



# British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

18<sup>th</sup> of January 2024

## **BRITISH TAMILS FORUM CELEBRATED “THAI PONGAL” AND TAMIL HERITAGE IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT**

The British Tamils Forum (BTF) celebrated Thai Pongal and Tamil Heritage month in the British Parliament on Monday, 15 January 2024.

Upon receiving overwhelming support from the British Tamil community including youth, charities, and business entrepreneurs, the demand for attending the celebration was exceptionally high, and the BTF had to have the celebration in two different halls, CPA Room and the Churchill Room in the UK Parliament to accommodate attendees for the event.

The BTF received unparalleled support from cross-party Parliamentarians from Conservative, Labour, LibDem, SNP and DUP in the function. The BTF conveys its sincere gratitude to all the Parliamentarians for facilitating and participating in the hugely successful event.

Several Members of Parliament, Mayors, Councilors and Lord John Mann participated in the event and shared their greetings and wishes with the Tamil people while enjoying the Tamil cultural celebration and traditional food. While appreciating and congratulating Tamil people for their high-spirited passion for their heritage and language, majority of them did not fail to recall the atrocities that Tamil people faced during the genocidal war in Sri Lanka. The majority pledged their continued support for justice for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and paved the way for a permanent political solution for Tamil people in Sri Lanka to live in peace and harmony with equal rights.

The celebration was exquisite and grand. Folk dances, plays, and musical performances were presented by several beautifully and colourfully dressed children of various ages from different parts of the United Kingdom. These children were honoured with certificates as a token of appreciation for the passion of their own heritage. The BTF sincerely offers their gratitude to the parents and teachers for their diligence and support.

The BTF took this opportunity to honour the charities - Serendip Children's Homes, The Federation of Saiva (Hindu) temples UK and Ray of Hope People appreciating their devoted volunteering work to the community.

A video presentation depicting “Tamil Heritage” was played as a part of the event.

**The following members of Parliament, Mayors, Councilors, Lord and other dignitaries participated in the event:**

**Martyn Day - MP for Linlithgow and East Falkirk, Former Shadow SNP Spokesperson for Health and Social Care in the House of Commons**

Matyn in his speech said “As you celebrate Thai Pongal, it is wonderful to see so many of you here and to see the rich culture and heritage on display. As you know I stand with you on truth, justice and self-determination”.



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**The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers – MP for Chipping Barnet, Vice Chair of APPG for Tamils, Immense contributor to the BTF on international advocacy.**

Being a regular advocate on Tamil peoples' plight, Theresa Villiers wished Tamil people, including those in Sri Lanka, for a bright future this Thai Pongal day. Further, by referring to the Tamil culture being older than the European culture and praising the British Tamils in the NHS and other industries expressed her sadness and anger on seeing the Sri Lankan state trying to walk away from its obligations of the UNHRC resolutions.

**Steve Tuckwell – MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip**

Steve Tuckwell said Thai Pongal celebration was a highlight of his day, praising Tamil people's contributions to the United Kingdom.

**Gareth Thomas – MP for Harrow West, Strong ally of Harrow Tamil community which forms a third of his constituency.**

Gareth Thomas is an ardent supporter for the Tamil cause from the outset, ascertained his continued campaign in parliament to bring the perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide to justice. He expressed concern for the European Parliament relaxing the GSP+ concession to Sri Lanka despite Sri Lanka's human rights records being below the norm. Referring to the sanctions imposed by the United States and Canada, Gareth assured that he would push the Labour Party to do the same in time to come.

**Elliot Colburn - MP for Carshalton and Wallington, Chair of the APPG for Tamils**

Elliot Colburn, upon wishing happy Thai Pongal to all on behalf of the APPG for Tamils and thanking British Tamils for their contribution in the NHS as well as public services and other places, extended his support for continuously fighting for justice for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

**The Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey - MP for Kingston and Surbiton, Liberal Democrat Leader, Vice Chair of APPG for Tamils** who accompanied & lobbied along with BTF in UNHRC Geneva and European Parliament Brussels on numerous occasions for justice and accountability.

Sir Ed Davey, after praising Kingston Institute of Culture in his constituency for its excellent work, continued his commitment in pushing the UK government, using the coalition of cross-party support, to follow the steps of the government of Canada to sanction against the perpetrators of atrocity crimes and for ensuring justice for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

**The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms - MP for East Ham, Vice Chair of APPG for Tamils**, an incredible supporter of Tamils, visited UNHRC with the BTF numerous times lobbying for justice and accountability for Tamils in Sri Lanka.



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Sir Stephen Timms, upon signifying the suffering that Tamil people are undergoing by the war, economic collapse, enforced disappearances, and the impunity allowing the authorities to get away from their crimes, stated that an efficient independent inquiry on what happened to the Tamil people in Sri Lanka is a must.

## **James Murray – MP for Ealing North, Shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury**

James Murray, expressing his desire to have “Tamil Heritage Month” in January, and admiring Tamil peoples’ contribution to the British economy, expressed his apprehension that fifteen years lapsed without finding accountability and justice for the victims of war crime, crimes against humanity and genocide.

## **Janet Daby MP for Lewisham East, Shadow Minister for Youth Justice**

Janet Daby, after expressing her pleasure in having a good, lovely, and strong Lewisham Tamil community that is strong enough to stand up against injustice, assured that she would always stand with them.

## **Sam Tarry MP for Ilford South, Former Shadow Minister for Buses and Local Transport, Vice Chair of APPG for Tamils,**

Sam Tarry, upon admiring Tamil peoples’ nature of preserving their culture strong, stated that he would be pressing the new government to use an international mechanism for justice and peace and also securing a permanent political solution for Tamil people in Sri Lanka. He envisioned a day when the young Tamil generation would see their homeland.

## **Paul Scully MP for Sutton & Cheam, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Energy, and Minister of State for London, former Chairperson (2016 – 2020) and Vice Chair of APPG for Tamils.**

Paul Scully, having stated that he visited the UNHRC several times with BTF, assured his commitment to find truth, justice and reconciliation for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka using international mechanisms and pushing the Foreign Minister in this respect.

## **Jim Shannon MP for Strangford, Spokesperson for Democratic Unionist Party**

Jim Shannon, during his speech, upon confirming that he had spoken out about persecution and human rights deviations that had happened in Sri Lanka against Tamil people, confirmed that he would be the Tamil peoples’ spokesman when it comes to speaking for the Tamils.

## **Lord Mann, Former MP for Bassetlaw, the UK Government Advisor on Antisemitism and a genuine friend of Tamil people**

Lord Mann, an ardent supporter of the Tamil people, assured his continued support in challenging countries, states, and the UN.



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**Virendra Sharma MP Ealing Southall, Vice Chair of the APPG for Tamils**

Virendra Sharma, acknowledging what is happening in Sri Lanka is genocide, and discrimination against Tamil people. He assured continuous support for self-determination and the protection of Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

**The Rt Hon Grant Shapps - MP for Welwyn Hatfield, Secretary of State for Defence (Video Message)**

**Mims Davies - MP for Mid Sussex, Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work**

**Wes Streeting - MP for Ilford North, Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Video Message)**

**Dame Siobhain McDonagh DBE - MP for Mitcham and Morden (Video Message)**

**Catherine West – MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, The Shadow Minister for Asia and the Pacific**

**The Rt Hon Valerie Carol Marian Vaz - MP for Walsall South, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons**

**Mo Ali, Vice Chairman of Conservative Party**

**Dr Rupa Asha Huq – MP for Ealing Central**

**Chi Onwurah - MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central**

**Sarah Olney - MP for Richmond Park**

**Fleur Anderson - MP for Putney**

**John McNally, Scottish National Party MP for Falkirk**

**Navendu Mishra - MP for Stockport**

Several Mayors and Councilors attended the event, and they also admired the high spiritedness of the celebration and equally extended their support for justice for the victims of Sri Lanka's genocidal war.

**Mayor of Harrow, Ramji Chauhan**

Migrated from Uganda and being proud of his South Asian origin, stated that the London Borough of Harrow passed the motion of celebrating every January as Tamil Heritage Month upon recognising Tamils contribution to British society and the importance of harvesting.



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**Cllr Chrishni Reshekaron**

Crishni expressed her pride for being a Tamil herself and the achievements of Tamils in the United Kingdom.

**Cllr Paul White**

Paul, while addressing the audience after greeting with best wishes, inter-alia expressed his anxiety had the international community taken prompt action for what happened in Sri Lanka, then the genocide happening now would have been stopped and the world would be living in peace and harmony.

**Cllr Sarmila Varatharaj**

**Cllr Elilly Ponnuthurai**

**Cllr Shanika Mahendran**

**Cllr Kuha Kumaran**

**Cllr Cumar Sahathevan**

Photos available at: [THAI PONGAL EVENT AT PARLIAMENT- 2024 – British Tamils Forum](#)

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**Notes to Editors:**

**British Tamils Forum** exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information

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