



# British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

21<sup>st</sup> of January 2021

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Thai Pongal 2021: Self-Reliance in Tamil Heritage Event**

Thai Pongal is a Tamil harvest festival to thank the sun for agricultural abundance. On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021, British Tamils Forum (BTF) hosted **Thai Pongal 2021: Self-Reliance in Tamil Heritage** online via Zoom webinar with a live feed to Facebook and YouTube. Due to COVID-19, we were not able to hold this event at the Houses of Parliament, Westminster, as we have done in previous years.

The event started off with welcome message and a one-minute silence (known as Agavanakkam) to pay respect for the Tamil victims whose *Right to Life* (Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998) was brutally taken away by the Sri Lankan state.

BTF delivered a eulogy for the late Thedsanamoorthy Kirupananthan (Kirupa Master). He was a valuable hardworking and dedicated member of BTF, who had been advocating for over a decade, for the freedom and the rights of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

There were performances, mainly by Tamil youths, from across the world including Britain, India and Sri Lanka:

- Flute, Thavil, Veenai and Naathaswaram musical performance
- Bharathanatyam and folk dance performances
- Vocal performance
- Presentation on Thai Pongal & Self-Reliance in Tamil Heritage
- Miruthangam, vocal and violin musical performance
- Veenai performance

UK cross party Members of Parliament including a Minister and Shadow Ministers personally joined this event and were introduced by their Tamil constituents. Attendees included The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers (Vice Chair APPGT), Paul Scully (Minister of State and Former Chair of APPGT), The Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey (Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Vice Chair of APPGT), Elliot Colburn (Chair of APPGT), Bob Blackman (Vice Chair of APPGT), Wes Streeting (Vice Chair of APPGT), Navendu Mishra and Steve Baker.

The UK Parliamentarians gave messages of well wishes to the Tamil community for Thai Pongal and reassured their commitment calling for truth, justice, and accountability for the atrocities committed against the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, whilst condemning the demolition of the University of Jaffna Mullivaikkal Memorial monument.



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The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson's Thai Pongal video message was played followed by video messages from The Rt Hon Keir Starmer (Leader of the Labour Party), The Rt Hon Stephen Timms (Vice Chair of APPGT), Siobhain McDonagh (Vice Chair of APPGT), The Rt Hon Robert Halfon (Vice Chair of APPGT), Janet Daby, Sam Tarry (Vice Chair of APPGT), James Murray, Claudia Webbe and Former Minister of Foreign & Commonwealth Office, The Rt Hon Alistair Burt (Written message).

The event ended with a thank you message from British Tamils Forum (BTF) followed by a video of a singing performance of a famous Pongal song.

We sincerely thank all for making this a successful and uplifting event. The event will be available for viewing on our website and YouTube channel soon.

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**Notes to Editors:**

**British Tamils Forum** exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic framework underpinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information [info@britishtamilsforum.org](mailto:info@britishtamilsforum.org) and/or visit: [www.britishtamilsforum.org](http://www.britishtamilsforum.org)