THIS IS MY VIEW!



He is outspoken and there is not a moment when he is not in the limelight. Unlike those who talk but show no action, Minister Mervyn Silva is a man of action. He is a person who keeps his word and works for the betterment of the people who have elected him. He is fearless and will stand up for what he feels is right. He is staunch in his stand that Sri Lanka has done no wrong. He believes that the Gods will protect Sri Lanka. The Minister speaks...

By Udeshi Amarasinghe
Photography Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara

Your name is always heard, there is not a time when your name is not in the limelight. Why is that?

There are different reasons for that. Take a well grown tree, it will have a good harvest. We go to see the tree to make use of the harvest. After planting the tree we will take care of it. That is how we look after trees. Even with people it is the same. People do not talk about those who do nothing, they talk about people who actually do something.

I am from the village, to be precise from Beliatta. There are those who look at us with envy and jealousy and they sling mud at us in various ways. Now, take Business Today; you write the truth about us. Some, even if they know the truth they do not write about it. They write with the intention of slandering me personally. I do not get upset by such petty actions because I do not even look at what is written. Furthermore, even if good things are written about me I do not become arrogant. That is because I hail from Ruhuna.

You won the Kelaniya seat. This is the first time that Kelaniya has been won by the UPFA with such a majority. How did you achieve this?

After coming from Beliatte, I worked tirelessly to achieve the aims of the Mahinda Chinthanaya, the manifesto of His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa. Furthermore, under the leadership of Hon Basil Rajapaksa who is the Gampaha district leader and from the moment I was selected to be the organiser of the Kelaniya seat I worked greatly for this electorate. Therefore, as I went into action on behalf of the entire population of Gampaha I was able to secure the votes and achieve this great miracle.

For the first time in the history of Kelaniya, I increased the number of members in the Provincial Council and increased the number of members in the Urban Council. I had the third highest number of votes in the Gampaha district at the Parliamentary elections. I bow my head in respect to those who voted for me.

I Have Been Able To Overcome Such Challenges Through The Strength I

Have As A Person From Ruhuna And Also Because I Love The People Of This Country.

Can you tell us about the development work you have done in Kelaniya?

At the time I was elected, Kelaniya was a place that got flooded even with little rain. During this time the flood water would flow with faeces in it. I have seen this with my own eyes and at times I have had to walk through this water as well. Therefore, the first thing that I did is look at the many illegal constructions that had been done under the direction of previous politicians. I put a stop to all of this. Then, I cleaned all the canals and the tanks. I demolished walls of some of the houses that had been built illegally and were an obstacle to the clear flow of water. I was very strict about this and worked fearlessly with a clear conscience. As I worked in that way we have been able to curtail the flooding in Kelaniya.

The old Kandy road could not be accessed for over 40 years or so. Usually when events at the Kelaniya temple are held, there is major traffic and it takes a very long time to reach the temple. Another reason is that I wanted to reduce the traffic congestion in Kiribathgoda. Therefore, I have paid compensation to all of those who were living near the road and we have begun construction though it is temporarily halted right now. We will recommence the work very soon. I have been able to achieve something that no one has been able to do in their lifetime. Through this, the aim is to make the journey to and from Kandy easier.

Then, I initiated plans to conserve the environment in Kelaniya. In order to meet the people of my electorate I allocated two days each week. I listened to their issues and addressed them to the best of my ability. I cleaned all the canals and built all the roads. This was all done under my leadership and direction. All politicians have to accept this.

As Kelaniya is the sacred site where Lord Buddha visited, I made it my aim to do whatever is required for the Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya. I cleaned the entire drainage system and ensured that the environs of the temple were clean. I have requested from the Prime Minister to make this area a sacred site. I will ensure that it is done.

I reopened the road that had been closed for over 14 years near the Kelaniya Temple. There were many illegal constructions, which I had to forcefully demolish. Then I built a Buddha statue in the Kiribathgoda town and also modernised the

Kiribathgoda town. Then I built the economic centre. No one had ever seen a a pandol (*thorana*) at Thorana *Handiya* (junction). I built a pandol there. All this was done with the personal funds of my friends and me.

To end the war, according to what was said in an ola leaf book, under the direction of His Excellency the President, my friends and I built a Vishnu Devalaya. It was after the Vishnu Devalaya was built that the war ended. I will say that without any fear. In that way within the Kelaniya electorate I have done various activities and been of service to the people. It is when we do work like this that certain politicians, who have been hiding, who have been engaging in activities outside the law, who are unable to engage in these activities anymore, start lying to the country and trying to ruin my name. However, I have handed this over to the law of this country. Investigations are being carried out in line with the law. Through these investigations if I am found guilty I will leave politics for good. It is the people who voted for me. Therefore no one can remove me from the parliament, which is valid till 2016. The Ministerial post can either be removed or kept according to the wishes of His Excellency the President. Even my position as the Kelaniya organiser can be removed by the President. However, if I have done anything wrong and the law finds me guilty then not even for a second will I remain in any of these positions and I am ready to take any punishment.

Even after doing so much of work there are certain segments who continue to attack you. How were you able to fulfill your duties under such challenges?

I have been able to overcome such challenges through the strength I have as a person from Ruhuna, and also because I love the people of this country. A person has to have the strength, determination and luck to achieve anything. Therefore, at times you have to take a step backwards, at times stop and just watch and that is what I am doing right now.

Why is it that certain sections are always against you?

There are certain individuals who are obsessed with money and when they do not get this money into their hands they become revengeful. Then there are those who listen to others and become jealous. When a strong person comes and makes a stand they are unable to do whatever they want. I do not think much about this because it is the way of man. Even when you look at religion, how many people were against Lord Buddha? Then Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed? Look at the

political leaders over the years, Prime Minister Bandaranaike was assassinated, Mahatma Gandhi was also shot, then Martin Luther King, John F Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln were all shot. Gamini Dissanayake, Lalith Athulathmudali, C Suntharalingam and A Duraiappah; all these valuable lives were taken by the LTTE. Therefore, as politicians these are things that we are born into.

The Sons Of D A Rajapaksa – President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa And The Three Armed Forces Countered The Most Ruthless Terrorist Organisation In The World.

As a country how can we go beyond these petty issues?

In any country, in any area, in any government there will be such people. But, with brave and fearless leadership we can go forward.

You are the Minister of Public Affairs and Public Coordination, can you tell us the responsibilities under this portfolio?

The Ministry of Public Affairs and Public Coordination has immense responsibility. There are many areas in the country where development work is progressing slowly. Then, if we are informed regarding this we will go with the relevant officials to inspect and subsequently speak to the relevant district organiser, minister or member of parliament and we try to expedite the process by discussing the possible actions with them.

We utilise the funds from our ministry and accomplish certain aspects of the work. We listen to the woes of the people and take remedial action to make their lives better. His Excellency the President has assigned to me the development of rural villages and under-utilised local industries.

According to the concept developed by Madam Shiranthi Rajapaksa we assist the families whose young sons have joined the temple as *samanera hamuduruwos*. We look into the lives of these poor families and uplift them. This is a major task.

The secretary of my ministry is currently compiling a report on our findings. For example, if we go to a village, they might not have roads, the sacred Bo Tree in the temple may not have a wall, the temple might not have a road, water canals may need dredging and cleaning. Therefore, whatever work that needs to be done for the benefit of the entire village is looked into by this ministry. There are many rural

areas in this country where people are very poor. We work towards uplifting these areas.

You have the protection of great divine power. How has this helped you to be who you are?

I have to say this, the protection of divine power is not only for me. If a person has been advised to wear a talisman because he is going through a bad period, there is nothing wrong in that. Even I wear talismans. But above that I believe that a person should live according to the religion they follow. If a person is living in this day and age they need to have the strength to face unfavourable periods. In the Buddha Dhamma, observing the five precepts is very important. We have to give merit to the Gods as well. What do the five precepts say? Refrain from taking the lives of others, refrain from stealing, refrain from sexual misconduct, refrain from saying lies and refrain from consuming alcohol and narcotics. If you follow these five precepts, your life will be good.

As a Buddhist, you need to assist the priests and respect them, work for the betterment of the temple. We have to respect our elders and teachers, assist the poor and also the disabled. If we keep these aspects in mind and follow these practices in our daily lives then we will have a good life. That is the strength one has. During the last few days there were various accusations against me including that I had taken bribes. If anyone can prove that I have taken a bribe then I will bid goodbye from my life.

A country lives through its media. But the media can also be destructive, it can destroy a country. There was an instance where an international newspaper had published an inaccurate headline, which would have resulted in war. The media should not sensationalise facts and write about things that should not be written about. However, if there is corruption, lawlessness and other illegal activities happening they have to write about it. They should expose the people who engage in such activities and pursue them till they are punished.

The media should not fall into the category of slanderers. There were many eminent journalists such D B Dhanapala, Munidasa Kumaratunga and D R Wijewardena in this country. The journalists today should emulate such persons.

Genuine media is where they do not expect any return by reporting the truth and

think only about the well being of the country. I will not say anything else as I do not want to clash with the media. However, anyone can say anything about me, but no one can destroy me. That is because I have not done anything wrong.

I have done much work for temples including Mirisawetiya, Thuparamaya, Ruwanveliseya, Lankaramaya and Kelani Viharaya. The most recent temple is Somawathiya where I provided the funds to white-wash the *stupa* and also apply gold on the *kotha*. I did all this with the funds of my friends and my own. I am following the path that His Excellency the President showed us. I am from Beliatte, the President is from Ruhuna and I am also from Ruhuna. During my childhood I always saw the family of D A Rajapaksa. I associated with them and would have a meal at their place.

For my birthday I will be going to Anuradhapura, it is the place where King Dutugamunu reigned. He was born in Ruhunu. I admire King Dutugemunu very much. I am very fond of Anuradhapura and I will be visiting all the sacred sites with my family and my mother. And then, on the morning of my birthday we will be going to Mahiyanganaya. The chief priest of this temple has asked me to paint the temple and I accepted. I will do this for the temple. Mahiyanganaya is the sacred site where Lord Buddha visited during the ninth year of his enlightenment. Lord Buddha gave his blessings to Sumana, the pious. Maha Brahma presented Him with *ata pirikara*. Lord Buddha gave his hair as a relic for worship, this was enshrined in the temple. Furthermore, I have agreed to build a pandol for the Saman Devalaya. Therefore, since I engage in meritorious deeds, I have the blessings of all.

I am a businessman. I import vehicles from Japan, which is a family company. The vehicle showroom is in Nawala and anyone can go and see this. My father was also a businessman in Beliatte.

If the father is a businessman then the son does not need to learn the ropes anew. I enjoy engaging in business activities.

What are your plans for the future?

These days I just eat what I have and watch what is happening. If anyone needs my

help I give them my assistance. In a few days I hope to continue my work under the guidance of His Excellency the President and Hon Basil Rajapaksa in Kelaniya and the Gampaha district. I will continue my work at the ministry and participate in the parliament.

We Do Not Have To Fight With Other Countries. We Can Still Engage With Them And Talk To Them… No One Can Do That To Any Country. We Have To All Work And Live Together. We Need To Be Connected. That Is My View.

Final thoughts?

I would like to express my personal views about the US backed resolution that has been presented in Geneva. As a country that has done no wrong and a leader who has done no wrong, there is not a single person who can point the finger at His Excellency the President, the Rajapaksa family or the heroic Armed Forces. In that case the first people to have violated human rights are the colonisers, then the Chola dynasty from India that invaded the country during ancient times. They killed our people and destroyed our temples. Maha Vijayabahu and King Dutugemunu faced the Chola invaders. Then Puran Appu, Keppetipola and other such heroes faced the wrath of the colonisers. They destroyed villages, forests and waterways, thus making the country poor. It was all perpetrated by the British. Therefore, we have to file the human rights case against them. The colonisers, that is the Portugese, Dutch and British, all committed grave violations. However, our people, our Kings such as Seethawaka Rajasinghe, during the Randenigala battle destroyed the colonial rulers.

The present day is very different. The entire world is connected. Science has developed and man has become more civilised. No one can invade or capture a country by force. The situation in Iraq and Libya recently are instances where human kind had gone back to their barbaric days. This is my personal view.

We do not want to fight with the US nor do we want to fight with any other country in the world. However, these countries should look at Sri Lanka; we are a country that has been in a war for 30 years, where the peoples' freedom and human rights had been snatched by the LTTE. Eminent, moderate and educated Tamils such as Sundaralingam and Neelan Tiruchelvam were assassinated by the LTTE. Muslims, Sinhalese and priests were all killed indiscriminately. They bombed religious places such as the Dalada Maligawa, they killed Muslims while they were at prayer in the

mosque. The LTTE assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who hails from the family of Jawaharlal Nehru. Therefore, America should first recognise the destruction caused by the LTTE over the last 30 years. That destruction was funded by US dollars provided by the Sri Lankan Diaspora. Third generation Tamils have not even seen the country,nor do they know the language. They have not tasted the flavour of drumsticks from Jaffna. They have not suffered like the people who had to undergo 30 years of war.

Successive Sri Lankan leaders and governments, from J R Jayawardene, R Premadasa, Chandrika Kumaratunga to Ranil Wickremesinghe were unable counter the LTTE. Then, the sons of D A Rajapaksa – President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the three Armed Forces countered the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world. Now the country is moving forward with renewed vigour. What the US should do right now is have discussions with our President, and if we have by some way had any shortcomings, then to speak to us about it. However, we have not done anything wrong. If there are any shortcomings let us overcome them and help us to proceed on our journey ahead.

The greatest thing that powerful countries can do is to give a helping hand to emerging countries such as ours. At this time China, Russia, Pakistan, the Middle Eastern countries and various other countries have been a great strength to us. My personal view is that our country should engage in discussions with the US. We need to rebuild communication and confidence between the two countries. We have to be given the time we need.

No one can hang us by passing a resolution. Our people are a nation that is determined and strong. Anagarika Dharmapala showed this in India, our ancient kings with our powerful giants went overseas and brought back 24,000 instead of 12,000 that had been taken to that country. We are such a nation, with great diversity of Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher. Our differences give us the strength.

It is wrong if people are betraying the country for political gains. We should have a country to fight for. This happened once before as well. The country was betrayed to the British. The Sri Lankan king was handed over to the British. At least think about how ants join together and build the ant hill, how the birds build their nests and in a similar manner we can join together and build our country. We do not have to fight with other countries. We can still engage with them and talk to them.

We have to live together in this universe. If a massive meteorite hits the world, the entire world will be destroyed. America will not survive nor will we. It is until then that we fight over various issues. If you go to the Grand Canyon, you will see what has happened because of a meteorite. Sri Lanka is a nation that comes from the line of Maha Ravana. Maha Ravana had ten heads, six of which were in communication with the heavens and the remaining with the *sathara pada*. Lord Buddha assigned God Vishnu to protect this country. Pure Buddhism prevails in this country. He assigned a person from Devundara to protect Buddhism; Uppalavanna is Sri Vishnu. Therefore, especially the children of D A Rajapaksa are protected by Sri Vishnu. Then Kataragama Deviyo is Mahasena, Sumana Saman is from Sabaragamuwa. We have the protection of all.

When we tell the world not to interfere, we cannot be stubborn or say it in an inappropriate manner. We have to do it in a peaceful manner. The Buddhist monks including Ven Galaboda Gnanissara Thero and Vidyalankara Maha Nayaka Thero are good examples where they in a very peaceful manner spoke to the representatives of the US.

Take Jayalalitha Jayaram, she could not go out onto the streets in the past and had to be in hiding because of the LTTE. It is only after the destruction of the LTTE that she is able to walk about freely. What I would like to say to her as well is that we should talk about this in a peaceful manner. Preventing people from seeking medical help; is that not a violation of human rights? Lord Buddha was born in India, there are people who need to go and worship these sites. Preventing them from coming to the country; is that not a violation of human rights? Preventing businessmen from going to India; is that not wrong? Firstly, the UN should look into why she has insinuated such a ban to be imposed on a neighbouring country.

We cannot ask Indians not to visit Sri Lanka. We cannot ask our women not to wear Indian sarees. No one can do that to any country. We have to all work and live together. We need to be connected. That is my view.





