

## Questions on death of Soma Thera: The need for a presidential commission

By Ven. Maharagama Dhammasiri thera

It is nearly two months since the demise of Ven. Gangodawila Soma thera. There is no positive response so far to a request from the Sasana Sevaka Society of Maharagama Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayatanaya to appoint a Presidential Commission to investigate the death of the monk under suspicious circumstances in Russia.

We do not question the report of the forensic experts who said that the death resulted from a heart attack. But our query has not been about the immediate cause for the death. We suspect that the immediate cause of his death had resulted from a conspiracy by an extremist religious group which induced the monk to visit Russia.

We called for a Presidential Commission to carry out a proper investigation, as there are many doubts to be cleared.

Ven. Soma Thera's life style was such that it could not have led to a heart attack, which is usually caused by a high concentration of cholesterol in blood vessels. Such a condition can be associated with lifestyles marked by smoking cigarettes and consumption of alcohol and red meat. Ven. Soma Thera was far from such a lifestyle.

Since the death of the thera, we had occasion to obtain information relating to the people who invited the thera. Those inquiries have further strengthened our suspicion.

The report relating to a person in Russia in this incident shows that he had been identified by different titles.

We also want to know whether a person, who organized the visit, was drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 18,000 from a leading company. We wonder how he draws a salary from this institution while being employed on the Janavijaya paper of Ven. Soma thera.

The Russian institution, which conferred the degree on Ven. Soma Thera, is not a government recognized body.

We have evidence to say that Soma thera did not receive proper medical treatment when he suffered a heart attack. Several statements made by this person are contradictory. Initially it was said that Ven. Soma thera was taken to the hospital as soon as the plane landed in St. Petersburg. But the thera had told one Mr. Rupasiri and a lecturer, Mr. Sirisena, in Russia that he was taken to a home while he complained a severe heart pain. They had taken him to the hospital only after he had suffered another massive heart attack in that home.

We believe that Soma thera had been forced to participate in the degree awarding ceremony even without obtaining the discharge ticket from the hospital, in spite of the advice given by Dr. Atukorale, the very respected heart specialist, not to move the thera from the hospital.

Sri Lankan doctors who performed the postmortem on Ven. Soma thera told us that they could have saved the thera, if the monk had been treated in Sri Lanka.

Ven. Soma thera who detested religious extremists, no doubt, was shocked when he was made to pose for photographs with them. We can imagine how the thera could have been shocked and hurt when he had been compelled to accept a doctorate from such people.

One may wonder as to why we question on this matter so much in spite of the unanimous opinion given by government analysts and medical officers that his death was due to natural causes and it resulted from a heart attack. There are many reasons for our suspicions.

The medical experts clearly stated that Ven. Soma thera passed away due to a heart attack and they could not detect that a poison known to them had entered the body. That means there could have been a poison, which had not been known to them.

It is a well known that there are sinister organizations in Russia involved in killing people by employing subtle means. Many political prisoners in Russia die due to heart attacks. They write-off such deaths as natural deaths. But heart attacks are induced through chemicals. The KGB during the Soviet regime was said to have resorted to such methods. Thus, there can be poisons which our analysts and medical experts may not be aware of.

Although the monk's death was caused by a heart attack the question arises as to how it occurred? As such we are not satisfied with summary investigations. One may question as to how the monk had suffered a heart attack while he had been proceeding to Russia. This could be as a result of a conspiracy, that was hatched two and a half years ago.

One could say that the thera was suffering from diabetes. The sugar level of the thera was under control. We found the equipment used to test and record his sugar level. The history of the disease was indicated with dates. Accordingly there was no sugar level, which could lead to a heart attack.

The main motive of fundamentalist groups is to destroy Sinhala Buddhist leaders who are dedicated to the uplift of the nation.

Some newspaper reports claimed that one fundamentalist group had set aside 24 lakhs of rupees against the names of Ven. Soma thera and Ven. Ellawela Medananda thera.

We saw a document, where it is said that they should appoint those who may assist them. If somebody attempts to hide this, it is a great injustice meted out to Buddhists in this country.

The fact that the person who organized this visit did not hand over the air ticket to Ven. Soma thera until he had reached the airport is another reason for suspicion.

Questions are also being raised as to why the thera was asked to come to Russia during the heavy winter, which is unbearable even for those who are healthy. One should obtain a health insurance cover if flying during such season. But it had not happened. Even the ticket was issued by a ticketing agency owned by him.

The monk was initially reluctant to accept the invitation. Later they pledged a donation for his social welfare activities and obtained his consent.

Shanthi Jayasekera alias Pushpakumara alias Rev. Shanthi had informed of this offer by contacting Ven. Soma thera on Maha Naga thera's (Vajiraramaya) telephone. After the call, Ven. Soma thera had told Maha Naga thera to look out for a land in Kuliyaipitiya area to put up a hospital. But some people say that Soma thera met with this destiny having gone after this money. But those who make allegations against him should think that the monk did not accept the offer for his own benefit. It was solely to set up a free hospital for the poor people.

Well they had awarded him the doctorate, where is the money promised? They offered such big money. Then why did they ask money from Sri Lanka to meet the theras' hospital bills? A huge amount of money was collected here and sent to Russia. At the end no surgery was performed. Neither did they return the money. They had admitted Ven. Soma thera to a small rehabilitation center.

Why did the thera say to those Sri Lankans who telephoned him, "I am now okay? These people treat me well" etc.?

Anybody who knew Soma thera's attitudes, it is not a problem to understand his response. The thera was not a person who would react to any threat he faced or any suffering he had to undergo. He would bear the pain himself silently if he thought that the others close to him too would suffer if he revealed his own suffering.

On every occasion, Ven. Soma thera spoke over the phone from Russia, we suspected that somebody was near him. Therefore we believe that he could not express his views freely.

We cannot believe that the person who organized this visit did not know that his brother was a non-Buddhist.

It is a question as to how a PhD. could be conferred for a book like *Buddhastupa*. PhDs are conferred for researched books. It is an accepted fact. A panel of professors should decide whether a given work deserves a PhD or not. *Buddhastupa* is an excellent work. Ven. Ellawela Medhananda thera and Professor Asanga Thillekerathne have clearly explained to the media that *Buddhastupa* is a book, which has been written to arouse the Saddha in people, but not a research work. Also how did the Russians evaluate this book, which had been written in Sinhala? Jayasekera had said that he translated this book into English. How did he translate such a book into English, being a person who could not write grammatically correct English?

Once Jayasekera had visited Dharmayatanaya and asked the monk who attended to the needs of Soma thera whether he too needed a PhD. This monk has never written a book. Similarly Ven. Olande Ananda Thera who is now living in Sri Lanka had said that the institution where Prof. Jayasekera is the rector had wanted to award him a diploma and a doctorate. I quote; "He asked for US\$ 5000. I rejected saying that I had already abandoned my Masters in Economics and Sociology when I opted to come to Sri Lanka in 1975. Then he offered it to me for US\$ 2500. When I refused that too he offered it free." unquote.

Also we know well that certain people who became close to Ven. Soma thera were responsible for distancing his genuine friends from the thera.

The distribution of leaflets at the cremation of the thera too roused suspicion.

There was no reason to use tear gas at Independence Square. I too was affected by tear gas.

Kollonawe Sumanagala thera, Uduwe Dhammaloka thera and I appealed to the gathering to be calm. We chanted *Karaneeya Metta Sutta*. It was for the first time in the history of the world that these innocent Sinhala Buddhists who chanted *Karaneeya Metta Sutta* were attacked with tear gas. It is a matter for grave concern why our rulers do not look into this affair.

Some people ask why I am so much disconcerted over this problem. As pupils of the late Most Venerable Maddihe Pannaseeha Maha Nayaka thera and the Ven. Ampitiye Rahula Maha thera, we have been living in a kindred spirit. We who have established brotherly links have a right and a duty to talk about it. If we

do not seek justice then who else is there to do that?

Soon after Ven. Soma thera passed away and even before the body was brought back to Sri Lanka the Sasana Sevaka Society of Maharagama Dharmayatanaya requested for a Presidential Commission. It is a great injustice done to Ven. Soma thera if we keep silence without finding a solution to this problem.

The delay itself is a cause for concern. Why can't they appoint a Presidential Commission to a national issue in a country where Presidential Commissions are being appointed for each and every problem?

As such we request that an impartial Presidential Commission be appointed immediately.

What we need is a commission with full powers like the Jain Commission in India.

The President is a person who had her Dhamma education at Vajiraramaya. As such we have not given up our hopes that she will fulfill justice at this national necessity. Today the whole country is weeping over Ven. Soma thera's passing away. The flags and banners will not go down until a Presidential Commission is appointed. We request that an impartial commission be appointed to enable the weeping Buddhists to breathe a sigh of relief. Our only hope is that. The only solution to this problem is that. We will continue with this request until it is fulfilled. We will not give up our agitation until a Presidential Commission is appointed and justice is meted out.

***(The writer is Viharadikari, Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayatanaya,  
Maharagama/Viharadipathi, Washington Vihara)***