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Press Release

CSR officially receives four most important evidence given at the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the 'Easter Attacks'; Further established that the security forces had prior information of the bombers.

The evidence given to the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the Easter Attacks by former Director of the Criminal Investigation Department SSP Shani Abeyskera, the incumbent acting Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon, Tuan Suresh Salley - the incumbent Director of State Intelligence Service and Fathima Hadiya - the wife of Zahran, have been officially released to the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) by the Information Officer of the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

Members of the Parliament had tabled these evidence during the debate held on 21st and 22nd September 2023, pertaining to the Channel 4 documentary on Easter Sunday attacks. The relevant information was released to the Research Team of the Centre for Society and Religion, following a Right to Information request submitted by them.

As the Centre for Society and Religion, we decided to present the following facts to the public, as revealed after reading and analyzing the said material by a dedicated research team.

1) Even during Mr. Tuan Suresh Salley's tenure as Director, Military Intelligence of the Sri Lanka Army, Military Intelligence units had information pertaining to Zahran Hashim.

When Mr. Tuan Suresh Salley was questioned during leading the evidence by Senior State Counsel Mr. Sanjeeva Dissanayake at the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on 25th June 2020, it had come to light that Eastern Intelligence officers had provided information to Mr. on Zahran Hashim. It is mentioned so on pages 94 and 95 of the said evidence. At page 113 in his evidence, he has stated that they were in contact with a Thowheed Jamaath group, and they were invited to and discussions were held with them at the Ministry of Defence. He has also stated in his evidence that an agent from the Military Intelligence Unit was sent to JMI organization, and that it was a sensitive process.

2) Zahran's wife Fathima Hadiya has stated in her evidence that a person identified as Abu Hind, who is based in India and had vehemently tried to ensure protection for Zahran, started "talking" to Zahran in or about the end of 2017. She had given evidence to the Presidential Commission on 20th October 2020. It is evident in the 76th page of her evidence that the person identifying as Abu Hind had communicated often with Zahran from the end of 2017 to 2019. Also, it is mentioned in pages 124 and 125 of Hadiya's evidence, about things (explosive material) being exchanged between the two houses in Panadura and Katuwapitiya on the 03rd of April. In page 150 of her evidence, Hadiya further states that Zahran told her that when the Police interfered during the weapons training in Kandy and carried on a search, although Zahran and the group had weapons with them, they didn't find any weapons, despite searching Zahran's bag. In her evidence in pages 170 and 171, Zahran's wife states that, during the series of events unfolding in Sainthamaruthu, when the house was on fire, Zaini i.e., Zahran's brother came from the outside and spoke to her through the window, but she refused to go, and after some time she heard gun shots, and thereafter she heard a voice that resembled Sara's, and when she turned back, she saw a woman standing, whose face was covered with blood and clothes were burnt. Hadiya has gone on to state that the said lady resembled Sara.

3) Deputy Inspector General Deshabandu Tennakoon has admitted that he had heard the name of one Zahran from 2017, and that he had participated in a program conducted by Mr. Nalaka Silva in 2017, and that Zahran's name had emerged when discussions were ongoing about religious extremism. Deshabandu Tennakoon has admitted in page 78 and 79 of his evidence that he could have prevented the Katuwapitiya attack, had he correctly implemented the written instructions on how to act with regard to such a scenario, as given by the then DIG - Western province to officers including him. Tennakoon has further stated that he had sent the sets of letters to lower ranking officers, and he had gone on leave on the 18th after duty, and that he was in Mahiyanganaya when the bomb attacks occurred. When asked by Inquiry Commission as to whether he didn't inform any Christian father about it as it was mentioned that churches could also be attacked, Deshabandu Tennakoon responded in the negative. When inquired whether the acting DIG was instructed on his security plan as there were information on a bomb attack targeting churches in the nearest future, and when it was evident that the Easter festival is certainly "nearest future", Deshabandu Tennakoon had again responded in the negative.

When carefully considering all the above facts and evidence, it is observed that the Intelligence units knew for a long time of, not only Zahran, but also about the organization called JMI, run by the sons of Ibrahim based in Colombo. We state that it is surprising to have not prevented the bomb attack, despite obtaining information about the same and even when having an insider planted within JMI, the membership of which was very limited. It must be publicly revealed as to on whose influence the bomb attacks were not prevented, and who were behind these events, despite the Intelligence units being aware of Thowheed Jama'ath, so much so that its representatives were invited for a discussion at the Ministry of Defence, and having continuous surveillance on them.

As per the evidence administered by Zahran's wife, some goods have been exchanged on the 3rd of April between the two houses in Panadura and Katuwapitiya. As claimed in the Parliament, the incident of a lorry alleged to have been released on an illegal order at Gelanigama took place on the 3rd of April as well. The interconnection between the following i.e., goods being exchanged between the house in Katuwapitiya - which is an area within the jurisdiction of Deshabandu Tennakoon, and a house in Panadura - which is not an area within his jurisdiction, and then him talking to Gelanigama Police - which is a station outside of his jurisdiction, and instructing with regard to the lorry, and his application on 03rd April to be on leave from 19th April etc. have not yet been properly inquired into.

As per Fathima Hadiya's evidence, Sara and one of Zahran's brothers, namely Zaini, were alive after the explosion. She states that Zaini spoke to her after the explosion, and then she heard gun shots. Although Zaini's body was found from there, Sara's body wasn't found. Zaini being alive and well after the explosion in the house, and then the gun shots being fired, and Sara's disappearance despite being alive clearly shows that a conspiracy that is barbaric beyond that of the bombers has taken place. No proper inquiry or investigation has been carried out yet, addressing these concerns.

It is noteworthy that the information revealed from this evidence is sufficient to establish that the reason behind other evidence and volumes of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Easter Sunday Attack being kept in confidence could be to avoid unraveling the conspiracy behind this brutal attack. National security is not only about the protection of the ruling class, but of the people too. We state that the persons in power are severely endangering the security of the citizens by hiding this important information without a proper inquiry being conducted into it, despite the fact that a severe breach of security of the people has been committed.

Therefore, we urge the government to release all information pertaining to the Easter Sunday attack, and pave way for a just and equitable international investigation into this matter.

- Centre for Society and Religion -

On this 19th day of January, 2024