



Dammike Kobbekaduwe

An Open Letter:

23rd August, 2023

Through Hon Sagala Rathnayake – The senior advisor to the President

His Excellency Ranil Wickremasinghe,
The Executive President,
Socialist Democratic Republic of Independent Sri Lanka
Presidential Secretariat,
Colombo 1

Your Excellency,

Re: Urgent Establishment of a Committee to Investigate the Ratwatte Estate Incident

I trust this correspondence finds you in sound health and high spirits. I am writing to bring to your esteemed attention a disconcerting incident that unfolded recently within the confines of Ratwatte Estate, an entity under Elkaduwa Plantations Limited. The gravity of the circumstances underscores the immediate necessity to unearth the truth and uphold justice, especially in light of the manipulative tendencies observed during land encroachment incidents, particularly during election periods, leaving the Plantation sector exposed and without appropriate remedies.

The crux of the incident is rooted in the erection of a provisional structure on Ratwatte Estate premises. It is pertinent to note that the individual held accountable for this construction is an outsider originating from beyond the Ratwatte estate community, diverging from the initial assumption of being a resident employee. This salient disparity amplifies the intricate complexion of the matter.

Numerous pivotal facets accentuate the urgency of a comprehensive response. Firstly, the estate superintendent lodged a formal complaint with the police pertaining to the matter several days prior to the incident. Subsequently, prospects of resolution emerged when the aforementioned individual committed, at the police station, to dismantle the structure and vacate Ratwatte Estate grounds. Unfortunately, circumstances took an unforeseen turn when the estate superintendent reported a violation of this commitment by the individual in question, who employed provocative language, thereby instigating a chain of events.

This circumstance necessitates clarification on the custodial rights concerning state land within the purview of plantation companies. Should the onus fall upon the "manager" of the plantation, it is incumbent upon the legal establishment of this designation, preemptively addressing the recurring predisposition for land encroachments during electoral cycles, given the state's ownership of these lands.

Tragically, the situation escalated into a confrontation involving Minister Jeevan Thondaman and six armed members of the MSD security team. Their intervention

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engendered an atmosphere of heightened tension, especially for General Manager Mr. Suresh Navaratnam. Operating under the instructions of the Chairman, Mr.

Navaratnam was present during the Minister's visit to the plantation, aimed at elucidating factual nuances. Minister Thondaman's direct threat to Mr. Navaratnam necessitated swift intervention to forestall a potentially catastrophic outcome. This incident throws a disconcerting light on a recurring pattern of intimidation and violence within the estate sector. The urgency to curtail this trajectory aligns seamlessly with Your Excellency's endorsement of cultivating a contemporary political ethos, wherein all individuals are unequivocally bound by the rule of law, thus cementing the principles of parity and justice.

The broader context of this incident underscores a disquieting pattern within the nation's political landscape. The infiltration of outsiders affiliated with specific political factions into state-owned estates not only compromises the integrity of the plantation sector but also destabilizes local communities. The allegations of political involvement necessitate thorough scrutiny to safeguard the tenets of impartiality and justice.

Given our steadfast allegiance to the rule of law, it behooves us to safeguard the sanctity of our legal framework. The Ratwatte Estate incident underscores the pressing need for accountability and an impartial inquiry. Aligned with Your Excellency's unwavering commitment to uphold justice and equality, I respectfully urge you to contemplate the appointment of an impartial committee entrusted with conducting a thorough investigation. The committee's purview should encompass unearthing the truth, identifying responsible parties, and proposing sustainable actions. **Moreover, it is imperative to establish a transparent legal framework delineating the authority of an estate manager concerning the safeguarding of land, especially state-owned land, to preempt future incidents.**

Equally vital is ensuring the legal safeguarding of such managers to embed this precedent within the legal fabric of the nation.

It is evident that this incident is not isolated; several politicians persist in "intimidating" plantation managers, impeding their fulfillment of duties without facing accountability. Video evidence circulating widely on the internet corroborates the confrontation between Minister Thondaman and Major Suresh Nawarathnam, a voluntary army officer.

I commend the recent pronouncement of the Minister of Public Security, underscoring the gravity of refraining from vigilantism and unlawful conduct. It is reassuring to discern the determination to pursue legal consequences against individuals, regardless of their stature, implicated in such transgressions. Adherence to the rule of law remains quintessential for the nation's security, stability, and progress.

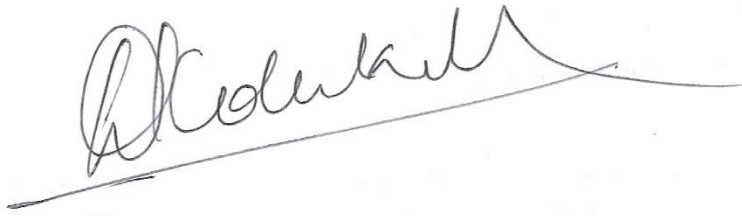
In summation, I earnestly implore Your Excellency to take decisive action in constituting a committee tasked with a comprehensive inquiry into the Ratwatte incident. This endeavor is pivotal in upholding the tenets of justice, accountability, and the rule of law that serve as the bedrock of our democracy. Your steadfast commitment

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to the well-being of our nation is held in the highest regard, and I am confident that your leadership will chart a course toward a just resolution.

I extend my gratitude for your attentiveness to this matter and maintain an optimistic outlook for a constructive response that resonates with our commitment to an equitable and impartial society.

Yours sincerely,



Dammike Kobbekaduwe
Member: Ex Planters Association of Ceylon

Copies:

The Esteemed Governor of the Central Province

The Hon. Minister – The Plantations Industry and Export Agriculture

The President, Ceylon Planters Society.

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