

# REAR ADMIRAL (RTD.) SARATH WEERASEKARA

Joint Dossier

with

Journalists for Democracy for Sri Lanka

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INTERNATIONAL  
TRUTH  
AND JUSTICE  
PROJECT



## RET.REAR ADMIRAL SARATH WEERASEKARA

**August 2020: State Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Government Affairs**

**November 2020: Appointed as Minister of Public Security<sup>1</sup> (with control over the Police department, Civil Security department, Police Training College and the Multi-Purpose Development Task Force [currently headed by Major General (Retd.) Nanda Mallawarachchi<sup>2</sup> ].<sup>3</sup>**

Sarath Piyananda Weerasekara was born on 29th of October, 1951. He studied at Nalanda College and Ananda College in Colombo.

### Career

He joined the Royal Ceylon Navy in August 1971. After following the basic officer training course at Naval and Maritime Academy in Trincomalee, he was trained in naval gunnery in India. He followed the Naval Staff Course in Rhode Island, USA, Security Studies in the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Hawaii, attended the National Defence College in New Delhi, Senior Executive Course in Washington and studied in Prague. He also attended a Fast Attack Craft course Tel Aviv, Israel and Pusan South Korea.<sup>4</sup>

He was promoted to Rear Admiral on January 1, 2001.<sup>5</sup>

He had held the following positions in the Navy:

- \* Commander Northern Naval Area
- \* Commander Eastern Naval Area
- \* Commander Southern Naval Area
- \* First Squadron Commander Fast Attack Craft
- \* Commanding Officer Surveillance ship "Editara"
- \* Director General Project and Plans

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Sarath-Weerasekara-sworn-in-as-Minister-for-Public-Security/108-200640](http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Sarath-Weerasekara-sworn-in-as-Minister-for-Public-Security/108-200640)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pmdnews.lk/බහු-කාර්ය-සංවර්ධන-කාර්ය-ස-2/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ft.lk/front-page/Gotabaya-to-take-over-Defence-Tech-Ministries/44-709277>

<https://srilankamirror.com/news/20558-for-whom-is-the-newly-created-ministry-for-the-police>

[http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/11/2202-25\\_S.pdf](http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/11/2202-25_S.pdf) Sinhala Gazette

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sarathweerasekara.info/sarath-weerasekara-bio>

<sup>5</sup> <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2008/03/30/spe03.asp>

- \* Director General Welfare
- \* Director General Operations and deputy Chief of Staff of the Navy.
- \* Ended his naval career as Chief of Staff of the Navy in the year 2006.<sup>6</sup>

## In Eastern Sri Lanka

Sarath Weerasekara's long standing association with Sinhala ultra-nationalist forces is well known. In May 2005, during the ceasefire, Sinhalese extremist forces erected a Buddha statue in eastern port city of Trincomalee, triggering ethnic and religious unrest in the area. As the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR - Jaffna) later revealed in their Special Report 29, Rear Admiral Weerasekara, who was the then Commander of Eastern Naval Area, had been a key player in inciting and promoting communal enmity during the turbulent days. The UTHR report said: "...the PNM (Patriotic National Movement) and JVP were behind the erection of the illegal Buddha statue in the sensitive area of Trincomalee, a city predominantly inhabited by ethnic Tamil and Muslim communities. The Navy's Eastern Commander Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera openly identified with the provocation."<sup>7</sup>

Weerasekara's controversial role in the East was further exposed by the 'Sunday Times' defence columnist who wrote:

*"President Kumaratunga ordered the Ministry of Defence to investigate a report from a state intelligence agency that Rear Admiral Weerasekera extended support to the group reportedly responsible for placing Lord Buddha's statue. He is alleged to have addressed this group, a team of three wheeler drivers offering a transport service and assured them he would ensure the statue would not be removed."*

The report revealed that after, *"the appearance of the statue of Lord Buddha in the Trincomalee town in the early hours of May 15, Rear Admiral Weerasekera is alleged to have spoken at a gathering of threewheeler drivers. A state intelligence agency had accused him of telling the gathering that he would make sure the statue was not removed. This statement, the agency said, had exacerbated feelings among groups responsible for placing the statue....President Kumaratunga asked the Ministry of Defence to conduct an inquiry into the allegations. On the Ministry's orders, Vice Admiral Sandagiri had called upon Rear Admiral Weerasekera to explain his conduct within six days."*<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, Weerasekara was removed from his position in the East and *"given the newly created post of Deputy Chief of Staff."*<sup>9</sup>

## 2006: Civil Defence Force Director General

In 2006, Sarath Weerasekara was appointed as the first Director General of the Civil Defense Force (CDF), which was formerly known as Home Guards Force since its formation in 1985 and initially functioned under the police department. But under the command of Weerasekara, the CDF was *"reorganised, restructured"* and expanded from '19,200 to 41,500 men, who were trained as a paramilitary force.'<sup>10</sup>

Under Weerasekara's command, new training courses were introduced including *'one month basic training under army and navy instructors and provided with new desert camouflage uniforms'*. He had also formed an elite CDF unit, called "Nandimitra" (named after a giant warrior who served in the army of Sinhala king Dutugemunu, who killed the Tamil king Elara, as described in the Pali chronicle 'Mahavamsa'<sup>11</sup>, a religio-mythical narrative about the origins of the Sinhala people), which engaged *"in a limited offensive role just outside the threatened villages"*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://sarathweerasekera.com/biography.php>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport29.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/050619/columns/sitrep.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/Appendix%20I%20PNM%20and%20the%20Buddha%20Statue%20in%20Trincomalee.htm>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover\\_page.php?issue=207](http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover_page.php?issue=207) ; <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2008/03/30/spe03.asp>

<sup>11</sup> Mahavamsa is a Pali chronicle written in 5th century CE by a Buddhist monk, which recounts Buddhist version of island's history. The encounter between the two kings who ruled two separate kingdoms in the island in the 2nd century BC, occupies the centre of the Pali narrative and still governs the modern Sinhala nationalist perspectives on the past.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover\\_page.php?issue=207](http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover_page.php?issue=207)

## Family

His brother, Major General Ananda Weerasekara worked as the Military Coordinator of the north central district of Anuradhapura, during the second JVP uprising (1987-1990). In 1990, under the provisions of Emergency Regulations, he was appointed as the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, to oversee the military run rehabilitation camps, in which arrested Sinhala youth were 'rehabilitated'.<sup>13</sup>

In mid-July 2000, Ananda Weerasekara was arrested by the police after he and two army sergeants were accused of running a detention camp in 1989, in which young Sinhala rebels were tortured and killed. At the time of his arrest, he was actively engaged with a right-wing nationalist group (Sinhala Veera Vidahana), which was closely associated with ultra-nationalist Sinhala Urumaya (later Jathika Hela Urumaya - JHU).<sup>14</sup>

In May 2007, Major General Weerasekara entered the Buddhist Order as a monk called Buddangala Ananda Thero.<sup>15</sup>

## Hate Speech

On 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, Sarath Weerasekara wrote an article to "The Sunday Times" criticising Sinhala filmmakers who were making anti-war films. He specifically named four filmmakers as unpatriotic. He accused them of, *"supporting the diabolical false propaganda campaign being carried out by the terrorists against the Sinhalese"*. He further emphasised that *"if there is a film on war and it scoffs at the soldier, insults his wife and tends to demoralize the soldier, such films indirectly contribute towards fulfilling the terrorists' objectives"* and that *"it amounts to treason and should be dealt with severely."*<sup>16</sup>

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, elaborating his point further in the Sinhala language, Weerasekara in an incitement to violence wrote an article to 'Sunday Divaina' newspaper, in which he said that the *"film producers should be labelled as terrorists and hanged."*<sup>17</sup>

In 2017, during a panel discussion on Derana TV, when confronted by a panelist about his statement, Weerasekara reiterated his position and justified his stance regarding a young Sinhala film maker, Vimukthi Jayasundera, who won the Caméra d'Or in 2005 for his film "The Foresekan land". Weerasekara said;

*"there is no middleman in terrorism. Either you are a terrorist or not....Therefore, all the masses in the country must support the war against terrorism. We [soldiers] made our contribution...How should the filmmakers contribute? They should boost the morale of the troops through their films....What I said back then was there should be no middlemen. If we have some power, we must take people like Ashoka Handagama and Vimukthi Jayasundera to courts. In any country, if a person is proved to be guilty of treason, he will be hanged. I didn't say Vimukthi Jayasundera should be hanged. What I said was, if what Vimukthi Jayasundera doing is treason, if that is proved without doubt in a court of law, like any others traitor, he should be given death penalty by hanging. That's what I said. But here, I was misquoted....This is treason. They should be punished with death. But only if that can be proved in a court of law. Because I can't hang people. If I can do that, there are many traitors I want to hang. If you like, I can give you a list. But I don't have power."*<sup>18</sup>

During an interview in June 2020, when he was asked to clarify his statement, he recapitulated his stance saying that there cannot be a middle position when a country is fighting terrorism. *"If someone is making a film to justify terrorism, he should also be treated as a terrorist. A terrorist will be hanged to death in any country, if proved guilty in a court of*

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/200000/asa370211990eng.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> AFP report in - <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/eelam/hrights/?cat=19&id=1000924>; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/859179.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/859179.stm)

<sup>15</sup> <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2007/05/13/fea06.asp>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/050904/>; <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2005/09/sril-s28.html>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2005/09/printable/050927\\_films](https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2005/09/printable/050927_films)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM1zUg-Kp68>

law."<sup>19</sup> His statement was perceived to be openly advocating hate speech and inciting violence against those he named as 'terrorists'.

### **An ultra-nationalist**

Weerasekara's open association with extremist Sinhala elements, such as the JVP backed Patriotic National Movement (PNM) and Manel Mal (White Lily) Movement (MMM), while being a serving military officer, further confirms his long standing ultra-nationalist inclinations. As the above UTHR report pointed out, in his capacity as Director General of Civil Defence Force, *"he shared an MMM platform with S.L. Gunasekera and Gunadasa Amarasekera at the BMICH in early January 2008 at a ceremony to distribute tables with manually rechargeable lights to soldier families"* disregarding the fact that MMM has been advocating atrocious policies such as *"solving the problem in 24 hours by bombing"*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Politics**

Rear Admiral Weerasekara contested the parliamentary elections in April 2010 from Ampara district and entered parliament as a member of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) led by Mahinda Rajapaksa. During his campaign, he was accused of threatening a senior journalist in Ampara, on April 4, 2010.

Wasantha Chandrapala, a well-known area correspondent of several mainstream media institutions, was threatened by Weerasekara over the phone, saying:

*"you better know that I am good for good people and worst for worst people, I do whatever I say. You journalists better remember that.....I tell you one thing Chadrapala, I am not like other buggers. Keep that in your mind.....Don't come to play your games with me. Be careful."*

On the same day night, Chandrapala's house came under attack and he filed a formal complaint at the Ampara police station.<sup>21</sup>

### **Anti Tamil National Alliance**

On December 18, 2013, Weerasekara called on the government to ban the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). While addressing parliament, he said:

*"We have done a foolish thing by not banning the TNA, which we should have done soon after defeating the LTTE. In the second world war, after Hitler was defeated, his Nazi party was banned. Once Mubarak was ousted from power, his political party was banned. After Pol Pot was murdered in Cambodia, his party was totally annihilated. But we, after defeating the LTTE, foolishly failed to ban the TNA. What we should have done is to bring formal charges against them for aiding and abetting terrorism and put them in prison. Else, just like we rehabilitated 11,600, we should have rehabilitated them and released them to the society. Today we are witnessing the consequences of our failure to do exactly that."*<sup>22</sup>

### **Anti-NGO**

On 7th September 2017, while being interviewed on Hiru TV, Weerasekera said:

*"Traitors are the ones who betray their country....If someone is trying to divide the country and take the war heroes who defended the country to a war crimes tribunal on false charges, they should be treated as traitors."*

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnxbK8vj6f4>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/Appendix%20I%20PNM%20and%20the%20Buddha%20Statue%20in%20Trincomalee.htm>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2010/04/journalist-threatened-by-ruling-party.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gr5Clg2ljs>

*Hence, in my opinion, the present rulers, the NGOs who live on Dollars and Sinhala federalists are traitors. If we come to power again and form a government, we will take them to courts on the charges of treason, and hang them like any other country would do.*<sup>23</sup>

## **Anti Human Rights Defenders**

In June 2018, Weerasekara addressed a press conference on behalf of the Federation of the National Organisations in Colombo. He said:

*"One of the consolations the armed forces had, was their ability to join international peace keeping operations, where they can earn some money higher than their normal wages and build a house or spend on their children's needs.....Even this has been blocked by the Human Rights Commission appointed by the current government. The Chairman of the Human Rights Commission is Deepika Udagama. As we know long since, Deepika Udagama is a person who had been working to support the LTTE with the NGOs against our armed forces.....So, she has taken steps to prevent anyone who had anything to do with the war in Sri Lanka from joining the peace keeping missions, as long as she holds this position. She refrains from issuing the required clearance to delay and block any such opportunity. As the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, our president should intervene in this matter.....Deepika Udagama should be summoned to the president's office and inquire why our forces are not allowed to join the peace keeping forces....Concealing this kind of information from the masses is treason..."*<sup>24</sup>

In August 2019, addressing a press briefing organised by the ultra-nationalist Sinhala Veera Vidahana, he repeated the need to take legal action against the chairperson of Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, Dr. Deepika Udagama, for not providing clearance certificate for the members of the armed forces to take part in international peace missions.<sup>25</sup>

## **Geneva**

Rear Admiral Weerasekara has continuously attended UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva along with the members of ultra-nationalist Sinhala diaspora group, the Sri Lanka Global Forum. He has openly condemned and issued thinly veiled threats against Sri Lankan human rights activists who have been attending Geneva sessions for 'committing treason'. For instance, in March 2018, before leaving for Geneva, he addressed a press conference organised by Patriotic Professionals Forum in Colombo. During the press conference he denounced the Office for the Missing Persons (OMP) and branded the members of the OMP as traitors. While specifically highlighting the individuals associated with the OMP, he said:

*"Who are the people appointed to the OMP staff? Nimalka Fernando is one such person. Nimalka Fernando is an individual who is attending Geneva sessions to speak in favour of Eelam, against us, our nation and our war heroes in collaboration with the Tiger terrorists and other NGOs who are supporting the terrorists. She is a traitor and we have seen her inside the cafeteria of the UN building, having coffee with Fr. Emmanuel of the Global Tamil Forum."*<sup>26</sup>

## **Viyath Maga**

Weerasekara is a founding member<sup>27</sup> and a prominent member of the "Viyath Maga" (Professionals for a Better Future), which was founded by Gotabaya Rajapaksa in February 2016 and which has promoted Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism. He had addressed many of the meetings and press briefings organised by Viyath Maga since then,

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaRqfLTkxCQ>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yl6RaCstts4>; <https://www.lankaleadnews.com/?p=11666>; [https://de-de.facebook.com/notes/groundviews/civil-society-condemns-attack-against-hrcsl-chairperson-dr-deepika-udagama/10160563761360641/?comment\\_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D](https://de-de.facebook.com/notes/groundviews/civil-society-condemns-attack-against-hrcsl-chairperson-dr-deepika-udagama/10160563761360641/?comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ9EUDMPBw>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suyngl1Wqfs>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ReAdSarath/posts/4277100412359903>

both locally and internationally.<sup>28</sup> He contested the parliamentary elections in 2020 from the Colombo District<sup>29</sup> as one of the 9 candidates fielded by Viyath Maga under the SLPP list of candidates and emerged as a winner gaining the highest number of preferential votes in the Colombo District.<sup>30</sup>

## Views on Devolution

His opposition to any kind of democratic reforms is clearly expressed though his position against 13 Amendment and 19 Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution. In July 2020, speaking to Daily Mirror he said:

*"Democracy has prevailed even without the 19A....I don't think repealing the 19A will challenge democracy. With this Amendment in place, all NGOs have started ruling the country in the pretext of appointing various commissions."*<sup>31</sup>

Ironically, Weerasekara has been appointed as the State Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Government despite his vehement opposition to any kind of power sharing agreement with the Tamils, including the 13 Amendment under which the Provincial Council system was introduced in 1987.

Just three days after assuming his ministerial duties, he 'pledged to remove all clauses -- in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution -- which are detrimental to the well-being of the nation:

*"We will not devolve police and land powers to the provincial councils," he said while highlighting the fact that handing over the State Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government to him might have been a plan of destiny because he was one who vehemently opposed the 13th Amendment."*<sup>32</sup>

In September, during an interview on Hiru TV, when asked about his position on Provincial Council systems as a state minister, he said: *"I opposed provincial councils, but I have been given the ministry on provincial councils. But I would never change my stance....."*<sup>33</sup>

On 29th September, addressing a meeting organised by "Sinhala Veera Vidahana" (SVV), an organisation founded by right wing nationalist group of Sinhala Industrialists and traders, Weerasekara said he has '*not changed his position on the 13th Amendment and it is absolutely essential to abolish it.*' He said:

*"We are opposing the 13th Amendment based on certain policies. Mr. Modi says to find a solution through negotiations with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Talking to the TNA after defeating Prabhakaran is like Churchill talking to the Nazis after killing Hitler during the second world war.....Even if I am accused of sedition, I promise that I would never be a traitor."*

The event was organised by the SVV as part of a campaign to launch a people's petition demanding the 'abolition of the 13th Amendment'.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

Sarath Weerasekera is a longstanding close confidante of the President who was actively involved in the civil war. He has made clear his opposition to any devolution of power to Tamils, expressed a desire to outlaw the main Tamil democratic political party, has revealed virulent antagonism to prominent Sinhalese human rights defenders in Colombo, and advocated violence towards those whose views he opposes.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.viyathmaga.org/?s=Sarath+Weerasekara>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.lankanewsweb.net/66-special-news/55553-Rear-Admiral-Sarath-Weerasekara-to-contest-Election-from-Pohottu-Party->

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.themorning.lk/sarath-weerasekera-secures-highest-number-of-preferential-votes-in-colombo/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/Nationalists-treat-everyone-alike-Sarath-Weerasekara/231-192974>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Negative-clauses-in-13A-will-be-scraped-Weerasekara/108-193869](http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Negative-clauses-in-13A-will-be-scraped-Weerasekara/108-193869)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dlf6kdigns>

<sup>34</sup> <https://emanisa.lk/%E0%B6%B4%E0%B7%85%E0%B7%8F%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%8A-%E0%B7%83%E0%B6%B7%E0%B7%8F-%E0%B6%85%E0%B7%84%E0%B7%9D%E0%B7%83%E0%B7%92-%E0%B6%9A%E0%B7%85-%E0%B6%BA%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%B8%E0%B6%BA/>