



*The Legacy of*

# M E E Z A N

H A J I A R

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A LIFE OF FAITH, SERVICE AND VISION

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A LIFE OF FAITH, SERVICE AND VISION

**Abdul Azeez Mohamed Fuaji**

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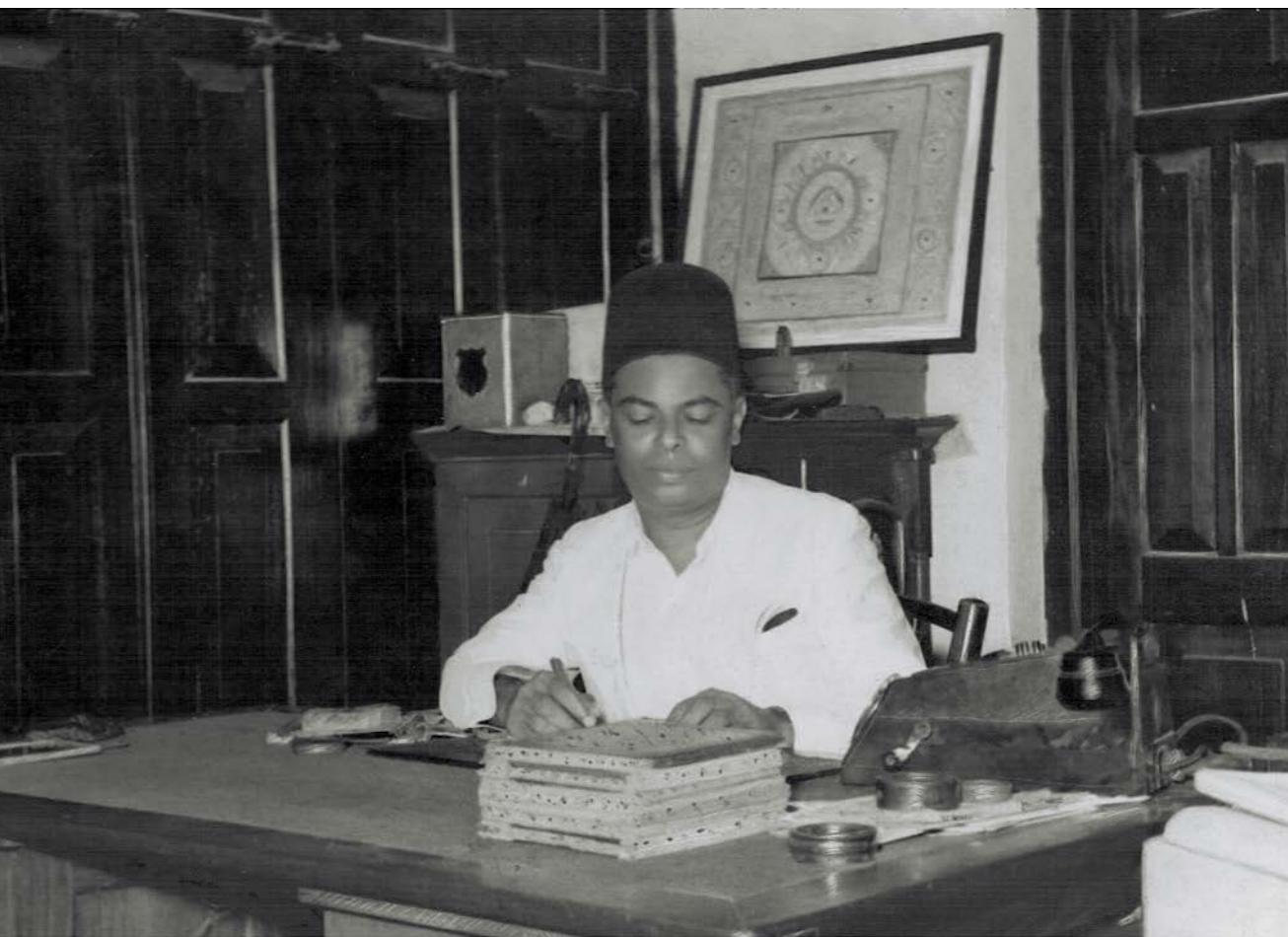
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*Imamohideen*

1911 - 1964

# FOREWORD

I am happy that a book about the life and contribution of Sathkorale Muhamdiramaledara Segu Abdul Cader Hajiar Mohamed Mohideen better known as Meezan Hadjiar or Meezan Mudalali of Matale [1911—1964] written by Mohammed Fuaji-a former Principal of Zahira College Matale, has now been published by a group of his admirers and relatives .It is a timely addition to the history of Matale district and the Kandyan region which is yet to be described fully as forming a part of the modern history of our country. Coincidentally this book also marks the centenary of Meezan Hadjiars beginning of employment in Matale town which began in 1925.

Matale which was an outlier in the Kandyan Kingdom came into prominence with the growth of plantations for Coffee and, after the collapse of the Coffee plantations due to the “Coffee blight”, for other tree crops. Coffee was followed by the introduction of Tea by the early British investors who faced bankruptcy and ruin if they could not quickly find a substitute beverage for coffee. They turned to tea. The rapid opening of tea plantations in the hill country demanded a large and hardworking labour force which could not be found

domestically. This led to the indenturing of Tamil labour from South India on a large scale. These helpless workers were virtually kidnapped from their native villages in India through the Kangani system and they were compelled to migrate to our hill country by the British administration. The route of these indentured workers to the higher elevations of the hill country lay through Matale and the new plantation industry developed in that region thereby dragging it into a new commercial culture and a cash economy. New opportunities were opened up for internal migration particularly for the more adventurous members of the Muslim community who had played a significant role in the Kandyan kingdom particularly as traders, transporters, medical specialists and military advisors. Diaries of British officials like John D'oyly also show that the Kandyan Muslims were interlocutors between the Kandyan King and British officials of the Low country as they had to move about across boundaries as traders of scarce commodities like salt, medicines and consumer articles for the Kandyans and arecanuts, gems and spices for the British. Even today there are physical traces of the “Battal” or caravans of Oxon

which were used by the Muslims to transport the above mentioned commodities to and from the Kandyan villages to the Low country. Another important facet was that Kandyan Muslims were located in villages close to the entrances to the hill country attesting to their mobility unlike the Kandyan villagers. Thus Akurana, Galagedera, Kadugannawa, Hataraliyadde and Mavanella which lay in the pathways to enter the inner territory of the Kings domain were populated by “Kandyan Muslims” who had the ear of the King and his high officials. The “Ge” names and the honorifics given by the King were a testament to their integration with the Sinhala polity. Meezan Hadjiars “Ge” name of Sathkorale Mohandiramlage denotes the mobility of the family from Sathkorale, an outlier division in the Kandyan Kingdom, and Mohandiramlage attests to the higher status in the social hierarchy which probably indicated that his forebears were honoured servants of the king.

Meezan Hadjiar [SM Mohideen] was born and bred in Kurugoda which is a small village in Akurana in Kandy district. He belonged to the family of Abdul Cader who was a patriarch and a well known religious scholar.

Cader’s children began their education in the village school but at the age of twelve young Mohideen left his native village to apprentice under a relative who had a business establishment in the heart of Matale town which was growing fast due to the economic boom. It must be stated here that this form of “learning the ropes” as an apprentice was a common path to business undertaken by many of the later Srilankan tycoons of the pre-independence era.

But he did not remain in that position for long. When his mentor failed in his business of trading in Cocoa, Cardamoms, Cloves and Arecanuts and wanted to close up his shop young Mohideen took over and eventually made a great success of it. His enterprise succeeded because he was able to earn the trust of both his buyers and sellers. He befriended Sinhalese and Tamil producers and the business he improved beyond measure took on the name of Meezan Estates Ltd [The scales] and Mohideen soon became famous as Meezan Mudalali-perhaps the most successful businessman of his time in Matale. He expanded his business interests to urban real estate as well as tea and rubber estates. Soon he owned over 3000 acres of tea estates making him one of the richest men in the Central Province.

## TRIBUTE BY HON. IMTHIAZ BAKEER MARKAR

With his growing influence Meezan spent generously on charitable activities including funding a water scheme for his native village of Kurugoda also serving adjoining villages like Pangollamada located in Akurana. He also gave generously to Buddhist causes in Matale together with other emerging low country businessmen like Gunasena and John Mudalali. Matale was well known as a town in which all communities lived in harmony and tended to help each other. As a generous public figure he became strong supporter of the UNP and a personal friend of its leaders like Dudley Senanayake and Sir John Kotewala. UNP candidates for public office—both in the Municipality and Parliament were selected in consultation with Meezan who also bankrolled them during election time. He himself became a Municipal councillor. The Aluvihares of several generations had close links with him. It was Meezan who mentored ACS Hameed – a fellow villager from Kurugoda—and took him to the highest echelons of Srilankan politics as Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was a supporter and financier of the UNP through thick and thin.

DR. SARATH AMUNUGAMA.

Though his premature death at the age fifty three in 1965 saved him from the worst political witch hunts under SWRD Bandaranaike who was his personal friend it was after 1970 and the Coalition regime that Meezans large family were deprived of their livelihood by the taking over of all their estates. Fortunately many of his children were well educated and could hold on till relief was given by President Premadasa.

It is only fitting that we, even a hundred years later, now commemorate a great self made Srilankan business magnate and generous contributor to all religious and social causes of his time. His name became synonymous with enterprise in Matale – a district in which I was privileged to serve as Government Agent in the late sixties. He was a model entrepreneur and his large family have also made outstanding contributions to this country which also attest to the late Meezan Hajiar's foresight and vision of a united and prosperous Sri Lanka.

When I began reading the biography of Meezan Hajiar, I was reminded of a book I had read recently, From Third World to First by Lee Kuan Yew. Like the Singaporean statesman, Meezan Hajiar too began with nothing and rose to become the proprietor of a vast group of estates, ultimately recognised as the highest tax-paying individual in the Central Province.

To many across the province, he was “Meezan Hajiar.” His given name, however, was S. M. Mohideen. The story behind the name “Meezan” is both humble and symbolic. In Arabic, Meezan means “scale.” At the outset of his career, when he began buying and selling spices and other produce from the hill country, a close relative gifted him a weighing scale, an act that reflected the simplicity of his beginnings. As his business expanded, he began transporting his goods to Colombo, selling directly to wholesale traders.

It was through some English businessmen he met there that he learned of a rubber shortage in the market caused by the Second World War, a revelation that changed the course of his life. Determined

to seize the opportunity, he returned to Matale and invested all his savings into trading rubber.

By the later years of his life, he had become the proprietor of an estate network spanning 3,710 acres. In 1964, just a few years before his passing, he paid a sum of Rs. 694,633 in revenue tax—a testament to both his success and integrity.

Reflecting on such examples of entrepreneurship, I am often reminded of how Sri Lanka’s early business leaders built industries, paid their dues faithfully, and contributed to the nation’s production and revenue. Had that spirit been sustained, our country might well have become the “Switzerland of Asia,” as many once predicted.

Whether it is an individual or a country, true progress depends on vision, dedication, effort, and determination. These were the very qualities that defined both Lee Kuan Yew’s leadership and Meezan Hajiar’s life. Unfortunately, successive governments of that era chose instead to pursue policies rooted

in jealousy and political populism, acquiring the estates of local entrepreneurs such as Meezan Hajiar (posthumously) rather than supporting their growth. The result was devastating: the Meezan family, like many others, was forced to start over from scratch. Parents who once travelled in Mercedes-Benz cars saw their children taking the bus. Even their ancestral home was acquired by way of a Gazette to serve as a Sub-Government Agent's Office. The state's takeover of once-thriving private estates and factories led to widespread inefficiency and decline.

These short-sighted policies, driven by political expedience, crippled hundreds of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim entrepreneurs alike. Some of the profitable enterprises acquired by the government were later turned into loss making entities. Tea factories were shut down. We saw how industries and businesses were burnt down and destroyed by some fractions of people who were misled by incorrect political decisions. The efficiency of tea estates was drastically lost. All these contributed to the downfall of our national revenue

and progress of the country. Similarly, our own private entrepreneurs who were in the transport services also suffered a similar fate. This resulted in the people having to bear the burden of a continuously loss-making state transport service.

Despite such adversity, Meezan Hajiar's legacy endured. His younger sons, Ziaudeen and Ihithisham, dedicated nearly three decades to rebuilding their family's presence in the plantation sector. With perseverance and courage, they reclaimed the government-acquired estates and re-established their family's standing, today they are two of the finest proprietary planters in Sri Lanka.

In contrast to Sri Lanka's missteps, nations such as Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore each with comparable or smaller economies after the war chose a practical economic path instead of acquiring businesses owned by local entrepreneurs, which has resulted in their significant economic growth.

Meezan Hajiar's spirit continues to live on in his

descendants. One of his sons, were recognised as the Highest Tax Payer in the Matale District in 2011, an honour marked by the Department of Inland Revenue's presentation of a Gold Card. His second son, Faiz Mohideen, rose steadily through the ranks of the Sri Lankan public service, serving as Deputy Secretary to the Treasury and Director General of the Department of External Resources at the Ministry of Finance. His principled refusal to accept duty-free vehicle permits—privileges extended to senior public officials—reflected the same sense of integrity and patriotism his father exemplified.

It is worth recalling that Lee Kuan Yew once said he aspired to make Singapore another Ceylon. Years later, after transforming Singapore into a first-world nation, he lamented that Sri Lanka had fallen behind because separatist thoughts took center stage. Lee Kuan Yew became the leader of a country where separatist Chinese - Malay conflict claimed many lives, and unified that same country under the theme "One Country - One Nation", and paved a new way forward for Singapore with "unity in diversity and a change of thought

process". His words should serve as a timeless reminder to all Sri Lankans.

As quoted in this book, the words of Mr. Alick Aluvihare, Former Parliamentarian representing Matale District, evinces the clear vision possessed by Meezan Hajiar in directing the country towards a positive destiny, and the support he gave and the dedication he had in order to make that vision a successful reality.

"A few days after this, Mr. Dudley Senanayake came down to Matale to select the candidate. Even today I very vividly remember how on that day, Hajiyar held my hand and told Mr. Senanayake, "Sir nominate this young man, we will make him to win", all the others who were there showed their approval very openly and I was nominated to contest the by-election on the U.N.P. ticket. The by-election was a tough one but the electorate stood with the Aluvihare family. As he had promised, Meezan Mudalali stood very firm behind me. I won with a majority of 1667 and thus became the second Aluvihare to enter the Parliament as an elected representative of the people. On the day of my victory, Meezan Hajiyar lost all restraints and gave vent to his

## PREFACE

feelings; he rushed towards me and hugged me very closely; my victory had delighted him so much.”

The letters by former Ministers representing the Matale District, namely P. B. Kaviratne and Wijeratne Banda, are also featured in this book, which further confirm Meezan Hajiar’s principled stance and the dedication he had for the same.

The letters included in this book, authored by former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake, Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel and Sir Macan Markar, are a testament to the fact that the contributions Meezan Hajiar made were to achieve the correct principles he believed in, which were not only limited to Matale.

I still remember what President Ranasinghe Premadasa once said upon learning that two of my younger sisters were to marry Meezan Hajiar’s sons:

“Imthiaz, I knew him very well. I met him during the Matale by-election. He was a man who always gave unwavering support to our party.”

The factual accounts included in this book, particularly

those describing Hajiar’s service to Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic associations in Matale, are of immense historical and moral significance.

It is taught in Islam that God grants money, wealth, property to a person as a privilege granted to such a person, and also as a test on how he / she would put such a privilege into use. In ordinary sense, it is expected that every prudent person would have an attachment to their wealth as their own. But, in that context too, Meezan Hajiyar was exceptional. As an exemplary and devoted Muslim, he considered the wealth he earned as a Trust from God, and disposed of his social responsibility by establishing Educational and Vocational Training Institute to guide the community, for which Meezan Institute of Technology stands as a brilliant example.

I extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who have contributed to the creation of this book. It invites us to reflect on our nation’s past, to learn from its misjudgments, and to rekindle the sense of vision, unity, and responsibility that leaders like Meezan Hajiar exemplified.

This book began as a labour of love, an effort to preserve the memory and legacy of Meezan Hajiar, who was more than just a historical figure. He was a father to the fatherless, a mentor to many, and a visionary whose values continue to shape generations to this day.

This compilation, the result of several years of dedication, draws from interviews, archival research, oral histories, and family recollections.

Great care has been taken to capture not only the story of an individual but also the collective voice of a community.

It stands as a record of a remarkable life. One that was lived with purpose and deeply rooted in the Sri Lankan Muslim experience of the twentieth century.

Though this work remains incomplete, as all human attempts at remembrance inevitably are, it is offered with sincerity and humility. May it serve as a point of reflection, inspiration, and gratitude, for those who knew him, and for those discovering the story of Meezan Hajiar.

IMTHIAZ BAKEER MARKAR

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## INTRODUCTION

### ORIGINS OF A LEGACY

In the heart of the impoverished village of Kurugoda, where red earth clung to bare feet and life moved to the rhythm of toil and prayer, a young boy once set out with nothing more than a few coins in his pocket and a heart bursting with hope. The year was sometime in the vibrant 1920s, and the journey ahead would take him to Matale, a town that would, in time, become synonymous with his name.

He was no child of privilege. His schooling lasted only three or four short years, yet the limits of formal education did nothing to dim the fire of ambition that burned within him. The bustling markets became his classroom. Buying cocoa and rubber by the ounce and pound, he learned the textures of trade, the weight of trust, and the value of persistence. By the 1950s, he owned acres of thriving plantations, cocoa, rubber, and tea spreading over the hills like a kingdom he had carved with his bare hands.

But his wealth was never truly his alone. To the village of his birth, he gifted a water scheme that brought life to parched homes for generations. In Matale, where he made his fortune, he gave even more: his time, his resources, and his unflagging energy. He played a key role in establishing and nurturing Zahira College Matale, the institution that would elevate an entire community and shape countless young minds.

A devout Muslim, he found joy in building mosques

across the Central, North Central, and Eastern Provinces, each structure a quiet testimony to his faith. As trustee of the Matale town mosque, his contributions were deep, unwavering, and often beyond measure.

A politician of rare civility and charm, he carried himself as a true gentleman, unbeaten in every election he contested, serving for seventeen consecutive years on the Urban Council. From 1947 to 1963, he shaped Matale's political landscape, often playing a significant role in the appointments of chairmen and vice chairmen. His influence extended far beyond Matale; even politicians from the capital city sought the counsel and support of this United National Party stalwart.

Yet for all his stature, he remained a man of many quiet passions. A keen hunter, an expert behind the wheel, and a humanitarian whose generosity knew no barriers of race or religion. He lived as he believed: a good Muslim, firm in his adherence to the tenets of his faith, yet expansive in heart and action.

Though described in many ways—tycoon, philanthropist, politician, trustee, hunter, benefactor—a single luminous thread binds them all: the extraordinary life of Haji S. M. Mohideen, affectionately known to many as Meezan Hajiar. His journey, a kaleidoscope of experiences, offers not just a portrait of a man, but a glimpse into the soul of a truly exceptional human being.

## KURUGODA AND ITS PEOPLE: A VILLAGE WOVEN FROM MEMORY

Long before Meezan Hajiar's name echoed through the corridors of commerce and public life, the soil that bore him had already been nurtured by centuries of quiet greatness. Kurugoda, like its sister hamlets Kurudugaha Ela, Pangollamada, Neerella, Thelumbugahawatte, Waragashinna, and Bulugahatenna, was more than a dot on a colonial map. It was an outgrowth of Akurana, one of the oldest Moorish settlements in Sri Lanka's Central Province, and it shared in the mystery, beauty, and strength of that heritage.

Set on rising ground and wrapped in lush greenery, Kurugoda was a village touched tenderly by the hand of nature. Its fertile earth and gentle climate gave rise to flourishing groves of coffee and clove, pepper vines weaving their way up arecanut, kithul, and jak trees, while coconut palms fanned over quiet homes. It was not just rich in land but in spirit, a community animated by the tireless industry of its people.

The village's history, like its landscape, is deeply rooted and richly layered. In the Gazetteer of the Central Province of Ceylon, the English district judge A. C. Lawrie, who served in Kandy from 1873 to 1892, recounts a striking legend: that three Arabs arrived in the hill country during the reign of a king named Rajasinghe. When the Portuguese threatened invasion, the king enlisted the Arabs in battle. Victorious, he

offered them a place in his realm. At the Kandy Perahera, they selected their wives from among Kandyan women. Though some relatives protested, the king declared that the women had already been claimed, and thus their marriages were to be honoured. The three men settled in Akurana, becoming the ancestors of a community that would flourish for generations.

It remains unclear whether the king in question was Rajasinghe of Sitawaka or Rajasinghe II of Kandy. Even if it were the latter, the events would date back to the mid-17th century, underscoring the deep historical roots of the Moorish presence in Akurana, and by extension, in Kurugoda.

By 1881, Akurana had a population of 1,366, enough to suggest that, by the mid-18th century, the village had expanded into the surrounding hills. Kurugoda, with 226 residents at that time, had already established itself as a distinct community.

In a land litigation case, a man named Ahamadu Gammahe presented a talpot dated 1741, testifying to land ownership in Kurugoda. And in the wake of the Dutch invasion of 1763, the Kandyan king Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe confiscated several Moorish estates in the area, further proof of the longstanding presence and prosperity of its Muslim inhabitants.

Lawrie observed that the Moors of Akurana were primarily traders and relatively affluent, even by early 19th-century standards. Their descendants in Kurugoda, bound by kinship and enterprise, followed in their footsteps, amassing land, wealth, and, perhaps most importantly, distinction.

Among all Akurana's villages, Kurugoda soon began to outshine the rest, not merely in economic stature but in the rarest wealth of all: intellectual achievement, producing a series of "firsts" that would etch its name into the annals of national educational and political history.

The first Muslim teacher from Akurana Marhoom T. M. Shahul Hameed hailed from Kurugoda. So too did the first university graduate, Al-Haj A. C. Mohamed, and the first to qualify as a medical doctor from the University of Ceylon, Dr. Al-Haj S. H. M. Farooque. The first law graduate: Al-Haj K. N. M. Ismail, and the first engineer: Al-Haj K. N. M. Farook, were brothers, again, from Kurugoda. The first Director of Education from Akurana, Marhoom Al-Haj M. Sheriff, and the first High Court Judge, Al-Haj A. A. M. Farook, were both sons of this same soil. Yet even above this roll call of excellence was one name that would come to symbolize Kurugoda's place in the national consciousness: Al-Haj A. C. S. Hameed, the first Akurana Muslim elected to

the national legislature and the first to hold a cabinet post in the government of independent Ceylon.

This dazzling string of achievements would be remarkable for any town, let alone a humble village nestled in the hills. But Kurugoda's gift to the nation did not end there. From its midst also emerged a man whose greatness lay not only in what he acquired but in what he gave.

Sathkorale Muhamdiramlagedara Segu Abdul Cader Hajiar Mohamed Mohideen, the man known across the province as Meezan Hajiar, was the first among the Akurana Moors to achieve provincial and national prominence. Others before him had prospered, but none had attained the heights he reached, nor matched the magnanimity with which he dispersed his fortune. In a brief life of just fifty-three years, he built a legacy measured not in rupees, but in various forms of long-remembered communal service. He understood something deeper than profit: that wealth, to be worthy, must serve.

Kurugoda was not merely the backdrop to his life. It was his beginning, his compass, and, in many ways, the seedbed of all that he would become.

## THE HOUSE OF ABDUL CADER: HERITAGE, KINSHIP, AND FOUNDATIONS

Haji Segu Abdul Cader and his wife built not just a home, but a lineage marked by faith, service, and distinction. They were blessed with five sons, each of whom would carry forward the family's values in their own remarkable ways.

Their firstborn, Abdul Hameed, passed away in childhood, a loss that left a silent ache but also deepened the tenderness with which they would raise the sons who followed.

Their second son, Abusally Alim, was known to all as Alimsa, a name that reflected both affection and respect, for he had become an *Ālim*: a scholar of Islam. His life was steeped in religious learning and dignity, and his children would go on to mirror his character. He was blessed with eight children: Farook, Sithy Rahma, Nazeer, Latif, Siddeek, Sadik, Shafeek and Fazeela.

His eldest son, Marhoom Alhaj A. A. A. Farook rose to the esteemed position of High Court Judge, where he served with honour until his retirement. Another son, Al Haj A. A. Lathif, became an attorney-at-law and now oversees Aql International School in Akurana, where the family's legacy of education and service continues.

The third son, Al Haj S. H. Mohamed, was widely known as Muthuwappa Hajiar. A tea exporter of significant standing, he was also known for his generosity and philanthropic spirit. He was blessed with thirteen children: Illiyas, Irshad, Kalisa Umma, Fareedha Umma, Nazhoon Beebi, Mohamed Zahir, Mohamed Nizam, Shamsun-Nisa, Abdul Hameed, Segu Abdul Cader (Thameem), Kamarun Nisa, Badurun Nisa and Noorun Nisa.

Among them, Illiyas, the eldest, was celebrated as one of the finest athletes ever produced by Matale Zahira College. His younger brother, Irshad, with the support and cooperation of his siblings, guided the family business to new heights, expanding both its scope and reputation.

The youngest of Haji Segu Abdul Cader's sons was Ahamed Jamaldeen, whose family carried forward the Abdul Cader name into the next generation with dignity and strength. His children included Abdul Raazik, Siththy Fareeda, Siththy Hakeema, Mohammed Mawsoom, Fauzul Mubeena, Ihithisham Ul Haq, Fauzul Nazeera, Aynul Niyaza, Nuzha Begum, Nazmin Rizaya and Mohammed Hussain.



▲ Seated left to right: G G Appa, Abdur Rahman, Segu Abdul Cader (Meezan Hajiar's father), Mohamed Ali (Kada Appa - Meezan Hajiar's Maternal Uncle), Habeeb Mohammed (Alim)  
Standing left to right: TBA, S. H. Mohammed (Meezan Hajiar's third brother), TBA, Abusally Alim (Meezan Hajiar's second brother), Meezan Hajiar



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – The family of Abusally Alim



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – The family of Haji S. H. Mohamed



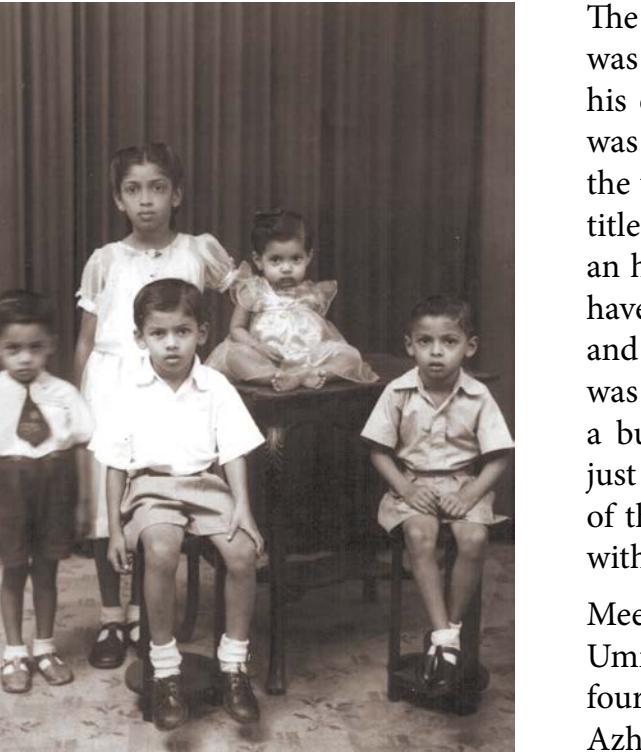
▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – The family of Ahamed Jamaldeen



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – The family of Meezan Hajiar



▲ Meezan Hajiar's sons  
Seated L-R Ihithisham, Ziaudeen  
Standing -Azhar.



▲ Meezan Hajiar's children,  
Ihithisham, Kabeer, Ziaudeen, Zohora and Ayesha



◀ Meezan Hajiar's Daughters –  
Izzath, Hinaya and Kathima.

The fourth son of this devout couple was Mohamed Mohideen, known in his early years simply as Samoon. It was a name carried with affection in the village, before he would earn the titles Meezan Hajiar ('Hajiar' being an honorific title given to those who have completed the Hajj pilgrimage) and Meezan Mudalalli ('Mudalali' was a title used to respectfully refer to a businessman), titles bestowed not just out of respect, but recognition of the balance, grace, and generosity with which he lived.

Meezan Hajiar's first wife, Rahumath Umma (Senior), was blessed with fourteen children: Mahroof, Faiz, Azhar, Fathima Zohora, Mubarak, Kabeer, Ziaudeen, Ihithisham, Ayesha, Shafee, Kathim, Kathima, Izzath and Hinaya.

With his second wife, Rahumath Umma (Junior), he was blessed with six more: Cader, Sathar, Hameed, Fazilath, Arifa and Nazeem.



▲ Meezan Hajiar's oldest sons and nephews  
L-R - Mahroof, Irshad, Farook, Illyas, Faiz



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – Group photo of family menfolk



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – Group photo of family womenfolk



▲ 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1997 – Meezan Hajiar's sons and nephews

## THROUGH HAJI ABOOSALI'S EYES: A FRIEND'S MEMORY OF HIS EARLY LIFE



▲ Meezan Hajiar's childhood home.  
Picture taken in the late 1990's.

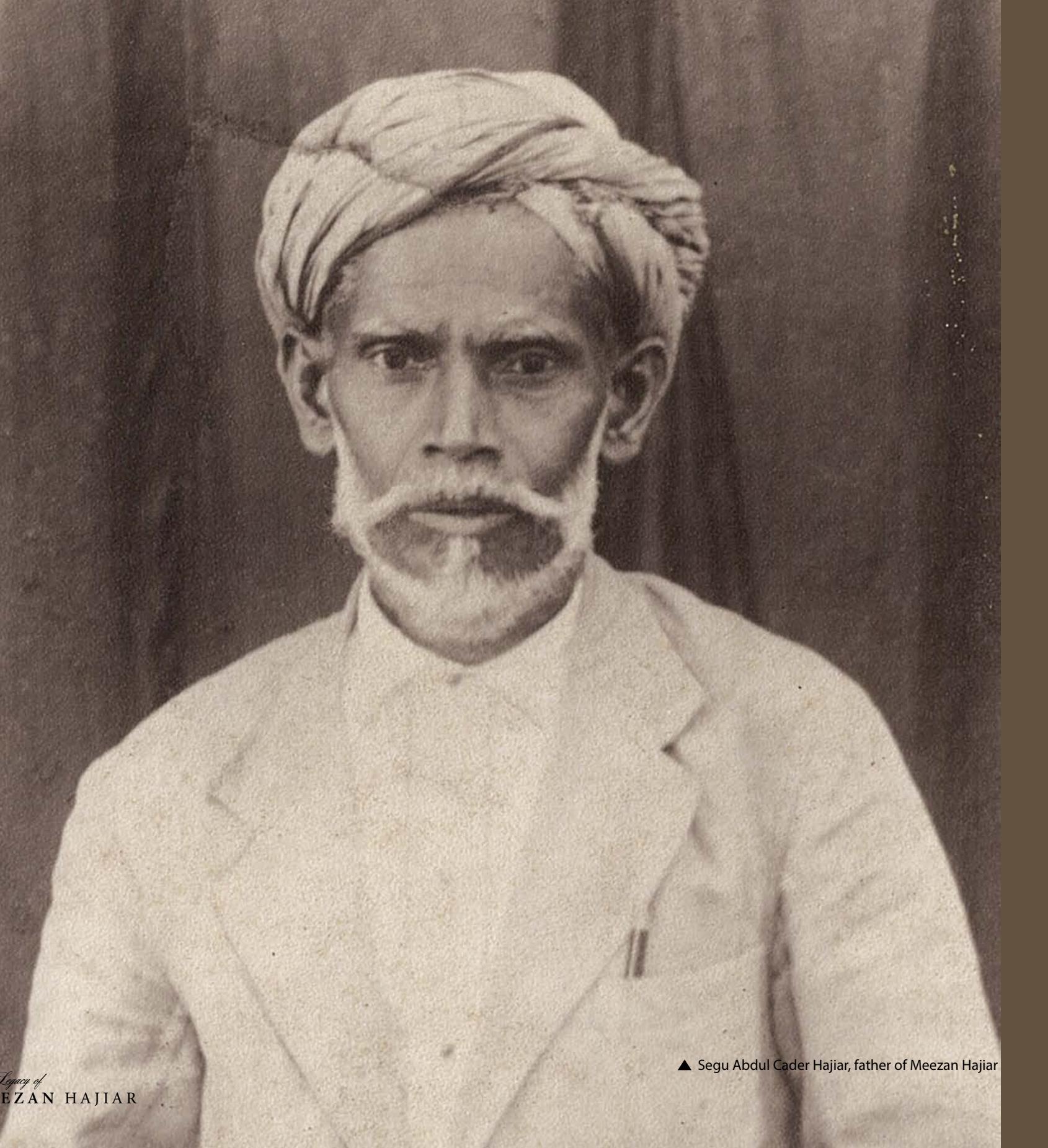
In later years, Marhoom Haji M. S. M. Aboosali, a man known in both Kurugoda and Matale for his wisdom and devout character, was interviewed about his memories of Meezan Hajiar. Aboosali had been a childhood friend of Meezan Hajiar, and his recollections offered a rare and intimate glimpse into the formative years of a figure whose legacy had by then become widely celebrated.

What emerged from this conversation was not simply a record of facts, but a deeply felt remembrance, spoken with clarity, humility and affection. His testimony reflected not only memory, but also a reverence and enduring gratitude. The manner in which he recalled these moments, his expressions, his silences, and the emotion behind his words, conveyed the depth of a lifelong bond.

Presented here are the recollections he shared from that conversation.

"The house stood a little uphill from mine, shaded by tall arecanut palms and surrounded by pepper vines that curled like watchful sentinels around the old jack trees. It was in that house that Samoon lived, though the world would later know him as Meezan Hajiar. Back then, he was just my friend, a little older than me, but always close. We went to school together, ran barefoot through the village lanes, played with spinning tops and climbed trees. His laughter was a little quieter than the rest of ours, but his eyes, his eyes were serious. Even in play, he seemed to carry some sense of purpose.

His father, Segu Abdul Cader Hajiar, was not only a respected figure in our village but also a learned man, an Ālim. He wore his piety lightly, never ostentatiously, and spoke with the kind of calm that made children fall silent and listen. People trusted him. His land stretched far and wide, paddy fields gleaming in the sun, and gardens rich with coconut, arecanut, and jackfruit.



▲ Segu Abdul Cader Hajiar, father of Meezan Hajiar

There were tea bushes too, about four or five acres of them, neatly arranged on a rise just beyond the pepper trellises. It was enough for a comfortable life, and more. He had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, which said everything about the kind of means he had and how he chose to use them.

But it was Samoon's mother I remember most vividly. Katheeja Umma was a rare soul, warm, soft-spoken, and radiant with a boundless love that knew no distinction. When she called Samoon away from our games to offer him something to eat, we knew well that our own invitation would follow soon after. And sure enough, moments later, she'd appear bearing more plates, more cups, sweets and savories alike. We were given exactly what her own son received: no less, no different. That was her way. She never let a child feel forgotten.

I can still see her in my mind: sleeves rolled, gently pressing sweets into our palms, brushing hair from our foreheads, praying over us in whispers we didn't understand then but understand now. I believe, to this day, that it was her duas that bore fruit in all her children.

Samoon, my friend, was different even as a boy. Not just in his obedience, though that stood out. He would never join in mischief, not because he feared punishment, but because he couldn't bear the thought of disappointing his parents. That kind of devotion shaped him from the start. He was always neat, respectful and careful with his words. He had a quiet sense of responsibility, even when we were barely ten. He could be talking about anything, but somehow, it always came back to business. Whereas other boys dreamed of bullock carts and cricket, Samoon spoke of shops, of ledgers, of trade. We laughed at him sometimes, but he was serious, he knew what he wanted, and later, when he opened his produce shop in Matale, he gave it a name that resonated "Meezan". It wasn't just a name, it was a measure of balance and trust.

When I think back on those days, it isn't the facts I recall so much as the feeling: the hush of dusk falling over the village, the scent of cloves in the air, the sound of elders reciting Qur'an under their breath. And within that world simple, devout, full of unspoken discipline was Samoon, already carving a path for himself, already walking with quiet certainty toward the man he would become."

## THE EARLY LIFE OF MEEZAN HAJIAR: THE MAKING OF A MAN

**H**e was born in the village of Kurugoda on the 18th of May, 1911. Like every Muslim child in the village, little Samoon began his earliest education not in a schoolroom but at home, tracing his first letters in the sacred script of the Qur'an. He took quickly to recitation and soon became adept. By the time he was six or seven, he was admitted to the government school in Akurana. Back then, it was known simply as the Seventh Mile Post School, a name that has since given way to the more illustrious title of Azhar Central College. It was the only school he would ever attend, and he remained there for just three or four years. His formal education, in the conventional sense, ended before his teens. But his leaving school was neither a result of poverty nor academic struggle. His parents were comfortably placed, and he was a bright student, quick-witted and numerate. Many who would later do business with him recalled how, in his shop, he could mentally calculate the price of betel, cocoa, pepper, or coffee before his kanakupillai (clerk) had even begun scribbling on paper.

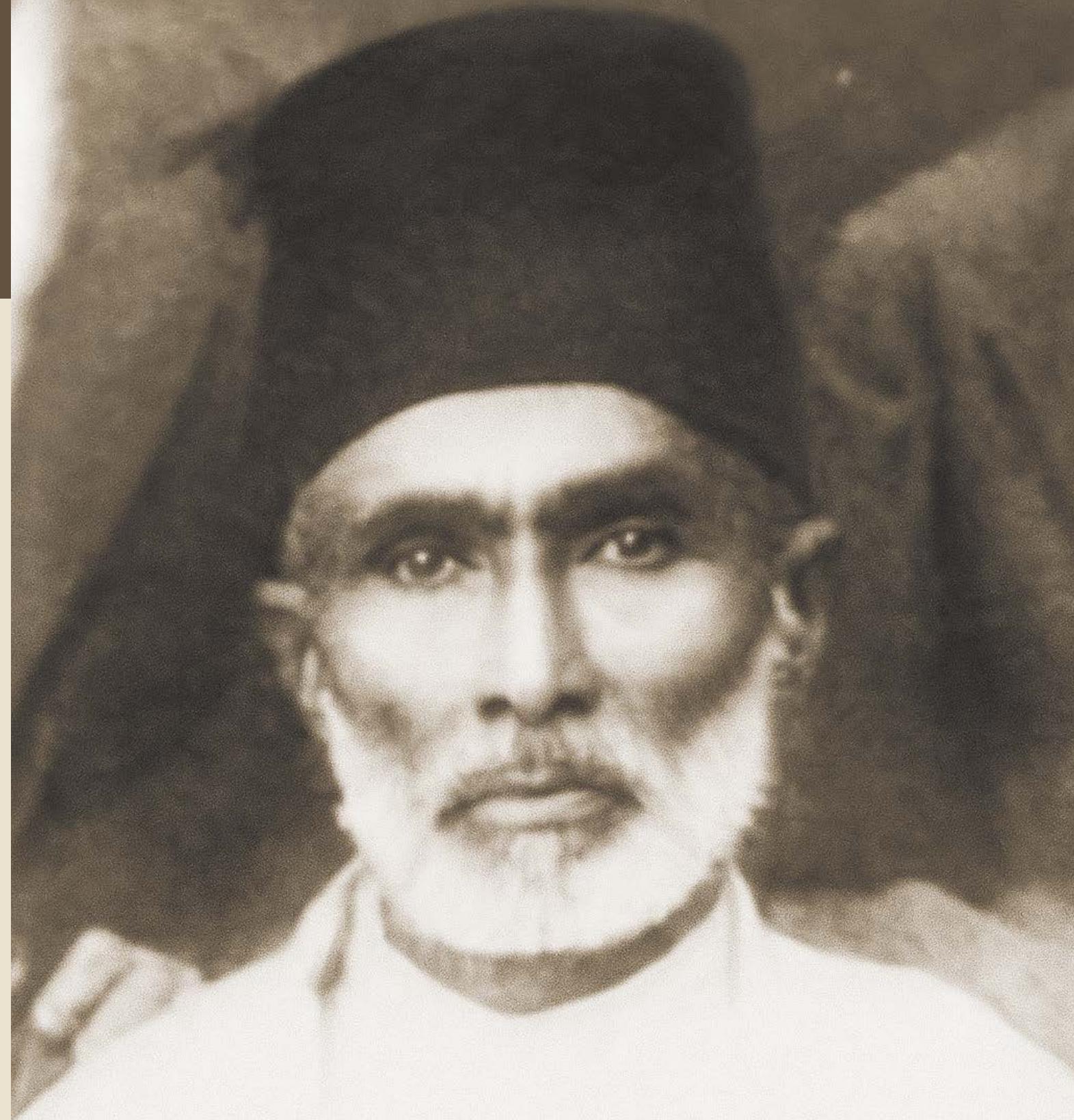
So why did he leave school so early?

Simply put, he was drawn elsewhere. Not by necessity, but by nature. From an early age, Samoon harboured a fascination with trade. While other boys dreamed of games or goats or the grand stories of war, he dreamed of ledgers and markets, of goods bought and sold, of

becoming a businessman. In today's world, a boy from a stable home announcing his intention to abandon school at twelve might raise concern or ridicule, but in the Ceylon of the 1920s, especially among Muslims, business was considered not only respectable but a proven path to prosperity.

The plantation sector was booming, roads were linking villages to towns, and trade was thriving in its wake. Ambition had found its moment and Samoon embraced it. He was just twelve when he made up his mind to begin his own business. Too young by most standards, and entirely inexperienced. But that didn't trouble him. He believed, as he would often say later in life, that "one cannot learn to swim without entering the water." He lacked age and experience, yes, but he lacked neither courage nor confidence. Most young men would begin their commercial journey in the employ of someone else. It was the accepted route: work under a merchant, learn the ropes, and then, if fortune allowed, branch out on one's own. But Samoon's temperament could not bear subordination. The spirit of independence ran deep within him. It did not matter how small the enterprise, so long as it was his own. And indeed, for the rest of his life, he found his way independently.

Still, there was method in his daring. His decision to go into business was not rash. He considered it carefully, chose a path with low risk and minimal capital outlay,



▲ Meezan Hajiar's Maternal Uncle - Mohamed Ali (Kada-Appa)

and started with what was close to home, betel leaves. In Kurugoda and its neighbouring villages, the vines were abundant. He could buy them easily in Akurana, transport them to Matale, and sell them at a fair price. Betel chewing was at the time, a widespread custom shared by all communities in Ceylon: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims alike. Conveniently, Samoon's maternal uncle ran a local produce shop on Harrison Jones Road, in the very heart of Matale. The boy had already chosen his trade, and now he had his location. But even then, he knew this would not be his destination, only a launchpad. He was not seeking mere profit; he was chasing experience, insight, and the relationships that would later serve as the foundation of a business empire.

Once the decision was made, he wasted no time. That very evening, with the blessing of his parents, he gathered a bundle of betel leaves in Kurugoda, tied them neatly, and set off early the next morning for Matale. That sense of initiative, of moving quickly and surely from intention to action, was one of the great secrets of his later success. Whether a transaction was ten or ten million rupees, procrastination was never in his nature. As anticipated, the leaves sold readily. The precise date of that first sale is lost to memory, yet it signalled the quiet emergence of a figure destined to influence the economic, social, and political fabric of Matale. For two or three years, this simple trade of betel from Akurana to Matale continued. The profits were modest, but Samoon was not disheartened. He was acquiring what he had truly set out for: trust, experience, and goodwill. He was preparing for the next step.

Even at fifteen, people had begun to take notice. One such observer was Hadji Naina Sahib Lebbe, a respected elder from Kurugoda. He had watched the boy closely,

noting his discipline, intelligence, and grace in dealings. One day, he turned to his wife and said, "This boy will become a great businessman." And he was right. Years later, Samoon married this very man's daughter.

Around 1923, as the betel-leaf trade had begun to run its course, young Samoon found himself at a crossroads. He was just fifteen, but already his mind was working restlessly, searching for the next foothold in his climb. It was then that a timely conversation with his maternal uncle, Mohamed Ali—affectionately known as Kadaappa—would alter the course of his life.

Kadaappa, who ran a local produce shop along Harrison Jones Road in the heart of Matale, confided to his nephew that he had decided to close down his business. He needed to devote more time to his lands in Kurugoda. For most boys, this would have been idle news. For Samoon, it was a signal. He saw at once what others might have missed: a well-positioned shop in a thriving town, accessible to the surrounding villages that were rich in coffee, cocoa, nutmeg, pepper, and cloves. He could see the possibilities even before a plan had been drawn.

He decided, then and there, that he would take over the shop.

This was not an act of youthful impulsiveness but of instinct sharpened by experience. His short venture with betel had taught him something crucial: he had what it took. And this shop, he believed, could become much more than a humble roadside business, if managed with vision, discipline, and integrity.

His uncle, deeply impressed by his nephew's resolve and precocious sense of judgement, gave his blessing. He also offered him a symbolic gift: his own pair of weighing scales. In Arabic, the word for scale is *meezān*.



▲ Meezan Hajiar at a political gathering with Bernard Aluwihare, Sir John and V.T. Nanayakara.



It was an ordinary gift, perhaps, but one that carried extraordinary resonance. From that moment, Samoon was no longer just Samoon. The villagers began to call him Meezan Hajiar, a name that would not only stick but eventually become synonymous with fairness and trust. Only a handful of old-timers, like Marhoom M. A. Buhari of Buhari Stores, continued to refer to him as Samoon Nana.

Formally, he remained Mohamed Mohideen. It was the name on his birth certificate, and the one used in official correspondence, particularly by his peers in Colombo, figures like Sir Razik Fareed, Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel, Sir A. H. Markan Markar, Al Haj Faleel A. Gafoor and Al Haj A. M. A. Azeez. In all his personal and commercial dealings, and on every invitation card issued from his home, the name Meezan appeared, discreetly placed in the margins when required, ensuring that its origin was unmistakable.

The decision to take over the shop at Harrison Jones Road was a calculated one. The Matale district, by the early 1920s, had become a flourishing hub of plantation agriculture. Coffee had once ruled the hill country, its reign stretching from 1830 to 1880, before disease and economic shifts pushed many estates toward tea, rubber, and cocoa. Even so, coffee continued to thrive as a garden crop, alongside pepper, arecanut, nutmeg, cloves, cardamom, and newer arrivals like cocoa.

These were the goods pouring into Matale from every corner: villages like Rattota, Kaikawela, Palapathwela, Pallepola, and Yatawatta to the north; and from the south, from fertile hamlets such as Bandarapola, Kiula, Ulpathpitiya, Muwandeniya, Godapola, and Wiharagama. The newly extended stretch of Harrison Jones Road, linking Gongawela to Oyapahala between 1921 and 1924, had made it even easier for villagers to

bring their produce to town, especially those from the south, who found the directness of Harrison Road far preferable to backdoor deals with itinerant traders.

These villagers were seeking fairness, accuracy in weight and honesty in price, and Meezan Hajiar knew that he could offer them exactly that.

When he resolved to take over the shop, his mother placed in his hands a gift of one gold sovereign, her contribution to the next chapter of her son's life. With the gold sovereign and his uncle's *meezān*, he stepped into business in earnest.

He could not have known then what that shop would become. But within twenty-five years, it had transformed a village youth into a merchant prince. It made him the undisputed leader of the Muslim community in Matale. It crowned him a key decision maker in the town's politics during the 1950s and early '60s. And it all began with a mother's gold, an uncle's scales, and a young man's unshakable faith in his calling.

As Ian F. D. Morrow once wrote of Bismarck, "His iron physique and love of the countryside came to him from his father. His mother gave her son his powerful intellect, retentive memory, intuitiveness, swift apprehension and untiring capacity for work. God, who alone can bestow it, gave him the supreme gift: genius." Something remarkably similar could be said about Meezan Hajiar. From his parents, he inherited not only a dignified bearing and impeccable manners but also a clear sense of right and wrong. But his business genius, his uncanny instinct for trade, negotiation, and growth, was a divine gift, bestowed from a realm beyond calculation or nurture.

Meezan Hajiar's initial capital was modest. But what he lacked in money, he more than made up for in trust

and acumen earned over time. By the time he opened his shop on Harrison Jones Road, he had already built a name for himself. The villagers knew him as respectful and fair, honest in word and precise in weight. His reputation was his true working capital, and in the fertile landscape of Matale, that reputation bore fruit quickly.

One of the earliest and most enduring relationships forged through this fledgling shop was with the Bindusara family of Muwandeniya. As Mr. W. G. S. Bindusara once recalled:

"My paternal grandfather, Bindusara Upāsaka Mahaththaya, often spoke to us about the old days. He told us how he and many of our relatives brought their produce to the young Muslim trader's shop. 'Kollage Kade' ('the young boys shop') The words 'Kollage Kade' were said with love and affection towards Samoon."

That bond, built on trust and fairness, would endure across generations. After the passing of Bindusara Upasaka Mahaththaya, his son John Bindusara Mudalalli continued the relationship with equal loyalty. And now, even a century later, the family's descendants supply their tea leaves exclusively to the factories run by Meezan Hajiar's grandchildren. It was no ordinary customer-seller arrangement. It was a business friendship, firm and enduring, sealed not with contracts but with mutual respect.

The Bindusaras were not alone. Villagers from Muwandeniya, Bandarapola, Kiula, Wiharagama and beyond came to trust Meezan Mudalalli because of his integrity and how he treated them. He paid fair prices. His scales were never rigged. He was kind in word and respectful in tone. He treated every customer with

dignity, regardless of how much they bought or sold. As time passed, these villagers came to know more about the man behind the counter. They learned of his quiet generosity, his readiness to help anyone in need, and his unwavering trust in the people who trusted him. Many came to town intending to buy goods, clothing, tools and household items, only to discover they were short of cash. They would go, without hesitation, to Meezan Hajiar's shop. Even if he wasn't there, his staff had standing instructions: trust them! Give what is needed. Settle later. And settle they did. These were not charity handouts. They were loans given with compassion and repaid with integrity, often deducted from future sales of produce. Sometimes the amounts were small, sometimes not so small. But whatever the figure, Meezan Hajiar made it a point to accommodate the borrower's circumstances. In turn, these humble villagers repaid his trust with their loyalty. It was a system of mutual honour.

Among these stories, one in particular stands out:

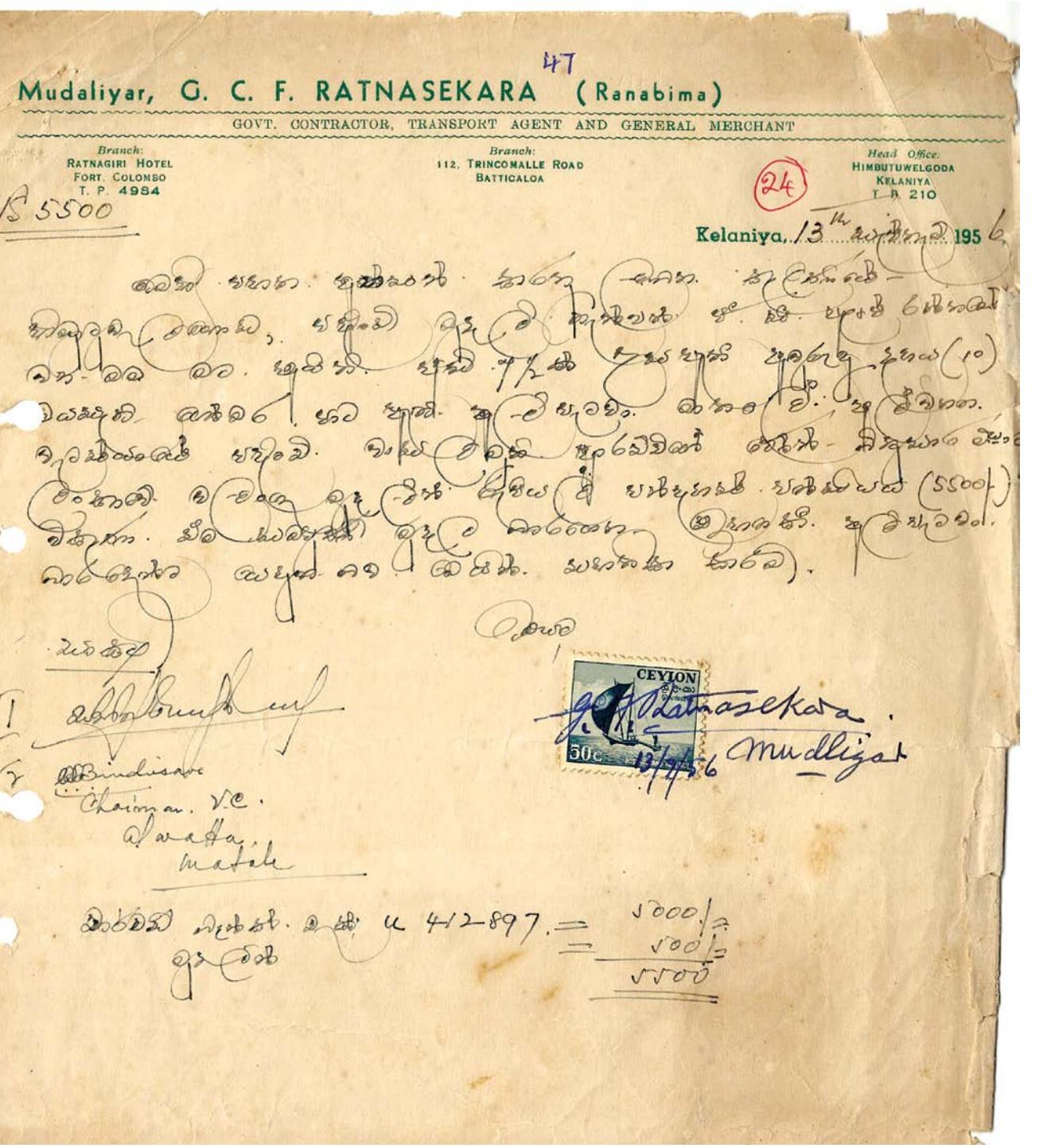
John Bindusara Mudalalli, already a prominent landowner and trader, also kept elephants, a rare symbol of prestige in those days, particularly among the Sinhalese elite. On one occasion, while in Matale town, he was informed by a broker that two elephants were up for sale in Kelaniya. But time was short and he needed to get there by six o'clock that very day. There was only one problem: he didn't have the necessary funds. Without hesitation, he walked straight to Meezan Hajiar's residence. A few moments later, he walked out again, with the money in hand. Days later, the two elephants stood proudly in front of Meezan Hajiar's shop. The sight of the animals moved him. He admired their majesty, their presence, mentioning to his friend that he wished to buy one. Without hesitation, John Bindusara replied: "Choose your one."



▲ Mr. Bindusara welcoming Meezan Hajiar on his return from the Hajj pilgrimage

And so he did. That was the kind of friendship they shared, simple, noble, unburdened by the pettiness of price. And thus, Meezan Hajiar became the first Muslim in Matale town to own an elephant, a mark of standing that few had attained. At that time, only a handful of influential Sinhalese, such as Mr. Bernard

Aluvihare and John Mudalali owned elephants. Now, Meezan Hajiar stood among them. But more than the elephant, what mattered was how he earned it: not by show or extravagance, but through trust, goodwill, and the moral authority that wealth alone cannot buy.



▲ Letter detailing the purchase of the elephant

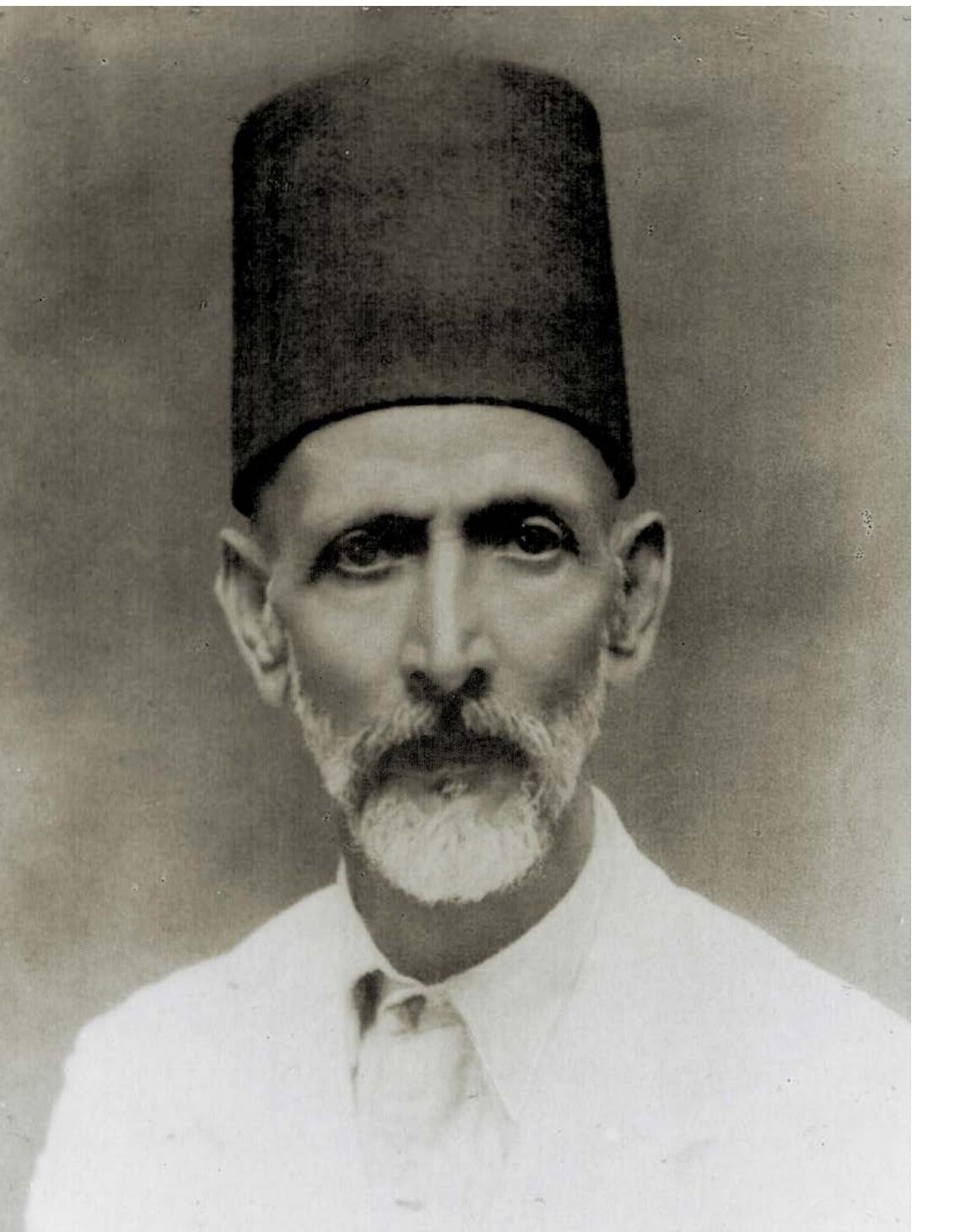
Almost every day, the mahout would lead the great beast to Harrison Jones Road, where it would stand patiently outside Meezan Hajiar's shop. At the sight of the elephant, Meezan Hajiar would emerge with a smile, feeding it a few plantains with a gentle affection that became a familiar and endearing scene in the town. Passers-by often paused to watch the sight of a young Muslim trader feeding his elephant with easy familiarity, a homely event that became part of the street's living memory.

By now, Meezan Hajiar had become one of the most eligible bachelors in Kurugoda. He was pleasant in manner, dignified in bearing, and the sole owner of a thriving business in the bustling town of Matale. His name was spoken with admiration both in his village and among his peers in town. Naturally, many families with daughters of marriageable age sought him as a son-in-law. But it was Mr. and Mrs. Naina Lebbe of Kurugoda who would be the fortunate ones. On the 1st of July, 1938, Meezan Hajiar married Rahmath Umma, daughter of Muhandhiramagedara Naina Sahib. It was a union of warmth, affection, and shared values, and as many elders would later say, it brought not only companionship but also great barakah (blessings) into his life. His fortune, already steadily rising, seemed to flourish with new vigour after the marriage.

By the early 1940s, Meezan Hajiar's name had become synonymous with success. While Matale town had its fair share of local produce dealers, names like Vincent Corera, K. A. Razak & Sons, M. K. Seyed Ismail & Co., Karamany, P. Muththlagu, P. M. Mohamed Ali & Co., and S. A. K. Ouhad & Co. it was Meezan & Co. that steadily grew to surpass them all. His business operated at both retail and wholesale levels, and traders from Matale's outlying towns began bringing their



▲ One of the elephants purchased by Meezan Hajiar



▲ Meezan Hajiar's Father in Law - Mr. Muhandhiramagedara Naina Sahib

entire collections to his shop. His fairness in pricing, promptness in payment, and personal integrity made him the natural choice.

Among those who supplied him regularly was Marhoom M. K. Abdul Hameed, the respected Chairman of the Rattota Town Council for over two decades. His son, Marhoom Al Haj A. H. M. Bacha, would later recall how his father consistently sent his entire collection of produce to Meezan Hajiar. This was no isolated case. By the mid-1940s, Meezan & Co., founded by a teenager with just one sovereign and a pair of scales, had grown into a mighty banyan tree, its shade providing sustenance, shelter, and opportunity for many.

Marhoom A. H. M. Bacha also recounted an extraordinary incident, one that shed light on why so many traders were loyal to Meezan Hajiar. During a particularly profitable pepper season, Meezan Hajiar had purchased large quantities of pepper from

his network of village traders, including Haji Bacha, all at prevailing market rates. Just weeks later, pepper prices soared, and the shop reaped immense profits.

But instead of pocketing the windfall, Meezan Hajiar did something few merchants would ever consider. He called Haji Bacha to his shop and handed him Rs. 7,000, explaining that it was only fair to share the profits with those who had supplied the goods.

“You should share in my good fortune,” he said.

That Rs. 7,000 allowed Haji Bacha to purchase a piece of land in Rattota, a plot that remains with his descendants to this day, and he was not the only one. Other traders, too, received unexpected sums, gestures of goodwill that confirmed what many already knew: Meezan Hajiar was not just a shrewd businessman, he was a man of character possessing an entrepreneurial vision that extended to a social and political vision of the common good. It is little wonder, then, that the name ‘Meezan’ was spoken not only with admiration, but also with love.

Then came the Second World War.

The conflict, which erupted in Europe in the mid-1930s, brought with it an unforeseen demand for natural rubber. Synthetic alternatives had not yet arrived in significant quantities, and the Japanese capture of Burma only intensified the shortage. Meezan Hajiar, already a leading rubber dealer in the Matale district, found himself in a position of enormous advantage. But it wasn't just luck that set him apart; it was foresight and initiative. At a time when transportation to Colombo was fraught with difficulty due to wartime bombings and disruptions, Meezan Hajiar relied on his own fleet of lorries. He drove the rubber himself to Colombo, ensuring uninterrupted delivery and substantial profits.

His role as a transport agent during this period proved just as important as his trading instincts. He had turned crisis into opportunity, and it paid off handsomely.

Even before the war, in 1935, he had shown entrepreneurial foresight. Alongside respected traders such as Mohammed Cassim Lebbe, Noor Mohammed of Malwana, Habib Mohammed (Kota Mudalalli) of the 8th Mile Post, and his own brother S. H. Mohammed (Mutuwappa), Meezan Hajiar moved operations to Colombo to explore broader opportunities, particularly in the export of tea and produce. Thus was born Meezan and Company, an ambitious venture based in the capital. But as the war intensified and Colombo experienced Japanese air raids, the other partners gradually exited the company, leaving S.H. Mohammed to carry on the business.

By the late 1940s, Meezan & Co. had outgrown its modest beginnings. The name had become well-known not only across Matale but also among traders and planters from neighbouring towns and estates. Yet, despite the flourishing success of his business, Meezan Hajiar had begun to feel that the premises in which he operated were no longer adequate. The shop was too small, too humble for the scale of operations it now sustained. But more than just space, there was a deeper principle at play, Meezan Hajiar believed in conducting business with dignity and hospitality.

In earlier years, his patrons had been the humble farmers and villagers from Kurugoda and the surrounding districts, smallholders bringing in their bundles of cocoa, sacks of coffee, or coils of pepper. Many of them remained loyal even as the business grew. But as his reputation expanded, another class of clientele had begun to appear at his counter: large estate owners, planters, superintendents, and urban

gentlemen. Some came to sell produce, others to inquire about market prices, and a few simply dropped in for amiable conversation. Yet the shop, narrow and cramped, offered little space to welcome them properly. On occasion, Meezan Hajiar found himself unable even to offer a seat. This, to him, was unacceptable. For Meezan Hajiar, good public relations was not a strategy, it was a matter of character.

At that time, Harrison Jones Road, particularly the stretch between Taj Mahal Junction and Trincomalee Street (known also as Main Street), was in a poor state of development. The area lacked architectural distinction. The road was flanked by a few small shops, some rundown structures, and long stretches of bare land. Even as late as the 1940s, anyone walking down that road from Main Street would pass the weather-stained side wall of Madeena Tea Room, a Matale staple that survives to this day, followed by the humble provision shop Naina Kade. Further along stood the old and poorly kept Zain Mowlana Thakiyah, followed by a long, dusty clearing of barren land. Across the street, two small shops sat unassumingly, one of them was Meezan Hajiar's own store, still in its original location.

But this was about to change.

With his characteristic foresight and decisive action, Meezan Hajiar purchased the full stretch of unused land adjoining the Thakiyah. A portion of it, about thirty feet wide, was left bare, thoughtfully reserved for the parking of lorries and cars. Upon the rest, he erected a new shop: a single-storied, spacious, and dignified structure that stood in striking contrast to its surroundings. Adjoining this shop, he commissioned the construction of a double-storied residence, which

soon came to be known as 'Meezan Bungalow'. At the time, it was the first two-storey building on Harrison Jones Road, and its appearance marked a turning point in the architectural landscape of the area.

Though built as a family residence, the bungalow was used primarily as a warehouse. But its significance would only grow with time. In 1951, it became the site of one of the most devastating fires in the town's memory. That year, the grand bungalow was consumed by flames and reduced to ashes in a single night. For those who had grown up in the area, especially the older residents of Gongawela, the image of that fire remained etched in memory until their final days.

Yet the bungalow left behind more than a charred outline. For several months in the early 1950s, it had served an altogether different purpose, a temporary home to the students of Zahira College Matale. Many old boys still recall with fondness their time within its walls, before the college moved to more permanent premises. For those who lived through that era, Meezan Hajiar was not just a businessman but a benefactor whose vision and generosity helped shape the town's civic and educational identity.

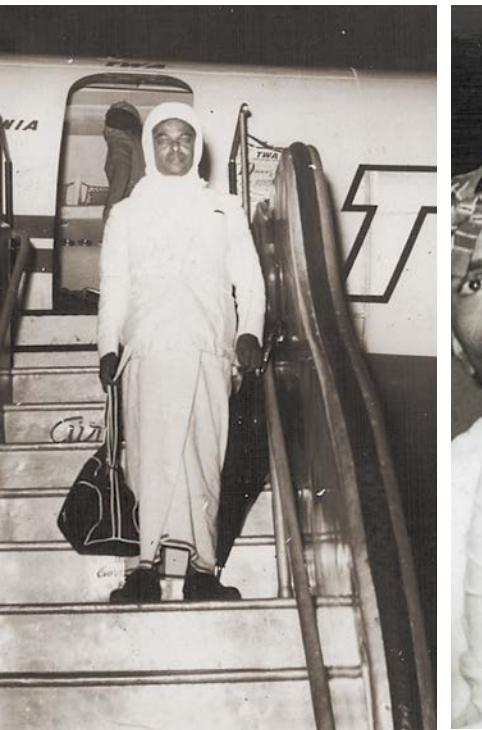
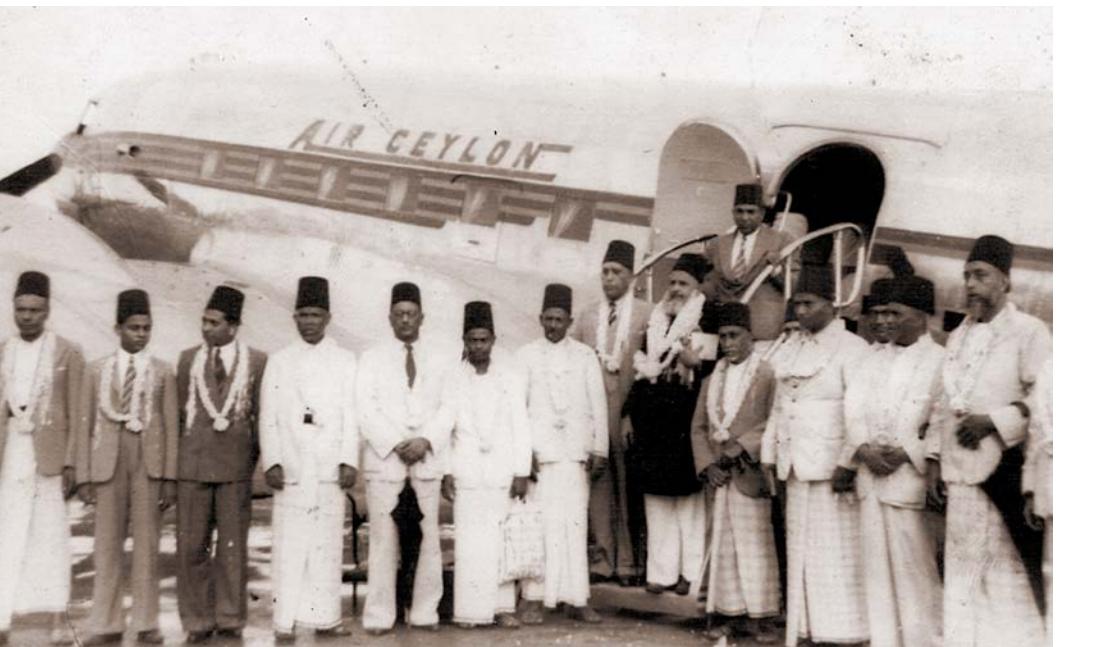
It was Meezan Hajiar who first gave Harrison Jones Road a sense of stature and beauty. His presence elevated the entire area, and once his new shop was completed, he moved his business from the old premises to this newly built commercial space. The results were immediate. From that point on, the success of Meezan & Co. grew exponentially. What had begun in 1925 with one sovereign, a pair of scales, and a cartload of betel leaves had, in two decades, grown into one of the most formidable local produce businesses in the region.



▲ Meezan Hajiar's shop at Harrison Jones Road

By now, Meezan Hajiar had made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca—the Hajj, a lifelong dream and religious duty that he fulfilled with devotion. His outward success in trade had never obscured the inward orientation of his heart. To those who knew him, it was always clear that the two were intertwined.

Circa 1950 – Meezan Hajiar (sixth from left) prior to boarding the first chartered Hajj flight to Jeddah which carried twenty one Hajj pilgrims from Sri Lanka. ▶



▲ Meezan Hajiar disembarking after returning from Hajj.



▲ Meezan Hajiar being welcomed back after Hajj

M. FALIL A. CAFFOOR  
M. B. E., M. M. C.

TELEPHONE:  
OFFICE 4723 & 6518  
RESIDENCE 2875

P. O. BOX No. 1.  
ABDUL CAFFOOR BUILDING  
CHURCH STREET, FORT.

Colombo 1..... 21st July..... 1955.

Al-Hajj Mohamed Mohideen,  
C/o. Seyed Siraj Omar Wali,  
Moallim,  
Bab Ibrahim,  
Mecca,  
SAUDI ARABIA.

Dear Sir,

I am glad to inform you that we are all keeping well here in Colombo and trust the same of yourself and every member of your party. We pray that Almighty God will give all of you good health, good spirit and strength to perform successfully all Hajj Rites and return home safely and in good health.

Please pray for all of us at Arafat, Mina and Mecca.

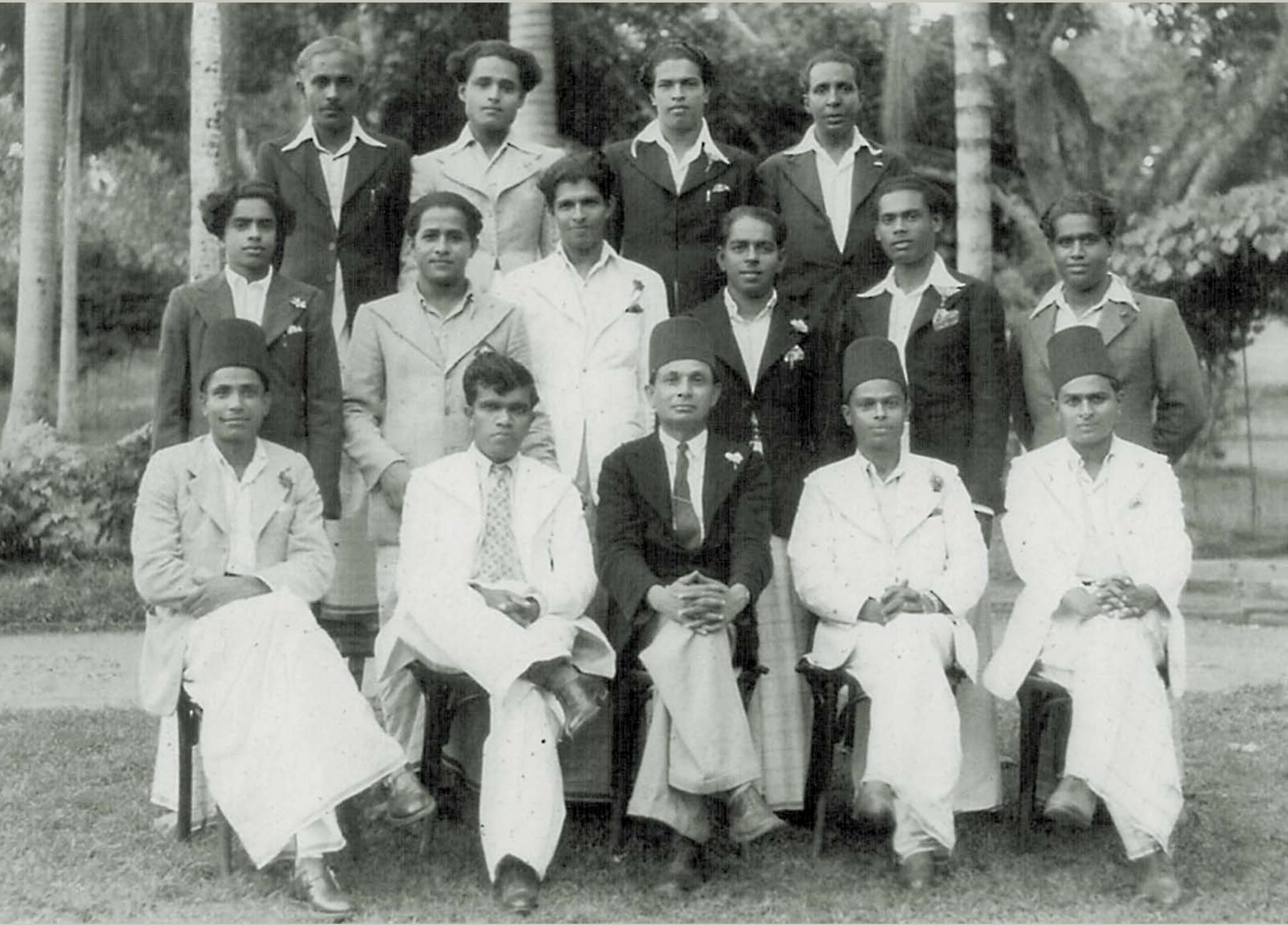
I came to the Aerodrome to meet and give you a send off. As I reached the Air Port it was too late to meet the passengers. Please excuse my delay.

With my Salaams and kindest regards.

Yours faithfully,

*m. falil A. Hajjar*

▲ Letter from Al Haj M. Falil A. Caffoor – a prominent member of the community, politician and businessman



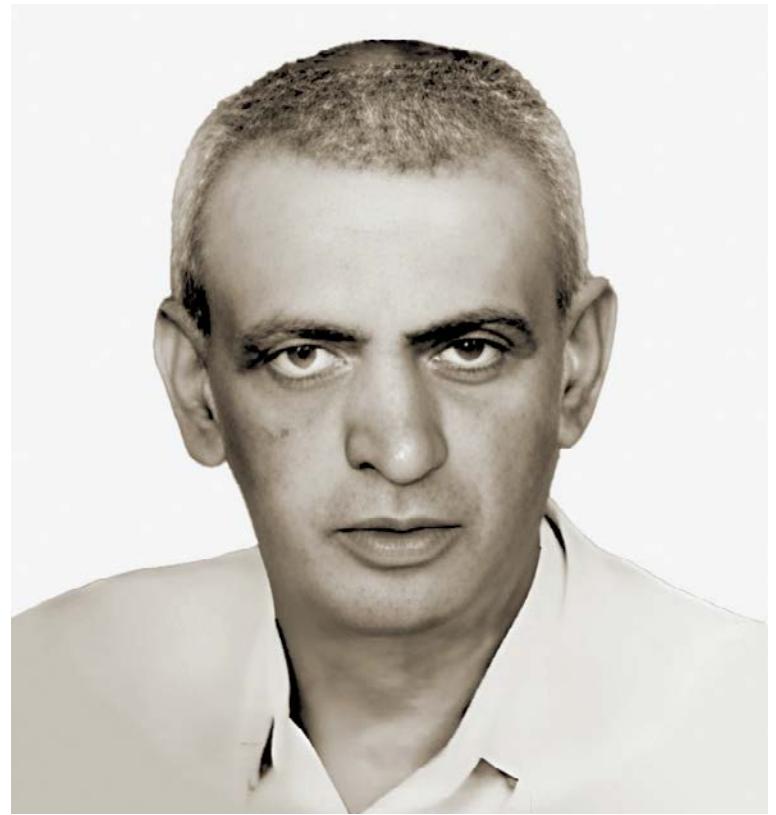
▲ Meezan Hajiar (seated second from right) and Mr. Thambirajah - Chairman of the Matale Urban Council (seated second from the left) - along with the other members of the Urban Council.

By the early 1940s, Meezan Hajiar had extended his influence beyond business. He showed great interest in the founding and development of Zahira College, Matale and was appointed its local manager in 1942.. He supported the school devotedly until it gained government assistance and became an aided college. That same public spirit led him into civic affairs, leading him to serve as a councillor on the Matale Urban Council.

With well-appointed new premises and an enlarged staff, Meezan Hajiar now stood prepared to meet the challenges of a much broader scale of commerce. His blend of practical experience and native intelligence distinguished him. Though he had little formal education, he possessed a quick understanding of people and situations, a sharp intuition for timing, and the rare gift of persuasion. In the art of influencing others, it was said he could have taught a lesson or two even to Dale Carnegie, the author of the great book "How to Win Friends and How to Influence People".

Meezan Hajiar's brother-in-law, M.K.N.S. Mohamed, affectionately known as Officer Mahaththaya was a steadfast source of strength, a trusted confidant, and an indispensable ally in his business ventures. His unwavering support played a pivotal role in Hajiar's rapid expansion and diversification into the plantation sector, where he managed large estates. Even after Hajiar's passing, Officer Mahaththaya continued to guide and support his sons in their business affairs, ensuring the legacy endured.

In the 1940s, Officer Mahaththaya oversaw the Gansarapola Estate, and following the acquisition of the Ancoombra Estate in the late 1940s, he took



▲ M.K.N.S. Mohamed (Officer Mahaththaya) – Meezan Hajiar's brother-in-law

charge of managing its affairs. His capable stewardship allowed Meezan Hajiar to focus on his core commodity and spice trading business, with full confidence that the plantations were in trusted hands.

Even after Meezan Hajiar's passing, Officer Mahaththaya continued to manage the estates under his care until the early 1970s, offering invaluable guidance to Hajiar's sons during their formative years.

As his ambitions grew, so did his charitable spirit. Wealth, to him, was a means to serve. He had inherited from his mother not only a generous heart but also a deep desire to uplift the poor and distressed. Many

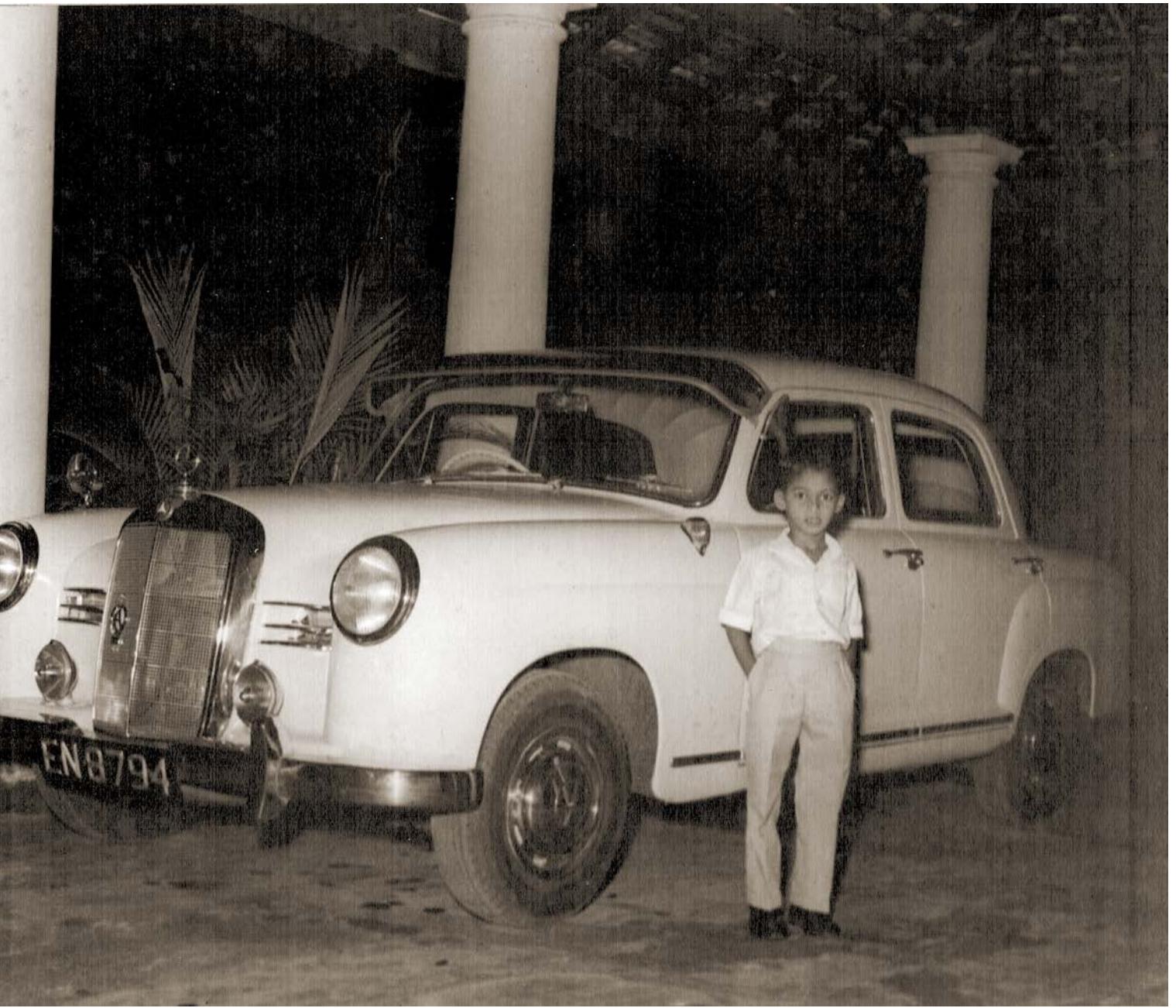
beneficiaries of his quiet generosity, whether in Matale or in the surrounding villages, continued to speak of his kindness. It is little wonder that people would say of him, “What would bloom on a rose planted, but a rose?”

No longer content with trade conducted solely from behind the counter, Meezan Hajiar began making regular visits to plantations. He approached estate owners and superintendents directly, encouraging them to supply their produce to his shop. Always immaculately dressed in a well-pressed sarong, coat, shirt and red Turkish cap, he presented a figure of dignified humility. His sense of equality allowed him to approach men of every community; Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, or European with ease. His direct manner and self-confidence won him many contracts.

He adopted a similar approach with exporters based in Colombo, forging relationships built on respect, honesty, and clarity of purpose. One telling anecdote from this period involved his first Mercedes-Benz purchase. Visiting the island’s only Mercedes-Benz showroom in Colombo, sarong-clad and unassuming, he found himself treated dismissively by the staff. They assumed he could not afford such a luxury vehicle. Undeterred, he chose his model, wrote a cheque for the full amount, and handed it to the stunned showroom manager. Upon calling the bank to confirm, the manager

was left stunned, the bank’s reply was unequivocal: “Not just one Mercedes-Benz, you could give him a hundred.” Humbled, the manager apologised profusely. Meezan Hajiar, true to his character, responded with grace: “It was an error anyone could have made.” And thus, he won another friend, just as he always had, with patience and dignity.

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▲ One of Meezan Hajiar's Mercedes Benz cars. His son, Ihithisham, stands beside the car.

## PLANTING PROSPERITY: MEEZAN HAJIAR AND THE RISE OF MUSLIM ENTERPRISE

Meezan Hajiar's long association with commodities like rubber and cocoa and his constant interaction with the planting community naturally kindled a desire to be an estate owner himself. Money was not a problem. He had enough to buy a large, well-maintained estate. He waited patiently for the right opportunity. It came in 1945 when a land broker informed him that a British firm intended to sell the Ancoombra Estate. This tea estate was ideally located and included its own factory, making it a highly attractive investment. All inquiries Meezan Hajiar made yielded positive feedback, prompting swift action. He acquired the estate in partnership with Mr. K.V Suppiah Pillai, who later sold his shares, making Meezan Hajiar the sole proprietor. Ancoombra remains a proud possession of his family to this day, having only temporarily passed out of their hands during the Land Reform Commission's acquisition from 1974 to 1990.

Though he owned several tea, rubber, and cocoa plantations throughout his life, Ancoombra brought him particular pride and joy. His sons, Ihithisham and Ziaudeen, now manage the estate with the same care their father showed. The Ancoombra Tea Factory is today considered among the finest in Sri Lanka. The

purchase of Ancoombra in 1946 made Meezan Hajiar a pioneer among Muslim estate owners in Matale. While he was not the first—Muslims had previously owned estates such as Annasikanda, Ocree, and Oyapahala—the scale and success of his operations were unparalleled. His entry into the plantation sector marked a turning point in the economic history of Muslims in the Kandy and Matale districts.

Dr. A. C. L. Ameer Ali, a noted economic historian, recorded in the volume *Muslims of Sri Lanka* that in the 1860s, Sinna Lebbe of Kandy owned more than 6,500 acres of coffee land, but his firm collapsed in 1865. Though Muslims retained some presence in the plantation sector, their share paled in comparison to the holdings of Europeans and Tamils. In Matale and Kandy, the belief took root that only these groups could successfully manage estates, Europeans due to their colonial authority, Tamils due to their familiarity with the labour force. Meezan Hajiar shattered that myth. He managed Ancoombra with outstanding success, and then proceeded to acquire other estates such as Elhaantenne, Bowlana, Gansarapola, Makulgolla, and Hangarankande. At the time of his passing, he was

also the Managing Director of the Wariyapola Group, comprising of three large estates with a total extent of over 2400 acres - Wariyapola, Wiharagama, and Kandenuwara Estates.

His success proved a beacon to others, inspired by his example, other prominent Muslims entered the plantation sector: M. A. M. Cassim Hajiar, the great benefactor of Matale Zahira College, became the owner of Kurugoda Estate; Abdul Hameed Hajiar of Ukuwela purchased Pattampaha; Al Haj Abdul Wahid acquired Koladatchi; Marhoom T. M. Ibrahim of Gonawela bought Oyapahala; and Al Haj Faleel invested in Mahatenna.

Meezan Hajiar's success encouraged many Akurana Muslims also to enter the plantation sector. Nalanda group and Suduganga estate were bought by Al Haj K. N. H. Mohamed of Bulugahathene. Hathamanagal was bought by Al Haj Fareed, a pleasant and dignified gentleman from Bulugahathene. Marhoom Hameed bought Galgewatte and Haji Noor Mohamed of Kurugoda was the owner of Bolagala and Vilana.

This economic diversification elevated the stature of

Muslims in the Central Province. More importantly, it bore fruit for the community. M. A. M. Cassim Hajiar used his estate wealth to fund the Cassim Block at Matale Zahira College, consisting of thirteen classrooms. Abdul Hameed Hajiar donated land for Hameedia College of Kuruwela. Noor Mohamed Hajiar contributed to mosque development, and Marhoom T. M. Ibrahim of Godapola Road established the Matale Muslim Reading Room and Library. If Meezan Hajiar had not first demonstrated that Muslims could thrive in the plantation sector, many of these initiatives might never have taken root. In this regard, he stands as a true trailblazer.

Two years after buying Ancoombra estate, Meezan Hajiar took Rahumath Umma (junior) of 9th Mile Post, Alawathugoda, as his second wife who survived him.

The crowning achievement of his planting career came with the acquisition of the Wariyapola Group in 1961, a consortium of three estates cultivating tea, rubber, cocoa, and cardamom. Among them, Wariyapola cocoa was especially renowned for its quality. When the English firm M/S Bassenquet & Scrimge offered the

group for sale, Meezan Hajiar immediately recognised that a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity was knocking at his door.

The Wariyapola group was an exceptionally valuable property. It surrounded the outskirts of Matale town, with a small portion even falling within the Matale Urban Council limits. Wiharagama Estate lay close to the heart of Matale, and though Kandenuwara was slightly farther, it too was not beyond easy reach. In every way it was a remarkably advantageous and strategic property to own.

The price quoted for the Wariyapola Group was 2.4 million rupees. While this figure may seem modest today, in 1961 it was a colossal amount, a sum that might have discouraged most investors. Yet, this amount did not stagger Meezan Hajiar; He could have easily raised the capital and acquired the entire estate for himself. f.

However, Meezan Hajiar saw beyond his own gain. Many of his close associates had long expressed a desire to invest in a venture under his leadership. Trusted for his integrity and foresight, he viewed this as an opportunity to empower them and share the prosperity. The group was vast—2,400 acres, and could accommodate a wide array of investors.

Meezan Hajiar paid the advance himself and set about carefully assembling a group of shareholders. Shares

were priced at Rs. 50,000 each. He kept only two for himself and hand-picked 37 other shareholders, choosing men of good character and cooperative spirit. In some cases, three or four individuals combined to purchase a single share. His meticulous selection ensured the stability and longevity of the partnership.

Though partnerships were not new to Matale, few had involved more than three or four individuals. This new company was truly unique. Notable shareholders included Dr. Samson Goonawardane, who purchased one share, and Dr. Rajiyah, owner of the Selagama Group, who acquired five shares, three for himself and two for his mother-in-law, Mrs. Ramasamy. Other shareholders included K. M. A. Mohamed, A. N. S. Hameed, K. M. S. Hameed, A. R. M. S. Mohamed, P. S. S. Mohamed, A. H. S. Mohamed, and Mohamed Jamaldeen. Some holding more than one share.

The success of the Wariyapola Group bore testimony to Meezan Hajiar's exceptional business acumen and selflessness. As land values soared in the following decades, those who had trusted in his vision were richly rewarded, further solidifying his legacy as a leader who not only built wealth but also shared it generously.

The transaction also revealed his steadfast adherence to Islamic principles. Only after finalising the purchase did he learn that a piggery operated on the Wariyapola



▲ Dr Samson Gunawardene

estate. He immediately informed the management of Bassenquet & Scrimces that he neither wanted the pigs nor any assets linked to the operation. They dismantled the facility, removed the pigs and the zinc sheet which had been used for the piggery and very graciously sent Meezan Hajiar a cheque for Rs. 40,000 in compensation. With equal graciousness, Meezan Hajiar returned that cheque to Bassenquet and Scrimces.

In the years that followed, Meezan Hajiar continued to extend his influence in the planting world — not merely through further acquisitions, but by uplifting others who sought to follow in his footsteps. On occasion, he parted with portions of his holdings to help aspiring planters make a start. True to his character, he often allowed buyers to repay in installments, with the understanding that payments could be made when business was doing well, and delayed when times were difficult. He firmly believed that temporary hardship should never be a barrier to long-term opportunity.

On one such occasion, a grateful estate owner, deeply moved by Meezan Hajiar's compassion and foresight, turned to his own children — in the presence of Meezan Hajiar's children — and said, "Feeding the Meezan family is like feeding the whole of Matale." It was more than just praise; it was an enduring testament to a man whose generosity had touched countless lives and whose spirit of giving had come to symbolise the very heart of the community.

Meezan Hajiar's business endeavours were never confined to plantations and paddy fields. His vision extended across the economic landscape of Matale, and his acquisitions reflected a deep understanding of

commerce, real estate, and civic development. Among the many properties he purchased, one of the earliest was a distinguished two-storey bungalow situated near the Rose Street/Main Street junction in the Matale town, a strategic location that underscored his foresight.

At the time of purchase, the bungalow was occupied by a formidable figure: Mr. Mant, a European and the proprietor of the Matale Bus Company, which was then among the most prominent and efficiently managed transport enterprises in the district. Stories about Mr. Mant abounded in Matale, tales of his strict discipline with staff and daring exploits hunting wild elephants. He had, by all accounts, attained near-mythic status. He was also the father of Mr. George Mant, widely recognised as the father of Matale hockey, a connection that added even further renown to the family name.

Although Meezan Hajiar had given Mr. Mant ample time to vacate the premises, the latter refused and, according to local accounts, behaved with considerable arrogance. But arrogance was something Meezan Hajiar neither tolerated nor feared. Through legal proceedings, he secured a court-ordered eviction, and Mr. Mant was removed with remarkable speed. The entire town watched this encounter with intense interest, and it left a lasting impression. Many recounted the event with admiration and relish, likening it to a legendary duel in which Hajiar had vanquished his opponent in the opening round, much like Sonny Liston flooring Floyd Patterson with a single blow.

Not long after the eviction, Meezan Hajiar allowed Mr. M. V. Mathai, the builder of Matale Zahira College, to reside in the bungalow rent-free. It also served

temporarily as the college's first hostel. To alleviate Zahira's pressing accommodation crisis, several of the senior classes were shifted to this building. Among those who lived there as boarders were respected figures such as Mr. S. Balasubramaniam, Mr. Thasleem, a retired police inspector, and Mr. Thayoob, a distinguished retired principal. Zahira College remained at this site until the institution moved into its new premises at Tharalanda.

When Mr. Mathai and the college no longer required the bungalow, Meezan Hajiar had it carefully demolished and, in its place, constructed a grand residence. Though located in the heart of the bustling city, the home was so well designed that one could be forgiven for thinking they were in a quiet retreat. Its architecture exuded serenity, a sanctuary amid the noise. This building remains an architectural oasis, a symbol of his taste and vision.

Another significant venture was his entry into the hardware trade. P. S. K. V. & Company, listed in the 1920 Ferguson's Directory as one of Matale's leading hardware merchants, was originally owned by a prosperous Muslim family from Kayalpattinam in South India. By the 1960s, however, the family had shifted its focus to the gem trade, operating businesses in Colombo and Ratnapura. As they gradually wound up operations in Matale, Meezan Hajiar leased the building and continued the business under the name Meezan Stores, later rebranded as Meezan Hardware Stores. In the 1980s, his children purchased the property outright. The business, which is still in operation today, has the distinction of having functioned continuously

as a hardware shop for over ninety years, an unmatched legacy in Matale's commercial history.

The life of Meezan Hajiar was a tapestry woven with ambition, resilience, and extraordinary strategic foresight. One defining moment came in 1958, when the government notified him of an income tax assessment amounting to Rs. 1,510,701, a staggering sum for the time. For perspective, he had also around this time sold his shops at No. 13 Prince Street in Matale for Rs. 12,000 and at No. 24 Castle Lane in Colombo for Rs. 45,000.

While lesser men may have faltered under the weight of such financial demands, Meezan Hajiar faced the challenge head-on. Viewing taxation as an inevitable counterpart to prosperity, he took swift and prudent action. Several properties were sold, and the construction of the much-anticipated Meezaniyyah school building had to be paused. Yet through it all, he remained firm in one resolve: to retain Ancoombra Estate. It was not just a profitable asset but a cherished achievement, the crown jewel in his portfolio.

With the clarity of long-range vision, he knew that the other properties could be reacquired or rebuilt, but the legacy represented by Ancoombra could not so easily be replaced. Thus, he made a deliberate decision to sacrifice short-term holdings in favour of long-term purpose. These calculated sacrifices laid the foundation for his financial resurgence, and soon enough, the arc of his fortunes ascended once more.

When God bestows wealth upon a person, He also entrusts them with responsibilities. In the chapters to come, we shall witness how Meezan Hajiar upheld those responsibilities, with dignity, generosity, and unwavering commitment to the welfare of others.

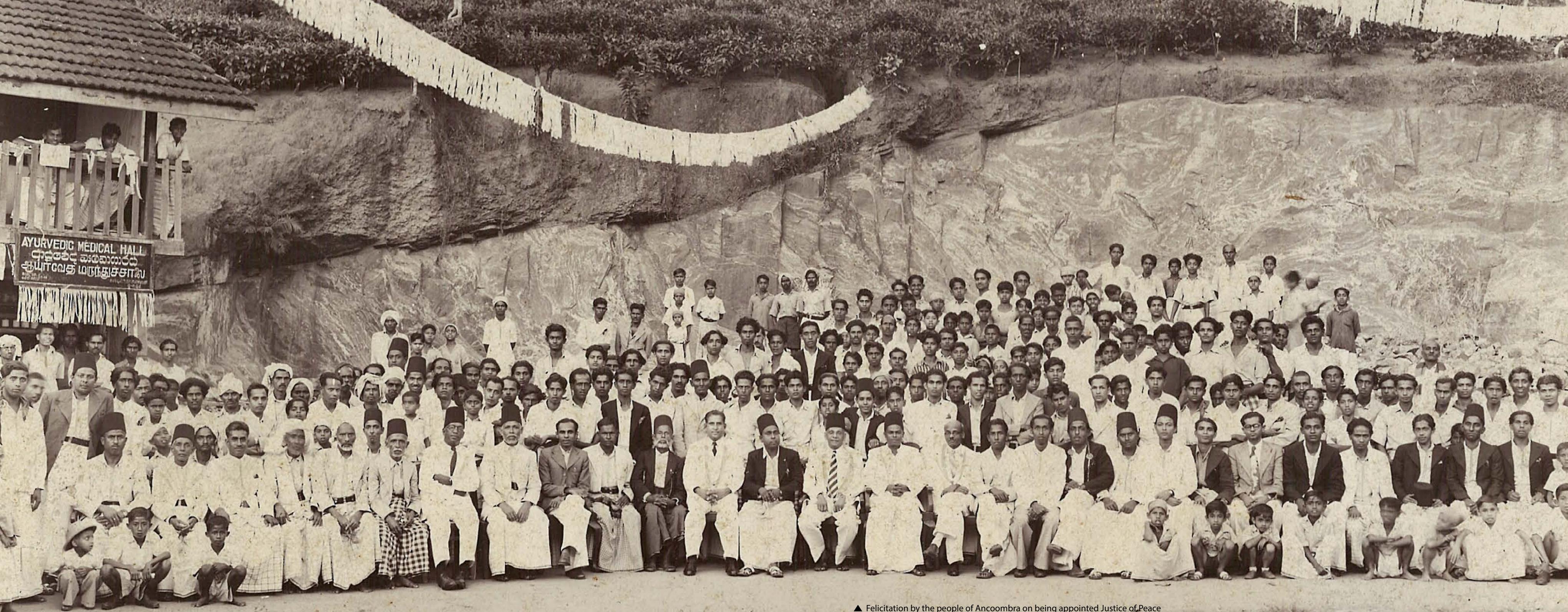
POLITICS:  
A QUIET INFLUENCE IN TURBULENT TIMES

In 1944, Meezan Hajiar formally entered the political arena, contesting and securing a seat on the Matale Urban Council. His candidacy was not only buoyed by the strong support of his community but also attracted the respect of established political figures. His long tenure on the Council, from 1944 until 1962, was marked by integrity, dedication, and a reputation for fairness. In recognition of his service and standing, he was appointed as a Justice of the Peace in 1955. At the time, this was both a rare and prestigious distinction, underscoring not only his personal influence but also his unwavering commitment to public service and the civic life of Matale.

His ideals resonated deeply, earning not just admiration but active endorsement from those in governance. This remarkable convergence of ambition and authority underscored how his vision extended beyond mere political aspiration, embodying themes of community welfare and social justice. Such a profound commitment garnered respect from both grassroots supporters and leaders alike, emphasizing his lasting impact on both the community and the landscape of governance.



▲ Meezan Hajiar at his reception hosted by friends on his appointment as Justice of the Peace.  
Left to right: Messrs. M. I. Mohamed, Segu Mohamed, S. D. Sakoor, B. A. Wahid, Dr. A. C. M. Jaid, Sir Razik Fareed, Al Haj S. M. Mohideen, A. W. Seyad Ahamed, B. D. Izadeen, S. M. A. Mukthar, T. M. Shaul Hameed, T. R. A. Cafoor



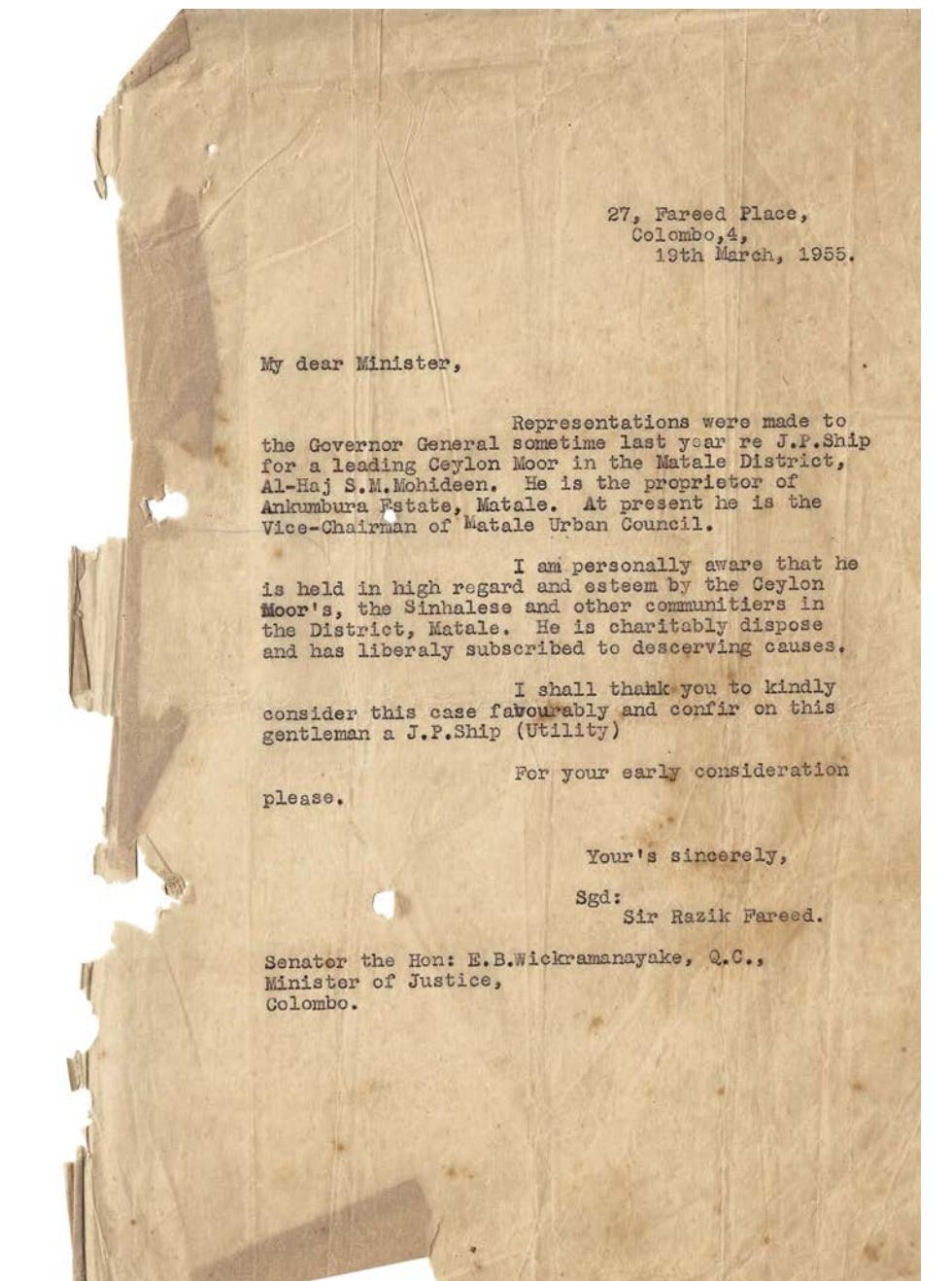
▲ Felicitation by the people of Ancoombra on being appointed Justice of Peace  
Among those present are - H. B. Udurawana (Diyawadane Nilame, Maligawa, Kandy), E. H. Mohamed of Galhina, Sir Razik Fareed, Meezan Hajiar and the Ex Government Agent - Kandy.

Meezan Hajiar was a respected and influential political figure in the Central Province, widely recognized for his significant role in the region's political affairs. His prominence is evidenced by correspondence from leading party members such as Mr. Dudley Senanayake, Sir Razik Fareed, Mr. Macan Markar, and Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel — at least among the letters we have on record, though it is likely there were many more that have not been preserved.

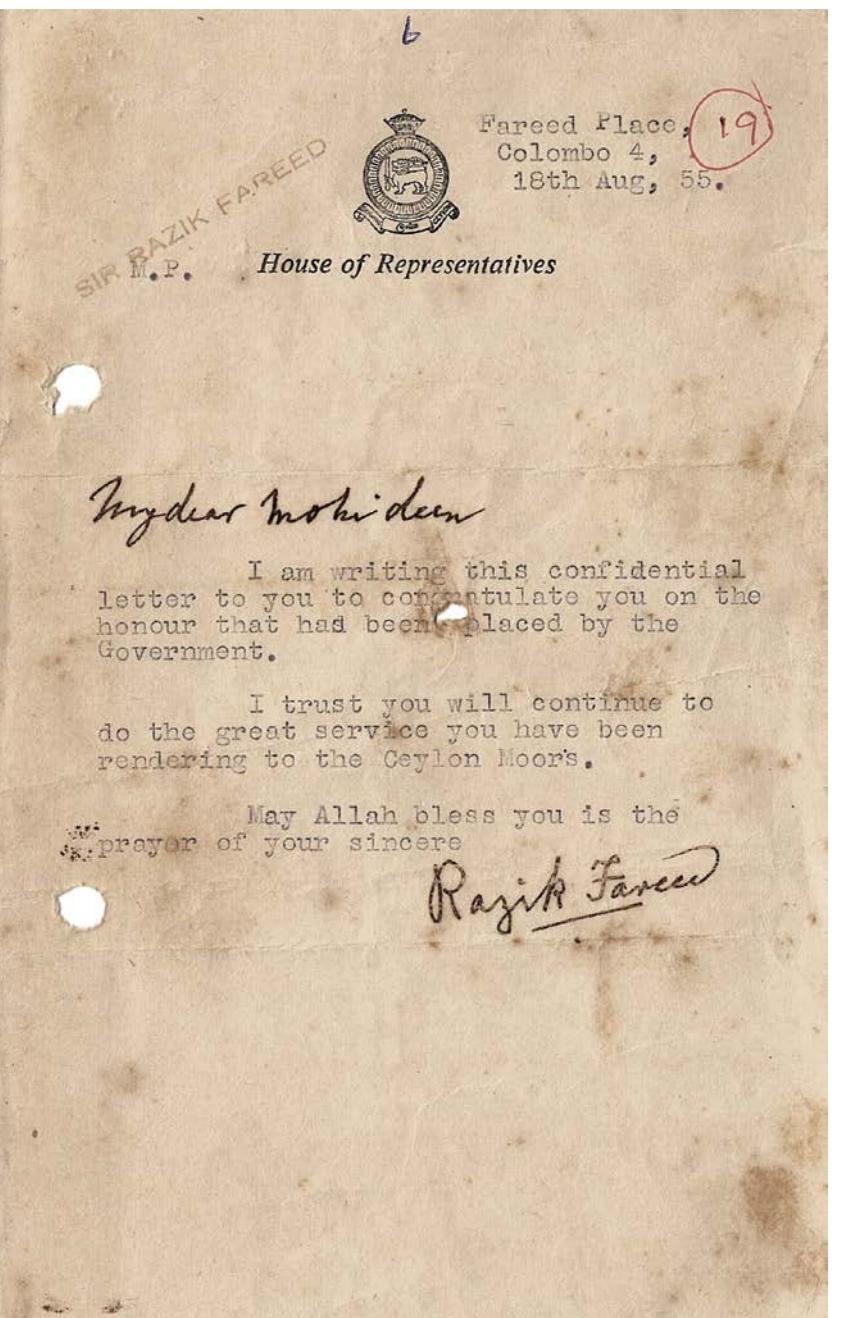


▲ Members of Matale Municipal Council circa 1950.

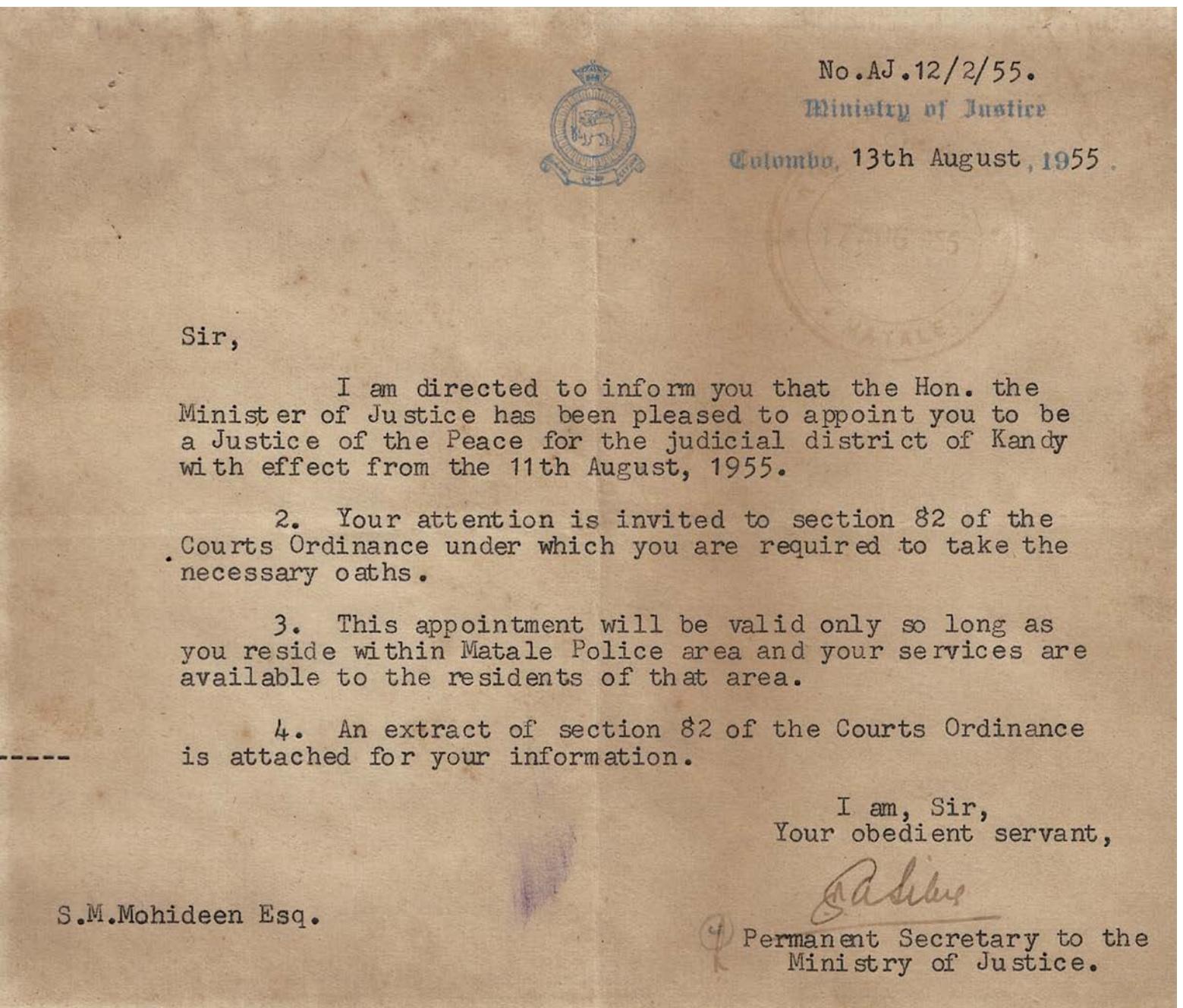
Notably, Mr. Macan Markar and Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel sought not only his political endorsement for their parliamentary nominations but also his financial support during election campaigns. Such gestures of trust and deference from national-level leaders reflected his standing as a key power broker whose influence extended well beyond the Matale district.



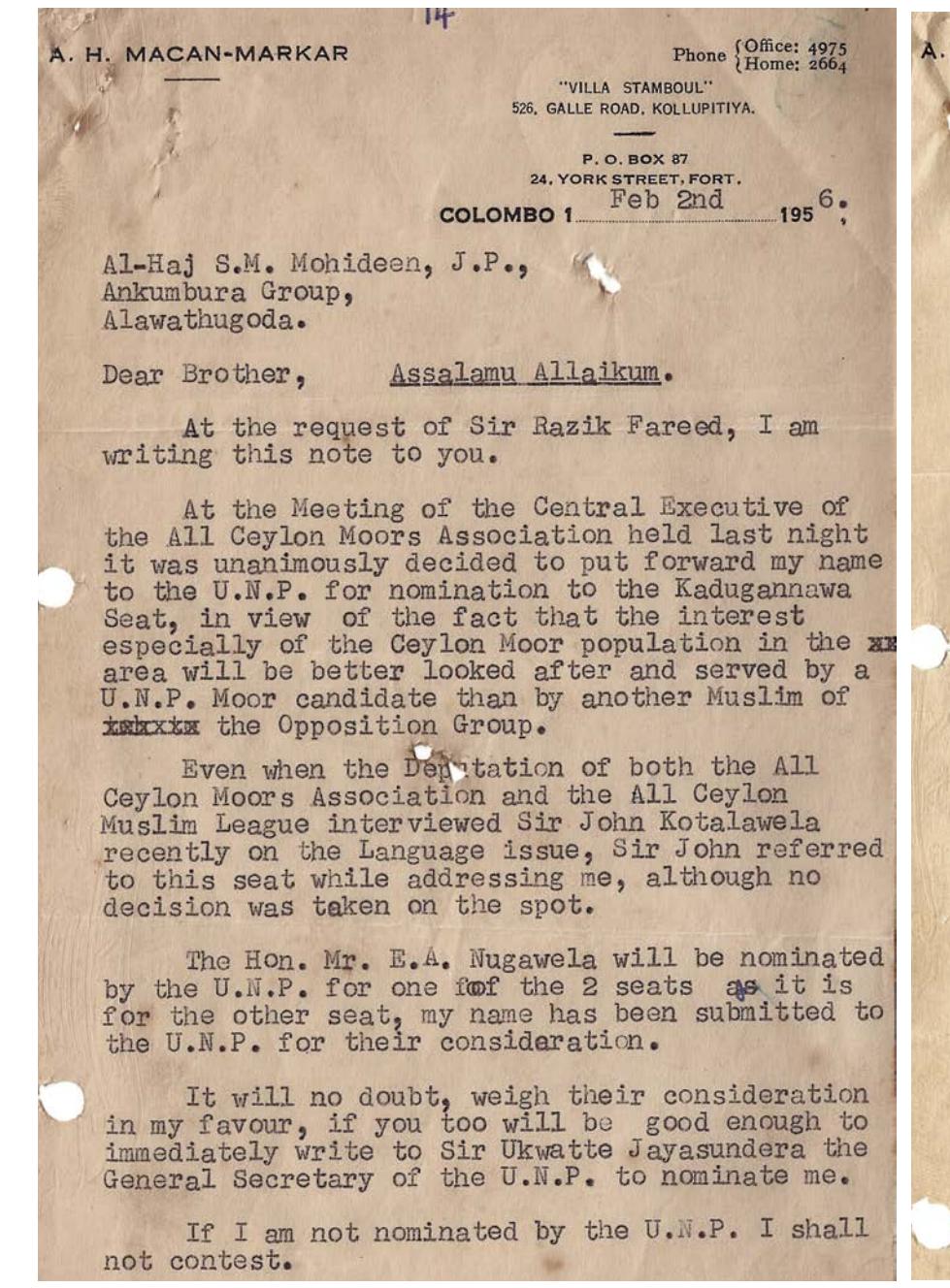
▲ Recommendation letter from Sir Razik Fareed to the Justice Minister regarding appointing Meezan Hajiar as Justice of Peace.



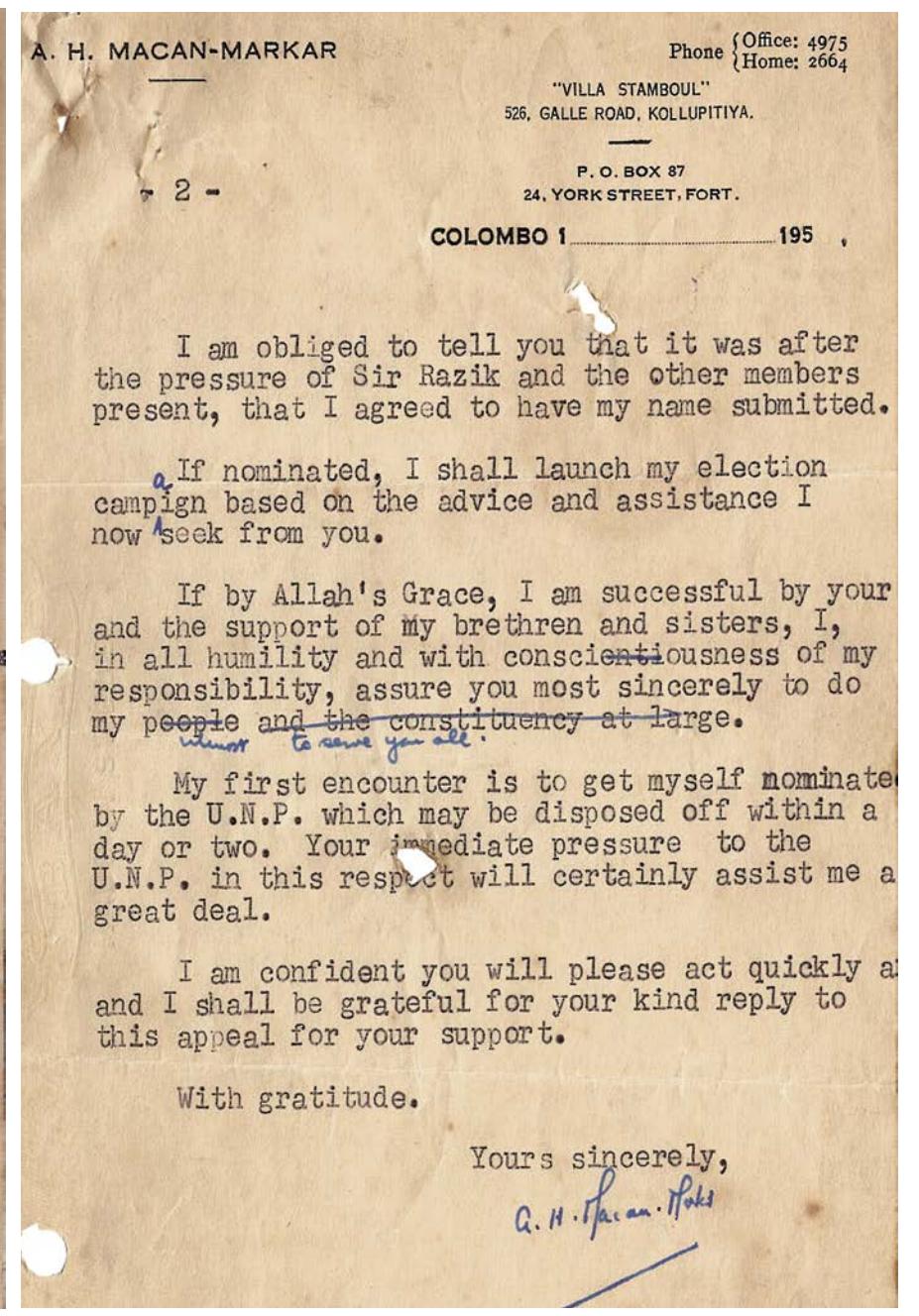
▲ Letter of congratulation from Sir Razik Fareed to Meezan Hajiar on his appointment as Justice of Peace.

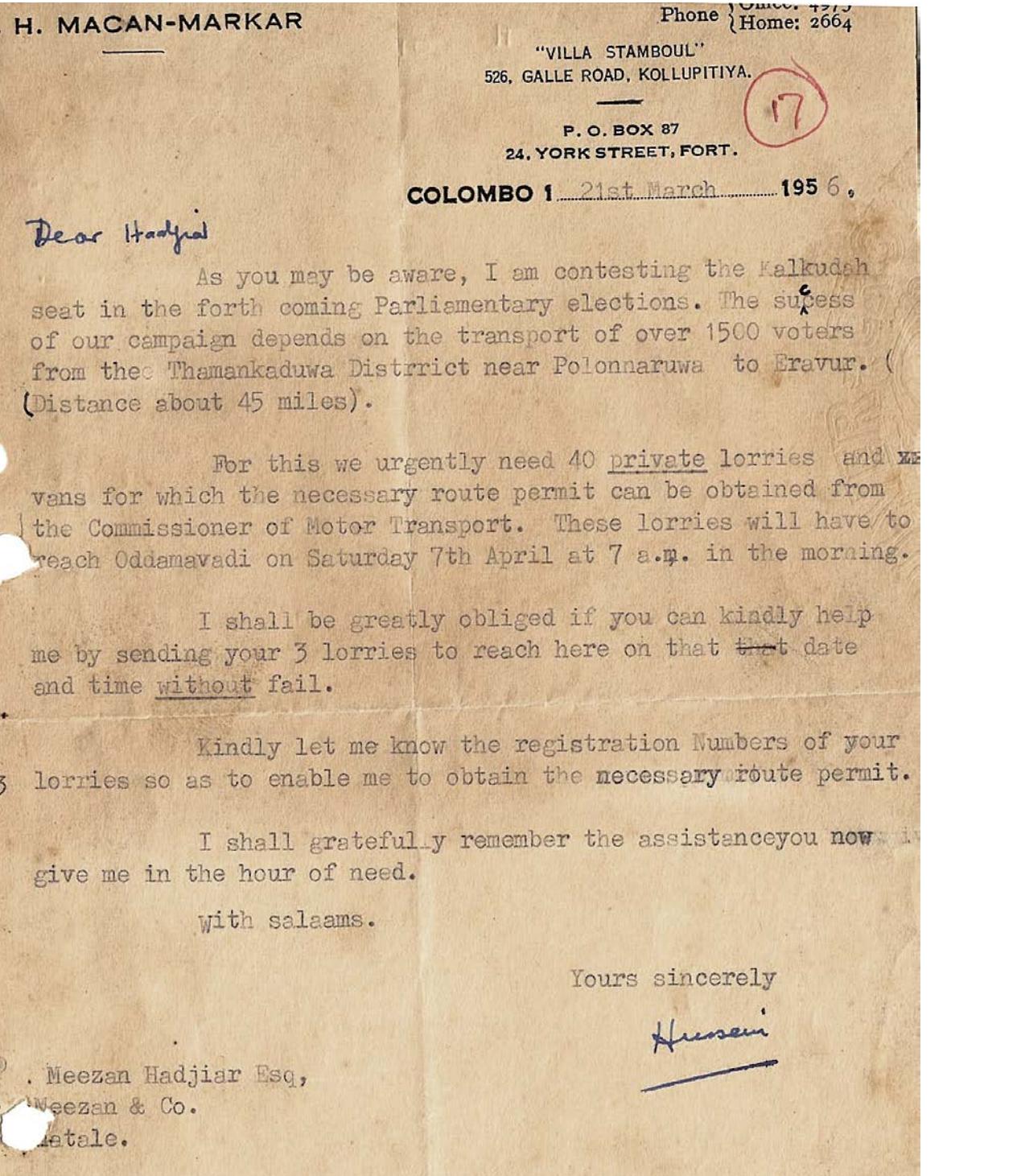


▲ Letter from the Ministry of Justice appointing Meezan Hajiar as Justice of Peace.

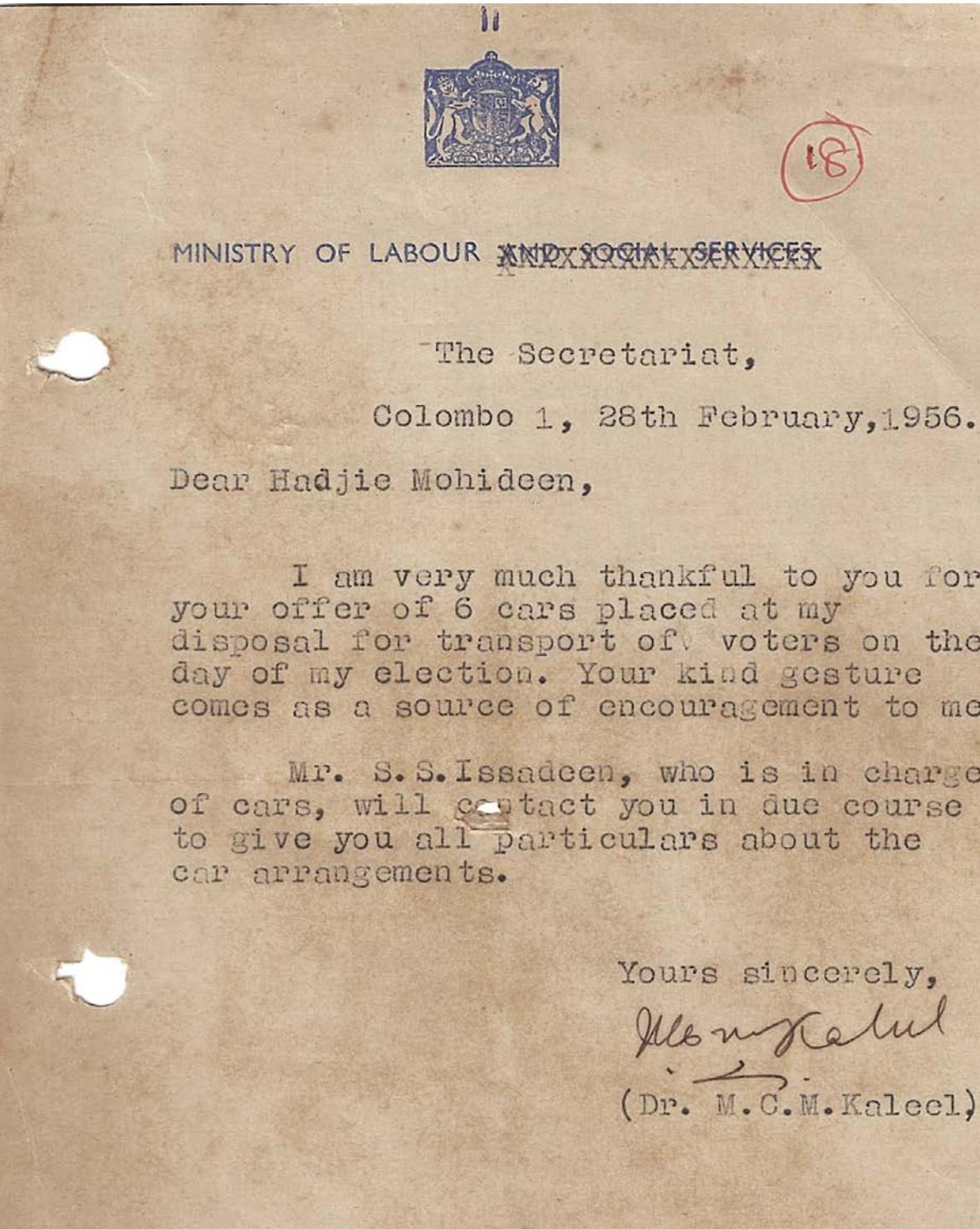


▲ Letter from Mr. Macan Markar requesting Meezan Hajiar's political support





▲ Letter of request from Mr. Macan Markar to Meezan Hajiar for support in his election campaign



▲ Correspondence between Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel and Meezan Hajiar with regard to assistance in his election campaign

Beyond his commercial vision, Meezan Hajiar's decisions were often guided by political foresight as well. When the Wariyapola Group was eventually offered to him, both economic and political incentives likely influenced his decision to purchase it. While the primary motivation was undoubtedly economic, there was a strategic dimension tied to his political career. Part of the Wariyapola estate, specifically the Kohombiliwela area, fell within Ward Number 6 of the Matale Urban Council, the very ward Meezan Hajiar represented from 1947 to 1963. As a seasoned and farsighted politician, he would have recognised that ownership of the estate could strengthen his grassroots influence in the ward. This move was especially astute in light of the proposal to elevate Matale to municipal status, a transition that could have led to redrawn boundaries and shifting political dynamics. Securing greater control over his ward through the acquisition of Wariyapola was, therefore, both a shrewd and proactive decision.

As anticipated, ownership of the Wariyapola estate consolidated his standing in Ward Number 6. Yet his political legacy extended beyond his years in office. When ill health led him to step back from active politics in 1963, Meezan Hajiar turned his attention to mentoring a new generation of leaders. Among

them was the young and ambitious A. C. S. Hameed. Sensing his promise, Meezan Hajiar took Hameed under his wing, offering both moral encouragement and crucial financial support. His endorsement and mobilisation of supporters laid a strong foundation for Hameed's political rise. He proposed the name of Hameed—an outsider to Matale—to succeed him as the representative for Ward Number 6 in the election for the newly established Matale Municipal Council. Thanks to Hajiar's considerable influence and foresight, Mr. A. C. S. Hameed inherited not only the goodwill of Hajiar's loyal constituency but also benefited from a seamless and successful campaign. This was particularly noteworthy given that Ward Number 6 had, by then, expanded to include areas with significant Sinhalese and Tamil populations. Even amidst these demographic changes, Hajiar's groundwork ensured a decisive victory. His efforts enabled Ward Number 6 to retain consistent Muslim representation in the Matale Urban Council until the reforms of proportional representation that rendered the policy superfluous, an enduring testament to his political acumen and legacy of mentorship.

Meezan Hajiar's political acumen led him to recognise the promise of Mr. A. C. S. Hameed as a strong advocate for the people of Matale and Akurana at the national

level. With characteristic foresight, he planned to support Hameed's bid for Parliament in 1960. Mr. Hameed was defeated in the parliamentary election of March 1960, but secured victory in the subsequent election held in July that same year. Meezan Hajiar had set aside a substantial sum (Rs. 35,000) to fund his 1965 campaign. Though Meezan Hajiar passed away before the election took place, his wishes were honoured by his eldest son, Mahroof Mohideen, who ensured the funds were delivered to Mr. A. C. S. Hameed's residence. The delivery was entrusted to two close aides: Mr. Pathikirikorale and Mr. Sivaneshvaraja, affectionately known as Tommy.

In addition to mentoring Hameed, Meezan Hajiar also played a pivotal role in Mr. Alick Aluwihare's successful campaign during the 1961 by-election. His local influence and strong reputation among constituents enabled him to mobilise substantial support in favour of Aluwihare. His bond with the Aluwihare family dated back many years, having been a trusted confidant and steadfast supporter of Mr. Bernard Aluwihare. A letter of appreciation from Alick Aluwihare further attests to this enduring relationship and to Meezan Hajiar's valuable contributions to their political endeavours.



▲ Late Mr. Alick Aluwihare

The relationship between the Aluvihare family and the late Meezan Hajiar, the well known philanthropist and an accepted leader of the Muslims of Matale, spanned a period of several years and was always very cordial and intimate. It was politics, which brought about this relationship. My revered paternal uncle, the late Mr. Bernard Aluvihare a Barrister at law and a son of Ratnemahathmaya Mr. T.W. Aluvihare and Mrs. Panabokke Kumarihamy, was in the thick of national politics from the second State Council days until his demise in 1961. He had represented Matale both in the State Council as well as in the House of Representative and he was one of these few fortunate Sri Lankans who had the good fortune to serve the nation as a Member of the Board of Ministers of the Donoughmore era and also as a Cabinet Minister under the Soulbury constitutions.

Meezan Mudalali, who was the richest Muslim in Matale at the time, was one of the most faithful and staunchest supporter of my uncle. In the pre 1960 days, the Election laws of our country were not so stringent as they are today. No limitations were placed on posters and notices and the candidates used every available space to display their posters. Transporting the voters to the polling booths was permitted and every candidate who entertained any hopes of victory had to have a large fleet of vehicles at his disposal. Party organization were not streamlined as now and the candidates had to bear a fair share of the election expences. Politics was certainly a very costly game then, in this context, Meezan Mudhalali, fabulously wealthy, was a great tower of strength to my uncle, who had lost a large share of his inheritance through his political involment.

Meezan Mudalali and my uncle were on visiting terms and I have seen Mudhalali in my uncle's residence on many occasions. Such visits were of course more frequent during election days. I was very young then and hence I never actively participated in their conversations I use to sit in a corner unobtrusively and observe them and listen to them. Still remember well, how cordially he was received by my uncle and others. Meezan Mudalali was a person of vast experience, very pragmatic and was a good judge of men and matters. When discussing politics or any other serious matters, he never ventured out any hurried opinions. His opinions were always well considered and were expressed clearly and lucidly. My uncle always gave due weight to the suggestions and opinions offered by Meezan Mudalali. Mudhalali and my uncle differed in race, religion, professional and educational background but they both had vast respect for each other. The affection and the respect they had for each other was genuine and transcended political and economic concerns. This friendship continued undisturbed until the death of my beloved uncle in 1961.

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Another Aluvihare to whom Meezan Mudalali was attached was my brother Claude; but what brought them together was not politics. What brought them together and what bound these two sportsmen together was their common passion for hunting.

The Hurly-burley of the two hustings of March and July, 1960 proved too strenuous for my uncle who was sixty then. He passed away in 1961 and thus a by-election was necessitated. Sri Lanka Freedom Party was in power and the first ever lady Prime Minister of the world, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranayake was at the helm of the government. Mr. Dudley Senanayake, the leader of the United National Party and many other party stalwarts rightly believed that a victory for their party in this by-election would discredit the government much and would boost up morale of the U.N.P supporters. But winning the election did not seem to be that easy. It is true that Mr. Bernard Aluvihare had won Matale for the U.N.P. both in the March and July, 1960, General Elections, despite the fact that the general trend in the Matale District had been anti - U.N.P., which had resulted in the victory of the S.L.F.P. candidates in all the other three constituencies of the Matale District in the old constituency of Dambulla and also in the newly carved out constituencies of Rattota and Laggala. The Charisma of the Aluvihare family, the personal attributes of Mr. Bernard Aluvihare and the unstinted and ardent, moral, physical and financial support offered by the Matale U.N.P. stalwarts like philanthropist Mr. J.E. Gunasena and Meezan Mudalali may have been the reasons for the victory of U.N.P. in Matale.

But the by-election to be held was a different matter altogether. Here the U.N.P. candidate nominated would have to face and overcome the might of the candidate fielded by the party in power. It was certain that the governing party's nominee would be Mr. T.B. Gunarathne, by no means a push over candidate. In the July, 1960 elections, which he contested as a S.L.F.P. nominee backed by L.S.S.P. and C.P. under a Non-contest pact. Mr. Gunarathne had polled 7489 votes against he 8961 obtained by Mr. Bernard Aluvihare; even in the March 1960 elections, which S.L.F.P. contested on its own stream, without any Non-contest pact, Gunarathne had amassed 6113 votes against the 8022 garnered by my uncle. The No - contest pact, which had helped S.L.F.P. to gain power, was still in existence and it was certain that Mr. Gunarathne would be the sole candidate of the S.L.F.P., L.S.S.P. and C.P. Alliance.

Mr. Dudley Senanayake had greatly succeeded in rebuilding and resuscitating the U.N.P. after the stunning debacle it had suffered in the General Elections of 1956. He very well knew how important the victory in the forthcoming by-election would be to maintain the enthusiasm among the party members and the vote bank he had built up painstakingly, walking over dales and hills with a camera slung over his shoulder. He was certain that a victory at the Matale by-election would be a great morale booster for his party. A victory was necessary: so Mr. Senanayake wanted to field a very strong candidate who could defeat the probable governing party nominee, Mr. T.D. Gunarathne.

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There was no lack of aspirants who sought U.N.P nomination. Mr. Dudley Senanayake visited Matale, held discussions with party supporters and went round the electorate to feel the pulse of the voters. My name had been mentioned favourably by many. The leader limited that I should come forward to contest our family seat but I repeatedly showed my reluctance. I was only thirty-one then; I thought I was too young. Frightening expense that a candidate contesting a governing party candidate would have to incur almost appalled me.

Meezan Mudalali who was highly distressed by the untimely death of his friend Mr. Bernard Aluvihare was very keen that the candidate U.N.P. puts forward must be an Aluvihare and had strongly felt that I would be the ideal candidate. One day, he had sent two friends of mine to my residence, requesting them to bring me to meet him. He was my uncle's friend and confidante; I also knew how much he loved and respected our family. So I thought that it is nothing but correct that I go to meet him. Mudalali received me very affectionately and requested me to accept U.N.P. nomination so as to continue the good work done to Matale by my late uncle. He also told me not to worry too much about the expenses and that he would back me up to the hilt. He further told me that he had been observing how I had been mingling with the people who come to my uncle's residence and had been much impressed by my flair for public relations. Meezan Mudalali talks in such an appealing and convincing manner, that it is very difficult to say no to him. The appeals of my friends and well-wishers and the repeated requests of Mr. Dudley Senanayake had changed my mind much. Now I was little inclined towards contesting. Hajiyar's kind request made a deep impression on me and strengthened my inclination to enter active politics. The cumulative effect of all these requests and appeals was that I consented to contest Matale, if I am nominated.

A few days after this, Mr. Dudley Senanayake came down to Matale to select the candidate. Even today I very vividly remember how on that day, Hajiyar held my hand and told Mr. Senanayake, "Sir nominate this young man; we will make him to win", all the others who were there showed their approval very openly and I was nominated to contest the by-election on the U.N.P. ticket. The by-election was a tough one but the electorate stood with the Aluvihare family. As he had promised, Meezan Mudalali stood very firm behind me. I won with a majority of 1667 and thus became the second Aluvihare to enter the Parliament as an elected representative of the people. On the day of my victory, Meezan Hajiyar lost all restraints and gave vent to his feelings; he rushed towards me and hugged me very closely; my victory had delighted him so much.

The second hustings I had to face was the Local Council election that was held in July 1963 to elect the thirteen members who were to constitute the first Municipal Council of Matale. I and my friend and school mate Mr. A.C.S. Hameed were not only in-charge of our party campaign, we will also contesting two different wards; I was contesting the newly formed ward of Aluvihare and my friend Mr. Hameed was contesting the ward which has been represented by Meezan Hajiyar for several years. We both were sitting members of the National Legislature; I represented Matale and he was representation the dual member constituency of Akurana. So a marginal victory would not have satisfied us; we both wanted our

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party to win the Municipal Council election with a big and convincing majority. Win we did comfortably and the tremendous backing Meezan Hajiyar gave us to succeed in our goal can never be overemphasized.

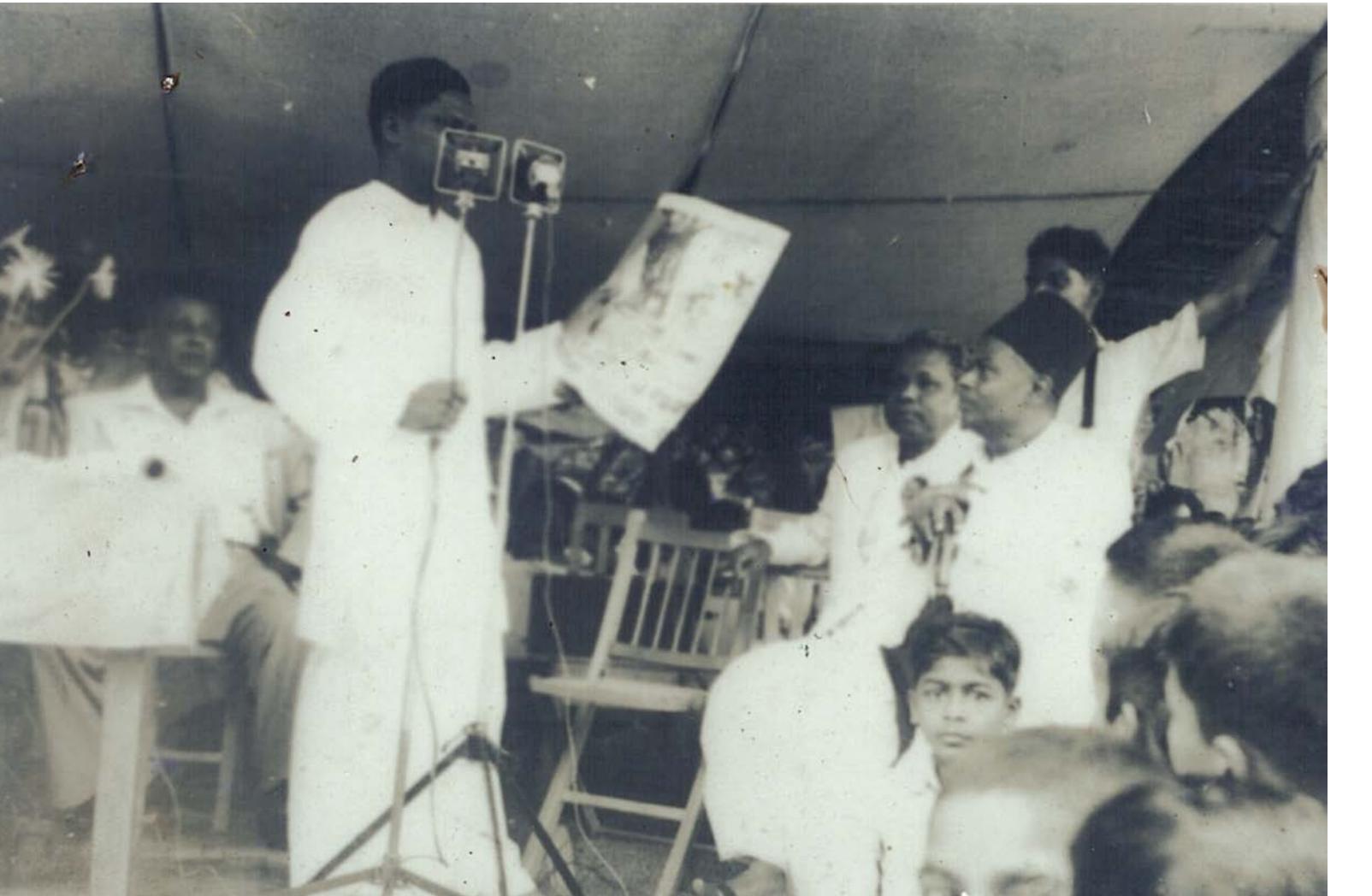
In my political career, which spans over four decades, I have faced many elections. I have lost only once and that two only by a slender margin of 650 votes. This was inspite of the fact that the anti U.N.P. forces had swept the country like a whirlwind on the crest of a popular wave. As Meezan Hajiyar passed away in 1964, I have been directly benefited by his help only in one Parliamentary election viz '3' the by-Election of 1961, but that single election is sufficient enough for me to remember him with gratitude for ever the affection he had for me and the confidence he placed on me were great. On the day of his funeral, when I was trying to order a wreath, a few friends around me at that time told me that wreaths are not taken to Muslim funeral houses, but I wanted to show my gratitude and respect to that great man in some way. So I took a wreath and the family member of the Hajiyar understood the spirit in which the wreath was taken and accepted it in the same spirit it was given. May the earth lie softly on him and may he be granted Eternal Bliss.

Alick Aluvihare

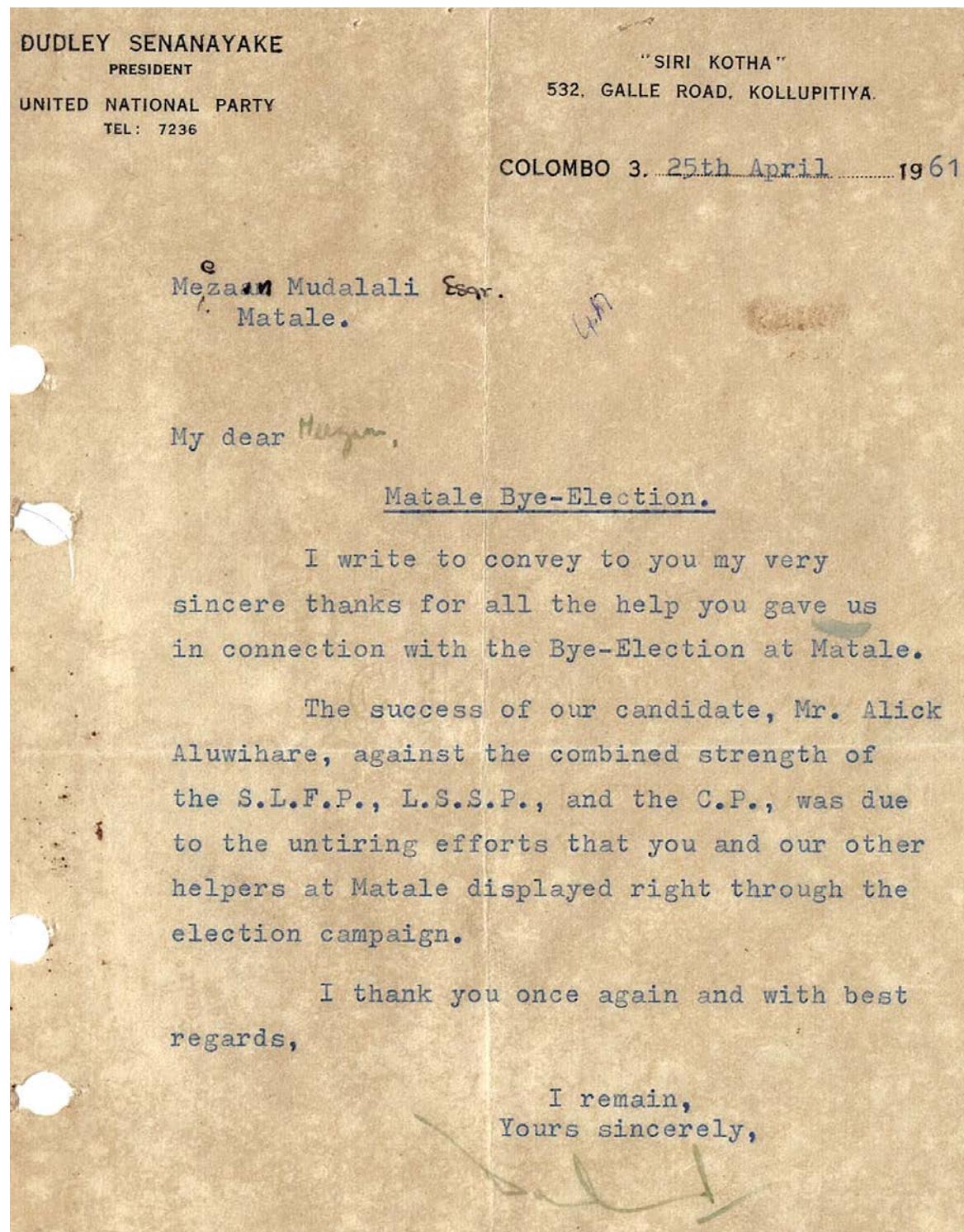
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▲ The Letter of Appreciation from Mr. Alick Aluvihare



▲ President Premadasa and Meezan Hajiar campaigning for Mr.Alick Aluwihara in the 1961 by-election



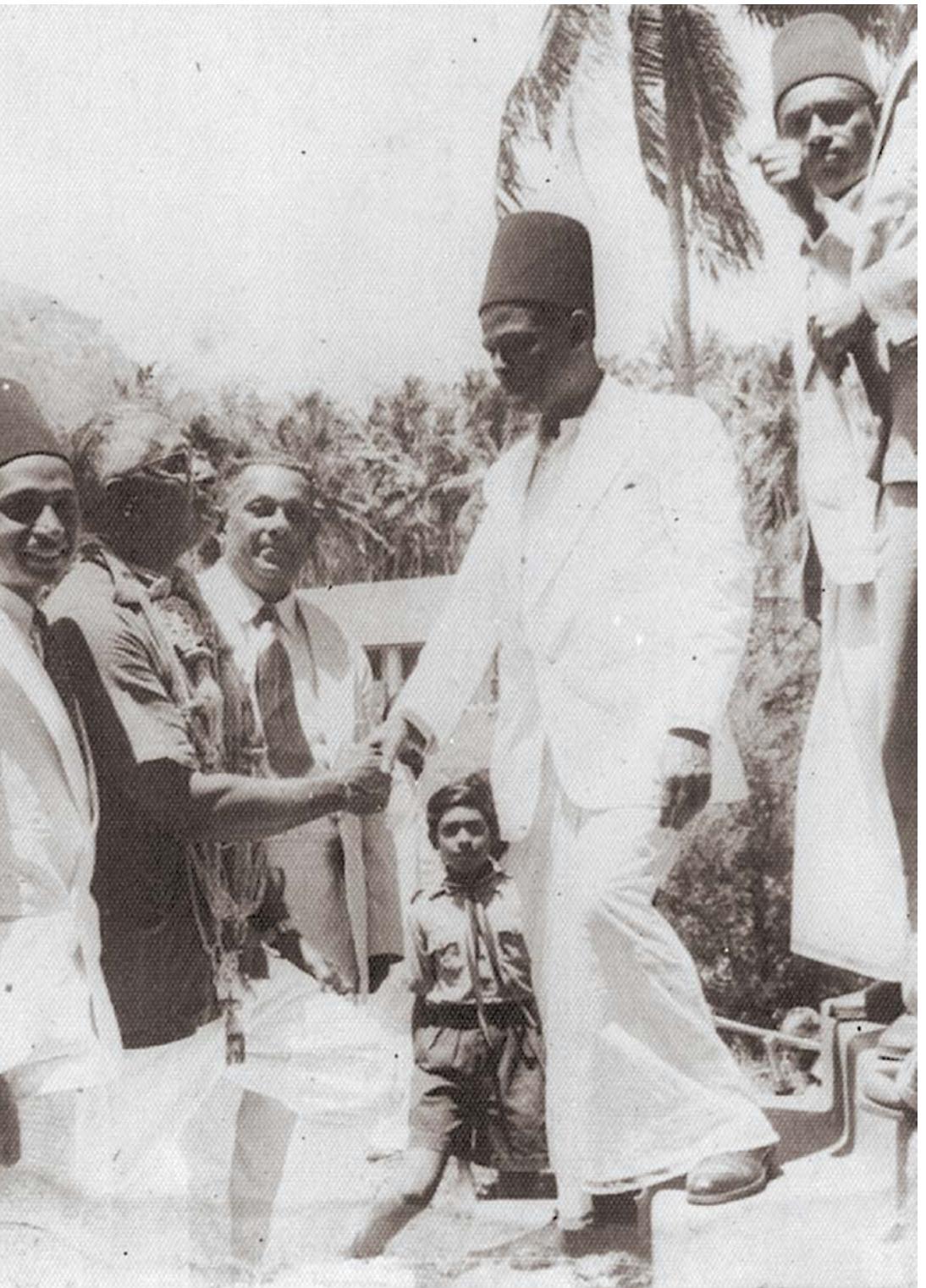
◀ Letter of appreciation from Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake to Meezan Hajiar for helping with the campaign of the Matale by-election



▲ Meezan Hajiar, Mr.Bernard Aluwihare and Sir John Kotalawale



▲ Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake's political rally in Matale in the presence of Meezan Hajiar



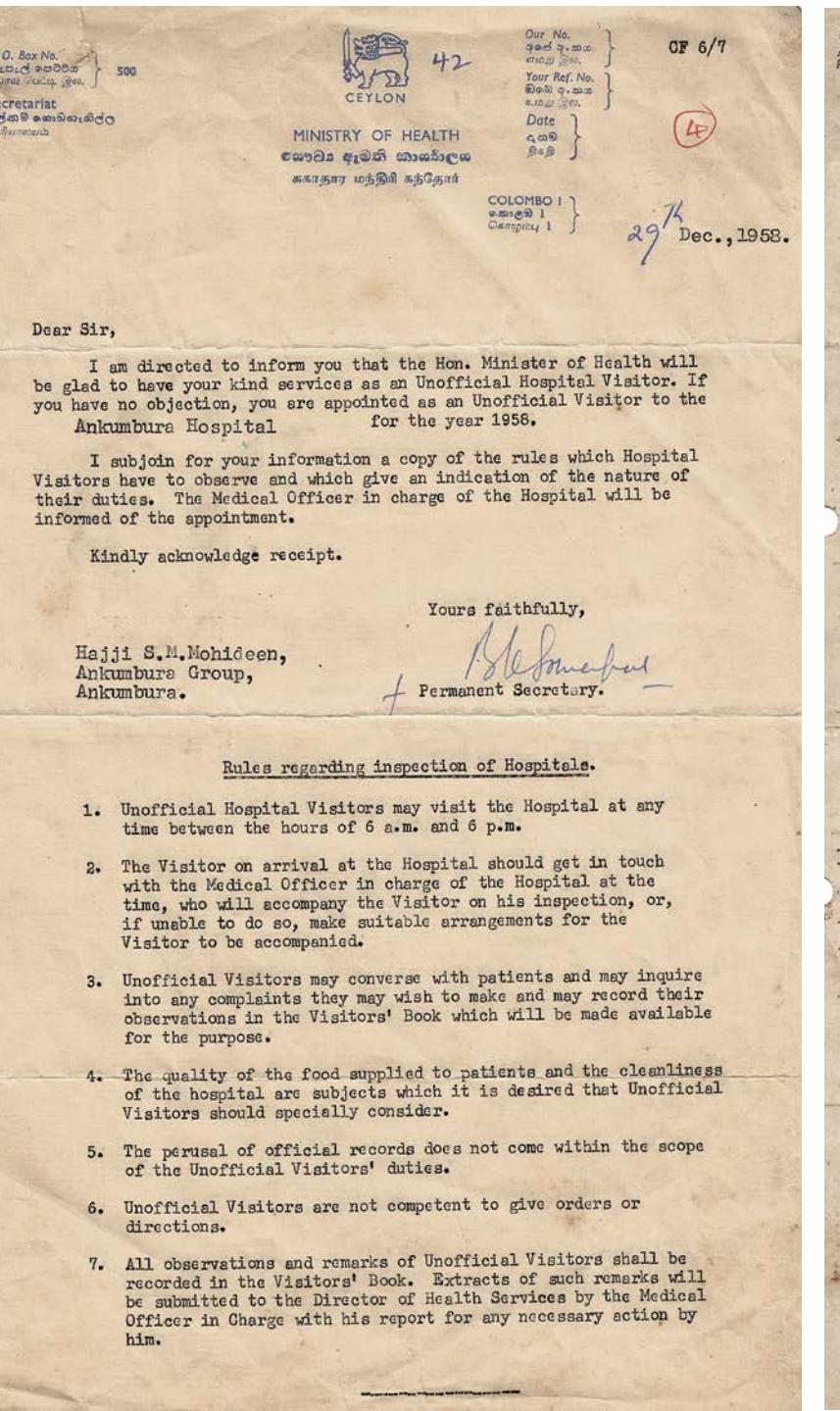
▲ Meezan Hajiar and Sir John Kotalawela

Meezan Hajiar exited politics in 1963 due to illness, after nearly two decades of public service. His contributions left an enduring mark on Matale and beyond, with his name continuing to be spoken with gratitude by citizens and recognised in the corridors of political leadership. On 7 June 1995, during a parliamentary debate (Hansard, Volume 99, No. 7), MP Alhaj A. H. M. Azwer paid tribute to his legacy, recalling:

"A very laudable and noteworthy feature of Dr. Kaleel's politics was his unfailing loyalty and unremitting devotion to the party which he served. His political consistency was never doubted or questioned. He was very consistent in his politics. Sir, when he sat at the United National Party Nomination Board in 1960, I still recall with very good memories, the way he used to praise Mr. A. C. S. Hameed, a young man coming from Matale, Harispattuwa. He wanted a nomination. Dr. Kaleel fought for it, he said. He was also greatly helped by Meezan Hajiar of Matale fans."

His contributions extended far beyond politics. He played a leading role in the construction of the Matale Town Mosque and served as a Trustee until his death, in addition to holding numerous posts in institutions dedicated to education, social welfare, and intercommunal harmony. These included: President of the Matale Government Tamil Schools Building Fund Committee, Treasurer of the Matale Town Security Committee, Vice President of Mahatma Gandhi Saba, President of the Muslim Educational Society, and President of both the Matale Town Mosque and the Aluwihare Jumma Mosque, amongst other positions.

Meezan Hajiar's commitment to community upliftment was expansive and inclusive. From 1958 to 1960, the Ministry of Health issued him an Unofficial Visitor's Letter, granting him authority to inspect the quality of care at the Ancoombra and Matale Hospitals. This role enabled him to advocate for patient welfare and uphold service standards, further reflecting his deep engagement with the well-being of the broader public.



▲ Unofficial Visitor letters received from Ministry of Health

## THE BIRTH OF ZAHIRA COLLEGE: THE SCHOOL THAT SHAPED A COMMUNITY

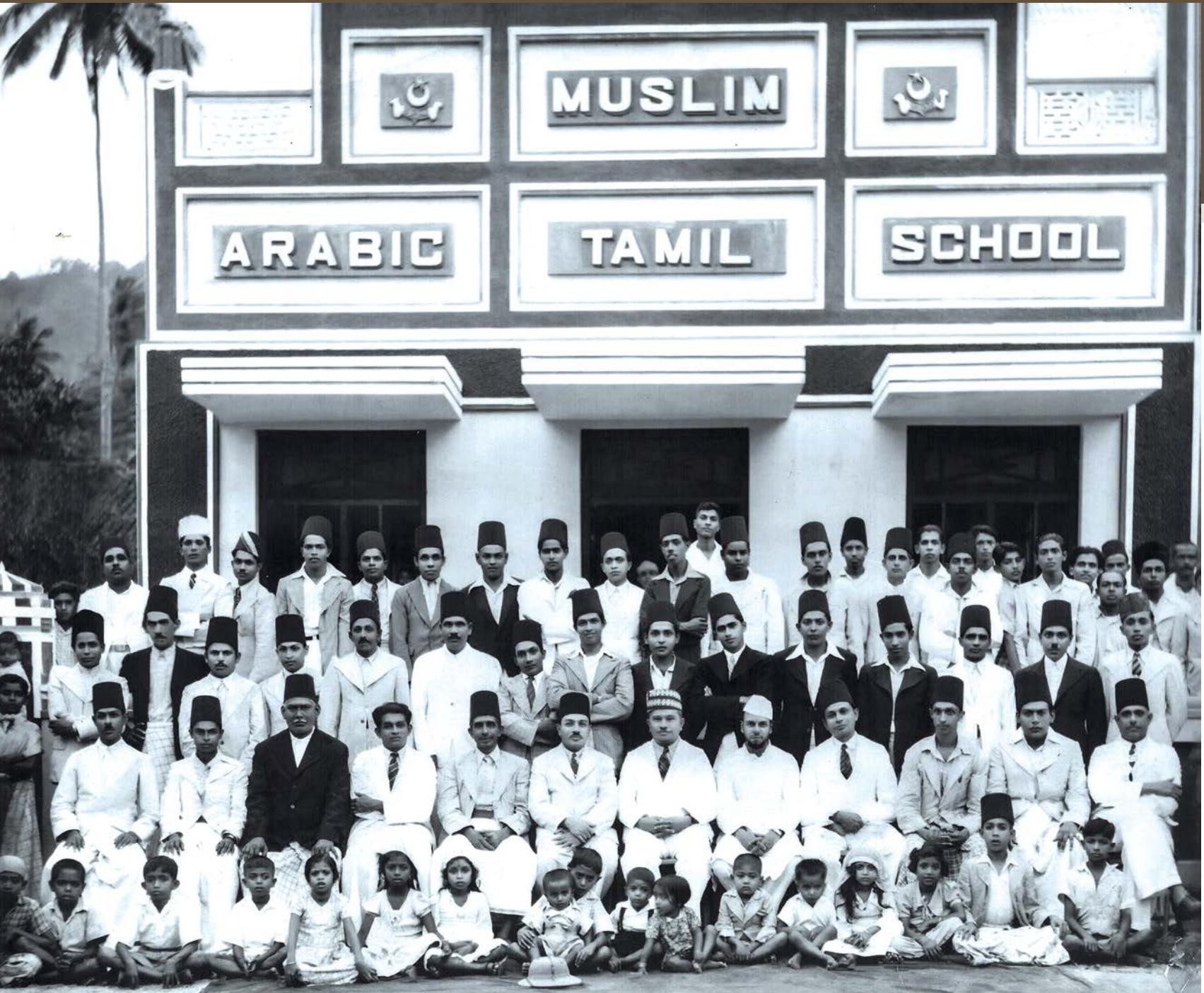
In Muslims of Matale District – History and Heritage, published in 1993 under the auspices of the Office of the Minister of State for Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs, the author posed a reflective question: what accounted for the remarkable advancement of the Matale Muslim community in the latter half of the twentieth century? Two answers were offered: first, the boundless grace and blessing of Almighty God; and second, Zahira College, Matale. Though decades have passed since that observation was made, it remains a conclusion that continues to resonate. For many Muslims born in Matale during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, Zahira College was not merely an educational institution; it was a transformative force. It opened doors to opportunity, instilled discipline, and affirmed a sense of dignity and self-worth, leaving an enduring legacy in the hearts and lives of generations.

The Muslims of Matale owe a debt of gratitude that words alone cannot repay. When they remember Zahira, and surely they must do so often, they should also lift their hands in heartfelt dua, beseeching the Almighty to send His blessings upon all those whose vision, effort, and sacrifice brought Zahira into being. Among those names, one stands above all: Meezan Hajiar.

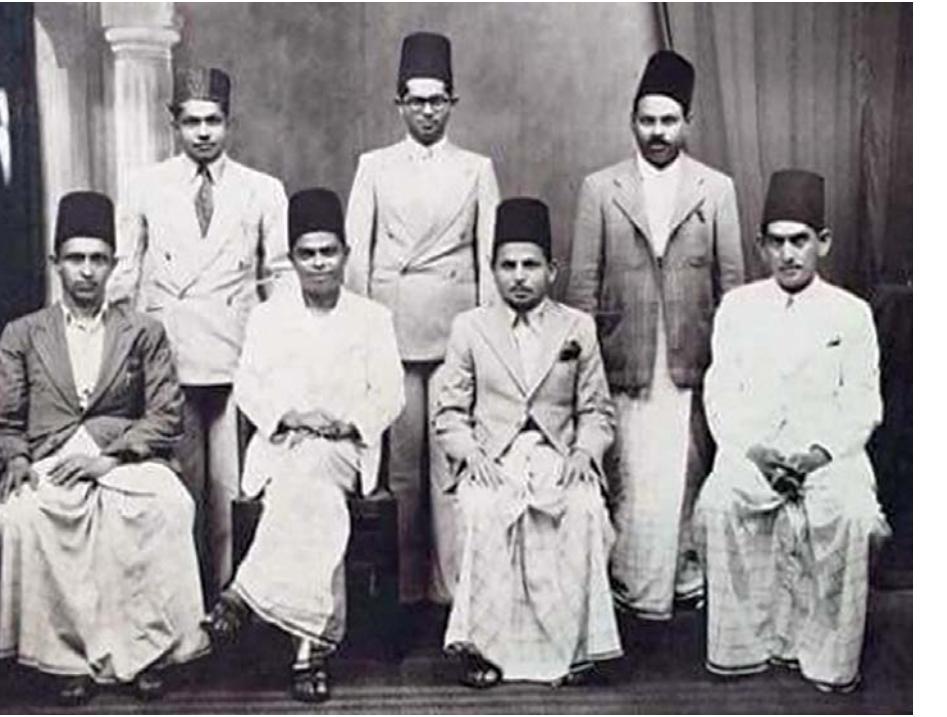
It was he who constructed the main building of Zahira College, a structure that would go on to shape the lives of hundreds, then thousands, of students, and who served as the Chairman of the Muslim Educational Society. From 1945 to 1960, he faithfully served as Zahira's local manager, overseeing its affairs with devotion and foresight. In the story of Zahira College Matale, Meezan Hajiar was not only a benefactor or administrator, he was an important pillar upon which the school stood. And in turn, the school became the foundation upon which the dreams of an entire community were built.

Zahira College, an English medium school established in the early 1940's was, and still is, one of the biggest gifts of God to the Muslims of Matale and the surrounding areas. It was this school which lit the lamp of education in many of the homes of the Muslims of Matale.

Today, the Muslim community of Matale can rightfully feel a sense of pride in having contributed to the building of the Sri Lankan nation, producing doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants, principals, teachers, entrepreneurs, and skilled professionals across various fields. Yet, behind this collective advancement stands a central pillar: Zahira College.



▲ The Original Madrasa built by the late Alhaj A.M. Ismail Maulavi which was converted to Hamidiya School in the year 1942 and later renamed "Zahira College Matale" in 1944. Seated: T. B. Jaya, Meezan Hajiar and the other prominent figures who played instrumental roles in the founding and development of Zahira College, Matale.



▲ The founders of Zahira College, Matale  
Seated left to right: Azeez Hajiar, Meezan Hajiar, Cassim Hajiar, Mukthar Hajiar  
Standing left to right: T. R. Arifeen, T.B.A., Mohamed Hassan



▲ Meezan Hajiar addressing a gathering at Zahira college in the presence of Principal Mr.M.V Mathai and Vice Principal Mr. S.H.A Wadood

Among Zahira's most important contributions was the early and sustained access it provided to quality education, particularly in the English language. From its inception until the late 1960s, Zahira College functioned as an English-medium school, and even after transitioning to a bilingual model, it retained a strong emphasis on English instruction. This made Zahira unique in Matale: an institution that offered generations of students an education that opened doors in an increasingly interconnected and multilingual world.

For two full generations, Zahira College enabled Matale Muslims to become confident users of English, a skill that proved beneficial in both local and international contexts. Many of its students, whether or not they passed public examinations such as the S.S.C. or G.C.E., emerged with a fluency that served them well in their personal and professional lives. Whether they became professionals or traders, whether they rose to wealth or lived modestly, many shared this common asset: a working command of English that broadened their opportunities.

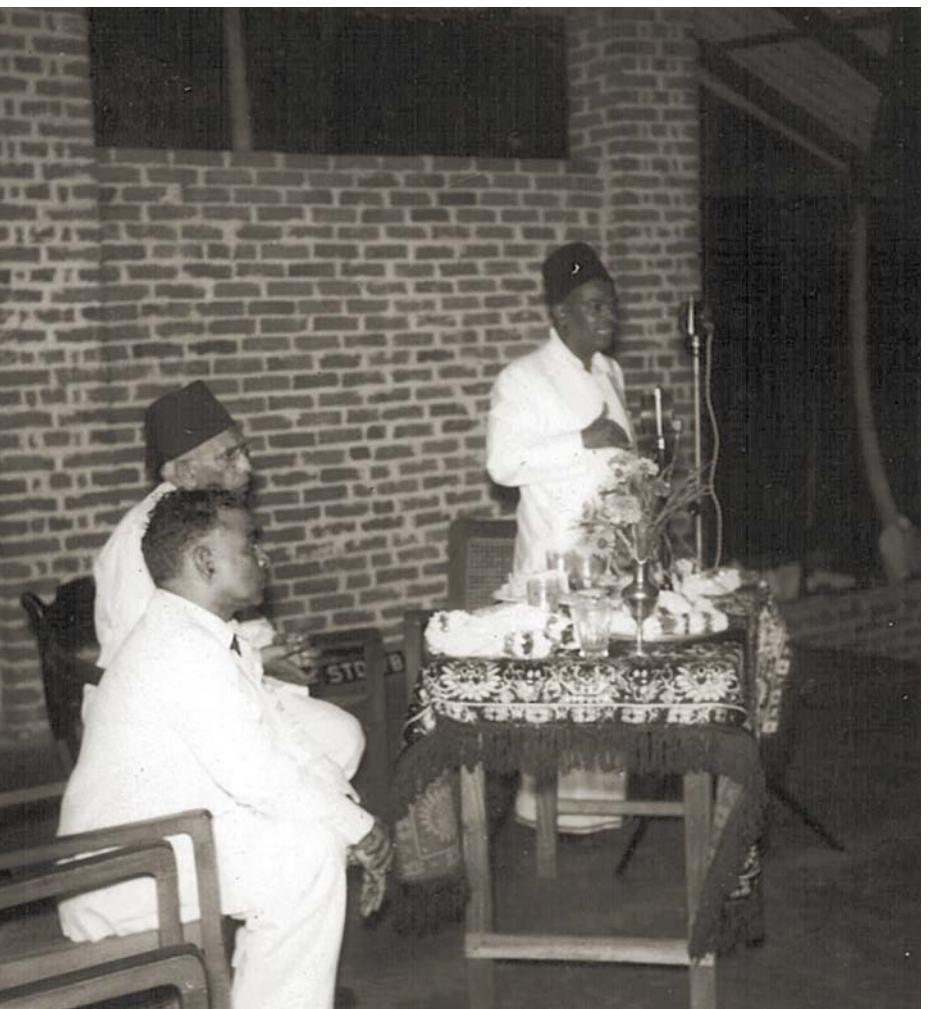
This is not to suggest that English is a measure of worth. Language alone does not define a person or a community. But in a country where access to English-medium education was often tied to privilege or missionary schools, Zahira College made it accessible to ordinary families. That is no small feat. While other towns, such as Galle, Matara, Mannar, Trincomalee, Mawanella, Batticaloa, Kalmunai, Warakapola, Badulla, and Nawalapitiya had limited avenues for Muslim children to study English, Zahira College quietly removed those barriers in Matale.

In doing so, it prepared its students not just to pass exams, but to engage with a rapidly changing world on more equal terms. It remains a legacy of empowerment, not imitation, a means through which knowledge and confidence were cultivated, and new horizons were made reachable.

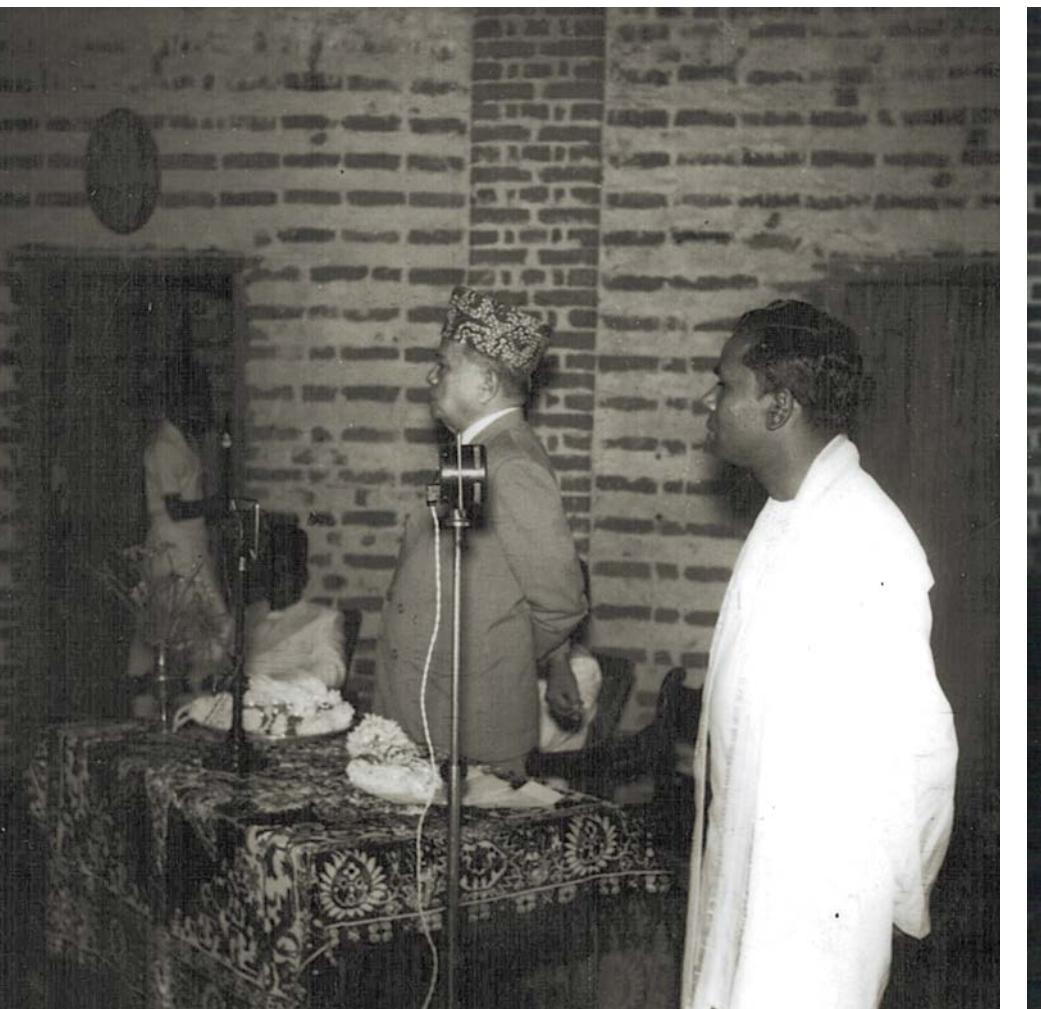
Another significant contribution for which the Zahirians of Matale, past and present, remain grateful to their alma mater is the racially and religiously inclusive environment it fostered. While the majority of students at Zahira College were Muslim, the school



▲ Meezan Hajiar and Mr. Matthai addressing a gathering



▲ Meezan Hajiar among the audience during an address by T. B. Jayah



▲ Meezan Hajiar and Mr. Matthai at a Zahira College function.



also welcomed and educated many Sinhala Buddhists such as S. B. K. W. R. M. Ekanayake, W. B. Ekanayake, E. M. T. Bandas, A. M. T. Bandas, Amarasinghe M. Bindusara, Ayupala, and Daya Devapatirana as well as Burgher Christians like Sylvester Dias, who went on to represent Sri Lanka in cricket, and Tamil Hindus such as Balasubramaniam, Thyagalingam, Sethuraman, and Subramaniam.

Zahira College was not only a place where Buddhist monks taught, it was also a place where a Buddhist monk once studied and resided, occupying a room within the college campus. For much of its early history, the tutorial staff consisted predominantly of non-Muslim teachers, reflecting the institution's inclusive ethos. From 1946 to 1961, the school was led by the esteemed principal Mr. M. V. Mathai, a Christian from Kerala, whose leadership left a lasting impression on generations of Zahirians. Students grew up with deep respect and affection for their teachers, among whom were M. S. Osman, V. C. Abraham, Sivaprakasan, Munaweera, Kathiravelu, Miss Thennakoon, and Miss Nadarajah.

The educational environment at Zahira College was remarkably free from sectarian, racial, or commercial prejudice. As a result, its students were well-prepared to live and work in harmony with people of different backgrounds, a formative experience that became one of the school's most enduring legacies.

To fully appreciate the profound impact of Zahira College on the Muslim community of Matale, one must first understand the educational vacuum that existed prior to its establishment. There had been no school specifically catering to the needs of Muslim students in the area. Zahira College filled that void, providing not only academic education but also a space for moral, religious, and civic development in a spirit of inclusion.

It is against this historical backdrop that the contributions of those who established Zahira College must be assessed. Their foresight, dedication, and sacrifice laid the foundation for a new era in the life of Matale's Muslim community. Chief among these figures was Meezan Hajiar, who served as chairman of the Matale Muslim Educational Society and was instrumental in the founding and growth of the College. The work of this society, under his leadership, deserves the enduring gratitude of all who have benefited from the institution. Their legacy continues to resonate, not only in the accomplishments of Zahira's alumni, but in the spirit of unity and service that the school continues to embody.

In 1952 and 1953, Zahira College used two large bungalows belonging to Meezan Hajiar, one served as a hostel, while the other accommodated several classes. During this period, the private lands provided by Meezan Hajiar to the college were more extensive than

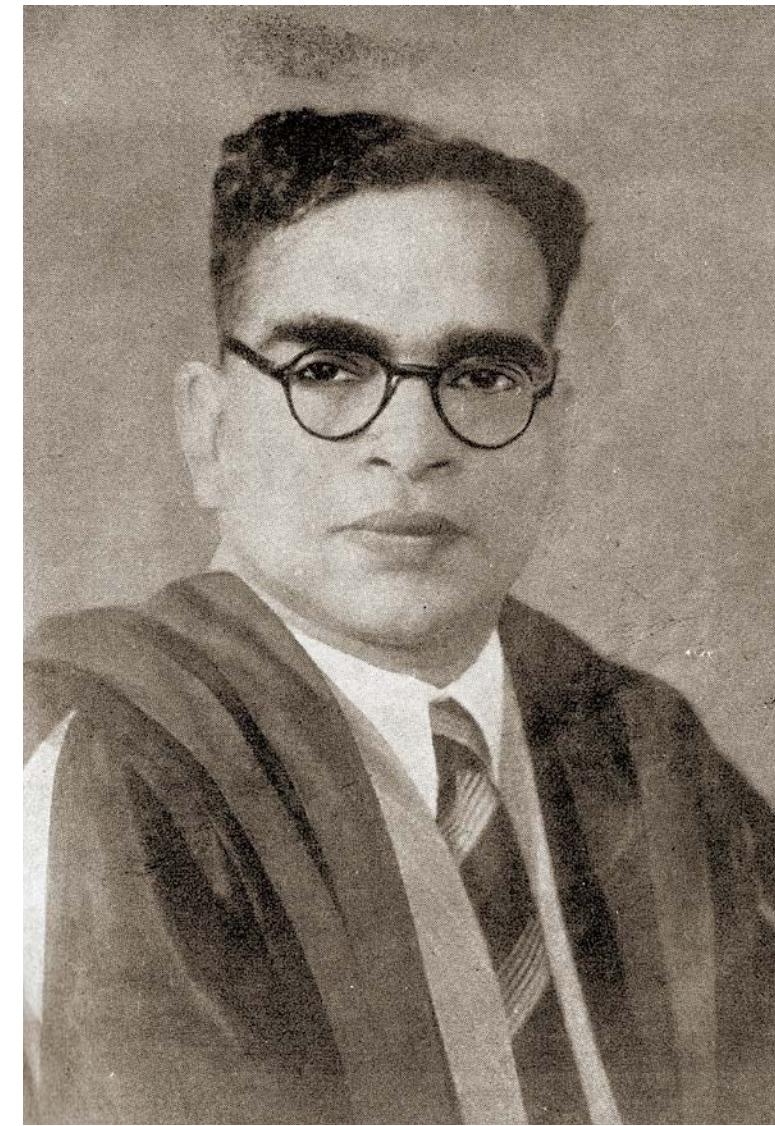
the public lands it occupied, a fact Zahirians recall with gratitude.

Marhoom Haji A. H. M. Batcha, a respected senior old boy, once shared that in those early days, Meezan Hajiar would visit the school three or four times a week, personally observing its progress and offering guidance.

At a time when the school did not have its own telephone facilities, most official calls were made from the office of Meezan and Company. Beyond logistical support, Meezan Hajiar also provided financial assistance whenever needed. Though this generosity was offered quietly and without public recognition, it was known to God and to one other, Mr. Mathai.

This is what he had to say of Meezan Hajiar (Source: Zahira College Book, 1967 – Page 19):

"A normal school needed some kind of fund to meet its financial needs, but this school (Zahira College) had no such reserves. It had to meet its needs from the monthly subscriptions of the members of the Educational Society. Fortunately for me, the president of the Society was a man of means (late Meezan Hajiar) and he was mainly responsible for financing the school in those needy days. I can honestly say that, but for his timely help, this school would have been closed down many years ago."



▲ Mr. M. V. Mathai (Principal of Zahira College 1946 - 1961).

## GIVING WITHOUT MEASURE: PHILANTHROPY AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

The Islamic ethos around charity entails that “what the right hand gives, the left hand should not know”—a timeless ethic of humility and sincerity in giving. Charity, in the Islamic tradition, is an act of devotion, not display; a duty carried out quietly and sincerely, for the sake of God and the well-being of others.

Yet in the spirit of historical record and moral inspiration, it becomes necessary to document the philanthropic legacy of Meezan Hajiar—not to seek praise, but to preserve the memory of a life lived in service. By recording these efforts, we hope to nurture a culture of generosity and communal responsibility, where the deeds of the past serve as guiding lights for the future.

Meezan Hajiar was born into a household steeped in religious devotion. His father, an esteemed *Ālim*, imparted Islamic scholarship and moral discipline, while his mother, a lady of deep piety and compassion, taught by example the sacred duty of caring for those in need. These early influences shaped a character that combined faith with action, devotion with service.

From the earliest days of his modest commercial undertakings, Hajiar set aside a portion of his earnings for the poor. His means were humble, but his spirit was expansive. As his business flourished in the 1940s, his charity grew with it. Yet his giving remained discreet, grounded in a belief that the blessings of wealth were a trust to be shared, not a source of self-glorification.

One of the most striking features of Meezan Hajiar's charitable philosophy was his insistence on shared ownership of good works. He believed that involving others in acts of giving not only multiplied the benefit but also protected one's intention from the corrupting influence of pride. This principle was not merely a personal conviction; it was a message he repeatedly conveyed in public.

A clear expression of this ethos was later quoted in a 2003 newspaper article, which reflected on his words at the opening of the Matale Town Mosque:

“I could have easily built this mosque on my own. But who can say what the future holds? If only my wealth is used, may Allah protect me, pride may take root. This house of Allah belongs to all

of us. It must be built and protected by the hands of every believer. So I urge each of you to contribute, no matter how small the amount. Let this be our shared blessing, and may it safeguard our unity and intentions in the years to come.”

This profound sense of humility guided not only his public acts of charity but also his behind-the-scenes efforts to improve the welfare of entire communities. One of the earliest examples of this was his solution to a longstanding issue in his native Kurugoda: the lack of clean and reliable water.

### THE WATER PROJECT OF KURUGODA (1945)

In 1945, Meezan Hajiar initiated a pioneering water supply system for the Kurugoda mosque and its surrounding community. Like many rural areas in Ceylon, Kurugoda relied on well water, which was unpredictable and increasingly

The bill is handwritten on aged paper and includes the following details:

The following are the pipe accounts :-	
To 2' Pipe, 1600 feet, @ 1/50	2400.00
" as per K.N.A. Bill piping 5019 Ft.	3323.82
" W.H. 1788 Ft. pipe	894.00
" Pangalhamadde Seyedu Hamadeu as per his bill for building tank water tank	166.20
cash for the above to A.L.M.	145.40
" cash for pipe to Ismail 63 ft.	38.28
" as per bill of T.L.M.	0.71
" as per bill of A.L. (Pipe & other goods)	480.10
" as per P.S.K.V. bill	12.01
To transport Lorry hire from Colombo to 1st milepost	132.00
To cash Baas contract for fixing pipe	300.00
" Lorry Fare, minor expenses	224.99
To Kurugoda Mosque water tank	201.00
<b>Total-----</b>	<b>8324.51</b>
By Kurugoda Jamathars cash	2000.00
To balance	6324.51
I, Hadji Segu Abdu Cader Lebbe's son Mohamed kahmmed Mohideen, hereby grant from his own account, the above amount Rs 6324.51 as Wakof to the Above Mosque and for the use of the Kurugoda Mosque Jamathars, but if the Jamathars wants to have a connection water to their houses, they may apply to the above mosque Committee and to get their permission and also must pay Rs 100/- to the said Committee and could fix up a water pipe, and if any other things to done they should carry out the	

▲ The bill detailing the materials purchased for the construction of the pipeline

scarce during the dry seasons. The mosque's hawl (ablution tank) was typically filled by hand from a nearby well, but in times of drought, even this source would run dry. Villagers were then forced to walk miles in search of water, sometimes just for a single pot, often carried for the sole purpose of ablution before prayer.

Determined to resolve this hardship, Meezan Hajiar launched an ambitious project to bring running water from a perennial spring located in an upland area, above the village of Pangalamada. This spring fed into a natural stream that drained toward Kurugoda. Thanks to the elevation difference, a gravity-fed system was feasible but the logistical challenges and cost were significant. Over 8,000 feet of galvanized piping would be needed to carry water from the highlands to the mosque.

Rather than fund the project entirely himself, Meezan Hajiar approached the village *jamā'ath* (community) and invited them to contribute what they could. He pledged to cover the remainder. The total cost came to Rs. 8,324.50, a substantial sum in 1945. The community

raised Rs. 2,000; Meezan Hajiar personally contributed the remaining Rs. 6,324.50.

Two storage tanks were constructed, one at the source, near the spring, and the other adjacent to the mosque. The tanks were connected through the newly laid pipe system, ensuring that the mosque's tank remained perpetually filled. With this, a long-standing need was resolved in a sustainable and dignified manner.

This project reflected a core principle that guided much of Meezan Hajiar's charitable work: even when he bore the greater share of the cost, the effort must be shared. He believed that community participation, however modest, turned personal charity into collective barakah (blessings), a blessing shared in both material and spiritual terms. It was this spirit of shared responsibility that protected such initiatives from becoming avenues for personal pride and instead transformed them into lasting institutions of service.

Though the line was originally intended to supply water to the mosque, the volume of flow proved sufficient to extend access to homes in both Kurugoda

and Pangalamada. Households contributed a small monthly fee for their connections, and this revenue helped maintain the mosque's operations.

The line served the community faithfully for many years, until local government pipelines were eventually laid. Yet the memory of the original system remained etched in the hearts of those who had benefited from it.

### THE CEYLON HOUSE IN MECCA

Among Meezan Hajiar's many contributions to public welfare, few are as enduring and far-reaching as his pivotal role in establishing Ceylon House in Mecca, a landmark initiative by the Ceylon Haj Pilgrims Rest and Welfare Association. This organization was founded with the noble aim of supporting Sri Lankan pilgrims during their sacred journey to the Holy Lands.

Ceylon House served as a sanctuary for pilgrims, offering free accommodation and essential services in Mecca. For many pilgrims, particularly those of limited means, it represented not only material assistance but also a profound spiritual reassurance in a foreign land.

The Association extended its services beyond Mecca, providing care and logistical support in Jeddah, Medina, Mina, and Arafat, thereby ensuring that the entire Hajj experience was conducted with safety, dignity, and ease.

As a trustee of the Association, Meezan Hajiar contributed generously, not only through substantial financial donations but through his active leadership. His support helped bring into being a three-storey rest house near the Haram in Mecca, strategically located to serve the needs of Ceylonese pilgrims. The building became a beacon of care and solidarity, a place where pilgrims could rest, reflect, and renew their strength for the rites of Hajj.

His commitment to this cause was rooted in a belief that service to the *duyūf al-Rahmān*—the guests of the Most Merciful—was a sacred responsibility. In extending this care beyond national boundaries, Hajiar demonstrated that the obligations of community did not end with borders. His efforts forged a lasting bridge between faith and service, and his work continues to be remembered with gratitude by those who benefited from it.

# CEYLON HAJ PILGRIMS REST AND WELFARE ASSOCIATION.

<b>Name</b>	1. This Association shall be called "The Ceylon Haj Pilgrims Rest and Welfare Association".
<b>Registered Office</b>	2. The Registered Office of the Association shall be "Arafat", No. 53, Neloen Place, Wellawatta, Colombo 6.
<b>Objects of the Association</b>	3. The objects of the Association shall be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) To establish a home in Mecca for Haj Pilgrims from Ceylon.</li> <li>(b) to manage and maintain the said home.</li> <li>(c) to provide in Mecca essential services and facilities for the pilgrims during the period of pilgrimage.</li> <li>(d) to provide such facilities and services as are necessary for the pilgrims in Jeddah, Medina, Mina and "Arafat".</li> <li>(e) to collect funds, sweep endowments, and donations for the above-mentioned purposes.</li> <li>(f) generally to look after the physical, spiritual and social welfare of the pilgrims.</li> </ul>
<b>Membership</b>	3. Any individual who pays to the Association a sum of Rupees Ten shall be entitled to be registered as a member on being elected by the Board of Trustees.
<b>Officebearers</b>	5. The office-bearers of the Association shall consist of a President, two Vice-Presidents, two Secretaries and two Treasurers.
<b>Board of Trustees</b>	6. The affairs of the Association shall be managed by a Board of Trustees consisting of the office-bearers and seventeen other members, all of whom shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. In the event of resignation, removal, death or incapacity of any member of the Board, the Board of Trustees shall elect a member to fill any vacancy in the Board.

▲ Articles of Ceylon Haj Pilgrims Rest and Welfare Association

<b>Meetings of the Board of Trustees</b>	7. The first members of the Board of Trustees shall be the following:— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hon'ble Al-Haj Badiudeen Mahmud</li> <li>Vice-Presidents:</li> <li>Al-Haj Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel</li> <li>Al-Haj Falil A. Caffoor</li> <li>Al-Haj H. S. Ismail</li> <li>Hon. Secretaries:</li> <li>Al-Haj Y. S. Hameed</li> <li>Al-Haj M. H. M. Naina Marikar</li> <li>Hon. Treasurers:</li> <li>Al-Haj A. R. M. Thassim</li> <li>Al-Haj A. Hussain Macan Markar</li> <li>Members:</li> <li>Al-Haj M. A. S. Marikar</li> <li>Al-Haj Mudaliyar Sinne Lebbe</li> <li>Al-Haj Sir Razik Fareed</li> <li>Dr. S. M. Jabir</li> <li>Al-Haj M. Sulaiman Marikar Bawa</li> <li>Al-Haj H. L. A. Saleem</li> <li>Al-Haj M. H. Mohamed</li> <li>Mr. A. R. M. Mukthar</li> <li>Mr. I. A. Cader</li> <li>Al-Haj L. M. M. Uvais</li> <li>Al-Haj K. N. H. Mohamed</li> <li>Al-Haj S. M. Mohideen</li> <li>Al-Haj M. T. M. Haniffa</li> <li>Al-Haj H. A. H. Rahmatullah</li> <li>Al-Haj S. T. R. Salay Mohamed</li> <li>Al-Haj A. M. A. Marzook</li> <li>Al-Haj Dr. M. P. Drahman</li> </ul>
<b>Quorum</b>	9. Seven members shall form the quorum at all meetings of the Board of Trustees. At least four days notice of such meeting shall be given.
<b>Annual General Meeting</b>	10. The Annual General Meeting of the Association shall be held in the month of June of each year, at which a report of the Board of Trustees by the secretary and an audited statement of accounts by the treasurer shall be presented. The quorum for the meeting shall be ten and at least 14 days notice of such meeting shall be given by the Secretary. The Auditor shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting.
<b>Funds</b>	11. The funds of the Association shall be deposited in a Bank approved by the Board of Trustees. The Board shall sanction the withdrawal of any sum of money from the Bank. All cheques drawn shall be signed by any one of the Treasurers and the President or any one of Honorary Secretaries.
<b>Legal powers of the Board</b>	12. The Board of Trustees shall be capable in law: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) of acquiring at all times hereafter all properties, movable or immovable, whether by purchase, gift or legacy.</li> <li>(b) of investing the funds of the Association.</li> <li>(c) of erecting any building on any land vested acquired or held by the Board.</li> <li>(d) of leasing any building or land acquired or held by the Board or of taking on lease any land or building or other immovable property.</li> <li>(e) of selling, exchanging, granting, conveying, assigning or otherwise disposing of any of its properties, whether movable or immovable.</li> <li>(f) of performing all such acts as may be necessary for the discharge of the duties of the Board.</li> </ul>
<b>Power to elect Trustees to hold property</b>	13. The Board of Trustees by a special resolution at a meeting specifically called for the purpose of acquiring immovable property whether by purchase or gift, or legacy or on lease shall elect Trustees to hold such immovable properties. Every trustee so

<b>Rules</b>	elected shall continue to act as such until he dies, becomes incapable of acting, resigns, or is removed from the office of the Trustee by a resolution of the Board at a special meeting. In any of the said events, the Board shall, in the manner aforesaid, elect a new trustee in place of the trustee so dying, becoming incapable of acting, resigning, or removed from office, and pending such election the authority of the full body of trustees shall be vested in the remaining trustees.
<b>The Seal of the Association</b>	14. It shall be lawful for the Board at a meeting specially called for the purpose and by a majority of not less than two third of the number of members present and voting at such meeting to make such rules in respect of all or any of the following matters:— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the appointment and removal of the members of the Association and the Board of Trustees.</li> <li>(b) the tenure of office of the members of the Board of Trustees.</li> <li>(c) the procedure to be followed by the Association and the Board of Trustees generally in the transaction of business, and in particular the conduct of the meeting.</li> <li>(d) the payment of the funds relating to expenses incurred by the Association and the Board of Trustees in carrying out the objects of the Association.</li> <li>(e) the opening of Bank Accounts and operation of such accounts.</li> <li>(f) for the conduct of the duties of the office-bearers, agents and servants of the Association.</li> <li>(g) generally for carrying out and giving effect to the objects of the Association and for the management of the affairs of the Association.</li> </ul>
<b>Witnesses</b>	15. There shall be a seal of the Association which shall not be affixed to any instrument whatsoever except in the presence of the President or one of the Vice Presidents and any one of the Secretaries or Treasurers, who shall sign their names to the instrument in token of their presence and such signing shall be independent of the signing of any person as witness.

## PROVIDING WATER TO THE YOUNG MEN'S BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION CHILDREN'S HOME, MATALE (1958)

Meezan Hajiar's compassion was not limited to his own community. At the inaugural ceremony of the Children's Home in Kohombiliwela, Matale, on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1958, the management appealed to well-wishers for help in securing a reliable water supply for the children. Without hesitation, Meezan Hajiar stepped forward to offer a solution. He volunteered to supply all the materials necessary to build a storage tank and lay a pipeline from Wariyapola, spanning approximately two miles. His generous intervention ensured that the children at the home would have access to safe, running water, an essential resource for their health and daily needs. This act stands as yet another example of his readiness to serve wherever there was a need, regardless of religious or social boundaries.

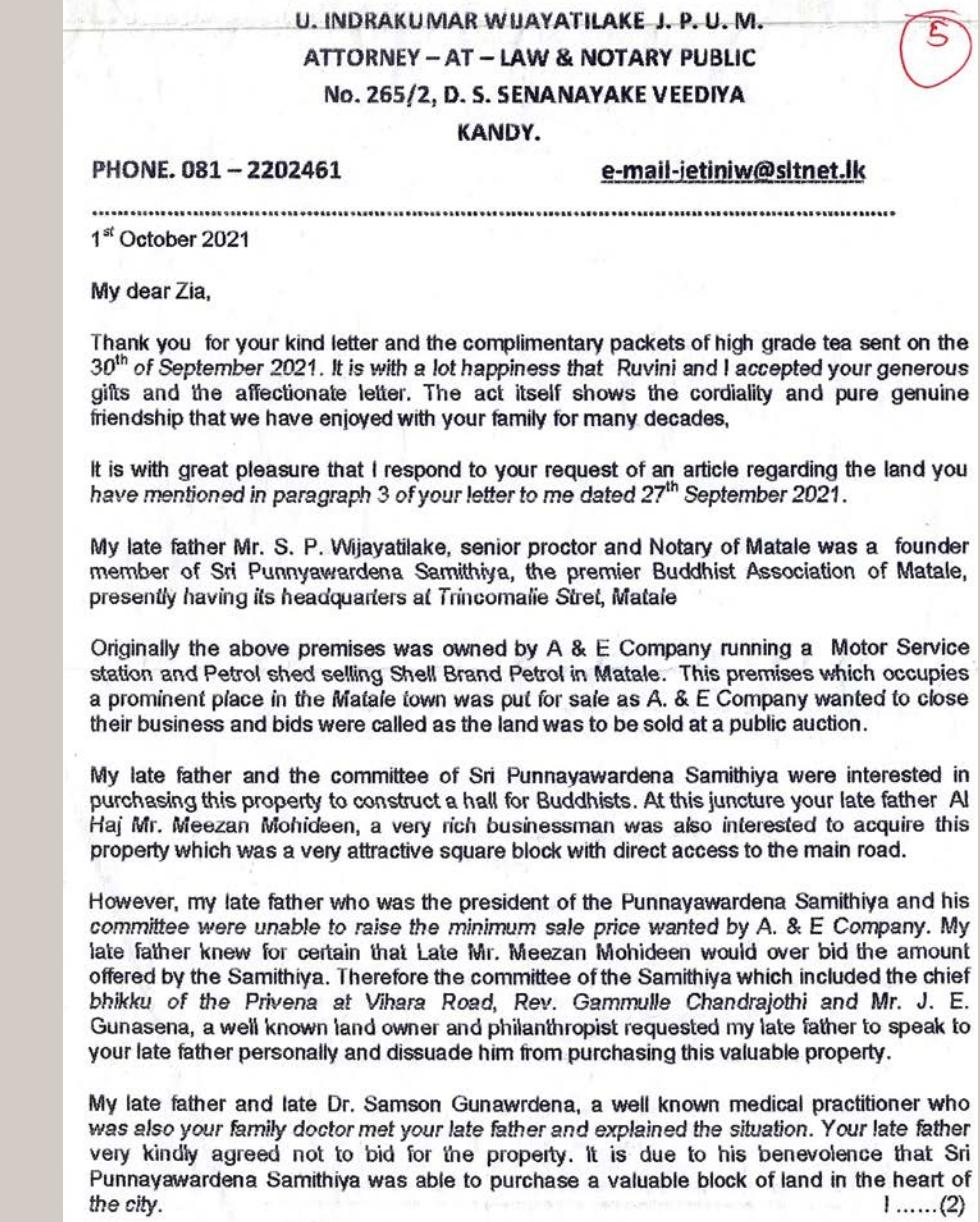
This act of generosity was so significant that it was later documented in a commemorative booklet published by the Young Men's Buddhist Association, Matale, an acknowledgment that underscores both the impact of his contribution and the deep respect it inspired across religious and communal lines.

## BOUDHDHA MANDIRAYA: A TESTAMENT TO INTERCOMMUNAL RESPECT

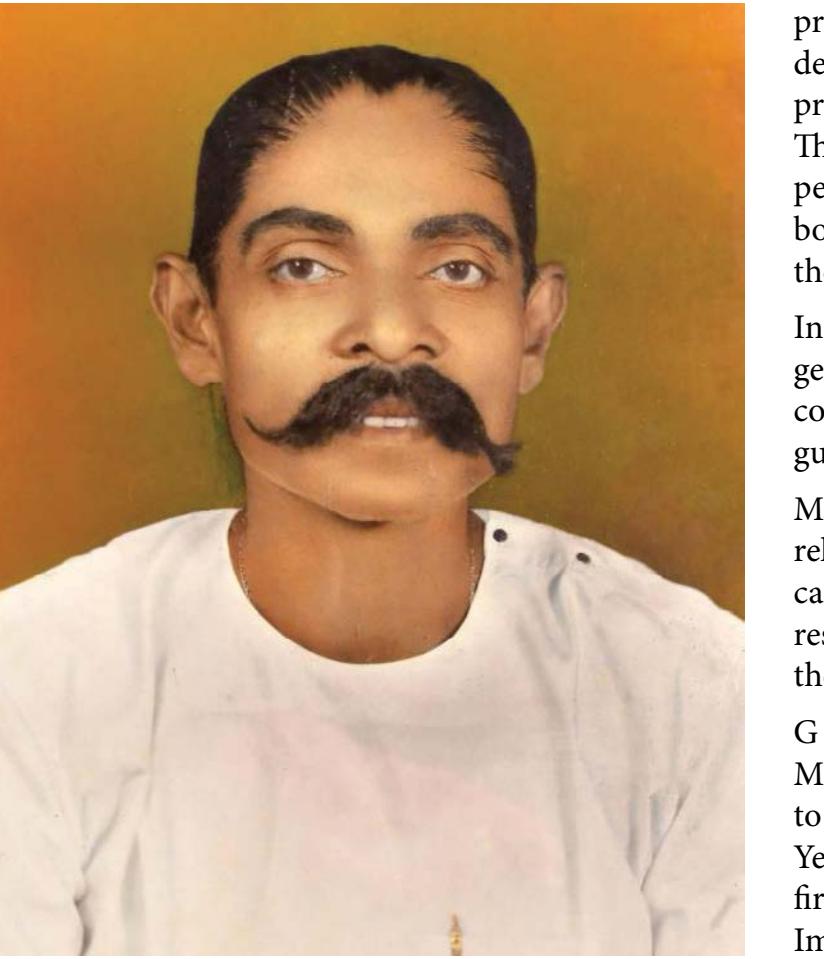
Another testament to Meezan Hajiar's spirit of interfaith respect and communal harmony is remembered through an account shared by Indrakumar Wijayatilake (Attorney-at-Law and Notary Public). Indrakumar recalls that his father, S. P. Wijayatilake, a founding member of the Sri Punnavawardena Samithiya, a respected Buddhist association in Matale, once found himself bidding against Meezan Hajiar for a prime piece of land in Matale. This property, formerly a Shell petrol station, was intended to become a center for Buddhist cultural and spiritual activities.

Though he was fully capable of winning the auction, Meezan Hajiar graciously withdrew after being personally approached by Dr. Samson Gunawardena and learning of the Samithiya's noble intentions. Thanks to his selfless decision, the association acquired the property, which later became the Bauddha Mandiraya (a spiritual and cultural center for the Buddhist community).

Indrakumar further recalls that during the annual sessions of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress hosted by the Samithiya, Meezan Hajiar's company generously



▲ Mr Indrakumar Wijayatilake's account of the episode



▲ G H Mathalis De Silva

provided meals for the delegates. These acts not only demonstrated his generosity but also embodied a profound respect for Sri Lanka's religious diversity. They serve as powerful reminders of a time when people of different faiths lived together like one family, bound by mutual respect and a shared commitment to the common good.

Indrakumar concludes his reflections by urging future generations to learn from such examples of unity and compassion, emphasizing that they should remain guiding principles in fostering peaceful coexistence.

Meezan Hajiar maintained deep and enduring relationships with people of all faiths. Each year, he was called upon to select the best Vesak Thorana, a highly respected role that reflected the trust and admiration the Buddhist community held for him.

G H Mathalis De Silva fondly known as Marthalis Mudalali, a Sinhalese businessman, would always come to Meezan Hajiar at the auspicious time of every New Year to perform his first "*ganu denuwa*" (symbolic first transaction), a gesture of respect and blessing. Importantly, Marthalis was not the only one, many others too sought Hajiar's blessings, highlighting the close bonds and mutual goodwill he fostered across communities.

## A LEGACY IN BRICK AND MORTAR

Meezan Hajiar's philanthropic legacy is not only etched in memory but also embodied in the brick and mortar of religious and educational institutions across Sri Lanka. Between 1950 and 1960, he played a central role in the construction and upkeep of a number of significant institutions, including:

- 1951 – Ankumbura Mosque
- 1954 – Walahena and Kotagoda Mosques
- 1956 – Meezaniyyah Arabic College (Inaugurated after his passing)
- 1957 – Al-Meezan Mosque and Arabic School in Panagama, Kurugoda
- 1960 – Nindiyagama Mosque
- Circa 1960 – Kaleliya Ladies Arabic College

This list, while notable, is by no means exhaustive. Oral testimonies passed down through communities suggest that his involvement extended to many more mosques and institutions, especially in rural or underserved areas. In some cases, his contributions ranged from acquiring the land, to financing construction, to offering architectural guidance or material support. Sadly, much of the documentation for these projects has not survived. Yet, their enduring presence and continued use testify more eloquently than any record could to the scope and sincerity of his efforts.

These buildings, often modest in design but rich in purpose, continue to serve as places of prayer, learning, and community gathering. They are silent witnesses to a man who viewed wealth not as a possession to be hoarded, but as a trust to be spent in service of others.

## THE DREAM OF MEEZANIYYAH

Among all his philanthropic pursuits, the most visionary and deeply personal was Meezan Hajiar's aspiration to establish an institution that would integrate both Islamic and secular education for future generations. His hope was to create a place where young minds could be nurtured in both worldly knowledge and spiritual values, an institution that would serve as a beacon for the community's educational and moral development.

Though he did not live to see this vision fully realized, the seeds he planted bore fruit through the dedication of his sons, who took up the mantle and brought the dream to life. Today, Dharul Uloom Al-Meezaniyyah stands as a flourishing institution, shaped by the ideals of its founder and sustained by the commitment of those he inspired. It continues to provide holistic education to children, in the spirit of faith, discipline, and service.

The story of how this dream took shape, and the enduring impact of the institution it birthed, is the subject of the next chapter: Meezaniyyah – A Dream Fulfilled.

## MEEZANIYYAH: A DREAM FULFILLED

In the mist-covered highlands of Kurugoda, where Sri Lanka's hill country breathes quietly between forest and field, one of Meezan Hajiar's most cherished dreams began to take shape. By the 1950s, he had already earned a reputation as a pioneering businessman, a committed public servant, and a generous patron of education. Yet even with his many accomplishments, he remained deeply concerned about the lack of Islamic educational opportunities in rural areas. It was this concern that led him to envision an institute dedicated to sacred knowledge, where children could study the Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic values in a setting that honoured both tradition and community.

He aspired not merely to build a school, but to create a sanctuary where young minds could flourish spiritually and intellectually. In 1954, he began laying the groundwork for what he hoped would one day become a lasting institution. He set aside land and began making preliminary efforts to realize his dream. However, in 1964, before he could bring his vision to full fruition, Meezan Hajiar passed away. Though his life ended, his vision endured, quiet, dormant, and waiting to be revived.

Decades later, in 1989, his sons, Ihithisham and Ziaudeen, carried their father's torch forward with reverence and resolve. They established a modest educational institute - Madrasathu Malharil Islam, beginning with just fifteen students, was opened by the late Niyas Moulavi and the late Mr. Mohamed Shareef. To mark this humble but meaningful beginning, fifteen guava trees were planted, each a symbol of hope, representing the students who would one day grow strong and bear fruit in service to their communities and faith.

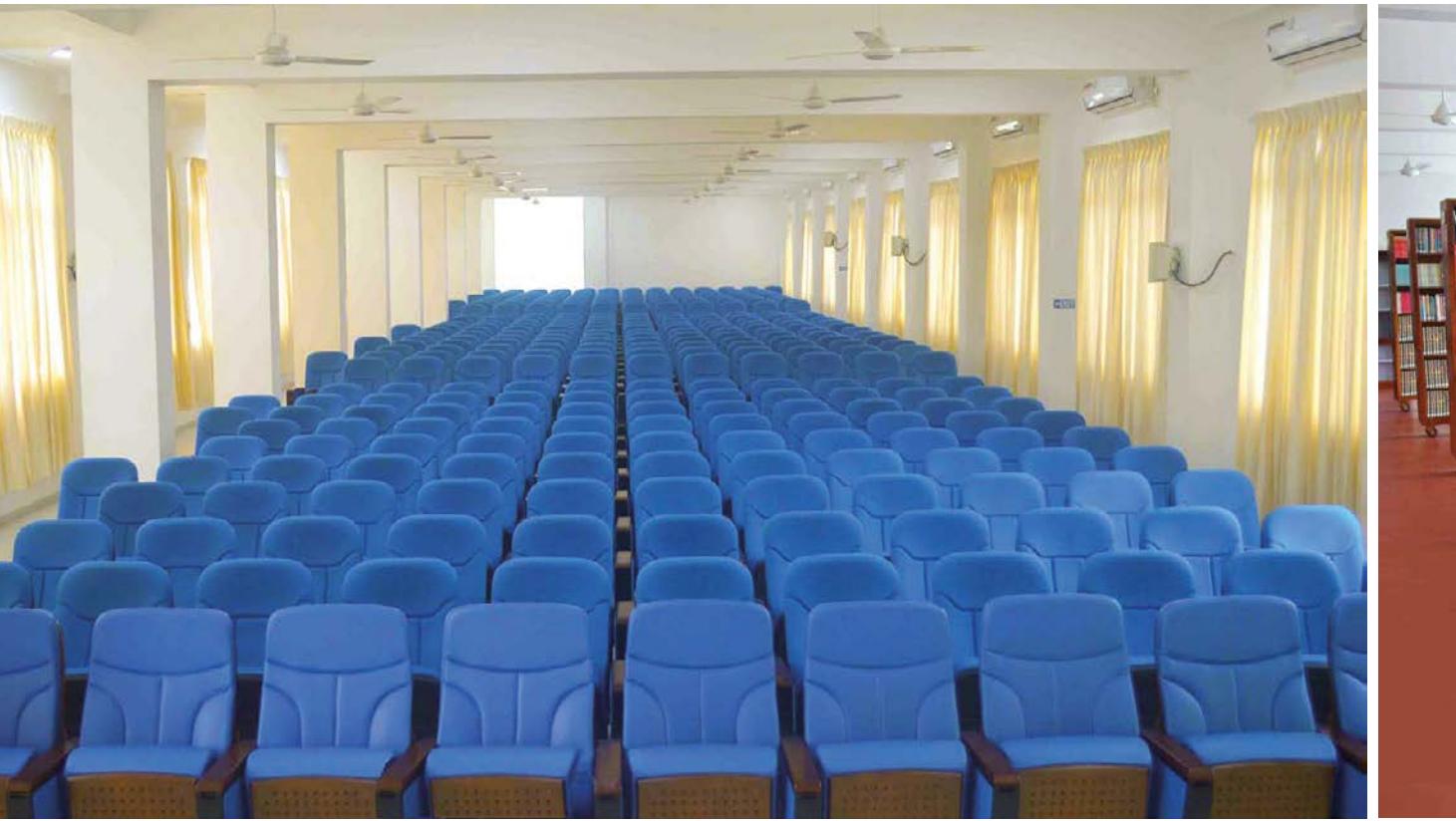
The institute grew rapidly, reflecting the increasing demand for quality Islamic education. By 1994, it was officially renamed Dhaarul Uloom Al Meezaniyyah Arabic College (The House of Knowledge of Meezan), widely known simply as 'Meezaniyyah'. With the new identity came an expanded vision: alongside Islamic sciences and Arabic, students would also be taught subjects such as English, Sinhala, Tamil, Mathematics, Science, and Geography, bridging religious tradition with modern academic disciplines.



▲ The first structure: Madrasathu Malharil Islam



▲ Students engaged in class room activities



▲ Meezaniyya's air conditioned auditorium



▲ Meezaniyyah's library contains hundreds of books on all topics of the Islamic Sciences.

Under the leadership of Ihithisham Meezan, Meezaniyyah entered a new phase of growth. In 2006, a major expansion added four new buildings to accommodate the growing number of students and staff. In recognition of its rising stature, the institution was incorporated under Act of Parliament No. 60 of 2007, marking a pivotal moment in its official recognition and legal status.

A landmark moment came in 2013 when Sheikh Salah Al Budair, Imam of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, laid the foundation stone for a state-of-the-art building. Completed in 2019 and inaugurated by Sheikh M.I.M.

Rizwe Mufti, President of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, this new facility embodied the very essence of Meezan Hajiar's dream: excellence in both form and function.

Today, Meezaniyyah spans over 82,000 square feet, with capacity to house over 400 students in its dormitories. Its facilities include 25 classrooms, science and computer laboratories, a modern library, and an air-conditioned auditorium seating 364, complete with projection and sound systems. Wireless networking and video conferencing capabilities ensure the institution remains connected to global academic trends while preserving its spiritual core.

The campus includes two mosques: Taqiyah, a small public mosque and Masjid Al Meezan, a larger mosque designed for the institute's students and faculty. Inspired by Turkish architectural elements, the main mosque is naturally lit and ventilated, combining aesthetics with sustainability.

Beyond academics, the institute promotes holistic development. Students benefit from free meals, on-site cafeterias, and recreational facilities including an 18-meter swimming pool, indoor grounds, a gymnasium and spaces for table tennis, cricket, and badminton. Most importantly they are nurtured

spiritually, through Quran memorization, critical thinking, leadership training, and moral education.

Over the years, Meezaniyyah has become a respected name internationally, welcoming distinguished guests such as: Sheikh Salah Al Budair - Imam of Masjid an-Nabawi, Sheikh Taha Karaan - Mufti, Judicial Council of South Africa, Prof. Dr. Muhammad bin Ali al-Uqla - Chancellor of The Islamic University of Madinah, His Excellency Prof. Ahmed Davutoğlu - Former Prime Minister of Turkey and His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa - Former President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.



▲ Students participate in a science class.



▲ The college's commitment to holistic education extends to students' physical well-being.



▲ Students participate in the newly opened MIT



▲ A view of the College (2024)

In a landmark achievement, the institute signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Islamic University of Madinah, further anchoring its global academic relevance.

Adding to his father's legacy, Ihithisham Meezan founded the Meezan Institute of Technology (MIT), recognizing the importance of digital literacy in the 21st century. MIT now offers a wide range of vocational

courses, from programming and cybersecurity to hardware and web design, supported by dedicated faculty and practical career guidance services.

Part of his motivation for incorporating technical vocations into a traditional Arabic College was to create future employment opportunities for students devoted to the study of the sacred sciences. His aim was to address the societal divide between religious education and acquiring job-ready skills, bridging the gap by



▲ Sheikh Kaleelur Rahman with his students in the mosque.

equipping students with both spiritual knowledge and employable practical skills.

What began as a father's dream in a quiet village has blossomed into a pioneering educational institution, one that harmoniously blends religious instruction with modern learning, local heritage with global vision. Under the stewardship of Ihithisham Meezan and the guidance of Principal Sheikh A. Kaleelur Rahman,

Dhaarul Uloom Al Meezaniyyah is not just a school, but a living legacy.

This institution stands today as a testament to Meezan Hajiar's unwavering faith, vision, and commitment to future generations. Though he did not live to witness its flowering, every brick and every student bears witness to the seed he planted and the light he kindled for generations to come.

## INTO THE WILDERNESS: RETREAT, REFLECTION, AND THE HUNT

The wilderness of Sri Lanka offered a striking contrast to the world of commerce and urban life. Its rich biodiversity, from dense forests to wild rivers, was home to an abundance of wildlife that had long sustained the island's rural communities. During the colonial period, British influence introduced and popularized recreational hunting among locals. Hunting was legal at the time and became especially fashionable among British residents, who often pursued large game animals like elephants and leopards as trophies, a practice rooted more in sport than subsistence. One such figure, Mr. Mant of Matale, was reputed to have shot hundreds of elephants, a claim that underscored both the extravagance and impact of colonial-era hunting culture.

In contrast to such displays, Meezan Hajiar's relationship with the wilderness was shaped by a different ethic. His love of hunting drew him to a quiet scarcely inhabited village - Ambana, where he found agricultural land surrounded by secluded tracts of jungle. He purchased this land not merely for sport and recreation, but also with the foresight of a true businessman, intending to

develop its agricultural potential. At the same time, it served as a retreat, an escape from the pressures of business, and a place where he could reconnect with the natural world. This land, ringed by forest and teeming with wildlife, became a beloved sanctuary. Meezan Hajiar's approach to hunting reflected a more traditional and responsible mode, grounded in the practical purposes of sustenance. Game that was hunted, such as deer and jungle fowl, was typically consumed. Animals that were not lawful to eat, or whose hunting served no communal benefit, were rarely targeted. In keeping with Islamic teachings

that prohibit hunting purely

for sport or cruelty, his expeditions were undertaken with restraint and reverence for nature.

Thus, for Hajiar, hunting was not a pastime of vanity but part of a broader rhythm of rural life, one that honored the bounties of the land while remaining conscious of divine accountability. In Ambana, his hunting grounds were an extension of the same values that marked his

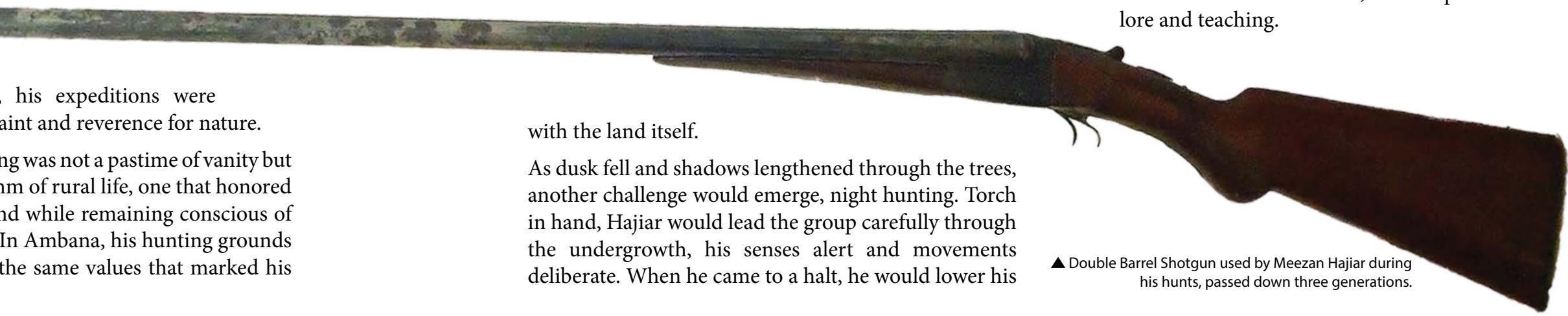
life elsewhere: responsibility, stewardship, and care for those around him.

In the early mornings, as mist clung to the forest floor and the air was thick with the scent of damp earth and wild foliage, Meezan Hajiar would set out into the jungle. Gun in hand and accompanied by a trusted circle of companions, he ventured into the heart of Ambana's wilderness with the practiced ease of one attuned to his surroundings. Each step into the undergrowth brought with it a quiet exhilaration, the pulse of the hunt, the discipline of movement, and the silent conversation

hand to signal silence. Years of experience had taught him how to read the jungle's whispers: a rustle in the leaves, the crack of a twig, the shift in animal presence.

With a flick of the torch, he would catch the glint of eyes peering through the dark. The beam held the creature in a brief spellbound stillness. Hajiar often described how different animals reflected the light in different ways: the eyes of a deer or stag, wide and cautious, shimmered with an amber glow, soft and ancient. The eyes of a rabbit, smaller and quicker, flashed a more intense red. These subtle distinctions, learned through observation and reverence for the natural order, became part of his

lore and teaching.



▲ Double Barrel Shotgun used by Meezan Hajiar during his hunts, passed down three generations.



▲ Meezan Hajiar going out on a hunt with his hunting dogs

The meat is carefully processed in the jungle then transported and expertly prepared ready for consumption. The meat of the game is lean, tender, and full of flavour. Whether roasted, stewed or grilled, it was always carefully prepared, marinated with a rich blend of local spices, cinnamon, garlic and cardamom that captured the essence of Sri Lanka's culinary traditions. In the spirit of generosity, the hunter shares his bounty with loved ones, friends and neighbours strengthening bonds and cultivating a sense of community and gratitude.

The thrill of tracking animals in their natural habitat, the skill and patience required to hunt, and the moments of stillness as he blended into the natural surroundings offered him a unique form of relaxation. Here, he was far from the structured life of business transactions, societal responsibilities and urban life. In the jungle, he found a way to unwind, letting the worries of everyday

life melt away in the quiet vastness around him.

Though Meezan Hajiar carried a gun and pursued game, his connection with nature ran deep. Guided by Islamic values and a profound respect for the land and its creatures, he understood the delicate balance between humans and the wild. His hunting practices reflected a sense of reverence rather than excess; he believed in sustainability, never taking more than needed, and often pausing to marvel at the wildlife he encountered.

Returning to Matale, refreshed and ready for the hunt of business, he felt renewed. The solitude, physical exertion, and quiet companionship of the jungle left him centered and prepared to tackle the challenges awaiting him in both his business and community roles. His experiences in Ambana became a cherished part of his life, a time to reconnect with nature, embrace his love for adventure, and find tranquility in the



▲ Meezan Hajiar is pictured here with a leopard he had to shoot on one occasion. While the precise circumstances are not known, it is possible that the act was undertaken for reasons of safety, as leopards were known to pose threats to livestock and villages at the time.

wilderness. The jungles of Ambana provided Meezan Hajiar with more than the thrill of the hunt; they forged a lasting bond with the natural world, a connection that sustained him throughout his life.

“Hunting is in the Blood” - This love for hunting has been passed down through generations, with children

and grandchildren continuing the tradition. However, instead of hunting animals, it has evolved into a form of sport through shooting targets. The family has also competed on the international stage, bringing glory to Sri Lanka.

## LIFE IN AMBANA: MEEZAN MUDALALI

When Meezan Hajiar first set foot in Ambana village in 1948, he encountered a quiet and scarcely inhabited landscape. The village of Naliyakande had only seven houses, while the neighbouring hamlet of Barekottuwa was home to just five Sinhala families. The fertile paddy fields of the area were primarily under the ownership of Tamil families from Tamankande. Sensing their potential and with characteristic foresight, Meezan Hajiar acquired a large portion of these fields. His aim was not mere acquisition, but rather the development of the land and the upliftment of its agricultural output, true to his lifelong ethos of combining enterprise with service. In time, his presence and influence became deeply rooted in the community, and the villagers came to affectionately refer to him as "Meezan Mudalali", a title that reflected both their respect and his prominent role in village life.

In addition to the paddy lands, he purchased an extensive tract of upper land and soon established a kamatha (a traditional threshing ground) spanning

nearly one and a half acres. This kamatha served both the Naliyakande and Barekottuwa communities during harvest seasons. At its edge stood a small thatched hut used for storing harvested paddy. A humble yet loyal caretaker named Kanwalanawathy was entrusted with overseeing the grain. This hut was also home to a cobra, adding to its mystique.

Among the most remarkable features of the land Meezan Mudalali acquired was a coconut plantation of nearly 300 trees, the only such grove in the entire vicinity at the time. The coconuts were harvested and sold at various surrounding marketplaces including Naula, Opalgala, Andawala, Kongawala and Akarahaaduwa. In time, the sight of his bullock cart laden with coconuts became familiar to many, as it traversed these routes under his supervision.

As he explored the breadth of Ambana, Meezan Mudalali grew increasingly attached to its natural beauty. To the east, the land was bordered by the Ambanganga River,

its cool waters winding gently through the foliage. To the north lay the ancient Amban Amuna, and to the south, the marked boundaries of Andawala village. The western horizon was crowned by the Ginihitiya hill, a forested elevation that completed the region's rich topography. The surrounding wilderness teemed with wildlife - leopard, bears, deer, and wild boar roamed the terrain freely. Towering native trees - maara, mathawarna, killa, kumbuk, galsiyambala, and kalumediriya, offered both shade and a sense of timelessness.

The land, steeped in both nature and legend, was also home to folklore. One such tale passed down through generations speaks of a mighty yodaya (a giant) who once carried four massive rocks from Ambana Amuna, intending to construct a bund across the Andawala River. Upon hearing that his pregnant wife had given birth not to a son, as expected, but to a daughter, he was so taken aback that he dropped the boulders on

the spot. These four great stones, still visible today, lie undisturbed at Andawala, and the area is known as Gal Hathara (The Four Rocks). This very site came to mark the boundary of Meezan Mudalali's Ambana lands.

Meezan Mudalali's ambitions for Ambana extended well beyond the initial land acquisition. His vision was to transform the area into a thriving agricultural zone. To this end, he cultivated a wide variety of crops including himbutu, karamba, veera, palu, siyambala, damba, and mango. The land was also home to hardy species such as pathok and kalupila trees, which dotted the landscape with resilience and character.

Among the many relationships he formed during this period, one of the most enduring was with the family of S. G. Bodhipala, a warm and trustworthy man from Konakanakala. Their friendship grew steadily, and on one occasion, Meezan Mudalali invited Bodhipala to visit Ambana. Though Bodhipala's wife, E. G.

Somawathie, was initially reluctant, circumstances soon changed, and Bodhipala was again approached by Meezan Mudalali, this time with an offer to join him in Ambana. With her earlier reservations set aside, Somawathie consented, and the family moved to Ambana with their infant daughter.

In March 1950, Bodhipala, Meezan Mudalali, and several friends journeyed to Ambanagama, taking up residence temporarily in a modest storage hut. The harvest season had just concluded, and work began, to clear the trees and ready the land for development. Bodhipala returned to his village to recruit additional workers, and soon a group of villagers arrived to assist. Meezan Mudalali allowed them to plough the newly acquired fields, placing Bodhipala in charge of supervising the operations. The barren lands of Ambana began to take on new life, slowly transforming into productive paddy fields, financed entirely by Meezan Mudalali and his firm.

Meezan Mudalali visited Ambana regularly, typically once or twice a week. His presence was humble and constant. He lived in a simple clay hut, where his coat would hang neatly from a nail, and he kept a firearm close at hand for protection. His treatment of all villagers, irrespective of caste, creed, or community,

was marked by respect and equity. Bodhipala and his wife became vital members of this growing rural community. She raised cows for milk, while he tapped kitul trees to produce jaggery and honey, supplementing the household income.

On one occasion, Meezan Mudalali embarked on a hunting expedition with Deiyadu Mudalali, Majeed Mudalali, Selma Lebbe, and Bodhipala (known to some as Patrick). The group ventured deep into the forest, where one misstep led to a fall, entangling two of the party. Lost in the wilderness, they shouted to each other through the night, eventually they were able to make their way back home only after breaking a branch and making a vow, an event retold in the village with both amusement and awe.

The community's spiritual life also found support through Meezan Mudalali's efforts. A modest mosque in Ambana, originally built by Segu Lebbe and Aabu Lebbe, was renovated under his guidance. He provided tiles and timber, and enlisted the help of villagers to carry out the work. During the fasting months, he generously distributed rice, paddy, clothing, dates, tea, and other essentials to those in need, including Bodhipala's family, who received financial aid for a year and a half. But true to his philosophy of self-reliance,

Meezan Mudalali encouraged Bodhipala to invest his energies in the land rather than depend on handouts. He gifted him a firearm to protect the crops and urged him to sell his harvest for income.

A major flood in December 1957 brought devastation to Ambana. The Ambanganga river rose ten feet, felling many coconut trees and damaging homes. Bodhipala's house survived, and his family was helped to cross the swollen river by Shahul Hameed of Naliyakande, after the bridge was destroyed. When the waters receded, Meezan Mudalali came to assist with rebuilding. He constructed an upper floor on their house, transforming it into the largest home in the area, fondly referred to by villagers as "the bungalow." He even brought in an elephant to transport timber for the repairs.

By 1963, the villagers who worked on his lands began to see tangible benefits. A small shop was opened in the new house, selling daily goods at reasonable prices.

On 16th August 1964, word of Meezan Mudalali's passing reached the villagers. Shocked and grief stricken, they abandoned their work in the fields and gathered to attend his funeral. His memory remained deeply embedded in their hearts and lives.

In the period that followed, his son Azhar took steps to

ensure Bodhipala's family was well cared for. He officially transferred ownership of the paddy fields and the house to them, providing a formal letter of confirmation. His untimely passing not long after deeply saddened Bodhipala, who remembered both father and son with great affection. "We would remember him during the time of boiling milk," he would say.

The political climate made it difficult for the Bodhipala family to secure meaningful employment, despite their education. When the government acquired most of the lands belonging to Meezan & Company in 1974, only 4.5 acres in Ambana remained with the Meezan family, with the produce from these lands being given to the company. In 1980, when Bodhipala fell ill, Meezan & Company provided for his medical expenses. Upon his passing in November 1988, during a time of curfew and political unrest, the company still ensured financial support and assistance.

To this day, Bodhipala's family continues to remember and pray for Meezan Mudalali with immense gratitude. After Bodhipala's passing, his daughters married and moved away; his son and wife now live near the old coconut shed. Their home may be modest, but their memories remain rich with the kindness, generosity, and lasting legacy of Meezan Mudalali.

## MEEZAN HAJIAR RETURNS TO HIS LORD: THE DAY MATALE MOURNED



▲ The funeral procession leaving Meezan Hajiar's residence



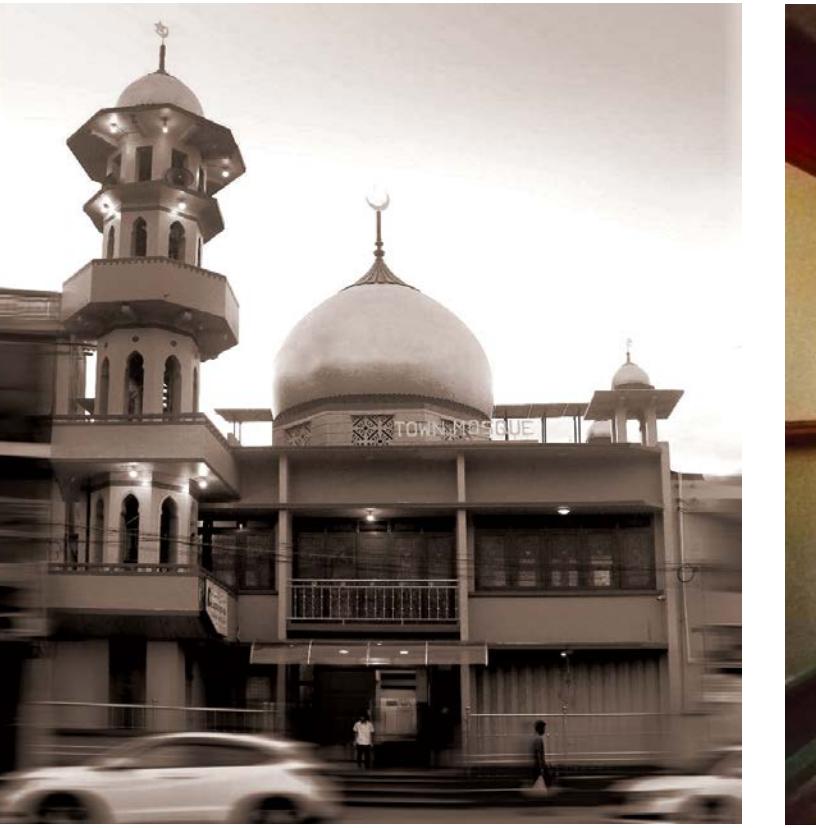
▲ The funeral procession carrying wreaths through Matale town as a sign of respect for the late Meezan Hajiar

On the 16th of August, 1964, Meezan Hajiar returned to his Lord at the age of 53. His passing marked the end of a remarkable earthly journey, a life dedicated to service, generosity, and devotion. As news of his death spread, the town of Matale came to a solemn standstill. Shops closed their doors. Streets emptied. And in their place, a river of mourners flowed through the heart of the town.

From his lifelong residence to the Matale Town Mosque, Meezan Hajiar was carried by thousands who came to pay their final respects. In a gesture that spoke volumes of his standing in the community, he was granted the rare and distinguished honour of being laid to rest within the very grounds of the mosque he had helped support.



▲ Meezan Hajiar's remains being carried on his final journey through Matale Town. The 'Janaza' is visible at the front of the procession



▲ Matale Town Mosque

The moments that followed were filled with quiet reflection. Amid the weight of grief, there was also comfort: in the enduring memory of a life well lived, and in the legacy of compassion, courage, and commitment he left behind. His presence was no longer visible, yet his spirit remained unmistakably present, woven into the fabric of the town he helped shape, the institutions he helped build, and the lives he quietly transformed.

*Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn*  
“Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we shall return.”

*Surah Al-Baqarah (2:156)*

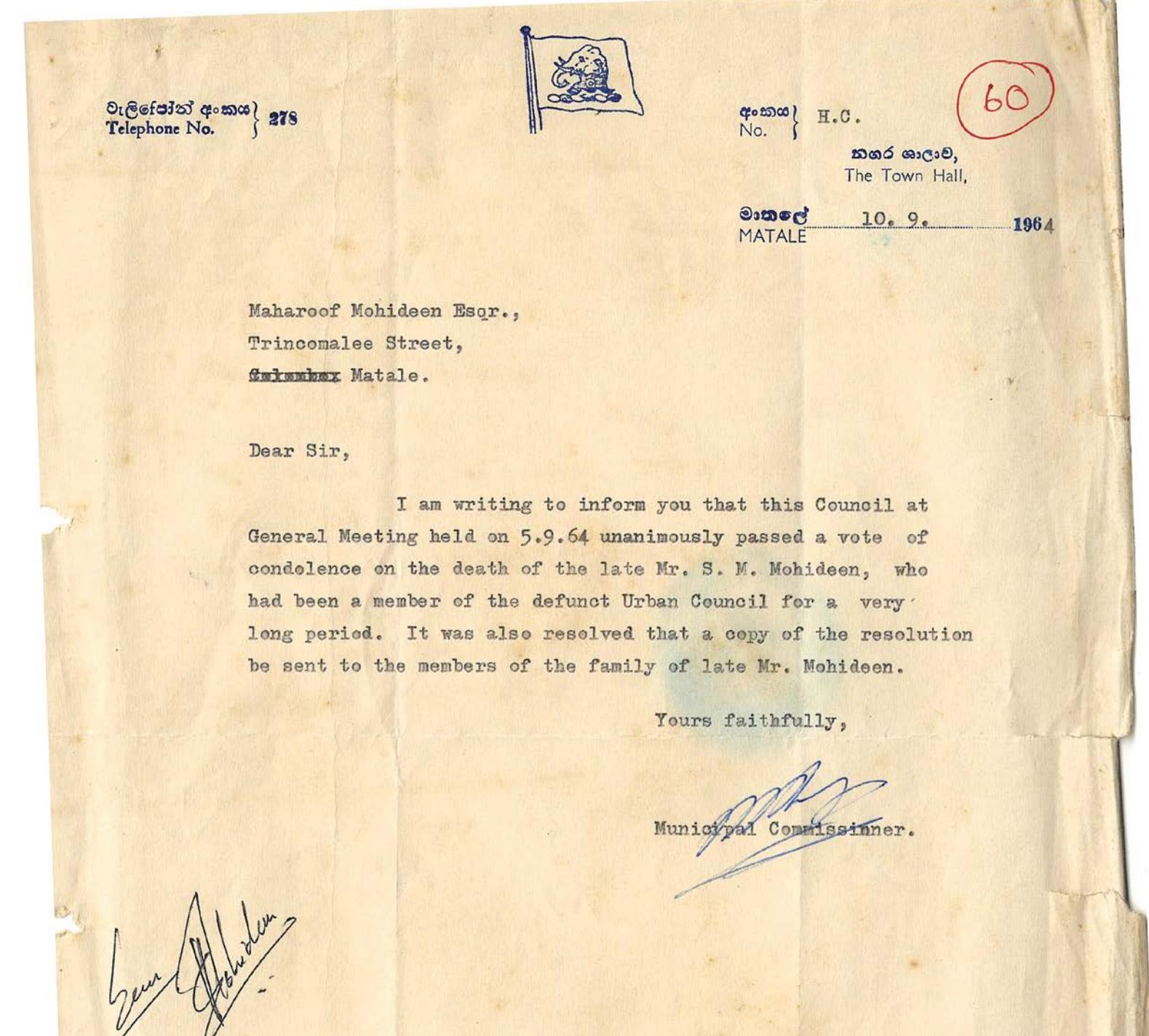
For his family, the loss was immeasurable. In the wake of his passing, they faced immense hardship



▲ Meezan Hajiar's final resting place at the Matale Town Mosque

and uncertainty, an uphill path marked by sacrifice and trials. Yet, true to the spirit of the man who raised them, they rose to the challenge with dignity and perseverance. Through unity and unwavering faith, they rebuilt. And in doing so, they carried forward not only his name but his vision.

Today, the legacy of Meezan Hajiar endures, alive in the work of his children and grandchildren, in the communities he uplifted, and in the hearts of those who continue to speak of him with reverence. His story did not end on that August day. It continues still, unfolding in every act of kindness, every institution of learning, and every prayer whispered in gratitude for the life of a man who gave so much, and asked for so little.



▲ Letter of condolence from Matale Municipal Council on the death of Meezan Hajiar

## A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS: RAHUMATH UMMA AND THE RESILIENCE OF THE MEEZAN FAMILY

### RAHUMATH UMMA MOHIDEEN (1924 TO 2009)

#### The Guiding Mother, The Enduring Matriarch

Rahumath Umma Mohideen, beloved wife of Meezan Hajiar, was a lady of remarkable strength, dignity, and unwavering faith. Born in 1924, she was married at the age of thirteen, as was customary at the time. By the age of twenty, she had already embraced the responsibilities of motherhood. Over the years, she and Meezan Hajiar were blessed with fourteen children, whom she raised with a delicate balance of love and discipline. Their home was a place of warmth and order, shaped by her constancy and rooted in the rhythms of Islamic tradition.

The greatest test of her life came unexpectedly and all too soon. In 1964, at the age of forty, she was widowed. Her beloved husband, the pillar of their family and community, returned to his Lord. Their youngest child was just forty-five days old and their oldest being 20 years of age, leaving her to single-handedly raise fourteen children.

In a single moment, the weight of an entire household fell upon her shoulders. Yet she did not waver. In the face of profound grief and daunting responsibility, Rahumath Umma rose with fortitude. She assumed both the nurturing role of mother and the protective role of father, without complaint and without pause. Her life from that moment forward became one of sacrifice, resolve, and unshakable devotion to the well-being of her children.

For the next forty-five years, she guided her family through seasons of uncertainty, financial hardship, and emotional strain. Her strength was not loud, but it was absolute. With grace and resilience, she sustained her children spiritually, emotionally, and materially, preserving the values that she and her husband had lived by. Under her care, the family did not only survive; they grew into adults of strong character, held together by her love and guided by her example. She was the silent architect of their recovery and growth. Her patience became their strength. Her prayer became their shield.

And her unwavering sense of duty ensured that the family legacy lived on.

The story of the Meezan family after Hajiar's passing is, in many ways, the story of her steadfast motherhood. She was the unseen force that carried the family forward, the enduring matriarch whose faith, strength, and love made everything possible.

In 1974, her family suffered a devastating blow when the government seized nearly all of their assets, a lifetime of her husband's work lost in what felt like a deliberate act of retaliation. Many would have been broken by such an event. But not Rahumath Umma. Her response was not despair, but steadfast endurance. With her faith as her compass, she taught her children that material loss could never erase moral strength or spiritual wealth.

Amid this upheaval, Rahumath Umma took a bold and strategic step to preserve a piece of the family's legacy. One parcel of land, earmarked by Meezan Hajiar for a nonprofit Arabic school, was donated by her to the

Kurugoda Jumma Mosque. Aware that land consecrated for religious use was legally protected from confiscation, she ensured that it would be safe. Years later, her son Ihithisham reclaimed this land, and today the Meezaniyyah Institute stands there, a lasting testament to her foresight and devotion to her husband's vision.

The trials did not end there. She suffered the loss of her beloved son Azhar in 1984, then her son Kathim in 1996. In 1998, her son-in-law Yusuf Ali passed away suddenly. Though sorrow visited her repeatedly, her resolve never broke. Her strength became a shelter for those around her.

Even in her later years, when arthritis made movement painful and illness took its toll, she never allowed hardship to interrupt her care. She continued to cook, provide, and offer comfort. Her children recall how she remembered every preference, every small joy, and every need. Her life was a tapestry woven with daily sacrifices, devotion, and quiet love.

## THE MEEZAN FAMILY

Her influence extended beyond her immediate family. As a quiet but resolute leader within her community, she championed education, charity, and welfare. In her hometown of Akurana, she helped build homes for the poor and arranged marriages for young women in need. Her hospitality was legendary: guests never left her home without receiving *sadaqah*, and her days were gently marked by dhikr, her fingers counting prayer beads in constant remembrance of Allah.

She understood that a true legacy is not merely survival, but the continuation of purpose. She made it her life's mission to preserve the vision of Meezan Hajiar. Her children were raised not only with pride in their lineage, but with a sense of moral responsibility. Recognizing the need to institutionalize that legacy, she entrusted her son Faiz with establishing a family trust to support education and community welfare, ensuring that the family's philanthropic spirit would endure across generations.

Her home remained a sanctuary of peace and unity, held together by her unwavering belief: "Family must be united." She extended her care to her sons- and daughters-in-law, embracing them as her own. She also maintained deep bonds with her siblings, three sisters and a brother, who remained a cherished part of her life. Her brother's weekly visits after Jumu'ah became a

sacred routine that continued until his final days.

A lady of humility and radiance, she favoured light blue, the colour of serenity, which seemed to reflect her own soul. Her presence calmed the heart, her smile was gentle, and her words were full of timeless wisdom.

Her final wish was simple, yet profound: to return to her Lord either in the holy city of Mecca or at home, surrounded by those she loved. On June 6, 2009, that wish was fulfilled. She passed away peacefully in Matale, with her family at her side, a life come full circle, marked by strength, faith, and grace.

She was laid to rest the following day. Her grave remains a place of remembrance for a woman whose life was a blessing to all who knew her.

Today, her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren carry forward her legacy, not only in name, but in spirit. They remember her not merely as the matriarch who held them together, but as the light who guided their path. Her story is not only one of endurance, but of quiet triumph. Through trials that would shake the strongest, Rahumath Umma stood firm, with love, dignity, and an unwavering heart.

Alhamdulillah for the gift of her life—a life marked by service, resilience, and unshakeable faith. *May Allah's boundless blessings be upon her always.*

### MOHAMED MAHROOF MOHIDEEN

Mohamed Mahroof Mohideen, the eldest son of Meezan Hajiar and Rahmath Umma, was born on 4th April, 1944 a date as easy to remember as the man himself was hard to forget. His life was marked by extraordinary intellect, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to family.

He began his education at Zahira College, Matale, and was later awarded a scholarship to attend the prestigious Royal College in Colombo. There, he excelled in Tamil and Mathematics, and revealed an extraordinary talent in chess, able to play blindfolded, a rare gift that reflected his razor-sharp memory and analytical mind.

At the age of twenty, Mahroof's life took an unexpected turn. His father passed away, just as he was preparing to leave for London to pursue higher studies. In that moment of loss, he made a life-defining decision to remain in Sri Lanka and take care of his family. Though it meant giving up personal ambition, he did so without hesitation. That act of selflessness would become a cornerstone of his life.

In 1973, he moved to Colombo to pursue his business ambitions. His ventures were many, but each reflected his entrepreneurial flair and willingness to innovate. He secured the sole agency for Indesit electrical appliances from Italy and later brought home an entirely new dining concept after visiting a restaurant called Banana Leaf in Singapore. Captivated by the flavors and atmosphere, he opened Banana Leaf Restaurant in Colombo in 1984, introducing a fresh and vibrant dining experience to Sri Lanka. The restaurant quickly gained popularity, showcasing his instinct for turning vision into success.

In 1986, he pivoted from electrical appliances to focus on sanitary ware. He became the exclusive agent for Armitage Shanks (UK) and Johnson Suisse (Malaysia), building a successful enterprise that became a benchmark in the industry. His eye for quality and professionalism earned him a respected place in Sri Lanka's business community.

Those who knew him best remember not only his achievements but his character. Mahroof Mohideen was a man of integrity, honest, direct, and deeply generous. He never publicized his charitable acts, and when

asked during his illness if anyone owed him money, he responded simply, "Don't worry about what people owe us; what matters is whether we owe anyone." It was a reflection of his philosophy to live a life focused on giving, not receiving.

He inherited the humanitarian spirit of his father, Meezan Hajiyar, and quietly carried that legacy forward. His love for food, his passion for business, his loyalty to family, and his lifelong generosity all spoke to a man who lived not for recognition, but for purpose.

In 1968, at the age of 24, he married Hidayathul Zeena Rauf. Together they had two sons, Roshun and Imthiaz, and daughters in law Farah and Mirzana and were later blessed with five grandchildren, Arish, Ayan, Imaadh, Zahar and Simra.

In 2017, Mahroof was diagnosed with cancer. Even in illness, he showed the same courage and strength that had defined his life. He passed away on 2nd May 2019, surrounded by his loved ones, leaving behind a legacy not only of enterprise, but of principle.

To his family, friends, and all who knew him, Mohamed Mahroof Mohideen remains a figure of inspiration, a man who sacrificed without regret, built without boasting, and gave without counting. His story is not just remembered. It is felt, every day, in the values he passed on and the lives he touched.

### MOHAMED FAIZ MOHIDEEN

Mohamed Faiz Mohideen, the second son of the Meezan family, was born on 6th October, 1946. A man of intellect, he carried forward the values of discipline and dedication that defined his family. His early education took place at Trinity College, Kandy, where he studied from 1958 to 1964 years that shaped both his character and his academic ambition.

At the age of nineteen, Faiz left for England to pursue higher studies at the University of London, earning his undergraduate degree. Never one to rest on laurels, he continued his academic journey at the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where he obtained a Master of Science degree in Econometrics between 1969 and 1971.

In July 1975, Faiz Mohideen married Shobha Mohideen and returned to Sri Lanka the same year, transitioning from academia to national service. He joined the Ministry of Finance and Planning, where his analytical skill, work ethic, and steady demeanor quickly became apparent. Over the years, he rose through the ranks to become Deputy Secretary to the Treasury and Director General of the External Resources Department, key leadership positions within one of the country's most critical ministries.

After a distinguished career in public service, he retired in 2005. His contributions to national financial planning and external economic relations remain respected in policy circles to this day.

In his later years, Faiz Mohideen continued to contribute to the private sector. He currently serves as a non-executive director at Kelani Valley Plantations PLC, bringing with him decades of insight and governance experience.

Within the Meezan family, he is remembered and admired for his soft-spoken nature, intellectual depth and unwavering humility. In a family of entrepreneurs and reformers, Faiz Mohideen stands out as the calm strategist, a man whose greatest legacy lies not only in titles held, but in the integrity with which he served his country and kin.

### AZHAR MOHIDEEN

Born on 17th January 1947, Azhar Mohideen was the third child of the family. Educated at St. Thomas' College, Matale, and Zahira College, Gampola, he joined his brothers in managing the family business from a young age.

He married Sithy Fareena, daughter of Abdul Latif of

Mawanella, and they had two children, Shafraz Meezan and Rahmath Rihana. Azhar passed away tragically young on 24th March 1984, at the age of 37. His family grew to include daughter-in-law Sheri, son-in-law Fawaz, and seven grandsons: Raaid, Laaiq, Mikhail, Ibrahim, Sulayman, Dawud and Adham.

He loved all things outdoors, motorbikes, hunting, and the great wilderness surrounding his father's estates. His father would say about the strength of his mind and unwavering determination - Irumpai karumpakkuravan karumpai irumpakkiravan (He could change steel into sugar cane and sugar cane into steel)

### FATHIMUTHU ZOHARA

Fathimuthu Zohara, the fourth child of Meezan Hajiyar, was a figure of grace and strength. She married Muhammad Zarook and was blessed with a son, Mohamed Afzal, daughter in law Shazni and four grandchildren: Leena, Umar, Ammar and Zaid. Like a second mother especially to her younger sisters, she held a very special place in Meezan Hajiar's heart as the first daughter. The image of her devotion to remembering Allah day in and day out in the quiet of her room is how she is recalled in the minds of the younger generations.

### **MUBARAK MOHIDEEN**

Born on 18th May 1951, Mubarak Mohideen, the fifth child, was educated at St. Thomas' College, Matale. An introspective person and an avid reader who was very fond of his siblings, especially his sisters who remember his moments of compassionate concern for their affairs and lives. He is married to Shakira Banu.

### **FAUZUL KABEER MOHIDEEN**

Fauzul Kabeer, the sixth child of Meezan Hajiar and Rahmath Umma, was born in 1953 in Ankumbura. From an early age, he demonstrated an aptitude for discipline and learning qualities that would later shape a long and impactful career in engineering and public service.

His educational journey began at the Baptist Mission School (BMS) and St. Thomas's College, Matale, followed by his formative years at Trinity College, Kandy. Excelling in academics, he went on to earn a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Engineering from the University of Sri Lanka, Katubedda Campus. Driven by a commitment to further his knowledge, he later pursued a Master of Science in Engineering at the prestigious Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Thailand.

In 1978, Fauzul Kabeer embarked on his professional path with the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) Sri Lanka's

national electricity provider. Over a distinguished career spanning more than three decades, he rose through the ranks, holding several key leadership roles, including Deputy General Manager, Additional General Manager, and ultimately serving as General Manager (The apex executive position within the CEB) until his retirement in October 2013.

Throughout his tenure at the CEB, his technical acumen and leadership were instrumental in shaping the nation's energy infrastructure.

His career is remembered not only for technical excellence, but also for his calm leadership and commitment to institutional progress, a legacy that continues to inspire within the engineering and energy sectors.

In 1983, he married Shahana Saheed, and together they built a close-knit family grounded in shared values and mutual respect. Their son, Ishrath Mohideen, and his wife, Nizra, have blessed the family with two beloved grandchildren, Hamza and Laila.

From the highlands of Matale to the executive offices of Sri Lanka's power sector, his journey reflects the enduring values passed down by his father's integrity, service, and humility. Through his work, he quite literally helped power the nation leaving behind a career defined by diligence and unwavering responsibility.

### **ZIAUDEEN AHAMED MOHIDEEN**

Born on the 26th of September 1955 at the historic Ancoombra Bungalow, Ziaudeen Ahamed Mohideen is the sixth son and seventh child of the revered Meezan Hajiar and Rahmath Umma. His life has been deeply shaped by the values of heritage, responsibility, and community from an early age.

He began his education at Matale Baptist Mission School (BMS) and St. Thomas's College, Matale, before continuing his secondary studies at Trinity College, Kandy. He embarked on a career path that mirrored his father's roots in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and service.

At just 18, Ziaudeen stepped up to taking charge of Meezan Hardware Stores showcasing a level of discipline and maturity well beyond his age. His early immersion in business would lay the groundwork for decades of dedicated leadership. He later became a proprietary planter continuing the family's contribution in the tea industry.

His commitment extends beyond the family estate to community development and social service. A former member of both the Lions Club and the Matale Sports Club in his younger days. Later he has been active in community service, serving on the Board of Trustees of the Matale Jummah Mosque (including as President and Advisor), and remains an active member of both

the Ankumbura and Matale Hospital Committees, contributing to and advocating for improved local healthcare services.

In 1987, Ziaudeen married Faheema Bakeer Markar, daughter of the late M.A. Bakeer Markar, former Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament. Together, they built a life grounded in shared values of compassion, humility, and public spirit. He is a proud father to Ziani Mohideen who is married to Fadhil Bakeer Markar. His family has since grown with the arrival of his two beloved grandsons, Thalha and Thaha, whose presence brings joy and laughter.

### **IHITHISHAM MEEZAN MOHIDEEN**

Ihithisham Meezan Mohideen, the eighth child of Meezan Hajiar was born on 25th December 1956 in Ancoombra. His early life was shaped by discipline, tradition, and the strength of a family renowned for its integrity and business acumen. Growing up in a large household, he learnt the values of unity, patience, and principles of hard work that would later become his greatest assets.

He received his education at Trinity College, Kandy, where a love for learning and leadership began to take root. However, at the age of 17, Ihithisham made a defining choice: he left formal education to step into the real world. His ambitions lay not in classrooms, but in continuing the legacy his family had built and confronting the trials that lay ahead.

On 1st January 1974, he took his first independent step by planting at Ancoombra Estate. It marked the beginning of a journey built from the soil up. But fate intervened. On 21st August 1974, the Land Reform Commission (LRC) took over all of his family's properties, a devastating blow that shook their identity, livelihood, and faith in the system.

On 10th June 1975, he took over Meezan Hardware, under his leadership, it became the cornerstone for rebuilding what had been unjustly taken. Ihithisham had been entrusted with Power of Attorney by his family members to handle Land Reform Commission (LRC) related matters, a responsibility both humbling and immense. His fight became one of perseverance, navigating government offices, writing letters, and attending court hearings all in pursuit of justice and reclamation.

On 1st January 1986, he successfully reclaimed the Nagalla Estate from the LRC. It was more than a legal victory. It was a powerful affirmation that what is lost can be regained through sheer will and determination. Building on this momentum, Ihithisham took another bold step on 21st November 1989, when he met President Ranasinghe Premadasa to advocate for the return of Ancoombra, armed with a letter written by Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake to his father, he framed his appeal not merely in political terms but as a

matter of history and legacy, a strategy that earned him respect and, ultimately, a presidential signature.

In fulfilling his father's wish, a substantial portion of the recovered wealth was allocated to Dharul Uloom Al Meezanniyyah including Forty shops he took over from the LRC. By 1992, the college was fully operational.

His passion for practical shooting led to the founding of the Hill Country Shooting Club in Kandy in 1999. What began as a personal hobby evolved into Sri Lanka's premier shooting range, a symbol of discipline and national achievement.

In 2002, he reclaimed the Hatale Tea Garden now considered the finest estate in the district. With Ancoombra, Nagalla, and Hatale all restored under his stewardship, these properties came to represent not only land but legacy, resilience, and revival.

He married Faseeha Bakeer Markar on 16th December 1987, daughter of the late M.A. Bakeer Markar, former Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament bringing a new sense of balance and strength into his life. Ihithisham is the proud father of three sons: Ijaz, Imran, and Iszhaq. His daughters-in-law, Amana and Amnah, are cherished members of their growing family. He is also a devoted grandfather to young Iyad.

On 13th February 2004, he was appointed Justice of the

Peace. In 2006, he was honored with the Deshabhimani title. He currently oversees eight companies under the Meezan Group.

Today, he serves as the President of the Matale Town Jummah Mosque and has been the President of Dharul Uloom Almeezaniyyah Arabic College since its inception in 1992, a role he continues to hold to this day. His journey has come full circle from a young man fighting for his family home, to a community leader building institutions that uplift others. His gold medal, awarded in December 2006 as Best Entrepreneur of the Central Province, is a symbol not only of personal achievement, but of the collective belief in his vision and effort.

Ihithisham's life is not a story of luck, but of relentless effort of rising each time it would have been easier to fall. To the next generation, his journey stands as a guide: fight for what is rightfully yours, and always give back more than you take.

#### SITHY AYESHA RAUFA

Sithy Ayesha Raufa, the ninth child of Meezan Haajiar. Graceful and dignified, she married Mohamed Unaiz and together they built a life rooted in mutual respect and strong family values. Ayesha was a pathfinder, largely unintimidated by the world at large she travelled much and has always been enterprising.

#### SHAFEE MOHIDEEN

Born on the 20th of January, 1960, Shafee Mohideen is the tenth child of Meezan Haajiar. A proud graduate of Trinity College, Kandy, he pursued a successful path in the commodity trade. He married Valli Mohideen, and together they were blessed with a son, Akeil. Shafee is admired for his business acumen and sense of responsibility.

#### KATHIM MOHIDEEN

The eleventh child of Meezan Haajiar and the male twin of Kathima. His time with the family was brief, but his memory remains deeply cherished by those who knew and loved him.

#### SITHI KATHIMA MOHIDEEN

Born on the 13th of December, is the twelfth child of Meezan Haajiar. She married Mohamed Azmi Mohamed Ibrahim and together, they raised three children with love and care: Akeed, Amna & Atheek. Their family now includes her loving daughter-in-law Phoebe. Kathima is known for her strength, maternal devotion and for her studiousness. She carried on this attitude throughout life, constantly learning and instilling a strong love for knowledge in her children. She instinctively worries about the health of all in the family. It's no surprise that her daughter went on to become the first doctor in the Meezan family.

### **IZZATH THAMEEMA MOHIDEEN**

Izzath Thameema is the thirteenth child of Meezan Haajiar. Married to Yusuf Ali in 1982 with whom she had Fathima Izra. She is the proud grandmother of Anah Imaan and Mother in law of Afker. Warmly known as 'Ijamama' to many of the younger generation, she has a special place in their hearts for her hospitality and way of bringing everyone together for a night of joy and laughter.

### **FAUZUL HINAYA MOHIDEEN**

Fauzul Hinaya Mohideen, the youngest of Meezan Haajiar's children, was born on 3rd July 1964. She married Zacky Mohamed Shariff, and together they created a warm, nurturing home. They are blessed with three children: Shabeer, Arshad, and Maryam. Their family later grew to include daughter-in-law Mariam, whose presence brought even more love and joy into their lives.

As the youngest of her siblings, Hinaya serves as a vibrant bridge between generations, bringing people together with her playful spirit, infectious humor, and boundless joy.

### **M.M.A. CADER MOHIDEEN**

Born on the 28th of July, 1949, M.M.A. Cader Mohideen received his early education at St. Thomas' College, Matale, upholding the family's tradition of academic excellence. He married Zareena Begam, and together they were blessed with three children: Farlin, Shermila, and Inticab. His family grew further with his son-in-law, Shareej Mohamed, and beloved grandchildren: Sabique, Aara, Aahil and Arhaan.

A man of unwavering integrity, Cader Mohideen passed away on the 12th of May 2000. His life remains a lasting example of devotion and leadership within the family.

### **M.M. ABDUL SATHAR**

Born on the 10th of May 1951, M.M. Abdul Sathar was known for his generous spirit and steadfast values. Respected for his sincerity and humility, he passed away on the 28th of March 2011. His memory is held dear by those who loved him and by all who were touched by his kindness.

### **M.M.A. HAMEED MOHIDEEN**

M.M.A. Hameed Mohideen was born on the 19th of January 1954, and studied at St. Thomas' College, Matale. Calm and contemplative, he was known for his thoughtful nature and respectful demeanor. Hameed lived a life anchored in dignity and family tradition, earning the admiration of many.

### **FAZILATH UMMA**

Born on the 17th of February 1958, Fazilath Umma was celebrated for her nurturing heart and warmth. She passed away on the 12th of October 2021. Her compassionate spirit and the love she shared continue to resonate in the hearts of those who knew her.

### **M.M.A. NAZEEM MOHIDEEN**

M.M.A. Nazeem Mohideen was born on the 11th of September 1959. A man of principle and poise, he is married to Saliheen Fathima Fazliya. They are blessed with three children: Milhan, Nameera, and Mumeen. Nazeem is known for his thoughtful outlook and balanced way of life, reflecting the ethical foundation passed down through generations.

### **SITHTHI ARIFA**

Siththi Arifa was born on the 22nd of July 1960. She is cherished for her gentle demeanor and enduring loyalty to her family. Quietly supportive and deeply kind, she remains a pillar of love and unity among her siblings.

# A LEGACY TESTED

The passing of Meezan Hajiar marked not the end of his journey, but the beginning of a new chapter in the legacy he left behind. His eldest son, Mahroof Mohideen, only twenty years old at the time, stepped forward to manage the family's estates in Matale and shoulder the responsibility of supporting his mother and younger siblings. In the years that followed, Mahroof expanded the family's holdings, acquiring the 1,907-acre Yataderiya Estate in the Kegalle District, an ambitious move that reflected the entrepreneurial spirit inherited from his father.

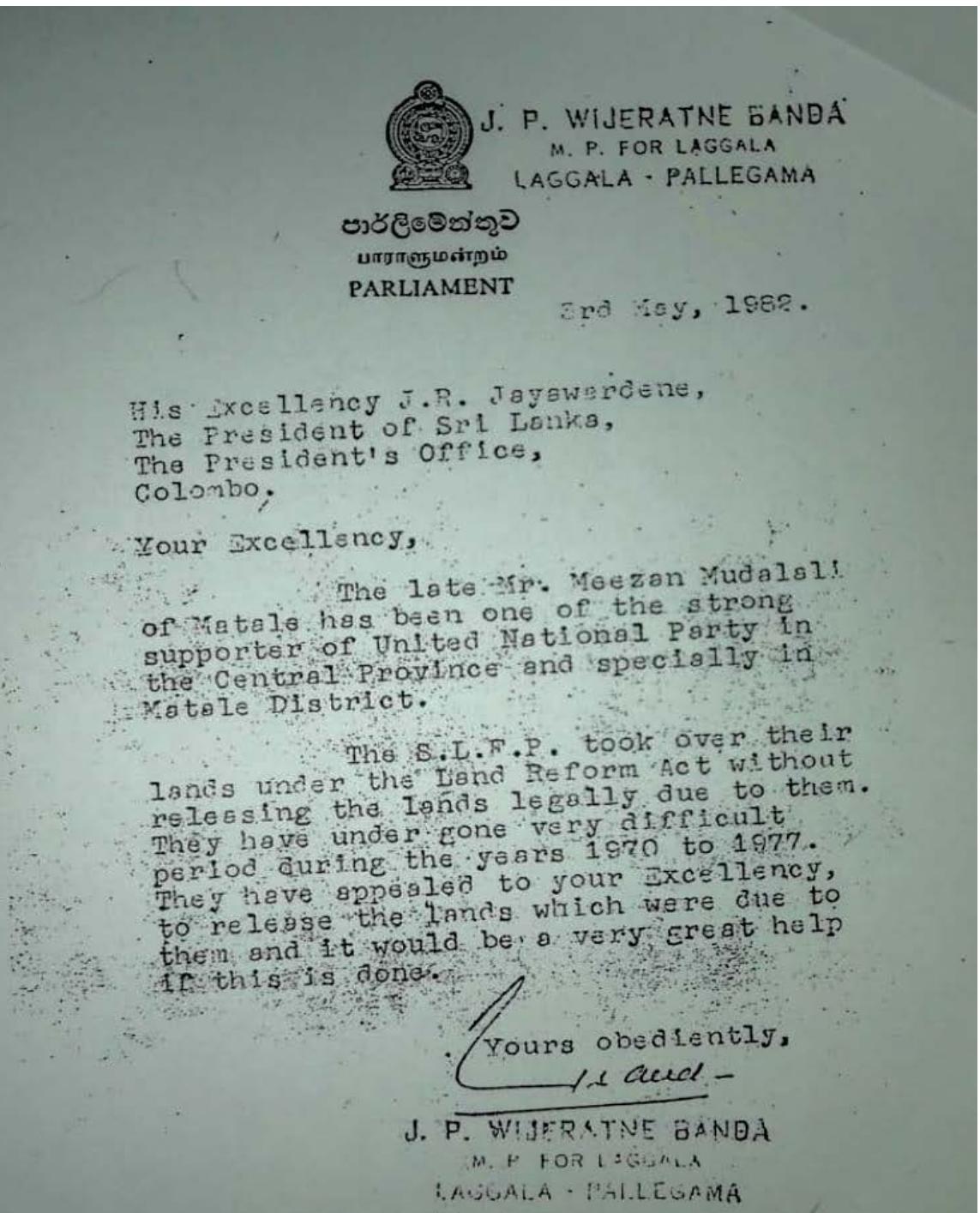
By 1973, Mahroof turned to pursue his own business interests, entrusting the estate's management to his younger brothers. Azhar took over the day-to-day operations of the estate, while Ziaudeen assumed responsibility for Hangarankande Estate. Ihithisham oversaw the Ancoombra Estate, continuing the family's involvement in tea plantations with dedication and resolve.

However, the family's stewardship of these lands was soon met with a sudden and harsh turn. On 21st August 1974, the government enacted sweeping land reforms, under which more than 3,200 acres of the family's estates, built painstakingly over decades, were acquired by the state. The blow was not merely economic but deeply personal, a dismantling of a lifetime of vision and sacrifice.

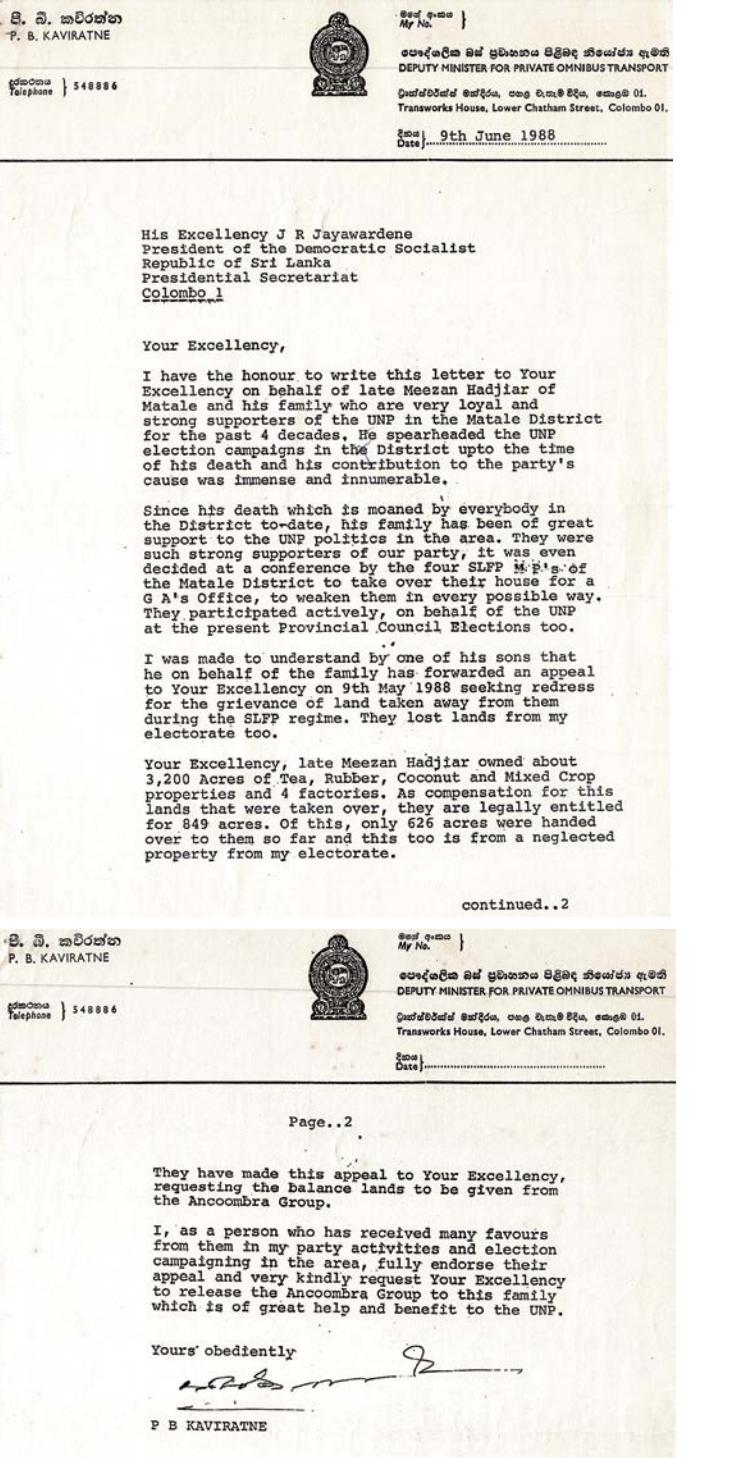
ng to this hardship was the political victimization family faced during this time. Meezan Hajiar, spected United National Party stalwart, was numously targeted for his affiliations. In a cularly cruel move, the government gazetted family home in Matale to be converted into a sional Revenue Officer's (DRO) office, effectively tening to leave the family homeless. It was only ugh the intervention of Hon. T. B. Tennekoon, and etermined negotiation of Ihithisham Meezan, that ome was ultimately retained.

At the time, politicians and well-wishers, urged government to recognize the injustice done to family of a man who had contributed so much to nation. Yet, for the most part, their appeals went unheeded.

s Ihithisham Meezan, who emerged as the family's advocate during this turbulent period. Between 1981 and 1986, after years of bureaucratic struggle, managed to reclaim a small portion of the family's estate, 918 acres. Yet even this partial restitution came in the form of the Nagala Estate, a dry, rocky tract on the outer borders of the Matale District, largely infertile and far from the lush plantations Meezan Hajiar once owned.



#### ▲ Letter to the President by Mr. Wijayrathna Banda.



▲ Letter to the President by Mr. P.B. Kaviratne

Undeterred, Ihithisham pressed on, and with the formal approval of President Ranasinghe Premadasa, secured the rightful exchange of 375 acres of Nagala for the Ancoombra Estate. Though Ancoombra had fallen into a state of disrepair, it would soon emerge as the family's most prosperous holding. A further 313 acres of Nagala Estate were exchanged for Hatale Estate in Panwila.

It was during this chapter of loss and quiet perseverance that a wise and pious elder from Galhinna, Ismail Hajji, reflected on the family's struggle with a verse from the Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf (18:82):

"And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was a treasure that belonged to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure as a mercy from Him..."

To him, this verse was not merely allegorical, but a divine reflection of the Meezan family's fate, protected through faith and returned to them by decree, at the appointed time.

Today, a century since Meezan Hajiar first began his business, the Ancoombra and Hatale Tea Estates stand tall as two of the most renowned and respected producers of tea in the region. Together, they form the heart of Meezan Plantations, now one of the largest and most reputed tea producers in the Central Province.



▲ Ancoombra Tea Factory (2025)

Their success is not only a tribute to hard work and perseverance, but also a profound testament to a father's legacy, tested by time, redeemed by faith, and carried forward by the strength of his children.

This proud legacy is upheld and guided by his sons Ziaudeen and Ihithisham, along with his grandsons Shafraz and Ijaz, who continue to nurture and expand the plantations with the same dedication and vision that defined Meezan Hajiar's remarkable journey.



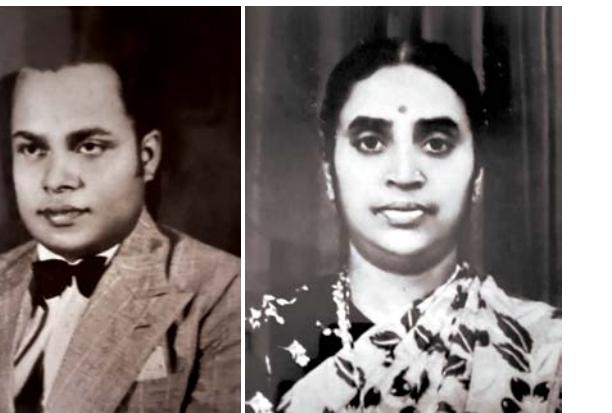
▲ Hatale Tea factory (2025)

## AFTERWORD - GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO STOOD BESIDE MEEZAN HAJIAR: FRIENDS AND FAITHFUL WHO JOURNEYED WITH HIM

Though their names have not appeared in the preceding chapters, these men and women were part of the quiet fabric of Meezan Hajiar's life. They shared in his burdens and his joys, stood with him in moments of challenge and change, and offered the steadfast friendship that so often works unseen. What follows are brief portraits of some companions whose presence, though not recorded in the main narrative, remains an enduring part of his story.

### DR. ARUMUGAM RAJAIYA & MRS. RASAMMA RAMASAMI

A respected physician at Matale Hospital, was also closely connected to the Meezan family through his mother-in-law, Rasamma Ramasami. Rasamma, a warm and familiar presence in their lives, was



a frequent visitor to the Meezan household and maintained a particularly strong friendship with Rahumath Umma, even after Meezan Hajiar's passing. During this period, Dr. Rajaiya's son was studying at Royal College in Colombo. Recognizing the depth of their familial connection and long-standing goodwill, Meezan Hajiar allocated two shares of the Wariyapola Estate to Mrs. Rasamma and three shares to Dr. Rajaiya. This act of generosity, grounded in affection and respect, continues to be remembered, with their family still retaining ownership of their share in the estate.

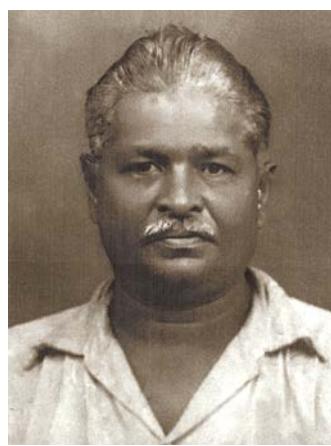
### H.M.M. ISMAIL

Among those who worked closely with Meezan Hajiar was H.M.M. Ismail, his nephew. Ismail joined Meezan & Company in the 1950s, briefly stepped away in 1961, and returned in 1964 to take on a central administrative role. He served as Secretary of Meezan Estates Limited, overseeing its operations with admirable diligence, honesty, and responsibility. His commitment to the family's vision never faltered. His life ended with spiritual dignity, he passed away in Makkah while on pilgrimage, a fitting closure for a man of quiet faith and dedicated service.



### NAGOOR ADUMAI (ADUMAKAKKA)

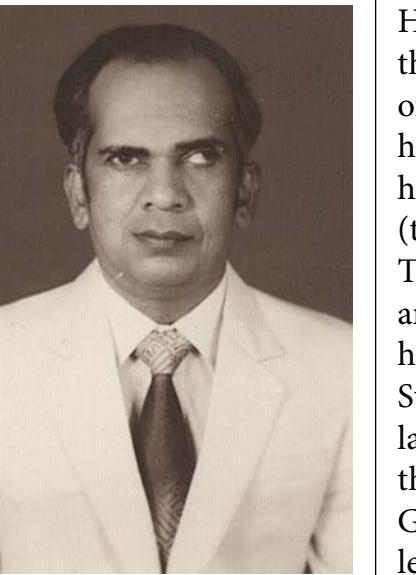
A man known for his unwavering dependability, he became a trusted companion during both routine and critical times. His toughness, loyalty, and unflinching presence made him a pillar of support for Meezan Hajiar. Whether standing watch during times of uncertainty or accompanying Hajiar



on hunting trips deep into the jungles of Ambana, Adumakkakka was always close by, calm, watchful, and resolute. His name became synonymous with steadfastness and courage.

### **ABU AYOOBUL ANSAARY**

Arriving in Matale in 1958, Abu Ayoobul Ansaary brought with him a blend of intelligence and professionalism. As the accountant of Meezan Estates Limited, he handled income tax affairs and financial matters with precision and competence. So trusted was he that Meezan Hajiar offered him residence at the Wariyapola house (formerly BMC), a mark of deep confidence and respect. His tenure with the company extended until 1973.



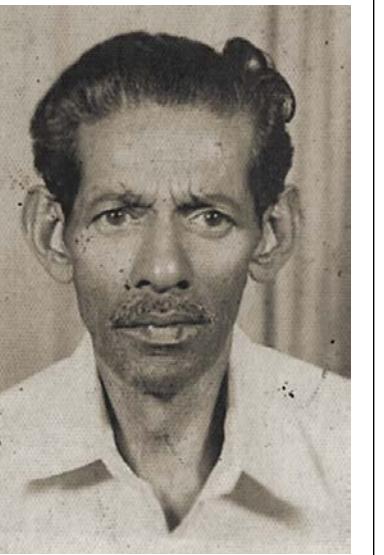
### **MR. K. M. M AMEER**

His family were among the original shareholders of the Wariyapola Estate, he began his career humbly as a creeper, (trainee planter). Through commitment and perseverance, he rose to become Superintendent and later the Manager of the entire Wariyapola Group. Under his leadership, the estate saw a period of disciplined growth and stability. During his stewardship, Meezan Hajiar himself stayed briefly at the Wariyapola bungalow. Mr. Ameer remained a trusted figure in Hajiar's ventures for many years, remembered for his integrity and unwavering dedication. He passed away on the 4th August 2023, leaving behind a legacy of principled service.



### **OMERDEEN SHAHABDEEN (SABU)**

Meezan Hajiar's personal driver, served with unwavering loyalty from the 1950s through the 1970s. He accompanied Hajiar on countless journeys across the country, earning his deep trust through years of devoted service and quiet dependability. More than a chauffeur, Sabu became a trusted presence in the family home, even teaching the children how to drive. He passed away in 1990 and is fondly remembered for his steadfast service and his dignified role in both the family and the company.



### **KUNJI MARIKKAR MOHAMED (MOHAMED KAAKA)**

A devoted and long-serving staff member of Indian origin, he arrived in Sri Lanka in 1920 at the age of nine, starting his working life at Liptons in Colombo. Ten years later, he joined Meezan & Company in 1931 and remained in service until the nationalisation of the estates in 1974. His loyalty spanned decades, leaving an indelible mark on the memory of those he served.



**R. THANGAWEL CHETTIAR  
(RTC)**



He was a close and trusted friend whose bond with Meezan Hajiar was deep and enduring. When word of Hajiar's passing reached him, R.T. Chettiar was among the very first to arrive at the family home, a touching gesture indicative of the depth of their friendship and the profound mutual respect they shared.

**BADURDEEN IZZADEEN**



The Father of Ad'ham (former Deputy Mayor of Matale), was another long-time companion of Meezan Hajiar. Their friendship was rooted in community, mutual trust, and shared values, and stood as a reflection of the many strong, respectful relationships Hajiar cultivated over the course of his life.

**HASAN ABDUL CADER**



A cherished friend and fellow community member, ran a modest coconut business opposite the mosque. After prayers, Meezan Hajiar would often visit his shop for tea and conversation—moments of warmth and ease that spoke volumes about the depth of their bond. It was in these simple, sincere encounters that the richness of their friendship found its purest expression.



▲ Meezan Hajiar in the company of his closest and dearest friends Mr. Muktar (Renown), Nagoor Meera , Dr. Jaid.



## EPILOGUE – A NAME THAT STILL ECHOES

Meezan Hajiar's story does not end with his passing, nor with the closing of these pages. It lives on—in the schools he built, in the lives he uplifted, in the soil of the lands he cultivated, and in the hearts of his children and grandchildren who continue to walk in his footsteps. His life was not simply one of success or generosity, but one of conviction: a quiet insistence that faith, integrity, and service to others are not optional values, but the very essence of what it means to live well. In a time when legacies are often measured in headlines and wealth, Meezan Hajiar's legacy speaks in subtler tones—in the soft prayers whispered for him across decades, in the memories passed down at family

gatherings, and in the enduring gratitude of a town that once paused to grieve his loss. His life was a bridge between tradition and modernity, village and city, spirituality and service.

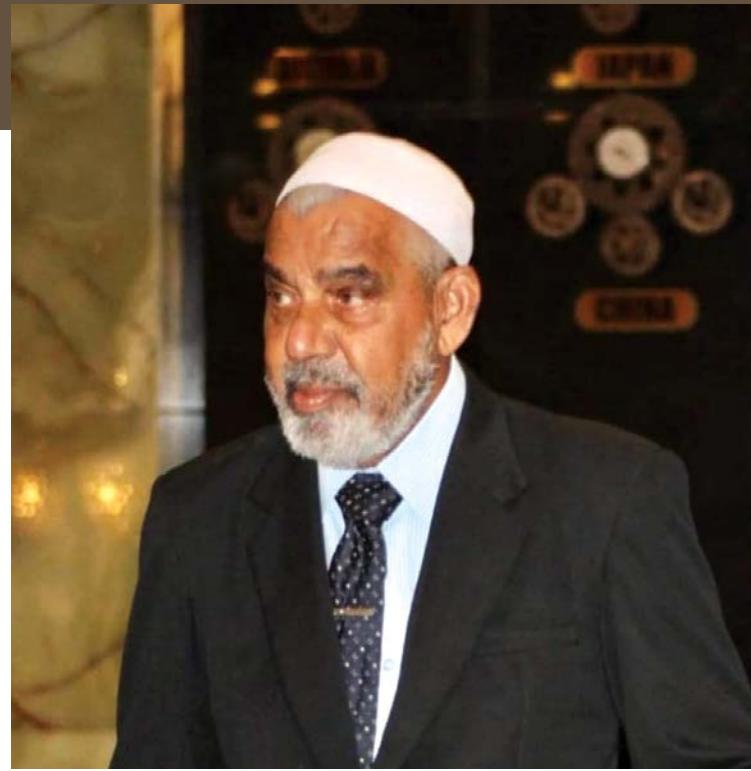
To tell his story is to remind ourselves of what is possible when one life is lived with purpose. And so the story does not end—it continues, in the next generation, and the next. May it always do so, *inshā' Allāh*.

May Allah forgive his shortcomings, elevate his rank among the righteous, and allow his legacy to be a *ṣadaqah jāriyah* that benefits him until the end of time. Āmīn.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The late Mr. Abdul Azeez Mohamed Fuaji (1941–2023) was a distinguished educator, scholar, and former Principal of Zahira College, Matale. Born on 20th September 1941, he began his early education in Tamil medium in Matale before continuing his secondary studies in English at Zahira College, where he would later serve as principal. He entered the University of Peradeniya in 1960, reading Tamil, History, and Economics, and went on to serve in the teaching profession from 1963 until his retirement in 1990. He later joined the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) at the University of Peradeniya.

Mr. Fuaji was a prolific writer and translator. His two seminal works, *The History of Tamils in Matale* and *The History of the Muslims in Matale*, were published by the State Department. He also translated numerous works from English to Tamil, including Dr. Weeramantry's *Islamic Law*. In recognition of his contributions to literature and scholarship, he was honoured with a state literary award.



Mr. Fuaji was the original author of the initial draft of this book. With his characteristic dedication to documenting history and culture, he laid the foundational narrative with great care. Sadly, he passed away before the manuscript could be completed.

Known for his deep sense of humility and humanity, Mr. Fuaji remains remembered as a model teacher and a man of quiet yet enduring influence.

This book on the life and legacy of Meezan Hajiar was originally authored by Late A A M Fuaji, whose pioneering effort laid the foundation for this work. We express our deep gratitude for this invaluable contribution.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Mohammed Abdulhai Azhar, Gavin Ronald Howson, Shafraz Meezan, Ijaz Meezan, Shabeer Zacky, Ihithisham Meezan Mohideen and Ziaudeen Ahamed Mohideen for their collective efforts in rewriting, expanding, and refining this work.

We are also grateful to everyone who shared their memories, offered documents, and provided guidance and support throughout this process.

*The Legacy of*  
**MEEZAN**  
H A J I A R

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This biography presents an expansive and meticulously researched account of the life and legacy of Meezan Hajiar, one of Matale's most respected merchants, community leaders, and visionaries. Beginning with his humble origins in Kurugoda and tracing his rise from a twelve-year-old betel trader to the founder of Meezan & Company, the book offers a richly detailed narrative grounded in historical context, personal anecdotes, and oral traditions.

Through its careful documentation of his fairness in trade, his deep sense of social responsibility, and his enduring relationships across ethnic and religious boundaries, the work reveals a man whose influence resonated far beyond commerce. The chapters on Ambana capture his transformative agricultural ventures, his commitment to uplifting rural communities, and the quiet philanthropy that defined his character. Equally compelling is the account of the educational legacy he envisioned, which was later realized by his sons in the establishment of the Meezaniyyah Institute, now a nationally recognized centre of Islamic and general learning.

Combining family recollections, community memories, and historical records, this biography stands as both a tribute and an authoritative chronicle. It preserves the story of a man whose integrity, humility, and vision shaped generations, offering readers an enduring testament to the values by which Meezan Hajiar lived, led, and served.

*~ Faisz Mustapha PC*

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