

# Mettananda: The great Buddhist revivalist

by Premil Ratnayake

In the forties when his entry to Ananda College was marred by ugly student riots and his glistening and glamorous Studebaker was set ablaze opposite the school he was going to head after the depose of A. B. Perera, L. H. Mettananda was referred to by all Anandians just as, METTA. Perhaps the students were not concerned about the religious connotation of the abbreviated name 'Metta' which in Pali means 'Compassion' or the 'Compensate One.' But they called him that, anyway, like they would have sometimes called their previous Principal AB — a shortened version of A. B. Perera.

There was gory when

Metta came in to take over as Principal of Ananda after A. B. Perera was virtually kicked out by the BTS because he refused to vacate. A. B. Perera by then had been given an extension by the BTS and then very cunningly he had organised a clique of student thugs to protest against his removal. But the BTS was firm and said enough was enough and he should quit. Of course he left but he left a most despicable scene of student violence, assault of teachers, Metta bleeding in his ascetic-looking white national dress, which at that time, would have surpassed all other student violence of recent



L. H. Mettananda

times including the hateful ragging in the universities.

Metta came to Ananda

from Dharmarajah College, Kandy and then began a glorious chapter in the history of Ananda equalled only by one of his predecessors, P. de S. Kularatne.

He stood like a giant in the face of adversity unleashed by some hooligans in student uniform and he was surrounded by a circle of teachers and even after he was informed that his car was smashed did not lose his cool, and with that benign Gandhian composure advised all students to go home because the atmosphere was becoming terrible even for a Metta to preside over. The Gandhian reference here is very relevant. When the great Mahatma was shot dead, Lokusathu Hewage

Mettananda called a special assembly in the school. He talked to students (in English) and lamented the killing of the great Indian sage, freedom fighter and an apostle of non-violence. It was apparent that Metta had an adoring admiration for the man whom Indians called 'Pithaji' (Father).

Metta spoke for a few minutes and then broke down. He could not control his emotions. While the students in the assembly hall stood perplexed, Metta, perhaps embarrassed for such public exposure of sentimentality, walked aside the stage and wept.

Metta could not continue his address and the teachers

took him away. That was a great moment in Metta's life, as students of Ananda remember.

Even at Ananda, Metta knew the sinister, covert campaign arraigned against the Buddhists in this country by vested interests of imperialists, locals included. He began what at that time he had to do — the great crusade called the Bauddha Jathika Balavagaya. But he was more or less a loner.

There were other rich, politically and religiously powerful 'crusaders' who came to wreck him. And he was wrecked in the sense that then BJB was atrophied. Maybe they killed the BJB but not the spirit of the man called, L. H. Mettananda.

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