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BREAKING NEWS

UP - DOWN - STOP

-PLOTE & EPRLF Secretly Meets Norway Official in Oslo: July 02: Srilankan PLOTE military Leader Pavan and EPRLF eastern Leader R.Thuraiaratnam met MFA and Red part leader in Oslo, Norway. Both of them are staying with Norway PLOTE Leader Rashasingham Sivarajah in Maria Dehlis Vei 15, 1084 Oslo near to Furuseeth. According to Rajan, PLOTE and EPRLF agreed to cooperate to all kind of Norwegian Peace activities in Srilanka.

-Bangladesh raises oil prices by 67% : July 02: The Bangladesh government has raised fuel prices by between 34-67 per cent amid soaring crude oil prices, officials say.

- African leaders adopt Zimbabwe power-sharing text: July 02: An African Union summit on Tuesday adopted a resolution calling for dialogue between Zimbabwe's political foes and a national unity government

Unity in diversity is essential for peace in Sri Lanka – Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah




(July 03, Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian) Although I am the bishop of the JDCSI and primarily responsible to help with the spiritual life of the people, I also have a key role as a citizen of the community. In this, I have to be an example in the community not just for the Christians alone. Our needs are varied; social, educational, economical and many others. I have to be very conscious of my position and how I relate myself to the community and must always be in pursuit of justice and peace. We are all one people. Ahead of us is a challenging task of rehabilitation of our people who have gone through the darkest period of our history once peace is restored in the country. We need to prepare leaders for such a task and in this our schools and universities have to play a pivotal role. *(Image: Bishop Jaffna Rt. Rev Dr. Daniel Thiagarajah met with Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the Ministry of Defence last evening (June10).)*

Nilantha Ilangamuwa interviews the Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah the Bishop in Jaffna of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India for the Sri Lanka Guardian.

Nilantha: What is this Church of South India of which the Jaffna Diocese in Sri Lanka is a part?

Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah: The Church of South India (CSI) is a unique union of churches of the protestant tradition that came together as one church in 1947. Among them were the South India United Church (SIUC), the Church of England, the Methodist Church and Church of Scotland, all of them widely spread out in India. We in Sri Lanka belong to the congregational tradition founded by the American missionaries in Jaffna in 1816 and had a sister church in Madurai in South India also of the same tradition. The CSI has several dioceses in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and has a strong relationship with the churches in North India.

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Nilantha: How is it that the Methodist Church and the Church of England in Sri Lanka are not part of the CSI union in Sri Lanka? Bishop Thiagarajah: When the CSI became a reality in South India, it was hoped a similar Church of Sri Lanka would be founded too. Unfortunately, that did not happen even though there is a strong interaction among the churches in Sri Lanka under the leadership of the National Christian Council (NCC).

Nilantha: The Church is often identified as a reach out arm of the West in its pursuit of building a colonial empire in the East and helped to create an elite community in the countries that came under colonial powers. Has this been a problem for church union in Sri Lanka and what lessons do we need to learn from the CSI?

Bishop Thiagarajah: Fortunately, the churches that are in union in South India, and that is true of the north too, were founded on India's indigenous base that is so diverse, rich and all encompassing. Despite the CSI being a church of four main language groups and hundreds of dialects, it has an awe-inspiring unity in diversity not just in language alone and the church too is one of the many healthy bonding factors of the incredible unity that vibrates India as a dynamic nation.

Furthermore, Indian culture and spiritual beliefs rent asunder the constricting factors of western concepts that trapped Christianity as a religion to come from the West. Christianity is more at home in India than anywhere else in the world and it became such a nourishing factor that today western philosophers are beginning to acknowledge Christianity that has been enhanced on the India soil is what the west needs to accept rather than being caught up in the emotions and frenzies of fundamentalist groups that have become a threat to good order in many western countries.

Nilantha: Why is such a union not been possible in Sri Lanka?

Bishop Thiagarajah: It is indeed a matter of regret too. Apart from our dear nation being caught up in a terrible ethnic crisis, the major churches such as the Church of England and the Dutch Reformed Church have been largely urban and catered to the elite sections that looked more to the west for its support and succor. They placed their major premiums on western values and hardly made their members appreciate our customs and traditions.

Although the Methodist Church had a wider impact with several rural parishes, it too was seen as a foreign element in Sri Lanka. When the CSI was formed and the Jaffna Diocese became a reality, one would have expected at least the Anglican and Methodist churches in the north to have become a part of it.

In contrast, in South India, the churches were very much rooted in the customs and traditions of the people of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka view the church as foreign and this is also being, very unfortunately, politically exploited.

Nilantha: What role has the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India to play in Sri Lanka apart being a spiritual source to its members?

Bishop Thiagarajah: We have to be forever conscious that our traditions, customs and age-old beliefs over eons of time are crucial to our well being. We have to acknowledge that we all have bonding roles to give our best among our people and the unity of all the communities in the country is cardinal. Our respective faiths must be the enriching factors and there are so many areas of unity in our beliefs that we need to cultivate further. Our diverse beliefs are like rivers of joy that inspire us and every individual should have his or her rights to understand the higher elements and the spirituality of our lives in a freer and all encompassing circumstances.

We of the JDCSI are committed to this ideal. We are no more a church of the privileged in the north. Our doors are wide open and have become free of clan control. We have a commitment to become a bonding factor searching for unity in this country and a nation where everyone irrespective of ethnic or religious or cultural diversity will feel a full and responsible citizen. Already we have parishes in the East, up in the hills and in southern Sri Lanka. As much as other faiths exist in Sri Lanka, we are a church of the people of Sri Lanka just like the CSI in India.

young short film director in Sri Lanka, expresses reservations when talking t merits of his experience of the "Rock and Crack" 'A film that isn't a feature film in terms of length of time. Has to be able to get the message/ideas etc. across a lot faster.' He was born in 19 and early 2000 he was joined with the mainstream medias in Sri Lanka. He c be reached at j.nuwan@gmail.com.

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Nilantha: Reverend Bishop, you were not originally a member of the JDCSI? How come you are now the head of this church?

Bishop Thiagarajah: My father was an Anglican that is Church of England. He has served as Vicar's Warden of the Holy Trinity Church. When he became a member of the St Peter's Church in Jaffna, he was appointed a lay preacher and leader of its quarterly meetings. My mother was a Methodist who has served as principal of Methodist mission schools and been a member of the Synod of the North-East Methodist Church.

When Dr D T Niles was felicitated at Trimmer Hall, Jaffna on his appointment as one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches, she was chosen to be the primary speaker at this function. My brother Christy who lives in Australia played a vital role in funding the renovation of the St Peter's Church, Jaffa. I had my education at a Methodist school, the Jaffna Central College.

My family is quite ecumenical and my belief being such, I had no problems joining the JDCSI as a presbyter in full appreciation of church unity for which the JDCSI is uniquely significant in Sri Lanka. I had prepared for this with a singleness of purpose both spiritually and educationally and, equally developing relationships in this direction. I was also aware that my parents committed me for such a role early in my life; their faith was an inspiration to me and my siblings too. They are all an encouragement to me and today stand head and shoulders with me in the work to which I am totally committed along with my family.

Nilantha: I am told that you were also quite a sportsman while at Jaffna Central College.

Bishop Thiagarajah: Sports is very much in my blood. Although the games were always quite competitive and yet healthy, it was a sheer joy to play with my peers from Jaffna College, St John's College, Jaffna Hindu College, Hartley College, St Patrick's College and several others, all of them from diverse religious traditions.

Nilantha: How is a bishop elected by the Church of South India?

Bishop Thiagarajah: There are two ways. Firstly and most acceptably, a bishop is chosen by the Synod of the Church of South India from an elected slate of candidates by the Diocesan Councils of the respective dioceses. In the absence of such being possible due to various circumstances that may arise, the Synod after giving enough time to choose a slate of candidates to a diocese, may take upon itself to elect a bishop but will give due consideration to every candidate who it considers electable to the bishopric. It accepts the principle in biblical traditions that no flock should be without a shepherd.

Nilantha: What is the hierarchy of the Church of South India and where is its headquarters?

Bishop Thiagarajah: The Moderator of the CSI elected for a period of time from the panel of bishops is the head of the Church of South India. He is assisted by a General Secretary and a Treasurer in its management but the executive body he heads is the Synod of the Church South India which has representation from all the dioceses of the church. The CSI is indeed a role model democratic body and in respect of church union, it is a unique pioneer.

The CSI has its headquarters in Royapettah, Chennai, Tamilnadu. It is also a hub of many activities the CSI is widely involved in, including social, communications, literacy, educational, medical missions and a vast field of training and development educational projects.

Nilantha: As the head of the JDCSI, what other roles do you have to play?

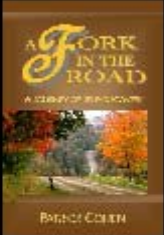
Bishop Thiagarajah: Although I am the bishop of the JDCSI and primarily responsible to help with the spiritual life of the people, I also have a key role as a citizen of the community. In this, I have to be an example in the community not just for the Christians alone. Our needs are varied; social, educational, economical and many others. I have to be very conscious of my position and how I relate myself to the community and must always be in pursuit of justice and peace. We are all one people. Ahead of us is a challenging task of rehabilitation of our people who have



"We are back to an old truth, a truth that government seems unaware of, despite its vaunted economic populism. Though necessary, economic growth by itself cannot improve the living conditions of the majority of the people; the state must put in place means of disseminating the benefits of growth among those who occupy the lower half of the economic totem pole."

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gone through the darkest period of our history once peace is restored in the country. We need to prepare leaders for such a task and in this our schools and universities have to play a pivotal role.

Nilantha: Do you think church union is possible in Sri Lanka?

Bishop Thiagarajah: This is one aspect of the many questions confronting us. We have to become a nation together and this is enabled if we all seek unity in our respective fields of involvement and activities. We should all be committed to this ideal in every aspect of life in this country, appreciate our diversities and seek a unity among them. Yes, yes church union is possible in this country and we must make it realizable, sooner the better in the larger interest of unity in Sri Lanka.

Nilantha: Thank you so much Reverend Sir. Do you have a message for the readers of Sri Lanka Guardian?

Bishop Thiagarajah: Sri Lanka Guardian has become a fearless forum of public opinion in Sri Lanka upholding the great traditions of the Fourth Estate. The way it has opened its columns for diverse opinions and points of views are remarkable indeed especially amidst the current circumstances in Sri Lanka. History will one day reaffirm that the pen is certainly mightier than the sword and the writers who have subscribed to the Sri Lanka Guardian in these times have indeed served their people immensely.

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