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‘We are ‘right sizing’ the Army to build a ‘capacity based’ military in Sri Lanka’ – Lt. Gen. Mahesh Senanayake. No question of ‘down sizing’ it



OBA President Bhuminda Karunatilake presenting a souvenir as a token of appreciation to Army Commander Mahesh Senanayake in recognition of his services to the nation. (Pic by Sisira Maddumage)

by Sujeeva Nivunhella in London

Army Commander Lieutenant General Mahesh Senanayake was felicitated in London by Ananda College old boys headed by its President Bhuminda Karunatilake last week.

Senanayake was in London on a private visit at the invitation of Sri Lanka Ex-Service Persons Association in the UK. The ceremony was held at the Thistle Hotel in Heathrow and was attended by both Ananda and Nalanda College old boys and well wishers.

In his address, Senanayake said that he is in this position today thanks to his Alma Mater and especially his principal, the late Col. G. W. Rajapakse.

Col. Rajapakse had the talent to identify students’ strengths and it was he who suggested that Senanayake should join the Army. "I was the only member of the school Police Cadet unit to join the Army and become the Commander, while all the others joined the Army by becoming members of the Army Cadet unit of the school", he recalled.

He thanked two Anandians, Major-General Jagath Alwis and Col. Pradeep Jayasooriya, who joined the Army with him for the support they gave him to become the batch top.

"Whatever some people say, I can assure that there will be no resurgence of terrorism in Sri Lanka. General Denzil Kobbekaduwa always said took up the position tha the war should not be handed down to the next generation and that is exactly what the army did", Senanayake noted.

"Sri Lanka is the only country where no bombs exploded or gunshots fired in the name of terrorism after terrorists were defeated because we had a strategy to deal with it. We have rehabilitated captured LTTE soldiers before reintegrating them into society", the Army chief said.

"After the war, we are in the process of "right sizing" the Army, and there is no question of "down sizing" it. That's called a "capacity based" Army. We had a "threat based" Army at the time of the war. Now the threat is not terrorism. Floods, landslides, drug abuse among youth and illegal deforestation have become our key threats. Now that the war is over we, want soldiers to take up bigger projects. We have already started restoration of old tanks and reservoirs", Senanayake underscored.

There was a much enthusiasm among Sri Lankans living in the UK to meet the Commander. On the day he arrived, the first engagement was to visit the London Buddhist Vihara.

Chief Sanga Nayake of Great Britain and Head of London Buddhist Vihara, Ven. Bogoda Seelawimala thera and resident monks, Ven. Konwewe Ariyaratana and Ven. Kalugamuwe Kassapa theras chanted Pirith to bless the Commander.

Ven. Seelawimala commended the service the Commander has rendered to the nation and blessed him with strength and long life to continue the work for the betterment of the country.

Senanayake also attended a meeting organised by the British Sri Lankan Forum at the temple and explained the current role of the Army as the war is over. He also answered questions from the audience.

The Army Commander was interviewed by the BBC Sinhala Service. He visited Amaravathi Buddhist Monastery in Hemel Hempstead in the outskirts of London on January 1.

He was also met by Janahanda Foundation members at the Sri Lanka High Commission premises. During the meeting, they handed over 1,700 English books to be donated to the Jaffna library.

The Army Commander's program was coordinated by Brigadier Priyankara Fernando of the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.