

# Man declared dead 20 years ago charged

He is accused of faking his death so his wife and brother could collect \$331,000 from insurance firms

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A MAN declared dead 20 years ago was produced in court yesterday, very much alive.

S. Gandaruban, now 59, was accused of faking his own death so that his wife and younger brother could collect his insurance money worth \$331,340.95.

He was said to have died in a shoot-out in Sri Lanka between the Tamil Tigers and the authorities in 1987.

Gandaruban was accused of instigating his wife, Madam Renuga Sinnadurny, now 50, to lie to a commissioner of oaths that he died without leaving a will.

He is also said to have schemed with Madam Renuga and his younger brother, Mr Moganaruban Subramaniam, to deceive three insurance companies into believing he was dead. The Insurance Corporation of Singapore, NTUC Income and The Asia Life Assurance Society gave his wife the payouts of his insurance and endowment policies.

Looking on yesterday were three of his four children, all in their 20s, and Mr Moganaruban, 56, who had done jail time for being part of the conspiracy to deceive the insurers.

The prominent member of the Ceylon Tamil community had protested his innocence right up to the High Court. Instead, he found his jail term of 16 months upped by another 10 months in 2005.

Yesterday, Mr Moganaruban post-

ed bail of \$500,000 for his elder brother, but not before having to return home to retrieve his brother's birth certificate as proof of identity.

Conspicuously absent were Gandaruban's wife and youngest child, now 11. It was the boy who was conclusive proof that Gandaruban was alive, as he was born years after his father had been declared dead.

Gandaruban's house of cards came tumbling down when the lawyer who was handling his estate alerted the authorities that fraud had been committed. It transpired that Gandaruban had left Singapore to escape creditors after his car rental business collapsed.

What followed after the lawyer dropped the bombshell were court hearings with all the elements of a soap opera. Madam Renuga admitted to the scam and having clandestine meetings with her husband abroad.

She had even "re-married" her husband in Sri Lanka under his new name, and their youngest child was conceived in 1996.

She was sentenced to a year's jail in 2004, but not before she fingered her brother-in-law as well.

With all that was unravelling in Singapore, it was expected that Gandaruban would remain in hiding in Sri Lanka forever.

The circumstances surrounding his capture were not disclosed in court yesterday, save that he entered Singapore on Monday on a Sri Lankan passport bearing another name.

His lawyer, Mr Subhas Anandan, maintained that the family had been trying to get him to return home for some time as he was not well.

Gandaruban's sister had asked him for help to make the arrangements.

"I have been so busy and never called her back. The next thing I know, this fellow is back," he said.

In court yesterday, Mr Subhas objected to Assistant Superintendent of



STILL ALIVE: Gandaruban, seen here outside court yesterday, was said to have died in a shoot-out in Sri Lanka between the Tamil Tigers and the authorities in 1987.

ST PHOTO: FRANCIS ONG

Police Zetty Sabrina's request for \$1 million bail, arguing that his client had returned to see his family.

Although he had a Sri Lankan passport, which he maintained was "not that difficult to obtain", Gandaruban was, for all intents and purposes, a Singapore citizen.

District Judge Danielle Yeow said she had to look at, among other things, the amount involved and the reasons for his absence when deciding bail. Gandaruban, she added, must have known police had been looking for him for 10 years.

She halved the bail sum and imposed his passport.

Gandaruban told the court through an interpreter that he was "not well".

He had undergone heart surgery, had diabetes and had to go to the toilet often.

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## Back from the dead

- **1987:** Gandaruban fled to Sri Lanka to escape creditors.
- **October 1987:** Family received death certificate, stating that Gandaruban was "hit and wounded by shrapnel" in crossfire between Tamil Tiger rebels and Sri Lankan army troops in Jaffna province.
- **January 2004:** His wife, Renuga Sinnadurny, is charged with three counts of conspiracy to cheat.
- **May 2004:** Renuga jailed a year.
- **June 2004:** Brother Moganaruban Subramaniam charged.
- **January 2005:** Moganaruban jailed for 16 months after a trial.
- **July 2005:** His sentence is upped by 10 months to 26 months.