

May 15, 2025

ISSN 3084-8962

# Jaffna monitor

UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED

Rs. 1000

A portrait of Anita Prathap, a woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling. She is wearing a black top and a necklace. The background is a red and white striped curtain.

**"Prabhakaran Was Very  
Clear-Eyed That He and His Family  
May Die Fighting for Tamil Eelam"**

**Anita Prathap**

SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY TO JAFFNA MONITOR

## ▶▶ Monitor's Map

03

Editorial

12

"Prabhakaran Was Very Clear-Eyed That He and His Family May Die Fighting for Tamil Eelam" :  
Anita Prathap Speaks  
Exclusively to Jaffna Monitor

24

How China Stood by  
Sri Lanka Then —  
and Now

27

"I Would Genuinely Love  
to See a Russian Cultural  
Center in Jaffna"

37

President cannot set foot  
in Jaffna: Sumanthiran's  
Kaipulla Moment

39

AKD Administration Is  
the Most Right-Wing Sri  
Lanka Has Ever Seen:  
– Dayan Jayatilleka

52

Ranil's Bodyguard Rings  
Trouble — Ends Up in  
KKS

54

Sinhala and Tamil  
Nationalism Are Two  
Sides of the Same  
Coin: - LTTE  
Co-founder Ragavan

64

Sibling Rivalry Done  
Right: Jaffna Hindu Twin  
Brothers Clinch Top Ranks  
in A/L Exams

65

Sri Lanka's Core Problem  
Is Its OverReliance on the  
U.S. as a Single Market-  
PROFESSOR  
CAI TONGJUAN

73

Anura Kumara  
Dissanayake: Hero of  
Reform or Villain in  
Disguise?

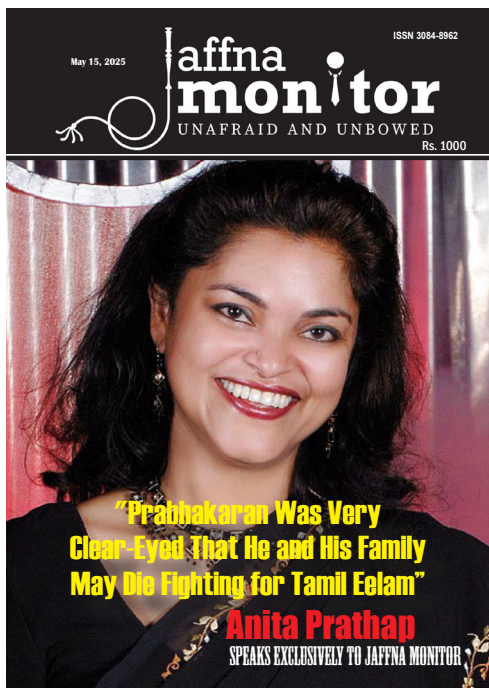
78

For whom the bells toll:  
Reflections on the Province

87

Story- Tapas

# The NPP's Manual: How to Lose an Election-and the People's Trust



I had initially planned to write a separate article and an Editorial on this subject. But as I went deeper, I realized the story-and the questions it raises-deserve to be told in one cohesive piece. Yes, it's a little lengthy, but I hope you'll bear with me.

I've been receiving calls from my Sinhala journalist friends as well as foreign correspondents ever since the local election results were announced. Their main question has been: How did the NPP, which emerged as the leading party in the parliamentary election just five months ago in the Tamil-majority North, fail to win even a single Municipal Council, Urban Council, Pradeshiya Sabha? Even in the Tamil-dominated parts of the East, the party couldn't secure control of a single local authority.

How do you explain such a dramatic downfall? Whether I was speaking to foreign correspondents or everyday friends, my answer remained the same: the NPP betrayed the hopes and abused the trust of the Tamil people who had so boldly placed their faith in them just six months ago.

## Tamil Voters Gave the NPP a Chance-Here's How It Was Squandered

Six months ago, when the parliamentary election results were announced in November 2024, Sri Lanka's political landscape underwent a dramatic shift. To the surprise of many, the National People's Power (NPP) secured a



majority of seats in the North and East, emerging as the dominant force in Tamil-majority regions. At the time, political observers-and even those who spoke to me-predicted a sweeping victory for the NPP in the upcoming local government elections. Many believed the party would take control of nearly every Municipal Council, Urban Council, and Pradeshiya Sabha in the region and begin delivering the clean, transparent governance they had promised.

In Jaffna-a district long regarded as the epicenter of Tamil nationalism, the birthplace of the Tamil Eelam demand, and a region that sacrificed countless lives for that cause-the people elected a Sinhala-majority party, the NPP, giving it 3 out of 6 parliament seats and 80,830 votes, or 24.84% of the total vote. The Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), the traditional Tamil party that once commanded the unwavering loyalty of generations, managed only 19.47%. The All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), known for its hardline nationalist rhetoric, received just 8.6%.

Now, let's be clear. This was not a vote cast in negligence or out of some collective political amnesia. Tamil people knew exactly who they were voting for. They knew that the NPP was merely a cosmetic rebranding of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-a party that once filed and won a court case against the unification of the North and East, that vehemently opposed political solutions for Tamils, and that continues to reject even the basic rights guaranteed under the 13th Amendment.

And yet, the Tamil people voted for them-not because they were deluded or deceived, but because they dared to hope. They voted for change. They voted for a new political culture. They voted to show that they, too,

were ready to embrace a unified Sri Lanka. They wanted to prove that they were willing to work for the betterment of the entire country, like true patriots.

They believed the NPP would break from the past, hold the corrupt accountable, reject the dirty politics of bribery and nepotism, and usher in a new, cleaner chapter in Sri Lankan governance. Through their vote, the Tamil people were sending a message to the world: "We, who once fought for a separate state, are now ready to move forward as patriotic Sri Lankan Tamils."

As a proud Sri Lankan Tamil and lifelong advocate for unity, I was deeply moved by what I saw. In that moment of unprecedented change, I wrote a special piece for Jaffna Monitor titled "North and East Bid Farewell to Rhetorical Tamil Nationalism, Embrace a Unified Sri Lanka." I also penned an editorial that was widely quoted and shared. In it, I invoked the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech-reframed in the Sri Lankan context-and wrote:

"I have a dream that one day, from the tip of Jaffna to the bottom of Matara, little Tamil boys and girls will join hands with Sinhala, Muslim, and Burgher boys and girls as sisters and brothers".

"I have a dream that my children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the race, religion, or caste of their ancestors but by the content of their character."

At the time, it felt like we were on the brink of something extraordinary-a moment when reconciliation wasn't just a slogan, but a shared national heartbeat.



Now, fast forward six months to the local government elections in Jaffna. The NPP's vote share dropped sharply to 20.45%, securing only 56,615 votes-a loss of nearly 25,000 votes in just half a year. Meanwhile, ITAK surged to 32%, the ultra-Tamil nationalist ACTC climbed to 18.44%, and the Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA) recorded a respectable 12.88%.

## Hope's Expiration Date

A foreign correspondent recently asked me a question that struck at the heart of Sri Lanka's evolving political landscape: "How is it that a people who, just six months ago, voted overwhelmingly for change and unity in Sri Lanka are now turning back to Tamil nationalist parties?"

It was a valid question. Voting for ITAK is understandable-they've long enjoyed the loyalty of Tamil voters, often regardless of their performance, which has largely been underwhelming. But how do you explain the sharp rise of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC)-a party that openly rejects any settlement within a unified Sri Lanka and unapologetically pushes ultra-Tamil nationalism? How did their vote share nearly double? Even ITAK's numbers surged. What changed?

My answer was this: When people place their faith in a genuine promise of transformation-and those they trusted end up indulging in the very same corrupt, nepotistic political games they vowed to dismantle, the sense of betrayal cuts deep. In that vacuum of hope, people often turn to hardliners. Not necessarily out of ideological conviction, but out of profound disillusionment.

This isn't unique to Sri Lanka-it's a pattern

we've seen across the world.

In Greece, years of austerity and broken promises from centrist coalitions led to the rise of the radical left. When that, too, failed to deliver, many disillusioned voters turned to the far-right Golden Dawn. In Germany, regions that once backed the Greens or Social Democrats shifted sharply toward the far-right AfD after feeling abandoned on key issues like immigration and national identity.

In the Philippines, anger at elitist governance paved the way for Rodrigo Duterte's rise and his brand of uncompromising nationalism. In the United States, after eight years of centrist leadership under Barack Obama, large swathes of the electorate swung dramatically toward Donald Trump, seeking disruption, even at the cost of social cohesion. Sri Lanka is no exception.

When the Tamil people of the North voted for the NPP, they were reaching across decades of division, placing their trust in a party they hoped would rise above ethnic fault lines and bring real change. But when that promise dissolved into the familiar rot of corruption, arrogance, and political silence-repackaged in a new logo-they turned away.

And this time, they turned harder.

## Why Build When You Can Buy? The NPP's Fatal Shortcut in the North

Let me dissect this downfall. The NPP-or rather, the JVP in a new cosmetic avatar-had no real grassroots presence in the North and East. There were no cadre-based structures, no organized party machinery, and no history of meaningful local engagement. They didn't win because they earned trust on the ground-they won because the people were yearning

for change. More importantly, they believed in President Anura Kumara Disسانayake and the image he had carefully built-one of modesty, integrity, and simplicity.

I remember speaking to a mother whose two sons-LTTE cadres-were martyred during the war. She told me she voted for Anura Kumara in the presidential election and again for the NPP in the parliamentary polls. When I asked her why, she replied without a pause: "Anura Thampi looks like one of us. He will definitely put an end to corruption and make us prosperous." She was not alone. Thousands of Tamil fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters saw Anura Kumara as one of their own-and voted for him with their hearts full of hope. That was the depth of their faith.

As the local government elections approached, the NPP had two clear paths before them in the North. One path was difficult but honorable: to work hard from the ground up-recruit fresh, clean, youth-driven local leaders in every village, build genuine grassroots structures, and stay true to their anti-corruption ethos. Even if they didn't win this time, they would at least have laid the foundation for a credible and ethical political movement, ready to contest future elections with integrity.

The other path was far easier-and all too familiar. It was the one systematically followed by every corrupt party before them: open the floodgates to opportunists and build instant structures by welcoming defectors from other parties.

Guess which one NPP chose?

They flung open their doors and ushered in a parade of opportunists-turncoats, molesters, thieves, and the full gallery of rogues.

Professional looters, amateur swindlers, men who had feasted on public funds like jackals at a carcass-every variety of political predator was embraced.

Many of these individuals came straight from discredited Tamil parties, and yet, the moment they joined the NPP, they were treated like saints. It was almost mythical-like the story of Ahalya, instantly redeemed when touched by Rama's foot. Except in this case, Rama was none other than the NPP's Jaffna District organizer, Minister Ramalingam Chandrasekar.

## **New Makeup, Same Mercenaries: The NPP's Jaffna Rebranding Circus**

In Jaffna, there exists a well-known gang of political mercenaries-men who have made a career out of hovering near power, no matter who wields it. When Douglas Devananda was in office, they clung to him. When Angajan Ramanathan rose, they marched loyally behind him. When Vijayakala took the stage, they sang her praises like seasoned choirboys. For these men, ideology and principle are meaningless. Their only compass is proximity to power, and they're willing to perform any political belly dance to stay near its warmth and taste its spoils.

And now, many of these very mercenaries have added a few theatrical touches-perhaps a wart on the cheek or a mustache twist-to reinvent themselves as the new "clean" faces of the NPP in Jaffna. Just like those old Tamil cinema villains doing double roles, they think a little makeup and a costume change can fool the audience.

## **How to Turn a Political Crook into a 'Comrade'-and Give Him Power: The**

## NPP's Manual

One of the NPP's earliest appointments in Jaffna exposed everything. They named a known crook as Chairman of the Palmyrah Development Board. I know his victims personally-diaspora donors who lost millions after he promised them government approvals to set up salterns. At the time, he was the loyal footman of a Jaffna-based minister.

This man has made a profession out of switching loyalties. When the LTTE held power, he cozied up to them. After their fall, he aligned with Douglas Devananda. When the minister discovered his crooked ways, he slipped into the circle of then Deputy Minister Vijayakala. Later, he flirted with the SLPP for a few years. And now, with polished shoes and a new political costume, he's parading under the NPP banner-and not as a foot soldier, but as a kingmaker.

A respected former AGA-known for his honesty-publicly wrote on Facebook that this man had cheated him, causing serious financial loss. But all of that was conveniently ignored. He was whitewashed, embraced, and elevated by the so-called "NPP's Prince of Jaffna," Minister Chandrasekar, who handed him the chairmanship of the Palmyrah Development Board like it was a reward for excellence in deception.

Shouldn't that infuriate the public? A man who managed to loot public funds simply by being close to power in the past is now handed real power-won't he loot even more? If he could do that with just proximity, what might he do now, sitting at the center of authority? That's a simple, common-sense question. But Minister Chandrasekar

doesn't seem the least bit concerned. When questioned by the press, he casually brushes it off, as if this man were some distant cousin of Raja Harishchandra, the legendary king who never told a lie or committed a single dishonest act.

Some argue that Chandrasekar, hailing from Nuwara Eliya, simply doesn't understand the political terrain of Jaffna-and that these crooks have taken him for a ride. That may be true. But come on-if I were hiring someone to work at Jaffna Monitor, wouldn't I at least check their background? Isn't that the bare minimum expected of any responsible leader? Or does background verification require Einstein-level scientific expertise?

## 70% Recycled: The Rotten Core of NPP's Jaffna Candidacy

A friend of mine and I sat down recently to conduct a small survey-and ran a few calculations. What we found was alarming. In Jaffna, over 70% of the NPP's local government candidates were individuals who had previously contested under other parties. Among them were several with a well-documented history of looting public funds.

One classic example stood out. A former Pradeshiya Sabha president-infamous for his "creativity"-once oversaw the construction of a bridge. But he wasn't content with building it once. He submitted the same proposal to both the Sri Lankan government and an international donor organization, securing funds from both. The double-dipping was eventually exposed during the international body's audit.

The party he belonged to at the time-no stranger to corruption-was so embarrassed



by the scandal that they expelled him. But guess what? In the most recent local election, that very same man contested as an NPP candidate.

Who exactly are you trying to fool?

Another NPP candidate has multiple theft charges to his name. And then there's a man from Nallur-once a loud champion of pure-blood Tamil nationalism and a former member of the troublemaking TNPF-who shamelessly contested under the NPP banner in the last local government election.

Have you heard of 'Naveena' Ravanani ("Modern Ravana")? A notorious London-based diaspora firebrand, he was once a die-hard Tamil nationalist and a loud cheerleader for Seeman, the rabble-rousing Indian Tamil politician. In one infamous incident at a public meeting in London, attended by Indian MP Thol. Thirumavalavan-Naveena Ravanani stormed in, shouted "Traitor!" at the parliamentarian, and single-handedly disrupted the entire event.

Like many diaspora ideologues whose voices grow louder the farther they are from home, he made his fortune abroad, then returned to Sri Lanka to start both a fringe organisation called Naveena Ravanani Senai ("The Army of the Modern Ravana") and a "farm" in Pallai.

He went party shopping, knocking on the doors of every major Tamil party in search of a ticket. All of them turned him down. So, in 2024, he launched his own independent group and contested under the symbol of a "water pipe." His performance was so dismal that a friend joked, "Even his wife must have voted for someone else."

And yet, after the NPP came to power,

he somehow managed to forge ties with the ruling party and is now paraded as the NPP's face in Pallai. The once-fiery Tamil nationalist, who once shouted slogans of ethnic purity and separatism, and repeatedly referred to Prabhakaran as Suriya Devan (Sun God) to entertain his diaspora-backed followers, is now awkwardly quoting Das Kapital, name-dropping Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as if he were born waving the red flag.

His once-fringe meetings have suddenly become headline events, attended by none other than Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya and NPP's northern chief, Bimal Rathnayake. Rathnayake even paid a courtesy visit to his farm for a meal-an event Naveena Ravanani triumphantly flaunted on Facebook, complete with photos, proudly boasting that a cabinet minister had dined at his table.

So what exactly are they trying to tell us? That the entire Northern Province is just a gullible mass of fools?

And it doesn't stop there. Just take a closer look at the list of NPP candidates in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. You'll quickly discover that many of them have been involved in illegal river sand mining and the shameless plundering of natural resources-acts that have devastated local ecosystems and livelihoods. And yet, these very individuals had no hesitation contesting the recent local government elections under the NPP banner-and the NPP, showing either a complete lack of political judgment or basic shame, had no issue fielding them as official candidates. All this from a party that claims to be the last bastion of honesty. The irony writes itself.

## Whose Man Is Chandrasekar, Really?

Fisheries Minister Ramalingam

Chandrasekar-Jaffna District organizer of the NPP and a longtime JVP cadre-has conducted himself in ways that many Northern Tamils would find deeply inappropriate. The way he speaks carries an unmistakable tone: “Mind it, we JVP have a militant past,” followed by the unspoken but palpable attitude: “This is who we are, and we’ll continue to act this way-do whatever the hell you can.”

I was genuinely happy when Chandrasekar was appointed both as Cabinet Minister of Fisheries and President of the Jaffna District Coordinating Committee. Why? Because he was born in Nuwara Eliya and grew up in abject poverty. I saw in him the rise of a Malayaga Tamil-a community that has historically been denied dignity by the caste-obsessed elite of Jaffna.

Even within the rigid caste hierarchy of the North, Malayaga Tamils are placed beneath the Dalits by some so-called “high-caste” circles. So, for me, it was refreshing-almost poetic justice-to see someone from that background rise to a position of power and influence in Jaffna. I thought, “Here comes a hardworking, genuine Malayaga Tamil to finally challenge this rotten caste structure.”

But my hopes have been shattered.

The NPP appointed Professor Kapilan as its mayoral candidate for Jaffna. According to sources at the university where he taught, Kapilan abruptly abandoned his academic duties to contest the election, without completing the semester’s lectures or evaluating student papers. Many within the academic community viewed this as highly unethical.

But that was only the beginning.

A far more serious concern was that Kapilan was not even a resident of the Jaffna Municipal Council area. He hails from Erlalai, a village located outside the municipal boundaries. Under the law, a candidate for mayor must reside within the jurisdiction of the relevant municipal council. To sidestep this requirement, Kapilan falsely listed the NPP’s Jaffna party office as his own residential address in his nomination papers.

At a press conference, ITAK’s acting General Secretary, M.A. Sumanthiran, publicly declared that Kapilan was ineligible to contest the mayoral post and warned that legal action would be initiated to challenge and remove him if elected.

In the end, NPP lost, and the legal drama never materialized.

But when journalists questioned Minister Chandrasekar about the legality of Kapilan’s candidacy, his response came in a manner many described as thuggish and confrontational. He declared that Kapilan was “not alone” and warned that “the entire NPP government is behind him.”

To many in Jaffna-particularly those who have lived through the authoritarianism of Sinhala-majority regimes-this came across as a chilling threat. It was seen as a dangerous message: that even the law cannot touch the NPP’s chosen candidates. That they are untouchable. That they have come not to serve, but to dominate.

In that sense, Minister Chandrasekaran may have inflicted more damage on his own party’s image than any political opponent could have hoped to.

## MPs or Meme Material?

Among the three NPP MPs elected from Jaffna, longtime JVP cadre Ilankumaran stands out-not for his brilliance or leadership, but as a textbook example of how not to be a Member of Parliament, or at the very least, a decent human being.

His public statements often leave people bewildered. He famously declared “நாங்கள் இதண்டுலோம்”-a colloquial Jaffna Tamil phrase for “we will do it”-but delivered with such misplaced bravado that it became the butt of local jokes. His grasp of basic geography isn’t much better. At one point, he bizarrely claimed that “Jaffna is in Erlalai,” confusing the district with the village, rather than saying Erlalai is in Jaffna.

Then came the infamous District Development Committee meeting-a forum meant to address vital issues like infrastructure, education, and livelihoods. But for Ilankumaran, it turned into a testosterone-fueled playground. He got into a loud, childish argument with another controversial Jaffna MP, Dr. Archchuna. But instead of discussing road repairs or public services, the two MPs loudly accused each other of chasing women.

Yes, you read that right. One shouted, “We all know how many girlfriends you had!” and the other shot back with “You went behind every girl you saw!” All this, in a room full of officials trying to discuss development plans.

Even Minister Chandrasekar-no stranger to rough talk-lost his patience. He slammed the table and shouted, “Dei Kumara, stop it!”

Then there’s Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy.

Just months before his dramatic switch to the NPP-right before the parliamentary election in November 2024-he was a loyal footman of ITAK heavyweight M.A. Sumanthiran. He regularly posted on social media, passionately urging people to rally behind Sumanthiran and Shanakiyan Rasamanickam. Then, as if turning off a switch, he deleted all those posts, rebranded himself overnight, and re-emerged as an NPP candidate. And surprisingly, he won.

But what has he done since taking office?

Within just four months of becoming an MP, he managed to appoint four of his own family members as Justices of the Peace (JPs). He also fielded his father, Jeyachandramoorthy, who had previously contested under ITAK and secured only a handful of votes, as the NPP candidate for the Velanai Pradeshiya Sabha. As if that wasn’t enough, he pushed another relative into a different local body candidacy.

When a diaspora critic called him out on Facebook, Jeyachandramoorthy lashed out, saying those who “wash plates abroad” should stick to doing just that. What he didn’t realize is that washing plates abroad is, in fact, far more dignified than washing politicians’ feet for scraps of power.

The only one among the three who can’t be accused of being foul-mouthed is Dr. Bhavananda Raja, only because he simply doesn’t speak, even when it’s absolutely necessary.

## While Voters Walked Away, NPP’s Leaders Stayed Asleep

Minister Chandrasekaran appears to be completely out of touch with political reality.



Following the local government election debacle, he wrote in a recent Facebook post: “The trust that the Tamil people have in the National People’s Power (NPP) has not diminished. A general election is one thing; a local government election is another. Therefore, the results of the local government election must be compared with the previous local government election results. On that basis, in the 2018 elections, NPP representation in the North could be counted on one’s fingers. But this time, the NPP has secured representation in every part of the North.”

There is an element of truth in what he says-yes, the NPP now has more local-level representation than in 2018. But what Chandrasekaran fails to grasp is the bigger picture: how did a party that swept the North just six months ago in the general election manage to lose 25,000 votes in Jaffna alone-and fail to win even a single local body-despite holding national power? With all the machinery of government at their disposal, the vote share should have surged, not nosedived.

Surrounded by a circle of yes-men, Chandrasekaran seems completely insulated from criticism. And he’s not alone. Even senior NPP figure and Northern organizer Bimal Rathnayake casually dismissed the defeat, claiming in Parliament that ITAK’s win in the North was due to the distribution of kasippu (illicit alcohol).

Who gave what to whom? I honestly don’t know. But one thing I can confidently vouch for-if anyone did hand out alcohol and asked the Northern Tamils to vote for them, they

definitely took the drink... but absolutely didn’t give the vote. That’s the story of our people-they’ll raise a glass with you, laugh at your jokes... and then quietly go vote for someone they actually believe in. When it comes to that, they’re PhD holders.

Let me remind you of an incident. After the war, when the Rajapaksa regime was hell-bent on winning Jaffna-to show the world that the Tamils were with them-in the 2010 parliamentary elections, they allegedly distributed alcohol and even arranged special bus services, just to make sure no one missed the vote, fully believing the votes would go to them. You know what our people did? They took the alcohol, boarded the buses arranged by the then ruling party, and voted for the TNA-the party they believed in at the time.

What’s clear is that both Bimal and Chandrasekaran are echoing narratives fed to them by the latest crop of opportunists-political shapeshifters who’ve floated from party to party, mastered the art of survival, and now serve the NPP. These are the types who know exactly what the leadership wants to hear-and say nothing more.

The real question is this: Will the NPP’s top leadership continue to fall for these comforting excuses? Or will they finally confront the truth, recalibrate, and change course-before the damage becomes irreversible?

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்  
**Kaniyan Pungundran**  
Editor-in-Chief,  
Jaffna Monitor



Anita Prathap

# “Prabhakaran Was Very Clear-Eyed That He and His Family May Die Fighting for Tamil Eelam”

## Anita Prathap

Speaks Exclusively to Jaffna Monitor

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்  
Kaniyan Pungundran

If not for the bravery and persistence of Indian journalist Anita Prathap, the Sri Lankan state might well have succeeded in burying the truth about Black July 1983. At a time when the government was determined to deny that any pogrom had taken place—and when the state machinery worked overtime to suppress every whisper of anti-Tamil violence—it was Anita Prathap who broke the silence on the international stage. Defying the odds, she travelled to Sri Lanka and became one of the first foreign journalists to document and report on the brutal massacre of Tamils.

Her searing eyewitness accounts, along with the photographs she captured while stealthily risking her life with a Kodak Instamatic camera, directly challenged the state's official narrative. Knowing that all journalistic material was being seized at the airport by Sri Lankan authorities, she smuggled the negatives out of the country with the help of a young couple and managed to get them to India. In doing so, she not only defied a state-led media blackout but also forced both India and the wider world to confront the truth. Her reporting helped internationalize the horror of the 1983 violence and spotlight the long-ignored plight of the Tamil people. Years later, in her acclaimed book *Island of Blood*, Anita reflected on that experience that changed everything: "Life for me has since been defined as before and after the 1983 riots."

In 1984, she achieved the unthinkable—persuading the elusive LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to sit down for his first-ever interview. Published in *The Sunday* magazine under the headline "If Jayewardene was a true Buddhist, I would not be carrying a gun," the piece offered the world a rare glimpse into the mind and philosophy of the man who would go on to become the epicenter of the Tamil armed struggle. It was in this very interview that Prabhakaran delivered one of his most quoted declarations: "Nature is my friend. Life is my philosopher. History is my guide."

She was a trailblazer in every sense of the word. At a time when women in Asia were rarely seen anywhere near riot zones, conflict areas, or frontlines, Anita Prathap walked straight into the fire—armed only with a pen, a camera, and an unshakable commitment to telling the truth. By doing so, she redefined what it meant to be a woman in journalism. Her courage was contagious. Today, every bold young female journalist from South Asia—including India and Sri Lanka—chasing stories in the world's most dangerous corners is undoubtedly walking a path she helped carve.

This is Jaffna Monitor's exclusive interview with her.

**You began your journalism career at a time when it was virtually unheard of for women in Asia to report on politics, riots, or war zones. You've mentioned that even your editors and male colleagues were initially taken aback by your determination to cover such stories. What was it like navigating the deeply male-dominated world of political and conflict journalism in those early years?**

It was tough, but not that tough. What I have learnt is that persistence breaks down resistance. Most people do things one way because that's the way things have been done. So their resistance is due to many factors – women have not reported war, women don't cover politics, etc., etc. There were, instances of male chauvinism, but equally, there were supportive men. Most of them were old-fashioned, not necessarily misogynistic. I don't give up. I fail a lot, but because I don't give up, I win eventually. Everybody remembers my victory; I remember all my failures.



**You come from a remarkable family rooted in Kerala's ancient Catholic community—your grandfather was a pioneering educator and legislator, your father the first in your community to earn an MBA from the U.S., and your upbringing spanned seven schools across eleven years. How did this intellectually rich, reform-driven, and peripatetic childhood shape your worldview? In what ways did your parents and early experiences influence your adaptability, curiosity, and your decision to pursue journalism on the frontlines of global conflict?**

My parents, grandparents, background, and childhood all shaped me to become who I am, but they did not make what I am— in terms of career. Yes, being in 7 schools in 11 years made me extremely adaptable, unafraid of new situations and new people. I am always excited to go to new places, meet new faces, taste new dishes, have new experiences, and try new gadgets. Newness opens up new frontiers, fresh ways of seeing, experiencing, understanding the world. How little we know! I see every day as a classroom of new ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Every night, when I go to bed, I think of all the new things I have learned during the day. I am learning more things now than I learnt when I was in my 20s. Learning new things every single day. That's what gives me joy and satisfaction. I am curious by nature. As they say, curiosity is not a destination, it's a compass in life.

**Sri Lankan Tamils like me have a deep personal connection and enduring gratitude toward you for being one of**

**the first to expose the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom to the outside world. Without your courageous reporting, some say the full brutality of 'Black July' may have never reached global attention. You risked your own safety to stealthily photograph the carnage, and your eyewitness reports sparked an uproar in the Indian Parliament, ultimately playing a role in India's decision to intervene in Sri Lanka. Looking back, how did that moment shape your career and the public's understanding of the conflict? Did you foresee that your journalism would have such political consequences, and how did you cope with the emotional toll of documenting such horror firsthand?**

It was the turning point of my career, I would say—even life, even though I was totally unaware of it at that time. Everything that happened afterwards was defined by this. It was war of a kind we, Indians, had not seen since the Partition, and South India did not really bear witness to that. I reported in detail—no adjectives, just describing what I saw. It was hugely difficult for me—the dangers, the unfolding of an atrocity, the horrifying images and emotions unseen and unheard of in my world until then. It shocked everyone, it stabbed everyone's conscience. It's one thing covering a situation like this through press briefings and interviews with analysts, etc., totally different when you report it from hell as it unfolds. No one had covered a story of this tragic proportion in this manner. Perhaps even more significantly, no woman had reported from ground zero. It captured people's imagination, it stirred the Tamil



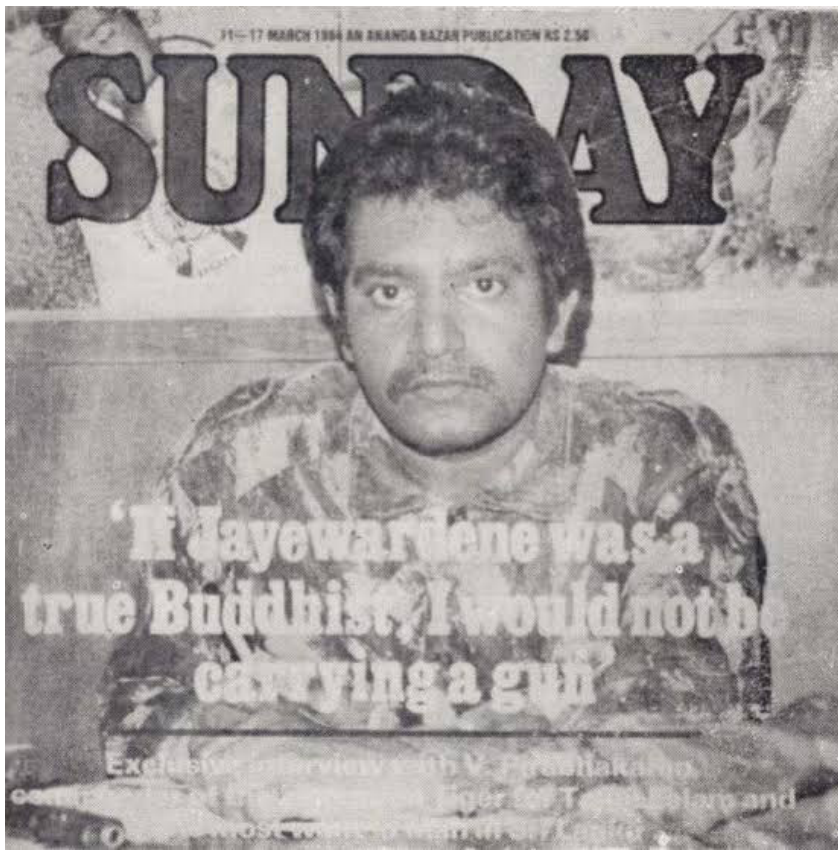
*Anita Prathap interviews LTTE leader Prabhakaran.*

media, and then suddenly I became part of the story. It shattered myths about women, broke glass ceilings. It was impactful in every way. Even today, no matter all the stories I have done—reporting from Siachen glacier or Taliban capture of Kabul—it is the Sri Lanka ethnic crisis, the interviews with Prabhakaran that is associated with me, most of all.

**As you mentioned, it is the interviews with Prabhakaran that remain most closely associated with you. At the time, nearly three dozen Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups were active, each fighting for Tamil Eelam on their own terms. Why did you identify the LTTE and its leader, Prabhakaran, as**

**the frontrunner? Was there something distinctive about their strategy, leadership, or organizational structure that drew your attention?**

Yes, absolutely. As they say, a person is known by the company he/she keeps. A guerrilla organisation is known not just by the leader, but by its cadre. The LTTE cadre was superior in every way — they were committed, hard-working, simple, unassuming, and spoke little. They were dedicated in a powerful way. The other groups had normal cadres; they were like us, ordinary people. When I saw how different the LTTE members were, I realised the leader must be of a different calibre if he raised this cadre. I met all the other leaders, but it was impossible to meet Prabhakaran. I was told



*Prabhakaran's first-ever interview, given to Anita Prathap in 1984 for Sunday magazine.*

— he is fighting a war, he has no time for interviews. I liked the fact that he was not into self-promotion, and so I redoubled and tripled my efforts to meet him.

**With your redoubled and tripled efforts, you became the first journalist ever to interview the elusive Prabhakaran. Could you take us through how you managed to secure that interview? What convinced him to speak with you, and why do you think he placed his trust in you? How did that historic encounter unfold—and as someone who met Prabhakaran in person, how did he strike you?**

He finally agreed to meet me after the July riots. His reason was that the LTTE were guerrillas, so they had to go into the war zones. But I didn't have to, I was only a

journalist. But that I chose to risk my life for the story impressed him, about my so-called courage and dedication. He said he was grateful that I had “internationalised” the Tamil conflict and brought attention to it, that I did so by highlighting Tamil suffering. He wanted to meet me to personally express his gratitude. After my articles, there was no longer he-said-she-said type of reporting. The onslaught against Tamils was evident. JR told me a few years later that G. Parthasarathy, India's envoy to Sri Lanka, quoted incidents from my report during their meeting to highlight that India cannot remain silent against such atrocities. The Indian side told me JR started the meeting denying any anti-Tamil pogrom, but kept quiet after a while when these specific incidents were pointed out.

When I first met him, my impression of Prabhakaran was that he was unimpressive. By the end of the interview, I felt he lived up to the impression I had of him before I met him – his commitment shone through like headlamps in a dark forest.

**The LTTE has often been described as a highly disciplined and tightly organized movement. Based on your firsthand observations, what aspects of its internal structure, command hierarchy, or operational discipline left a lasting impression on you—or perhaps even evoked a sense of awe?**

I was always impressed by their dedication. I have never seen anything like it. We can't get a carpenter to fix a table properly—here was Prabhakaran raising a cadre willing to sacrifice





*Anita Prathap with Indian Army officers in Siachen*

their lives for him and for the cause. There was no flash or boastfulness, no body language that suggested they were on a grand mission. Their simplicity was striking. They were soft-spoken and neatly dressed, but in simple clothes and chappals. They never carried a gun. Their unwavering devotion to Prabhakaran was the secret glue that kept the LTTE so tightly knit. It was also the most security-conscious, secretive group I have ever encountered.

**In your conversations with Prabhakaran, was there anything he shared off the record-or conveyed between the lines-that the world never got to see or hear? Now that it's been over 16 years since his death, would you feel comfortable sharing any of those insights, if they are still relevant or revealing?**

No, when I met him, I told him upfront that whatever he said would be reported. I taped our entire conversation. He knows better than

to share a secret with a journalist. He never spoke ill of anyone. I remember J. N. Dixit and Ranjan Wijeratne would say terrible things about Prabhakaran.

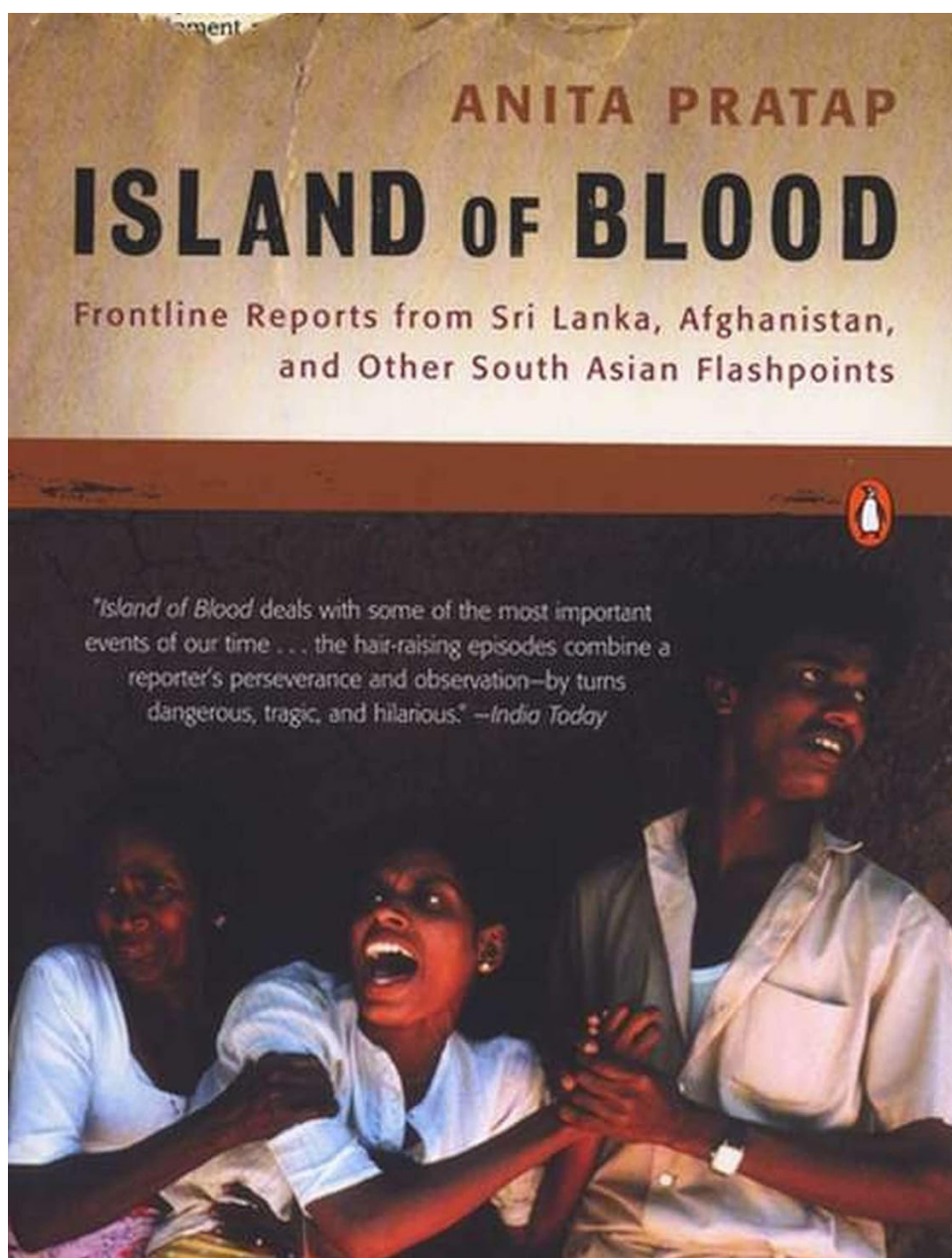
Ranjan Wijeratne would tell me – ‘Next time you come to Colombo, Prabhakaran will be a dead man.’ Next time I came, Wijeratne was dead, killed by an LTTE suicide bomber. Prabhakaran never made threats. He just executed them. I knew Gamini Dissanayake well. He was an amazing raconteur. He would regale me with Colombo 7 gossip. Once I told him Prabhakaran likes Chinese food, because invariably after our interviews, Chinese fried rice, etc., would be served. Even in wannu jungle! On my next trip to Colombo, every single person I met—from the President to people on the street—knew that Prabhakaran liked Chinese food. Of course, I had mentioned this in my story months earlier, but there was hardly a ripple. In Colombo, nothing could match the Gamini Broadcasting Corporation.

**You once described Prabhakaran as the man you met with the greatest**

**sense of foresight. In hindsight, do you still stand by that assessment—especially considering the decisions he made during the final stages of the war, which ultimately led to the LTTE's military collapse and a devastating humanitarian tragedy?**

Yes, I still believe he had tremendous foresight. At the height of India's support to the LTTE in the '80s, he told me one day he would have to fight India. It shocked me. And that day came in 1987. He said the Indian, international role will determine the fate of Tamil Eelam. He was very clear-eyed that he and his family may die fighting for Eelam. Many tried to intervene, urging him to come to some sort of settlement. Nothing worked.

**Why do you think he consistently refused to accept a negotiated settlement, even in the final years of the war? Was it driven by ego,**



*The cover of Anita Prathap's much-acclaimed book Island of Blood.*

**unwavering conviction, strategic miscalculation, or something deeper within his worldview?**

There were many opportunities for a negotiated settlement. In 1990, after the IPKF left, Premadasa literally gave him the Northeast on a platter. I thought this was as good as it gets—take it and build on it. His answer was, 'I don't want their Eelam, I want our Eelam.' There was ego, there was stubbornness, a steadfast purity of intent that is virtually unachievable, unrealistic in real life, and also a sense of misplaced loyalty.

When I asked him why he can't settle for something less than Eelam, his reply was, 'So many of my cadres have died for Eelam. If I settle for something less, they would have died in vain.' As I wrote in my book, *Island of Blood*, he didn't seem

to see the conundrum—by not settling for something less than Eelam, he was sending more of his cadres to death.

**In your landmark interview with Prabhakaran, he famously said, “Nature is my friend, life is my philosopher, and history is my guide”—a line you once remarked struck you more deeply than anything you'd heard from a prime minister or president. But looking back, did he truly live by those words? He claimed nature was his friend, yet in the final stages of the war, he chose to entrench himself in flat, exposed terrain surrounded by sea and lagoon, effectively cutting off escape and ensuring encirclement. He said life was his philosopher, yet he rejected every opportunity for a negotiated political settlement, dragging his people into an unwinnable war. And he called history his guide, yet he ignored its clearest lessons—refusing to return to guerrilla tactics and instead opting for conventional warfare against a far superior army. In hindsight, do you believe these choices reflect a betrayal of his own ideals? Or was he, by that point, blinded by conviction—or perhaps delusion?**

I think that statement of his was bingo as long as he was a guerrilla fighter. And I think,

at an individual level, it is true for most of us – nature as friend, history as guide .... I analysed his guerrilla actions in light of his quote, and I found it was absolutely true of his style. He used terrain to deadly effect, he was philosophical also in the way he spoke about larger concepts than something pertaining to him or the LTTE, and he had a deep understanding of history.

We all evolve in life. At 50, we are not what we were at 20. Prabhakaran evolved too—but that's where I think he took a wrong turn. I wrote about this in the early 1990s. The IPKF's departure was a big boost—he had kicked out the world's third-largest army. Of course, Premadasa played a bigger role, but that's not how Prabhakaran chose to see it. In his mind, the LTTE had evolved from a guerrilla force to a conventional army. This was a fatal turn. So many LTTE boys and girls got killed in the Elephant Pass battle that followed, where he fought a conventional battle. He couldn't scale down, and eventually went down fighting.

**What role did women play within the LTTE—both symbolically and strategically? Do you believe they were genuinely empowered within the movement, or were they, to some extent, instrumentalized in the name of revolution? While women held leadership roles within all-female units, it's notable that no woman was ever appointed to command a mixed-gender fighting force. How would you assess the LTTE's approach to gender, empowerment, and leadership?**

It was a male-oriented organisation, no question about it. Women came later to supplement fighting men. There were plenty of





women fighters—maimed, dead. They, too, were leading on the battlefield. I have met the leader of the women's cadre. In their behaviour, there is no difference between the men and women cadres. Dedicated—men and women of few words, mindful of their duties.

**Given the highly polarized nature of the Sri Lankan conflict, did you ever face pressure—whether from the LTTE, the Indian government, or editorial leadership—to frame your reporting in a particular**

**way? At times, some critics perceived your work as being sympathetic to the LTTE. How did you navigate such criticisms while upholding your journalistic integrity and credibility in such a charged and complex environment?**

I never faced any pressure from the Indian government, LTTE, or Sri Lankan government. I was probably the only one who had top access to all three groups. The reason they gave me access was that I never misreported either what they said or the facts on the ground.

In a slight twist from the Bhagavad Gita, my way has always been: do your duty—never mind praise or criticism. Stay steady on the ground, not allowing praise to take you high or criticism to take you low. I wrote what Prabhakaran said because I had access to him, not because I was pro-him. Those who hated him felt I shouldn't be reporting him. I see why they feel that way, but I have a job

to do as a journalist. I have not spared the LTTE from my criticism, but Prabhakaran continued to meet me—because he and Indian or Sri Lankan ministers knew I had no personal agenda, no malice. I was ethical, professional, trying to understand—not pass judgments.

Situations happen, history unfolds... whether we like it or not. As a journalist, I saw my role as understanding the situation in its entirety—not just one point of view, however right it may be, or excluding another point of view, no matter how wrong it may be. Even illogic has its own, often self-defeating, logic. It may not be the winning or losing side, but it is part of the complex web that life is.

Actually, while I covered all the protagonists in this conflict, my number one priority was always the public. As much as I took JR, Rajiv Gandhi, Prabhakaran's points of view, I always sought the ordinary person's point of view. The most dangerous situations I have been in were not journeys to interview Prabhakaran, but when I was trying to talk to civilians. I guess this is also the reason my reports were different.

**In your view, what were the key miscalculations or structural flaws that led to the LTTE's downfall and the tragedy of Mullivaikkal? Firsthand accounts and UN reports have documented how, in its final years, the LTTE resorted to practices such as child abductions and targeting civilians attempting to flee. How do you explain this moral and strategic transformation—from a movement that took up arms to protect its people, to one that ultimately turned its guns**

**on them? Looking back, did you observe any early signs or tendencies toward this kind of brutality when you first encountered the LTTE in the 1980s?**

The LTTE always had a brutal side to them. How can we forget the lamppost killings, the executions? Prabhakaran had zero tolerance for those whom he considered 'traitors'—it was punishment, lesson, and deterrence to keep the cause a watertight ship. It's okay that he wants to lay down his life for the cause, but to demand that of the public is not just unrealistic—it's bizarre.

A characteristic of all strongmen is that they never groom a successor. There is no second line of defence when it comes to leadership. So the organisation—or state—goes crashing down with them. The LTTE was a liberation movement but it was also a cult revolving around Prabhakaran. When he goes, so does the group—though the ideology lingers. I don't understand the end. There are no secrets in life. Eventually, the full truth will come out.

**During the final days of the war in Mullaitivu, trusted intermediaries were reportedly approached by some LTTE commanders seeking surrender. Were you contacted by anyone within the LTTE at that time?**

No

**Several independent investigations and reports—including the UN Panel of Experts (2011), the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL,**

**2015), and credible testimonies from survivors—have documented grave allegations of war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan military during the final stages of the war. These include indiscriminate shelling in designated No Fire Zones, targeting of hospitals, summary executions, and sexual violence against detainees. What is your assessment of the Sri Lankan military's conduct during the last phase of the war?**

Militaries do what militaries do. They bomb, shoot, kill. They have one goal—destroy the enemy and his infrastructure. In that mission, they care two hoots for hurdles, concerns, good practices. We see what is going on in Gaza today. The UN is a toothless body. They do the best they can—there are brave men and women in the UN—but in the end, it is the brute state power of the P5 and local governments that matter.

Prabhakaran's story should be a lesson for all – Tamils and Sinhalese – that military means cannot achieve peace. States can use catastrophic means to achieve traumatic peace. What politicians on both sides must realize is that just peace brings huge dividends. Europe is a great example. It was in ruins after World War II. By avoiding war and pursuing peace and prosperity, it has become the admired “lifestyle superpower” of the world.

If the Sinhalese politicians pursue a zero-sum game, everybody will lose. Life is all about the possibilities of abundance, but you must choose to see it that way. In my childhood, shops in India had few items. It amazes me to see abundance today.

Sinhalese politicians don't have to deprive the Tamils of their rights to grab a slice of the economic pie. If Tamils are treated fairly, what happens inevitably is that Tamils and Sinhalese together will bake an economic pie of abundance—and everybody gets a bigger slice. This is common sense, but also proven by historical experience.

**Sixteen years after the end of the war, many of the core grievances of the Tamil people remain unaddressed. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)—widely condemned by international human rights organizations for enabling arbitrary detention and torture—is still in force, despite repeated pledges to repeal or reform it. Likewise, vast areas of civilian land, particularly in the North and East, remain under military occupation, with over 60,000 acres still held by security forces, according to civil society monitors. Now, with the Tamil people having overwhelmingly supported the NPP in Parliament—placing their faith in a new political alternative—do you believe this government has both the will and the capacity to meaningfully address these long-standing issues of demilitarization, justice, and dignity?**

I am skeptical because too many past promises have been broken, too many opportunities missed. Democracy is great when it brings in sweeping, much-needed



changes, but not so good when politicians feel they have to mobilize their base to win. Then jingoism, prejudice, and bigotry come into play. The problem is that, in most cases, personalities cannot bring change because injustice, discrimination, and exploitation are baked into the system.

**Despite India's historic involvement, do you believe New Delhi is still committed to securing a political solution for Sri Lankan Tamils? PM Modi's recent visit prioritized strategic and economic issues but remained silent on Tamil aspirations. Has India deprioritized the Tamil issue in favor of broader geopolitical interests?**

It would seem that way. Other than those days in 1983, North India was not so exercised about Sri Lanka. The strong pro-Sri Lankan Tamil feelings also dissipated in Tamil Nadu. The mantra of the current era is deals, not ideals. It's all about expanding markets, achieving growth. The world is busy—and wants to get busier—making money. This may not be such a bad thing. Sometimes emotions make solutions harder to solve.

Economic prosperity often allows the problem to recede. We see how Japan and Germany prospered out of trauma. India has taught me that you can't always solve problems, but you try to manage them. Economic growth, provides time, space and opportunities to do that. I guess one must think positive.

**Finally, looking at Sri Lanka today, do you see any realistic path forward—either internally or with international**

**support—for achieving justice, autonomy, or reconciliation for the Tamil people?**

I think young Tamils in Sri Lanka, around the world, have a proud or nostalgic notion of their homeland. This is natural and good, as long as it is patriotic and not nationalistic. There is an important difference. The current phase of the Tamil struggle is not LTTE 2.0. It is young men and women, in Sri Lanka and the diaspora, who fight for justice in the modern way. They document, collect facts, data, accounts, stories, connect, disseminate, lobby, and try to get institutional redressal. They are doing that. They struggle in their own way to fulfil what matters to them, with means of their choice and competence, not with gun, but with words, paintbrushes, laptops, camera, mobile phone, contacts list, affidavits. Deals are won or lost, but ideals are universal; they may not always find a public arena, but they live in our hearts. Just because victory is not in sight doesn't mean you give up the struggle. In story after story that I have reported, I have seen that injustice is harder to bear than poverty. To be human is to struggle for what is just—for us, for those around us, for those who came before us, and for those who will arrive long after we are gone.

**Note:** Anita Prathap's much-acclaimed and best-selling book *Island of Blood*, published by Penguin, is available on Amazon.com and Amazon.in.



# How China Stood by Sri Lanka Then — and Now



BY:

**Qi Zhenhong, Chinese  
Ambassador to Sri Lanka**

According to the World Bank's latest report, Sri Lanka's economic growth rate is expected to reach 3.5% this year, consistent with the October forecast, but challenges from high US tariffs and high poverty rates cannot be ignored. President Dissanayake stated that measures have been taken to minimize the impact of US tariffs on the domestic economy. Building a strong economy that will not be shaken by any economic storm is one of the government's top priorities.

Given the disparity between economic development levels and economic strength, the US tariff policy will further widen the gap between rich and poor countries, with less developed countries suffering a greater impact. As one of the countries most affected, Sri Lanka's right to development has been severely undermined, and its already fragile economy will be further strained, with a particularly severe impact on the export sector. As Sri Lanka's economic pillar industry and the second-largest source of foreign exchange earnings, the garment industry has experienced a sharp decline in orders and a reduction in garment export revenue, with export values potentially decreasing by 20%



and threatening tens of thousands of jobs in related industries. Previously, garment factories in Sri Lanka had already canceled Sinhalese and Tamil New Year bonuses, triggering labor disputes and leading to widespread factory shutdowns. Other export industries, such as rubber and plastic products, tea, and gems, may also suffer negative impacts due to the tariffs. In addition, the decline in exports will lead to a reduction in Sri Lanka's foreign exchange earnings, depreciation of the rupee, increased import prices, and exacerbated inflation, affecting its macroeconomic stability and foreign debt repayment capacity, and slowing economic growth.

Globally, the United States, disregarding the balance of interests achieved through multilateral trade negotiations, and under the guise of so-called "reciprocity" and "fairness," uses tariff as a weapon to exert maximum pressure for its own selfish gains and subverting the existing international economic and trade order. This unilateralism and hegemonic bullying have severely impacted the global economic order and the multilateral trading system, and seriously harmed the interests and well-being of all countries. Ostensibly, this is done in the name of "protecting domestic industries" and "reshaping supply chain security," but in reality, it continues the traditional approach of politicizing economic and trade issues, bringing unprecedented difficulties and challenges to multilateralism and global economic recovery.

Looking back at history, this bullying behavior by the United States seems somewhat familiar. In the early 1950s, when China had just been founded, its development was severely hindered due to the Western countries' embargo and blockade. To survive and develop, China urgently needed to import various materials, including rubber. At this time, under the control of the United States, rubber prices plummeted, while rice prices soared. This caused severe economic difficulties for Ceylon,

which depended on rubber exports and rice imports. However, China and Sri Lanka broke through numerous obstacles and signed the historically significant Rubber-Rice Pact, opening the door to friendly relations between the two countries. To retaliate against Ceylon's trade with China, the United States invoked the Battle Act, halting aid to Ceylon and the supply of sulfur needed for rubber plantations.

Now, the United States is once again placing its own interests above the common interests of the international community, provoking a new round of tariff and trade wars. In response, China has made it clear: "We have made it very clear that China does not look for a war, but neither are we afraid of it. We will fight, if fight we must. Our doors are open, if the U.S. wants to talk." The reason China firmly says no to US hegemony is that history and reality have repeatedly told the world that appeasement cannot bring peace, and compromise does not lead to respect. Seeking so-called exemptions by harming the interests of others for the sake of one's own selfish and short-term gains is as futile - and dangerous - as bargaining with a tiger for its own skin, and will ultimately lead to losses on both sides, harming others without benefiting oneself. China's standing up is not only to safeguard its own legitimate rights and interests but also to protect the common interests of the international community, including the vast number of small and medium-sized countries, and to defend international fairness and justice.

Economic globalization is an unstoppable historical trend, and multilateralism is the inevitable choice for addressing difficulties and challenges. Like many developing countries, China is a defender, contributor, promoter, and beneficiary of multilateralism, economic globalization, and free trade. In the face of a complex and volatile world situation, China's contribution to global economic growth has remained at around 30% for many years, and it has been an important engine of world



economic growth. China firmly upholds the rules-based multilateral trading system, promotes trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and works to make the "pie" of common development bigger.

Amidst change and continuity, the friendship between China and Sri Lanka has withstood the tests of time and remains one of good friends, good brothers, and good partners. Over the years, with China's participation and support, a large number of infrastructure and livelihood assistance projects have been completed, involving various fields such as ports, highways, water affairs, electricity, and healthcare, significantly improving its infrastructure and investment environment while boosting local employment, strongly supporting Sri Lanka's economic and social development and bringing tangible benefits to the Sri Lankan people. China-Sri Lanka economic and trade cooperation has achieved rapid development, with the Colombo Port City and Hambantota Port are landmark projects of the Belt and Road invested by China, being successfully constructed and steadily advancing, becoming two engines of Sri Lanka's economic development.

In January of this year, President Dissanayake visited China for the first time since taking office, holding the dual titles of "the first foreign head of state to visit China in the New Year" and "the new President of Sri Lanka." During his meeting with President Dissanayake, Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out that China-Sri Lanka relations faces a historic opportunity to build on past achievements and open up the future. Both sides should grasp China-Sri Lanka relations from a strategic height and jointly build a China-Sri Lanka community of shared destiny. Following their talks, the two heads of state jointly witnessed the signing of several cooperation documents in such areas as Belt and Road cooperation, agricultural products, social welfare, and the press, radio and television. In the joint statement

issued by China and Sri Lanka, cooperation in various fields such as economy and trade, agriculture, climate change, and education was detailed, from the landmark projects of jointly building the "Belt and Road" to Sri Lanka tea, making the "Working drawing" for China-Sri Lanka's practical cooperation clearer. In the face of the United States' use of tariffs to implement hegemonism and power politics, China has stated its readiness to support Sri Lanka's development and strengthen the long-term partnership between the two countries to address global trade tensions. China-Sri Lanka relations are a model of South-South cooperation, and the two countries are fully capable of building a shared future based on mutual benefit, win-win cooperation, and stable development.

Justice will prevail, while injustice is doomed to fail. The US is waging a tariff war, in defiance of global criticism, is pitching itself against the rest of the world. Unity brings strength, and cooperation leads to mutual success. Currently, changes in the world, times, and history are unfolding in unprecedented ways, and the world is entering a new period of turbulence and change. Faced with the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, China has both the courage to say no and the determination to match its words with actions, as well as the confidence to win. Faced with a turbulent world, Sri Lanka should more firmly safeguard its own legitimate rights and interests, believe that China is a more trustworthy partner, follow the historical trend of peace and development, and resist the undercurrents of geopolitical and bloc confrontation, as well as the countercurrents of unilateralism and protectionism. The two countries should safeguard peace, pursue development, and achieve shared prosperity, so as to make solid progress in building the China-Sri Lanka community with a shared future in the new era, and bring greater stability and certainty to this turbulent world.

JAFFNA MONITOR EXCLUSIVE

# **“I Would Genuinely Love to See a Russian Cultural Center in Jaffna”**

- Maria L. Popova,  
Head of the  
Russian Cultural  
Center, in an  
Exclusive Interview



*Maria L. Popova*





BY:

## Our Special Correspondent

**M**aria L. Popova, the Director of the Russian House in Colombo and First Secretary of the Russian Embassy in Sri Lanka is a distinguished figure in cultural diplomacy. Widely respected for her efforts, her leadership has played a pivotal role in strengthening cultural ties between Sri Lanka and Russia.

A writer herself, she has actively fostered literary connections between the two nations and has contributed significantly to the translation of Russian literary works into Sinhala.

With a professional journey that began in prominent media institutions — including Capital FM Moscow — and later at the Consulate General of Russia in San Francisco, she has seamlessly transitioned into a diplomatic role focused on cultural outreach.

Over the course of nearly a triennium in Colombo, she has exerted a profound impact on bilateral cultural exchange, spearheading substantive collaborations across education, the arts, and public diplomacy.

Beyond her official remit, Maria L. Popova is also recognized for her refined aesthetic sensibilities and steadfast advocacy for Sri Lankan fashion. She artfully amalgamates Russian elegance with indigenous textile traditions and passionately champions the regional fashion and textile industry.

This exclusive interview with Jaffna Monitor unveils a cultural envoy whose endeavors continue to bridge nations—not merely through diplomatic channels, but through

the enduring conduits of people, literature, fashion, and shared heritage.

## In your view, what makes the Russian Cultural Center in Sri Lanka significant?

The Russian Cultural Center in Colombo holds a special place in the history of Sri Lanka–Russia relations. It was officially established in its current location in 1986 under the Russia–Sri Lanka Friendship Agreement, though its presence dates back even earlier as the Soviet Cultural Center in Colombo 2. The inauguration was a historic moment, attended by then-President J.R. Jayewardene, who ceremonially opened the center and planted a sapling in the courtyard — a tree that has since become a beloved symbol of our enduring friendship.

Over the years, that tree has become part of our identity — featured in numerous cultural events, from literary tributes to art performances. During one celebration of Alexander Pushkin's birthday, for example, we even recreated a mermaid scene on its branches, inspired by one of his fairy tales. Its presence continues to inspire and anchor our community activities.

But more importantly, the Russian Cultural Center exists to share Russia's rich artistic and intellectual heritage—from literature, ballet, chess, and classical music to language and higher education. It's a place where cultures connect and where Sri Lankans can explore Russia's contributions to global civilization.

One of our key missions is to promote Russian higher education. In 2024 alone, the Russian Government offered 50 fully funded scholarships to Sri Lankan students in fields ranging from medicine and engineering to arts



and humanities. With nearly four applicants per seat, the demand has been remarkable, prompting discussions to increase the quota to 80 scholarships next year — at the request of Sri Lankan authorities.

## **What fields of study are the Russian scholarships offered for, and how are the students selected?**

The scholarships offered by the Russian Federation cover a wide range of academic streams, including Bachelor's, Master's, and Postgraduate degrees. One of the most popular fields among Sri Lankan students is General Medicine. Over the years, many Sri Lankan graduates from renowned institutions like the Moscow State Medical University, the Pirogov Russian National Research Medical University, and, of course, the highly popular People's Friendship University have gone on to build highly successful careers — some of them now hold prominent positions in government institutions and the healthcare sector in Sri Lanka. Their success has inspired the next generation, including their children, to pursue medical education in Russia.

Beyond medicine, we've also observed an increasing interest in Tourism and Hospitality Management, Information Technology, Natural Sciences, and Fashion Design. During my two and a half years here, I've personally been impressed with how fashion is developing in Sri Lanka. Many young designers have immense talent and creativity. To support this growing creative sector, we are planning a collaborative fashion show featuring Sri Lankan designers inspired by Russian culture.

## **How are students selected for Russian Government scholarships? Is there a**

## **district quota system?**

No, there is no district or ethnic quota system. All Sri Lankan citizens with valid passports are eligible to apply, regardless of background. The selection is entirely merit-based, transparent, and competitive.

Applications are submitted via the official platform – [education-in-russia.com](http://education-in-russia.com) – usually starting in September. The process includes:

- Online Registration: Uploading certified translations of O/L and A/L results.
- University Preferences: Applicants may list up to five preferred Russian universities.
- Document Review: Our team in Colombo checks eligibility and completeness.
- Final Selection: Based on academic results and supporting materials such as articles, certificates, or awards.

To assist applicants, we run a 24/7 live support chat in English and Sinhala and regularly hold online/offline seminars across Sri Lanka.

Recently, we hosted a Russian Higher Education Fair with 22 universities from across Russia — from Crimea to Siberia — offering students the chance to interact with university representatives and explore diverse academic programs.

Currently, we collaborate with nearly 30 Russian universities, including leading institutions in Aviation, Medicine, Engineering, IT, and Design. One of our notable partnerships is with a prominent aviation university in St. Petersburg, which is attracting increasing interest from Sri Lankan students.

Our mission is to keep strengthening these academic links and ensure that more Sri Lankan students have access to world-class education in Russia.

## **What efforts are being made to connect Sri Lankan readers with Russian literature?**

Russian literature has always resonated with Sri Lankan readers — with enduring admiration for authors like Maxim Gorky, Alexander Pushkin, and Anton Chekhov. But we are now also promoting contemporary Russian voices, bridging the gap between modern Russian authors and Sri Lankan translators, poets, and critics.

A key example is the Sinhala translation of the internationally acclaimed novel “Laurus” by Eugene Vodolazkin, known for his blend of historical fiction and spiritual themes. This translation was done by Felix Fernando, a distinguished philologist who has played a vital role in expanding the reach of Russian literature in Sri Lanka.

Another writer we’re proud to introduce is Alexander Tsypkin, a popular short story writer, screenwriter, and cultural commentator. His Christmas short story was also translated into Sinhala by Felix Fernando, marking a step forward in showcasing contemporary Russian literature to local audiences.

To further support this literary exchange, the Russian House hosts an annual Literature Festival, bringing together translators, writers, and academics from across Sri Lanka. It’s a platform to celebrate Russian literary heritage while building new bridges of collaboration and creativity.

## **Has there been any effort to translate Russian literature into Tamil in Sri Lanka?**

At present, most of the Russian literary translations available in Sri Lanka are in Sinhala. However, we recognize the importance of making Russian literature accessible to Tamil-speaking audiences. This is an area where we are actively seeking collaboration.

If there is someone with a strong command of both Russian and Tamil, we would be delighted to work with them. It is an open invitation to anyone who wishes to contribute to this cultural and linguistic bridge. We are eager to support such initiatives and are open to partnerships with literary organizations, translators, and educational institutions in the Tamil-speaking regions of Sri Lanka.

## **How important is literature to Russia as a country and to its citizens?**

It is part of our DNA. It’s something we are born into, something that becomes a part of our identity from a very young age.

Speaking for myself, I simply cannot imagine my life without literature. I’m an avid reader. Not just within Russian literature, but globally, I find great inspiration in both the classics and modern literary voices. But when it comes to Russian literature specifically, I feel a deep, almost unexplainable sense of pride.

Some people even start learning the Russian language just to be able to read their masterpieces in the original text. That, to me, is one of the greatest tributes to the power of literature — and to the cultural depth of our country.





*Maria L. Popova at Sri Kaileswaram Kovil in Captain's Garden*

At the beginning of this year, we launched a new video project dedicated to great Russian literary figures. I realized that while many people in Sri Lanka have heard of Pushkin or Sergei Yesenin, they often aren't familiar with other remarkable Russian poets and authors — especially those from the Silver Age of Russian poetry in the 1960s and 70s, a period of extraordinary artistic expression during the Soviet era.

This era produced poets whose works remain relevant and powerful today. I want to introduce these voices to the Sri Lankan audience.

Through our new initiative, we aim to feature translated readings, visual storytelling, and educational materials about poets like Boris Pasternak, Bella Akhmadulina, Joseph Brodsky, Anna

Akhmatova, and others who deserve global recognition. These are the voices that shaped the emotional and philosophical fabric of a generation — and they deserve to be heard beyond Russian borders.

## **Do the younger generation of Russian children still read like previous generations, especially given the influence of smartphones and television?**

This is a challenge faced globally. The digital age has fundamentally changed how young people engage with the world.

Speaking personally, I have a 14-year-old son, and I find myself constantly negotiating with him about screen time. Whenever he has a free moment, his smartphone is in his hands — usually watching TikTok or short videos. He's a bright boy, and it's not that he lacks depth or curiosity, but like many of his peers, the allure of fast content and constant stimulation is very strong.

When I was growing up, books were my escape. I always had one in my hands. We didn't have internet, we didn't have streaming platforms or social media, and going to the cinema was an occasional treat. Naturally, books became our closest companions.

Today, the environment has changed. The modern world is fast, digital, and visually driven — and we cannot wish it away. But I don't see this as a tragedy. Rather, I believe it's up to



us — the older generation, educators, cultural leaders, and parents — to find creative and engaging ways to draw young people back to the joy of literature.

That's why we launched a new initiative this year: a visual storytelling project dedicated to classic and modern Russian literature. It combines poetry, imagery, voice, and animation to make these works more accessible and appealing to the digital-native generation.

### **Would you consider organizing a literary or cultural project in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, where the Tamil community — with its own rich literary tradition — is the majority?**

I would absolutely love to. If there is genuine interest from the Tamil-speaking community, I see no reason why we shouldn't. In fact, I would be truly excited to collaborate on something meaningful in that region. Sri Lankan Tamils have a deeply rooted and profound literary heritage, and as someone who believes in literature as a bridge between cultures, I see this as a beautiful opportunity for mutual exchange.

This is an open invitation — if someone with the necessary linguistic expertise is interested, we at the Russian House would be eager to collaborate.

On the education front, I also want to extend our support to students in the North and East who are interested in studying in Russia. We understand that traveling from places like Jaffna or Batticaloa to Colombo can be challenging and costly. That's why we are actively promoting online "Meet & Greet" sessions with Russian universities.

These virtual open days allow students to:

- Join remotely from anywhere in the country
- Watch real-time presentations by Russian universities
- Ask questions directly to university representatives and academic advisors
- Learn about available programs, scholarships, and the application process

So here's what I propose: whenever we organize these sessions — which we do regularly — we will inform Jaffna Monitor. You can then help spread the word across your community. Interested students can simply join online — there's no need to travel.

### **Why don't you open a Russian Cultural Center in Jaffna?**

I would genuinely love to see that happen — but unfortunately, it's not a decision I can make on my own. The establishment of an official branch of the Russian House in any city requires an intergovernmental agreement between the Russian Federation and the Government of Sri Lanka.

That said, while we may not be able to open a full-fledged center right away, we've had positive experiences establishing satellite projects, particularly Russian language courses in various parts of the country.

One such example is our collaboration with the University of Peradeniya about a year and a half ago, where we successfully launched a Russian language course. The response was very encouraging — we had over 20 students, conducted examinations according to official standards, and even created a small literary corner on campus. However, after a change in university leadership, the new management

decided not to continue with the program, despite its popularity. So for now, that initiative has been paused.

## **Then why not consider launching something similar at a university in the Northern or Eastern Province?**

We are open to that idea, absolutely. It's something we are thinking about seriously. But for such a project to succeed, we need to find a qualified and passionate Russian language teacher who is either based in Jaffna or willing to travel from Colombo regularly.

Personally, I am a maximalist. As long as I am here, I am committed to expanding the presence of the Russian language and culture across the island.

In fact, we've already seen success in other regions. For instance, we launched a Russian language course at the Police Academy in Galle for officers in the Tourist Police Division. The program began on June 10, 2022, and ran for a full year with 25 officers participating. It was a meaningful step in bridging the communication gap between Russian tourists and local authorities — and a great example of how Russian language skills can have practical, professional applications in Sri Lanka.

So yes, if we can identify the right partners and passionate educators, Jaffna or any part of the North or East would be an exciting next step for us.

## **What was the purpose of teaching Russian to police officers?**

The purpose was very straightforward — to help them better communicate with Russian tourists, especially in key tourist hubs like Galle, where multiple tourist routes converge.

There's been a steady increase in Russian visitors to Sri Lanka in recent years, and naturally, there's a growing need for basic Russian language skills among frontline service providers.

Due to high demand, we launched a Russian language course for Tourist Police officers in Galle in 2022. It was extremely popular and the response exceeded our expectations. The officers were incredibly disciplined, never missed a class, and showed a genuine eagerness to learn. When I visited them a few months later, I was amazed — they stood up and spoke confidently in Russian. It was truly heartwarming to see how much effort they had put in.

Following this success, we were approached by the National Police Academy in Colombo, and in February this year, we launched another Russian language course there. Once again, they're showing excellent results. The course also provides an official Russian language certificate, which for many officers has been a valuable addition to their professional qualifications.

## **Why do so many Russian tourists choose Sri Lanka? What makes it so special for them?**

Of course, affordability plays a part. Compared to other tropical destinations like the Maldives — which has become quite expensive in recent years — Sri Lanka still offers great value. For those staying in three- or four-star hotels, it's an ideal choice. Even though five-star resorts have raised their prices, the experience here feels more authentic, and more immersive.

But what truly draws Russians is the combination of stunning natural beauty and ancient cultural richness. Russians aren't just

looking for a place to lie on a beach — they want to feel, to learn, to connect. And Sri Lanka offers that rare chance to walk barefoot along golden shores in the morning... and by afternoon, be standing before thousand-year-old ruins that whisper the stories of forgotten kings.

We both revere our past, honor tradition and take pride in our heritage. Whether it's a museum in Moscow or a sacred stupa in Anuradhapura, there is a shared respect for what came before us. And that creates a sense of familiarity — a kind of quiet kinship.

With eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, dramatic landscapes, spiritual sanctuaries, and welcoming people, it feels like a journey that feeds both the heart and the mind.

And personally? I can tell you from experience: this island stays with you.

Every month, I visit the Sri Kaileswaram Kovil in Captain's Garden, right in Colombo. It's a Hindu temple — ancient, powerful, full of color, light, and energy. I call it my place of power. The rituals, the chanting, the fire — it's not just something to see, it's something to feel. Every time I bring someone new there — friends, colleagues, even visiting diplomats — they're overwhelmed. Some cry. Some just fall silent. But everyone leaves changed.

## **How enthusiastic are Sri Lankans about learning the Russian language?**

At the Russian House in Colombo, we offer certified language courses at A1 and A2 levels, which attract a wide range of participants — from students preparing to study in Russia to professionals in tourism, hospitality, and business.

Our language department includes five qualified instructors: three native Russian-speaking female teachers and two Sri Lankan philologists, both graduates of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN). These Sri Lankan instructors are also respected translators who have enriched local literature by rendering Russian classics and modern works into Sinhala.

## **Is there any similar initiative for the tourism industry?**

Absolutely. We recognized the need to expand beyond the police force and created a program called "Russian for Tourism", which is now offered at the Russian House in Colombo — primarily on weekends. The course teaches:

- Basic conversational Russian
- Grammar essentials
- Key vocabulary for hospitality
- Descriptions of Sri Lanka's major tourist attractions — in Russian

The program is designed to be practical, user-friendly, and affordable — with fees kept reasonable to make it widely accessible.

With more Russian companies expressing interest in hiring Sri Lankans, we've developed an intensive Russian language course for migrant workers planning to move to Russia. The course is tailored to prepare them for the mandatory Russian language exam required by Russian immigration authorities for foreign workers.

This exam is crucial — without passing it, entry for employment is not permitted. Our course is available both online and offline and is structured to fast-track learners depending on how quickly they need to travel.



## What kinds of jobs are Sri Lankans going for in Russia?

The opportunities are diverse. Many Sri Lankans are being hired in manufacturing plants, production lines, courier and delivery services, and increasingly, in the garment sector — especially women skilled in tailoring and clothing production. This demand is rising steadily.

We even had a delegation from a Russian state agency involved in international labor relations visit the Russian House in Colombo. We discussed structured, transparent recruitment pathways for Sri Lankan workers.

## Why are Sri Lankans choosing to go to Russia for work? There were allegations that some were sent to war under the pretext of employment — can you clarify?

One of the main reasons Sri Lankans are opting to work in Russia is the attractive salary packages. On average, workers can expect to earn around USD 500 per month, which is considerably higher than many local wages, especially in rural areas. In addition to the salary, employers often provide accommodation, healthcare, and other basic needs, allowing workers to save and send money home to support their families.

However, it is true that there were isolated incidents involving unofficial recruitment channels, where a few individuals were reportedly misled and ended up being drawn into the conflict zone under the guise of employment. These were deeply unfortunate cases.

Since then, both the Sri Lankan and Russian





governments have taken corrective action. Authorities have tightened oversight, and I can confidently assure you that such incidents no longer occur under official, legal pathways.

Today, employment opportunities are offered through regulated systems, overseen by Russian government institutions such as immigration and labor departments, ensuring transparency, legitimacy, and safety for foreign workers. We strongly advise all job seekers to use only verified recruitment channels to avoid exploitation.

Russia continues to welcome skilled Sri Lankan workers — especially in sectors like manufacturing, logistics, textile production, and courier services — and many companies report high satisfaction with their Sri Lankan employees, valuing their discipline, reliability, and work ethic.

## What other activities and programs do you offer at the Russian Centre in Colombo?

One of our most popular programs is the Chess Classes for students. As you may know, chess holds a very special place in Russian culture and history. That legacy has sparked strong interest among Sri Lankan students. The classes we offer are well-structured, progressive, and taught with genuine passion — and it's incredibly rewarding to see students so engaged in a game that sharpens both their intellect and focus.

We also offer Ballet Classes, which have become increasingly popular, especially among school-aged children and young adults. Our instructors bring the elegance, discipline, and technique of the Russian ballet tradition right here to Colombo. For many students, learning ballet is a journey into grace, strength,



*Maria L. Popova with friends at Sri Kaileswaram Kovil, Captain's Garden.*

posture, and self-expression. They often share how it has improved not just their physical fitness, but also their confidence, poise, and mental clarity. It's a beautiful blend of art and wellness, and we're proud to witness such enthusiasm from Sri Lankan youth.

These programs — along with our Russian language courses, film screenings, cultural festivals, and literary events — are part of our broader mission: to create a vibrant, inclusive space where Sri Lankans can explore the depth and diversity of Russian culture, while also discovering new dimensions of their own creativity and curiosity.

# President cannot set foot in Jaffna: Sumanthiran's Kaipulla Moment



In what many on social media have dubbed his 'Kaipulla moment'—all bravado, little substance—M.A. Sumanthiran, acting General Secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), delivered a fiery threat that, to many observers, epitomized the opportunistic politician willing to stoop to any level to radicalize Tamil youth.

"The government must immediately withdraw the gazette notification aimed at acquiring lands in the North. If not, we will ensure that the President cannot come to—or even set foot in—Jaffna," he thundered, channeling, as some quipped, the ghost of Prabhakaran issuing an ultimatum.

The irony? Prabhakaran never relied on chest-thumping theatrics. He didn't issue grand threats for applause—he simply acted.

And as expected, newspapers said to be sponsored by Sumanthiran's loyal coterie ran the statement like it was a declaration of war—complete with blazing headlines and soul-sold opinion pieces cheering him on.

Yes, many observers agree that the land gazette may be unjust and deserves to be withdrawn—no question about that. But when Sumanthiran threatens to stop the President from entering Jaffna, no one's trembling. They're laughing. One social media user mockingly asked, "Is he



going to trip the President by the foot- “காலை தடுக்கி விழுத்தப் போறாரா?” Another chimed in, “Or maybe tickle his toes- “காலில் கிச்சு கிச்சு மூட்டப் போறாரா?” What could have been a serious and principled critique of state land policy has instead turned into full-blown meme material.

Sumanthiran, not content with the theatrics-or perhaps eager to further inflame disillusioned Tamil youth-took it a step further on Facebook. He shared a campaign poster aimed at the NPP, quoting: “அப்பு ஆச்சி ஆண்ட மண்ணை அப்டுகாமிகள் ஆள்வதா?” (“Should the land ruled by our forefathers now be ruled by Appuhamis?”) -a direct remix of the LTTE’s infamous wartime slogan: “அப்பு ஆச்சி ஆண்ட மண்ணை எதிரி ஆள்வதா?” (“Should the land ruled by our ancestors be ruled by the enemy?”)

While this drew applause from his shrinking base, the backlash was swift—and scathing. Thileepkumar, the NPP’s Kalkudah organizer,

responded on Facebook with a fiery post accusing Sumanthiran of “performative nationalism.” He pointed out the irony that Sumanthiran’s own children are married to Sinhalese. He wrote: “Dear leaders, open the doors of your own bedrooms first. Tonight, your children are asleep in the arms of the very ‘outsiders’ you rage against. When you’ve welcomed them into your homes, why stand on the streets shouting racist slogans?”

What do you call this version of Tamil nationalism—where you stir hate among ordinary Tamils while you sleep peacefully beside Sinhalese?”

**Note to non-Tamil readers:** Kaipulla is a legendary comedy character played by iconic comedian Vadivelu in the Tamil film Winner. The character is known for his loud bravado, empty threats, and-as everyone expects-inevitable beatings. A cult figure in meme culture, Kaipulla talks big... and falls harder.







Dayan Jayatileka

# AKD Administration Is the Most Right-Wing Sri Lanka Has Ever Seen

*—Dayan Jayatileka*



BY:  
Our Special  
Correspondent

**D**r. Dayan Jayatilleka stands as one of Sri Lanka's preeminent public intellectuals, diplomats, and political theorists.

A former revolutionary — and notably, a Sinhalese among the earliest members of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) in the late 1970s — he epitomizes the early inclusive ethos of Tamil militancy. His political trajectory mirrors the complexity of Sri Lanka's modern history, evolving from militant activism to a principled commitment to democratic pluralism.

An accomplished academic and prolific author, Dr. Jayatilleka's oeuvre includes *The Travails of a Democracy*, *Fidel's Ethics of Violence*, *Long War, Cold Peace*, *The Fall of Global Socialism*, and his latest, *Interventions: Selected Political Writings* (2024).

In diplomacy, he distinguished himself as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Russia (2018–2020) and earlier held ambassadorial appointments in France (also accredited to Spain and Portugal) and at the United Nations Office in Geneva (2007–2009).

This is our exclusive conversation with him.

**In a recent interview with a Sinhala-language news outlet, you reportedly remarked that President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is “behaving more like a Chief Minister of an Indian state than the head of a sovereign nation.” What prompted you to make that comparison? In your view, is his government undermining Sri Lanka's sovereignty?**

Anura's JVP comrade and the Chief Government Whip in Parliament stated at a media briefing that his government cannot—and will not—disclose the contents of the MoUs signed with Prime Minister Modi without the concurrence of the Government of India. If true, this implies that India holds a veto over whether or not agreements signed on Sri Lankan soil, concerning Sri Lanka's bilateral relationship with its neighbour and signed by Sri Lanka's President—elected by the Sri Lankan people—can be made public.

No Sri Lankan government since independence in 1948 has ever made such a declaration. Does this suggest that Sri Lanka, its President, and its Government are now effectively governed from India? This is certainly not the stance or rhetoric of a sovereign and independent nation. It resembles, instead, the posture of a Chief Minister of an Indian state. As the saying goes, “If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck—it is a duck”.

**You've accused India of "compromising the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils" in its recent dealings with Colombo. Could you elaborate on this statement? How, in your view, has New Delhi failed to uphold its traditional role as a guarantor of Tamil rights?**

There was no reference to the 13th Amendment or Provincial Councils in any text. The only reference was verbal and non-specific, in Prime Minister Modi's remarks, which referred to the implementation of the Sri Lankan Constitution including elections to Provincial Councils.



This is a huge contrast with the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987 where the crux of the matter was devolution. The strategic issues were in the Annexures and exchange of letters. Today there is a complete inversion.

What was in the Annexures and Exchange of letters form the core of the Modi-AKD agreements, while devolution has disappeared. There is no written commitment by the Sri Lankan government to anything with regard to Tamil autonomy. 40 years of policy discourse starting from Annexure C (1984) and the Delhi agreements signed by Harry Jayewardene, agreeing to the Province as the main unit of devolution, have evaporated.

This is more the fault of the Tamil political class than of India, though. As Joni Mitchell sang, “Don’t it always seem to go, that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone.”

**You publicly criticized the recent defence cooperation agreement signed during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Colombo—an agreement many saw as a diplomatic milestone. Why do you view it as a potential threat to Sri Lanka’s sovereignty or regional neutrality? What long-term concerns does it raise for you?**

There are two sources for my suspicions—indeed, my objections. Firstly, the unprecedented and obdurate secrecy on the part of the Anura Dissanayake administration. Why? What is it hiding? What is it so afraid of? Logically, it can’t be anything good or acceptable to the Sri Lankan people.

Secondly, the leaks in the Indian media—both print and electronic—which refer to a “first-

ever defence pact,” a “defence alliance,” and to Trincomalee as an “energy hub.” Sri Lanka has never had a defence pact or alliance with any country—until now. Why should we entangle ourselves in such a relationship at a time when India is part of the Quad with the USA; when the USA considers China a ‘peer adversary’ and is in a trade war with it; and when China’s prestige is rising across Asia, in part due to Trump’s behaviour? Why should Sri Lanka align itself with one side over the other?

**How would you assess the performance of the current government led by the National People's Power (NPP)? Have they delivered on their electoral promises? And as someone who once identified with the Left, do you believe they remain ideologically consistent?**

I have always identified myself to this day as on the Left, of the Left, (coming) from the Left. But after the 1980s ended, I’ve not been identified with a particular Left because I’ve found that far too self-limiting.

The current NPP Government has not only failed to deliver on its most important promises—it has actively reneged on them, embracing the very policies it had vehemently opposed over the past few years, including during its 2024 election campaign. On the IMF agreement and the debt deal with private creditors, it didn’t even attempt to renegotiate, but instead rushed to continue the arrangements made by President Ranil Wickremesinghe with the IMF, and agreed to in principle by him with the private creditors. These agreements had been publicly denounced by Anura Dissanayake during his presidential campaign.

What is most emblematic of the character of his administration is the unprecedented appointment of the current Chairman of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce as one of two senior economic advisors to the President and as a key negotiator with both the private bondholders and the IMF.

No serious country—let alone a self-proclaimed progressive—would appoint the head of its top business chamber as senior economic advisor, especially to negotiate sovereign debt.

It is a blatant conflict of interest. The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce includes major ISB holders, and ISB debt lies at the heart of Sri Lanka's crisis. In effect, a local bondholder is negotiating with foreign bondholders. Whose interests will prevail—the citizens' or the creditors'?

This move exposes the class interests underpinning the Anura Kumara Dissanayake presidency—not just its composition, but its character.

As for India, JVP-NPP leader Anura Dissanayake has enthusiastically signed agreements with Prime Minister Modi—agreements he had fiercely criticized in his 2023 speeches to the Veterans Collective when they appeared in the Joint Statement following Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit to India.

There is nothing remotely left-wing, centre-left, or even centrist about the AKD administration. It has executed a 180-degree shift—from a centre-left opposition to arguably the most right-wing administration Sri Lanka has seen.

You've long framed politics through a Left vs. Right lens. But in a context where so-called Leftist parties form alliances with capitalist



elites and flirt with nationalist rhetoric, does that ideological binary still hold any relevance?

No, I've never framed politics as a binary of Right vs Left. If I had, how could I have worked so closely with Presidents Premadasa and Mahinda Rajapaksa? Populism doesn't fit neatly into Right/Left binaries—nor does statism. Not everything can be reduced to Right vs Left. I've always acknowledged the existence of the Left, Right, Centre, Centre-Left, and Centre-Right.

In terms of policy content, strategic orientation, and political discourse, today's JVP-NPP is clearly on the Right. Let alone Centre-Left—even a Centre-Right leader would never have dared to appoint the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce as an advisor and negotiator, and then proceed to sign seven agreements, including on defence, with India while refusing to disclose their contents.

**You have, in the past, characterized the JVP as a Sinhala-extremist force that obstructed ethnic reconciliation. Could you elaborate on this with historical context? And how do you view the JVP today under the NPP banner, especially given its unexpected success in Tamil-majority areas? Has the party genuinely transformed?**

The JVP leader Wijeweera's book on the Tamil Eelam question was published in 1986, a year before the Indo-Lanka Accord. In it, he denounced every form of devolution, including the District Development Councils, which his party had contested in 1981. The JVP murdered student leader Daya Pathirana in December 1986—well before the Indo-Lanka Accord. That incident stands as evidence of the JVP's chauvinist past.

As for the present, the JVP is definitely not a Sinhala extremist party. That is partly because Wimal Weerawansa, the main exponent of radical Sinhala nationalism, quit the party. Additionally, the radical left breakaway faction—the Frontline Socialist Party, led by Kumar Gunaratnam—offered a strong critique of the JVP's chauvinism, both internally and from the outside. Most significantly, the ideology of the Aragalaya, which the JVP did not lead, dealt a major blow to Sinhala chauvinism.

But the JVP-NPP has yet to face the real test. That test is: What is its political solution to the Tamil national question or the ethnonational question? The JVP still does not acknowledge that such a question exists.

It continues to reduce everything to

socioeconomic and developmental dimensions. While there is some recognition of the need for a degree of provincial-level autonomy within a unitary framework, the JVP's continued opposition to the 13th Amendment does not appear to stem from the belief that it is inadequate. On the contrary, the critique of the 13th Amendment seems to come from an outright anti-autonomy, anti-devolution, conservative perspective.

**You've long argued that reconciliation must stem from domestic reform, rejecting Western calls for international accountability to protect sovereignty. Yet, 15 years after the war, devolution is stalled, the military remains entrenched in the North and East, and domestic justice mechanisms have failed. Has sustained inaction eroded Sri Lanka's moral and institutional credibility to conduct its own inquiries—and doesn't continued resistance to international involvement now risk obstructing justice and lasting reconciliation?**

As a political scientist, I tend to adopt a comparative political studies perspective. I know of no functioning democratic state, headed by a democratically elected civilian government, which fought a civil war against a secessionist-terrorist movement—within its own internationally recognized borders—and won a decisive military victory, that has then submitted itself to international accountability processes or even a truth and reconciliation process.

As we know, the Good Friday Accords (the 1998 peace agreement that ended three





decades of conflict in Northern Ireland, focusing on political compromise rather than legal accountability for past violence) had no such accountability component. Any such effort by a government is likely to be socially polarizing and politically destabilizing. I firmly believe that prosecution by Sri Lankan courts of emblematic cases—as recommended by the LLRC Report of 2011, which identified over 10 incidents requiring investigation—remains the only viable path forward. That is as far as one can realistically go, on the ground, in Sri Lanka.

I wouldn't recommend that the JVP-NPP pursue anything more ambitious, as it would likely provoke a resurgence of the Sinhala Far Right. Moreover, it has always been a zero-sum game between accountability and autonomy. Sinn Féin and the IRA wisely chose the latter.

**You once defended Tamil militancy as a national liberation struggle. In retrospect, how do you view that stance now? Where did the LTTE and broader Tamil militant movements go wrong—politically, morally, and strategically?**

Tamil militancy was definitely a national liberation struggle—or predominantly so—in its first decade. I agree with both M. Narayan Swamy and LTTE co-founder Raghavan, who, independently of each other, identify 1984 as the watershed year when that began to change. I would argue that with the Naiyaru, Kokilai, Dollar Farm, Kent Farm, and Anuradhapura massacres, as well as the slaughter of TELO and EPRLF members in 1986, the character of the struggle changed qualitatively, and its fascist tendencies came to the fore.

Where the LTTE went wrong has been best detailed by Raghavan in *Jaffna Monitor* and before that by Nithiyanandan, who was the first to expose Prabhakaran's admiration for both Hitler and Zionism. The only chance the LTTE had for a different trajectory would have been if the leadership and political line of Mahattaya had prevailed over Prabhakaran's—but I don't believe that was ever a viable prospect.

As for the other Tamil movements, their fatal mistake was that—even as they came to understand the nature of the LTTE—they failed to form a united front of the left-oriented Tamil organizations. Had the EPRLF and PLOTE done so, or better still, had PLOTE, EPRLF, EROS, NLFT, and PLFT united, history might have taken a far better turn.

There were also fundamental political reasons behind the tragedy that followed. No Tamil organization showed the realism of Sinn Féin/IRA in recognizing that the 13th Amendment within a unitary state was the maximum achievable at that historical juncture. They never even attempted to make the 13th Amendment work. While Premadasa's government was engaged in a war to preserve the democratic state, Vardarajaperumal was escalating his demands and issuing ultimatums—moves that simply could not be accommodated given the precarious situation in the South.

A larger, often overlooked issue must also be acknowledged: in no other country would the population have supported a war against foreign peacekeepers deployed with the consent of their own government.

Imagine, for instance, if Russian speakers in Crimea and the Donbass had fought against Russian forces! Even today, the Tamil diaspora has not fully recognized that fighting the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was the LTTE's ultimate blunder.

The Tamil nationalist movement has yet to come to terms with the limitations of its own slogans. Consider the once-mighty Kurds of Syria, or the trajectories of the Basque and Catalan struggles. At this moment, there is only one practical move left for the Tamil struggle: not to push for a solution beyond the 13th Amendment, but to first demand the holding of elections to the existing Provincial Councils. Sometimes, when you have got so many things so wrong for so long, you must start with what you have because if you don't, you may lose that too. Democracy is the answer—in the form of elections to the existing provincial Councils. That may be the only way of saving any kind of large-unit devolution.

**During your diplomatic service under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, you staunchly defended Sri Lanka's human rights record. In hindsight, with mounting evidence and testimonies of wartime atrocities, do you believe you helped shield the regime from legitimate international scrutiny?**

If I had to do it all over again, I believe I would—though perhaps not in every tactical detail. Whether then or now, I was never going to allow the diplomatic victory of a secessionist movement with a fascist terrorist character, or of Western imperialist powers hypocritically calling for international inquiries.

Now, as then, I believe that a basically just war was waged by a fundamentally democratic state. Long before Geneva, I opposed any attempt to appease the Tigers; I never believed a negotiated solution was possible with a movement that had assassinated Nehru's grandson. I firmly believed that a military victory over the LTTE was both desirable and achievable.

Then, as now, I support the kind of political solution envisioned in the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, and in the various rounds of negotiations held between 1984 and 1986.

**On what basis did you believe that a military victory over the LTTE was achievable? And did you factor in the thousands of lives—mainly Tamil—that were lost during that pursuit, at the hands of both the military and the LTTE?**





I went on record arguing at length that Prabhakaran could be militarily defeated, though the Tamil Question had to be politically resolved. This was in a detailed interview that D.P. Sivaram, a.k.a. Taraki—my late friend—conducted with me for the North-Eastern Herald, which he edited (before J. Tissanayagam), in late 1992. He published it with a title featuring a provocative line from my interview: "Premadasa should be a little more of a war-monger."

Then again, in 2004—well before Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected President—I wrote a piece in *The Island*, or perhaps the *Sunday Island*, titled "Why Prabhakaran Will Lose."

I stuck my neck out and risked my credibility in both instances. As Godfrey Gunatilleke writes in his three-volume autobiography, mine was a lone voice—not even the entire military brass, or most of it, shared my view. But history proved me right.

Why was I so sure?

Because Prabhakaran had violated all the rules and norms of People's War, and could not possibly win in the long run. He had read extensively on conventional warfare but ignored People's War and the great minds who theorized and fought such wars.

As for the massive casualties, they were the direct outcome of Prabhakaran's refusal to arrive at a negotiated settlement short of Tamil Eelam, even when he held the upper hand—as in 2003. They were also the consequence of Ranil Wickremesinghe's decision to call off a Special Forces ambush on Prabhakaran in December 2001, which could have decapitated the LTTE and shortened the war.

In 1981, while I was a doctoral student in the U.S., I wrote an article for the *Lanka Guardian*, which was later translated and published in Viduthalai Puligal, the organ of the LTTE. It was titled "Individual Terrorism or Urban Guerrilla War?" and argued that the armed actions underway in Jaffna at the time—





which did not involve attacks on unarmed civilian "soft targets"—could not be classified as terrorism, but rather as urban guerrilla warfare. However, my critique of the LTTE, and my warning of possible failure, began even before the massacres of late 1983–1984.

In 1982 or 1983, I delivered a lecture at Jaffna University at the invitation of Marumalarchik Kalaham—the Renaissance Society—which was unofficially affiliated with the LTTE. The topic was The Lessons of the Nicaraguan Revolution. My translator on that occasion was D.P. Sivaram.

At one moment during the interpretation, Sivaram paused and made it clear that he was merely translating my words, not expressing his own views. That was when I criticized the dismembering of a policeman and the public display of his severed limbs. Among the audience were LTTE youth, including some who had participated in the raid on the Chavakachcheri Police Station. Vardarajah Perumal was still on the university staff, and we met later for a chat in the staff room.

In that lecture, I warned that if the iron rules of People's War—as exemplified by the Nicaraguan Revolution—were not adhered to, the struggle would eventually fail. Some

elements in the Renaissance Society were impressed by my argument and translated the lecture into Tamil. I later learned that these elements were close to Mahattaya, the LTTE's main link with the university. The translation was published as a pamphlet. Tragically, the young student leader carrying the pamphlet on a motorcycle was shot at an Army checkpoint, and his colleague swallowed cyanide. The text was lost for some years.

Later, during the period I was underground, Rajani Thiranyagama brought me a copy of the translated pamphlet that Mahattaya had given her for me. I believe this was in 1986.

My point is this: I had not only cautioned about the likelihood of failure if the norms of People's War continued to be violated—I had done so before a para-LTTE audience, in Jaffna University itself. Furthermore, my warning had sufficient resonance for an element within or linked to the LTTE to have it published in translation. However, that progressive tendency was later eliminated by Prabhakaran. Had it survived, the entire history of the struggle might have been different.

But the deviations from People's War were already very clear in the theory and practice of the LTTE even in the early 1980s. Chief among them were the rejection of united fronts and, most fatally, the violation of the ethical boundaries of violence that any successful guerrilla, national liberation, or revolutionary movement adheres to.

Thus, my prediction of the LTTE's eventual defeat goes back not to 1992 or 2004, but to 1982–1983.

**You were part of Vikalpa Kandayama, a progressive collective formed after the 1983 pogrom, aimed at countering Sinhala nationalism and bridging the**

## **ethnic divide. Can you reflect on the group's goals, methods, and what legacy—if any—it left behind?**

I would say I was more than just 'part of the Vikalpa Kandayama'. When 23 members of the group and its allies—including K. Padmanabha, founder-leader of the EPRLF—were indicted in the High Court of Colombo on 14 counts under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Regulations, starting with 'conspiracy to overthrow the state through violence', I was named the First Accused.

The group was a revolutionary left organization with a Marxist-Leninist ideology and a multi-ethnic composition. It aimed at a socialist revolution in alliance with the Tamil Left. We had envisioned a North-South project based on a two-front struggle. We had identified the EPRLF as the most authentically leftist of the Tamil organizations—far more Marxist-Leninist than PLOTE.

As Suresh Premachandran can confirm, the initial discussions with me took place at Peradeniya University in 1978, when I was still a student and Padmanabha and Suresh were still members of EROS and its student wing, GUES (the General Union of Eelam Students). A few years after our first meeting in 1978, Padmanabha gave me the founding program of the EPRLF in 1981.

As for its legacy, I am glad to see that the idea of comradeship between Northern and Southern leftists—crossing the ethnic divide, for which we were murdered in the South by the JVP and our EPRLF comrades were killed in the North by the LTTE—is now a broadly shared idea. We now see it realized, both in the JVP-NPP to some extent, and more deeply in the FSP (Frontline Socialist Party) and the People's Struggle Alliance (PSA).



## **You briefly served as a minister in the Northern Provincial Council through the EPRLF. Why was your tenure cut short? What were the internal or political dynamics behind your departure?**

I had urged Padmanabha to become Chief Minister, but he stubbornly refused. Had he accepted the post, everything might have turned out differently. The Northeast Provincial Council (NEPC), the Tamil National Army (TNA militia), and the Chief Minister were manipulated by his advisors and external patrons in an attempt to outflank the LTTE on a Tamil Eelamist platform—by confronting the Sri Lankan state and armed forces, not to mention Sinhala villages.

The Sinhala South had already paid the price with the loss of hundreds of militants and leaders—such as Vijaya Kumaratunga—in defence of the 13th Amendment and the Provincial Councils. Yet here was the NEPC and Varadaraja Perumal denouncing the

13th Amendment as inadequate, even before taking office and beginning to govern. The adventurist confrontationism of the NEPC-TNA was aiding the JVP in polarizing the situation and destabilizing the state in the South.

I had to take a stand, choose a side—it was a bitter civil war in the South—and free myself to help defend the democratic state as well as the most progressive leader we had ever elected: Ranasinghe Premadasa, who came from a subaltern class-caste background. That's what I did.

**You describe Ranasinghe Premadasa as the most progressive leader we have ever elected. But history also records that, under his regime and reportedly with his blessings, thousands of Sinhala youth were killed. How then can you describe him as a progressive leader?**

In the very first place, Premadasa's election meant there was no legitimate reason to continue the armed struggle. As Che wrote in *Guerrilla Warfare*, if a government comes into power by a vote—fraudulent or not—a guerrilla uprising cannot be justified. The JVP should have ceased fighting and entered into negotiations.

Secondly, Premadasa insisted on the departure of the IPKF and implemented it even after Wijeweera was dead—demonstrating his sincerity. The JVP should have laid down their arms, since their primary demand was now being actively pursued by the newly elected president.

Thirdly, Premadasa declared a unilateral ceasefire, released 1,500 JVP detainees, invited them to attend the All-Parties

Conference (which the LTTE's political wing, the PFLT, attended—represented by Dilip Yogi), encouraged them to participate in the upcoming parliamentary election process, and even promised them three ministerial portfolios.

The JVP rejected all of it, and scornfully announced their rejection at a public meeting in Nugegoda in June 1989, before unilaterally returning to war.

Premadasa had no choice but to respond. All those who died after he was elected and extended an olive branch died needlessly—because of the JVP's obduracy. The same story repeated itself with the LTTE twenty years later.

Premadasa was progressive, firstly because he broke the caste-class ceiling and became the first Sri Lankan leader from a subaltern caste. Even Anura Dissanayake's victory didn't break that barrier. Premadasa's ascent was the social equivalent of Barack Obama's.

Secondly, Premadasa was progressive because of his policies. He was the only one of our leaders—and among the very few in the world—who simultaneously achieved growth and equity: growing the economy while transferring real income to the least wealthy. Amidst two civil wars, he implemented programs such as Janasaviya, provincial industrialization, housing, free school uniforms, and more. That's why I call him the most progressive leader Sri Lanka has ever had—and one of the most progressive that South Asia and the Global South have ever produced.

His main mistake was not going all out against Prabhakaran and the LTTE. He misread them—viewing their secessionist project as an expression of deeper social struggles



rooted in caste-class oppression. I advised him otherwise, but he only sporadically heeded my counsel. He ultimately died as a consequence of that misjudgment.

**Pillayan (Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan) was arrested over the murder of Eastern University Vice Chancellor Prof. S. Ravindranath. However, critics point out that the JVP—now the ruling party—was implicated in extrajudicial killings during the 1987–89 insurrection, including the assassinations of Vice Chancellors Prof. Stanley Wijesundera (Colombo) and Prof. G. P. Samarasinghe (Moratuwa). Shouldn't those cases also be reopened with equal seriousness, especially given the government's renewed emphasis on accountability?**

Either there has to be a moratorium on accountability, or accountability must be universal. This government will never investigate the atrocities committed by its own party, nor will the general public accept accountability hearings focused solely on one side, especially in the context of a historical period marked by two civil wars—and civil wars within civil wars.

**Do you believe Sri Lanka can become a genuinely multi-ethnic democracy without revisiting the constitutional primacy of Buddhism?**

The moment for that passed with the

Aragalaya and I can't envisage when it may come again. If it comes up in any discussion on a new Constitution, it is enough to ensure its defeat at a Referendum. So maybe it should be left to another generation.

**What is your personal assessment of the LTTE and its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran? How do you weigh their legacy in the context of Tamil political struggle and Sri Lanka's post-war challenges?**

I have little to add to what Raghavan said in the superb interview in your periodical. Prabhakaran was so arrogant that he disregarded detailed warnings—issued even in Tamil—by N. Sanmugathasan, the legendary Communist leader of Sri Lanka. These were first published in the Lanka Guardian journal in 1984, criticizing the LTTE's complete violation of the principles and strategies of the People's War as theorized and practiced by Mao Zedong. Prabhakaran ignored Sanmugathasan, a fellow Tamil who had met Mao multiple times.

The continued survival of Hamas—fighting from devastated terrain and underground, despite relentless Israeli bombardment—demonstrates its superiority as a fighting force compared to the LTTE. Prabhakaran lacked the prudence to revert to guerrilla warfare when the Sri Lankan military gained the upper hand.

An admirer of Hitler, and a fascist in both theory and practice, Prabhakaran met a fate similar to Hitler's—delusional and ultimately destroyed, his military decimated.

As long as the Tamil diaspora and hardcore nationalists in the North and East of Sri Lanka

continue to revere the Prabhakaran cult and the LTTE, they will remain confined to passing symbolic resolutions in Western parliaments. They would have been wiser to study the political and diplomatic success of Sinn Féin.

**You often emphasize your academic background and global awareness. But do you feel the Sri Lankan intelligentsia, yourself included, has done enough to challenge the ideological foundations of post-war militarism, ethnic majoritarianism, and systemic discrimination?**

I think the Southern intelligentsia has done more to challenge “the ideological foundations of post-war militarism, ethnic majoritarianism, and systemic discrimination” as evidenced by the Aragalaya, than their Northern counterparts have done to challenge LTTE fascism and its glorification.

As for myself, as a political scientist, my main focus and object of concern has been the Sri Lankan state. I have fought against Sinhala chauvinism for decades just as I have fought against the JVP in its Pol Pot phase and the LTTE in its post-1984 fascist incarnation. But my primary project has been two-fold: (a) fighting for a Sri Lankan social democracy and (b) an application to the contemporary Sri Lankan nation-state of the Gramscian project of the Modern Prince, which derives explicitly from Machiavelli’s historical project of a nationally-unifying republican state.

hellojaffnamonitoi

**Your father, Mervyn de Silva, was a towering figure in Sri Lankan journalism. How has his intellectual legacy influenced your political thought, diplomatic approach, and your engagement?**

I realize that I have tried to stay true to Mervyn’s ideals and code of values, while putting into practice the principles he admired. He was a liberal democrat, a humanist, and an internationalist. I have sought to embody a more radical version of the ideas he introduced me to from boyhood and adolescence. Maybe I went too far, for too long.



# Ranil's Bodyguard Rings Trouble — Ends Up in KKS

In a striking shake-up within Sri Lanka's police establishment, Chief Inspector Ashoka Ariyawansa — the longtime Chief Personal Security Officer to former President Ranil Wickremesinghe — has been abruptly transferred to the Kankesanthurai (KKS) Police Station in the country's northern peninsula.

The transfer, effective May 1 and approved by the National Police Commission, ends a more than two-decade tenure during which Ariyawansa served as one of the most trusted figures in Wickremesinghe's inner security

circle. For 23 years, including 15 as the chief of personal security, he remained a constant presence alongside the former president, through shifting administrations and political turbulence.

While no official explanation has been provided, senior police sources say the move is linked to an incident involving former Eastern Province Chief Minister Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan, commonly known as Pillayan, who is currently in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).





According to those familiar with the matter, CI Ariyawansa allegedly attempted to facilitate a phone call between Wickremesinghe and Chandrakanthan — a request that reportedly raised alarms within the CID. The officer is said to have contacted CID personnel to inquire whether such a call could be arranged, a move seen by some in the department as an overreach. The attempt was flagged by CID officials to their superiors, prompting what appears to be a swift administrative response.

“This isn’t your average reshuffling,” said a senior police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. “When someone who’s been at the heart of presidential security is suddenly posted to a remote northern town, there’s more to the story than meets the eye.”

**Response from the Former President’s Office**  
Amid rising media scrutiny, the Office of the Former President issued a formal statement seeking to clarify the circumstances. According to the statement, Wickremesinghe had been informed by Chandrakanthan’s office that the former MP had been detained, though the nature of the charges was unclear. His team subsequently requested assistance in obtaining further information.

The former president, the statement said, was informed that communication might be possible through a CID officer named Madawa. In accordance with past practice, Wickremesinghe directed his security officer — CI Ariyawansa — to make an inquiry with relevant authorities.

“It has been customary that when the former President seeks to contact an individual in custody, his security personnel initiate a formal request to determine the permissibility of such a call,” the statement read.

Ariyawansa is said to have followed procedure by reaching out to CID officers, who informed him that any such request would require clearance from the CID Director. The request was later denied.

The former President’s office also raised procedural concerns, noting that “it is the standard practice that a VIP is informed when their security officer is being reassigned” — a courtesy they claim was not extended in this case.



# "Sinhala and Tamil Nationalism Are Two Sides of the Same Coin—Both Rooted in the Flawed Logic of Territorial Ownership and Ethnic Exclusivity"

Part 05

- LTTE Co-founder Ragavan



Ragavan



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

How do you perceive the protests against Tissa Raja Maha Vihara in Thaiyiddy, Jaffna, with some Tamil nationalist politicians calling for its demolition? Similarly, how do you view Sinhala settlements in traditionally Tamil-majority areas—are they a state-backed demographic shift or natural migration? Do these settlements threaten Tamil identity and political rights, or is this concern exaggerated?

I believe there needs to be a paradigm shift in how land disputes and ethnic discourse are framed, particularly concerning land grabbing. Historical events do not follow a linear trajectory but rather form a complex web of regressions, progressions, and socio-political changes. Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalist historiographies have portrayed settlement processes through the lens of traditional homelands, often overlooking broader socio-economic factors.

In principle, people have the right to move and settle anywhere in Sri Lanka. Migration, both within and beyond territorial boundaries, has been a historical constant. For example, in the 1890s, many Tamils from the Jaffna Peninsula migrated to Trincomalee for employment at the colonial military base. Similarly, the colonial government brought Tamils from India to work in the plantation sector, where they were severely exploited.

Muslims and Sinhalese also migrated across the island in pursuit of economic opportunities. Tamils from the North, particularly from Delft and other small islands, settled in the Wanni before the war, which led to tensions with local communities. A local group called “யாழ் அகற்று சங்கம்” (Yaal Agatru Sangam-Jaffna Eviction Association) emerged in response, opposing the settlement of Jaffna Tamils. Likewise, Malayaga Tamils who were displaced by anti-Tamil riots settled in the Wanni but were often marginalized.

A former LTTE member admitted that when the LTTE instructed Tamils from Jaffna to relocate to the Vanni in 1996—amid the military's advance—thousands were displaced. At that time, Mayilāyāka Tamils, who had resettled in the Vanni after the 1977 anti-Tamil riots, owned fertile roadside lands—properties that would be worth crores of rupees today.

The newly displaced Jaffna Tamils, many of whom had money but no land in Vanni, allegedly lured the Mayilāyāka Tamils into relocating further inland by offering them Rs. 5,000 as a ‘gift.’ Officially, such land—granted under a permit—cannot be sold; it is only transferred as a gift. Though the LTTE did not directly orchestrate these transactions, they were the de facto governing authority in the area. As such, they had the power—and the responsibility—to prevent this quiet dispossession. But they didn't.

In my view, this was an appropriation of land through deception, carried out in the shadow of war and sanctioned by silence.

The real issue, however, lies in state-sponsored Sinhala settlements. While forcible settlement schemes and military occupations must be confronted, agrarian development programs should be analyzed separately. Poor, landless peasants from the South were promised land and economic stability, leading to voluntary settlements. Until the late 1970s, Tamil and Muslim communities were not forcibly displaced through these programs and were, in some cases, allocated land for cultivation. However, there were allegations that Sinhala settlers were given priority in land distribution. Projects like the Gal Oya scheme led to demographic shifts and occasional tensions, yet nationalist historiographies tend to ignore the broader socio-economic context in favor of ethnic narratives.

Sinhala settlement in the dry zone can be broadly categorized into three phases. The first phase, from the 1930s to 1980, was driven by food shortages and the colonial government's efforts to encourage agricultural production. More than 80% of Sri Lankan land was state-owned (formerly crown land during British rule). D.S. Senanayake pursued two key objectives: achieving self-sufficiency in food





production and glorifying ancient Sinhala agrarian development. The Gal Oya project, completed in 1953 under the leadership of a Jaffna Tamil, Kanagasundaram, served multiple purposes, including hydroelectric power generation, agrarian expansion, and sugar production. While Sinhala landless peasants were settled in the East, this phase did not involve the systematic displacement of Tamils and Muslims. In fact, Tamils and Muslims from the Eastern Province were encouraged to participate in the settlement. However, most of them were reluctant to move into the schemes, as they already had access to fertile lands in the East.

The second phase, from the 1980s to 2009, was characterized by militarization and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, leading to land grabbing and forced evictions. The state aggressively promoted Sinhala settlements while displacing Tamil and Muslim communities, often under the pretext of agrarian development, but in reality, to create buffer zones against Tamil militancy. Tamil villagers were forcibly

expelled, and some were killed by security forces. The Weli Oya project is a prime example of this militarized settlement strategy. The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR-J) documented widespread human rights violations, but Tamil nationalists largely overlooked their findings, undermining their critical work.

During the Weli Oya project, Tamil villages were depopulated, and their lands were handed over to Sinhala settlers, who were simultaneously recruited as Home Guards to fight against Tamil militants. Scholars such as Thiruni Kelagama and Korf described this as "the lure of the land." These settlers were ultimately betrayed by the state, facing severe water shortages and becoming targets for LTTE attacks. Meanwhile, military expansion under the guise of national security resulted in the establishment of High-Security Zones (HSZs), where lands belonging to Tamils and Muslims were seized.

The third phase, after 2009, saw the continuation of Sinhala-Buddhist ideological expansionism, military land appropriation, and commercial ventures. Following the end of the war, the military retained vast tracts of land under the pretext of national security, but many of these lands were used for tourism, agribusiness, and private enterprises, particularly under the Rajapaksa regime. The Yahapalana government (2015–2019) claimed to have returned 80–85% of military-occupied lands, but in practice, many rightful owners were denied access. Under Gotabaya Rajapaksa, land acquisitions intensified, with sacred Buddhist sites being established on seized Tamil-owned lands under the guise of archaeological conservation.

It is important to recognize that land grabbing has not affected only Tamils. In Trincomalee and Ampara, the state has also appropriated

lands belonging to Muslims. In Ambara, the lands of Sinhala villagers were also appropriated. However, Tamil nationalist discourse does not acknowledge this, as it considers the North and East to be exclusively Tamil territories.

Under the NPP government, there's little evidence of new land grabs. The Thaiyiddy issue, however, warrants critical examination. Unlike past land protests in the East and Wanni, this case gained national attention—largely due to Jaffna-centric mobilization by right-wing Tamil nationalists exploiting ethnic and religious tensions. A Vihara existed in Thaiyiddy since 1948 but was abandoned after the 1958 riots, rebuilt, and then destroyed by Tamil militants in 1978. The area later became part of a High-Security Zone (HSZ). While HSZs may have been justifiable during the war, retaining land after the conflict isn't. Instead of restoring the Vihara at its original site, the Gotabaya regime enabled the building of a new temple on privately owned Tamil land—an undeniable violation.

The rightful owners of the land have every reason to protest. However, the involvement of right-wing Tamil nationalists and certain Hindu religious leaders—who appear to be using the issue for political gain—is troubling. Initially, the owners reportedly pursued a negotiated



settlement, requesting alternative land nearby. A letter to this effect was submitted to Governor Vethanayagam. But Tamil nationalists, both local and overseas, opposed the compromise and pressured the owners to instead demand the destruction of the Vihara. Interestingly, there's an unconfirmed story that a Tamil Buddhist Sangam abroad contributed financially to the Vihara's construction, unaware that it stood on privately owned Tamil land.

Narrowing the land dispute to religious sentiment risks deepening divisions. Instead of framing land rights through the lens of Tamil nationalism or religious exclusivity, broader issues—such as militarization, economic justice, and political rights—must be brought to the forefront.

The government has both a political and moral responsibility to ensure a fair resolution. It should allocate land outside the Vihara premises while compensating

rightful owners. Progressive activists and intellectuals must continue pressuring the government to uphold its electoral promises, particularly regarding the release of all military-occupied lands. Additionally, the state must recognize the importance of land access for livelihood, particularly in regions like the Wanni, where communities depend on state lands for survival. Military claims over such lands are unjustifiable.

The NPP's Clean Sri Lanka project aims to achieve social and environmental progress within a defined timeframe. A similar task force should be established to address land grabbing and military expansionism. Sri Lanka must move beyond ethnicized narratives to adopt an inclusive approach that ensures land rights for all communities, fostering long-term peace and coexistence.

### **What mistakes are the current Tamil leaders and Tamil political parties making? As an early militant, how do you view this trend?**

That is an important question. It is true that post-colonial Sri Lanka was shaped as a majoritarian, ethno-nationalist state. However, countering this with an equally rigid Tamil nationalist ideology is counterproductive. Tamil nationalism cannot serve as a counterweight to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism—doing so only entrenches a cycle of exclusivist identity politics.

Sinhala supremacists have long clung to the Mahavamsa narrative, which falsely portrays Sri Lanka as an exclusively Sinhala-Buddhist land—divinely ordained for them. In reaction, Tamil nationalists have crafted a mirror image: a counter-narrative that claims the North and East as an exclusive Tamil homeland,

historically ruled and inhabited solely by Tamils. Though seemingly at odds, both ideologies are built on the same foundation—territorial entitlement, cultural exceptionalism, and exclusion. At their core, both stem from ethno-nationalist thinking—and both are historically flawed.

When the Federal Party was formed in 1949, its advocacy for federalism was broader than today's ethnic Tamil nationalism. The Party's concept of "Tamil-speaking people" included Muslims and Malayaga Tamils.

However, when it claimed the North and East as the traditional homeland of Tamil-speaking people, it came to be seen as a Tamil homeland. This was problematic, as most Muslims lived outside these provinces and had distinct political concerns, while the disenfranchised Malayaga Tamils lived primarily in the south. I once spoke to Thilagar, a Malayaga Tamil politician, who told me: "You were asking for separation, while we, after being made stateless, fought for citizenship and inclusion."

The Federal Party's vision of Tamil-speaking unity collapsed after the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 1976, which called for a separate state. Although the Resolution retained the term "Tamil-speaking people," it framed Tamil Eelam around the historical Tamil kingdoms, embedding ethnic nationalism into its core political demand. Once territorial claims are tied to an ethnic identity, exclusion becomes inevitable.

Merely residing in a particular region does not justify territorial sovereignty. History is a story of migration, intermixing, and evolving identities. Traditions are often retroactively constructed to serve political narratives. There is no scientific or historical basis for exclusive



Tamil ancestral rights over the North and East. Nationalism itself is a modern construct, that emerged in the 18th century. Before that, ethnic identities were fluid and not central to political power.

In ancient Sri Lanka, Tamil warriors served in Sinhala armies, and vice versa. Ethnic divisions were not sharply defined in the social or political order.

According to historian Nira Wickramasinghe, the 1871 census listed 78 “nationalities” and 24 “races.” By 1911, the census had begun categorizing populations more rigidly—distinguishing among groups such as Kandyan and Low Country Sinhalese, Ceylon and Indian Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Veddas, and Burghers—labeling them as distinct “races.” She found that the census served as the basis for determining race-based representation in the colonial state, and political representation was initially distributed equally among selected racial groups.

Race came to signify not just physical traits but also assumed mental and behavioral characteristics—shaped by emerging racial theories in early 20th-century Europe. In Sri Lanka, ‘ethnicity’ was officially introduced only in the 1971 census, marking not a real shift, but a continuation of colonial thinking. ‘Race’ was simply replaced by ‘ethnicity’—a change in terminology, not in ideology. This reflects how colonial powers constructed identities, which were later adopted and reinforced by local political elites during post-colonial nation-building.

Recent genetic studies also reveal striking similarities between Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils. Linguistically, Sinhala has absorbed extensively from Tamil and Sanskrit. Culturally and religiously, too, there are



overlaps—Sinhalese worship Hindu deities like Ganesha, Vishnu, Kali, and Murugan, and Sri Lankan Buddhism integrates Hindu practices. Claims of ethnic or cultural purity are thus largely arbitrary.

As Palestinian-American academic and literary critic Edward Said aptly observed: “No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions... but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness as if that was all human life was about.”

Tamil politics must now liberate itself from rigid ethno-nationalist thinking. Nationalism manufactures a false unity through imagined identities. Whether Sinhala or Tamil, ethnic nationalism is an aberration—undemocratic and inhumane. Coexistence must instead be rooted in fraternity, equality, and social justice.

Ordinary people do not inherently follow nationalist ideologies. Their priorities are

livelihoods, stability, and safety. Nationalism gains traction only when it appears to secure those needs—often through fear and misinformation.

Today, Tamil nationalist politics is in decline, especially with the rise of the National People's Power (NPP). As I said earlier, during the Aragalaya, a new political consciousness emerged, particularly among youth. Many began to see ethnic politics as a tool long exploited by elites for power. The NPP capitalized on this by promoting unity and justice across communities. However, dismantling entrenched ethnic narratives will take time. The challenge ahead is to turn this political awakening into real reform.

This shift has unsettled Sinhala supremacists, as it threatens their ideological dominance. Simultaneously, Tamil nationalist parties—having lost recent elections in the North and East—see this transformation as a threat to their survival. They are now uniting out of fear of political irrelevance.

The NPP, while committed to a non-racist, united Sri Lanka, must act on its promises. The civil and military institutions of the state were built on ethnocentric foundations. Reforming them is essential. Without meaningful structural change, there's a real risk that ethnic politics will once again rise to fill the void.

**In your view, how has the National People's Power (NPP) government performed in the months since coming to power, particularly in relation to the Tamil people who extended their support at the polls? Do you believe the NPP is adequately addressing the long-standing grievances of the Tamil**

**community — or do you feel that, once again, the Tamil vote is being taken for granted?**

I believe we need to assess the NPP's performance not through an exclusively ethnic lens, but by critically evaluating its commitment to dismantling Sri Lanka's entrenched ethnocentric state structure. While acknowledging the ethnocentric nature of the state, I would argue that invoking Tamil ethnic nationalism as a response is counterproductive.

My concern is that certain right-wing Tamil nationalist forces are now regrouping to discredit the NPP entirely. Rather than offering constructive criticism, they brand all southern political formations as "Sinhala parties" and urge Tamils to vote exclusively for "Tamil" parties.

From an inclusivist political perspective, I choose to engage critically—but not dismissively—with the NPP. The party came to power with promises of ethnic reconciliation, abolition of the executive presidency, repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), and an economy rooted in social justice. It garnered support from Sinhalese, Sri Lankan and Malayala Tamils, and Muslims who were eager to dismantle the entrenched political status quo.

Although often labeled a leftist force, the NPP is more accurately described as a social democratic party. Yes, it has fallen short on several key promises—but criticism must be tempered with historical and political awareness.

The JVP, the dominant political party within the NPP, has a complicated past. It once aligned with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, opposed the 13th Amendment, rejected the North-East merger, and resisted the





Norwegian-led peace process. It uncritically supported the military during the war. Despite its Marxist origins, the JVP's practice often fused socialism with Sinhala nationalism.

Ironically, the LTTE also opposed the 13th Amendment and the peace process, albeit for different reasons. They aligned secretly with President Premadasa to fight the IPKF and later supported Mahinda Rajapaksa's 2005 presidential bid.

However, the JVP's political vision began to evolve after the ouster of ultra-nationalist figures like Wimal Weerawansa and the formation of the NPP in 2019. The 2022 Aragalaya movement was a turning point—it mainstreamed discourses on ethnic unity and social justice. The NPP embraced this moment, promoting a more inclusive political ethos. While remnants of Sinhala nationalism remain, branding the NPP a Sinhala supremacist party is both inaccurate and intellectually lazy.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake pledged to complete the 2015 constitutional reform process by introducing a new constitution that promotes democracy and equality, devolves power, and reforms the parliamentary electoral system. The NPP's public commitments to recognising Sri Lanka's multiethnic and multireligious character, and to safeguarding linguistic, cultural, and religious freedoms, are steps in the right direction. But rhetoric must translate into action.

Repealing the PTA was a central campaign promise. With a two-thirds majority, it should be achievable. Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya has acknowledged that the PTA should be abolished. President Anura also stated clearly in a recent interview that repeal is forthcoming. Yet, after the NPP came to power, individuals continued to be arrested under the PTA. In March 2025, Mohamed Rusdi was detained under the Act for allegedly pasting a sticker critical of Israel. Authorities justified it by claiming he held extremist views. In a global climate of protest against Israel's actions in Palestine, detaining Rusdi for an anti-Israel sticker resembles an Orwellian "thought crime." He was later released on bail, but the incident casts doubt on the NPP's reformist credibility.

Of course, the NPP inherited a repressive and corrupt state apparatus. Dismantling it will not happen overnight. However, symbolic and substantive gestures—like repealing the PTA or announcing a phased demilitarisation of the North and East—can foster trust among Tamils and other minorities.

The global context cannot be ignored. We are witnessing the ascent of hard-right ideologies: Trumpism in the U.S., neo-Nazi movements in Europe, Hindutva in India, Zionist violence in Gaza, and Putin's ethno-nationalism in Russia. In this climate, Sri Lanka's departure from racist authoritarianism—reflected in the



electoral defeat of the Rajapaksas and Ranil Wickremesinghe—is meaningful.

Chile offers a useful comparison. After decades of neoliberalism, its 2019 student-led uprisings led to the formation of the broad progressive alliance Apruebo Dignidad and the election of Gabriel Boric. Though their proposed constitution was rejected, the movement disrupted hegemonic narratives. Similarly, Aragalaya challenged Sri Lanka's corrupt elites, neoliberalism, and ethnocracy—marking a paradigm shift.

Yet, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism remains largely unchallenged. If the NPP truly wishes to fulfil Aragalaya's vision, it must form a broader progressive alliance to tackle both neoliberalism and the ethnocratic state structure.

Back in 2009, after the LTTE's defeat, some predicted a democratic opening. I was skeptical—foreseeing instead the deepening of a militarized and politicized state. Under the Rajapaksas, that pattern only intensified. Today, NPP leaders have acknowledged past state violence, enforced disappearances, and ethnic discrimination. That acknowledgment is important—but it must lead to concrete, accountable action.

President Anura and Prime Minister Harini have won the trust of people across communities. They are charismatic and appear genuinely committed to public expectations. Particularly in the North and East, Tamils have shown a willingness to listen—attending meetings and engaging with the leadership. This is a valuable opportunity to turn promises into policy.

Demilitarisation of the North and East is essential. It won't happen overnight—but the NPP must articulate a clear, time-bound roadmap.

In sum, the NPP deserves critical but conditional support from all democratic forces. As Chilean President Boric said, countering extremism requires “ideology, conviction, less rhetoric, and more concrete actions that improve people's quality of life.”

Let us hold the NPP accountable—not to weaken it, but to push it toward fulfilling the hope it inspired.

**What do you think is the way forward? Do you think that the Tamils have the right to self-determination? If not what is the solution?**

Let me address the issue of self-determination. As I mentioned earlier, self-determination, when linked to national liberation struggles against colonialism, had an inclusive character despite its limitations. However, during the post-colonial nation-building process, the rights of minorities were ignored, leading them to assert their right to self-determination and, in some cases, secession.

In Sri Lanka's political and practical context, if Tamils assert their right to self-determination as a distinct nation, a critical question arises: what about minorities within that proposed Tamil nation—such as Muslims, Sinhalese, and Veddas in Tamil-majority areas? Likewise, in the South, do Tamils, Malays, Bohras, Burghers, Muslims, and Hill Country Tamils have the same rights? Where does this path of fragmented self-determination lead, and who has the authority to define nationhood? Should population size disqualify smaller groups like the Malays from being recognized as distinct nationalities?

There are about 600 linguistic communities and 5,000 ethnic groups in the world. If every community claimed the right to self-determination and secession, there would

be 5,000 exclusive states. Is it possible and practical to establish separate states for each ethnic group?

For instance, when drawing the border for a new nation, what happens to those living on the border between the old state and the newly formed one? Will they be included or excluded? Will they be granted political rights? Do they have the choice to be part of the new state or remain in the old one?

Daniele Archibugi, an Italian political theorist, argues that the principle of self-determination is evolving into a new form of tribalism, reinforcing some of the most reactionary tendencies in contemporary society. Sri Lanka's decades of war, destruction, militarization, and ethnic divisions have provided painful lessons on the dangers of this approach.

In the Sri Lankan context, approximately 30% of Sri Lankan Tamils live in the South. Although a significant portion of Muslims reside in the East, more than 70% of them live in the South. Similarly, Malayaga Tamils are not confined to the Malayagam but also live in Colombo and other cities. Sri Lanka is a multicultural, multi-religious society, and territorial divisions based on ethnicity are neither practical nor sustainable. Such divisions are not only unrealistic but also dangerous, as they risk leading to further fragmentation and regression.

In the global context, the Palestinian struggle is widely recognized as a fight against settler colonialism and imperialism, and thus carries a progressive dimension. However, prominent activists and intellectuals—such as the late Edward Said—did not support the two-nation solution, despite Israel being classified as an apartheid settler-colonial state. Said noted the absence of a shared concept of citizenship among both Jewish and Palestinian communities. He argued that any solution

should not be based primarily on ethnic or racial identities, but rather on the principles of equal rights, social justice, and peaceful coexistence as citizens of a unified Palestine.

Sri Lanka is neither an apartheid state nor a settler-colonial state. There has been a long history of coexistence, albeit with disputes. Although the modern nation-state building promoted an ethnocratic state, there is room for coexistence and peace. In the recent elections, people overwhelmingly voted for the NPP without regard to ethnicity or religion.

This creates a relatively more favorable environment for building a truly democratic society—one in which leftist, democratic, and progressive forces from all communities can work together toward that goal. The abolition of the Executive Presidency and the establishment of meaningful power-sharing mechanisms are essential steps in that direction. However, power-sharing should not be based on ethnicity or religion, as doing so risks reinforcing ethno-nationalist politics and deepening existing divisions.

To conclude, I quote Marx: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like an Alp [mountain] on the brains of the living." As Marx said, if you need to learn a new language, instead of translating it back to your mother tongue, embrace the spirit of the new language without constantly recalling the old.

### Note:

*A full-length book version of this interview—featuring many additional questions and never-before-published insights from LTTE co-founder Ragavan—will be released soon by Jaffna Monitor Publications.*

*To pre-order your copy, email [hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com](mailto:hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com) or send a WhatsApp message to +94 71 541 8220.*

# Sibling Rivalry Done Right: Jaffna Hindu Twin Brothers Clinch Top Ranks in A/L Exams



In what is arguably a first of its kind, twin brothers from Jaffna have made academic history. Pranavan and Saravanan, students of Jaffna Hindu College, have clinched the top two positions in the Biological Science stream in the Jaffna District at the 2024 G.C.E. Advanced Level Examination. But their brilliance didn't stop at the peninsula's borders — the duo went on to secure the 3rd and 5th highest island-wide rankings in the same stream, making them a sensation far beyond the North.

The results, released recently, have drawn admiration from educators and students alike, highlighting the exceptional performance of the siblings in one of the country's most

competitive examinations. Both students have been selected for admission to the prestigious Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo.

Pranavan and Saravanan, sons of Dr. Sivanathan Jamunanantha — Deputy Director of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital — have unmistakably emerged as role models for students across the region. In a candid post-exam interview, the duo revealed a refreshingly honest secret to their success: no TV marathons, no YouTube spirals, and absolutely no drama — neither on screen nor in real life. “We used our laptop strictly for past papers and model exams,” they said with a smile.



INTERVIEW

# Sri Lanka's Core Problem Is Its Over-Reliance on the U.S. as a Single Market

– PROFESSOR CAI TONGJUAN



BY:  
Our Special  
Correspondent



*Professor Cai Tongjuan*

The escalating tariff war between the United States and China has reached unprecedented levels, with the U.S. imposing tariffs of up to 145% on Chinese imports and China retaliating with 125% tariffs on American goods. This intensification of trade tensions has introduced significant uncertainty into the global economy. For countries like Sri Lanka — already grappling with the aftermath of its 2022 sovereign debt default — the impact could be particularly severe, especially with Washington's proposed 70% tax on certain Sri Lankan exports under its revised trade preferences.

To gain deeper insights into the broader implications of this trade conflict and its specific impact on Sri Lanka, we turned to Dr. Cai Tongjuan, Director of the Macro Research Department and Research Fellow at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China. As a Chinese economist with extensive expertise in both China's global trade strategies and Sri Lanka's economic landscape, Dr. Cai offers a uniquely informed perspective on how the U.S.-China trade tensions might shape Sri Lanka's economic future.

This is our exclusive conversation with her.

**With the U.S. recently escalating tariffs on Chinese imports to 245%, and China retaliating with 125% tariffs on U.S. goods, how do you assess the current phase of the U.S.–China trade war? What distinguishes this phase from previous trade tensions?**

With U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods raised to 245% and China's tariffs on U.S. goods reaching 125%, the China–U.S. trade war has evolved beyond a mere tariff dispute into a

broader contest of economic resilience and national strength.

The first phase of the trade war, beginning in 2018, was driven by U.S. efforts to address its trade deficit with China. Under the banners of “unfair trade practices,” “market distortions,” and “forced technology transfers,” Washington adopted a strategy of “limited tariffs + entity lists,” coupled with the “small yard, high fence” doctrine. This intensified investment restrictions, supply chain scrutiny, financial pressure, and alliance-building efforts (such as the semiconductor or “chip” alliance), aiming to contain China's high-tech industries and achieve technological decoupling.

In the current phase, successive U.S. administrations, starting with Trump, have sought broader decoupling by imposing sweeping tariffs and blocking re-export trade. The aim is not merely revenue generation, but accelerating China's exclusion from global supply and industrial chains. As a result, the conflict has expanded beyond economics into a long-term strategic rivalry, fragmenting the global economic and trade system.

Unlike the relatively swift Phase One trade deal, resolving the current phase will be far more difficult. This is no longer a traditional trade dispute but a full-spectrum strategic competition—spanning geopolitics, security, cultural influence, and public discourse. In this environment, developing countries are increasingly being forced to take sides, accelerating the bifurcation of global supply chains into a dual-track system.

**The U.S. President has repeatedly claimed that China imposes significantly higher tariffs on American goods than the U.S. does on Chinese**

**products and that this imbalance justifies the current wave of U.S. tariff hikes. From your expert point of view, is there any factual or economic justification for this claim? How do China's tariff policies actually work in practice—especially in comparison to the U.S.? Could you help clarify the real dynamics behind these competing tax regimes?**

This is factually misleading and economically flawed.

Before the 2018 trade war, U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods averaged 3.1%, while Chinese tariffs on U.S. goods averaged 8%. By early 2020, after escalating tensions, U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports rose to about 20%, and Chinese tariffs to around 21.1%—a minor difference that hardly justifies recent U.S. tariff hikes of up to 245% on certain Chinese products.

The U.S. administration's latest justification—a “reciprocal tariff calculation” based on dividing the bilateral trade deficit (USD 295.4 billion) by total imports from China (USD 438.9 billion) to yield a “deficit ratio” of 67.3%, then halving it to propose a 34% tariff—is widely criticized as simplistic and economically unsound.

China’s retaliation has been targeted and strategic, focusing on U.S. agricultural and energy exports, while U.S. tariffs primarily aim at high-tech sectors to curb China’s industrial growth. Economically, American consumers and businesses bear most of the tariff burden, while China has diversified its suppliers, minimizing the impact.

Ultimately, this dispute is less about tariff fairness and more about strategic competition. The U.S. seeks to restructure global supply chains and weaken China’s manufacturing dominance, while China counters through industrial self-reliance, de-dollarization efforts, and regional trade initiatives like RCEP. In this light, the “tariff imbalance” narrative serves political purposes rather than reflecting genuine economic reality.

**Considering China’s strategic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and its diversified trade partnerships, how resilient is China's economy to these heightened tariffs? Are there specific sectors or regions within China that are more vulnerable?**

China’s economy has demonstrated considerable resilience against high U.S. tariffs, supported by the Belt and Road Initiative and a diversified trading strategy.

The sectors most affected include machinery and equipment, electronics, textiles, and metal products—industries with high U.S. export exposure and vulnerability to tariff fluctuations. However, on April 11, the U.S. government quietly exempted several key electronic products—including smartphones, laptops, hard drives, processors, chips, and semiconductor manufacturing equipment—from Trump-era reciprocal tariffs, even if sourced from China.

Regionally, coastal provinces such as Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Jiangsu have been more heavily impacted due to their higher reliance on U.S. markets. For instance, Zhejiang’s export dependence on the U.S. stood at 16.2% in 2024.



Nevertheless, China has actively worked to cushion the impact by strengthening trade ties with ASEAN, the EU, and other regions, while promoting industrial upgrading and boosting domestic demand.

### **The U.S. has exempted certain electronics, such as smartphones and computers, from the new tariffs. What does this selective exemption indicate about the U.S.'s strategic economic interests, and how might China interpret this move?**

Tariff exemptions for smartphones, computers, and other electronic imports reflects the duality of its strategic economic interests. On the one hand, those products are highly dependent on China's supply chain, and if high tariffs are imposed, it will directly drive up the price of U.S. consumer electronics, exacerbate inflationary pressures, harm the interests of technology titans, and spark voter dissatisfaction, so the exemption is a compromise in consideration of short-term economic realities. On the other hand, the U.S. is still attempting to maintain its long-term strategy of technological containment of China through selective exemptions, retaining the 20% basic tariffs and planning to impose "national security reviews" on key areas such as semiconductors. Such duality shows it intends to ease the economic impact while not giving up suppressing China's high-tech industry.

China may interpret this move as a U.S. swing between supply chain dependence and political objectives, a disguised recognition of China's manufacturing advantage yet also an exposure of the ambivalence of the U.S. trade policy. China may see this as a tactical

concession rather than a strategic shift and may use this window to strengthen the resilience of its industrial chain while keeping a wary eye on the U.S. for a new round of pressure on the grounds of "technological security" in the future.

China's Ministry of Commerce has responded that there is "no winner" in a tariff war, urging the U.S. side to completely abolish the wrong practices, indicating that China will not relax its guard against the repetitive nature of U.S. policies due to partial exemptions.

### **In your view, how are the escalating U.S.–China trade tensions influencing global trade dynamics, particularly for developing countries? Are we witnessing a shift towards regional trade blocs or alternative trade alliances?**

Firstly, the high tariffs imposed by both the US and China have driven up supply chain costs globally, leading to higher prices for consumer goods.

According to the International Trade Centre (ITC), these tariffs could shrink global trade by 3% to 7% and reduce global GDP by as much as 0.7%. Developing countries would bear the brunt of this impact. For instance, Bangladesh, a major clothing exporter, could see its exports to the US drop by \$3.3 billion by 2029 if these tariffs remain in place. Other countries like Lesotho, Cambodia, Laos, Madagascar, and Myanmar are facing similar pressures, and the disruptions to global supply chains could erase the economic progress they've made in recent years.

Secondly, China's exports to the US are now facing much higher effective tax rates. That



has created short-term downward pressure, forcing industries to shift their focus toward domestic sales. Labor-intensive industries such as electronics and textiles are also directly impacted. Companies that heavily rely on Chinese supply chains are now facing double pressure from reduced orders and rising costs.

Furthermore, this trade conflict may trigger a profound restructuring of global value chains. To avoid tariff costs, many companies are forced to relocate their production facilities from China to places like Southeast Asia,

India, or Mexico. This realignment is making global manufacturing even more unstable.

At the same time, the rise of regional trade blocs and alternative trade alliances has become a key trend in the global trade landscape. To address the uncertainty caused by US-China trade tensions, countries are seeking new trade partners and cooperation models. For example, China is actively strengthening ties with emerging markets like ASEAN and Latin America through agreements like the Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership (RCEP) to diversify market risks. Meanwhile, the US is promoting a strategy to bring manufacturing back to its home soil by encouraging investments in domestic production. These trends indicate that the global trade landscape is evolving from a single, large-loop system to multiple smaller-loop systems centered around regions or trade blocs. The emergence of regional trade blocs and alternative trade alliances has become a critical strategy for addressing trade protectionism.

## **The U.S. has imposed a 44% tariff on Sri Lankan exports, significantly affecting its apparel industry. How do you interpret this move in the context of U.S. trade policy, and what might be the underlying motivations?**

This action can be analyzed through three main objectives: reducing the trade deficit, increasing fiscal revenue, and promoting the re-shoring of manufacturing.

### **First, reducing the trade deficit.**

In 2024, the U.S. trade deficit reached \$918.4 billion. The Trump administration attributed much of this imbalance to “unfair trade practices” and sought to pressure trading partners by imposing tariffs. For instance, in 2024, total merchandise trade between the U.S. and Sri Lanka amounted to approximately \$3.4 billion, with the U.S. importing \$3.03 billion in goods from Sri Lanka while exporting only \$370 million. This resulted in a bilateral trade deficit of \$2.66 billion for the U.S.

The 44% tariff was calculated by dividing the trade deficit by U.S. imports and multiplying by two. By imposing this tariff—targeting primarily Sri Lanka’s key export sector,

apparel—the U.S. aimed to force Sri Lanka to adjust its trade structure and reduce its surplus.

### **Second, increasing government revenue.**

With U.S. federal debt surpassing \$36.4 trillion and interest payments accounting for 3.1% of GDP, the government faces mounting fiscal pressure. The Trump administration estimated that higher tariffs on trade partners such as Sri Lanka could generate between \$300 billion and \$600 billion annually. A portion of this would be used to meet interest obligations on the national debt. By framing tariffs as a “direct tax” on foreign goods, the administration sought to enhance political acceptability—effectively shifting the burden away from domestic taxpayers and onto external trading partners.

### **Third, promoting the re-shoring of manufacturing.**

The Trump administration has mandated that multinational corporations achieve a “domesticization rate” of over 60% for key industries by 2028. High tariffs are being used as a tool to weaken the attractiveness of overseas supply chains. In the case of Sri Lanka, apparel products made up more than 70% of its \$3.03 billion exports to the U.S. last year. The imposition of a 44% tariff will significantly erode profit margins, potentially leading to the loss of an estimated 710,000 jobs. This disruption is intended to incentivize industries to either relocate to regions with lower tariffs or return manufacturing operations to the U.S.

Additionally, this strategy aligns with the broader “America First” agenda—seeking to



reconstruct a U.S.-centered global supply chain and curb the industrial advancement of competitors like China.

**Given Sri Lanka's economic vulnerabilities and its ongoing recovery efforts, what immediate and long-term measures would you recommend for the country to mitigate the adverse effects of these tariffs?**

Sri Lanka's core problem is its over-reliance on the United States as a single market: the United States has always been Sri Lanka's most important export destination, and exports to the United States account for 23% of Sri Lanka's total commodity exports in 2024. In 2024, Sri Lanka's trade deficit expanded to US\$6.07 billion, and the trade surplus with the United States (US\$2.66 billion) is an important source of foreign exchange income for the country.

In the short term, Sri Lanka cannot temporarily reverse its trade dependence on the United States. As a small country, it is unable



to confront the United States and can only seek compromise and negotiate with the US government to reduce or delay the imposition of tariffs. In the long run, as a developing country, Sri Lanka will inevitably maintain a trade surplus in manufacturing industries such as clothing to promote economic growth by developing export-oriented and labor-intensive industries. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce dependence on a single market and promote the diversification of export markets to promote balanced trade development.

## **Do you see the potential for Sri Lanka to strengthen its trade relations with China or other regional partners as a counterbalance to the challenges posed by U.S. trade policies? What opportunities and risks might this entail?**

Sri Lanka is expected to ease the impact of the US tariff policy and achieve sustainable growth in the regional economic landscape by deepening economic and trade cooperation with China and regional partners, taking the Belt and Road Initiative as a framework, balancing cooperation with China and multilateral partners, and enhancing endogenous driving forces through technological upgrading and industrial diversification. However, it is necessary to carefully balance opportunities and risks.

As for Opportunities. First is the big potential of the Chinese market. As Sri Lanka's second-largest trading partner, China's bilateral trade volume reached US\$3.81 billion in 2024, and China promised to further reduce tariff barriers through free trade agreement negotiations. Sri Lanka's specialty products such as Ceylon black tea and gemstones have differentiated competitiveness in the Chinese market. With the help of cross-border e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba, the export share to China can be expanded.

Second is the regional supply chain integration. Sri Lanka participates in China's Belt and Road initiative. The infrastructure projects such as Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City have enhanced its status as a regional logistics hub. By signing free trade agreements with India and ASEAN, Sri Lanka

can build a diversified supply chain and avoid dependence on a single market.

Third is industrial cooperation upgrades. China's investment in Sri Lanka in textiles, new energy and other fields, if extended to high value-added industries (such as information technology), can enhance its position in the industrial chain.

As for Risks. One is geopolitical maneuvering. The United States has included Sri Lanka in the framework of the "Indo-Pacific Strategy", and Sri Lanka's cooperation with China may trigger pressure from the United States. For example, the Hambantota Port project in Sri Lanka was once questioned by the United States as a "Chinese military base".

Second is the fragility of the economic structure. Sri Lanka has a weak industrial base and a single industrial structure. As of the third quarter of 2024, the manufacturing sector was estimated to account for only 27.5% of GDP. Among its industries, the textile and apparel sector dominated, contributing over 60% of the total manufacturing output. At the same time, Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry is more dependent on foreign investment.

Third is the intensified regional competition. If participating in regional economic cooperation, Sri Lanka will be less competitive than other economic partners, and vulnerable industries are likely to be impacted. A longer period of industrial protection will be required. India offers a zero-tariff policy for Sri Lanka's textile industry, while countries like Vietnam are also competing for a share of low-to mid-end manufacturing. Sri Lanka needs to find its strategic position within the regional industrial chain.

# Anura Kumara Dissanayake: Hero of Reform or Villain in Disguise?



BY:

**M.L.M. Mansoor**

Recently, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake appeared on the political program Sattana on Sirasa TV, where he patiently and responsibly answered questions from journalists for nearly three and a half hours—an unprecedented moment in the 47-year history of Sri Lanka's executive presidency.

He faced the questions with calmness and complete self-confidence, free from any tension or discomfort. His natural composure, effortless grace, and body language—radiating a gentle, engaging warmth—were all hallmarks of his distinctive character. He presented a clear, data-backed picture of the country's

overall macroeconomic trends. But he didn't stop there; he went on to share detailed insights, supported by accurate statistics and relevant examples.

Throughout the entire three-and-a-half-hour session, his voice remained steady, flawless, free from hesitation, stumbles, or pauses to search for words.

Among all eight individuals who held the presidency between 1978 and 2024, not one has ever appeared before the press this well-prepared. Equally, none of his predecessors demonstrated such clarity and conviction in presenting a comprehensive reform agenda or showed the ability to structure their thoughts and express them with such coherence and fluency.

In that sense, it is evident that no one, either in the opposition or the ruling party today,





comes close to challenging Anura Kumara's charismatic personality, distinctive leadership qualities, and exceptional communication skills.

Apart from hurling insults at the President, calling him names like 'Anda Puluhan' (Great Liar) and 'Andhare' (Court Jester), today's opposition lacks the strength or vision to present any constructive programs to the electorate. It must be said that, in the past 50 years, there has never been an opposition to this weak or this disconnected from the people.

The way this year's May Day rallies were organized clearly highlighted the growing prominence of the NPP as a giant political force and, in stark contrast, the rapid decline and disintegration of parties like the SJB, SLFP, and SLPP.

Those like Sajith Premadasa, Namal Rajapaksa, Champika Ranawaka, and Dilith Jayaweera,

who continue to spend their days dreaming of the presidency, remain far behind when it comes to matching the exceptional qualities demonstrated by Anura Kumara.

Fully aware of the reality that an immediate economic recovery with a substantial relief package for the people in the form of reduced cost of living and new job opportunities is not feasible, the government appears to be strategically focusing its attention on other sectors.

Within this context, the President has taken up the slogan: 'We will root out corruption, bribery, waste, and malpractice from politics and the state machinery'. The government believes that this approach, though indirect, could eventually pave the way for economic recovery and sustainable development.

Bringing an end to the entrenched Politician-Bureaucrat nexus—a system that has long operated as a collective looting mechanism—is

the first step in this effort. As the President pointed out, it appears that this dismantling has already begun. However, fully eradicating the deeply rooted culture of bribery and corruption within the bureaucratic machinery will require a long and sustained effort.

The government's next priority is to weaken and neutralize religious extremist forces by dismantling the so-called Rajapaksa legacy, which thrived on an aggressively racist agenda. A few prominent pro-government social media activists have already been strategically deployed for this purpose.

One of the most popular and influential YouTubers offering unwavering support to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and the NPP government is Sudaththa Thilaksiri, popularly known as "Sudaa." It is widely believed that he operates with the tacit endorsement and backing of senior NPP leaders. (Many have also raised questions about the special police protection he is reportedly receiving from the government.)

He uploads at least four videos to his YouTube channel every day, either solo or in collaboration with another person.

In the Sinhala YouTube space, Sudaa's archrival is Iraj Weeraratne, an outspoken loyalist of the Rajapaksas, particularly Namal Rajapaksa. It's no exaggeration to say he represents their camp online. The intense clashes between these two, though lacking in serious political discourse or reasoned debate, draw tens of thousands of viewers through their sharp insults, innuendos, and the use of Sinhala obscenities rarely uttered in the public sphere before.

"It is rather unfortunate that figures like Sudaththa Thilakasiri have risen to become a key influencer of the public opinion in this country... However, given the complexities of today's social media-driven world, in a sense, it

is inevitable," says veteran leftist ideologue and political activist Deepthi Kumara Gunaratne.

It goes without saying that the severe criticisms directed at the NPP government by the opposition and anti-government YouTube channels cannot be countered individually by ministers or the over one hundred newly elected Members of Parliament. Most members of the government simply lack the communication training or the debating skills necessary to appear on visual media and effectively outsmart their opponents.

In a way, Sudaththa Thilakasiri plays a complementary role in this regard, acting almost as the government's unofficial spokesperson in the digital space.

Complementing his efforts from another platform is Professor Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri of the University of Colombo, Department of History, who runs the YouTube channel History with Nirmal. From a pro-government standpoint, he analyzes contemporary political and social issues in Sri Lanka. He also attempts to provide both the ideological and practical contexts for the decisions and moves made by President Anura Kumara.

The virulent attacks launched by Sudaa's YouTube channel targeting hardcore Sinhala nationalist elements at an unprecedented scale appear to have the implicit nod of the government.

In a video released during the Dalada Exposition, he praised the exemplary gesture shown by the Muslim community in Kandy by keeping city mosques open for the convenience of thousands of devotees. He used that opportunity, as well, to hurl severe verbal abuse targeting Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, whose extreme Sinhala-Buddhist outfit the Bodu Bala Sena has been on a warpath with the country's Muslim minority since 2012.

In another viral video, Sudaa launched a scathing attack on the key players of the Dr. Shafi conspiracy, such as Athuraliye Rathana Thero, Wimal Weerawansa, Udaya Gammanpila, and Channa Jayasumana, by referencing the A Level results of his daughter. It seems that a well-orchestrated effort is made to weaken religious extremists.

Meanwhile, certain remarks made by Balangoda Kasappa Thero during Dan Priyasad's condolence speech, where he accused Jihad extremists of being behind Dan's killing, without presenting any evidence, has also drawn sharp criticism in the Sinhala social media circles.

In sum, these developments, although may seem unrelated, point to an emerging confrontation between hardline Sinhala-Buddhist elements and the NPP government. That could escalate further in the coming months.

A leading Buddhist monk recently made the following remarks on a YouTube channel in a program titled The Victory of Malimawa means the Defeat of Sinhala Buddhists: "Appointing a Christian as the Minister in charge of the Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs is not a coincidence. It was a calculated move. These individuals are not truly 'Niragamika' (non-religious); While they respect all other religions in Sri Lanka, they deliberately demean Buddhism alone.

He further alleged: "For years, the Galduwa Aranya sacred site has been maintained and refurbished by the Sri Lankan Navy. However, this time when the request was made for such assistance, the Navy authorities responded by sending a letter stating that the required services can only be rendered subject to a payment of Rs. 93,000 per hour".

In late March, a new Hall was inaugurated

at the Thayiddi Tissa Vihara premises in Jaffna, reportedly affiliated to the Amarapura Chapter. During the religious ceremonies that followed, many military personnel were deployed for security and almsgiving duties, and a military band was also present. However, it is said that the army was abruptly withdrawn from the site, following a phone call from the Army Commander.

In response to this development, Wimal Weerawansa launched a scathing attack on the President during a press conference held in Colombo. One of the points he raised was: "A top-level Government leader has summoned the senior officials of the Department of Archaeology and issued a strict directive, to the effect that: 'From now on, archaeological sites in the North and East should not be labeled as Buddhist or Hindu sites.' This directive will inevitably lead to future claims by Hindus over sites currently considered Buddhist heritage".

Weerawansa also quoted two lines from a letter written by Dr. Pussellawel Somavisuddhi Mahanayaka Thero of the Amarapura Chapter, to the President:

"We opine that the Army Commander, someone who belongs to a different faith, should have acted with even greater caution in this matter."

While the government has been handling very sensitive issues with great caution, these two incidents also demonstrate that it is gradually taking steps to remove certain 'problematic precedents'

President Anura Kumara's mildly worded admission during the Sattana program—"We must accept that in the past, we have not addressed the problems of the Tamil people in a way that respects their sentiments. To be honest, we have mostly focused on the Sinhalese population"—can be seen as a





remarkable shift in the thinking within the JVP camp.

In addition, following a few confusions related to the recent Dalada Sacred Tooth Relic Exposition, a series of attacks launched by the "Sudaa" YouTube channel targeting the Diyawadana Nilame (Chief Lay Custodian of the Temple of the Tooth) has now reached its peak. Sudaa has publicly accused the Diyawadana Nilame of misusing Temple funds and engaging in illegal financial transactions. He has also issued a warning, stating that he will present evidence to support these claims in the coming days. It is important to note that these criticisms are emerging at a crucial time - just months ahead of the upcoming election to appoint the next Diyawadana Nilame.

Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, who had a strong presence in the country's polity over the past 13 years by capitalizing on Islamophobia, perhaps for the first time is now facing a hostile government. In the recent press conference, his body language revealed noticeable tension and fear, which became apparent to close observers.

Sudaa has even issued a warning that he may be compelled to release certain videos related to the darker side of Gnanasara Thero. Whether the controversial monk could continue his usual practice of spreading unsubstantiated narratives about Islamic extremism in Sri Lanka, thereby stoking irrational fears among Sinhalese and tensions within the Muslim community, remains to be seen.

There is no doubt that the most significant challenges Anura Kumara Disسانayake currently faces include managing the economic crisis, handling of protests led by the "Anthare" (Inter-University Student Federation) led by Kumar Gunaratnam, and the protests organized by trade unions.

However, when it comes to minority communities, whether he will ultimately be seen as a Hero or a Villain, depends entirely on how he chooses to deal with the re-emerging forces of ethno-religious extremism in the country!

# For whom the bells toll: Reflections on the Province

The Northern Province does without a doubt have a rich and proud history. Marred by turbulence from the late 70's. The Jaffna Monitor has carried the related narrative previously. The material in this piece quotes extensively from a Census Report. It does not attempt to interpret the contents. Suffice to say these numbers have been the subject of great emotions.

## ENUMERATION OF VITAL EVENTS 2011 (ISBN 978-955-577-779-7)

NORTHERN PROVINCE Enumeration of Vital events - in the Northern Province was carried out by the DCS commencing 10th June till 15th August 2011. The field data collection required for the project covering the entire Northern Province was planned and executed within the period of two weeks from 3rd July to 17th July, 2011.

### Summary

Total population		Household population	Urban Population
Northern Province	997,754	978,859	166,285 (16.7%)
Jaffna district	567,229	557,715	112,403 (19.8%)
Mannar district	95,430	92,763	22,183 (23.2%)
Vavuniya district	164,852	161,229	31,699 (19.2%)
Mullaithivu district	66,526	65,042	-
Kilinochchi district	103,717	102,110	-
Re-settled population		Re-settled households	
Northern Province	388517	112297	
Jaffna district	158747	46654	
Mannar district	34229	9876	
Vavuniya district	40722	12691	
Mullaithivu district	58114	16771	
Kilinochchi district	96705	26305	
Deaths (2005 - 2009)		Deaths - 2009	
Northern Province	22,329	11172	
Jaffna district	10,884	3677	
Mannar district	1427	608	
Vavuniya district	2,857	1542	
Mullaithivu district	2,716	2019	
Kilinochchi district	4,445	3326	



BY: **Jeevan Thiagarajah**  
Former Governor Northern Province/  
Former Member Commissioner  
Election Commission.

**Untraceable population (2005 - 2009)**

Northern Province	4,156
Jaffna district	1,359
Mannar district	335
Vavuniya district	603
Mullaithivu district	635
Kilinochchi district	1224

**Untraceable population (2009)**

2635
651
164
378
488
954

**DEATHS AND UNTRACEABLE PERSONS**

The EVE 2011 paid special attention to deaths and untraceable persons reported in the Northern Province during the last 3 decades since 1982. Family members reported details of deceased or untraceable persons when such death or intractability has taken place while they were still members of the family and the basic information gathered at district level are shown in table 3.1.12.

**Table 3.1.12: Deaths and untraceable persons by district reported from 1982 to July 2011**

District	Total	Status		
		Dead	Untraceable	Not stated
<b>Total</b>	<b>71201</b>	<b>61651</b>	<b>6352</b>	<b>3198</b>
Jaffna	42410	38006	2539	1865
Mannar	4912	4144	551	217
Vavuniya	7925	6567	999	359
Mullaithivu	6346	5229	799	318
Kilinochchi	9608	7705	1464	439

EVE 2011 recorded 71,201 cases of deaths/ untraceable persons reported by respondents in the entire Northern Province since 1982. Nearly 5% of the cases were partly responded due to the sensitiveness of the status in question and due to various other reasons unstated or not known.

**Table 3.1.13: Deaths by reported district and year from 2005 to 2009 - Northern Province**

Year death occurred	Total	Reported district				
		Jaffna	Mannar	Vavuniya	Mullaithivu	Kilinochchi
<b>Total</b>	<b>22329</b>	<b>10884</b>	<b>1427</b>	<b>2857</b>	<b>2716</b>	<b>4445</b>
2005	2095	1556	111	192	96	140
2006	2655	1850	206	284	107	208
2007	2750	1744	223	376	178	229
2008	3657	2057	279	463	316	542
2009	11172	3677	608	1542	2019	3326



Table 3.1.13 shows the distribution of the reported deaths by district and by year of occurrence. The EVE 2011 reports that the death toll in the Northern province over those 5 years to be 22,329 and one half of the deaths have taken place in the year 2009. In relation to the total size of the population, Mullaithivu and Kilinochchi districts show higher deaths during the year 2009.

**Table 3.1.14: Deaths by cause and year occurred from 2005 to 2009 - Northern Province**

Year death occurred	Total	Cause of death		
		Natural deaths	Other deaths	Not stated
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,329</b>	<b>9,341</b>	<b>11,032</b>	<b>1,956</b>
2008	3,657	1,854	1,349	454
2009	11,172	2,523	7,934	715

Table 3.1.14 illustrates the deaths occurred from 2005 to 2009 in the Northern Province and their causes. Natural deaths include deaths due to succumbing to diseases, aging, due to natural disasters etc. while other deaths include deaths due to accidents, homicides, suicides, acts of terrorism etc... However 71% of the deaths that occurred in 2009 are reported as being due to extraordinary circumstances but majority of the deaths, prior to and beyond that, are reported to be the results of natural causes.

**Table 3.1.15: Untraceable persons by reported district and year -2005 - 2009 - Northern Province**

Year	Total	Reported district				
		Jaffna	Mannar	Vavuniya	Mullaithivu	Kilinochchi
<b>Total</b>	<b>4156</b>	<b>1359</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>1224</b>
2008	697	216	76	114	99	192
2009	2635	651	164	378	488	954

EVE 2011 has been reported with 4,156 cases (Table 3.1.15) of untraceable persons during this period from 2005 to 2009 and also that a majority, 63%, of such untraceable persons were reported to have been last cited in 2009.

**Table 4.13: Deaths by district, month and causes of death - Jan - May, 2009**

District* and month death occurred	Total	Causes of death				
		Old/ Sick	Natural disaster	Acciden t, Homicid e, Suicide	Other	Not stated
<b>Total</b>	<b>8998</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>6858</b>	<b>584</b>
January	889	180		42	612	55
February	1758	176	5	95	1369	113
March	3066	205	20	147	2514	180
April	1991	251	7	101	1514	118
May	1294	255	3	69	849	118
<b>Jaffna</b>	<b>2344</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>1273</b>	<b>118</b>
January	276	124		22	111	19
February	422	141	2	42	217	20
March	670	145	6	48	442	29
April	558	158	1	48	327	24
May	418	172		44	176	26
<b>Mannar</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>12</b>
January	64	16		1	46	1
February	83	8	1	2	70	2
March	134	13		6	112	3
April	108	14	1	4	85	4
May	57	17		3	35	2
<b>Vavuniya</b>	<b>1286</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>1047</b>	<b>62</b>
January	108	24		10	69	5
February	231	13		8	203	7
March	391	22	4	13	337	15
April	341	38		12	276	15
May	215	24	1	8	162	20
<b>Mullaithivu</b>	<b>1872</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1576</b>	<b>148</b>
January	154	5		4	129	16
February	344	8		21	283	32
March	751	10	7	35	657	42
April	389	15	2	18	320	34
May	234	18	1	4	187	24
<b>Kilinochchi</b>	<b>3050</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>2614</b>	<b>244</b>
January	287	11		5	257	14
February	678	6	2	22	596	52
March	1120	15	3	45	966	91
April	595	26	3	19	506	41
May	370	24	1	10	289	46

\* Resident district of respondent

**Table 4.16: Total deaths by Age and district of residence/ reported - 2009**

Age group (Years)	Total	District				
		Jaffna	Mannar	Vavuniya	Mullaithivu	Kilinochchi
<b>Total</b>	<b>11172</b>	<b>3677</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>1542</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>3326</b>
Less than 10	849	235	65	108	158	283
10 to 19	1200	237	79	183	255	446
20 to 29	2291	516	110	320	525	820
30 to 39	1395	386	81	214	264	450
40 to 49	1069	314	65	187	181	322
50 to 59	1105	369	72	188	197	279
60 to 69	1139	549	48	136	152	254
70 or more	1408	811	71	119	145	262
Not stated	716	260	17	87	142	210

**Table 4.18: Untraceable persons by Place last seen and year - 2005 - 2009**

District last seen	Total
<b>Total</b>	<b>4156</b>
Jaffna	360
Mannar	103
Vavuniya	199
Mullaithivu	1953
Kilinochchi	290
Other district	87
Not stated	1164



**Table 4.19: Untraceable persons by Age and district - 2009**

Age group (Years)	Total	District				
		Jaffna	Mannar	Vavuniya	Mullaithivu	Kilinochchi
<b>Total</b>	<b>2635</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>954</b>
Less than 10	73	17	3	13	15	25
10 to 19	699	117	39	118	156	269
20 to 29	1085	257	88	137	197	406
30 to 39	344	123	13	44	55	109
40 to 49	97	30	10	18	14	25
50 to 59	52	16	4	12	8	12
60 to 69	36	10	2	6	5	13
70 or more	52	15	1	8	12	16
Not stated	197	66	4	22	26	79

## Truth and Reconciliation

Arriving at the truth around tragedies that touched the persons requires a process discussed ad nauseum. A recent commentary by Prof. GL Pieris called for:

### Territorial Application

There is a crucial difference in this regard. The mandate in South Africa embraces the whole nation without qualification (Preamble and section 3 of Act No. 34 of 1995). By contrast, the proposed mandate in Sri Lanka is operative throughout the Island, but only where the atrocities in question “were caused in the course of, or reasonably connected to, or consequent to the conflict which took place in the Northern and Eastern Provinces during the period 1983 to 2009, or its aftermath” (section 12(i)).

## Structural Framework

The South African legislation envisages three committees specifically established alongside the Commission—the Committee on Human Rights Violations, the Committee on Amnesty and the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation. Each of these Committees has a statutory mandate and function, the role of each being clearly defined in relation to the Commission.

The Sri Lankan Bill is much less precise and clear-cut. The corresponding provision empowers the Commission to appoint panels consisting of not less than 3 members, the members being assigned to panels by the Chairperson of the Commission (section 7(2)). Unlike in South Africa, there is no indication of either the number of panels or the subject matter entrusted to each panel. A tighter conceptual scheme, with an explicit definition of identity and scope, is desirable at this juncture.

## Reconciliation and the Judiciary

Investigation which the Commission in Sri Lanka is authorized to undertake encompasses a wide range of activity including “extrajudicial killings, assassinations and mass murders” (section 12(g) (i)), “acts of torture” (section 12(g) (ii)) and “abduction, hostage taking and enforced disappearances” (section 12(g) (IV)). These are grave crimes in respect of which proceedings are instituted before the regular courts. In this event, should judicial proceedings, of a civil or criminal nature, be suspended until conclusion of the Commission’s investigations, or vice versa, or should they take place concurrently?

This is a matter of obvious practical importance that receives detailed consideration in South Africa, but not at all in Sri Lanka. For instance, where the person seeking amnesty before the relevant Committee in South Africa has a civil action in court pending against him, he may request suppression of the proceedings pending disposal of the application before the Committee (section 19(6)). The court may, after hearing all relevant parties, accede to this request. Similarly, a criminal action may be postponed in consultation with the Attorney-General of the relevant Province. These provisions serve the salutary purpose of averting the risk of conflicting orders by the courts and a Committee of the Commission in simultaneous proceedings. The Sri Lankan Bill fails to make any provision against this unacceptable contingency.

## Protection and Compellability

Discovery of truth requires the compulsory attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence before the Commission or its delegate. There is an equally critical need, in subsequent proceedings, to protect witnesses

against incrimination by testimony obtained through compulsion. These are competing objectives which need to be reconciled equitably.

This is achieved by the South African legislation: a person will be compelled to answer or produce evidentiary material having the potential to incriminate him, only if the Commission is satisfied that this course of action is “reasonable, necessary and justifiable” (section 31(2)). Moreover, the vital proviso is attached that the incriminating answer or evidence is inadmissible in criminal proceedings against the person providing it. This is a satisfactory result.

The position in Sri Lanka is quite otherwise. There is provision for the Commission to summon any person or to procure material (section 13(t) and (u)). This exists side by side with provision empowering the Attorney-General “to institute criminal proceedings in respect of any offence based on material collected in the course of an investigation by the Commission” (section 16(2)). Vulnerability is enhanced by the removal of protection conferred by the Evidence Ordinance (section 13(y)). In stark contrast with the position in South Africa, there is a singular absence of any provision against self-incrimination in Sri Lanka.

## Amnesty

The basic purpose of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions around the world is to enable victims to come to terms with a deeply scarred past and to face the future with dignity and self-assurance. This is the gist of the Greek concept of Katharsis, or the purging of the soul. Through full and candid disclosure, involving unburdening and relief, comes the expiation of guilt.

This is the context in which the idea of amnesty occupies a central place in the scheme of reconciliation. The Committee on Amnesty is the centerpiece of South African legislation. The primacy of its function is underlined by the provision that “No decision, or the process of arriving at such a decision, of the Committee on Amnesty shall be reviewed by the Commission” (section 5(e)). The status of this Committee is unique, standing as it does apart from, and indeed above, the other Committees. An application for amnesty succeeds in South Africa if there is genuine contrition manifested in complete disclosure of all relevant facts (section 20(i)).

Sri Lankan law takes an entirely different course. Although the proposed Bill postulates, as one of the main objectives of the Commission, “providing the people of Sri Lanka with a platform for truth telling” (section 12(d)), no provision whatever is made

for conferment of amnesty in consequence of uninhibited disclosure. At the core of the law, there is a policy contradiction, with practical implications.

## Conclusion

The toll has been heavy on lives. It is elicited from those who were resident in the Province in 2011. However, many left prior, from the Province and their narratives are not captured in the enumeration. The numbers will be subject to debate.

Legal closure and truth telling is what Prof. G.L Pieris has explained.

Additionally in all our religions there is a spiritual dimension. I show an example from Beirut titled the Garden of Forgiveness and closer home, mentioning on what Hindus would undertake.

Formally called Cardo Maximus, Hadiqat As-Samah, the Garden of Forgiveness, is an ancient ruin on which 15 civilizations have lived successively. The site, which is in downtown Beirut near Martyr’s Square, helps mark the green line where some of the most intense fighting during the civil war occurred. This line divided Beirut into east and west for more than a decade.

The vision Hadiqat As-Samah will be a garden in which people can gather strength and inspiration, a place for calm and gentle reflection. A garden for individual introspection, a sanctuary accessible to all. An edifying place, archetypal of Lebanon’s flora, with flowing water, suitably covered by sun and shade, which nurtures sentiments of peace, joy and healing. Beirut’s city center was always a meeting point for Lebanon’s many communities. It can therefore offer

an important neutral location with a multi-communal history that other parts of Beirut, or Lebanon as a whole, cannot. This area can also stand out as a paragon of social integration and reconstruction. As a global landmark, it will differentiate itself along spiritual lines rather than according to physical form or architectural grandeur.

As Beirut progresses with its rehabilitation and reconstruction, a sense of renewal and integration brings with it the need to come to terms with the past. Hadiqat As-Samah is envisioned as a place of calm reflection, sheltered from the bustle of the city and expressing themes of understanding, forgiveness and unity. Open to all, Hadiqat As-Samah will be a pluralistic public space at the heart of the city. Integrating archeological remains of surviving city layers, Hadiqat As-Samah will offer unique insights into earlier



civilizations. The integration of archeological artifacts within the garden will provide a historical context, demonstrating a shared ancestry that predates the recent conflict. By displaying these layers of civilizations, the garden will “use foundations of the past to build foundations for the future.” In its proximity to the wartime Green Line that divided the city and became the focus of

conflict, Hadiqat As-Samah will challenge the segregation of communities. The garden, nestling between mosques and churches, will provide a meeting point for diverse communities and beliefs. Hadiqat As-Samah will be a place for individuals to reflect on their collective memory and perhaps to nurture a renewed sense of common identity.

## **Athma Shanthi Puja for Soul Peace and Liberation**

What Is the Athma Shanthi Pooja? The Athma Shanthi Pooja is a sacred ritual performed to honor and bring peace to the souls of departed loved ones. According to Vedic traditions, this ceremony helps the departed soul find liberation (moksha) and can resolve any lingering karmic debts or disturbances. It is especially significant for those who passed away unexpectedly, tragically, or without the opportunity to receive proper rites.

### **Why Perform the Athma Shanthi Pooja?**

The Athma Shanthi Pooja is a compassionate and powerful ritual that serves both the living and the departed. Here's why it's important:

- Soul Liberation: Help the departed soul attain peace and release from the cycle of rebirth;
- Karmic Resolution: Release negative karmic influences caused by unresolved ancestral energies;
- Ancestral Blessings: Bring blessings and protection from your ancestors into your life;
- Healing and Closure: Provide emotional healing and closure for grieving family members.

### **Who Should Consider This Pooja?**

The Athma Shanthi Pooja is recommended for anyone who has lost a loved one and wishes to bring peace to their soul. It is especially

beneficial if: The departed soul passed away under tragic or sudden circumstances. Proper funeral rites were not performed, or there is a feeling of unfinished spiritual business. You feel the presence of ancestral disturbances in your life. You want to honor and express gratitude to your ancestors.

### **How the Athma Shanti Pooja is Performed?**

The ceremony is conducted according to ancient Vedic traditions and usually takes place near a sacred water body or an altar. Here's what to expect: Invocation of Divine Energies: The ritual begins with the chanting of mantras and prayers to purify the space and invoke divine energies.

Sacred Offerings: Offerings, including rice, flowers, and sacred items, are made to the departed soul.

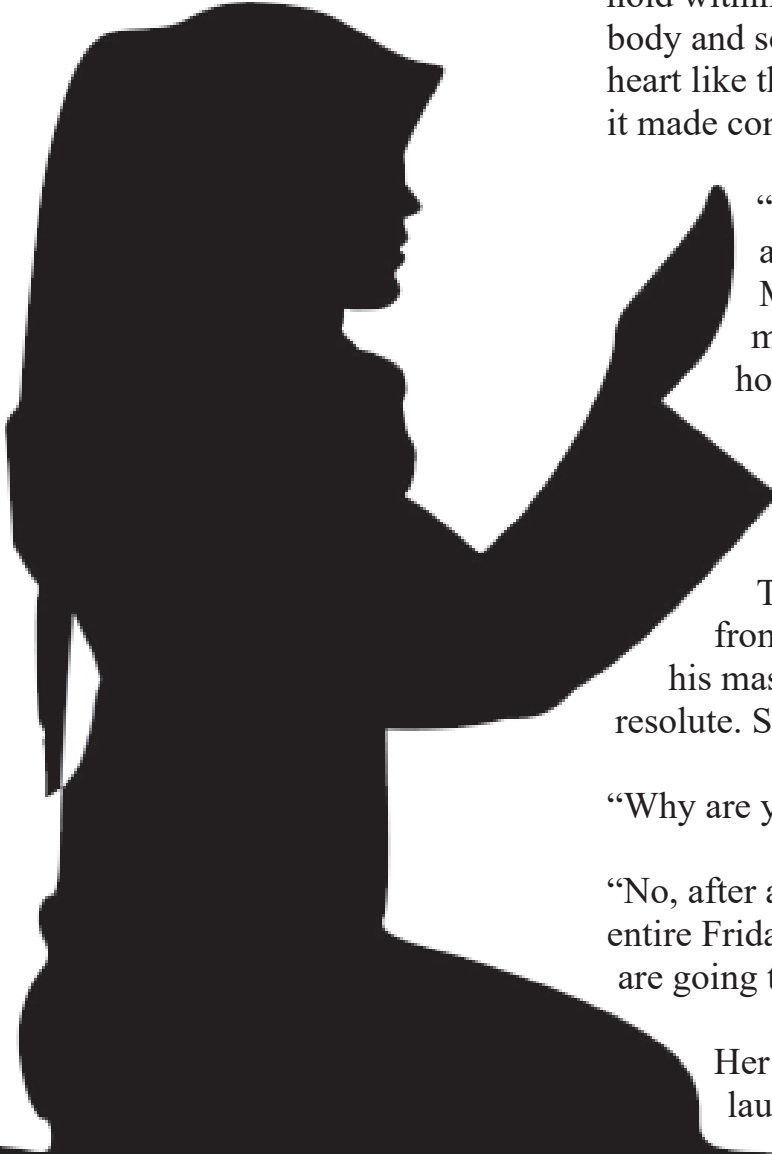
Prayers for Peace: Special prayers and mantras are chanted to bless the soul and guide it towards liberation.

Water Rituals: The ceremony may involve offerings to sacred waters, symbolizing the purification and release of the soul. Given the significant bloodletting where thousands fell or have not been found, performing Athma Shantis would be essential.

# TAPAS

Translated from the original Tamil short story *tapas* (தகஸ்) from his 1992 collection of short stories by **S.L.M. Hanifa**.

Translated by:  
**Eluttukkinīyavan**  
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)



“Katheerja!”

“Hmm.”

She paused from chopping striped eel catfish and turned toward him under the pretext of sharpening her knife.

Even the other night, yearning for a life to take hold within her belly, she submitted her naked body and soul to him. The memory singed his heart like the sparks that flew from the knife as it made contact with the whetstone.

“Look here. This time, as soon as the rice paddy threshing at Madhurangundu is finished, let’s make a pilgrimage to Hayat Nabi’s holy mausoleum at Kataragama.”

The anguish in his words blended with their rhythm.

The thin saree that separated joy from suffering had a tear. Having seen his masculinity through that tear made her resolute. Sparks flew from her gaze.

“Why are you glowering?”

“No, after all those five-prayers-every-day and entire Friday nights at the mosque, it seems we are going to Kataragama now!”

Her words were punctuated by derisive laughter.

Anger blinded Ahmed's eyes.

"Bitch! How dare you! Where did you learn to talk like that?" Katheeja finished cutting the fish and stood up to wash her hands. Only when she was drying her hands using the top of her saree did she realize that her husband was waiting for a response.

"From you," a derisive smile accompanied this feisty response to hit him with its full force.

His slap across her cheek jolted her, sharp and sudden, like an electric shock. Her eyes welled up.

Ahmad stared blankly into the silent void before him.

Clouds of morning mist hung motionless as though lost in meditation. His glance roamed across the sky and searched for the moon...

On the edge of the western horizon the reflection of the crescent moon was searching for its shine.

An ancient tamarind tree stood to the west of the farmer's shed, enveloped by the humming of its resident crow pheasants.

He was focused on the task of irrigating the bed of saplings.

He gathered up the thick semi-cylindrical barks hanging from the sapling guard pole and made his way towards the well.

The satisfaction of having irrigated twenty-thousand saplings, before dawn crept up to swallow the retreating darkness, made him crave for a cup of tea.

Despite blowing on the wood-burning stove with all his might, he could not get the fire to catch. Smoke crept into his eyes, making them

smart and igniting a fire of memory in his heart. The rope of memories, soaked with his emotions, stiffened, its frayed strands jutting out like rigid spikes.

Her image appeared in his heart, shimmering like a bouquet of flowers adorned with morning dew.

In the very next moment, his heart hardened and turned bitter.

Her eyelids batted furiously, her lips quavered, and her eyes turned red.

She always obediently acquiesced to him. But that day, the elegance of her newfound independence gave her a certain ferocity.

"Why don't you abandon this infertile woman and find another?"

Her words were tinged with frustration. Ahmad barged into the house and yanked open the wooden cabinet with unusual force. Sarees and property deeds scattered in all directions.

"Here you go, all the riches your parents gave us. Goodbye." He got onto a train right away. That was almost three months ago. He got a job with a Sinhala farmer in his chili plantation. The farmer grew fond of Ahmad's hard work. Occasionally he would offer Ahmad a drink to show his appreciation. But Ahmad always stepped back. "Boss, it is enough that you give me the wages my work deserves. In my religion, it is a sin to even touch what is forbidden."

"Oh come on Ahmad," the farmer would say, "all your Muslim bigwigs eat and drink everything nowadays! We are all the same, aren't we?" as he gulped down his glass of coconut arrack.

Ahmad felt queasy. But his consistent refusal





only made his Boss respect him even more. Ahmad quickly became one of his trusted employees.

Ahmad's thoughts dwell on how the trust he placed on the prospect of parenthood was shattered.

Katheeja's captivating beauty filled his imagination. He could never take his eyes off her exquisitely sculpted breasts and her

voluptuous body. She, in turn, would melt in his gaze and give herself unto him, as they would become one.

But fate had different ideas. Their marital bliss had a flaw. Her beautiful belly never enjoyed the pride of being pregnant. In their decade of wedded life, he spent every waking moment appealing to God. He sought a remedy for his impotence by devoting himself to the mausoleums of saints and their teachings.



He made pledge after pledge. As a result, his herd of calves and his flock of chickens dwindled rapidly. Although he continued his efforts relentlessly, they bore no fruit.

But he did not lose faith in the power of pledges.

After sipping his tea slowly and taking tiny bites of a sweet between sips, he loosened the long underwear around his waist and waded into the river.

The river surged forward with force, roaring like a stampede of disoriented buffalos. The infant sun slowly rose in the east, its gentle rays eager to stretch across the emerald carpet of the land, growing stronger and harsher as the day unfolded.

He held his nose to dip into the cold water. When he raised his head again, his body could feel the memory of Katheeja. For three months, he was in the iron grip of those memories, his mind throbbed like the dismembered tail of a gecko caught in a trap.

He hastened to finish his bath and return to the farmer's shed. With his right hand, he kneaded the old rice, softened overnight in water, with buffalo curd, shaping it into small balls that he popped into his mouth. They slipped down his throat as smoothly as river water.

"How is it going, thampi! Aren't you going back home? The festival is tomorrow. I hear that Bulamir Sahibu is going to stage a play by the stream." Ahmad raised his eyes from his plate when he heard Vilāvadi Yunus kākkā's question.

"For people like us, money in the pocket is what counts as a festival," replied Ahmad and without waiting for a response, pushed a footstool towards Yunus kākkā.

He picked up another plate for Yunus kākkā, ladled some rice onto it, and heaped yogurt on top. The yogurt sat like a little white mountain atop the rice.

"You are right, Ahmad. Your wife came by the house yesterday. She must have come to inquire after you. But she didn't broach the subject."

"I couldn't care less! Women who don't obey their husbands deserve to be treated like that," bristled Ahmad.

"What can the poor child do to cope with our anger?"

"Stop talking about her and talk about something else."

"Ahmad, there is a little too much yogurt here," continued Yunus kākkā. "My wife told me that your wife plucked all the tender mangoes from our tree. Apparently she hasn't menstruated for three months."

Yunus kākkā was oblivious to Ahmad. He kept on talking as he tilted his plate to drink the runny yogurt remaining on his plate.

Ahmad felt that the rice ball descending down his throat gave him a strange tingling sensation.

His thoughts flowed like a river. After a long time, his wife appeared in his mind, radiant with the glow of motherhood. She laughed joyfully. The sound seized him, gripping his thoughts. Tears welled up and splashed onto his body.

His boss, Dias, the Sinhala farmer, waddled towards him, breaking his reverie.

"How are you? Aren't you going home for your festival? Here, take this fifty rupees—go home, and come back soon."





Ahmad stuffed the money into his pocket. He attached a sickle to the pole and headed towards the tamarind tree at the head of the plantation.

The tamarind fruits tinkled in the wind. He imagined the tinkle of the triumphant laughter of his wife joining in.

As he filled the palmyrah leaf basket with tamarind fruit, he made a mental note to look for wood-apples as well.

Determined to catch the ten o'clock train, his legs found the vigor and pride of a twenty-year-old.



### **For Donations:**

Full Name	: <b>JAFFNA MONITOR PUBLICATIONS</b>
Bank Name	: <b>National Development Bank PLC</b>
Branch Name and Address	: <b>No.30, KKS Road, Chunnakam, Jaffna</b>
Account Number	: <b>111000221437</b>
SWIFT Code	: <b>NDBSLKLX</b>
Bank Address	: <b>No.40, Nawam Mawatha, Colombo 2</b>

### **Need more information?**

Call or WhatsApp us at	: <b>+94715418220</b>
Email us at	: <b>hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com</b>