

People's Decision

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Thusitha Halloluwa, a name that is gradually coming into the limelight, has been a key figure behind the scenes in the political arena of the country. A staunch supporter of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party(SLFP), it is his life's aim to protect the party that moulded his career path. Thusitha was pivotal in the movement that changed the government this year. Who is Thusitha? This is his story.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe

Photography Mahesh Bandara and Indika De Silva

Who is Thusitha Halloluwa?

I was born in Baddegama, Galle. I received my education at Christ Church Boys' School, Baddegama. Thereafter I was engaged in many professions including the plantation industry, Department of Examinations and Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) where I worked for Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte.

I was a member of student organisations from the time I was schooling and that is how I entered politics. There was a certain political ideology that I believed in as well as represented and I always stood by that.

I worked as the Media Secretary to Ministers, Amarasiri Dodangoda and Anura Priyadharshana Yapa. At one point, I was the Media Secretary to both of them at the same time. I was the Secretary to Minister Mangala Samaraweera after which I worked as the Press Officer at Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's Media Unit. At that time, I was also the Director of the Propaganda Unit of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Subsequently I was appointed again as the Media Secretary to Minister Amarasiri Dodangoda, Anura Priyadharshana Yapa and Dilan Perera respectively. I was also the Secretary to Minister Nimal Siripala Silva and thereafter to Minister Susil Premajayanta. Currently I am the Chairman of the Colombo Commercial Fertiliser Company and Director of Sri Lanka Telecom Mobitel. I also work as the Coordinating Secretary to Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

During my younger days, I was a very sensitive child; if I saw a beggar or an old man hungry, I would give him the food that I have. I could not go to funerals because I was not able to bear the sight of people crying. In Grade 7, students were given the choice to either choose Music or Art. About 20 of us selected Art and our teacher was Mr Alawaththa who was like a friend to us. One day, I went up to him and discussed with him about my problem. He looked at me for a while and said, "that is humanity and you should never lose that quality". That touched me and I promised myself to never let go of that quality. In my life, what I have done for others exceeds what I have done for myself. It has been the same in politics as well.

How did you join the SLFP?

I have always respected the ideologies of the SLFP even from my school days. I could relate to their thinking. The SLFP was founded by S W R D Bandaranaike in 1952, with his concept of 'Pancha Maha Balawegaya' (the fivefold forces), which transformed our country. It was only through Prime Minister Bandaranaike's ideology and the SLFP that people who were not from elite families could enter politics. That is how politicians such as T B Illangakoon entered Parliament and became cabinet ministers. That is why I am loyal to the SLFP and work towards the betterment of the party.

Even the people from my hometown and my family support the SLFP and always discuss politics. That was the exposure I had from my childhood and when I reached the age that I could understand political ideologies and other such matters, I did my own research and decided that the SLFP presented the best policy for our country. The SLFP is the only party with a policy that is not aligned either to the left or right, they follow the middle path.

I Was Very Disappointed With The Direction In Which The Country Was Heading During The Past Few Years. As Such, I Even Risked My Life In The Name Of Political Change.

You are not a politician, but if you feel that there should be a change in this country for its betterment, then you will work towards that change. Can you elaborate on this?

If anyone asks me whether I like getting involved in politics, I will say no. However, I was very disappointed with the direction in which the country was heading during the past few years. As such, I even risked my life in the name of political change. If anyone questions my motives, I will say that if we are engaged in politics then we have to render the service that is expected from us. And in that process, certain decisions that we took became national decisions of the country. I must thank Minister Mangala Samaraweera for that. He is a politician whom I admire and respect. I know his way of thinking, position on politics and his vision as to what politics should accomplish. And I admire his vision. There is no other politician like Minister Mangala Samaraweera. He is methodical and he listens to others. There is always a discussion and decisions are made in a collective manner. He never forces his ideas on anyone and then expect people to work to achieve that. Whenever we have meetings at Minister Mangala Samaraweera's home, it is always after midnight when we finish our discussions. It is never about personal things but about progressive politics and what needs to be done for the future.

Then, Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte was an excellent organiser. He had the ability of organising events across the island with just a telephone call. I have learned much from him.

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Why did you want to change the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa?

I know Mahinda Rajapaksa personally, and have associated with him very closely. But I have not in anyway participated in his election campaigns from the start. I did not participate in his election campaign in 2005 and informed Minister Mangala Samaraweera about this at that time. I have always been true to my conscience. If I do not agree with something, then I will never support it. I did not cast my vote at any election held from 2005 until the Presidential election this year. I have always stood by what I believe in, which may or may not have been beneficial to me.

Mahinda Rajapaksa is a character moulded by the media. The most significant achievement in this country during his regime was the end of the war. But there were many issues after that. The war victory was not achieved solely through his efforts.

When Mahinda Rajapaksa came into power, Jaffna had already been captured during Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's period. Under Madam Chandrika's leadership, Minister Lakshman Kadiragamar in his capacity as the Minister of External Affairs worked with the US, Europe and India to ban the LTTE. Then as a result of the peace talks initiated during Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's period, Karuna Amman left the LTTE. With Karuna abandoning the LTTE, they lost their power in the Eastern Province. We also had a good Army Commander, Gen Sarath Fonseka as well as the complete support of all Ministers. It was through the collective efforts of all these parties that we won the war. Many issues arose because credit was not given to those who deserved it.

There are many projects that were initiated by the Rajapaksa Government that have had adverse effects on the country. Mihin Lanka, Hambantota Port, Mattala Airport, Norochcholai Power Plant, and Lankaputhra Bank are such projects.

The Galle Expressway project was initiated during Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's time and the plans for the Colombo-Katunayake Expressway and Nelum Pokuna were drawn during her time as well. These were completed during the Rajapaksa regime and named after them. The electricity generating capacity in Sri Lanka, which was 27 percent, was increased up to 85 percent by the end of Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's term. The World Trade Centre was built during her time and she initiated the construction of the Colombo-Hatton Road, Colombo-Puttalam Road, Galle Road and Kandy Road.

No one imagined that the regime of President Mahinda Rajapaksa could be toppled.

The mastermind of this plan was Minister Mangala Samaraweera. I know how he works and I remember in 2002-2004 when Ranil Wickremesinghe was the Prime Minister, a few of us met at IF in Unawatuna on April 18, 2002. The meeting was attended by Mangala Samaraweera, Ruwan Fernandez, Sripathi Sooriyaarachchi, Janadasa Peiris and I. We made a plan to topple Ranil Wickremesinghe's government in 20 months. A document was formulated after working continuously for two days. This plan was executed step by step and Mangala Samaraweera was at the helm. Just as we projected, we were able to topple the government in 20 months. We can say that Mangala Samaraweera is the person who determines whether a government stays in power or not.

In 2011, I was the Secretary to one of the Cabinet Ministers. I was appointed not by the government but by the Minister who was close to me. During this time I met Mangala Samraweera after a long time at the Business Today TOP TWENTY FIVE awards ceremony on December 12, 2011. We agreed to meet up later to discuss the prevailing political situation. During the subsequent meeting, I suggested that we split the SLFP and he inquired whether this was possible. I said it was possible due to the strain that the party was going through at the time. Many members were disappointed with the manner in which the Rajapaksa family was behaving.

By that time, the government had many enemies. Even if they appointed a minister, the most important sections of that ministry was under them. The Rajapaksas appointed secretaries to all ministries, chairmen and directors. Then they created issues between the chairmen and ministers. It was divide and rule.

I remember during the time of Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's regime, ministers used to give publicity to the projects they completed. But in the Rajapaksa regime, many ministers have personally told me, not to publish their pictures in newspapers and not to show them on any media because they did not want to take the limelight. Many ministers were disappointed with the way things were happening. Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Ruwan Fernandez and I met at my house and we discussed the situation within the party. By that time I was already working with a group of ministers to topple the government.

One day, Minister Janaka Bandara Tennakoon and Minister Mangala Samaraweera met at my house. We discussed on breaking the SLFP. By that time, Minister Mangala Samaraweera was also confident that the government could be toppled. But we decided that the ministers who were willing to crossover should do so during a main election, such as the Presidential or General Election.

During one such meeting, Minister Mangala Samaraweera said that the executive presidency should be abolished. He further said that there should be a change in the system and that the country will never be able to move forward if the current system prevails. I was very happy he said that because this was one of my dreams as well. As such, I decided to work to achieve this goal even if it meant sacrificing my life. I was determined.

This was a gradual process, which started in 2011 and many people contributed towards its success. Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's father founded the SLFP, as such her motive was not to come into power again, but to save the party.

There was a request for Madam Chandrika to return to lead the country, but she said she will never contest an election again. Then the ministers requested her to

save the SLFP. To that she agreed if the members were willing to support her.

Whenever I spoke to President Maithripala Sirisena, he used to tell me about the issues he faced. He was never given a chance to speak on behalf of the SLFP or work towards its development. It was due to these reasons that Mahinda Rajapaksa had to be defeated.

The People Of This Country Were Way Ahead, But They Did Not Have The Proper Leadership. However, When All The Political Parties Came Together And Created That Leadership, The People Supported Them.

The people of this country were way ahead, but they did not have the proper leadership. But when all the political parties came together and created that leadership, the people supported them. Mainstream media did not support President Maithripala Sirisena's campaign. Everything was done through social media that reached the people. There were no posters, and no cut outs on every other lamp post. Lanka News Web with Chandima and Lanka enews with Sandaruwan Senadheera and also Ruwan Fernandez through his websites did a mammoth task to send the message to the people. The presidential election was driven by the people and they gave their verdict.

Has the SLFP won?

Yes, now both the President and the Opposition Leader are from the SLFP. The implementation of the 100-day programme is going well, which has shown certain systematic transformations. SLFP ministers may have had to give up their positions, but they live freely. They value that freedom than the ministership that trapped them. We want everyone to unite and build the SLFP.

Though many people talk about the members of the Rajapaksa family being in politics, all of them have contested in elections and secured the required number of votes. Then they have been elected by the people.

Everyone in this country knows how the Rajapaksa family contested elections. When it comes to power, Rajapaksas do not care whether a person is their relative

or not. The best example is what happened to Shasheendra Rajapaksa. He was Mahinda Rajapaksa's private secretary. At that time Namal Rajapaksa had not entered politics, as such they made Shasheendra contest the provincial council elections and appointed him as the Chief Minister of Uva Province, thus confining him to regional politics. Then, Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa, a simple man who has been in politics for a very long time and has been maintaining a good relationship with the people in Hambantota, was appointed as the Speaker in Parliament, thereby preventing him from participating in active politics. All that was done to create the path for Namal Rajapaksa to enter politics from Hambantota.

I Suggested That We Split The SLFP And He Inquired Whether This Was Possible. I Said It Was Possible Due To The Strain That The Party Was Going Through At The Time..

Then Basil Rajapaksa?

Basil Rajapaksa is the only person in the Rajapaksa family who understands politics. He was a very good organiser. When Mahinda Rajapaksa was at the Ministry of Fisheries, Basil Rajapaksa initiated the projects to construct fishermen's villages. Then when Mahinda Rajapaksa was at the Ministry of Labour, Basil Rajapaksa developed and implemented the statute for workers. He was the person who did all the ground work for all election campaigns. At the end what happened to him? When the Colombo-Katunayake expressway was opened, there were two massive cut-outs on either side of the entrance-one was of Mahinda Rajapaksa while the other was of Basil Rajapaksa. But within the course of the night, Basil Rajapaksa's cut-out was removed and only Mahinda Rajapaksa's cut-out was kept.

Basil Rajapaksa was put in-charge of the development activities in the North and East, but after a short period of time, all the responsibilities were given to Namal Rajapaksa. He started treating the people who supported Basil Rajapaksa badly. One such person is Willie Gamage who has always stood by the SLFP and the Rajapaksa family, then imagine how others were treated. If Mahinda Rajapaksa had won this election, before any issues were raised against the UNP or President Maithripala Sirisena, the first person to be removed would have been Basil Rajapaksa.

But everyone is saying that Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the election because

of Basil Rajapaksa.

Everyone is blaming him because he is not in Sri Lanka. But that is not true. Basil Rajapaksa was sidelined even though he was the national organiser. If he was given the freedom as before to manage the election campaign and do what was required then this election would have taken a different turn and there would have been a greater fight.

We Did Not Topple An SLFP Government. It Was The Rajapaksa Regime That Was Toppled...The SLFP Will Journey On, Like Before, Because Now We Have All The Leaders Under One Umbrella.

You are an SLFP member. But the Prime Minister in office now is Ranil Wickremasinghe, which means that the SLFP does not have a majority in the government.

Yes, ensuring the victory of Maithripala Sirisena as the President was our first challenge that we had to address in order to save the country. We had to save the SLFP from the Rajapaksa regime and that happened accordingly. Once the main issue was resolved, then addressing the rest was not difficult. President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe are flexible and reasonable people with a great amount of experience. They can talk to anyone, arrive at an agreement and govern this country. The hardest part is now over. We have a President who represents the SLFP. The current political system is not driven by party politics.

We did not topple an SLFP government. It was the Rajapaksa regime that was toppled. Even the SLFP Ministers were with us. Those who could not crossover stayed back and provided the support we required. Though we initiated the process it was the leadership of Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga that brought all of the leaders together. Ven Athuraliye Rathana Thero of the Hela Urumaya was also instrumental in executing this well constructed plan. He was the one who ignited the flame. Hela Urumaya revealed the true qualities of the Rajapaksa regime, who were deceiving the people with the Sinhala Buddhist label. When Hela Urumaya left the government, Mahinda Rajapaksa could no longer sell the brand of Sinhala Buddhist to the people.

What was the role of the JVP and Hela Urumaya?

JVP is the party that spoke against the numerous Bills that were harmful to the people of this country; 18th Amendment, impeachment of former Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake and the Casino Bill and they were also very vocal against corruption. It was the JVP that voiced their disagreement in all of these instances. They contributed significantly towards the toppling of the government on behalf of the people. They are the ones who took the message to the people at grassroot level. At a time when all mainstream media institutions-state and private-were in the hands of the Rajapaksas, the JVP made people aware of what the Rajapaksas were doing and their level of corruption. That is what took this journey forward.

The Hela Urumaya was also at the standpoint that the Rajapaksa regime should be beaten and that the country should be saved from them.

What will happen to the SLFP now?

The SLFP will journey on, like before, because now we have all the leaders under one umbrella.





