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## Journalist in hiding after she exposed 'unlawful' leader

**Matthew Campbell**

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Her newspaper refused to publish the claims for fear of reprisals from the Rajapaksa dynasty, which has dominated Sri Lankan politics for almost two decades. "These people are very dangerous," said the journalist, using the pseudonym Ashana. "If they knew I was doing this they would take my children and send me their heads in a basket. They're a bunch of thugs."

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**Continued on page 4 →**





# Leader's citizenship: journalist in hiding

→ Continued from page 1

groups describe a systematic targeting of journalists perceived to be critical of the Rajapaksa brothers: 13 were killed between 2005 and 2015 when Mahinda was president. Gotabaya, now president, has denied operating death squads and sending them against members of the press during that period.

His dual Sri Lankan and American citizenship was a subject of noisy debate leading up to his election in 2019. He was permitted to run after insisting he had given up American citizenship by swearing an oath at the US embassy in Colombo, the capital.

But the US appears to have considered him a US citizen for some time after that: his name did not appear on the Treasury department's official list of former citizens until May 8, 2020, by which time he had already been president for almost six months.

"Rajapaksa did not qualify to be a presidential candidate as he violated the most important constitutional requirement, which is being a citizen of Sri Lanka alone," Sanje Sadera, a businessman in America who helped Ashana with her investigation, said.

Ashana believes that "the illegitimacy of the Rajapaksa presidency calls all of his executive decisions into question".

Attempting to verify her findings, The Sunday Times consulted the US Treasury department's "Quarterly Publication of Individuals Who Have Chosen To Expatriate", dated May 8, 2020. It includes Rajapaksa's name and is held up by Ashana as proof that he was a US citizen when elected.

The publication states that those on the list "are people

losing United States citizenship... with respect to whom the secretary received information during the quarter ending March 31, 2020."

Rajapaksa was elected president on November 17, 2019 and sworn in the next day. The department did not reply to requests to clarify whether Rajapaksa had been considered a US citizen until at least the start of 2020. Nor did the state department.

Whether or not the president follows his brother's example by resigning, there is little sign of public fury abating or being contained by a state of emergency and curfew.

Rampaging mobs have burnt more than 50 homes, including the ancestral residence of the Rajapaksa clan, the focus of anger over nepotism, corruption and the worst economic crisis in decades.

Many Sri Lankans believe the president has paved the way for his relatives to plunder the country's wealth for their own gain – besides the president and prime minister, four other Rajapaksa family members held ministerial posts until early last month, when the full cabinet resigned over the protests.

"They're such crooks," Ashana said. "They make up ministries to give jobs to all the clan, one was put in charge of 'potatoes, onions and cultivation'," she added. "It's wrong that this family are worried only about themselves while the rest of the country is suffering."

"There is no Panadol or paracetamol, no fuel, the country has come to a standstill. People don't have food. They need to know the truth. They've been cheated. The president has lied."

Rioters have set up road blocks on the way to the airport to prevent politicians from leaving the country. Patrolling the streets in armoured personnel carriers, the military has orders to shoot anyone damaging public property.

Not long ago, this island of



Mahinda Rajapaksa, left, and brother Gotabaya have set off protests in Colombo, below, and elsewhere



22 million people was a beacon of relative prosperity with near-universal literacy and a poster-child for Asian democracy. What went wrong?

A powerful land-owning family, the Rajapaksa brothers had dominated local politics for years before ascending to the national stage for a decade in 2005 under Mahinda, who made Gotabaya his defence secretary – a big jump for the younger sibling who had been in the US after retiring from the Sri Lankan military.

The brothers proved a popular duo, hailed as heroes among the Sinhalese, who comprise 70 per cent of the population, for bringing an end to the 30-year civil war against ethnic Tamil rebels in 2009 after a brutal military campaign that led to accusations of war crimes on both sides.

Gotabaya was elected president on a nationalist platform and set about stuffing his administration with family members. But now things have gone horribly wrong for him and his brother – and cracks have begun to appear in their double act. Gotabaya was reported to have prompted Mahinda to "take one for the team" and resign.

This was humiliating for the proud former president: after announcing on Twitter that he was stepping down, he had to evacuate his official residence with the help of armed troops after it was besieged by an angry crowd who broke down the gate.

He has found refuge in a naval base with his immediate family and is reportedly under court order not to leave the country.

Since then, pressure has been growing on Gotabaya, who has offered to give up most of his executive powers, to resign too. For Ashana, it would be best if he goes. "We've had 30 months of decision-making by an unconstitutional president," she said, "and that's a crime".

A presidential spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

@MCinParis

Editorial and Dominic Lawson page 22

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**Continued on page 4**

**‘சட்டவிரோத’ தலைவரை அம்பலப்படுத்திய பத்திரிகையாளர் தலைமறைவானார்**

மே 14, 2022 தி டைம்ஸ் (யுகே)

மத்தேயு காம்ப்பெல்

2019 ஆம் ஆண்டு அதிபர் ராஜபக்சே பதவிக்கு போட்டியிட தடை விதிக்கப்பட்டிருக்க வேண்டும், எனவே அவர் ஒரு சட்டவிரோத தலைவர் என்பதற்கு ஆதாரம் கிடைத்ததையடுத்து, இலங்கையில் ஒரு பத்திரிகையாளர் உயிருக்கு பயந்து தலைமறைவாக உள்ளார். அந்த நேரத்தில் அந்த அரசியல்வாதி அமெரிக்க குடிமகனாக இருந்ததால், அவர் போட்டியிடுவதற்கு தகுதியற்றவராக

இருந்ததைக் குறிக்கும் அதிகாரப்பூர்வ ஆவணத்தின் நகலை அவர் அமெரிக்காவில் உள்ள ஒருவரிடமிருந்து பெற்றார். ஏறக்குறைய இரண்டு தசாப்தங்களாக இலங்கை அரசியலில் ஆதிக்கம் செலுத்திய ராஜபக்ச வம்சத்தின் பழிவாங்கல்களுக்கு பயந்து அவரது செய்தித்தாள் கூற்றுக்களை வெளியிட மறுத்தது. "இவர்கள் மிகவும் ஆபத்தானவர்கள்" என்று பத்திரிகையாளர் அஷானா என்ற புனைப்பெயரைப் பயன்படுத்தி கூறினார். "நான் இதைச் செய்கிறேன் என்று அவர்களுக்குத் தெரிந்தால், அவர்கள் என் குழந்தைகளை அழைத்துச் சென்று அவர்களின் தலைகளை ஒரு கூடையில் அனுப்புவார்கள். அவர்கள் ஒரு குண்டர் கூட்டம்."

கடந்த வாரம் குழப்பத்தில் மூழ்கிய நிலையில் இளம் தாய் இலங்கையில் இருந்து பேசிக்கொண்டிருந்தார். உணவு மற்றும் எரிபொருள் பற்றாக்குறை மற்றும் நீண்ட மின்வெட்டு பற்றி கோபம் அதிகரித்து வருகிறது.

திங்களன்று ஜனாதிபதியின் மூத்த சகோதரர் மகிந்த ராஜபக்ச, அரசாங்க ஆதரவாளர்களுக்கும் அவர்களது எதிர்ப்பாளர்களுக்கும் இடையே பல வாரங்களாக நடந்த மோதல்களில் ஒன்பது பேர் கொல்லப்பட்டதுடன் 200 பேர் காயமுற்றனர்.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/journalist-in-hiding-after-questioning-sri-lankan-leaders-legitimacy-60l0lkjx8>

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**Continued on page 4**

‘නීති විරෝධී’ නායකයා හෙළිදරව් කළ  
මාධ්‍යවේදියා සැඟවී සිටී  
2022 මැයි 14 ද ටයිම්ස් (එක්සත් රාජධානිය)

මැතිවි කැමිබලේ

ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ මාධ්‍යවේදිනියක් 2019 ජනාධිපති ධුරයට තරග කිරීම වැළැක්විය යුතුව තිබූ බවත් එබැවින් ඔහු නීත්‍යානුකූල නොවන නායකයෙකු බවත් සාක්ෂි සොයා ගැනීමෙන් පසු ජීවිතය ගැන බියෙන් සැඟවී සිටී.

එම දේශපාලනඥයා එවකට එක්සත් ජනපද පුරවැසියෙකු වූ අතර, ඔහු තරඟ කිරීමට නුසුදුස්සෙකු වීමට ඉඩ ඇති බව පෙනෙන පරිදි, ඇය ඇමරිකාවේ සම්බන්ධතාකරුවෙකුගෙන් නිල ලේඛනයක පිටපතක් ලබා ගත්තාය. දශක දෙකකට ආසන්න කාලයක් ශ්‍රී ලංකා දේශපාලනයේ ආධිපත්‍යය දැරූ රාජපක්ෂ පෙළපතෙන් පළිගැනීම්වලට බියෙන් ඇගේ පුවත්පත එම ප්‍රකාශ ප්‍රකාශයට පත් කිරීම ප්‍රතික්ෂේප කළේය. "මේ මිනිස්සු හරිම හයානකයි" මාධ්‍යවේදියා පැවසුවේ අශානා යන අන්වර්ථ නාමය භාවිතා කරමිනි. "මම මේක කරනවා කියලා එයාලා දන්නවා නම් මගේ ළමයි අරන් ගිහින් මට එයාලගේ ඔළු කෑඩේ එවනවා. මුත් මැරයෝ කට්ටියක්." පසුගිය සතියේ අවුල් ජාලයක ගිලී ගිය නිසා තරුණ මව ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සිට කතා කරමින් සිටියාය. ආහාර හා ඉන්ධන හිඟය සහ දිගු විදුලිය විසන්ධි කිරීම ගැන කෝපය වැඩි වෙමින් පවතී.

සඳුද ජනාධිපතිගේ වැඩිමහල් සොහොයුරා වන මහින්ද රාජපක්ෂ අගමැති ධුරයෙන් ඉල්ලා අස්විය, පෙනෙන විදිහට ඔහුගේ සහෝදරයාගේ ඉල්ලීම පරිදි, සති ගනනාවක් ආන්ඩුවේ ආධාරකරුවන් සහ ඔවුන්ගේ විරුද්ධවාදීන් අතර ගැටුම් වලින් පුද්ගලයන් 9 දෙනෙකු මිය ගොස් 200 දෙනෙකුට තුවාල සිදු විය.



# A fearless reporter who is risking death to tell the truth

As protests over food and fuel shortages set Sri Lanka ablaze, a story threatens to tip petrol on the flames. A young journalist known only by the pseudonym Ashana claims to have uncovered evidence that the autocratic president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, broke electoral rules when he won power in 2019. She says he held American citizenship at the time, an allegation that appears to be backed up by US Treasury Department records. That would mean he violated Sri Lanka's constitution.

Ashana says her newspaper refused to publish the story. She is clear what would happen if she were identified by the Rajapaksa family's cronies: "If they knew I was doing this, they would take my children and send me their heads in a basket."

The Rajapaksas, powerful landowners, have held sway over Sri Lanka on and off since 2005, when Gotabaya's brother

Mahinda became president. After a period in opposition, they returned in 2019 under Gotabaya, who had brutally crushed the Tamil Tigers terrorist movement. Gotabaya cut taxes, stripping the government of revenue just as Covid smashed the tourism industry. The country has unravelled: a cost-of-living crisis and nepotism allegations have sparked riots that have killed nine people.

The Rajapaksa family's reign has been characterised by an intolerance of criticism. Human rights groups say 13 journalists were murdered between 2005 and 2015, while Mahinda was president.

Ashana's claims are the latest reminder not to take our democracy and our liberties for granted. Freedom of the press is one of the main pillars of a healthy society, as those suffering under Sri Lanka's collapsing economy can testify.

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The Rajapaksa family's reign has been characterised by an intolerance of criticism. Human rights groups say 13 journalists ere murdered between 2005 and 2015, while Mahinda was president.

Ashana's claims are the latest reminder not to take our democracy and our liberties for granted. Freedom f the press is one of the main pillars of a healthy society, as those suffering under Sri Lanka's collapsing economy can testify.

අශානා පවසන්නේ තම පුවත්පත එම කතාව පළ කිරීම ප්‍රතික්ෂේප කළ බවයි. රාජපක්ෂ පවුලේ ගෝලබාලයන් විසින් ඇයව හඳුනාගතහොත් කුමක් සිදුවේදැයි ඇය පැහැදිලිය: “මම මෙය කරන බව ඔවුන් දැන සිටියහොත්, ඔවුන් මගේ දරුවන් රැගෙන ගොස් ඔවුන්ගේ ඔළු කුඩයක දමා මට එවනු ඇත.”

රාජ්‍යක්ෂ පවුලේ පාලන සමය විවේචන නොඉවසීම මගින් සංලක්ෂිත විය. මහින්ද ජනාධිපතිව සිටියදී 2005 සිට 2015 දක්වා කාලය තුළ මාධ්‍යවේදීන් 13 දෙනෙකු ඝාතනය කර ඇති බව මානව හිමිකම් කණ්ඩායම් පවසයි.

අශානාගේ ප්‍රකාශයන් අපගේ ප්‍රජාතන්ත්‍රවාදය සහ අපගේ නිදහස සුළු කොට නොසලකන ලෙසට නවතම මතක් කිරීමයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ කඩා වැටෙන ආර්ථිකය යටතේ දුක් විඳින අයට සාක්ෂි දිය හැකි පරිදි, මාධ්‍ය නිදහස සෞඛ්‍ය සම්පන්න සමාජයක ප්‍රධාන කුළුණු වලින් එකකි.

அஷ்னா தனது செய்தித்தாள் கதையை வெளியிட மறுத்துவிட்டது. ராஜபக்ச குடும்பத்தின் கூட்டாளிகளால் தன்னை அடையாளம் காட்டினால் என்ன நடக்கும் என்பது தெளிவாகத் தெரிகிறது: "நான் இதைச் செய்கிறேன் என்று அவர்களுக்குத் தெரிந்தால், அவர்கள் என் குழந்தைகளை அழைத்துச் சென்று அவர்களின் தலைகளை ஒரு கூடையில் எனக்கு அனுப்புவார்கள்."

ராஜபக்ச குடும்பத்தின் ஆட்சியானது விமர்சனங்களை சகிப்பின்மையால் வகைப்படுத்தப்பட்டுள்ளது. 2005 முதல் 2015 வரை மஹிந்த ஜனாதிபதியாக இருந்த போது 13 ஊடகவியலாளர்கள் படுகொலை செய்யப்பட்டதாக மனித உரிமை அமைப்புகள் கூறுகின்றன.

அஷனாவின் கூற்றுகள் நமது ஜனநாயகத்தையும் நமது சுதந்திரத்தையும் ஒரு பொருட்டாக எடுத்துக் கொள்ளக் கூடாது என்பதற்கான சமீபத்திய நினைவுட்டலாகும். பத்திரிக்கை சுதந்திரம் ஆரோக்கியமான சமூகத்தின் முக்கிய தூண்களில் ஒன்றாகும், ஏனெனில் இலங்கையின் விழ்ச்சியடைந்து வரும் பொருளாதாரத்தின் கீழ் பாதிக்கப்பட்டவர்கள் சாட்சியமளிக்க முடியும்.