

A Tribute to Late Mr. N S Thanapalan

We all have come to remember Mr. N S Thanapalan, Principal of St John's College Jaffna Sri Lanka who passed away on August 15th 2006 after a brief illness.

We thank you all for your presence. We all of us knew Mr. Thanapalan in one way or other either as a student, colleague, classmate or in many other ways or when he came to Canada in August 2004.

Mr. Thanapalan will be best remembered as the Principal who guided St John's College during a turbulent period in the history of Tamils in Jaffna.

It is not an easy task to be a principal of a school at a time of civil unrest. One has to walk a fine line between the opposing factions in order to provide education to the students and safeguards their lives. The mind set of students in Jaffna is all the time thinking of the ongoing unrest but Mr. Thanapalan gave what even it took to uphold the traditions of St John's college and guided the students in a path that fostered harmony.

During his tenure, the school was bombed, buildings destroyed, classes disrupted and location of school moved to various places like Vaddukoddai, Chavakachcheri, and Killinochchi. Both students and staff underwent enormous hardship for lack of basic facilities but Mr. Thanapalan managed to encourage and overcome difficulties and made the flag of red and black fly high.

While all these things were happening Mr. Thanapalan focused his energy to develop the curriculum and rebuild the war destroyed buildings. He was able to diversify the curriculum to suit the present day needs of the students, so that they could obtain meaningful employment or post secondary technical education when students failed to get university admission.

On the other hand he harnessed foreign aid from various aid agencies and from the alma mater to build a new office, classrooms, halls, library, science lab and workshop.

While he was the Beacon of St. John's he also a Deacon for the underprivileged. He used aid to help the needy children with scholarship and money for books and boarding fees.

Mr. Thanapalan started his secondary education at St John's college Jaffna and proceeded to the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya and obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree and came back to start his career as a teacher at his alma mater.

While being a student at St John's he participated in all sports activities. Cricket was his passion. Cycling was another. He had a sports bicycle and after school will travel through old park road towards Nallur closely following a bevy of girls from chundikuli Girls college who are also on bicycles. In doing so he was able to meet his life partner Prema and married her in 1971.

His principalship earned him accolade both from the north and south. The army had a respect for him and so was the LTTE. Mr.Thanapalan grew in a larger family. His older sister Mrs.P. Rasiah who is present today will testify to his keen family values. He also loved dogs as a pet.

He was a strict disciplinarian at school and helped students achieve very high moral and ethical standards besides education. He knew all the students by the names.

While being the Principal he traveled extensively outside of SriLanka and made use of his visits to further the needs of St.John's. Mr. Thanapalan left an indelible mark in the history of St John's College and ensured that future generations of students who go through St John's will be able to enjoy a better standard of education.

May his sole rest in peace

By - Puvendran Sithamparapillai.