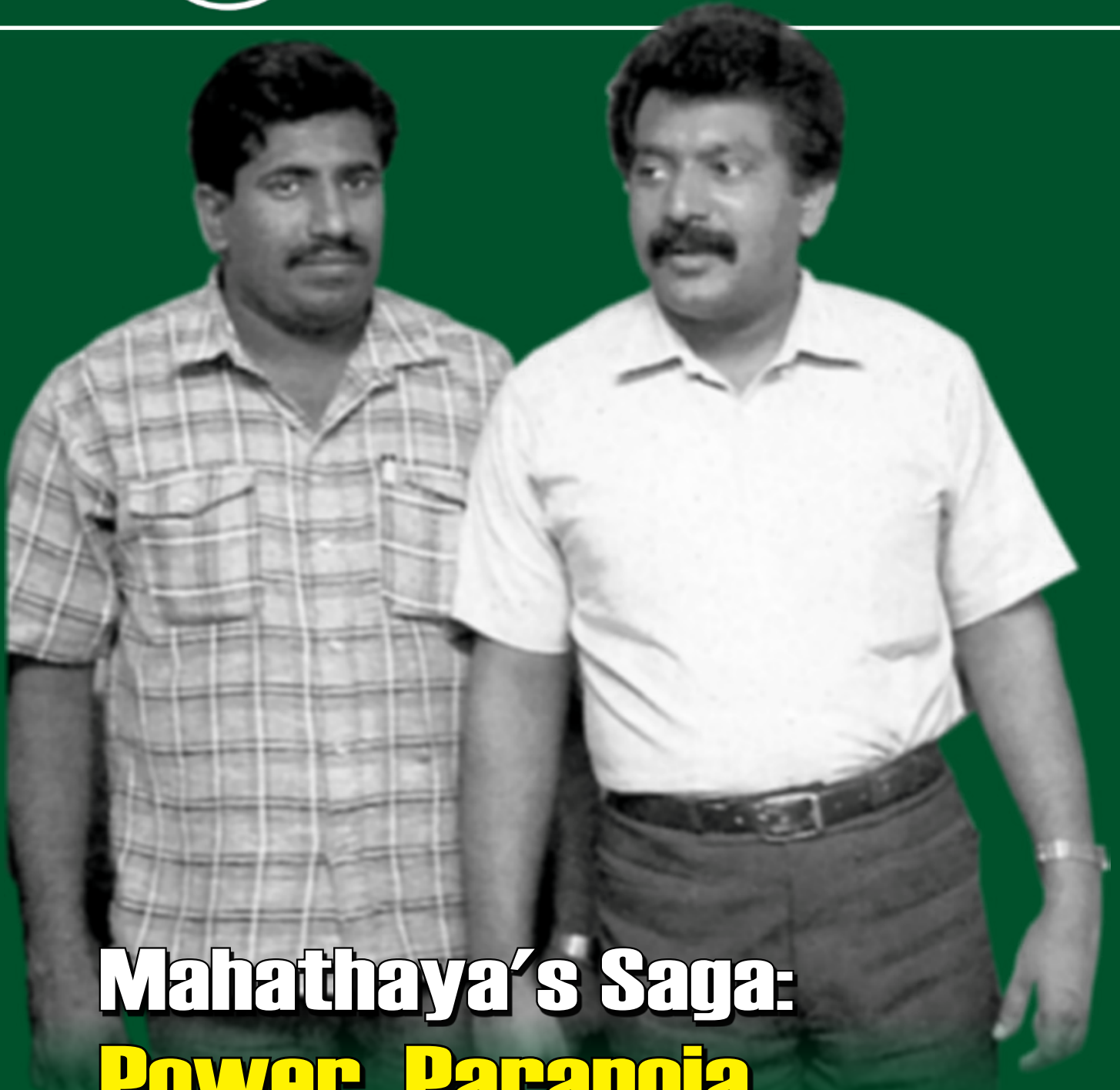


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UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED



**Mahathaya's Saga:
Power, Paranoia,
and Politics in the LTTE**

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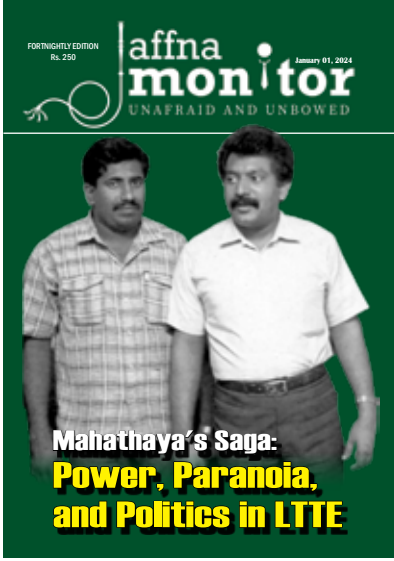


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Diverse Narratives: Welcoming 2023 with the Jaffna Monitor

Dear Esteemed Readers,

Happy New Year! As we step into a new year filled with hope and ambition, I am thrilled to present to you an issue of the Jaffna Monitor that promises to be both thought-provoking and enlightening.

This edition embarks on a deep dive into the complex saga of Mahathaya, a figure who once stood as the deputy leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As we approach the 29th anniversary of Mahathaya's execution on December 28, 1994, we bring you a narrative enriched with unique perspectives and untold stories.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our invaluable sources – former members of the LTTE who now reside in Sri Lanka and various parts of the world. Their first-hand accounts and provision of rare photographs have been instrumental in bringing depth and authenticity to our coverage. Their contributions underscore the power of shared history and the significance of diverse narratives.

We also have the honour of featuring "Kapṭan" (கப்டன்), a literary masterpiece by the esteemed Sri Lankan Tamil writer Shobasakthi, expertly translated by Eḷuttukkiṇiyavan (எழுத்துக்கினியவன்). We sincerely thank Shobasakthi for allowing us to share his work and Eḷuttukkiṇiyavan for his exceptional translation skills. Due to its extensive narrative, this captivating story will continue in our next edition.

In our sports section, Dr Aravinthan Arunthavanathan, a renowned cricket writer, presents a fascinating article that intertwines the cricket world with invaluable leadership lessons. His unique perspective offers our readers a fresh look at sports and leadership, adding another layer to our diverse stories.

Your overwhelming response to our transition from a monthly to a fortnightly publication has been incredibly heartwarming. Your calls, emails, and messages brimming with congratulations and encouragement have been a source of immense motivation for our team. We are deeply grateful for your unwavering support and engagement.

Our commitment to journalistic integrity remains stronger as we continue on our journey. We are dedicated to delivering stories that are informative, stimulate thought, and contribute to a deeper understanding of our world.

Thank you for being a part of this journey with us. Here's to a year filled with insightful storytelling and shared discoveries.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor



Kilmisha Yaazhisai: Jaffna's Melodious Nightingale Conquers Sa Re Ga Ma Pa

By:
**Our Entertainment
Reporter**

In a stunning display of musical talent and cultural resonance, Kilmisha Yaazhisai from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, has made history with her victory in "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Little Champs Season 3" on Zee Tamil. This triumph is not merely a personal accolade but a historic event, potentially marking the first time a Sri Lankan has

emerged victorious in an Indian reality TV show.

Affectionately termed the 'musical nightingale' of Jaffna, Kilmisha's journey is steeped in inspiration. Born to Kilson, a businessman and social worker from Ariyalai, and Tharmini from Uruthirapuram, Kilinochchi, her upbringing in a culturally vibrant environment was instrumental in her musical development. Her initial training with Mrs. Kamalajini Umasankar and subsequent guidance at



the local Temple and from the Ariyalai Saranga Music Group was pivotal in honing her as a compelling vocalist.

Kilmisha's path to success, underpinned by unwavering support from her family, the Kalaimagal community, and relatives, is a testament to her innate talent and determination. Her debut song, "Kuyil party oh. Vandhadhenna laminae," set the tone for a series of spellbinding performances, culminating in her well-earned victory and a prize of 10 lakh Indian Rupees.

Her return to Jaffna was met with an extraordinary celebration, a testament to her significant impact on the Jaffna Tamil community. The grand welcome she

received at Palali Airport and the subsequent parade to her village in Ariyalai were reminiscent of a royal procession, seldom seen in Jaffna. The community's gesture of welcoming her with a palanquin near Ariyalai was particularly symbolic of the high regard in which she is held.

The response to Kilmisha's victory, while varied on social media, highlights a profound shift in societal attitudes. Amidst the celebrations, some voices urged her to balance her burgeoning music career with academic pursuits. Coming from a marginalized background, Kilmisha's triumph is more than just a musical victory; it is a beacon of hope, symbolizing that talent and perseverance can indeed overcome societal barriers.



Kilmisha Yaazhisai's success transcends the bounds of mere musical competition. It embodies a narrative of cultural unity, resilience, and the transformative power of music. As Jaffna's 'musical nightingale,' she has not only captivated millions with her melodious voice but also stands as an emblem of hope and progressive change in the musical landscape.



LTTE Leader Prabhakaran with Deputy Leader Mahathaya and Senior Member Yogaratnam Yogi of the LTTE

The Mahathaya Chronicle

Dear Readers,

Within the complex history of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the story of Gopalaswamy Mahendraraja, better known as Mahathaya, stands out distinctly. His journey from the heights of LTTE leadership, where he was celebrated as the deputy leader and a charismatic figure within the group, to his abrupt and dramatic downfall epitomizes the volatile nature of power and destiny in the organization's tumultuous narrative. Mahathaya's life story is a vivid illustration of rapid ascension followed by an equally swift decline.

In the following pages, we delve into the captivating story of Mahathaya, which, in turn, unfolds a significant part of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam's (LTTE) history. This organization has played a pivotal role in shaping the modern history of Sri Lanka. Mahathaya's journey within the LTTE is not just a personal narrative; it serves as a vivid illustration of the intricate dynamics of power and destiny that permeated the organization. Through his story, we aim to unravel the complex layers of the LTTE's history, offering insights into its influential role in the region's tumultuous past.

Mahathaya's story is marked by a meteoric rise and an equally rapid fall. After joining the LTTE in 1978, he quickly ascended to its zenith as its deputy leader. However, in August 1993, Mahathaya faced a stark reversal of fortune. In a shocking turn of events, the LTTE, the very group he had dedicatedly served, arrested him on grave accusations. These accusations



From left: LTTE Member Shah Jahan, Deputy Leader Mahathaya, Leader Prabhakaran, Political Commissar Thileepan, and Member Dinesh

included allegedly colluding with India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to assassinate Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE's controversial leader, and other key members.

This feature aims to provide a balanced view of Mahathaya's significant yet ultimately tragic role within the LTTE. While recognizing his involvement in acts marked by violence and criminality, reflecting the brutal nature of the group's struggle, our narrative also sheds light on the leadership dynamics within the LTTE. We explore how leaders maintained relevance and proximity to Prabhakaran, often through flattery and internal politicking.

The story of Mahathaya is not just a recounting of past events but a lens through which we examine the multifaceted nature of the LTTE. We seek neither to glorify nor vilify Mahathaya or the LTTE but to present a nuanced understanding of his character and the organization he helped lead. His journey, culminating in his execution on December 28, 1994, remains a poignant chapter in the LTTE's history.

Given the extensive scope of this article, we have divided it into two parts. The first part, presented in this issue, lays the groundwork for understanding Mahathaya's rise and fall. The continuation, to be featured in our next issue, promises more insights into the LTTE's internal workings and the complex legacy of its leaders.

We invite you to engage with this comprehensive examination, which we believe will offer a deeper understanding of the LTTE, revealing the often unspoken and darker sides of its history and operations.

Thank you for your continued engagement with our publication.

Sincerely,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

Mahathaya's Saga: Power, Paranoia, and Politics in the LTTE



From left: LTTE Deputy Leader Mahathaya, Political Strategist Anton Balasingham, Leader Prabhakaran, pipe-smoking Indian High Commissioner Jyotindra Nath Dixit aka JN Dixit, and Major General Harkirat Singh at Palaly Military Base.

Mahathaya and Prabhakaran: A Bond Beyond the Battlefield

BY:
Kaniyan Pungundran
கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Mahathaya (Gopalaswamy Mahendraraja), Once a prominent figure within the LTTE and seen as the deputy leader and public face of the organization, faced a dramatic downfall when he was arrested in August 1993 by the LTTE itself. He was accused of colluding with



Prabhakaran with his Deputy Mahathaya at the Punithabhoomi Base in Nittikaikkulam, Mullaitivu, in the Late 1980s.

India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in a plot to assassinate Prabhakaran and other key LTTE leaders. After enduring 16 months of captivity, Mahathaya was executed on December 28, 1994. This year marks the 29th anniversary of his execution.

The arrest of Mahathaya, coupled with the allegations leveled against him, sparked widespread speculation and disbelief among observers and LTTE supporters alike, particularly considering his previously close relationship with Prabhakaran. His fall from grace and the subsequent execution were seen as indicative of the complex and often perilous internal politics of the LTTE.

Credible sources who were formerly associated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have shared in-depth insights with the Jaffna Monitor, shedding light on the complex dynamics that led to the downfall of Mahathaya. According to these sources, a

key factor in Mahathaya's decline was the combination of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's insecurities and paranoia, along with the intense paranoia about the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of India that had enveloped Pottu Amman, the head of LTTE's intelligence wing. These sources also highlighted Pottu Amman's ambition to climb the ranks within the LTTE, which significantly influenced the unfolding events. Following Mahathaya's downfall, Pottu Amman rose to a position of greater power, becoming the undeclared but effective second-in-command of the LTTE, a role that Mahathaya had previously occupied.

Mahathaya, once a trusted deputy of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran, shared a deep connection with him that extended beyond their roles in the organization. Both hailed from Valvettithurai, a significant location in the Sri Lankan armed struggle, belonged to the same caste, the Karaiyar caste (Traditionally, the Karaiyar were known as a seafaring and fishing community), and were alumni of Chidambaram College. Their close association was also marked by their proximity in age, with Prabhakaran born in 1954 and Mahathaya in 1956, leading some to speculate about their familial relationship.

Mahathaya's journey with the LTTE began in 1978 and was significantly influenced by Prabhakaran. He was personally chosen by Prabhakaran to join the ranks of the LTTE. Initially known within the LTTE as 'Sri,' and 'Ajit'. Mahathaya's identity evolved over time. A source who interacted with him extensively in India between 1981 and 1983 disclosed to the Jaffna Monitor that he was known as 'Sri' during this period. However, by 1985, he had become widely recognized as 'Mahathaya' within the LTTE circles. A former prominent member of the LTTE disclosed to the Jaffna Monitor that Mahathaya was also known by the nickname 'Mokku' Mahathaya. The term 'மொக்கு (Mokku) in Tamil is often used colloquially to describe someone who is dumb or an idiot.

There is a common misconception regarding how Mahathaya came to be known by his name, which in the Sinhala language means "sir," a term of respect. Contrary to the belief that he acquired this name after leading peace talks with the Premadasa Government in 1989, sources who worked closely with Mahathaya have clarified that he was actually referred to as Mahathaya as early as 1984.



LTTE leader with his close aide Lt. Sellakili at the Udayarkaddu training camp in early 1983.

Mahathaya and the LTTE: Unconventional Training and Indian Government's Role

Contrary to popular belief, Mahathaya did not receive formal military training in any of the LTTE's official training batches. The first military training camp for LTTE cadres was conducted in Udayarkattu, located in the Mullaitivu District, during February, March, and April 1983. This pioneering training camp was led by none other than the LTTE chief Prabhakaran himself. About 25 members participated in this initial training session. Among the attendees were several prominent LTTE figures including Kittu, Pottu Amman, Sellakili, Ponnammann, Pulendran, and Lala Ranjan. It's important to highlight that at this time, the LTTE was still a relatively small guerrilla group, comprising no more than 30 members. Sources present at this first

camp told the Jaffna Monitor that, although Mahathaya was seen a few times at the campsite, he did not participate in the training.

Following the 1983 violence, the Indian government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi covertly provided military training to various Tamil militant groups from Sri Lanka, including the LTTE. The first two LTTE training camps, conducted in Uttar Pradesh and Jawalamukhi in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, North India, were part of this clandestine operation. These sessions, known within the LTTE as batch-1 and batch-2, featured direct training from Indian Army personnel. This secret military assistance was a component of a broader initiative by the Indira Gandhi government to offer similar training to other Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups, though in different locations

The first batch of LTTE cadres sent to India for military training was kept unaware of their exact location, a strategy by the Indian government and RAW to maintain discretion. The secrecy surrounding the training was crucial due to the sensitive implications of providing arms training to a foreign militant group. The militants were transported via long routes and isolated from the public to ensure confidentiality and prevent potential future disclosures. While the trainees were aware that they were in Uttar Pradesh, the exact location of their training site was deliberately kept undisclosed.

Similarly, the second batch of LTTE cadres sent for training was covertly transported. They embarked on a two-day bus journey from Delhi's Hazrat Nizamuddin railway station, taking a deliberately longer route to maintain secrecy. Ingeniously, two trainees from this batch, Raheem and Suseelan, managed to deduce their location. They identified their whereabouts as 'Jawalamukhi,' a small village in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, by noting the name on a post office board. It's worth noting that Suseelan, recognized for his mechanical skills, was later tragically killed following the Mahathaya case within the LTTE. Additionally, insiders from these training batches confirmed that Mahathaya was not a participant in these training sessions.



From left: LTTE Member Abdullah, Leader Prabhakaran, Tamil Nadu Politicians Alagarsamy and Nedumaran, LTTE Fighters Kamal and Cheliyan at a Tamil Nadu Training Base of the LTTE.



LTTE leader with a Tamil Nadu little girl at the Sirumalai training camp in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, in 1985.



From left: LTTE fighters Lingam, Aruna, LTTE leader Prabhakaran, Pulenthiran, Victor, and Pottu Amman at the Koomapatti training camp in Rajapalayam, Tamil Nadu.



Pirabhakaran along with his fighters at the Rajapalayam Koomapatti training camp



Pirabhakaran at the Sirumalai training camp in Tamil Nadu.



LTTE leader Prabhakaran with Kiddu, Abdulla, Lingam, and Pandiyan at a training camp in Tamil Nadu.

LTTE's Tamil Nadu Training and Prabhakaran's Superstitions

The first two batches of LTTE training in India were conducted by the Indian government. Following these, the LTTE organized seven additional training batches in Tamil Nadu. These sessions were led by trainers, referred to as 'masters' in LTTE parlance, who themselves had been trained during the initial batches overseen by Indian authorities. Notably, the first batch of these LTTE-conducted sessions (the third batch overall), along with the 6th and 10th batches, took place in Kumbarapatti, a small mountain hamlet in the Kolathur area of Salem district. Over time, this village, Kumbarapatti, became known as 'Puliyur' – meaning 'village of the tigers' in Tamil – a name that emerged as a tribute to the LTTE training camps established there.

The 4th and 7th batches of LTTE training took place in Sirumalai, Dindigul, at an estate owned by a close aide of Pazha Nedumaran, Dindigul Alagirisamy. The 5th and 9th batches were conducted in Rajapalayam Koomapatti. Notably, the 7th batch was exclusively for

women. An interesting aspect of these training batches is that they were numbered from 1 to 10, yet there were only nine batches in total. This is because there was no 8th batch. The omission of the 8th batch was due to Prabhakaran's superstition; he considered the number 8 unlucky. Sources told the Jaffna Monitor that this belief was firmly held by the LTTE supremo until the 1990s. Sources who were part of these training batches informed the Jaffna Monitor that Mahathaya did not participate in any of these sessions.

This lack of formal military training was not unique to Mahathaya. Other prominent LTTE figures, such as Baby Subramaniam, the Head of the Tamil Eelam Education Department; Col. Shankar, founder of the LTTE's air wing and marine division; Anton Master, former head of Military Office (MO) and Nadeshan, the LTTE's Political wing Leader, also reportedly did not participate in formal training camps. Like these individuals, Mahathaya was thrust into military ranks within the LTTE without undergoing conventional military training. However, it is understood that these individuals, including Mahathaya, received military training in some form somewhere.



LTTE Leader Prabhakaran delivering his famous speech at Suthumalai Amman Temple, Jaffna, Sri Lanka, on August 4, 1987. With him from left: Deputy Leader Mahathaya, Former Eastern Commander Karuna, and Kiddu

Man of the people

People and former LTTE fighters who closely interacted with Mahathaya shared their insights with the Jaffna Monitor, emphasizing that Mahathaya was a man of the people. Like Captain Pandithar (S. Ravindran), who was known to be a childhood friend of Prabhakaran and served as a Jaffna commander until his death in January 1985, Mahathaya also possessed a remarkable ability to connect with people easily. His capability to engage with individuals and sway them into supporting the LTTE was notable. Indeed, at a certain juncture, Mahathaya effectively led the LTTE's public relations (PR) efforts, even though there was no formally designated PR unit within the organization. His role in this capacity was significant, as he played a crucial role in shaping the LTTE's interactions and image with the public, leveraging his ability to connect with people and communicate the group's objectives and perspectives.

In 1984, Mahathaya was appointed as the Vanni regional commander of the LTTE by Prabhakaran. The Vanni region, encompassing the districts of Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya, was a crucial area for the LTTE. Sources within the LTTE have stated that Mahathaya served effectively as the Vanni commander. Significantly, in 1987, when the LTTE leadership had to relocate its Base to the Vanni region amidst the conflict with the Indian Peace Keeping Force, Mahathaya's network and contacts in the area proved invaluable. His connections and familiarity with the Vanni region greatly assisted Prabhakaran and the LTTE in establishing their new Base and continuing their operations during this critical period.

Behind the Scenes: Mahathaya's Appointment as LTTE's Deputy Leader

Mahathaya's role in the history of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is indeed significant, as he was the first and ultimately the last person to be designated as the Deputy Leader of the organization. This position



From left: LTTE's Col. Shankar, Mahathaya, Leader Prabhakaran, Yogi, and The Hindu Newspaper's Editor N. Ram in Chennai.



LTTE's Shankar, Mahathaya, Prabhakaran, and Yogi, with Gaddafi (standing) alongside IPKF officers.

was not reestablished following Mahathaya's arrest and execution. Despite the lack of official documentation, credible sources have confirmed to the Jaffna Monitor that Mahathaya was appointed deputy leader by LTTE leader Prabhakaran in 1987.

Before the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord on July 29, 1987, the Indian government extended an invitation to Prabhakaran for discussions in New Delhi. Initially reluctant, Prabhakaran eventually agreed to the visit. On July 24, 1987, he was flown from the Suthumalai Amman temple grounds to Chennai aboard an Indian Army military helicopter. From Chennai, he continued his journey to Delhi on a military flight. Accompanying him from Suthumalai were key LTTE figures 'Yogi' Yogaratnam and Thileepan, along with Hardeep Puri, who was then serving as the 1st Secretary of the Indian High Commission and is currently a Minister in Narendra Modi's Government. In Chennai, Prabhakaran was



Pirabhakaran with Anton Balasingam, LTTE's chief strategist, and IPKF officer Major General Harikirat Singh in an IPKF helicopter.

joined by Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief political strategist, for the trip to Delhi.

Before leaving for Delhi, Prabhakaran internally announced within the LTTE that Mahathaya would assume the role of Deputy Leader in his absence. While this appointment was not formalized through public statements or documented evidence, sources confirmed that Prabhakaran explicitly directed his cadres to adhere to Mahathaya's orders during his absence.

Differing Perspectives on Mahathaya's Path to LTTE Leadership

Within the ranks of former LTTE members who spoke to the Jaffna Monitor, a divergence of opinion exists regarding the reasons behind Mahathaya's initial rise within the LTTE.

One school of thought suggests that Mahathaya's elevation was primarily due to his close relationship with Prabhakaran. These former members pointed out that Prabhakaran had known Mahathaya for a long time, and both hailed from the same place, Valvettithurai. This geographical and personal connection reportedly led Prabhakaran to view Mahathaya as harmless and trustworthy. Sources suggest that Prabhakaran's perception of Mahathaya



Hardeep Puri, 1st Secretary of the Indian High Commission, and Captain Gupta, Defence Attaché in Jaffna, 1987, inviting Pirabhakaran to New Delhi just before the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord.

significantly aided his rise within the LTTE. Additionally, sources pointed out to Jaffna monitor that Prabhakaran believed Mahathaya, colloquially known as 'Mokku Mahathaya,' was not a competitor for his leadership. This belief that Mahathaya could not effectively challenge Prabhakaran's authority, sources believe, further contributed to Mahathaya's elevation in the organization.

However, this view is contested by another group of former LTTE members. They believe Mahathaya's rise was more circumstantial, particularly following Kittu's departure to Chennai. They point out that Baby

Subramaniam, following Prabhakaran, was the most senior member of the LTTE. However, due to Baby Subramaniam's non-military background, Mahathaya, who followed him in terms of seniority, was the natural choice for a prominent position within the LTTE's military and operational framework.

Arrival of the IPKF

Following the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on July 29, 1987, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) entered Jaffna on July 30, 1987, as part of their mission in Sri Lanka. Initially, the arrival of the IPKF in Jaffna was met with a warm welcome from the local population. Unaware of the future implications, the people of Jaffna greeted the IPKF troops with garlands and flowers.

Kittu's Attack and the Rise of Mahathaya in the LTTE

On the night of March 29, 1987, approximately 4 and a half months before the IPKF entered Sri Lankan soil, An unidentified assailant attacked the Mitsubishi Lancer carrying Kittu on Jaffna's Second Cross Street. When the attack happened, Kittu was en route to meet his girlfriend, Cynthia, a medical student at Jaffna University. The assailant fired at the vehicle and lobbed a powerful grenade; Kittu suffered a severe injury, with his right leg being virtually severed, an injury that led to its eventual amputation. This marked the end of

Kittu's long and distinguished military career with the LTTE.

Following this life-altering incident, Kittu relocated to Chennai, where he took charge of the LTTE's propaganda office. The perpetrator of this attack remains unidentified to this day, with even the once-powerful LTTE intelligence wing under Pottu Amman's leadership failing to determine who was behind it.

This incident, however, had a significant repercussion within the LTTE ranks. It paved the way for Mahathaya to ascend within the organization. With Kittu's move to Chennai and his shift away from active military involvement, Mahathaya's prominence within the LTTE increased substantially. He returned to Jaffna from the Vanni region and took on a more central role, overseeing military actions against Indian forces.

The rising popularity of Mahathaya

The relationship between the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) took a significant turn for the worse, ultimately leading to open conflict. By October 1987, the tensions between the two groups had escalated to the point of full-scale warfare.

In December 1987, following intense clashes with Indian forces, the LTTE retreated to the Vanni region. In this strategic move, Prabhakaran established his Base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu, while Mahathaya set up his Base in Omanthai Koliyankulam. During this critical period, Mahathaya's connections and deep familiarity with the Vanni region greatly assisted Prabhakaran and the LTTE in establishing their new bases and continuing their operations.

During the fight, LTTE had captured 18 Indian Army soldiers and, in a move aimed at enhancing their public relations, decided to hand these soldiers over to Indian authorities. This gesture was designed to attract media attention and took place in the presence of prominent Indian journalists. The handover events were held in Chavakachcheri and Uduvil, with Mahathaya at the forefront, personally overseeing



Kittu with his wife Cynthia in Chennai



Pirabhakaran along with Col. Shankar in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu during the IPKF period.

the process. Adding to the significance of these events, Raheem, described in a WikiLeaks cable as the "trilingual aristocrat" and spokesperson for Kittu, arrived in Jaffna on an Indian Army flight from Chennai, accompanied by about 15 Indian journalists.

This strategic move by the LTTE was not only to boost its image but also stemmed from practical considerations. The LTTE, engaged in intense warfare and continually on the move, was not equipped to detain prisoners of war. Furthermore, there was a conscious decision not to harm these soldiers. Raheem candidly expressed to the Jaffna Monitor that the captured soldiers were not viewed as significant adversaries. Furthermore, there was an element of seeking 'vilasam,' a Tamil term playfully used here to mean publicity, especially after inflicting significant blows on the world's fourth-largest army. The event was widely covered in prominent newspapers worldwide. This occasion received



Mahathaya, Shankar, Raheem along with IPKF officers talking to press persons after handing over 18 IPKF soldiers to Indian authorities.

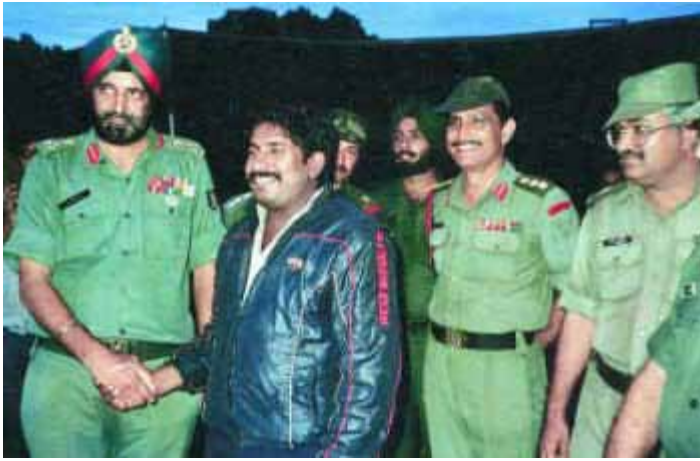
considerable global attention. The coverage of this event not only brought substantial publicity to the LTTE but also particularly highlighted Mahathaya's role in the process. The image of Mahathaya alongside Brigadier Manjit Singh Minhas during the handover became emblematic of this moment. This act and its extensive news coverage significantly enhanced Mahathaya's status in the international arena. It showcased him as a key player in the LTTE's interactions with external entities.

Media Spotlight on Mahathaya: The Face of LTTE in Peace Talks

During this period, anti-India sentiment escalated in southern Sri Lanka. In the 1988 presidential election, held on December 19, Ranasinghe Premadasa succeeded J.R. Jayewardene amidst a backdrop of conflict in the north and east between the Indian Peace



President Premadasa and the LTTE delegation headed by Anton Balasingam in Colombo for the second round of talks on 15 June 1989.



Mahathaya with IPKF officers.

Keeping Force and LTTE and violence in the south involving government forces and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna militants. Both major political parties in the election pledged to revoke the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and sought the withdrawal of Indian troops.

By this time, the LTTE, also cornered in the Sri Lankan jungles by the IPKF, sought a strategic pause. To achieve this, they initiated peace talks with President Premadasa's government, guided by the Tamil adage "an enemy's enemy is my friend." The primary goal of these talks was to facilitate the withdrawal of Indian forces from Sri Lanka. The Premadasa government, aiming to fulfill a key election promise of expelling Indian troops from Sri Lanka, initiated peace talks with the LTTE.

In an effort to lend credibility and a formal structure to their negotiations with the LTTE, the Premadasa government advised the LTTE to establish a political party. This move aimed to provide a legitimate platform for dialogue and facilitate a more structured approach to peace talks. Prabhakaran approved the formation of a political party for the LTTE, the People's Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT), or Viduthalai Pulikal Makkal Munnani, appointing Mahathaya as its head and "Yogi" Yogaratham as its Secretary.

The peace talks garnered immense media coverage, both locally and internationally. The LTTE delegation, led by Mahathaya, was accommodated in Colombo as guests of the Sri Lankan government, staying in five-star hotels and participating in the negotiations. During this time, Mahathaya became the talk of the town, with his presence and activities extensively featured in TV, newspapers, and magazines, marking a peak in his public visibility.

Mahathaya's Omnipresence and Prabhakaran's Insecurity

Trustworthy sources from the LTTE told the Jaffna Monitor that the rising prominence and public acknowledgment of Mahathaya caused uneasiness for Prabhakaran, his Leader, who had a reputation for being insecure. A former prominent LTTE leader, who is currently living in exile and chose to remain anonymous, shared insightful reflections with the 'Jaffna Monitor' magazine about the atmosphere during Mahathaya's peak popularity. He described a time when Mahathaya's presence was ubiquitous in the media: "If you woke up and read the newspaper, there was Mahathaya; if you turned on your radio, there was Mahathaya. His name was virtually everywhere." This omnipresence in the media made Mahathaya a household name, significantly elevating his profile. The former Leader further argued that such widespread recognition could easily lead to feelings of insecurity in others, especially in a person like Prabhakaran, known for his inherent insecurities.

The LTTE's Strategic Blunder: Mahathaya's Role in the Amirthalingam Assassination



Appapillai Amirthalingam



Vettivelu Yogeswaran

On July 13, 1989, amidst ongoing peace talks between an official LTTE delegation and President Ranasinghe Premadasa's government in Colombo, Appapillai Amirthalingam, the Leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and former TULF Jaffna MP Vettivelu Yogeswaran were assassinated on Colombo's Bullers Road. The assailants, Rasiah Aravindarajah (Visu), Peter Aloysius Leon (Vigna), and Sivakumar (Arivu), active members of the LTTE, were known as



Appapillai Amirthalingam



Amirthalingam alongside former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and then External Affairs Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1983.



Amirthalingam's loyal security officer, Nissanka Thibbotumunuwa, who gunned down Amirthalingam's assassins, captured with Amir's son, Dr. Bhagirathan Amrithalingam.



One of Amirthalingam's assassins, Visu (extreme right), with, from left: Aruna, Victor, Lingam, Pottu Amman, and Pulendran at the LTTE's military training camp in Rajapalayam, Tamil Nadu. This photo is significant as it provides evidence of Visu being trained in the LTTE's camp.

Mahathaya's men and were linked directly to him, who was at the time leading the LTTE's peace negotiations. These killings, carried out under the orders of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, resulted in the assassins being gunned down by Amirthalingam's security officer, Nissanka Thibbotumunuwa. Despite initial denials by the LTTE's political wing and its General Secretary, Yogaratnam Yogi, the involvement of the LTTE, and particularly Mahathaya's faction, in these assassinations was widely recognized and condemned.

The assassination, while achieving its immediate goal, is considered a significant tactical and strategic blunder by the LTTE, a view echoed not only by external observers but also by former LTTE cadres, as told to us (Jaffna Monitor). Several reasons contribute to this perception of failure. One crucial aspect was the

loss of two valuable LTTE members, Visu and Vigna. Former LTTE leaders, now living in exile and speaking anonymously with the Jaffna Monitor, provided insight into this view. They noted that before Amirthalingam's assassination, the LTTE had primarily conducted a single major suicide attack on July 5, 1987, against the Sri Lankan army at Nelliady Madhya Maha Vidyalayam, executed by Vallipuram Vasanthan, also known as Captain Miller, the first Black Tiger. The second suicide attack attributed to the LTTE was the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 21, 1991, although the LTTE never officially claimed the attack or included the assassin, Thanu, in their list of Great Heroes (Maveerar). These ex-leaders criticized the planning and execution of Amirthalingam's assassination, orchestrated by Mahathaya's group, likening it to an unplanned suicide

attack. They argued that Amirthalingam, a political figure, and not a military target, could have been assassinated in numerous other ways that wouldn't have resulted in the loss of key LTTE operatives. Instead, they described the approach taken – attacking Amirthalingam in his own home, surrounded by his loyal bodyguards – as tactically unsound and counterproductive, illustrating a significant lapse in strategic judgment by the Mahathaya's team. This decision reflected a considerable lapse in strategic judgment on Mahathaya's part and exposed a significant deficiency in planning and military prowess within his team.

This incident significantly impacted the LTTE's public perception and image. The operation inadvertently revealed the LTTE's direct involvement despite their initial denials. Historically, the LTTE had frequently denied involvement in specific assassinations, often utilizing its propaganda tools to deflect responsibility and preserve its public image. However, the bodies of LTTE members Visu, Vigna, and Arivu served as undeniable evidence of the LTTE's involvement. This event, almost akin to an unintended exhibition, starkly exposed the reality of the LTTE's tactics, undermining their attempts to portray themselves as a peace-loving organization amid ongoing negotiations with the Sri Lankan government.

The assassination also highlighted the LTTE's contradictory actions. On one hand, they were engaged in peace talks, while on the other, they were executing high-profile assassinations. This inconsistency raised doubts about their true intentions and commitment to peace, suggesting a deceptive strategy of feigning peace negotiations while continuing to engage in acts of violence.

Moreover, this incident drew strong international criticism and led to increased isolation for the LTTE. The assassination of a prominent political leader during peace negotiations was perceived as a direct attack on, and a significant setback to, the peace efforts in Sri Lanka. The global community condemned this act, viewing it as an aggressive move that significantly hampered the prospects of resolving the conflict in the country.

While there are individuals loyal to both Amirthalingam and Prabhakaran who contend

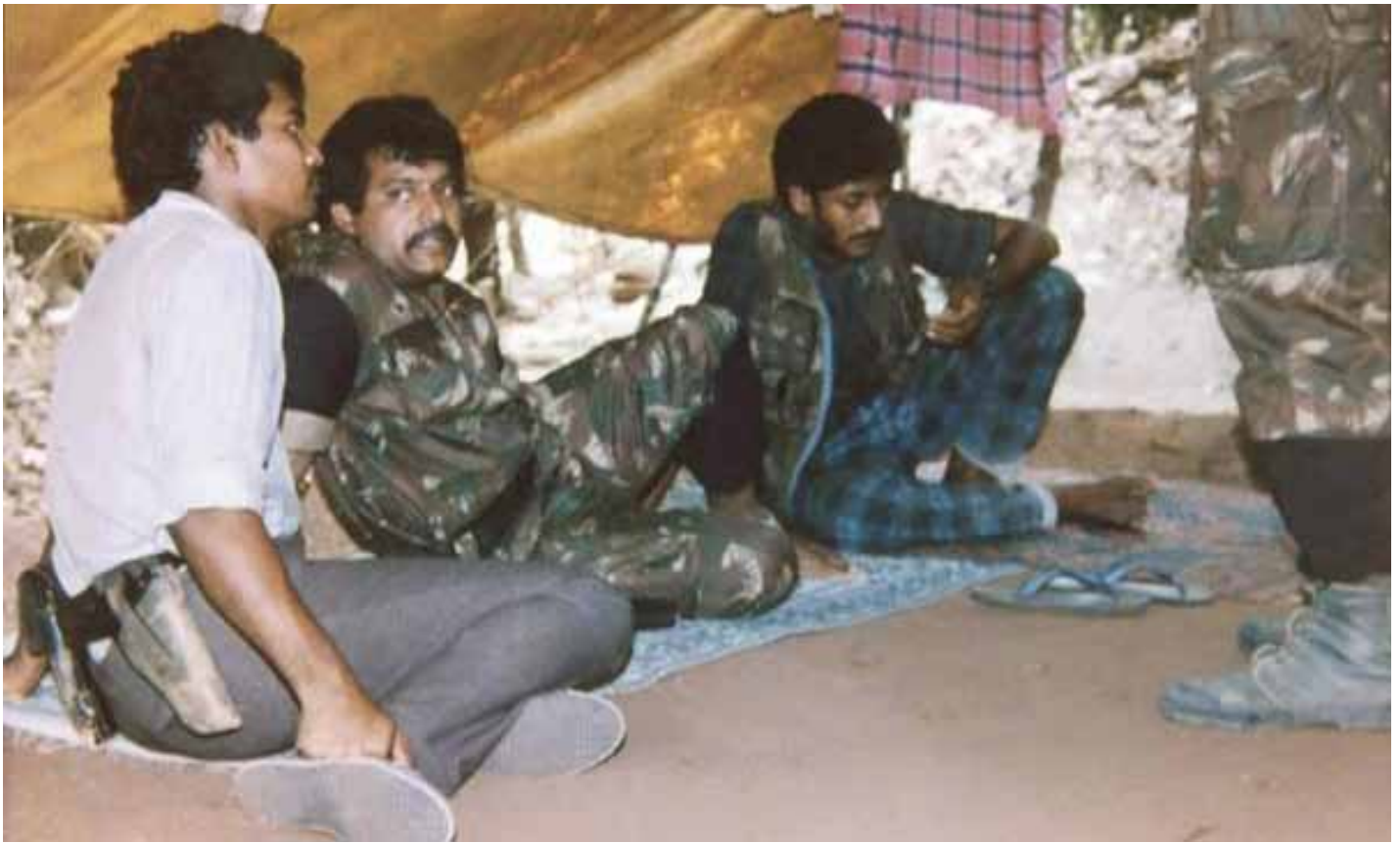
that Amirthalingam's murder was orchestrated and executed by Mahathaya independently, without the consent of LTTE supremo Prabhakaran, former senior leaders of the LTTE disagree with this assertion. In conversations with the Jaffna Monitor, these ex-leaders have described such a claim as absurd. They argue that given the hierarchical structure of the LTTE, it would have been impossible for Mahathaya to plan and carry out a high-profile assassination like that of Amirthalingam without direct orders from Prabhakaran. The organizational framework of the LTTE was such that operations, especially those of significant magnitude and impact, required approval and directives from the top leadership.

Credible sources indicate that Prabhakaran was angered by the loss of three guards and the public exposure of the LTTE's involvement in the assassination. Despite this, he remained largely unaffected by the criticism directed towards him and the organization.

The First Great Heroes Day at Punithabhoomi: Prabhakaran's Confession on the Assassination of Amirthalingam



Lieutenant Shankar or Suresh, the first LTTE member to die in combat



From left: Prabha (who was later dismissed by Prabhakaran from LTTE), LTTE Leader Prabhakaran, and Pottu Amman at the Punithabhoomi Base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu.



Prabhakaran with his trusted lieutenants Pottu Amman, James, and Bhanu in Punithabhoomi.



Prabhakaran along with Kolathur Mani, a Tamil nationalist leader from Tamil Nadu, at his Punithabhoomi base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu, during peace talks with the Premadasa government



Prabhakaran with his wife Mathivathani at his Punithabhoomi base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu



Prabhakaran along with Anton Balasingam at his Punithabhoomi base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu, during peace talks with the Premadasa government.

A few months after the assassination of Amirthalingam, the LTTE observed its first annual "Maaveerar Naal," or Great Heroes Day, on November 27, 1989. This date was chosen by Prabhakaran to coincide with the anniversary of the death of Selvachandran Sathiyathan, alias Lieutenant Shankar or Suresh, the first LTTE member to die in combat on November 27, 1982. Prabhakaran selected November 27 as Great Heroes Day to remember and honour all the fallen LTTE fighters.

The first Great Heroes Day was a sombre and restricted event, with the highlight being an emotional speech delivered by Prabhakaran to his followers in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu, where he had established his temporary camp. The specific site of the speech was known as 'Punithabhoomi' or 'sacred land' in Tamil. This area, designated within the Nittakaikkulam base, was more than just the location for the speech; it was also where Prabhakaran, along with his loyal bodyguards, resided. Interestingly, the Base where Velupillai Prabhakaran lived was named 'Punitha Bhoomi' by Prabhakaran himself.

During the first Great Heroes Day speech, an LTTE member who was present and later spoke to the Jaffna Monitor recalled that Prabhakaran acknowledged responsibility for the assassination of Amirthalingam. Interestingly, this part of his speech was subsequently edited from the video cassette circulated among the Tamil Diaspora. The source conveyed that Prabhakaran justified the assassination by stating that although Amirthalingam had initially supported the Tamil Eelam cause, he ultimately betrayed it. In his speech, Prabhakaran emphasized the seriousness of

such a betrayal, declaring that anyone who betrays the Tamil Eelam cause, including himself, deserved to be killed.

Mahathaya's Tribute to Visu and Its Implications

Initially, the LTTE did not include the men who assassinated Amirthalingam and were subsequently killed by his bodyguards in their Maaveerar (Great Heroes) list. However, in early 1990, while peace talks with the Premadasa government were still ongoing, Mahathaya visited the home of Visu, an LTTE operative killed at Amirthalingam's house, in Nellyadi to offer condolences to his parents. During this visit, credible sources suggest he was confronted by Visu's parents about their son's exclusion from the Maaveerar list. Emotionally driven, Mahathaya responded by publicly posting a condolence notice for Visu and posthumously promoting him to the rank of Major. This act was significant because, at the time, the LTTE was still vehemently denying any involvement in Amirthalingam's assassination. Therefore, Mahathaya's actions were interpreted as an implicit admission within the LTTE of their role in the killing. This incident was particularly notable as it suggested a divergence in approach between Mahathaya and Prabhakaran. Credible sources indicate that Mahathaya's decision to independently honor Visu without consulting Prabhakaran created uneasiness in Prabhakaran's mind. Known for his insecure nature, Prabhakaran likely viewed Mahathaya's independent action as a challenge to his authority and control within the organization.



LTTE Leader Prabhakaran with LTTE's Controller for Finances Tamilendi and Col. Shankar, founder of the air wing of the LTTE.



Singer Thenisai Sellappa being awarded a gold coin with the Tiger's emblem by Prabhakaran, with poet Kasi Ananthan in the middle, wearing a Tiger's uniform.

Inside the LTTE: Flattery, Surveillance, and Power Play

Contrary to the popular belief that Prabhakaran was indifferent to praise or criticism, credible sources disclosed to the Jaffna Monitor that he valued and often encouraged commendation. These sources noted that key figures in Prabhakaran's inner circle, including Pottu Amman, Col.



'Holser' babu

Shankar, Tamilselvan, and others, were known to frequently engage in what appeared to be excessive flattery towards their Leader.

This inclination for flattery was further highlighted in an incident shared by a former LTTE member with the Jaffna Monitor. On Prabhakaran's 50th birthday on November 26, 2004, Babu, alias 'Holser' Babu, the chief of Cheran Vanipam, an LTTE business outlet, organized a massive Pongal ceremony to mark the LTTE chief's birthday. Some LTTE members criticized Holser Babu's lavish Pongal celebration for Prabhakaran's 50th birthday as overly sycophantic and wasteful. They discreetly shared their disapproval among trusted circles within the LTTE, wary of potential repercussions. Interestingly, our source, who was with Prabhakaran at the time, revealed that when Prabhakaran learned about the grand Pongal

ceremony, he reacted with visible happiness and delight, indicating his appreciation for such grand gestures.

Colonel Shankar: The LTTE's Infamous 'Thagaadu' and His Effects on Mahathaya

Colonel Shankar, in particular, was widely known for his flattery attitude towards his Leader. In the Sri Lankan Tamil context, the terms 'Thagaadu vaithal' (தகடு வைத்தல்) or 'Anduthal' (அண்டுதல்) describe acts of sneaking or snitching. Shankar earned the nickname 'Thagaadu' Shankar or 'Andal Master' for his tendency to snitch on others within the LTTE to his boss. Even today, former high-ranking LTTE officers, whether living in Sri Lanka after rehabilitation or those who have escaped abroad, still refer to him by the moniker 'Thagaadu' Shankar in their conversations. To write this series of articles, I engaged in an extensive discussion with a former high-ranking member of the LTTE. Throughout our conversation, this individual repeatedly referred to Shankar as 'Thagadu' Shankar. The consistent use of this nickname, which essentially means a snitch or informant, highlights Shankar's particular reputation and perception among his peers in the LTTE.

Shankar reportedly harboured a dislike for Mahathaya, although the reasons are known only to Shankar himself. Credible sources revealed to the Jaffna Monitor that Shankar systematically reported negative



Prabhakaran being interviewed by Anitha Pratap, with Anton Balasingam and Shankar aka 'Thagadu' Shankar present.

information about Mahathaya to Prabhakaran. This snitching likely influenced Prabhakaran's perceptions and decisions regarding Mahathaya.

A valuable source shared an intriguing anecdote with the Jaffna Monitor, revealing an incident highlighting the internal dynamics and trust issues within the LTTE leadership. The incident occurred during a period of peace with the Premadasa government. 'Thenisai' Sellappa, a well-known Tamil folk music exponent and staunch supporter of the LTTE, visited an LTTE-controlled area from India. One of the events organized by the LTTE took place on the city grounds in Vavuniya in front of the Vavuniya court. Mahathaya was giving the introductory speech at the stadium. During this event, the source encountered Shankar, who had a friendly rapport with the source. He pointed to Mahathaya and remarked, "Michael made a mistake worthy of killing him." Mahathaya was also called Michael, but only by a few people within the LTTE, including Shankar. This statement piqued the source's curiosity, prompting further inquiry.

Shankar then disclosed critical operational details about the LTTE's internal communication system. He explained that in those days, every LTTE base had a yellow box where fighters could directly write letters to their Leader, Prabhakaran. These letters were meant to be confidential and directly delivered to Prabhakaran without any intermediaries reading them. While in the Jaffna region, a dedicated LTTE cadre loyal to Prabhakaran was appointed to collect these letters from each Base, this system was not feasible in more remote areas like the Vanni region. In these places, the Base in charge, who had a key to the yellow box, was responsible for collecting and forwarding the letters to Prabhakaran. According to Shankar, Mahathaya violated this protocol by opening and reading these letters before they reached Prabhakaran, a significant breach of trust and loyalty in the eyes of both Prabhakaran and the LTTE.

The source believed that Shankar, known for his tendency to snitch on Prabhakaran, would have undoubtedly informed him about this incident. This report would have further increased the resentment



From left: LTTE Member Rahu, Deputy Leader Mahathaya, Tamil Nadu Politician Vaiko (Vaiyapuri Gopalsamy), LTTE Leader Prabhakaran, Prabhakaran's Bodyguard Thiyagu, Yogi, Prabhakaran's Chief of Bodyguard Sornam, Kiddu, Pottu Amman, and Banu at the Punithabhoomi Base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu.

and insecurity that Prabhakaran already harboured towards Mahathaya. Our source believes that this event implies Mahathaya's readiness to defy Prabhakaran, showing a willingness to breach established protocols and ignore Prabhakaran's orders. Such actions represented a notable departure from the strict loyalty and obedience demanded within the LTTE's hierarchical framework.

Balasingham's Reservations About Mahathaya

Anton Balasingham, the chief strategist of the LTTE, also harbored a dislike for Mahathaya, as revealed by sources close to the LTTE. Affectionately known within the organization as Bala Anna, Balasingham had specific reservations about Shankar and Mahathaya despite his occasional differences with various figures, including Prabhakaran. Credible sources indicate that Balasingham's distrust and disbelief in Mahathaya might have influenced the mindset of the LTTE's Leader, Prabhakaran. An interesting story shared by our source highlights Balasingham's influence. Following Mahathaya's execution, Prabhakaran was considering appointing Shankar as the new head of the political wing. However, Balasingham, who strongly opposed both Shankar and Mahathaya, intervened. His intervention was crucial in convincing Prabhakaran to select Thamilselvan as the LTTE's political commissar in 1994.

Pottu Amman's Ascendancy and Mahathaya's Decline in the LTTE

Sources closely associated with Mahathaya describe him as somewhat immature in many aspects. His nature as a people person rendered him highly emotional, and he was known for harbouring grudges. Like a child, this tendency to take offence quickly led to him ceasing communication with other leaders within the LTTE. Figures like Shankar, Anton Balasingham, and other prominent members developed a dislike for Mahathaya primarily due to these childish behaviours.



From left: LTTE Leader Prabhakaran, LTTE's Head of Arms Procurement Kumaran Pathmanathan alias KP, with Anton Balasingham and Shankar at the Punithabhoomi Base in Nittakaikkulam, Mullaitivu

Another individual who disliked Mahathaya within the LTTE was Pottu Amman, the intelligence chief of the LTTE; however, in the case of Pottu Amman, his dislike for Mahathaya was not just a matter of personal animosity. Credible sources conveyed to the Jaffna Monitor that Pottu Amman's aversion towards Mahathaya was driven by his own agenda. They point out that Pottu Amman had a particular plan concerning Mahathaya. Observing the LTTE's history, they mentioned a clear, direct correlation between the decline of Mahathaya and the ascent of Pottu Amman within the organization's hierarchy.

Pottu Amman assumed leadership of the LTTE's intelligence wing in mid-1988, holding the position for 21 years until the LTTE's military defeat in May 2009. While his role as second-in-command was never formally declared, he effectively held this position by 2009. Initially, during Mahathaya's tenure as the LTTE's number 2, Pottu Amman's presence within the organization was less prominent. However, with the gradual decline of Mahathaya's influence, Pottu Amman's stature within the LTTE grew, ultimately leading him to become the de facto second-in-command.

This article will be continued in our next issue, where we delve further into the story.



Sri Lanka's Software Sector Faces New Challenges with VAT Implementation

Sri Lanka's recent decision to impose an 18% VAT on locally produced software, effective from April 2023, marks a significant shift from its previous 0% rate. This move, part of a broader tax reform, has stirred concerns among industry insiders about its impact on Sri Lanka's goal of becoming a tech hub akin to Silicon Valley.

Sources indicate that the CEO of a well-known taxi-hailing app company expressed concerns about the VAT, suggesting that it might compel Sri Lankan software companies to move their startups overseas, where they wouldn't face similar tax liabilities. This sentiment is shared across the industry, with many pointing out that the VAT is just one of several factors influencing such decisions. Ongoing issues like power outages and better job opportunities abroad have been driving factors in this trend.

The rationale behind the VAT imposition and its potential effects on the IT sector have been topics of heated discussion. Some experts argue that while seeking financial equilibrium, the government must also consider the impact of such taxes on the burgeoning tech industry. They highlight that Sri Lanka's tax policy changes have been frequent compared to other countries known for their tech industries.

For instance, tech hubs like Ireland and Singapore have thrived partly due to their favorable tax policies. Ireland's low corporate tax rate has attracted major tech firms, while Singapore offers a variety of incentives to nurture its tech sector. These countries provide examples of how supportive tax environments can foster technology innovation and growth.

In contrast, Sri Lanka's new VAT policy on software could potentially hinder the growth of its tech sector. Technical consultants and industry experts urge the government to focus on creating a supportive ecosystem for tech startups. This includes not only tax policies but also infrastructural support and a stable business environment. They emphasize that Sri Lanka is competing in a global market, where other countries are also vying to become IT hubs.

As Sri Lanka heads towards its next review of the VAT policy in 2024, the government faces the challenge of finding a balance. The decision on VAT will not only impact revenue generation but will also play a crucial role in determining the country's position in the global technology landscape. The success of Sri Lanka in becoming a South Asian Silicon Valley will significantly depend on how these policies evolve and support the tech industry's growth.

The Majestic Flamingos of Thatuvan Kotti: A Call to Action



By: **Our Environment Correspondent**

Photos by: **Dev Mukund**

In Kilinochchi's war-affected yet naturally rich landscapes, a natural marvel unfolds each year that remains relatively hidden from the global eye. The region of Thatuvan Kotti, located at Elephant Pass in Northern Sri Lanka, becomes the stage for a breathtaking display of nature: the arrival of thousands of Greater Flamingos. This spectacle, captured through the lens of local wildlife enthusiasts like Dev Mukund, highlights an urgent need for wildlife conservation and sustainable tourism development in the region.

The Majestic Flamingos of Thatuvan Kotti

Each year, in a migration that spans hundreds of kilometres, flocks of Greater Flamingos paint the skies and waters of Thatuvan Kotti with vibrant hues of pink and orange. Originating mainly from India, these birds are drawn to the area's water bodies, enriched with prawns and algae post-monsoon. With their stately stance and striking colours, the sight of these elegant birds creates a natural spectacle like



no other, transforming Thatuvan Kotti into a haven for bird watchers and nature lovers.

A Natural Wonder Overlooked:

Despite the grandeur of this annual event, Thatuvan Kotti's flamingo congregation has not received the attention it deserves, especially from the tourism and conservation sectors. The lack of awareness and infrastructure development has left this natural wonder largely uncelebrated and vulnerable.

Challenges Facing the Flamingo Population:

The flamingos, while a visual treat, face several threats in their temporary home. Illegal hunting, although prohibited, continues due to insufficient monitoring and enforcement. This practice not only endangers the flamingo population but also disrupts the ecological balance of the region.



The Need for Sustainable Development:

In contrast with other parts of Sri Lanka, where tourism is heavily promoted, Thatuvan Kotti's potential remains untapped. The absence of essential amenities such as hotels and proper transportation infrastructure limits the region's growth as an eco-tourism destination. This lack of development hinders economic opportunities for the local community and impedes efforts to protect and study these magnificent birds.

A Call to Action:

The Sri Lankan government and the Northern Tourism Board must recognize the ecological and economic value of Thatuvan Kotti's flamingo migration. Investing in sustainable tourism infrastructure, enhancing conservation efforts, and promoting global awareness could transform Thatuvan Kotti into a thriving eco-tourism hub. This development would not only provide economic benefits to the local population but also ensure the protection of the flamingos and their habitat.



Drugs, Money, Politics:

Jaffna's Arrest Exposes a Troubling Connection



BY:
David Ignatius

In a recent shocking turn of events in Sri Lanka's Jaffna district, the arrest of a young man with close familial ties to a sitting Member of Parliament has cast a spotlight on a disturbing reality. This arrest, involving illegal narcotics worth a staggering 10 crores rupees, not only underscores a critical drug problem among the youth but also exposes a tangled web of influence and corruption weaving through the upper echelons of Jaffna society.



A Tangle of Influence and Corruption

Belonging to a family with significant clout, the arrested individual's connections to a prominent Jaffna MP paint a troubling picture of the intertwining of illicit activities and political power. The family, clouded by various allegations, including past involvements in political turmoil, stands at the center of this scandal, epitomizing the complex interplay of power and illegality that plagues the region.

The Legal Maze

At the heart of the legal battle is the classification of the narcotics involved. Owing to legislative loopholes, this substance, "Kush," remains in a legal gray area, complicating the prosecution's efforts and potentially enabling the suspect to evade stringent penalties. The involvement of a high-powered legal team underscores the significant influence wielded by certain factions in Jaffna, challenging the very foundations of legal fairness.

Media Under the Microscope

The local media's subdued approach to this high-profile case raises critical questions about the independence of journalism in the region. The tempered coverage reflects the considerable sway of the implicated family and their political allies, hinting at a concerning level of control over public narratives and media freedom.



Jaffna at a Crossroads

This episode marks a pivotal moment for Jaffna. It reveals the disturbing extent to which influential families armed with political connections can manipulate societal dynamics and adversely affect the youth. The limited media coverage and the case's broader implications underscore an urgent need for decisive action from both governmental authorities and civil society groups.

As Jaffna stands at this crucial juncture, the path forward must be paved with a resolute demand for transparency, accountability, and justice. It is only through a concerted effort and a steadfast commitment to these principles that Jaffna can begin to dismantle these deep-seated illegalities and chart a course towards a more just and equitable society.



Sayanthan: Lawyer or Predator?



A young man previously arrested under the stringent provisions of the Terrorism Prevention Act was granted bail by the Chavakachcheri Magistrate's Court on December 28. His arrest on November 27 in Kodikamam during the Maaveerar Day commemoration occurred because he was wearing a T-shirt featuring the image and emblem of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the infamous leader of the LTTE.

The case initially met with a stern response from the authorities but saw a shift when the Attorney General's Department consented to the youth's release on bail. Tharmakulasingam Anjanan, representing him in court, successfully argued for his release. However, this legal victory was overshadowed by a controversial episode involving former Provincial Council member and Tamil National Alliance member Sayanthan.

Following the arrest, the youth's parents, in a desperate bid to secure their son's release, sought assistance from Minister Douglas Devananda. They shared a distressing account of their interactions with Sayanthan, who, despite publicly inciting support for the LTTE cause, allegedly exploited their plight by demanding a hefty fee of 20,000 rupees for his legal services. The financially struggling family had to pawn their jewelry to meet this demand.



The irony of Sayanthan's actions sparked widespread outrage, mainly as the story unfolded. A video of the youth's parents discussing the incident with Minister Devananda went viral on social media, leading to public indignation. Accusations flew thick and fast against lawyer-politicians like Sayanthan, suggesting ulterior motives in their actions. There were allegations that they were inciting innocent youths into arrestable activities as part of a profitable scheme. This incident has raised serious ethical questions about those who claim to defend a cause only to exploit those they purport to represent.



Captain

PART 01

Translated from the original Tamil short story *kaptan* (கப்டன்) by Shobasakthi. The original story is available at his website www.shobasakthi.com



Translated by:
eluttukkiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

In January of the year Nineteen Hundred and Ninety One, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam nicknamed Manuel *Ponrāsā* as ‘Captain.’ This incident unfolded thus:

In June of Nineteen Ninety, Tigers had laid siege to Jaffna fort. Hundreds of government army soldiers were caught inside the fort. Tigers had cut off all supply lines to the fort. They were trying to scale the fort walls using light cranes. There was a secret passage to enter the fort from the sea. Tigers on small boats tried to breach the fort via this secret passage. Tiger artillery kept on pounding the fort walls and perforating them. It was a battle of life and death for the soldiers. They fought day and night to defend the fort. In July, two helicopters that attempted to airdrop food and medicines were shot down by two Tigers. By the middle of August, having completely depleted their ammunition and food stocks, it appeared that the army had no option other than to surrender to Tigers. The day after the Red Cross had informed the government that they would facilitate the arrangements for the surrender, rescue forces from the army landed by air and sea in *Urāththurai*,

14 kilometers southwest of the fort. Those forces started slowly advancing towards the fort. Launching rockets, and dropping bombs from aircrafts, the army inched forward from *Urāththurai*.

Tigers had not anticipated that the army would land in *Urāththurai*. There was no other way to move their forces from Jaffna or *Vanni* to *Urāththurai* than by sea. The sea was already under the control of the Sri Lankan navy. Every inch of the sea was burning. The skeletal Tiger forces that were in *Urāththurai* started falling back, advising the people along the way, “run!”

Around midday that day, they entered the village of Suruvil and sped through in their vehicles telling, “the army will enter this village by tomorrow morning, run.” With the army at one end, the fort at the other, and the sea on either side, people scampered, looking for a fifth side. Two youths from Suruvil, twenty-year-old Christy and eighteen-year-old Bosco, went to their father and said, “*aiyā*, we are going to escape to India by boat.” Fear of life pervaded their faces.

Rubbing his left cheek with his right hand, *Ponrāsā* regarded his sons intently. Finally, he declared, “there is no need, you can remain here, the army will not come here.”

The sons were overcome with sadness and disappointment. In their minds, it was a battle for life and death. *Ponrāsā*'s nonchalant demeanor began to irritate them. The younger Bosco mustered some courage to assert, “the boys from the movement have told everyone to evacuate, the army will be here at any time.”

Ponrāsā, who was standing on the front yard of the hut, sat on his haunches in the sand, and told his sons to do the same. He smoothed the sand with his hand and hurriedly started to draw a map. His scarred index finger tore through the sand to create lines. “This is *Urāththurai*, this is where the army has landed now,” his finger zoomed to one end of the map. “This is the fort,” his finger zipped over to the other end. “The army will traverse the northern road, hugging the northern coast, via *Karampaṇ*, *Nāranthaṇai*, *Saravaṇai*, *Arāli* Junction, *Maṅkumpāṇ*, *Allaippiddy*, and *Maṅdaitivu* Junction, to make their way to the fort. Their target is to reach the fort, not capturing you two weaklings. It is unlikely that they will turn left to reach Suruvil. Even

if they do, I will protect you. I know Sinhala, I will talk to the soldiers,” said *Ponrāsā*.

Christy, the elder boy, raised his voice slightly and said, “the soldiers will arrive in murderous rage; they will not talk to you, perhaps they will spare you because you are old, but they will kill us.” He turned to look at his mother who was sitting at the hut’s entrance. His eyes pleaded with her.

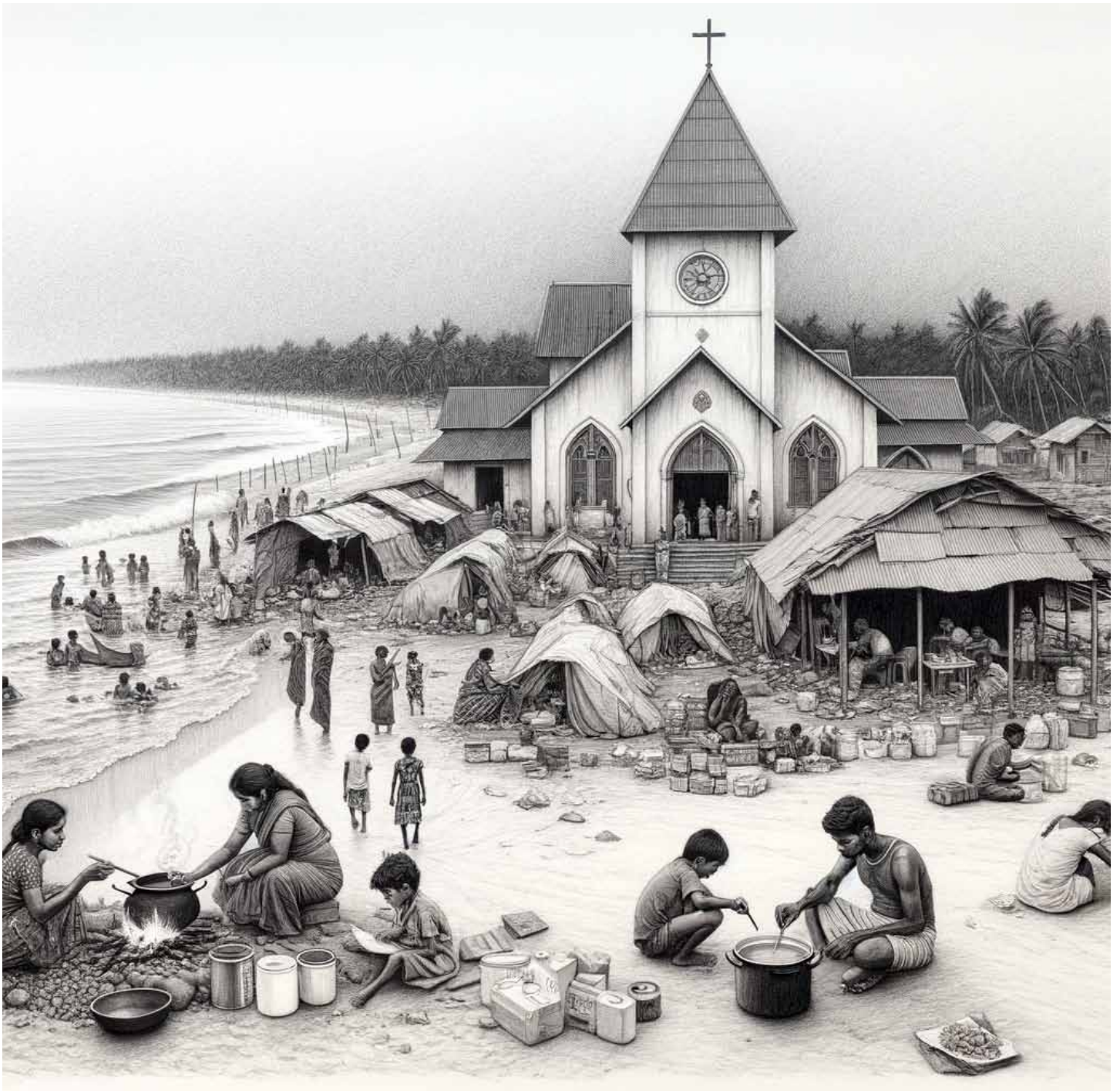
Ponrāsā propelled himself up from the ground only using his strong legs. He cleared his throat noisily at length and spat out the phlegm. Then he asked haughtily in a voice tinged with a little anger, “how will you go to India? Will you swim all the way?”



The elder boy hung his head and said, “boats are leaving for India from *Vēlaṇai*'s *Mukkuvathurai*. They are charging three thousand rupees per person.” The younger boy piped up, his voice quavering, “the movement is charging two thousand rupees departure tax for each person leaving for India. If we have ten thousand rupees, we both will go to India.”

“Ten thousand! You have that kind of money?” *Ponrāsā* asked flippantly. “Didn’t *akkā* send money?” muttered the elder boy.

“Oh, is that so! Your mother and I can give you that money and starve,” he said as he whipped off his shirt drying on the clothesline, draped it on his shoulder, folded his *vēṭṭi* at knee length, and left. He paused at the gate and called out



in a loud voice “*dēy* Christy, *dēy* Bosco, listen carefully... for twenty years I have protected you and raised you. I also know how to protect you going forward.” He put on his shirt standing on the street.

People thronged along Suruvil roads with their boxes and pots and pans in tow. The big question was where they should run to. They could not discover that fifth direction. The chatter was that they should walk four kilometers eastwards to seek refuge as a crowd at the Shrine of our Lady of Good Voyage in *Chāddy*, known as the *Chāddy Māthā* church. *Ponrāsā* cursed them, “cowards who fear for their lives.” The people of that village generally did not want to cross *Ponrāsā*. If there was ever a little quarrel or friction, *Ponrāsā* would show up in front of

his antagonist’s house every evening without fail to yell at them. If he was quarreling with two people at the same time, he would draw up a timetable and stick religiously to it, visiting the first enemy’s house after the morning toddy drink and the other enemy’s house after the evening drink. The villagers called him ‘exhausting’ *Ponrāsā* because he wears them out.

When *Ponrāsā* inquired how far the army had advanced, no one knew the answer. *Ponrāsā* declared to those present that he would go find out and started walking westwards. No sooner did he go out of their view, than they started murmuring that ‘exhausting’ *Ponrāsā* is going to capitalize on the fact that everyone had fled their houses, to steal coconuts or chickens from abandoned houses.

He entered the village of Saravaṇai and surfaced by the eighth mile post on the northern road. Until Saravaṇai, he encountered people occasionally. But the eighth milepost was completely empty. Notably, the fact that the toddy tavern at that junction was closed made him furious. With his strong leg, He forcefully kicked the empty barrel standing in front of the tavern. The barrel somersaulted thrice and fell on the ground.

As he walked eastwards through the paddy fields that nestled the northern road, the ground began to gradually disappear in the embrace of the reddish twilight of dusk. When he saw a bomber appear abruptly in the sky, he rushed to hide behind the lone palmyra tree. As the bomber circled, he, too, circled the palmyra. Suddenly the circling bomber disappeared. He then heard the sounds of bombs exploding over on the side of the northern sea.

Poṇṛāsā came as far as *Nāranthaṇai* junction. People had already fled their houses. Although the sound of explosions was incessant, there was no sign of the army advancing. “The idiot Sinhalese are lighting crackers out of fear,” he mumbled to himself. He thought that the army was not going to advance anymore in darkness, they would resume at dawn. *Poṇṛāsā* turned to walk back to the village of Suruvil. He lengthened his stride with his long legs, so that he could walk faster, thinking that he should tell everyone to sleep in their own homes overnight and reassess the situation in the morning.

When he reached Suruvil at around eight in the evening, the village was enveloped in darkness. Not a creature was stirring on the streets. He cleared his throat and spat out. Then he walked towards his hut. When he saw no light in the hut, he stood outside and called out to his wife, “*Gñāṇammā... Gñāṇammā.*” There was no response. With anger welling up inside him, he entered the hut and lit a lamp. The hut was empty. He could see that the bedding, bags, pots, and pans had all been taken away. He surmised that the mother and sons had gone to *Chāddy Māthā* church. When he thought of the fact that they fled despite his advice earlier that evening, he was incensed, burning up within and without. He rooted around the soil in the southern corner of the hut to retrieve the buried can. The money was intact. He reburied it tightly. He reached into the cadjan wall of the hut to fetch a bottle of arrack. It was half full. He drank one half of it in one gulp, wrapped the bottle up in a piece of paper, and hurried eastwards in search of his wife and sons. He told himself that he would intercept them while they were still on their way and beat them to pulp. The roads were deserted all the way. He entered some of the neighboring houses. They were empty, too. By the time he reached *Chāddy Māthā* church, it was eleven at night.

The church was full of people from the seven or eight neighboring villages. They lay down inside the church hall as well as outside on the sand. Cooking was in progress by the well behind the church. *Poṇṛāsā* hurried through the crowd angrily, searching for his wife and children, murmuring from time to time through gritted teeth, “these promiscuous bastards, running around having abandoned their houses.” When he saw *Gñāṇammā* leaning against a pillar, he grabbed her by the arm and dragged her out. When they reached a darkened spot, he gave her a thundering slap across her cheek. She remained silent when he asked about the whereabouts of Christy and Bosco. When he grabbed her throat to strangle her, her neck was sticky with tears. *Poṇṛāsā* jerked his hands away from her and growled, “where are Christy and Bosco?” She said, softly, “they have left for India.” *Poṇṛāsā* slowly sat down on the sand. He took the bottle out of the paper wrapping and gulped the remaining arrack. Then he stood up, grabbed his wife’s hand and rushed back to the church.

In the church hall, *Gñāṇammā* gave him the rice parcel. *Poṇṛāsā* fiddled with the rice, his brows furrowed, deep in thought. His eyes were red from anger and intoxication. “How did they get the money to go?” he asked. “I gave them my four-sovereign gold chain,” said *Gñāṇammā*. When *Poṇṛāsā*’s brawny hand slapped *Gñāṇammā* again, her face was caked with rice and gravy. “Give me your ear studs,” he held out his hands. Without a word, *Gñāṇammā* removed her ear studs with blue gemstones. Father *Varapragāsam* had gifted them to her when *Poṇṛāsā* married *Gñāṇammā*. He held them out in his palms to inspect them, tucked them into his lap, and stood up to go out. He could sense that his feet were unsteady. He shook his head and started walking towards the south.

By the time *Poṇṛāsā* arrived at *Vēlaṇai* Mukkuvathurai, it was past one in the morning. His sons had said that this was where the boats to India left from. The deserted beach basked in the late-night moonlight. He punched the ground a few times with his left foot, saying “Motherfuckers have left.” Then he paced up and down the shore a couple of times. Along the shore, in knee-deep water, a row of boats had been tied up. He looked around to see if there was anyone in any of the boats. He leapt into one of the boats to examine it. Inside the blue plastic boat, there were fish nets and support poles. The part where the engine would have been mounted, stood empty. The boatman must have anchored the boat on the shore and taken the motor with him.

Standing on the boat, he peered at the sky, working out the direction using the stars. Over in the northern sky, a row of stars stood in formation as if someone had drawn a straight line through them. He clearly saw the direction towards



India. He removed his shirt and held it up to flutter in the wind so that he could gauge the wind direction. The shirt fluttered northwards. He threw the fish nets overboard and hauled the anchor into the boat. Then he started driving the boat towards India by pushing with a quant pole. The boat appeared to move. But soon *Ponrāsā* was exhausted. Sighing, ‘motherfucker, how do they drive this thing forward?’, he sat on the prow of the boat. Although he was not pushing with the quant pole, he observed that the boat was still moving at a moderate pace. He stood up to place the two quant poles on the prow, and with herculean effort tied them up firmly using a rope he found so that they stood parallel to each other. He removed his *vētti* and tied it across the poles as a makeshift sail. Now the boat moved rapidly in the direction of the wind. He sat on the prow, lit a cigar, and peered northwards into the black

night. He resolved to himself that he would not return to Sri Lanka from India without his sons Christy and Bosco. When he felt thirsty, he did not regret having forgotten to bring water. Instead, he scooped up sea water and gargled with it. He secreted the blue-gem ear studs into the inside of his underwear, fearing that someone might filch it when he landed in India. As he had heard that once you passed *Kachatīvu*, you could see the light from the *Rāmēswarem* temple tower, he waited for this light to appear. He felt nauseous, his breath reeking of arrack. This was his first long sea voyage. He had heard that one’s first voyage is typically accompanied by nausea. So, he was not too worried. But he felt his head spin. The retch that emerged from his mouth had the stench of arrack. He leaned back on the prow and fell asleep without realizing it.

(To be continued in Part 2...)

Roaring Pleasantly, Leading Boldly:

The Pat Cummins Story

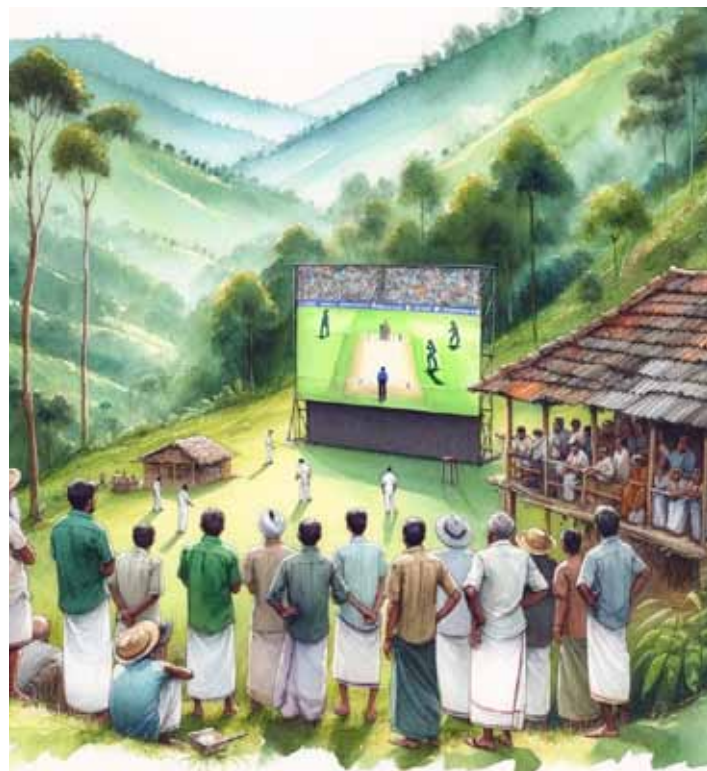


By:

Dr. Aravinthan Arunthavanathan

As the cricketing world moved on from the recently concluded World Cup, a defining image emerged. It was Pat Cummins, metaphorically roaring like a lion, albeit a pleasant one, after dismissing Virat Kohli. This moment, set against a backdrop of stunned fans clad in blue, captured the essence of the tournament.

Pat Cummins is indeed a paradox, much like the phrase 'roaring like a pleasant lion.' He stands out among contemporary cricketers, not just for his skills but also for his demeanour. With the looks of a James Bond protagonist, Cummins naturally commands attention. His unexpected elevation to the leadership of the Australian team brought an unforeseen impact. This was during a time when Cricket Australia was keen on improving its image,



especially following the controversial departure of Tim Paine. Cummins, a fast-bowling captain, is a rarity and often faces unique challenges. His journey so far has been marked by significant hurdles, yet how he has navigated these challenges has set him apart, reshaping what it means to be an Australian cricketer.



Cummins's leadership was truly tested with the dismissal of former coach Justin Langer. Facing criticism from cricket veterans, he chose to support his younger teammates, mirroring the solidarity shown by past Australian greats for Langer. His leadership shone through in both triumphs and thoughtful gestures, like being mindful of Usman Khawaja's presence during the Ashes victory celebration.

His leadership qualities were further evident in his defence of David Warner against criticisms from Mitchel Johnson, showcasing his unwavering support for his team. Warner's subsequent performance in Perth, scoring a century against Pakistan, was a testament to the positive impact of Cummins's support.

Cummins's decision to prioritize national commitments over participating in the IPL 2023 was a significant move, especially considering the lucrative opportunities he forfeited. This decision is particularly influential in an era where many emerging players prioritize franchise cricket. Cummins's handling of the World Cup final against India was exemplary. Choosing to bowl first, he defied conventional strategies, demonstrating a blend of courage and clear-headed strategy. His fast bowling masterclass, culminating in the dismissal of Kohli, was a dream-like execution of his plan. Notably, his pre-match media interactions showcased his ability to turn challenges to his team's advantage, exemplifying masterful leadership.

Jaffna's Amuruthaa Joins England U19 Women's Cricket



The England Women's Under-19 cricket team is set to embark on a tour of Sri Lanka in March-April 2024, where they will compete in a Tri-Series against the host nation and Australia. The series will feature T20 and 50-over formats, with further details on dates and venues to be confirmed later. A significant highlight of the series is the inclusion of Amuruthaa Surenkumar, a Tamil woman of Sri Lankan descent from Jaffna, in the England squad. This announcement marks a historic moment, as Amrutha is the first woman from Jaffna to be selected for an international women's cricket team. Her father, Surenkumar, is a former cricketer from St. John's, renowned for his record-breaking individual score of 145 runs in the Jaffna Big Match against Jaffna Central College.

In 2021, at the young age of 14, Amuruthaa achieved a remarkable feat by becoming the youngest player ever selected for an academy squad in the new regional women's cricket competition. This competition involved eight teams from across England. Amuruthaa was chosen from a pool of 100 nominated players to join the inaugural Sunrisers Academy. This academy is part of a hub representing nine counties throughout London, the East, and the MCC, catering to players up to 19. Her selection into this prestigious academy was a significant milestone in her cricketing journey, paving the way for her current achievement as the first woman from Jaffna to be selected for an international women's cricket team.

The image of Cummins, metaphorically roaring like a pleasant lion against a sea of blue, speaks volumes. It represents not just a pivotal cricketing moment but also his journey as a leader and the way he has faced challenges.

In describing Cummins, 'roaring like a pleasant lion' is paradoxically apt. He embodies an unconventional Australian spirit, making him both admirable and relatable. Beyond his charismatic appearance, he is a visionary, capable of transforming the image of Australian Cricket, aligning with the aspirations of its board.

The respect he has garnered was evident when the Barmy Army, traditionally fierce rivals, paid tribute to Cummins's ailing mother. It underscores the profound impact Cummins has had, bridging divides and earning respect from even the most unlikely quarters.



DR. ARAVINTHAN ARUNTHAVANATHAN is a multi-talented professional, renowned in both medicine and cricket writing. A graduate of Colombo Medical Faculty, he contributes significantly to the pharmaceutical industry, focusing on Medical Marketing and Business Development. He is also known in Sri Lanka as a cricket writer, particularly for his Twitter analyses @Cricket_decoded. Additionally, he is a proficient public speaker with interests in cognitive sciences, medical, and management education. His blend of scientific knowledge, sports insight, and communication skills distinguishes him in both medical and sports domains.

Pimple Patrol: Sri Lankan Airlines Quest for Spotless Air Hostesses



SriLankan Airlines recently embarked on a mission to find the crème de la crème of air hostesses, and let's just say the criteria were... quite specific! Out of a whopping 6,000 hopefuls who dreamed of soaring the skies, only 196 made the cut. Why? Well, Aviation Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva had a checklist: clear skin, an unblemished midriff (saree-ready, of course), and a mastery of English to chat up the passengers.

Picture the scene: a sea of applicants, each more eager than the last, only to be turned away for a tiny pimple or a mark on their midriff – ouch! The Minister, playing the role of a beauty and language guru, advised future applicants to start their pimple-fighting regimen and English lessons

practically in the cradle. He lamented that many, especially from rural areas, missed this memo early on.

The interview room must have been quite the stage, with candidates putting on their best show of beauty and eloquence. But alas, if your English wasn't up to snuff, you were out of the flying game. The Minister stressed that chatting and assisting passengers in English is a must in the high-flying world of air hostesses.

While SriLankan Airlines might not be the biggest contributor to the country's economy, Minister de Silva is keen to bump up those numbers. His recipe? Start young with your skincare and English books, and who knows, you might just be the next star of the skies!



Celebrating Unity through Language: Naminioya Central College Hosts First-Ever Tamil Language Festival

by:
Our Matale Reporter

In an inspiring display of cultural unity, Naminioya Central College in the Wilgamuwa region of Matale District recently hosted its inaugural Tamil Language Festival. Celebrated on December 21st, this groundbreaking event marked a historic moment in the school's history and signalled a hopeful step towards greater regional cultural harmony.

Among the 42 schools in Matale District, Naminioya Central College is the sole institution offering Tamil as a second language. The festival, a brainchild of the



school's Tamil language students, was orchestrated under the expert guidance of Matale Suneetha Thero, a Tamil Buddhist monk dedicated to fostering cross-cultural understanding.

The festival was a vibrant tapestry of Tamil culture, featuring activities like Pongal celebrations, Bharatanatyam dance performances, and melodious Tamil songs. The participation of all 1,200 students at the school in these events was a testament to the school's commitment to cultural exchange and an eye-opener for Sinhala students. For many, it was their first immersion into the rich heritage of Tamil culture.

Adiyar Vipulanada Swamy, a Saiva Swami from Jaffna, participated as the chief guest.



A pivotal moment of the event was when Matale Suneetha Thero addressed the gathering. He underscored the importance of exposing Sinhala students to Tamil culture, asserting that such initiatives are crucial for cultivating understanding and peace between Tamil and Sinhala communities. He advocated for the replication of this event in Sinhala schools and called for Tamil schools to celebrate Sinhala cultural events similarly. In a poignant remark, Matale Suneetha Thero observed that adherence to the values of Buddha could be the key to resolving ethnic tensions in the country.



This Tamil Language Festival at Naminioya Central College was more than just a celebration of language and culture; it was a bold statement on the power of education and cultural activities in bridging community divides. The event set a precedent, hoping to inspire other schools across Sri Lanka to embrace such initiatives. As a celebration of unity and understanding of Sri Lankan diversity, the festival illuminated the path towards a more cohesive and peaceful society.





Balancing Health and Economy: Sri Lanka's Challenge Amidst a New COVID Wave

■
by:
Our Reporter

The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised alarms about an uptick in respiratory diseases, including COVID-19 and its new sub-variant JN.1, particularly in Southeast Asia. This new variant, classified as a variant of interest due to its swift global spread, has made its way to various states in India. The mutation is believed to have increased the virus's ability to evade immunity, sparking significant concern among public health experts. Yet, there's a consensus that there's no

cause for panic as current vaccines appear effective in preventing severe illness and death.

In Singapore, the re-emergence of COVID-19 cases has led to the reinstatement of mask mandates. This move underscores the need for other countries to adopt similar preventative measures to combat this elusive virus. Sri Lanka, in particular, is urged to intensify its response to this emerging health emergency and implement preventive strategies promptly, avoiding its usual delays.

Another global outbreak of COVID-19 could be devastating, not just in terms of human lives but also

Geethanath's Mission Impossible



Geethanath Kassilingam, previously serving as the Coordinator Secretary for former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and a close ally of Rajapaksa's son Namal, has been appointed to the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) amidst the party's latest restructuring. A Jaffna Tamil, born in Jaffna and raised in Colombo, Known for his school ties with Namal, Geethanath is stepping into a crucial role at a time when the party, known for its staunch Sinhala nationalist stance, is grappling with lost credibility in Sinhala regions due to the economic blunders of Gotabaya Rajapaksa during his presidency.

Geethanath has been given a task akin to selling meat during the Nallur Temple festival. His mission? To ramp up the party's charm in the Tamil-majority Northern and Eastern provinces, where SLPP's support is as scarce as good governance in Maithripala Sirisena's 'Yahapalana' (good governance) government.

With such a slim fan base in these Tamil-speaking areas, Geethanath's role is as challenging as finding a needle in a haystack. But considering his background as the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Rehabilitation Issues there, he might have the right strategies up his sleeve. It's a wait-and-see game to determine if he can make the improbable happen.

for the world economy, which is already in a precarious state. According to Fitch Ratings' latest Global Economic Outlook Report, the world's growth is expected to plummet to 2.1% in 2024, impacted by monetary tightening, China's property downturn, and the stagnation of the eurozone economy. Developing countries, including Sri Lanka, currently facing a severe economic crisis, would be hardest hit by a global economic downturn.

The risk of the new COVID-19 variant spreading to Sri Lanka is real, particularly given its proximity and interactions with India, where the variant is already present. Initially, COVID-19 infections tend to be sporadic, but they can escalate rapidly, leading to waves of cases that might necessitate drastic measures like lockdowns—something Sri Lanka can ill-afford amid its economic turmoil.

Health experts in Sri Lanka are advocating for public mask-wearing, a sensible precaution. However, mere advisories may not suffice. The Sri Lankan health authorities need to swiftly evaluate the situation and take decisive actions, potentially making mask-wearing mandatory again and resuming COVID testing while ensuring transparency and avoiding corruption, which has plagued the Health Ministry in the past.

In these trying times, politicians must refrain from exploiting the crisis for their own ends, such as delaying elections under the guise of public health. The country's economic recovery, achieved at a tremendous social cost, could quickly unravel in the face of a national health emergency, further straining the already overburdened state coffers and healthcare system. The previous government's downfall was significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, a history Sri Lanka cannot afford to repeat.

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