

RETIREMENT OF PRINCIPAL - ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, JAFFNA



Mr. Sivasambo Thanapalan retires in August 2006. He was associated with St. John's for a continuous period of 52 years starting in 1954. He was a Student, Teacher and Vice Principal. In 1990 he was Acting Principal and was installed as Principal in 1993.

He entered the Peradeniya University from St. Johns and after completing his Bachelors Degree came back as a teacher and resided in the College compound. He held other important positions till he was appointed Acting Principal. Over the years he became saturated with the multi-facet activities of this great citadel of learning. Throughout the long years of intimate association with St. John's he will be fondly remembered with gratitude by tens of thousands of his students, colleagues and parents both here and in all parts of the globe for the dedicated and loyal services he rendered.

As a teacher for nearly 28 years I have watched him grow into maturity especially after he became a teacher. After leaving St. John's, I continued to have close contact with him to date, even when I was living outside Sri Lanka. The trail of legacy left by Thanapalan as Principal will be remembered for generations to come. He had the longest period of captaining the ship of St. John's as Acting Principal and Principal for a period of 16 years, when the college was tossing in

very turbulent ethnic political waters, never abandoning his crew of dedicated staff members and loyal disciplined students.

Rev. Henry Peto and Rev. J.T. Arulanantham were the only Principals who had longer years as head of St. John's serving a period of 20 years and 17 years respectively. Both were excellent. However their great contribution was at a time when there was political tranquility in the North. In fact they could even alter the educational policy of the School and dictate to their staff, which in their opinion was good to undertake.

Thanapalan mastered the technique of administrative capabilities which was geared to suit the disturbed political environment. I marvel his commitment to keep the Johnian flag fly high in the sky, which is worth emulation by other educational institutions.

Discipline, which is the bottom line for the success of the long Johnian history, has never stalled throughout Thanapalan's period as Principal. There have been many occasions when local, foreigners and old boys [including myself] visited the school while in session. There was pin-drop silence as we approached the school gate. We really had to ask the gatekeeper whether the school was in session.

At the height of fierce ethnic combat when it was impossible to run the school at Chundikuli, Thanapalan gallantly moved his loyal staff and students across the Jaffna Lagoon to Kilinochi, putting up makeshift classrooms and returning to Chundikuli when tensions eased. On another similar occasion he closed school and shifted to Vadukoddai where Jaffna College graciously opened her doors to accommodate St. John's. The exodus to Pt.Pedro is another example.

It was during his time that the largest number of buildings were put up or renovated, always maintaining the traditional architecture of each building. He mastered the spoken usage of Tamil and English and could match any scholar of either language. He could 'move with kings and not lose the common touch'. His forte was to remember faces and names with initials – an art that can bring close relationship. He was the first to be selected along with another old Johnian Dayaladeva by the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation to give a ball-by-ball commentary in Tamil when the All England Cricket Test Team Captained by Mr. Kenth Fletcher came to play against Sri Lanka in 1982, with our first All Ceylon Test Team captained by Bandula Warnapura. He was a walking Encyclopedia of any Johnian Cricket Team or player especially after 1950.

Thanapalan's retirement under the present set-up can bring a serious void to the administration. The governing body, with God's grace has chosen a rightful leader to replace him. While we thank God for Thanapalan's unprecedented contribution under years of such trying conditions, may it also be the prayer of the Johnian community throughout the world to give his successor who will ask as King Solomon prayed "..... and now O Lord Thou has made me king [the head]..... I am but a little child and thy servant is in the midst of thy people give thy servant O Lord an understanding heart that I may discern between good and bad. Amen"

V.R. AMARASINGHAM

Retired Vice Principal

St. John's College,

Jaffna.

3 July 2006