

SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT'S COVID19 TEAM

-  RAJAPAKSA FAMILY (1)
-  ANANDA COLLEGE (4)
-  GAJABA REGIMENT (5)
-  SERVED TOGETHER IN MATALE (3)
-  ARMY OR NAVY (9)
-  FINAL WAR COMMAND ROLE (7)



**ACTING CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF
/ COMMANDER OF THE ARMY**
LIEUTENANT GENERAL
SHAVENDRA SILVA

Alleged to have committed war crimes (ITJP Dossier).

Designated by US Government under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act.



PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL ENVOY
BASIL RAJAPAKSA

(Brother of the President, unelected)

PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE FOR FOOD DELIVERIES



SECRETARY OF DEFENCE
MAJ. GEN. KAMAL GUNARATNE

Alleged to have committed war crimes (ITJP Dossier).



**DIRECTOR GENERAL,
CIVIL DEFENCE FORCE**
REAR ADMIRAL (RETD.)
ANANDA PEIRIS



**DIRECTOR GENERAL,
SRI LANKA CUSTOMS**
MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.)
G. VJITHA RAVIPRIYA

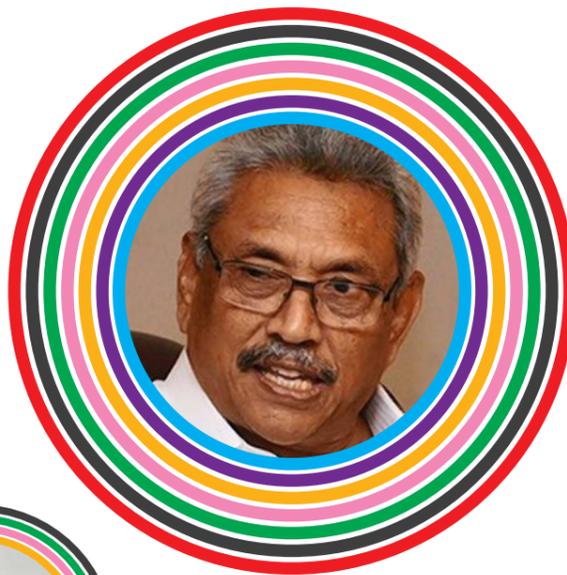
2009 War: Task Force VIII.



**CHAIRMAN, CONSUMER AFFAIRS
AUTHORITY**
MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.)
SHANTHA DISSANAYAKE

2009 War: Air Mobile Brigade.

NATIONAL OPERATION CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK



PRESIDENT
GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA

Alleged to have command responsibility for war crimes and torture.



**DIRECTOR GENERAL,
DISASTER MANAGEMENT CENTRE**
MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.)
SUDANTHA RANASINGHE

Previously Commissioner General of "rehabilitation".

2009 war: Brigadier General Staff of SF HQ Wannii.



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**CO-CHAIRMAN, TASK FOR
POVERTY ERADICATION AND
LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT**
MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.)
SUMEDHA PERERA

2010-12 Joseph Camp commander when torture occurred.



COMMANDER OF THE NAVY
VICE ADMIRAL PIYAL DE SILVA

2012: Appointed to Trincomalee just after torture site closed.

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TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

PRESS RELEASE: Sri Lanka's Militarisation of COVID-19 Response

[Accompanying Infographic](#)

8 April 2020

Johannesburg: The lack of civilian oversight over Sri Lanka's militarised COVID-19 response raises some very serious human rights concerns, said the International Truth and Justice Project.

"Sri Lanka has an alleged war criminal heading its COVID-19 response, who served in the same army regiment as the President, raising questions about transparency, accountability and oversight," said the ITJP's Executive Director, Yasmin Sooka, herself under lockdown.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings, Agnes Callamard, has said that any measures taken to deal with the COVID-19 emergency should be guided by the principles of legality, proportion, precaution and non-discrimination. Appointing military personnel to manage the crisis without any civilian oversight does not bode well for Sri Lanka - nor does Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva specifically identifying those COVID-19 patients who are Muslims in public statements.

"Experienced professionals from the civil service should be in charge of coordinating complex public health and distribution issues, not the Army," said Yasmin Sooka, *"People's lives are at stake as well as huge amounts of money and supplies that need to be equitably shared. It is essential that the public be allowed to question the response operation without being threatened with arrest. This crisis shouldn't become an excuse to erode civil liberties yet further."*

Already there are clashes between medical professionals and the military over what the best public health measures should be. Even the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) has expressed disappointment that

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
YASMIN SOOKA

the Government placed an Army commander in charge of the country's overall COVID-19 Response.

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The National Operation Center for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak

The Sri Lankan Government says all prevention and management of the COVID-19 virus outbreak and healthcare provisions and other public services are to be managed by this newly formed National Operation Centre. All other government officials should be available for the Centre to deploy¹.

However the National Operation Centre is headed by Sri Lanka's Army Commander who is also acting Chief of Defence Staff, Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva. Silva was publicly designated this year by the US State Department because of credible information of his involvement, through command responsibility, in gross violations of human rights, namely extrajudicial killings². Silva was appointed to this powerful COVID-19 role by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was his superior officer in the first battalion of the Gajaba Regiment in Matale during military operations to crush the second Sinhala youth insurgency in 1989 when hundreds disappeared in the area under their control. In 2008-9 when the US Government says Silva was allegedly involved in war crimes, he was receiving orders allegedly directly from Gotabaya Rajapaksa who was then secretary of defence.

Moreover the legal basis for this latest appointment is unclear as there is no gazette notification establishing the COVID-19 National Operation Centre, as for other COVID-19 entities³. This raises the question of who in the civilian administration holds Shavendra Silva accountable, other than his friend the President who is himself ex military. Media conferences on the outbreak are dominated by Shavendra Silva who briefs on the quarantine situation⁴.

Presidential Task Force On Food Supplies

This was gazetted by the President in March to ensure the supply of food to the nation during the crisis. In a detailed analysis the Centre for Policy Alternatives commented that "the mandate and powers assigned to the Task Force are much wider in scope and range from ensuring the supply of essential goods and services to providing relief measures to vulnerable groups of society"⁵. The Task Force is also headed by the President's unelected brother Basil Rajapaksa and contains a large number of retired military officials close to the President (including from his Gajaba Regiment) also implicated in the 2009 war in Sri Lanka, which saw widespread violations of international law by the Army.

The appointment of military officers to key public roles has been controversial - for example Major General Vijitha Ravipriya's appointment as Director General of Customs was opposed by the customs trades unions who said this job should not go to a retired army officer

¹ <http://www.pmdnews.lk/army-commander-shavendra-silva-heads-national-operation-center-for-prevention-of-covid-19-outbreak/>

² <https://translations.state.gov/2020/02/14/public-designation-due-to-gross-violations-of-human-rights-of-shavendra-silva-of-sri-lanka-under-section-7031c-of-the-department-of-state-foreign-operations-and-related-programs-appropriations-a/>

³ http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/3/2167-18_E.pdf

⁴ <https://news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/29929-lt-gen-shavendra-silva-dig-ajith-rohana-update-the-public-on-the-current-situation-in-the-country>

⁵ <https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINAL-Presidential-Task-Force-on-COVID19-April-2020-copy.pdf>

with no experience of civil administration but to a civil servant from their own department⁶. The President's secretary, P. B. Jayasundera, alleged the reason for appointing a military officer was to curb corruption. Shockingly, in 2008 Jayasundera himself, had to step down as Treasury Secretary over allegations that he was responsible for the unlawful sale of a revenue-producing public asset at an artificially low price to a private corporation but a year later was reinstated by then President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, brother of the current President⁷.

In addition, the Chairman of the Consumer Affairs Authority is Major General (Retired) D.M.S. Dissanayaka (Shantha Dissanayake⁸), also from the President's Gajaba Regiment, was caught on camera recently threatening a vendor profiteering during the COVID19 disaster, saying "I will pulverise your ears"⁹. Moreover, the Committee of Inquiry into the Prison Incident Welikada in 2012 recommended charging Dissanayake under Section 162 of the Sri Lankan Penal Code for his alleged involvement in the Welikada Jail massacre in which 27 prisoners were killed, along with Gotabaya Rajapaksa¹⁰. Neither was charged.

COVID19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa established this Fund on 23 March to collect direct deposits and donations from organisations and individual donors¹¹. On 7 April, the fund stood at SL. Rs. 420m (US \$ 2.2m). The President's website says more details can be obtained from Mr. K.B. Egodawela, Director General Administration. Egodawela is a retired military officer and previously a co-accused in the Avant Garde corruption case with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa but released from the charges two months ago, after he had already been appointed the President's Chief of Staff¹².

⁶ Military DG Only for Two Years, 1 Mar 2020, Sunday Times Lanka, <https://www.pressreader.com/sri-lanka/sunday-times-sri-lanka/20200301/281539407998376>

⁷ Jayasundera Interrogated On Hedging Deal, 31 Mar 2015, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/jayasundera-interrogated-on-hedging-deal/>

Also: <https://whistleblower.org/in-the-news/sunday-times-sri-lanka-gap-report-pbj-returns-despite-orchestration-unlawful/>

⁸ http://www.caa.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=141&Itemid=591&lang=en

⁹ The Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) raided Manning Market in Pettah which sells wholesale vegetables. It found vendors were selling at inflated prices; vendors said they had additional costs. CAA Chair Major General Shantha Dissanayake threatened vendors saying that he would seal the shops if they didn't sell at the price set by the CAA. Consumer Affairs Authority Chairman Major General Shantha Dissanayake can be seen threatening a vendor: "I will pulverise your ears if you sell goods at a higher price" 0'26".

<https://www.facebook.com/ruvibennettmusic/videos/2663054907251432/>

¹⁰ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/charge-gota-says-nambuwasam-coi-on-welikada-massacre/>

Also Sirasa says quoting the three-member committee report: "Prisons commissioner general P.W Kodippili, Prisons intelligence unit jailor Indika Sampath, DIG Anura Senanayake, Brigadier Shantha Dissanayake and magazine (Welikada) Prison chief Emil Ranjan had neglected their duty. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190819143811/https://www.newsfirst.lk/sinhala/2017/11/09/27-%E0%B6%AF%E0%B7%99%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%99%E0%B6%9A%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%A7-%E0%B6%B8%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%94-%E0%B6%9A%E0%B7%90%E0%B6%B3%E0%B7%80%E0%B7%96-%E0%B7%80%E0%B7%90%E0%B6%BD%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%A9/>

And: CID told Colombo additional magistrate Priyantha Liyanage on July 31:

"On the day of the incident, a statement was recorded from the Brigadier at the time and presently Major General Dissanayake Mudiyanseleage Shantha Dissanayake who was the commander in charge of the 14th division that first went to provide security to the Welikada prison on 9/11/2012..." <http://www.dinamina.lk/2018/08/01/%E0%B6%B4%E0%B7%94%E0%B7%80%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%8A/57829/%E0%B7%80%E0%B7%90%E0%B6%BD%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%A9-%E0%B6%9D%E0%B7%8F%E0%B6%AD%E0%B6%B1%E0%B6%BA%E0%B7%9A-%E0%B6%89%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%92-%E0%B7%83%E0%B7%90%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%94%E0%B7%80%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%8A-%E0%B6%85%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%8A%E0%B6%85%E0%B6%A9%E0%B6%82%E0%B6%9C%E0%B7%94%E0%B7%80%E0%B6%A7-%E0%B6%9C%E0%B7%90%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%93%E0%B6%B8-%E0%B6%AF%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%BB%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%AE%E0%B6%B1-%E0%B7%80%E0%B7%8F%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%8A%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%8F-%E0%B6%85%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%94%E0%B7%80?&page=21>

Clearly it is the same man:

"Brigadier Shantha Dissanayake says that breaking the siege on the Jaffna Fort was to the success of Thrivida Balaya. In fact, the SLA couldn't have planned a ground offensive to regain Jaffna at that time without consolidating its positions at the Jaffna Fort, he said. Dissanayake is now in command of 14 Division deployed in the Districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Gampaha, Ratnapura, Galle and Matara".

http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=83040

In 2014 he was the NGO Secretariat director general: July 10, media reported concerns from NGO Secretariat director general D.M.S. Dissanayake that nonprofit organizations registered under the Companies Act were "acting out the role of NGOs" and would be required to register with the NGO Secretariat. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/559bd53a12.html>

¹¹ <https://www.president.gov.lk/covid-19-fund-increases-further/>

¹² <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2020/02/20/court-rejects-amended-indictments-on-avant-garde-case/>

<http://www.adaderana.lk/news/60275/five-accused-in-avant-garde-case-released-senadhipathi-granted-bail>

Calls for Civilian Oversight

Twenty leading trade unions representing the public sector workforce recently wrote to the President calling on him to bring COVID-19 prevention under a civil authority. In a joint statement on 18 March they said:

“In such a national disaster situation a national operation centre should be established under the Disaster Management Centre, which is the regulatory authority with special training. We notify the government that all public services should be aligned under that centre...¹³”.

Meanwhile former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said more than a week ago that there should be a mechanism under director health services to unite the private and state health services to face the peak in cases that is expected between April 4 and 11.

Religious Hatred

Organisations in Sri Lanka have expressed concern that the crisis could be misused to whip up religious hatred, in particular against Muslims. This is of concern given Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s closeness to Sinhala Buddhist extremist organisations, such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), which are notoriously anti-Muslim.

A statement by 26 trades unions complained that:

“While reporting information about infected and the dead from the novel corona virus, it is evident that people are categorised according to religion and ethnicity in a manner that incites racist sentiments... Our trade unions would highlight that these guidelines should be followed by state officials, government ministers and all politicians who make statements about corona patients and those who passed away¹⁴”.

Censorship

The acting police chief, C.D. Wickramarathna, instructed the Criminal Investigation Department of the police and all offices to arrest and take legal action against anyone who publishes posts on social media criticising government officials¹⁵. The 1 April police statement in Sinhala recommends, “Tough legal action against those who publish false or malicious statements in the internet”.

Activists have pointed out this violates the right to freedom of expression¹⁶. A statement by seven media organisations¹⁷ on 4 April

¹³ [https://theleader.lk/news/2361-request-for-civil-authority-to-deal-with-coronary-disaster-\(Sinhala\)](https://theleader.lk/news/2361-request-for-civil-authority-to-deal-with-coronary-disaster-(Sinhala))

¹⁴ [වෛරසය එන්නත් ජාතිය බලාගෙන නොවන වග ජාතිවාදී ප්‍රචාරකයන්ට සිහිපත් කිරීමක්!](https://www.theleader.lk/news/2578-the-virus-comes-as-a-reminder-to-racist-propagandists-that-the-nation-is-not-watching), 5 Apr 2020.

¹⁵ http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Strict-action-against-those-criticise-state-officials-on-social-media/108-186028

Translation of Sinhala statement: “It is reported that videos and other material are made public in the internet that criticize those duties, highlight minor shortcomings of those officers, obstructing their duties immensely, reprimanding them and containing false or malicious statements. The acting IGP has instructed the deputy inspector general of the Criminal Investigation Department and officers in charge of every police station throughout the island to enact the law very strictly against such persons, arrest them and take further legal action by producing them in court.”

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/saliyapieris/status/1245299875110989824>

¹⁷ Tamil Media Alliance (TMA), Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), Free Media Movement (FMM), Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF), Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU), Internet Media Action (IMA), Young Journalists Association (YJA).

“The wide distribution of accurate and true information should be encouraged as the awareness raised among the public makes taking steps against the epidemic, easy. Therefore, every party fighting against the disaster should choose the alternative of making accurate and true

accepted that that “fake news” or “incorrect information” during an epidemic was harmful but added that “fair criticism was a right and if a mistake was made by public officials people should be able to express their views online. A letter to the acting Inspector General of Police and copied to the Secretary of Defence signed by 46 individuals and 9 organisations on 7 April, commented there was “no provision in law that authorizes the arrest of those ‘criticizing’ the state”¹⁸.

“There is no doubt that in this unprecedented period of fear and turmoil, many governments resort to securitizing a public emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis rather than a rights-based response. A rights-based approach requires a framework which places human rights and the rule of law at the forefront,” said Yasmin Sooka.

“The Sri Lankan government must ensure that each and every restriction on rights and freedoms has a clear legal basis, described in specific terms so that people know how their rights are being limited, under which law, and precisely what they are (and are not) permitted to do. Any limitation or restriction must be subject to the review of the courts,” she added.

“We call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to establish a civilian, non-partisan, independent response committee that has oversight of the Government’s response; the military and police should not be allowed to simply do whatever they want to combat the pandemic. COVID-19 should not be used as an excuse to impose military control through stealth especially by officials already discredited,” Ms. Sooka commented.

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information public. Whereas, dealing with punishments could make those who provide accurate information inactive. While appreciating the service provided by public officials, we highlight that if any is mistake is committed, fair criticism is a right.”

¹⁷ <https://www.cpalanka.org/regarding-notice-issued-by-the-police-media-division/>

