'. Surprisingly, on the same day, Saman AthawudaHetti of the opposition leader's office had called and left a message that the leader of the opposition Ranil Wickramasinghe wanted to meet the leader of the 'Raavaya' investigation team. The

leader of the 'Raavaya' team first called the presidential personal aides and made an appointment.

As per instructions, the author had to visit the President without being recorded officially at the security gates of Temple Trees (the official residence of the Prime Minister, which was the agreed meeting point). Only the President's official vehicle and the official vehicle of Nihal Karunaratne, the Chief of Police who was responsible for her protection, were excluded in the inspection and records. Accordingly, arrangements were made to travel by Nihal Karunaratne's vehicle to meet the President that evening.

At the meeting which took place around 8.00 pm the author, the President and her media adviser Sanath Gunathilleke were the only attendees. President Kumaratunge said at one point that she felt the need to conduct an examination of the 'Batalanda torture chamber'. She explained that it was in fulfilment of a promise made during the elections to investigate the 'disappeared' adding that in order to assign the Criminal Investigation Department to investigate this, a police complaint was needed. Accordingly, she asked if the author who was the leader of the investigation team could file a complaint with the CID. He agreed to this request and emphasized that by conducting a formal police investigation and examination, these findings will be stronger and formal. Hence, an agreement was made to give a statement to the CID at the President's official residence by fixing a date and time forthwith.

After meeting the President that Friday night, the author did not forget to respond to the opposition leader's message over the weekend. Accordingly, he contacted Saman Atavuda Hetty who answered the phone and gave a short answer.

"It's okay. The boss doesn't want to meet you now."

One thing that became clear from this was that there was a double agent between these two camps (the opposition leader and the president). The secret meeting on Friday night was known only amongst four participants. If so, there was a spy of the opposition leader amongst

them. Although he was not able to prevent what was happening, he had the ability to enlighten the opposing parties about them. The team of journalists unanimously suspected this person to be Sanath Gunathilake who at the time was Kumaratunge's media advisor.

Had the chief investigator met Ranil before meeting Chandrika, the story of Batalanda torture chamber would have had a different fate. Generally the politicians of Sri Lanka silence the writers and investigators of a media report that destroys their political future in three ways. The first is by inviting and promising money or other perks and after a happy feast the report is taken and burnt. The second method is the journalist's loss of employment and preventing them from obtaining employment in any other media organisation. The third is to kill him or her or force exile. The most common is the first. The second and third are also common and in fact Sri Lanka was ranked one of the most dangerous countries for journalists with dead and in exile by Lasantha Wickramatunga was killed for exposing the 'MIG deal'. Prageeth Ekneligoda disappeared forever for writing about the 'Rajapaksa family tree.'

One night in the third week of January 1995 soon after he visited the Batalanda Housing Complex and camp, an armed group raided the rented house of the author of the Batalanda article of Raavaya. Only his wife and four-year-old son were at home. Even then, the author was living in hiding. When this was reported to the area's police station, the author was informed that a police group from Peliyagoda police had visited his house and therefore to complain there. His complaint was investigated

by Ranjith Wickramasinghe, who at the time had risen to the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police. He was none other than the Police Inspector Ranjith Wickramasinghe who was the head of the 'Counter Subversive Unit' of the Kelaniya Police Division. How does one find justice?

However, on the appointed day when the investigator entered the Temple Trees as arranged before, he was sent to a private room. After some time, Sumanasekara, who was the director of the CID at the time,

came there. These were the first questions of the CID's boss:

"Why did you go to the housing complex in Batalanda?"

"Who advised you to do this?"

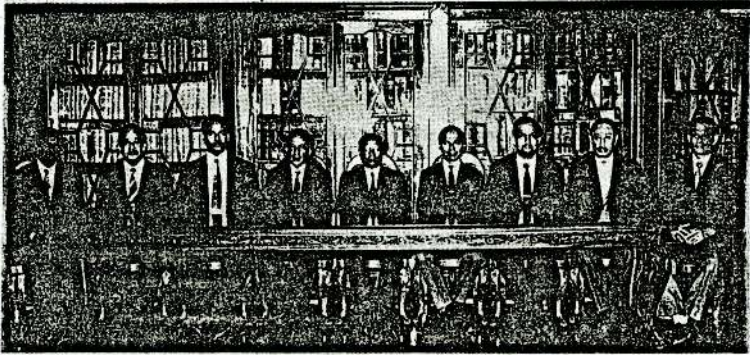
"For what purpose did you seek this?"

"Were you also a member of a terrorist gang?"

The author explained to the investigator how the media obtains information missed by the police and official crime investigators. While hiding his anger towards the police chief the author answered the questions posed. It was obvious that being a third level police chief during that era, he saw or knew all this. He was merely carrying out an order given by the country's Executive president and commander-in-chief.

Yet, it was clear that he was in shock about the fate that was looming on his police colleagues. The author knew Batalanda well. Its housing complex was also known. Before the torture chamber commenced, he used to meet a friend, an engineer who worked at the Urea factory residing there. During the 88/89 period, the author was a frequent visitor to a house of his friend in close proximity to the housing complex. On this basis, he managed to give important information to the CID.

A PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE BATALANDA CRIMES



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT : Mr. G.K.G. Perera (Secretary), Mr. S.C. Pathirana (SSP), Mr. Yasantha Kodagoda (State Counsel), Mr. R.I. Obeyesekere P.C., Hon. Justice D. Jayawickrama (Judge of the Court of Appeal - Chairman), Hon. N.E. Dissanayake (Judge of the High Court - Member), Mr. Sarath Jayamanne (State Counsel), Mr. T.V. Sumanasekera (J.J.G.), Mr. H.H.M.R. Premaratne (SP)

“A full investigation has commenced on the torture chamber in Sapugaskanda Batalanda, which is known to have killed and exterminated thousands of young people in the past era. This investigation is being conducted by the security forces on the order issued from the highest level of the government. A colossal house said to have been used as a torture chamber was found in the said housing complex. It also came to light that the President's media unit captured in video the scenes inside the chamber where old tires, bloodstains and large inscriptions saying “Black Cats” were found.

The housing complex occupied by Ranil Wickramasinghe until he assumed office as the Prime Minister, was being used as a torture chamber and Douglas Pieris who is a suspect in the case of abductions and disappearances, and is currently interdicted, also was occupying the same premises.”

[Old tires and blood stains in a spacious house in Batalanda..!
Sunday 26th February 1995 'Raavaya']

Udayachandra and Ratnachandra, two brothers from 'Amba Sevana' at Kanduboda, Delgoda, were abducted on 07th July, 1989. A 'habeas corpus' petition was presented to the Court of Appeal about this abduction. Here it was revealed that these two brothers were kept in the Batalanda torture chamber. Ratnachandra had already been killed but Udayachandra's life was saved. Twenty years later this crime was avenged. On 26th August 2009, Judge Saman Wickramarachchi, who heard the case in the Gampaha High Court, convicted and sentenced five police officers, including Douglas Peiris, of kidnapping with intent to cause death. Accordingly, these five police officers were sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment and presently Douglas Peiris is said to be fighting a few court cases without a state pension. It is some consolation, justice though delayed was achieved partially. Yet, it took a long time for the perpetrators to be revealed, let alone sentenced for the crimes committed in Batalanda. The campaign carried out by 'Raavaya' as a newspaper for this, is an example for a future Sri Lanka.

"It was reported that the Criminal Investigation Department started investigations into a string of murders committed in the "black cats" torture chamber in the Batalanda housing complex in Sapugaskanda during the last terror period. It was known that a large number of JVP supporters have been killed in this torture chamber, and many other mysterious murders have also been carried out. As a result of these investigations it is known that this torture chamber was maintained with the full blessings of a prominent politician and that a number of other crimes of a political nature. The Criminal Investigation Department too had received vast information related to various mysterious murders said to have been committed there and among these were the mysterious killings of Rohitha Priyadarshana who was the Sub Inspector of police, Sapugaskanda and police constable Sisira Kumara. As a result of this investigation, details regarding many political killings of this nature would come to light."

[Batalanda on fire, Ranil questioned, 'Raavaya' front page, Sunday 05th March 1995]

Although there was no sign of a commission being appointed, these reports were updated weekly. Apart from this, 'Raavaya' published the story of sub-inspector Ajith Jayasinghe, who had seen Batalanda torture chamber with his own eyes and was a detainee there. On Sunday 02nd April 1995, 'Raavaya' reported that police constable Sisira Kumara who was abducted and killed in Batalanda was "Another victim of Batalanda's blood sucking serpents".

"Informed sources indicate that an investigation team and an investigation commission are receiving a large amount of evidence and information about the killings and disappearances in the Sapugaskanda Batalanda torture camp. The Commission of Inquiry has been appointed with the aim of investigating the incident of Police Inspector Rohitha Priyadarshana, who was kidnapped and disappeared while he was working for the Sapugaskanda Police, and the incident of Sub Inspector Ajith Jayasinghe, who escaped the abduction and assassination attempt."

"It was announced that information had been offered by several people who inadvertently saved their lives when they were being forcibly abducted and were about to be killed. Also information by a large number of witnesses related to Police Inspector, Rohitha Priyadarshana's murder, many kidnappings and killings and about people who used police force to rob money and property were received."

"It was revealed that about 60 abductions, killings and burnings that have been carried out in the Biyagama area during the period of terror, are found to be linked to the politician who has been running the Batalanda torture chamber with the involvement of the police murder gang."

[Batalanda before the Secret Commission, Sunday 19th March 1995 'Raavaya']

'Raavaya' single-handedly updated the story of this torture chamber, which was not reported by any other media in the country. Reports related to Batalanda continued to be published relentlessly and an investigation was demanded. Ultimately, the government could not remain silent in the face of this pressure. According to the

'letter of authority', President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed the Batalanda Presidential Commission on 21st September 1995. This order paper was changed 12 times by December of that year. Appeal Court Judge Dharmasiri Jayawickrama (Chairman) and High Court Judge Nimal E. Dissanayake was appointed to the commission. The government lawyers leading the prosecution were Yasantha Kodagoda and Sarath Jayamanna. Two investigation teams were appointed by the Commission under the leadership of Deputy Inspector General of Police

T.V. Sumanasekara and Senior Superintendent of Police, S. C. Pathirana. With the publication of these reports, the newspaper 'Lankadeepa' owned by Wickremesinghe's uncle [Ranjith Wijewardene's mother's brother] launched a campaign against 'Raavaya'.

The commission met in the High Court Complex in Hultsdorf for 127 days from 10th January 1996 and examined the evidence. Total of 87 witnesses were summoned. The record was completed in 28 volumes of 6780 pages. On 28th March 1998, at 5.30 pm, the report was scheduled to be handed over at the Presidential Secretariat. The President arrived at this official function three hours late.

A number of special incidents occurred while the commission was in session. The most notable was the killing of Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando, a key witness described earlier in the article. He was the bungalow caretaker of minister Ranil's Batalanda quarters from January 1st, 1987 to January 31st, 1994.

The second was Police Inspector S.S.B. Nissanka committing suicide with his duty pistol. A few hours earlier testifying before the commission, Nisshanka committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with his duty pistol.

The third was the fleeing of Douglas Peiris. The CID/ Secret Police reported to the Commission that he had fled the country on 20/07/1996. However, retired police officer Peiris, who submitted an affidavit to the court in 2010, claimed that Ranil Wickramasinghe, provided him with US\$5,000, and helped him flee the country obtaining a fake passport.

The fourth was on the day that the then opposition Leader was to testify, a group of people suspected to be his followers created a riot in the court premises. The commission silenced these rioters.

The Batalanda Commission made five major recommendations to the government

01. As explained in detail in the preceding chapters, one of the main reasons which led to the establishment and the maintenance of places of unlawful detention and torture chambers, was the manner in which Politicians of the then Government and Police officers, conducted themselves in relation to the insurgency of 1987 to 1990. As mentioned earlier, whatever the degree of provocation be, there ought to be certain rules according to which a responsible government and its agencies should react, even during a period of insurgency all actions should be in accordance with the rule of law. The fundamental rights of all citizens guaranteed in the Constitution have to be protected.

We recommend that Your Excellency be pleased to consider inviting Representatives of the People (such as Members of Parliament) to discuss these matters in detail, and propose a set of guide-lines applicable to politicians and Law Enforcements Officers, in their conduct during extraordinary situations, where there is a serious threat to peace and public order. If necessary, suitable amendment, to existing Laws including the Constitution should be considered. In this process it is recommended that, people and representatives of all social groups given an opportunity to express their views.

It would be appropriate that, Representatives of the People consider developing and adopting a 'Code of Conduct' for themselves. In the event of a representative of the people (such as a Member of Parliament or a Member of a Provincial Council) being found guilty for having violated the aforementioned Code of Conduct, it is recommended that the other members of the relevant forum be entitled to move for the impeachment of the guilty member. Upon such impeachment, the relevant member shall cease to be a representative for a specific period.

02. As stated in the preceding chapters, we have observed serious violations of Human Rights by both senior police officers and a politician of then government. Notwithstanding the jurisdiction vested in the Supreme Court, and the appropriate exercise of the said jurisdiction by the Court, we observe that, such violations have been repeated with impunity. One reason for the continued violation of Fundamental Rights by certain persons representing the Executive is that their conduct is not that, reprimanded by immediate and appropriate sanctions. We recommend that Supreme Court be vested with suitable additional jurisdiction, to impose suitable sanctions in the form of 'deprivation of Civic Rights' on persons who are found to repeatedly violate basic Fundamental Rights of citizens.

03. We have observed during the course of this inquiry that, certain persons who came to know directly and indirectly of the establishment and maintenance of places of unlawful detention and torture chambers at Batalanda, refrained from complaining to the Police due to fear of harassment, and danger to their life. Another reason was that, they had reasons to believe that no action would be taken to arrest the situation, since those who were responsible were also Police Officers. Hence they did not expect a fair and impartial investigation.

We are of the opinion that, in instances such as this, it is appropriate to empower Judicial Officers (such as Magistrates) to cause necessary investigations and supervise the same and forward the investigational findings to the Attorney General, for the consideration of the institution of criminal proceedings. Amongst other investigative powers, the relevant judicial authorities should be empowered to proceed to the relevant venue in which it is suspected that illegal activity is being perpetuated, and examine the same. In this regard, we recommend that, Your Excellency be pleased to appoint a Committee to consider formulating suitable amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure Act, to implement the recommendations contained herein.

04. In the course of the proceedings before this Commission, it transpired that, various Police Officers had committed serious offences, which included Abduction, Murder, Wrongful Confinement, Causing

Grievous and Simple Hurt. We recommend that Your Excellency be pleased to direct the Inspector General of Police to cause comprehensive investigations into all complaints made to the Commission, with the view to instituting criminal proceedings in appropriate courts of law, against the relevant suspects. In this regard, Your Excellency may be pleased to forward to the Inspector General of Police the Report of this Commission along with proceedings, the Notes of Investigations and other material pertaining to the investigations conducted by the Police Officers attached to the Commission.

05. We have listed out in the preceding chapter, serious disciplinary lapses and violations of Police Department Regulations by Police Officers. It is recommended that Your Excellency be pleased to forward the Report of this Commission along with proceedings to the relevant Disciplinary Authority and the Inspector General of Police, for the consideration of the institution of necessary disciplinary action against the relevant Police Officers.

The government of Chandrika Kumaratunge did not implement any of these recommendations. Instead, the report of the Batalanda Commission was solely utilized for campaigning, during the 1999 presidential election.

On 26th September the Lankadeepa newspaper published that "Sirikotha" (UNP headquarters) claimed that a smear campaign has been launched to tarnish the image of the UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe using the government resources such as the government press and the pro government media and an alternative newspaper that is pro-government."

In a letter written by 'Dinapati' to the Lankadeepa political column on 28th October, 1995 it was also stated:

"The government has once again started a program to destroy the image of UNP leader Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, despite the failure of the special investigations conducted in the Batalanda housing complex, which caused great controversy in the country a few months ago."

In September 1995, the reports of Ranil's protector 'Lankadeepa'

newspaper directly conflicted with the reports of 'Raavaya'. On 01st October 1995, 'Raavaya' in reply to this cold war in the print media, stated that "Some people are afraid of the Batalanda Commission," in reference to the fears of the UNP leadership.

In November 1996, Chitralekha Sarkar, of Indian origin and employed by a television channel in Switzerland, reached out to the author who was then working in the Sinhala section of the BBC World Service in London. This information was provided to Chitralekha by a Sri Lankan named Gamini Vandakone in Zurich.

"Former Senior Superintendent of Police, Douglas Peiris, has recently arrived in Zurich, seeking protection as he claims political refugee status. Given your familiarity with him, we invite you to contribute to a TV show discussing his situation."

In response, he travelled to Zurich. The Swiss program makers were provided with information confirming that Douglas Peiris was a criminal who had committed atrocious crimes in his official capacity. Subsequently, the investigator set out in search of the 'refugee camp' where Douglas Peiris, now a 'political refugee,' was reportedly held. Surprisingly, Peiris had managed to escape to Italy that very morning! The investigator's arrival was communicated to Peiris by another Sri Lankan political refugee, who hailed from Kiribathgoda, and had been released by Peiris after paying a ransom of "Rs.50,000.00".

In December 2001, upon Ranil Wickramasinghe assuming the position of Prime Minister, Douglas Peiris returned to Sri Lanka from Italy and promptly submitted an affidavit claiming that 'Nandana Weeraratne' conspired with Kaduwela Wasantha (a well-known underworld leader) to kill him,' compelling him to leave Sri Lanka and seek refuge in Italy.

Another plan was set in motion to prosecute the perpetrators of the Batalanda incidents in an international court. To achieve this, two international human rights organizations sought the assistance of the author. These organizations were introduced to two American lawyers residing in California with expert knowledge in the field. Their objective

was to secure affidavits from eyewitnesses to the crimes committed in the Batalanda torture chamber. The author selected 8 key witnesses who had testified before the commission. However, he also stipulated to the human rights organizations that these witnesses should be provided with security for their lives when the criminals of Batalanda are prosecuted in an international court. They agreed to this condition.

Subsequently, in 2002, the two American female lawyers arrived in Colombo. At that time, two rooms were arranged at the Colombo Oberoi [now Cinnamon Grand] hotel for their stay. Upon their arrival in Colombo, they promptly met with leaders from two prominent human rights organizations in the country. A meeting with the author had been planned at the hotel that night. However, when they finally met at night, these lawyers appeared very apprehensive. This was attributed to the advice given by human rights leaders in Colombo.

Human rights activists in Colombo had cautioned that the main suspect in the Batalanda torture chamber was a highly influential politician, and his official criminal gang wielded more power than a Chicago underworld gang. Additionally, there was a concern that these two foreign lawyers could be in danger. Overwhelmed by fear, arrangements were quickly made to transfer them to the Hilton Hotel, known for its more secure rooms, on the same night. The following day, they met with the witnesses. With the assistance of an interpreter, they successfully obtained eight affidavits. Their visit to Sri Lanka was planned for two weeks, but within two days of their stay, they departed for the US.

However, copies of these affidavits were securely stored in the safes of two human rights organizations in London and California. This precaution was taken with the aim of civil or criminal prosecution if the suspects were to visit these two cities at any point. It's crucial to note a specific detail here. In Britain, such affidavits can be utilized in criminal proceedings, while in the United States of America, their use is limited to civil cases only. A notable precedent was the criminal case against Agostino Pinochet, the dictator of Chile, initiated in London under the provisions of British criminal law.



Ranil Wickremesinghe testifying before the Batalanda Commission



Protests against Ranil Wickremesinghe outside the chamber of the Commission

Chapter 28

THE CRUEL LOVER AND INNOCENT VINCENT



Ranil Wickremesinghe

“In this regard, we would be failing in our duty if we do not briefly narrate the evidence given by witness Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando. The evidence of this witness was recorded in camera. Apart from Counsel assisting the Commission, and Counsel representing witness Ranjith Wickremesinghe were also present. Upon consideration being given to the statement made by the witness to the Police Investigators who were assigned to the Commission, it was decided to elicit the evidence of this witness in camera. From the contents of the statement referred to above, it was evident that, the testimony of the witness would affect the legal rights and the Political standing of the present Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Member of Parliament Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe...”

[Page 62 onwards, Batalanda Commission Report]

This is where we meet the most innocent and harmless lover of Sri Lanka! He is handsome, young and lovable Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando. The author, who was the principal investigator (and who was

briefly a youth service officer) met him for the last time in 1987 at the Nilaveli (Trincomalee) training center of the National Youth Service Council. This fair skinned man with cheeks in bloom like a ripe pink jambu fruit was well built and was as winsome as a youth could be and happened to be the caretaker in charge of the Tourist Bungalow there.

His looks brought both happiness and woe! He begot bouquets from male and female lovers alike but unfortunately the males outnumbered the fair sex who sought his favours! As a result the very Minister in charge of the ministry under which he was employed fell in love with him. He was doomed because he was in no position to reject the love of the Minister! Vincent wholeheartedly accepted the love of his lover, whose domain was not confined merely to the National Youth Services Council. His domain included Education and Youth Affairs bearing the future responsibility of not only the Youth Service Council but also the youth of the whole of Sri Lanka. He was given all the care and respect that a loving lover would have.

Born in Trincomalee in 1961, Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando was a Sinhalese Catholic. He joined the National Youth Service Council as an office assistant, but a cunning top official who knew 'the taste of Minister Wickremesinghe' manoeuvred to make him a bungalow employee. The introduction was made 'to free them from the nuisance of bringing lovers to the minister from Colombo' who frequents the Nilaveli bungalow of the Youth Service Council. However, this officer ensured that Vincent was not offered as a 'bribe.' Placing Vincent in the tourist bungalow was like keeping a 'butterfly' to catch the minister's eye. The minister also accepted the 'butterfly offering' without showing much surprise. Innocent Vincent faced life without knowing any of this.

The love of his powerful rich boyfriend came his way only when the minister came to the circuit bungalow for a visit which turned out to be often as time ticked away. He accepted this piecemeal offerings of love gracefully even though he realised that he was only but one of such young men of the minister! He was not jealous nor did he try to find out about the other young men who his lover was courting. Perhaps he realised that he was just one in the harem of the minister. Anyone

who enters the harem of royalty must learn to share the master's love. Common sense must have told him these home truths. It is also possible that without Vincent's knowledge, he may have been recruited for the job by an official who knew the minister's love interest and sacrificed him as a 'ministerial offering'.

Another fortune Vincent received from this 'unmatched' love was that he, who held the lowest position in the Youth Service Council, received honour and respect from the highest officials. With the initiation of this "love", the abuse he received from many people in the position of bungalow caretaker decreased. Official visitors who came to this bungalow bent over backwards to please the caretaker for obvious reasons. Vincent happily tolerated it. He did not abuse the privilege of this great love. He did not gossip to his lover for position or gain. The bosses however made sure not to talk about the minister's faults or shortcomings in the tourist bungalow.

By 1982, the activities of Tamil Eelam militants were intensifying, making visits to Nilaweli quite risky for the minister. Due to the fear of death, he invited Vincent to come to his Biyagama house. Indeed, the minister did not have his own house in Biyagama. Vincent, who preferred to be closer to his lover, agreed to it. Upon arrival, Vincent discovered that the Biyagama house was not the minister's own residence but a tourist bungalow belonging to the Fertilizer Corporation. To comfort the minister's lover, in April 1982, the Youth Service bosses transferred Vincent to the Gampaha district, specifically to Heiantuduwa (Biyagama) Youth Service Training Center.

However, there was no bungalow owned by the Youth Service in Heiantuduwa. Vincent was paid by the Youth Service to take care of a non-existent tourist bungalow, effectively making him the caretaker of another bungalow. Even though there are no provisions for such arrangements in the state 'Establishments Code,' government officials have the power to override the 'Code' when appeasing powerful ministers.

Vincent stayed at the bungalow in Batalanda from April 1982 to mid-85, comforting the minister-lover and entertaining not only the

minister but also his friends. For all this, he received only a monthly salary and overtime allowances approved by the minister, that too only if requested. During these three years, Vincent realized that he was not a minister's lover but only a sex slave. So, he begged for a transfer back to Trincomalee to take care of his parents. After much persuasion, he was sent back to Nilaveli. Meanwhile, the separatist Eelam War was escalating; not only Vincent but also the residents of the entire country and foreign tourists were being deprived of the peaceful life in beautiful Nilaweli. On the other hand, his minister lover came to the top of the list of enemies of the Eelam fighters after taking responsibility for the 'Ministry of Manpower Utilization,' which provides Sinhalese youths for the war. However, Vincent had a period of solace.

But he enjoyed peace only until December 1986. In January 1987, he was once again transferred from the Eastern Province to the Western Province, specifically to the Heiyanthuduwa Training Center. His appointment was at Batalanda's tourist bungalow. The Youth Services boss explained to Vincent the reasons for his transfer, stating, 'It seems that the minister has not been able to forget the way you 'treated' him'.

When Vincent returned to Batalanda, it had changed dramatically. It had become the new kingdom of the minister's lover, but there was no youth service; it had transformed into a youth destruction service. Vincent had witnessed Eelam militants killing each other when he was a teenager in Trincomalee. He had seen enough of hardened Eelamist youths with angry eyes, monstrous looks, and brandishing automatic firearms. However, as an innocent and delicate youth, he saw weak, emaciated youths with a banana stem-like appearance in torture chambers for the first time in his life. It was the first time he became a neighbor there.

In 1990, Sudath Chandrasekhara, who served as both the minister's bodyguard and a police officer, proposed to Vincent to get married and lead a 'settled' life. Without hesitation, he also found a beautiful young woman. Vincent, an innocent and honest young man, was unaware that this 'wife' was a death trap. However, he saw the advantage of owning a house with a wife and not paying rent in a different way. He found

a little relief from the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week 'ministerial comfort' service. Soon, he discovered that the new 'wife' was a zombie of the minister's security gang. Despite this knowledge, Vincent endured everything, even when he suspected that his 'wife' might be another lover of Sudath Chandrasekhara, the minister's security chief. He felt helpless in the situation.

Until the change of government in 1994, Vincent stayed in Batalanda, pleasing his minister lover. This innocent lover of the minister also met the same fate that always befalls the minister's former lovers. Vincent was not only forgotten by this capricious lover but was also discarded like a rag he had once worn. There were times when Vincent felt as though he had been living in a dream world.

The bosses of the youth service started seeking revenge on Vincent under the new minister for covering up the shame caused by the respect and fear loyalty that had been shown to Vincent until then. By that time, Vincent's patience had reached its limits. However, he patiently waited for the opportunity, believing that what is 'good for the goose is good for the gander.'

Vincent's run of bad luck pursued him and caught up with him again in January 1995 with the invasion of 'Raavaya' investigative journalists into the domain of Batalanda! Following the revelations of the journalists, the CID arrived on the scene.

Inevitably the scent led them to young Vincent and he in turn revealed everything he was privy to about the activities that went on in the torture chambers and the part played by his lover in the perpetration of these cruelties! The innocent lover dropped a bombshell about the ministers' love life, perversion, and cruelty! He agreed to give evidence at the Batalanda commission. The investigative police team not only recorded every word of the witness but also leaked the information to enable the rumour mongers to feed on the lucre! Both the legal team and the judges who saw the facts divulged by the minister's lover, were shocked and disgusted. They were above all frightened for their own well-being as they proceeded with the work of the commission with trepidation. They were ashamed because the man who had been the

Prime Minister of the country was such a debased pervert of the lowest order! They were frightened when they learned that while a team of police officers of the crown were engaged in torturing the youth of the country a minister of state was orchestrating the procedure to the extent that he was the one who decided what methods of torture to be used like a Satan of hell! These officials were, to say the least, expected to be victimised at a future date in the same manner!

The act of dragging a family member of Wijewardena-Wickramasinghe who claims to be a descendant of Tudugala Wijewardena and King Rajasingha II generation is not a matter to be trifled with. By this time another member of this family had had the privilege of being the executive president of the country on two occasions. The person against whom these charges are being levelled, Ranil Wickramasinghe (even if one forgets his past positions) happened to be the leader of the opposition at this time. The Chandrika Bandaranayaka Kumaratunge government was hanging on to power with a majority of one seat in parliament. What this meant was, that if her government was to crash the next PM would be the opposition leader, which meant he would be the next president. In the event of this eventuality the police officers, the legal officers and the judges who conducted this enquiry would be the first victims that Wickremesinghe would pursue in revenge. For this reason they decided to examine and record the evidence of 36 year old Sylvester Reginald Vincent in the privacy of the chamber. Accordingly when the most important section of his evidence was led, the only personnel present were the two judges, two lawyers of the crown and the single female stenographer. All others were sent out by an order of the commission....! At least the voters of Sri Lanka would have had a chance to prevent a criminal from becoming the country's head of state once again, if the relevant important evidence was made known to the public, omitting the passionate private information.

Even though the most powerful and crucial part of his testimony was provided in secret, Vincent was not spared. His life was left unprotected. Perhaps the Honourable Justices believed that Wickremesinghe, who was the leader of the opposition at the time, lacked the power to retaliate against Vincent and showed little concern for his life. However,

Vincent's life was cut short just as it was decided to summon Ranil Wickramasinghe.

On 07 November 1996, the CID met Ranil Wickramasinghe at the office of the opposition leader and questioned him for 5 hours. Although he was summoned to appear before the Commission on 3 September 1997, as reported by the Batalanda Commission, Reginald Sylvester Vincent Fernando died suddenly in the second week of August 1997, just a few days before summons was issued to Wickremesinghe. He was a healthy 36-year-old man at the time of his death, and it was shrouded in mystery. None of his relatives lived in the western province where he resided, and he had no friends. The only other individuals were his 'wife' under the guise of marriage and Sudath Chandrasekhara. Vincent was the sole individual who presented the most powerful testimony before the Batalanda Commission. Despite this, there was not even a coroner's inquest into his mysterious death.

However, the police officers who had assisted in the investigations of the Batalanda commission were haunted by guilt over Vincent's mysterious death. These very officers had convinced him to testify before the commission. Fueled by a sense of responsibility, they unofficially assembled a team to delve into the circumstances surrounding Vincent's demise. The investigation revealed that Vincent had died due to poisoning. Shockingly, the inquiry implicated Sudath Chandrasekara, who had risen to the position of Ranil Wickramasinghe's private secretary at that time, as the person behind Vincent's poisoning, acting on the instructions of the then opposition leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe. The investigators also found that Vincent's 'wife' was involved in the poisoning, leading them to launch a thorough investigation into the mysterious death.

Details about the initiation of the CID investigation into the sudden death of Vincent Fernando are reported in the book titled 'Aruma Puduma Abhirahas' (Astonishing Mysteries), authored by the well-known journalist Sri Lal Priyantha. On page 53 of Sri Lal's book, he quotes a letter written by the Secret Police to investigate Vincent's death.

Deputy Inspector General of CID,

Colombo 01.

1998.07.10

The chief security officer for Opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe, Sudath Chandrasekara, was formerly associated with the Batalanda Commission. Wilson Fernando, who served as a cook in Ranil Wickramasinghe's house in Batalanda, was poisoned and killed.

It became evident that Sudath Chandrasekara, Sergeant Kappagoda, and ASP Ranchagoda were involved in poisoning Wilson Fernando.

Sudath Chandrasekara was found to have an illicit relationship with Wilson Fernando's wife. Fearing that Wilson Fernando, who was aware of everything that happened in Batalanda, might testify, they conspired and poisoned him. We urge for their arrest.

Additionally, we are forwarding letters to the President to bring attention to this matter.

From Sapugaskanda villagers

[‘Amazing Mysteries’ page 53, 2007, author publication] According to Sri Lal, this letter was purportedly written by the

CID itself to the CID, with the intention of initiating an investigation into the suspicious sudden death of Vincent Fernando. However, the inside story suggests other potential motives. Ranil Wickramasinghe sought a way to ‘remove’ Vincent Fernando before his testimony at the Batalanda Commission, concerned that Vincent's presence could pose serious trouble for Wickremesinghe in the future. The second motive could be that Vincent was ‘taught a lesson’ for his boldness in testifying against and was annihilated as a punishment.

However, the following extract from the Commission Report sheds light on the more probable motive.

“Vincent recalled the period of subversive activity. He said that, during this period, several Police Officers were in the habit of coming to the residence to meet Mr. Wickremesinghe, and discuss matters relating

to subversive activity. The Police Officers who came included SSP Nalin Delgoda, ASP Douglas Peiris. They had meetings in the circuit bungalow. The meetings were attended to by Mr. Wickremasinghe. Vincent was required to serve tea to the participants. During such instances, he had the occasion to hear some of the conversations. He heard the participants discussing about the terror unleashed by the JVP. Discussions had also taken place regarding suspects being detained within houses in the Batalanda Housing Scheme. On certain occasions, referring to subversive suspects, he heard Mr. Wickremasinghe saying to the Police Officers "Get them out". Vincent stated that, what he understood under the circumstances was that, Mr. Wickremasinghe wanted the suspects destroyed."

(Batalanda Commission Report, page 62)

The above extract provides enough ground to conclude that Vincent Fernando's testimony at a court of law would have led Wickremasinghe to the gallows. He was the most powerful witness against Wickremasinghe, who had a first hand account of what went on at the Batalanda torture complex. He was privy to secret discussions, orders and saw the detainees' fate. For these reasons, Vincent could not live anymore. He mysteriously passed away a few days before Wickremasinghe's testimony before the Commission.

The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Punya de Silva, who led the CID at that time, and the Assistant Superintendent of Police, H.M.R. Premaratne, were planning to utilise the aforementioned letter to initiate an investigation into the mysterious death of Vincent, a common strategy employed by the CID. However, according to Sri Lal Priyantha, Mangalika Rathnayake, a constable of the CID who wrote this letter and agreed to post it from Sapugaskanda, declined to send the letter. This decision was influenced by her close relationship with a police officer in the official security force of opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe. As a result, the strategy of the CID went awry. However, according to the author's research, another development took place. In the meantime, Senior Superintendent of Police Nihal Karunaratne informed President Chandrika Kumaratunga that the

CID was actively seeking suspects in this crime. Unsurprisingly, Chandrika Kumaratunge no longer wished to 'harass' Wickremesinghe. Instead of politically destroying her friend, who attended 'Montessori' with her, she aimed to weaken him. Additionally, she did not want to subject her relative and friend from the elite Cinnamon Gardens to criminal jurisdiction. As a result, DIG Punya de Silva, the leader of the investigation, had to halt these investigations by the President's executive order.

When the young lover's evidence was led the chamber of the commission was cleared not to protect the witness but solely to protect the powerful minister lover! Such is the 'witness protection' of the justice system! Vincent's love story went the same way all tales of love go. A sad ending! Not only his love but also his life was taken. A few days before the powerful boyfriend, the minister-lover was to take the stand in December 1996, Vincent was rubbed out without a trace ever being found as to how when or where he died. This is how the commission records his disappearance.

"...It is to be noted that, Counsel who represented Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe and Counsel who represented certain police officers obtained certified copies of the evidence of this witness. Eventhough, the witness died shortly before the commission concluded its sittings, he was available for resummoning for the purpose of cross examination by Counsel for a period exceeding one year, from date of the witness having given evidence. However no application was made by Counsel to summon the witness for the purpose referred to above. In particular, the Commission wonders why Counsel for Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe did not choose to examine this witness, notwithstanding the fact that the witness had given damning evidence against Mr Wickremesinghe. It was reported to the commission a few days prior to Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe being summoned that, this witness had died. At the time of death, he had been 36 years of age. The exact circumstances under which he died, was not investigated into by the Commission, due to lack of required authority..."

(Batalanda Commission Report: Page 62-63)

According to our belief, the two judges who administered justice in the Batalanda Commission were very wise. These two parties had a good understanding of the future political course of Sri Lanka. President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed this commission not to bring justice to the victims of political crimes of Ranil Wickramasinghe who was a friend since childhood days at Cinnamon Gardens but to weaken him politically until she wins the next presidential election (1999).

This is well proven because Chandrika kept the report of the Batalanda Commission under lock and key for two years after it was presented without making it public. Also, she did not implement the recommendations of the commission nor did she order the Attorney General to institute criminal proceedings. Ranil Wickramasinghe's civic rights would have been lost if the commission's recommendations were implemented in any way. His criminal political journey in the history of Sri Lanka wouldn't have travelled this far. The fact that Vincent Fernando, who came forward to testify in the commission with the belief that Chandrika would do justice was murdered mysteriously, was proof that the People's Alliance government allowed Ranil's criminal gang to murder during its tenure. Investigations were not allowed. We extended the history of Ranil's underworld politics to 1977-1997 because the murder of Vincent Fernando also falls to his criminal account.

Finally, shortly before the 1999 presidential election the Durutch box (Pettagama) was opened in Horagolla. With the aid of the Batalanda report and her loss of one eye, she won the presidency again...!

Despite all these atrocities, Ranil Wickramasinghe was elected as Prime Minister twice by popular vote. Currently, he serves as the Executive President of the country, chosen by the votes of the people's representatives. Assessing whether these developments reflect the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka as a comedy or a tragedy is not a difficult task.

The Criminal History of Ranil Wickremesinghe 1977-1997

AN INVESTIGATION
NANDANA WEERARATNE

Nandana Weeraratne has worked as a reporter and feature writer for over 45 years for the newspapers 'Kamkaru Mawatha', 'Seenuwa', 'Gini Siluwa', 'Raavaya', 'Mawbima', 'Rathu Tharuva' and 'Satiaga Aruna' published in Sri Lanka. He was also a program producer at the BBC World Service (Sinhala) in London [1995 – 2001]. A pioneering investigative journalist in the country, he was the first Sinhalese reporter to provide war reports from the territory of Tamil Eelam for 'Raavaya'.

His most famous media works are the investigative reports, programs and documentaries about the 'Kamal Addararachchi's rape' case, the 'Batalanda torture camp' in Sapugaskanda, the 'massacred villages' and 'caste injustices'.

'The Criminal History of Ranil Wickremesinghe 1977-1997' is intended to link the past to the present. Even if it takes the form of a horror story and sends chills down the spine, this book should be read by every voter, researcher and lawyer in Sri Lanka. This investigative report confirms how the politicians who come into power through popular vote of the people as caretakers of government, the police officers who are paid by public funds to maintain law and order and the underworld criminals who act as blood sucking ticks of the people, come together under one roof to decide the fate of others. It is up to the people of Sri Lanka to decide if they want this to continue.



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