

# Sri Lanka: The SLPP Attack On GotaGoGama: a Timeline

Tuesday 17 May 2022, by [PERIYAPPERUMA Nisal](#), [WIJERATNE Yudhanjaya](#) (Date first published: 9 May 2022).

**A record of what happened on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 2022, told with images, video and the occasional map.**

## A few things to note

This is part one of a duo of articles. This explores the events leading up to the attack on GotaGoGama on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 2022. Part two, the aftermath, explores the events that immediately followed the attack.

Take time as a rough measure (plus or minus 5 minutes) unless we indicate it very precisely.

Names marked in red are people scheduled to appear on our dossiers project as a direct result of today's events. When ready, this line of text and the red names will be updated with links to each dossier.

Regarding names: we generally believe in the right to privacy. We also believe that right ends when you publicly attack someone, or when you're a public official involved in infringing the right of Sri Lankan citizens (such as the right to protest peacefully). Play stupid games, win stupid prizes.

Let's begin. Click the arrows behind each header to unfold the section.

## **Before 10:00 AM: The Pro-Mahinda Protest Behind Temple Trees**

Public figures in frame: Mahinda Kahandagama, Dilip Fernando

[NewsFirst picks up a pro-Mahinda gathering behind Temple Trees](#). Two notable people are in this footage: Mahinda Kahandagama (the red shirt: President of the SLPP-affiliated Colombo Municipal Councillors & Employees' Union), and Dilip Fernando (the guy with Mahinda's face tattooed on his chest: Private secretary to Milinda Rajapaksa, SLPP Chief Organiser Colombo 06).

## **10:00 AM+: The Call to Battle at Temple Trees**

Public figures in frame: Mahinda Rajapaksa, Pavithra Wanniarachchi, Johnston Fernando, Sanjeeva Edirimanna, Sanath Nishantha, Namal Rajapaksa, Mahinda Kahandagama.

Just before 10:00 AM, pro-Rajapaksa groups began gathering outside the rear entrance of Temple Trees, the official residence of the Prime Minister.

The gathering included staff from local government authorities led by the SLPP, and SLPP-affiliated unions. [NewsFirst, which started a livestream on Facebook at 9:47 AM, got a microphone in front of the gathering to ask them directly what they were on about:](#)

Mahinda Kandagama is also clearly visible here (see the 10:20 mark on the video). These groups then went into Temple Trees, where several former Ministers and SLPP Parliamentarians addressed them. As you can see, the gathering is pretty huge.

Immediately afterwards (going by the causality of the NewsFirst live feed), Mahinda Rajapaksa addressed the gathering.

A little after 11.33 AM, Johnston Fernando, SLPP MP from Kurunegala, was on the microphone. He very clearly incites the supporters, mentioning MainaGoGama by name. 'ඔබ ඔබ ඔබ!' he roars ('let's begin the battle!'). 'If the president can't do it... we'll clear out everything!'

"Cry 'Havoc!'," as Mark Antony says, in William Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar, "and let slip the dogs of war."

Next to Johnston, cheering on the destruction, is Sanjeeva Edirimanna, SLPP MP from the Kalutara district and a Namal Rajapaksa affiliate. Namal Rajapaksa is also in attendance. Here he is taking selfies with supporters amidst shouts of 'Let's go to Galle Face!'

Namal Rajapaksa would later retweet the same footage that he appears in above to claim that the SLPP meeting was peaceful and was 'hijacked by mobs with vested interests.'

This is countermanded by Johnston's decidedly anti-peace call to action above. It's also bunked by the appearance of this man: Sanath Nishantha, an SLPP MP who participates directly in the mob that came to GotaGoGama, and is on video doing so. Nishantha's Facebook page was broadcasting live from the location. Note the T-shirt: yellow, red, black.

On the screen, speaking in front of what looks like the same podium (note the dual-mic setup that Mahinda and Johnston both spoke in front of) is another SLPP MP, Pavithra Wanniarachchi.

Shortly afterward (see the 15:40 mark on the video below), a screaming mob filters out of Temple Trees, chanting "ඔබ ඔබ ඔබ, Galle Face ඔබ!" (This is the time to go / get to Galle Face!).

## **12:00 PM+: Attack on MainaGoGama**

**Public figures in frame: Nishantha Jayasinghe, Dilip Fernando, Pushpalal Kumarasinghe**

[Twitter video shared by AmanthaP](#) show the mob vaulting over barricades in front of Wonder Hotel (a bit past Temple Trees and the police, towards Kollupitiya) to go attack MainaGoGama.

This [photo above from Economynext](#) contains a precise timestamp - 12 PM. This mob then proceeds up the road to MainaGoGama. Here's footage below, seemingly recorded from the Temple Trees side, that captures the moment the mobs attacks MainaGoGama.

Here's NewsFirst footage of the attack:

A journalist is assaulted on the road behind Temple Trees. Video from NewsWire puts Dilip Fernando at the scene.

Multiple news outlets captured clear footage of a white-shirted man slapping a female protestor to the ground and located the event at MainaGoGama.

Social media users on our #AttackonGGG hashtag began tagging us in images identifying the man in question as Amitha Abeywickrama.

Amitha Abeywickrama appears to be a goon of little consequence. Shortly before he locked his Facebook profile, he did (inadvertently) provide us with great full-length photos of himself like below for comparison against his actions in the video. And yes, his Facebook cover image is of him meeting Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The second goon here (light blue T-shirt) has been ID'd as Nishantha Jayasinghe. Both Mahinda Rajapaksa's Facebook page and Dinamina pegs the name as 'නිශාන්ත ජයසිංහ රාජපක්ෂයාගේ සාමාන්‍ය සහකාර' - ie: [coordinating secretary to Mahinda Rajapaksa](#).

Somewhere in the middle of all this, Pushpalal Kumarasinghe, SLPP-affiliated Chairman of the Ambalangoda Provincial Council, attacked a priest near Temple Trees.

Footage from the [Mind Adventures Twitter account shows \(very clearly\)](#) people dismantling MainaGoGama and picking up metal rods and planks to use as weapons.

This mob then marches towards GotaGoGama.

### 12:30 PM+: The March Towards Galle Face Roundabout

Public figures in frame: Sanath Nishantha

The earliest footage we have was archived by the [Instagram page 'The Sri Lankan Struggle'](#) as it [made the rounds on WhatsApp](#). This shows police standing by as the pro-Rajapaksa mob marches on Galle Face. In this video, the person holding the camera questions a police officer as to why they're not stopping the mob. The officer's response is essentially 'we can't'.

This second video is from the Galle Face roundabout: in this, the mob has not yet reached this location. On camera, Senior Deputy Inspector-General Deshabandu Tennakoon tells GotaGoGama and MainaGoGama protestors to 'go inside' - meaning towards GotaGoGama - and promises to stop the mob. In the background, a water canon rolls up and the police begin to form a cordon just in front of Galle Face roundabout.

At 12.33 PM (going by the Derana timestamp), SLPP MP Sanath Nishantha is in front of the cordon. Remember that yellow T-shirt?

## 12:43 PM+: The Police Let the Mob Through at Galle Face

Public figures in frame: Sanath Nishantha

This is where the NewsFirst livestream comes in. At 12:40 PM (39:37 on the livestream) they have a camera right up against this second police cordon - on the mob side. We can clearly hear a man screaming “ barriers barriers! Barriers barriers! rifle! rifle! petrol! petrol!”

(We want Gotabhaya! We want Mahinda! Break the barriers! Ask for their rifles! Kill them! Kill! We won't leave anyone at GotaGama [alive]! We've waited long enough! Throw petrol on them!)

Despite the severity of these threats and the size of the crowd, the police cordon folds almost instantly. Derana footage shows the mob pressing against the riot shields for less than a minute before the police line caves in on one side.

To understand how token this attempt is, watch this video captured [second from a higher vantage point](#). It shows an unbelievably token attempt; a thin, two-line of police form and melt away almost

instantly in front of the mob. Also in attendance: not one, but two water cannons (unused) and police in heavy riot gear (who do nothing).

The mob runs immediately through. Here's a trimmed clip that covers what we spoke of above:

The police can be seen running back and attempting to form a second cordon just in front of the Galle Face bus halt. Despite the equipment being around, no water canon or tear gas is used: instead the cops link hands, again, yet another token cordon that melts practically instantly.

The next clip is this. Our best guess is around 12:46. You can clearly see the police falling back to form their cordon in front of the mobs on the road - but Galle Face is completely open from the side. As with the first cordon, the mobs run right through.

The image below appears to show Sanath Nishantha walking in towards GotaGoGama in apparent conversation with SDIG Deshabandu Tennakoon - the same officer who pledged to stop the mobs at the Galle Face roundabout.

[NewsWire confirms that this was, indeed, Sanath Nishantha](#) and SDIG Deshabandu Tennakoon.

## **The Attack on GotaGoGama**

Public figures in frame: Sanath Nishantha

The mob immediately attacked GotaGoGama on both sides, with the police making absolutely minimal effort to stop them. The police attempt a third cordon on the road, again completely neglecting the sides, which let the mob attack the GotaGoGama tents. Footage from Derana lets us see the attack clearly.

The art gallery and the memorial to the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks are one of the first to fall.

Police pass pro-Rajapaksa mobs attacking tents without even a token attempt to stop them (see 05:03).

Thirty seconds later in the video, multiple tents are on fire.

Water cannon finally begins firing. They aim into the already-ruined seaside facade of GotaGoGama. One water cannon truck briefly attacks another water cannon truck, apparently by accident.

At the midpoint of the video (see 7:55 on) you see the pro-Rajapaksa group viciously attacking a person on the road; at this point anti-government protestors have geared up and are entering the scene to counterattack. NewsFirst video captures Sanath Nishantha being led away from the site of the attack (see 1:24 on the video below).

[This live feed from Webnews.lk started at 12:04 and gives a handheld view of the mob tearing into GotaGoGama](#). At around 46:00 (that's 12:50) the police attempt the third cordon. At around 52:13 (that's 12:58 PM) you can hear the telltale sound of a tear gas cannon; the journalist recording this comments that water cannon have already been fired.

Police officers in heavy riot gear (padding, gas masks, the works) float in and out of the frame, again doing almost nothing.

Somewhere around this time, Sajith Premadasa attempts to make an entrance and is beaten off. RIP

windshield.

By this time, anti-Rajapaksa mobs have begun to form and are hunting Rajapaksa supporters. The police seem to be trying to prevent them from attacking the SLPP mob.

In total, from mob rush to tear gas, we estimate the attack on GotaGoGama lasted around 10 minutes. Four police cordons have mock-formed and run away; ironic, given that the firepower available to the police at each cordon point far exceeded what was available to the ultimate defenders of GotaGoGama.

By 1.51, lawyers had formed a human barrier between GotaGoGama and the police (this timestamping possible because of EconomyNext's image below).

### **In conclusion**

This is what you already know, but we'll say it anyway.

The police were compromised. In comparison to their recent tactics, not only did they do the bare minimum towards preventing the destruction of a peaceful protest, an SDIG is seen conversing with Sanath Nishantha as a mob sets fire to tents a few feet ahead.

Namal Rajapaksa claimed that their meeting had been hijacked by mobs with vested interests, and that most of the violence was directed towards SLPP supporters.

This is clearly a big fat lie. Johnston Fernando openly incites battle, at the podium, in the meeting. Sanath Nishantha is present throughout the affair (from meeting to the GotaGoGama attacks). There is the presence of Dilip Fernando, the video of Nishantha Jayasinghe assaulting a woman, and the presence of SLPP organisers and pro-SLPP union leaders throughout.

Sources have noted that Samanlal Fernando, the SLPP-affiliated Mayor of Moratuwa, was also heavily involved. However, we have not been able to find photo or video documentation of his involvement. There's also partial ID on Milan Jayathilaka, SLPP MP from Gampaha. We say partial, because we've attempted to trace the origin of these screenshots and couldn't find a higher-definition source.

The mob with vested interests here was clearly the SLPP.

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**P.S.**

Watchdog

<https://longform.watchdog.team/observations/the-slpp-attack-on-gotagogama-a-timeline>