Rise Lanka, **Rise to Your III Grandeur**

Independence Memorial Museum: Lanka's freedom hall of fame

A walk back into our chequered past to get a glimpse of the history of Ceylon now Sri Lanka... this is what the Independence Memorial Museum offers

Sunday, February 5, 2023

Sited in the belly of the Independence Memorial Hall in Colombo 7. the compact and state-ofthe-art museum takes one into the dim and distant past and then onto more recent times, portraying the country's

freedom struggle.

While Sri Lanka's greats look on benevolently from a 'gallery' of busts flanking a red carpet, more current heroes, have not been forgotten. Just as one enters the museum, on the left is the Commemoration Gallery of War Heroes where numerous pus kola (ola leaf) in glass cases list the fallen and missing security forces personnel.

Anniversary — of Independence

A sculpture before one turns into the

rectangular museum depicts all races which have contributed towards Sri Lanka gaining its freedom and also its growth.

Opened back on February 4th, 2008 by Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake to mark the 60th independence commemoration, the museum portrays the early, middle and late Anuradhapura periods and follows Sri Lanka's destiny through



The names of war heroes on Ola leaves

Polonnaruwa, Transitional, Kotte, Kotte-Seethawaka and finally Kandy periods.

Rebellions, uprisings, the end of national kingship, the coming of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, the first independence struggle against the British by Keppetipola Disawe and then the second by Veera Puran Appu are all there. Pride of place is given to the momentous event of the country gaining independence in 1948 and then "full" independence with the declaration of the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972.

Among the sculpted busts of more than 20 from 50 National Heroes identified are long-haired Veera Puran Appu, serene-looking Ven Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera, Anagarika Dharmapala, Arumugam Sri Navalar, Siddhi Lebbe Mohammed Cassim and Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan.



The gazette notification announcing Lanka's independence

Colombo harbour



The sculpture underlining the message of unity



By Kumudini Hettiarachchi

he trail leads from the Racecourse grounds to the Independence Commemoration Hall, both located very close to each other at Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo 7.

The stone edifice of the hall with its imposing lion sculptures and statue of 'Father of the Nation' D.S. Senanayake who took over the leadership of independent Sri Lanka from the British colonial rulers, as the first Prime Minister, is where the formal ceremony celebrating the start of self-rule was held.

It was February 1948. But what was there before?

It is believed that the site was home to aircraft of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Sunday Times went along different pathways for verification.

"I remember, as a schoolboy of Royal Prep., walking past what is now the Independence Commemoration Hall when the temporary structure was being put up for the celebration of the first Independence Day 75 years ago. The area was scattered with debris including gadol-keta (pieces of



An RAF bomber taking off from the Colombo Racecourse during the war. (Pic courtesy ceylonguide)



The majestic Independence hall under construction

Freedom shrine rises from airfield in middle of Colombo

homes of the then Chief Justice Sir middle of Colombo' from the 'cey-Alan Rose and the first Governor of the Central Bank John Exter. The Sunday Times, meanwhile,

longuide', which describes itself as "an online archive of the good old Ceylon days" with the goal of col-

Ceylon), was given the task of its construction. Consisting only of a single runway, station headquarters and the officers' mess were set up in the bungalows in Cinnamon Gardens and was serviced by a newly established military hospital in the premises of Royal College, Colombo," states Melder.

were under attack, the Hurricanes from the Racecourse got airborne and started climbing frantically to 10,000ft to gain an altitude advantage over the enemy. While climbing they observed that the Japanese dive bombers had already started their attack over the harbour. So they were forced to engage the enemy, from the east, with the sun behind them. This caught the Japanese off-guard. The 'Hurries' being heavier could out-dive the Zeros, but at slow speeds, the Zero was more manoeuvrable." The Royal Navy also established a Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) here during the war with the name HMS Bherunda. 882 Naval Air Squadron was based here, he adds. The AHB, meanwhile, goes into detail that the two RAF squadrons initially based at Colombo Racecourse were No. 258 with Hawker Hurricanes and No. 11 Squadron with Bristol Blenheims. The former tried to intercept the Japanese raiders attacking Colombo on April 5, 1942. The Hurricanes at Colombo Racecourse focused on harbour defence, whilst the Hurricanes at Ratmalana con-

centrated on the defence of the aerodrome. No. 258 Squadron had been cobbled together from remnants of an RAF squadron destroyed in Sumatra, Indonesia. The Squadron was in the process of moving from Ratmalana to the Racecourse before the attack. The Japanese were seemingly not aware of the existence of the Racecourse RAF facility. The Squadron lost 7 of its 14 Hurricanes scrambled. No. 30 Squadron at Ratmalana lost 8 of its 22 Hurricanes scrambled. The Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm lost four out of the six Fulmers scrambled," says AHB. While pointing out that when he was researching independence, he read that D.S. Senanayake who was a draftsman had called Chief Architect Wynne Jones to brief him that the Independence Hall should reflect the audience hall in Kandy, where the country lost its independence, retired Wing Commander Ratnapala also explains Air Force language: "When the siren sounds, pilots are required to 'scramble' to their aircraft for immediate takeoff."

Crescent Gregorys Rd.

Maitland



brick). Of course, it was one large open space, nothing like the builtup area of today," recalls 85-yearold Ranjith Ratnapala, going down memory lane.

Mr. Ratnapala, who now lives in retirement in Nawala amidst his collection of books and yellowed and frayed newspapers, had later served the Royal Ceylon Air Force (RCyAF) as a Wing Commander.

He remembers hearing about how the racecourse had been an airfield, but what he walked through as a boy was barren land from school through the grandstand entrance, past the stables (now where the National Archives is located) which housed race horses. It was curiosity that drove him because there was much talk about the coming of the *rajjuruwo* (king), while hordes of craftsmen, carpenters and surveyors with their theodolite were at work.

"We would look on at the activity and then go further to McCarthy Road (now Wijerama Mawatha) looking in wonder at the stately buildings, two of which were the

got in touch with the British authorities to gather information which may be buried in the dim mists of time, whether RAF hangars did occupy the Independence Hall site back in 1948.

This is what the RAF's Air Historical Branch (AHB) based in Ruislip, Middlesex. United **Retired RAF Wing** Kingdom stated: "We believe that the hangars on the site of the **Ranjith Ratnapala**

Independence Memorial Hall belonged to RAF Colombo Racecourse, which was a tempo rary RAF station constructed during the war. Unfortunately, we have very little in the Branch which is directly relevant to this RAF station and we have no file for it. Our card index entry tends to only detail units at Colombo.... We have consulted our Photographic Archivist but unfortunately, we do not have any relevant images.'

The AHB points us in the direction of the piece 'An airfield in the

lecting and sharing photographs and information about the journey from Ceylon to Sri Lanka.

A plan shows the airfield, with a number of hangars (J) marked on it, notably near the Observatory and on the north-east of the plan.

'An airfield in the middle of Colombo' credited to Henrik Melder, Wikipedia, describes how in late 1941, World War II began in the East. After

the fall of Singapore, the Royal Navy's East Indies Station was moved to Colombo and then to Trincomalee. Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton was appointed Commanderin-Chief, Ceylon with Air Vice Marshal John D'Albiac as air officer commanding No. 222 Group RAF which was based in Ceylon.

"The order was given to construct an airfield at the Colombo Racecourse. D.S. Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture and Lands (later the 1st Prime Minister of

He goes on to say that the Japanese knew about the Ratmalana Civil Airport. However, they did not know about the airport at the Racecourse, in the heart of the city. One end of the Runway was near McCarthy (now Wijerama) Road, Colombo 7 and the other end was at the 'Thunmulla' Junction. (The SSC, Independence Hall and other playgrounds came later). The RAF 258 Squadron of Hurricanes was parked there. The fences down Reid Avenue had been removed and the aircraft even parked at the University College grounds, where the Government Farm had been, before it was relocated to Narahenpita.

Melder gives a colourful description of the Japanese raid over then Ceylon...... "During the April 1942 air raid, as soon as the news was received that the Ratmalana airport and the Railway workshops



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Commander



Lured by greener pastures, and then exploited

Periannan

Sundaram

By Jaya Peri Sundaram

Around the latter half of the 19th Century, Ceylon under British rule saw coffee, its then major export, affected by a deadly disease that destroyed the entire crop. The British swiftly replaced it with tea. Tea being more labour intensive, they had to find the workforce to tend the new crop and hand pick the tea leaves.

This they did by 'importing' cheap and abundant labour from neighbouring South India. Those mainly in today's Tamil Nadu were fed stories of a better life in Ceylon. Employment agents or 'recruiters' convinced hundreds of thousands from South India, to make the journey to Ceylon.

The trek was arduous and came at a heavy cost. They landed at Talaimannar and trekked by foot to the planta-

tions in the central hills. Some estimates put the death toll, usually from malaria, snake bite or sheer exhaustion, at around a third of the people who landed in Talaimannar. Once in the plantations, they were housed in cheaply built, back-to-back line rooms, unventilated and lacking toilets and pipe water, where entire families lived in a tiny, single room. Thus began the story of plantation workers of Indian origin in Ceylon, later Sri Lanka.

This population of workers of Indian origin grew exponentially and continued to be exploited. Living conditions did not improve; they continued be paid measly wages. The country's political leadership, the Sinhalese mainly led by D. B. Jayatilleka, D.S. Senanayake and E.W. Perera and the Tamils led by Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Ramanathan Ponnambalam, having formed the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) were busy battling the British for Ceylon's independence, and the Tamils of Indian origin were a forgotten lot, socially, economically and politically, despite being the producers of the 'Black Gold' - a major part of the country's economic output.

It was against such a backdrop that Periannan Sundaram, better known as Peri Sundaram, emerged as a patriot, freedom fighter and workers' champion to become a legitimate leader of the people of Indian President of both organisations. Ceylon was granted independence on February 4, 1948 in a peaceful transition of power, but the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No.3 of 1949 passed by Parliament deprived those of Indian origin of Ceylonese citizenship.

In the early '50s, the CIC Labour Union was renamed the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) which continued the task of fighting for plantation workers of Indian origin who remained 'stateless'.

Peri Sundaram passed away on February 4, 1957, but by then he had groomed a protégé, Savumiamoorthy Thondaman to be an able successor. 'Thonda' as he came to be known, easily fitted into the role

of leading the CWC. The son of the head 'Kangani' of the Ramboda estate, Thondaman compensated for his lack of finesse and eloquence with an astute mind and sense of political pragmatism that would stand him and his community in good stead.

Meanwhile, at the national level, there were attempts to resolve the 'stateless' issue. The Sirima-Shasthri Pact signed between then Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her Indian counterpart, Lal Bahadur Shasthri on October 30,1964 would grant Ceylonese citizenship to 300,000 persons of Indian origin while 525,000 would be repatriated to India, still leaving 150,000 'stateless'. A few weeks later, on December 3, 1964, Thondaman declined to vote on the Press Council Bill, thereby bringing down Mrs. Bandaranaike's government.

Except for the period between 1970 and 1977 when he was out of Parliament, Thondaman had the knack of picking winners in politics and served as a minister under Presidents J.R. Jayewardene, R. Premadasa and Chandrika Kumaratunga until his demise in 1999.

Thondaman enjoyed the best working relationship with Jayewardene. Both shrewd judges of men and matters, they understood and respected each other. When 'JR' requested undated letters of res-

By Malinga Gunaratne

he Plantation Raj! As the name suggests it was a kingdom of its own with its own very unique atmosphere created by the British whose enduring legacy the plantations were.

During the colonial era and even much later, the plantations were well structured for effective management. The owners, mainly in the UK, entrusted the management of the plantations to an Agency House in Colombo which recruited the managers and assistant managers through a strict selection criteria. The manager was answerable to the Colombo Agent who rigorously monitored operations on the plantations. The Colombo Agent also appointed a Visiting Agent to inspect the plantations and report to the Agency House and the overseas directors.

Most importantly, the British established an auction system handled by brokers to sell the tea. Auctions were held every Tuesday and the tea was paid for by the next Tuesday. If payment was not made on the stipulated date, the errant buyer was barred from future auctions.

The estate bungalows, built very much like the spacious houses of the better-endowed British, had rolling lawns complete with architecturally perfect but inexpensive swimming pools that were the envy of the rest of Sri Lanka. The planters played rugby and cricket while the rest of the country played football and volleyball.

The British developed the most elegant clubs in all plantation districts where the rest of the world were told 'thou shall not enter'! Indeed the Hill Club in Nuwara Eliya restricted membership to the white planters and did not even allow their womenfolk to enter through the front door! They had to enter through the rear – the original notice is displayed even today.

Then there was the Hill School in Nuwara Eliya exclusively for Caucasian students that prepared the children of the planters for boarding schools in the UK. Unlike the wives of today, the British plantation wives never left the plantations; they were by their husbands' side, their whole lives devoted to



The plantations in British times (Pic courtesy www.historyofceylontea.com)

Plantations: A key colonial inheritance

the plantations without any distraction.

No tribute to tea is complete without reference to the man who made Ceylon tea the symbol of quality in the furthest outposts of the world – Sir Thomas Lipton, the master marketer. Of course he gave the impression that he owned most of the tea lands in the island, an exaggerated claim though not in any way, a harmful one.

There is also an amusing anecdote of British discrimination practised not only against the brown-skinned members of the Plantation Raj but also against their own. Lipton who created the brand 'Ceylon tea' was denied membership at the elite Colombo Club because he was a 'shoppie' (belonging to trade)!

Yet, for all their faults and foibles, the British created an industry that was the principal foreign exchange earner in real terms for this island. More importantly, the tea industry is the single largest employer of the national workforce. Sri Lanka was the largest exporter of tea in the world and Sri Lanka tea was, and still is, the highest priced tea in the world.

But nationalisation disturbed the equilibrium of this sensitively managed industry.

Today we are only the fourth biggest exporter. However, our teas continue to fetch the highest prices in the world, due to the wonderful climate, the rich soil and the differ-

ent climatic regions producing pleasingly different teas, which no country in the world could match.

The tragedy now is that the crops are declining badly due to the government's ill-conceived decision to ban the use of chemical fertilisers and weed control inhibitors.

Almost 500 tea factories have been shut down and abandoned. Significantly massive acreages of lush tea land have been lost to plantation companies due to unabated politically motivated encroachments.

The management of plantations rests largely on gentle but firm authority and a high degree of discipline. The Manager's bungalow once symbolised such authority but without the Manager's presence, there is an invisible but incalculable loss in authority. A loss in authority brings about a loss in production and management. These are indefinable but may account for the decline. Plantation bungalows in most areas have been converted into ' boutique hotels' and those that have not are in a dilapidated condition.

The workforce on the plantations too is diminishing. Estate youth are manning supermarkets in Colombo and other cities or seeking employment in the Middle East. The manifold reasons for this migration include poor wages, substandard living conditions and now with the current economic crisis, the rising price of essential foodstuffs, acute malnutrition.

It must never be forgotten that if Sri Lanka was the world's premier tea producing country, it was possible only because of the labour and toil of the plantation worker. However, they have not benefited from all the progressive measures taken post-Independence like free schooling, health services and State-sponsored housing.

It is thus imperative to begin the process of absorbing the plantation community to all the nation's programmes. There are acres and acres of uncultivated areas where the plantation worker could grow vegetables and engage in cattle and goat farming. The reverse migration will then begin and the plantations could ensure the continued welfare of these innocent people befitting their contribution to the land.

The tea industry is 136-150 years old. It provided direct and indirect employment to 3.5 million souls and a livelihood for many thousand smallholders. It is sliding rapidly but the decline of this most robust plantation crop can be arrested and restored to its original grandeur. It has also the potential of securing the foreign exchange so essential for the country's economic recovery.

The process of recovery is not difficult but it needs hard, dedicated work, passion and commitment. The tragedy is that 'those who care do not matter and those who matter do not care'.

(The writer is a senior tea planter and proprietor of Herman Teas at Handunugoda Estate, Ahangama. He was Regional Manager of the State-owned JEDB - Nuwara Eliya region, in charge of 100,000 acres of tea lands in the country and Deputy Chairman, Kahawatte Plantations (Dilmah). He is the author of the book 'The Plantation Raj'.)

By Kumar Nadesan

When we go back in time and review the history of land, people and ethnicity, we need to understand that Sri Lanka and India were one land. When the tectonic plates broke, islands in the Indian Ocean Rim sank, and many new islands arose as did the island we live in.

When we talk of the other Indians, we need to mention the establishment of the Sinhala race and the history of Lanka that followed. One of



Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake with Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar and other Chettiars at a function hosted by the largest Chettiar group in the island for leading members of the Government of Ceylon (1948)

Kurunegala (his son Johnston Fernando is in Parliament today and Omar Kameel, a Memon who was Mayor of Colombo in 1999. Ashroff Omar also from the Memon community is CEO of Brandix, apparel manufacturers. Interestingly the first woman lawyer to practise in Ceylon was Avabhai Metha, a Parsi. Mr. K. N. Choksy, a Parsi, is remembered as a leading lawyer and Finance Minister.

MAS Holdings, a leading apparel manufacturer is headed by Mahesh Amaleen, of the Gujarati community. The Ambanis also head the Metropolitan Group. The Hemas conglomerate now in healthcare, hospitals, pharmacies and tourism among other industries was initiated by Hassanally Esufally from the Borah community. Aban Pestonjee, from the Parsi community, is involved in electronic appliances, travel, environmental projects and real estate developments among other industries. Ahmedbhoy Habibhoy, a Khoja is remembered for his purchase and running of the Ceylon Spinning and Weaving Mills in Wellawatte. Dr. Subash Chawla, a sports personality and leader of the Punjabi community is remembered for his publication of the Sinhala-Hindi similarity dictionary. The Sindhi community has left its mark in the textile trade, Hidramani garments now supplying garments to the world. The people of Kerala left an indelible mark in Sri Lanka. Kochikade in Colombo and another by the same name in nearby Negombo are believed to have originated from a time when immigrants from Kerala settled in these areas. Popular words such as 'miris', 'kolikuutu', and 'Malabar' city in Kandy, the martial art of Angampora also came from Kerala as a result of migration. Some foods believed to have evolved through the Malayalees are rice and curry, 'pittu', 'indi appa', 'appa' and 'kewum' . The list of the many Sri Lankans of Indian origin who have contributed in so many ways to the progress and growth of Sri Lanka goes on. Hopefully the 75th anniversary of Independence will be a key date when the island will look for inclusiveness for all its citizens. (The writer is Managing Director of Express Newspapers and Chairman, Sri Lanka Press Institute. He was recently conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA), 2023, the highest honour given by the Government of India to foreign nationals, presented to him by the President of India Droupadi Murmu.)

origin notably Indian Tamil workers in the plantations and elsewhere in Ceylon.

A Cambridge educated scholar and Barrister, Peri Sundaram was the son of a head 'Kangani' of Nellumalai Estate, Madulkelle. With family support and through his own drive and initiative, he got himself educated at Trinity College Kandy, S. Thomas College and Law College in Colombo, and thereafter Cambridge University and Gray's Inn in the UK. This background equipped him to gain acceptance and fit in with the national leadership at that time, as a founder member of CNC.

In 1919, he was Founder and Secretary of 'The Ceylon Workers' Welfare League', the first labour union formed in Ceylon, and also Founder and Secretary of the 'Ceylon Workers Federation'. Thereafter, being elected uncontested to the seat of Hatton at the first-ever elections to State Council in 1931, he served as Ceylon's first Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, driving workforce legislative reforms to provide legal protection for workers from exploitation and unfair labour practices. He was instrumental in the enactment of landmark Trade Union, Workman's Compensation and Minimum Wages ordinances.

Having met with Indian leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, Peri Sundaram was inspired by their struggle against the British. Nehru suggested the formation of an umbrella organisation for the advancement and welfare of the people of Indian origin bringing together the 25 disparate organisations that represented various people of Indian origin at the time. This encouraged him to form the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) in 1939. A year later, he formed the largest registered trade union in the country, the 'CIC Labour Union', consisting mostly of plantation workers of Indian origin. Peri Sundaram was elected ignation from the government Parliamentary group, Thondaman was the only MP who didn't oblige. "I am the leader of the CWC, I am not part of the UNP," Thondaman told JR, who merely said "Alright, Thonda" and left it at that.

It was this kind of understanding that enabled Thondaman, while being in JR's Cabinet, to decree that the CWC should stage strikes to win better wages - which they did. The rapport between them enabled Thondaman to convince JR to grant citizenship to all those of Indian origin. This was finally concluded after Ranasinghe Premadasa assumed office as President.

Despite this significant achievement, questions remain about plantation workers of Indian origin, almost 200 years after their arrival in the country. While their wages have increased nominally, it is questionable as to whether this has kept pace with the rising cost of living. Even more telling are their living conditions which have improved only marginally.

The leadership of the CWC meanwhile has passed, like a family heirloom, to Thondaman's grandson Arumugam and, after his sudden death, to his son, Jeevan, now 28 years of age.

Tamils of Indian origin in the country, amounting to well over 1,000,000, may not be second class citizens but for most, their socio-economic conditions remain 'second class'. The CWC of today, different from what it was during the days of Peri Sundaram and Thondaman, has still miles to go and many promises to fulfil because Sri Lankan citizens of Indian origin haven't gained their 'independence' as yet.

(The writer is the son of Periannan Sunderam Snr. He is an attorney-at-law, former Senior Vice President of the CWC, and ex-Sri Lanka Ambassador to Indonesia and the Philippines)

> Even today, do the tea pluckers' socioeconomic conditions remain 'second class'?



the greatest migrations in Indian history took place when Vijaya, son of Sinhabahu and his followers left Sinhapura and landed in Sri Lanka in 543 BC. It is said that at the time he set sail. that the Buddha who had visited this island earlier believed that the island would become a great civilization. On the day of his passing at Kusinara he called upon the God of the Heavens to guard the Prince and his companions who would eventually establish the island of Lanka. Legend has it that Sakra summoned Vishnu and bade him to protect Vijaya and his followers and the Doctrine that would follow in Lanka for a full 5,000 years.

And so this was the beginning of the Sinhala race, a pre-destined event.

Legend says that the Kings of Lanka sought the fair princesses from the neighbouring country to be their Queens. The last such King whose mother was of a Telungu origin was Sri Vijaya Rajasinha – King of Kandy. Then came the armed incursions of the island for the next 1,500 years from the Cheras, Cholas and Pandians, many settling in the North and other areas of Lanka. To fight the invaders and to secure their own kingdoms, the Sinhala Kings recruited Kerala and Kannada mercenaries.

All such people were absorbed by the island. Then came Buddhism brought by Ashoka's children. With Buddhism came Pali, a variation of Sanskrit and with Elalan came Tamil. Together they contributed to the Sinhala and Tamil spoken in the island. As Buddhism took hold in Sri Lanka and in keeping with Buddhist tenets, it was held that all men were equal. Consequently, the people of Lanka believed in equality and the principles of justice.

With the peace and freedom that prevailed, trade began to flourish. Gems and spices that grew on the island were exchanged for textiles brought in from India and other countries.

During the days of the Portuguese there was much interaction between the Goan coast and the island. Missionaries including St. Joseph Vaz too came into the island.

The other Indians

The Dutch when they took over from the Portuguese in the 17th century continued the trade with the Chetties who had settled along the western coastal areas of the island. Later known as Colombo Chetties, they provided British Ceylon many leading professionals from lawyers to doctors and scholars.

The lucrative pearl banks on the northwest coast of Lanka that attracted pearl divers and merchants to the island was mainly conducted by the coastal Moors. The early Arab traders looking for spices, pearls, shells, timber and gems married local women and spoke Tamil mixed with Arabic and it was these people that the Portuguese referred to as Moors.

The two most distinguished Chetties in recent history were Dr. Peter Philip Ondaatachi and Simon Casi Chetty, a member of the Legislative Council and the compiler of the *Ceylon Gazetteer*.

The island was also an exporter of arrack and the trade attracted merchants from Kerala. Soon regional commerce was left to Indians willing to establish themselves in Ceylon. The South Indian communities were joined by other trading communities, especially the Borahs, Memons and Parsis all from the western shores of North India. The islanders were, by preference, agriculturalists while their daily needs were supplied by the retailers such as the Nadars, Reddiars and the Malayalees, while the Chettiars stayed with wholesale trade. The Pereiras and the De Mels, the Victorias and Roches, the Mirandas, Fernandos and the Paivas were all part of this migration.

With trade, came the bankers – the Nattukottai Chettiars were the leaders in financial matters. For nearly 100 years, the biggest bank was the Oriental that backed the local population opening up new ventures, not asking for any security but trusting them. The Chettiars also built many of the temples we see today. They however left soon after Independence and the implementation of the Indian and Pakistani Resident (Citizenship) Act of 1949 that made many people of Indian Origin stateless until in 2001, when all People of Indian Origin living in Sri Lanka were declared citizens of the country.

The traders who came from India mainly from the Gujarat and Maharashtra region included Parsis, Borahs, Gujaratis, Memons, Sindhis and the Khojas. The first Parsi is remembered as Hormusgee Khambata who arrived in Ceylon in 1803. Later however they moved out of trade and took to professions in which their contributions to Ceylon must be recognized. Among them are the Rustomjes, Pestonjes, Captains and Choksys.

It may be remembered that Independence Hall built in 1947 and Mumtaz Mahal built in 1929 (the former residence of the Speaker), were both designed by Parsi architect Billimoria.

As education began to spread, qualified teachers were very much in demand and there were many Malayalees who took that discipline across Sri Lanka. One such was Ms. Perumal Pillai was the Principal at the Ramanathan College, Jaffna, while the other was Susan Pulimood who came to Ceylon in the 1930s, was first appointed a teacher, then Acting Principal, and finally Principal of Visakha Vidyalaya, a premier Buddhist school in Sri Lanka.

When the bicameral legislature was established in 1946 as the outcome of the Soulbury Commission, there were several persons of recent Indian origin in the Senate. They were Peri Sundaram, Sir Donatus Victoria, Kurban Adamaly and Doric De Souza. There were others of repute including A. Chockalingam Chettiar who was Chairman of the Anuradhapura Union District Council, Mayors including Stanislaus Fernando of

Memorable moments in the public service

Feizal Samath speaks to Bradman Weerakoon

ecalling major events in the public service in the post-independence era, veteran administrator Bradman Weerakoon corrected a widely held belief that one-time Prime Minister W. Dahanayake had, after losing the election, departed from Temple Trees in a bus with a bag, to his hometown of Galle.

"In fact he asked me for a vehicle and I provided him with a car," smiled Mr. Weerakoon

The veteran administrator, now 92 years, who served as Secretary for a record number of six prime ministers says his parents named him 'Bradman' as he was born on October 20, 1930, the day Australian cricket legend Don Bradman arrived in Sri Lanka by ship en-route to England to play the Ashes series.

"It was a joy to work in the public service those days. There was never a dull moment." he said.

According to official records, during the era when Sri Lanka was a colony under the British Empire, the first Public Service Commission was established by the Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council on 15th May 1946. The Public Service Commission was vested with the executive powers of appointment, promotion, transfer, disciplinary control and dismissal of public officers

With the adoption of the first Republican Constitution in 1972, the Public Service Commission which was hitherto in existence for 26 years was abolished and the



Bradman Weerakoon at 92 (Pic by Indika Handuwala)

authoritative power over the public service was vested in the Cabinet of Ministers.

A new era began in the Sri Lankan public service on the 1st of May 1963 with the establishment of the Ceylon Administrative Service (CAS), predecessor of the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS), wrote another retired administrator V.K. Nanayakkara to mark 50 years of the SLAS in 2013

What was the most memorable moment of the advent of independence?

"On Independence day (1948), the British flag came down and the Sri Lankan flag went up. The most important change that occurred was in our personal lives ... we were able to make our own decisions rather than them coming from above. We were public service," he recalled adding that there was "a nice feeling in the air that we were free for the first time.'

Six years later in 1954, Mr. Weerakoon joined the civil service which was a separate unit but part of the public service.

About 100 people belonged to the civil service ... they were the higher echelons of the public service. The permanent secretaries (a title given during British times) and heads of departments were civil servants. They may have been junior in years but senior in positions. Later on permanent secretaries were designated as secretaries to ministries.

"I joined as a cadet officer in 1954 and worked for two years under the supervision of a senior secretary. My first posting was as a cadet to a Government Agent (GA). There were 24 GAs in the country. In my batch four cadets were selected from among 500 applicants who sat the final examination," he said adding that it was difficult to get into the civil service. There was great competition for jobs in the public service which was the cream of jobs at that time the best jobs were in this sector.

During this period, he was posted as Asst. Secretary to Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala for a few months. Then in the 1956 election, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was elected Prime Minister.

At times it was difficult to deal with Sir John. He would on occasion object to decisions of his senior staff. "I remember one instance when he wanted to illuminate the pathway to Adam's Peak (Sri Pada). It was difficult and a logistical nightmare to hangreat difficulty," he said, noting however that he was popular with the staff.

D.S. Senanayake was the first PM postindependence, followed by his son Dudley for a short period. Sir John was appointed following Dudley's resignation. Mr. Weerakoon was Secretary to the PM when Mr. Bandaranaike was assassinated. "Everyone was shocked and stunned. The whole nation was stunned. We discussed the procedures that should be followed after his death." he said recalling that W. Dahanayake, who was the senior-most minister and in charge of education, was appointed PM for a short period, followed by Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike.

Were there any interesting anecdotes during Mr. Bandanaike's tenure?

"Many interesting things happened under him. For example, he banned the serving of liquor at Temple Trees and introduced a dress code – he directed that the national dress - tunic shirt and sarong or trousers should be worn in the public service," he said, laughingly adding, "I wore the shirt but not the sarong," and pointed to the tunic shirt he wore for the interview.

Another controversial decision by Mr. Bandaranaike was the language policy... everyone in the public service had to pass an exam on the Sinhala language. Many were unhappy in the public service as they had studied and were coached in the English Language. Some of the decisions taken by Mr. Bandaranaike had to be followed even with opposition from staff. He also changed some of his staff when they disagreed with him. Some staff left the gov-

able to choose our own rulers and run the dle this project but eventually done with ernment service due to such disagreements.

> The civil service was abolished in 1960 and everyone there was absorbed to the public service.

> Under Mrs. Bandaranaike, if she made a decision, it had to be carried out. While she listened to the opinions of officials, she had her own views on many subjects and issues but often relied on them. She had this firm belief that a woman can do a man's job but relied a lot on the advice of then Minister Felix Dias Bandaranaike.

> When Dudley Senanayake became PM in 1965, he wanted Mr. Weerakoon to continue in office. "He didn't have anyone else in mind and he knew I knew the job, and had integrity like many other public servants at that time. It was an unusual situation of serving many PMs," he said, laughing when reminded that he had a world record in serving so many PMs!

> "Under Dudley, the public service did very well. He was the ideal PM and knew how to get things done. He had an excellent relationship with the public service," Mr. Weerakoon recalled.

> In 1970 Ms. Bandaranaike transferred him to Ampara as GA as she felt "I should not have served too long under UNP governments." He spent six years as GA including stints in Batticaloa and Galle. "I began to really enjoy the freedom and being able to do what I wanted to do which was constrained as secretary to the ministry where you are daily under the control of the minister," he said, recalling, "as GA, you were your own boss! They had more freedom than secretaries to ministries!'

Time to look beyond the colonized mind Can we celebrate an architecture of independence, asks Dr Shanti Jayewardene

Early in the 20th century, J.P. Lewis, the Irish civil servant and colonial intellectual, remarked on the lamentable impact the government's policy was having on native architecture whereby, 'old and artistic Kandyan work is being removed and replaced by nondescript and hideous, modern work after the style of the petty masons and contractors of the low country'.

The low country Lewis jeers at had been under European rule since the 16th century, albeit with contested territorial boundaries. The Kandyan zone came under secure British rule following the so-called Rebellion of 1848. So what do we make of Lewis' lament?

We know little of the built landscape of the interior of the country at the time the British began their long 60 years of war to completely subjugate the people of this region. Why did they intervene so massively to transform the entire building organization? Between 1800 and 1900 they institutionalized a State monopoly of building and undermined the intellectual

technocrats with no local knowledge, supervised state construction - from ports, police stations, markets and prisons to hospitals and schools among others. They needed native knowledge to function and they learned from native experts. Unequal intellectual collaboration between colonizer and the colonized was a generic feature of knowledge collection in the colonies.

By the late 18th century Europe witnessed the emergence of a few engineering/ architecture schools. In India, for instance, the first engineering school on the European model came about in the 1840s. At the same time, Europe was beginning to send overseas, men, equipped with new, allegedly superior 'scientific' knowledge. Since Europeans competed with natives for their jobs, men who thought like Lewis were a minority. The European 'civilizing mission' narrative, premised on the construction of a poor subject people with a glorious past, was instilled in the minds of colonizer and colonized alike. Finely tuned, it tena-



Restoration of Abhayagiri dagoba: Intangible heritage questions in ancient living sites

knowledge, had begun. Ceylon's modern architecture of the 20th century was naturally a jumbled, largely PWD affair until natives, trained in UK, India and Australia, began returning home in the 1940s, equipped with new knowledge. Exciting as was this search for modern knowledge from the colonizer world, it concealed a darker side - the violence of 'coloniality' (a term used by Walter Mignolo). In chasing the west, we almost lost our ability to think independently. We became trapped in the epistemes of our rulers. All our minds, colonized to some extent, are unfree. The Portuguese introduction of European classical architecture for official buildings was accompanied by an indigenizing strain in domestic architecture, that was further differentiated by Dutch rulers and cosmopolitan natives. The colonial state's Parliament building, in 1920s Colombo, was a resolutely neo-Baroque, Classical monument, proclaiming British power. The former colonized native rulers, however, announced their unequivocal rejection of Classical colonial architecture in 1953, when they commissioned in Colombo, a peculiar monument to independence that stoutly mimicked the timbered Audience Hall of Kandyan Kings. The new political elites' wish was articulated in the designs by PWD Chief, the

Welshman, Wynne Jones.

The Independence Monument brought, to Lewis' low country, the symbolic power of indigenous royalty, annihilated by the British. In 1860s India, British proconsuls commissioned PWD architect, Robert Chisholm, to design a landmark building, the Senate House, University of Madras, in a hybrid European, Deccani, Madurai mode. Seen in this light, the designs with a Buddhist veneer, prepared for the University of Peradeniya campus, 80 years later by Shirley de Alwis, can be seen as responding to the overlapping predilections of Ceylon's nationalists and enlightened British intellectuals. This exchange interface illustrates how an unequal sharing of knowledge emerged in a colonial architecture discourse.

Having digressed to set the long duration of the historical context of colonial knowledge making, I shift back to the main theme of looking at how knowledge of modern architecture is made today. From inception, in the 12th century, or earlier, Colombo was a plural, indigenized urban form, home to many ethnicities -

knowledge making, Professor of Archaeology, Jagath Weerasinghe, remarked in 2016 that the relationship between history (Mahavamsa as the authoritative source of knowledge) and archaeology has established 'a seriously flawed notion that the past is synonymous with history'. In architecture schools too, the past is regarded as synonymous with history. The flaw conceals the relevance of the history of modern architecture to contemporary architectural practice. It denies history a vibrant discursive theoretical connection with design. Students have no exposure to the politics of knowledge-making during colonial occupation and believe the narrative that modern Euro-American knowledge in architecture is both objective and scientific. Untrained in reflexive thinking, their world is circumscribed by Eurocentric theory.

Weerasinghe further remarks that 'the outdated belief, that what archaeologists do is scientific method', is a limiting factor that prevents engagement with archaeology as a critical discourse, where archaeology is seen as a discursive formation that requires a critical practice. He comments that restoration of the Abhayagiri stupa controversy, ongoing from the 1980s, presents an extreme case of 'internationalism' gone wild, where the heritage experts refused permission for the stupa to be plastered in white. Whereas, the modernizing at Dambulla is a case of 'indigenism' gone wild. The examples illustrate the inability of archaeologists to engage in archaeology as a critical practice because their thinking is framed by international (UNESCO) guidelines of 1972 that deal with 'authenticity' as defined in Europe, leaving little room for intangible heritage questions arising in ancient living sites. Sri Lanka's archaeologists were unwilling to abandon a European discourse on authenticity, that uncritically serves nationalists and racial nationalism after independence from occupation. The heritage expert refused to break with colonial knowledge. But the monk at Dambulla. also in tune with international currents of thinking on intangible heritage, gave his devotees an indigenized invention of the past irreverent to internationalism. Weerasinghe suggests that a critical archaeology practice has the power to produce a more balanced outcome between such extremes. To date, the stupa is unplastered! It is exciting to imagine a scenario that goes beyond the bounds of extreme duality where students, grounded in the historical knowledge of their own architecture, could develop an architectural pedagogy of sharing knowledge with their Euro-American counterparts, where sharing is founded on equity and mutual respect. For this to become a reality, we would need anti-colonial practices, as articulated by British archaeologist, Dan Hicks, to be developed by the colonized and colonizer. (The writer is an architect, architectural historian and independent researcher living in Colombo. She was trained at Moratuwa University, University College London and the University of Oxford. Her published works include several articles and two books; Imperial Conversations: Indo-Britons and the architecture of South India(New Delhi, 2007) and Geoffrey Manning Bawa: Decolonizing Architecture (Colombo, 2017). She is presently collaborating with a Swiss team on a book on the ancient gardens of Sri Lanka, due for pub*lication in Milan later this year)*

culture of architecture.

Can we even remotely conjure up those precolonial urban rural landscapes of exquisite forests, rivers, lakes, rice-fields, flower gardens and orchards, emerging from the Sandesas, and read them in conjunction with British records of cold, misty, forested mountains and open plains where large herds of deer, elephant, buffalo and wild boar roamed? Can we begin to give life to those people within the urban cores, and others who dwelt in the hinterlands be they craftsmen, farmers, fisher folk, hunters or nomads who tended their lands, herds of cattle and managed their trans-basin irrigated landscapes at the time of conquest? Is it useful to think about how they designed and built prior to subjugation? Does it matter? Let us skim the practical or material interface where imported knowledge systems collided with those diverse knowledge systems and practices in place.

The powerful Ceylon Public Works Department (PWD) created in 1796 was a colonial institution with no counterpart in Britain. It facilitated conquest, united the conquered lands physically and enabled construction of the myth of a united nation state. The PWD assisted colonial armies move, dispossess, govern and transfer extracted resources to the coast for shipment to the motherland. When aristocrats and nobles were brutally deprived of their land, wealth and titles, native architects and engineers lost patronage. Existing building systems were dismantled as powerful alien patrons of architecture upheld the view that European knowledge was superior to native knowledge.

The merry band of men, who would eventually lead the PWD, were in search of employment, across expanding European empires. They came primarily from Scotland and Ireland, untrained, or with a modicum of apprenticeship. Potential rookie

ciously lingers

Modern architecture in Ceylon blossomed under the purview of engineers, while the first PWD Architect, J.G. Smither, appointed in 1865, also served in the Archaeology Department. His task was to consolidate the myth of the glorious past against a dying architectural present. The colonial story of architecture splendidly revealed, through measured drawings and English text, the glorious ruins at Anuradhapura. Smither's native assistants almost vanished in the magisterial collaborative tome, published by the government in 1895. The conqueror was replacing the native intellectual as the knowledge maker.

A decree restricting access to higher echelons of the PWD, to those with European qualifications, registers a more violent exercise of power. The Ceylonese intellectual is becoming a 'conscript of modernity' precisely because violence was woven into the fabric of the colonizer's mind. The colonized mind, born of this violence, is equally unfree. Local architects, engineers or equivalent specialists, who had designed and built all of Ceylon's extensive engineering works up until then, were displaced or absorbed into the second tier of the PWD.

By 1900, mixed race persons were singled out, for training in state technical colleges, to serve in the lower strata of the government technical cadre. The production of a technical cadre in architecture, looking towards Europe for



Some believe that by 1948, government buildings were 'decolonized' by Ceylonese architects, returning from abroad, who also advocated a Buddhist decorative veneer. The same group was responsible for establishing the first school of architecture in 1961, initiated after independence in Colombo, its pedagogy and format taken from University College London. We now have four schools of architecture, three university faculties and several private schools of engineering where reflexive thought and a theoretical discourse engaging the history of modern architecture or engineering and the construction of knowledge is rarely seen.

While India had the JJ School of Architecture by 1911, it too was modelled on European precedent. Decolonization was not on the agenda. Recently, Mustansir Dalvi, head of the JJ School, writes that 'This New Architecture', produced in Mumbai from the 1920s, is a home-grown modernism. It grew within the colonial discourse and not under the auspices of the European Masters who designed Nehru's dream of independence and modernism in Chandigarh. The Indian discourse is not taught here.

The mainstream Bawa narrative operates within a descriptive 'tropical modernist' European discursive trend, carefully insulated from deeper currents of colonial violence and the struggle for independence. That Bawa's work might have engaged in a politically aware quest for indigenous knowledge is ignored. The anti-Bawa drift in architecture circles is founded on a historical mainstream pedagogy inclining towards copy-paste, digital modernist, problem solving, 'scientific', knowledge systems in architecture schools. The current pedagogy preserves Euro-American dominance.

In the context of independence and

The Independence Monument built by Wynne Jones

By Yomal Senerath-Yapa

We tend to think of "the gentlemen's club" as a Jeeves-like oddity where the Englishmen retreat to get away from the womenfolk, and attend to more masculine matters in a congenial setting.

But in colonial Ceylon, gentlemen's clubs served a different purpose. While there were clubs in the capital city, the planters' clubs upcountry were the real social hubs where the planting fraternity gathered frequently for a 'whiff of civilization'- riding or driving down from their isolated estates in the hills.

These clubs were a symbol of occidental exclusivity till later times, when the Ceylonese in defiance established

their own, or till the Anglo-Saxon bastions simply had to cede to the 'brown skins'..

The oldest hill clubs included Radella and Darrawella, where the whole family had a rollicking time mostly with the kind of people they would have mingled with back home in England, holding dances, playing billiards, cricket, tennis, rugby and hockey. High spirits ruled, as well as piano playing and practical jokes.

The Colombo Club is one of the oldest in the capital. Today it allows men and women - a membership of about 400 Sri Lankans, to mingle freely in the clubhouse still exuding a palm-lined colonial prestige. It began though, as a viewing platform for British punters. Later

The gentlemen's clubs

admission was by subscription, while unmarried ladies had always to be chap-

To quote from the coffee-table book 'Colombo Club- 150th Commemorative Edition':

eroned.

"Period photographs show a building with a pinnacle shaped roof constructed from cadjan atop a platform functioning as a viewing gallery. This putative 'grandstand' of the Galle Face Race Course was later made permanent and used as the Colombo Club's foundation, courtesy Governor Robinson. While the sporting impulse

was a prime mover in the club's antecedents, less muscular and more social imperatives also shaped the development of its ethos.

As reported in a Ceylon Times article datelined November 30, 1869, in an Assembly Rooms' memo, it was set up for "providing Colombo with an Assembly Room and Race Stand, and which may be available for Balls, Concerts and Public Meetings, Family Bazaars, Lectures and other like purposes, and letting it out."

The Hill Club in Nuwara Eliya was barred to locals till 1967, its ivy-clad grey stone walls with crest of a heraldic panther welcoming only planters from Europe. This palatial building with 45 rooms stands near the Golf Club.

The Kelani Valley Club, much less select today, by the banks of the Sitawaka River was a watering hole for doughty planters around Avissawella where weekends were given to jolly roistering - as evidenced by the club motto 'Usque Ad Tertium Diem' (All the way to the Third Day) - signifying that Friday's bawdy revels led to rugby matches on Saturday and picnics on Sunday

The Royal Colombo Golf Club is the oldest golf club in Sri Lanka. The British

The Orient Club was established as a rejoinder to the British who refused entry

of the native sons to their clubs. (Pic by Indika Handuwala)

There is sugar in the red hot chillies and no

As is known quite well the Orient Club

was established as a rejoinder to the British

who refused entry of the native sons to their

clubs. But it was modelled on the same lines

parippu, pol sambol or poppadom.

first played on the Galle Face Green alongside polo, cricket, football, hockey, rugby, etc. till they bought the expanse of land then earmarked for a farm by philanthrophist Charles Henry de Soysa.

The Dutch Burgher Union with its dark timbered halls, was begun in British times, in 1908, and membership was only for those with an uninterrupted line of patrilineal descent from a European employee of the Dutch East India Company.

Let's not forget the Nuwara Eliya Golf Club, which turns 134 this year, the pukka hill station club where the gleaming corridors are still trodden by caddies and valets as if the English gentry still call the tune...

Orient Club: A haven for the brown sahib

By Gamini Weerakoon

In the souvenir of the Orient Club on the occasion of its centenary celebrations, 25 years ago, I wrote an article titled, 'The Departure Lounge' - the bar of the club. It was so named, explained the member who conferred that moniker, a medical specialist, because members who frequently inhabited the place departed to Kanatte with a frequency much greater than those who spent their leisure hours elsewhere.

I was at the Departure Lounge last week reminiscing about the times that I enjoyed spending there while enjoying a gin & tonic to ward off the afternoon heat but realised that of the one hundred odd members, according to my estimate, who had been members of the Lounge, many had departed to the heavens/ the nether world or into the world of nothingness between then and now. Only three of that membership remained: a sprightly nonagenarian, myself an octogenarian and another of the same vintage

The Orient is subject - like all things - to that eternal law of nature: Change with Time

While I was enjoying my gin & tonic, a sturdy young man walked in, nodded perfunctorily at me, ordered a Pilsner, and commenced poking away with his forefinger at a box while swiping at the screen and talking to it. The box talked back to him, and they even laughed together. It was a new world for them. The world had changed and so it had come to the Departure Lounge.

Gone were the days when members greeted each other loud and clear: So, how, how? How's life and the wife? Or Alagan, that veteran servitor, presenting an incoming member, the race sheet that contained details of the runners and riders of the main horse races in good old England. The Sport of Kings of the English still had a hold on the Orientals who established this club



A home away from home: A quiet place to relax. (Pix by Indika Handuwala)

their wealth at the bar. They maintained standards of the past, the quality of membership of new recruits, and were enforcers of the dress code etc which keeps the Orient on its old tracks.

Adjoining the Departure Lounge is the spacious lounge where history - a glorious history - gazes down on the occupants from the walls. They are past members - four prime ministers - DS, Dudley, Sir John and SWRD with the first Governor General of Ceylon and distinguished politicians from the north, Chief Justices, Supreme Court Judges, legendary medical professionals, outstanding businessmen and academics.

You can't help but get a feeling of inferiority considering their past achievements and those of members that followed them. But that could be a wrong perspective. They on the walls achieved what they could in their time under different conditions and contributed to the improvement of the Orient very well. But each generation has performed to flooring is Mahogany. The Members Hostel is now a well known restaurant in town supposed to be bringing in income. Other new sources of income have been generated.

Of course some changes have taken place not in accordance with what was essentially the Orient. Its lunch in the good old days was Sinhala Buth Curry. As a cook put it: "The gentlemen living in Colombo miss the taste of Kos, Mus and Pol Sambol and we provide it." But now alas it's gone tourist.

as English clubs: A home away from home. After a hard day's work, a man needs relaxation away from the pressures at the workplace, domestic politics and trivialities at home. The Orient has refused ladies member-

ship because it would go against the basic logic for a gentlemen's club: A home away from home which may be nearby. The present management, it is hoped, would realise from events around the world that gender equality results in female superiority. Now ladies are welcome even into the Departure Lounge but only as guests. They do sip their cocktails and stronger stuff as effortlessly as their partners. As far as I'm concerned, enough is enough as far as membership is concerned

It is a place primarily for the male of the species to rest their tired limbs and worried minds

Let's say 'Cheers' to that gentleman, who used to retreat to the Departure Lounge and keep recalling the words of that immortal poet Omar Khayyam over his Nth Double Distilled

Ah,fill the cup - what boots it to repeat How Time is slipping underneath our feet Unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday Why fret about them, if today be sweet.

(The writer is a veteran journalist, one-time Editor of The Island and a senior member of the Orient Club)

CR&FC - The first rugby club dedicated to Ceylonese citizens

By Ted Hiran Muttiah

As the country commemorates its 75th year of independence, not far from Independence Square, the Ceylonese Rugby and Football Club (CR&FC) celebrates its centenary year. CR&FC was founded in 1922 as the first rugby club dedicated to

together a team to play on the Nondescripts Cricket Club grounds. Colonel Joseph, who was the then President of NCC, took charge of his players, coached them, and organised fixtures with other established and reputed clubs. The instant success achieved prompted him to form a truly Ceylonese Rugby and Football

Stanley, Governor of Ceylon, the red shirts went on to register a memorable victory 6 points to 3. Such was the euphoria following the victory, members of CR&FC procured an enlarged framed photograph of the club founder and president Col. E. H. Joseph and positioned it prominently in recognition of the splendid serwith "practice with patience. Fear no one. Play with enthusiasm, enjoy playing the game and most of all, wear the "red jersey" with pride".

Fast track one hundred years and the CR&FC has established itself as a premier rugby club and expanded its sports programme offering close to a dozen sporting facilities.

because the English did not permit entry into their clubs, even in this country.

Fortunately, the Law of Change has only come in some parts. Some of the old features remain

In another corner of the Departure Lounge it was like in old times. They were arguing and insulting one another, they ordered the hard stuff and were quite raucous. The hard-core comprised sons of the fathers of the earlier generation that had departed. Some could even trace their membership to their grandfathers! This comprised the engine room of the club providing the finance through liquification of

their capacity depending on the conditions that prevailed.

In 1991 when I joined the Orient, it was in shambles. Prabhakaran had bombed the Joint Headquarters of the Defence Forces located across the road from the Orient. That explosion shattered almost every single sheet of glass that was in the club house and took off a part of the roof of the massive building. The Members Hostel was a total wreck. Demolition was recommended.

Yet, the club house is today spick and span, colour washed and white washed though a little bit remains to be done. The kitchen and laundry are functioning. The Ceylonese as citizens of this land were called then.

The club's founder Colonel Ernest Henley Joseph was driven by his social and moral conscience, to establish a recreational venue dedicated to the Ceylonese, at a time when European colonialists held sway and locals were only permitted to enter existing sporting clubs at their behest.

As history records, it all started when Colonel Joseph established Ceylonese rugger, and grouped

Club and for this purpose, public opinion and support were canvassed.

The Clifford Cup was first presented in 1911 by the wife of then acting

Governor of Ceylon Hugh Clifford. In 1928, thanks to the industrious Oxford educated F. J. De Saram (vice president at the time). CR&FC secured the Longdon Place grounds. The first "home" game was against the much fancied all European "merry men of Uva". After the ceremonial ground opening by Sir Hubert

vices rendered to the club and Ceylonese rugby in general. This photograph still adorns the club's entry even today.

The club's oldest living honorary life member and captain Summa Navaratnam recalls "the best and happiest years of my life were spent at the club. So much so, I met both my brides at the after match functions at the CR! I believe the CR&FC's contribution to rugby and my life journey has been immense." Adding sage advice to emerging CR players

The recently released centenary book "Tackling Change: 100 years of CR&FC" superbly presents the journey aptly demonstrating how well the club adapted to the relentless socio-economic changes. Each decade is seamlessly forged to build an organisation that is representative of the community expectations. It provides a desirable ambiance for a social fellowship regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or age. (The writer is the President of the CR&FC)

Where truth lingers: 75 years of figurative language

By Dr Madhubhashini DISANAYAKA RATNAYAKE

What talk of art and literature in the 75 vears of Independence, one might ask, when our focus is now more on survival than aesthetics. Yet it is relevant, always relevant, I feel, for in words lie the heart of a nation that is quiet, unlike mass media; is subtle, unlike mob rule and hysteria; has the capacity to speak truth to power, unlike many of its ordinary citizens like us.

A few days ago, I watched Rajitha Dissanayake's drama Sihina Horu Aran (Dreams Robbed) where a young man's fate encapsulates the fate of our youth here: The only future available for him is to either go abroad somehow, or become a murderous politician's stooge - he cannot even kill himself. The quiet audience taking this all in knew what the playwright knew: We are living in a country where hope is dying. But art matters, because, for whatever it's worth, it tells us that we are not alone in our desperation, and that alone is something.

Current dramatists have captured a mood and a fate, and put it on stage: Asanka Sayakkara's Ayya Malo (Brothers/and also 'The Elder Brother is Dead') puns on the title, or Chamila Priyankara's Sanga Veda Guru Govi Kamkaru, by the very title itself frames what led this nation into a path of exclusivist nationalism, for which Sri Lanka has paid quite a heavy price, its citizens still being unable to think outside ethnic divisions even after 75 years of living together.

The birth of this exclusivist nationalism itself cannot be separated from the fields of drama and literature either. In fact, the beginnings of Sinhala fiction, in which Piyadasa Sirisena and his polemic novels played a main part, are tied to the urge of those pre-Independence writers to show up the faults of the colonizers and their Western way of life. A fertile ground to bring forth such resistance was already made in the 19th Century with the Buddhist Revival Movement in the South brought about by figures like Waliwita Saranankara Thero and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, and Navalar's Hindu Revivalist movement in the North. In drama too, the theatre of John de Silva and so on was doing more or less the same thing. According to Ediriweera Sarathchandra, the coming of age of the Sinhala novel, when art superseded politics, was Martin Wickramasinghe's novel Gamperaliya in 1944. Sarathchandra's own dramatic production in 1956, Maname, is believed to have ushered Sinhala theatre into its own identity, the fact that it was a construction taking many elements of world theatre, according to the playwright's own admission, not being given much attention. Names itself, like the playwrights, were constructed for well known artists during that time, erasing all Western sounding names they originally had; it was, after all, a time when linguistic nationalisms were at its height, with the Sinhala Only Act coming into effect the same year.

After the British left, there came a time in the 1960s and the '70s where there was a strong sense of leftism both in art and the country. In literature, this marks a rare time of both Sinhala and Tamil writers working on the same wavelength, the latter including some Muslim writers as well according to M.R.

Nuhuman. The Sinhala Janatha Lekeka Peramuna and the Tamil collective called the Sri Lanka Progressive Writers Association worked within more or less the same ideological framework, and writers like Ayathurai Santhan still speak fondly of finding himself at home in both. Even in drama, as Kanchuka Dharmasiri has shown, there had been close links earlier between the Sinhala and Tamil dramatists, and both groups objected in their art in the 1980 and 90's to the coming of neoliberalism to Sri Lanka which happened with the opening of the economy in 1977, against which Gamini Haththotuwegama's street theatre group founded in 1974 also gave powerful social commentaries, acting their dramas out in open spaces around the country. Tamil theatre disappeared from Colombo after the 1983 riots, contends Dharmasiri, and didn't quite flourish elsewhere either, as many artists either migrated or were displaced.

The JVP uprising in the late 80s saw drama become one of the most powerful places of protest, resistance and public expression, when that was often punished by death in this country at that time. I still remember the catharsis expressed by the audience's reactions each night, when Dharmasiri Bandaranaike's Sinhala adaptation of Jean-Paul Sartre's Men without Shadows was enacted, for which I played the violin under Premasiri Khemadasa's baton. It may have been the French Revolution the actors were depicting, but the audience knew that the torture shown and the deaths of idealistic young people had everything to do with here. There were many such plays then, perhaps the only mode of release was art in those times of terror, as Ranjini Obeysekera had called that era, in her book about theatre then.

If protest and resistance left drama after the carnage of the '88-'89 JVP uprising, it seemed to have moved into fiction during the long war that followed, the point to where an exclusivist nationalism had finally led us. In the decade after the war ended in 2009, Sinhala fiction – at least that written by the best in the field right now - speak against violence, injustice and the fault-lines in Sri Lankan politics. They do so openly, the cover, if at all, by some, is in allegory and symbolism; they are often multiple State Literary Award winners like Liyanage Amarakeerthi, Keerthi Weliserage, Sunethra Rajakarunanayaka, Kaushalya Kumarasinghe to name just a few who generally write in the realist vein, or fabulists like Reverend Batuwangala Rahula, Prabath Jayasinghe or Piyal Kariywasam. There are superb new writers emerging as well, both in fiction and poetry. There is hope in the field of drama too as mentioned at the beginning; in English theatre, plays like Ruwanthi de Chickera's Dear Children, Sincerely, or those created by Tracy Holsinger's Mind Adventures Theatre Company show how engaged with current politics English theatre can become as well.

And that is what makes me end this short look back with a note of hope. In the midst of general devastation, Art still lives here.

(The writer is a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language Teaching, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Her PhD dissertation was on post-war Sinhala and English fiction in Sri Lanka)





A scene from Sihina Horu Aran

INDEPENDENCE 75 5

75 years after: A Sri Lankan Midnight Child's story

By Sarath Amunugama

was eight years old when my father took me to Queens Hotel in Kandy to see our first Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake unfurl the national flag from the Pattirippuwa after Independence day in 1948.It was midnight and I was sleepy but I still recall the cheering and the fireworks that were set off soon after. So after a fashion, following Salman Rushdie's characters in his novel 'Midnight's Children', I too may be called a Sri Lankan 'Midnight's Child'.

It is now 75 years since that famous day and many people and things near and dear to me, including my parents, friends and social activists, are no more. So there is a certain sadness in me when looking back. But at the same time I also have a feeling of a tragic loss of the promises held out to us for a new beginning when compared with the tragedy of our present times. However to be realistic there have been both gains as well as losses during this period and now 75 years later is the time to look at them afresh. There is no doubt that this period has seen many advances particularly for the disadvantaged and oppressed rural community. Economists like Amartya Sen have advocated this model of inclusive growth even though there are reservations about how it all panned out.

Let us go deeper into these changes.

The first obvious difference is what is called the 'demographic transition'. At the time of independence we were about 71 lakhs of people. Today we are over 210 lakhs and soon will be reaching 230 lakhs before we hit a plateau in population growth according to demographers and statisticians. Before social interventions became the rule in the modern world, according to the now abandoned Malthusian theory, there was a balance in population growth because the natural increase in births were matched by the death rates. High maternal and infant mortality was a characteristic of the pre-modern period and it accounted for the slow growth of populations.

Some modern historians have demonstrated that the spurt of activities in western Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries – particularly their advances in seafaring and conquest of new territories - leading to colonialism, was a function of rapid demographic changes in those countries. With the elimination of "Black Death" or plagues and the development of inventions following the Renaissance they were able to master long range navigation in their search for the 'Americas'. By accident they came to the East and inaugurated the "Vasco De Gama" of modern Asian history as propounded by K.N. Pannikar, the famous Indian historian. (In passing we may also note that seafaring and regional trade was also a characteristic of medieval Asia).

In Sri Lanka the stage for rapid population growth was set in the later colonial period. However the granting of universal franchise in 1933 following the recommendation of the Donoughmore Commission led to a spate of social welfare measures promoted by the newly elected State Councillors. Among these changes, rural health was given priority. Accordingly rural hospitals and village level health care led to the drop in maternal deaths and a rapid increase in births largely due to the drop in infant mortality. There is an argument among demographers about the reasons for this leap in rural health. The Editors of 'Population' ascribed it to the discovery of DDT and the conquest of Malaria. Ananda Meegama and others have argued persuasively that it was due to a raft of social welfare undertaken at that time including food subsidies, educational reform and the transformation of the rural health sector.

With independence the emphasis on social welfare was intensified. Not only did we have a surplus of sterling reserves but the later Korean War sent rubber prices sky high and the early Senanayake regimes were able to complete major development activities like the Gal Oya scheme and the construction of an idyllic new residential University in Peradeniya with domestic savings. But that could not last long because of several reasons including population growth mentioned above. No attention was paid to the need to transform our economy freeing it from dependence on exports of tea, rubber and coconut and a domestic small farmer-based agriculture which was so inefficient that we had to regularly import our staple food - rice from Burma and even locate an embassy there to ensure that there was no break down in

Seventy five years after independence we have not yet discovered the growth model that will suit the particularities of our situation.

food supplies.

But this honeymoon could not go on. After his unanticipated victory in 1956, SWRD Bandaranaike raised alarm bells and advocated population control while as Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike said the following in 1972: "The continued growth of population at the present high rate will pose problems which will defy every attempt at solution. In the short term any further increase of the number of births from the present level of 370,000 per year will put inordinate strains on the school system, on hospitals and the supply of other goods and services and in such a situation, it is only by a shift of investment in productive activities that it would be possible to maintain these services even at present levels.'

How to face this impending crisis? It was here that political ideologies came into play and ensured that we proceeded on the path that has led to the present crisis. It is noteworthy that all recently emancipated nations in South Asia first undertook to sponsor growth through Statist policies. Given the linkages between a feeble native capitalism and the departing colonial administration, leaders of these new nations emphasized a state-led growth at the expense of a possible open economy. The

Councillors. Among these changes, rural health was given priority. Accordingly rural hospitals and village level health care led to the drop in maternal deaths and a rapid increase in births largely due to the drop in

In Sri Lanka free education, free health, subsidised transport and social welfare handouts were paid out of the earnings which were becoming more and more difficult to obtain. The history of our external sector is one of assisted suicide. All the traditional income earners were systematically decimated by bringing them under state control which was at the heart of mismanagement and corruption that followed. The so called Socialist state with its "licence raj" was the epicentre of corruption, inefficiency, patronage and loss of markets. One may think that the above observations were only in respect of Sri Lanka. Not so. They became well known as the drawbacks of the Nehru (Jawaharlal and Indira) led economies which were referred to sarcastically by economists as "The Hindu rate of Growth".

It was only after the Indian economy was opened up following the fall of the USSR and Eastern European economies and the growth of China after the fall of the 'Gang of Four' which advocated Mao's disastrous economic theories, that India under the leadership of Manmohan Singh and Chidambaram took to the path of economic liberalization which has led to spectacular results. While admittedly there are imperfections in the liberal economic system, today's growth of the technology-led competitive economic system so created has led to greater productivity and the common good. Such spurts of economic growth in our country were seen only when a policy of foreign investment, higher technology and an open competitive economy was allowed to operate even for a short while. It enabled us to capitalize on our greatest asset which is our hub position in the Indian Ocean.

Amartya Sen in his recently published autobiography 'Home in the World' revisits theoretical debates on this issue among the world's leading economists some of them Keynsians like Kaldor, Joan Robinson and Richard Kahn and others - 'Neo-classicalists' like Denis Robertson. There were also Marxists like Dobbs and Piero Sraff at Cambridge University. Being a student of Marxist theoretician Sraffa Gramschis' friend and benefactor, Sen hews a line which has now been rejected by Indian planners when he says regarding Joan Robinson's views, "Somehow Joan had little sympathy for the Smithian integrated understanding of economic development. For example she strongly criticized Sri Lanka for offering subsidized food to everyone on nutritional grounds and for the sake of good health, even though it contributed to economic expansion at the same time. She dismissed such a mixed strategy with a highly misleading analogy "Sri Lanka is trying to taste the fruit of the tree without growing it."



When hopes were high: The Independence ceremonies in 1948



my and recommend models which do not appear to work in terms of economic growth. Ironically it has been the Left which has chosen to emphasise a 'National Economy"citing odd instances like importing apples and grapes. What they have done through populist politics is to make all the mistakes which ruin a functioning economy. In the 'nationalising spree'' of the SLFP and its toadies in the Left, plantations, trade, transport, shipping, the Port, Airlines, fuel distribution and insurance and many other ventures which were running efficiently with good management were all taken over and decimated. Profit generating ventures which were well managed were turned into employment exchanges for relatives and hurrah boys. Systematically the country was deliberately - because of an outdated ideology which later brought down the Communist system in the USSR and Eastern Europe - set on the path to economic ruin.

It is a strange irony that the very masses who were mesmerised by the populists are now protesting against the loss of benefits which can only be sustained by a growth momentum which they rejected at the polling stations.

When I met Amartya Sen several years ago in Delhi, I asked him why his recommended development growth model of Sri Lanka had failed. His answer was that the ethnic conflict had blunted that growth trajectory. There may be some truth to that assertion but what he fails to recognize is that the very ethnic conflict was created by the misuse of Statism which underpinned that growth model. Countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Rwanda have, after the end of internecine wars, fuelled rapid growth through a market economy model which has linked itself to a globalized economy. Only Sri Lanka has not emerged richer unlike the above mentioned countries.

The reason for this must surely be wrong leadership which follows a populist antigrowth programme and relies on policies which benefit a narrow ruling political class which like in Marcos' Philippines established a kleptocracy and family rule which while throwing crumbs at their followers, indebted the country and focused their attention on the wrong "enemy" by rousing communal passions. We, at this juncture, need a strong intellectual debate on how to fashion our future economic policies based on productivity, sound management, elimination of corruption and selfless leadership. That was the message that the youth of this country attempted to send through the Aragalaya.

Trotsky wrote of a "Permanent Revolution". An Aragalaya is never over until wrong policies and wrong leadership using populism to divert attention from the realities of economic growth to gain power continues to dominate our society.

(The writer is a former member of the Ceylon Civil Service and one-time Cabinet Minister. He graduated from the University of Peradeniya and taught Anthropology at both the Universities of Peradeniya and Vidyodaya. Later, he obtained a Doctorate from the Centre for Advanced Social Studies in Paris, France and was a senior official of UNESCO)

Seventy five years after independence we have not yet discovered the growth model that will suit the particularities of our situation. Like the proverbial blind man we touch different parts of an elephant's anato-

What was it like to work with the world's first woman prime minister whom I was privileged to serve first as assistant secretary from 1962-1965, and as secretary during her second term as prime minister during the period 1970-1977?

Personalities are not static. They change and evolve. This was as true of Mrs Bandaranaike as of anyone else. Her first administration consisted of the period in which she held no direct political office, in that she was not an elected Member of Parliament. She had given effective and charismatic leadership to her late husband's political party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) at the behest of that party's political leaders and its key supporters. Upon the party's triumph at the polls she was appointed to the second chamber, the Senate and then made prime minister.

According to those who knew her better than I at the time, she entered politics reluctantly and under much pressure from the elders of the party that her husband had founded. Mr SWRD Bandaranaike's tragic death by assassination in September 1959 was a great shock to her, her family and indeed to the country as a whole. When the subsequent general election came around, she was still in mourning. In fact, during the entire period as prime minister in her first administration, she always wore a white sari and blouse.

My recollection of Mrs Bandaranaike during this period was of a person who was quiet, dignified and serious-minded. She also had a fine sense of humour which was occasionally on display.

The popular belief for some time was that her kinsman, the brilliant young minister of finance Mr Felix Dias Bandaranaike ran the government. But this was fair from true. The strong personality that she was, Mrs Bandaranaike who possessed great self-confidence, could not be hustled nor intimidated. She valued the advice of bright and experienced persons, but ultimately she made the decisions.

By the time she became prime minister for the second time in 1970, she had matured greatly. Her self-confidence had grown, and the death of her husband had become suffi-

Humane, tough and with a fine sense of humour: The many sides of Mrs B

Dharmasiri Peiris recalls working with the world's first woman Prime Minister

Mrs Bandaranaike proved to be outstanding in her role and capacity as minister of external affairs. She had a knack for foreign affairs and an abiding interest in it.

ciently distant not to affect her temperament to the extent it did in the 1960s.

Mrs Bandaranaike's maturity and strength were called into play on several occasions. One such signal event was the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgency of 1971. The advantage of surprise was with the JVP. The attacks commenced on the early hours of the 5th of April 1971 But prior to that based on significant intelligence reports that an attack was imminent, the then Commander of the Army, Gen. Sepala Attygalle made a personal appeal to Mrs Bandaranaike to move out of her private residence at Rosmead Place to her more secure official residence at Temple Trees. But it was difficult to convince the prime minister of the necessity to move. She told the Army Commander "I am not leaving my home. You defend me here." I was present on this occasion and so was her brother and private secretary Dr Mackie Ratwatte. It took considerable effort on the part of the army commander and the two of us to persuade her to leave for Temple Trees. In retrospect I am amazed at the fearlessness of her stance in a time of peril. While directing operations from Temple Trees during this difficult period she displayed the same calm authority. Meetings went on, one after another, until about midnight. She personally coordinated all important matters of state, civilian and military, including logistical issues pertaining to the functioning of ports, airports, road and passenger transport and food managements. In addition, she also oversaw matters related to the safe functioning of essential services such as electricity, water and telecommunications. My colleagues and I from the public service assisted her with ideas and helped her work out strategies to deal with any and every contingency. But the major decisions were hers; and when they were taken, there was no micro-management. There was follow-up review and fire-fighting due to unforeseen circumstances but there was no interference in operational matters. Anyone who came to her with a problem, walked away with a solution due to the decisive nature of the prime minister. Alongside the efficient discharge of her official duties, she did not overlook her role as hostess at this trying time. She was conscientious, punctual and as we discovered, had enormous reserves of stamina

The next matter I wish to advert to was her attitude to the public service and to public servants. In this she was most proper. In her office there was a clear dividing line between official duties pertaining to governance and other matters.

The prime minister took care to observe the proprieties of the public service which in the 1970s was much less politicised than it is now.

Mrs Bandaranaike proved to be outstanding in her role and capacity as minister of external affairs. She had a knack for foreign affairs and an abiding interest in it. She enjoyed handling the subject as anyone who worked with her will attest. Non-alignment was central to her vision. She saw it as a way for developing countries to avoid getting dragged into the power struggles of big powers locked in diverse conflicts. She was not however unaware of certain other international obligations. That is why she took the considerable risk of permitting a hijacked aircraft to land at Katunayake airport for refuelling when the prime minister of Malaysia made a fervent appeal to her. She took the view that there was an obligation to help a friendly country in dire need and that certain risks had to be taken in such a context. Whenever she travelled abroad, she was received and treated with great respect by her hosts. When we travelled to Cairo in 1970 for President Nasser's funeral, for instance, the reception she received from the political figures of the Arab world was vividly indicative of the high esteem in which she was held.

On our visit to the Soviet Union in

Non-alignment was central to her vision. She saw it as a way for developing countries to avoid getting dragged into the power struggles of big powers locked in diverse conflicts.

November 1974 on the invitation of the Soviet government we had two sessions of official talks with prime minister Kosygin and his team of advisors. The prime minister was keen to explore the possibility of obtaining Soviet aid for certain development projects. The discussions dragged on because she was trying to get the best terms possible. At one stage PM Kosygin wagged a finger at her and said, "You are a hard lady." She smiled and replied, "If I am it is for the sake of my country." The overall discussions were held in a very cordial atmosphere. This is only one episode which throws some light on Mrs Bandaranaike's character, her tenacity in particular.



Portrait of a leader: Sirimavo Bandaranaike

Mrs Bandaranike's strength was that she was prepared to argue as well as listen to an argument and many were the times when she did not permit political considerations or expediency alone to dominate her thinking. Let me cite the case of a senior and influential minister when she thought he had acted unjustly due to political considerations. When the minister told her in response that the issue concerned a UNP supporter, she angrily asked whether those who belong to the UNP were not citizens of this country.

She was a humane, serious-minded, hard working, dedicated and courteous person with a fine sense of humour. She was considerate at all times in her dealings with the public service and especially so to the officials who worked closely with her. She relied much on decision-making by consensus most of the time. But on occasion, like all leaders she could be stubborn and stick to her strong personal views.

(Extracts from 'Sirimavo - Honouring the world's first woman Prime Minister' edited by Tissa Jayatilaka)

Lanka's 75-year political timeline: Milestones, mayhem and





Top row from left: First Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake signs the Independence document (1948); Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike takes part in an Independence Day event (1957); JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera addresses a political meeting (1970) a year before he led a youth insurrection; and Ethnic riots (1983)

Middle row from left: J.R. Jayewardene takes oaths as Sri Lanka's first executive President (1978); Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi narrowly escapes an attack by a naval rating during a guard of honour after signing the Indo-Lanka accord (1987); Norway's special envoy Erik Solheim carries a message of peace to LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran (2002); Army Commander Sarath Fonseka and President Mahinda Rajapaksa celebrate the war victory (2009); and jubilant troops (2009) Bottom row from left: The Easter Sunday massacre (2019); Gotabaya Rajapaksa takes oaths as President (2019); the Aragalaya that forced President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and then resign (2022); and Ranil Wickremesinghe being sworn in as President (2022)

1947: Elections are held for Sri Lanka's 101-seat House of Representatives (lower House in a bicameral Parliament) in August and September, contested by the United National Party (UNP), the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the Ceylon Indian Congress, the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, the Communist Party and the Labour Party. The UNP, formed a year earlier and led by D.S. Senanayake, wins 42 seats and forms a government with the ACTC and independent MPs most of whom are from Tamil parties. Senanayake becomes the first Prime Minister. On November 13, 1947, the "Ceylon Independence Bill" is passed in the House of Commons in Britain. It receives Royal Assent (the signature of Britain's King George VI) in December. February 03-04, 1948: Ceylon ceases to be a colony at midnight. The next morning, Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake addresses the nation as a free country after 443 years of rule by the Portuguese, Dutch and British. A ceremony is held in Colombo on February 10, 1948, attended by the Duke of Gloucester at the site where the Independence Hall is subse-

auently built. July 12, 1951: Health and Local Government Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike crosses the floor of the House to announce his resignation from the government. On September 02, 1951, he forms the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).



D.S. Senanayake and Dudley Senanayake

March 22, 1952: 'Father of the Nation' Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake, dies after a fall while horse-riding at Galle Face a day earlier. Four days after his death, Governor General Lord Soulbury calls on Senanayake's son Dudley to form a government.

August 12-13, 1953: The country's first civil disobedience campaign, termed the 'Hartal', called for by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSPP), is staged. Many sectors go on strike and demand the restoration of the rice subsidy. The unrest that follows leaves at least ten dead. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake resigns on October 12. He is succeeded by John Kotelawala

April 1956: At the election held from April 5-10, the SLFP wins

51 out of 95 contested seats in the 101-seat House of Representatives. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike becomes Prime Minister. Keeping a major election promise, Bandaranaike has the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, known as the 'Sinhala Only Act' passed, making Sinhala the sole official language of the country. Bandaranaike also nationalised bus companies and the Colombo port, forming the Central Transport Board and Ceylon Shipping Corporation respectively.



The handshake that marked the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact

July 26, 1957: Bandaranaike signs the 'Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam' Pact with Federal Party leader S.J.V. Chelvanayakam granting more autonomy to the Tamil community. Months later, on 09 April 1958, Buddhist monks protest at Bandaranaike's Rosmead Place residence. He tears up the pact.

1958: Between May 22 and June 2, the first major clashes between the Sinhala and Tamil communities escalate into countrywide riots. Officially, 158 people are reported dead. On September 03, 1958, the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act is passed to offset the effects of the Official Language Act.

September 26, 1959: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike dies after being shot at by a Buddhist monk, Thalduwe Somarama, a day earlier at Rosmead Place. Wijayananda Dahanayake is appointed caretaker prime minister.



a general election. Contesting from the Lanka Prajathanthravadi Pakshaya, he wins only four seats. The UNP is the party with the most number of seats and Dudley Senanayake becomes Prime Minister, but the UNP lacks a simple majority and cannot form a stable government, lead-

ing to another general election in July.



Ms Bandaranaike sworn in as premier by Governor General Gopallawa

July 21, 1960: Bandaranaike's widow, Sirima Bandaranaike, leads the SLFP to victory at the general elections and becomes the world's first woman Prime Minister. In 1964, Ms. Bandaranaike nationalises the distribution of fuel, forming the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.

January 27, 1962: An attempted coup against the government by a group of senior Police, Army and Navy officers and public servants is thwarted. Those responsible are tried and convicted, but acquitted on appeal to the Privy Council in Britain. On March 2, 1962, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke is replaced as Governor General by William Gopallawa.

July 06, 1962: Thalduwe Somarama, convicted of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's assassination, is hanged after the restoration of capital punishment which had been abolished by Bandaranaike in 1956



The Sirima-Shastri pact

525,000 to be repatriated to India while the citizenship of another 150,000 "stateless" persons is to be negotiated later. December 3, 1964: Leader of the House C.P. de Silva leads thirteen MPs to cross the floor of the House, opposing the Press Council Bill. The government loses the vote on the Throne Speech by one vote. Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman

of Indian origin, with

who opposed the Sirima-Shastri Pact abstains from voting. March 22, 1965: Dudley Senanayake wins the general election and forms a government in coalition with the Federal Party, the first government to last its full term of office since independence.

May 27, 1970: Sirima Bandaranaike wins the general election and forms the 'United Front' government in coalition with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party. April 5, 1971: The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) launches an insurgency to capture state power and gains control of a few towns in its initial phase. The government regains total authority by June. At least 1,500 are believed to have died. A Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) is established and JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera and his comrades are sentenced to life imprisonment.

May 22, 1972: The Dominion of Ceylon becomes the 'Republic of Sri Lanka' following the adoption of the Republican Constitution by the Constituent Assembly at the Navarangahala at Royal College, Colombo. Governor-General William Gopallawa becomes President. The House of Representatives becomes the National State Assembly. The Senate and the Privy Council are abolished. All remaining links with the British Sovereign are severed.



The massive crowd at the funeral of Dudley Senanayake

April 13, 1973: Former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake dies from a heart ailment. Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations are cancelled in most homes. Days later, an unprecedented gathering, estimated at over a million people, attend his funeral at Independence Square.

1975: Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike postpones general elections to 1977, claiming her five-year term begins only after enacting the Republican Constitution. The UNP launch a series of 'Sathyagrahas' demanding polls. Opposition Leader J.R. Jayewardene resigns his Colombo South seat in protest. He is returned at the subsequent by-election.

August 16-19, 1976: Prime Minister Bandaranaike chairs the 86-nation 5th Non-aligned Summit at Colombo's

March 1960: Dahanayake calls W. Dahanayake

INDEPENDENCE 75 7

the Colombo High Court due to lack of evidence on October 12,

June 1, 1989: President Ranasinghe Premadasa, elected in December 1988, demands the withdrawal of all Indian troops from Sri Lanka. On June 28, the LTTE announces a ceasefire with the Sri Lanka Army.



Wijeweera leads the second insurrection

November 13, 1989: The insurgency by the JVP and its armed wing, the Deshapremi Janatha Viyapaaraya (DJV), with targeted killings of prominent personalities ends with the capture and killing of JVP leaders including Rohana Wijeweera. The insurrection is estimated to have cost more than 50,000 lives.



Homebound Indian peacekeeping troops March 24, 1990: The last Indian soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force leave Sri Lanka.

June 11, 1990: The LTTE abducts and executes more than 600 Police officers in the Eastern Province after they receive orders from Colombo to surrender, ending the Premadasa government's ceasefire with the LTTE.

August-October 1991: A motion to impeach President Premadasa is submitted to Parliament, spearheaded by UNP stalwarts Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali. Premadasa prorogues Parliament. On its resumption, Speaker M.H. Mohamed rules the motion is not valid as it does not have the required number of valid signatures.



The last picture of Lalith



President Premadasa minutes before he was assassinated

May 1, 1993: President Premadasa is assassinated by a suicide bomber while taking part in the UNP May Day procession at Armour Street, Colombo. Prime Minister Dingiri Banda Wijetunga succeeds him. Ranil Wickremesinghe is appointed Prime Minister.



Peace talks in Thailand

February 22, 2002: The government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, elected on December 05, 2001, enter into a ceasefire agreement brokered by Norway. The government holds talks with the LTTE in Thailand, Norway, Germany, Japan and in Switzerland over the next few years.

February 20, 2005: The only (former) United States Presidents to visit Sri Lanka, George Bush (Snr.) and Bill Clinton arrive in Sri Lanka to observe the devastation caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004 that claimed over 35,000 Sri Lankan lives in the country's greatest natural disaster.



August 12, 2005: Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, responsible for having the LTTE banned internationally and for recognising Vesak as an international day of celebra-

tion is killed at his Colombo home by an LTTE sniper.



Eelam War IV begins

January 16, 2008: The Sri Lankan government headed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa formally ends the ceasefire with the LTTE following a series of ceasefire violations. October 16, 2006: the Supreme Court rules that the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces had 'no force in law



Humanitarian operation during the last stages of the war

May 19, 2009: After months of intense fighting, Sri Lanka declares victory in the Eelam war after the capture of all LTTEheld areas, the killing of LTTE leaders and the discovery of LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran's body at the Nanthikadal lagoon in the Mullaitivu district.

August 13, 2010: General Sarath Fonseka, former commander

major feats









April 23, 1993: Former

Minister Lalith Athulathmudali is shot and killed while addressing a provincial council election rally at Kirillapone in Colombo.



Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall purposebuilt and donated by China for the event.



The fifth Non-Aligned Movement summit in Colombo

July 21, 1977: The UNP wins the general elections, securing a record 140 of the 168 seats in Parliament, I.R. lavewardene becomes Prime Minister. Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) Leader Appapillai Amirthalingam is Leader of the Opposition. The socialist-oriented economy of controls is liberalised and opened up for imports. Massive development projects such as the Mahaveli scheme begin. A Free Trade Zone is set up to attract foreign investments.

February 04, 1978: J.R. Jayewardene is sworn in as the first Executive President of Sri Lanka at Galle Face after the Republican Constitution is amended, converting the President to an Executive position.

September 7, 1978: A new Constitution is enacted, providing for an Executive Presidential system of government. The country is renamed the 'Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka'. The National State Assembly reverts to Parliament. October 16, 1980: Former Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike and former minister Felix. R. Dias Bandaranaike are found guilty of abuse of power and stripped of their civic rights following a 139 to 18 vote in Parliament.



The Jaffna Library after the arson attack

June 1, 1981: The Jaffna Public Library housing almost 100,000 books is set on fire by mobs and four persons are killed, a day after two policemen are shot dead at a rally of the TULF in Jaffna. April 29, 1982: The new Parliament building, gifted by Japan is opened at Sri Jayewardenepura, Kotte. The old Parliament at Galle Face is converted to the Presidential Secretariat. October 20, 1982: Jayewardene wins the country's first-ever presidential election, defeating his nearest rival Hector Kobbekaduwa of the SLFP and securing 52 percent of the vote. JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera, released from prison by Jayewardene, also contests and is placed third.

December 22, 1982: Jayewardene conducts a referendum on a proposal to extend the life of Parliament for a full new term. It is approved with 54 percent of the vote and in 120 electorates. July 24-30, 1983: Following the ambush and killing of thirteen soldiers in Thirunelveli, Jaffna by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a day earlier, mob violence erupts in the South of the country. Estimates of the death toll from the race riots range between 400 and 3,000. This results in a massive exodus of Tamils, leaving for the West claiming refugee status and seeking asylum.

May 14, 1985: LTTE terrorists massacre 146 persons at the Anuradhapura bus stand, Sri Maha Bodhiya and at the Wilpattu national park.



The Indo-Lanka accord

July 29, 1987: Following an unsolicited Indian air drop of food items over the North to stop a military assault on the LTTE, an Indo-Lanka Accord providing for a merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces, provincial councils and Indian troops in Sri Lanka is signed by President Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. A day later, Gandhi is attacked in Colombo by a Naval rating while inspecting a guard of honour.



Parliament attack

UNP MPs in Parliament is disrupted by a grenade attack. MP Keerthi Abeywickrama and a Parliament employee die. Minister Lalith Athulathmudali is seriously injured. Ajith Kumara is The scene following the charged with conspiracy to commit murder but is acquitted by



Chandrika Kumaratunga takes oaths as executive president

August 16, 1994: The People's Alliance led by Chandrika Kumaratunga wins the general election, ending seventeen years of UNP rule. Kumaratunga is appointed Prime Minister. Wijetunga continues as President, the first instance where leaders of two rival parties head different arms of government.



October 24, 1994: Gamini Dissanayake, UNP candidate for the presidential election is killed in an election rally bomb blast at Thotalanga, Colombo. His widow Srima replaces him as candidate. Kumaratunga wins the poll that follows on November 9, 1994 with a record 62 percent of the vote. January 31, 1996: The LTTE

attack the Central Bank with an explosive-laden lorry. Ninetyone people are killed.



The Dalada Maligawa after the blast

January 25, 1998: LTTE suicide bombers explode an explosive-laden truck at the Dalada Maligawa, Kandy, the holiest Buddhist shrine in the country, killing 17 persons. February 04, 1998: Prince Charles of Britain attends celebrations for the 50th anniversary of Independence as chief guest. December 21, 1999: Chandrika Kumaratunga, having survived an LTTE suicide bomb attack at her final campaign rally at Town Hall, Colombo three days earlier, is re-elected President.

of the Sri Lanka Army and candidate at the 2010 presidential poll is court-martialled and later jailed. He is pardoned and released by President Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 21, 2012. Fonseka is subsequently promoted by a new government as Field Marshall with all privileges restored.

January 13, 2013: President Rajapaksa removes Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake from office after Parliament passes an impeachment motion against her two days earlier. Bandaranayake is later re-instated in office on January 28, 2015 by President Maithripala Sirisena and resigns a day later.



Maithripala Sirisena takes oaths as President

January 08, 2015: Maithripala Sirisena is elected President, defeating Mahinda Rajapaksa, ending a decade of rule by Rajapaksa. Ranil Wickremesinghe is appointed Prime Minister. October 26, 2018: President Sirisena triggers a constitutional crisis by 'sacking' Wickremesinghe, replacing him with Mahinda Rajapaksa. Sirisena dissolves Parliament on November 9, 2018, calling for elections on January 5, 2019. The Supreme Court determines this unconstitutional. Rajapaksa resigns on December 15, 2018; Wickremesinghe is reappointed the next day ending the 51-day crisis.



Apr 21, 2019: An Islamic extremist group stage a series of bomb explosions at several churches, luxury hotels and a guest house in Colombo, Negombo, Batticaloa and Dehiwala. Eight suicide bombers are responsible

for the attacks which cost

Terrorists behind the Easter blasts

269 lives including 46 foreigners.

November 16, 2019: Gotabaya Rajapaksa, candidate of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) is elected President, the first to do so from a party other than an alliance led by the UNP or the SLFP. He appoints his brother Mahinda as Prime Minister and brothers Basil and Chamal and nephew Namal as ministers.

March-July 2022: Protests erupt against fuel, gas and electricity shortages leading to the 'Aragalaya' campaign at Galle Face. On May 09, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns. On June 09, Basil Rajapaksa resigns from Parliament. On July 09, Gotabaya Rajapaksa leaves President's House, flying to the Maldives after crowds storm the President's House and Presidential Secretariat. On July 14, Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigns. On July 20, Parliament elects Ranil Wickremesinghe as President.



By H.M.G.S. Palihakkara

ri Lanka at 75 is hopefully on course to a stable transition to recovery from a crippling crisis, and then to a sustainable growth path. Whether this is a mere hope or a realistic expectation is still too early to tell.

What is real, however, is that Sri Lanka's diplomacy has got its work cut out. A recovery seamlessly leading to growth will, of necessity, require complex negotiations abroad on external inputs in tandem with a spirited local effort towards stability and consensus.

These negotiations involve a multiplicity of players and interests in the realms of our creditor and investment constituencies state, non-state, multilateral and bilateral. Obviously, diplomacy of this effort needs to factor in geopolitical forces at play in these domains while negotiators endeavour to calibrate our recovery and growth needs accordingly. Also, there is the bothersome reality that we are not negotiating from a position of strength or equality but out of dire need.

The country is obliged to promote, negotiate and secure these external inputs in the face of a couple of countervailing factors as well. Its ability to negotiate as a Sovereign with proven competence in governance stands impaired by the crisis.

Meanwhile, politics here remains mired, as usual one might add, in parochial stuff including regime change schemes rather than focusing on a crisis-exit agenda based on a consensual reform project. Secondly, Sri Lankan diplomacy has to do all this at a time when the world itself is navigating an array of downturns and fractures, both economic and political, entailing disruption and even destruction in some cases.

Intermestic factors

All this is sobering. However, it also suggests that the challenge is intermestic, as the pundits call it. Jargon apart, this notion captures a simple home truth about a fundamental 'domestic-foreign affairs nexus' our diplomacy has to reckon with in the context of the current crisis. Our local actions and inactions impact what we can do abroad to secure our interests and vice versa.

Following the conception of this idea in 1979 by Bayless Manning, the first President of the Council on Foreign Relations, a US think tank, theorists and practitioners alike have used and expanded it to describe and understand this coupling between domestic and foreign affairs in diverse situations ranging from the Vietnam war then to the Ukraine war now, and how leaders made choices, recklessly at times, to wage war or make peace in problem-solving.

Researchers have given further examples, on a broader front, of this interface between domestic-foreign relations matters touching upon war and peace, tariffs and debt, governance, human rights, accountability, reconciliation and so on. Sri Lanka has not been unfamiliar with the intermestic nature of its public policy and governance deficits as well as its leadership failures.

Our leaders' inability or unwillingness to forge a political consensus for an independent and credible domestic process of postconflict peace-building in general and accountability and reconciliation in particular, and their failure to implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and follow-up commissions, let these essentially



Diplomacy challenges: Taxing but doable

During his recent visit to Colombo, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar confirmed 'strong' Indian support for IMF's Extended Fund Facility and debt sustainability for Sri Lanka while reports about China's support sounded more nuanced and a bit ambivalent. Despite qualifications, this is good news but conclusive negotiations on debt sustainability plus medium and longterm measures must continue and can be bumpy. The Indian Minister's reaffirmation during his visit, of the principle that 'all creditors must be treated equally'; China's persistent ambiguity on the debt sustainability issue, while appearing to be very 'humanitarian' towards Sri Lanka's troubles and terse polemical exchanges between the highly vocal US and Chinese envoys in Colombo on the same subject, even testing the resilience of the 'Third country refrain' of conventional diplomacy, are testimony to these challenges Does Sri Lanka have the leverage to sort all these out? Enfeebled by the crisis and its precursor failures, it may not have a compelling clout. But it can offer something else -- a template for recovery and subsequent growth viz. a domestic political consensus on commitment to a reform programme and its continuity over the long haul. That is how other countries in similar predicaments recovered and grew - e.g., Italy and Greece to name two. We, of course, do not have to follow everything the two countries did. After all, the Italians lost a world war and the Greeks an empire! But we can learn from their more recent recovery experience that brought about a reasonably apolitical and consensual governance framework geared for reform and recovery (R&R). Why should the President and his domestic rivals be interested in a consensual template? Simply put, the crux of the matter is that we are once again asking Governments of other countries to persuade their taxpayers and the Board Members of foreign entities to foot the bill of public policy blunders and political mischief we have repeatedly made over the past decades in this country. We are doing this, having defaulted on many reform promises made before. So, our interlocutors including the much-needed FDI sources must know that this vicious cycle (of crisis-promise of reform-predictable non-compliance) will not be replayed this time around. The only way to do that is to strive for a general understanding on R&R so that the promised reforms will not be unravelled by the next government that comes along or decimated in the blood sport called election politics in this country. The much-quoted Singaporean statesman, the late Lee Kuan Yew, probably had this in mind when he made reference to the slew of elections here: ... in Sri Lanka, elections are an auction of non-existent resources.'

66

While the Movement or the institution of NAM suffered internal inertia and faded away with the ending of the Cold War, the idea of non-alignment lived on, dynamically creating space for emerging nations to pursue human/territorial security and economic prosperity

ing the right and opportunity to fight elections on other issues. This will be good confidence building all around -- among the people, negotiators and other stakeholders, foreign and local.

Secondly, the plain truth is that both the crisis as well as reforms aimed at its resolution will obviously cause a great deal of pain. Paradoxically, reforms that are so essential for recovery can be equally, if not more, destabilising than the problem itself since people are faced with the brunt of double jeopardy in quick succession viz. crisis pain dovetailing into reform pain. Reforms cannot, therefore, be 'unleashed' on a crisis-ridden people in a rapid-fire single hurst like what seems to be happening now. They need to be introduced in a calibrated way along with necessary safety measures in parallel. Above all, they need a bipartisan marketing strategy that will have traction with people so as to ensure that adverse effects are mitigated to the maximum and recovery paves the way to eventual relief and well-being. That cannot be done in an unmanageable cauldron of election polemics, union activism and assorted street manifestations of different partisan hues that could outgrow from an 'onslaught' of intimidating reforms in one go. Nor can it be managed by repression of dissent through a widely loathed PTA or a clumsy bureaucracy which seems to be the line of thinking and action at the moment. Prudence demands that the above bipartisan project be brought to a successful conclusion. While the opposition must play its role, the President must be the prime mover of the process of negotiating this understanding. Public posturing alone would not suffice. And the President must stop chasing dissenters and the residue of the Aragalya but start chasing consensus through good faith negotiations. Public polemics will only aggravate polarisation. One thing should be clear to any impartial observer, though. While criticising the President as they must, the Opposition needs to acknowledge that despite the debate about the Kautilyan politics of his ascent to the job, the President has undertaken the unenviable burden of the essential but huge ly unpopular reforms project. This he has done possibly incurring a heavy political cost. The least the opposition parties can do for themselves and the country is to use that space to pave a bipartisan way out of this crisis. This way, the President has an opportunity to leave his legacy behind and the opposing parties can have their electoral bonuses because the President has shouldered an otherwise 'untouchable' liability possibly becoming the whipping boy for reform in the process.

broadest sense, it is a crisis about the lack of system-wide accountability along with attendant gaps in reconciliation. Many unimplemented but doable recommendations exist on both.

The urgently felt and widely shared need to reach a common understanding for recovery is a rare platform available to explore and firm up a credible and viable domestic machinery for accountability and reconciliation which remains a growing diplomatic challenge as well. A proposal by the executive branch of the State alone won't do. It needs a general understanding across party lines for it to have national and international traction it needs to succeed.

Thus, Sri Lanka at this juncture appears to be confronted with three principal diplomatic burdens of which most, if not all, are intermestic in nature as they emanate largea spot of bother to the Western Alliance. Since security is hardly an objective math calculation but a subjective perception, we have no option but to allay that fear through a credible policy of 'alliance neutrality' and verifiable assurances of compliance.

This is the best way, perhaps the only way, to craft a prudent foreign policy posture which can ensure that the much-vaunted strategic location of our homeland will be an economic asset and not a geopolitical liability for us.

A good start will be to consider the desirability of public articulation of an enlightened port calls regime – a policy that will, inter alia, invite, subject to safeguards, all vessels plying the Indo-Pacific waters to visit us and boost our port incomes consistent with the 'innocent passage' norm, barring those ships on overt or covert conflict related missions.

These considerations take us to the kernel of an overall foreign policy that can be anchored in three elements as below (not necessarily brand new in and of themselves but a refurbishing of what exists in order to try to cope with the current flux):

- A neutral policy without any military alignments while shunning power rivalries and related doctrines (neutrality or neonon-aligned principle)
- Friendship and engagement with all expecting reciprocal respect for Sri Lanka's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. (Mutuality principle)
- Support international cooperation including with the UN for achieving Sustainable Development Goals, Peace and Security in accordance with international law including the UN Charter (Policy of cooperation). Some tend to confuse or conflate the 'insti-

Some tend to confuse or conflate the 'institution' of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with the 'idea' of non-alignment. This is too simplistic an attitude towards a dynamic conception. While the Movement or the institution of NAM suffered internal inertia and faded away with the ending of the Cold War, the idea of non-alignment lived on, dynamically creating space for emerging nations to pursue human/territorial security and economic prosperity.

Singapore, an iconic success of the emerging world which was only lukewarm at best towards the NAM even as the Cold War was peaking, shifted gears somewhat a few weeks ago to flag the relevance of this reality. Singaporean Foreign Minister Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan called for a 'new' non-aligned foreign policy approach as an enabler, especially for those countries in Asia looking forward to capitalising on their comparative advantages in science, technology, digital space, artificial intel etc. (Next Step Global Conference, Nov. 10, 2022, Singapore.)

He argued cogently that such countries cannot and need not suffer disadvantages or sanctions arising from perceptions about their being on the 'wrong side' of a given power rivalry, as they want to derive economic benefits from 'all sides'. Non-alignment is not about distancing and meek diplomacy. It is about engagement and robust diplomacy. The utility of this thinking comes into sharper focus in the context of the already ongoing power rivalry and looming confrontation in the 'Indo-Pacific' that can lead to conflict potentially reversing the abundance of prosperity Asia has registered and aggravating the paucity of security the continent has begun to perceive.

There were times when Sri Lanka was observed as punching above its GDP weight thereby creating for itself an international diplomatic profile quite in excess of its demo graphic and economic attributes. Some noteworthy bilateral and multilateral achievements in diverse domains marked this phenomenon. The late Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was a great advocate of such a bipartisan culture on foreign policy through which it was possible to do things like peacemaking nationally while combating terrorism internationally including the ban on the LTTE. Under this bipartisan watch, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry developed the brief that fighting terrorism and fighting for human rights are not mutually exclusive What was unique and common to all this was good bipartisan political support for these diplomatic endeavours. The determinant was the national interest, not partisan posturing. A notable exception was the 2015 HRC Resolution on Sri Lanka. The Yahapalana government unwisely decided to co-sponsor this Resolution pursuing a 'nouvelle diplomacy' of owning the undeliverable rather than negotiating a deliverable. In so doing, the then government sought to build an international consensus on an intrusive and externally driven accountability process in the country, having been unable or unwilling to build a domestic consensus on this same vital issue. These are contrasting cases of intermestic factors impacting diplomacy and foreign relations positively and negatively. Domestic consensus on critical public policy matters is an enabler of diplomatic and foreign relations success. When governance and public policy making are in deficit or bereft of broad-based support, diplomacy by itself cannot make miracles. This is true of both routine FR activity and crisis-diplomacy. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka has been a painful test bed for both. A good faith bipartisan effort aimed at liberating these intermestic interests from parochial regime change enterprises can shed light on a more comfortable consensual way forward. Paradoxically, the crisis and the widespread demand for a 'system change' provided an opportunity to do that. But that has vet to be grasped by the 'leaders' on all sides. At 75, some in Jurassic Park may say it is too little too late but most of the next generation will likely say better late than never. (The writer is former Foreign Secretary during the period of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and one-time Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, and New York).

domestic issues migrate abroad and morph into foreign relations (FR) issues.

Human rights issues have thus become diplomatic challenges culminating in a plethora of Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolutions of escalating intrusiveness not only in the realm of civil and political rights but now touching on other areas of governance, like the economy, corruption, etc.

The HRC Resolution of last year is considered the epitome of this escalation. The upshot of all this is the creation of a UN funded office in Geneva to do 'prosecutorial' work on alleged offenders in Sri Lanka -- a virtual outsourcing of the Sri Lankan Attorney General's warrant to a bureaucracy abroad. This is an intrusiveness quite unprecedented for any country, let alone Sri Lanka which has had a reputation as a progressive third-world democracy espousing egalitarian ethos, at least for over a quarter of a century since Independence. So the Governments spend time and effort defending its human rights record rather than defending the human rights of its citizens as required by our constitutional and treaty obligations.

Over the years, our political and policy establishments have obviously failed to guide the economy away from a culture of 'dependency and entitlement' towards a selfreliant and sustainable path addressing the deep-rooted and long-standing problem of the paucity of enlightened reform including what the Aragalaya signified. We thus took this intermesticity to a new level in the ongoing economic crisis - a crisis that entailed existential issues for the entire population perhaps for the first time in postindependence history. Naturally, external inputs needed to recover from this necessitate building common ground among competing and even rival geopolitical players like China, India, Japan and the US-led West as well as collaborative multilateral entities of the Bretton Woods system such as the IMF, World Bank, etc. To this list of bilaterals and multilaterals, one needs to add the non-state creditors who hold the lion's share of what we owe.

This task demands harmonising diplomacy, on the one hand, and hard-nosed negotiations, on the other. The need is to produce what must 'appear' as win-win solutions for all stakeholders, local and foreign. Consequently, these outcomes must represent a reasonable distribution of 'managed dissatisfaction'-sans perfect happiness to any particular party-among the interlocutors concerned.

Bipartisan approach

The current President continuously exhorts (including in Parliament just about a week ago) about 'working together' to overcome the crisis. The Opposition, too, has affirmed that although it does not want to join what it calls a franchise-less government, it will nonetheless support a programme for recovery. So, the consensus ingredients are there. Now they must walk the talk and bring it to fruition while reserv-

Last but not the least, almost every crisis embeds opportunities as well. The current crisis we suffer from is no exception. In its ly from a domestic-foreign affairs nexus:

- Managing the inventory of external inputs necessary for the country to recover from the crisis and grow;
- Handling the trilemma of deepening and widening our vital relations with China, India and the United States/West -- the hegemonic candidacies of the Indo-Pacific theatre -- without ruffling their respective geopolitical feathers;
- Internalising the (now externalised) accountability and reconciliation process of Sri Lanka by developing a political consensus for credible, independent and robust mechanisms and procedures on the subject on a system-wide basis.

The challenge for Sri Lanka's diplomacy will be to show that we are after economic benefits, not strategic or geopolitical mischief and that Sri Lanka will aggressively exploit the full investment and trading potential of all FDI and credit sources including China's Belt and Road Initiative.

However, this is easily said than done, given the clear and present trends of emerging 'Indo-Pacific alliances' seeking to contain China. The history of 'containment strategies' dating back to the Cold War tells us that it is a matter of time before 'containment' gets militarised and eventually nuclearised, e.g., the latter may already be happening in the Indo-Pacific --our home waters -- e.g. the progression of the Quad to AUKUS.

Alliance neutrality

In this context, alliance neutrality, not alliance partnership, is the sensible bet for the likes of Sri Lanka, to maximise and possibly leverage its strategic location value. In doing so, rather than having demarcated 'zones' for different investor States thus 'parcelling out' our sovereign assets including land to contending powers (e.g. quasi-vasal state projects in Trinco, Hambantota etc.), the whole of Sri Lanka can become a venue supporting multinational investment and multilateral cooperation for growth and development.

This averts geopolitical binds for us involving regional or extra-regional powers and the country will not be the ground zero for a 'zero sum' strategic power play by anyone. And we steer clear of the doomsday scenarios of the kind popular in the 'Indo-Pacific' analytics literature viz. Sri Lanka can be an unsinkable 'aircraft carrier parked just off the coast of India'. We as Sri Lankans may dislike or even despise this particular characterisation. However, for a number of well-founded or illfounded reasons, it may well be a troubling fear to the Indian security establishment and



The ups and downs of Lanka's separatist war

BY IQBAL ATHAS

Over a third of Sri Lanka's 75 years of independence has seen a separatist war, one that grew exponentially in four different phases, heaping a colossal financial burden on the people, leaving thousands dead and yet others wounded.

Until then, the military was essentially a parade ground outfit. They showed their impressive public presence every year on Independence Day, displaying their assets, mostly vintage. That done, they were back in their barracks. The mass-scale spit and polish of boots came just once a year.

Paradoxically enough, a gradual march to modernisation was dictated by threats from different Tamil guerrilla groups. Soon, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or the Tiger guerrillas, brutally destroyed their rivals to emerge as militarily the most powerful. At first, it was a ragtag group attacking police stations in the north to seize weapons. The prized assets then were 303 rifles and Sterling sub-machine guns. They also robbed banks to raise funds. They trained in the soil of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

In what is euphemistically called Eelam War 1, the guerrillas introduced the Russian-built AK-47 assault rifles as well as its cheaper equivalent, the Chinesemade T-56. They also mastered the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). They caused enormous death and destruction. They also obtained rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

The Eelam War III saw artillery guns (both smuggled into Sri Lanka as well as those seized from the military). Their ingenuity in smuggling these artillery pieces is noteworthy. They were unloaded off the Mullaitivu coast from one of their own ships (they ran a shipping network). They were pulled by tractors along the beach. From there, they launched it onto a barge lying on a channel they had cut linking it to a waterway and moved it to one of their camps. During Eelam War IV, they set up an "Air Wing." All this was not as highly sophisticated as in the case of a conventional military outfit. Yet, they were of more than nuisance value and thrust the defence establishment in Colombo into action. They also procured the shoulder-fired Russian-built SAM 7 surface-to-air missiles. Successive governments had to evolve their own strategies. They were not necessarily cohesive. In executing a war against the guerrillas, perhaps understandably, the government had to impose taxes. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga relaxed procurement rules. Her objective was to ensure time-consuming procedures do not delay urgently needed equipment. This opened the floodgates to bribery and corruption. It created billionaires and millionaires both in and out of uniform. The governments in power ignored exposures and trained their guns only on media personnel who exposed them. They were perceived as the second enemy. They did not hesitate to try to paint one black even before the eves of their foreign colleagues. An example: I was invited by the Defence Attaché of the US Embassy in Colombo in 2017 to serve as a media panelist at a Non-Lethal Weapons Executive Seminar (NOLES). It was co-hosted by the Sri Lanka Navy. A group of junior and lower ranks raised questions over the procurement of MiG-27 fighter jets. The questions were pregnant with sarcasm and innuendo to the exposure which was exclusively reported by the Sunday Times. That third parties made good money in this scandalous deal was later confirmed by investigations by the then Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID). The rapidity of the questions gave me the impression that they had been well orchestrated. There was mirth in the faces of some seniors. I responded to them. Later, an officer of the US Marine Corps gave me some friendly advice "do not be discouraged. I know this happens in your part of the world." Ironically, who was to defend me – an officer of the Sri Lanka Air Force

That infamous parippu drop

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, then Minister of Education, recalls that shocking moment when the country's sovereignty was violated -- as told to Iqbal Athas in 1997.

The news of the Indian food drop came from our High Commissioner in New Delhi, Bernard Tillekeratne. He had been summoned to the Indian External Affairs Ministry. It was State Minister Kanwar Natwar Singh who told him.

Within minutes, he telephoned President Jayewardene. That he was both shocked and surprised is to put it very mildly. That triggered a flurry of activity. It was a time when Operation Liberation was being conducted in the Jaffna peninsula. National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali was focused on the operation to recapture parts of Vadamarachchi held by Tiger rebels.

Jayewardene summoned an emergency meet-ing of the National Security Council (NSC). We met on an upper floor at the Janadipathi Mandiraya (President's House) to study all the implications that unfriendly move would have. Nevertheless, we were conscious that any reaction from us, the Government, should not be provocative or offend India. We were also strong in our resolve that the ongoing operation should not be halted.

Taking part in that meeting were Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali and Mahaweli Minister Gamini Dissanayake, among others. Dissanavake, the great cricketing enthusiast, had by then developed backchan nel contacts in New Delhi and they were to become very useful. Initially, our attention was focused. One suggestion was to resist the food drop. That was almost a pipe dream. We simply did not have the troops nor the equipment for such a course of action. The other was to have two of our aircraft airborne and tell the pilots of the planes bringing in the food stocks to return. After exhaustive discussions where every available option was discussed, it was agreed to bear the brunt. Let them carry out the food drop. The world would be witness to how a small nation was not only helpless but also bullied into submission.



Indian aircraft paradropping food aid over Jaffna in 1987

So stocks of rice, dhal, sugar, spices and other items were air dropped, some in the Vadamarachchi sector too.

Sri Lanka was world news. For the first time since independence, here was an instance

small way in combatting violence. I was moved

Pic courtesy The Hindu

by the way they showed their solidarity. En route to Colombo, I stopped over in Islamabad. I had a meeting with President Zia-ul-Haq. I had a message for him also from

As President Ranil Wickremesinghe once told me, a decade after the food drop, the news was conveyed in New Delhi by India's State Minister for External Affairs, Kanwar Natwar Singh, to Sri Lanka's High Commissioner Bernard Tillakeratne.

In Colombo, at noon on Monday, June 1, 1987, Indian High Commissioner Jyotindra Nath Dixit called at the Foreign Ministry. He told Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed that "the Government of India proposes to send urgently needed relief" by sea to Jaffna City starting June 3, 1987. A note he handed over gave the purported reasons for the move. It claimed "the population of Jaffna, already suffering extreme hardship under the five-monthold economic blockade imposed upon by their own government are now becoming the victims of an all-out military assault. (The reference was to Operation Liberation which ended a day earlier with the capture of the Vadamarachchi sector of Jaffna). Thousands have already been killed and hundreds more are dying....

A fleet of naval patrol craft led by the surveillance command ship SLNS Edithara moved into the Palk Strait -- the waters of the Indian Ocean dividing India and Sri Lanka -- on the night of Tuesday, June 2. In command was Captain Mohan Samarasekera, who was to later become the Commander of the Navy. This exercise was codenamed "Operation Jelly Fish.'

Aboard the SLNS Edithara which lay within Sri Lanka's territorial waters, they observed echoes on their radar coming from the direction of the island of Kachchativu. "We observe you are coming towards Sri Lankan territorial waters. Please refrain," said Captain Samarasekera on the radio. Moments later, the Indian Coast Guard vessels Vikram T 33 and a tug belonging to the Indian Oil and Natural Gas Commission were visible. A flotilla of 19 boats stood around the tug whilst Vikram T 33 moved, circling the flotilla. From Vikram T 33, an Indian External Affairs Ministry official responded by radio to Captain Samarasekera's call. "We are bringing food for the starving people of Jaffna," he said. Replied Captain Samarasekera "Please give them to the starving people in Tamil Nadu. In Jaffna, the armed forces are distributing food. The Sri Lanka Red Cross has not sought relief. If you still want to give, please hand it over to the government of Sri Lanka.' When the official was invited on board the SLNS Edithara, he said he wanted to come with the representative of the Indian Red Cross Society and media representatives based in India. "Please do not lay down conditions to my invitation," said Captain Samarasekera. The dialogue went on till Tuesday night. At that point, the captain of Vikram T 33 came on air and told Captain Samarasekera they were not coming to Sri Lankan waters. He said they were returning. Thereafter, the relief was airdropped for 20 minutes on Wednesday evening. The planes were escorted by Mirage fighter bombers. The packages contained rice, boxes of matches, wheat flour, and sugar. The exercise was titled "Operation Eagle". Thirty-seven years later. India became Sri Lanka's saviour during the economic crisis that brought bankruptcy. It unhesitatingly rendered assistance to the tune of US\$ 4 billion, unlike others who are offering smokescreens. If supplies were to come from Tamil Nadu for the food drop, they came again, this time under peaceful circumstances for the people of Jaffna. Captain Samarasekera, a seasoned and respected officer, rose to the rank of an Admiral and was the 12th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy. The near-three decades of separatist war, the guerrillas called the shots. As a result, they modernised the military and made a sophisticated fighting force out of them. As for the guerrillas, they raised money in one theatre, procured weapons in another to fight in a third and lost militarily. With that, their dream of an Eelam faded away.

Earlier, an elderly man, whose sanity was once questioned, was trained in a

camp in the Wanni to say he was LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's translator. He declared before television cameras that his task included translating what I wrote. If indeed there were any transgressions of the law, the logical course would have been to seek recourse to the law. This was a different trial. The project flopped. The man later named to me those who trained him. The message – drive those making revelations to the graveyard of the frightened and the silenced. There are many more instances

Military equipment which was of little use was among those procured. There was also procurement of others which never arrived in Sri Lanka. Just two examples: The purchase of a hovercraft for the Sri Lanka Navy. It operated only a few times.

This air-cushion vehicle or ACV is an amphibious one capable of travelling over land, water, mud, ice, and other surfaces. This vessel is now lying idle at the SLNS Rangala, the Navy's headquarters for the western area. It is located in Colombo. The other is the order placed with a company in Zimbabwe for the procurement of 32,400 pieces of 31mm mortar shells. The money was remitted but the supplies did not arrive. Then there are purchases like for example the MiG-27 fighter jets. There is convincing evidence now that Sri Lanka did not procure these ground attack aircraft from the supplier. It had been sold by a company in Ukraine to a hurriedly setup Singaporean company. That third parties became millionaires from the deal has now been confirmed. There have been many instances of prices of equipment being prohibitively high. One such case has been the purchase of Multi-Barrel Rockets.

All this meant that the separatist war cost much more than it should have. That is not only in terms of procurements but

where our sovereignty was being violated. If the hurt and pain was unbearable for Sri Lankans, it was touching that some in India also felt the same way. They believed might is not right.

This was the time I was scheduled to travel to China as Minister of Education. At a National Security Council meeting, when the news surfaced, Defence Secretary Sepala Attygalle suggested that I travel as a special envoy of President Jayewardene. He said I should carry a special message from him to Wang Yi, Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Committee of the People's Republic of China. His advice to the Government was to stay calm. The leaders in Beijing stood firmly with us. China helped in no

also the recruitment of manpower. This is why, for example, the strength of the Sri Lanka Army is as much if not more than the British Army. The numbers have swelled in the Navy and the Sri Lanka Air Force, too. On top of that, there is a Civil Defence Force at a time when the police are short of strength and crime is mounting. There is also a Coast Guard when Sri Lanka simply does not have the resources to develop a blue water navy and match India. It was then necessary. Ironically such recruitment has been going on for years after the end of the separatist war. And now, they talk of reducing the military's strength. Is mismanagement the cause?

This begs answer to the all-important question - why Sri Lanka's politicians and bureaucrats who directed the war did not think of a proper lessons-learnt project? The United States with whom they are now engaging in close military cooperation could easily help in this task. They have a Centre for Lessons Learnt which conducts a review of the military operations the US carries out. One need hardly say that in Sri Lanka's case, it has to go beyond battlefield endeavours to procurement, efficacy of the equipment, prices and related matters. It also should examine how people go scot-free if they have powerful connections.

Another area which has remained neglected is media relations. At least in hindsight, it has become clear that it was woefully inadequate. Take, for example, the final stages of the separatist war that ended in May 2009. The Colombo-based media were debarred from the battle zone. Information for them was disseminated from Colombo. Troops fighting the war were tasked with putting out news releases. They raised serious credibility issues. The cumulative effect it had can be seen

President Jayewardene. General Zia also advised us not to go for any confrontation or to surrender.

The empathy shown to us by our well-wishers was enormous. National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali was asked by President Jayewardene to continue with Operation Liberation. The military got a tight grip on Vadamarachchi and regained territory.

Today, ten years later, we have relegated the sordid events to our history books. Our relationship with India has improved by leaps and bounds. It should be so because we share a common heritage and common ideals. We are profiting from the lessons learnt.

from what has been transpiring over the years before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. A new Secretariat is now probing human rights as well as humanitarian law violations. among others, during the penultimate stages of the separatist war. Wouldn't allowing the media with limited restrictions (due to battles) and permitting them to report not have minimised the damage? That it was allowed for a selected few from overseas shows that the government's message has not reached the outside world as it expected.

In distancing the vast segment of the media, almost entirely local, it seems ironic that only a handful of the acts of heroism of the troops at the ground level were highlighted. Some were even by default. The credit for most others for being heroes went to others, perhaps most deserving but a few were not even on the battlefield. This reminds one of what General Norman Schwarzkopf, the US commander of the war in Iraq, said, "It does not take a hero to order men into battle. It takes a hero to be one of those men who goes into battle." An official review would have brought out much more heroes from the soldiery or their equivalent in the other forces.

There is no gainsaying that terrorism or violence, whether locally or from those abroad, could be condoned. That notwithstanding, the men and women whom the troops fought were also citizens of Sri Lanka. They were compatriots. The only fears of a foreign invasion came during the food drop by India on Monday. June 3. 1987. I happened to be the only local journalist from Colombo to remain in Jaffna and saw a firsthand account. It was with the approval of Defence Secretary, General Sepala Attygalle and General Cyril Ranatunga, Joint Operations Commander (JOC).

(Iqbal Athas served as Defence Correspondent of the Sunday Times. He covered the separatist war from its beginning to the end.)

By Dr Lionel Bopage

s the 75th anniversary of independence gathers steam, it will be important to reflect on the gradual erosion of checks and balances and the rule of law. No crisis, be it in 1953, 1971, 1983, the long civil war, or the current crisis, has seen a desire for accountability, good governance, commitment to social justice and economic competence from the three families that have ruled the country since independence. Instead, they have demanded more centralised and unaccountable power.

Currently the Rajapaksa clan and several notable personalities from the UNP have combined to crush the demand for meaningful political change, using the draconian power enshrined in the Executive Presidential constitution, with such repressive legislation as the Prevention of Terrorism Act, whereby a person can be held without charge for up to two years.

Here we look at the economic and structural reasons that lay behind to the 1971 JVP insurrection and led to the current economic crisis.

1971

Like the current crisis, the economy in the seventies was characterised by sinking export income, growing foreign debt and escalating unemployment. Throughout the 1960s the size of the industrial sector remained static and hovered between 12 and 13 per cent, with the majority of income derived from the service sector and agriculture. In the export sector, there was a fundamental dependence on agricultural products. The country was caught in a classic economic pincer movement and still is - declining export prices and rising export costs.

The country's debt rose from Rs. 95 million in 1957 to Rs. 349 million in 1966, and again to Rs. 744 million in 1969. Then as now, the money to pay for the foreign debt came from foreign loans and the running down of the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Shades of 1971 JVP uprising in current crisis

Like today, foodstuffs made up a large part of the country's imports - around 53 per cent.

Unemployment continued to rise in 1971. Out of a labour force of 4.4 million, 585,000 were officially unemployed. The economic authority of the time, Dr N.M. Perera, estimated the figure to be around 700,000.

Out of the 585,000 who were unemployed, 460,000 were in the rural areas and 250,000 were aged between 19 to 24. 167,000 of these had received a secondary education or went on to tertiary level.

The children of the era which began in 1956, the "beneficiaries" of the Official Languages Act, were not given the economic fruits promised to them. As a result of government repression in 1971, though never acknowledged by the country's rulers, around 10,000 to 15,000 young Sinhalese were killed and tens of thousands more were imprisoned and tortured without due process. In contrast, according to the government, 61 civilians and 63 members of the armed forces lost their lives. The security forces' extra-judicial killings and torture escaped scrutiny and impunity became the norm.

To prosecute the leaders, of whom \ensuremath{I} was one, the rule of law was trampled on, habeas corpus was waived and confessions gained by torture were admissible. The murder of countless thousands of Sinhalese youth by the security forces has never been examined.

The repressive playbook was set: an unwillingness to examine and fix structural issues, be they economic, political and



1971: A file photo of youth rounded up for alleged involvement with the IVP

judicial, accompanied by ever more restrictive and unaccountable measures and a marked reluctance to investigate crimes committed by the state.

An economic snapshot before the second coming of the Rajapaksas

By the 1980s the economic direction changed, neo-liberalism became the mantra, and welfare provisions were gradually dismantled. Lanka now relied on tourism, garments, remittances and tea. National debt continued to rise

Billions of dollars were spent on vanity projects by the ruling clan: airports, stadiseaport, with no thought of who would need or use them.

Debt by the 2000s had risen to 79 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It continued to rise and rise, reaching 100 per cent just before Covid struck. The economic instability is exacerbated by the fact that the top 20 per cent of the population have 42 per cent of the island's income, whilst the lowest 40 per cent make do with 17.8 per cent.

Accession of Gotabaya and the latest resurrection of Ranil

The economy contracted after the fall in tourism as a result of the 2019 Easter bombums, freeways, convention centres and a ings, putting a strain on the country's for-

eign currency reserves. Gotabaya Rajapaksa exacerbated the crisis by cutting taxes collected from a very small base, costing the country hundreds of billions of rupees. Next, he banned the import of fertilisers, partially due to the lack of foreign exchange to pay for them. Agricultural production declined at an alarming rate, in particular vital export earners like tea and rubber. The economy went into freefall, with a shortage of food, fuel, medicine, cooking gas and other essentials. Whilst the top 20 percent had the economic means to cope, for the vast majority the burden was catastrophic.

A spontaneous protest movement erupted which forced the resignation of the then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the installation of the veteran serial aspirant, Ranil Wickremesinghe. Instead of opening dialogue with the protestors and dealing with their legitimate demands, we got state repression and the scapegoating of the protestors. The same people who looted the public purse and were ineffectual economic managers are in charge of the recovery! Solutions on offer do not deal with the heart of the problem: the mismanagement, corruption and wastage prevalent in the economic and political system. Those least able to pay will be forced to shoulder the burden, and the structural issues, if not addressed, will lead to another economic and political crisis.

It is vital that celebrations to mark the anniversary of independence be tempered by reflection on how the country got to the current crisis and how it should be fixed. Otherwise, we will be forced to relive past disasters. As 1971 and 2020 remind us, the failure to change the system comes with enormous costs, both at a personal and economic level. It is the least we can do for those thousands of young people being detained on spurious grounds and those nameless 15,000 young people who lost their lives at the hands of the state in 1971.

(The writer is a former general secretary of the Sri Lankan People's Liberation Front (JVP) and was second accused at the main CJC trial. He now lives in Australia.)



Rs 200 banknote: Issued for the 50th anniversary of Independence

In commemoration of special events

By Kavan Ratnatunga

Commemorative stamps, coins and banknotes are issued for important national events as lasting collectibles. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) this week issued a non circulating Legal Tender Rs.1000 copper nickel coin minted at 75th anniversary the Royal Dutch Mint in the



Education: A look back at the past

longer discussion that is best left for a

The key reforms among those pro-

Kindergarten to University which came to be

b. The introduction of swabasha as the medi-

c. The place of English in our national educa-

um of instruction in all schools in the coun-

Any mention of these educational

reforms must include a reference to the

posed by the Special Committee on

a. The removal of tuition fees from the

known officially as free education;

future date.

try; and

tion system.

Education were:

BY TISSA JAYATILAKA

On February 4, Sri Lanka reached 75 years since the end of the British colonial rule (1815-1948). It is as good a time as any to revisit some key issues that our country dealt with in the run-up to independence which have had a significant impact - for better or for worse - on our post-1948 destiny. Of these, I wish to pick education, a subject close to my heart.

The granting of universal adult franchise in 1931 under the Donoughmore Constitution whereby all Sri Lankan citizens over 21 years of age became eligible to vote, is a crucial landmark in modern Sri Lankan history. Another such landmark was the introduction of far-reaching educational reforms of 1945 of which the Educational Ordinance of 1939 was the forerunner. It was during the period when the late C.W.W. Kannangara held the education portfolio (1931-1947) in the State Council. Did the grant of the franchise which paved the way for electoral politics in Sri Lanka have a direct bear-



along been free to them.

What were the consequences of the proposed changes in the language policy? In summary, the two significant observations were the following:

a. The determination of the mother tongue of a child is no easy task. As Sir Ivor Jennings has correctly pointed out, the mother tongue of a child is the language in which a mother spoke to her children, the language of the home. It is the language in which children would tend to express their most intimate thoughts however fluent they may become in other languages. The mother tongue issue proved to be, with the passage Peramuna (JVP) which was far more intolerant of those with political views different from theirs. In addition, the JVP were far more inclined to resort to violence than any of their predecessors among student political groups. Given below in summary are some of the more violent acts committed by the JVP.

- On 15 December 1986, Daya Pathirana, the president of the Independent Students' Union of the University of Colombo was kidnapped and murdered.
- On 3 March 1989, Prof. Stanley Wijesundere, vice chancellor (1979-1988) of the University of Colombo was shot dead in his office.
- On 6 June 1989, the JVP's student demonstrators at Peradeniya seized who they believed to be a group of security officers of the state dressed in civilian clothes, four men in a jeep. One escaped but the other three were battered to the point of death and killed later. A short while after this incident students at Sri Jayewardenepura University killed three men.
- On 11 September 1989, Prof. C. Patuwatavithane, vice chancellor of the

Netherlands to mark the 75th anniversary of independ ence on February 4, 2023. It was the 71st commemorative coin issued by the CB

The first commemorative coin was the pair of coins issued in 1957 for the celebration of the 2500th year of the Buddhist Era. The first commemorative stamps in Ceylon were issued by the Postal Department along with most other British colonies in 1935 for the Silver Jubilee of King George V.

For the first anniversary of Independence on February 4th, 1949, four stamps were issued. Two of 5 cents and 25 cents depicting the country's first Prime Minister D.S Senanayake, and the other two of 4 cents and 15 cents with the original Lion Flag.

The Philatelic Bureau was opened in 1967 to promote the collection of stamps. In 1968, two stamps of 5 cents and 1 rupee were issued for the 20th Anniversary of Independence.

After the Republic of Sri Lanka declared on May 22nd, 1972, that date took prominence in the celebration of independence. After 1978, with the inauguration of the first Executive President, February 4th was once again celebrated as our day of independence.

In 1998, for the 50th anniversary of independence 5 stamps, 3 coins and a commemorative banknote were issued. The stamps were of Rs 2, 2 x Rs 2.50, Rs 5 and Rs 10. The Rs 10 circulation coin is the only bimetallic, and the Rs 200 banknote is the only polymer so far issued by the Central Bank. The Rs 1,000 silver crown and a Rs 5,000 gold sovereign, the most valuable coin issued to that date.

In 2008, the 60th anniversary of Independence was marked with a Rs 5 stamp, and in 2018, the 70th, with a Rs 15 stamp and Rs 1000 banknote.

The 50th Anniversary of the Republican constitution in May 2022 was however forgotten with only a stamp issued as an afterthought in October 2022.

The 1998 Rs1000 coin was of the same size as the Rs 5 Buddha Jayanthi coin issued in 1957.

The Rs 5000 Sovereign which was the price of gold in 1998, has now risen to about Rs 170,000.

Commemorative stamps of D.S. Senanayake, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah were issued on February 2nd. The motivation to include these leaders of India and Pakistan on our independence stamps is questionable. I understand it was at the direct request of the President. Maybe it is to counterbalance the unexpected issue of gold and silver coins of Rs 1000 in July 2021 by the CBSL to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, which was the first time Sri Lanka coins were issued to celebrate any foreign anniversary, not associated with the United Nations

Stamps for that event were rightfully declined by the postal authorities, which seem to have been unable to do so on this occasion. Very few Sri Lanka stamps have been issued with foreign dignitaries, the first being a 40 cent for Lenin in 1971. It is sad to see geopolitics recently influence the issue of commemoratives in Sri Lanka.

(The writer maintains a Lankan website lakdiva.org)

ing on the introduction of these pathbreaking educational reforms?

Kannangara appointed the Special Committee on Education in 1940 to look into the shortcomings of the existing educational system and recommend measures for reform. The Special Committee consisted of the members of the Executive Committee of Education and educational experts as were available in the country. (see The Road to Peradeniya An Autobiography by Sir Ivor Jennings, 2005). Much has been said and written about Kannangara's role in formulating the path-breaking educational proposals of 1943 which were debated in that body in the latter half of 1944 when he moved a resolution on May 30, 1944, to the effect that these be adopted (see J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka A Political Biography, Volume 1: The First Fifty Years by K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins). The board of ministers approved these proposals and placed them before the State Council on August 24, 1945.

Does Kannangara deserve all of the accolades paid him by his contemporaries and some of his die-hard loyalists of today? Whether Kannangara achieved greatness or had greatness thrust upon him, to my mind, is debatable. He was, as noted above, assisted by a 23-member Special Committee on Education. And yet Kannangara is identified as the person who, in 1945, introduced the free education scheme to Sri Lanka. Some academic historians, Professor J.E. Jayasuriya for one, attributed this honour to both Kannangara and A. Ratnavake (see Jayasuriya's Educational Policies and Progress During British Rule 1796 - 1948) whilst K. Alvapillai who served as the secretary of the Executive Committee for Education from 1937 – 1943 singles out A. Ratnavake for this honour. He states:

The circumstances that weighed with the majority of the Committee in "plumping" for free education are interesting. The idea originated with that confirmed democrat A. Ratnayake (now President of the Senate) and he was strongly supported by the Chairman of the Committee (my emphasis). (see The Special Committee on Education, Chapter 53 in Part 11 of Education in Ceylon A Centenary Volume, 1969).

Thus it appears that Kannangara was more *primus inter pares* (a first among equals) than the sole originator of free education. The latter issue requires a

Central Schools Scheme, that is, the establishment of secondary schools in rural areas that offered the same education in the medium of English as found in urban secondary or denominational schools. There were 54 Central Schools in operation by 1944 and, while they functioned, they proved to be a stepping stone for rural children for social and economic advancement. Regrettably due to a lack of funds, the Central Schools Scheme could not be sustained.

A close look at the three key reforms stated above based on the views of those who participated in the deliberations of the Special Committee as also those of later critics of these reforms, bearing in mind that hindsight is always 20/20, begs the question - How free was free education even in 1945 and thereafter? Even as staunch a supporter of free education as Dr N.M. Perera (as any nationalist-socialist would have been in that era) was sceptical of the State Council securing the requisite funds needed for this ambitious scheme given the state of the economy at that time (see Dr N.M. Perera's The Case for Free Education, he wrote while in Detention Prison in Kandy in 1944, for details).

Admittedly free education and swabasha were not bad concepts in and of themselves but were they, as formulated in the reforms, implementable? Were these ideas carefully evaluated by competent persons to determine if they could be successfully implemented given the social, political, and economic realities of the time? How much of a role, if any, did political expediency play in this matter?

Contrary to the fond expectations of those who advocated free education from the Kindergarten to the University, what actually materialised was something very different. Education, as J.E. Jayasuriya has pointed out, "was indeed free to all in theory but in practice what was free was a good education for the few and a bad education for the many". What Jayasuriya says in Education in the Third World -Some Reflections (pp. 86-87) is worthy of quotation in full:

The immediate consequence of the principle of free education accepted in 1945 was to give a bonanza to the wellto-do by making available to them without payment the good education that had hitherto been paid for by them. The masses continued to receive free the poor quality education that had all

- of time, another example of communalism A Sinhalese was to be compelled to learn through Sinhalese, and a Tamil through Tamil. The fact that some Sinhalese spoke Tamil fluently and some Tamils spoke Sinhalese was ignored (see Sir Ivor Jennings' The Road to Peradeniya An Autobiography,2005); and
- b. Robert Marrs, the outgoing Principal of the University College, presciently observed that, "If English divided the privileged from the non-privileged, once English was dethroned there will now be two languages to divide the people.'

What of university education? How did the educational reforms of 1945 affect this sphere? The development of university education in Sri Lanka, as Professor C.R. de Silva has noted, may be conveniently divided into three stages. The first, from 1942-1959, was a period of planned progress. The years 1959 - 1965 were marked by chaos due mainly to "unplanned expansion", especially in the Arts stream. From 1966 onwards, higher education in Sri Lanka was marred by government interference in the internal administration of the university. This situation was made worse by government efforts to enforce rigid control over university expenditure during a period of inflation.

The University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, originally designed to accommodate less than 2500 yet continued to have more than double the envisaged number. The efforts to provide accommodation for an additional intake of students, especially for the Arts Faculty, proved problematic. The university began to produce more and more Arts graduates finding employment for whom soon became an insurmountable problem. The seeming indifference of successive governments to the brewing crisis in the university resulted in a breakdown in administration and led in 1965, to a student strike, the first of what was to become a regular feature as the years went by. The degree of violence during these student disturbances also began to grow.

The Higher Education Act of 1966, which the then minister of education, Mr. I.M.R.A. Iriyagolla pushed through parliament was a major turning point in the history of university education in Sri Lanka. From around this time, the university came to be more and more affected by national politics. The Peradeniya campus of the university became a stronghold of the Janatha Vimukthi

University of Moratuwa, was shot dead in his office, and the chief security officer of the university was killed with him.

On 4 October 1989, the adherents of the JVP killed a senior administrative official at the University of Peradeniya. (see K.M. de Silva's The Sri Lankan Universities from 1977 to 1990; Recovery, Stability and the Descent to Crisis. for details).

The conclusion one is forced to arrive at is that, however well intentioned they may have been, the educational reforms of 1945 and their flawed implementation led to Sri Lanka's higher education system, beginning in the mid-1960s onwards to a low that could not have been imagined possible in 1955. This descent, as noted above, was aided by political interference which made university administration a nightmare.

Instead of building on the educational foundation Sri Lanka had laid from Kindergarten to University, in the process of ushering in momentous changes without a sound prior assessment of the financial and administrative structure that was required to make the changes possible, Sri Lanka ended up making a bad system infinitely worse.

The change of the medium of instruction in schools without creating an enabling environment, led to raising the aspirations of the poor which the state could not meet. It also served to alienate the Sinhalese from the Tamils. The inability of the state to provide employment to the swabasha educated, mostly Arts graduates, who had no knowledge of English, bred deep frustration amongst the rural youth in particular. They were now, unlike earlier, "educated" but unemployable. The rapid expansion in university education, the lack of books and journals in Sinhala and Tamil for those proficient only in the vernacular languages and the woeful inability of the state to meet the needs for the promised teaching of English to all students from grade 3 onwards contributed to a volatile and disastrous mixture, the repercussions of which are to be felt to this day.

In sum, the achievement of the educational reforms of 1945, was to produce what has been called an "equality of degradation". Because the poor had an inferior education, everybody had to have an inferior education. Because the poor had no access to English, everybody had to be deprived of that access.

(The writer is a former academic and academic administrator)

Still seeking 'parity of status' for the Tamils

Senior politician and Leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Veerasingham Anandasangaree speaks to Feizal Samath on the politics of the North of Sri Lanka, which led to a protracted separatist armed insurgency, which he opposed as a pacifist. Mr. Anandasangaree advocates devolution of a Federal nature.

hen Tamils organised a satyagraha (protest) against the Official Languages Act No. 33 of 1956 (often referred to as the 'Sinhala Only Act') at the Galle Face Green in front of the then Parliament just as the bill was being enacted into law, rowdy mobs attacked the protestors forcing one of the protesting Senators to seek refuge in the nearby Galle Face Hotel, recalled veteran politician Veerasingham Anandasangaree.

"Those were terrible times," he said, adding that at that time he was attending Law College classes in the morning and worked as an English Teaching Assistant in the afternoon at a government school in Ratmalana managed by a Buddhist monk.

The often controversial 89-year-old politician, who fell foul of the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and faced multiple death threats from the terrorists, was speaking on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Sri Lanka's Independence, from Jaffna where he resides nowadays. The one-time lawyer, who is also fluent in Sinhala, went down memory lane in recalling events 'in my own words and recollections' as to how Tamil parties were formed in the late 1940s, the cry for separation, his conflict

with another veteran politician R. Sambanthan and his 'frosty engagement' with the LTTE, and how LTTE-backed nominees through its Tamil National Alliance (TNA) entered Parliament at the 2004 general election with 22 seats.

year before А Independence in 1948, fatherof-the-nation and Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake wanted Tamil leaders to join hands and cooperate with his government. "I think he got our support." At that time the Tamils didn't have any major issues and were happy with the assurances by D.S. Senanayake that the Tamils would be treated equally.

During the pre-Independence period, there was the Jaffna Youth Congress. The membership was radical, but non-communal. The elections to the first State Council on May 4, 1931 Veerasingham Anandasangaree

under the Donoughmore Constitution saw a new breed of indigenous politicians coming forward to contest in the first all-island elections. It was largely based on caste, race, wealth, education, religion.

The Jaffna Youth Congress called for a boycott of these elections. The boycott failed, but some seats in the North went uncontested by June when the polling ended. A young Cambridge educated lawyer, Gnanapathipillai Gangaser Ponnambalam (G.G.Ponnambalam) refused to join the boycott. He was defeated but soon became a spokesman for the Tamils and in his mid-30s formed his own party, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) as political parties started to be formed throughout the country.

Quite a few Tamil MPs were part of the left movement and members of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party (CP) who had branches in Jaffna. "I also started my career as a member of the left move-

ment (LSSP).

At one point in late 1949, Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and a few others broke away from the ACTC (after the ACTC decided to join the ruling United National Party) and formed the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) which means "Tamil Rule Party".

At that time, there were no major issues that the Tamil parties raised, but the ITAK was pushing for a federal solution in the north and the east while plantation leader Mr. S. Thondaman was fighting for the rights of the Indian

Tamils on the plantations and pushing for their citizenship rights. One of the problems at that time was

the national flag issue. The lion in the flag represented only the Sinhalese. Mr. Chelvanayakam and others raised issue and D.S. Senanavake appointed a national flag committee including Tamil and Muslim members. Their recommendation was that the maroon portion should represent the Tamils and the green portion the Muslims.

"I was a keen political student while my father was principal and was with (former prime minister) W. Dahanayake at Teacher Training College. I recall during an election procession that I joined, the

ACTC candidate collapsed and died." In 1956, Tamils wanted 'parity of status' or equality during the tenure of

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. In 1959, Mr. Anandasangaree contested the Colombo Municipal Council against V.A. Sugathadasa and lost and when general elections were held in January 1960, he was nominated by Dr. N.M. Perera (LSSP) to contest a parliamentary seat from Kilinochchi. Since no proper government could be formed after that election, another

election was held in March 1960. In 1970, Mr. Anandasangaree entered Parliament as a member of the Tamil Congress also known as the ACTC. Then the trouble started when Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike brought in a Republican Constitution in 1972.

"We were opposed to the removal of Section 29 of the earlier (Soulbury) Constitution which was the only protection minorities had. This section ensured you cannot enact any law that would favour a section of the people or discriminate against anyone," he recalled.

"There was a move for all Tamil parties to join together. I also joined this movement for a united Tamil front.³

Various groups of people met to create the TULF in 1972. At that time, the fear was that with Sri Lanka becoming a republic, there would be more restrictions on the Tamils. Mr. Chelvanayakam and Mr. Ponnambalam were political enemies and not talking to each other, but they too joined.

On 14th May 1972 the TULF (Tamil United Front - TUF at that time) was formed at the Trincomalee town hall. Mr. Chelvanavakam was the president and subsequently Mr. Ponnambalam and Mr. Thondaman (one of the founder members) were made joint presidents.

At the first convention, two years later (1976), a resolution (Vaddukottai Resolution) calling for separation was supported. However, it was stated that if the Tamil problem was successfully solved to the satisfaction of the Tamil people, they would not demand separation. "Our main demand was to introduce a federal system of government.'

After TULF leader Appapillai Amirthalingam was assassinated, there were hardly any meetings of the leaders of the TULF for four years. "I supported Mavai Senathirajah to take over Amirthalingam's position but (Mr. R.) Sambanthan wanted that position. What I feared happened, as the $\ensuremath{\mathsf{TULF}}$ was destroyed after that," he said on his disagreements with Mr. Sambanthan.

"My proposal, which I still believe is valid, was to follow the Indian model of governance of various states. At one time, I met a Buddhist monk and explained to him why I was proposing the Indian model. He agreed with me and offered his support. Several ministers offered their support and there were three newspaper editorials supporting my view."

Mr. Anandasangaree, who is the leader of the currently lowly placed TULF, is bitter with the current Tamil leadership and their policies. "They are not fit to be in Parliament," he said.

"It was the 60 million Tamils in South India who started the separation call for their state. Then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru convinced them to give up separation and provided enough autonomy to the states. Here too, we should have followed that example and I had the courage to promote this thinking," he said, adding, "That was how I viewed the problem and felt my thinking was correct".

🗖 ri Lanka has a proud health history, in recent times considered the best with regard to certain indices such as maternal mortality rate (MMR) and infant mortality rate (IMR) in the Southeast Asian Region, even comparable to developed countries.

Piecing together the twists and turns health has taken within Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) President Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne traces its beginnings back to over two millennia... the introduction of Buddhism from North India in the 3rd century BC during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa (247-207 BC), marking the beginning of the tradition of medical care in ancient Sri Lanka.

The traditional system of medicine had two components, the truly indigenous system, which existed prior to the advent of King Vijaya known as Deshiya Chikitsa or Hela/Sinhala Vedakama; with the second component being Ayurveda. Currently, the Deshiva Chikitsa system does not seem to exist in its original form due to the influence of other systems.

Allopathic medicine was introduced



A well-managed hospital ward

Evolution of the healthcare system

The structure of the medical service begun dotting the country. since Sri Lanka gained independence In 1948, the curative and prevenis captured by Dr. Lucian Jayasuriya and Dr. K.C. Shanti Dalpatadu in a

tive care achievements:

(TB); Anti-Venereal Disease (VD); Anti-Leprosy and Anti-Filariasis were established. However, the Anti-Malaria Campaign had been launched earlier during colonial rule.

In 1966, the Department of Health Services was amalgamated with the Ministry of Health based on the recommendation of a Committee on Administrative Reforms - Sessional paper ix of 1966.

By 1977, the General Hospital, Colombo was separated from the Colombo Group of Hospitals and upgraded, while in 1980, the project Ministry of Colombo Hospitals supervised the General Hospital, Colombo and other hospitals in Colombo. As this ministry was under the Health Ministry and had little power, it was closed in 1984

This was followed by a Cabinet level Ministry of Women's Affairs and Teaching Hospitals which oversaw the 10 teaching hospitals of the medical faculties, while the decentralized division of the Colombo Group of Hospitals was abolished and each hospital was made a decentralized unit. In 1989, however,

Pages from 1948

Frayed at the edges, faded from its original red and brown. the book cover shows signs of wear but within, the contents are beautifully preserved - a marvellous insight of where the country stood as it gained independence from Colonial rule.

The book we are talking of is a souvenir, running to just over one hundred pages which was issued for the Pageant of Lanka that grand programme held to commemorate freedom.

'The idea of a Pageant of Lanka originated with a letter written to

Surya Sena early in 1947,' says the Foreword. "The country was agog with the excitement of the General Elections and the constitutional changes

Seebert Dias whose son, as we know, was the legendary Chitrasena. Episode 3 – Vijaya and Kuveni is by the same team.

Episode 4 is the Introduction of Buddhism, another ballet, this time by the Sripali Players produced by Ananagalal Atukorale. Episode V is titled Elara the Just. Later episodes like the Arrival of the Portuguese, the Dutch, lead to Episode XII which is 'Sri Vikrama Rajasinha – the last King of Kandy produced by Devar Surya Sena which includes a scene from the Kandyan

Convention. The very last segment is 'The Voice of Lanka', a ballet produced bv H.R. Premaratne & Shanti Kumar and performed



the Press by Devar



by the Portuguese, while the Dutch who followed, built hospitals in different parts of the country. The British who took full control of the country from 1815, expanded the allopathic healthcare system, setting up important structures such as 'Health Units' in Kalutara in 1926. They brought preventive and curative services under one administration the same year.

Looking at developments 90 years later, Dr. Ariyaratne refers to the new 'Sri Lanka National Health Policy – 2016-2026' and the 'National Strategic Framework for Health Development 2016-2025'. The proposed implementation of significant reforms represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of healthcare provision, he says.

Adopted in December 2017, the Health Policy aims to reorganize primary care, improve healthcare provision through data utilization and strengthen the overall health sector. In this connection, the World Bank in 2018 supported the launch of the Primary Healthcare Systems Strengthening Project (PSSP) which aims to reorganize the primary healthcare system and reinforce integration of preventive and curative care.

According to Dr. Ariyaratne, four vears on, significant results towards transformation are seen with innovative tools such as a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) and a citizens' engagement mechanism through 'Friends of Health Services Committees'.

comprehensive chapter in 'History of Medicine' 1948-2018 of the SLMA.

To set the backdrop, they venture back to 1801, when British Governor Fredrick North created a Medical Department within the military establishment. The first dispensary for western medicine was set up in Colombo for their troops, followed by military hospitals and dispensaries in other areas, with military doctors attending on civilians too.

A milestone was 1858, when the Civil Medical Department saw the light of day, with its first head Dr. Christopher Elliot being named Principal Civil Medical Officer (PCMO). With the growing importance of public health and the enactment of the Medical and Sanitary Ordinance No. 11 of 1925, the PCMO became the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services (DM&SS)

Universal franchise in 1931 was a great impetus for the expansion of both curative and preventive care. By the time the British left Ceylon in 1948, the Civil Medical Department (and its successor, the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services) had been in existence for 90 years.

The achievements during this period were phenomenal. In 1848. there were only three civil hospitals - a leprosy hospital, a lunatic asylum and a smallpox hospital – and two prison hospitals at Welikade and Hulftsdorp. Thereafter, numerous hospitals and dispensaries had

Focus on MCH starting with Kalutara Health Unit in 1926

How did Sri Lanka successfully reduce its maternal and infant mortality rates (MMR and IMR)?

This is what is answered by Dr. Palitha Abevkoon. Dr. U.H. Susantha de Silva, Dr. Vineetha Karunaratne and Dr. Chithramalee de Silva in 'Maternal and Child Health' in 'History of Medicine 1948-2018

... An organized effort to provide maternal and child health (MCH) services commenced with the introduction of the Health Unit System in 1926, Kalutara being the first, established with an MOH in charge. A Health Unit was a clearly defined

institute, managed by a qualified team of public health professionals. The introduction of the Health Unit System provided clinics and domiciliary based care for mothers and children.

By 1936, eight similar Health Units were established in the country. The control measures adopted following the Malaria Epidemic of 1935 led to further expansion of the system, while MCH services widened along with them.

The beginnings may have been humble but the results are obvious. The MMR has declined remarkably from 400 per 100,000 live births in 1955 to below 30 per 100,000 live births in 2021.

- There were 183 including specialized hospitals and 45 rural hospitals. Every province had a General Hospital, with the apex being the General Hospital, Colombo. These tertiary care centres had the four basic specialties of medicine; surgery; obstetrics & gynaecology; and paediatrics. The other specialties available were ophthalmology, otolaryngology, venereology, radiology and pathology while some also had orthopaedics and physical medicine.
- Below the General Hospitals were Base Hospitals, District Hospitals, Peripheral Units, Rural Hospitals, Central **Dispensaries and Maternity Homes and** Central Dispensaries.
- The in-patients treated for the year were 502,012.
- The 240 central dispensaries, 176 branch dispensaries, and 453 visiting stations, catered to an estimated 7,060,000 outpatients.
- Preventive care was provided by Medical Officers of Health (MOH) with each MOH area covering about 100,000 persons. The MOH was responsible for maternal and child care including immunization, communicable disease investigation and control, sanitation and approval of building plans in built up areas. Under the MOHs were Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) and Public Health Midwives (family health workers).

Decentralization of the Health Service

In 1949, the Government of Ceylon appointed Dr. J.H.L Cumpston, former Director General of Health Services of Australia, to advise on reforms and after the Cumpston Report (1950), came the Health Services Act No 12 of 1952 with the Director of Health Services (DHS) as the head. A major recommendation in the report, the decentralization of the health service to 15 Superintendent of Health Services (SHS) divisions, was implemented in 1954. All curative care institutions including the General Hospitals and all MOHs were supervised by the relevant SHS, making the health service efficient and effective.

It was also in the 1950s that special campaigns such as Anti-Tuberculosis

this ministry was scrapped and absorbed back to the Health Ministry. In 1983, meanwhile, the designation of the DHS was changed to Director General of Health Services (DGHS).

With the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1989 and the setting up of Provincial Councils (PCs), power was devolved to Provincial Ministries of Health and Provincial Health Departments. The line ministry retained policy formulation, teaching and special hospitals, training and bulk purchases of medical supplies and health legislation. But the PC system with its hierarchy was problematic, while another complication was the power of the relevant PC and its Governor to appoint - even occasionally - any medical officer, even persons who did not have the necessary qualifications as a Provincial Director of Health Services.

The PCs were always poorly funded and found it difficult to manage the hospitals under them and readily handed them over to the line ministry. whenever requested. As such, today the central ministry manages a number of large hospitals in addition to teaching and special hospitals.

Under curative services, in 1996, the General Hospital. Colombo became the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, with more coming in as the National Eye Hospital, the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Mental Health.

More specialized campaigns were also launched in the preventive service including the National STD and AIDS Control Programme (NSACP), the Respiratory Diseases Control Programme, the National Dengue Control Unit, the Family Health Bureau, the Health Education Bureau and the Epidemiology Unit.

"There are now 612 hospitals and 475 Primary Medical Care Units, while the number of MOH units stand at 330. The total health sector work force was 123,845 of which 66,993 were in the line ministry and 56,852 in the provincial ministries. They have been treating over 6.1 million in-patients and over 55.1 million outpatients, with the total population served being 20.966 million," according to the Annual Health Bulletin 2014.

they foreshad owed. A Parliament was going to be inaugurated and

a new constitution established The cover of the souvenir conferring upon the people of this country a far greater measure of freedom than they had hitherto enjoyed. Devar Surva Sena's proposal was that the occasions should be used for a cultural contribution by the Artistes of the Island towards ushering in the new era, a contribution which, by reminding us of the greatness that had been ours, would also inspire us with a confidence to face the future .

"It is not just a historical pageant, but modelled on recent pageants in England and India where historical incidents have been framed in various art forms, such as ballet and music, song and colourful pageantry," the foreword stated.

An inside page gives the details - held on February 16th, 17th, 19th and 21st, 1948 at the Ladies' Golf Links: General direction by T.V. Saravanamuttu, Stage Direction by S. Sanmuganathan, Processions Direction by J.N. Jinendradasa, Lighting by Arthur van Langenberg, Dick H. Dias, Sound by N.S. Wickremesinghe and Devar Surya Sena, Interlude Music Directors - Lionel Edirisinghe and Mrs Surya Sena, Green Room Direction – Sydney de Zoya and Mrs C.V.S Corea, Property Seebert A. Dias and Mudliyar D.B. Kannangara, Makeup by Stanley Abeyasinghe and Mrs M.W.M. de Silva.

The next page describes all 14 episodes of the pageant essentially a walk through the country's history: Episode 1 produced by Norbert Siriwardene is 'Lanka in the dim past' - how legend has it that four Buddhas visited 'this Blessed Isle', the episode depicting one such visit.

Episode 2 is the ballet Ravana and Sita, performed by the Chitrasena Troupe, producer



Niketan. The description tells of Mother Lanka distressed by the evils of disunity, communal dissension and lust for power among her

by Shanti Kala

children, looking for a change of heart and a new spirit to free her. The programme finale is given merely as 'The temple of art'.

A galaxy of distinguished writers have contributed to the souvenir – from Shirley de Alwis writing on the University of Ceylon, G.P. Malalasekera on Lanka's contribution to Buddhist culture. Irrigation in Ceylon by R.L. Brohier, the New Anuradhapura by G. Weerasinghe, Parakrama at Polonnaruwa by R.L. Spittel and many, many more.

"I wish to record my grateful thanks to all those who contributed articles at so short a notice and the business houses of Ceylon who have lavishly advertised," says S. Sanmuganathan in his Editor's note, dated 16th February 1948. Indeed the advertisements themselves bring a flavour of life at that time firms such as Cargills, Walkers, the Ceylon Insurance Company, Shell Company, the Grand Oriental Hotel, Don Carolis among others less familiar to a reader today recording messages of congratulations and support to the nation.

The souvenir is with the family of J.A.A.(Algy) Perera who served in the Police and was one of the bodyguards of the Duke of Gloucester when he made that historic visit to represent his brother George VI at the Independence Day celebrations in 1948. Algy's eldest daughter was seven, and has a vague memory of attending the celebrations. Handwritten on the flyleaf of the souvenir are her words, faint but still legible; '4.2.1948. first independence day, bought as a memento of that happy day on which Ceylon received her independence'.

A tragedy beyond belief

It was the worst natural disaster this country has faced. On Boxing Day, December 26, 2004, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, triggered a tsunami that devastated Sri Lanka. The killer waves that swept through the country's coastline on the East, North and South took the lives of more than 30,000 people.

coastline on the East, North and South took the lives of more than 30,000 people. More than 1,700 people died in the Peraliya train tragedy alone when a packed coastal train heading to Galle– the Samudra Devi, was caught up in the massive wave. It is considered the biggest train disaster in the world.

He gave back: Helmut Kohl

Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, was a frequent visitor to Sri Lanka and was among the many thousands on the coast caught up in the tsunami. He had been undergoing ayurvedic treatment in a villa in Thalpe and being on the



Helmut Kohl

Thalpe and being on the third floor escaped unscathed. He was subsequently airlifted by a military helicopter to the Katukurunda airbase and then driven to Colombo.

"On Sunday morning at about 9 a.m. I stood on the balcony and saw that the sea was changing. It sounded very different," Kohl wrote in Germany's Bild newspaper. He says, "Then a huge wave rose up. This wave developed enormous power. People were running around screaming. The wave ripped everything away. Wooden huts and buildings that were not solidly built were just washed away.

"Only when we saw that the entire lower and second floors of our hotel were flooded did we realize the full extent of the catastrophe," he said. "It brought back images of the war, which I lived through as a boy. It looked like after a heavy bombardment."

In the aftermath, the Chancellor through funding from the German government provided boats for fishermen and houses for tsunami victims, as well as a community centre, montessori and tsunami warning tower.

His biggest contribution was a 600-bed maternity hospital in Karapitiya with Rs 900 million from the Helmut Kohl Foundation, in place of the Mahamodara Hospital which was badly damaged by the tsunami.

The face of tsunami heartbreak

By Kumudini Hettiarachchi

It was the worst natural disaster to engulf many Southeast Asian nations in recent history – the tsunami of December 26, 2004!

For Sri Lanka, the 'face' of the tsunami which launched a generous sea of empathy and sympathy was that of 10-year-old Asitha

Rukshan Fernando of Koralawella, Moratuwa. Asitha's tear-streaked face

Asitha's tear-streaked face crumpled up in heartrending agony at his mother's funeral, splashed across hundreds of newspapers and magazines across the



d a gennpathy was that Asitha

though their parents of are hopeful that they are alive and are being looked after by ce someone else. More than 30,000 men, women

and children died in the tsunami while numerous others were affected both physically and men-

tsunami have never

been found again,



world, epitomized the heartbreak of the tsunami. The tsunami of Boxing and Poya Day Handreak distribution Boxing and Poya Day Handreak distribution Homes, schools, hotels and businesses being destroyed or badly damaged.

Many of the reports and magazines which portrayed the tearstreaked face of Asitha at his mother Ranjini's funeral, did not identify him. It was *the Sunday Times* which went in search of him, found him with the help of Sr. Jacintha Silva of the Sisters of Charity, Jesus and Mary from a convent close to Asitha's home, and wrote a piece which brought help to his family from a lot of people.

For Asitha, more tragedy struck the next year – as this humble family which survived through fishing made ready to hold an almsgiving in their mother's name, father Ivan died after falling off a moving train. The heavy responsibility of looking after Asitha and also his sibling with special needs fell on their elder sister.

However, throughout the years, in response to *the Sunday Times* articles, numerous people steadfastly responded in cash and kind, one even donating a house to the family.

Nineteen years after the terrible tragedy of the tsunami and as Sri

It is our Independence Day. What?

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

At the time when Sri Lanka's 75 years of independence is being celebrated, the Sri Lankan economy is struggling to recover from a devastating crisis. Directly hit by consequences of the crisis and forced to bear the burden of IMF-inspired policies of economic recovery, most citizens find themselves helpless, hopeless and angry. Feeling abandoned and orphaned, many, from the rural poor to Colombobased professionals and business persons, have begun to leave the country in search of economic and existential security in foreign lands. They accuse political leaders of being the primary authors of this unprecedented economic and social catastrophe in the making.

People are particularly angry at the arrogance and insensitivity repeatedly demonstrated by the government leaders to their suffering and travails. For a huge number of Sri Lankan families, sheer survival is at stake. People ask why political and bureaucratic leaders are not held accountable for this misfortune of historic proportions.

Ambivalence and scepticism

In the past too, Independence Day has provided the space for citizens to ask some searching questions about the meaning of independence. Responses to questions such as 'are we really independent?' have always been either ambivalent or negative. As senior citizens like me might recall, the annual Independence Day has always been a moment of celebration only for the section of the political class in power, their bureaucratic subordinates and newspaper feature writers

Even during the 1950s and 1960s, rural children learned about independence when it was celebrated in the school with very little pomp and without burning patriotic passions being aroused. We, the children of Sinhalese-Buddhist parents, were told in the school how our 'national leaders' won independence from the colonial rulers without shedding a single drop of blood.

We were also told that these modern-day national leaders were the true heirs to previous generations of heroes who had fought valiant battles against the South Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and British invaders and even sacrificed their lives.

Newspaper supplements and special radio programmes on February 4 were the key medium of propagating that specific official historiography of our independence. Other than that, our villagers were generally unexcited and ambivalent about the idea of independence. After they became managers of the new nation's destiny, what have those national leaders and their descendants done to the country and its people? Quite revealingly, the answer to that question has been, and even continues to be, one shrouded in deep scepticism and cynicism. Until about the 1970s, many people of the older generation used to say that all their current misfortunes began to build up only after the 'suddas' ('white men') have left. Despite the seemingly colonised worldview easily observable in this claim, it had a very subtle point of critique, too: the new class of local rulers have messed up the independence the British gave us. Hearing occasionally our elders, even school teachers, utter this sentiment, so widespread during the early years of our independence, we grew up in a culture of scepticism about what political independence had really meant to the citizens outside the ruling elites. We may now repeat the same question, re-wording it in a politically more correct contemporary language: Isn't the messing up of independence the key achievement of Sri Lanka's ruling class? Why waste so much public money to celebrate something so hollow, when thousands of poor families and millions of children, are facing the threat of starvation? Are the continuing pauperisation and social misery what the seventy-five years of post-independence elite rule have given to most of our citizens?

hope shared by citizens across many social strata. Why is it that our political class so openly displays its inane insensitivity to the impending catastrophe about which many of the country's citizens are deeply agonised? Is it the ruling elite's class arrogance and lack of empathy for other people's suffering that prevent them from seeing even the simple political facts so visible around them?

The middle-class anger and despair being aired these days at regular demonstrations against the government's latest tax policy remind us what Sri Lanka's citizens told the political class last year during the *aragalaya*: reform yourselves or resign.

Are there any signs of the ruling class' willingness to reform itself, at least in the face of such a catastrophe in the country? What the moment of the 75th anniversary of the country's independence reminds the citizens of Sri Lanka is a simple truth: unreformability is the defining attribute of their ruling class.

No systemic reforms

Unreformability apart, the refusal to reform the overall 'system' has also been a feature that has made Sri Lanka's political class a species of its own. During the past 75 years, no sustainable alternative has been established to replace the colonial economic structure that Sri Lanka inherited at the time of independence. They severely damaged both the liberal and social foundations of Sri Lankan democracy and led the country along the path of a political and social calamity, a way out from which has not yet been found. Sri Lankan citizens are still trying to repair this emaciated version of democracy,

with no tangible outcome as yet. Meanwhile, two anti-state armed rebellions, spread over a period of four decades, have highlighted the urgency of effecting some fundamental reforms to Sri Lanka's state and governance structures in the form of deep democratisation. Yet, our ruling elites are still refusing to change the 'system' so that the causes of unmanageable social discontent and unrest can be addressed. "Let us forget the root causes; focus on the immediate issues" was the haughty advice that the current head of Sri Lanka's political class gave the country just two weeks ago when the present economic crisis was the theme of a parliamentary debate.

When Sri Lanka's citizens reminded the ruling elites the urgent necessity of a 'system change' just a few months ago, the outrageously hostile way these elites reacted to it once again showed how unfitting they are to rule this country.

Lanka marks its 75th Independence Day, Asitha is a responsible young man, having a family of his own.

Taking care of the visitors amidst the chaos

BY FEIZAL SAMATH

When the tsunami on December 26, 2004 devastated a large portion of Sri Lanka's eastern, southern and southwestern beaches and hotels that stood in the way and stranded many tourists, the country's tourism industry had to rally together to miminise inconvenience to travellers.

"We brought the industry under one unit and worked hard to ease the pain and suffering of many of the affected," recalled Udaya Nanayakkara, then Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board.

Nearly 30,000 people including tourists died in the worst-ever natural disaster in this country which also displaced over 1.5 million. At least 50,000 tourists were affected and around 2,000 were dead or missing. The worst affected were the southern and west coasts along with the east coast. Sri Lanka's efforts to care for stranded tourists and the handling of the crisis were complimented by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO). There were lots of letters of appreciation from embassies and other quarters.

Recalling the events of that fatal day, Abbas Esufally, Director at Hemas Group, said he received a call from his General Manager at Serendib Hotel on the south coast saying they had to evacuate all their guests as the entire ground floor was flooded. "I told him that they faced a major logistics problem as roads were flooded, damaged and trees had fallen preventing buses from going to the scene to bring the tourists to Colombo." The roads had to be cleared first. Giving his experience of the events, Mr. Nanayakkara said: "Once the tsunami happened, my immediate response was to summon all the Destination Management Companies (DMCs) as this was peak winter season.

"We collected all the tourists' numbers from DMCs, where they were and their fixed itineraries. We opened an emergency office at the BMICH – which became the nerve centre of operations. Tourist Board directors in London, Frankfurt and Paris were requested to fly down to Colombo immediately. Since we had a public emergency and since Tourist Board staff had their own work to do and also had to care for their own families who were affected, I contacted the international schools and



brought in senior students as volunteers to man the desk 24/7.

"We used radio and TV announcements to track tourists with a central call-in number. Halls in Buddhist temples were used to ask tourists to congregate. They had lost passports/ money and everything they owned.

"Since the railway was affected, we sent buses, sometimes accompanied by students, to bring the tourists to Colombo. A large number was accommodated at the BMICH. We also asked hotels to help in turning their ballrooms into dormitories.

"We asked Arpico and other stores to provide us with beds, mattresses, bed linen and towels – all three meals were provided to stranded tourists.

"We gave cash vouchers to tourists to buy clothing and other needs from supermarkets. We were in contact with counsellors of key embassies here and others based in Delhi who came down to Sri Lanka where there was a desk at the BMICH to issue temporary passports. Airlines set up computer terminals at the BMICH and through this we were able to track flights and passport details of those who lost passports. All this activity was funded by the Tourist Board. Doctors were at the BMICH attending to minor injuries and offer ing trauma counselling.

"We reached out to the world giving contact numbers for relatives of tourists to get in touch with us. We had a play area in the BMICH gardens to keep children occupied."

He said within eight months hotels were renovated in time for the 2005 winter season. Hotels were provided with concessions to import equipment and raw material.

Mr. Esufally, meanwhile, said they were responsible for 1,976 stranded travellers."We found everyone except for two who were missing," he added.

Resentment and despair

In fact, there is a deep sense of citizen resentment being expressed these days over the independence-day celebration. It is fused with an equally deep sense of despair and anguish because of an increasing loss of

What is in store?

What will the rest of 2023, the year of Sri Lanka's 75th independence, have in store for its citizens? Not very many positive things, I am afraid, are in sight, unless a major transformation of who holds political power occurs through peaceful and democratic means.

Meanwhile, there are already signs of the repetition of the same old governance and policy failures, exacerbated by ruling class arrogance and ineptness.

There is very little doubt that more miseries will pile up before most of the poor, working and middle-class citizens. There will also be a burst of accumulated social despair and anger in the form of renewed protests, agitations and social unrest. A new phase of citizens' protests is already in the making, suggesting that 2022 might be continued through 2023 too.

The ruling class reaction to another phase of political reawakening of the citizens is most likely to be a repressive response, claiming to protect what is euphemistically called law and order and what the leaders understand as 'democracy'. Their democracy is a singularly narrow, non-normative, and statist version of democracy which is neither liberal, nor democratic. It indeed is an emaciated variant of democracy very different from what most of Sri Lanka's citizens now appear to understand as democracy.

Thus, another confrontation between the rulers and the ruled, the political class and the citizens, is quite possible to erupt during the months to come, no sooner than the ceremonial horses with the glittery medals have returned to their stables.

(Jayadeva Uyangoda is emeritus Professor of Political Science, University of Colombo)

INDEPENDENCE 75 13

ACHIEVEMENTS IN SPORTS 1948-2023



1948: First Olympic Silver Medal Duncan White became the first Sri Lankan to win an Olympic medal in 1948, when he bagged the Silver medal in Men's 440 yard Hurdles at the 16th Olympiad held in London, England, finishing behind Roy Cochan of the USA. In the 1950 British Empire Games, now known as Commonwealth Games, held in Auckland, New Zealand, White won a Gold medal in Men's 440 yard hurdles and became the first Sri Lankan to win a gold medal in any sporting event after independence.

1958: Gold medal at Asian Games High Jumper Nagalingam Ethirveerasingam, who represented Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) at the 1952 (Helsinki) and 1956 (Melbourne) Olympic Games, became the first Sri Lankan to win a Gold medal of any kind in 1958 at the Tokyo Asian Games.

1973: Billiards World Champion



Muhammad Junaid Muhammad Lafir, regarded as Sri Lanka's best ever billiards and snooker player, gave the country its first World Cup. Lafir became the world champion in billiards in December 1973 in the World Amateur Billiards Championship by defeating Satish Mohan of India in the finals held in Mumbai.

1975: Inaugural Cricket World Cup

Sri Lanka led by Anura Tennekoon partipated at the inaugural ICC Cricket World Cup played in England.



1979: First Ever Victory in ODIs The Sri Lanka team led by Bandula Warnapura recorded its first ever international victory

match played in Manchester 1979: ICC Trophy Champions Sri Lanka won the inaugural ICC

beating India at the World Cup

Trophy (played among associate members) Tournament beating Canada in the Final.



Sri Lanka skipper Warnapura facing the first delivery in Test cricket bowled by Bob Willis



in Test cricket. Winning catch by Rumesh Ratnayake

1991: Hosts for SAF Games Sri Lanka hosted the 5th South Asian Games in Colombo - the biggest sporting event to be held in the island at the time. Sri Lanka won a record 44 gold medals, 34 silver and 40 bronze medals to be placed second in the overall medal tally behind India.



Darsha, Ramyaseeli, Jayamini & Ineka (4X100m gold)

1994: Gold Medal at Commonwealth Games Sri Lanka's women's Air Rifle shooting pair Pushpamali Ramanayake and

Malini Wickramasinghe won gold at the 1994 Pushpamali and Malini Victoria Commonwealth

Games. This was Sri Lanka's second gold at the Commonwealth Games post-Independence.

1996: Cricket World Champions





award. Aravinda de Silva

1997: Highest Total in Test cricket Sri Lanka scored a massive innings total of 952 /6 agaist India at R. Premadasa Stadium in August 1997. Sanath Jayasuriya (340) and Roshan Mahanama (225) put on a record partnership of 576 runs for the second wicket.



2000: Silver Medal at Olympics

Sprinter Susanthika Jayasinghe gave Sri Lanka its second Olympic medal, winning initially the Bronze medal in the Women's 200m event at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. She finished behind Marion Jones of the USA and Pauline Davis-Thompson of the Bahamas, becoming Sri Lanka's first Olympic medalist since 1948. In October 2007, Jones admitted to having taken performance-enhancing drugs prior to the Olympics, and Jayasinghe was later awarded the silver medal. During her illustrious career as a 100m and 200m sprinter, Susanthika Jayasinghe bagged a total of nine gold medals, six silver and three bronze medals at many international events.

2006: Gold Medal at Commonwealth



Chinthana Geethal Vidanage won a weightlifting gold medal in the men's 62 kg category; the first weightlifting gold medal for Sri Lanka in the 2006 Commonwealth Games held in Australia. Four years later he grabbed silver at the Delhi Games



in 2010.

2006: Highest Partnership in Test Cricket Mahela Jayawardene (374) and Kumar Sangakkara (287) put on a massive 624 runs partnership against frica at the SSC Grounds in August







2011: Runners-up at Cricket World Cup Sri Lanka led by Kumar Sangakkara became Runners-up in the ICC World Cup played in lindia. They lost to India at the Final played in Mumbai.

2014: ICC T20 World Cup Champions Sri Lanka won the ICC T20 World Cup in 2014, beating India by 6 wickets in the final played in Dhaka, Bangladesh on April 4 2014. This was the 5th ICC World T20, as Sri Lanka, led by Lasith Malinga, claimed its first World Twenty20 victory, after being runners-up twice in 2009 and 2012.

2018: World Carrom Champions



Sri Lanka won the 5th Carrom World Cup, defeating title holders India 2-1 in the final held at Chuncheon, South Korea. The Sri Lanka Men's team captained by Chamil Cooray, included Nishantha Fernando, Shaheed Hilmy and Udesh Chandima.

2022: Fastest in South Asia



Sri Lankan to have competed at the Diamond League. In April 2022, he set the new Asian record in the men's 150m by clocking 15.16 seconds. In May 2022, at a meeting held in Italy, he won the Men's 200m event setting a new national record of 20.37 seconds. Few days later, at an event held at the

Sprinter Yupun Abeykoon,

finish the Men's 100m

Resisprint

International

competition.

event with a timing

of 9.96 seconds, in

Switzerland at the

Abeykoon is also

the first and only



following his 3 for 42 with an unbeaten 107 won the Man of the Final award. Dav Whatmore coached Sri Lanka.

2007: Runners-up at Cricket World Cup Sri Lanka led by Mahela Jayewardena became Runners-up at the ICC World Cup held in West Indies They lost to Australia in a rain-restricted final.

Paul-Greifzu-Stadion, Dessau in Germany he won the Men's 100m setting a new national record of 10.06 seconds.

Photos: Newspaper Archives Graphic by Wasantha Siriwardena

The road to cricketing glory

By Ana Punchihewa

Throughout history there are instances and occurrences that have changed our meandering path to human evolution. Sri Lanka is no exception. Volumes of this country's history have been chronicled in the Mahawansa, but, I humbly delve into a part of our own cricketing history that changed Lankan sporting destiny forever.

This we could mark proudly as the 1996 Cricket World Cup win and how since then, the manner in which Lankan sportsmen and women began to think about international sports and their attitude towards it changed irrevocably. Now we do not see giants in the opposition. Now we are equals in the international arena. We may win or lose, but we treat our opposition as mere counterparts.

Here my effort is to roll out the part that was not put in print before. The role that a dedicated and professional team of administrators played which also became an inherent part of this famous game changer.

Since we gained full membership of the International Cricket Council(ICC) in 1981 and played our first Test match in 1982, we were in the big league of cricket but as minnows. In most of the instances, our cricketers felt the pangs of being patronized, the 'little brother' attitude, seen in instances such as the nature of the Darrel Hair saga which was the culmination of a very painful controversy between the ICC and the then Board of Control for Cricket

in Sri Lanka over the bowling action of young fledgling off spinner Muttiah Muralitharan.

In the midst of this, Sri Lanka possessed one of the most talented and experienced cricketing ensembles in the ICC realm under Arjuna Ranatunga, but what we lacked was the due recognition and acceptance. In 1994 the BCCSL team $% \mathcal{A} = \mathcal{A} = \mathcal{A} + \mathcal{A}$ under me recognised this huge anomaly and pondered ways of bridging it.

While the cricketers were battling out their own wars on field, the BCCSL executive committee decided to do away with the minnows cricketing image. We came up with the slogan of "Best Test Playing Nation by the year 2000" and backed

it with an innovative five-year development plan with the help of some of the best cricketing and marketing brains in the county.

Today, cricket is a mighty dollar churner which even could take on a gigantic task of monetarily helping a project of the calibre of the Commonwealth Games. But, in 1994, the cricket headquarters at Maitland Place was similar to Old Mother Hubbard. The cupboards and the coffer under the keys of unforgettable Tissa Gunaratne - the Cricket Administrator were practically empty and luckily the national cricketers indulged in their business while being attached to a rich conglomerate to ensure their take home pay at the end of the month.

It is under these circumstances the executive committee managed to convince Cricket Australia to release Lankan-born Australian coach Davenell Whatmore to become Sri Lanka's first-ever fulltime professional overseas coach.

The year was 1995 and the Lankans were just about to venture into a gruelling Test series against New Zealand. For the first time the Lankan team was treated to a grand send-off at a plush five-star hotel under the theme "We are the champions". 15 March 1995, Sri Lanka won its first overseas Test match under the leadership of Arjuna Ranatunga against New Zealand, when they beat them by 241 runs at Napier. This win also



Turning point: Australian umpire Darrel Hair no-balling Muttiah Muralitharan

resulted in their first overseas Test series victory, 1-0.

The Lankan cricketers had broken the shackles. The upward trend in Lankan cricket began to get visible.

Then came the Cricket World Cup 1996 in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Ironically the strife-ravaged Lankans had their own share of problems, but the BCCSL and the Lankan Government were willing to give full security to the players and the respective World Cup matches. Nonetheless both Australia and the West Indies opted to stay out for games played in Sri Lanka citing security reasons. Adding insult to injury also initially the \bar{ICC} came up with the decision that no points would be given to Sri Lanka for the boycotted matches. Yet, we fought, thoughtout-of-the-box or call it whatever name you prefer, but, the decision was reversed by one vote and the Lankan cricketers had four points in the bag without playing a single game, also making sure that they were a part of the next stage of the tournament. The rest is Lankan cricketing history.

Our tiny island nation won the 1996 Cricket World Cup beating Australia in the final and remaining unbeaten in the tournament. (The writer was President of the Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka when Sri Lanka won the World Cup in 1996)



Standing tall in the cricketing world: Arjuna Ranatunga and his World Cup winning team

When hope was young

By Yomal Senerath-Yapa

Swarnamali Salgado (90)

Swarnamali Amarasuriya (later Salqado) from Panadura read the proclamation in Sinhala at the first anniversary of Independence ceremony in 1949.

"My village was Moratuwa. I schooled at Visakha Vidyalaya (and Ladies' College briefly). My father was Thomas Amarasuriya whose brother was H.W. Amarasuriya, former minister of trade and commerce.

I was given my name because I was born on the exact time when the hathares kotuwa of the Ruwanweli stupa was enshrined with treasure - 4.32 p.m. on December 29, 1932.

However, all this had nothing to do with my being selected to read the message in Sinhala at the first vear celebrations after Independence was granted.

The other three girls (representing the Tamil. Muslim and Burgher communities) were from university: they could not get a Sinhala undergraduate because all of them were steeped in leftist ideas and refused

I was 16 when J.R. Jayawardene and A.P. Jayasuriya came to Visakha to test 10 selected girls. The principal was Ms. Susan George Pulimood. After being selected I was allowed to wear a 'Kandyan half sari'. There was no security checking on the big day and I participated with Phyllis de

Banker and author Lankeswara Pieris,

fresh out of Prince of Wales' College

Moratuwa - was 19.

in India and Gandhi's "Quit India"

movement, Moratuwa, a hamlet of

fishermen and carpenters, was peaceful with no trade unions.

L.S.D. Pieris (94)

Swarnamali Amarasuriya (R) with Phyllis de Kretser (representing the Burghers), Srimani Ramachandran (Tamils) and Ayesha Zally (Muslims).

Kretser (representing the Burghers), Srimani Ramachandran (Tamils) and Ayesha Zally (Muslims). Four runners having traversed the length and breadth of the country gave their messages in the four languages to us. Oscar Wijesinghe to me, the late Lakshman Kadirgamar to Srimani, Duncan White to Phyllis and Mohamed A. Sherrif to

Ayesha. The messages were handed over to the Prime Minister. Those were very good times; not corrupted like now. Even if there is

material advancement now. those days were much freer.'

Ursula Wijesuriya (90)

Author and retired English teacher "I was sixteen. Euphoria: Free! Free! The British were not oppressing but this word 'freedom' had so much resonance. We had hopes of better lives than we were leading. Everyone wondered what kind of life it was going to be. The empha-

sis was on the 'free'

Bridget Halpe (86)

Renowned music teacher and

wife of late Prof. Ashley Halpe

"I was born in 1936.

My father was

period I didn't

find a lack of

food, morality,

Since then I

dence of moral values. I

much prefer the sim-

pler system of village

eration of political

headmen to this prolif-

have seen a

cv and deca-

sad degenera-

anything-

etc.

a civil serv-

ant. In that

put a flag. Our dog followed me a miracle we Were the Not much. did not make that much of a difference. I think people used it as an excuse to forget their

branches.

I schooled at three

talents were

I was encour-

organ. There

of any kind.

was no anxiety

There was plenty of food -

cheese, butter -

and the econo-

my was strong.

The train compart-

cushioned in damask. It

was a very comfortable

ments I recall were

zone and time.'

encouraged and

aged to play the

major convents. Our

We had a cadjan shed

climb up that to

in the garden. I tried to

whining. It was landed without broken bones! hopes fulfilled? Becoming free

responsibilities.

Independence, and are we still is a question we all have. I must admit that as a married

woman I have fear of how the situation will affect our future. Will it be safe for our kids? The amount we earn for the family is

Abisheka Pitumpe Lecturer, cybersecurity researcher (Kirindiwela)

"With the new tax revisions, proposed income taxes and yet another electricity bill hike. I don't see any solution in the near future. I didn't plan on leaving the country so soon but I received a full PhD scholarship in New York and therefore am leaving in August.

As much as it hurts me to leave, and I always planned on settling down here in Sri Lanka some day - I believe that life is just going to get harder in Sri Lanka and having more

"The idea of freedom in this country is a very bittersweet concept. Unlike certain countries we are very progressive regarding education for women and career opportunities for women. At least that was the case for me. However, each day is followed by a sense of doom. The constant feeling that

Cilani Wijesinghe Finance professional (Wattala)

"I wish to see a country free of corruption, or at least one with a considerable reduction in it. A plan for the country which is beyond the five years a government gets so that whoever comes to power will continue with the plan and

dom - looking at today's situation, we are unable to fight for each others' own needs.

The road ahead: "I have not

given up on Sri Lanka yet"

After 75 years of freedom, how do they see the future?

BY ANOUSHKA JAYASURIYA AND SHANNON SALGADOE

It's surprising to see how challenging life has become in Sri Lanka now. Even though I dreamed of living here throughout my life, now I only aim to settle down abroad because of the price hikes and the instability of the country and politics."

not even enough for our basic

As a back-up plan I decided

have to move abroad to find

rights and hope for a better

jobs. Till then, I will fight for my



Shanaz Samseer Small business owner (Kandy)

P.G. Senuri Apsara

Undergraduate (Anuradhapura)

"We are going through a journey

since 1948, rising up as Sri Lankans.

Hearing all the brave moments and

incidents that happened back then, I

thought how confident and brave our

people were then. Without being sep-

arated as Sinhalese, Muslims, Tamils,

Burghers, we all fought for our free-

needs. I had to find another "We are completing 75 years of solution and I started doing workshops to find another able to celebrate the victory? Are income we able to enjoy that moment? It that if we are unable to face the current situation anymore, that I

options is safer than staying here in an environment where everything is so unpredictable. However, I hope things have a turn for the better

future.'

soon, and I fully plan on moving back to Sri Lanka after my PhD is completed. I love this country so much, the

people, the environment, and the amazing food. There will never be another country like Sri Lanka and I wish from the bottom of my heart that there will come a day that we can celebrate independence, truly with less stress and more freedom.'



your future will never be secure. The high cost of living and the reduced access to basic necessities

harder. While leaving the country is a constant resonating thought, there's still a smallest spark inside me that's holding me close to home. I intend to not let it die. I have not given up on my Sri Lanka vet."

makes everything in life seem



addressing the core issue of poor governance and corruption, we will not be able to get out of the current rut we are in."

"I don't want to leave my country - I want to help it get out of the situation it is in currently. I also don't want the people leaving at a time the country needs them the most, only to come back when things are better. It is very difficult to live here. Education has not changed, and

health is underfunded, but if we don't stand up

for change now, who will? We are responsible

up and let the corrupt destroy it completely."

for the future of our country and must not give



"The State Council had introduced franchise; they had controlled malaria which was a problem at the time, and started a university which I attended three years later.

"We sang 'God save the King' at the cinemas and every important function, and part of the Sunday morning service was giving thanks to the royal family. We studied the British history books in schools very much like British schools ...

much of a difference-because the country was being given over to people who were very British in their thinking."



Climate worries add to young people's problems

By Tharushi Weerasinghe

With every passing day the urgency of the climate emergency, especially in vulnerable countries like Sri Lanka, is becoming increasingly irrefutable. From the smog in December last year to the devastating floods every year, the impacts of climate change-related disasters continue. On Sri Lanka's 75th Independence Day, young people the generations most at risk of the reckoning of inaction spoke out on the country's future where climate change is concerned. "Adverse impacts of climate change are one of the biggest challenges faced by youth today, especially in developing nations like Sri Lanka," observed Kavindu Ediriweera, Director of Youth Programs at the SLYCAN Trust, a climate change and environmentbased think tank. \Amidst the many issues that young people have to face, it has become an uphill task for their survival and youth should be allowed to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes related to climate change and be involved in policy processes as a key stakeholder, he felt.



free education, free health, universal

Melani

Gunathilak

"But there wasn't going to be



Matheesha Udawatte Barre and Pilates instructor, Music Director (Colombo)

Knowledge dissemination processes must be initiated among youth to enable them to find sustainable mechanisms to contribute towards climate action, he says. "Youth-driven platforms such as

'Global Youth Forum on Climate Change' and 'EthicalX - Climate and Incubation Hub' have given opportunities to youth to express their views and concerns and to develop innovative and transformative climate solutions that connect to local, national, and global processes. "Sri Lanka is one of the most affected countries but can't even predict the impacts because there's so little data and research to go

Kavindu

Ediriweera

on," said Melanie Gunathilaka, founder of Climate Action Now Sri Lanka.

This was an issue when it came to taking prevention measures. The young activist also noted the growing neglect of Sri Lanka's biodiversity. "Sri Lanka is a biodiversity hotspot but as the economic crisis has worsened the dangers posed to it have been pushed to the back burner.'

Given Sri Lanka's position as a small economy, its susceptibility to

false solutions is high. "Right now it looks like we're taking up solutions that aren't actually beneficial for the people and planet in the long term."

Buthmee

Fernando

Yashodhara

Pathanial

Sustainable solutions based on ecological justice would focus on measures to stop pollution and environmental destruction going forward. "Right now the focus seems to be on false solutions that let corporates greenwash their activities without having an actual lasting impact," she says.

With the sea level rising, a lot of coastal communities and the urban poor living in Colombo, which is a wetland area, will face displacement. "And in terms of justice for these people we have a long way to go," she told the Sunday Times adding that grass root consultations were vital for sustainable solutions.

Sri Lanka's rapid rates of deforestation were another concern to young people. "The continuous deforestation causes landslides that endanger

"It's important to invest more in renewable energy, fast," she stressed. She believed that the transition into renewables, especially solar energy, would provide more jobs. "The dependence on

coal plants is obsolete solely due to the abundance of natural resources we possess as a nation."

wildlife and livelihoods of those liv-

ing in hill areas and act as an agent

in micro-climatic changes making

monsoons intense and warm peri-

Fernando told the Sunday Times

adding that the deforestation of

Sinharaja and wetlands around

essential rainforest areas such as

Colombo affects rainfall and natural

drainage increases flood risk and the

consequential displacement of peo-

ods much warmer," student Buthmee

"We need global responsibility and solutions," said artist Yashodhara Pathanjali. Conscious consumerism is a common responsibility, she says. "It is our money that is fuelling this disaster, so if we don't buy, if we don't consume, harmful products, the bigger systems will be forced to change." She noted that focusing on the reduction /elimination of plastic garbage from packaging, and strengthening food security with more community farms and safer farming practices. could achieve a lot for Sri Lanka in terms of minimizing climate change impacts.

not their own agenda. The mindset of the majority should also change to show that the country belongs to and equally represents everyone who lives here."

"If we go down the same path without

Clifford Fernando Banker (Kandy)

"It's going to be a difficult period for the country. While we are challenged with multiple issues in Sri Lanka, issues like the global financial crisis and the war in Ukraine will play their part in making it a tougher year for all of us."

"I hope the political leaders will get their act together - they have failed us miserably. Leaders should have the ability to lead by example if they expect the people to follow. Sri Lankans are very resilient and will buckle up and do

what it takes to come out of the present crisis. If the leaders could act wisely, use some common sense and put their words into action, we will be able to manoeuvre through these challenging times.'

I won't migrate but I sincerely hope there will be change in Sri Lanka. All our attitudes need to change, better discipline is needed, people need to obey rules and also show more empathy towards each other. Young committed leaders with a vision to make Sri Lanka what it should be is what we need. I hope these changes come forth."



By Malaka Rodrigo

uring the colonial period, British hunters killed thousands of elephants, even offering rewards for those who killed the beasts. A report indicates that more than 5,000 elephants were systematically eliminated within a period of 10 years during British rule, with some hunters like Major Thomas William Rogers slaughtering 1,400 elephants.

Elephants are now a protected species. But in the past ten years, around 3000 elephants have been killed, primarily because of the Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) that reached its peak in 2022 with a toll of 145 human and 439 elephant lives. The official elephant number of Sri Lanka is around 6.000 and the country now loses more than 5% of the total elephant population annually. If no action is taken this would further escalate and this is not a pressure Sri Lanka's elephant population can bear in the long run, warns Prof. Devaka Weerakoon, an expert on the ecology and behaviour of Asian Elephants.

During the last ten years, the Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) had claimed nearly a thousand lives. Elephants occupy over 60%

Human Elephant Conflict: No sign of easing

land area and as people are resident in nearly 70% of the elephant range, HEC is inevitable, but unplanned development has made it worse over the last few decades. The mega irrigation projects in the post-colonial period aimed at cultivating the lands in the dry zone are a root of this conflict as the behaviour and the needs of elephants were not properly addressed," says Prof. Weerakoon.

Elephants were driven out of many of their traditional grounds and the idea was to restrict them to protected areas. But protected areas are mainly demarcated as hydrocatchments of large reservoirs rather than areas aimed at conservation. "No proper habitat enrichments in these protected areas were carried out reducing their carrying capacity, so not finding enough food in these protected areas, they had only two choices: either die of starvation or come out of the fences and find food elsewhere," says Prof. Weerakoon.

The Anuradhapura District experiences the worst of the HEC. Last year 37 human lives and 90 elephants were lost. Polonnaruwa remains second with 18

human lives together with 73 elephants killed. The main livelihood of people in both these districts is paddy cultivation. "In the Polonnaruwa District farmers face a range of issues from lack of fertilizer to water shortages, but above all, the Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) remains the district's worst issue, says Polonnaruwa Divisional Secretary Dharmasiri Weerathunga. In most cases, it is the breadwinner of the family who gets killed due to elephant attacks, putting the whole family in jeopardy, so HEC has become a socio-economic issue for the district that is already stricken by poverty, Mr. Weerathunga said.

The government pays one million rupees to the families for deaths. Property loss or crop damages also take a big financial toll. The government also spends a colossal sum on HEC mitigation activities such as constructing electric fences, distributing elephant crackers, and translocating elephants. In 2019 and 2020, Rs 490 million was used to build 4,756 km of electric fences, but the statistics indicate the solutions failed to achieve the intended results

"The HEC mitigating actions fail because they are not in line with the solutions backed by science," says Dr. Sumith Pilapitiya, former Director General of Department of Wildlife Conservation. It is proven that translocations, elephant drives, or building electric fences along administrative boundaries would not work, but we keep on trying them, mostly as politicians want quick solutions, Dr. Pilapitiya said.

Sri Lanka's elephant conservation policy was adopted in 2006. In 2020, President Gotabhaya Rajapakse formed a presidential committee to come up with a national action plan that sadly became just another document on the shelf.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has set up another committee to oversee the implementation of this action plan in July last year under Dr. Pilapitiya. Other than wildlife and forest departments, this committee consists of local agencies that can contribute to escalating the HEC as well as those that can assist in controlling it.

"Based on scientific analysis, the electric fence is still the most effective solution, but

their success depends on the location and how the fence is maintained," Dr. Pilapitiya says. In the last 25 years, we have been placing them on administrative boundaries of the protected areas under the Wildlife Department where sometimes elephants are found on both sides of the fence. The elephant doesn't understand the human's administrative boundaries and moves through ecological boundaries, so the new action plan aims at relocating these fences between elephant habitats and non-elephant habitats," Dr. Pilapitiya said.

The plan also encourages community fencing around the villages and agriculture plots. Villagers are expected to be part of maintaining these fences with the support of the government agencies active at the field level such as divisional secretariats. The plan will be first implemented in Anuradhapura and Kurunegala Districts.

We need to find innovative methods, such as ways to increase the productivity in agricultural lands without trying to clear more forests in order not to let the HEC escalate further, says Prof. Weerakoon who is not very optimistic about a meaningful solution being achieved without the necessary political will.