

Candauda Arachchige Chandraprema

The new Sri Lankan representative proposed by the Sri Lankan government to the United Nations in Geneva¹ is C. A. Chandraprema, a known member of a government sponsored death squad² and was alleged by an ex policeman to have been responsible for the killing of three Sinhalese human lawyers in 1989.

During the late eighties Chandraprema was a key member of the PRRA, the People's Revolutionary Red Army³ (**see below**), and was repeatedly referred to as "Thadi (fat) Priyantha"⁴ in public sources and has never denied that this is him.. From 1987-90, it's estimated 40,000 Sinhalese were killed during the country's second Sinhala youth insurrection. PRRA helped the Sri Lankan military target their opponents and is reported to have killed more than a thousand people in this period of conflict⁵.

In 2000 Chandraprema was arrested in connection with the execution of two human rights lawyers (Kanchana Abhayapala and Charitha Lankapura⁶) but later released⁷. Media reports say the Attorney General found no legal grounds to proceed with the prosecution of Chandraprema⁸. *Ravaya* newspaper carried a lead story at the time saying that another PRRA member facing arrest had threatened to expose members of the government implicated in past incidents, which he said would force them "to hide their heads in shame"⁹.

Chandraprema's arrest occurred after a former police officer, himself implicated in torture, was arrested on 3 August 2000¹⁰. He was ex SSP Douglas Peiris. A government established Commission of Inquiry had found Peiris directly responsible for the design and function of a torture site in the late eighties, "including the abduction and detention of police colleagues who were investigating the disappearances"¹¹. Peiris gave an affidavit after his arrest saying that Thadi Priyatha (aka Chandraprema) had killed four people, including three human rights lawyers¹². Peiris himself was convicted in 2009 for the abduction of two young boys and sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment¹³.

An ICJ report¹⁴ at the time cited ten murders of lawyers in Sri Lanka in 1989; among them the three referenced by SSP Peiris:

Killed on 7 Jul 1989 - Charita Lankapura Reports say he was shot in the neck by two men in civilian dress. He had filed hundreds of habeas corpus petitions on behalf of people disappeared after arrest by the security forces and had received death threats on the telephone warning him to stop. Shortly after his death, two lawyers Kanchana Abhayapala and Prins Gunasekera received death threats and similar warnings to stop filing cases, from a caller claiming responsibility for Lankapura's killing.

Killed on 28 Aug 1989 - Kanchana Abhayapala. Unidentified gunmen shot him twice in the chest as he opened the door to his home, seriously injuring his father who stood behind him. He had been threatened on 7 July 1989 that he would be killed if he filed one more habeas corpus petition. One caller who had threatened him said his name was on a death list.

3 Oct 1989 Lawyer of Gampaha, Neville Nissanka. He was abducted and his corpse found next day in front of his house.

In his affidavit, which is publicly available online¹⁵, Peiris testified that he was introduced to Thadi Priyantha (aka Chandraprema) by a government minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, (who later became Prime Minister twice). Peiris also made startling allegations in his affidavit regarding former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, which were never tested in court or proved:

"I am also aware that the gang led by Thadi Priyantha, as instructed by Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, killed the following persons: (i) Person by the name of Perera who served at the Kelaniya Tyre Corporation. (ii) Lawyer of Hulftsdorp, Mr. Daya Lankapura. (iii) Lawyer of Hulftsdorp, Mr. Kanchana Abeyapala. (iv) Lawyer of Gampaha, Mr. Nissanka. I was aware that the group led by Army Lieutenant Nissanka and Senanayake, who were close to Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, carried out operations in civvies within the Gampaha District as instructed by Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe.."

Since 1994 four key political figures have dominated Sri Lankan politics serving as Prime Minister or President - Chandrika Kumaratunga, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Mahinda Rajapaksa and now his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Each one has a reason not to pursue justice in this case. Chandraprema was in the late eighties part of a students' group aligned to a leftist Alliance which included Chandrika Kumaratunga. Ranil Wickremesinghe was a minister

in the JVP era and Chandraprema was his media advisor. Chandraprema wrote the official biography of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was himself an army officer during the crushing of the JVP uprising.

There has been almost total impunity for the mass atrocities of the JVP period as well as the war crimes linked to the internal armed conflict which ended in 2009. An examination of the modus operandi and patterns of the crimes during these two period is incredibly similar: unlawful and arbitrary detention, white vans, torture, enforced disappearances and state sponsored terrorism which implicates successive regimes, none of which emerge with clean hands. There is no therefore no incentive to hold anybody accountable for these crimes which is why impunity becomes entrenched.

PRRA – the People’s Revolutionary Red Army

PRRA was not a large armed organisation – authors estimate it had about 40 members¹⁶. Formed in August 1988¹⁷, PRRA was a death squad that worked closely with the army and military intelligence, assisted by some of the Tamil militant groups in targeting JVP suspects¹⁸. Two authors say PRRA received arms from the Army in 1989¹⁹. One estimates PRRA was responsible for the deaths of 1222 people in the late eighties, among them 200 university students²⁰. Journalists and lawyers were targeted²¹; Amnesty International said journalist, H E Dayananda, was killed on 3 Dec 1988 by PRRA²² and another Amnesty report alleged PRRA was involved in the disappearance of a 16 year old boy and his uncle in Embilipitiya in 1989²³.

Amnesty International was described as a terrorist organisation by PRRA. An Amnesty researcher in Colombo recalls on 4 June 1991 receiving a phone call from PRRA in which they issued a death threat; this was mentioned in an Amnesty report as the reason why a planned public event had to be cancelled²⁴.

An Amnesty report in 1990 said regarding PRRA: “Posters were left by some bodies in the name of such groups claiming responsibility for the deaths. Threats were also issued in their name on posters or in reproduced letters. The practice of leaving posters by bodies and issuing threats in letters echoed the methods used by the JVP²⁵”.

The two photographs below²⁶ were taken in Thihagoda Matara, in December 1988. The same two notices were found attached to the dead bodies, which read:

"The butchers of Rohana Wijeweera [JVP Leader], the traitor who was born to the misfortune of the nation, will be punished with death for killing innocent citizens. - PRRA"



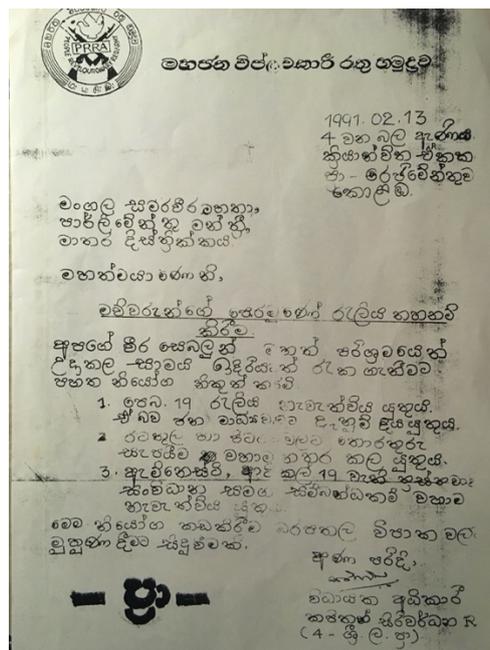
During elections in 1988-9, the JVP called for a boycott and threatened to kill anyone who defied their orders. PRRA launched a parallel terror campaign threatening to kill those who boycotted the election. This poster says:

"Those who refrain from voting will be punished with death"²⁷



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PRRA also issued letters threatening members of civil society and journalists²⁹, including this one to member of parliament Mangala Samaraweera who later became Sri Lankan Foreign Minister in 2015.



TRANSLATION:

*"Peoples' Revolutionary Red Army
1991.02.03
4th Battalion, Operational unit, PRRA Regiment, Colombo.*

*Mr Mangala Samaraweera
Member of Parliament
Matara District*

Sir,

RE: *The Banning of the Mothers Front Rally*

The following orders are issued to further safeguard the peace brought through enormous effort of our valiant soldiers.

1. The rally scheduled for 19th February must be cancelled. The media must be informed of the decision.

2. Providing information locally and internationally must be immediately stopped.

3. All the interactions with terrorist organisations such as Amnesty International and Article 19 must be stopped with immediate effect.

Violation of these orders can result in serious consequences.

By order of,

Executive Commissioned officer,

Capt Siriwardane R.

(4 - S.L.PRAA)"

REFERENCES

¹ Veteran columnist C.A.Chandraprema appointed as Lankan envoy at the UN in Geneva, Menafn, <https://menafn.com/1099570738/Veteran-columnist-CAChandraprema-appointed-as-Lankan-envoy-at-the-UN-in-Geneva>
Also: <https://newsin.asia/veteran-columnist-c-a-chandraprema-appointed-as-lankan-envoy-at-the-un-in-geneva/>

² Political violence and its cultural constructions : representations & narrations in times of war, de Silva, P.L, 2000, available at <https://docplayer.net/85187156-Political-violence-and-its-cultural-constructions-representations-narrations-in-times-of-war-de-silva-p-l.html>, p 3 describes PRAA as one of the “government-affiliated or covertly sanctioned death squads” and says (p175) Chandraprema was too close to agents of political violence.

³ “The beginnings of the PRRA are connected with the formation of death squads, mainly under leading UNP politicians. With the multiplication of these squads, they were loosely linked through a hierarchy of government politicians, military coordinating officers and police officers..”.

The PRRA Killer’s Diary: Ranil W, Rajitha R And The Left, Rajan Hoole, 1989: The Eclipse of the JVP and the Perplexity of the Left – Part 3, *The PRRA (Peoples Revolutionary Red Army)*

<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-prra-killers-diary-ranil-w-rajitha-r-and-the-left/>

⁴ Multiple media references confirm this as well as experts on the period and a person in Sri Lanka who knew him in the eighties (where this was his rather unflattering nickname at university) and another individual who was a contemporary at university; furthermore Chandraprema has never challenged multiple public sources that call him Thadi Priyantha.

17 Aug 2000, Dinamina (Sinhala; state run media) headline story: *CA Chandraprema arrested for killings carried out as Thadi Priyantha.*

Reference To Thadi Priyantha as Chandraprema in: JDS Lanka, 15 Nov 2019.

<http://www.jdslanka.org/s/index.php/2014-12-24-03-23-00/2014-12-24-03-25-15/896-2019-11-15-09-06-09>

මාතලේ මිනිස් දඩුවම: 'ගනඩ පොල්ලකින් මළවලට ගහලා උරහිස් දෙපැත්තට ඇණ ගැහුව'

See also <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2012/12/impeachment-motion-against-chief-justice.html> December 5, 2012, Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian) “A friend of mine who knew this man who known as ‘Thadi Priyantha’ since 1980’s as a controversial character suspected of having a hand in the 1988/1989 JVP insurrection, posted a column written by him to the “Wham Ivura” of Divaina Sinhala Daily paper for me to read it.”

And: <https://www.sangam.org/PIRABAKARAN/Part23.htm> which says: “C.A.Chandraprema *alias* Thadi Priyantha.”

And <http://twonationsoneisland.blogspot.com/2015/03/gota-rajitha-chandraprema-meeting.html>

Also a Minister identifying him and alleging he was involved in male sexual violence against detainees (which another source confirmed to ITJP):

“What right does Thadi Priyantha (an alias used by C.A. Premachandra) have to question my morals? That fellow had killed hundreds of people together with “Pra.” He is responsible for the deaths of Charitha Lankapura and Kanchana Abepala.” – said by then Public Relations Minister Mervyn Silva.

<http://www.elakiri.com/forum/showthread.php?t=1215915>

“C.A. Chandraprema aka Thadi Priyantha (a recent biographer of presidential sibling Gotabhaya Rajapaksa)”, <http://ceylon-ananda.com/kanagasabai-k-gunaratnam-1917-1989/>

⁵ There is a Sinhala language book published recently in two volumes about the JVP uprising. The author is an ardent supporter of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In Jan 2020 he was appointed as the Editor in Chief of the “Silumina” Sunday paper (sister paper of Sunday Observer) published by Lake House (state run). The details of the source for the killings carried out by PRRA (the exact number is 1222) is the book: *‘JVP’s Second Uprising’ (Vol.1) by Dharman Wicktamaratne (2016 December) / Pages 236 & 243.*

Also Sunday Observer lead news (1991, February 17 – on file) names 4 students it alleged were killed by PRRA.

Also: “Founding meeting of the PRRA was held on May 18, 1988 at the Head Quarters of Government Clerical Service Union in Colombo, as a way of planning a violent response to JVP’s terror campaign against the mainstream left parties and groups. It is reported that PRRA was responsible for killing over 1200 JVP members or sympathisers.”

<http://lankanewsweb.org/archives/461> (Sinhala)

⁶ [Chandraprema's bail application put off for October 17](http://www.island.lk/2000/10/04/news03.htm), The Island, 4 Oct 2000,

<http://www.island.lk/2000/10/04/news03.htm>

⁷ <http://www.island.lk/2000/10/03/news05.html>

<http://www.island.lk/2000/10/18/news08.html>

<http://www.lankalibrary.com/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=1171>

⁸ <http://www.island.lk/2000/10/18/news08.html>

“...the Attorney General informing the CID that there were no legal grounds to proceed with the prosecution of Mr.Chandraprema. When CID officials informed the Magistrate of the Attorney General's advice Mr.Chandraprema was released... Mr.Chandraprema was not formally charged of any offence.”

<http://www.island.lk/2000/11/09/news01.html> *November 9, 2000 - The Island*

⁹ Ravaya (lead story) - August 20, 2000, Copy on File, Sinhala translation:

“Alliance also in trouble over Batalanda

The investigation process associated with the affidavit of senior superintendent of police Douglas Peiris on Batalanda torture camp has caused serious problems not only to the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, but also to some of the leaders of the Peoples' Alliance government, it is reported.

Based of Douglas Peiris' affidavit, on 15th, C A Chandraprema aka 'Thadi Priyantha' was arrested by the CID. According to the reports appeared on state media, it was a group led by C A Chandraprema and K L Dharmasiri that killed lawyers Charitha Lankapura, Kanchana Abeypala, Nissanka from Gampaha and a person named Perera, an employee of the Tyre Corporation

Chandraprema is the author of the book "Kolapata Samajaya" (Green Society). Although he is currently affiliated to the United National Party, during the terror period, he had been closely associated with United Socialist Alliance (USA) led by Chandrika Kumaranatunge. He had contested the 1988 provincial council elections as an USA candidate.

At the time he was a student at the law faculty of the university of Colombo. He was also an active member of the Independent Students Union, a student organisation (ISU) affiliated to Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP).

During the uprising, ISU and SLMP acted as a united movement. The activists from both groups took up arms against the Peoples' Liberation Front (JVP) while it was the Ministry of Defence which provided them with weapons and training sanctioned by the UNP government. It is reported that not only Dharmasiri and Chandraprema, but some office bearers of the incumbent Peoples' Alliance government were also associated with the groups that operated against the JVP.

The nature of the statement made in custody by Chandraprema is not clear yet. But it is learnt that plans are in place to arrest another person affiliated to the group. It is reported that he had called a deputy minister of the government who worked with him during the terror period and warned that if this plan to achieve narrow political gains is not brought to an immediate halt, the details of everyone who were associated with the past incidents will be revealed and some who are holding official positions of the government will then have to cover their faces in shame. “

¹⁰ Douglas Pieris sings another song, <http://www.island.lk/2000/10/23/news14.html>

¹¹ Human Rights Prosecutions in Democracies at War, By Moira Lynch, P 59

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Cf5uDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA59&lpg=PA59&dq=Senior+Superintendent+of+Police+Douglas+Peiris&source=bl&ots=4XG6sIFjHN&sig=ACfU3U3-e_a5xo8FAswXWQ4D5ugKNGDgBw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjT5eqIzY_nAhXTNcAKHSL_D_MQ6AEwBXoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=Senior%20Superintendent%20of%20Police%20Douglas%20Peiris&f=false

He confirms this at Ex-SSP Douglas Peiris divulges details in new book

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2018/12/02/news/ex-ssp-douglas-peiris-divulges-details-new-book> on 2 Dec 2018

¹² At the time the government had created various death squads with names like Black Cats, Yellow Cats, Ukusso, Green Tigers and Praa.

¹³ Douglas Peiris- One of many crimes, 29 Aug 2009, Basil Fernando, <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2009/08/douglas-peiris-one-of-many-crimes.html>

¹⁴ From the ICJ report <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/1990/07/attacks-on-justice-july-1989-june-1990-publications-1990-eng.pdf>

¹⁵ Copy online at <https://www.scribd.com/document/274464279/Ranil-Batalanda-SSP-Douglas-Peiris> and <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2017/12/29/affidavit-of-former-senior-superintendent-of-police-douglas-peiris-in-august-2010-revealing-mr-ranil-wickramasinghes-involvement-in-the-affidavit-sworn-translation/>

Also <http://www.island.lk/2000/10/23/news14.html>

In 2010 <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2017/12/29/affidavit-of-former-senior-superintendent-of-police-douglas-peiris-in-august-2010-revealing-mr-ranil-wickramasinghes-involvement-in-the-affidavit-sworn-translation/>

¹⁶ 'JVP's Second Uprising' (Vol.1) by Dharman Wicktamaratne (2016 December) / Pages 232. “A section of PRRA which played a decisive role in crushing the JVP maintained close links with the state intelligence organisations. Some of them were paid on a regular basis using National Auxiliary Force as a cover while they were also issued with ID cards. There were about 40 members and nearly 200 sympathisers who provide support for their actions. “

¹⁷ Dharman Wickremaratne's "JVP's Second Uprising" (Vol. 1) / 2016 Pg. 232, “The inaugural meeting that led to formation of PRRA was held on the 18th of May, 1988 at the head office of the Government Clerical Service Union (GCSU), Colombo. The first manifesto detailing PRRA policies was released on 1st August, 1988.” The second revised manifesto was issued on August 2nd, 1988.

¹⁸ PLOTE, TELO. Confirmed by *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy* By Asoka Bandarage, P 144.

¹⁹ 17 Aug 2000 *Dinamina Page 10. On file*, It says CA Chandraprema is a close media advisor to Ranil Wickremesinghe and advisor to the Ranjan Wijeratne memorial school.

²⁰ Dharman Wickremaratne's "JVP's Second Uprising" (Vol. 1) / 2016

²¹ Pg. 234 "Batalanda torture camp was operated through a death squad known as Black Cats while they maintained close contacts with the PRRA members. It is reported that the PRRA leaders received arms at least twice from (then) Col. Janaka Perera, in April & May 1989."

Dharman Wickremaratne's "JVP's Second Uprising" (Vol. 1) / 2016

²² "PRRA's name began to be used earlier. For example, the killing of H.E. Dayananda in Colombo in December 1988 was attributed to the PRRA." P 70

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/200000/asa370211990eng.pdf>

²³ The victims were: 1. Nammuni Arachchige Chamara Sudarsana Jayantha (age 16) of Embilipitiya. Student at Embilipitiya Central College. 2. Nammuni Arachchige Jayatillaka (age 27) of Embilipitiya.

"A group of army officers dressed in civil clothes travelling in a white van who said that they belonged to the People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA), a death squad linked to the security forces. They forced their way into the house. There were witnesses to the arrest." P11, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/196000/asa370181991en.pdf>

²⁴ It described a "threat received on 4 June 1991 from somebody claiming to be acting on behalf of the People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA), one of the "death squads" operating in Sri Lanka in recent years.."

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/196000/asa370141991en.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/200000/asa370211990eng.pdf>

<https://apeyrata.wordpress.com/2015/01/28/rajitha-the-yahapalana-spoke-person/> see photo.

²⁶ The photographer was Robert Nickelsberg//Time Life Pictures/Getty Images. <https://www.robertnickelsberg.com/about>

²⁷ The poster must have been put up either during 1988 December presidential election or 1989 February parliamentary election.

²⁸ Also Page 16. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/200000/asa370211990eng.pdf>

²⁹ For example a Sinhalese journalist recalls receiving two threatening letters from PRRA, one at his office and one at his home.