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Symposium 2014

20th June 2014
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Message

I am pleased to convey my best wishes to the members of the Sri Lankan Majlis Qatar on the occasion of holding the annual "Symposium".

The SLMQ continues to be active in organizing many events for the benefit of its members and the Sri Lanka Community in Qatar. I believe that it had a very successful year in 2013.

Your flagship event the "Symposium" with the participation of an invited guest speaker has become an important date in the calendar of the members of SLMQ. I hope that all your members will participate in it and benefit from the discussions.

I wish the members of the Majlis and their families every success.

Jayantha Palipane
20.06.2014



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President's Message



In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful

All praise be to Allah. May Peace and Blessing be upon His final Prophet and Messenger.

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmathullahi Wabarakathuhu!

The recent attacks on the Sri Lankan Muslim community by politically motivated religious extremist elements have left all peace loving Sri Lankans shocked and unable to comprehend such systematic heinous crimes committed while the country is coming out of a 30 year war. Muslims have been living peacefully in these areas for several centuries as an example of coexistence in a plural society. According to some notable historians, there are historical evidences of ancient Muslim settlements as early as the 7th century in Ceylon.

We pray to Almighty Allah to save all Sri Lankans and our motherland from the dangerous extremist elements working against the unity, development, peace and prosperity of our motherland Sri Lanka.

It is a great honour and privilege to be part of the team for organizing the prestigious event, the Annual Symposium, and to have brought all the members, sponsors and well-wishers of the Sri Lankan Majlis – Qatar to witness this most remarkable annual feature. This gives an opportunity to look back on achievements & accomplishments in the past and to discuss future projects that would be beneficial to the community.

I wholeheartedly thank the past presidents, the Executive Committee (Exco) for selflessly working as a team and members & their families for supporting in every opportunity. On behalf of the Exco and the entire membership, I express my gratitude & appreciations to our Patron, H. E. the Ambassador to Qatar Mr. Jayantha Palipane for his support and guidance that was available at any time.

After the theme 'Coexistence among communities' was finalized for the symposium 2014, we did not have any doubt who the keynote speaker should be, but whether he would accept our request is what was uncertain. However, Dr. Jehan Perera was kind enough to accept our invitation and agreed to deliver the keynote speech. On behalf of the Sri Lankan community living in Qatar, I thank Dr. Jehan Perera.

On behalf of SLMQ, I express my gratitude & appreciation to Ooredoo - our corporate sponsor and all well-wishers & sponsors for your continuous support and help in serving the community in Qatar and back home in Sri Lanka. I pray that Almighty Allah will accept our sincere efforts and guide us in the straight path.

Ameerudeen Moulana
President, Sri Lankan Majlis – Qatar (SLMQ)

20.06.2014



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Our sponsorship of SLMQ is great opportunity to enable people to connect with one another, and we hope to help continue SLMQ's strong tradition of charitable, social, cultural, educational and religious events for Sri Lankan expats in Qatar.

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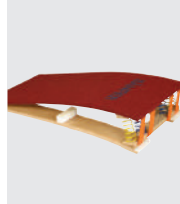
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(2004, 2005)



Mr. Mohamed Mansoor
(2006, 2011)



Mr. Hilmy Ghaffoor
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Mr. Ameerudeen Moulana
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Summary of the keynote speech by Dr. Jehan Perera

The Importance of Peaceful Engagement-The Muslim Example

I wish to begin my presentation by thanking the Sri Lankan Majlis of Qatar for having invited me to be the keynote speaker at this symposium on the theme of “Coexistence among Communities.” Your decision to invite me to this symposium is an indicator of your sense of community and sense of belonging to the whole of Sri Lanka. Whether we are Muslim, Tamil or Sinhalese, it is entirely right and proper to believe we are one community. We are a plural society in Sri Lanka. Pluralism means that we have the right to believe that our way is the best, while accepting that multiplicity of cultures, faiths and traditions in the same public space have a similar right to coexist. The challenge is to learn to respect values of others that may not be compatible with, and may even be in conflict with our own values.

The Muslims are an integral part of the Sri Lankan people. They are present in every part of Sri Lanka’s social, political, economic and cultural spheres. According to Professor Dewaraja, there is evidence that throughout the Anuradhapura period to the Kandyan kingdom, Muslims advised the Sinhala kings on trade policies. As early as the 13th century, Abu Uthman was sent to Egypt to negotiate trade relations. This intermediary role became especially important during the Kandyan period when the Dutch isolated the kingdom by controlling the sea coast. Muslim traders with overseas contacts became the means of communication with the outside world.

With regard to the peaceful nature of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, former Chief Justice Sarath Silva noted that “A salient feature of the Muslims of Sri Lanka and their organizations is that they never organized themselves for armed insurrection or destruction. They are a peaceful ethnic group spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. They interact with other religious and ethnic groups cordially interlinking those cultures with their own culture while protecting their own culture.” There was no Muslim participation in the two Sinhalese insurrections that took place in 1971 and again in the 89-1988 period. Although there was limited Muslim participation in the early stages of the separatist campaign in the North and East, this did not take root.

The Muslim ethos in facing political issues has been to engage in dialogue and accommodation rather than in confrontation. This ethos derives its strength from the trading and business traditions of the community and also through a pragmatic recognition that there is no alternative to coexistence with other communities. Inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations between Muslims and others at the community level are largely amicable and free of animosity. Those who have experience of inter-religious work, including myself, will speak of the positive response they get from adherents of all religions, and in particular the Muslims. As they are generally bilingual and conversant in both Sinhala and Tamil languages, the Muslims can be a bridge between the Sinhalese and Tamil people. They also share the Tamil apprehension about the erosion of minority rights; at the same time they share the Sinhalese commitment to a united and undivided country.

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Ingredients:

- 200g Tilda Brown Basmati rice
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 175g raw tiger prawns, peeled
- 250g cherry tomatoes or regular tomatoes, halved

For the quick Coriander Pesto:

- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 tsp salt
- 80g fresh coriander, leaves and stalks
- 30g whole blanched almonds, toasted
- 6 tbsp good quality extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 25g wild rocket leaves

METHOD:

- 1) Place rice in a large saucepan of boiling salted water. Simmer over a medium heat for 25 minutes until tender, then drain and return to the pan over a low heat for 1 minute or 2 to dry out the rice a little. Tip into a large serving dish.
- 2) For the pesto, place garlic, salt and coriander in a food processor and blend until finely chopped. Add almonds and blend again until coarsely chopped. Take out the blade and stir in olive oil and lemon juice.
- 3) When the rice is almost ready, heat oil in a frying pan over a high heat and add prawns. Stir fry for 1 minute and then add tomatoes and stir everything together until prawns are pink all over and tomatoes are softened.
- 4) Stir the pesto into the rice whilst still warm so it coats all the grains and add half the tomatoes and prawns.
- 5) Serve on to dishes topped with the rocket leaves and the extra prawns and tomatoes.

Nutritional Information (per 60g serving)
282 calories
Total fat: 14g
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Summary of the keynote speech cont...

The Importance of Peaceful Engagement-The Muslim Example

In this context, civil society organizations need to work with government agencies in building links between the diverse communities that will create better country-wide understanding of the continuing grievances of the different communities. One important tool for confidence building would be the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) appointed by the government. The LLRC report calls upon civil society to play an active role in addressing issues of social and national integration. These include the formation of inter-religious committees at the grassroots level and people-to-people exchanges. The National Peace Council, of which I am a member, is doing this work in eight districts of the country. We have found that the Muslims amongst these groups are the most enthusiastic and supportive of our work.

The evidence of positive relations and the desire for such positive relations between the ethnic communities exists in Sri Lanka. It gives reason for hope that the basis for unity and joint problem-solving exists. What is lacking is the political leadership that shows the way forward to people. So far the mutual acts of good will and assistance are at the micro level. Civil society groups which are usually small, and with limited resources, tend to act at the micro level. As a result they can best play a supplementary and complementary role to that of the government. But their importance remains high, as they provide a vision of what is possible and what the future can be. If small civil society initiatives can achieve positive results on the ground in overcoming ethnic differences, we can expect the government can achieve much more once they are imbued with the appropriate vision and political determination.



Jehan Perera is the Executive Director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka. The organization was established in 1995 as an independent and non partisan civil society organisation to support the Government of Sri Lanka in its efforts to peacefully and politically resolve the conflict that led to war. Its commitment today is to facilitate a citizen's movement for post-war reconciliation. He is on the board of several civil society organizations, including the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections and the Centre for Communication

Training. He writes a regular weekly political column for the Sri Lankan media, including the Island, Sunday Leader, Thinakkural and on a monthly basis for Lanka Monthly Digest. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Harvard College, a Bachelor of Law degree from the Open University of Sri Lanka and a Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School.



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Hon Dudley Senanayake's Speech at the formal opening of BMICH Building - May 30 1965

Muslim culture needs no introduction from anybody. Right through the long history, right through the pages of history, Muslim culture has left a deep impression throughout the world - Europe as well as Asia. Today too we know the tremendous impact Muslim culture and Muslim thought have on world affairs. In our country, we are well aware of the part played not only by Muslim culture and religion but by that community in the development of this country; particularly, the trading activities of Ceylon, and, therefore, we are beholden to that community for the tremendous service it has rendered this country. In fact, when we think of the long history for the fruition of this project - namely this building, I am rather amazed, because unity of purpose has been a distinguishing feature of the Muslim community of Ceylon. I think they set an example to the rest of us all. Unity, I suppose, follows from the fact of the stress they embark on any venture, the wholehearted support of the community is generally forthcoming and I have no doubt, are long, we will see the completion of this building.

In Ceylon, I am sorry to say, that the respect for the cultures and religions of the different communities that inhabit this land has not been too conspicuous in the recent years. Our parlous state today in very many activities in which we should have forged ahead in the recent years is entirely due to the lack of this understanding and harmony among the different communities and religions that call this country their home. I do hope that era is over and we realize that true democracy cannot exist in a country without the rights and the religions and the cultures of all who call this land their home, have their rightful and proper place. That is another fact of democracy that people seem to forget and I do hope that any endeavor to thrive and build up movements based on division and hatred will meet with the fate, the disastrous fate that such objectives rightly deserve. When we think of religions, surely we are not deluded when we realize that religion, whatever religion it may be, was never meant to divide, but unite mankind. What are the cardinal principles of all religions? I think, unity, mutual respect, brotherhood. They are, in one way or another, enshrined in the noble principles of all religions, but for some unaccountable reason religion that was meant to unite has been prostituted, I say, for the purpose of division.



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Introduction to SLMQ

VISION

To lead the Sri Lankan Muslim community as a forum in it's unity, prosperity and growth.

MISSION

To bring all Sri Lankan Muslim families resident in Qatar under a single united group and conduct activities of educational, religious, cultural and charitable backgrounds.

OBJECTIVES

To develop and strengthen cordial ties among families, communities and other associations, thereby deriving greater benefit for the community

Educational and religious Activities

- Skill Development Programs
- Seminars and Workshops
- Competitions for Children and Adults
- Quran and Islam Teachings
- Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimages

Charitable Activities

- Scholarships for needy Students
- Janaza assistance
- Assistance to needy families
- Charity bazaars

Social and Welfare Activities

- Sports Events
- Eid Celebrations
- Family Gatherings/Picnics
- Job Bank

Membership

All Sri Lankan Muslim families resident in Qatar are eligible to apply for membership by filling an application form available with Executive Committee members.

Everyone else can obtain membership of SLMQ Bachelor Wing (B'Wing)

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 2014



Standing from left: Mr. Abdul Wahab, Mr. Mohamed Akram, Mr. Sabir Ahamed, Mr. Sahal Alavi, Mr. Lafir K. Lebbe
Seated from left: Mr. Riza Mohamed (Treasurer), Mr. Mohammed Lafir (General Secretary), H.E. Jayantha Palipane (Patron),
Mr. Ameerudeen Moulana (President), Mr. Ashkaf Mohammed (Vice President)

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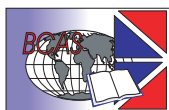
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Website – <https://sites.google.com/site/alhudafund/>

Message from Al Huda Foundation

Al Huda Foundation (“The Foundation”) was established in November 2006 by a group of Sri Lankan professionals living in the State of Qatar. It was formed with the primary objective to persistently pursue to uplift the education of needy Muslim students in Sri Lanka. The Foundation is dedicated and determined to help these needy and talented students by providing them with much-needed financial assistance to continue their higher education. Initially commencing with a handful of members, *Alhamdulillah* the Foundation has grown steadily in size and content during the past six years with current membership strength of over 100 active members.

Primary Objective

To provide financial assistance to needy candidates who are identified by the members eligible for assistance to continue their higher education.

Progress update

The Foundation currently provides scholarship for more than 85 students across major education streams including commerce & finance, medicine, islamic studies, engineering and arts. By the grace of Allah, as of now 40 students have benefited from the scholarship and have successfully completed their higher education and are self sufficient now, helping the Sri Lankan society at large.

In 2013, The Foundation has joined hands with SLMQ to commence scholarships for vocational training programs for needy Sri Lankan youths. We continue, together with SLMQ, to explore more diversified opportunities to educate and uplift the Sri Lankan community.

Finally, we would like to thank the President, the Executive Committee and the Members of the SLMQ for their continuous support in our activities. We wish the SLMQ Symposium 2013 to be a grand success.

For more information please visit our website: <https://sites.google.com/site/alhudafund/>

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Report of the General Secretary



In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful. All praise and thanks belong to almighty Allah (SWT) alone, the most high, the most merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the last and final messenger of Allah (SWT).

It is with great pleasure that I present the Report of the Secretary on behalf of the Sri Lankan Majlis Qatar's (SLMQ) Executive Committee for the Annual Symposium 2014.

SLMQ, as the pioneer Community Association in Qatar leads the community programs for the Sri Lankan Muslim community with a committed mission and a clear vision. The activities of the Majlis include programs that cater to the members' families, Sri Lankan youth in Qatar, nationally significant endeavors and endeavors that are significant to the host nation, Qatar.

The symposium is the marquee event of the SLMQ calendar. The event has been traditionally graced by prominent speakers. The Annual Symposium 2013 was held on Thursday, 09 May 2013 at Coral Hotel Doha. The keynote speaker for last year's event was Mufthi Ismail Ibn Musa Menk, a world renowned Islamic Scholar from Zimbabwe who delivered the keynote speech.

SLMQ co-hosted the Independence Day celebrations of the host nation Qatar in association with Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Interior, Qatar. As part of its contribution to the host nation, SLMQ also has its Annual SLMQ Challenge Trophy Cricket Tournament which is held on National Sports Day of Qatar. The current year's edition was held on 11 February 2014 at Old Indian School grounds.

Ramadan 2013

Ramadan is the most important month in SLMQ's calendar. SLMQ lined up several programmes during the holy month of Ramadan for its members and the Sri Lankan community at large in Qatar in 2013. The Ramadan programmes included an Ifthar for the members of SLMQ which was held at CORP Doha Suites Hotel and the Ifthar which was held in association with the Sri Lankan Embassy in Qatar at the Embassy premises. The Sri Lankan community Ifthar was held at Al Arabi Stadium with the guest speaker being Ash Sheikh A.C. Agar Mohamed, Deputy Director, Jamia Naleemiyya, Beruwala, Sri Lanka. The Eid prayer was conducted at the Embassy premises for both festivals of eid.

The SLMQ Annual Cookery Challenge for the families of SLMQ was staged with grand success on 23 November 2013 at Gulf Paradise Hotel. There were more than 50 contestants participating in the competitions. The evening was also enlightened with a live salad preparation competition for all having men, boys and girls as separate categories.



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Report of the General Secretary

contd...

As participants for different categories, there were six men, seven boys and eight girls who contested in the live salad preparation competition. Mrs. Rahuman, Principal of Stafford International School (Sri Lankan School Doha) was the chief guest and gave away the gifts to the winners.

The annual event to mark the independence day of Sri Lanka, the "Independence Day Competitions 2014" was held on the 14th February 2014 at the Sri Lankan Embassy premises. As in the previous years, the competitions covered events such as Drawing, Colouring, Prepared Speech and Essay Writing which were all conducted in Junior, Sub Junior, Intermediary and Senior age categories. The event was well attended by more than 160 contestants from various schools in Qatar. The Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the State of Qatar, His Excellency, Jayantha Palipane graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Mrs. Sithara Khan, The Deputy Chief of Mission of the Sri Lankan Embassy in Qatar and Lt. Al Ghanem, from the Ministry of Interior were the Guests of Honor.

Doha Islamic Convention was a milestone event of the SLMQ in 2013. SLMQ joined hands with Abdulla Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center (FANAR) and KATARA on a spiritual journey titled "Reviving Our Spirit" - Doha Islamic Convention 2013. Mufti Ismail Menk and Dr. Muhammed Salah were the guest speakers while Shaikh Saad Noumani revived the audience with his exclusive recitation of the holy Quran at the Katara Amphitheater. The convention was held for two days on 27th & 28th December 2013. Nearly 4,000 people attended the event on both days.

Several career guidance programs were conducted for the youth in Qatar by the SLMQ B-Wing. Various programs including Islamic lectures were also conducted throughout the year with visiting scholars as well as with scholars within Qatar which were immensely useful to the participants.

We are indeed grateful to Almighty Allah for the success of these events and wish that Almighty Allah grants us the same and more success in future.

I warmly welcome all our members and invited guests and value your esteemed presence this evening for the 13th Annual Symposium of SLMQ.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members, Sponsors, Affiliated Bodies, Sister Organizations and all government authorities in Qatar for their continued support in all our endeavors.

MOHAMMED LAFIR
General Secretary - SLMQ

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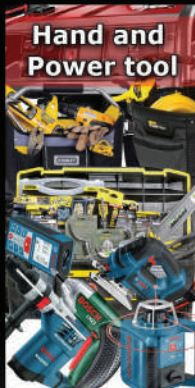
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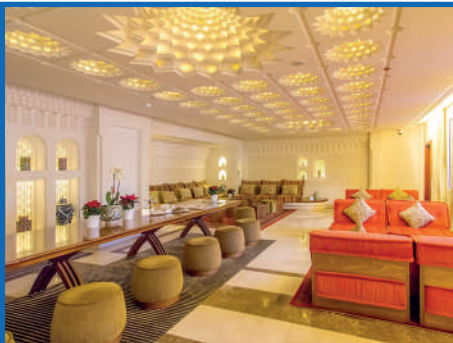
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“Sinhala-Muslim Unity must be preserved” - by S.D. Bandaranayake

Reported in the Sunday Observer of Oct 30, 1983

Extracted from the MICH Souvenir IV 1977-1982

We have still not got over the shock of the traumatic events of last July. It was a tragedy that we failed to avert. It was a tragedy that did the country no good. The duty, an inescapable duty, to the country is to see that another disaster of that nature never overtakes our people. Another holocaust is something unimaginable.

But, are some forces, anti-national forces, planning another disaster?

That question arises because there appears to be a mischievous campaign through anonymous letters, through a whispering campaign to threaten the Muslim people. They are being threatened with violence similar to that we went through last July. Whoever the people involved, they cannot be patriotic-minded Sri Lankans.

I am happy that the government is alert to this threat and has warned, through its official spokesmen, that mischief makers or subversive elements would be severely dealt with.

The Minister of Trade and Shipping, in Parliament, warned the country about the new strategy of the Northern terrorists of spreading fire and terror to the South. And one of the modus operandi appears to be to create diversion between two friendly communities. Therefore, it is not a purely Muslim issue, a threat to the Muslims - but a national issue aimed at subverting the unity and dignity of our country. It is a challenge to the nation. Therefore, this time we should close ranks and be vigilant so that these anti-national forces will not succeed in their wicked schemes.

The Muslims are peace-loving people. They have lived as a law-abiding people, for centuries, with the Sinhalese. A close bond of friendship and understanding has existed between the Sinhalese and Muslims. They have, not only, lived among the Sinhalese, but also, with the Sinhalese. Travel to any part of the country - from Devinuwara to Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and the Vanni - you see them engaged in their peaceful pursuits of co-existing with the Sinhalese neighbors.

To my mind, the co-existence of the Muslims for so long, many, many centuries, with the Sinhalese is the best repost to the virulent campaign unleashed abroad that the Sinhalese are intolerant and bent on eliminating the minorities in their midst. Under no circumstances should our people fall prey to the designing terrorist elements determined to cause damage to the country by poisoning this happy relationship of two communities.

The task before any patriotic minded Sinhalese before all Sri Lankans, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or other considerations, is to consolidate this unity and take it forward to include all our peoples belonging to all races, religions, and languages.

That is the prime task. You turn your back on that when you turn your back on the country and our people's well-being.

The Sinhalese people have no grouse against the Muslims. The Muslims have never called for the division of Sri Lanka. On the contrary, they have opposed division and stood by the Sinhalese.

I have read that the Prophet of Islam has said, "Hubbul Watani min Al Iman". It means, "love of one's country is a part of one's faith". I, as a Sinhalese feel proud that my Muslim brothers have lived up to this noble precept of their great Prophet.

Obviously, the faceless anonymous letter writers have different views and different goals. They want to further blacken the image of the country. "The Tamils have been 'taught a lesson', now teach the Muslims a 'lesson'.. Let the world know that there is no place for minorities in this country." How could the country's good name be devalued than by going at another minority people?

After the country's good name was damaged in July, it was left to a Muslim to put the picture right. I am happy about that Foreign Minister Mr ACS Hameed told the United Nations General Assembly that what happened in July was tragic, but it was "an aberration in our civil and political life".

He had credibility because he is a Muslim. He told the world assembly, "No government in Sri Lanka has tried harder to resolve this problem by accommodating the claims of the minority Tamil community. For the efforts and concessions made one the one hand, the government is under severe criticism by the majority Sinhalese community."

"On the other hand, the representatives of the Tamil minority proclaim to the world outside that their civil and human rights have been violated and therefore their answer is a separate state. Perhaps this dissatisfaction of both majority and minority communities is in itself evidence that the government has been both balanced and impartial in handling of this difficult question."

He declared, "The Muslim community and a substantial section of the Tamil people residing in the North-West, East, North-East, and the South of the country have demonstrated in repeated elections that they are vehemently opposed to separatism or a division of the country..."

When I read this convincing speech I got in touch with him in New York and said that the speech should be debated in Parliament to record our appreciation of his formidable defence of our common motherland when we needed support from the international community. He graciously declined.

It was a proud moment for Sri Lanka when a member of a minority community, a Muslim defending the good name of the country in an international forum. It meant, primarily, two things. The people of this country have faith that a Muslim leader could present an unbiased picture of the country to the world, and, that the world knows that the Muslim people of this country are loyal and contended.

I want to warn the Sinhalese that the forces that are itching to pit the Sinhalese against the Muslims and raise it to the level of an international agitation should be thwarted.

The country is facing, both, nationally and internationally, problems that require unity of all peoples so that they could be resolved without any diminution to the country's sovereignty. Fomenting conflict between the Sinhalese and the Muslims will not amount to contributing to that unity.

Muslims have always been loyal to the country. That is a great quality in the people who profess Islam. Wherever they have made their homes, they have always shown loyalty and patriotism to the country of adoption. I must tell you that the patriotism of the Muslims in Sri Lanka has never been in doubt. They were in the forefront of all our struggles resisting the foreign invader, winning back our lost freedom and consolidating the newly won freedom.

They fought in the armies of Mayadunne when the Portuguese colonialists were trying to entrench themselves in the country. Every resistance movement of the Sinhalese, whether it was Kotte based or Kandy based, had Muslims in their ranks. So much so that they became targets of persecution under all the colonial powers, Portuguese, Dutch, and British.

We are familiar with Albuquerque's massacre of Muslims in Goa because they put up resistance to Portuguese penetration. The conquest of Goa was complete in 1510. After Thanksgiving Mass, Albuquerque, the conqueror, ordered the bloody massacre of 6,000 Muslims, men and women and children. The massacre of the Muslims of Matara in 1643 was no less heinous. All because the Muslims stood for the Sinhalese.

King Senarat settled the Muslims in the strategically important areas of the Eastern coast between Trincomalee and Pottuvil to resist the Dutch. They paid a price for this. The Dutch denied them even the freedom to practice their religion.

For a period of roughly three centuries, between the arrivals of the Portuguese, in 1505, to the departure of the Dutch in 1795, the Muslims in the Maritime Provinces underwent untold suffering at the hands of the colonialists.

The Muslims have a proud record of uncompromising resistance to the foreign invader.

Has it ever struck you that the Muslims do not even have a political party of their own? Not having a party is a matter arrived at by the Muslims after deliberation. They feel that their interests could be better served by not having such a party. They have put their faith in the mainstream political parties. Instead of seeking to manipulate the mainstream parties from "positions of strength". They believe that others when shown confidence would respond with greater confidence.

The Sinhala people have understood and responded to the Muslim people on many matters in many fields. This understanding co-operation and friendship for the greater glory of our country. We, the majority community have a duty to show the world that the Sinhala people are a magnanimous people. This is needed more so today than ever before.

The winds that blow from across the Palk Straits these days are cold winds that bring no good. The "kootams" around the tamarind trees across the arid stretches of Tamilnadu where the slogan is "Vaala Tamil Eelam", should not be dismissed as imaginative slogans and terrorist, and their South Indian patrons have many ambitious dreams. They see in fanning conflicts between the Sinhalese, on the one hand, and the Muslims and the Christians, on the other, an easy road to vivisecting our country.

The Sinhalese in particular should not fall for this ruse.

Sri Lanka's image received a severe battering as a result of the July violence. e cannot afford another repetition. This is the hour for all of us to put the entire interests of the country above all other consideration and to make one solid bid to unite all our peoples on the basis of patriotism. Forging the unity of all our peoples is a challenge today, not only to the statesmanship of our leaders but to every Sri Lankan.

We are, indeed, fortunate that at this crucial period we have the wise and benign leadership of President JR Jayawardena.

We should strengthen his hands if the many unresolved problems are to be solved to the satisfaction of all our peoples and continue to build a united Sri Lanka where we could live in peace, harmony, equality, and dignity.

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‘When will our displacement end?’

The plea of Muslim refugees of Northern Sri Lanka

Professor Shahul Hasbullah, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Introduction

This yet to be resolved quarter century old story is about a grief-stricken ethnic cleansing experience of around 100,000 Muslims who lived in the Northern part of Sri Lanka for centuries. This is a voice of people which has not been properly heard, a community that waited 24 years to return to their homes, appealing for help to return home with dignity, self-respect, peace and stability. The purpose of this brief note is to highlight the grievances of a community whose plights have been completely forgotten by most.

Muslims of Northern Sri Lanka – coexistence with other communities for centuries

Muslims of Northern Sri Lanka are with a distinct ethnic identity based on historical traditions. They have lived peacefully and cordially with the Tamils in northern Sri Lanka for centuries. They lived in more than a hundred small and large settlements scattered over the five districts of the northern province. Agriculture, fishing and trading were their main occupations. They married within their own community and had strong religious and cultural ties with Muslims from other villages in the Northern Province.

Forcible expulsion of Muslims from their homes in the Northern Province

The forcible expulsion of Muslims of Northern Sri Lanka by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at gun point in a calculative and schematic manner was a traumatic experience for them. On the 25th of October 1990, Muslims of Mannar were presented with a 48 hour ultimatum by the armed LTTE cadres to leave the Northern Province, abandoning all they earned and possessed, otherwise to face death. Similarly, on the 30th of October 1990, Muslims of Jaffna City (the Capital of Northern Sri Lanka) were given only a 2 hour ultimatum to leave or face death. Knowing the brutality of LTTE, Muslims fled out of the Northern Province to safeguard their lives. By November 1st, 1990, the Northern Province was without Muslims; from 75,000 Muslims who lived in five districts. This ethnic cleansing was an event that was unheard of at that time; but it still has not received due recognition, even today.

When will displacement of northern Muslims end?

With the endorsement of the United Nations (UN), the government of Sri Lanka has resettled almost all the Tamil people who were displaced during the long years of war and conflict. However, this does not hold true for the Muslims who were chased out at gun point by LTTE during the conflict. Moreover, 80 percent of displaced Muslims have continued to live in their places of displacement under trying conditions.

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‘When will our displacement end?’

The plea of Muslim refugees

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Aspirations of Muslims of the Northern Province

Northern Muslim refugees have desired to return home since their forcible expulsion. In the early years, they hoped to return home promptly, believing their displacement to be temporary. Trust remained that they would be given assistance in returning from displacement. Some have bravely returned to their areas, but their bravery has not been supported and duly respected by all those who are responsible for return and resettlement.

Continued displacement and refugee camp life

Others in displacement have waited for a peaceful situation to return home. Renewed war in the north in 1995 shattered the hopes of returning home. Many were prepared to accept a “relocation scheme” in place of their displacement, where they could live in their own land together with relatives and fellow villagers. Many consciously expressed that resettlement, for them, must fundamentally be facilitated in their places of origin.

Displaced Muslims expected that 2002 peace talks would facilitate an appropriate resettlement. Security assurance and re-construction of totally destroyed settlements were considered to be the most important requirements for return. Unfortunately, the peace talks were not successful in recognizing the district needs of Muslim returnees. The displaced Muslims lost hope in the local mechanisms of conflict resolution.

Flow of return after the end of war (POST-2009)

After the LTTE was eliminated by government forces at the end of the war, the largest barrier to the return of northern Muslims was removed. Long-desired return became a plausible option for refugees.

Approximately 65% (about 25,000 families) of all Internally Displaced Muslims (IDPs) immediately registered for resettlement in the north. The number is impressive, and illustrates a determination to return after being away from their homes for over two decades. Only about half of those who registered for resettlement actually stayed in the north with whatever shelter and basic facilities were available, whilst others returned to their places of displacement hoping to return if and when acceptable basic facilities for living are provided in the north.

As of yet, basic facilities (land, shelter, water, etc.) are not sufficient for the returnees even 3 years and 6 months after the end of war. However, Muslim IDPs and returnees remain hopeful that something tangible will happen to strengthen their determination to return to their homes.

‘When will our displacement end?’

The plea of Muslim refugees

contd...

CONDITIONS OF THE PLACES OF ORIGIN of Muslims after end of last war, 2009.

Conditions of different places of origin of Muslims of the Northern Province are the following.

An agrarian heartland (e.g., Musali DS Division) Peoples' living places were overgrown with secondary forest and infested with wild animals. Approximately 40 village tanks, educational structures and other village institutions have disappeared.

Commercial and educational centers of Muslims (e.g., Mannar Island):

A grave shortage of housing for returnees exists where original homes have been completely destroyed; a loss of land has been incurred due to sales under duress and land disputes with others. Returnees are disappointed and forced to return to their places of displacement.

Giant's Tank/Rice Bowl area (e.g., Manthai West):

Loss of land due to sale under duress has occurred in the most fertile area, and loss of homes in multi-ethnic and religious settlements such as Vidataltivu, Wattakandal, etc. have saddened the returnees.

Fishing bases that were used as bases for sea tigers (e.g., Nachchikuda/Kilinochchi):

Long years of displacement have created serious problems concerning land rights, creating a feeling of being strangers in their 'former homes'.

Heart of Jaffna Town (e.g., Jaffna Moor Street):

Returnees have been shocked to see the total destruction of their residences. The 'former glory' is faded due to complete destruction of Moor Street which was once said to be the 'most populous quarter' of Jaffna Town (Cassie Chitty, 1834). Well-known Muslims' educational institutions (Osmania and Katheeja Colleges) have become 'returnee's camps' as there is no alternative place for them to take refuge upon return.

Interior but resource rich (e.g., Mullaithivu District):

Once a place for all, a wave of Muslim returnees have seen hopes destroyed due to the absence of places to live, and opportunities for economic activity lost.

Entrance to Northern Province (e.g., Vavuniya Muslims):

Long term grievances of Muslim communities continue as their needs are not met by state officials or others engaged in welfare work.

‘When will our displacement end?’

The plea of Muslim refugees

contd...

Living conditions of Muslim refugees for 25 long years

- Several generations of the same IDP family had to live within a land limit of less than ten perch, which was common in almost all IDP settlements.
- Overcrowding led to various social-environmental problems including preventable health problems, unacceptable limitations to education, and difficult social and political situations within host communities.
- No land for expansion is available in already overcrowded environments, housing both IDP and host communities of this area.
- Economic under privilege is pervasive due to lack of income and earning opportunities.
- Tensions between IDP communities, and with other communities

The dilemma of Muslim refugees

In the places of origin: Muslims were erased from the north; they lost everything moveable and immovable at the time of expulsion. Long years of displacement elsewhere disconnected them from their homes, properties and livelihood, distanced them from ethnic relations and made them alien to their home places.

In the places of displacement:

It has become increasingly overcrowded without space for any sort of expansion. No sustainable employment and competition with locals has strained the community's relationship, portraying a bleak future.

Possible solution and action:

Facilitating return for those who can and are willing by having a comprehensive plan of action (e.g., road map/master plan) to initiate and sustain their return and building confidence with local communities (in the places of origin and displacement).

Specific Requirements

The estimated northern Muslim population at present is approximately 35,000 families. They seek to return to around 100 former community concentrations in the north. So far, 85 such Muslim concentrations have already been revived for resettlement and 22,134 Muslim families have reported to them for resettlement.

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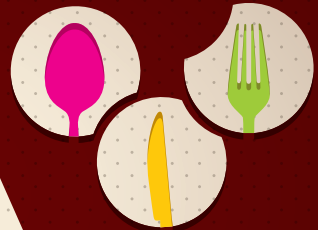
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‘When will our displacement end?’

The plea of Muslim refugees

contd...

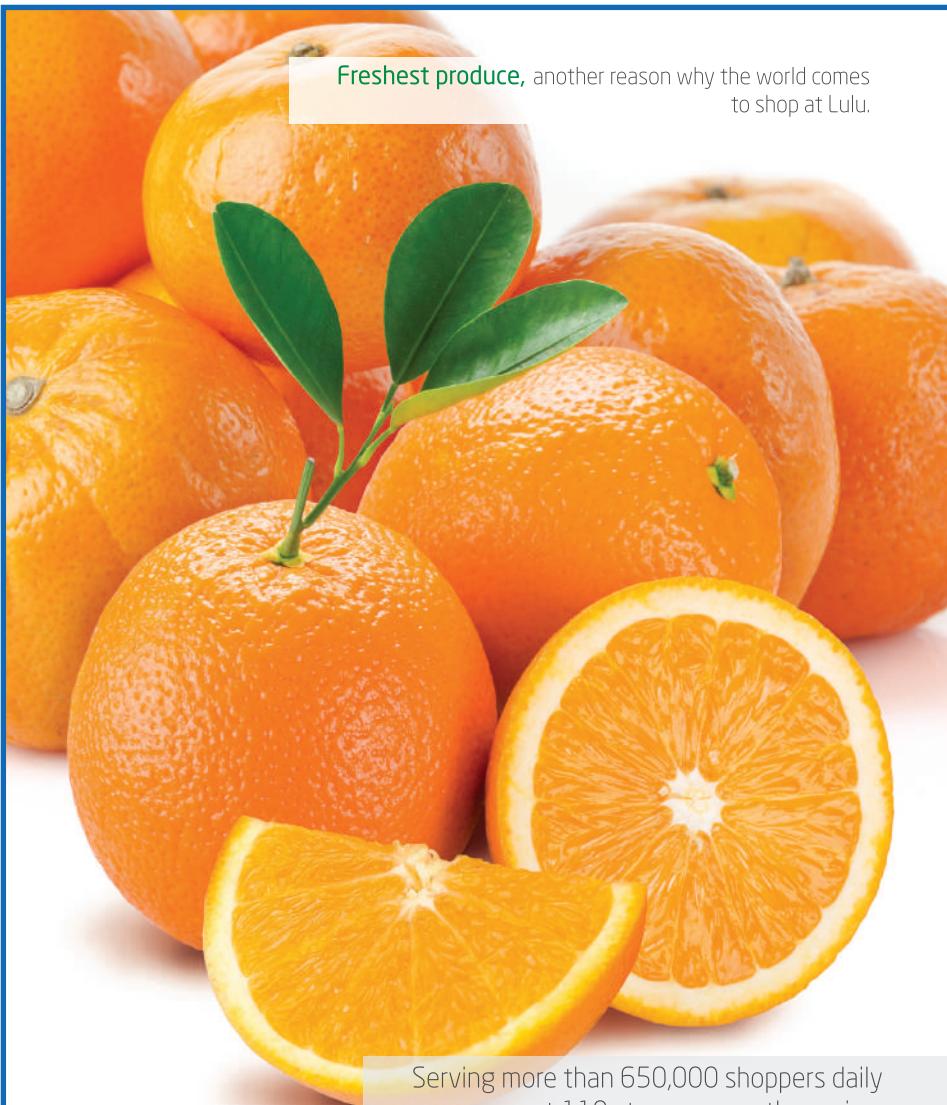
All of them are still facing multiple challenges. These include:

- At least 9,076 landless Muslim returnee families immediately need for land for housing and livelihoods
- At the moment, at least 15,399 returnee families need to be provided with shelter and other essential facilities such as water, electricity, roads and other fundamentals.
- More than 90 tanks, associated irrigation channels and other agriculture-supporting resources, which used to be prime sources of livelihood, need to be repaired.
- Another 85 Muslim concentrations to which Muslim returnees thus far have returned, are in need of provision of social (e.g., schools), medical (e.g., hospital), religious and cultural (e.g., mosques and other) facilities.
- Thousands of business and industrial establishments that were lost during or after the time of expulsion will have to be regained, repaired or assisted to be renewed (e.g., in Jaffna Town over 800 business establishments, and 60% of Mannar Town which was lost, etc.).
- Land and other ownership disputes result in denial of the rights of numerous returnees; these must be addressed. A recent example is of several land disputes and conflicts over sea beach rights in Mannar.

Appeal of the Community

The northern Muslim community appeals to the leaders and members of all political parties, national and international communities to recognize the scale and significance of their suffering in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, recognition of the confusion and complexities arising from the situation of those displaced is fundamental. They request assistance toward facilitation of secure rights to return, and regain lost assets and properties. Appropriate resettlement and an assurance of peace and stability for those returning, as well as those who have opted to remain in the places of displacement is essential. Above all, it is the desire and the request of the displaced people that a durable and just solution be reached without delay to all those who have been affected by war and conflict.

“Muslims refugees want to return home with dignity and respect. They seek your help”



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APPRECIATION

- **The Embassy of Sri Lanka**
- **Ooredoo**
- **Ministry of Interior - State of Qatar**
- **Dr. Jehan Perera - Keynote Speaker**
- **Sheikh Thani Bin Abdullah Foundation for Humanitarian Services**
- **FANAR Islamic Cultural Center**
- **Al Huda Foundation, An Affiliate of SLMQ**
- **College of the North Atlantic (CNAQ)**
- **Tharik Bin Ziad Independent Secondary School for Boys**
- **Mohamed Rusaike - Graphic Designer**
- **Shuja'deen Moulana**
- **Donors, Sponsors and Well Wishers**
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