

## Lanka to swelter through April and May, Met Dept warns

Sri Lanka is set to experience continued hot weather conditions until May, the Department of Meteorology has warned.

Additional Director General of Meteorology Ajith Wijemanna said the current heatwave is expected to ease only slightly once the southwest monsoon sets in toward the latter part of May.

Wijemanna explained that the island is currently in the first inter-monsoon period, characterised by low wind speeds and shifting wind directions, which contribute to rising temperatures. Reduced cloud cover and the sun's direct position over the country are causing increased heating of land and sea, generating heat waves and warmer atmospheric conditions.

He cautioned that the hottest period of the day will be between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., urging the public to limit outdoor activities during these hours.

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A queue at a petrol station in Kandy. Sri Lanka's fuel stocks will last no more than 25 days at current consumption levels, the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation's managing director, Mayura Neththikumarage, told the media on 20 March as the country's energy crisis deepened sharply against a backdrop of war in West Asia and surging global oil prices. (Ashkar Thasleem/Al Jazeera)

## ADB warns West Asia conflict threatens Asia-Pacific growth

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (26 March 2026) — The conflict in the Middle East could lower economic growth in developing Asia and the Pacific by up to 1.3 percentage points over 2026-2027 and raise inflation by 3.2 percentage points if energy market disruptions last more than a year, according to new research by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The conflict affects economies in Asia and the Pacific through higher energy prices, supply chain and trade disruptions, and tighter financial conditions. Tourism and remittances could also be impacted.

An ADB brief outlines three risk scenarios indicating that effects on the region's developing

economies will depend largely on the duration of disruptions. Under a short-lived conflict, energy price pressures would ease relatively quickly. More prolonged disruptions would lead to larger and more persistent impacts on growth and inflation.

Adverse effects on growth will be most severe for economies in developing Southeast Asia and the Pacific, with inflation rising highest in South Asian economies. The scenarios reflect the high degree of uncertainty around how the conflict and the associated disruptions will evolve, and should be treated with caution. In addition to higher

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# War-linked power crunch pushes Lanka to four-day week

By AMAL JAYASINGHE

(AFP) Millions of Sri Lankans enjoyed a government-ordered extra day off on Wednesday as the island nation battles an energy crisis triggered by the Middle East war.

Rail and bus stations were largely deserted as most state institutions, schools and universities shifted to a four-day working week.

"I am really enjoying the mid-week break because it is a fully paid holiday," said housing ministry official Prarthana Perera, 40.

Her office, like many government departments in Battaramulla — the capital's main administrative hub — was closed.

Banks operated on shorter hours, while many private firms introduced work-from-home arrangements, industry bodies said, urging members to help curb energy use.

Sri Lanka has already raised fuel prices by a third since the United States and Israel began bombing Iran, triggering retaliatory attacks that have disrupted global energy supplies.

About half of Sri Lanka's electricity is generated by coal and diesel.

The cabinet has set a target of cutting electricity consumption by 25 percent, ordering street lamps switched off and asking civil servants to use table fans instead of power-hungry air conditioners.

Shipping executive Varuna Perera welcomed the day off but was uncertain of its impact.

"It will not be effective in the long term," Perera said. "But the government will have a breather for a couple of weeks, to save some energy."

Environmental lawyer Ravindranath Dabare was more sceptical, arguing the move would have limited impact as those needing government services would have to travel on other days.

"We can't close hospitals... the doctors and health officials can't work from home," Dabare said.

The influential Chamber of Commerce said it had urged members to follow government guidelines or adopt remote work where possible, if

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## Iran hits key Kuwaiti ports as Middle East tensions intensify

(Daily Jang)

Kuwait's main commercial port was damaged in a drone attack today, authorities say, as Iran pressed on with its campaign in the Gulf in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes.

The Shuwaikh port was targeted at dawn in a separate attack. "by enemy drones, preliminary reports revealed material damage but no human casualties," the Kuwait port authority says in a statement on X.

Moreover, Kuwaiti authorities have reported another attack on the coun-



A satellite image of smoke billowing in the vicinity Kuwait International Airport as Iran presses on with its attacks. AFP

try's infrastructure, targeting Mubarak Al-Kabeer port on its Bubiyan island.

According to Kuwait's Ministry of Public Works, the port infrastructure was attacked by "hostile drones and cruise missiles."

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## SriLankan sees 13-pct revenue increase following AI-led digital shift

**ECONOMYNEXT** – SriLankan Airlines has recorded a boost in revenue following the rollout of a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) powered management system, the airline said on Friday.

The carrier said it had implemented a next-generation Origin and Destination revenue management platform to automate pricing and inventory.

The system uses predictive analytics to offer real-time seat availability, allowing the airline to adjust prices dynamically based on market demand.

This technology served as a key driver for the 13 percent growth recorded by SriLankan Airlines during the first three quarters of the 2025-2026 financial year.

"Transitioning to a dynamic, integrated revenue management system reflects our strategic focus on remaining

agile in a competitive industry," said Chamara Perera, Group Head of IT at SriLankan Airlines.

He noted that the shift allows the airline to respond faster to market fluctuations and modern traveler demands.

The platform is powered by technology from global providers PROS and Amadeus.

By leveraging these algorithms, the airline can better align its seat capacity with passenger demand and optimize the allocation of premium seats.

The initiative has also gained international recognition, with the airline winning the Growth Catalyst Award at the Outperformer Customer Awards 2025 in Las Vegas.

Locally, it secured a Silver Award in the AI and Data Science category at the National Project Management Excellence Awards.

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## Indian scientists decode moon's titanium-rich basalts ahead of Chandrayaan-4 mission



Ilmenite is a titanium-iron oxide mineral that is an important ore of titanium on earth.

By S VENKAT NARAYAN  
OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has planned the Chandrayaan-4 mission for 2028. It aims to collect rock samples from the moon and return them to the earth, making the choice of landing site critical.

The moon's surface is covered by ancient lava flows that are often different from those found on the earth. While volcanic rocks on the earth rarely contain more than 2% titanium

dioxide (TiO<sub>2</sub>), some lunar basalts — common volcanic rocks — carry up to 18%, a fact that planetary scientists have struggled to explain for decades.

A new study by researchers from IIT-Kharagpur and the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad, published in *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, has now offered an experimental account of how these titanium-rich basalts could have formed.

The study is authored by Himela Moitra, Sujoy Ghosh, Tamalkanti Mukherjee, Saibal Gupta, and Kuljeet

Kaur Marhas.

Prof. Ghosh, one of the lead authors and associate professor at IIT-Kharagpur, said, "Regions near the lunar south pole, such as those being evaluated for Chandrayaan-4, including areas near Shiv Shakti region, have been studied in detail using data from Chandrayaan-2, NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, and other missions. What our work adds is a deep interior perspective."

According to the study's first author Himela Moitra, "High-resolution microscopic cameras on landers can

help identify minerals in lunar rocks, while instruments such as X-ray fluorescence and X-ray diffraction can determine their chemical composition before collection."

"Spectroscopic tools such as Raman and visible-near infrared spectroscopy can help confirm the mineral phases in rocks before they are collected. Similar instruments have already been successfully used in Mars missions," Tamalkanti Mukherjee, a PhD student at IIT Kharagpur and co-author of the study, added.

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## News

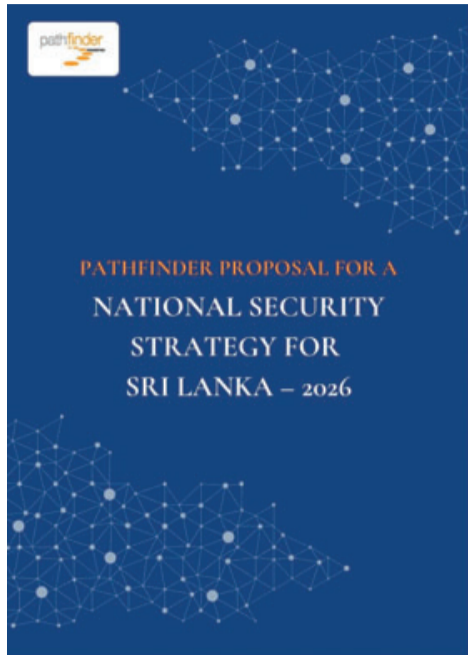
# Pathfinder Foundation launches Proposal for a National Security Strategy for Sri Lanka

The Pathfinder Foundation launched a proposal for a National Security Strategy for Sri Lanka—2026, emphasising the urgent need for a comprehensive and state-led national security framework.

The proposed strategy contends that an effective National Security Strategy (NSS) must be based on a robust National Security Policy, which provides the long-term framework for protecting the country's sovereignty, stability, and development in an increasingly uncertain global environment. The Pathfinder Foundation's initiative, developed through consultations with academics, retired military officers, legal experts, and policy specialists, seeks to stimulate national discussion and support the formulation of an official state policy. The launch event was attended by those involved in preparing this proposal, heads of local think tanks, and media representatives.

Chairman of the Pathfinder Foundation, Amb. (Retd.) Bernard Goonetilleke, in his presentation of the report, emphasised that many major and middle powers, including the United States, China, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, and Japan, have developed formal national security strategies. He pointed out that several South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore, also rely on NSS, whereas Sri Lanka still lacks a single, officially adopted National Security Policy (NSP) or a National Security Strategy to guide long-term strategic planning.

The report highlights key strategic priorities across several sectors,



including good governance, internal security, cybersecurity, energy and food security, health security, human capital development, and environmental protection. It also employs the internationally recognised DIME framework (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economy) to guide the coordinated use of national power in advancing Sri Lanka's interests. Among its main institutional recommendations are establishing a fully legislated National Security Council, creating a National Security Secretariat, and officially appointing a National Security Advisor to coordinate policy and implementation across the government.

The full text of the report is available <https://pathfinderfoundation.org/publications>, and your comments a/ welcome via [pm@pathfinderfoundation.org](mailto:pm@pathfinderfoundation.org)



Chief Incumbent of the Nawala Vimala Viharaya and Principal Ratmalane Mallikaramaya Privena Ven Beragama Vimaladhamma Thera offering a Prikara to Mahanayake of the Kotte Sri Kalyani Samagri Sangha Sabha Ven Ittepane Dhammalankara thero during a ceremony held at the temple last week to mark the 59th birthday. Pic by Thushara Athapaththu

## SriLankan...

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The upgrade positions the carrier for long-term success in modern airline retailing, Kshanaka Saparamadu, Head of Revenue Management, said.

The airline expects the system to improve its ability to attract high-value connecting passengers and strengthen its position in the global aviation landscape.

## Lanka...

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Authorities also advised drinking plenty of water, wearing light-colored clothing, and avoiding prolonged exposure to direct sunlight, particularly for children and the elderly.

The Meteorology Department further noted that rainfall may remain limited in the coming months, with drier conditions possible due to climate variability.

## ADB...

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energy prices, they account for broader supply chain disruptions and a global tightening of financial conditions.

"Prolonged energy disruptions could force economies in developing Asia and the Pacific to navigate a difficult trade-off between weaker growth and higher inflation," said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. "Governments should focus on containing market stress and protecting the most vulnerable, while adopting policies to improve longer-term resilience."

The brief presents four key policy responses:

– Policies should focus on stabilization rather than suppression of price signals. Allowing higher energy prices to pass through, at least in part, can encourage energy conservation, fuel switching, and investment in alternative energy sources. Broad price controls or generalized subsidies risk distorting incentives, delaying adjustment, and misallocating resources.

– Fiscal support, where needed, should be targeted and time-bound. Priority should be given to supporting

vulnerable households and the most affected industries. Well-targeted measures can cushion the social impact of higher prices while containing fiscal costs and preserving incentives to adjust to the shock.

– Central banks should focus on limiting excessive market volatility while keeping a close watch on inflation expectations. The priority should be to provide targeted liquidity support to preserve orderly market functioning. Tightening policy too aggressively risks amplifying growth headwinds and exacerbating financial volatility. While some tightening may be warranted, anchoring inflation expectations with effective central bank communication will remain key.

– Governments should curb energy demand where feasible. Practical measures include temperature mandates to limit air-conditioning, cuts to non-essential lighting, peak-hour electricity-saving campaigns, and work-from-home or staggered schedules. Incentivizing public transport use and car-free days in urban areas on public holidays can also help reduce transport fuel use.

# After toppling old regimes in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh Gen Z Wave reshapes Nepal's politics as Balendra Shah assumes office

BY S VENKAT NARAYAN  
OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** In a defining political moment for South Asia, Nepal's government led by KP Sharma Oli collapsed last year under sustained youth-led protests, paving the way for the swearing-in of Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah as Prime Minister on 27 March 2026.

The development marks the third major instance in South Asia—after Sri Lanka and Bangladesh—where Gen Z-driven movements have directly contributed to regime changes, signalling a powerful generational shift in politics.

Youth Surge Forces Oli's Exit  
The immediate trigger for the 8-9 September 2025 protests in Nepal was a mix of economic distress, unemployment, and frustration with entrenched political leadership. But what set this movement apart was the scale and discipline of youth mobilisation.

Thousands of young Nepalis coordinated protests through social media, sustaining pressure on the government for weeks. Demonstrations spread rapidly across Kathmandu and other cities, with first-time voters and urban youth forming the backbone of the agitation.

As protests intensified and political allies began withdrawing support, Oli found himself increasingly isolated. Within days, he resigned, acknowledging what he described as a "changed national mood."

The elevation of Balendra Shah—widely known as "Balen"—represents a dramatic break from Nepal's traditional political order. A Bengaluru-educated civil engineer and former rapper, Shah first gained national attention after winning the Kathmandu mayoral election as an independent candidate.

As mayor, he built a reputation for administrative efficiency, anti-corruption drives, and direct engagement with citizens—particularly the youth. His outsider image and delivery-focused governance made him the natural rallying point in the post-Oli vacuum.

Political parties, responding to strong public sentiment, coalesced around Shah as a consensus leader capable of restoring credibility to governance.

The template for such youth-driven upheaval in South Asia was set in Colombo in 2022. What began in March 2022 as scattered protests over economic collapse soon evolved into



Balendra Shah being sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister in Kathmandu on 27 March 2026.

the Aragalaya—a sustained, largely youth-led occupation at Colombo's Galle Face Green.

For nearly four months, students, professionals, and ordinary citizens maintained relentless pressure on the government. The movement peaked in July 2022, when protesters stormed key state buildings.

Then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned on 14 July 2022, marking a dramatic end to his administration.

In the political churn that followed, anti-establishment sentiment carried into electoral politics. Anura Kumara Dissanayake emerged as a major beneficiary, with his appeal among youth and reform-oriented voters helping translate protest energy into electoral success.

In Dhaka, protests against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina followed a different trajectory. Beginning in late 2024, demonstrations—driven largely by students and Gen Z activists—continued for six to nine months, making it a more prolonged and diffuse movement than Sri Lanka's.

University campuses became nerve centres of dissent, while digital platforms enabled sustained coordination across the country. Protesters raised concerns over electoral integrity, governance, and economic pressures.

The prolonged agitation weakened the government's position, eventually leading to a political transition. Opposition leader Tarique Rahman capitalised on the anti-incumbency wave, using the momentum generated by youth protests to stage a significant political comeback

in the electoral arena.

A Regional Pattern Emerges  
Across Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, a clear pattern is visible: Protests lasting months, not days  
Youth-led, digitally coordinated movements

– Collapse of entrenched leadership structures  
– Conversion of street energy into electoral outcomes

"Young voters are no longer passive participants," said a regional political analyst. "They are agenda-setters, narrative builders, and now power brokers."

Challenges Ahead for Nepal's New Leadership

Despite the optimism surrounding Shah's rise, Nepal faces significant challenges. Economic vulnerabilities persist, including inflation, limited industrial expansion, and dependence on remittances.

Shah's lack of experience in national politics could test his ability to manage coalition pressures and geopolitical balancing, particularly with India and China. There is also the larger question of whether protest-driven momentum can be institutionalised into long-term reform.

Gen Z and Global Regime Change  
The rise of Gen Z as a political force extends far beyond South Asia. Across continents, young people are driving movements demanding accountability, climate action, and democratic reform. Activists like Greta Thunberg have shown how digital-native generations can mobilise global opinion.

From protests in Iran to demonstrations in Latin America and Europe, Gen Z has combined street action with online strategy to challenge authority. Their emphasis on transparency and inclusivity is reshaping governance norms, often forcing rapid political responses and, in some cases, triggering regime change or significant policy shifts.

Nepal's position is more than a leadership change—it is part of a broader redefinition of political legitimacy in South Asia. Authority is increasingly being shaped not by hierarchy or legacy, but by responsiveness and public trust.

For millions of young citizens across the region, the message is clear: political power is no longer inherited—it can be claimed.

As Balendra Shah took oath as Prime Minister in Kathmandu on Friday, that generational shift stands fully realised.

## War...

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"business continuity can be effectively maintained".

And Sri Lanka's leading technology firm WSO2 made working from home mandatory for its 500 employees on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

"This is our way of contributing to the national cause," WSO2 spokeswoman Zaithoon Bin-Ahamed told AFP.

Media Minister Nalinda Jayatissa said the government had yet to assess the impact of the energy-saving measures, but expected broad compli-

ance.

Sri Lanka has been running coal and diesel power plants at full capacity to meet electricity demand.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake urged electric vehicle owners not to charge their cars overnight, as they would add a surge to an already strained grid.

He asked motorists instead to plug in during the day, when excess solar power is available.

Officials said the country's diesel stocks are sufficient to last until mid-

May, while petrol could last a week longer.

The government is seeking oil supplies from Russia and hopes to tap Iran for crude oil, Jayatissa said.

Political commentator Kusal Perera said the crisis also presented scope to boost productivity across the state sector.

"They must use this opportunity to have a national dialogue on improving productivity," he told AFP. "We have to address the inefficiency in the public sector."

## Iran...

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It said there were material damages, but no casualties reported.

Middle East authorities also reported Saudi Arabia's air defence systems have intercepted multiple drones targeting parts of the Eastern Region.

The Saudi Defence Ministry confirmed the latest incident, marking the second attempted aerial strike on the capital within an hour.

Beginning as a direct confrontation, the US-Iran

and Israel conflict is now rapidly evolving into a multi-front regional war with growing risks for civilians, infrastructure, and global stability.

Additionally, with back-to-back attempts to target key regions, the Saudi military remains on high alert as regional tensions continue to surge.

The ongoing conflict involving Iran, Israel and allied forces has killed thousands across the Middle East.

## Indian...

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The European Space Agency (ESA) is also planning to launch its Lunar Volatile and Mineralogy Mapping Orbiter mission in 2028 to map the distribution of water and ilmenite on the moon.

Roughly 4.3 billion years ago, the moon was still cooling from a global ocean of molten rock. In the process, olivine and orthopyroxene crystallised first, then plagioclase, which floated up to form the moon's pale crust.

The last to crystallise was a dense, iron- and titanium-rich layer containing minerals called clinopyroxene, ilmenite, and fayalitic olivine. Scientists call this the ilmenite-bearing cumulate (IBC) layer.

The IBC layer was too dense to stay put. Gravity pulled it downwards through the less dense, magnesium-rich mantle in a process called cumulate overturn. As it sank into the hotter regions of the lunar interior, the IBC layer began to melt. The titanium-rich partial melts it produced are widely thought to be the source of the moon's titanium-rich basalts—but the exact mechanism has remained contested.

When researchers previously tried to melt IBC rocks in the lab, the resulting liquids didn't match the basalts on the moon's surface: they either didn't have enough magnesium or were too dense to rise and erupt as lava. The authors of the new study set out to find the missing link.

They used a piston-cylinder apparatus at IIT Kharagpur, capable of exerting pressures up to 3 gigapascals (GPa) of pressure—equivalent to that under 700 km deep inside the moon—and temperatures of 1,500 °C.

The team designed two sets of experiments. In

one set, they placed a thin layer of a synthetic IBC layer above a layer of San Carlos olivine, a mineral on the earth that is a good proxy for the moon's magnesium-rich mantle, inside a capsule and subjected it to pressures of 1-3 GPa and temperatures of 1,075-1,500 °C.

This setup mimicked the place where a sinking IBC layer comes in contact with the mantle. In the other kind of experiments, the team blended the two materials together before subjecting them to similar conditions, simulating a chemical interaction during a slow descent or ascent.

The results of the tests suggested that basalts high in titanium were created in a complex process involving both reactions and mixing.

The first kind of experiments generated melts containing 9-19% titanium dioxide. But they were stubbornly low in magnesium oxide, which is the same discrepancy older studies had run into. The mixed experiments produced basalts that were too high in magnesium and too low in titanium.

"Indian laboratories, including those at IIT Kharagpur, PRL Ahmedabad, and other ISRO centres, have made significant progress in recent years," Prof. Ghosh said. "Our study demonstrates that high-pressure experimental work relevant to planetary interiors can now be carried out entirely within India, marking an important step toward building indigenous capability in planetary science."

When the team simulated a combination of these processes and outcomes on a computer, they found that some molten rocks could have risen directly and erupted with moderate amounts of titanium. Those

More than 1,900 people have died in Iran, while nearly 1,100 have been killed in Lebanon amid continued airstrikes and cross-border fighting.

The war has also claimed the lives of 13 US military personnel, along with several civilians in the Gulf region on land and at sea.

During the latest operations in Lebanon, at least 18 people have died, along with four Israeli soldiers killed during operations in Lebanon.

rocks very rich in titanium could have however become stuck deep inside the moon. Later, fresh magma rising from below could have mixed with these trapped pockets and the combined molten mass could have erupted as lava rich in titanium.

Per the study, this two-stage model could successfully reproduce the observed magnesium, titanium, silicon, and iron contents of the moon's high-titanium basalts, but underestimated aluminium oxide and calcium oxide.

The model could also explain why volcanic activity high in titanium continued throughout the moon's geological history rather than being confined to its earliest period: because the natural satellite had a repository of titanium-rich melts in its interior for billions of years, waiting for the right conditions to bring them to the surface.

## DEATH

**PETER WILLIAMS** of 39 Thorley Hill, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, UK. Beloved husband of Merle, nee Edirisinghe, loving father of Clifford, brother in law of Vianney, Athulla, Srilali, the late Vasantha and Loyola of Boralukada Waluwa, Baddegama, Sri Lanka, is called to rest and safe in the arms of Jesus. Remains will lie at the Chapel of Rest, at Daniel Robinson's, Bishop's Stortford, UK and the funeral service and cremation will take place on 1st April at 4.30 p.m.

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## Editorial

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## No-shows, 'witch-hunt' and waste of energy

Teachers' trade unions are protesting against what they describe as a political witch-hunt against some of their members who did not attend a meeting chaired by Prime Minister and Minister of Education Dr. Harini Amarasuriya in Tangalle on Sunday, 15 March, 2026. Many seats in the Tangalle Municipal Council auditorium, where the meeting was held, were left empty by no-shows. The trade unions have taken exception to a letter sent by the Tangalle Zonal Education Office to the school principals in the area, asking them to explain why their staff members did not attend the aforesaid meeting. Their consternation is understandable. When the show cause letter, dated 24 March 2026, became public and got bad press, some trade unionists speculated that the government politicians might try to dissociate themselves from it. There is reason to believe that the letter at issue would not have been issued if the absence of teachers had not become a matter of concern to the government, and therefore it is unlikely that the Zonal Education Director who called for explanation from the school principals has done so unbeknownst to her superiors in the Education Ministry.

Teachers or other state workers should be free to decide whether to attend meetings, etc., held outside their regular working hours, especially during weekends, and they must not be penalised for skipping such events. In a way, the above-mentioned show cause letter can be considered a kind of comeuppance for the state-sector teachers who, together with their trade union leaders, went out of their way to bring the JVP/NPP to power. So did other state employees and their trade unions, as evident from the postal vote results in 2024. Now, it is mandatory for them to attend even unofficial meetings chaired by the ruling party politicians!

Why should government politicians travel all the way from Colombo to faraway places to chair meetings while the country is facing a crippling energy crisis, which has prompted the ruling party politicians to urge the public to reduce fuel consumption. Shouldn't they practise what they preach?

VIP motorcades consist of dozens of vehicles, some which operate undercover, blending into traffic at present as the current leaders came to power, promising to disband VIP security divisions and do away with huge security contingents. Whenever they travel, one can see lead cars, pilot vehicles, decoy cars and many other vehicles carrying counter-assault teams. They ought to travel less and help save state funds and precious fuel these days. They must follow the energy-saving guidelines issued by the Commissioner General of Essential Services to the state sector. Almost all the meetings attended by the government leaders can be held online. State officials also have to travel long distances in official vehicles to attend the events 'graced' by politicians in power. Nothing usually comes of such meetings, which only help politicians wax eloquent and say very little in many words.

In Pakistan, fuel allocation for the state sector has been halved as an energy crisis management measure; 60% of the state-owned vehicles have been taken off the roads, and, most of all, fuel quotas for ministers have been abolished. Sri Lanka must adopt such austerity measures, and ensure that the politicians share in the hardships faced by the public. After all, the present-day leaders came to power, promising to use public transport. This is the best time for them to make good on their election promises, and travel with the ordinary people in crowded buses and trains. They claim to be very popular, and a research organisation would have the public believe that the approval rating of the incumbent government has increased to a whopping 65%. So, there is no reason why the ruling party politicians should hesitate to travel with hapless commuters.

About two months ago, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake went out for a constitutional with only a single security officer, in Jaffna, and the government released a video of his famous walk to gain political mileage. If the former war zone is safe for the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief to move about without heavy security, why can't other government politicians travel in buses and trains or cycle to work? Above all, they insist in Parliament and elsewhere that the law-abiding citizens do not have to worry about frequent shooting incidents, which they describe as turf wars among drug dealers. They need not worry about their safety at all, for they say they have no underworld links. Shouldn't they set an example to the public at least during the current fuel crisis by cancelling meetings and using public transport?

# After Iranian frigate sinks near Sri Lanka, a call for a Colombo-based framework to prevent regional spiral

By DR. ACHALA GUNASEKARA ROCKWELL

The US Navy's sinking of an Iranian frigate IRIS Dena just off Sri Lanka's southern coast has done more than disturb the waters of the Indian Ocean. It has jolted a small island nation into the gravitational pull of a geopolitical drama that is no longer confined to Tehran's crumbling political architecture. Sri Lanka did not seek this moment. Yet history has a habit of choosing its bystanders, and the detonation beneath the waves has now placed Colombo at the fault line of Iran's post regime turmoil. What had been a fractured and uncertain transition has suddenly acquired a maritime focal point, one that carries the potential for escalation, misjudgment, and the opportunistic meddling of regional powers eager to shape the emerging order.

In response, Sri Lanka has moved with a discipline that belies its size. Naval vessels were dispatched within hours to secure the wreck site. A formal inquiry was announced even before public speculation could harden into rumor. Senior officials established discreet channels with the International Maritime Organization to ensure that the investigation proceeds within an internationally recognized framework. Throughout these actions, the government has maintained a posture of strict neutrality. Yet the neutrality itself is a message. It signals that Sri Lanka intends to steady the situation without becoming entangled in the rivalries now radiating outward from Iran's internal collapse.

For weeks, analysts have warned that Iran's unfolding transition was approaching a dangerous tipping point. That warning has now come to pass. The crisis is no longer political alone. It is no longer a matter of rival factions disputing legitimacy in distant capitals. It has become a security crisis with consequences that wash onto the shores of states that never imagined they would be pulled into the vortex.

It is into this unpredictable moment that I have advanced the proposal known as the Colombo Accord. It is presented not as a government blueprint, but as a scholarly intervention grounded in the mechanics of negotiated transitions and the realities of regional security. The Accord outlines a multi-phase framework for structured dialogue among Iran's four principal factions and relevant international stakeholders. In any week, the initiative would have been timely. In this week, with Sri Lanka thrust into the story by the accident of geography and the violence of the sea, its logic has become unavoidable. The stakes have risen. So has the urgency.

### A Maritime Tragedy Highlights a Political Vacuum

The sinking of the Iranian frigate, still the subject of an evolving investigation, has unleashed a torrent of speculation that mirrors the broader uncertainty consuming Iran's post regime landscape. Tehran's provisional authorities have already gestured toward sabotage. Within Iran's rival factions, whispers circulate that the incident may be a settling of scores disguised as misfortune. Regional analysts, quick to see the hidden hand of intelligence services, suggest the possibility of covert action by states with long standing grievances against Tehran. No version of events has been substantiated, yet each interpretation reveals the same unsettling truth. A nation struggling to define its political future is now projecting its instability outward, and the tremor has been felt far beyond its territorial waters.

In the aftermath, Iran's political factions have turned upon one another with renewed ferocity. The sinking has become a canvas on which competing narratives of legitimacy are being hastily painted, each faction scrambling to depict itself as the victim of a conspiracy and its rivals as the likely authors of national humiliation. As Tehran's internal quarrels intensify, regional powers have begun repositioning their naval assets nearer to the Indian Ocean's key transit routes. The maritime movements speak more loudly than the official communiqués. They betray a quiet preparation for whatever comes next, whether escalation, opportunity, or a larger realignment triggered by the vacuum in Iran.

For Sri Lanka, the event has created a delicate and unfamiliar burden. The country now finds itself attempting to preserve its neutrality while managing the political sensitivities of hosting the wreckage of a foreign military vessel barely beyond its shoreline. Every statement must be calibrated, every operational decision measured. An island that has long viewed geopolitical turbulence as something observed from afar must now contend with the fact that great power politics can arrive not by choice or invitation, but as debris drifting toward its beaches.

The tragedy at sea has made unmistakably clear what distant observers sometimes forget. Geography offers no immunity when instability expands beyond its point of origin. In a world where maritime space is both the arena of commerce and the stage of strategic rivalry, even a nation seemingly far from the epicenter of conflict can find itself drawn into its orbit.

### Why Colombo Now Matters More Than Ever



IRIS Dena

In response, Sri Lanka has moved with a discipline that belies its size. Naval vessels were dispatched within hours to secure the wreck site. A formal inquiry was announced even before public speculation could harden into rumor. Senior officials established discreet channels with the International Maritime Organization to ensure that the investigation proceeds within an internationally recognized framework. Throughout these actions, the government has maintained a posture of strict neutrality. Yet the neutrality itself is a message. It signals that Sri Lanka intends to steady the situation without becoming entangled in the rivalries now radiating outward from Iran's internal collapse.

My proposal for the Colombo Accord predates the sinking of the Iranian frigate, yet the incident has given the framework a sharper edge and a sense of immediacy that no academic theorizing could have supplied. Iran's transition has long been fractured among four principal blocs. Monarchists cling to the memory of a political order that once anchored Iran in a very different world. The National Council of Resistance of Iran (a coalition of Iranian dissident groups) and the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK)—an exiled Iranian opposition group advocating for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic to establish a secular, democratic state—operate with a disciplined organizational machinery that inspires both loyalty and unease. The technocrats and remnants of the Artesh, the conventional Islamic Republic of Iran Army, represent the continuity of a state apparatus that refuses to vanish with the fall of its governing ideology. The democratic coalitions, particularly those rooted in Iran's ethnic peripheries, carry their own visions of a future that balances autonomy with nationhood. Their rivalry has always posed a significant risk to Iran's internal stability, but until now it remained largely contained within the fractured political landscape of a country struggling to reinvent itself.

The loss of the frigate near Sri Lanka's waters has altered the nature of the crisis. What had been an internal contest for legitimacy has tipped outward. It has become transnational, touching actors and geographies that never sought to be involved. The sinking is not merely a maritime accident. It is an early signal that Iran's instability possesses a centrifugal force capable of drawing in distant states through the mechanisms of happenstance, miscalculation, or opportunistic interference. When a nation in turmoil radiates uncertainty into the sea lanes of the Indo Pacific, it is no longer possible to treat its troubles as an isolated matter.

The Colombo Accord argues that Sri Lanka, or any similarly neutral Indo Pacific venue, provides both psychological distance and geopolitical safety essential for meaningful dialogue. This distance is not a luxury. It is a structural requirement for factions that have spent decades regarding one another as existential threats. Colombo's neutrality was once a diplomatic asset, useful but not indispensable. After the frigate incident, that neutrality has acquired a different kind of weight. It has become a stabilizing counterpoint to the suspicion that now permeates the region. When the waters grow crowded with vessels watching one another, calculating advantages, and anticipating the next provocation, a neutral shoreline becomes more than a symbolic refuge. It becomes a strategic terrain upon

which the first steps toward de-escalation can plausibly be taken.

Sri Lanka did not ask for this role, yet circumstances have placed the island in a position where neutrality is no longer simply a posture. It is a form of strategic relevance. The calm that Colombo projects in the face of a foreign frigate resting near its coast demonstrates a kind of quiet capability that the region increasingly needs. The Accord seeks to build upon this moment, not to entangle Sri Lanka in the ambitions of others, but to offer a platform on which Iran's fractured actors might finally find a way out of their zero sum contest.

### A Scholar's Framework for a Global Crisis

The Colombo Accord remains, at its core, an intellectual construct rather than an instrument of statecraft. It was conceived not in the corridors of a foreign ministry, but in the analytical space where theory, history, and strategic necessity intersect. Yet the fact that it is an academic design does not diminish its relevance. On the contrary, scholarly frameworks often precede political action, especially when governments find themselves reacting to crises they did not anticipate and do not fully understand. The Accord offers a disciplined structure for a transition that has so far unfolded as a series of disconnected improvisations by actors who distrust one another far more than they fear the consequences of inaction.

The framework proceeds in three distinct movements that reflect the logic of negotiated transitions. The first is a period of stabilisation talks that addresses the most immediate sources of danger. These include the custodial control of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, the architecture of sanctions relief, and the assurance of safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. The frigate incident has now broadened this agenda. Maritime stability is no longer separable from the wider Indo Pacific environment, and any discussion of navigational security must take into account the possibility that Iran's turmoil can spill outward into seas once considered peripheral to its internal struggles.

The second movement concerns the formation of a Transitional National Council. This requires closed negotiations in which the factions confront the difficult questions of representation, authority, and temporal limits. It demands that monarchists, technocrats, armed political organizations, and democratic regional coalitions attempt to imagine a shared political future after decades of mutual suspicion. A council of this nature cannot be imposed from outside. It must be assembled by the factions themselves yet guided within a structured environment that prevents the stronger parties from overwhelming the weaker and the weaker from derailing the process through fear of exclusion.

The third movement culminates in the drafting of two foundational texts. A Stabilisation Communiqué formalizes the immediate agreements necessary to prevent a descent into chaos. A Transitional National Council Framework sets the rules of the interim governance period and outlines the path toward elections or constitutional ratification. These documents, once completed, would not require Sri Lanka to act as guarantor. They would instead be presented to the United Nations by states willing to sponsor a viable path forward without seeking to dominate its content.

The sinking of the frigate does not alter the design of these phases. What it alters is the timeline. Crises at sea have a way of compressing political space. Maritime insecurity forces actors to confront the possibility that the next miscalculation could ignite a conflict far larger than anyone intends. The Colombo Accord, once a conceptual blueprint, now functions as an urgent scaffolding for de-escalation. It offers a disciplined alternative to the drift that currently characterizes the regional response. The longer the vacuum persists, the more likely it becomes that events will unfold according to the logic of accident rather than the logic of strategy. The Accord exists to prevent that outcome.

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Frederick Trump, Frederick Christ Trump, and Donald John Trump

# No Cure for Trump Plague

BY NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

As I have pointed out since the first term of the Trump administration, Donald Trump was never merely a leader in the conventional sense; he is a phenomenon. This phenomenon embodies a worldview in which truth is subordinate to loyalty, perception outweighs fact, and the manipulation of circumstances for personal gain is both instinctive and strategic. The Trump phenomenon thrives precisely because it sees opportunity where others see only risk or moral constraint. In a world already struggling with structural failures—from international organizations to grassroots communities—Trump presents an alternative: a chaotic, unrestrained force that reshapes rules according to his own whims.

Whether one admires him or despises him, the phenomenon reflects a darker truth about human ambition: the capacity to privilege self-interest and personal dominance above all else. Now, after a four-year hiatus and into the second year of his return, the world is encountering something markedly different—a subsequent stage of the same force. This, I would argue, is the Trump Plague: something far more enduring than a political cycle and far more difficult to contain, contaminating democracies, autocracies, and theocracies across the globe.

Today, one can step into a taxi in almost any part of the world, including Colombo, and, without prompting, hear global problems attributed to Trump. Only recently, a tuk-tuk driver remarked to me, “All these issues are because of that idiot.” Such reactions are not merely casual frustrations; they are symptoms of something deeper. The plague is political, but it is also psychological. It is everywhere, penetrating not only institutions but also the cognitive and emotional frameworks through which people interpret reality. It is a haunting condition that allows societies to externalize blame while avoiding introspection, a convenient narrative that shifts responsibility away from systemic and personal failures. In this sense, the Trump Plague is not just about one man; it is about a transformation in how truth is processed, how responsibility is evaded, and how the world increasingly explains its own disorder.

Trump demonstrates a consistent pattern: a refusal to acknowledge responsibility coupled with a relentless pursuit of admiration and control. From his earliest years, as David Cay Johnston (2016) chronicles in *The Making of Donald Trump*, he was shaped by a family legacy in which deceit and opportunism were considered legitimate business strategies. Fred Trump, his father, engaged in illicit business practices to build his fortune, from skimming profits on FHA-subsidised housing to partnerships with known organized crime figures. Donald Trump inherited more than wealth; he

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inherited a philosophy in which cunning, aggression, and the strategic use of fear were central. This inheritance explains why Trump never sees failure as his own.

Mary L. Trump (2020), in *Too Much and Never Enough*, notes that Fred's constant enabling created a delusion of invincibility: “The more money my grandfather threw at Donald, the more confidence Donald had, which led him to pursue bigger and riskier projects, which led to greater failures, forcing Fred to step in with more help”. This cycle of reinforcement ensured that Trump never learned accountability; it was never necessary for him to confront the consequences of his actions, for he would always be rescued by wealth, influence, or the loyalty of those around him.

Loyalty, rather than truth or competence, is the central currency of Trump's world. Roy Cohn, his first and most formative mentor, taught him that relationships should be transactional and adversaries crushed without hesitation. Cohn's mentorship instilled a moral framework in which power is the measure of worth and loyalty is more valuable than ethical integrity. Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher in *Trump Revealed* recount that Cohn, reflecting on his influence, wrote of his ties to organized crime figures in New York, asserting that “in those days, nobody became US Attorney in

New York without the O.K. from the mob” (Kranish & Fisher, 2016). Trump internalized this lesson: it was less important to act within the law than to surround himself with people who would protect and amplify his interests. This mindset explains why, as Johnston notes, Trump “has worked just as hard to make sure few people know about his lifelong entanglements with a major cocaine trafficker, with mobsters and many mob associates, with con artists and swindlers” (Johnston). To Trump, secrecy and deception are not failings; they are strategic tools to manipulate perception and control outcomes.

Trump's business practices demonstrate a remarkable consistency of behaviour, revealing a pattern of aggression, exploitation, and disregard for legal or ethical constraints. From the demolition of Bonwit Teller in 1980, where Polish immigrant workers laboured 12-18-hour days without proper safety equipment, to his dealings with Mafia-controlled unions during the construction of Trump Tower, Trump consistently placed personal gain above human cost or legal accountability (Kranish & Fisher). He not only minimized the value of others' labour, he leveraged fear to enforce compliance, instructing foremen to destroy valuable sculptures despite the availability of alternate solutions (Kranish & Fisher).

Even when legal frameworks threatened his interests, Trump's response was to manipulate outcomes rather than comply: his casino license applications omitted critical investigations, while his meetings with John Cody, a convicted mob associate controlling New York's concrete supply, went unexamined by regulators (Johnston, 2016). Trump's operational model demonstrates a psychology in which the ends justify the means and the narrative, rather than the fact, is the ultimate arbiter of success.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Trump's psychology is his treatment of relationships, whether personal, familial, or political. Loyalty is rewarded, but disloyalty is punished with disproportionate vengeance. Johnston describes how Trump terminated medical benefits for a sick child after a lawsuit challenged his father's will, remarking that “I can't help that. It's cold when someone sues my father” (Johnston). Mary L. Trump observes that this behaviour is an extension of Fred Trump's conditioning: “Knowing ahead of time that you're going to be bailed out if you fail renders the narrative leading up to that moment meaningless... That guaranteed that Donald would never change, even if he were capable of changing, because he simply didn't need to” (Mary L. Trump). For Trump, loyalty is transactional, moral responsibility is negotiable, and ethical consistency is irrelevant. These traits translate directly into his approach to politics: the law is a tool to be bent, facts are malleable, and opponents are obstacles to be crushed.

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# Cuba and the end of an era

BY MILINDA MORAGODA



Cuba's deepening crisis represents more than the failure of an economic model—it signals a turning point in Global South politics. While

attention remains fixed on the Middle East, consequential shifts are unfolding across Latin America, shaped in significant part by a more assertive U.S. policy posture that has intensified long-standing pressures on the region.

The island is facing a severe economic and energy crisis, driven by structural weaknesses and the cumulative weight of external constraints. Decades of U.S. economic embargoes—tightened in recent years—have pushed an already fragile system toward breaking point. Fuel shortages, power outages, and rising social strain reveal a system under acute stress, reflecting a wider shift in hemispheric dynamics. Cuba, long seen as an emblem of resistance to Western dominance, now confronts the practical limits of that posture.

For decades, countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia were romanticized across the Global South as symbols of sovereignty and defiance. Figures like Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Hugo Chávez occupied an outsized place in this imagination. Yet ideology and symbolism often obscured more complex realities. Cuba became a Soviet outpost during the Cold War, culminating in the Cuban Missile Crisis—the closest the world came to nuclear confrontation in that era.

Economically, Cuba and Venezuela might have achieved more sustained development had they pursued more pragmatic engagement with the United States, as many in the region did.

Today, that question is no longer theoretical. The collapse of Venezuelan support, particularly in the energy sector, combined with sustained U.S. pressure, has left Cuba increasingly isolated. Early signs suggest Havana may now explore limited accommodation with Washington. Even tentative steps would mark a profound departure from decades of entrenched positioning.

If this trajectory continues, it may signal the decline of an older form of Global South politics—once anchored in ideological defiance, now yielding to the imperatives of realism. The Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, once central to the moral and rhetorical architecture of the post-colonial world, are likely to see their influence further diluted in this evolving environment. An earlier era of ideological posturing is giving way to more pragmatic navigation of power and opportunity.

Yet realism does not eliminate the need for dignity. States must recognize their limitations, but major powers must also understand that humiliation can seed future instability. The experiences of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya illustrate

how coercive or poorly managed transitions often create new crises. Similarly, the post-Cold War order—widely perceived in Moscow as dismissive of its security and status—helped shape grievances that continue to influence global geopolitics.

An instructive counterpoint is the evolution of relations between the United States and Vietnam. Despite a deeply traumatic war, the two countries today engage as pragmatic partners. This transformation underscores that even the most adversarial histories can give way to stable and mutually beneficial relationships—provided transitions are managed with foresight and respect.

How transitions are managed can be as important as the transitions themselves.

Amid this evolving landscape, India has a distinct opportunity. It is one of the few countries with credibility across the Global South and sustained engagement with the United States. This positions it to act as a bridge-engaging country like Cuba while supporting gradual, dignified economic and political adjustment.

India's own experience—balancing strategic autonomy with pragmatic partnerships—offers a relevant template. Platforms such as the Non-Aligned Movement and BRICS will need to adapt, or be complemented by more flexible coalitions aligned with contemporary realities.

Diasporas also shape outcomes. In the United States, Cuban, Venezuelan, and Iranian communities influence domestic debates and, at times, foreign policy. India, too, must navigate the growing influence of its diaspora in key Western capitals—an asset if managed carefully, but a potential complication if not.

The manner of transition remains critical. Cuba and Venezuela must adapt with legitimacy intact. An emerging order perceived as purely coercive or dismissive will generate resistance, undermining both regional stability and broader strategic objectives. Successful transitions require early, careful engagement, guided by respect and strategic foresight.

The stakes are significant. Cuba, Venezuela, and others remain symbols of a historical narrative, but the world is moving toward a multipolar order shaped by realism, strategy, and negotiated respect. India has both the credibility and the opportunity to help guide this transition—toward a Global South that is pragmatic, resilient, and capable of asserting itself without confrontation.

The Global South is not disappearing; it is being redefined. The question is whether India and its partners will move early enough to shape that process—ensuring the emerging order reflects inclusion, pragmatism, and respect, rather than humiliation.

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## Features

# When seabed goes dark: The Persian Gulf, cable sabotage, and race for space-based monopoly

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*Undersea fiber optic cables constitute the backbone of global digital connectivity, carrying over 95% of international data traffic. The increasing geopolitical tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States elevate the risk of deliberate or collateral damage to submarine cable systems, particularly in the Persian Gulf, a critical global digital chokepoint. This article examines the strategic consequences of undersea cable sabotage in this region and its cascading effects across the Indian Ocean, with a focused analysis on Sri Lanka’s vulnerabilities and opportunities. It further argues that prolonged disruption could incentivize technologically advanced states and corporations to accelerate satellite-based global internet architectures, potentially reshaping control over global connectivity. The article concludes that Sri Lanka must urgently operationalize the National Submarine Cable Safety and Resilience Framework (NSCPRF) to safeguard national security while positioning itself within this evolving technological and geopolitical landscape.*

Beneath the world’s oceans lies a largely invisible but indispensable network of submarine communication cables that form the backbone of the contemporary global order. These cables silently facilitate financial transactions, sustain military command and control, and power the digital economies that define modern life. Yet, in an era of intensifying geopolitical rivalry, this critical infrastructure has emerged as a strategic vulnerability and a prime target for hybrid warfare.

Current tensions among Iran, Israel, and the United States have introduced a new dimension of conflict: seabed contestation. The Persian Gulf, already a focal point for global energy security, has now become equally pivotal for digital connectivity. Any disruption to its dense network of submarine cables would not merely affect regional actors; the consequences would ripple across the global system, threatening financial stability, communications, and strategic operations worldwide. This evolving vulnerability underscores the urgent need to understand, protect, and adapt to the emerging risks facing undersea infrastructure in geopolitically sensitive regions.

## Strategic importance of Persian Gulf cable network

The Persian Gulf serves as a critical digital chokepoint in global connectivity, functioning for data flows much like the Strait of Hormuz does for energy transport. A dense aggregation of undersea fiber optic cables traverses this narrow maritime corridor, linking Europe, the Middle East, and South and East Asia. The strategic centrality of the region arises not only from its role in facilitating global commerce and communications but also from its function as a redundancy hub for intercontinental digital traffic.

Several factors exacerbate the vulnerability of this network. First, the geographic concentration of cable routes in a limited corridor creates systemic risk: damage to even a few cables could severely disrupt connectivity. Second, the relatively shallow waters of the Gulf render cables physically accessible to divers, remotely operated underwater vehicles, and maritime operations that may inadvertently or deliberately cause damage. Third, the proximity of these routes to active conflict zones, territorial disputes, and naval operations further elevates the risk of intentional or collateral disruption.

A significant interruption in the Persian Gulf cable network would have far-reaching consequences, potentially impairing intercontinental data flows, destabilizing financial markets, degrading strategic communications, and undermining both commercial and military operations worldwide. This underscores the Persian Gulf’s dual role as a linchpin of global connectivity and a high-value target within contemporary hybrid warfare and geopolitical contestation.

## Undersea cable sabotage as hybrid warfare

Undersea cables, due to their strategic importance and relative physical exposure, constitute high-value targets within contemporary hybrid warfare scenarios. Both state and non-state actors may seek to exploit these vulnerabilities through methods that are difficult to attribute, enabling deniable or covert operations while inflicting disproportionate disruption.

Potential attack vectors encompass a range of capabilities. Physical interference may be conducted by divers, unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), or remotely operated submersibles, allowing direct manipulation or damage to cable infrastructure. Covert disruption may also occur through maritime activities, such as the unintentional or deliberate anchoring of commercial vessels, trawlers, or offshore operations in cable corridors. In parallel, cyberattacks targeting cable landing stations, associated terrestrial

networks, or associated operational technology systems could degrade functionality without physical intervention.

Historical precedent underscores the plausibility of such scenarios. The 2008 Mediterranean submarine cable disruption, which caused widespread interruptions in internet connectivity across multiple regions, illustrates how failures, whether accidental or malicious can propagate globally. In the context of conflict involving high-stakes geopolitical actors, deliberate and coordinated sabotage could amplify these impacts, triggering cascading disruptions across financial systems, communications, and critical infrastructure worldwide.

## Global consequences and systemic risks

A major disruption to undersea cable systems in the Persian Gulf would have far-reaching and cascading effects across the global digital and economic landscape. Financial systems, including banking networks, trading platforms, and digital payment infrastructures, could experience severe instability, potentially halting international transactions and market operations. Digital services reliant on continuous connectivity such as cloud computing, data centers, and online platforms would face operational collapse, disrupting both commercial and governmental functions worldwide.

From a security perspective, military command, control, and communication systems could be degraded, compromising operational readiness and the ability to coordinate defense and strategic responses. Logistical networks, encompassing aviation, maritime shipping, and port operations, would similarly be affected, creating delays in supply chains and critical goods transportation.

The sudden rerouting of data traffic through alternative pathways, notably via the Indian Ocean region, would place immense strain on those networks, exacerbating congestion and increasing vulnerability to further disruption. In this context, Persian Gulf cable vulnerabilities are not merely regional concerns; they represent systemic risks capable of destabilizing global connectivity, commerce, and security simultaneously.

## Spillover into the Indian Ocean region

The Indian Ocean functions as a strategically significant secondary corridor for global data traffic, linking the Persian Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa. In the event of disruptions to submarine cables in the Persian Gulf, whether due to conflict, sabotage, or hybrid warfare traffic would inevitably be rerouted through Indian Ocean pathways, placing unprecedented strain on existing networks. This redirection could result in severe bandwidth congestion, degradation of service quality, and delays in critical communications for both commercial and military operations.

The increased reliance on the Indian Ocean network would also elevate the region’s vulnerability to further attacks, whether deliberate or opportunistic, as adversaries may seek to exploit the bottlenecked infrastructure. Moreover, the operational scope of any regional conflict could expand, effectively extending the theatre of digital contestation to the Indian Ocean and affecting the maritime security environment of surrounding nations.

Consequently, the Indian Ocean is not merely a passive conduit for rerouted data; it could emerge as an active domain of strategic competition, where control over undersea infrastructure and the ability to defend it becomes a critical determinant of regional and global digital resilience.

## Sri Lanka’s strategic position and vulnerability

Situated at a pivotal maritime and digital crossroads in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka occupies a uniquely strategic position within global communication networks. The island serves as a critical node for multiple undersea fiber optic cable systems, including the SEA-ME-WE 3, 4, and 5 series, the Bay of Bengal Gateway (BBG), FALCON, as well as Chinese-led systems such as the Asia-Pacific Cable Network (APCN) and China-Asia-Pacific Network (CAPN). These networks not only connect Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, but also provide essential redundancy for global data traffic, rendering Sri Lanka an indispensable conduit for intercontinental digital flows.

## Vulnerabilities

Sri Lanka’s strategic location, while advantageous, also exposes it to significant vulnerabilities. In the event of disruptions elsewhere in the network, traffic is often rerouted through the island, increasing the operational load on existing infrastructure and heightening the risk of congestion. Moreover, the island’s position as a critical redundancy node renders it a potential target for deliberate attacks or sabotage in scenarios of geopolitical tension. Currently, the absence of a fully operational legal and

regulatory framework for submarine cable protection exacerbates these risks, leaving strategic infrastructure exposed. Limitations in seabed surveillance and rapid response capability further constrain the country’s ability to detect, deter, and mitigate threats effectively.

## National implications

Disruptions to Sri Lanka’s undersea cable network could have profound national consequences. Financial and commercial systems reliant on uninterrupted digital connectivity would face operational instability, with potential cascading effects on banking, trading, and online services. Port operations and maritime logistics, which increasingly depend on real-time communication and data flows, would also be adversely affected, impacting the island’s role as a regional transshipment hub. From a national security perspective, interruptions could compromise command, control, and communication systems essential for defense and maritime governance. Finally, economic repercussions would extend to the digital and technology sectors, threatening both foreign investment and domestic industry reliant on high-speed connectivity.

In sum, Sri Lanka’s unique position at the intersection of major global and regional undersea cable systems provides both strategic leverage and significant exposure. Recognizing and addressing these vulnerabilities through a comprehensive protection and resilience framework is essential for national security, economic stability, and regional digital leadership.



The Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb of the Red Sea are two choke points sitting right on top of a huge web of fibre-optic cables laid on the ocean floor. Image courtesy AP

## Indian Ocean nexus: From seabed vulnerability to space-based control

A disruption originating in the Persian Gulf would cascade into the Indian Ocean, where dense maritime activity and limited surveillance heighten systemic risk. Reduced communication integrity and gaps in maritime awareness could mask further interference with submarine cables, compounding the crisis. Also, the fragmented jurisdiction under frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and limitations in real-time monitoring create exploitable gaps.

Yet disruption also creates opportunity. Technologically advanced nations and corporations, already deploying Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite constellations, could rapidly step in as alternative providers of global connectivity. Systems led by SpaceX, Amazon, and OneWeb are capable of scaling quickly to offset cable outages, while China’s state-backed China Satellite Network Group (Guowang) and commercial initiatives such as Qianfan further reinforce this emerging space-based connectivity architecture. In such a context, the large-scale deployment of thousands of miniature satellites dedicated to global data connectivity by technologically advanced nations cannot be ruled out, further accelerating the shift toward space-based communication dominance.

## Emerging risk: Space-based connectivity and strategic monopoly

A prolonged or large-scale disruption of undersea cable systems could catalyze a structural shift in global connectivity architecture. High-technology corporations and advanced states may exploit such a crisis to accelerate the deployment of satellite constellations, effectively bypassing vulnerable seabed infrastructure.

Sustained or large-scale disruption of undersea cable systems possesses the capacity to trigger a profound structural transformation in the global connectivity landscape. In such a scenario, technologically advanced states and private enterprises could exploit the crisis to accelerate the deployment of satellite constellations, effectively bypassing the vulnerabilities inherent in submarine cable infrastructure. This transition would fundamentally reshape the architecture of global communications, enabling rapid network deployment that surpasses the timelines required to repair damaged cables. It also carries the potential to centralize control over global connectivity within a narrow set of actors, undermining national data

sovereignty and altering the distribution of geopolitical influence by establishing dominance over space-based communication systems. In effect, disruption at sea may act as a catalyst, accelerating a strategic shift from seabed-based to orbital-based control of global information flows, concentrating technological, informational, and strategic power in the hands of a limited cohort of state and corporate actors, and redefining the very nature of global digital governance.

## Case for national submarine cable safety and resilience framework

Sri Lanka’s proposed National Submarine Cable Safety and Resilience Framework (NSCPRF) constitutes a proactive and strategically essential response to the evolving spectrum of threats to critical undersea communication infrastructure. Recognizing the vulnerabilities posed by both accidental and deliberate disruptions, the framework has been developed with technical guidance from the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC) and operational support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Importantly, it aligns with international obligations, including UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/124, thereby situating Sri Lanka’s initiative within the broader framework of global maritime security norms.

The NSCPRF is designed around four core objectives: first, to formally recognize submarine cables as Critical National Infrastructure, thereby elevating their status within national security and policy frameworks; second, to establish dedicated Cable Protection Zones within Sri Lanka’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to prevent inadvertent damage and deliberate interference; third, to integrate naval, coastguard, and civilian agencies into coordinated protection, monitoring, and enforcement efforts, ensuring a unified operational response; and fourth, to develop rapid repair and contingency mechanisms capable of restoring connectivity promptly in the event of disruption. Collectively, these measures aim to safeguard Sri Lanka’s strategic digital infrastructure, mitigate the risks associated with global cable vulnerabilities, and strengthen the country’s resilience in an increasingly contested maritime and technological domain.

## Strategic recommendations

To enhance national resilience and strengthen Sri Lanka’s strategic positioning in the emerging landscape of maritime and digital security, a multi-dimensional approach is required. First and foremost, the NSCPRF should be enacted without delay, providing a formal legal and operational framework that recognizes submarine cables as critical national infrastructure and establishes robust protection protocols.

Second, Sri Lanka must significantly strengthen its Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities, with a particular emphasis on seabed surveillance and real-time monitoring of undersea cable routes. This would enable early detection of potential threats, ranging from accidental damage to deliberate sabotage, and allow for timely, coordinated responses.

Third, the development of specialized naval and coastguard capabilities dedicated to submarine cable protection is essential. These forces should be trained and equipped for rapid interdiction, repair support, and enforcement operations within Sri Lanka’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), ensuring both deterrence and resilience against emerging threats.

Fourth, infrastructure redundancy should be promoted through diversification of cable routes and integration with alternative regional networks. Redundant pathways would reduce the operational and economic impact of localized disruptions, ensuring continuity of digital communications under a variety of contingency scenarios.

Fifth, Sri Lanka should actively engage in international partnerships to facilitate coordinated protection, information sharing, and joint response mechanisms. Collaboration with regional actors, international organizations, and private cable operators would enhance collective security and resilience across the Indian Ocean Region.

Finally, as the risk of space-based connectivity monopolization grows, Sri Lanka should assess the integration of satellite systems as a complementary component of national digital infrastructure. This approach would safeguard against technological dependency on a limited number of external actors, while maintaining national control over critical communications.

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## Red Sea on edge: Houthis signal entry into Iran war; Bab el-Mandeb choke point looms

(SNS) Rising tensions in West Asia may spread further as Yemen’s Houthis indicate readiness to support Iran, with strategic Red Sea routes emerging as a potential flashpoint.

Yemen’s Ansarullah movement, widely known as the Houthis, is preparing to step into the ongoing conflict alongside Iran, according to a report by *Tasnim News Agency*. The development comes as tensions continue to rise following US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

The possible entry of the Houthis could widen the conflict beyond Iran’s borders, bringing a key maritime route, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, back into sharp geopolitical focus. The narrow passage connects the Red Sea to global shipping lanes and has been a pressure point in earlier confrontations.

An informed source told *Tasnim* that the group has remained on high alert since the conflict began

on February 28. “As they have stated since the first day,” the source said, Ansarullah “is on full alert and ready to enter the battlefield.”

## Bab al-Mandeb Strait emerges as potential pressure point

According to the report, the Houthis may use control over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait as leverage against the US and Israel. The source claimed such a move would help “discipline” their adversaries, adding that both Iran and Ansarullah have the capacity to create a serious threat in the waterway.

The group has previously demonstrated its ability to disrupt maritime routes. *Tasnim* noted that Ansarullah has in the past enforced restrictions in the Red Sea, suggesting that closing the strait is within its operational reach.

When tensions surged on October 7, 2023, and



Israel intensified its operations in Gaza, the Houthis responded by trying to stop ships they said were connected to Israel. The impact was immediate; many vessels stopped using the Red Sea route and were forced to sail the longer way

around southern Africa, adding time, fuel costs and delays to their journeys.

The report also said the group has carried out drone strikes on Israeli locations and repeatedly targeted US naval forces operating near Yemen’s coast.

Separately, Iran has reiterated that it will not shift its current stance. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to state broadcaster *Press TV*, said Tehran would continue its policy of “resistance” in response to what he described as “unprovoked American-Israeli aggression”.

“At present, our policy is to continue resistance, and no negotiations have taken place,” Araghchi said in a televised interview on Wednesday, adding that there are no ongoing talks and questioning the credibility of external guarantees.



**Recognising brands and personalities**

“The SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 was a powerful celebration of the voice of the Sri Lankan people. The strong public connection reflected through this year’s winners once again demonstrated the value of recognising brands and personalities that have earned genuine trust, admiration, and loyalty.”

**Prof. Dewasiri N. Jayantha,**  
President of  
Sri Lanka Institute of  
Marketing (SLIM)

**A truly memorable occasion**

“Tonight’s event was a meaningful reminder of the deep connection that exists between brands, personalities, and the people they serve. To see that connection honoured on this platform made the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 a truly memorable occasion.”

**Mr. Enoch Perera,**  
Vice President –  
Events &  
Sustainability of Sri Lanka  
Institute of  
Marketing (SLIM)

**A relection of true voice of Sri Lanka**

“What makes the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards truly distinctive is that it reflects the true voice of Sri Lanka. This year’s winners have earned their recognition through trust, affinity, and a meaningful relationship with the public, and tonight’s celebration brought that to life in a very powerful way.”

**Dr. Dilhan Sampath Jayatilleke,**  
Project Chair of the  
SLIM-KANTAR  
People’s Awards 2026,

**Benchmark of consumer sentiment**

“The successful conclusion of the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 once again reaffirmed its place as one of the country’s most anticipated and meaningful recognitions. It continues to serve as an important benchmark of consumer sentiment while celebrating those who truly resonate with people across Sri Lanka.”

**Mr. Chamil Wickremasinghe,**  
Chief Executive  
Officer of  
Sri Lanka Institute of  
Marketing (SLIM)

**True success beyond market share**

“The SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 once again demonstrated that true success goes far beyond market share or visibility. The brands and personalities recognised tonight stood out because of the strong and meaningful connections they have built with people over time. Based on a scientifically designed, nationally representative survey, these recognitions reflect trust, loyalty, and emotional bonds earned through consistency, relevance, and a deep understanding of people.”

**Ms. Himalee Madurasinghe,**  
Country Head of KANTAR Sri Lanka

# SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 honours Sri Lanka’s most loved brands and personalities

The SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 was held in grand style on 18 March 2026 at the Monarch Imperial, bringing together Sri Lanka’s most admired brands, celebrated personalities, and leading figures from the business and marketing fraternity for an evening dedicated to recognising those who have truly won the hearts of the people.

Widely regarded as one of the country’s most anticipated awards ceremonies, the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards continues to hold a distinctive place in Sri Lanka’s marketing and brand landscape by celebrating popularity, public trust, and emotional connection. Unlike many other awards platforms, the accolades presented at these awards are determined by the voice of the people, making each recognition a reflection of genuine public preference.

This year’s event welcomed an esteemed gathering of business leaders, marketers, celebrities, media representatives, and invited guests. **Kalasurei Anoja Weerasinghe** attended

the event as the Chief Guest, adding further prestige to an evening that once again spotlighted the brands and personalities that have resonated most strongly with Sri Lankans. The awards honoured those who have earned admiration, loyalty, and relevance across the country, reaffirming the significance of public recognition in shaping brand and personality stature.

Organised by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) in partnership with KANTAR, the awards have evolved into a respected national platform that celebrates both established names and emerging favourites across a wide range of categories.

**Prof. Dewasiri N. Jayantha,** President of Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), said, “The SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 was a powerful celebration of the voice of the Sri Lankan people. The strong public connection reflected through this year’s winners once again demonstrated the value of recognising brands and personalities that have earned genuine

trust, admiration, and loyalty.”

**Mr. Enoch Perera,** Vice President – Events & Sustainability of Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), said, “Tonight’s event was a meaningful reminder of the deep connection that exists between brands, personalities, and the people they serve. To see that connection honoured on this platform made the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026 a truly memorable occasion.”

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The successful conclusion of the SLIM-KANTAR People’s Awards 2026



once again reaffirmed its standing as a premier national platform honouring the brands and personalities that have truly captured the hearts of Sri Lankans.

For companies interested in purchasing the SLIM-Kantar People’s Awards 2026 data reports or for any additional inquiries, please contact Gangani at 070-3266988 for further information.

## Highlights of the event





# Thilakawardhana Textiles Wins Fashion Retail Brand of the Year for the 8th Consecutive Year



Managing Director Mr Ravindu Thilakawardhana, General Manager Mr Saman Lal Vithanage, the Heads of Branches and Managers of Thilakawardhana Textiles at the ceremony.

Thilakawardhana Textiles has once again reaffirmed its exceptional place in the hearts of Sri Lankan consumers by winning the prestigious Fashion Retail Brand of the Year title at the SLIM-KANTAR People's Awards 2026. This remarkable recognition marks the 8th consecutive year that the brand has received this honour, further strengthening its reputation as one of Sri Lanka's most trusted and admired names in fashion retail.

Organised by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), the SLIM-KANTAR People's Awards are regarded as one of the country's most respected platforms for recognising brands that have built a genuine and lasting bond with the public. Unlike many other accolades, these awards reflect the true voice of the people, making this achievement especially meaningful for a brand that has consistently placed customers at the centre of everything it does.

For Thilakawardhana Textiles, this recognition is not merely an award, but a

reflection of years of dedication to customer satisfaction, service excellence, and a deeply rooted customer-centric philosophy. The brand's continued success has been driven not only by its wide range of fashion and lifestyle offerings, but also by the trust it has earned through attentive service, understanding customer needs, and delivering value with consistency.

At a time when the retail landscape is increasingly competitive, Thilakawardhana Textiles has shown that true leadership lies in building relationships, not just transactions. Its ability to connect with customers across generations, while maintaining high standards of service and accessibility, has made it a household name and a preferred shopping destination for countless Sri Lankan families.

Winning this title for the eighth year in succession is a testament to the brand's unwavering commitment to putting people first. It highlights how customer service remains the strongest pillar of the

Thilakawardhana identity and how a sincere focus on customer care can create enduring brand loyalty.

As Thilakawardhana Textiles celebrates this latest milestone, the achievement

stands as both a proud moment for the company and a powerful reminder that brands built on trust, service, and genuine care will always hold a special place in the hearts of the people.



## Highlights of the event

Pix by Kamal Bogoda and Nishendra Silva





# Commercial Bank wins public vote as 'People's Private Bank' for 4th year running



Senior members of Commercial Bank's marketing team led by Mrs Ashani Senaratne, Assistant General Manager - Marketing, accept the award on behalf of the Bank.

**R**eaffirming the continued love, trust, and unwavering support of the people of Sri Lanka, Commercial Bank of Ceylon has once again been voted the 'People's Private Banking Services Brand of the Year,' securing this coveted title for the fourth consecutive year at the SLIM Kantar People's Awards 2026 and retaining its standing as the most popular private sector bank in Sri Lanka.

Presented by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) and based on independent research conducted by global insights leader Kantar, the People's Awards are among the most anticipated accolades in the country's corporate calendar. Distinctively determined by consumer preference rather than a panel of judges, the awards recognise the brands and personalities that are closest to the hearts of Sri Lankans, through a rigorous nationwide survey and analysis process.

Commercial Bank said the continuation of this recognition for a fourth successive year reflects the enduring trust and affinity the Bank enjoys among customers across the island, as well as

the strength of its brand engagement and customer-centric strategies. The accolade underscores the Bank's ability to remain relevant and responsive to evolving customer expectations, while consistently delivering service excellence and innovative banking experiences.

Sri Lanka's largest private sector bank and the most-awarded financial institution in the country, Commercial Bank serves a customer base of over four million and continues to lead the industry in key segments including SME lending. The Bank's sustained investment in brand building through impactful thematic campaigns, inclusive multilingual communications, and a strong digital presence, has enabled it to connect meaningfully with diverse customer segments across the country.

The Bank has also maintained a dominant presence across digital platforms, supported by industry-leading engagement on its corporate website and social media channels, alongside strategic sponsorships and on-ground activations at both national and regional level. This holistic approach to customer engagement has fur-

ther strengthened its position as a brand that resonates deeply with Sri Lankan consumers.

For the People's Awards, SLIM partners with Kantar to conduct comprehensive, country-wide research, with respondents invited to name their preferred brands and personalities across multiple categories. The resulting honours are therefore regarded as the ultimate expression of consumer endorsement in Sri Lanka, making Commercial Bank's fourth consecutive win a powerful testament to its sustained popularity and public trust.

Commercial Bank is the

first Sri Lankan bank with a market capitalisation exceeding US\$ 1 Bn. and was also the first bank in the country to be listed among the Top 1000 Banks of the World. Commercial Bank has the highest capital base among all Sri Lankan banks, is the largest private sector lender in Sri Lanka, and the largest lender to the country's SME sector. Ranked No. 1 in the Business Today Top 40, Commercial Bank is recognised as the most respected and most-awarded Bank in Sri Lanka. Commercial Bank is also a leader in digital innovation and is Sri Lanka's first 100% carbon-neutral bank.

Commercial Bank operates a network of 272 strategically located branches and automated machines island-wide, and has the widest international footprint among Sri Lankan banks, with 20 branches in Bangladesh, a fully-fledged Tier I Bank with a majority stake in the Maldives, a microfinance company in Myanmar, and a representative office in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). The Bank's fully owned subsidiaries, CBC Finance PLC and Commercial Insurance Brokers (Pvt) Limited, also deliver a range of financial services via their own branch networks.

**Chosen by Hearts.  
Trusted for Generations.**

Commercial Bank of Ceylon is proud to be named  
**Private Banking Services Brand of the Year**  
for the 4th consecutive year at the SLIM Kantar People's Awards 2026.  
Voted by the people of Sri Lanka, this recognition reflects the trust placed in us and the enduring relationships we continue to nurture.  
We remain committed to delivering a private banking experience shaped by care, built on trust and guided by a dedication to a sustainable future.

**COMMERCIAL BANK**

## News/ Feature

By VIJAYA CHANDRASOMA

Donald Trump is now pretending to negotiate a peace on the war against Iran he declared on February 28. A war for no reasons, with no provocation from Iran. A war Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu had been planning against Iran for decades.

Trump posted a threatening message on Truth Social in the wee hours on Sunday, March 22, that, unless Iran opens the strait of Hormuz within 48 hours, he will obliterate the nation.

Donald J. Trump @ real Donald Trump

"If Iran doesn't FULLY OPEN, WITHOUT THREAT, the strait of Hormuz within 48 HOURS, from this exact point in time, the United States of America will hit and obliterate their various POWER PLANTS, STARTING WITH THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST. Thank you for your attention to this matter. President Donald Trump"

Then, on Sunday evening, Trump said he had received a very valuable gift, worth a ton of money from Iran, which made him realize that he was not talking to the "right people". The present, a couple of oil tankers, produced a change of Trump's heart regarding the war. Presents, technically bribes, like the \$400 million flying palace he received from Qatar, are the only direct line to Trump's heart.

So, less than 24 hours after his "obliteration" threat, Truth Social carried the following post:

Donald Trump @real Donald Trump  
"I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE COUNTRY OF IRAN, HAVE HAD, OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS, VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ASSURING A COMPLETE RESOLUTION OF OUR HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. BASED ON THE TENOR AND TONE OF THESE IN-DEPTH, DETAILED AND CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS, WHICH WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, I HAVE INSTRUCTED THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR TO POSTPONE ANY AND ALL MILITARY STRIKES AGAINST IRANIAN POWER PLANTS AND ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A FIVE-DAY PERIOD, SUBJECT TO THE SUCCESS OF THE ONGOING MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS MATTER. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP"

At a press conference, Trump said that he's giving Iran five days to negotiate a deal that will benefit everyone. When asked what he would do if no deal was worked out in five days, he said he would have no option but to annihilate Iran. So Iran would be annihilated in five days, (now increased to ten), as the 15-point conditions US by submitted by Trump during these "negotiations" were totally unacceptable to Iran. And vice versa. But in the highly unlikely event that agreement was reached, Trump was asked who would run the strait of Hormuz, his response: Me, maybe me, with an Ayatollah whom they hadn't killed, as yet.

As expected, Trump's post about peace negotiations caused a tumble in the price of a barrel of oil from \$100+ to \$84 within hours, with the corresponding optimism in the stock market. But the continuing hostilities after Trump's peace message during the week pushed the price of a barrel of oil back to \$100+. There was a flurry of trading of nearly \$500 million in the hours between these two contradictory posts – and someone (I wonder who) made a killing on the stock market with obvious insider knowledge.

There has been complete silence from Iran to Donald's empty threat. Iran's Foreign Ministry confirmed that no such negotiations had taken place between Tehran and Washington. Iran refused to take Trump's threats seriously and its

collective middle finger towards the White House was clearly visible over the oceans.

Prime Minister of Canada, Marc Carney, has taught smaller nations being intimidated by Trump that the only way to handle him is to call his bluff. To paraphrase Shakespeare, to ignore Trump's meaningless bluster, "told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".

Until 2016, the USA was considered

which I have extolled before. Suffice to say he holds the highest degrees in Economics from Harvard and Oxford, and served as the Governor of the Central Banks of both Canada and the United Kingdom, the only non-Brit to hold that post in history. An added qualification: he has never been a politician, had never held elected office.

Carney showed no indignation at Trump's "offer". He most politely told Trump that the people he represents will

illegal war against Iran. An "excursion", as he called it, draining the economy with no objective in sight, had already caused the loss of 13 American lives. His public comment that there will be more losses of thousands of lives as the war progresses, especially if he carries out his plan of putting boots on the ground in Iran, infuriated Americans of all stripes. And the "most unkindest cut of all": his pet Supreme Court ruled against him, with a 6/3 majority, that the power

Time will tell if the impossible has happened, that Trump has realized that he has lost the confidence of his base, and would be forced to abandon his dictatorial ambitions, if only to survive.

Iran's Fars News Agency claimed that there have been no direct, or even indirect communications between Tehran and Washington. Fars also said "Trump backed down on targeting Iran's power plants after Iran warned it would target power plants across West Asia in response". Iran's Tasnim News Agency confirmed that no negotiations are underway with the United States.

Now we are in a quandary. Who are we to believe? A leader of a theocratic, corrupt, authoritarian regime (I mean Iran, of course) or, well, the leader of our own theocratic, corrupt, authoritarian regime? My money is on Trump, if only because, when asked with whom in Iran he was negotiating, his answer was "a tip-top person". Also, why did he post the "annihilation" message on Truth Social on Sunday, referred to above, if negotiations were in progress. He also is supposed to have accepted a valuable gift from Iran while Iran was under heavy bombing.

Every word Trump has uttered after declaring an illegal war against Iran has been a lie. Now he's trying to pass the buck to Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth and Joint Chief of Staff, "Raizin" Cane, for "persuading" him to wage war against Iran. A war entirely of his own making, perhaps with a little push from Netanyahu, the war criminal who has been responsible for all the violence in the Middle East during the past few years, who has been dreaming of a war against Iran for decades.

There is no real hope that this war will end in the near future. Remember that the last illegal war to promote US and Israeli interests against Iraq took eight years for the greatest army the world has ever seen to retreat, with the loss of 4,600 lives and trillions in losses of infrastructure. Somehow, even though Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11, Americans, in their grief and anger at the worst terrorist attack on their shores, needed someone on whom they could wreak revenge. They gave Bush their full support at the start, although they were killing the wrong terrorist and causing chaos in the wrong country.

Trump does not have that luxury. Americans in a large majority, Republicans, Democrats and Independents, are all against this unnecessary Iran war with neither reason nor anything but a tragic end, with the loss of millions of lives and devastation of property.

Trump will see evidence of his disapproval of the people with the largest protests in the nation's history. Officially titled as The No Kings Protests, with thousands of scheduled events across all 50 states, in major cities as well as in rural suburban areas. It is estimated that more than 3,000 local events have been planned, bringing together millions of people in one of the largest days of political organization in the nation's history. These protests will show not only Americans disapproval of another unnecessary war with no end in sight, but with the economy reaching recession levels, with inflation out of control and gas and consumer goods rising daily. Americans are also incensed at the administration's Draconian immigration policies, with Americans arrested and imprisoned without due process, even two American peaceful protesters murdered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for no reason whatsoever.

Hopefully, Saturday's No Kings nationwide protests will at last turn the tide, but violence by Trump's white supremacist base may be inevitable, before the United States resumes its destined path to democracy.

## Iran war escalates despite Trump's claims about negotiations for peace

# Largest nation-wide protests in history against Trump on Saturday, March 28



the leader of the free world, not because it had the largest economy, not because they had the most powerful military in history, but because the post WW2 US treated other nations, especially its NATO allies, with respect. And all the nations which had dealings with the USA, appreciated that, and competed against each other to deliver the best deal to the USA.

Trump had recently been insulting Canada, its closest ally of over 300 years and largest economic partner with \$800 billion of annual trade, sharing the longest border in the world. Canadians and Americans had fought side by side in World War II, and Canadians were the first to join the Americans in their war against Afghanistan after 9/11. Trump, to whom loyalty and friendship is a one-way street, had been stating that Canada was dependent on the USA, and should really be its 51st state, with Carney as its Governor. He made this belittling statement at a meeting with Carney at the Oval Office.

I do not intend to repeat the qualifications of Prime Minister Carney,

never agree to such a proposal, that Canada will never be for sale.

Carney had been expecting this increase in taxes for months, and had already successfully negotiated alternative trade deals for Canadian products with other nations, members of NATO, Japan and Australia. And more importantly, he had shown smaller nations, which had hitherto been intimidated by the power of the USA, how to deal with Trump. Instead of individually toadying to Trump's America, smaller nations could work together instead of competing against each other. This policy may cause temporary economic hardship, but would have the luxury of maintaining their self-respect.

Trump realized that his economic policies, especially on tariffs and his wars were dragging the US economy to a recession. His approval ratings, with the crucial midterm elections just a few months away, were at 36%, the lowest levels in presidential history. Even his Republican base was turning against many of his policies, especially the latest

to levy taxes and tariffs lay, according to Article I Section 8 of the constitution, exclusively with Congress. All tariffs levied by Trump without even consultation with Congress, from April 2, 2025 ("Liberation Day") to date were unconstitutional and had to be refunded to the importers and consumers.

J. A. Baker, in *The Peregrine*, said that "the hardest thing of all is to see what is really there." Perhaps, as incredible as it may seem, Trump has seen the light, he may have seen what is really there, the chaos he has wrought, with inflation at third-world levels, gas and grocery prices out of control, the wait-time at most airports longer than the actual flight time, his illegal immigration policies resulting in arrest, imprisonment and even killing two American peaceful protesters without due process, has infuriated the American people. His ratings are in the pits and the United States has become the Most Hated Nation in the Free World. America First is now America Alone, embraced only by past adversaries, who are taking full advantage of his narcissistic stupidity.

## Lankan rights defender wins Sweden's 2026 Per Anger Prize

Brito Fernando fought for families of people forcibly disappeared during decades of armed conflict and political violence

(UCAN) Lankan human rights defender Brito Fernando has been awarded the 2026 Per Anger Prize by the Swedish government for his tireless efforts to uncover the truth about tens of thousands of disappeared people in his country.

Fernando, a Catholic and founder of Families of the Disappeared (FoD), has spent the past three decades advocating for the rights of more than 20,000 families of missing persons in the island nation.

"What distinguishes Fernando's work is not only his personal courage but his ability to unite families across Sri Lanka's deep ethnic, religious and linguistic divides," noted Diakonia, a faith-based Swedish development organization, which was among those who nominated him for the award.

Brito Fernando said that the award — named after diplomat Per Anger, who saved Hungarian Jews during WWII — recognizes the dedication of the courageous mothers of disappeared persons, the media, and all rights activists.

Sri Lanka is home to one of the largest recorded numbers of missing persons in the world — an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 people from all eth-

nic and religious communities.

It also has a long history of enforced disappearances, both during the insurrection, spearheaded by communists in 1971 and 1987-89, and the prolonged civil war, led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 1983 to 2009.

At least 10 priests were killed and four went missing during the civil war, according to the Catholic Church, while thousands of majority Sinhalese also disappeared between 1989 and 1990 over alleged links to leftist groups.

The majority of the missing people cases are still unresolved.

"The victims' families have pinned great hope on the current government due to the suffering of the leftist cadres in the past," Fernando told UCA News on March 26.

He, however, regretted that there are no signs of the now ruling party addressing the issue of disappearances differently after more than 15 months in power.

"Last year, the government allocated 1 billion rupees [US\$3.35 million] for these families, but it has not yet been paid," he noted.

Fernando expected the government to allocate another 2 billion rupees to



Lankan human rights defender Brito Fernando was awarded the 2026 Per Anger Prize, the Swedish Government's international human rights and democracy award

compensate the families of the disappeared.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary

Disappearances ranks Sri Lanka as having the second-highest number of unresolved disappearance cases globally, behind Iraq.

Sri Lanka ratified the UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and established the Office on Missing Persons in 2016 to investigate and provide redress for victims.

It further enacted a law criminalizing enforced disappearances in 2018.

Over the decades, Fernando has led and mobilized the movement that put pressure on the Sri Lankan government. In 1991, he initiated the annual Oct. 27 commemoration of the disappeared persons, which has grown into an island-wide event. He also designed the well-known Monument for the Enforced Disappeared.

Fernando said he and fellow rights activists also fought for the setting up of inquiry commissions, which made numerous recommendations, though few were implemented.

"I demand the current government conduct mass grave excavations according to international standards, seek support from relevant international

agencies, and expedite all disappearance-related court cases pending for decades," he said.

The work has come at a high personal cost. Fernando has been arrested and detained multiple times, won a Supreme Court case against the government after being falsely imprisoned, had his home attacked, and been repeatedly summoned for questioning by the country's anti-terror agency.

Jeevan Nilantha from the University of Kelaniya said that Fernando has fearlessly fought against the many arbitrary arrests made under Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

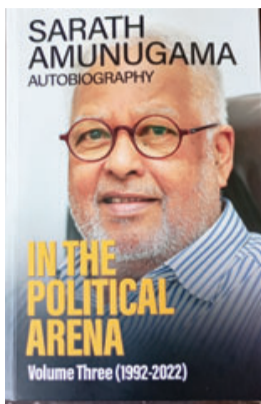
"In the last phase of the armed conflict against the LTTE in 2009, the government targeted its surrendered cadres and displaced Tamils. Fernando continues to stand up for them," Nilantha told UCA News.

Mattias Brunander, the secretary-general of Diakonia, said Fernando's work embodies the values of the prize, honoring him and all Sri Lankan families who refuse to let justice and truth be buried despite the lifelong suffering caused by enforced disappearances.

CBK was driving force of 'revolt' and Mahinda turned increasingly to his family

# Internal conflicts in SLFP under MR presidency and crossovers from UNP

(Excerpted from vol. 3 of the Sarath Amunugama autobiography)



Partly because of Anura's fiasco and partly due to the frustration of some MR campaigners who had expected Cabinet office and had been disappointed, trouble began to brew very early in the new regime. The driving force behind the "revolt" was CBK who had been treated roughly by the new President. Many of the perks that she had cleared through Cabinet at the last minute were removed, including a large contingent of security personnel and allocation of funds for her newly formed social service organization.

She was not on the invitees list for many of the state soirees. But the most drastic of all was when her party position was summarily removed on her birthday. Old grievances were resurrected and the party was splintered with only the old faithful and those with an axe to grind against MR supporting CBK. She had managed to get Anura and Mangala to her side but was angry that other "friends" did not follow suit. She took this as a personal betrayal.

On the other hand the new President was over suspicious and kept track of any signs of contact between his ministers and their earlier leader. My view was that it was counterproductive to start clashing and that we should give MR a chance, particularly because the LTTE was growing in strength and the Government looked incapable of meeting that threat. As the new Minister of Finance MR understood the difficulties of funding development while at the same time finding resources to prosecute a war. At the beginning he was looking for a negotiated settlement but the LTTE remained intransigent. This made him to change his outlook towards the war. In this atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty he turned to his family for assistance.

He brought in a younger brother Gotabaya who had been an army officer as his Defence Secretary. Another brother Basil was entrusted with managing party affairs and economic activity, Elder brother Chamal was made the Speaker of Parliament. First cousin Udayanga Weeratunga was appointed the Ambassador to Russia. A host of other relatives were found plum positions in the state sector leading to much criticism both within and outside the party.

**Revolt**

The sidelining of Anura and CBK from the beginning of his tenure led to cracks in the Presidents inner circle. The most significant was the alienation of Mangala and his cronies. It has recently been disclosed by author Chandraprema, who was privy to Rajapaksa secrets, that Mangala had expected to be appointed Prime Minister in view of his bravura performance as campaign manager. Mangala's chief lieutenant, who played a significant role in negotiations with the LTTE, Sripathi Sooriyarachchi - an ex-naval officer who expected a cabinet position - was fobbed off with a deputy ministership.

In frustration he threatened to go public with details of the MR-LTTE deal. He died in a car crash soon after leading to much speculation regarding the cause. Anura and Mangala who were closest to the JVP began to canvass their support to defeat the government during a vote on a Finance Bill. Mangala contacted me but I told him that this was not the time to destabilize a President from our own party on personal grounds.

On the appointed date there occurred a bizarre episode which was unique in our Parliamentary annals. It was an afternoon session and Anura turned up without being briefed about a JVP decision taken that morning not to support the Anura-Mangala initiative. He walked into the Opposition benches hoping to announce his defection, win the vote which would follow and be appointed Prime Minister. Technically he had crossed over and, watching the events unfold from the opposite benches, I saw the consternation on the faces of JVP leaders who had realized what was happening. Weerawansa rushed up to him and literally forced Anura to get back to the lobby after informing him of their "volte face". It was a comic example of the lack of communication among the rebels.

Anura and Mangala were sacked from their positions that evening. If my

memory serves me right Anura never came back to Parliament after that - an ignominious end to a career which was tailor made to take him to the top. MR survived the threat but it led to a fear psychosis about his colleagues which was seen in his growing dependence on his relatives and cronies. The temptation of the JVP and JHU to flirt with Anura and Mangala which nearly led to a defeat in Parliament made him open to the offers of UNPers to join him from time to time in exchange for Cabinet positions.

Mahinda Samarasinghe and Keheliya Rambukwella crossed over from the UNP and later a large contingent of UNPers led by Karu Jayasuriya joined the government. The CBK/Anura/Mangala revolt was crushed and MR emerged with a bigger majority in the House but his sense of insecurity bred by years of subservience to Anura and the latter's attempt to dislodge him, led to a dependence on a select coterie of relatives which in the end failed him and drove him out of power in 2015. Suspicion and "drawing up of his wagons in a circle" became a characteristic of MR which blighted a Presidency that had achieved unparalleled popularity with the electorate after the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE in 2009.

**Gotabaya**

The war with the LTTE still remained the main problem. Prabakaran was intransigent and the early attempts by the new President to enter into a dialogue by allocating funds for Northern rehabilitation was having no effect. But bringing his brother Gotabaya as Defence Secretary was beginning to yield results. The first advantage was that the usual suspicion of many Presidents of the incumbent Army chief's activities became unnecessary because his brother as the Defence Secretary covered that flank. He was the President's "eyes and ears" and no little tattle about the army would bother MR as it did his predecessors.

This clear line of command and trust was strengthened when GR broke seniority and appointed Sarath Fonseka as the Army Commander. SF was well known in the army as an ambitious but gutsy fighter who could take on the LTTE. He was supported by the appointment of Karannagoda as Navy chief and Gunatilleke as Air force commander. This was a new combination at the top with whom GR could interact easily. Many decisions which earlier needed the President's intervention could now be easily left to his senior military team.

SF also reshuffled his unit commanders so that a courageous fighting force could be moulded. A perennial problem with the armed services was that their field strength was limited. The President as Finance Minister allocated sufficient funds to more than double the strength of the armed forces. Educational qualifications were pared down and rural youth from districts like Anuradhapura and Kurunegala which had 'border villages' were given preference because they were closer to the theatre of war.

So much so that unemployment



CBK



Mahinda Rajapaksa



With Anura and Mangala

figures in those areas registered a significant decrease. At the same time a publicity campaign to go with the recruitment drive was tailored to enhance the self worth of the soldiers. This campaign was entitled "Api Wenuwen Api" by Triad advertising company. It became one of the most effective communications efforts in the history of advertising in Sri Lanka. After the war was concluded in 2009 I was asked to speak at the launch of a book by C. A. Chandraprema entitled "Gota's War". I said the following at that meeting as reported by Sandun Jayasekara of the Daily Mirror.

"Addressing a well attended launch ceremony of the book 'Gota's War', Dr Amunugama said that GR had an unbounded confidence in and affection for his brother President Rajapaksa which helped him to fashion and effectively put in place a fighting machine. The setting of priorities, a steady supply of weapons, building up of morale and financing were the results of this confidence within the high command that contributed to winning the war. Gota was a soldier's soldier. He knew the army from his first day as an officer cadet to the highest echelon. He built up a team of battle hardened commanders; the armchair generals were eased out. Frontline commanders were given their due place which convinced them that the war was winnable. He had clear objectives as seen in the development drive that he launched later in Colombo city and Kotte".

**Public Administration**

Since the new President took over the Ministry of Finance, a position he never gave up during his long tenure of office, I went back in the Cabinet to my old Ministry in which I had served as a public servant. President Rajapaksa addressing a meeting of officials in Matale had stated that he was happy to appoint a former senior public servant as his Minister of Public Administration. He was supportive of my initiatives to streamline the state services in order to provide a better deal to the public.

Another of my advantages was that I had the unstinted support of the new Secretary to the President Lalith Weeratunga. Lalith had briefly served as Additional Secretary when I was the Minister of Education. Indeed he had been selected as an entrant to the SLAS when I presided over an interview board as the Director of Combined Services under Felix Bandaranaike. He was a smart officer who had southern roots and had been selected by MR to be the Secretary to the PM when he assumed that office.

It is not well known that it was Lalith who extricated MR from the mess created by the fund entitled "Helping Hambantota" which according to CJ Sarath Silva could have landed MR in prison for four years. So naturally he was beholden to Lalith who followed him like

Mary's little lamb to whatever high position that his patron was elevated to. I knew that Lalith was in my corner when MR discussed the abilities of his Cabinet Ministers.

My predecessor Amarasiri Dodangoda had been very ill and unable to attend to his duties on a full time basis. He spent a lot of his time as a Minister either in hospital or at home. So my first step was to clean up the building and offices which had been neglected since the time of Ratnasiri Wickremanayake and Karu Jayasuriya. To tackle a practice which was central to my Ministry functions and which badly needed reform, I studied the procedures relating to salaries and pensions in the government service.

The prevailing system was antiquated and I and Gamini Wickremanayake who was an Additional Secretary under Felix Bandaranaike, had earlier thought of reforming it. The current practice was that each office had to make a paysheet, get cash from the nearest bank or post office and prepare envelopes in to which salaries in currency notes were manually inserted. The recipient would then sign on a stamp in front of a paying officer and collect his envelope. This called for a large staff dealing with payments and receipts in every office.

I introduced a radical change. Every public servant was provided with a bank account in his name. We would issue one cheque to the manager of the relevant bank with a list of payees and the amount due to them. The bank would then deposit that amount of money in the individuals bank account from which he could withdraw it at will. I asked the banks to install ATM machines so that money could be withdrawn by the "salarymen" [As the Japanese describe their officials] without crowding the bank's outlets. The same procedure was recommended for pensioners who had earlier to get a monthly certificate from the AGA's office and take it to a post office for payment. This reform reduced the number of clerks dealing with payments by a considerable number. They could now be deployed for more productive work. It was also a convenience to the salaryman and the pensioner.

As expected this suggestion drew a storm of protest from the Trade Unions and hide bound officials who were afraid of change. But I also had forward looking senior officers like The Director of Pensions Tillekeratne who boldly adopted the new method so that the value of such a change could be appreciated by our clients. I negotiated with the unions and found that their fear was that without "loose change" their members would not pay their TU dues. But since that could be done at source their fears were allayed.

I also got the Banks to advertise freebies like special draws and all expense paid trips to Buddhagaya and Saranath to new depositors from the public service. Banks were delighted to get these new deposits - a job they should have been doing anyway - and happily undertook the extra work that came their

way. Even now when I meet retired public servants they thank me for my innovation which had helped them to save money.

**Research and Training**

From the time I was the Director of Combined Services, research and training for public servants was high on my agenda. Several reports regarding improving the performance of the public service had emphasized the need for training. Among them the most emphatic were the recommendations of Shelton Wanasinghe, a senior CCS officer. He suggested the establishment of a SLAS training institute. This was done and Wanasinghe became its first director. He was full of enthusiasm and received the support of the Ministry of Public Administration.

It was linked to the Indian Training Institute in Hyderabad and our syllabus was based on the Hyderabad model. When I was Director of Combined Services and later Senior Assistant Secretary of the Public Administration Ministry, as the official responsible for overseeing SLIDA [Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration], I gave my full support to this venture. All recruits to the SLAS were given a year's training at SLIDA after which they were absorbed to the permanent cadre of the SLAS.

Several mid level officials of the SLAS preferred to transfer to this Institute as lecturers since they could follow their academic interests as well as obtaining paid leave for training abroad. SLIDA is well established today and is an integral part of a SLAS officers' career path.

**Melbourne**

As the new Minister I had the opportunity to expand the activities of SLIDA and link it with top class universities. The Commonwealth Office in London which had a division on the promotion of education which was headed by my CCS colleague Raja Gomes, invited me to a high level meeting on promoting administrative skills to be held in Sydney. Raja had earlier served in our Training Centre and was especially interested in administrative reform. This invitation gave me a good opportunity to visit Australia and interact with senior specialists in research and training. At the same time my friend Kusumsiri Balapatabendi, who was our High Commissioner there, had arranged a productive itinerary for me in Sydney and Melbourne which were cities with large concentrations of Sri Lankan expatriates especially among the professionals.

The visit to Melbourne was a memorable one. The state of Victoria of which Melbourne was the capital had many universities and training institutes which were manned by ex-Sri Lankans who went out of their way to support our proposals. Prominent among them were Monash University and the University of Victoria. After a fruitful visit to Monash, which had one of my students in its faculty of Social Sciences, I was able to launch an initiative for an exchange of researchers between that University and SLIDA.

The lady registrar of Victoria University was also a Burgher expatriate and was keen to strengthen links with Sri Lanka. With the enforcement of the "Sinhala Only" policy many highly educated Burghers had left the country and occupied good positions abroad. Among them was Professor De Kretser a scientist who had been appointed to the prestigious position of Governor of Victoria state. He invited me for lunch in the Governor's mansion which was located in a sprawling estate in the heart of the city. It had been occupied earlier by English Governors who had been appointed by the Queen of England.

Dr. De Kretser was a nominee of the Australian government but he received his letter of appointment from the Queen as she was the head of the Australian state. As an immigrant he had been selected to be the symbolic head of Victoria which was a state full of migrants from all parts of the world. Governor De Kretser told me that he was born in Dehiwela and had been a student at Royal College upto the sixth standard. He had migrated with his parents and excelled in his studies in Australia.

As one of the leading scientific researchers in his new home country he had been honoured by being nominated to one of the highest positions there. The large contingent of ex-Sri Lankans in Melbourne were proud of him and had arranged a procession with Kandyan dancers and drummers to escort him to his office on the first day. He was proud of that gesture and showed me photographs of that event. I in turn invited him to pay a visit to his native country. He obliged some months later and received a warm welcome, including a reception by his former neighbours from Dehiwela.

## Features

# More about President Premadasa - his caring nature & lack of trust in people

(Excerpted from *In Pursuit of Governance*, autobiography of MDD Pieris)

President Premadasa was extremely hard working, meticulous in his approach to anything and displayed a tremendous capacity as well as desire to learn. This was evident to anyone who worked with him. There are many things one could relate regarding these aspects of his character. I would however, confine myself to just one. One day he called some of us to Sucharitha at about 7 p.m. in order to discuss some issues relating to education. That day, he appeared to be freer, more relaxed and ready to reminisce. He spoke of his school days, his teachers and other things.

When in this mood he was an excellent raconteur, and most interesting to listen to. There was a striking portrait of Mahatma Gandhi of India on the wall of his office room, where we were seated with him. It was a calm and serene portrait of the great leader, and in the course of his conversation that evening, the President related to us the story of how he happened to acquire it. He told us that once on a visit to Rashtrapathi Bhawan in India, he spotted this portrait on a wall, and he so admired it that the Indians gave him a copy of the painting, which was what we were discussing now.

In it, the painter had brought out in Mahatma Gandhi a particularly distinctive look. The President was now gazing at it, and he was keen to capture this look in words. We were also looking at it and trying to figure out the overwhelming impact of the portrait. What could the painter have represented? Many words were suggested, such as "Peace" "Tranquility" "Calm" and so on. But it was clear that these words did not capture the subtlety or the overall impact of the portrait. There was a certain spirituality in the face, which was quite riveting. The President was not satisfied. I too was gazing at it intently, muttering various words to myself and at one point, the word "Renunciation," escaped from my lips.

The President, half heard it and immediately asked "What was that word Dharmasiri?" I said, "Renunciation." "That's the word!" he said. "That's what it is." Virtually on that note we parted. I had just reached home at about 9.30 p.m. when the telephone rang. It was the President. "What was that word you said?" he asked, and as I began to say "Renunciation," he too remembered, and we both said it at the same time. This episode illustrated one of the many facets of an extremely complex personality, an outstanding characteristic of which was a desire to learn, and a constant alertness to its possibilities.

The issue of trust is also an important component of governance. To the extent that there could be an environment where such trust prevails, activities would proceed smoother and faster. If there prevails a mutual acceptance of the *bona fides* of the principal actors in government, both at the political and official levels, it would affect positively the quality and the working of the whole machinery of government. President Premadasa did not appear to be in that happy position. He was wary of people. Many told me that he trusted nobody. This of course did not bother me.

I went on the basis, that one stood or fell on the basis of one's own record, and one's own credibility, and that what others thought of you really did not matter. In situations and circumstances where you deal with hundreds, even thousands of people, at various levels, holding so many different, and in the case of some, even eccentric views, it would have been foolish in the extreme to have permitted oneself to be affected by all these.

My approach was to quickly decide whether a view was fair or valid. If it was not, and if it was important enough, you tried to convince the other party. If that didn't work, you just moved on. You had so much to do, that it was impractical to permit yourself to be held hostage to any particular matter or thing. You indeed kept on working on the more important matters which were not prone to an immediate solution. But I was careful to see that preoccupation with time and distance did not detract from putting in the effort needed to achieve the here and now. The fact that there was an environment of mutual respect and trust between me and my senior colleagues in the public service smoothed the way considerably.

Apparently, the President did not seem to have been in the same happy position that I was. One day, in the course of a conversation when only both of us were there, he said "Dharmasiri, I don't trust anybody." We were discussing the reliability



Premadasa

of some people for appointments. Then he went on to state why he doesn't trust people. It had been based on considerable personal experience, and as an illustration he related the story of how he was trying for many months to rectify an erroneous decision of the Department of Inland Revenue about his income tax, at the time when he was just a Member of Parliament.

He had pursued it with the officials concerned and failing, had even gone to the Minister, because he felt deeply aggrieved. Nobody did anything. One day during the course of a casual conversation with a businessman, when this matter came up, the businessman had told him, "This is a small matter, Sir. I will get this attended to within two weeks." Mr. Premadasa had not believed this, but had said nothing. A week thereafter, he happened to pass this businessman's residence one evening, and thought that he would just drop in.

As he walked in unexpectedly, there was a flurry and a scurry, and he was just able to see the Assessor handling his case in the Inland Revenue Department darting into a room. He had pretended not to have seen it. As promised, the businessman had attended to his matter within two weeks. "What Ministers can't do these people can" he said. The President said that he had had many such experiences and that is why he found it extremely difficult to trust any person. This was indeed a revealing story, which illustrated the strong impact of experience on people.

At the same time what would be important would be the degree of generality that each one elicits from one's specific personal experiences. The whole issue of trust is not an abstraction. It concretely affects working relationships and even efficiency. My own view is that one has to take reasonable and calculated risks. You cannot perpetually go on the basis that you trusted nobody.

## Back trouble

The year 1993 also started with a flurry of activities. There was the free school books and free school uniform distribution ceremony at Mirissa, followed on January 29 by the Presidential Mobile Service in Trincomalee. Early February demonstrated a very caring side of the President who was on the whole a very complex personality. This caring side would only have been known to a few people, if at all. I didn't know it myself, until one morning, when getting ready to go to office, I bent down to put on my shoes. Something gave way in my back, and I was in severe pain unable even to straighten up.

With great difficulty and with the assistance of my wife I managed in due course to hobble into bed. The pain in the lower back was so severe that I could not even lift up my feet to stretch out in bed, without considerable assistance from my wife. I thought, I would be in hospital for weeks and had visions of lying in a hospital bed with the discomfort of one leg raised high in traction. We telephoned Dr. P.R. Anthonis, the eminent surgeon as well as a man of so many talents, who was my wife's uncle and apart from any relationship, a good friend of mine, as well as my parents, even before the time of my marriage.

Continued on page 13

# WHAT'S THE NEWS?



BY GOOLBAI GUNASEKARA

I watch all the news channels available to us in Sri Lanka—BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, CGTN (China), NDTV (India), News France and Euro News. Naturally I do so at different times of the day. One thing strikes me forcibly: It is the constant repetition of news that takes place on most channels - notably the BBC and Al Jazeera.

Ergo, I have to ask "Are we being told what is ACTUALLY going on in the world in its entirety or are we getting what is deemed politic to let us know?" For instance are we being forced to follow the tally stick of Trump's successes by the blandishment of a servile press or is there a less fallacious story?

I try to react sensibly to both the TV programmes as well as to the Press but of late my emotions have not been on a particularly even keel. Many of my acquaintances tell me they do not bother to read the newspapers. They read whatever they want online thus missing out on a great deal of supposedly interesting goings on in the world. Many react to neither the press nor the TV showing a stoic, if rather bovine, attitude to affairs surrounding them. And because of this, I am sure they sleep better at night than I do.

The story of the Iranian women-footballers seeking Australian sanctuary, and then reneging, has now been mentioned so often over the last few days that I must say I don't really care where they decide to live. In fact how many of us need constant reminding of such trivia?

Of ongoing interest is President Trump who dominates most of the news in any case. His contradictory statements, his brash attitude at press conferences, his airy dismissal of previous statements, his ability to seemingly be on top of everything absolutely mesmerizes me. Can anyone be so narcissistic? I imagine that sensible Americans - even sensible Republicans - must be writhing in embarrassment at some of Trump's more blatant utterances.

Poet Robert Frost (Trump's compatriot from a long gone era) said that we would all go insane if we could not laugh. He lived long before Trump put in an appearance but it is certainly an apt comment at this moment in history when Trump's very name evokes derisive laughter.

Another highly irritating observance which is often made by Western leaders is that they refer to "The World" which in reality only encompasses the WESTERN world. Recently, I cannot quite recall when (as my retentive memory is not what it was) some European Chancellor made the remark that Europe was responsible for the future of the world.

Let's examine that astounding comment. Europe has approximately 750 million people as its citizens. The rising influence of countries like China and India relegate that Chancellor's claim to the realms of idiocy. Europe comprises around 44 countries and if one adds Russia, Turkey and one or two others it can total nearly 50 sovereign countries. Population wise Asia is well ahead. Some one needs to remind Europe that the days of colonization are well past.

Of course the news is sometimes contradictory. Trump claims Iran is virtually bombed to submission while Iran carries on making strike after strike on the American bases in the Gulf States and most successfully defending itself. It is left to us, the hapless viewers, to decode the news as best we can and wonder where we stand amid all this turmoil.

Elected Heads of countries should not display ignorance of the constitutions of important countries. Trump declared this

morning (March 17<sup>th</sup>) that he is annoyed with Starmer for his lack of support because Starmer "Can do what he likes." Obviously Trump does not know that the British Constitution does not allow Starmer to do as he likes. The British PM is 'primus inter pares' meaning 'first among equals' in the British Cabinet and does not have the right to act on his own.

Talking of leaders reminds of one of Asia's - if not the world's greatest rulers - namely the Moghul Emperor Akbar whose biography I have just finished reading. Akbar was illiterate. He was probably dyslexic which is why he could never sit still long enough to learn to do so. He made up for this with a formidable memory and an unmatched skill in governing the varied races of India. In these days of upheaval we need an Akbar at the helm of world affairs. The only problem here is that we need an Enlightened Dictator to direct world affairs. Obviously not a remote possibility. Still, I can dream can't I?

Just the other day, one of my ex-pupils asked me whether I was following the Gaza War. (As if one has any choice in the matter seeing that it is on the news channels daily and at irritatingly frequent intervals) The news unblushingly records Israel's behavior without comment as to its legality or barbarity.

The Ukraine has a leader who is illegal himself if one wants to be honest. He is my LEAST favourite personality at the moment. He needed to stand for election years ago and has overstayed his period of office by years. How come no country has mentioned all this? Gossip has it that some time ago his wife took 60 ladies abroad on a fashion display and leads a social life worthy of fashionistas anywhere. Of course

this is just gossip as I hasten to say but, frankly, I like gossip!

Watching the SAME leaders, up to the SAME antics, being accepted by the SAME countries is frustrating in extreme. One recalls the words of a humourist who said that anyone has the right to go to hell in his own way. Truly it seems to me that this is happening to many of us but it is not always our own choice - going to hell I mean! The news channels give ample evidence of the folly of leaders who impact the world having neither the education nor the wisdom to govern. Fate is fickle indeed.

Despite the usual barrage of unimportant criticism from the opposition, our own government cannot be faulted for trying. Of course they make mistakes. Vijitha Herath should start using interpreters when he speaks to a non-Sinhala audience. But these are parlous times. The global situation cannot be helped by anything Sri Lankans do. Our nation is at the mercy of affairs out of our control. Is this not the best time for all parties to make a UNITED effort to plan and work out how best Sri Lanka should operate till this world crisis is over?

The barrage of regular criticism, from the opposition leader specially, is upsetting and valueless. It overheats our imaginations and pushes our emotions to a crescendo. Let us praise whatever deserves praise and halt criticisms of the Government for the moment. The world is in frightening new territory and we desperately need a CALM and deft government. ALL Sri Lankans should use every iota of their intelligence and patriotism to see us through these next months of turbulence. Togetherness has never been more vitally desired or needed.

Let us use formidable national vigour forgetting political and personal differences for the time being. Let us attempt to govern our Resplendent Isle with honesty and UNITY. Qurelling can resume AFTER this world crisis is over!!

No Cure...

Trump's narcissism and need for validation are inseparable from his decision-making. He rarely makes choices based on objective analysis; instead, he weighs decisions by how they will enhance his image, consolidate his influence, or humiliate adversaries. Johnston illustrates this in his account of Trump's obsession with revenge: "Second, Trump recommended revenge as business policy. 'Get even,' he said. 'If somebody screws you, you screw 'em back ten times over. At least you can feel good about it. Boy, do I feel good'" (Johnston). This principle governs his interactions at every level, from boardrooms to the Oval Office. In the political sphere, it manifests in impulsive actions, disregard for institutional norms, and prioritisation of personal vendettas over national interest. The USFL antitrust case, in which Trump pursued a reckless legal gamble resulting in a symbolic \$3 award while destroying a potentially successful league, exemplifies this pattern (Kranish & Fisher). Decisions are judged not by consequence or strategic merit but by their capacity to reinforce his self-image or punish those who challenge him.

Trump's approach to governance and policy follows the same psychological template. He consistently interprets events through a lens of personal threat and opportunity, rarely acknowledging systemic realities. In his dealings with Iran, as I have observed, Trump's statements of self-reliance—"I trust no one"—reflect a mindset in which alliances, institutions, and norms are expendable. He thrives on disruption, treating crises as arenas for personal aggrandizement. Yet the danger lies not only in his decisions but in the vacuum they create: the institutions designed to mediate risk, enforce accountability, and maintain stability are systematically undermined by the Trump ethos. This is the Trump Plague: the transposition of personal

narcissism into public consequence, where errors of judgment are magnified by power, and the incentives for ethical governance are inverted.

What makes Trump uniquely intractable is that he is impervious to conventional corrective measures. The combination of early familial enabling, a lifelong pattern of being bailed out, and an acute talent for spinning events into personal advantage ensures that conventional political checks—laws, norms, even media scrutiny—cannot recalibrate his behaviour. Mary L. Trump argues that Donald Trump's self-perception is inseparable from his environment of enablers: "Fred had become so invested in the fantasy of Donald's success that he and Donald were inextricably linked. Facing reality would have required acknowledging his own responsibility, which he would never do" (Mary L. Trump). Even failures that would cripple ordinary leaders—financial collapse, public scandal, legal penalties—are converted into narratives of triumph or vindication, reinforcing his delusional sense of omnipotence.

Trump's decision-making is not merely flawed; it is structurally incapable of prioritizing collective interest over personal aggrandizement. As Johnston notes, he "told the New Jersey attorney general that unless he expedited approval, he would not build in Atlantic City... Given Trump's well-known success in convincing the City of New York to perform lucrative favors, that was a subtle but powerful threat" (Johnston). This approach—leveraging institutional processes to enforce compliance with personal goals—has been replicated at every level of governance he touches. Loyalty and fear become the operating principles, while law, ethics, and reasoned debate are subordinated.

The world that emerges after Trump,

therefore, is one that must contend with the structural consequences of his choices. His influence extends beyond policy into the norms of political behaviour: expedience over principle, loyalty over law, and spectacle over substance. There is no simple antidote. The Trump Plague is not a problem to be solved in one term or one election; it is a challenge to political systems, social norms, and institutional resilience. Attempts to treat it as a conventional political issue are doomed to partial failure, for the pathology at its center is neither transient nor externally imposed. It is an enduring feature of human ambition, magnified by wealth, media, and power.

The remedy, if it can even be called that, requires vigilance, institutional reinforcement in the face of personal glorification, and a deeper understanding of the psychological architecture that underlies our own behaviour—for there is, in some measure, a Trump within each of us. From East to West, from ancient spiritually awakening philosophies to modern intellectual discourse, this has been a central question: how to be humane in the face of power, temptation, and self-interest. Only by recognizing the interplay of narcissism, opportunism, and cultivated impunity can we begin to safeguard governance from the extremes of the Trump Plague.

There may be no indefinite cure for the Trump Plague, but confronting it remains one of the most urgent and defining challenges the world faces today as the Trump Plague is both individual and systemic, both internal and external, both powerful and powerless; both rich and poor, both visible and invisible, both rational and irrational, both deliberate and instinctive, both truth and distortion, both order and chaos, both strength and fragility, both fear and ambition, both control and collapse, both dominance and decay.

FROM PAGE 5

KINGSWOOD TASTE VICTORY AFTER 68 YEARS

Kingswood College ended a 68-year drought when they trounced the rivals Dharmarajah College at the picturesque Asgiriya Stadium in the 119th Battle of the Maroons. This victory was mainly due to outstanding performances by two talented players. Kavija Gamage, the Vice-Captain of the Sri Lanka National Youth team who scored a century in each innings (which incidentally is a record for the series) and also had a match bag of eight wickets. The other player who starred in this victory was Kenula Pihiliyanga who claimed a stunning eleven wickets in the match.

The last time Kingswood won the big match was in 1968 under the captaincy

of Maurice Fernando. Maurice Fernando was selected as the second schoolboy cricketer of that year. This was the second time that a cricketer was selected from Kandy. In 1957 when this award was inaugurated, it was W Premaratne, who captained St. Anthony's College, Katugastota was selected as the first schoolboy cricketer of the year.

This was heartening news for Kingswoodians old and young as the victory came after 68 years. Well done, Kingswood College.

Kingswood for ever!

HM Nissanka Warakaula

Tribute to a distinguished BOI leader



Mr. Tuli Cooray, former Deputy Director General of the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI) and former Secretary General of the Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF), passed away three months ago, leaving a distinguished legacy of public service and dedication to national economic development.

An alumnus of the University of Colombo, Mr. Cooray graduated with a Special Degree in Economics. He began his career as a Planning Officer at the Ministry of Plan Implementation and later served as an Assistant Director in the Ministry of Finance (Planning Division).

He subsequently joined the Greater Colombo Economic Commission (GCEC), where he rose from Manager to Senior Manager and later Director. During this

period, he also served at the Treasury as an Assistant Director. With the transformation of the GCEC into the BOI, he was appointed Executive Director of the Investment Department and later elevated to the position of Deputy Director General.

In recognition of his vast experience and expertise, he was appointed Director General of the Budget Implementation and Policy Coordination Division at the Ministry of Finance and Planning. Following his retirement from government service, he continued to contribute to the national economy through his work with JAAF.

Mr. Cooray was widely respected as a seasoned professional with exceptional expertise in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and facilitating investor relations. His commitment, leadership, and humane qualities earned him the admiration and affection of colleagues across institutions.

He was also one of the pioneers of the BOI Past Officers' Association, and his passing is deeply felt by its members. His demise has created a void that is difficult to fill, particularly within the BOI, where his contributions remain invaluable.

Mr. Cooray will be remembered not only for his professional excellence but also for his integrity, humility, and the lasting impact he made on those who had the privilege of working with him.

The BOI Past Officers' Association jagathcds@gmail.com

When seabed...

Taken together, these recommendations provide a comprehensive roadmap for safeguarding Sri Lanka's undersea cable infrastructure, reinforcing national security, and positioning the country as a regional leader in maritime and digital resilience.

Securing seabed, safeguarding the skies

Undersea cables are no longer merely commercial infrastructure; they are strategic assets at the heart of global stability. In a conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States, disruption in the Persian Gulf could trigger a global digital crisis, with cascading effects across the Indian Ocean.

Simultaneously, such a disruption could open the door for technologically advanced actors to redefine global connectivity through satellite constellations, potentially

establishing monopolistic control over digital networks.

The crisis envisioned in "When the Seabed Goes Dark" is not hypothetical, but it is structurally plausible. The convergence of dense cable networks, geopolitical rivalry, and weak maritime governance creates conditions where disruption is not only possible, but strategically attractive. What follows may be even more consequential: a shift in global connectivity from the ocean floor to orbital space where control is narrower, faster, and potentially monopolistic.

For nations like Sri Lanka and the broader Indian Ocean region, the challenge is clear: secure seabed infrastructure while preparing for the strategic realities of space-based connectivity.

For the broader Indo-Pacific region, the

challenge is clear: to secure the seas without surrendering the skies.

By operationalizing the NSCPRF and adopting a forward-looking posture, Sri Lanka can transform vulnerability into leadership in the emerging domain of integrated maritime and digital security.

In the future battle-space, dominance will depend not only on control of the seas, but on control of the data pathways beneath them and the satellites above them.

This article and its conceptual framework are based on the research and analysis of Rear Admiral J.J. Ranasinghe (Retd), who holds a master's degree in Maritime Policy from the University of Wollongong, reflecting his strategic insights into undersea cable vulnerabilities, Indo-Pacific maritime security, and emerging space-based connectivity risks.

FROM PAGE 6

After Iranian...

Sri Lanka's Dilemma: Neutrality in the Eye of a Storm

Colombo's response in the days since the sinking has been marked by a quiet discipline that reflects both prudence and an awareness of the moment's gravity. Naval patrols have been extended across the affected waters in an effort to ensure that no foreign actor exploits the wreck or attempts to manipulate the scene for strategic advantage. The government has initiated a joint maritime safety review aimed at reassuring international observers that Sri Lanka intends to handle the incident with full transparency and in accordance with international maritime norms. Diplomats have opened discreet channels with Tehran, New Delhi, Washington, and several Gulf capitals, not as an act of alignment, but to prevent premature narratives from hardening into geopolitical assumptions that could force Sri Lanka into positions it has no desire to occupy.

Neutrality, however, becomes most fragile precisely when events press hardest against its boundaries. The sight of foreign debris washing ashore has created a symbolic intrusion that no government can simply cordon off with patrols or press releases. The island now occupies a liminal space between spectator and participant, and this is a position familiar to many small states navigating the undertow of great power rivalry. Their neutrality becomes most prized by the international community at the exact moment it becomes most difficult for them to preserve. It is a

paradox that is neither new nor avoidable. It is the structural reality of a world where crises migrate unpredictably across borders and through seas.

Sri Lanka now confronts a moment in which the temptation to withdraw into studied silence must be balanced against the need to shape the narrative before larger powers do so on its behalf. This is where the logic of the Colombo Accord becomes most compelling. The framework is not only a mechanism for easing Iran's internal fragmentation. It is also a means for Sri Lanka to assert a form of agency that does not compromise its neutrality. By offering a venue for structured dialogue, the island positions itself not as a partisan actor, but as a stabilizing presence in a region increasingly defined by uncertainty at sea and volatility on land. In doing so, Sri Lanka shapes events before events shape Sri Lanka, which is the essential choice required of any state forced, however reluctantly, into the center of a crisis not of its own making.

The Narrowing Window

The sinking of the frigate has emerged as a stark emblem of a deeper reality. Iran's transition is no longer a distant abstraction that can be managed at diplomatic arm's length. It has shed the illusion of containment. The crisis now lives simultaneously in contested territorial waters, in competing claims of political legitimacy, and in the widening space between what factions assert and what realities unfold. Its center of gravity remains in Tehran, but its

shockwaves have reached Colombo with an insistence that can no longer be ignored.

This moment reveals a simple but unforgiving truth. Statements will not steady the situation, and sanctions will not guide a fractured nation toward coherence. The forces now in motion are too varied, too suspicious of one another, and too willing to interpret every event as either an opportunity or an existential threat. The wrecked frigate near Sri Lanka's shores is a reminder that crises born of political collapse do not respect geography. They travel outward until they encounter resistance or structure, and at present there is no structure worthy of the name.

The Colombo Accord does not pretend to offer a miracle. It offers something far more modest and far more necessary. It creates a disciplined mechanism within which Iran's competing actors can confront one another without turning the region into their arena. It provides a framework for de-escalation at a moment when the absence of structure risks inviting a cascade of increasingly dangerous misunderstandings. The Accord is not a promise of peace. It is an attempt to slow the march toward catastrophe long enough for reason to reenter the conversation.

As investigations proceed and diplomats circle carefully around the wreckage, this one fact will not change. Without a neutral venue that can host structured dialogue, the next Iranian crisis will not

limit itself to a sinking offshore. It will break outward in ways that no state in the region, and few beyond it, are prepared to manage. History rarely gives much warning before the window for action closes. Sri Lanka now finds itself standing at that window, and the world would be unwise to ignore the view from its shore.

Dr. Achala GunasekaraRockwell is a Sri Lankan-born scholar of international security affairs whose work focuses on political transitions, regional security architectures, and defence strategy. She holds advanced degrees from the University of Wisconsin and has published widely on geopolitical dynamics across the Indo-Pacific, South Asia, and the Middle East. Her research emphasizes negotiated transitions, smallstate diplomacy, and the intersection of security with political instability. Dr. GunasekaraRockwell writes in her personal capacity, and her views represent her own scholarly analysis.

Disclaimer

The views, interpretations, and analyses presented in this article are solely those of the author. They do not represent, reflect, or imply any official position of the US Government, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force, Air University, or any other federal entity. This work was produced entirely in the author's personal capacity, outside the scope of her official duties, and is completely unrelated to her employment or responsibilities within the US Government.

FROM PAGE 4

More about...

He said he would come immediately. In the meantime, I used the bedside telephone to speak to my Secretaries in office and to make arrangements for appropriate officials to handle my appointments for the day, including discussions with foreign visitors. On a matter of principle, I disliked postponing anything, unless the situation was totally impossible. Finally, I telephoned Mr. Wijayadasa, the President's Secretary. He was concerned, because he himself had gone through this problem sometime earlier. He advised me to be very careful and strictly follow doctor's advice, and added that he would put up a note to the President and keep him informed.

Dr. Anthonis arrived soon thereafter, checked me out, prescribed Voltaren which he in fact brought along with him, advised warm fomentation, etc., and wanted me to rest in bed. He promised to keep in touch with me. That evening, I got down several boxes of papers from office and propping myself up on

pillows, and with the assistance of my Secretary and Personal Assistant attended to them. In my case this was a psychological necessity. If I didn't attend to the papers I would not have been at ease.

Towards dinner time, which in our case is late, around 9.30 p.m. I was feeling more comfortable, although the pain was still very much there, and quite evident whenever I moved. I was still at my dinner when the telephone rang. It was close upon 10 p.m. We wondered who it could be, ringing up at this time. It was the President. "Aiyyo Dharmasiri, what happened?" Were his first words. I told him the problem and ended up by saying lightly, "Must be creeping old age, Sir."

The President must have thought that I was treating the matter too casually. He proceeded to give me a lecture on the necessity of being very careful. He said that a similar thing happened to him sometime back, when he bent to wipe himself after taking a shower. He advised me to tell

my wife to plug on the hair dryer and let the warm air play on my back, and to do this a few times a day. I was feeling slightly better, and made the mistake of telling him this, and saying that by morning if I felt still better, I intended going to office.

His affable manner changed immediately and in an icy tone, he said, "your coming to office is a secondary matter. What is important is to get completely well." Then he asked me who was treating me. When I mentioned Dr. Anthonis's name, he said "Dr. Anthonis is an excellent doctor. But he is a surgeon no? You must see a physician." Then he inquired whether I knew his own physician. - Dr. H.H.R. Samarasinghe, the eminent consultant physician at Sri Jayewardenepura Hospital. I said that he was a good friend of mine. "Then telephone him now and ask him to come and see you tomorrow morning," were the President's parting words.

I thanked him sincerely for his kindness and concern. His interest

was not pro-forma. His tone and manner as well as the time he spent talking to me indicated genuine concern. I got back to my dinner. I thought I would give Dr. Samarasinghe a call next day, mostly because, the President wanted me to, and he would have been very angry if he checked back and found that I had not done so. Five minutes later, the telephone rang again. My wife said, "Looks like you are not going to finish your dinner tonight."

On the line was Dr. Samarasinghe. "Dharmasiri, what happened?" Were his opening words. "How do you know?" I inquired, just for the record although I knew what must have happened. "The President phoned me a short while ago," he said. HHR would have come home and seen me as a friend. In fact, he came several times during my mother's illness. But now the matter was official. He had a mandate from the President to see me next morning, examine me, and report to him, what my condition was! By 6.15 next morning, he was at

home. He checked me out, asked me to continue with the same treatment as prescribed by Dr. Anthonis and insisted I remain three days in bed, with permission only to carefully walk to the bathroom and back.

He said, he was reporting this to the President. In three days, I was much better. He came and checked me out again, but advised another three days in bed. He was not going to encourage me to take any chances whatsoever. This was the second occasion that the President had demonstrated something special, in his approach towards me. The first was when he blindly signed a number of Cabinet Papers and Supplementary Estimates, put up by me, the first day he came to the Ministry after assuming office as Minister of Education and Higher Education. On that occasion, he flatly refused to read them or to be briefed about their contents. None of us knew, at the time of the episode I have related, that he had less than three months to live.

FROM PAGE 12

## Strengthening conservation through active law enforcement Police engagement supports wildlife protection in hill country



An awareness and capacity-building program on wildlife crime prevention, with a special focus on the Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), was successfully conducted on March 20 at the Dimbula Athletics & Cricket Club, Radella. The session was organized under the ongoing Multi-Regional Leopard Research and Conservation Project implemented by the Wildlife & Nature Protection Society (WNPS), in collaboration with LOLC. It brought together senior officers representing 28 Police stations across the Nuwara Eliya and Kandy districts, underscoring the growing importance of law enforcement in conservation efforts within multi-use landscapes, a WNPS news release said.

The Central Highlands present a unique conservation challenge, where increasing habitat loss and fragmentation, depletion of natural prey, and use of snares continue to threaten leopards inhabiting these landscapes majority outside formally protected areas. The session therefore focused on strengthening the capacity of Police officers to identify, prevent, and respond to wildlife crimes, while fostering closer coordination with conservation stakeholders, it explained.

Co-Chair of the Wildcats Subcommittee, Prof. Enoka Kudavidanage, highlighted the ecological and economic significance of leopards as apex predators,

emphasizing their role in maintaining ecosystem balance and supporting nature-based tourism. She also outlined the current conservation challenges in the Hill Country and presented ongoing interventions under the WNPS-LOLC project.

Dr. Sanjaya Weerakody, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden (XTBG), Chinese Academy of Sciences, shared key research findings on leopard mortality trends over the past 17 years revealing concerning patterns, including the disproportionate loss of mature male individuals and the increasing prevalence of snaring as a primary cause of death highlighting an urgent need for targeted enforcement.

Attorney-at-Law Charaka Jayaratne provided an in-depth overview of the legal provisions under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, with particular attention to offences related to snaring. He discussed how Police can take more proactive and effective action, identifying gaps in current approaches and suggesting practical measures to strengthen enforcement outcomes.

Adding further perspective, Samantha Gunasekara, former Deputy Director of Customs and Chairman of the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA), spoke on the broader context of illegal wildlife trade in Sri Lanka. Drawing from

past cases and recent observations, he highlighted emerging trends and risks associated with wildlife trafficking.

Representing the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Ranger Srinath Dissanayake of the Hakgala Wildlife Range shared recent cases on leopard deaths and rescue operations recorded in 2025. He emphasized on personal observations, importance of timely intervention, and strong collaboration between field officers and the Police to mitigate human-wildlife conflict and prevent avoidable losses.

An interactive discussion followed, allowing officers to raise questions, clarify procedures, and exchange experiences while sharing their feedback as well. This dialogue contributed to reinforcing the value of strategic engagement between the Police, the Department of Wildlife Conservation, and conservation partners while strengthening inter-agency understanding and highlighting the need for coordinated responses during leopard-related incidents.

The session commenced with opening remarks by WNPS President Graham Marshall, who expressed appreciation for the participation of the Sri Lanka Police and reiterated the critical role of law enforcement in safeguarding biodiversity beyond protected areas.

WNPS Past President and WNPS LOLC Project Head Spencer Manuepillai, Project Coordinator Gihani Hettiarachchi, Regional Center Coordinators, Thilanka Dissanayake and Attorney-at-Law Malaka Palliyaguruge were also present as part of the WNPS team.

WNPS extends its sincere appreciation to all officers who participated for their commitment and active engagement. Supported by LOLC, these initiatives form part of a broader effort to strengthen practical conservation through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and effective enforcement in Sri Lanka's Hill Country.



From Left; Anjali Goonetilleke, Chief Manager – Marketing, Sampath Bank; Aroshi Nanayakkara, Independent Non-Executive Director, Sampath Bank; Chamila Bandara, Chamila Bandara, Group Management Committee Member – Hayleys Advantis, Director Advantis Express Pvt Ltd, Licensee Federal Express Corporation for Sri Lanka & Maldives, Director – IML Delivery Systems Pvt Ltd; Representing Citypak; Ramani Fernando, Director and CEO, Ramani Fernando Salons; Shea Wickramasinghe, Group Managing Director, CBL Group; Deepal De Silva, Chief Operating Officer, Sampath Bank; Keshini Jayawardena, Independent Non-Executive Director, Sampath Bank; Asanka Liyanage, DGM – Consumer & SME Banking, Sampath Bank.

## Sampath Bank Champions SME Women Entrepreneurs Through the 'Unstoppable Woman' Programme

In recognition of International Women's Day 2026, Sampath Bank hosted its Entrepreneur Development Programme under the theme 'Unstoppable Woman', bringing together SME women entrepreneurs for an evening centred on knowledge sharing, inspiration and practical business insights. Held at the Cinnamon Grand Colombo, the event welcomed over 100 participants alongside members of the Bank's Board

and Corporate Management, creating a platform for meaningful dialogue on entrepreneurship, resilience and sustainable business growth.

Independent Non-Executive Director and Board Marketing Committee Chair at Sampath Bank Aroshi Nanayakkara said the Bank's annual International Women's Day initiative reflects a deeper commitment to empowering women within Sri Lanka's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The event featured a distinguished line-up of speakers who shared perspectives drawn from their professional journeys including renowned entrepreneur Ramani Fernando, Shea Wickramasingha, Group Managing Director, CBL Group, Chamila Bandara, Group Management Committee Member – Hayleys Advantis, and Asanka Liyanage, DGM – Consumer & SME Banking, Sampath Bank PLC.

## Mangala Tex marks expansion with new Kurunegala Branch

TEXT AND PIX BY SK SAMARANAYAKE

Fashion retail leader Mangala Tex celebrated the grand opening of its newest branch in Kurunegala on Saturday, March 14, 2026, adding a vibrant new dimension to the city's commercial landscape.

Since its inception, Mangala Tex has been synonymous with style, durability, and quality, earning a lasting reputation as a premier clothing retailer. Guided by the visionary leadership of Chairman Ronald Nimal Hope, the brand has successfully established a strong presence with thriving outlets in Yatinuwara Veediya, Kandy, Cross Street, Kandy, and Peradeniya, Kandy.

The Kurunegala expansion marks a significant milestone in the company's growth, bringing its signature fashion offerings



closer to a wider customer base. True to its slogan, "Let Your Clothing Do The Talking," the new store features an extensive range of apparel catering to all age groups, blending contemporary style with durable, high-quality fabrics.

Shoppers at the Kurunegala branch are greeted by a welcoming atmosphere and attentive staff, which long-time customers cite as key reasons for their loyalty. The store's combination of trendy designs, reliable quality, and customer-centric service continues to set it apart in Sri Lanka's competi-



tive fashion retail sector. Mangala Tex now employs more than 120 staff members across its branches, remaining a proudly family-driven enterprise alongside Managing Director Pahan Dissanayaka and Directress M M G P Dissanayaka.

With the official opening in Kurunegala, Mangala Tex demonstrates that consistent quality, style, and service can drive sustained growth, expanding the brand's reach to new communities while reinforcing its status as a trusted name in Sri Lankan fashion.

## The Winghead Shark



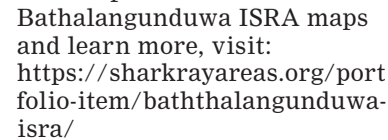
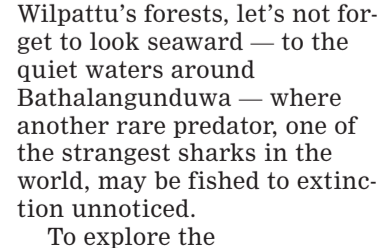
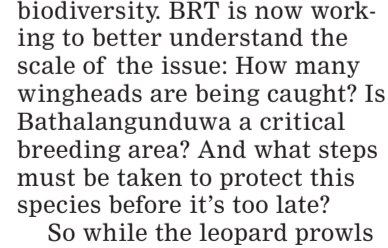
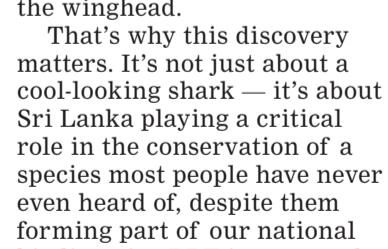
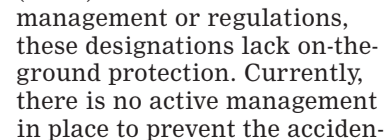
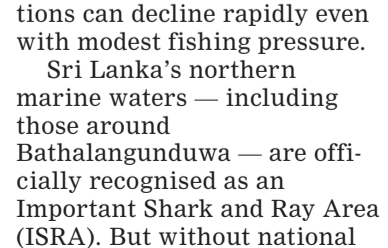
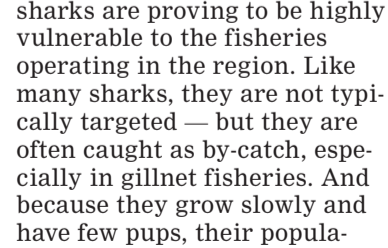
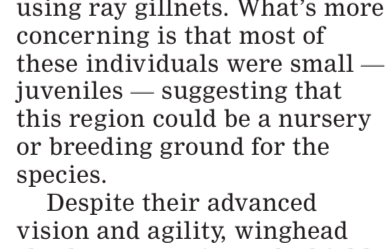
You've probably heard of Wilpattu National Park - home to the Sri Lankan leopard, one of our most elusive apex predators. But just offshore, in the coastal waters around Bathalangunduwa Island, lurks another equally fascinating and arguably more unusual predator: It doesn't roam the jungle or leave paw prints in the sand. It glides silently through the shallow coastal seas, equipped with 360-degree vision and a head that looks like it belongs in a science fiction film.

Meet the winghead shark (*Eusphyra blochii*) — a truly unique member of the hammerhead family. With a wing-like head that spans nearly half its body length, it has the widest head-to-body ratio of any shark in the world. If the shape wasn't wild enough, its head placement gives it an almost full panoramic visual field, with eyes placed so far apart they can nearly see behind themselves. This gives the winghead a massive binocular overlap — about 48 degrees, the highest known among sharks.

It's like having rear-view mirrors built into your skull — and as if that wasn't impressive enough, the winghead is incredibly agile, able to make tight turns and manoeuvres like a tuk-tuk dodging traffic.

But here's what makes this shark even more extraordinary: it's extremely rare. Winghead sharks are only confirmed to be present in the waters of northern Australia/southern Indonesia. And now, thanks to ongoing research by Blue Resources Trust (BRT), with support from several donors including the Tokyo Cement Group, Sri Lanka has joined that list.

BRT's field team have recorded several winghead sharks (often multiple individuals within a single day) caught by small outboard fibre-



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Business

# Mahindra Ideal Motors celebrates gala 'Excellence Awards' honouring outstanding performance and innovation

The Mahindra Ideal Motors Excellence Awards ceremony, a grand celebration to recognize dealers and other stakeholders of Ideal Motors, was held at the Wave n' Lake Banquet Hall & Restaurant in Welisara recently.

The event was graced by the presence of special guests including Nalin Welgama, Founder and Chairman Ideal Motors, Dilani Yatawaka, Group Managing Director/CEO Ideal Motors, Nimisha Welgama, Director Legal and Corporate Affairs Ideal Motor, Sachin Arolka, Head International Operations, Auto Division Mahindra & Mahindra India. Senthil Selvaraju, Head International Operations and Customer Service Automotive Division Mahindra & Mahindra India, Sujeth Jayant, Country Head Mahindra & Mahindra India and Shitam Kundu, Head Domestic Services Mahindra & Mahindra India.

Also, in attendance from Ideal Motors were Kasun



Nalin Welgama Dilani Yatawaka Sachin Arolka

Fernando, General Manager Commercial Vehicle Sales Division, Sameera Bamunuarachchi, Deputy General Manager Spare Parts, Logistics & Inventory and Prasanna Manamperi, Deputy General Manager After Sales Service.

Speaking at the event, Nalin Welgama Ideal Motors Founder and Chairman said, "When we began our journey with Mahindra in 2009, the previous company had sold 300 vehicles in the country, of which nearly 150 had various defects. At that time our journey began by engaging with the parent

company in India and repairing those vehicles free of charge. That commitment has brought us to where we are today. As we believe, our journey truly begins after the sale. We are dedicated to strengthening our customers, and in doing so, strengthening ourselves. That is how we transformed the after-sales service experience."

He added, "Our main strength is the Mahindra Bolero, which has sold more than 10,000 units in just two years. In a very short period, we grew from zero to over 100,000 vehicles sold. This is not my victory, but the victory of all of you

who contributed to it. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis we faced, this awards ceremony was organized to express our gratitude to all of you who trusted our institution and stood by us. Let us continue our victorious journey together."

Dilani Yatawaka, Group Managing Director Ideal Motors, said: "Today is a very happy day for us. This is the first time in history of the organisation, that representatives of our vehicles, spare parts, services, and financial institutions are meeting together under one roof."

Speaking on the occasion, Sachin Arolka, Head International Operations, Auto Division Mahindra & Mahindra India, stated that Ideal Motors in Sri Lanka is one of the largest seller of Mahindra vehicles in Asia.

More than 300 dealers and finance partners participated in the event which concluded with dinner, fellowship and entertainment.

# HNB Assurance Achieves Historic Milestone with 256 MDRT Qualifiers, Including 8 TOTs and 33 COTs

HNB Assurance has once again set a new benchmark of excellence, celebrating an unprecedented 256 members of its sales force qualifying for the prestigious Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) in 2025, the highest in the Company's history.

Building on the strong foundation of 222 MDRT qualifiers in 2024, the Company's consistent upward trajectory reflects a deliberate, technology-enabled and training-driven strategy. Of the 256 qualifiers in 2025, 33 achieved Court of the Table (COT) status, while 08 reached the elite Top of the Table (TOT) criteria, highlighting both quantitative growth and qualitative advancement.

The MDRT is globally recognized as the gold standard in the insurance and financial services industry, representing leading professionals from over 500 companies worldwide. MDRT membership signifies exceptional productivity, ethical practice, and a commitment to client-centric financial solutions.

Commenting on this historic milestone, Lasitha Wimalaratne, Executive Director / CEO of HNB Assurance, stated, "Our journey from 222 MDRT qualifiers in 2024 to 256 in 2025 is not incidental, it is the result of disciplined strategy and structured execution. We have made significant investments in strengthening our distribution framework, redesigning

our sales training architecture, and introducing AI-powered sales enablement tools supported by clear performance roadmaps for our advisors and bancassurance officers.

The increase in COT and TOT quali-



Sanesh Fernando - Chief Business Officer, Partnerships Harindra Ramasinghe - Chief Business Officer, Advisor Distribution Channel

fiers demonstrates that we are not merely expanding in numbers, we are elevating professional standards across the board. Our focus goes beyond achieving targets. We are committed to shaping ethical, customer-centric and highly skilled financial professionals who are equipped with data-driven insights, continuous

learning opportunities and personalized coaching. This holistic approach ensures sustainable growth for our people, greater value for our customers and a high-performance culture built on trust, discipline and long-term impact."

Chief Business Officer - Advisor Distribution Channel, Harindra Ramasinghe commenting on the achievement, stated, "This milestone reflects the discipline and resilience of our advisors across the island. Over the past year, we have strengthened our coaching frameworks, leadership development initiatives and performance management systems to ensure that our teams are empowered to consistently perform at the highest level."

Sanesh Fernando, Chief Business Officer - Partnerships, sharing his thoughts, added, "Our bancassurance channel has continued to grow in strength through close collaboration with our banking partners and a strong focus on capability building. By equipping our bancassurance officers with the right training, tools and customer insights, we have created an environment where they can confidently deliver meaningful financial protection solutions to customers while achieving outstanding professional milestones such as MDRT."



The Wishwa Pranama award ceremony, organized by the Sri Rajakeeya Foundation and Universal Gates, was held last week at the Sri Sambuddhatva Mandiraya in Colombo. Emeritus Professor Preethi Kulatunga, Patron Advisor of the foundation, participated as the Chief Guest. Psychologist, consultant, and lecturer Nalin Dhammika Jayasinghe (left) and psychologist, consultant, and advisor A.R. Chandrapala (right) received their Sri Lankabhimani Kerthi Sri Vishwapranama titles from Prof. Kulatunga. Also in the picture is Kavindya Movindu Menike Pitigala, Chairperson and Founder of Universal Gates. Pix by Thushara Athapaththu



Kandy Selection building getting ready for the launched

# Kandy Selection makes long-awaited debut in hill capital

TEXT AND PIC BY SK SAMARANAYAKE

After 38 years of growth and countrywide expansion, the iconic Sri Lankan fashion brand Kandy Selection has finally arrived in the heart of the hill capital with the opening of its flagship store, Kandy Selection, in 2026.

Founded in 1988 by brothers Ajith Rathnasekara and Sujeewa Rathnasekara in a modest Kiribathgoda outlet, Kandy Selection has grown from humble beginnings into a nationwide fashion powerhouse, known for its curated collections of apparel, sarees, and lehengas.

The Rathnasekara brothers' journey began with little capital, supported by their brother-in-law, Ranjan Perera, who provided seed funding that helped launch the brand's first major expansion in Kiribathgoda in 1998. Island-wide growth followed with branches in Wattala (2002), Kadawatha (2009), Dehiwala (2013), and the landmark Uptown store at Liberty Plaza in 2015.

The brand has continually innovated, introducing outdoor fashion runways, an advanced e-commerce platform, and a healthcare initiative with Kandy Pharmacy—currently the largest privately owned pharmacy

in the country.

Speaking on the new opening, the Rathnasekara family said the move into Kandy was both symbolic and strategic, linking the brand's legacy to the historical Kingdom of Kandy. "The Kingdom serves as a reminder of the fights won. It is a title we are honored to carry," they said.

The launch of Kandy Selection marks a historic milestone for the brand and promises to bring its distinctive fashion offerings to residents and visitors of Sri Lanka's hill capital, fulfilling years of anticipation from loyal customers.

# Turning waste into fuel: Kalawana resident shows way amid gas woes



P.M.P. Samarathunga and his biogas unit

BY UPENDRA PRIYNAKARA JATHUNGAMA

At a time when rising prices and intermittent shortages have once again thrust domestic gas into the national spotlight, a quiet experiment in a remote village in Kalawana offers a practical alternative rooted in self-reliance.

Across the country, long queues for cooking gas have become a familiar sight, underscoring the extent to which households—irrespective of income—have come to depend on LPG for daily cooking. The convenience it offers has largely displaced traditional firewood stoves, making any disruption in supply a matter of immediate concern. Yet, in Samanpura, a retired public servant has found a way to ease that dependence using little more than household waste.

P.M.P. Samarathunga, a retired Grama Niladhari, has set up a biogas unit within his home premises, enabling him to generate over 25 per cent of his household's gas requirements. While biogas technology itself is not new, its adoption at the domestic level remains limited, largely due to lack of awareness and initial investment concerns.

Speaking to the Sunday Island, Samarathunga said the idea took root during the COVID-19 pandemic, when gas shortages prompted him to seek alternatives.

"I did not have prior technical knowledge, but a relative of mine, Niroshan Warnakula from Piliyandala, who works at the Government Survey Department, guided me through the process," he said.

The system, which comprises three tanks and associated equipment, requires an initial capital outlay. However, Samarathunga emphasized that once established, it incurs virtually no maintenance costs. "All that is needed is to feed the system with household waste from time to time," he explained.

Organic refuse such as vegetable scraps, fish waste, and dried fish remnants serve as the primary input. However, he cautioned against adding coconut residue due to its oil content, which can clog the system, as well as acidic substances that may disrupt the process.

Beyond gas production, the unit yields an additional benefit in the form of liquid fertiliser, which collects



Food waste to be used in the bio gas unit



in the tank as a by-product. This, Samarathunga noted, can be effectively used for home gardening and even tea cultivation, thereby enhancing its economic value.

"This system never really runs out of gas, as long as waste is added regularly. Unlike purchased gas, which eventually depletes, this offers a continuous supply," he said, adding that such solutions could prove particularly useful during periods of supply uncertainty.

Samarathunga believes that wider adoption of small-scale biogas systems could help households mitigate both financial strain and time lost in queues, while contributing to sustainable waste management.

"In the long run, it saves money and time. It is simply a matter of making use of what we usually throw away," he said.

As the country continues to grapple with energy challenges, such grassroots innovations may well hold the key to easing pressure on both households and national supply chains.



Samarathunga spraying liquid fertilizer on tea plants

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Kangaroo Cabs

## LadyJ, The Pappare to power Colombo Kickerz Football Academy in 2026 / 27 season

Colombo Kickerz Football Academy at a media briefing held on Wednesday (25) announced that 'LadyJ' one of the largest homeware stores in Sri Lanka has come on board as the academie's main sponsor and The Papapare as the Digital Media Partner in the 2026/27 season.

With over 300 aspiring football enthusiasts between the ages of 5 to 18 on roll,

Colombo Kickerz Football Academy founded in 2015 by Ms Viveca

Weerasinghe is one of the largest football academies in the island.

The academy provides their changes with the opportunity of being nurtured by internationally trained coaches and gain experience by playing in local and international competitions on their way to become Sri Lanka's future football stars.

Managing Director of LadyJ Anuraddha Wijerathne highlighted the importance of investing in sports at grassroots level and supporting young athletes.



Managing Director of LadyJ Anuraddha Wijerathne hands over the sponsorship to Ms Viveca Weerasinghe Founder and Academy Head of Colombo Kickerz FA (pic by Nishan S Priyantha)

## No fitness, no IPL

BY REX CLEMETINE

Many would argue that had Sri Lanka gone into the recent World Cup with all their big guns fit and firing, they might have reached the semis. That's the popular line doing the rounds. But if we are calling it as we see it, this campaign was heading for a collapse even before the first ball was bowled.

Reappointing Dasun Shanaka as captain was a gamble, lacked foresight and in the end created divisions within the team. The decision to bring back Pramodya Wickremasinghe as Chairman of Selectors didn't inspire confidence either. It was a move that had trouble written all over it, the kind that can unsettle a dressing room before a ball is even delivered. It's like appointing Mervyn Silva as Public Relations Minister. A bull in a China shop is less troublesome than these two southerners.

Of course, injuries played their part. Losing Matheesha Pathirana and Eshan Malinga robbed the attack of bite, but the biggest dent was the absence of Wanindu Hasaranga. A proven match-winner, Hasaranga is the sort who can turn a game on its head in the space of a couple of overs. Without him, Sri Lanka were always chasing the game.

What is more concerning is the recurring nature of Hasaranga's injuries. Missing yet another global tournament due to a hamstring issue raises serious questions. Over the last two years, the pattern has been far from encouraging, and for a professional cricketer, that's an area that needs urgent attention.

Clearly frustrated by the injury crisis that derailed the campaign, Sri Lanka Cricket have decided to take a firmer stance. Players seeking No Objection Certificates for the IPL will now have to clear fitness tests first. It's a step in the right direction and one that had been coming for some time.

In the past, when the board tried to assert control, players pushed back, often using franchise connections to apply pressure. This time, however, SLC seem prepared to stand their ground and



Nuwan Thushara

ensure that national duty is not treated as optional.

There has to be a sense of accountability. It does not sit well when key players miss a World Cup and then turn up fully fit for franchise cricket. That is a contradiction that undermines both the team and the system.

Nuwan Thushara's situation, however, presents a slightly different picture. The slinging seamer, who was not part of the World Cup squad, has also struggled to meet fitness standards. SLC have inserted a clause allowing them to withhold NOCs for three months beyond the con-

tract period, a move that shows the board have learned from past lapses.

That said, Thushara's case deserves a degree of empathy. At 31, he is nearing the latter stages of his career and opportunities like the IPL do not come around often. While fitness standards must be upheld, there is also room for discretion, particularly in cases where the player was not part of the World Cup plans.

If players are now seeking leniency, it also reflects gaps in how fitness has been managed over time. Preparation at this level is a long-term investment, not something that can be patched up overnight.

## Japan Premier League [JPL], building cricket from the ground up

The Japan Premier League (JPL) T20 competition is cricket's unlikely outpost - a self-sustaining though struggling-to-survive tournament far away from cricket's traditional centres. It's on a growth path just over a decade into its existence, starting to connect local players to those outside, and looking to create a cricketing community in the country.

It was founded in 2015 with four regions - North, South, East and West Kanto (Tokyo region) - in the fray, with games held at the home venues of each of the teams. That model was scrapped owing to low turnouts, and the tournament has since been played at one or the other venue, while Kansai (Osaka region) has come in as the fifth team.

In 2026, the JPL will be a three-day competition - May 2 to 4 - with 12 games at the Sano International Cricket Ground. All the buzz in the lead-up is about the participation of former Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, BBL winner Josh Brown, and Nepal allrounder Karan KC.

"A major goal," Alan Curr, the Japan Cricket Association (JCA) chief operations officer, says, "is to showcase a good standard of cricket for Japanese fans so that they can really see and understand what the sport looks like."

The challenge there is that despite being played in Japan since 1863, cricket hasn't found a niche. There has been some systemic progress, with the formation of the JCA in the 1980s, five-year plans running up to 2032, and the presence of men and women's leagues for juniors and seniors - including the JPL, which struggled to find traction early on.

One of the reasons for excitement recently was that a significant majority of the 15 players in Japan's squad at the 2020 Under-19 World Cup came through the Cricket Blast, the junior participation programme. However, that's not translated to mass acceptance or participation.

"Often, for us, cricket in itself isn't enough to attract people to the ground," Curr says. "We have to be creative and come up with other things - dance, music, food, drinks and Japanese commentary. But the hope is that if they see the game, it's of a high standard because when fans see players doing special things, it's easier to be impressed."

When it comes to the players, not everyone is too ambitious. Those that are have rewards to aim for as the JPL can have a significant effect on selection for the national side. Having said that, those in the national side are not professionals - they are students or are employed - and use their annual leaves for international assignments. Making time can be a challenge.

"A lot of the players here play recreationally," Curr says. "Cricket is a recreational hobby to them rather than a high-performance pursuit. For us, concentrating the talent, getting players together at once to give local players the opportunity to play at a higher standard, and going overseas and playing cricket isn't a feasible option. [So] to be able to bring high-level cricket here is really important."

"At the moment, we are relying heavily



Japan has been taking cricket seriously and starting to make a bit of an impression [Cricinfo]

on the goodwill of people, who are happy to come out and play for no payment and out of the kindness of their heart. We know that's not sustainable. If we can get financial backing, getting a sponsor on board will really make a big difference"

Alan Curr, the COO of the Japan Cricket Association

The last bit is why Brown, especially, coming to JPL in 2024 was critical. Brown is a "pro player" - each team gets one - and will be returning for his third year in a row.

"He signed up quite a long time in advance - that year he had a breakthrough year in the Big Bash," Curr says. "He scored 140 off 57 balls against

Adelaide Strikers. We had him locked in when he did that, but we hadn't announced it. Then his profile went up, and he started playing leagues around the world. Fair play to him, he still came."

"That year, people were pretty excited when we made that announcement, and people did come and the live-streaming certainly got up. It was the first time we had someone of genuine stature coming over and being involved."

Other than pro players, the 14-player squads have four retained from the previous year's teams. All of them find their teams in a draft - this year's draft took place on March 24.

Where do these players come from, and

how do they make their way? "Inside Japan is through domestic performances and trials at the start of the year for any new players," Curr says. "The overseas talent right now comes from our own contacts as we want to make sure we get players who really understand what the tournament is about. It's a development league; there's no salary for these players. We just cover their costs."

As for the future, there are different avenues for expansion. One is getting more pro players into teams, which, according to Curr, could squeeze out local players, making it a less-than-ideal option. Having more teams is more appealing, as is the prospect of having a nine-day tournament than one only over a long weekend.

"All of those things require funding. At the moment, we are relying heavily on the goodwill of people, who are happy to come out and play for no payment and out of the kindness of their heart," Curr says. "We know that's not sustainable. If we can get financial backing, getting a sponsor on board will really make a big difference."

So far, cricket in Japan made news when the national team did anything of note, like qualifying for the 2020 and 2026 men's Under 19 World Cups. If the JPL can take the next steps towards becoming bigger and better, maybe it will start attracting interest from other parts of the world in a more significant way. And that in turn could mean the next step for cricket in Japan as a whole.

[Cricinfo]

With Tasty, Crunchy Cashew...



Kandos Cashewnut Milk Chocolate Bar. Pan toasted fresh Cashew kernels enwrapped in exotic chocolate.

By AVISHKA MARIO  
SENEWIRATNE

The passing of Fr. Aloy Pieris S.J. marks the end of a rare and remarkable chapter in the intellectual and spiritual life of Sri Lanka. I knew Fr. Aloy not merely as a name of global academic stature, but as a presence: warm, disarming, and quietly profound. He belonged to that diminishing generation of men who combined deep scholarship with an almost childlike simplicity of spirit.

Born on April 9, 1934, Fr. Aloy's life was one of sustained inquiry and disciplined purpose. He hailed from a pious Catholic family from Ampitiya, Kandy. Among his siblings, there was one priest and three nuns. From an early age, it was clear that he was a prodigy. He was formed by the Jesuits at St. Aloysius' College, Galle, his alma mater, which led him to join the Society of Jesus. Although he wished to pursue a life in the arts, his superiors directed him toward an academic path. Speaking over a dozen oriental and western languages, he was a top scholar from a very young age. After long spiritual training in Sri Lanka, India, and Italy, Fr. Aloy was ordained in 1965. Upon returning to Sri Lanka, he was stationed at the Jesuit House "Nirmala," Bambalapitiya, where he rendered yeoman service to the community, especially the youth.

His founding of the Tulana Research Centre, Kelaniya in 1974 was no ordinary institutional act. It was, in essence, a response to the intellectual and spiritual tensions of the time—between Buddhism and Christianity, between faith and social unrest, and between the educated elite and the marginalised youth of the island. Tulana, under his care, grew into something far greater than a research centre; it became a living space of encounter.

He was my spiritual father, mentor, teacher, and friend. Fr. Aloy welcomed me as a serious "scholar" when I was just a teenager. He taught me the scientific approach to scholarship, the discipline of the desk, and instilled in me values and morals. He showed me how to be a praying Christian and, above all, shaped my method of thinking. He taught me to think critically, to understand different views, religions, and methods. Without doubt, he made the greatest impact on my life.

When there was a personal or professional crisis, I ran to Tulana, which was almost a hop, step, and jump from home. My evenings after school, and later after work in Ratmalana, were often spent there. We spoke of history, Church affairs, art, film, theology, and politics (on which we often "agreed to disagree"). I once joked with him, saying, "Father, I was born in 1998 and you in 1934—how did I become 64 years older, or you 64 years younger?"

The last 13 years of my life were shaped by him, and many of my achievements are a direct result of his guidance. When I had difficulty deciding on a career, he came to my rescue. He shared his own struggles as a student and made me confident in the multiple interests I had as a youth.

Through him, I came to know many remarkable personalities, among them Robert Cruz, Sr. Greta Nalawatte, the late Sr. Frances, Fr. Sarath Iddamalgoda, Nimal Pieris, and Dr. Shiela Fernando. Along with the staff of Tulana, they were his true friends and stood by him through many challenges. As we remember Fr. Aloy, these individuals too must be acknowledged for their steadfast devotion to him.

In my own small way, I introduced Fr. Aloy to some of my family and friends in Kelaniya and elsewhere. We even began a small Bible study group with weekly sessions. On one occasion, I surprised him by bringing Dr. Michael Roberts, who was visiting Sri Lanka, to Tulana. The two, being old school friends, had not met in decades. In time, I introduced many others who came to appreciate the joy of conversation with him. These memories will always bring a smile to those who knew him.

What struck me most about Fr. Aloy was the seamless manner in which he held together worlds that are often kept apart. He was at once a Jesuit priest, a scholar of Buddhism, an Indologist, and a social thinker. These were complemented by his wide range of interests in music, art, literature, and cinema. His engagement with Pali texts and the Abhidhamma was rigorous, sustained, and deeply respectful. Yet he never allowed intellectual pursuit to become detached from lived reality. For him, theology was not merely to be written—it had to be lived, tested, and



Fr. Aloy, 2024 Photographed by the writer

## The Greatest Man I Knew: Fr. Aloysius Pieris SJ (1934-2026)

Born on April 9, 1934, Fr. Aloy's life was one of sustained inquiry and disciplined purpose. He hailed from a pious Catholic family from Ampitiya, Kandy. Among his siblings, there was one priest and three nuns. From an early age, it was clear that he was a prodigy. He was formed by the Jesuits at St. Aloysius' College, Galle, his alma mater, which led him to join the Society of Jesus. Although he wished to pursue a life in the arts, his superiors directed him toward an academic path. Speaking over a dozen oriental and western languages, he was a top scholar from a very young age. After long spiritual training in Sri Lanka, India, and Italy, Fr. Aloy was ordained in 1965. Upon returning to Sri Lanka, he was stationed at the Jesuit House "Nirmala," Bambalapitiya, where he rendered yeoman service to the community, especially the youth. His founding of the Tulana Research Centre, Kelaniya in 1974 was no ordinary institutional act. It was, in essence, a response to the intellectual and spiritual tensions of the time—between Buddhism and Christianity, between faith and social unrest, and between the educated elite and the marginalised youth of the island. Tulana, under his care, grew into something far greater than a research centre; it became a living space of encounter.



Fr. Aloy and the writer at the SG Perera Memorial Library, 2023. Photographed by Robert Cruz

shared among people.

The Tulana Library, enriched by the legacy of Fr. S. G. Perera, stood as a testament to this vision—a place where history, religion, philosophy, and culture met in quiet dialogue. Scholars came, certainly, but so did students, workers, clergy, and artists. It was this breadth that defined his work. He refused to confine knowledge within academic walls.

Yet, if one were to look beyond his publications, lectures, and global recognition, one finds perhaps his most meaningful contribution elsewhere. His role in co-founding the Centre for Education for Hearing Impaired Children reveals a side of him that no academic title can capture. He himself regarded this as his greatest achievement.

Personally, what remains with me is not the scholar alone, but the man. Conversations with him were sometimes heavy (as my intellect grew), yet never distant. There was always humour, a certain lightness, and an openness that made one feel immediately at ease. His faith was not worn as authority; it was lived quietly, inseparable from his commitment to justice and human dignity.

Fr. Aloy will be remembered in many ways: scholar, priest, thinker. However, for those of us who knew him, he will remain something rarer: a deep human presence, rooted in faith, guided by intellect, and sustained by an enduring generosity of spirit.

Fr. Aloy, without exaggeration, stands as the most remarkable human I have encountered in my life. To the world, he is a towering scholar of liberation theology and Indology; to me, he was something far more personal—a mentor, a guide, and in many ways, a fatherly presence.

For over sixty years, he remained a leading voice in promoting the reforms of Vatican II in Sri Lanka, often at a time when much of the Church chose to ignore them. He championed the cause of the poor and lived a life of remarkable simplicity. Clad in a simple sarong and his trademark "Astron" cap, he had a way of putting everyone at ease.

He was also a man of culture. He could play several musical instruments, especially the piano, and would often sing an old C. T. Fernando song. In a moment that reflected both courage and creativity, he once, with the permission of the late Fr.

Chiriatti, removed the Blessed Sacrament at Nirmala Jesuit House to screen classic films for the youth of Bambalapitiya.

Yet, despite all his academic achievements, his most cherished work was the Centre for Education of Hearing Impaired Children, which he ran with Sr. Greta Nalawatte for over 40 years. He never charged a cent from these children, who came from the poorest communities. I have personally witnessed him paying teachers' salaries from his own earnings, often from the funds he received teaching at numerous universities. Many of these children, once considered unfit for society, went on to become graduates, professionals, and responsible members of society. On his 90th birthday, when some of them spoke, the entire audience was deeply moved.

A liberal mind, far ahead of his time, he had his share of opponents—sadly, many from within the Church. This never troubled him, but one cannot help but feel that the Church itself lost much by not making fuller use of his gifts.

In 2023, when he entrusted me with the task of editing and producing his biography, I realised that he had given me a rare and golden opportunity to study his life in depth. As his youngest confrere, I was deeply moved by the trust he placed in me. We spent many months working together, producing what I believe is one of the finest autobiographical accounts of a priest in this part of the world. His intention was simple: to "glorify God," whom he believed had worked through him in achieving so much in life.

I first came to know of him in 2013 while still a schoolboy at St. Joseph's College. What began as curiosity soon turned into a life-defining encounter. Living just a short distance away at Tulana, I went to meet him during a vacation. I was only 15; he was nearing 80. Yet from the very first moment—his warm welcome, his simplicity of dress, and his ease of conversation—I knew this was no ordinary man.

Fr. Aloy possessed a rare quality: he lived what he preached. Despite his immense academic stature, there was not an ounce of pretension in him. Over the years, I visited him regularly, drawn by a presence that was both intellectually stimulating and spiritually grounding. Though physically small, he was a giant in courage, conviction, and compassion. He had no tolerance for injustice and consistently stood for the poor and the marginalised.

What he did for me personally cannot be overstated. At a time when I lacked direction and confidence, he nurtured my inner life. He taught me prayer—not as ritual, but as a lived relationship with God. He taught me to think, to question, and most importantly, to love. In moments of both success and crisis, he was always present, offering counsel, prayer, and strength.

One of his greatest gifts to me was opening the doors of the Tulana Library. Through the legacy of Fr. S. G. Perera and his own lifelong additions, it became a treasure trove of knowledge. It was there that he recognised in me a passion I had not yet understood myself. "You must pursue history," he said—and that single direction changed the course of my life.

Fr. Aloy was also a demanding teacher. He insisted on discipline in thought, objectivity in writing, and fidelity to sources. Under his guidance, I began my early research and publications. Even in disagreement, I found in him a man of deep faith, humility, and sincerity.

To me, he was not merely a scholar or priest. He was, quite simply, a man of God—one who shaped lives quietly, firmly, and with enduring love. Today, there is a void in my life. I have lost the greatest human being I have known: a fatherly figure who understood me long before anyone else, who comforted me in difficult times and celebrated the happier ones. He lived his life to the fullest and inspired those around him to do the same. A most beautiful heart and an innocent spirit, hidden beneath an intellectual and sharp façade.

As perhaps the youngest of his close friends, I owe him immensely for the profound impact he had on my life, bringing me closer to God while encouraging me to pursue my dreams in accordance with a higher calling. From Bible discussions to historical analysis, I have hundreds of memories of this great man, who made the last 13 years of my life worth living.

May his saintly soul rest in peace.

## Features

# Trincomalee Oil Farm and Energy Hub: Sri Lanka's Missed Opportunity Returns

BY GAMINI GOONETILLEKE

The Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm stands today as one of the most strategically significant yet historically underutilized energy assets in South Asia. Located off the deep natural harbour of Trincomalee, the facility embodies a convergence of history, geopolitics, and economic potential. In the current global context—marked by energy insecurity, shifting geopolitical alliances, and regional competition—the Trincomalee oil farm offers Sri Lanka a renewed opportunity to transform itself into a regional energy hub. However, this transformation demands clarity of vision, political consistency, and strategic partnerships.

## Origins and construction

The origins of the Trincomalee oil tank farm date back to the era of World War II, when the British Empire recognized the strategic importance of Trincomalee as a naval base in the Indian Ocean. Construction of the oil storage facility on 600 acres of land began in 1924 and continued into the late 1930s. The project was designed to support British naval operations in the Eastern theatre, particularly as Japanese expansion threatened Allied supply lines.

The facility originally comprised 101 large storage tanks, each constructed with a robust one inch thick steel sheet and surrounded by thick one foot thick concrete walls for protection against aerial attacks. These tanks were ingeniously built into the natural contours of the terrain, often partially buried, enhancing both structural stability and camouflage. Each tank had an approximate capacity of around 12,000 metric tons of fuel, giving the entire complex a total storage capacity of nearly 1.2 million metric tons—an immense reserve by regional standards even today. This dwarfs the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation's (CPC) existing storage facility and even the new storage complex, built by the Chinese at Muthurajawela which has a capacity of 220,000 metric tons.

## The fate of two oil tanks

Out of the 101 tanks, one was destroyed when a Royal Ceylon Air Force plane crashed in the early 1960's. But the most famous is the destroyed tank number 91 lying on the far edge of the forest. During World War II, the strategic significance of Trincomalee attracted enemy attention. In April 1942, Japanese forces launched air raids on the harbour in what became part of the broader Indian Ocean campaign. One of the oil tanks—commonly referred to as Tank 91—was hit during these attacks and destroyed. This incident underscored both the vulnerability and the importance of the facility. While most of the tanks survived the bombardment, the destruction of Tank 91 remains a historical reminder of the oil farm's wartime role.

## Strategic location and infrastructure

The inclusion of China Bay within Trincomalee Harbour complex was not incidental. China Bay offered deep-water access, allowing large oil tankers to dock safely. The harbour itself is one of the finest natural deep-water harbours in the world, capable of accommodating large naval and commercial vessels with minimal dredging.

A sophisticated pipeline system was constructed to facilitate the transfer of oil from ships directly to the storage tanks. This network of pipelines minimized handling time and reduced vulnerability during wartime operations. The integration of maritime access with inland storage infrastructure made Trincomalee a logistical asset of immense value, capable of supporting sustained naval operations across the Indian Ocean.

## Post-Independence neglect

Following Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the Trincomalee oil tank farm gradually fell into neglect. Successive governments failed to recognize or capitalize on its strategic and economic potential. The facility was largely abandoned, with many tanks left unused and the surrounding area overgrown with dense shrub

jungle. Infrastructure deteriorated, pipelines corroded, and the once-critical installation became a symbol of missed opportunity.

This neglect was not merely administrative but also strategic. At a time when global energy demand was rising and regional economies were expanding, Sri Lanka failed to leverage a ready-made asset that could have positioned it as a key player in the Indian Ocean energy network.

It may be argued that if newly Independent Ceylon, hosting two British bases at Trincomalee and Katunayake, seized the opportunity of encouraging Western investment to optimize utilization of the existing tank farm asset, companies like Shell, Stanvac and Caltex already in the profitable oil distribution business here, would have looked positively of making Sri Lanka a regional oil hub—something Singapore enjoys today.

## Early attempts at revitalization

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, President J. R. Jayewardene recognized the potential of the Trincomalee oil tank farm and proposed its development. However, these efforts were complicated by geopolitical considerations, particularly concerns from India regarding foreign involvement in a strategically sensitive location so close to its southern coastline.

As a result, the project faced diplomatic resistance and was ultimately abandoned. This marked another missed opportunity, driven by a combination of external pressure and internal indecision.

## The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and aftermath

The signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987 renewed attention to Trincomalee. The accord included provisions recognizing Trincomalee's strategic importance and implicitly acknowledged India's security concerns regarding its use.

During the years of civil conflict in Sri Lanka, the oil tank farm remained largely inactive. Security concerns, lack of investment, and the broader instability of the region prevented any meaningful development. Even after the end of the war in 2009, progress remained slow.

## The role of Trinco Petroleum Terminal – 2022

A significant development occurred in 2022 with the establishment of Trinco Petroleum Terminal (Pvt) Ltd (TPPTL), a joint venture between the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) and the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), through its subsidiary Lanka Indian Oil Corporation (LIOC), which had been operating in Sri Lanka since 2003. Under this arrangement, CPC holds a 51% stake, while LIOC holds 49%, reflecting a collaborative approach to developing the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm.

As part of the agreement, a portion of the oil storage tanks was leased to the Indian partner, while the remaining tanks came under Sri Lankan control, earmarked for phased renovation and redevelopment by TPPTL, LIOC, and potential international partners. LIOC has since been utilizing approximately 14–15 tanks, primarily for fuel storage and distribution within Sri Lanka.

Although these steps marked meaningful progress, the majority of the tanks have remained underutilized, and the full strategic and commercial potential of the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm continues to be unrealized.

## Political opposition and geopolitical concerns

Efforts to expand Indian involvement in the development of the oil tank farm were met with strong resistance from nationalist political groups, particularly the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The opposition was rooted in concerns over sovereignty, national security, and perceived over-reliance on India. This political wrangling delayed decision-making and discouraged investment. The Trincomalee oil tank farm became entangled in broader debates about foreign policy and economic strategy, rather than being treated as a



Trinco Oil Farm

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national asset requiring pragmatic management.

## From geopolitics to geoeconomics

In recent years, there has been a shift in perspective—from viewing Trincomalee primarily through a geopolitical lens to recognizing its geoeconomic potential. The global energy landscape is changing, with increased emphasis on supply chain resilience, regional storage hubs, and diversification of energy sources.

Sri Lanka's strategic location along major shipping routes in the Indian Ocean positions it ideally to serve as a regional energy hub. Trincomalee, with its natural harbour and existing infrastructure, is central to this vision.

## The Tripartite Agreement- 2025

A major breakthrough came in 2025 with the signing of a tripartite agreement involving Sri Lanka, India, and the United Arab Emirates. This agreement aims to jointly develop the Trincomalee oil tank farm, combining Sri Lanka's strategic location with India's regional influence and the UAE's financial and technical expertise. The activation of this agreement marks a turning point. It reflects a pragmatic approach that balances national interests with the need for foreign investment and collaboration.

## Importance in the current global context

The importance of the Trincomalee oil tank farm has been heightened by recent global developments, including tensions and conflicts in the Middle East. Disruptions in oil supply chains have underscored the need for strategic reserves and regional storage facilities.

For Sri Lanka, expanding the storage capacity at Trincomalee could provide energy security by maintaining reserves sufficient for up to 60 days of consumption which at present is sufficient only for 30 days. Renovation of the existing tanks, along with modernization of infrastructure, would significantly enhance the country's resilience to external shocks.

Moreover, the facility could serve as a storage and redistribution hub for other countries in the region, generating revenue and strengthening Sri Lanka's economic position.

## Vision for Trincomalee as a comprehensive energy hub

The transformation of Trincomalee into a dynamic and sustainable energy hub represents one of the most significant strategic opportunities for Sri Lanka in the coming decades. Anchored by its historic oil tank farm at China Bay and supported by one of the finest natural harbours in the world, Trincomalee possesses the rare combination of geography, infrastructure, and strategic location necessary to evolve into a major energy centre in the Indian Ocean region. However, realizing this potential requires a shift from a narrow focus on storage toward a broader, integrated, and forward-looking energy ecosystem.

At the heart of this vision lies the expansion and modernization of petroleum storage and distribution. The refurbishment of the existing oil tanks—many of which date back to the Second World War—along with the construction of new, technologically advanced facilities, will significantly enhance storage capacity, efficiency, and safety. With modern monitoring systems and international-standard operational practices, Trincomalee can function as a reliable regional energy reserve, capable of meeting domestic needs while also serving international markets.

Beyond storage, the development of refining and value-addition industries is essential. Establishing a modern refinery would reduce dependence on imported refined petroleum products and create opportunities for producing lubricants, petrochemicals, and other high-value derivatives. These downstream industries would stimulate industrial growth, generate employment, and encourage the emergence of ancillary sectors, thereby contributing to broader economic development.

Trincomalee's geographic advantages also extend to the aviation sector. Its proximity to China Bay Airport provides an opportunity to develop a dedicated aviation fuel supply chain, catering to both civilian and military requirements. This would enable the region to function as a refuelling and logistics hub within the Indian Ocean network, strengthening connectivity and enhancing operational efficiency for regional air traffic.

Equally significant is the potential of Trincomalee Harbour to emerge as a major centre for maritime services. Located along key east-west shipping routes, the harbour is ideally positioned to provide bunkering, maintenance, and logistical support to passing vessels. Developing competitive bunkering facilities would increase port revenues and enhance Sri Lanka's standing in global maritime trade, while integrating energy services with port operations.

In keeping with global trends, the integration of renewable energy sources must form a key component of this vision. Trincomalee's climatic conditions are conducive to both solar and wind energy generation, allowing for the development of hybrid energy systems that complement traditional fossil fuel infrastructure. Incorporating renewable energy will not only reduce carbon emissions but also align with international sustainability goals, ensuring that the hub remains relevant in a rapidly evolving global energy landscape.

Another dimension that warrants reflection in the development of Trincomalee as an energy hub is the story of Sampur—an example of both missed opportunity and emerging renewal. Strategically located in close proximity to China Bay, Sampur was once envisaged as a key site for a coal power project, later evolving into proposals for a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility. However, a combination of political opposition, environmental concerns, and shifting policy priorities led to the abandonment of these initiatives. This not only delayed potential gains in energy generation and regional development but also underscored the need for policy consistency and long-term planning in national energy strategy.

Yet, Sampur's relevance has not diminished. Its transformation into a ground-mounted solar power facility, commissioned in 2025, marks a significant shift towards sustainable energy development. While its contribution to the national grid when fully operational may be modest (120 MW in two phases) compared to the scale of earlier proposals, it represents an important step in diversifying Sri Lanka's energy mix and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. More importantly, Sampur's evolution highlights the potential for integrating renewable energy into the broader vision for Trincomalee. As the energy hub concept matures, Sampur could serve as a model for balancing economic ambition with environmental responsibility, reinforcing Trincomalee's role in a resilient and forward-looking energy future.

The realization of the energy hub vision depends heavily on robust infrastructure development and enhanced connectivity. Modernizing port facilities, expanding pipeline networks, and improving road and rail links to the rest of the country are essential steps. In addition, ambitious proposals such as undersea pipelines linking Trincomalee with regional partners could further strengthen its role as a critical node in South Asia's energy network, facilitating cross-border energy trade and cooperation.

Strategic partnerships will play a crucial role in this transformation. Given the scale of investment and technical expertise required, collaboration with international stakeholders is both necessary and beneficial. However, such partnerships must be carefully structured to ensure transparency, equitable benefit-sharing, and the protection of

national interests. Drawing on global best practices while maintaining sovereignty over strategic assets will be key to long-term success.

Equally important is the establishment of a stable and consistent policy environment. Investor confidence depends on clear, predictable policies governing taxation, pricing, and operations. A well-defined national energy policy, supported by a strong regulatory framework, will provide the foundation for sustained investment and long-term planning. Regulations must also ensure strict adherence to environmental standards, safeguarding the ecological integrity of the Trincomalee region while enabling responsible development.

Human resource development is another critical pillar. The successful operation of a modern energy hub requires a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Investment in education, technical training, and capacity-building programs will be essential to equip local professionals with the expertise needed to manage advanced infrastructure and complex operations.

Finally, regional integration offers a powerful pathway for growth. By strengthening energy and economic ties with neighbouring countries, Trincomalee can position itself as a reliable and efficient hub within the wider Indian Ocean region. This will not only enhance energy security but also elevate Sri Lanka's role in regional and global energy networks.

In essence, the vision for Trincomalee is one of transformation—from a historically significant but underutilized asset into a vibrant, multifaceted energy hub that drives national development, fosters regional cooperation, and secures a sustainable energy future.

## Lessons from past failures

Sri Lanka's history with the Trincomalee oil tank farm and the projects in Sampur for power generation is marked by missed opportunities, often due to political indecision, opposition by nationalist political parties and short-term thinking. Repeated changes in policy, lack of continuity, and politicization of strategic assets have hindered progress.

To avoid repeating these mistakes, there must be a clear, long-term national strategy agreed by the parties concerned. Transparent governance, professional management, and accountability are essential.

## Conclusion

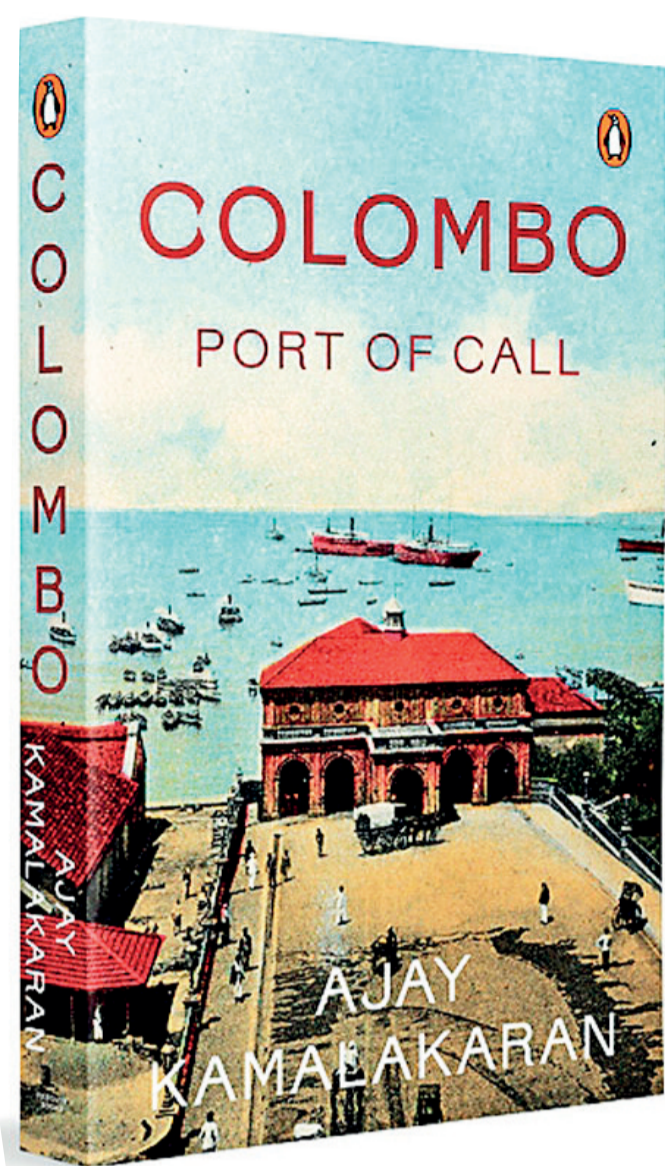
In conclusion, the future of Trincomalee stands at a decisive crossroads, shaped by both its historic legacy and its untapped potential. What was once conceived as a strategic wartime asset now presents itself as an opportunity of national significance especially during a time of energy crisis in the world brought about by the present war in the Middle East. The convergence of geography, infrastructure, and global energy demand places Trincomalee in a uniquely advantageous position within the Indian Ocean region.

Realizing this vision demands more than ambition—it calls for disciplined planning, policy consistency, and a commitment to national interest above short-term considerations. Investment in modern infrastructure, technological advancement, and human capital must proceed alongside transparent governance and environmental responsibility. Equally important is the cultivation of strategic partnerships that enhance capacity while preserving sovereignty.

If approached with foresight and unity, Trincomalee can evolve into a resilient, multifaceted energy hub that not only secures Sri Lanka's energy future but also stimulates trade, industry, and regional collaboration. It is an opportunity to convert past delays and failures into present momentum and future success.

The time has come to act decisively. The foundations are already in place; what is needed now is the will to build upon them.

Continued on page 20



# Ajay Kamalakaran's "Colombo: Port of Call"

## A book about travel, discovery, and disillusionment

By HIRUN MATHEESHA

**A**jay Kamalakaran's *Colombo: Port of Call* is a book about travel and discovery. It is about the joy of discovery and the dreariness of disillusionment. It is about how the beliefs that shape us influence how we see another society, another world.

The book contains 14 chapters and relates accounts from 14 travellers. It tries to imagine a world and a country far removed from our own. In doing so, it tries to bring that world, and that time, closer to ours. To quote the author himself:

*"The essays in this book look to capture Colombo and Sri Lanka through the eyes of those who visited the island in the heyday of ocean travel."*

This was a time when ocean travel was the only mode of transport between countries, when one had to

endure weeks, sometimes months of travel to get to one's destination.

To those who have read him in Sri Lanka, Ajay Kamalakaran is not an unfamiliar name. He has been writing so much about Sri Lanka that, as he puts it in the introduction to this wonderfully evocative book, Sri Lanka has become "a home away from home" and Colombo a "final destination" and a "base."

It may surprise first-time readers that *Colombo: Port of Call* is not really about Colombo or its Port of Call at all. The port and the city are just transit points, and they set the stage for the many journeys that follow. Described very evocatively, these journeys all add up to a narrative that flows from one traveller to another.

The beauty of Ajay's book is that while there is very little which these men and women share with each other, they are all bonded together by a common love for new experiences. Depending on how high their

expectations are, these men and women return from Sri Lanka, and from all the places they have been to, with great joy or utter disenchantment.

Traveller's books and guides are a dime a dozen. They come and go.

*Colombo: Port of Call* is a book which steers clear of this subcategory. What Ajay does is to get us into the shoes of the people he describes. He gets us to see Sri Lanka through their eyes, through the filters of their beliefs and biases. Indeed, there are certain points when we laugh at, and points when we are humbled by, the impressions of these men and women.

Hans Christian Anderson, the great teller of fairy tales, whose flights of fancy animated our childhoods, has this to say about travel in his autobiography.

*To move, to breathe, to fly, to float,  
To gain all while you give,  
To roam the roads of lands remote,  
To travel is to live.*

The point that travel is not an abstract state of mind, but a way of life and a way of seeing other cultures, other societies, other people.

I believe this is what animates *Colombo: Port of Call*.

*Hirun Matheesha studies law at Sri Lanka Law College and management at the University of Colombo. Having completed his secondary education at Royal College, he did his A Levels in 2023, served as a prefect, and co-edited the flagship publication there, The Royalist, in 2024. Since leaving school in 2025 he has been involved in multiple projects, involving biographies of prominent people and histories of public institutions. Most of these projects have been with Uditha Devapriya. Hirun and Uditha are now co-writing a biography of a prominent Sri Lankan entrepreneur. He can be reached at hirun.m13@gmail.com.*

# LESSONS FROM MY CAREER: SYNTHESISING MANAGEMENT THEORY WITH PRACTICE – PART 34

## My Stint at Dankotuwa Porcelain – Episode 2

By SUNIL G. WIJESINHA

**T**he last episode described some of the interesting experiences during my first stint as non-executive Chairman of Dankotuwa Porcelain, including the privatisation. However, there was one incident I forgot to describe at that time, and I will relate it in this article.

### Political interference continues

Political interference at the local level continued unabated. A particular senior minister would walk into the factory without warning at any hour of the day. The security guards were too frightened to stop him. He would speak on behalf of the workers and demand salary increases.

The company was doing well at the time, and our employees' salaries and benefits were already well above the ceramic industry average. The management felt there was nothing more that could reasonably be given, and we stood firm. No more special increases. The union at the time was the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya, which was affiliated with the UNP.

One day, the General Secretary of the parent union requested an urgent meeting, which we arranged immediately in Colombo. Since the factory union arrived late, our HR Manager used the opportunity to explain to the parent union official the full details of salaries, the monthly cost-of-living allowance, which increased regularly, and the other benefits provided by the company.

We were operating 26 buses to transport workers from different areas in two districts. Breakfast and lunch were subsidised, and the meals were of good quality. When the union official heard all this, he was shocked. When the factory union leaders finally arrived, he scolded them severely and told them their demands were unreasonable. They left the meeting very embarrassed.

### Briefing the minister while pirth was being chanted

Despite this, the agitation continued. I realised that some militant elements had entered the union committee and were determined to create trouble and unsettle the company. Their agenda was different.

I decided I needed political support to resolve the situation and arranged to brief the Minister of Industries. He said he was very busy but suggested that I meet him at an all-night pirth ceremony which had been organised to bless the new building the Ministry was moving into.

When the Minister, Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe, arrived, he sat on a mat in the middle of the hall, with everyone else seated along the walls. I made myself visible to him, and when he saw me, he signalled me to come forward and sit beside him. I was quite embarrassed, because even senior officials were not seated near him.

I explained the entire situation to him, which took nearly 45 minutes while the pirth chanting was underway. The monks did not look very pleased because the Minister was listening to me rather than the chanting.

When I finished, I quietly asked him whether I could leave. He smiled and said, "It depends on you. If you want to gain more merit, you may stay. If not, you may leave."

The company was doing well at the time, and our employees' salaries and benefits were already well above the ceramic industry average. The management felt there was nothing more that could reasonably be given, and we stood firm. No more special increases. The union at the time was the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya, which was affiliated with the UNP. One day, the General Secretary of the parent union requested an urgent meeting, which we arranged immediately in Colombo. Since the factory union arrived late, our HR Manager used the opportunity to explain to the parent union official the full details of salaries, the monthly cost-of-living allowance, which increased regularly, and the other benefits provided by the company.

I took the opportunity and slipped away quietly.

### The Politician-inspired Work Stoppage

The demands for salary increases continued, even though the workers already received annual increments, a monthly cost-of-living allowance, a monthly incentive, and an annual bonus. Meals and transport were subsidised.

The senior minister of the area, who was also the President of the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya, asked the Dankotuwa Porcelain branch union to go on strike. The workers stopped work and left the factory, but remained within the administrative perimeter. They were confident that the Government would intervene and force the management to give in.

At that time, I was also the Executive Chairman of the Employees' Trust Fund Board, and therefore had access to both the Prime Minister and the President. I met the Prime Minister and showed him the faxes we had received from concerned customers, as well as the details of the salaries and benefits our workers were receiving. He was surprised and told me firmly not to give in.

One night, the Board was invited to the Minister's house for discussions to settle the issue. I took the other directors with me. The Managing Director joined us halfway. We were slightly nervous about travelling at night, but the journey passed without incident.

We arrived around 8 p.m., but we were called in only at midnight. I felt this delay was deliberate, as the Minister had arranged several political meetings before ours. The discussions were tough. Even when the Minister suggested a small increase of Rs. 50, my fellow directors did not agree. 'Not one rupee,' one Director said. We left without reaching a settlement. As we walked out, the Minister made a



veiled threat, but we ignored it.

### Keeping the factory running during the work stoppage

Meanwhile, the factory had to continue operating. The main glast kiln could not be stopped suddenly. It had to be cooled gradually over about 14 days. If not, the sudden temperature change would permanently damage the kiln, resulting in a significant loss.

Managers and supervisors themselves had to do manual work to load and unload the kiln. There was also a threat that the strikers would cut off water and electricity to the managers' quarters within the administrative area. We were also worried that the lorries parked there might be set on fire. Our Managing Director, Mr Jagath Pieris, had to drive the lorries himself into a safer area inside the factory perimeter. He later told me that it was the first time in his life he had driven a lorry.

We then briefed the President, who instructed the Prime Minister to refer the matter for compulsory arbitration immediately. I also requested that the Prime Minister send police from outside the area, as the local police appeared to be under political pressure.

At six o'clock the next morning, I was informed that three busloads of police from other stations had arrived, cleared the premises, and taken control of the factory. Our managers continued to run the operations.

This changed the situation completely. The strikers realised that their political support had weakened. At the same time, the compulsory arbitration order was issued. The newspapers reported that the strike had to be called off, and that those who refused to return to work would be considered to have vacated their posts. The SLBC morning news also carried the same announcement.

The union had no choice. They decided to march to the Minister's house. The Minister then advised them to return to work.

He later came to the factory and told the union leaders to ask the workers to resume duty because the compulsory arbitration order had to be honoured. They refused, saying it was he who had asked them to strike, and that he himself should address the workers. He did so and then left quickly.

Before leaving, he shouted at the Managing Director, "Tell your Directors that if my people are harassed, I will not hesitate to bomb the place."

### Discipline restored

Even after the Minister left, the union leaders continued speaking to the workers

using the factory microphone. Our HR Manager courageously went forward, took the microphone, and said that they had no right to use it.

He also announced that the workers would not be allowed back until all the placards, caricatures, and effigies placed along the Dankotuwa-Pannala road were removed. Apparently, there were some very well-made effigies of me, along with placards containing language that was not fit to print. I asked for photographs, but my staff refused to show them to me.

That incident effectively ended the union's power. Management power and discipline were restored, but we continued to treat the employees fairly and provide benefits whenever possible. The union leaders themselves were later reprimanded by their parent union, which had not approved the strike. They even had to bear the cost of the arbitration proceedings personally.

The union leader later came to see me privately. He showed me the loans he had taken to cover the expenses and asked for my help. He promised never to start a strike again. More than 30 years have passed, and he still keeps in touch with me. After this incident, the company enjoyed industrial peace for many years.

### The surprising arbitration award

When the arbitration decision finally came, we were surprised. The award stated that the management's generosity had actually backfired. Because the company had given regular salary increases and good benefits year after year, the workers had developed higher expectations. Therefore, those expectations had to be recognised.

The arbitrator's award was much smaller than the union demanded, and we decided not to appeal. It was a small price to pay for the stability we achieved.

### The lesson - generosity can create expectations

The lesson from this experience is very clear. Many managers feel happy to give higher wages and better benefits when the company is doing well. However, the happiness level comes down to normal soon. Psychologists call it the 'Hedonic Treadmill'. Satisfaction with a new benefit soon becomes a norm, and expectations increase. Business conditions do not remain the same forever. When difficult times come, and the company can no longer be generous, workers feel something has been taken away from them and blame management.

When Dankotuwa later faced strong international competition, some workers blamed the management for not getting enough orders. We explained the global

situation, and although the younger union members understood and realised that they were on the same side as management in reducing waste and improving productivity, the older leaders still believed they had to fight management to win demands, irrespective of the international situation.

Interestingly, towards the end of my tenure, some young union leaders were even monitoring the Saudi Aramco contract price, because our energy cost formula depended on it. That showed a new level of maturity with the new generation.

### A lesson I should have learned earlier

I must admit that I had seen this situation before, but I had not fully understood or internalised the lesson.

Many years earlier, I visited a tea estate owned by a very generous man. He provided his workers with facilities far better than those given in neighbouring estates, and he was very proud of his benevolent management style.

I was there with a retired Deputy Commissioner of a Government Department, a much wiser man. After listening to the owner and his boasts of how well he treats his labour, he quietly said to me,

"Giving much more than the basics will one day boomerang on him."

Sometime later, I returned to the same estate and saw many vehicles parked there. Officials from a regional union office had come to form a union. One speaker addressing the workers said loudly,

"It is true that the owner gives many benefits, but he makes a big profit too. Therefore, we must demand more, because he can afford it."

I was shocked by that attitude. Soon afterwards, the union presented a list of demands, and the owner was deeply disappointed. His generous style gradually disappeared. He learned his lesson.

### A warning to another company

After the Dankotuwa arbitration award, I was invited to speak to the managers of a factory in the Pannala area. I learned that they were about to introduce several new benefits to workers. I told them our story and advised them to be careful.

The moral is simple. Generosity is good, but it must be balanced with long-term thinking. Several management and motivation theories also warn that once higher pay and benefits become the norm, people quickly adjust their lifestyles to that level. When the benefits stop increasing, dissatisfaction begins.

The next episode will also describe further experiences at Dankotuwa Porcelain, including my return.

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## Features

BY ERROL C. BAPTIST

*(This article so relevant to today, believe it or not, was written by a 16-year old schoolboy in December 1991 when modern tools like the Internet and AI were not even heard of, and published in the Royal College Magazine of April 1962. The writer, a retired Professor of Pediatrics, from the University of Illinois, Rockford, now lives with his wife, Rosemary, in the USA.)*

The start of the Second World War coupled with the success of Hitler's Flying Bombs led to the pooling of resources by



# THIS NUCLEAR AGE

Allied Scientists, who carrying on their researches under the United States Government, endeavoured to harness the basic unit of the Universe – the atom. Their labours were well rewarded when in July 1945 the first Atom Bomb was successfully tested.

Its subsequent use on the two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, brought to a close the Second World War. Yet four years later, when the Russian scientists discovered its secrets – greatly helped by their spies like Julius and Ethel Rosenberg – the arms race began. Thus, today, the quiet of the world has been disturbed by a number of nuclear explosions as both East and West try to develop a bigger and better bomb.

A nuclear bomb or missile warhead hurtling through the atmosphere at great speed, explodes with a big bang on hitting the earth. As a result of this violent explosion a large ball of fire is formed, stretching for miles on end, its diameter depending on the power of the bomb. The spherical mass of fire then draws into its grip all matter in the vicinity and ascends leaving a grim memorial of its deadly work in the form of a huge crater.

In the upper layers of the atmosphere it assumes the shape like that of a cumulus cloud, though larger and darker. While the large pieces of debris in this debris-laden and radio-active mass fall down to earth, the smaller particles are carried by wind, rain and the like, to nearly every corner of the world. Thus during natural atmospheric disturbances a nuclear fall-out is produced in distant regions.

The radio-active fall-out consists of minute particles that are readily absorbed by plant organisms. Animals feed on these plants and man devours them both. Consequently radio-active products find their way into the human system causing serious illness or death if the fall out reaches a dangerous level. The radio-active isotope Strontium-90 for instance, may cause the growth of a cancer, or settling in bones, may bring about an osseous disease.

As the years have gone by more powerful nuclear bombs have been made. The power of the Hiroshima bomb is estimated at 19 kilotons, a kiloton being equivalent to a thousand tons of TNT (tri-nitro-toluene or dynamite). About 78,000 people were killed outright in this blast while those who escaped death were maimed for life. Even today some die of its after-effects while others are born deformed. Such was the might of this comparatively small bomb.

How much greater are today's bombs, that run into megatons or millions of tons of TNT! Half a dozen of the Russian 100-megaton bombs would be sufficient to completely obliterate our world of 3,000 million inhabitants. The noise produced in the explosion of such a bomb would be louder than the loudest explosion since history began – the eruption in 1883 of the volcanic East Indian island Krakatoa that was heard as many as 3,000 miles away.

Except where aircraft are based near enemy territory they will be of little or no use as striking forces in a future nuclear war. For today, the war machinery of the major powers has been revolutionized by the possession of guided missiles, the nose cones of which explode when the missiles hit their targets. These missiles are the Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's) and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM's).

The latter travel short distances of about 1,000 miles, while the former are long-range missiles. The U.S. Atlas

ICBM for instance has a range of about 9,000 miles. The mechanism of these missiles is such that the pressing of a few buttons would send them on courses of destruction. Thus, today, the nuclear striking forces of both East and West stand at the ready, awaiting the signal that may well mean the end of the world.

Aware of these dangers of nuclear testing, of the hazards involved in the arms race and of the fatal results of a nuclear war, the Nuclear Powers – the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain – have for the past few years been holding talks at the Palais de Nations in Geneva, aimed at working out a treaty banning nuclear testing and controlling the manufacture of nuclear weapons. But east is east and west is west..... and like all east-west negotiations these talks have been deadlocked. The West proposes one thing, the Soviet Union thinks of something else, and the vigil is prolonged.

A treaty involving nuclear disarmament and the control of nuclear testing is an urgent necessity in this war-scarred world. Those who campaign for such a treaty point out that if adequate precautions are not taken very soon nearly every country in the world will have its own bomb. And this world still has its Hitlers and Stalins. Then, what is there to prevent such a megalomaniacal dictator from using it against the rest of the world? As it is, France has become a Nuclear Power (it has exploded four bombs in the Sahara Desert) and it is reliably reported that Communist China will have its own bomb before very long.

The deadlock in the Geneva talks is almost entirely due to the inability of the Big Three to agree on means of Control of disarmament. The question asked is – how is the outside world to know that these countries are actually disarming, and that they are not carrying on nuclear tests? The setting up of an International Control Authority is at present the only answer. Such a body would have

**Its subsequent use on the two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, brought to a close the Second World War. Yet four years later, when the Russian scientists discovered its secrets – greatly helped by their spies like Julius and Ethel Rosenberg – the arms race began. Thus, today, the quiet of the world has been disturbed by a number of nuclear explosions as both East and West try to develop a bigger and better bomb. A nuclear bomb or missile warhead hurtling through the atmosphere at great speed, explodes with a big bang on hitting the earth. As a result of this violent explosion a large ball of fire is formed, stretching for miles on end, its diameter depending on the power of the bomb. The spherical mass of fire then draws into its grip all matter in the vicinity and ascends leaving a grim memorial of its deadly work in the form of a huge crater.**

detection centers on the territories of the Nuclear Powers so that the reduction of nuclear weapons could be supervised and any suspicious blasts checked.

Nevertheless it is not an ideal solution because, as the eminent scientist David Lutyens points out, to detect every explosion down to the Hiroshima bomb range 600 detection stations must be set up in Russian alone. The West does not object to the setting up of such bodies. Let alone the 600 stations, the Soviet Union is against even having the dozen that the West has asked for. According to Soviet Premier Khrushchev such stations would house "spies, saboteurs and enemies of the Soviet Union."

A Soviet proposal put forward some time ago envisaged the setting up of a three-man "troika" Control Authority consisting of a Western, a Soviet and a Neutral member each having the power to veto a move of the other two members – even if the move meant the inspection of a suspicious explosion. It goes without saying that such a proposal is ridiculous if real disarmament is to be achieved.

The clamour for Nuclear Disarmament has gathered momentum during the past few years. Among those who want the bomb banned are the selfless Doctor Albert Schweitzer, the Reverend Michael Scott and the 'philosopher' Earl Bertrand Russell, whose 'Committee of Hundred' has been involved in a number of anti-nuclear demonstrations. The general feeling among the 'ban-the-bomb' protagonists is that once the bomb is banned or a disarmament treaty signed world tensions will be reduced.

This is something like the truth, but not exactly the whole truth. For much will depend on the sincerity of the Big Power leaders. The possibility of one of them flouting the treaty and re-arming cannot be overlooked. When in October 1958 the three Powers agreed to a voluntary moratorium on Nuclear testing all the world hoped and believed that it would be for an indefinite period. Yet three years later the Soviet Union unilaterally resumed Nuclear testing – 'to bring the world to its senses' to use Khrushchev's own words. The Soviet Union, it must be remembered, is guided by no Religious belief, is under obligation to no International authority – not even the UNO. but deeply believes in the teachings of its Fathers like Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (alias Lenin) who once wrote: 'It is ridiculous not to know the history of war, not to know that a treaty is the means of gaining strength.....'

Despite the dismal picture that has been painted of it, atomic energy has its uses as well as its abuses. Atomic reactors could supply electricity at extremely low costs; nuclear submarines, ships and vehicles (that hardly need any fuel) could be made; radio-active elements may help in the control of disease. In fact a world, built in the image of the dreams of science-fiction writers like Jules Verne could be realized.

One may sincerely hope that a terrible nuclear catastrophe will not befall this earth; that the materialistic anti-religious Communist doctrine will be eliminated without a violent revolution, and that the contemporary historian Arnold Toynbee, was not speaking optimistically when he said: "Our age will be remembered not for its horrifying crimes or its astonishing inventions, but because it is the first generation since the dawn of history in which mankind dared to believe it practical to make the benefits of civilization available to the whole human race."

## Trincomalee...

FROM PAGE 18

### Trincomalee Oil Farm and Energy Hub: A Strategic Asset Sri Lanka Can No Longer Ignore

At a time when Sri Lanka continues to grapple with energy insecurity, volatile global oil prices, and the economic aftershocks of recent crises, one national asset stands out—vast, historic, and still underused. The Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm, located within the deep natural harbour of Trincomalee, is no longer merely a relic of the past. It has re-emerged as a critical national asset with the potential to reshape Sri Lanka's energy security and economic future. In the context of an ongoing global energy crisis, the question is not whether Trincomalee matters, but whether Sri Lanka is finally prepared to act decisively.

The origins of the Trincomalee oil tank farm date back to the strategic imperatives of the British Empire during the Second World War. Recognising the unmatched value of Trincomalee's harbour—one of the finest natural deep-water harbours in the world—the British constructed a vast oil storage complex across approximately 600 acres at China Bay. Built between the 1920s and late 1930s, the facility comprised 101 massive storage tanks, each capable of holding around 12,000 metric tons of fuel. With a total capacity of nearly 1.2 million metric tons, the complex was designed to support sustained naval operations in the Indian Ocean theatre. The tanks were ingeniously embedded into the natural contours of the terrain and reinforced with thick concrete, offering both protection and structural stability. A sophisticated pipeline network enabled the efficient transfer of oil from ships directly into storage, making Trincomalee a logistical asset of exceptional value.

Despite this remarkable beginning, the decades following independence in 1948 saw the gradual neglect of the facility. Successive governments failed to incorporate the oil tank farm into a coherent national energy strategy. As global demand for energy expanded and regional economies strengthened, Sri Lanka allowed one of its most valuable assets to deteriorate. Infrastructure decayed, pipelines corroded, and many of the tanks fell into disuse, eventually becoming overgrown by jungle. What should have been a cornerstone of national energy security instead became a symbol of indecision and missed opportunity.

There were intermittent attempts to revive interest in Trincomalee. In the late 1970s, President J. R. Jayewardene recognised the strategic and economic potential of the facility and proposed its development. However, these efforts were constrained by geopolitical realities, particularly concerns from India regarding foreign involvement in a strategically sensitive location close to its southern coastline. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord once again highlighted Trincomalee's strategic importance, but the ensuing years of civil conflict and persistent policy inconsistency prevented any meaningful progress. Even after the end of the war in 2009, development remained slow and fragmented.

A more structured effort emerged in 2022 with the establishment of the Trinco Petroleum Terminal (Pvt) Ltd, a joint venture between the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation and the Indian Oil Corporation. Under this arrangement, Sri Lanka retained a 51 percent stake, while the Indian partner held 49 percent. A number of tanks were allocated for immediate use, while others were designated for phased development. Although this marked a positive step forward, the majority of the facility remains underutilised. Political opposition, particularly from groups such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, continued to slow progress, often framing the issue in terms of sovereignty rather than economic necessity.

The urgency of developing Trincomalee has been amplified by the current global energy crisis, driven in part by instability in the Middle East and disruptions to global supply chains. These developments have exposed the vulnerability of countries with limited strategic reserves. Sri Lanka, at present, maintains fuel reserves sufficient for roughly 30 days. With full development of the Trincomalee oil tank farm, this capacity could be extended to 60 days or more, providing a vital buffer against external shocks. Such an expansion would not only enhance national energy security but also reduce the risk of recurring fuel shortages and economic instability.

A significant breakthrough came in 2025 with the signing of a tripartite agreement involving Sri Lanka, India, and the United Arab Emirates. This partnership represents a pragmatic alignment of interests, combining Sri Lanka's strategic location with India's regional presence and the UAE's financial and technical capabilities. More importantly, it reflects a shift in thinking—from

viewing Trincomalee purely through a geopolitical lens to recognising its broader socioeconomic potential. In an era where energy infrastructure and regional cooperation are increasingly interconnected, Trincomalee has the capacity to emerge as a key node in the Indian Ocean energy network.

However, the true potential of Trincomalee extends far beyond oil storage. To fully realise its value, Sri Lanka must adopt a more integrated and forward-looking approach, transforming the region into a comprehensive energy hub. This would involve modernising storage facilities, expanding distribution networks, and developing refining capacity to reduce dependence on imported petroleum products. The establishment of petrochemical industries could further enhance value addition and create new avenues for export and employment.

Trincomalee's geographic advantages also position it well for the development of aviation fuel supply chains, particularly given its proximity to China Bay. In addition, the harbour's location along major east-west shipping routes offers significant potential for bunkering and maritime services. By integrating energy infrastructure with port operations, Sri Lanka could enhance its role in global maritime trade while generating substantial revenue.

Equally important is the integration of renewable energy into this vision. The nearby area of Sampur, once the site of abandoned coal and LNG projects, has now been repurposed as a solar power facility commissioned in 2025, with a planned capacity of 120 MW. While modest in scale, this development represents a meaningful shift towards sustainability and highlights the potential for combining traditional and renewable energy sources within a unified framework. Sampur's evolution serves as both a lesson in missed opportunity and a model for a more balanced and forward-looking energy strategy.

The transformation of Trincomalee into a functioning energy hub will depend on several critical factors. Foremost among these is the need for policy consistency and long-term planning. Investor confidence cannot be sustained in an environment of shifting regulations and political uncertainty. Transparent governance, clear regulatory frameworks, and a commitment to protecting national interests are essential. At the same time, strategic partnerships with international stakeholders must be carefully managed to ensure that Sri Lanka benefits fully from its assets while maintaining sovereignty.

Infrastructure development will also play a central role. Upgrading port facilities, expanding pipeline networks, and improving road and rail connectivity are necessary to support increased activity. Investment in human capital is equally important, as the operation of a modern energy hub requires a skilled and technically proficient workforce.

Sri Lanka's experience with the Trincomalee oil tank farm and related projects, including those in Sampur, underscores a recurring pattern of missed opportunities driven by political indecision and short-term thinking. To break this cycle, there must be a clear national consensus on the strategic importance of Trincomalee, supported by consistent policy and professional management.

In conclusion, the future of Trincomalee stands at a decisive crossroads. What was once conceived as a strategic wartime asset now represents an opportunity of immense national importance, particularly in the context of a global energy crisis. The convergence of geography, infrastructure, and rising global demand places Trincomalee in a uniquely advantageous position within the Indian Ocean region. Realising this potential will require disciplined planning, sustained commitment, and a willingness to act in the national interest. If approached with foresight and unity, Trincomalee can evolve into a resilient and dynamic energy hub, securing Sri Lanka's energy future while driving economic growth and regional cooperation. The foundations are already in place; what is needed now is the resolve to build upon them.

**(Dr. Gamini Goonetilleke, FRCS, is a senior consultant surgeon in Sri Lanka with over four decades of distinguished service, including extensive work in conflict-affected regions during the civil war, where he managed complex trauma cases. He is the author of three acclaimed books—In the Line of Duty, The Extra Mile, and The Healing Cut. Transitioning from medicine to intellectual inquiry, he is now a researcher, writer, and commentator on national issues. In this article, he brings a critical perspective to Sri Lanka's energy challenges, highlighting missed opportunities and the urgent need for strategic vision.)**

*The simple answer is that it is usually wise to wash new clothes before wearing them, particularly garments that will touch the skin directly. However, the reasons behind this advice are more nuanced than many people realize. The journey a garment takes before reaching the consumer involves multiple stages of production, treatment, transport and handling. Each stage can introduce chemicals, residues or microbes that are invisible but sometimes significant. Understanding this journey helps explain why a quick wash can be beneficial.*

Few small pleasures rival the feeling of wearing a brand new garment straight from the shop. The fabric is crisp, the colours vibrant and the smell distinctly "new." Because the item looks clean and unused, many people assume that it is perfectly safe to wear it immediately. Yet experts in dermatology, textile science and public health often advise otherwise. The question of whether new clothes should be washed before wearing them has gradually become a matter not merely of habit but also of hygiene and health.

The simple answer is that it is usually wise to wash new clothes before wearing them, particularly garments that will touch the skin directly. However, the reasons behind this advice are more nuanced than many people realize. The journey a garment takes before reaching the consumer involves multiple stages of production, treatment, transport and handling. Each stage can introduce chemicals, residues or microbes that are invisible but sometimes significant. Understanding this journey helps explain why a quick wash can be beneficial.

**Long journey of a garment**

When people see a neatly folded shirt on a store shelf, it is easy to imagine that it arrived there straight from a clean factory. In reality, clothing typically passes through many different environments before it reaches the buyer. Textile fibres are processed in mills, dyed in vats, finished with chemical treatments, packaged in warehouses and shipped across continents. By the time the garment appears in a shop, it may have been handled by numerous workers and exposed to a range of environmental conditions.

Textile experts explain that fabrics are often treated with chemicals during manufacturing to give them particular qualities such as wrinkle resistance, colour stability or protection against mildew during transport. These treatments are not necessarily harmful in regulated amounts, but traces can remain on the fabric surface. According to consumer safety guidance, substances such as formaldehyde are sometimes used in the textile industry to help garments retain their shape and resist wrinkling or staining. Washing and airing new clothes before wearing them is therefore recommended to reduce potential irritation from such residues.

The path from factory to shop also means that clothing may accumulate

Loose dyes are another common concern. Dark or vividly coloured clothing sometimes contains excess dye that has not yet been washed out during manufacturing. If such garments are worn without washing, the dye can rub off on the skin or transfer to other clothing. A simple wash removes much of this loose dye and prevents staining.

**Microbes and human contact**  
Another factor that encourages experts to recommend washing new clothes is the possibility of microbial contamination. Clothing displayed in retail stores is often tried on by multiple customers. Even items that appear untouched may have been handled by several people while being stocked, sorted or



fabrics come into contact with different bodies and surfaces. Washing a newly purchased item therefore serves as a simple precautionary measure.

**Skin sensitivity and allergic reactions**  
People with sensitive skin or existing dermatological conditions are particularly encouraged to wash new clothes before wearing them. Individuals who suffer from eczema, contact dermatitis or allergies may react more strongly to chemical residues in fabrics. Dermatologists explain that certain dyes, particularly those used in synthetic fabrics, are among the most common triggers of textile related dermatitis. An allergic reaction may not appear immediately. Instead, it can develop hours or days after the fabric comes into contact with the skin. The resulting rash can persist for weeks in severe cases.

Because washing helps remove many of these irritants, it can reduce the likelihood of such reactions. Experts often advise paying special attention to garments that will be worn close to the skin, such as underwear, shirts, sleepwear or sportswear. These items are more likely to trap sweat and create friction, which can intensify irritation if chemicals remain in the fabric.

**Comfort and performance**  
Beyond health considerations, washing new clothes can also improve comfort and functionality. Many fabrics are treated with starches or sizing agents to keep them stiff and wrinkle free during transport and display. These coatings give garments their crisp appearance in shops

it can help reduce any residual odours or chemicals.

Clothing that is sealed in packaging and shipped directly from the manufacturer may also carry fewer contaminants than garments displayed in a store. Nevertheless, even these items have been through manufacturing processes that may involve chemical treatments.

As a general rule, the closer a garment will sit against the skin, the more sensitive it is to wash it first.

**Cultural habits and everyday practice**

Despite expert advice, many people still wear new clothes straight from the store. Surveys suggest that a significant proportion of consumers rarely wash new garments before wearing them, particularly outerwear items. Some people simply enjoy the crisp look and feel of new clothing and prefer not to risk fading or shrinkage before the first wear.

Others regard the recommendation as overly cautious. Since serious health effects from unwashed clothing are relatively rare, the practice may seem unnecessary. However, many health professionals view the simple act of washing clothes as an easy precaution that reduces multiple potential risks at once.

In everyday life the decision often depends on personal preference, lifestyle and sensitivity to fabrics. Some individuals always wash new garments as a matter of routine, while others do so only for certain items.

**Practical advice for washing new clothes**

For those who choose to wash new clothes before wearing them, a few practical guidelines can help ensure that the process is effective without damaging the garment.

The first step is to read the care label carefully. Manufacturers provide specific instructions about water temperature, washing method and drying technique. Following these instructions helps prevent shrinkage or colour loss.

It is usually advisable to wash dark or brightly coloured items separately the first time. This prevents loose dye from staining other garments. Using a mild detergent and cold or warm water is often sufficient to remove chemical residues while protecting the fabric.

People with sensitive skin may prefer fragrance free detergents and an extra rinse cycle to ensure that no detergent residue remains. Air drying garments instead of using high heat can also reduce shrinkage and preserve fabric quality.

**A simple precaution**  
In the end, the question of whether new clothes must be washed before wearing them does not have a rigid rule. Wearing an unwashed garment once is unlikely to cause serious harm for most people. Yet the advice offered by dermatologists and textile experts reflects a broader understanding of how clothing is manufactured and handled before it reaches consumers.

A brief wash can remove many of the substances and microbes that accumulate during the garment's journey from factory to wardrobe. It can reduce the risk of skin irritation, prevent dye transfer and improve the comfort of the fabric. For these reasons, washing new clothes before wearing them is widely regarded as a sensible and hygienic practice.

The ritual of laundering a new purchase may seem mundane, but it serves as a quiet reminder that appearances can be deceptive. What looks fresh and pristine on the outside may still carry traces of the long path it has travelled. A simple wash helps ensure that when the garment finally touches the skin, it truly feels as clean and comfortable as it appears.

(From agencies)

# The question of washing new clothes

dust, packaging debris or residues from storage conditions. Garments often travel long distances in sealed shipping containers where heat and humidity can fluctuate. Although modern manufacturing standards attempt to minimize contamination, these conditions are far from sterile.

**Chemical residues and textile finishing**

One of the most frequently cited reasons for washing new clothes is the presence of chemical finishing agents. In the textile industry, the finishing stage is the final step that determines the appearance and performance of a garment. During this stage fabrics may be treated with resins, dyes, softeners, water repellents or antimicrobial coatings.

Formaldehyde resins are widely used because they help fabrics resist wrinkles and maintain a crisp appearance while they are folded and transported. Disperse dyes are often used to colour synthetic fabrics such as polyester or nylon. Some garments also contain flame retardants, stain resistant coatings or optical brighteners designed to make the fabric look brighter and cleaner.

These substances are not necessarily dangerous in small amounts, but they can cause problems for people with sensitive skin. Dermatologists report that certain textile chemicals can trigger contact dermatitis, an allergic skin reaction that produces itching, redness or rash. Studies have shown that washing garments once before wearing them can remove a substantial proportion of these residues and reduce the likelihood of irritation.



but can make the fabric feel rough or unnatural against the skin.

The first wash removes much of this coating, allowing the fibres to relax and soften. Textile specialists note that cotton garments often undergo a process called relaxation shrinkage when they are washed for the first time. The fibres loosen slightly and settle into their natural shape. Washing the garment before wearing it ensures that any small shrinkage occurs before the item becomes part of a regular wardrobe.

New towels provide another example. Many towels are coated with finishing agents that make them appear fluffy and smooth in the store.

Unfortunately these coatings can reduce their ability to absorb water. Washing them once before use removes the coating and restores their absorbency.

**When washing may not be necessary**

Although washing new clothes is generally recommended, it is not always essential. The degree of risk varies depending on the type of garment and how it will be used.

Outer garments such as jackets or coats do not usually come into prolonged contact with the skin. For such items, washing before first use may not be as important. Similarly, some garments labelled "dry clean only" may not be suitable for conventional washing. In those cases airing the garment before wearing

examined.

Microbiologists note that fabrics can carry bacteria and fungi acquired during production, transportation or retail handling. While the risk of contracting an illness from clothing is generally very small, the possibility exists that microbes could remain on the fabric for some time. Washing garments helps remove these organisms along with sweat, skin cells or cosmetic residues left by previous handlers.

In busy clothing stores the problem may be greater simply because of the number of people who interact with the garments. Changing rooms and display racks are shared environments where

Fashion minimalism is a style philosophy built around the idea that simplicity can be elegant and powerful. Instead of constantly chasing new trends or filling wardrobes with countless garments, minimalist fashion encourages people to focus on fewer, carefully chosen pieces that are versatile, timeless and comfortable. The principle is often summarized by the phrase "less is more," which means removing unnecessary elements and concentrating on essentials that express personal style clearly and effortlessly.

Minimalist fashion is not about deprivation or wearing dull clothing. Rather, it is about intentional choices. A minimalist wardrobe usually contains clothes that work well together, fit properly and remain stylish over time. Clean lines, simple silhouettes and a restrained use of colour are common features. Instead of heavily decorated garments with many embellishments, minimalist pieces tend to be sleek and uncluttered.

At its core, fashion minimalism is both a style and a mindset. It encourages people to move away from impulse buying and fast fashion and to focus on quality, practicality and personal comfort. When a wardrobe contains carefully selected pieces that mix and match easily, dressing becomes simpler and more satisfying.

One of the most recognizable aspects of minimalist fashion is the use of a consistent colour palette. Many minimalist wardrobes revolve around neutral shades such as black, white, grey, navy or beige. These colours combine easily with one another and create a cohesive look. Because the colours harmonize, a person can mix different garments without worrying about clashing tones. This allows a small number of clothes to produce many different outfits.)

Another defining feature is the emphasis on quality rather than quantity. Minimalist fashion encourages buying



## Fashion minimalism

fewer items but choosing them carefully. Well-made clothing often lasts longer, fits better and looks more refined than cheap garments produced for short-term trends. When people invest in durable fabrics and classic designs, they tend to keep their clothes for many years instead of replacing them every season.

Minimalist style also relies heavily on versatility. A typical minimalist wardrobe might include items such as a well-fitting pair of jeans, a plain white shirt, a blazer, a neutral sweater and a simple dress. Each of these pieces can be combined with others in multiple ways. Because the clothing works together, a person can create many outfits without owning a large number of garments.

Although minimalist fashion appears effortless, achieving it often requires

thoughtful planning. Many people accumulate clothing over the years without considering whether each item truly fits their lifestyle. Simplifying one's style usually begins with reassessing the wardrobe and removing items that are rarely worn. This process helps identify what actually works and what simply takes up space.

One effective way to simplify style is by creating what fashion experts often call a capsule wardrobe. This is a small collection of clothing pieces that complement one another and can be worn in different combinations. A capsule wardrobe might contain around twenty to forty items including shirts, trousers, jackets and shoes. Because each item is chosen with care, the wardrobe remains practical without becoming overwhelming.

Another important step toward fashion

minimalism is learning to recognize personal style. Many people buy clothes because they are fashionable at the moment, even if those garments do not suit their personality or lifestyle. Minimalism encourages individuals to identify colours, cuts and fabrics that make them feel confident and comfortable. Once these preferences become clear, shopping decisions become easier and more intentional.

Decluttering the wardrobe is often the most transformative step in adopting minimalist fashion. This process involves sorting clothes into categories such as frequently worn items, occasional pieces and garments that have not been used for a long time. Items that no longer fit, feel uncomfortable or simply do not match personal taste can be donated, recycled or repurposed. Removing excess clothing makes it easier to see what remains and reduces the daily stress of choosing what to wear.

Minimalist style also values proper fit. A simple garment that fits well often looks more elegant than an elaborate piece that does not. Tailoring can make a significant difference in how clothing appears. Even basic items such as trousers, shirts or jackets can look sophisticated when they are adjusted to suit the wearer's body shape.

Accessories play a subtle but important role in minimalist fashion. Instead of wearing many accessories at once, minimalists tend to choose one or two pieces that complement the outfit. A simple watch, a pair of understated earrings or a well-designed handbag can add personality without overwhelming the overall look. The aim is balance rather than excess.

Adopting minimalist fashion can also change the way people think about shopping. Instead of buying clothes frequently, minimalists often pause and consider whether a new item truly serves a purpose. Questions such as whether the gar-

ment matches existing pieces or whether it will be worn regularly help prevent unnecessary purchases. Over time, this approach reduces waste and encourages more responsible consumption.

There are practical benefits as well. A simplified wardrobe saves time during busy mornings because there are fewer choices to consider. Clothes that coordinate easily eliminate the frustration of trying to assemble matching outfits. Many people also discover that they spend less money on clothing because they buy fewer but better items.

Minimalist fashion can also have environmental advantages. The fast fashion industry produces enormous quantities of clothing each year, much of which ends up in landfills after only a short period of use. By buying fewer garments and wearing them longer, minimalist dressers contribute to a more sustainable approach to fashion.

Despite its emphasis on simplicity, minimalist style does not mean that everyone must dress the same way. Personal expression remains important. Some people prefer monochrome outfits, while others incorporate occasional colour or textured fabrics into their wardrobe. The essence of minimalism lies not in strict rules but in thoughtful choices that eliminate clutter while preserving individuality.

Ultimately fashion minimalism is about clarity. It allows people to focus on what truly suits them instead of being distracted by constant trends and excessive options. By choosing versatile clothing, maintaining a cohesive colour palette and prioritizing quality over quantity, anyone can simplify their style while still looking polished and confident. Over time this approach transforms not only the wardrobe but also the relationship people have with fashion, making it calmer, more intentional and more satisfying. (Anita)



Sabeetha and Vijaya - duo that defines intensity



Freddie's charm and Vijaya's

By ZANITA CAREEM

The 1970s and 1980s are remembered as the "Swarna Yugaya" — the Golden Era of Sinhala cinema, a period that produced some of the country's most memorable films, legendary performances, and culturally defining stories. Through Scope Classics, Scope Cinemas aims to reintroduce these timeless classics to modern audiences while preserving their place in Sri Lanka's cultural and cinematic history.

While many of these films have been available through television and digital platforms over the years, Scope Cinemas believe that the true impact of cinema can only be experienced on the big screen. By presenting these classics in modern theatres equipped with advanced projection and sound technology, audiences will once again be able to experience them as they were originally intended.

This initiative also supports the growing momentum of Sri Lankan cinema, which has seen renewed audience interest in recent years with successful local releases such as Rani, Kathuru Mithuru, Nelum Kuluna, Dharmayuddhaya 2, Walampoori, Moda Tharindu, and Rhythm of the Guitar: Clarence.

"Scope is bringing back the Golden Era of Sri Lankan Cinema on the big screen. We give you SCOPE CLASSICS where we show movies back from the 70s and 80s. And we kick things off with the movie NOMMARA 17." said Chassy Cortes, Head of Marketing and PR at Scope Cinemas. "We wanted to bring back the great Sinhala classics and give younger audiences the opportunity to experience the films that shaped our industry. These movies are classics for a reason — the stories were powerful, the creativity was bold, and they represent a remarkable era of Sri Lankan cinema."

In the tapestry of Sri Lanka films, a few films resonate with as much emotional gravity and cultural memory as

# Timeless thriller, *Nommara 17*



Suspense and unforgettable moments



Screen presence legendary



Unforgettable moments



Deadly intentions

*Nommara 17* returned to the theatres, giving fans a chance to relive its magic while introducing a new generation to a timeless classic. Its gripping story and iconic performances continue to captivate audiences.

Scope Cinemas is launching a special initiative to celebrate and preserve Sri Lanka's cinematic heritage by bringing beloved Sinhala film classics back to the big screen. The programme begins with the re-release of the iconic 1989 box office hit *Nommara 17*, premiering on 27 March 2026.

*Nommara 17* It is a 1989 Sinhala action thriller that became more than just a box office hit. Directed by Hemasiri Prethiraf Weeraratne and produced by Priviraj Weeraratne, the film stars the legendary Vijaya Kumaratunge, in one of the most unforgettable roles, supported by Sanath Gunatillake, Jeevan Kumaratunge, Sabeetha Perera, Manik Kulakulasuriya and others who helped shape its powerful narrative. What sets *Nommara 17* apart is its action drama

According to Galagedera Jayaratne, Manager of Marketing and Production at Scope Cinema, the movie was restored shortly after Vijaya Kumaratunge's assassination, an event that sent shock waves through the nation and transformed this film into a final cinematic fairwell for one of Sri Lanka's most beloved stars.

There were longer crowds lined up to see the movie outside the theatres from early morning, with screening run-

ning for more than 200 days making this film as one of the big blockbusters of its time. This film *Nommara 17*, re-screened, won the most popular film award at the 17th Sarasaviya Awards. The story is an action thriller. Filled with action, betrayal and family drama, the story revolves around Vijaya's quest for revenge and justice. His reconciliation with his brothers, and taking down the criminals who destroyed their family. Finally the brothers reconcile, weaving a tale of loyalty, redemption and the bonds that endure even in the face of violence. The chemistry among the cast, especially the chemistry between Vijaya and his brothers and his love interest in Vasanthi (Sabeetha) bring both intensity and heat to the narrative making it as much a family saga as an action thriller.

Even now, the film holds a place in the memories of Sri Lankan audience, not just as a piece of entertainment but a cinematic celebration.

The film is being re-screened at Scope Cinemas. It was a special revival presentation giving the people a chance to enjoy a classic on the big screen once more.

This old time favourite *Nommara 17* screened at the Scope Cinemas holds a special place in the hearts of the audience. The gripping storyline and memorable performances of old time favourite actors and actresses is an opportunity to experience the magic excitement and charm that made it a classic proving that good movies never truly fade away.

## Pakistan's 86th National Day celebrated in Sri Lanka



Acting High Commissioner Zunaira Latif



Adeel Sattar - Media Attache

The High Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Pakistani community based in Sri Lanka celebrated the 86th National Day of Pakistan with traditional flavour and resolve to make Pakistan a strong, vibrant and progressive democratic welfare state.

The day commemorates a defining moment that led the foundation for the creation of Pakistan.

The ceremony commenced with the raising of their national flag, fluttering proudly against the morning sky, symbolising faith, unity and discipline, the ideals upon which the nation was built. Dignitaries, members of the diplomatic corps, community leaders and guests gathered in silence as the national anthem resonated creating an atmosphere charged with emotion and national pride.

Cultural elegance added a distinctive charm to the occasion, with traditional attire and warm exchanges reflecting the rich heritage of Pakistan. Guests were later invited to partake in light refreshments, providing an opportunity for cordial interaction and celebration.

Acting High Commissioner of Pakistan, Zunaira Latif unfurled the Pakistani flag to the tune of Pakistan's national anthem in a ceremony held at the Pakistan High

Commission. The National Day of Pakistan is celebrated on 23rd March every year in remembrance of the historic 1940 resolution passed in Lahore, calling for a separate homeland for Muslims of the sub-continent that ultimately led to the creation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947.

Special messages by the President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan were readout, in which both the leaders highlighted the impor-



Trade and Investment Attache Mahwas Sami

tance of the day and paid tributes to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Acting High Commissioner of Pakistan in her message on the occasion said that Pakistan and Sri Lanka continue to maintain their traditionally close and mutually beneficial relations, based on mutual respect and trust. She said that the strength of the Pakistan - Sri Lanka relationship lies in diversified engagement in many fields such as trade, defence, science, culture, and education. She also extended sincere greetings and best wishes on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan to the government and people of Sri Lanka.

## World Wildlife Day 2026: From rescue to rewilding, Kalo's journey continues

# From rescue to rewilding, Kalo's journey continues

He arrived at the Elephant Transit Home in Udawalawe on March 23, 2024, barely eight months old. Kalo had spent an unknown number of days trapped at the bottom of an abandoned well near Galenbidunuwewa in Sri Lanka's Anuradhapura District, separated from the herd he had lost. When wildlife officers from the Department of Wildlife Conservation pulled him out, they found a frightened calf, but also something else: resilience.

Today, nearly two years after his rescue, Kalo is no longer the fragile elephant calf who arrived at the Transit Home alone. He is growing steadily, eating well, and has fully integrated into a group of calves preparing for eventual release. His progress is measured not only in size, but in behaviour like social bonding, herd interaction, and independent foraging skills that will determine his readiness for life beyond human protection. Since his arrival, Kalo has grown from 125 kilograms to over 300 kilograms. The wounds he sustained before rescue have fully healed, and he is no longer on any specific medical treatment instead routine management only. He is, by every measure, active, playful, and thriving.

The Elephant Transit Home, also known as Ath Athuru Sevana, has operated within Udawalawe National Park since



1995. It is not an orphanage in the traditional sense. There are no rides, no performances, no human dependency. Human contact is limited strictly to feeding and veterinary care. The rest of the time, the calves are left to bond with one another.

That philosophy is intentional. Elephants are deeply social animals, and calves that grow too attached to humans struggle to survive in the wild. The daily

play, the hierarchy, and the formation of peer bonds are all part of a structured rehabilitation process designed to prepare them for rewilding.

Since its establishment, more than 200 orphaned elephants have passed through the Elephant Transit Home. Over 100 have been successfully released back into the wild. In July 2025 alone, six young elephants were returned to Udawalawe

National Park during the facility's 26th release. If all continues as planned, Kalo will follow that path in 2029.

On May 8, 2024, less than two months after Kalo's rescue, Sun Siyam Pasikudah formalised its long-term commitment to his care through the CarePhant initiative under Sun Siyam Care. The resort pledged ongoing monthly contributions to support Kalo's nutrition, veterinary care, and daily rehabilitation needs through to his planned release.

Sun Siyam Care is the group's overarching sustainability programme that integrates environmental stewardship, biodiversity conservation, community engagement, and long-term socio-economic value creation across all Sun Siyam Resorts in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Through Sun Siyam Care, we invest in initiatives that protect marine and terrestrial ecosystems, reduce waste and single-use plastics, improve resource efficiency, support renewable energy and local sourcing, and promote awareness and participation among guests and communities alike. Kalo's journey from rescue to rewilding is one example of how Sun Siyam Care extends beyond hospitality, connecting responsible tourism with meaningful environmental and wildlife conservation impact.

"We are delighted to embark on the CarePhant project and become stewards of Kalo's well-being. Sri Lanka's elephants are not just a conservation issue; they are part of the living identity of this island, and we feel a genuine responsibility to play our part in protecting them," said Arshed Refai, General Manager, Sun Siyam Pasikudah.

For Chaminda Upul Kumara, Sustainability Project Manager at Sun Siyam Resorts, the commitment reflects the deeper purpose of Sun Siyam Care. "Conservation is not a single moment. It is a process that requires patience and con-

sistency. With Kalo, we committed to being part of that journey from rescue to release. Every month of support is an investment in his return to the wild," said Upul.

In the month that marks World Wildlife Day, observed on 03rd March, Kalo's story serves as a reminder that conservation is not abstract. It is individual. It is long term. And it depends on partnerships between public institutions and responsible private sector actors. In a landscape where habitat loss and human-elephant conflict continue to threaten Sri Lanka's wild elephant population, sustained commitments like CarePhant demonstrate how responsible tourism can contribute to tangible, measurable conservation outcomes.

Sun Siyam Pasikudah, which holds Travelife Gold Certification and operates under the broader Sun Siyam Care sustainability framework, integrates conservation, local sourcing, and community engagement into its daily operations. The CarePhant project builds on that foundation by linking responsible hospitality directly to wildlife protection.

Three years from now, in 2029, Kalo is expected to walk beyond the protective boundaries of the Elephant Transit Home and into Udawalawe National Park as a young wild elephant. Every veterinary check, every month of nutritional support, and every bond formed within his herd brings him closer to that moment.

"When Kalo walks back into the forest in 2029, it will mark the completion of a journey that began in crisis but was sustained through commitment," added Arshed Refai. "We are proud that Sun Siyam Care is part of that long-term promise."

Until then, Kalo continues doing what young elephants at Ath Athuru Sevana are meant to do: growing, learning, and preparing quietly for a life in the wild.



The leadership team behind the academy at the head table

# Grace, grooming and confidence

## Ramani Fernando's new Image and Etiquette Academy

By ZANTIA CAREEM

**I**n a world where first impressions speak before words, Sri Lanka's beauty icon Ramani Fernando has taken a bold step beyond the salon chair to shape confidence from within. Her newly launched Etiquette and Image Academy is designed to refine not only appearance, but presence, poise and personal power.

Step into a space where confidence meets sophistication, Ramani Fernando Academy is redefining how Sri Lankans approach personal branding, offering a unique blend of etiquette, style and communication mastery.

Her newly launched personal branding and Etiquette Academy was unveiled in a simple ceremony at the Galle Face hotel. This marks a bold and timely step into the realm of confidence leadership, presence and modern social grace.

Colombo's social elite, corporate leaders, fashion insiders and longtime clients gathered in celebration of a vision that seeks to shape not just appearance but confidence building.

Ramani, in her opening speech, said "our courses are carefully designed to meet with international standards, ensuring participants receive training that meets both local and global expectations.

Faith Launder who is the Director of Etiquette and Protocol in the Academy pointed out this personal branding and etiquette programmes will help participants cultivate grace, confidence and refined personal style through expert guidance. A former Miss Sri Lanka beauty queen, with experience in aviation, will contribute a creative and professional lens to the Academy's curriculum.

She brings professionalism, poise and a strong commitment to cultivate confidence and promote refined social skills among stu-

dents. Known for her approachable style and inspiring presence, she strives to create an inclusive learning space where students can transform into confident individuals to navigate life with dignity and elegance.

For decades, Ramani has been a transformative force in Sri Lanka's beauty industry and now this venture signals a natural evolution from external refinement to the art of personal distinction.

The programme blends traditional etiquette with contemporary relevance, offering personal branding and professional image building both in social and corpo-

othe senior professionals

The Managing Director, Lakmini Lenagala, Training and Administrative Manager, Ramono, Navaratnarajah, Personal Assistant, Merisha Aserappa and Chalana Munasinghe are all industry professionals who have experience, theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

They are experienced instructors with hands on expertise in grooming, etiquette, image building and communication.

While the vision of the Personal Branding and Etiquette Academy belongs to Ramani Fernando, its strength lies in the collective expertise of the professionals who bring the programmes to life.

By bringing together specialists from diverse fields, the Academy offers participants a rare opportunity to refine every dimension of their public and private persona under one roof.

Sessions cover skin care, hair, make up, wardrobe planning and colour coordination.

Communication and public speaking recognising that presence is also conveyed through voice and expression, the Academy offers training in articulation tones, posture and body language.

The training also includes table manners, event conduct, professional courtesies and cross cultural awareness. This Etiquette Academy is designed for both women and men offering guidance on grooming, communication, professional conduct and social confidence.

The Academy acts as a transformative space - one that equips individuals not merely to succeed but to stand out with authenticity and grace. The institution reflects Ramani Fernando's belief that true elegance is a way of being not simply a way of dressing!

Pix by Thushara Athapatu



Chalana at the helm of beauty

Professional face of etiquette training



Carolyn Jurie



Invitees from the world of fashion gathered to celebrate the occasion

rate etiquette. These are some of the programmes:

- Communication skills and body language, grooming, style and wardrobe alignment.
- Digital image and social media conduct.
- Platforms or in social events the ability to command attention with confidence has to become an important tool.

In today's hyper connected world, impressions are formed in seconds often long before a handshake, whether in boardrooms, diplomatic circles or in the media.

The teaching staff consists of industry experts trainers and administrators led by



L-R: Mikail Hameed - Business Development, Hameedia, Arjuna Kumarasinghe - MD, Cargills Food and Beverage, Ruwan Perera - Chief Executive Officer, NDB Wealth Management, Kamal Munasinghe - Snr VP, Colombo Hotels, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts / GM, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams, Ajai Vir Singh - Founder, Colombo Fashion Week, Sandun Hapugoda - Country Manager, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Mastercard, Bernhard Stefan - MD, Nestle Lanka, Harsha Maduranga - GM, Vision Care

**T**he Colombo Fashion Week Summer Edition 2026, presented by Mastercard take a bold step onto the international stage through its partnership with the BRICS International Fashion Federation. This collaboration introduces the BRICS fashion showcase South Asian Edition, a pioneering initiative bringing together designers from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, alongside Sri Lanka's brightest talents.

Colombo Fashion Week (CFW), the South Asian Fashion platform in its 23rd year, presented by Mastercard is planned for 1-4 April at the City of Dreams Sri Lanka, Colombo. Established in 2003, CFW is one of four fashion weeks in South Asia that have surpassed 20 years. This edition marks a significant milestone as CFW continues its partnership with the BRICS International Fashion Federation, further cementing its standing as a pivotal regional and international platform.

As a member of the BRICS International Fashion Federation, CFW has played an active role in bridging diverse fashion markets and fostering creative dialogue across continents. The federation's designer exchange programme continues this year to open new markets and create conversations for Sri Lankan talent. This edition sees CFW also presents the BRICS Fashion Showcase with the BRICS International Fashion Council South Asia edition for the first time.

Ajai Vir Singh, Founder, Colombo Fashion Week, stated: "Sri Lanka's geostrategic advantage

Colombo Fashion Week Summer Edition presented by Mastercard Planned for 1-4 April

## CFW partners with BRICS International Fashion Federation

has always positioned it as a regional hub, and our partnership with the BRICS International Fashion Federation reflects the importance of Sri Lanka being represented on international platforms. These associations place our fashion industry within a global conversation and open doors that extend well beyond the runway. We are proud that Colombo Fashion Week remains one of the oldest fashion platforms in the region, and that its reputation continues to attract the world's best to Colombo, especially as we prepare for this season.

This year's edition features an exceptional lineup of over 30 plus designers. International designers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa, China, and Russia will take to the runway alongside celebrated Sri Lankan designers making CFW Summer 2026 one of the most globally represented editions in the platform's history. CFW's Emerging Designer initiative also remains one of its most important pillars, providing a meaningful entry point for the next generation to pursue design-based

entrepreneurship. This season, 11 emerging designers will present their collections, each supported through CFW's structured mentorship programme that guides them through collection planning and presentation.

Sandun Hapugoda, Country Manager, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Mastercard, said, "Mastercard is proud to once again be the presenting partner of Colombo Fashion Week. This platform reflects what we stand for bringing communities together, elevating local creativity and enabling new possibilities through global connections. As CFW marks its 23rd year, we are delighted to support a movement



that continues to shape Sri Lanka's fashion ecosystem and unlock opportunities for emerging talent. We look forward to delivering experiences that reflect the best of Sri Lankan creativity and elevate it on a global stage."

This year, CFW announces the Batik Collective with the objective of encouraging young emerging designers to engage with and incorporate the Sri Lankan artisan craft of batik into their collections. Sri Lankan fashion has its best opportunity to develop a distinct identity when designers integrate local crafts into their work. The developing of this identity has been professed by CFW among the design fraternity, so they are able to create market demand beyond Sri Lanka.

CFW Summer 2026 transforms the City of Dreams Sri Lanka into Colombo's premier fashion destination for four days in April. As the official hospitality and venue partner, City of Dreams provides a world-class integrated setting that elevates the CFW experience well beyond the runway. This year, sees the introduction to its fashion experience, offering guests early access pre-show to an exclusive CFW Premium Lounge Pass with special designated spaces, fashion menu and drinks. The CFW Premium Lounge Pass in collaboration with City of Dreams aims to offer guests a more immersive show experience.

Kamal Munasinghe, Senior Vice President, Colombo Hotels, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts and General Manager, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams, stated: "City of Dreams Sri Lanka is designed to be the epi centre of lifestyle, entertainment and cultural experiences in the region. Partnering with Colombo Fashion Week is a natural fit, as both brands celebrate creativity, energy and the evolving spirit of Colombo. Together, we are proud to showcase the city as a vibrant destination where fashion, entertainment and world-class hospitality come together." (ZC)

## Students bring magic of Shakespeare inspired Fairy Tales



Senior Student of the British School in Colombo took to the stage with confidence and creativity, presenting a lively theatrical production that showcased their acting, music and stagecraft at the school Auditorium. The young performers captivated the audience with their energy and teamwork, turning the evening into a celebration of talent and performing arts. It was a presentation of vibrant stage production impressing parents and guests with their expressive performances and polished stage presence. Their dedication, creativity and countless hours of rehearsal truly paid off at the stage filled with laughter, from the first time to the final bow. Every student at the Senior School contributed to making this production unforgettable and their hard work shone brighter than the stage lights. Pix by Kamal Wanniarachchi

# Wizard of ID

by Hart, Mastroianni and Parker

HMM... OKAY... NOPE... OOOH!... CLOSE... EUREKA!... FINALLY GOT THE PERFECT NAME FOR THE KING'S BUDGET... THE CRAZY, AWESOME GOD OF ALL SPENDING BILLS!... IF Y'ALL ONLY PUT THAT MUCH WORK INTO WHAT'S IN IT!

**Andy Capp** By Reg Henry Scargelli -Graig Boldman

ROSE & CROWN Fine Ales & Wines. Tonight \*Guitar Bob\* plays sounds of the 1970s. HAD A GOOD EVENING, ANDY? CRACKING, ALAN. OL' BOB PLAYED LOADS OF MY FAVOURITE SONGS. SOME OF THEM WERE EVEN IN TUNE. I WANNA KNOW. HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN. SPLOOSH!

**PICKLES** by BRIAN CRAKE

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT? TRYING TO READ THE SMALL PRINT ON THIS NEW PRESCRIPTION I'M TAKING. LET ME SEE IF I CAN MAKE IT OUT. HMM... IT SAYS, "WARNING..." "...MAY CAUSE EXTREME SEXINESS." GIVE ME THAT!

**Mother Goose & Grimm** By Mike

HOW WAS THE BEATLES TRIBUTE SHOW MOM TOOK YOU TO LAST NIGHT?? OH, VERY REALISTIC. ONLY PAUL AND RINGO SHOWED UP...

## Shangri-La Hambantota hosts international golf tour

Shangri-La Hambantota recently welcomed a distinguished group of 27 golfers from Belarus for an exclusive golf tour from 18th to 23rd March 2026, marking another milestone in the resort's growing appeal among international golfing communities. Set across the resort's expansive coastal landscape, the visit culminated in a friendly golf tournament held on 22nd March 2026, bringing together the visiting players and a group of Sri Lankan golfers in a spirited showcase of sportsmanship and camaraderie. The event not only highlighted the championship-level course at Shangri-La Hambantota, but also created a meaningful platform for cultural exchange through a shared passion for the game.

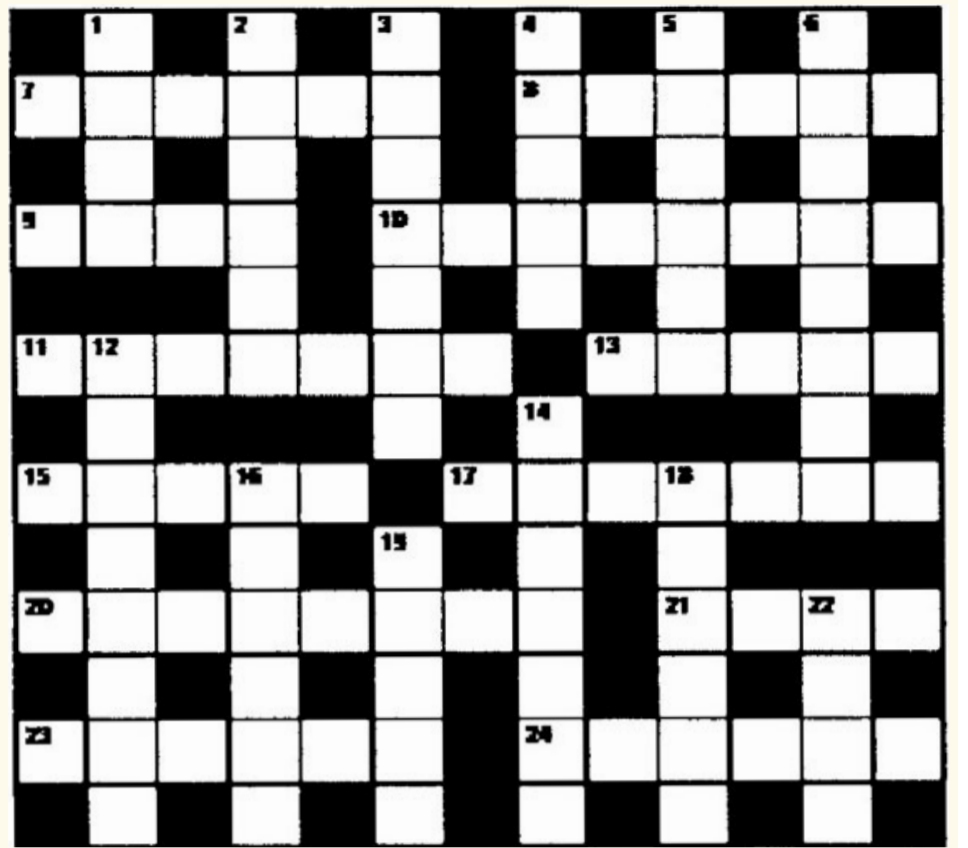


Moments from the golf tournament

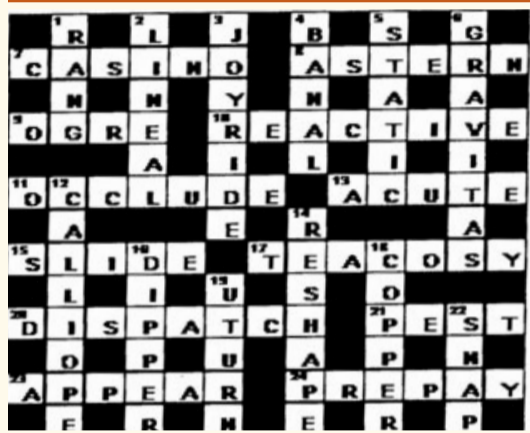
In a memorable display of home-ground excellence, the Sri Lankan team emerged victorious, adding to the celebratory atmosphere of the occasion. The tournament concluded with an awards ceremony held at Ulpatha Restaurant, where players and guests gathered to mark the success of the

event in an atmosphere of warmth and connection. The evening was graced by the presence of Deputy Minister Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe as Chief Guest, whose attendance underscored the importance of such initiatives in positioning Sri Lanka as a premier golf tourism destination. With its 18-hole championship golf course set against a unique backdrop of ocean views and thriving wildlife, Shangri-La Hambantota continues to attract discerning golfers from around the world. Experiences such as these not only elevate the resort's offering but also contribute to the broader narrative of Sri Lanka as an emerging destination for golf tourism in the region.

**SUNDAY ISLAND CROSSWORD NO. 1159**



**SUNDAY ISLAND CROSSWORD NO. 1158**



Name: .....  
Address: .....  
BankDetails: .....

- Please include your bank details, with your entries, so that in the event of your being a prize winner, we can remit your prize money, direct to the bank.
- First Prize: Rs. 750/-**  
H. M. D. Chamodya, 30/3, Circular Road, Kandana.
- Second Prize: Rs. 500/-**  
H. M. D. Chamathka, 110, Kaldemulla Road, Moratuwa.
- Three Prizes of Rs. 250/- each**  
Shehara Peiris, 707/5, Subootheri Mawatha, Battaramulla.  
R. E. Goonesinghe, 40/2, Wattegedara Road, Maharagama.  
Soundararani Wadivelu, 53, Grand Street, Negombo.

- Across**
- 7 Long-tailed black-and-white bird (6)
  - 8 Annually (6)
  - 9 Dearly loved (4)
  - 10 Diminish (8)
  - 11 Use (7)
  - 13 Manacles (5)
  - 15 Primate (5)
  - 17 Import or export without paying customs duties (7)
  - 20 Someone who collects and pays bets at a gaming table (8)
  - 21 Animal house (4)
  - 23 Maintain (6)
  - 24 Glutton (6)
- Down**
- 1 Prepare with dry heat in an oven (4)
  - 2 Helical (6)
  - 3 Ruddy (7)
  - 4 Kill (5)
  - 5 Rich and elaborate cake (6)
  - 6 Happy (8)
  - 12 Suppose (8)
  - 14 Offence (7)
  - 16 Shylock (6)
  - 18 Soft blue-grey mineral; lead sulphide (6)
  - 19 Short simple song (5)
  - 22 Detail (4)

**Sunday Island Sudoku No.1009** **Sunday Island Sudoku No.1008Solution**

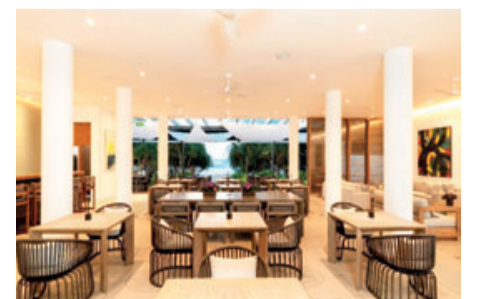
9	8							
					1	4		
4		9			2			
			1	7			3	
		8				5		
	3		9	4		2		
	6			3			7	
			5			2		
7	4		6					

7	3	5	1	2	9	4	8	6
8	1	9	4	6	7	3	2	5
4	6	2	8	5	3	1	9	7
5	4	3	7	8	6	2	1	9
2	8	7	3	9	1	6	5	4
6	9	1	2	4	5	7	3	8
3	7	4	9	1	8	5	6	2
9	2	6	5	3	4	8	7	1
1	5	8	6	7	2	9	4	3

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Results will appear next week

## Elegant stop for sundowners and coastal dining in Bentota

Positioned between the iconic Galle Road and the golden shoreline of Bentota, Table by Nyne - The Beach pairs panoramic Indian Ocean views with a thoughtfully curated menu that celebrates creativity, flavour, and freshness. Located at Anuprit, one of a trifecta of properties that form Nyne Hotels' premium collection - Nyne LUXE - the restaurant is ideally placed for spontaneous coastal stopovers. "Most Nyne dining experiences are reserved for in-house guests, but Table by Nyne - The Beach warmly welcomes walk-in visitors," explains General Manager Rizwan Hareez. "Travellers exploring the coast, beach enthusiasts, and anyone seeking an elevated yet relaxed dining experience can drop in to enjoy fresh seafood, grilled specialities, vibrant seasonal salads, and a carefully crafted selection of plant-forward dishes." The restaurant has earned particular praise for its vegan offerings - inventive,



flavour-driven dishes that go far beyond token options. From robust vegetable mains to creative small plates and nourishing bowls, the kitchen ensures vegan diners enjoy the same depth, balance, and artistry as any other guest. Credit for this philosophy lies with Executive Chef Shantha Peiris, who, together with Nyne founder Nayantara 'Taru' Fonseka, designed the restaurant's distinctive menu.