

Experiencing Family Life

Pre-mature Birth of Radhia and the Experience therewith

It was during the Niagara Falls Project that Radhia, AGA's youngest child, was born. It was on a Sunday, the 30th of January 1972, that AGA was at home, fixing the washing machine in the basement. Jiffriya was crying, complaining about pain, to which a concerned AGA, still in the basement, asked how she could be experiencing such discomfort two months before the due date. Jiffriya didn't stop crying, however. Instead, her sobs turned to screams, terrible sounds that spurred AGA to come up running. It soon became clear that his wife, now on the verge of fainting, had broken her water. AGA had to act swiftly. He called both an ambulance and a doctor, the former arriving within seconds to transport Jiffriya to the hospital. Yet the experience was not quite over.

Whilst traveling with Jiffriya by his side in the ambulance, AGA was going through agony. Jiffriya had given birth to twin girls, one the cute little Radhia weighing 3lbs 3 oz, the other, sadly, stillborn. The deceased child was buried in York Cemetery, marking the first time that a member of the family was buried outside the shores of Ceylon. Compounding the pain was Radhia, born prematurely, being confined to an incubator for about one and half months before she could be brought home. Alhamdulillah, Radhia recovered, growing into a beautiful, healthy child.

More Sri Lankans in Niagara

Around this time. Ananda Jayasinghe - very fondly known as "Mynah" - joined them in the Niagara Falls apartment. As he had just arrived, his wife had sent him a suitcase from Sri Lanka by air cargo. AGA volunteered to clear his bag to which Ananda agreed. The well-intentioned deed by AGA also possessed an ulterior motive – the desire to pull Mynah's leg as a joke. On their way back home, AGA produced a letter, supposedly from Mynah's wife, in the Sinhala language. The letter contained a threat and accused Mynah of having a good time in Canada, leaving her back at home. It said that, if he did not make arrangements to get her to Canada, he would have to face the consequences. Poor Mynah was befuddled, embarrassed to have received such a bellicose message from his wife. He tried avoiding conversation with AGA and the others, thinking they were unaware of its contents. As expected, Mynah was a blushing mess. As AGA knew what the letter contained, he started to probe Mynah cunningly. Finally, Mynah revealed the 'secret' and started to blame his wife, saying she did not know the difficulties he was undergoing, especially when the temperature was below zero! The ploy was eventually revealed, becoming a source of good laughter between those involved, Mynah included.

Another incident AGA recalls is the occasion when Jiffriya found some money on the road. Unable to locate the owner, they decided to utilize the funds to install new carpets in their home. When they were carpeting the basement, a fire broke out. AGA and his family had to rush out of the house, almost forgetting little Radhia in the process. Razvi, AGA's nephew, had to go back into the house and fetch her. Alhamdulillah, the fire subsided immediately, leaving only minor damages. AGA afterwards thought that the money should have been given away as charity. He took the ordeal as a lesson from the Creator, that one should always be cautious with wealth earned or, in this case, found on the side of the road.

Around this time, the family visited Sri Lanka for Sulaiha's wedding. Radhia, about a year old, hilariously did the 'big job' on AGA's blazer during the flight. The blazer was cherished by AGA for years, him only parting with it as a gift to Radhia. Today, it now resides in the possession of AGA's grandson, Radhia's son, Aqil Refai.

It was around this time that Haleema and Nihar with their daughter Rizwana migrated to Canada and lived with AGA's family in Ottawa. AGA's memories of the Ottawa area are far too many to be condensed in a single paragraph. It was there, in the Canadian capital, that Jiffriya decided to learn driving and one day. Quite humorously, their car was nearly driven into the Rideau Canal. The mistake had been AGA's, a fumble caused by his panic at Jiffriya's driving. When she had lost control of the vehicle, AGA reached over and accidentally hit the accelerator instead of the brakes. George was there again to help them out with the police following the instead. The damage was, Alhamdulillah, minor; they had to tow the station wagon out from the pile of snow. Even though Jiffriya has a valid licence to drive today, she has yet to operate a car on her own.

Iftikhar had his first experience in fishing when living in Ottawa. He had already caught a fish and removed the hook off its mouth, a feat that he was proud of. Unfortunately, it slipped out of his hand and got lost in the water. AGA recalls that he could hear his son angrily berating the escaped fish as it swam away.



JIFFRIYA AND THE KIDS AT PINEMORE CRESCENT HOME

AGA prayed to Allah to show him the way to bring up in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. He felt as if the true meaning of life was slipping away, that he was more focused on worldly affairs than the hereafter Alhamdulillah. Within a matter of three days, Allah answered his prayers by sending an old friend who wanted AGA to go to the Middle East to do a feasibility study on Bridge Bearings. Incidentally this was the friend who offered 5% to AGA to arrange the expansion joint deal during his first project in Canada. This friend had realized that AGA was the person most suited for the project as AGA was a Muslim who could travel all over Saudi Arabia without any restriction and that he was an honest worker. It all happened in a matter of days. AGA was most pleased to take up the offer.

SAUDI ARABIA HERE I COME

Opportunities in Saudi

AGA travelled to Saudi Arabia during the Christmas holidays of 1975 to work on the feasibility studies. He first arrived in Dhahran, expecting his good friend Dr. Ishaq at the Airport. To his surprise Ishaq was not there. AGA therefore ended up in a hotel, finding accommodations to sleep for the night. He decided it was best to look for Ishaq at the University next day. The next morning, however, was Friday, a day where the university was closed. Devoid of Ishaq's phone number and address, AGA was directed by the security guard to a few Apartment blocks where some of the lecturers were living. As AGA was passing by one of the apartments, he miraculously spotted Ishaq junior playing outside. He then asked the child to take him to his father.

AGA surprised Ishaq, the doctor possessing no information about his arrival in Saudi; the telex which AGA sent was waiting for him in his postal box. Alhamdulillah, the occurrence was again direction from Allah. AGA started his mission in Dhahran, an encouraging endeavour that led to his referral to Riyadh.

In Riyadh, AGA stayed with Yasin Marikar and made a good number of friends. Yasin was the Chief Engineer of Intercontinental Hotels and had lots of Sri Lankans working for him. Even today, AGA enjoys the company of the Moulanas, Careems, Hamids, Ramzeens, Jabirs, Niyaz Dorays Etc. At the time of writing some of these friends are no more – Inna Lillahi wa inna ilaihi rajiuoon, to Allah we belong and to Him we will return.

Employment in Cansult and Appointment in Medina

During his routine work, AGA came across Cansult, a Canadian firm, looking for an engineer to work in Medina. AGA decided to go to Medina through Jeddah, where he met with one of the consultants. He decided to call the company 'Petromin', an employer that one of his friends was supposed to work for. AGA called to inquire about Wanigasekera but was told there was one 'Wanisekera'. Of course, 'Wanisekera' was not known to AGA. Curious, the fellow on the other end of the line wanted to know who AGA was. "Barrie," was AGA's response, a name to which the fellow replied "AGA Barrie?". This person happened to be AGA's good friend Farouk Khalid. Once again, Allah had blessed AGA. Instead of staying at the hotel, he found residence with this old friend.

AGA was able to send all the feasibility study reports to the Company through Fahmi Uvais, who too was working in Petromin. After performing Umrah and finishing all the meetings, AGA ended up in Medina. As he was walking towards the Prophets Mosque, he asked one of the passersby what the shortest way to masjid was. The man, humorously, began speaking in Urdu. A flustered AGA, stranded out in the heat and lost, started cursing the chap in Tamil. To his surprise, the man glared at him and asked whether AGA knew Tamil. It so happened that this stranger was a Sri Lankan by the name of Sheikh Mohideen, who later became a good friend.

AGA eventually ended up in the Cansult office. The resident manager, Abdul Razak, explained to him what the job entailed, and AGA swiftly realized that it was perfectly tailored to his skills. However, he couldn't give Abdul Razak his word as he had no intention of leaving Pitts. AGA was, after all, well-respected and well-placed at the company; loyalty was still important to him. Yet when he returned to Pitts in Canada, one of his superiors, Sandy McDonald, tried to find every fault in the book pertaining to AGA's foray. He accused AGA for having gone overseas without permission, a scathing label further exacerbated by an accusation that AGA was intentionally fishing for jobs. Alhamdulillah, the accusations

provided AGA with the golden opportunity for him to send in his resignation. The President of Pitts, Sydney Cooper, called him up and offered to increase the salary twofold. But AGA told Mr. Cooper that he desired to go to Medina, to which Cooper assented, even assuring AGA that if he were to change his mind, the doors of Pitts were always open for him. The path to Cansult was thus shown. Allah answered AGA's prayers and relocated him to Medina, the city of the Prophet (PBUH), the perfect place to strengthen his Islam.

The family moved to Saudi Arabia in 1976, leaving all the furniture and house contents to Fatima. They initially settled in Riyadh before hopping to Medina. AGA arrived in Riyadh in April 1976, where he was met at the airport by Cansult Human Resources Manager Ihsan Eid. Ihsan and took AGA to the company guesthouse, a temporary abode that served as comfortable residence until they shifted to Medina. C.C.C, the contractor for storm drainage works in Medina, provided him with a Chevrolet Station Wagon as part of the contract. The family's first trip to Medina by car was, according to AGA, an experience. Raihana refused to get out of the car, deeming their new home unpleasant. When she finally decided to exit the vehicle, she walked on her toes, her skirt pulled up, donning a miserable face. Despite terrible first impressions, Raihana, again according to AGA, eventually came around to Medina. Aside from childish theatrics, they performed their first Hajj together with Yasin Marikar, Jabir, Dr. Ishaq and Huzair. Additionally, Alhamdulillah, both Iftikhar and Raihana attended Arabic schools, while Radhia was placed at a nursery. Jiffriya today takes all the credit for the children's progress in studies and their best behaviour.



HAJJ WITH JIFFRIYA'S PARENTS IN THE YEAR 1978

As AGA migrated for the sake of Islam, he had a more comfortable house to live, excess money in hand, a better place to work and was still employed by a Canadian firm. His income had increased almost double, permitting him to help his family in all possible ways. Be it weddings, building houses or setting up businesses, AGA was there with pleasure to lend a hand, all for the sake of Allah. "Charity does not

decrease wealth, no one forgives another except that Allah increases his honour, and no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises his status,” so spoke the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), principles that AGA never let go of.

AGA found work most pleasing. He was involved in the construction of the storm drainage system in Medina, including the system for Prophet’s Mosque. His construction background, especially the one gained in Canada, was very helpful in administering the contract. He used his construction skillset to set up contractor facilities like the quarry. These were well-appreciated by the contractors, and boosted AGA’s respect among them. Most amazingly, by the grace of Allah, even ministry officials started to appreciate and respect him.

About this time AGA’s nephews, Afnan and Abdul Rahman, came to perform Umrah and stayed back with AGA and family in Medina. AGA arranged for them to work with C.C.C. Ltd, while a number of friends from Puttalam too were brought by AGA’s friend ‘coco’ Nizar to work in Medina. Many friends and relations that came for Hajj often stayed with AGA. His house was always full, a blessing that allowed him and Jiffriya to attend to pilgrims, Alhamdulillah. Some of AGA’s close relations who performed Hajj were Jiffriya’s parents, Nafeesa aunty, Sabir Pasha, Refai, Batcha Matchan, Badur Thatha and Sada Mainee. Sabir Pasha and Refai had planned their trip as part of their world tour.



RAIHANA, RADHIA AND IFTIKHAR IN MEDINA IN THE YEAR 1978

An unforgettable event that took place in Medina was Radhia getting struck by a “dabbab”, a Saudi moniker for a Toyota van. She was returning from school and the bus had stopped on the other side of the road, contrary to all instructions. When she crossed, the dabbab struck her slightly. AGA heard the scream and within seconds was carrying Radhia in his arms. He rushed her to the hospital in the same vehicle that hit her. Alhamdulillah, Radhia’s injury was little more than a bruise.

Accomplishing Construction Projects in Saudi Arabia

Cansult were the professional consultants employed by the Saudi government on behalf of the Medina Municipality. Furthermore, Palestinian Contractor Consolidated Construction Company WLL (CCC) were the contractors. AGA was the appointed project manager, selected by the consultant on behalf of the government.

CCC had an extension of the contract to cover the out-fall with a twin box culvert. This was completed in a record time of six months. The steel forms were modified to strip the walls and haunch in 18 hours after placing the concrete. It puzzled most of the engineers, including the Construction Manager of Cansult, Harry Redstone. It was based on concrete strength obtained by crushing the cylinders every hour. Only the centre support for the roof slab was left for a longer period as required. In the month of Ramadan, the maximum amount of concrete was placed. This was possible by changing the working hours from daytime to night.



ADMIRING THE COMPLETED OUTFALL OF MEDINA STORM DRAINAGE SYSTEM, BEFORE LEAVING TO RIYADH IN DECEMBER 1979.

Having completed the project in Medina, AGA took over the Storm Drainage System contracts from David Tyreman in Riyadh. AGA was able to establish a wonderful working relationship with the Riyadh Municipality through this job. In fact, Abdul Karim Babtain, the Director of the Storm Drainage Department, would never approve anything unless it was agreed to by AGA. There were more than five international contractors working on about seven projects, all at once, to complete the drainage system in Riyadh. AGA still recalls them all, them being Al Kharafi of Kuwait, Huta Hagerfeld from Germany, Zachery of United States, Ballast Needham from Netherlands, Incas Bona and Impresit from Italy and I.C.C. from Korea. To work with so many contractors was of course no small task. Yet by the help of Allah, AGA headed a group of young engineers from around the world to see it through.

Family Responsibilities Abound

Following in his footsteps, AGA's family found their own success. Radhia was one of the first Muslim children to gain admission to the Riyadh International School. Raihana, having spent some time away, came back to Riyadh and joined the Manaret School while Iftikhar continued studies in England. Jiffriya too found work, joining Mrs Hall's Play group as a teacher. Located along the same street as their home, Jiffriya could, quite easily, walk to her job and back.

Raihana soon joined her brother in England for academics, her move perpetrated by a bad experience of being punished by a teacher. Haris Deen joined C.C.C. Ltd towards end of his stay in Medina. They performed Hajj together every year until AGA's family left for Riyadh in the year 1979.

Life in Riyadh became another set of adventures and memories. Little Radhia, scarcely seeing her older siblings, enjoyed the company of other school children. Her acquaintance was supplemented by the arrival of Afnan, who was transferred to Riyadh. Whenever there was any project in school, poor Afnan had to lend her assistance. AGA remembers how they had to collect butterflies for one such project. The insects, rounded up after a day's long work, were devoured by the family cat, Jerry. Beyond academia, Radhia was the first girl to get a nice drive through the only storm drainage tunnel in Riyadh. Soon, however, she joined her sister Raihana in England for higher studies while Iftikhar proceeded to Canada for a stay at St. Andrews College. He was preparing to enter University in Canada by completing Grade Twelve and Thirteen.

By this time, AGA had completed all the works in Riyadh, including the North diversion channel. This was a unique project that utilized the NATM (The New Austrian Tunnelling Method). As it was dangerous and challenging, senior engineers from Canada were even proposing to construct it by adopting the 'cut and cover' technique. However, AGA was able to convince them that it would be constructed as designed, to which he took on the responsibility. Alhamdulillah, it was finished, and Canadian Expert in tunnelling, Dr Franklin, was even amused that it was completed perfectly.

As his workload was reducing, AGA spent some time on the Qatif Project as Construction Manager for Cansult. This project entailed constructing 600 houses for the Saudi Ministry of Housing in Qatif. Despite such a noble goal, the Ministry of Housing was not easy to deal with. They were giving a hard time to both Harry Hamilton, the General Manager, and Mike Ceski, the Project Manager. Both Harry and Mike left Cansult, leaving one Hisham Sabra to take over the operation. AGA too was compelled to move to Dhahran as the Project Manager of the Qatif Housing Project. The Ministry, quite whimsically, was searching for a 'white' Canadian for the job. AGA brilliantly retorted that his beard was 'white' and that his experience would be far more valuable than rudimentary skin colour. Because of this, AGA initially butted heads with the Ministry, though this stormy relationship eased when AGA's value became apparent.



HOUSING PROJECT IN QATIF SAUDI ARABIA

Elsewhere on the family front, Iftikhar gained admission to the University of Petroleum and Minerals. This was facilitated through Dr Ishaq, who was then a lecturer at the institution. AGA, enjoying his son's success, continued with his vocation. The work itself was full of challenges. Turaif al Sulaiman, the Director, and Yamani, the Deputy Minister, were uncooperative with Cansult. AGA played a role in solving all the problems in a satisfactory manner, a task lightened with the help of Allah. Ministry officials lauded AGA as the best Project Manager they ever had, Alhamdulillah.

Facing a Period of Trials and Tribulations

Overcoming a Difficult Period

With Raihana having entered McMaster University and Radhia gaining admission to Bishop Staunton in Toronto, life appeared on the upswing. Tragically, however, Jiffriya's father passed away, followed swiftly by Sabir Pasha. The loss of Hathy Uncle was a terrible blow to AGA. It was Abdul Hathy who often played a pivotal role in guiding all the family members, including AGA, in the right direction.

Iftikhar and Raihana were in their last year of university when Ahsan came to Canada. He was to complete a course in Business Administration but was called back by his father ZAM Refai within a year. Furthermore, Zacky Pasha appeared to be deliberately avoiding his kin. This worried the whole family, especially so soon after Pasha's demise. Zacky showed little interest in familial affairs, never contacting his mother and giving all sort of false stories to Raihana, his betrothed. Raihana stood strong enough to go through and complete her university studies.

Building a Home in Toronto and Raihana's Wedding Arrangements

With all the heartache, AGA had started to build a house in Toronto, a project that brought with it many issues. George Brown, the contractor, faced many court injunctions due to delays. Alhamdulillah, after long struggle it was painstakingly completed. The abode was a 'Monster Home' as described in the Globe and Mail Papers and was given unnecessary publicity. Unfortunately, their fridge and cooker were also stolen by the contractor's labourers due to a payment dispute. Regardless of the fallout of the construction dispute, the house was fabulous and large, a dream home for any family looking for comfortable residence. AGA and family were unable to move in, however, as he was working in Saudi Arabia. Dastakeer and Fatima resultingly moved in temporarily for the first year. The home was also later rented out.



FIRST CUSTOM BUILT HOME BY SRI LANKAN AT 56 ARAGON AVENUE.

As time went on there was still no adequate response from Zacky. Therefore, AGA had to call off the arrangements of Raihana's marriage to him. Raihana, however, completed her degree in biology, and AGA was adamant on finding a suitable partner for her. Alhamdulillah, within few days AGA's good friend Haris Deen agreed for his son Hussein as a match. All parties involved were happy, except AGA's niece, Rizwana, for whom Hussein had tentatively been engaged to. Rizwana was saddened to hear the news but AGA managed to convince her that he would find someone else suitable to her liking.

The tragedies and complications did not end there. AGA then lost his beloved cousin ZAM Bari in Toronto. It was a miracle that he happened to be in Toronto for ZAM's funeral, as at that time he had just completed his assignment in Saudi. ZAM too eventually joined the family in Canada, though being separated from his wife meant he spent his days at AGA's. Both Raihana and Radhia were by then, working. Radhia, who was working with Izzat Gad, a Muslim Program Producer, agreed to stay back with Anana Mama (as ZAM was so fondly called). But next day, ZAM decided to go to his house. From there he was admitted to hospital and passed away. He was buried in the same cemetery as AGA's stillborn daughter.

More Hardships

Everything was simply bad that year. AGA lost one year's worth of rent from his Aragon Ave. home, as the jobless tenant was unable to pay. The ordeal led AGA to take the man to court to have him legally evicted. In the meantime, they were living in Watson House and getting ready for Iftikhar's and Raihana's weddings, with no hope of any future jobs. Jiffriya spent time overseas, preparing for the weddings in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, AGA cashed in all his Cansult shares and left for Sri Lanka, leaving the kids in Canada. Of course, he went through Saudi. Here again, Allah made him fulfil another undertaking and obligation. Rizwana was proposed to in Jeddah, at Abdul Careem's house. Iftikhar Hassan was looking for a girl for his brother, and AGA was looking for a boy for his niece Rizwana. This soon became apparent to both parties and the talks were finalized in the air when they were flying back to Colombo. Jiffriya joined AGA in Jeddah and returned back to Colombo after a last-minute shopping spree. The children came straight to Colombo.

They had a grand double wedding at the Hilton. The event was a superb outing, well-organized and attended by family and friends. When it was over, Raihana went back to London with Hussein, while Iftikhar had to go back alone to Canada, as his wife, Shazmina, didn't have a visa. AGA stayed back in Colombo with Jiffriya and Radhia, but in a rented flat in Wellawatte. It was there he began working for Zam Gems, a seemingly good fit considering that Radhia was engaged to Ahsan Refai. The engagement function, much like the previous double wedding, was organized and fine-tuned to perfection.

A Brief Engagement at Zam Gems

Zam Gems took a major step to invest in the development of the business and in real estate. They started various projects such as forming a branch in Kandy and the four flats in Colpetty, also extending the Bambalapitiya headquarters. The work was keeping AGA busy, but it lacked a certain excitement. His mind was doubly so occupied with Radhia's wedding, an event for which he required 1,000,000 Rupees. AGA remembers discussing the sum with Jiffriya. He told her his plans of earning this million in a year and assured her *nothing*, this included, was impossible with the help of Allah. As usual Jiffriya laughed it off without realizing that AGA was quite serious in seeing it through. AGA put his faith in Allah, seeking His divine aid through patience and prayer.

One day there was a call from a friend in Saudi, Abdul Rahman Jazzar, who requested AGA to join him in the States for a Technical Conference. For this, Abdul Rahman said that he would pay AGA for the

tickets in addition to 5000 dollars. Alhamdulillah, AGA could not say no to such a gift. He left immediately, ready to take on the challenge of organizing Radhia's wedding. During this period, AGA visited England to see Raihana, who was expecting her first baby. Iftikhar meanwhile had moved into the Aragon home, as they had sold the Watson house and invested that money in the construction of the basement. Now AGA was looking for additional ways and means to earn sufficient money to organize the wedding in full. He contacted ZAM Refai, who brought him on board in the development of ZAM Gems' many projects. However, the venture proved fruitless, and AGA soon realized it was a waste of time and money. He therefore had to return to Canada for the time being, taking along with him Radhia and Jiffriya.

Once back, AGA was on the lookout for opportunities in Canada and abroad with Cansult. One night around 2 AM, AGA received a call from Walid Atari, his old contact Cercon. Walid was asking him to return to Saudi to work on the Ministry Headquarters project in Riyadh, as Cercon was experiencing some difficulties. AGA agreed, for how could he turn down yet another gift from the Almighty Himself. And Allah, the most Generous and Noble, furthermore bestowed His bounty on AGA when Ubayd Deen, Raihana's son and AGA's first grandchild, was born on the 8th of November 1991.

AGA commenced his work in Riyadh alongside some old friends. The Ministry headquarters was redesigned to accommodate the requirements of the Minister. This would prove to be a challenge as part of the old design was already complete. The entrance was made two floors high by demolishing some part of the first floor and increasing the height of the columns. The building was surrounded by a channel and sported a lovely mist fountain. It was also landscaped with plenty of date palms, lending it just the right touch of "Arab" aesthetic. All four sides of the building had curtain walls, their windows a collage of tinted glass. Never looking to be outdone, AGA and his team completed the seven-storey building at a rate of thirty days per floor. The area of each floor was 1600 square meters and concreted in four segments. It was a record and was appreciated by the Ministry, so much so that Walid Atari even advanced 50,000 Saudi Riyals to AGA during construction.

Radhia's Wedding and Thereafter

Radhia's wedding took place in the Colombo Hilton. Her groom, Ahsan Refai, made all the arrangements to ensure the event would be another splendid affair. Once again, Zulficar found a spot in the limelight with his vigilant overseeing of the process. Without divulging too many arduous details, of which AGA was more than welcome to share, the event transpired without much trouble, Alhamdulillah. Raihana even attended the wedding with a two-month-old Ubayd. Unfortunately for the dazzling bride, her nephew stole much of the show.

It was amidst all the humdrum of Radhia's wedding that Shazmina got her visa to Canada. She accompanied Iftikhar overseas, where they settled in the house at Aragon Avenue. There she gave birth to her first child Hasina, AGA's first granddaughter, named after his beloved mother. Some days before, however, across the ocean Radhia gave birth to Aqil in Colombo. The two were born on the 6th of October 1992 and the 26th of September 1992 respectively. To this day, Hasina refuses to live down the fact that her cousin is indeed older than her.

After some time, Raihana also moved to Canada from England to live with Iftikhar. Both she and her sister-in-law gave birth to two more grandchildren, Amani and Huda, in Toronto. Jiffriya, the 'Flying Midwife', had her hands full, managing not one but four grandkids. Huda was born on the 28th of February 1993, while Amani was born on the 26th of September 1993.

Saudi Newspaper Riyadh Daily publishes AGA's Achievements

In that year, *Riyadh Daily* carried a full-page article of AGA's experience and achievement in Saudi Arabia. The article is reproduced in this biography for pleasant reading and record.

Sri Lankan engineer's 17 years involvement in Saudi projects

VETERAN EXPATS

By MOHD. RASOOLDEEN
Riyadh Daily Staff

THE past 17 years have been meaningful to A.G.A. Barrie. He is an engineer from the pearl island of Sri Lanka and has been involved in many important construction projects in the Kingdom's principal cities such as Dammam, Riyadh and Madinah.

As one of the senior Sri Lankan citizens in the Kingdom, Barrie says that he was one of those who had witnessed the Kingdom's various stages of development.

Barrie now works as a project manager of the building project of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

Barrie says with pride that he has been fortunate to see the development of Riyadh from its very beginning — from humble huts to modern architectural buildings, from overhead power lines to underground cables.

"The growth of the Kingdom, particularly the city of Riyadh, has been unprecedented," he says nostalgically. "I was able to witness Riyadh growing into a full fledged modern city within a short period of one-and-a-half decades."

Barrie has been involved in storm drainage projects of various international contractors in the cities of Madinah and Riyadh. He was also project manager of a project for the construction of 600 villas and the related site development works for the Ministry of Housing and Construction in the Eastern Province.

In the 70s, he recalls, there were only a few streets. Sharah Wazeer and Old Airport road were the main access roads leading to downtown. There was a big drain through the center of the Batha Road, dividing the road into two with access bridges in between. Invariably the wadi was used as a dump which was a health hazard at that time. "I was involved with the reconstruction of this area providing a two meter sewage line below. This was the massive Batha storm drainage channel to take drain water."

Sitteen Street, he further recalls, had parking facilities in the center of the road. The present King Fahd Road was a small street, later made into a fairly wide road with a series of temporary steel bridges. In fact, it was known as "bridge road". The road was built in record time, almost at the rate of one bridge per week. Now this has been converted into a first class highway running north to south.

There was just one supermarket,



SON Ifthikar who obtained a honors degree in industrial management from the King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) with his wife, Shazminna and child.



BARRIE's youngest daughter Radhia, an interior designer qualified in London, with Ahsan Refai.

Ringside view of

Kingdom's development

opposite the present General Post Office building. This was the busiest spot in the city and catered to many people in the city. "During the same period, there was no supermarket in Madinah. So I used to take sliced bread and cereal to Madinah from Riyadh's sole supermarket."

On his life in the Kingdom, Barrie says that he stepped into the Holy Land of Saudi Arabia in 1974. "It was the turning point in my family life," says Barrie, who has been in Sri Lanka and later migrated to Canada, "where upbringing of the children in accordance with the teachings of Islam was very, very difficult." This difficulty prompted him to venture to Madinah, where my children had the basic Islamic education. Barrie had three children and they attended the Arabic school and proceeded abroad for their higher studies.

His son, Iftikhar Barrie having completed his secondary education both in England and in Canada. Later, he gained admission to King Fahd University for Petroleum and Mineral where he obtained an honor degree in industrial management. Now, with this degree, coupled with qualification in accountancy, he is working in Canada.

Elder daughter Raihana Barrie went to school in Riyadh and proceeded for higher education in England and was admitted to MacMaster University in Canada where she qualified in biological science. She married Hussein Deen who is an aeronautic engineer. Incidentally, Hussein Deen is the son of Haris Deen, a good friend of Barrie, who also worked in Madinah, Riyadh and Dhahran for a considerable period of time.

His youngest daughter Radhia Barrie, an interior designer who is more inclined to business, after completion of her higher studies in Canada, married Ahsan Refai, who is involved in the gem business in Sri Lanka. She hopes to assist her husband in promoting the jewelry business, both locally and abroad.

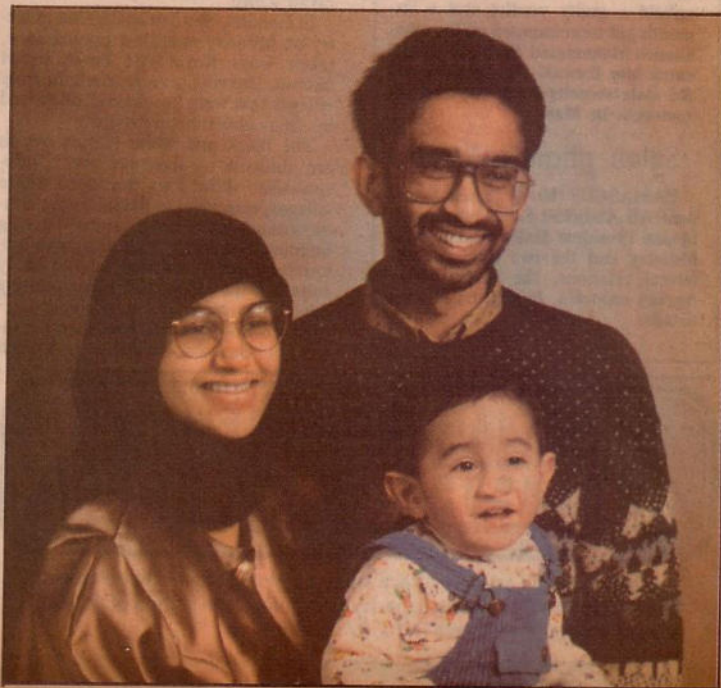
Barrie hails from Maggona, a coastal town, 36 km from Colombo, where the early Arabs were believed to have landed. He has studied at Zahira College, Colombo which has produced many Muslim luminaries.



BARRIE recalls his 17 years experience in the Kingdom. Photo by ANEES KHAN



A.G.A. Barrie with his wife Jiffriya. Photo by ANEES KHAN



ELDEST daughter Raihana, a bio-science graduate of the McMaster University in Canada, with husband Hussein Deen.

AGA's overall stay in Riyadh was fantastic. During his time there, his good friend Izzat Ahmed was appointed as ambassador to Sri Lanka. As both AGA and Izzat were residing in Riyadh, they both celebrated the 46th year of Sri Lankan independence together. The function was widely considered amongst the best ever held in the city.



ENJOYING A MEAL WITH AMBASSADOR IZZAT AHAMED IN RIYADH IN 1993

Having substantially completed the Ministry project, AGA was then requested to manage another for the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. This new challenge he of course took up with a smile. To reside in Jeddah was a blessing from Allah, one that allowed AGA to perform Umrah almost every weekend. He could also spend most of the blessed days of Ramadan in Makkah. AGA never wasted a moment during this period. He thanked Allah whenever he could, for the blessings of that year were numerous. The house at Aragon was fully paid off, and AGA was, in 1994, a proud grandfather to five grandchildren.

Yet the family expansion did not cease there. Radhia gave birth to Alila Maryam on the 13th of August 1994. Waleed, Iftikhar's son, was born on the 21st of May 1995, and Raihana's daughter, Asiya, was born on the 28th of December of the same year.

With his work nearing completion, AGA met Hadji Thasleem Ibrahim, the Chairman of High-Point Rendel, in Jeddah. The acquaintance was facilitated by Haris Deen, who was working for Thasleem in Malaysia. Thasleem offered AGA a job in Malaysia, subject to Ministry approval. During the wait, AGA received a surprising call from Iftikhar stating that he had sold the Aragon home and had booked two homes closer to the Islamic Foundation of Toronto, a local masjid. The arrangement pleased AGA as both Iftikhar and Raihana would, ostensibly, be living next to each other.

AGA eventually returned once more to Canada. He now possessed two prospects, one involving remaining in Canada, the other potentially taking him to Thasleem in Malaysia. The latter, AGA was informed, had indeed been approved. The project involved working on the facilities for the sixteenth Commonwealth Games in Malaysia.

Before he could accept the Malaysian offer, AGA had to see Iftikhar's new housing arrangements. He inspected the location of the new homes and quickly found them not to his liking. The houses were more than 100 meters apart, an annoyance for AGA as he desired them to be adjoining properties. The next day he went again with Raihana to have another look at the homes. To their surprise they couldn't locate Raihana's house. It was soon discovered that the property had caught fire overnight, rendering it inhabitable. AGA recalls Raihana's expression, one of immense sorrow that tugged on his heartstrings. Yet Allah is the best of planners. As the liability lay on the developer, they were forced to construct a brand-new property. Most blessedly, the new house was erected beside Iftikhar's, both being the closest properties to the local masjid. AGA's sincere prayers were again answered, Alhamdulillah.



The Two Houses On Robbinstone Drive Scarborough

Professional Engagement in Malaysia

In the April of 1997, AGA left Canada for Malaysia. His impact there was instantaneous, his employers noting with pleasant surprise just how rapidly and effectively he could finish a project. He was promoted to senior project manager within one year and compensated accordingly. The project was completed in time for the Commonwealth Games in 1998, an event that was deemed a grand success. AGA was additionally appointed a director of the firm in the same year. This AGA considers the peak of his engineering career and achievements.

His further work in Malaysia included taking over the building of the University for the MAIKA Institute of Education and Development. Like the subsequent project, AGA took the construction to new heights. Through his hard work and aid from Allah, he thoroughly impressed the educational arm of the Malaysian Indian Congress.

Having spent a significant duration in Malaysia, AGA decided to inform Hadji Thasleem of his inability

to continue. The news was unpleasant to Thasleem and others. They would be losing their most skilled engineer, after all, someone they had come to admire and cherish as a dear friend. They realized that AGA's health took precedence over the work, however, and gave him leave to depart if he so desired. This was all in the course of another project, the building the university for the Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology.

AGA could have worked in Malaysia for a longer time. Yet the pleasure of watching his grandchildren grow was too poignant. He simply could not pass up the opportunity, especially in those years following 1997 and 1998, which brought with them the joy of new familial additions Lina, Safa, Nada, and Yahya. AGA thus decided it was best for to split time between Canada and Sri Lanka rather than remain working for Thasleem.

And so, a meeting was called onsite on the 9th of November 2004. All were informed about AGA's decision, and the remaining work was doled out amongst Thasleem's other engineers. AGA opted to remain around until April 2005 to oversee the completion of the university.

Interestingly, it was during AGA's tenure here that Ahsan and Radhia completed construction of their in Sri Lanka. The domicile was a beautiful and large abode, complete with a separate room – all facilities included - where AGA and Jiffriya could reside during visits. Incidentally, when AGA was leaving Jeddah for good, Walid Atari presented him with a complete set of furniture which he sent to Radhia's new home, Alhamdulillah.



Chairman High Point Rendel – Dato' Haji Thasleem Ibrahim discussing a report with AGA



DAT'O SAMY VELU WISHING AGA AT THE PROJECT OFFICE IN 2004



**THE LAST LOOK AT THE AIMST UNIVERSITY BEING BUILT AT ALOR ESTAR MALAYSIA.
IT IS ALMOST 85% COMPLETE. PICTURE TAKEN IN NOVEMBER 2004.**

Facing Retirement

Health Issues, Housing Boons

In December 2000, Ahsan visited Malaysia and mentioned to AGA that he planned on going for Hajj that year. AGA told him that he didn't mind joining. Because of the Sri Lankan passport in AGA's possession, he was able to join his son-in-law for the trip, along with Jiffrya and others. The Hajj proved a fruitful one, Alhamdulillah, despite some health-related complications.

When AGA was in Mina, he noticed blood in his stool but never took it seriously. The problem continued when he was in Canada on holiday and persisted on when AGA returned to Malaysia. In Malaysia, however, the ailment was further exacerbated by AGA's passing of mucus. Now he became worried, seeking preliminary inspection via an endoscopy. The test revealed that he had a growth in his colon and would require an operation. Malaysian surgeons insisted that the procedure should proceed without any delay, prompting AGA to consent. But Allah had different plans. It was around this time that Jiffriya was also undergoing a hysterectomy operation in Sri Lanka. Rather than remain in Malaysia for his procedure, AGA joined his in Colombo. He was thus operated on by Professor Kemal Deen, a cousin of Reza Samsudeen. The entire ordeal was another blessing in disguise, it seemed. Apart from having a successful operation, AGA found he got much closer to Allah. It certainly helped that the process also involved him meeting family and old friends again.

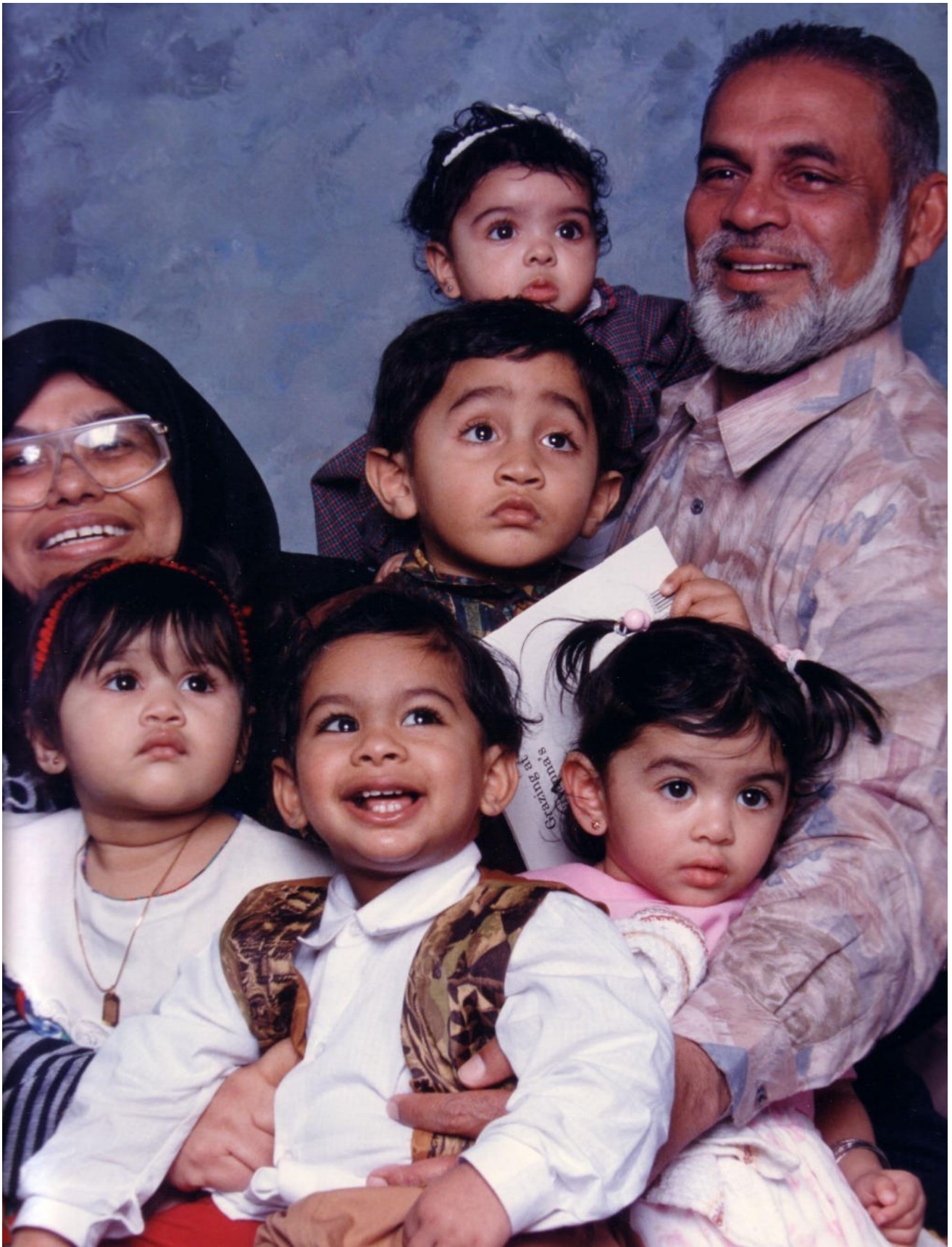
Rather than remain idle, AGA began collecting data on his family. He set up a data bank to store information on cousins, siblings, uncles, and aunts alike, laying the foundations for a long-term project. He also remained true to himself, serving others by providing the essential requirements to both the Maradana and Maligahene schools with financial help from ZAM Refai.

Back in Canada and further Family Expansion

In Canada, both Iftikhar and Raihana were settling down in the cold weather while Radhia basked in the warmth of Sri Lanka. The two houses in Canada were improved with finished basements, both sporting dedicated rooms for AGA and Jiffrya. The old couple now, by the grace of Allah, had living arrangements on either side of the globe. For the months they would spend in Canada, they resided with Iftikhar or Raihana. When the temperature inevitably dropped in the northern hemisphere, they could return to Sri Lanka. There, Radhia awaited them with a wonderfully furnished room on Mcleod Road.

These living arrangements were the least of their many joys. Both Raihana and Radhia were blessed with a child each in the years 1999 and 2000. Hannan was born on the 27th of October in the new century, while Redha Zainulabdeen was born on the 15th of November 1999. Raihana and Shazmina decided not to have any more kids, their batch on Robbinstone more than a handful. Radhia, however, wanted one more. Thus, the sweet girl Yumna, youngest of AGA's grandchildren, was born on August 4th, 2002, making the metaphorical "Great Rugger 15".

Yet with all life comes the balance of death. Allah had decreed that AGA's maternal uncle Thahir would return to Him in 2003. Alhamdulillah, AGA was able to visit him in Beruwela when he was ill. At the time, Thahir was living with his daughter Ayesha at the Cader's home. Another blessing the meeting was, as AGA was able to have a good conversation with him, fondly recalling old memories.



AGA AND JIFFRIYA WITH THE FIRST FIVE GRAND CHILDREN



IFTIKHAR AND HIS CHILDREN TAKEN IN THE YEAR 2003



RAIHANA AND CHILDREN



RADHIA AND CHILDREN TAKEN IN EARLY 2004 AT ENDAH VILLA



PICTURE TAKEN WITH THAHIR UNCLE IN HIS LAST DAYS. HE IS ENJOYING ONE OF THE GREAT GRAND DAUGHTERS ZEENATH



AFTER OPERATION IN JUNE 2004



THESE PICTURES WERE TAKEN IN JUNE 2004 AFTER AGA'S OPERATION. SOME OF 'THE GREAT ZAHIRA RIFLE TEAM' WITH THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT



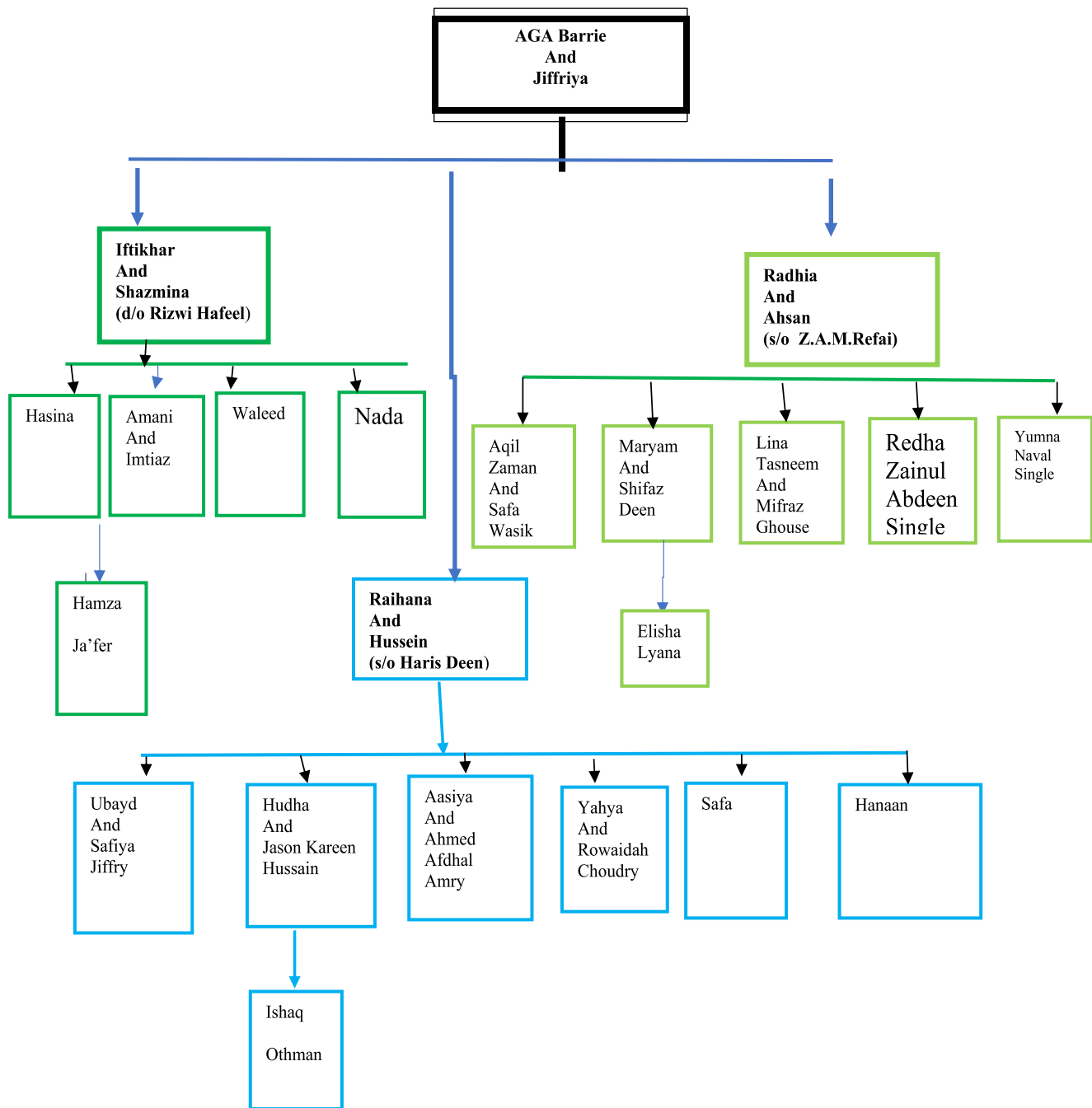
**Left to Right: 1st Row M.S. Amit, AGA Barrie, Minister M.H.M Fowzie, M.S.M.Nazeem, M.Y.Mohamed.
2nd Row M.K.M.Mulaffer, T.M.Rajudeen, M.Siddique Sally.**



**1st Row Left to Right: M.G.Ahmath, AGA Barrie, ZAM Refai. Ahsan Refai.
2nd Row Left to Right M.Y.Mohamed, Minister M.H.M Fowzie, T.M. Rajudeen,
M.W.Amit, M.S.M.Nazeem, M.S.Amit, M.K.M.Mulaffer, M.Siddique Sally**

Visit the website www.familyofgood.org for details of AGA Barrie's family connections.





FACING RETIREMENT

In 1985, having completed most of the obligations to the family, AGA purchased an old house and property in Maggona, next to the local masjid. This was demolished to make way for the building of AGA's dream home. As a good friend of AGA, Lelwela was assigned the task of overseeing construction, handed plans drawn up by AGA himself.



WATERS MEET AT MAGGONA

In the year 2004, when AGA was knocking at the door of the elite club of septuagenarians, he paid a visit to his ancient abode in Welikade. It was there, of course, he had spent a good part of his student life in Colombo. He walked up to the entrance and, seeing the old ladder and the rope of his youth, he thought aloud: ***Things have not changed.*** He stood there in contemplation for a few minutes. His memory flashed back to the days when he would be perilously perched atop the ladder, with one hand clinging dearly to a rung whilst the other clutched on to the “hangman’s” rope.

More thoughts began to cross his mind: ***What if he had lost his grip? His footing? What if the rope had given way?*** His uncles would have undoubtedly suffered in guilt for the rest of their lives. Yet AGA knew how responsible these uncles of his were. He could say that Abdul Hathy would have checked *every* rung of the ladder and *every* strand of fibre in the rope *every* day. If his safety was thus so assured, why then did Hathy uncle deem it fit to subject AGA to such harsh treatment? AGA himself provided the answer. There exists a famous Sri Lankan saying - ***one who falls from a mat on to the floor will not hurt.*** AGA understood well enough that a person who learns hardships early on in life is far better equipped to deal with them later on.



ATTIQUE AT RAJAGIRIYA SHOP

AGA, by Allah's design, followed a more difficult path in life. His early marriage was not one of financial gain. He had to work hard and pray harder for his wealth, tasks from which he derived enormous personal satisfaction. Despite the arduous nature of his life journey, he always made time, primarily, to serve others, be them family or friends. While he took action to help this wide circle of relatives and friends, he also made new acquaintances among the professionals and business associates around the world. Each person he met admired him for his rare qualities and held him in high esteem for his wide and deep knowledge of the discipline of engineering. They would come asking for help on professional matters, wherever in the world he happened to be at the time. These qualities would become instrumental in AGA unduly postponing his retirement.

After a long and distinguished career spanning well over four decades, during which he was able to win accolades of everyone who crossed his way, AGA would be eventually retiring into a well-deserved rest. He could now enjoy a relaxed and peaceful life in the midst of his partner in life, his children and his grandchildren.

If one were to count the number of grandchildren he proudly possesses, Alhamdulillah, one could see the efficiency of the man when it comes to reproductive power of his gene.



AGA Barrie and his Family

AGA's life has been rich - literally as well as figuratively - eventful, and very rewarding all the way. He had overcome adversity in early life in an unprecedented manner. As far as his work ethic was concerned, one outstanding feature in him was that he never waited to *'see'* things happen, but he almost always *'made'* them happen. He was a trailblazer, adopting new ideas, approaches, and techniques all the time in his projects, often surprising even his more orthodox superiors. He was daring, rushing where others feared to tread. He had his own art and skill of winning friends and influencing people. He had the uncanny knack and the remarkable ability to put his finger straight into a fault when, in the performance of his duties as an engineer, he was often called upon to scrutinize, check, and pass someone else's work. He was relentless in the pursuit of honesty, justice and fair play on behalf of everyone who came under his purview, be it employer, subordinate or an outside contractor. He also had the capacity for long hours of hard work and almost always would give back to his employers much more than he would have got from them, irrespective of whom he was working for. This was the reason why those who had the good fortune to know him and use his services would not easily let him leave them. And also why he, as a semi-retired professional, could not leave the 'game' for too long.

REKINDLED SPIRITS.

Humanitarian Social Involvements

Tsunami Rehabilitation

Not for the first time, AGA's spirits were rekindled when he heard of the complete devastation caused by the tsunami in December 2004. He had hardly packed his bags to proceed to Canada for retirement when the tragedy struck. He knew he had been summoned elsewhere, back to his homeland to serve once more.

AGA plunged head on into a massive project to help the badly affected areas of Beruwela, Galle and Hambantota. He realized that his powers of philanthropy were woefully inadequate to match up to the requirements caused by the deadly tsunami. He therefore did the more appropriate thing and started a relief fund. AGA wouldn't have tapped a better person for financial support than his cousin - the Chairman of Zam Gems, Refai. He got as many friends and well-wishers, bosses, and any willing donor prepared to sympathise with this worthy cause from Malaysia.

There cannot be a doubt that whatever a golden man touches turns into gold. The response from Malaysians was overwhelming, and AGA was now ready with the Zam Gems Fund for the needy and the poor. He then made the next move, visiting the tsunami-affected site in Beruwela on the 6th of January 2005 to initiate the reconstruction work after collecting all relevant information.

AGA met with the first stumbling block on arrival at the site. An obnoxious rule prevented any new constructions within 100 meters of the beach line. This turned out to be a major problem, as he was in a hurry to push through with the project. Yet AGA was a fellow who didn't wish to be kicking his heels. He thought his time then could be better spent by visiting Doha and Abu Dhabi and looking into the prospect of tapping some petro dollars for the relief fund. Having met almost all his old contacts from Cansult, CCC, Projacs etc, Chairman Jim Metcalfe promised to help further attain his goal.



AGA Barrie with Jim Metcalfe in Cansult office, Abu Dhabi on 29th January 2005

As a direct result of such a great benefactor, the tsunami residencies were completed at a cost of 17.5 million rupees. These houses were more than adequate to accommodate the tsunami victims and the

encroachers who had occupied the Abrar Masjid land. There were also two extra flats to house the Medical Clinic run by the Germans.

Assisting Victor Soncin in Canada

No sooner than the tsunami project was handed over, AGA proceeded to Canada on a request from his old friend Victor Soncin. Soncin desired to set up a cost control system for his construction company and would trust only AGA for the task. AGA got right to it. With the daily monitoring of the progress of the works as against the original targets laid down in the bid, an increase in output was recorded about which the management was extremely happy.

During the work, AGA came to an understanding with his friend. He would spend the summers in Canada, assisting Victor, while in the winter he would depart for Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The arrangement suited AGA well and satisfied his friend's needs. In fact, so pertinent was AGA's assistance that in the year 2006, he was able to help Victor secure the largest single project he was to undertake, the Simcoe Street Tunnel Project, costing over \$35 million. This was accomplished by a clever manoeuvring of the bid price to nudge his opponents out of contention.



THE SIMCOE STREET TUNNEL, USING PRE-CAST GIRDERS

The Simcoe Tunnel project was unique in many respects. It was necessary to produce the precast girders at the site and stress them prior to installation, so as to form the tunnel under the railway tracks the Union Station Rail Corridor. AGA's life suddenly became busy once again due to the circumstances of the time. He had his usual share of social service towards to his family to compound an already busy routine. That was not all. In the midst of such a hectic schedule, he had an accident damaging his ligaments and muscles while playing soccer in the park with his family members.

The accident to his ligaments immobilized him. He was put in cast for three months after the operation, and, after its removal, had to utilize a cane to walk. AGA's grit and determination helped him to continue

helping his friend unabated and pursue other needs such as setting up the precast yard and the quality control system to get the much-needed CSA approval.

AGA's plan during winter was working equally well. In the cold months of 2006, he travelled down to Malaysia to work with HPRC Consulting group and help them prepare a Master Plan for the Shell Company of Malaysia in Miri, Sarawak State.

As the summer of 2007 was approaching, AGA then returned to Canada to continue to work with his friend Victor Soncin on the Simcoe project. It was by then time to erect the beams. AGA realized that the work was something that needed special effort, special procedures, and great coordination. Though a tough combination of working conditions, he was able to see that the project was completed before he left Canada to spend the winter in Sri Lanka.

Involvement in Social Activities in Toronto and Sri Lanka

The summer of 2007 also saw AGA step up his social service activities in Toronto in the form of Da'awa work in the Don Jail. Furthermore, by virtue of his elevated status as a much-respected Senior Citizen respected by the community, he was invited by a movement known as 'Canadians for Peace' to deliver a presentation on peace in Sri Lanka at a rally organized by the movement.

The extract from his speech is reproduced for the record:

*Mr. Chairman, Organizers, Distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me welcome you with the Universal Greeting of Islam. "Assalamu Alaikum". It means, "Peace be upon you". You must reply as **Walikum Salaam**, meaning, "And peace be on you too"*

*We have gathered here today, to promote Peace in Sri Lanka, our war-torn mother country, so it is nothing but very appropriate to greet you with the expression of peace as divinely directed by Allah the Almighty, **which delivers my intention and the intention of all the Sri Lankan Muslims who are living in Canada**. This greeting has no parameters such as time or position or gender. It is all accommodative and one greeting for all.*

*Islam means Peace. It is derived from the Arabic root word "Sala'am". Muslim is one who follows the religion of Islam and who submits to the complete will of Peace, which is the Will of Allah, the Creator of the World and the Heavens. He created the human beings to worship Him and Him alone. This cannot be accomplished unless the Human beings live in peace. **Hence the basic requirement to live and worship, is Peace.***

Peace cannot be achieved in any place unless Justice prevails. Justice cannot prevail till people's rights are preserved. None can preserve the rights unless they respect each other. Thus, Human rights, Justice, and mutual respect are the basic ingredients for peace. We cannot have peace if any one of these ingredients is missing. Even in a family if these basic principles are lacking there will be no peace.

So, what is missing in Sri Lanka, for lacking peace? What had happened to us who are considered to be very kind, tolerable, helpful, accommodating and generous, above all peace-loving people? We need the peace back.

*The country was peaceful, when I migrated to Canada in late sixties, then called Ceylon, was known worldwide, for its natural beauty, splendid beaches, wonderful Ceylon tea and above all for peaceful and tranquil lifestyle of the people. In fact, it was known as the '**Pearl of the Orient**' and '**Paradise of the East**'. The island was not only beautiful and scenic, but the people were very hospitable, kind and caring. Those of you who have visited the Pearl of the East can vouch for it. I am sure Mr. Bob Rae, who has*

been in Sri Lanka many times can bear witness to it. This was mainly due to multi-cultural and multi religious groups living together, that prevailed for last so many centuries. **In Sri Lanka we, the Buddhists, the Christians, the Hindus and the Muslims were living in harmony from the inception.** When any of the community get together for any function or pilgrimage there is always peace why? Because, the mind is set on one goal, that is 'for the good of the mankind and peace'. Therefore, we should always meet with the intention of peace in our mind, like we have gathered here today. When we met in Canada, thirty-five years ago, in the seventies we were trying to help the country economically but today the priority has changed and we are meeting to promote peace. Where did the harmony go? Hence we need the peace to be restored in Sri Lanka, to live in harmony.

As for me, being a Muslim, I had my early education at Zahira College, Colombo, which at that time, was the prime Muslim Educational Institution. Its principal was a Muslim, the deputy was a Singhalese and vice principal was a Tamil. What more evidence do you need to prove the harmony that existed not too long ago? It was just over fifty years. In addition to this, the teachers and the students were mixture of all communities. In fact, last week I met an old school friend of mine after forty years, who is living in Canada. He is a Singhalese Buddhist, and we were talking of the good old days and comparing it with the status of the country today. It is very disheartening and sad to see it deteriorating day by day. We need peace. We want the country to come back to its original form. We want people to feel safe. We need harmony in the golden Island. This is not difficult to achieve, if we the people of Sri Lanka change our attitude and work towards it. When Canada-Sri Lanka Association was first formed, in the early seventies, the president was a Tamil and the vice president was Singhalese. I was to be Secretary, but I declined due to pressure of work. Where did that feeling of Nationalism go? Where did that feeling of brotherhood go? Where did that feeling of understanding go? I have another personal example of peaceful coexistence. During the early part of seventies when we had to do a project in Niagara Falls, where I was the project Engineer we had three other Sri Lankans in the team, a Buddhist, a Christian and a Hindu working for the same company, and we lived together with a fellow Canadian. We were very happy and lived in best of harmony, right through the project forming a happy group sharing all the ups and downs of living. This was possible because of our unique way of upbringing in our country, where we always enjoyed tolerance and understanding, which enabled us to live peacefully in a foreign country of different culture. We need peace back in Sri Lanka.

No doubt in my mind today, there is sincere desire amongst all of us present here and those living in Sri Lanka to bring back peace and harmony, we had enjoyed in good old days, as soon as possible. As for Muslims, I can assure, we love peace, and we need it to be restored back immediately in the golden island of Sri Lanka. Now the question is how to regain or restore the lost peace?

In my humble opinion it must start with us here. Learned speakers and experienced peace activists had proposed many sophisticated long-term solutions, but I as a layman can only emphasize that peace is not something new for Sri lankans and it had been proved that we lived in peace for many years hence restoring of peace should not be difficult if we change our approach and attitude in life. Canada provides everything possible for peace loving people. It is a country of two main languages and many ethnic groups, but harmony and peace prevail everywhere. Canada is a golden example to follow.

We have to respect the country's law and live respectfully. We as individuals have to like each other. Help each other. Live for the sake of each other. We must be involved in social activities for the community irrespective of ethnic groups, cast, creed or colour. We should be involved in neighbourhood activities as it consists of all groups. This is the beginning of peace.

We urge the leaders political and community, in Sri Lanka, to work toward peace at all time. They must keep the interest of the country at large, in their heart. They must feel for the people, irrespective of any

ethnic group when decisions are made. There should be justice at all times in their approach. They should be fair and maintain rights of all the people, all the time to achieve peace.

The National schools in Sri Lanka should be open to all ethnic groups and not confined to one particular group. This results in segregation and children do not get the opportunity to learn about other culture and learn to live in harmony.

As for Media it should portray the truth and stand for justice. It should not give any importance to war or conflicts instead publicize any major events which lead to peace. Carry article promoting peace and its advantages to the country and people. They should refrain from reporting news, which could lead to any misunderstanding whereby creating disharmony among people. I propose to the Peace Convening Committee to declare the month of December as the Month of peace in Sri Lanka and the media should refrain from reporting any news with respect to war but project the image of peace.

Finally, I conclude my speech by thanking Allah to have given me opportunity to speak on spreading peace in Sri Lanka, I thank the organizers to have invited me to speak on behalf of Muslims on peace, I thank the organizers who worked very hard to make this event happen. Many thanks to the distinguished speakers who addressed us on the importance of peace in Sri Lanka, and finally I thank you all who took your precious time to attend this convention and making it a great success. I conclude with my humble prayers to Allah Almighty to grant ever lasting peace to our mother land Sri Lanka, this beautiful country of Canada and the world.

Wasslamu Alaikukum

During his annual visit to Sri Lanka in the winter of 2007, AGA had a rewarding experience. He gave serious thought to implementing a project that he had in mind for a very long time. It was profoundly gratifying for him to have decided to help the school in his village where he was nurtured during his formative years. This institution of course gave him the initial push to get over every obstacle he faced in life, achieve every goal he wished, and stand up to every adversary in any part of the world with confidence, courage, and an air of respectability. The school project, once completed, would offer students 40 brand new classrooms, which were roomy, well ventilated, and clean; a playground where children could receive the necessary physical training and opportunity to play outdoor games of their choice; the basic necessities such as laboratories for science, computers, etc which are sadly lacking in a large number of government schools. What better gift could one give in return for receiving a primary education? The project would cost RS 50 million.

MALIGAHENA MUSLIM MAHAVIDYALA, BERUWELA

BACKGROUND

Maligahena Muslim Mahavidyalaya started almost ninety years ago as a Madarassa by Sheikh Mubarakh Alim of the Bukhary Thakya with limited students. Today it has over seven hundred students with about thirty teachers having classes from grade one to GCE (A) level. When this school was visited by two of his old students, namely Al Hadj ZAM Refai and AGA Barrie it was found to be in a very deteriorated condition.



Reviewing the proposal by ZAM Refai and AGA Barrie, to improve the facilities in the school.

The principal and the School Developing Society updated the visitors with all the drawbacks and promised that if the facilities were improved, they could produce results. Based on this discussion, a master plan to develop the school in stages was drawn up. Accordingly, Refai purchased the adjoining land and constructed a three-storey building to house fifteen classrooms and a hall to house science and computer classes.

Refai agreed to construct all buildings according to the Government requirements and has since pledged to donate all completed facilities in memory of his late father Zainul Abdeen Marikar. This new phase started in the year 2008 by purchasing the adjoining land at a cost of 7,000,000 Rupees. It was completed in December 2009 and the transfer of the property and vesting in the Government took place in February 2010.



The foundation stone to be laid by ZAM Refai



ZAM Refai Visits the Site – April 9th, 2011



Completed School Building with Part of the Playground



Opening Ceremony

AGA's interest in imparting knowledge led him to set up programs for monitoring the quality of education in Beruwela. He was instrumental in holding three seminars for students in local schools about achieving goals. There was no one better for such seminars than AGA. A life achiever, his wisdom in setting goals and seeing them reached was passed on to those who attended. An additional project he dedicated himself to was the Azeez Memorial Hall at Zahira College. He helped prepare the master plan for this undertaking, something which he considered a long-felt need.

During his 2008 stay in Sri Lanka, the design of the three-storeyed school building at Beruwela had to be completed before other work could commence. It was AGA's desire that as much of the work on the school building be completed before he left for Canada that summer. Work, however, couldn't be done at the speed that AGA wanted due to multiple factors such as bad weather, intervening holidays, and the enormity of the construction of the retaining wall that consumed much of the time. All matters considered, AGA was eventually satisfied with the progress when he departed for Canada.

Despite the many projects, AGA always tried to show gratitude to his elders. Accordingly, he paid a visit to his brother Azeez in Galle, spending as much as two long weeks by his side. At the time, Azeez had been ailing, so a visit from AGA lifted his spirit. AGA never forgot to speak about his brother and remembers how Azeez had been of help to him in his younger days.

With his duties complete, it was time to return to Toronto for the Summer of 2008. Back in Canada, AGA was ready to help his friend Victor Soncin and follow up on three projects. His next annual visit to Sri Lanka was due in November 2008.

However, an unexpected turn of events took place during the month of August 2008. AGA received a message from Colombo that Jiffriya's younger sister had suddenly taken ill and had been rushed to the hospital in an unconscious state. AGA realised that it was best he sent Jiffriya to Sri Lanka so that she could be there for her sibling. In his usual manner, he reassured his wife that he would look after himself and that she should not worry about him. He said he would stick with his original plan to travel down to Sri Lanka by the third week of November.

After few weeks, more shocking news reached AGA that ZAM Refai too had suddenly fallen ill. Refai had collapsed at home, whilst taking some clothes out of his wardrobe one morning and was in a state of semi consciousness. Colombo had delayed transmitting the message for some time, since they were of the view that he would get better. Yet when Refai's condition did not improve substantially in the interim period, they all agreed that AGA should be immediately informed. AGA then took the next available flight to Colombo. He landed in Sri Lanka at least two weeks before the originally intended date.

Under AGA's continued advice and guidance, Refai recovered from his illness and returned home in the course of time to begin his recuperation. In the meanwhile, AGA decided to honour Refai's continued commitment to helping the vast multitude of his relations, the people of Beruwela, as well as the larger Sri Lankan society.

Inauguration of the Sailan Muslim Foundation

With signs that the Sri Lankan Civil War would soon be over, AGA felt that he should set up an organization that would initiate and promote communal harmony. With that in view, he spoke to some of the leading Muslim professionals, intellectuals, and other men of eminence, forming a think tank to develop the idea into a workable outfit. This became the Sailan Muslim Foundation, a group with the following key objectives:

1. Promote interest among the community
2. Raise awareness of issues and grievances
3. Promote education
4. Promote interaction between communities
5. Promote interaction among religions, media, think tanks and other associations
6. Reach out to the decision makers and key government officials
7. Cooperate with government and international bodies
8. To share the knowledge: ***“science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life.”***
9. To serve as a data base for all Muslim information resulting in an encyclopedia of Muslim details
10. Maintain transparency will in all activities

AGA arranged for the launching of a website for the purpose of issuing the mission statement. It was inaugurated in the presence of a gathering of selected invitees from a cross section of Sri Lankan society. Some notable guests included Faisz Mustapha P.C, Shibly Azeez the former Attorney General, Izeth Hussein Former Civil Servant, Dilup Chickera the Bishop of Colombo, Ven. Uduwe Dhammaloka Thera and Justice Wigneswaram.

Continued Work and a Final Goodbye

Aga continued to be active by the grace of the Almighty. He strove to provide services for the community in both Sri Lanka and Canada. With help of ZAM Refai, he involved himself in numerous charitable works dedicating his time and effort in assisting others through financial, educational, and religious means.

As planned, however, AGA returned to Canada after spending the winter months in Sri Lanka to continue with Soncin Construction. He was involved with the Queensway Bridge restoration over the Canadian Pacific Railway, West of Kipling, repairing the Gardiner Expressway and few more projects. In addition to construction, AGA was much involved in social work, continuing to give da'awa in Canadian prisons.

In the midst of his work, AGA lost his closest friend M S M Nizar on the 23rd of September 2012. Nizar passed away suddenly, leaving an established accounting firm, many stocks and shares in his name without any beneficiary, a large home, and above all, no will. As AGA was his trusted friend, Nizar's wife, Hidaya, enlisted AGA's help in clearing the complications. AGA gladly agreed and carried out her wishes to the letter.

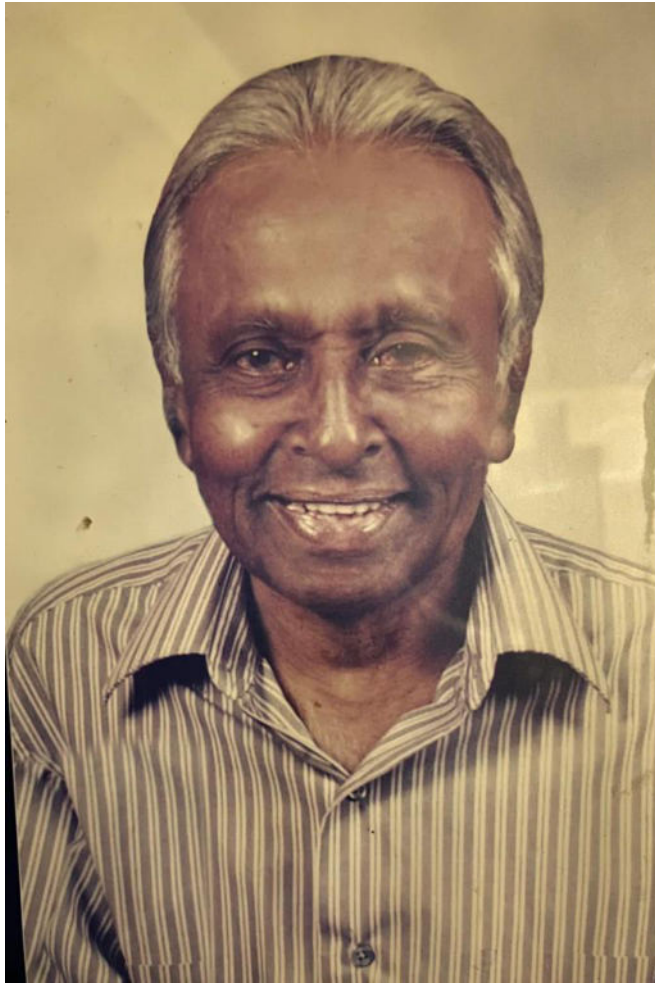
AGA again returned to Sri Lanka and was immediately involved in many social activities. He conducted multiple seminars pertaining to education and the achievement of goals. One such seminar even took place at Zahira College, and was tailor made for GCE (Advance Level) students and teachers. AGA also spent time in collecting data and conducting surveys to determine why Sri Lankan Muslims were being attacked by radicals amongst the Buddhist community. He published his findings in an article entitled '*Are the Muslims Barking at the Wrong Tree*'.

Work in his advanced years seemed to be transpiring well. On the 11th of February 2013, however, AGA would receive another severe blow. His dearest friend Daya Chitrapiriya Lelwela, so amicably known as Lel, passed away that year. Despite the hurt, AGA knew he was blessed to have been able to spend time with Lel during his friend's final days in hospital. He was also most fortunate to have been in Sri Lanka to pay tribute to him. AGA writes here in honour of Lelwela:

"I will be failing in my duties if I don't pen few words of appreciation about my good friend Daya Lelwela. I knew Lel from the time we entered the University of Ceylon in 1956 till he departed this world in 2013. A good fifty-seven years, much more than our half our life spans. During this period, we were very close shared many memories as undergraduates, coworkers and, above all, family friends, as mentioned in this biography – many sections of which were written by him.

We were so close. We joined the Railways on the same day, but I was placed senior to him as I had an Honours Degree and every time a vacancy occurred, I would get promoted against my wishes. At one time in the Lower District when I was the District Engineer, Lel was the Assistant District Engineer. This is the worst thing that can happen among two good friends. I had to bring this to the notice of the Chief Engineer and divided the district into two as we had the Coast Line and the Kalany Valley Line. I did the entire administration and technical of the Coast Line while Lelwela oversaw the KV Line. Around this time, I had decided to leave the Railways but never mentioned it to Lel. When the right opportunity arose, I resigned. Lelwela, however, continued in the Railways, holding many responsible positions and finally ended up as the General Manager.

Lelwela has a great family – a wife and three children. The younger daughter Mihri now has children of her own, something that Lel was very proud of."



Mr. D.C Lelwela



Lelwela with his Family

Fighting through the loss of his best friend, AGA attended to other issues. Muslims in Sri Lanka were going through a bad spell, and so he was involved in easing the situation. One of his endeavours was to organize a meeting with the Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapakse, at ZAM Refai's residence through M J M Muzammil, Mayor of Colombo. Many prominent Muslims attended this meeting, and most issues were ironed out.

As part of promoting education among Muslims, AGA, through Zam Trust, completed a building for the Fathima School, one of the leading Muslim Girls schools in Colombo. The effort made their 'Dream come true', as entitled in a report prepared by Sailan Muslim (enclosed here). During the same time, Zam Trust Fund laid the foundation for a four-storey building for the Khairya School in Colombo, one of the oldest Muslim Girl Schools in the city.

SOME OF THE DREAMS COMES TRUE

The Government of Sri Lanka had decided to upgrade 1000 Schools of which 74 were Muslim schools. Unfortunately, Fatima Muslim Ladies College, even though requires upgrading, didn't fall under this category. Hence the responsibility rest on the shoulders of Muslim Community to facilitate and upgrade the school.

The school was visited on Tuesday the 3rd April 2012 by the officials of Sailan Muslim Foundation based on the minutes of meeting held on Thursday 22nd March 2012 and follow up meetings held on 26th and 27th March 2012, with respect to improve the standard of education in the community. Fact finding team consists of A.G.A. Barrie, of Sailan Muslim Foundation, M.Y.A.Bawa and M.I.H.Hamid of Education Department

Details of the school

<i>Name:</i>	<i>Fathima Muslim Ladies College</i>
<i>Grade of School</i>	<i>1AB</i>
<i>Principal</i>	<i>Mrs H.M.Yousuf</i>
<i>Medium</i>	<i>Tamil, Sinhala and English</i>
<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>2800</i>
<i>Number of Teachers</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>Student to Teacher Ratio</i>	<i>28:1</i>
<i>Number of Classrooms presently available</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Number of Class rooms required</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Under equipped laboratory</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Audi visual Equipment available but no classroom</i>	
<i>No other facilities</i>	
<i>Science teachers</i>	<i>no issues</i>
<i>GCE (O) level Science Stream Tamil Medium</i>	<i>111 sat and 60% passed</i>
<i>GCE(O) Level Science Stream English medium</i>	<i>18 sat and 15% passed</i>
<i>GCE(O) Level Science Stream Sinhala Medium</i>	<i>None sat</i>
<i>GCE(A) Level</i>	<i>three entered University</i>



THE PRINCIPAL SHOWING THE STATUS OF THE BUILDING

Requirements

1. *Classrooms*

Presently the classes are held on corridors and sheds. The government has approved construction of a three storey building which could provide at least 10 of the 17 classrooms required. Details of the approved building are available with Mrs. Batugedara, Provincial Engineer. The office is located on Scoffield Place Colombo.

2. *Science Laboratory*

Only one laboratory for all grades from grade six to thirteen, under equipped and hardly enough room for the children to move around is available and there is room to extend the laboratory. It has to be restored into a livable classroom with sufficient equipment for all grades has to be provided. More than 60% of the student appeared for GCE(O) Level passed purely due to dedication of the teachers and hard work by the students without any motivation through facilities. The school is 1AB grade and no facilities have been provided for the last 20 years

3. *Computer and Audiovisual Facilities*

There are audiovisual equipments available but no classroom to teach or utilize. There are 15 computers available in a small computer laboratory. Need to improve.

4. *Sports Facilities*

Due to non-availability of sports field or grounds, Sports Meet is held once in four years. Sports being vital for the development a fair size ground to be provided.

5. *Under nourished children.*

70% of the children are from low income group. At least five children cannot afford breakfast. Many of the children have no place to study, no lights and above all family unrest.

Conclusion

Even though the teachers are dedicated under good direction of the Principal, lack of class rooms and facilities is holding back the children's progress. The children who do well in GCE(O) level tend to leave the school due to lack of facilities to further their education. It is creditable to note with all the difficulties, three students gained admission to university one for Unani Medicine, one for Commerce and the other Arts.

The fact finding team recommend the construction of the approved building to provide the immediately needed ten class rooms, restore and upgrade the existing laboratory and provide a fair size play ground.

Foundation Laying Ceremony



LAYING OF FOUNDATION STONE

By the help of Allah and through the efforts of Senior Minister AHM Fowzie and Provincial Member Nouzer Fowzie, contacted Alhadj ZAM Refai Hadjiar and have agreed to finance the construction of the School building. Accordingly the foundation stones for the building were laid today, Sunday the 9th December 2012 by Hon. Basil Rajapakse, Minister of Urban Development, Hon. A.H.M. Fowzie Senior Minister for Urban Affairs, His worship A.J.M. Muzammil, Mayor of Colombo and Al Hadj ZAM Refai. Chairman Zamgems. Alhamdulillah the long awaited dream has come true.



GUESTS OF HONOUR AT THE FUNCTION

The ceremony commenced with recital of Quran by the student F.H.Zaahidha followed school song. Principal Mrs Yousuf welcomed the guests and thanked Al Hadj Z.A.M. Refai for the kind gesture. Hon. A.H.M. Fowzie, Senior Minister for Urban Affairs, mentioned that he will continue to support the school and will try to purchase the adjoining land for a ground. Hon. Basil Rajapakse, Minister of Economic Development, recalled his youth period, living in the vicinity and promised to help the school in whatever way possible to enhance the education and thanked Al -Hadj Refai for the kind assistance to erect the building. The Mayor of Colombo, His worship. A.J.M. Muzammil thanked the principal for the good work and praised Al Hadj Refai for continuance support to the community. Hon. Alavi Moulana, Governor, Western Province thanked Refai Hadjiar for the continuing support to raise the standard of Education among the needy. Mr. AGA Barrie mentioned that helping towards education of the community runs in the family and AlHadj Refai's father was the first to donate a land to build a school for girls in Beruwela and Al Hadj Refai is following his father's footstep. He asked the audience to pray for his health. The function concluded with recital of Dua by Najeemuddin Moulavi, Vote of thanks by the Vice Principal Mrs. Mumthas Begum and playing of the National Anthem and finally the Salawaath by all.



INVITEES AND GUESTS AT THE FUNCTION

The function was grand and well attended by the students, teachers, parents and well wishers. The school band welcomed the guests of honour, School, Provincial and National flags were hoisted and the students performed many colourful cultural events.

Tokens of appreciation were presented to Hon Minister Basil Rajapakse and Alhadj Z.A.M. Refai, Chairman Zamgems by Senior Minister A.H.M. Fowzie.

PROMOTING TOURISM THROUGH MASAJID

For the first time in Sri Lanka, AGA was involved in promoting tourism through masjids. This was a concept borrowed from foreign countries and was set up with Asiff Hussein. One of the mosques selected was Masjid Al Abrar in Maradana, Beruwela, the first masjid in Sri Lanka. To get the masjid ready, a major renovation was required along with and new buildings. The initial meeting was held at AGA's residence, a gathering attended by Imtiaz Bakeer Markar, Asiff Hussein, Azam Bakir Markar, Aga Barrie, and the architect on the 20th of January 2013. As the project involved changing the entire set up of the masjid, the architect didn't respond, and construction has not taken off the ground in Beruwela. Similar initiatives, however, are being pursued through CIS in Colombo and elsewhere.

MASTER PLAN FOR MASJD AL ABRAAR

A meeting was held at AGA Barrie's residence on Monday, the 20th of January 2013, attended by :

1. *Imtiaz Bakeer Markar*
2. *Ashely de Vos (architect)*
3. *Asif Hussein*
4. *Azzam Bakeer Markar*
5. *AGA Barrie*



MEETING IN PROGRESS

The following were agreed to:

1. *To prepare a brief for the project*
2. *For Ashely to visit the site*

3. For Ashely to prepare the Master Plan
4. Implementation to be phased

The Brief

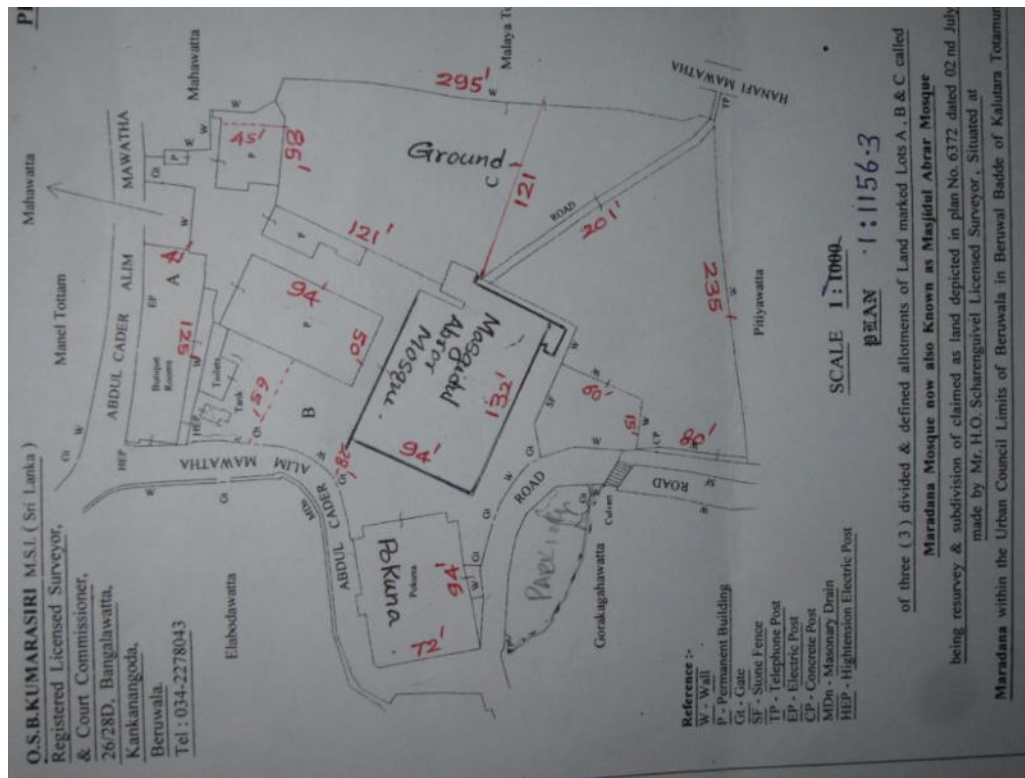


MASJID AL ABRAAR

Introduction

Masjid Abraar is the first known Masjid in Sri Lanka, estimated to be over 1000 years old. Even though it is being developed it has no Master Plan. Hence it was decided to prepare a Master Plan utilizing the renowned Architect Ashely de Vos, taking the following criteria:

1. Survey Plan



The survey plan, dated 20th April 2013, as prepared by the Registered Surveyor O.S.B. Kumarasiri, was provided by Raji of Maradana and he has undertaken to provide the as built information of the existing structures.

These existing structures consist of:

I. Masjid

The Masjid, being the first Mosque, was built in the year 922 AD (To be confirmed) but now must be expanded to accommodate the increase in population, maintaining the original concept of a veranda around the main prayer hall.

II. The Pond

As washing is a prerequisite for daily prayers, the pond had been constructed with easy access to the Masjid from the west. It also has two accesses from Abdul Cader Alim Mawatte, for the convenience of the public, as this was also used as a bathing pool.

III. Zavia cum Madrasa

It is same building used for both purposes and not presentable

IV. Burial grounds

Even though the existing boundary wall prevents people from encroaching, it has to be renovated to keep in line with the ongoing development. Improvements to the burial ground are in progress and to be incorporated in the master plan.

V. Toilets

These facilities are spread with one recently constructed closer to the Western Entrance closer to the existing well.

VI. Access road and Drainage

Abdul Cader Alim Mawatte runs around the Masjid property from North to the West and a local road passes to the South. There is a land adjoining this local road belonging to the Masjid and can be used as parking lot.

VII. Parking

There are no Parking areas at present, but the public road is utilized for this purpose

VIII. Other ancillary buildings

The row of shops belongs to the Masjid. There are other small, unplanned structures around and all need to be evaluated

2. Brief

- a) Review and evaluate the entire property with respect to proper usage and circulation.*
- b) Identify any old and heritage value features, so that these can be restored and maintained*
- c) The Masjid has been expanded but identify or propose any additional features to reflect the originality*
- d) The roof to be reviewed and repairs to be recommended.*
- e) Quarters, Rooms, Offices, Conference Rooms and Facilities to be reviewed and changes if any to be proposed.*
- f) The pond to be restored maintaining the original concept but with arrangements of fountain to purify the water quality*
- g) Improve the access road to blend with the proposed changes to the environment*
- h) Review and recommend proper drainage system to avoid stagnation of water.*
- i) Design an Archive at the North entrance, over the toilets and camouflage the toilets with a new façade as part of the archive building, with access around the well and exposing the well to the sky.*
- j) Propose improvements to the row of shops with an additional floor*
- k) Consolidate all service buildings to one area and provide open cooking area for Zavia functions.*
- l) Improve the Zavia cum Madrasa with proper facilities for public and students, taking into consideration the annual feast which takes place in the same building where students learn Quran.*
- m) Parking to be provided at the available land adjacent to the local road in South*
- n) Incorporate the improvements being done in the burial grounds with the balance available land with respect to landscaping*
- o) Phase the implementation with Archive to be completed within six months and the rest of the improvements to be clearly packaged*

Work, Projects, and Family Matters

AGA Continued to work with Soncin in many projects including the replacement of the bridge on Keele Street over Highway 401. This bridge was unique for Aga as he introduced his friend Ayman Al Fayaz, the owner of DecoArc, to Soncin to produce special fiberglass for design purposes.

The summer of 2014 was an extra ordinary one for AGA. He first and foremost enjoyed his granddaughter's, Amani's, wedding in a banquet hall where he himself was involved in the installation of the ceiling and interior decoration. The wedding took place on 29th August and proved to be yet another splendid marital ceremony.

The Sailan Muslim Foundation of Canada also celebrated the country's first Islamic History Month at Masjid Al Jannah with Mufti Yusuf Badat as a guest speaker. Recalling the history of Sri Lankan Muslims in Canada, AGA gave a wonderful presentation of all the 'firsts' of the community.



Mufti Yusuf Badat Speaks at Canada's Inaugural Islamic History Month Gathering

Before leaving for Sri Lanka, AGA got fully involved in a unique project with Soncin. They were required to produce special moulds, via DecoArc, to precast the multi-dimensional concrete elements meant for the construction of a monument of the members of the Operators Union. The monument was designed by Patrick Birmingham of Bermingham Pile Company, AGA so recalls. His family also witnessed two more third generation weddings in Canada, these involving grandsons of AGA's beloved brother. Beyond this scope, AGA continued to work with the Canadian Correctional Services, delivering the weekly Friday sermons.



MONUMENT FOR OPERATORS UNION

When he found himself on the Sri Lankan front, AGA continued to be involved with Zamgems, providing social services and sharing knowledge with others. Professor Achi Ishaq arranged for both AGA and Haris Deen to speak with Eastern University undergraduates about their careers. While Haris Deen spoke about project management, AGA, of course, lectured the students about the engineering profession.

Whilst still in Sri Lanka, another of AGA's granddaughters was engaged. Maryam Refai was betrothed to Dr Shifaz Deen, who, most interestingly, was none other than a grandson of AGA's uncle Thahir. It is noteworthy to mention that this marriage marked the fifth generation of the Samsudeen Marikar clan of Beruwela.

AGA also continued with the initiative for improving education among Muslims. He spearheaded further improvements to the Khairiya Girls school, Dematagoda, Colombo, which faced many problems due to its location and lack of land to expand. Alhamdulillah, the land opposite to the school was acquired by the government, and Zam Trust once again commenced the project by laying the foundation for a four-storey building meant to provide additional facilities.

For Zam Gems, AGA rendered his services the construction of a nine storey show room at Green Path. Here again AGA faced difficulties which he tackled with gusto. The foundation presented a slew of issues, though AGA ingeniously overcame them by founding the building on bored piles and used the additional underground space as a water storage tank.

To avoid more complications, AGA persuaded Haris Deen and Engineer Lutfi Jamaldeen to form a project management consulting company for the purpose of handling Zam Gems projects. The company was named 'Total Construction Solutions Ltd. (TCS)' and carried the same address as Zam Gems.

With familial and civil work sorted, AGA departed to Canada to continue his services with Soncin. He became involved in the 404 Rehabilitation project, costing over 15 million, and spread over three years. This was a good break for AGA. He enjoyed the work, its location mere minutes from Iftikhar and Raihana's homes in Scarborough.

That summer in Canada was a great one for AGA. There was plenty of excitement and achievement to found, with AGA first involving himself in the Muslim Welfare Center. There he assisted in planning and preparing the drawings for a much-needed Seniors Home in the GTA.

As usual, AGA also ventured into family construction projects. He extended Raihana's house, adding a full bedroom complete with an additional bathroom and a separate one room unit. Victor readily offered to excavate and construct the basement which was the difficult part of the extension. Alhamdulillah, on approval of the extension drawings the project commenced on the 26th of September 2016 and was closed before AGA left for Sri Lanka.

AGA's family saw the coming of its next generation that summer. Amani gave birth to Hamza Hamid on the 29th of December 2016, a long and painful process that resulted in AGA's first great grandson. Hamza's birth also marked the beginning of the fourth generation of the family in Canada.

Returning to Sri Lanka, AGA didn't miss a beat. He got right back into his routine, now involving himself in getting ready for yet another wedding. He assisted Ahsan Refai in modifying the rooftop of Ahsan's home to become the bridal suite. The project turned out to be a masterpiece, a fine little marvel speckled with bits of Mediterranean influence and coupled with Fast Eastern decor. Maryam's wedding took place in July 2017 with a grand function at the Galle Face Hotel.

The excitement for AGA was doubled when Ahsan and Radhia decided to have Aqil's engagement to Safa Wasik in January 2017. The ceremony took place at the Nimal Masjid in the presence of the two happy grandfathers, ZAM Refai and AGA. Both gentlemen were dressed in typical Beruwela attire – a sarong and a red fez cap.

AGA's construction work was also proceeding well. With Green Path and all the plots amalgamated, the final phase piling also commenced. This was a major project for Zam Gems, the construction being awarded to MAGA for 250 million Rupees.

AGA took on further responsibilities when he assumed position as the Chairman of the Muslim Scholarship Fund. With some authority, he convinced the Board to invest in a property in Dehiwela. The move was an integral one designed to give the Fund some freedom. As their old base of operations was an office, they were paying huge sums of rent. With their own property secured, they could allocate greater investments into new awards and scholarships for Muslim students.

Yet AGA was not finished there. He made arrangements with ZAM Refai to advance a loan to purchase land in Jaffna for the refugees. Unfortunately, the initiative failed to go through due to some hitch in the title of the land. However, it was a fruitful exercise for record, one that demonstrates AGA's unyielding willingness to serve others. A report reproduced here captures the essence of the project.

RESETTLEMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE – JAFFNA REFUGEES

Dear Friends,

The LTTE evicted the Jaffna Muslims in October 1990. After the war ended in May 2009, many were hopeful of returning to Jaffna. However, the Government has not addressed their resettlement, and the Jaffna Muslims are scattered all over. Those who have returned are without housing facilities, although the Government had promised relief in

many ways. Most of these houses are beyond repair and were not restored due to many reasons, mainly due to lack of funds by the owners.



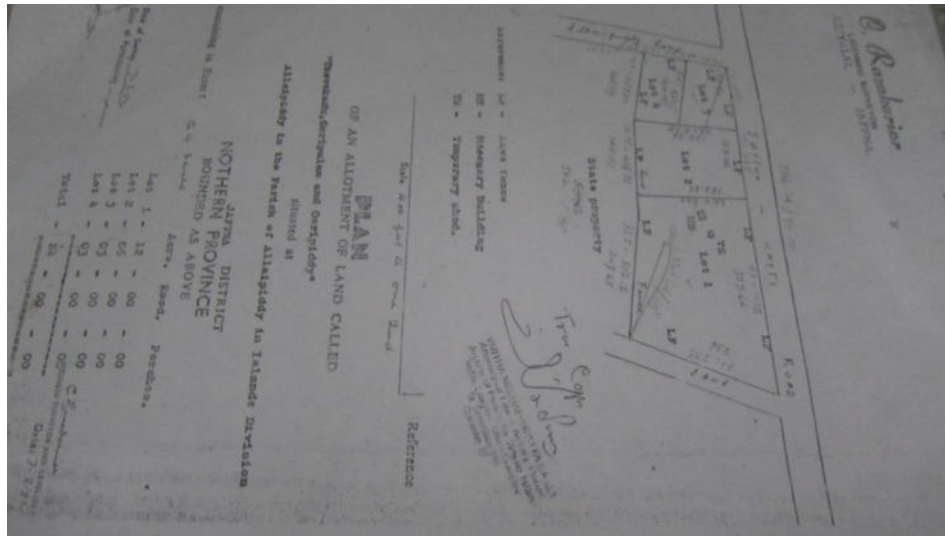
NEGLECTED HOMES NOT RESTORED

Many interested parties have been investigating the resettlement of Jaffna IDPs. Land is a big problem as families have increased over the 25 years since they were ‘chased out’ in 1990. The Govt. is willing to contribute towards building houses provided lands are identified. Many IDPs are living in the damaged Khadeeja Girls’ College, and they need to be resettled. After they leave the school can be repaired by the State. There are others without land and housing. Some IDPs in Puttalam, Kalpitiya etc. are willing to return provided adequate facilities are available.



REFUGEES OCCUPYING KHADEEJA SCHOOL

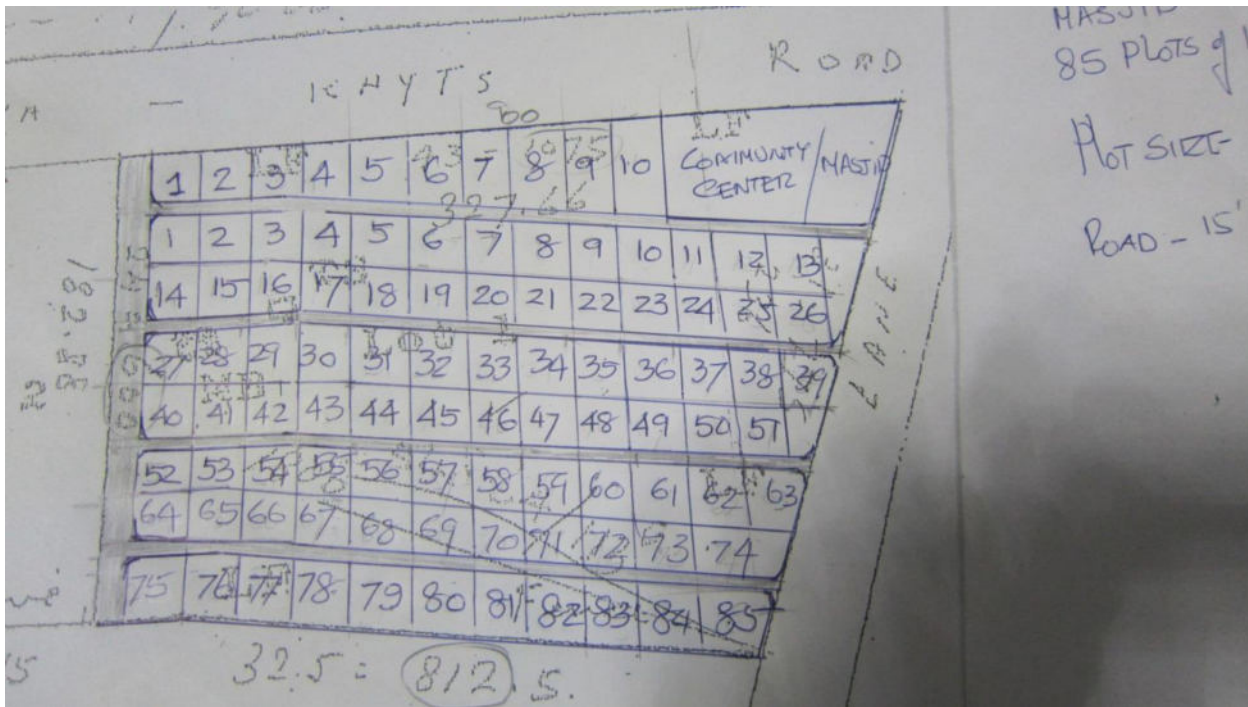
An extent of land comprising 12 acres has been identified along the main road, halfway from Jaffna town to Kayts leading to the masjid on the beach. Br. M.S. Raheem, former President of the YMMA, identified this and a social worker involved is resettling the refugees in Jaffna. The land is owned by some influential families who want Rs. 300,000/- per acre, totalling Rs. 3.6 million. In our opinion, it is a reasonable amount, and the land needs to be purchased. We do not want to miss the opportunity, Insha Allah. Hence, we are looking for contributors.



PROPOSED LAND LOCATED ALONG KAYTS – JAFFNA ROAD

Meanwhile, as we are much interested in settling some of the refugees living in makeshift areas in Jaffna initially, and Barrie is working out a plan to buy this land for resettlement. We have mentioned about the above to many, who are interested to resettle the displaced and are very enthusiastic about the proposal. As the cost is reasonable and the project is very viable, we had a detailed discussion with Raheem, who is one of the prime movers of the project. We want to identify about 10 or 12 persons who can contribute at least Rs. 300,000/- each. We envisage plots for the IDPs, a mosque, community center and shops on the main road to maintain the mosque from their income Etc.

A local registered surveyor will draw a professional subdivision plan for the project. Raheem is pursuing the documentation with the owners, to check the Deeds and Plan and other documents, before we pay an advance to book the land. In the meantime, we have proposed to subdivide the land into 85 plots. Each plot will be about 14 perches. There will be 10 shop lots along the Jaffna-Kayts Road with a Community Center and a Masjid



PROPOSED SUBDIVISION PLAN TO BE DONE PROFESSIONALLY

We envisage a Trust to be formed with eminent interested persons, who will have full control. The sale or abuse of the land by the IDPs have to be prevented. Suitable legal conditions can be drawn up.

We think that it is a good project with Almighty Allah's Blessings.

If you are interested, you can contribute more if you wish to. Kindly let me know your agreement, so that we can keep you as one of the contributors.

PROGRESS AS OF: 16TH APRIL 2016

A MEETING WAS HELD ON SATURDAY, THE 16TH APRIL 2016, REGARDING THE LAND FOR IDPS IN JAFFNA AT AGA BARRIE'S RESIDENCE.

The notes on the minutes are as follows:

Present:

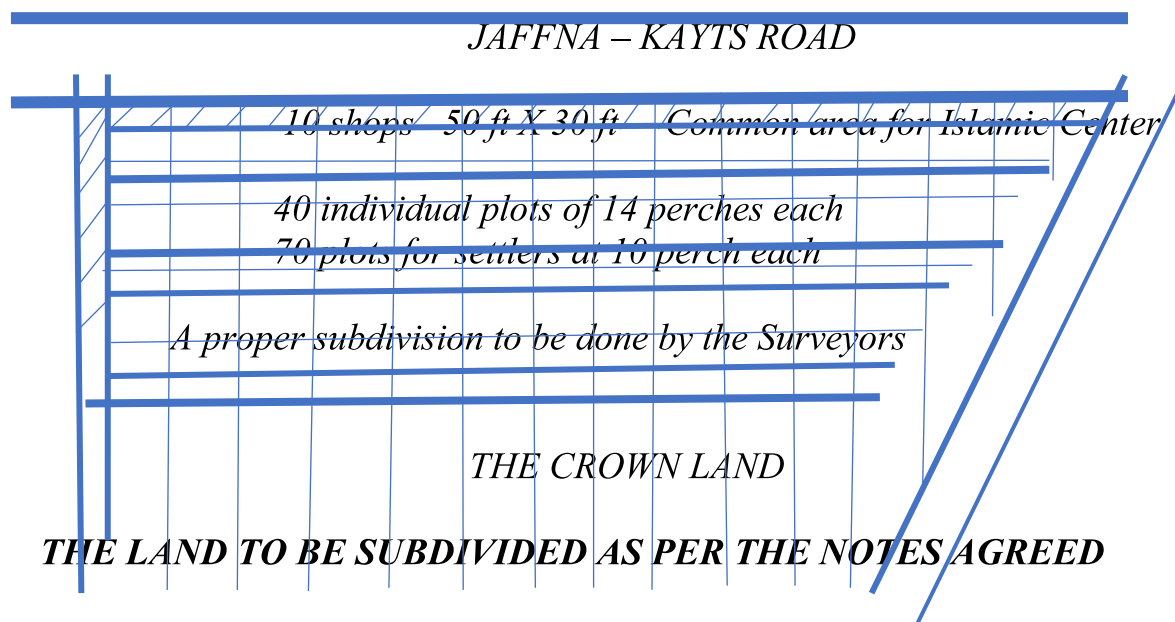
- Ali Azeez,
- M S Raheem
- Ziard Deen
- AGA Barrie

1. Allocation

After a detail discussion, the following allocations were arrived:

Total extent of the land is 12 Acres which is 1680 perches at 140 perches per acre (This is farmers measure as opposed 160 perches per acre) All the allocation and subdivision was done on this basis.

- A) Public Road within the property parallel to Jaffna - Kayts Road, utilizing the road reservation within the property 29 perches
- B) Common area Islamic center 600 ft X 50 ft 96 perches
- C) 10 shops 50 ft X 30 ft 48 perches
- D) A major road to be provided at the beginning of the land, perpendicular to Jaffna Kayts Road 20 ft wide 30 perches
- E) 7 Cross roads 12 ft wide 200 perches
- F) 40 shareholders at 14 perches each 560 perches
- G) 70 settlers @ 10 perches each 700 perches
- Total allocated extent 1,683 Perches



2. Fund

Land cost 12 acres @ Rs 300,000.00 each	Rs 3,600,000.00
Stamp Fee, Lawyers Fee and Surveyors cost	400,000.00
Total fund required	Rs 4,000,000.00

Committed to date:

<i>ZAM Refai</i>	<i>Rs 600,000.00</i>
<i>AGA Barrie.....</i>	<i>Rs 600,000.00</i>
<i>Radhia Barrie</i>	<i>Rs 300,000.00</i>
<i>Fahli Caffoor.....</i>	<i>Rs 300,000.00</i>
<i>Fahraz Farouk.....</i>	<i>Rs 300,000.00</i>
<i>Rizni Lafir</i>	<i>Rs 100,000.00</i>
<i>Ramzeen Batcha.....</i>	
<i>Irshard Hassan.....</i>	
<i>40 Share Holders @ Rs 15,000.00</i>	<i>Rs 600,000.00 (To be collected by Raheem and to be used for sundry expenses)</i>

<i>Payment will be advanced by Refai Hadjar</i>	<i>Rs 3,000,000.00</i>
<i>Cash payment by Aga Barrie</i>	<i>Rs. 600,000.00</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>Rs. 3,600,000.00</i>

Ali Azeez to meet Refai Hadjar and Radhia to collect the fund once the transactions are in order and complete

3. Ownership and distribution

40 plots of 14 perches each, equal to 560 perches to be owned by the shareholders. The deed will be written directly to them as the owners are already known. There will be no conditions stipulated in the deed, but the payment to be collected prior to completing the deed.

The common area for the centre and 10 shops equal to 144 perches to be Owned by Azeez Foundation and YMMA Jaffna and will be written in their names. YMMA in association with Azeez Foundation will administer the property who will be reporting to a special Trust. The Trustees of the new Trust will be:

Ali Azeez

Fouad

M S Raheem

Mahroof A Cader

Farouk Khalid

**Ziard Deen and
A G A Barrie**

*The balance (1680 - 560 -144) 976 perches for settlers and roads to be written in ZAM TRUST name till the individuals are identified which will then be transferred to them with conditions and agreement. The settlers will own the land but cannot dispose it. Lawyer to be consulted in writing the deed.
Local YMMA Jaffna will administer the day-to-day activities reporting to the Trust.*

4. Utilities

*Water is available and individual tube wells can be drilled
Sealed Septic Tank to be built
Electric power distribution is available*

5. Building of the houses

The Government and NGOs to assist the settlers to build the houses

6. The public area and the shops

This to be developed by Azeez Foundation and Jaffna YMMA under the direction of the new Trust.

Following are the service providers at present

*Lawyers : Waznia Thahir cum Zulfiqar Ahamed
Surveyors : Subramaniam
Administrators: YMMA Jaffna in association with Azeez Foundation
Notes taken by: AGA Barrie*

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS PROJECT DIDN'T COME TRUE DUE TO DELAY IN PROCURING THE PROPOSED LAND IN JAFFNA – ALLAH KNOWS BEST.



Ziard Deen has been very helpful towards all the social services projects carried out both in Sri Lanka and Canada through Sailan Muslim Foundation and World Forum for Sri Lanka Muslims

Further Work and Familial Happenings

AGA made his summerly voyage back to Canada. Upon his return, he was immediately met with a plethora of requests. He was needed everywhere, it seemed, his engineering expertise a much-vaunted commodity. With Soncin, he worked on a bridge that spanned over the Highway 401, located at Henry Street, Whitby. He also lent his skills to the construction of 10 bridges for an extension to Highway 407 in Oshawa.

His professional work, however, took back seat to yet another family event. His granddaughter Huda was getting married, and the home at 130 Robbinstone required some work to fit an ever-growing household. AGA completed the extension to the house with help of Soncin, just in time for the wedding. The function itself was a beautiful event that took place at the Chandini Banquet Hall.

AGA would again jump back to Sri Lanka to avoid Canada's colder months. Per his routine, he did not rest, involving himself in Zam Trust projects and the renovation of the Molliyamalai Mosque in Beruwela. While AGA was on the Island, however, he missed out on the birth of Amani's second son, Jafer Hamid, born on the 4th of February 2018. The sting of being absent from such an occasion only drove AGA to work harder. He spent his time in preparation for Aqil's wedding, executing renovations to Aqil's room flawlessly. Some notable mentions of this project include an extension to the balcony and the addition of three picturesque arches.

Upon his return to Canada, AGA found unique additions and changes to his circumstance. Soncin had by then adopted the usage of the 'Cloud', permitting AGA to access files from anywhere in the world. It was quite the change for a man who had all his life been accustomed to briefcases, files, and physical folders. However, the technological advancement did not unnerve AGA. It was, of course, a maudlin thing relative to a new familial surprise. AGA may have missed out on the birth Jafer Hamid, but he was, Alhamdulillah, able to witness the arrival of Ishaq, Huda's son.

Life was going splendidly for AGA. He dedicated his schedule to leaping back and forth between Canada and Sri Lanka, achieving and witnessing fantastic things. He attended dinners hosted by the Sri Lankan Muslim communities, including an event organized by the Sailan Muslim Foundation. It was at that particular outing that AGA's achievements were recognized via the presentation of a 'Life Time Achievement' award. He continued with his Da'wah work and various construction projects, both in his homeland and across the Atlantic in Canada. He saw the coming and going of family and friends, life and death, most notably rejoicing at the birth of Elisha Refai on the 2nd of February 2019. And, as if to crown his, Masha'Allah, respected place in the Sri Lankan Muslim community, he was elected as Chairman of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims on the 18th of October 2019.

Remembering an Old Mentor

The 50th Death Anniversary of Dr A M A Azeez took place on the 17th of February 2024 at Zahira College's Gaffoor Hall. The oration delivered was by Professor Sornarajah, with AGA participating as one of the guest speakers. His speech is reproduced below:

"It is indeed my pleasure and privilege to say few words of appreciation on late Marhoom Dr. A M A Azeez on his 50th commemoration of his death anniversary, who dedicated himself to empowerment the Community through transformative power of Education. I have decided to present the appreciation in three parts

- 1. Highlights of his career.*
- 2. His visions coming true.*
- 3. Remembering Dr Azeez.*

Dr Azeez was born in the year 1911 in Jaffna and passed away in the year 1973 in Colombo. His journey, even though very short, began with a spark of brilliance blazing through his early years in Hindu College, Jaffna, like a comet excelling in studies, he inspired those around him, lighting the love for learning that became a torch illuminating the path for generations to come. His admission to university and graduating with an honours degree in History and subsequently awarded a scholarship to Cambridge would have marked the beginning of an exceptional academic journey.

But his heart responded with a different rhythm to the pulse of the community, yawning for progress and grappling with the harsh realities of poverty and limited opportunities. He chose to serve the Nation in general and his community in particular by choosing the Ceylon Civil Service and being the first Muslim Civil Servant, venturing into remote corners of the Island to witness in person the struggles the community is experiencing specially in the Eastern Province. This experience became the crucible from which his vision spirit arose.

He excelled in all his appointments he held, specially where he was handpicked by then Agriculture Minister Hon D S Senanayake to boost the Paddy cultivation in the Eastern Province during WW2. Here he was responsible in setting up an Emergency Kachcheri in Kalmunai and converted the starving fields into thriving fields of mass production and earning a name for his success.

Around the peak of his career, when T B Jayah, the Principal of Zahira College took to politics he was looking for a suitable replacement and the obvious choice was Dr A M A Azeez. This position Dr Azeez accepted with pleasure as this was the ideal platform for him to realize all visions of empowering the community through education.

Dr Azeez became the Principal in 1948 and within a short spell of ten years he converted Zahira as one of the leading schools in Ceylon excelling in both Studies and sports and became the radiating centre of Islamic culture and education. This vision of converting Zahira into a cultural university didn't materialize but the blueprint was well utilized by Naleemiah resulting Colombo's loss as Beruwela's gain.

He held many important positions during this period such as member of the Senate, Member of Public Service Commission, Presidents of many organizations, above all he was the only one from Sri Lanka to be included in the Book of 20th Century Muslim Leaders.

He left this world on 24th November 1973 Innah lillahi Wainnah Ilaihi Rajioon. May Allah forgive him and admit him to jannatul Firdouse.

These were some of the highlights of his brilliant career but during this flourishing period he had ventured into many of his visions but the most important of those were founding the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund, All Ceylon YMMA Conference and contributions to education through Zahira.

During his period as Assistant Government Agent he had the opportunity to travel to nooks and corners of his region experiencing the suffering of the community mainly due to lack of education, due to poverty. From the ashes of Adversity forged a beacon of hope – Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund in 1945, shattering the shackles of poverty and propelling the community towards the academic excellence, which today have produced over 2000 scholars of various professions. Each scholarship recipient, each accomplished scholar and professionals stands as testimony to the Dr Azeez's foresight and unwavering belief in the power of education, including myself. Alhamdulillah.

My journey through CMSF started in 1954, when the Ceylon Navy called for applications to select the Naval cadets. The applicant should be under 18 years of age and have a first division pass in SSC with four Distinctions including Mathematics, should have been a cadet or scout and it was tailor made for me, but the application form has to be signed by the parent or guardian and the principal of the school. The application was signed by my uncle who was my guardian, and I met the principal to get his signature. On seeing my brilliant performance at the SSC examination, he inquired why I cannot proceed with higher education. I told him that my uncle cannot afford, and I don't want to be a burden to him. Immediately on realizing my potentials and the obstruction to proceed with higher education he tore the application instead of endorsing it and offered a scholarship to join the hostel with half the fees paid by the CMSF and the other half paid through giving tuition. This offer I couldn't refuse and accepted readily as a gesture from Allah. Today I stand in your presence as a well accomplished scholar, excelled in studies and sports and internationally recognized as a Professional Engineer Thanks to Allah and Dr Azeez for his timely vision and action. Not many in my experience have come across leaders who can understand the problem, come out with a viable solution and take it through implementation. Dr Azeez was able to do it because he was the head of a college, had access to financial assistance and had the mechanism to implement. My converting the adversity to excellence is one of many examples of success of Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund the brainchild of Dr A M A Azeez.

Walking in the path of empowering the community through youth he gathered all the YMMAs under one Umbrella forming the All-Ceylon YMMA Conference in 1950 which was inaugurated. Its achievements and present status will be elaborated by Mr Rasooldeen an old boy of Zahira and past president of YMMA who is well versed with the organization who will deliver the details after my session.

When T B Jayah entered politics in 1948, he had already earmarked and had identified young enthusiastic Dr A M A Azeez to replace him as the Principal of Zahira College. Dr Azeez too accepted the offer with open arms as Zahira was not new to him. Immediately after graduation he was a residential Tutor in 1933 and would have had his dreams of utilizing the institution, to promote education and when opportunity arose, he embraced it with pleasure. Coincidentally when Azeez took over as Principal of Zahira I was in the Fifth Standard and fortunate enough to benefit from his inspiring leadership and expertise. I distinctly remember his two famous phrases 'Easy to attain but difficult to maintain' and 'rake up defeat like gentlemen and victory like men' These two advices are foundation of my success and is the key to excel in today's competitive world.

As an administrator he knew the ingredients required to mould the potential school into a college of fame. With discipline as the foundation and the dedicated teachers as the driving force, reaching the desired goals was made easy.

In the fifties, known as the ‘Golden Era of Zahira’ the administration was under the Executive Committee of the Maradana Mosque headed by Al Hadj A.H.M.Ismail as the Manager and Senator A.M.A.Azeez as the Principal. D.W.Wijeratne and B.J.H. Bahar as Deputy Principals, S.J.A.Doray as the Head Master, M.F.M.H. Fakhir as Assistant Deputy Principal, M.P David as Vice Principal, Roy De Mel as Senior Science Master. Forty-seven post primary teachers, 49 Primary teachers, 7 office employees, ten Board of Prefects, 20 Sub-Prefects and four House Captains and Secretaries.

Student population of over 3,000 having 5 HSC Classes, six classes in grade five, four classes in grade four, five classes in grade three, four classes in each grade of two and one The students did extremely well in both studies and sports. During this Golden Era, an average of 10 students entered the University every year totaling 130 over thirteen years and in the golden era of 1955 and 1959 total of 64 entered with the maximum of 15 in the year 1959. There was only one University on the Island and the entries to the university from other schools are not known to compare.

1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
1	4	10	8	9	9	7	13	11	11	14	15	5	14
1	5	15	23	32	41	48	61	72	83	97	112	117	131

In the years 1955 and 1956 there were students who not only did well in studies to enter University but also did extremely well in sports specially in rifle shooting and were members of the National Team. This is rare feat for the schoolboys to be part of the National Team and have never been matched yet by any schools.

The some of the remarkable achievements in the golden Era were winning the Herman Loose Cup for all round efficiency of the Senior Cadets in 1955 and placed first in five events out of six. Besides cadeting the members of the Rifle Club excelled by annexing four of the possible four team events and winning over three quarter of the individual evets at the Small-Bore Rifle Association’s Annual Open Firing Meet and awarded the Championship Trophy at the Negombo Rifle Club Annual Meet. Two School boys namely M.H.M. Ameen and K.M.Mohideen won the Queens cup in two years in succession, beating the Ceylon Army professionals.

For the first time the Ceylon Football Association conducted the Inter-collegiate Soccer Tournament in 1955 and Zahira won the Sir John Tarbat Trophy and the First school to win the Tarbat Challenge Shield. Brilliant soccerite T.P.Hashim was the Vice Captained the Ceylon Combined School Team against Sind Muslim College.

The time allocated to me does not permit me to cover all the achievements of Golden Era, but the ones cited here is more than sufficient to prove that Azeez’s vision to empower the community through education have been attained and maintained.

When Zahira, was at the peak, the government of Sri Lanka, pass the bill, in the year 1961, to abolish all assisted schools and replace them with either Private or Government schools. In the same bill there were options for each of the communities to convert one of their schools into a Cultural University. Accordingly, Zahira went private with the hope of becoming a Muslim University. This was announced in

the Throne speech of July 1961, but due to financial difficulties Zahira couldn't continue as Private school and was taken over by the government in August 1961.

The community challenged the government and took them to court for taking over the only prime Muslim school and was given back in the year 1967 and struggled through with over a dozen Principals till early 2010 where it became under the present Board of Governors and Trizvy Marikar as the Principal and is in the path of recovery to regain its lost glory.

When Zahira went under Government Dr Azeez resigned and worked closely with Naleemiah utilizing the blueprint of the cultural University resulting in Colombo's loss as Beruwela's gain.

The choice of Dr Azeez as a transformative force to shape Zahira's destiny, leaving behind the prestige Civil Service, who embraced the challenge, was proven correct and under his stewardship, Zahira blossomed into a powerhouse of academic and athletic excellence. He laid the foundation for its future as a university, even though it didn't realize, the blueprint that still shines, influencing the establishment of Naleemiah University and continuing to expand access to higher education for his community.

Dr. Azeez's legacy is not confined to institutions or statistics. It lives on in the minds and hearts of those he touched, in the fire of ambition he ignited, and in the countless stories of dreams realized and destinies fulfilled.

He reminds us that true leadership lies not in titles or privileges, but in the courage to choose service over comfort, in the vision to see beyond the present, and in the unwavering belief that education is the key that unlocks the potential of a community, a nation, and the world.

Let us celebrate his life not just with words, but with action. Let us carry the torch of education he so proudly held, let us empower the youth, and let us strive to build a Sri Lanka where Dr. Azeez's dream of equal opportunity and shared prosperity becomes a reality.

Be a part of the Muslim Scholarship, by increasing your involvement and increasing the annual scholars, Visit Azeez Foundation Website to update with his services to the community and above all help all education projects and institutions to keep the flame of learning alive.

Jazakallah Khairan

Walikum Salaam Warahmathullahi Wabarakathuhu.”



AGA Addressing the 50th Azeez Commemoration