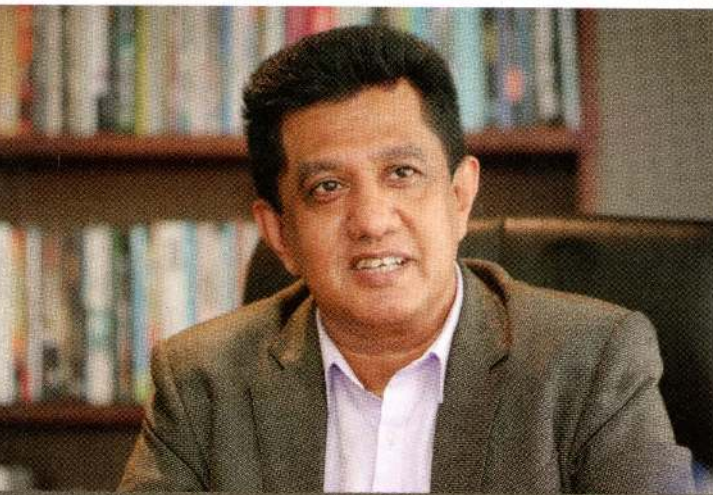


## Pillar of Strength

Dr Willie Gamage, Governor of the Southern Province has immense experience in working with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Rajapaksa family since the days of his youth. He has been a pillar of strength, quietly but diligently fulfilling his duties. He has never sought the limelight but has worked with great determination. The Governor highlighted the tremendous amount of work carried out by the Southern Provincial Council despite challenges.



## Accountability to the People

Prof Charitha Herath, MP, Chairman of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) outlined the authority and the mandate of COPE, while being buoyant about its commitment to play its role fairly and squarely under his leadership.



## A Unified Approach

Rohan Fernando, Chairman, SLTMobitel, expressed satisfaction in the journey of recovery that the new Board had embarked upon assuming office to increase profitability. Under his stewardship SLTMobitel was introduced as a unified corporate brand identity.

## Opening the Country



Udayanga Weeratunga, former Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Russia was able to achieve the unimaginable when he implemented a special project to revive the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. It showed that even during these challenging times it is possible to engage in tourism with a clear and practical plan.

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## Opening Statement of Dr Janet Yellen Before the Senate Finance Committee

As Treasury Secretary, Dr Janet Yellen stresses that the longer term project is to rebuild the economy so that it creates more prosperity for more people, and to ensure that American workers can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy.





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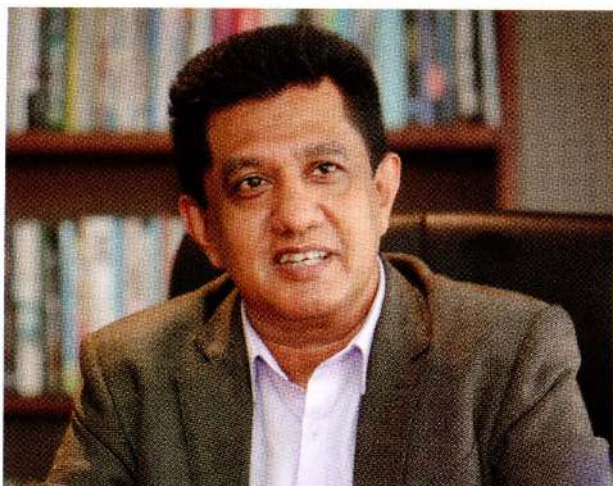


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# PILLAR OF STRENGTH

Having had a long history of political affiliation, especially with the Rajapaksa family for over 50 years, Dr Willie Gamage, Governor, Southern Province has served in many roles before assuming office as Governor in which he has big plans to develop the province extensively, targeting all the vital sectors. Dr Willie Gamage has immense experience in working with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa from the days of his youth. He has been a pillar of strength, quietly but diligently fulfilling his duties. He has never sought the limelight but has worked with great determination. The Governor highlighted the tremendous amount of work carried out by the Southern Provincial Council despite the challenges of the pandemic while he outlined the plans for 2021.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene.  
Photography Menaka Aravinda.

*Dr Willie Gamage, Governor, Southern Province.*





**As the Governor of the Southern Province can you tell us the work done so far during your tenure?**

I was appointed as the Governor of Southern Province in November 2019. The South is one of the main provinces in the country for various reasons such as economically, socially and politically. Whilst the economic and social importance is well known to the public, the political importance is highlighted mainly due to the President, Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, other politically involved members of the Rajapaksa family and senior political figures who represent the Province. The fact that I too hail from the Southern region, my long-standing career experience of over 50 years in different spheres and in particularly the long-standing relationship with the entire Rajapaksa family and other senior politicians have immensely helped me in carrying out my scope as the Governor of the Southern Province.

Despite the arduous challenges posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we

**I too hail from the Southern region, my long standing career experience of over 50 years in different spheres and in particularly the long standing relationship with the entire Rajapaksa family and other senior politicians.**

have been able to successfully implement a considerable number of projects that have been in the pipeline. To begin with, in setting up a COVID-19 coordination center, with the support of the representatives from both public and private sector, I was able to manage the spread of the virus further and bring the negative conditions in the province under control. It was a well-orchestrated initiative executed from the Governor's Office. Moreover, the countrywide lockdown also prevented the general public from attending to their official duties, accessing our services and voice their grievances where we organized a mobile service in support of the public to seek assistance to their burning issues. In fact, 92 percent of the total 9,296 people who accessed the mobile service had their issues resolved on the same day.

Improving the living standards of people by providing them with better access to services has been a priority for us, as we understand the extensive nature of their needs. Health and



Education are two of the main sectors that the Provincial Council has earmarked under development programs. In this regard, we initiated development activities in several selected hospitals and schools with the objective of providing the public with access to better quality services and in comfortable surroundings. Among such initiatives in the health sector was the modernizing of OPDs in Udugama, Gangodagama, Hakmana and Akuressa hospitals. Under this project, we have installed a new digitalized system of maintaining patient records and set up comfortable seating areas. We have also constructed care centers for COVID-19 patients in areas such as Archchi Kanda, Karandeniya, Weligama, Ambalangoda, Kaburugamuwa, Angunukolapalessa and Koggala; these isolation wards have more than 1,507 beds for such patients of which 850 have already been occupied.

Further, I was able to implement the 2019 Southern Province Multipurpose Cooperative Service (MPCS) Pension Act ensuring that MPCS workers can retire in peace with the thought that they have a pension income for the rest of their lives. This pension scheme was established by setting up a fund of 100 million rupees for them. The construction of the Nilwella Bridge was a huge boost to people in Lankagama who were severely inconvenienced in commuting to and from their village in the absence of an accessible road. In addition to the facility provided to the people in Lankagama, it will be an iconic asset to develop the Lankagama and Deniyaya tourist zone. When the Galle Municipal Council and four other local government authorities were challenged with the issue of waste management at Monroviya Watta, I managed to resolve the issue with an investment of 35 million rupees. We also reached out to 179 monastic colleges and 153 Buddhist temples that were not financially sound with financial assistance to carry out religious programs and monastic education actively and consistently.

In a bid to reduce the competition for popular schools in the province and encourage parents to seek entrance to schools that are closer to their homes, the Southern Provincial Council embarked on a project to develop 45 primary schools with latest facilities, such as creating smart classrooms and digital teaching platforms and refurbished classrooms. We have implemented this program

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in 14 schools already. I have planned to complete the balance 31 schools, but the prevailing unfavorable situation in the country due to the pandemic has compelled me to delay the second phase of this project by few more months in 2021.

All local Government councils come under the purview of the Provincial Council, hence all income generated from taxes, rates, fines and other sources by these local councils, are channeled to them through the Provincial Council. However, in the past for some reason these monies had not been transferred to the respective councils in a just and fair manner. From the total due for councils, approximately 20 to 30 percent had been transferred to the councils which was a major issue that I faced during 2020. Generally, the Southern Provincial Council receives around 150 to 200 million rupees monthly for the local councils, but we were not privy to this income. However, not giving up, I successfully secured 1,500 million rupees in 2020 for the work of the Southern Provincial Council to deliver its services, and implement its development and social activities. This was an average of over 70 percent of their entitlement for the year. I made an electronic fund transfer required for such activities on the 16<sup>th</sup> of every month. In addition, there are around eight local councils that do not make substantial income, some collecting less than 500,000 rupees from the local councils, which has been a challenge to carry out their work, such as providing fuel for the tractors and tippers to collect garbage. We have been giving these councils 500,000 rupees on a monthly basis to carry out their work, for which I have been commended, as this money allows them to carry out their tasks without interruption. Further, I have requested all councils to allocate 60 percent for development work and 40 percent for recurrent expenditure, if necessary.

The Southern Province's objectives have been aligned with H E President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's "Saubaghagyaye Dekma" policy document. In pursuing the President's objective of ushering in prosperity to the country, the Southern Provincial Council has planned to assist women in selected Grama Sevaka divisions in the province with constructed shop spaces; there are 2,800 Grama Sevaka divisions in the Southern Province. In addition, we introduced the 'Liya Aruna' initiative aimed at self-employed women, and we have already



conducted workshops for selected entrepreneurs on business development and technology; we have allocated over 21 million rupees for this task. Former Minister Basil Rajapaksa aims to create more than 200,000 self-employment opportunities in the country, which makes it imperative that every Provincial Council should develop at least 20,000 self-employment opportunities within its administration. We intend to fulfil this task and are already in the process of planning to create Galle – 8,000, Matara – 7,000 and Hambantota – 5,000 employment opportunities under this initiative. We have also proposed in our budget the construction of urban parks in Galle, Matara and Hambantota towns, thereby contributing to the national development process.

Although we had embarked on several development programs, the pandemic had not allowed us to complete them as planned, as we have had to halt the work associated with these projects at several intervals due to lockdowns imposed in certain areas. In 2021, we are focusing on conducting field visits to address the development related issues of rural areas in the Province, such as infrastructure development and creating self-employment opportunities and building small parks.

**The Southern Province is very diverse and therefore economically bears an important place. Can you tell us about the work that you do to harness this potential?**

The fisheries sector is an important area because we have a coastal area of about 125 kilometers; we have several fisheries harbors and a great deal of work surrounding this sector from Beruwala to Hambantota is being carried out. The fisheries harbors have been established and managed through the central Government. However, the Ministry of Fisheries of the Southern Provincial Council used the 2020 budget allocation to provide fishermen with fishing equipment with the aim of increasing production. In another initiative aimed at sustaining and developing the fishing community, we renovated and built restrooms and community centers for fishermen in the Galle, Matara and Hambantota districts.

Tourism is another important economic activity of the province, which, unfortunately has been severely hampered by the pandemic. We are

**Tourism is another important economic activity of the province, which, unfortunately has been severely hampered by the pandemic. We are very optimistic that with new plans of the central Government under the direct guidance of H E the President, the tourism sector could be revived in the very near future.**

very optimistic that with new plans of the central Government under the direct guidance of H E the President, the tourism sector could be revived in the very near future.

The Galle district is involved in the plantation industry, mostly with the tea and other minor export crop small-holders. Generally they possess from about half an acre to two acres, as family-owned plantations. Handicraft making is also a popular industry in the South, especially mask making, clay production and lacquer based work. While we want to uplift these craftsmen, we also intend to guide these people to diversify into other sectors like greenhouse farming. The Ministry of Agriculture is supporting people with required knowledge to pursue the Government program to uplift the local agriculture sector and the Southern Province is giving a grant of up to 300,000 rupees to those who want to start economic activities. We also hope to increase paddy production by 4,500 metric tons by re-cultivating paddy lands that have remained uncultivated for nearly ten to 15 years. Strengthening farmers is very important to us, therefore, we have given each farmer a grant of 10,000 rupees, in addition to providing incentives to cultivate potato, manioc, ginger and turmeric. The Provincial Council has encouraged farmers by providing them with seeds and plants free of charge. We also intend to provide farmers with technical know-how on better techniques in cultivation and equipment to boost production.

In addition, we are focused on generating self-employment in aquaculture and ornamental fish breeding. On our part, the Southern Provincial Council's Ministry of Fisheries has spent 45 million rupees to introduce fingerlings to tanks and reservoirs through fisheries committees and with the assistance of the National Aquatic Development Authority, the Mahaweli Authority and NGOs, an initiative that is in line with our objective to increase the income of people engaged in this industry and create self-employment opportunities while helping people to improve their nutritional standards.

There are 48 garment factories in the Koggala free trade zone and despite the pandemic, some of the factories produced 50-60 million face masks for the export market. Despite the prevailing situation, production continues in



factories, but one cannot deny the impact of the spread of COVID-19 on daily work.

**How do you support the livelihoods of the people in the Southern Province?**

Being aware of the challenges people are facing in the midst of the pandemic, we have accelerated the availability of financial assistance to the people in the province. We have organized our programs to allow the flow of cash to the grassroots level in some form. People may say that Sri Lankans are very reluctant to take loans, but that notion has changed with the younger generation, who are willing to take that facility. While this notion may be true of rural people, who are most likely to go to their grassroots level organizations and women's societies to fulfil their capital requirements. The women's federation in Hambantota is giving small loans of 10,000 to 15,000 rupees. The Southern Provincial Council provides 50 percent as a loan of the required capital for self-employment. For instance, an individual who requires a sewing machine to be self-employed, receives 50 percent of the value of the machine from the Provincial Council. In 2020, we extended 1,000 such loans; in 2021 given the dire situation we plan to go up to 100 percent credit facility, as we have to help people rise from the current crisis, because if we give them only 50 percent of the requirement, they will have to go to a bank or financial institution to obtain the rest as a loan to fund the remaining 50 percent, which means they will have to repay two places, which will make their recovery process harder.

**What are the infrastructure development activities in the Southern Province?**

We have an excellent road network, not to mention the Southern Highway. The development activities going on in Hambantota are very much like those carried out in the urban centers and in Colombo. Hambantota has a botanical garden, an airport, harbor, and a zoo. However, the Southern Provincial Council is contributing and developing the infrastructure under the given scope of the Council.

**You were involved in politics since 1970. What has been your experience and your journey since?**

I began my involvement in politics in 1965 when I was preparing to sit for my GCE Advanced Level exam in my home village of Akuressa. The



**The development activities going on in Hambantota are very much like those carried out in the urban centers and in Colombo.**

political environment in my village then was seeped in Communist ideology, although not anymore. One of the electorates in Akuressa was represented by a Communist party leader at that time. My family members were also big supporters of Dr Wickremasinghe. I started my work as a member of the Lanka Samithiya, where I was active during several elections; such as in the 1967 by-election when Ronnie de Mel was elected from Devinuwara. I entered Sri Jayewardenapura University in 1967, which was then known as Vidhyodhaya University. But my focus was rather political than academic and finally in 1969 my involvement in politics cost me my education and I was thrown out of the university. My friendship with Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa began at university, when he was employed as a librarian. He supported me through a student rebellion in which I sustained injuries. Then in 1971, we were even suspected of being involved in the insurrection and hence I had to hide in Beliatta and thereafter, I have been working with him in politics, serving in youth societies and other political societies and built an acquaintance with former Minister Basil Rajapaksa.





I have been associated with politics for over 50 years with the Rajapaksa family. For a brief period of about ten years I was not actively involved in politics as I was employed in the NGO sector, otherwise, the rest of my active life in politics has been spent with the Rajapaksa family.

#### **Have things changed over the years?**

The structure of politics is far better today. For instance, recruitments by the Provincial Councils is being conducted in a fair manner, whereas few decades ago it was completely politicized and people were hired for jobs through political connections; today though graduates enter the workforce through a competitive process by sitting for an examination. There isn't much political interference in recruitments today. As mentioned few decades ago, people were dependent on politicians for all their needs, from jobs to development, but it is no longer the case. This situation was very much changed particularly with the jobs offered to the graduates by H E Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2010 and by H E Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2020, 50,000 and 60,000 jobs

**His Excellency the President with his initiative of offering 100,000 jobs to the public changed even the little political interference in offering public service jobs.**

respectively. Also all clerical jobs in the public service is recruited through a competitive exam. This Government completely maintained absolute transparency and not considered any differences such as political affiliations. The little political interference had was over the minor category of public service staff such as office assistants and other similar categories.

However, His Excellency the President with his initiative of offering 100,000 jobs to the public changed even the little political interference in offering public service jobs. These jobs were offered completely on merit and by identifying exactly the deserving people. The main qualification considered was the ability to be employed but unemployed and/or being a Samurdhi family. My view is that the situation has changed drastically. Also, people have the freedom to choose today, because we have a very economically active private sector, which has somewhat reduced the domination of the State sector in economic activities and jobs. My opinion is that the Government must be involved in infrastructure development projects, strengthen



and provide security and financial facilities and allow the private sector to do the development work, otherwise Government institutions that may become nonviable overtime may become a burden to the system and go bankrupt.

**As you mentioned you have been part of the journey of the Rajapaksa family, through many milestones, and now with the formation of the SLPP and its victory. Can you tell us about that experience?**

The formation of the SLPP was an incredible way of coming out of the defeat. The SLPP was totally a one-man effort, ably supported by Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa and His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa; the entire idea was birthed by Basil Rajapaksa, who established the new party and led to victory within a very short span of time. This is the first time a new party won resoundingly, when in the past, a new party may have won just a few electorates. He has the ideas and the courage and is extremely politically savvy. There's no one to compare with him in this region. Basil Rajapaksa is the mastermind behind strategic thinking. While he was Minister of Economic Development, he set up a good network among the local authorities, and he made use of the leaders in these local bodies to create this party. He began with the lowest rungs, which ensured a sound foundation. Even when some senior politicians went against the new party, he ensured that it had a strong base with the support of these lower rungs of leadership. He began by ensuring victory at the local level by winning local Government bodies, which helped solidify a sound foundation for the Presidential Election and the Parliamentary Election.

**Before 2005, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was often sidelined. But despite that he came to the forefront. What do you think his special character was?**

Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa was someone unique because he had the vision, which he didn't openly pronounce. One day when he was the leader of opposition he called me unexpectedly, at that time I had resigned from the NGO field. When I met Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa he explained that he feels that he can achieve something more; in other words he felt that he had the potential to be the country's leader. First, he became the Prime Minister, then he was successfully elected as the President. He had a vision according to

**The SLPP was totally a one-man effort, ably supported by Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa and His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa; the entire idea was birthed by Basil Rajapaksa, who established the new party and led to victory within a very short span of time.**

which he worked. He is able to work with the people and be close to them. He did not separate people according to parties. He's friendly with all. Take a funeral, no matter the party affiliation, he would be the first to be there. In the 1970s, he built a close acquaintance with the people and people still hold him dear. I don't think we will find a similar leader in this century or the next. He built his political image from a very young age. When I first met him, he was in his 20s.

I have also learnt many attributes from Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa, which I too use in my daily work at the Southern Provincial Council. He has the ability to make people feel relaxed by saying a joke or two, and to create a more positive atmosphere. I too, do the same.

**When you met him and joined politics did you envisage that Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa would reach the top someday?**

He had a vision to come out of district politics to national politics. Before 2005, everyone tried to undermine and suppress him, but he had a stronger support from the media and even from other political parties. He's a rare leader. At that time he was a mature, friendly and thoughtful individual. He supported us in our student struggles despite the risk of losing his job as a librarian. He entered politics in the 1970s and he came into active politics after the death of his father. Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike invited someone from the family to represent Hon D A Rajapaksa's seat. She had Hon Chamal Rajapaksa in mind, but the most active was Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa. It was a good decision I believe, because today the Southern Province has produced two Presidents for the country. I say it's a good decision because we were redeemed from 30 years of war and experienced tremendous development. There could be criticism, but when we look at the bigger picture of what he has done at the grassroots level and the region, I believe the work has been remarkable and it has a real impact on the people.

**What has been your experience working with the current President?**

I have worked with His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa for five years, while he was the Secretary of Defense. He has a tough character. I happened to be one of his Additional Secretaries from 2005-2010. He's methodical, well organized



and disciplined and has a strong personality. The Rajapaksa brothers carry different extraordinary skills with them according to their thinking and other backgrounds. Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa and H E Gotabaya Rajapaksa are different. Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa is a humanitarian with excellent public relations. H E Gotabaya Rajapaksa is a technocrat. My view is that generally he goes into very detail of whatever he does and seeks perfection in everything. He doesn't come out to discuss too much and is not pursuing popularity. One example I could mention is the Ipalagama housing complex in Anuradhapura district that he built. This project was totally entrusted to me by him to construct 1,506 houses for war heroes. This project was a complete project with all the facilities. Another project he entrusted to me was the "Api Wenuwen Api" social service and welfare fund for the "Ranaviru" (Armed Forces). For this fund, one billion rupees was raised under his guidance and the fund was used to build houses for the service personnel who had land without houses. This project was managed by the present First Lady Mrs Ioma Rajapaksa, then as the chairperson of the Ranaviru Seva Vanitha unit. Such experience has given me a greater understanding to work under him in the present Government.

He used the popularity and the family base to come to power. Of course he had his own support base, such as the Viyathmaga professionals, who wanted to support the political process. There were around 5,000 professionals who were politically very neutral, that were awakened and joined with H E Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his journey to become President.

**Despite such close involvement in politics why have you stayed away from the limelight?**

I did my part, which I am satisfied with. From 2005, I have been entrusted with many responsibilities time to time, which I have done to the best of my ability and ensured satisfaction of the then Government. I had a passion to contribute to the national economy by converting the loss making public enterprises as profitable ventures. As Secretary to the Ministry of State Resources and Enterprise Development, I was able to turnaround few key state institutions such as the Mineral Sand Corporation, Ceramic Corporation, Lanka Phosphate, and Laksala; while


**For year 2021 we are well planned, prepared, and geared up to work towards achieving the goals set by His Excellency the President through his policy document.**

resolving many inherent problems of the institutions that came under the Ministry's purview. I am satisfied with my efforts.

I have had the desire to be part of the national policy making process as a Member of Parliament, which did not happen, but I can still share my ideas and vision with the current leaders and contribute to the Southern Province to the best of my ability and I am able to get things done. I am linked with senior national-level leaders and able to make an influence on national policy. I believe that is quite sufficient and I am satisfied.

**What is the way forward and future plans for the Province?**

As you know the Government has decentralized its operations from the Central Government to Provincial Councils and to local Government authorities in order to serve more effectively and efficiently to the citizens in the country. Therefore, the Southern Provincial Council has already planned to develop the local fisheries, agriculture, tourism, education, and health sectors coming under the purview of Provincial Council with priority. In this connection, a substantial amount has already been allocated from the annual budget of the Provincial Council for the development of said areas. The main focus is to develop the rural economy. Furthermore, while developing the rural infrastructure through the local Government authorities and the Provincial Council Ministries, the other public grievances and mainly the poverty elevation programs will be carried out by reaching the villages.

A program has been finalized to have a Governor's mobile service to cover every rural village in the province. We have also formulated another program to create 20,000 new employment opportunities for those who could directly contribute to the national economy by using their knowledge, skills and entrepreneurship. Further, we have already commenced developing tourist locations coupled with recreational activities such as jogging tracks. Also an extra focus has been given to protect and establish the traditional local industries such as handlooms, wood carving, coir, and crocheting. Therefore, all in all, for year 2021 we are well planned, prepared, and geared up to work towards achieving the goals set by His Excellency the President through his policy document. 





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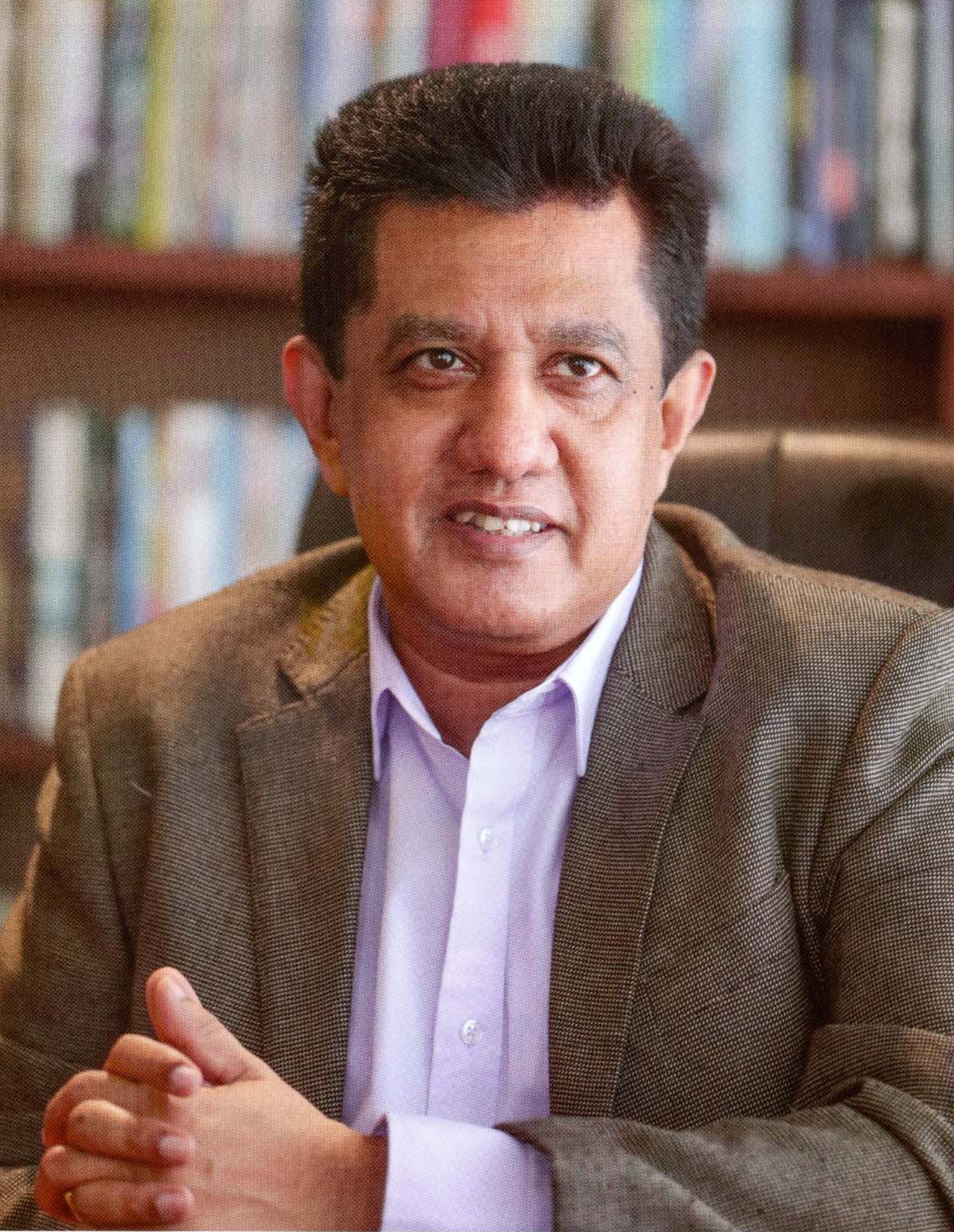
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*Prof Charitha Herath, MP, Chairman of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE).*



# ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE PEOPLE

Prof Charitha Herath, an academic by profession, and serving as Member of Parliament has had a long history of engagement with public service, first as chairperson, Central Environmental Authority and later as secretary, Ministry of Mass Media and Information. Currently, he is the Chairman of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE). The Chairman outlined the authority and the mandate of COPE, while being buoyant about its commitment to play its role fairly and squarely under his leadership to hold public entities accountable to the people of this country, whose money has been entrusted with them under the watchful eye of the parliament.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene.  
Photography Menaka Aravinda.

## **As the Chairman of COPE can you tell us the work that is being done?**

COPE is an important parliamentary working committee. Since we still follow the British system of governance, committees and sub-committees are an important core in a parliamentary democracy, which we have inherited from the British. The argument is that the country belongs to the people and hence the people have a right to control and overlook public finances. And it further says that the people have the sole authority to make legislations for the country. Therefore, the job of parliamentarians comprises several responsibilities. They make laws on behalf of the people while taking care of public finances as well. Since people are the main stakeholders of 'the republic' and parliamentarians are people's 'representatives,' they (MP's) should act on behalf of the people. The beginning of every public corporation was based on the people's mandate, hence, at the end of the day, the premise is that it's the people's money that is used to run public corporations. Therefore, the rationale of the parliamentary oversight committees such as COPE is that the people of a country have the right to crosscheck, overlook, oversight and examine how these institutions

**COPE is an important parliamentary working committee. Since we still follow the British system of governance, committees and sub-committees are an important core in a parliamentary democracy, which we have inherited from the British.**

are governed. And to see, how these public entities manage their finances, the gains and losses, corruption or misappropriation of finances that may be taking place in their decision making process. Committees like COPE can make recommendations to Parliament regarding the actions and decisions, which have been taken by the boards of those public enterprises. COPE activities can be interpreted as one of the main intervention of the Parliament on behalf of the people. This is the mandate given to COPE.

There are around 450 public entities (in the COPE reviewing list) in Sri Lanka. Some of these public enterprises can be called 'attractive' business, such as petroleum products, banking, media and retail. Out of the 450, there are around 150 public entities that make profits. In terms of public finance in this country, these profit-making businesses are very important. Out of whole list of institutions, nearly another 150 institutions, which are not making such good profits and not showing such 'attractive nature in their business' yet, are still very important to the country. Some of the businesses in this category are CEB, Transport Board, and SriLankan Airlines. And, nearly another 150 public entities that are neither important nor do they make any





profits. All these three types of institutions come under the purview of the COPE as public enterprises.

As a sub-committee, we have been mandated by the Parliament to examine the reports of the Auditor General. The Auditor General's Department is engaged with all these government institutions to develop audit reports. There are two committees in Parliament; one is Committee on Public Enterprises or COPE and the other is the Committee on Public Accounts or COPA, which examines only public departments and ministries. On the other hand, COPE examines profit aiming entities, which are mainly public corporations. Hence, All the Boards, Corporations, Authorities and State institutions that come under the Company Act of 2009 come under our purview. By the Standing Order 120, it mentions as follows. "It shall be the duty of the Committee on Public Enterprises to examine the accounts of public corporations, institutions funded wholly or in

**The ninth Parliament has so far in the first quarter examined six main institutions and COPE is at the point of releasing the first quarterly report to Parliament shortly.**

part by Government and of any business or other undertaking vested under any written law in the Government laid before Parliament, with the assistance of the Auditor-General".

Members of the COPE have been selected from Both Government and opposition MP's of the House. There is a standing order that stipulates that the number of members would be decided by members of an incumbent Parliament. At this ninth Parliament, we have 22 members in the COPE committee, who represent different political parties. The major component of COPE comprises Government MPs.

My name was proposed with the blessing of both the Government and the opposition members of Parliament, but initially there was a debate as to whether a member from the opposition should be given its chairpersonship. I am the 15<sup>th</sup> Chairperson of COPE. The first chairperson was appointed in 1979 with the enactment of the new constitution; out of the 15, ten chairpersons had been elected from the (then) ruling parties, while five had been from an opposition political parties. Chairpersons from Government as well as from opposition political parties in Parliament have performed well in their positions in certain situations, while there have been chairpersons from the governing party as well as from opposition political parties who have not performed well in their posts in certain situations.

The ninth Parliament has so far in the first quarter examined six main institutions and COPE is at the point of releasing the first quarterly report to Parliament shortly. Some of the institutions that we have examined so far include very critical and sensitive entities, such as the Central Highway Project, which is long overdue and has been mired in many issues. The project commenced in 2009 and is still continuing, and although part of the highway from Mirigama to Kurunegala has been constructed, the rest has been left untouched. We have also had an interesting dialogue on ICTA and on financing communication technology in government institutions and the benefits and losses of such initiatives. We have identified many projects that had been initiated by some institutions, which remain incomplete. We have also examined the National Lotteries Board; also discussed about projects causing environmental pollution and water management issues, especially water management issues related with the Kelani



River, which is the main source that provides drinking water to the residents of the Colombo Municipal Council, which makes it vital for this water resource to be safeguarded and kept clean, because the consumption in Colombo is colossal. We have examined the measures that had been taken thus far and identified the lapses. We have identified the factories in two industrial zones located in close proximity to the Kelani River, Biyagama and Seethawaka, dumping waste into the river. We have raised questions in this regard and proposed for a standing committee comprising of three ministries in order to safeguard the water in the Kelani River. Suggestions in this regard have been made already.

**You spoke about making proposals, but have there been any practical outcomes from COPE reports and proposals?**

Of course. If financial irregularities have been happening in a public entity, we have the mandate and the power to instruct the chief accounting officer of that particular ministry to take action. The chief accounting officer is also the secretary of a ministry. A secretary is empowered by a separate letter of appointment from the Treasury to function as the chief accounting officer of that ministry. What COPE does is to first identify and examine the issue with the assistance of the Auditor General's Department before coming out with recommendations. We first recommend by instructing the chief accounting officer to do a complete and substantial inquiry. Second, if an officer or an individual has been allegedly involved in carrying out an illegal activity, but is not in the system right now; for instance, an officer who had served in a previous administration had taken a particular decision, which subsequently cost millions to the entity and left, could be identified and legal proceedings initiated against such an individual. And we have done so on several instances, where we have instructed the chief accounting officer to go ahead with initiating legal proceedings against such individuals. In such instances, they have to seek the opinion of the Attorney General's Department. In cases where a person is continuing to hold office, we instruct the chief accounting officer to discuss with the minister on the relevant action to be taken in order to remove such individuals from office. We have in our capacity made submissions and introduced tools.

**Yes, COPE is very effective since the country has a huge engagement with the public sector. There are countries that don't have very many public entities, but only regulatory bodies, but in Sri Lanka the Government is part of various businesses, such as, in retail, in transport, in telecommunications, and in media...**

We bring all these issues back to the House (Parliament), where they are taken up again to decide whether to hold a special debate on the issue or pass a special communique or regulation. COPE members don't have judiciary powers, such powers rests solely with the courts. What we can do is to instruct the chief accounting officer, who is obliged to follow our instructions as he is bound by the rules of public office. We can, at the same time, go before Parliament to table a report, after which Parliament can appoint a special commission or committee or initiate a debate on a matter. COPE members deal directly with the chief accounting officer while reporting back to the Parliament.

**Would you say that COPE is effective?**

Yes, COPE is very effective since the country has a huge engagement with the public sector. There are countries that don't have very many public entities, but only regulatory bodies, but in Sri Lanka the Government is part of various businesses, such as, in retail, in transport, in telecommunications, and in media. The state manages two television stations and print media, the Government is also in finance and banking, with two big banks and four other smaller banks; the Government is in telecommunication, SLT being the main telecommunication provider to the country, while Mobitel, a leading mobile service provider also come under our purview; we also regulate the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation; providing power being a big public engagement and a big business, we also look into the functioning of the Ceylon Electricity Board, which is solely a state entity. SriLankan Airlines is also under the scope of COPE. Therefore, COPE is an effective and a much required entity.

However, the effectiveness of COPE rests with a willingness to engage with its decisions by an incumbent Government and by public service officers. This was an important institution under the British system of governance. Still the authority on public finance is with the Parliament, not with the executive or the judiciary, which means finances pertaining to the Government cannot be decided by the president or the judiciary; it is a decision for Parliament. So then, every penny that belongs to the Treasury should be managed by Parliament. Parliament has to approve the budget every year, without which no Government is allowed to spend a cent, which



would be deemed illegal otherwise. Therefore, Parliament should have an oversight arm like the COPE in order to examine the way in which public entities manage their money, which belongs to the people. The effectiveness of COPE's actions depend on the political will of a serving Government and the institutional structure.

COPE is essential because in Sri Lanka, there is a Government change every five years and if members of a board serving in a public entity had taken irrational decisions to spend millions of rupees of public money and are relieved of their positions upon a change in Government, these individuals would not be held accountable for their actions. While it is true that the judiciary can be used to prosecute them, but prior to that, an entity like COPE is important to investigate their actions.

#### **Do people listen to COPE?**

Well, that is a good question. COPE was given the mandate to 'direct' public entities. But sometime it is not that much easy to get some officers to follow the 'direction' that we give. Thus, if we have such cases (cases where accounting officers would not adhere to COPE directives) COPE will report back to the Parliament. Parliament has the power to summon any person. I can share with you one interesting example, which we are dealing these days. There is a Government education institution under COPE investigation, which had been set up by an earlier Government; and it seems a subsequent Government decided that the ownership of the institution should be handed over to the then existing board of directors (BoD); an MOU had been signed in this regard. (One important thing we should notice here is that the said BoD of this institution was appointed not on a personal capacity. But, on the basis of their representation of other government entities such as BoI and UGC). Therefore, COPE is inquiring into this since there are serious issues that need to be resolved, because a huge amount of money belongs to this institution is being diverted in many different directions and to individuals. Directors were appointed by one Government and although there was a change in Government, the directors of the said institution had not resigned based on the ground that the institution was handed over to them as their private property by an earlier Government. Therefore, COPE is going to report back to the Parliament on this.

**COPE is essential because in Sri Lanka there is a Government change every five years and if members of a board serving in a public entity had taken irrational decisions to spend millions of rupees of public money and are relieved of their positions upon a change in Government, these individuals would not be held accountable for their actions.**

Similar issues had been happening with several other entities as well, but hadn't intensified to the extent like in the entity I have just described. There have been several public entities that had been handed over completely to the private sector. For instance, establishments like Sathosa Printing and Sathosa Motors had been handed over to the private sector from Government ownership. They were completely handed over to private individuals. Some of these restructuring processes were made based on a Government decision, while some others were not done in this way. In this instance, members of the board of directors have taken the upper hand claiming that the entity was handed over to them. So, we are in the process of investigating this claim.

Answering your question, a ministry secretary has to come before COPE if and when summoned, failure to do so can lead to an action in Parliament. It will be reported to the high posts committee, which reverts to the said secretary for an explanation, which prompts many not to keep away from responding to summons. So, it is not true that officials when summoned don't turn up for an inquiry. Only one institution that belongs to the Government is, right now involved in an issue, but, we are communicating back and forth with the board of directors of this institution. The problem is that some of these institutions don't like to communicate with the Parliament.

If I go back to the issue relating to the institute I mentioned, the fact that the Government is not getting anything out of the profit made by this education institution. This institution was developed on 35 acres of Government land in Colombo. The land is still owned by the State. Such incidents are just a few. But, such institutions and their directors cannot compromise on the right of the people of this country by undermining Parliament's mandate. The Parliament and the people have the right to be involved.

#### **What happens when private sector people are appointed to positions in entities under the purview of COPE?**

Yes, there are such institutions, which, although a Government body, is run by officers selected largely from the private sector. I need to admire some of the private sector personals who have given their time and skills to develop the public sector enterprises. But at the end of the day, all these public enterprises are answerable to COPE.



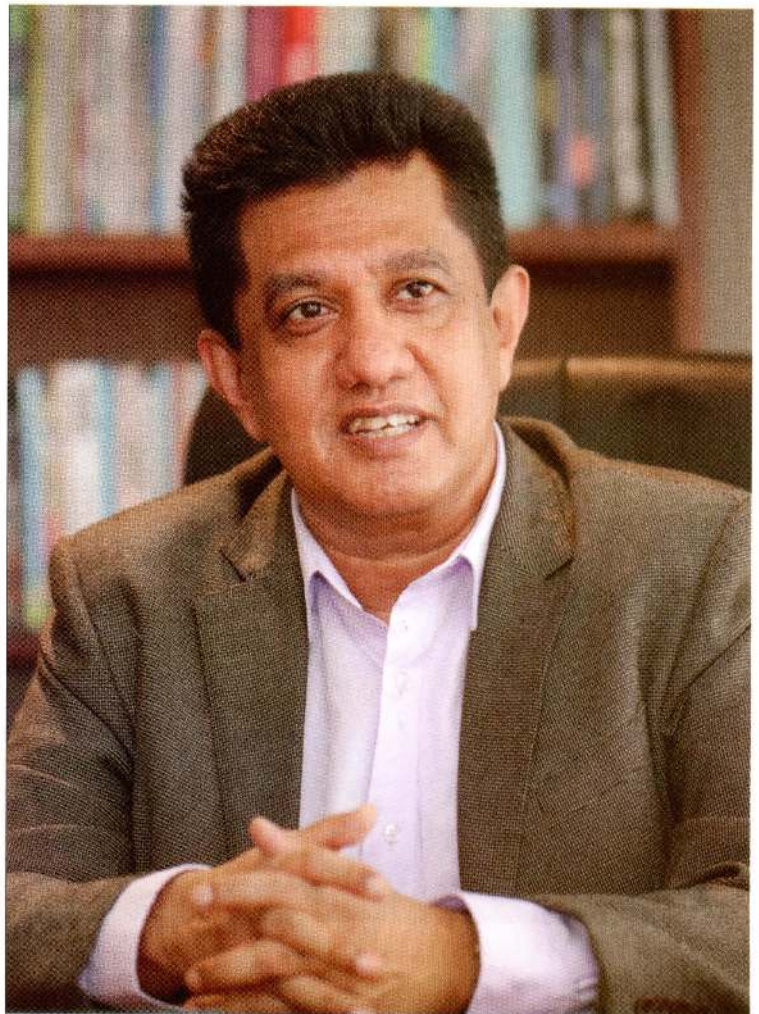
**Are these institutions answerable to COPE on the decisions they make or their finances?**

Whenever an institution is summoned, its officials have to come before COPE members. There are some institutions, which were never summoned to the COPE for more than five years. Last week we have summoned institutions related with coconut industry, that is, the Sri Lanka Coconut Research Institute, the Coconut Development Authority and the Coconut Cultivation Board. These three institutions were summoned in 2014!

We will be meeting with officials from the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau and Sri Lanka Cricket soon. We identify the institutions that need to be summoned. Our discussion is based on the report of the Auditor General, who is responsible to the Parliament. The Auditor General's Department works closely with the main committees in Parliament. The Auditor General himself, together with members of his staff have been meeting with COPE and COPA members and providing us with details pertaining to the status of accounts and finances in public entities. So, our discussion with selected public entities will be based on the report provided by the Auditor General. We have the authority to question officials of these entities on any matter relating to that public enterprise. For instance, the northern highway project was initiated by the Government of 2010-2014, that had planned to build the highway to a certain distance. It shows that amendments for the basic plan were introduced into the project later by different Governments. What COPE is doing right now is to examine the rationale for such changes, because such changes have cost millions of rupees to the country. We will examine whether a feasibility study had been done prior to the change or had it been on an ad hoc decision; whatever the decision, it had cost the country a lot of money, which we are in the process of examining. We are firm on the decision to instruct every chief accounting officer to initiate legal proceedings regarding any irregularities that may have happened with the northern highway project.

**But how can you be positive when nothing concrete has really happened in the history of COPE?**

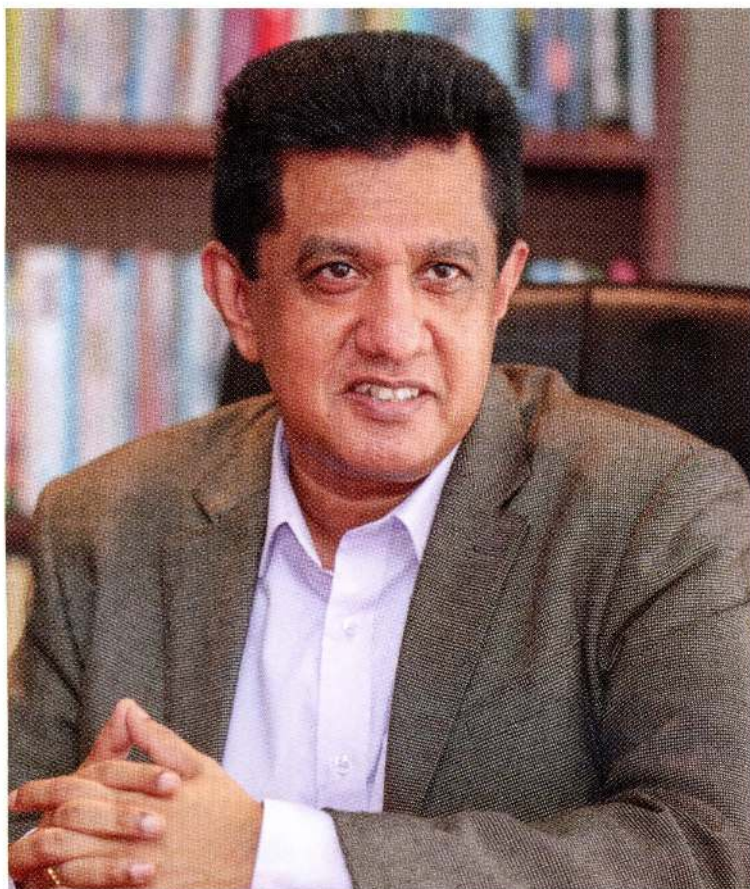
It is not true. There were and there are positive outcomes. When I was secretary to the Ministry of Media and Information, I was summoned by Hon DEW Gunasekara, who was



**We are firm on the decision to instruct every chief accounting officer to initiate legal proceedings regarding any irregularities that may have happened with the northern highway project.**

the chairperson of COPE to discuss an issue regarding the head of an institution under my ministry purview. The chairperson instructed me to either remove the individual or return after a fortnight to inform the committee of the outcome. In turn, I had to consult with my minister, who agreed to remove the head of that particular institution. We sent his letter of resignation to COPE. So, this was one way to deal with an issue. Hon Sunil Handunetti as COPE chairman dealt with the Central Bank bond scam, which reached a high level of public debate then, which, I think cost the party in power to lose at elections. This was an outcome of what went on in the COPE. At the end of the day, there are many ways that perpetrators can be punished. One would be to defeat a Government or an individual, or file legal charges against an individual or individuals or initiate public consultation on the matter.





**What has been your experience working with members of different parties as chairperson of COPE?**

I conduct business in a very diplomatic and scholarly manner, hence, have not had an issue with any member of COPE although they are from different parties. We have representatives from the TNA, the JVP and the JHU, and most are represented by senior members, plus there are five ministers who are on the committee. They are all very senior gentlemen. They have all been very supportive and cooperative. We have been examining issues very openly, not with the intention of blaming anyone or pointing fingers. Some people assume that there are differences among COPE members because they are from different political parties, but inside COPE we don't debate each other; we, as the committee act as a single entity representing Parliament. Inside Parliament we debate on various issues, but, as a sub-committee, we function as a single entity. Every member of COPE, be it from the

**My argument is that despite our effective engagement in the conceptual and administrative spheres, the country will always fail if we do not act sufficiently in the policy space.**

Government or Opposition, is conscious of their role therein, that is, of safeguarding the money belonging to the public.

#### **Why did you enter politics?**

I have been an academic for a long time. We are all products of free education. As an academic, I consider myself fortunate to have been offered a good job with a good salary and minimum work at the university. At senior level, an academic has to teach only six hours per week, and the rest is used to engage in research and consultations. It's a relaxed and flexible job. But, I strongly believe that Sri Lanka needs to be developed and hence we need to look into the gaps and the lapses in post-independent Sri Lanka. We are now in our 72<sup>nd</sup> year of independence and countries that were way behind us then are going past us in development. We, as educated individuals have a duty to examine why it has been so and why things have been happening in a certain way that has not allowed us to evolve and develop. For instance, our GDP and growth related indexes were quite high at independence, so much so, we were very close to Japan's growth indexes, while some countries were way behind us; there were countries that had not been even born. The growth rate in Bangladesh is eight percent and the country is currently on a growth trajectory. There was no Bangladesh when Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. In 1948, India had just been divided to create Pakistan; subsequently Pakistan was divided as East and West Pakistan. Bangladesh, which was created as an independent country in 1972, has been developing at an impressive rate. As an academic I wondered, apart from the academic related work I engage in, whether I could contribute in a different way to help develop Sri Lanka. As an academic I have been developing concepts, then as chairperson of the Central Environmental Authority and secretary to the Ministry of Media and Information I served in an implementation (administrative) space. Between the conceptual space and the implementation space there's something called the policy space. Policy is about creating legislation, which is essentially the purview of Parliament. My argument is that despite our effective engagement in the conceptual and administrative spheres, the country will always fail if we do not act sufficiently in the policy space. As academics we may be able to generate good concepts to teach students and be good



implementers in administrative positions, but we need to engage in the policy space for the sake of our country. A majority seem to be engaged in the first and the third, the second lacking in proper engagement. Therefore, I decided that I will enter this space. So, here I am. I hope I will be able to make a worthy contribution through policy.

#### **Can you tell us something about yourself?**


I hail from a very rural village in Kuliyapitiya in Kurunegala District. My family, relations and friends still live in Kuliyapitiya. I obtained by BA degree in Philosophy with a minor in Psychology from the University of Peradeniya in 1994 and Master of Arts (MA) degree in Social and Political Philosophy from Ohio University, Athens, Ohio in USA in 2003. In 1998, I completed a Master's Diploma at the Sichuan Union University, Chengdu in China. I received my Doctoral Degree (PhD) on Environmental Philosophy from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The topic of my Doctoral thesis was 'A Philosophical Analysis on the Concept of Conservation in the field of Environmental Ethics - The Case of Environmental Impact Assessments in Sri Lanka'.

I was teaching at the University of Peradeniya from 1995 to 2019 in an official capacity, while I was on secondment in Government jobs in-between. In 2019, I was appointed as the chair professor of philosophy at my department at the University of Peradeniya, a position that had been vacant for more than 20 years, and then in 2019 I entered politics. I have published widely on research and as an academic, I have been participating in debates on policy and politics in mainstream media. My engagement with the media is mainly focused on environment. I was fortunate to have been on the CHOGM sub-committee in 2013, which was a very successful event after the non-aligned summit in 1976. Basil Rajapaksa was an immense support in this endeavor and the work of the various committees preparing for CHOGM. I have also served in various regulatory bodies, in environment and the media. I was very engaged with the public sector during 2005 to 2015, which makes me more a public intellectual, implementer and policymaker. My current engagement with COPE is based on my enthusiasm for policymaking. Having defeated terrorism in 2009, the country embarked on multi-level development projects,

**We are fortunate to have Mahinda Rajapaksa as a pillar of this entire exercise and I realized that this was my time to deliver at a policy level. In the meantime, new President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa has a great deal of enthusiasm and vision and Basil Rajapaksa has been the driving force for people like me to enter politics.**

which happened up to 2015, until we were defeated. When we examined the reasons for the defeat, we realized that it was not about the policies or the plans, but the lack of commitment and failure to be result-oriented by some of the people involved, although there was political leadership to succeed. We are fortunate to have Mahinda Rajapaksa as a pillar of this entire exercise and I realized that this was my time to deliver at a policy level. In the meantime, new President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa has a great deal of enthusiasm and vision and Basil Rajapaksa has been the driving force for people like me to enter politics. Our party had been working for the past five years to regain power and I knew it would happen and hence, realized that the time was ripe for me to enter politics and be a policymaking Parliamentarian. I was planning to contest from the Kurunegala district, but since there was a long list of candidates from our party, along with many others expecting slots, I was not able to contest and hence, the party along with Basil Rajapaksa suggested that I enter Parliament from the national list. Today, I'm quite involved with the Kurunegala district and am the chairperson of the Regional Development Council of the Polgahawela electorate, an area that has been the focus of my work.

#### **What is the way forward?**

Sri Lanka should change towards becoming a modern and productive nation. We can do that because we have a very good system of education, healthcare and security. The President has laid down three concepts in the Saubhagayaya Dekma policy statement to change the country; first, Development, where the focus has been on developing the export sectors, second is Security, which is in place, third is Reforms. Many regulations in this country prevent people from investing, especially foreigners. Our target is to change the way the country has been operating so far, by applying the three layers - development, security and reform. I think the pandemic has somewhat blocked the progress and the plans, but I believe that we will be able to achieve our targets in the next four years. We need to rethink policy and policy engagement. I have been trying to convert my thinking, capacity and ability into policymaking processes and invest time on regional development, reforms and the tasks of COPE. 



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# SAFETY BY CHOICE – SOLEX EMPHASIZES ON NATIONAL SECURITY



Above left, right and below: Solex team officials handing over the Police Barricades to the Police officers; at the sacred Kelaniya Temple; and at the Sri Lanka Parliament premises in Battaramulla.

**S**OLEX the household name for water pumps in Sri Lanka leads the market with its dominance in domestic, agricultural pumps and industrial ranges by locally manufacturing over 100 models catering to different customized requirements. Over the past few decades, the company has established a stronghold of the Sri Lankan market due to its supreme quality in products.

In addition, Solex also offers a wide array of industrial products including industrial vehicles such as Vacuum Jetters, Arial Platforms, Water Bowsers, Garbage Compactors, Gully Bowsers, Dehumidifier Machines, Fire Pumps, and other products.

Solex, a genuinely local organization on a mission to expand its social responsibility has invested in a number of CSR projects, which have benefited different segments. To name a few, Solex has extended its generous contributions towards society by providing water management systems to a number of sacred places of all religions, establishing a bathing system for elephants in the Pinnawala Elephant orphanage, and building cooling drinking water plants in a number of locations for daily commuters.



Dr Sandini Wijayasiri, Director of Branding and Mass Media of Solex Group, widened the CSR project 2021 titled – “Safety by Choice”, leading the program of providing “Road Barricades” to Police posts at key points across the country. Aiding and ensuring national security to create awareness and discipline on the road was the main underlying theme focused throughout this program. Solex manufactured these new barricades within their Foundry Facility Unit situated at Ekala with the outstanding contribution of its factory workers whose untiring efforts brought success to this project.

Marking a significant milestone, the Company recently provided Police barricades to Sri Lanka Parliament premises in Battaramulla and the sacred Kelaniya Temple in the presence of a distinguished gathering. The senior

officers of the Sri Lanka Police Sarath Kumara – SSP Parliament Police, Nuwan Asanka – SSP Mirihana Police and Nalinda Dilruk – OIC Thalangama Police were amongst the distinguished guests at the handing over ceremony. Sudath Walpola, OIC Kelaniya Police attended the barricade handing over ceremony held at the Kelaniya temple premises.

Celebrating the event Dr Sandini Wijayasiri stated, “On behalf of Solex Group of Companies, we are truly honored to carry on the project of repairing and providing Police barricades of the country. My vision for this project came true solely due to hard work that my company team has put forward. I extend my gratitude to the Sri Lankan Police for granting timely approvals. We look forward to continuing this project in the future by completing 100 barricades in key locations by the end of 2021.”



# A UNIFIED APPROACH

Rohan Fernando, Chairman, SLTMobitel, expressed satisfaction in the journey of recovery that the new Board had embarked upon assuming office to increase profitability and to regain the place due to SLTMobitel in the corporate world, as well as in the communications industry and expanding its portfolio beyond Sri Lanka, by launching SLT Global. Under his stewardship SLTMobitel was introduced as a unified corporate brand identity that hopes to leverage on the new binary codes representation signaling a direction in offering complete digital solutions to the country.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene.  
Photography Menaka Aravinda.

Rohan Fernando, Chairman, SLTMobitel.







**What has been SLT's performance over the last year?**

I am extremely happy with SLT's performance, which the whole country is aware of, and along with success came the brickbats, which always come to the tree that bears fruit. When the new board took over the company in January 2020, it took us a few months to understand the operations of the company. Upon examination we found that although there had been good management systems, some of them had been bypassed for various reasons. As a result, there were questions about accountability, responsibility, and vulnerability to external forces. External forces in this instance were political forces, suppliers, vendors as well as competitors and the concerns of shareholders, specifically the company's foreign shareholders who had their misgivings on the way the business was conducted in the past.

The first few months in office were spent identifying and fixing the leakages. By doing so, we were able to save a lot of money, in the first instance, on operation costs. I believe that we will end the year with a substantial saving on operation costs, which would be close to a billion rupees. As of now, accounts are being audited and will be presented to the board. We are hoping to make significant savings on operational costs, interest cost and reduce our long-term debt burden. Our long-term debt burden at the end of December 2019 was 53 billion rupees. We hope to and also are confident of reducing the debt burden by at least ten billion rupees as at December 2020. The substantial interest benefits expected and the substantial depreciation in the P&L will help with future cash flows.

Our progress in the past year has been helped by primarily winning the confidence of the staff, especially the trade unions. SLT has been infamous for strikes and trade union action. People have gone to the extent of climbing communication towers as trade union action. One such person who had climbed a communication tower called to express his joy after the corrective actions we took in the first few months. We were able to win employees' confidence by demonstrating that we are here not for a job, but to fulfil a national task. Winning employees' confidence is very important for a company to turnaround. I speak of a turnaround because SLT has been ranked number one in

**On the merging of the two brands SLT & MOBTEL, we optimized the synergy between the two brands, in the telecommunication field, which were being run separately... Thus, the board decided in May 2020 to converge the two brands onto a single platform and to project them as a single brand entity to the customer.**

telecommunications until 2012. SLT has been in operation for over 160 years, only to be overtaken by a newcomer, of course with due credit to this new entity, who has reached the number one slot. Naturally, we have to strive harder to regain our rightful position in the country's telecommunication industry as the number one telecommunication service provider in all aspects of service and product delivery, asset base, profitability, customer satisfaction and industrial harmony among employees. We are very happy with the journey of recovery that we had started upon assuming office to increase profitability and to regain the place due to us in the corporate world, as well as in the communications industry. We want to be a global player now. As we look beyond Sri Lanka we have established SLT Global.

**What was the rationale behind the transformation in the brand identity?**

Mobitel is a fully owned subsidiary company of SLT. Other subsidiary companies include Peo TV, SLT Digital Services and SLT Services, which engage in systems integration and outside plant operations. The SLT Campus and the SLT Muve taxi app, I feel, do not come under our core business, as we are neither a taxi company nor a higher education university, and these are specialties that can be done only by specialists in the subject. We are trying to divest these two entities. SLT training centers will be another subsidiary section that we hope to empower. These training centers will be enhanced to teach students and SLT employees IT and technical aspects of telecommunication.

On the merging of the two brands SLT & MOBTEL, we optimized the synergy between the two brands, in the telecommunication field, which were being run separately. In fact, they were in an unhealthy competition operating as separate entities. Thus, the board decided in May 2020 to converge the two brands onto a single platform and to project them as a single brand entity to the customer. We now operate as a unified brand and have consolidated our sales and marketing tasks under a joint working group representing the different companies in the SLT Group. It was not so earlier. A good example is the disjointed sales and marketing of group companies spending around four billion rupees annually on promotional activities, but we couldn't see significant growth in the top line of the customer

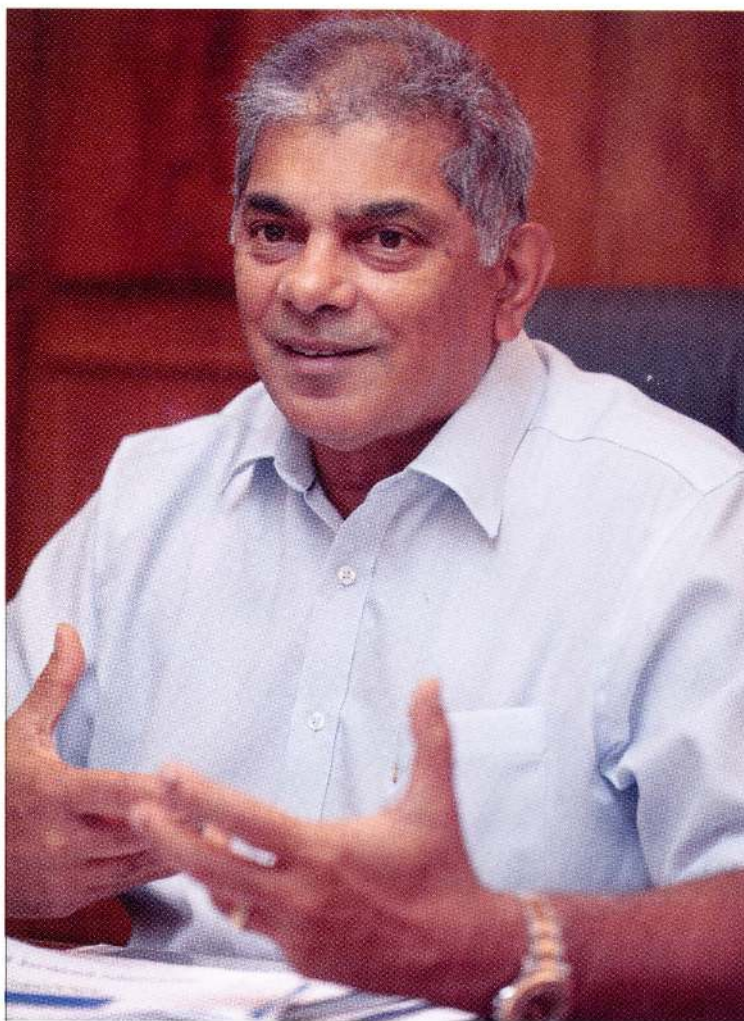


base. The unified brand option was established as a result of the pitch by advertising companies and the change did not cost additional money, contrary to the false claims in political circles and social media. We have also instituted strict financial discipline in cost recognition especially the interest costs to reflect the correlation between the P&L and cash flow.

All companies in the group were realigned for centralized operation reporting to a Group CEO, Group CFO, Chief People's Officer and Group Treasury Management. We see a lot of improvement in them working together. They are from different cultures. Mobitel is primarily a corporate culture; SLT has primarily a department culture. This is how these two entities have functioned in the past and will continue to do so in the future as well. You can't marry the two overnight. I earnestly pray that a corporate culture would sink into SLT and one day become a single culture. This of course will take time. Until such time, the companies will operate separately, but marketing will be strategized from a unified platform. We can go anywhere in the country and the world with this modern brand identity.

There is a misnomer that SLT has been diluted. SLT is still the main company. People tend to mix up the fact that the company and the brand are not the same. What matters when you go to the market is the brand. The company is only a registered entity. Similarly, SLT is the new corporate identity and will be the entity that will operate, manage and run the goods and services as well as the brand expansion. I bring my personal business experience onto the table and as chairperson I don't enforce upon the management team. I am only a non-executive chairman and an independent director and hence, I don't try to use any executive powers, which will be detrimental to the company and is not in sync with corporate governance. Therefore, what I bring are ideas and suggestions for the team to discuss, debate and disseminate to come up with workable solutions.

Today, I can proudly say that we have tremendous harmony as merged entities. Initially, even the trade unions were very worried, but, today, they are very happy to embrace the change. One must keep in mind that everything has a lifespan; nothing is permanent. Even a brand if it doesn't evolve with the changes taking place



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in the market and evolve according to the dictates of the consumer and the needs of society, it will either be stagnant or even die. A good example is Kodak, which refused to believe the changes that were taking place in the world of electronics. We have to learn from global scenarios. There have been so many brands that have failed as a result, such as Xerox. We didn't use the term photocopy then, it used to be either Xerox copy or Xeroxing, but, things today have changed, we can scan a document rather than make a photocopy and have a digital copy over a paper copy.

SLT is primarily the telephone, but if we were to embrace only the telephone disregarding other developments, we would have closed the shop a long time ago. The world is running on digitalization. Hence, we have to move on to the





digital platform. We will be a thing of the past if we fail to understand this reality as the primary telecommunication service provider. SLT has been through many changes, changing from a department to a process of restructuring and subsequently more changes such as the acquisition of Mobitel in 2002 and new changes in 2015 and after. The earlier tagline 'One country. One voice' led to too many questions being asked.

Moving forward the brand insignia will be in the spotlight, thereby in time, people will identify the product by its brand logo. The changes will apply to our 5G, 4G, fiber optic and Peo TV services as well. The new logo with the binary codes representation is simple but has reasoning behind it; it has a purpose of achieving brand expansion and recognition by the consumer without limiting it to language. For instance, the Nike insignia has no language, but it has an identity, similarly in the future, SLT's new insignia will accompany all its brands. The new insignia will be the point of connection for all

**We began 2021 launching the new brand identity and we are in the process of restructuring the subsidiaries to be profit centers and not to be a burden to the main company.**

the other products. This is the transformation that we are currently engaged in and already there is a great deal of affinity for the brand.

In introducing this change, I had the least amount of objections, but a lot of questions were asked, and so, a great deal of time was spent explaining the rationale behind the new move.

**What else have you planned to change and develop at SLT?**

We began 2021 launching the new brand identity and we are in the process of restructuring the subsidiaries to be profit centers and not to be a burden to the main company. These subsidiaries will have their own CEOs to run operations and bring in profits. We are empowering our training centers, three in Welisara, Moratuwa and Peradeniya, the two in Anuradhapura and Galle are dormant. We intend to shift these two dormant training centers, from Anuradhapura to Batticaloa and from Galle to Matara, so that we cover the entire island. There



are many people in Batticaloa from conflict affected areas who could be empowered through this move. The people here have encountered a lot of problems even after the war. There are 30,000 war widows in the Batticaloa district and 8,000 war-affected disabled persons who are challenged by daily struggles. We believe that our extensive network of communication and offices can empower some of these people, which is our national duty. We are not only doing a business, but also a national service.

We have identified the presence of a number of micro-level businesses in the east. These are hardworking people who lack the platform to transform their micro enterprise into a small business. They will enter the SME sector if they transform their micro business into a small business, a process that we can help in through our extensive network and connectivity. The best cashew comes from Batticaloa, Ampara and Kalmunai; they also make good curd from buffalo milk, they are known for making good treacle and handicrafts and fish products. Unfortunately their products are bought at bargain prices by intermediaries who make a lot of money. In response, SLT has set up the Hela Wiru platform, to promote the concept of plant to plate. We are in the process of testing this platform and hope to make the multilingual platform available to the entire country where entrepreneurs will be able to log onto the platform, enter their products online and the platform will find the buyer and the logistics. This platform offers a complete service of enabling product promotion, buyers and logistics and financial services. For instance, Bank of Ceylon and People's Bank are on board. The Hela Wiru platform provides connectivity and the facilities for micro-level farmers and businesspeople to get the right value for their products by eliminating intermediaries.

Once the five training centers become fully operational, we want them to be places that churn out technically qualified people for the Telco industry, here and abroad. I have been told that there is a huge demand for people with technical qualifications, who are in short supply, so we intend to fill that void. It will be a core business as well. Through this venture, we will be creating an avenue for people who retire at the age of 60, but have a great deal of value left in them, to be able to join our revamped training centers. We hope to draft engineers and technicians over 60

**Once the five training centers become fully operational, we want them to be places that churn out technically qualified people for the Telco industry, here and abroad.**

into a knowledge pool that we have created, through which they will be able to work as lecturers in these training centers. This will allow them to earn a decent stipend after retirement by imparting their knowledge. It will be a part time job that will keep them engaged and not let them drift after retirement.

We intend to divest non-core businesses, SLT Campus and the taxi service. We have deployed an investment banker to find a suitable partner or buyer for this purpose.

Another important area that we hope to focus on is research and development, which has been lacking at SLT. We have not had focused research up to now. The SLT section at Trace City is where the blueprint for the new R&D department has been established and hopefully by February we will be able to launch a demand driven focus research and development center for SLTMobitel. We have already identified 72 projects from which we will select the pertinent areas for research to move to pilot projects and subsequent commercialization. Some of the research will focus on applications, coding and processes, such as cost cutting processes and processes to improve efficiency.

Service is primary in our business and customers are the most important to us. They demand quick solutions in the event of a breakdown. Hence, we have initiated a quality assurance protocol. People will be trained at the five SLT institutions to be quality conscious, like the manner in which an employee presents himself to a customer, such as when entering a house, to be presentable through cleanliness and good health practices, especially in the current pandemic environment. And when they leave a house they should not leave behind telltale marks of their presence and their work. We want to create two-member teams to deal with every aspect related with telecommunication and services in a house. Earlier there were different teams for fixed wire telephone connections, Peo TV connections, and smart home options and for wiring. This will be a thing of the past.

We intend to make every home a smart home in Sri Lanka, a concept we are driven to achieve. Right now, Sri Lanka has 30 million mobile phones in a 22 million population. We have three million households, so every home has a telephone connection and a television. The basic format for a smart home concept is to make that



house a home with entertainment, connection and security. Our strategy is to find out the number of people in a household and the users of telephone, then offer a bundle package of Wi-Fi and data to the house. The TV in a household may not be a smart one; so our R&D is developing a unique application that can be plugged in with a chip to make it a smart TV, so that households can run a small business or a communication agency or make zoom calls. At a higher level, security cameras will allow users to have remote connectivity to switches. At an advanced level of smart home, an individual will be able to use the smartphone to remotely see what's happening at home from the cameras and switch on the air-conditioning and the lights prior to reaching home, so the ambient temperature is set when the individual reaches home. There are unlimited options through digitalization to promote the smart home concept.

**What is SLT doing regarding the industrial waste and other challenges that are prevalent in the company?**

We are also working on a concept called waste to cash. SLT has a lot of waste, more like industrial residue such as copper wires, cabinets, and electronic waste and damaged telegraphic posts and rails. Right now we have a project to convert the massive amount of damaged telegraphic posts to fence posts, primarily for areas that face elephant invasions into homesteads and plantations, we intend to convert this huge amount of waste into cash and we hope to rake in a substantial amount to the cash flow from this year.

One area that we have failed to be diligent in is the maintenance of stocks and debtors. We are currently conducting an age analysis to determine the age of some of the stocks that have been lying in our warehouses and have engaged our debtors to recover long outstanding dues. The procurement process has worried us a great deal, because we had a lot of issues with many of the agents involved in the procurement process, such as agents going missing and having to face legal challenges and escalation of costs. Hence, we have taken a policy decision to work only with principals. We are a big company capable of working directly with the top principals of the world for procurement. We are also in the process of trying to introduce new systems for

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**opportunities.**

**The saying is that one must aim for the moon, and you will at least be among the stars. We have to think big and aim high, then you will find the niche markets.**

underground cabling, such as micro trenching. The President has made us aware of the visible distorted hanging wires and distorted poles on the road, a sight that doesn't look good for a city. We have taken that to heart and initiated a project, starting with one zone, to remove telegraphic posts. We will be working with the Water Board, the Electricity Board, the UDA, the RDA and the local authorities to determine the best way to have duct pathways along the roads instead of doing so on poles. This way, we can create a beautiful city. Although the cost of investment will be high in this instance, the eventual payoff will be when there's a reduction in the service costs. These are some of the projects earmarked for implementation in 2021, which will save a lot of money for us and will make SLT a modern company. As a result we will be releasing less waste to the environment.

Another initiative will be to go into is solar power; we are already working with Tesla for power walls to migrate from diesel generated power to sustainable solar power wherever possible. Such initiatives will help save money and reduce environmental pollution. These are ambitious programs that we hope to at least initiate in 2021. I envisage a lot of benefits from these proposed initiatives.

**Considering the current situation SLTMobitel has been able to perform well. What was the thinking?**

When the chips are down, you need to look where the new opportunities are. Complaining will not help find new opportunities. The saying is that one must aim for the moon, and you will at least be among the stars. We have to think big and aim high, then you will find the niche markets. At SLT, we are aware that the world is moving rapidly towards a digital landscape; everything in the world will have some form of digital connectivity and the country too should develop to such a landscape if we are to be successful. We hope to offer different digital platforms to the country; we hope to have one for judicial tasks; the Hela Wiru is a digital platform for the agriculture sector; in education we plan to connect nearly 2,000 schools through fiber optic lines to provide uninterrupted connectivity; with the railways we are offering a platform for e-ticketing, and to CTB the booking for medical tests required for a driver's license through e-channeling. The CTB has also been





given the WiFi connectivity for the park and ride city bus service, which will help people to do their work while traveling. We see a great deal of potential.

A majority want to look at only the negative side of a situation. On the positive side, we are a country that has emerged from a war; the war was a very difficult period for all of us with security concerns for our safety when bombs were exploding in public transport and government buildings. Then the chaos was in Sri Lanka, but today, the entire world is in turmoil, comparatively Sri Lanka's situation is not so bad, especially when we consider the death rate from the pandemic. There's so much attention from the media on daily figures, but Sri Lanka has been through worse epidemics in the past; we had outbreaks of malaria; leprosy was quite a serious disease that led to an isolation zone being set up off Mannar on an island and a special hospital in the suburbs.

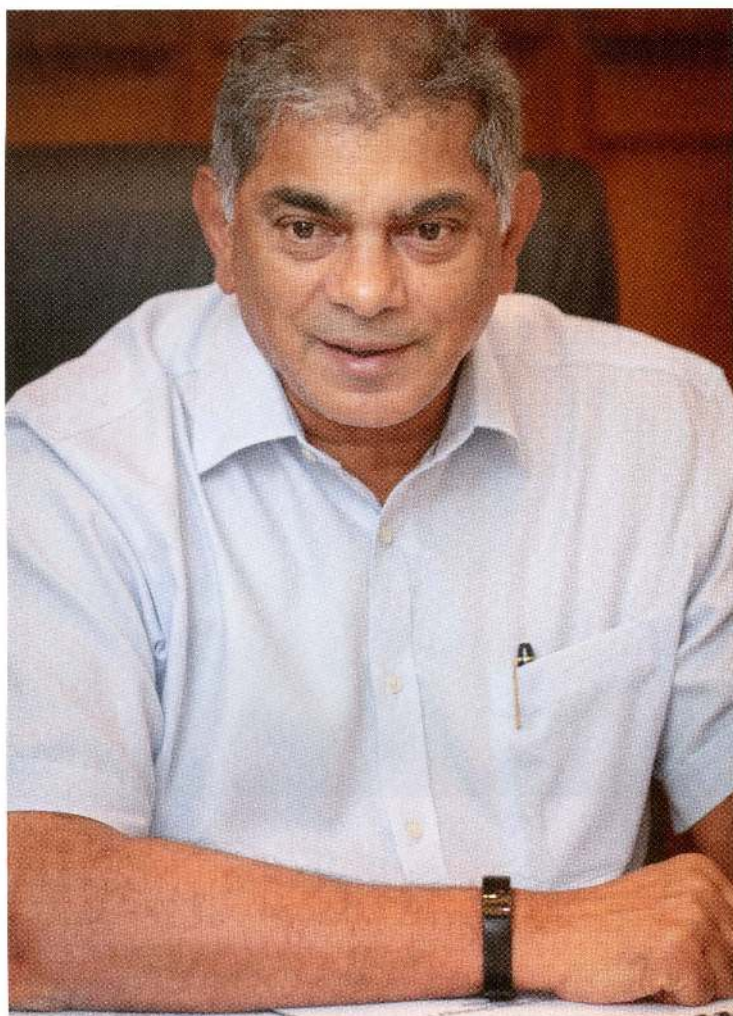
In recent years, we have had an outbreak of dengue and Japanese Encephalitis and every year Sri Lankans experience a flu season. COVID-19 is also a type of viral flu. We have been inoculated against TB, which is also a virus that can affect

**Is COVID-19 the biggest issue we have? People are moving about and are at work...Our foreign reserves have gone up to 5.6 billion dollars; a figure we couldn't have achieved had we failed.**

the breathing system. Therefore, I don't see much of a difference between the disease outbreaks that we have experienced in the past and COVID-19, which is not a fatal disease although it affects lungs; yes, it can be fatal owing to negligence or underlying illnesses. The high numbers we see around the globe are in regions that anyway experience issues during an outbreak of the flu, for which they have flu shots, which they take before the onset of the flu season and the COVID-19 vaccine is also another flu shot. Why should we panic and demand that the country be shut down? For whose benefit is it if the economy collapses as a result? Is it in the best interest of the country or for political expediency? These events worry me as we destroy our country's future by revolving around petty issues. Is COVID-19 the biggest issue we have? People are moving about and are at work; a demand for our tea has been created; for the first time our balance of payment has narrowed down to a manageable level. Our foreign reserves have gone up to 5.6 billion dollars; a figure we couldn't have achieved had we failed.

The Port City project has been reactivated and SLT has offered the smart city option to the





Port City; the Hambantota Industrial Zone has also been activated with the construction of the largest tire manufacturing plant in South Asia. We were importing a large number of food items from salt to fish, green gram to cowpea, when we could grow all that locally and also export. Why aren't people talking about these positives rather than dwelling on the daily death rate due to COVID-19? Positive people are taking things under their control and looking at the opportunities. I'm not interested in what people speak in parliament, some have spoken ill of SLT as well, especially about the two billion rupees spent on brand unification, whereas in truth we have not spent a cent on brand unification. What we did was to invite advertising companies to pitch in order to select a single entity to do our promotions and one of the main tasks was to give us a unified brand identity, which we could

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consider. The company that did best was Phoenix Advertising, which we have selected; it came as a bonus for us and not as a cost. We have engaged them for the annual marketing plan and this was their entry to win the contract. People have to be smart in meeting challenges and if one is smart, Sri Lanka has ample opportunities.

#### **Future prospects?**

I am very hopeful that the country has potential despite the rabble-rousers and prophets of doom trying to create a very dark picture. I have traveled inside the country. During the lockdown I traveled to the north and the east and the south to inspect the operations, which made me realize that digital transformation will unite the country and with connectivity even the most rural village could be empowered. This would allow the dissemination of information, technology and true news. Unfortunately, we have allowed the freedom of expression to reach unprecedented levels, which has given freedom to individuals to malign anyone on digital platforms from anywhere in the world without being challenged or questioned.

I feel the Government needs to introduce some control to manage such scenarios. What do we see in the USA, the so called temple of democracy? They are suppressing all anti-Biden news and propaganda. Donald Trump's twitter account has been blocked permanently and they are also identifying his supporters to target them and block their freedom of expression on social media. How can they do it and in turn question our actions? This shows that freedom of expression is a good thing when used positively. I hope this Government will take note of what's taking place globally and take action in Sri Lanka to protect the rights of people who are targeted, protect their privacy and dignity from unsubstantiated online rhetoric.

The country must also have stable policies, which was not the case in the past few years; the leaders wavered. Stable policies are important for investment. The state minister for finance had said that Sri Lanka has five trillion rupees in bank deposits, which if invested in development and to strengthen the capital market, the country will emerge stronger. The interest regime has to be managed, which is key to development. People will not invest if interest rates are very high, they'd rather invest the money in a bank to reap the benefits of high interest. We must learn from the most successful economies of the world that have low finance costs. ☐



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Apple Fitness+ features a team of celebrated, charismatic, and passionate trainers who are specialists in their fields, working together to create outstanding fitness content for everyone. From left to right: Gregg Cook (Cycling, Strength, Core, Mindful Cooldown); Ben Allen (Dance); Anja Garcia (Rowing); Molly Fox (Yoga, Strength); Kim Ngo (HIIT); Tyrell Désean (Cycling); Jessica Skye (Yoga, Mindful Cooldown); Jamie-Ray Hartshorne (HIIT, Treadmill); Emily Fayette (Cycling, Treadmill); Betina Gozo (Strength, Core); Sam Sanchez (Strength, Core, Treadmill); Kym Perfetto (Cycling); Dustin Brown (Yoga, Mindful Cooldown); Jhon Gonzalez (Dance); Sherica Holmon (Cycling); Bakari Williams (Cycling, HIIT, Core); Kyle Ardill (Strength, Core); Scott Carvin (Treadmill); Josh Crosby (Rowing); LaShawn Jones (Dance); and Amir Ekbatani (Strength, Core).



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# OPENING THE COUNTRY

**Udayanga Weeratunga, former Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Russia was able to achieve the unimaginable when he implemented a special project to revive the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. It showed that even during these challenging times it is possible to engage in tourism with a clear and practical plan. Udayanga Weeratunga took the risk to do something that would benefit the country. He utilized the experience, connections and relationships that he had formed over the years especially in Russia, Ukraine and other CIS countries to formulate a plan that none thought was possible. There were many challenges but he persevered through them all. Through his initiative, Sri Lanka was yet again opened to the world.**

**By Udeshi Amarasinghe.**

**Photography Menaka Aravinda.**

*Udayanga Weeratunga, former Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Russia.*



### Who is Udayanga Weeratunga?

I was born in Matara and I started my education at the Medamulana Maha Vidyalaya. Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was the youngest MP at that time, decided to send me to Nalanda College in Colombo and I entered the school in 1972 to Grade 3. I continued my studies at Nalanda College, and I left in 1983 upon completion. Thereafter, I worked at the Survey Department for about seven months, where I was selected to the Colombo University to study Physical Science, and at the same time I was selected to work in Diyatalawa as a Surveyor. But, more than anything my dream was to go to the Soviet Union. During the same year, I received the opportunity to follow my studies at the university and to also join the Soviet-Sri Lanka Friendship Society through which I traveled to Moscow on August 22, 1985. At that time, Russia was part of the Soviet Union (USSR), and after I arrived in Moscow, the students were separated according to the region they were going to attend university. I was assigned to Kiev, which today is the capital of Ukraine. During the first year we studied the Russian language, and thereafter we were assigned the university according to the specialty we were to study. Once I learnt the language, I pursued my studies to become a mechanical engineer at the Light Industries University in Kiev.

I completed both my BSc and MSc from 1986 to 1993. It was during this time that the USSR was dissolved into independent nations. The previous regions of USSR started to gain independence and become individual countries. Ukraine too gained Independence in 1991-92. During that time an opportunity arose to engage in trade because up until then the USSR did not trade with other countries. During the last few days of the Union, they gave the opportunity for small companies known as cooperatives to engage in business. As foreign nationals we received the opportunity to engage in trade, which is something that no one else would ever get again. Russians were not able to travel overseas and there were restrictions on bringing technology such as computers into the country. We intervened and we were able to trade.

Once I completed my studies I applied for my permanent residency and thereafter, I stayed in Kiev and engaged in my businesses. My first business was importing computers and

**Hon Lakshman Kadiragamar as the then Foreign Minister appointed me as the Honorary Consul for Ukraine in 1999, during President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's time.**

electronics. Thereafter I entered the tourism industry in 1996, and was also involved in Ceylon Tea and construction. To this day I have my own tea brand, Randy Tea, in Ukraine. With those businesses I decided to reside in Kiev. I was able to build a network and build relationships with many people including politicians and Presidents.

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union there was only one Sri Lankan Embassy, which was based in Moscow. The embassy was established in 1957 and the first Ambassador was Gunapala Piyasena Malalasekera. Once the USSR dissolved into individual countries, Sri Lanka did not have the capacity or the ability to establish embassies in every single country. Therefore, Honorary Consuls were appointed to most of the countries. Hon Lakshman Kadiragamar as the then Foreign Minister appointed me as the Honorary Consul for Ukraine in 1999, during President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's time. However, Ukraine did not finalize my appointment saying that I had to obtain citizenship of Ukraine because according to the agreement we had signed with them the Honorary Consul should be a national of the country, and it was the same in Sri Lanka as well. I always maintained my permanent residency but never applied for citizenship. Therefore, though they did not legally appoint me to the post, I worked as the Honorary Consul.

That is the reason I was involved with the military. From 1993, the Sri Lankan Army, Navy and Air Force visited Ukraine. After the dissolution of the USSR, independent nations started engaging in their own military contracts. However, they did not have the experience or knowledge in negotiating agreements. During the USSR era everything was controlled by Moscow. After the breakup the responsibility was assigned to Kiev but as they lacked the experience, we were able to secure military contracts at a reduced price. The first purchase by Sri Lanka from Kiev was the AN 32 for the Air Force. Thereafter a large quantity of RPN and tanks were purchased from Ukraine. Though Sri Lanka also looked at purchasing vessels for the Navy, it was not successful. During this period many officers of the Army visited Ukraine and their main issue was the language. Ukrainians do not speak English. Therefore, I used to assist the Sri Lankan military in these matters.

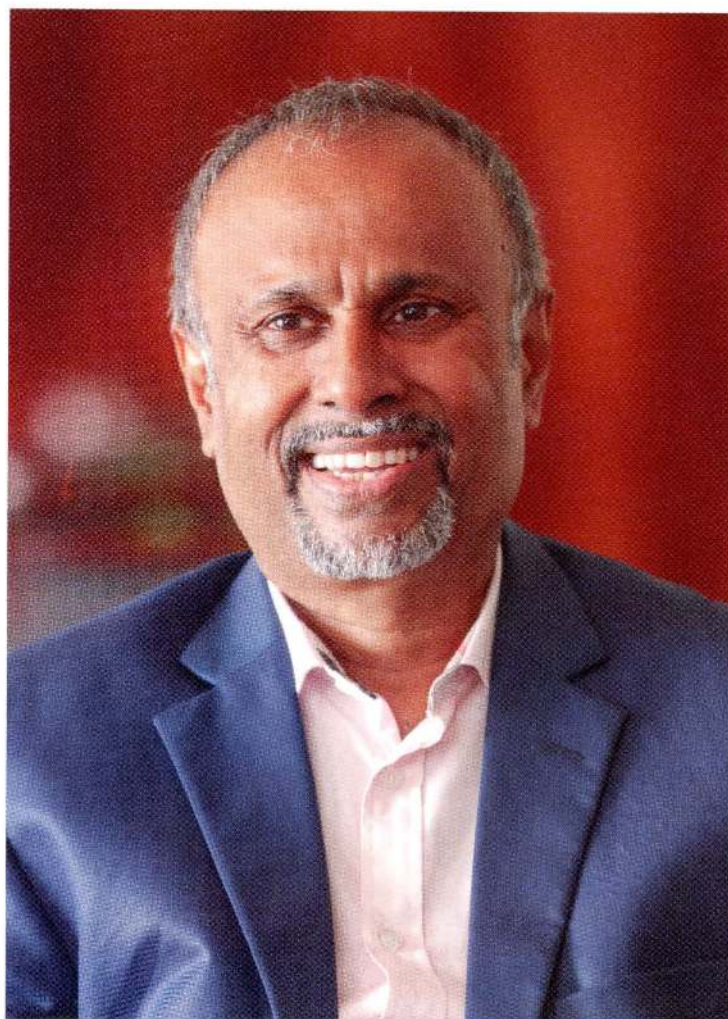
It was for this reason that I was appointed as the Honorary Consul and I had to represent the



country officially at times as well. Though I provided my assistance to the military, I was never an intermediate or part of the negotiation process or the agreements that were made for the purchase of military equipment.

When you take the role of the translator, he can either bring both parties together or ensure that both parties never get together. At that time, the Sri Lankan delegation would come with their own mindset and the Ukraine team would have their own thinking. It is the translator that brings both parties together. I have the ability to understand both sides and win their trust. I would follow the middle path to solve a problem. Sri Lanka purchased eight AN 32 planes, and it was a Singaporean company that was the intermediary. At that time the Antonov factory was not doing well, this was the situation in the entire former USSR. The master plan at that time was for Russia to benefit and if the USSR dissolved then the individual countries would be at a disadvantage. The various parts of the plane were manufactured in different areas and the sales was done by another. Therefore, when the USSR split this whole mechanism was disabled. The split was not a planned one. Therefore, the industries faced a very difficult situation. Thus, the Antonov factory had lost its business and the workers did not have any work. The Antonov factory itself is like a village with buses running through. It is that big and there is a runway within the factory. To this date the largest plane has been produced by the Antonov factory, known as Antonov An-225 Mriya. It was built in the 1980s to carry the space shuttle with six turbofan engines and is the heaviest aircraft ever built, with a maximum takeoff weight of 640 tonnes.

When Sri Lanka placed the order, the workers were really happy and they loved us because they finally had work and was receiving a salary with old arrears. The people used to share their meals with us thinking that it was because of us that they were receiving a salary. We were merely coordinating the process. Towards the latter part of the project a few problems arose with customs where Sri Lankans had over purchased. The Singapore company could not sort it out, neither could the Antonov factory. Sri Lanka was waiting for the planes. I was able to sort it out in half an hour and the two flights were able to proceed to Sri Lanka.



**Though I provided my assistance to the military, I was never an intermediate or part of the negotiation process or the agreements that were made for the purchase of military equipment.**

Another interesting example is that just before the Tsunami there were two overhauled flights carrying Air Force equipment. It was the responsibility of the Sri Lankan Embassy in Moscow to obtain the approval for the flight route from the various countries. From Russia they would fly to Baku in Azerbaijan and thereafter via Pakistan to Sri Lanka. Before the flight left Kiev, I was informed that we did not have permission to fly over Azerbaijan. I spoke to the Commander and said to stay another day and to start traveling once permission was received. They assured me that everything was in order. The two flights left and as they neared Azerbaijan they were issued a warning saying to not enter the airspace as permission had not been granted. They could not journey back to Ukraine because they did not have enough fuel, so they landed in





Rostov, Russia. When they were getting ready to leave Rostov when the Russian military came to check, even though it was a civil flight, it was registered as an Air Force plane as such it was considered as defense related and had to obtain special permission to fly over Russia. I was not the Sri Lankan Ambassador at that time and our Embassy did not know that such permission had to be obtained. The Ambassador was also not involved in this issue at that time but I was able to discuss with the Russian officials over two days and ensure that the two planes were released without any issues. These are real incidents. It is because I was able to build relationships and

**The first charter flight from Ukraine to Sri Lanka was arranged by me in 1998. During that time, it was not even heard of Ukraine tourists coming to Sri Lanka.**

able to engage in discussions and get things done that I was later appointed as the Ambassador to Russia. I was appointed as the Ambassador to Russia during President Mahinda Rajapaksa's time, by Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

It is because of this reason too that I had to face many challenges during the previous Government. I was never an intermediary but I always participated in the meetings and discussions. Whenever there is a delegation, I am the first to meet them. I had good relationships with the former Presidents of Ukraine. Even today I can speak to them. Since I had these connections, the Government should use them for the betterment of the country.

#### **How did you enter the tourism sector?**

I started Ceylon Tour, Ukraine Branch for tourism. The first charter flight from Ukraine to Sri Lanka was arranged by me in 1998. During that time, it was not even heard of Ukraine tourists coming to Sri Lanka. Similar to the risk that I took recently, even in the past I took the risk and organized a charter flight to bring tourists to Sri Lanka. Therefore, I have experience in working with Ukraine Airlines.

When I think back even I am surprised at the risks I have taken. It was an old plane but it was completely overhauled, it was a flight known as IL-18. It was similar to the plane that was used by a former USSR President to fly to the US. The plane was completely repaired, and the tourists were brought in that plane. According to the number of passengers we would have had to transit in two locations. However, in the center there was a place called Bandar Abbas in Iran. It was a military airport and the location of the main base of the Iranian Navy, but I had connections with them. If the flight stopped there, we would be able to reach Sri Lanka with only one transit. It was only when we reached the airport did the passengers know that we were stopping at Bandar Abbas. They were scared but we provided them with unlimited beverages and they forgot everything. I was also on the flight but the passengers did not know that I was the organizer of the trip. We arrived in Sri Lanka. Later on, Sri Lanka purchased the plane to be used for the Jaffna flights by Expo Air. This is how I started my business in the tourism sector.

I have the knowledge and also a passion for this industry. I engaged in my business continuously until 2004, thereafter I was not able



to focus on the tourism business as much but gave priority to the tea business.

**Can you tell us about your tenure as the Sri Lankan Ambassador to Russia?**

Following my appointment as the Ambassador to Russia, I moved to Moscow in 2006. Thereafter, I was not able to engage in either my tourism or tea business. But I engaged in tourism promotion activities because I am well-versed in the subject and have the passion for the industry. I was the Ambassador for Russia and another seven countries; Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Moldova and Georgia. When there were political issues between Russia and Ukraine, it is not allowed for both countries to be covered by the same Ambassador, but I am the only exception. Therefore, the present Ambassador is overlooking only four countries, but I was in charge of eight countries. There were no political tensions between Sri Lanka and these countries, and they had very strong friendships. During those days we needed Russia's help to face the challenges from the UN in Geneva, and the Security Council in New York. On all these instances Russia stood by Sri Lanka.

I looked at ways in which we could strengthen economic ties between Sri Lanka and these countries. Sri Lanka was very strong in the tea industry and Russia continuously purchases about 25 percent of Ceylon Tea. Russia is one of our main markets. However, when I looked at the number of tourists that visited Sri Lanka from Russia and the former USSR, it was less than 4,400 tourists. During my tenure as Ambassador, I increased the number by 28 times to 120,000. Previously we did not have flights from Moscow to Colombo. Using my own abilities, I was able to launch SriLankan Airlines to fly from Colombo to Moscow therefore, making history. At the same time, we had not ever thought about flights from Kiev to Colombo. Only about 450 visitors had arrived from Ukraine, and this could be possibly for defense purposes. I focused on developing the tourism sector, I did not receive any support from Sri Lanka Tourism initially.

The main issue was the language. Russian travel agencies did not have information on Sri Lanka in the Russian language. Usually, the English brochures are given but the staff cannot understand that. They would only look at the photographs. There might have been a leaflet distributed by the Embassy but there was no

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comprehensive guidebook on Sri Lanka in Russian. During my tenure, we published eight books in Russian. We have very few Sri Lankan guides who can speak Russian. And those that we have now mostly are those who have studied medicine. As such they have a limited vocabulary and are unable to describe history and culture in Russian. For example, if they go to Sigiriya, the guide would not be able to describe the history because they have studied medicine, they do not have the required words in their vocabulary. They have not learnt the complete language. But during the time of Soviet Russia there were people who had studied history, geography and other such subjects.

We have a Buddhist priest by the name of Ven Dr Pallekande Rathanasara Thero. I brought him to Russia and we did a recording with embassy staff, Anna Korolkova, that could be used as an audio guide for tourists. We corrected all the information and recorded the audio and produced two CDs that covered 56 historical sites. Therefore, even today any Russian speaking person can visit these locations with the audio guide. I distributed the CDs to all the guides and tourist drivers in Sri Lanka. They do not have to know Russian, because the CD has it in Sinhala as well. When they reach a destination, they need to simply switch on the audio. If we focus only on the beach and bring tourists to Sri Lanka, they can visit countries that are closer such as Turkey or Egypt for that experience. If we show them our history and culture, then we would have repeat visitors.

In this manner, we promoted the destinations and we gradually increased the number of tourists to Sri Lanka. We made the CD and also printed the book, which had 312 pages and became very popular among travel agencies. The book included the historical and tourist sites, and also the available hotels nearby. I do not think a similar book has been produced since then. We first did the book in Russian and later in English. Such work had not been done previously. We made the CD, tourism guide books and a book about President Mahinda Rajapaksa, and thereafter I also made a video documentary of the same CD, which is four and a half hours long. To this date, my video is available on YouTube.

In Russia, it is the tour operators that formulate the package for the tourists. This includes the ticket, tour and other expenses. It is the travel agent who sells these packages and there are many travel agents in Russia. The travel



agent needs only the license and the tour operators had to keep a USD one million as guarantee during that time. The travel agent sells the package and receives a certain percentage for the sale. But if we do not educate the travel agent about our country, the country would not be promoted by them. The travel agent has packages from various countries, and it is only when he knows about a particular country that he would promote that to the traveler. Therefore, I held seminars for the travel agents. We used to have about two seminars a month and we would invite about 50-100 travel agents to my residence at the Embassy. We would invite them for lunch and thereafter have a seminar for about an hour. They like to attend these functions because it was at the embassy. Thereafter we focused on cities that had more than one million inhabitants. We visited 25 cities in 85 days. We took a cultural troupe as well and did promotions in those cities. Furthermore, in 2011, I arranged for SriLankan Airlines to fly to Moscow, which was a first for the airline. Though Aeroflot had been flying between the countries since 1960, SriLankan Airlines had never flown to Moscow. It is through all these initiatives that I was able to promote tourism to Russia and the other countries.

**You achieved the unthinkable by bringing tourists during the current environment. How was this achieved?**

I had formed a good relationship and trust with the tourism industry during my tenure of eight years as Ambassador. It was these connections that I utilized during this time as well. I am able to speak to the largest tour operators because of the relationship that I have built with them. It is not as a business but through personal contacts that I had formed during the time we did promotions, tours, and by helping them.

I discussed with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and explained to him that I have all these connections and that we should use them to re-establish tourism in Sri Lanka. I read an article about Antalya in Turkey, which is a beachside resort town similar to Bentota in Sri Lanka. While the country was on lockdown about one million tourists had arrived in Antalya during the period of August 1-19, 2020. According to the article from the total about 299,967 tourists had been from Ukraine, then around 281,398 had been Russian, and thereafter 221,151 from Germany and there were also tourists from

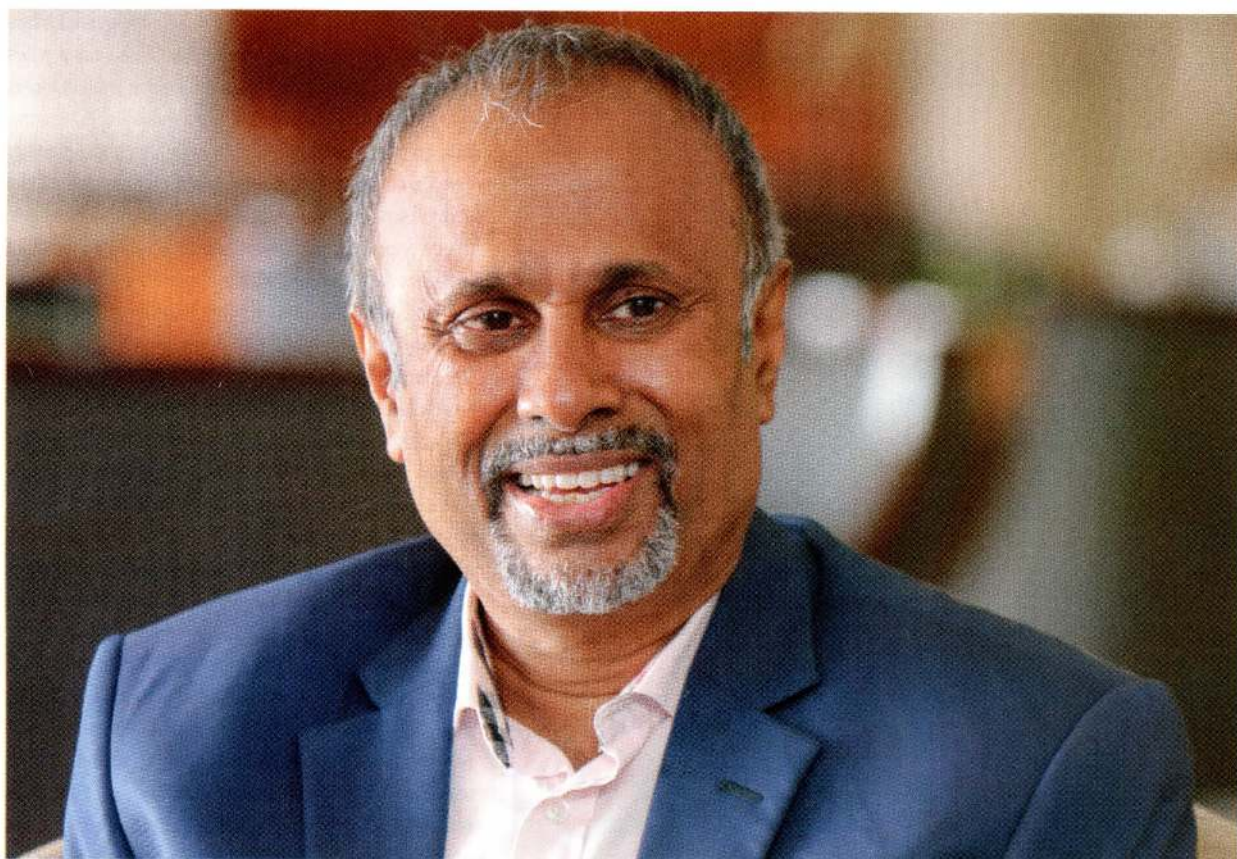
**This crucial decision to reopen the airport was made by the chairman of the committee, Basil Rajapaksa, to facilitate the possible flights that could arrive in Sri Lanka within a month, which involved trusting me and challenging me to bring tourists.**

Belorussia and Kazakhstan. When I read this article, I realized that about 60 percent of tourists had come from countries where I had worked as the Ambassador. Furthermore, the main attraction in Antalya is the beach and they have many hotels as well. I wondered why we could not replicate this in Sri Lanka. I went to see hotels, I started from Tangalle and I looked at beach areas, which could be blocked so that we could bring tourists to those hotels. Then I thought we could bring the tourists via Mattala Airport because regular flights were not arriving to the airport and again, we could block the area. Thereafter I looked at the flights that could come from Ukraine and I explained the project to the Prime Minister.

Firstly, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I wrote an official letter to the Prime Minister regarding my project to restart Sri Lankan tourism then, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, the Cabinet Paper on the project was submitted to the Cabinet by the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister together with the Tourism Minister. On September 19<sup>th</sup> we had to provide some additional information. And, it was on September 28<sup>th</sup> that the Prime Minister received approval to bring 44,000 tourists from Russia and CIS countries in 159 flights. Thereafter, the second COVID-19 wave hit Sri Lanka. The project was halted and thereafter, the President appointed a high-powered working group for Strategic Management of Tourism Industry Revival in Sri Lanka, which is headed by the former Minister Basil Rajapaksa as the Chairman. But the project was not initiated at that time since Sri Lanka was experiencing the second wave. Thereafter, it was only on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 that the committee met again. That is when I presented this proposal again and said that we should go ahead with the project. This crucial decision to reopen the airport was made by the chairman of the committee, Basil Rajapaksa, to facilitate the possible flights that could arrive in Sri Lanka within a month, which involved trusting me and challenging me to bring tourists. It was on December 9<sup>th</sup> that we got partial permission to commence the project. I was able to bring the first flight on December 28<sup>th</sup>, and thereafter the flights started to come in as planned. At the moment, 13 flights have arrived, and 1,926 tourists were brought to Sri Lanka.

My concept was to bring tourist groups to larger hotels where there is more space and the number of rooms are higher. We wanted to form a tourist bubble of all the hotels that are located in one stretch. That is why I selected Bentota beach, which





was coincidentally the first beach resort designated by President J R Jayewardene for tourists only. We selected five hotels with a total of 1,800 rooms. I am not saying that my thinking is correct, but from the experience and knowledge I have gained over the years, I can say that this is the way to encourage tourism to Sri Lanka.

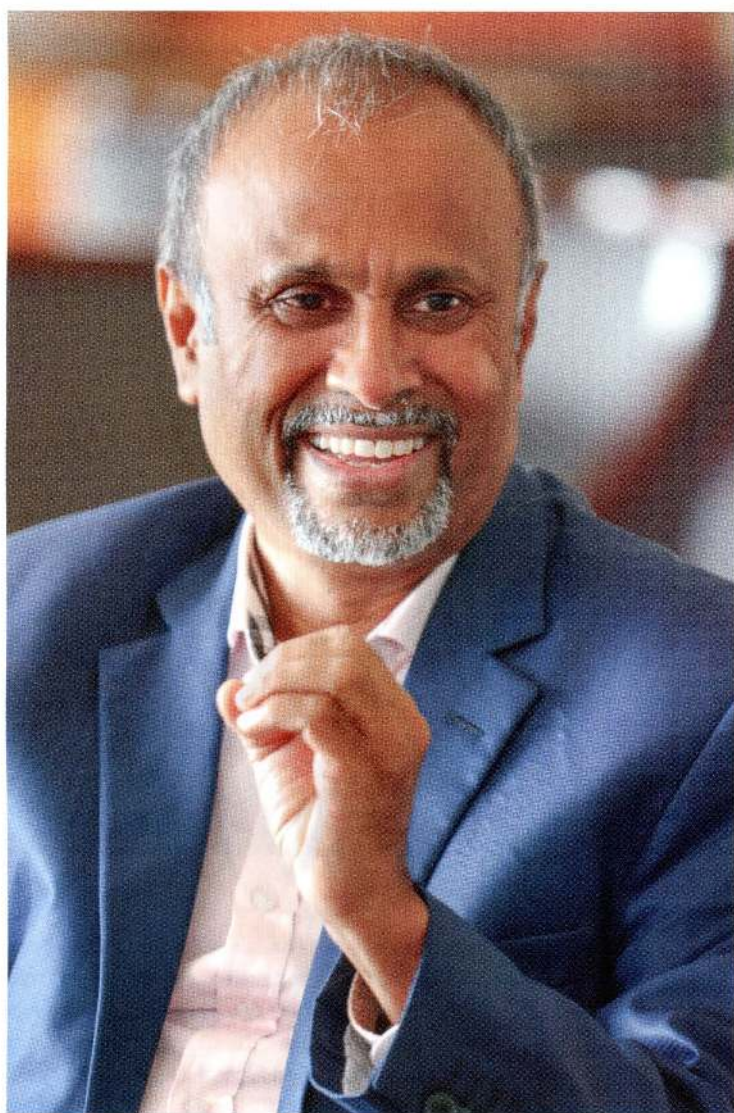
There was an airline by the name of Aerosvit Airlines in Ukraine, and it later became part of Ukraine International Airline. I was able to bring that airline to Sri Lanka. They never thought of coming to Sri Lanka because they did not know much about the country. I arranged everything for them and they started flying to Sri Lanka. At that time, they gave me a Gold Card and later, I found out that I could travel to anywhere in the world free of charge where I had to only pay the airport tax. When I later met the President of the Airline again, I asked him why he gave me such a card. He said it was the first time that an official had worked hard, arranged everything and given them a business, and that is why he had given the card to me, which was also used by their directors. What I am trying to say is how much they

**It is through the connections that I had made in the past that I was able to organize and arrange the tourist groups to Sri Lanka even during this COVID-19 period because we need to restart the tourism industry.**

appreciated what I had done for them. Therefore, when I have fostered such a relationship, it is not difficult for me to speak to them and ask them to help us and arrange a flight to bring tourists to Sri Lanka. The second flight that came to Sri Lanka recently was from UIA, but they were the first airline to agree to this project. They agreed because they trusted me. Thereafter, once the airlines agreed it was the tour operators that needed to sell the tickets. I approached three of the largest tour operators, one tour operator, TPG, is the one I worked with in 1998 to bring the first charter flight to Sri Lanka. Therefore, they trusted me. Then the other two tour operators had also been part of the promotions that we had conducted through the embassy. It is through the connections that I had made in the past that I was able to organize and arrange the tourist groups to Sri Lanka even during this COVID-19 period because we need to restart the tourism industry.

I am very disappointed to say that Sri Lanka does not know the value of the initiative we made. They do not understand how difficult it is to bring tourists to a country at this time.





I had to face a lot of criticism, even from our own Government. But I said I made a promise to the Prime Minister and I will somehow make this a success. The perception of the Sri Lankans also changed gradually with the arrival of the tourists. If Sri Lankans do not accept the arrival of tourists then we cannot make the tourism industry a success. When we first landed in Mattala, all the small shop owners and the people were thrilled to see the tourist buses. Even in other areas people were becoming open to the arrival of tourists. We visited Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Kandy, Yala, Anuradhapura and Dambulla. Unfortunately, it is still prohibited for tourists to visit Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage.

**With the most recent arrivals it was apparent that the Sri Lankan people too are gradually becoming open and welcoming the tourists to Sri Lanka.**

The Sri Lanka Army helped us greatly but they cannot do so for everyone. This was a pilot project that we did to reopen tourism in Sri Lanka.

The media has a great responsibility to ensure that they do not instigate people. An entire image was created in Sri Lanka about the arrival of the tourists to such an extent that in Polonnaruwa there was not a single place to buy a mask, then in Pinnawala none of the souvenir shops were open. I was worried that a situation would be created when the tourists were traveling. Sri Lankans were scared because they thought that they would be quarantined for 14-days if they associated with the tourists. A very negative image was created. But the damage is not for me, but to the country and our tourism industry. However, with the most recent arrivals it was apparent that the Sri Lankan people too are gradually becoming open and welcoming the tourists to Sri Lanka.

At this moment the most important countries for Sri Lanka are Russia and CIS countries. During the first two weeks of January, Maldives had received about 40,000 tourists out of which 10,000 was from Russia. Aeroflot is flying to Maldives eight times a week. Each flight is bringing about 400 tourists and they are requesting for a further five more flights. Therefore, I believe Sri Lanka has immense potential.

#### **What were the challenges?**

I am saddened that due to personal views and agendas, projects that are of benefit to Sri Lanka are at times curtailed. The main flight that we were planning to bring to Sri Lanka was Aeroflot, we had given them the schedule to fly three times a week to Sri Lanka. I know them personally as well since I had worked with them previously while I was the Ambassador. They had almost completed the initial process required for the sale of the air-tickets, and we had agreed on terms and conditions. However, the health guidelines were translated into Russian from the Sri Lankan Embassy and distributed with the Embassy covering letter to a large number of travel agents without our knowledge. The document mentioned that for two weeks the visitor cannot leave their room, similar to being quarantined. Our agreement with Aeroflot was that the tourists would do one PCR test and thereafter, they can come and have a holiday in Sri Lanka. Once they received the translated health guidelines, Aeroflot informed us that all the tour operators and travel



agents had pulled out. They wanted us to send the Sri Lankan health guidelines officially, which I knew if we did the tourists would definitely not come to Sri Lanka. 16 flights from Russia were cancelled as a result. Kazakhstan also stepped back after the Russians. However, Ukraine because of the close relationship I have with them they agreed to come. 12 flights from Ukraine came to Sri Lanka.

I believe that as officials such things should not be done. Look at the tourism industry how many lives depend on it? If you take the safari drivers in Yala, they were happy when the tourists arrived. Because for almost a year they had not had any income. We cannot close this industry. Prior to the war it was possible because Sri Lanka was receiving only about 400,000 tourists at that time but after 2009 there are large number of rooms and hotels, where an entire ecosystem of people is being employed by the industry. Tourism is a massive industry in Sri Lanka. COVID-19 is going to be prevalent for some time, and though it is not easy to curtail it I do not believe it is as bad as the media portrays it to be. COVID-19 is a flu so we have to learn to live with it. My personal view is that some countries were able to develop because of COVID-19 and some other countries do not want to accept that the decisions they made were wrong. Look at China, they are progressing, then many European countries even though they do have lockdown are proceeding with their economic activity. As an island, Sri Lanka cannot afford to be a closed country. We have to re-energize the tourism industry. I believe that the decision taken by the Government is the right one but the guidelines have to be changed.

The airport opened but Sri Lanka Tourism cannot say what are the procedures for tourist arrivals. They stress on the certificate, which is not practical. When a hotel cannot afford to even function, how can they obtain another certificate? Furthermore, in Sri Lanka there are over 3,000 hotels but only 150 have the certificate. Sri Lanka Tourism says only those with the certificate can accommodate tourists. How unreasonable is this? These are done because of personal opinion and I do not believe it is right.

Then, there is the categorization of hotels as 'level 1', that means tourists can come to the hotel but Sri Lankans cannot. Then, the staff have to remain in the hotel they cannot go home. The staff will have to work for about two to three

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weeks, and they can go home after two weeks of quarantine. That means the hotel needs to have three sets of staff to work accordingly. Currently the staff are paid only 40 percent so then how can a hotel afford to pay two more sets of staff? Hotel staff have to be trained staff as well. Therefore, when regulations are made, they should be practical. I suggested the alternative where staff work and they do a PCR before they go home and then they quarantine for two weeks at home, which fulfills both requirements.

Furthermore, as a 'level 1' hotel, 25 percent of the rooms have to be closed and only 75 percent can function. If you are level 1, rooms have to be provided for the military and police and also for the medical staff. How practical is this?

The role of Sri Lanka Tourism is not to make life difficult for the hotel or the travel agent, but to see with appropriate guidelines from the Ministry of Health how to reopen the tourism industry. Thereafter, to provide the requirements of the tourists. Generally, a tourist would stay for maximum two weeks. Those who stay longer are coming for work or other reasons. What we need today is not the numbers but the investment or spending power of the tourist. The risk we are taking and the amount of work we need to do to welcome them results in expenditure, therefore the tourist should be able to spend in Sri Lanka so that an income is generated within the country. I proposed that we bring groups because it is easier to handle. Thereafter we can look at FITs.

We need to accept that the tourists who come to the country are not patients. Once they have done a PCR test and it is confirmed as negative they are not patients. From the 1,926 tourists that I brought to Sri Lanka only four were confirmed as positive. Those who showed symptoms had to stay in the room. The reason why the Maldives removed the PCR test is because there is no other option. When a group travels together, they come on the same flight, they go on tours together, eat together and socialize. They are like one family.

Once a PCR test is done and confirmed as negative you cannot think of the tourist as a patient. If we have that thinking, we can never revive the tourism industry. It is for this reason that I welcomed the Ukrainian tourists warmly on their arrival, I hugged them and spoke to them in the Russian language, which made them very comfortable. Furthermore, it gave a sense of security for the airport staff as well because they



were initially scared of the tourists. But they are no longer so. They are doing their work while maintaining the necessary precautions. For the first time in the history of Mattala, they experienced 100 percent tourist flights back-to-back. When such a massive task is being done and no one is supporting it, it does not affect me but all of those in the tourism industry.

The tourists arriving in the country feel too restricted. They cannot go anywhere to purchase goods; at times the bus would not even stop on the way if they want to go to the washroom. Furthermore, places would agree to provide accommodation or meals but once the authorities go and check the place they pull back. Therefore, we have to change the system. The first thing to do is to revise the number of days of quarantine.

We have to first decide whether we are going to live with COVID-19. In Dubai, there are many who had the infection and have now recovered. Then 85 percent who live there are expatriates. Dubai has given priority to the tourism industry. They have welcomed tourists to come and have a holiday and go. If a person gets ill then they are given a wrist band and they have to stay at their accommodation and if they venture out, they are fined. Once the ten days are over, they go to the clinic and the band is removed. There is no PCR test. Even if they have to do one at the airport it is done free of charge. However, in Sri Lanka, the authorities charge USD 40 per PCR test and the tourists are required to take three tests and they pay USD 30 more than the market price. This resulted in less than 100 tourists arriving to Sri Lanka by the first week after reopening the airport. Comparatively, the tourist going to Dubai as well as Maldives, do a PCR in their home country and they arrive in Dubai/Maldives, enjoy their holiday and go back.

We need to solve the PCR issues; it should be maximum one and thereafter that too should be removed, this is for groups. But you have to be strict with individual tourists who travel on their own. I do not believe tourists who are staying for more than two weeks are needed for Sri Lanka. The groups that we are bringing are staying in five-star, four-star and one three-star hotel, and who have the capacity to spend. Additionally, the payment for the PCR test should be directly given to the hospital from the tour operator, without the Government authorities being involved in the payment.

**Sri Lanka Tourism should be on the side of the private sector, because they are there to provide a service for you. Not to punish or cancel licenses. There has to be a connection between the Government and the private sector.**

Sri Lanka Tourism should be on the side of the private sector, because they are there to provide a service for you. Not to punish or cancel licenses. There has to be a connection between the Government and the private sector. There has to be people with knowledge and experience managing the tourism industry. It would not be practical to have those who simply look at statistics and make decisions according to personal views.

We have to change the entire system because by March this year, we need to have tourists arriving in Sri Lanka.

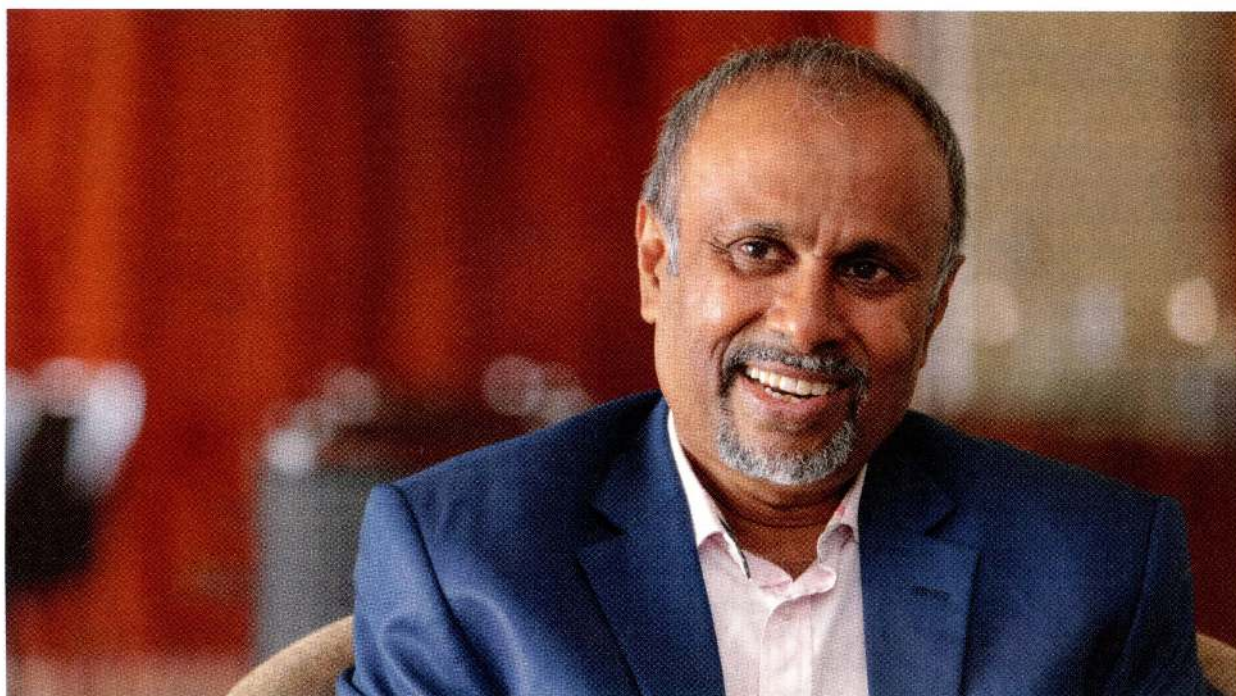
**Are you happy after initiating this tourism project?**

I am very happy that the airport was opened. For five years, during the Yahapalana government, I was considered as a very bad person to Sri Lanka. But today people love me. Wherever I travel today they welcome me and treat me with great respect. This is very important, especially for my son because for a time he too believed in the allegations that were levelled against me. There were times he used to ask his mother whether he could take her surname and not have my name as he were scared to use the name Weeratunga. Today, this has changed. Everyone agrees that what I accomplished by bringing the tourists was not an easy task. I disclosed the three tour operators and the two airlines from the beginning. So once all the information was provided it is each person's responsibility to do their business. I never interfered. Everyone who has the required knowledge of the market could work with these companies. We will be soon be bringing tourists from Russia and starting from February 6<sup>th</sup>, we will bring tourists from Kazakhstan through Air Astana and then SCAT Airline. All the hotels and tour agents have been working with these organizations previously as well. Even the last five years these companies worked with everyone. Why is it that no one else was able to achieve such a feat? It is because I took the risk.

The Russian market is different; they will travel under any circumstances. Even after the Tsunami, they traveled to Thailand. If there is a holiday, they will travel. A lockdown was imposed on Ukraine, but the flight that arrived in Sri Lanka the next day was full.

Yes, the Rajapaksas are my relations and I have their blessings. But I was born into the





family and I cannot change that. If you take the tourism industry, it is 100 percent governed by the private sector. The Opposition is slinging mud at me as if the tourists were brought by the Government. The Government gets a revenue only from the Visa. The people have been misled in many ways. There are those who cannot understand how I am involved in this and why I am doing this, that I am in fact promoting tourism. But those who have been in Russia and worked with me during my tenure as Ambassador do not say anything bad about my work.

I explained to the Prime Minister to use the skills, knowledge and connections that we have. I am sure there are other Ambassadors similar to me from other countries who can provide a similar service.

I am happy that the airport is opened. And, we have to bring groups soon. The tourism that Maldives is experiencing including private jets during the past few months are all from Russia, CIS countries and India. That is the same market that we can attract as well. Since China is closed, we will not be able to get tourists from there as yet.

What I did was not simply bring Ukraine tourists to Sri Lanka, what I did was open the country to the outside world. It is because I took that step that others opened their eyes as well.

**I have no financial interest in this project as well. I bring everyone together that is the tour operators, agents, airlines and hotels; doing business is their responsibility. My only requirement is that my concept should be implemented. There is no financial benefit to me at all.**

The target markets that we can focus right now is Russia, CIS countries and India.

I have no financial interest in this project as well. I bring everyone together that is the tour operators, agents, airlines and hotels; doing business is their responsibility. My only requirement is that my concept should be implemented. There is no financial benefit to me at all. However, the happiness I receive from working for the country and the love I got from Sri Lankans cannot be bought by any amount of money. Through this endeavor the country has already earned a significant amount of revenue. Why are we trying to stop this?

#### **Your name is always controversial?**

I like it that way. It was actually during the previous Government that my name was brought into the limelight and made controversial. While I was the Ambassador of Russia, I did not receive such publicity. The previous Government was targeting someone else through me. I knew that if I came to Sri Lanka I would be confined and forced to do what they want. I was also confident that they would not be able to bring me to Sri Lanka. They created many stories, and their allegations could not be confirmed even by Interpol. Interpol believed what I had to say. The previous Government had no basis in their allegations against me. But



by that time, the Government had seized the container that had all my personal belongings. To this date my family does not even have a single wedding photograph. Everything was confiscated. Even for this interview my friend told me to where a nice suit as I used to have many suits. I told him that I no longer have anything. We came back to Sri Lanka with only a 40kg suitcase.

We lived abroad for about 35 years. It was only recently that we decided to come to Sri Lanka because of our children's education. I felt that if the children grow up overseas, they will get used to that culture and leave us soon. Therefore, I wanted them learn the Sri Lankan ways as well. We planned to live in Sri Lanka from 2015. An Ambassador is provided with a container to take their personal belongings to the assigned country, and when they return, they are given another container to bring their personal belongings back. It is a 40ft container, I ended up using only 20ft. I had many of my personal belongings from the time I had gone to USSR to study in 1985. Some of the people who gave me autographs are now ministers and in high positions. Furthermore, mementos from my children's infant days are very important to us, even if it is not for others. Then I had worked with 12 Presidents during my tenure. Each President has sent at least one souvenir per year. My thesis was there, and my notebooks, which are things that I would like to share with my son and daughter when they are doing their degrees. I was awarded as a Honorary Professor from KSMU in 2013 due to my contributions to diplomatic services and I would like to share the knowledge I gained with my children. These are special things to me. All of it was confiscated. I requested from the former President, to return all my personal belongings and that they can take anything that they feel are commercially valuable.

Life is more than just money. There is much more happiness in life. When you take former President Mahinda Rajapaksa he didn't earn money, but he has the love of the people. Even we grew up under his guidance.

#### **What is next for you?**

I have another project in the pipeline, which is taking SriLankan Airlines to Moscow. Currently, due to the COVID-19 situation, over 50 percent of the aircrafts are on ground and are at a loss of money daily. I have assured them that the airline


**There is a saying in Russian that even a challenging situation can be converted into an opportunity. During this period, the tourism industry has a great opportunity. Because just as we do not have tourists, they too have no place to go.**

will be filled with tourists and they trust me to start the project now. This will too will be a marvel.

There is a saying in Russian that even a challenging situation can be converted into an opportunity. During this period, the tourism industry has a great opportunity. Because just as we do not have tourists, they too have no place to go. Many of the tourist destinations are closed and there are only limited countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Dominican Republic, Zanzibar, and Maldives. Therefore, Sri Lanka has a great opportunity. When you take the Maldives, it was Sri Lanka that built the airport, the hotels and taught them how to do everything in the tourism industry, see how far they have progressed and where they are today. Let's forget Singapore, even Maldives has gone ahead of us. Those days Russians did not even travel to the Maldives, Aeroflot used to come to Sri Lanka. I believe that our Government system is being controlled by the bureaucracy for the last few decades.

I always believe that I can do something for the country and that I should do something for the country. My father used to say that one should earn their wealth by the age of 35, so I had that idea from a young age. Therefore, by the age of 30, I felt that I had earned enough to live a comfortable life, and to support my family. Thereafter I wanted to retire. I want to do something for my country. I believe that former Minister Basil Rajapaksa has a good program that will be successful. He has a good knowledge of statistics, he has knowledge from the grassroot levels itself and he has expertise on various subjects. Technology has to be included in this as well.

We have to increase local production, because we have limited foreign exchange and all other countries are also focusing on local production. It is not easy but we have to persevere. We are looking at Pharmaceutical production but that will take a long time. Bangladesh has already established themselves in this industry. But the Sri Lankan name has more recognition around the world. We are well-known in the banking sector and tea. Our name is respected. Ports have to be developed as well. We will be able to develop this country and move forward.

We need to encourage and support each other while also being patriotic. We have to always focus on the best interests of the country. 





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# OPENING STATEMENT OF DR JANET YELLEN BEFORE THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEARING ON JANUARY 21, 2021



*Dr Janet Yellen, US Secretary of the Treasury.*

**C**hairman Grassley, Ranking Member Wyden, members of the committee: It is an honor to appear before you. And Senator Feinstein, thank you for that very kind introduction.

I have immense respect for the task before this committee: rebuilding the American economy from its sharpest downturn in history.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would strive to be a good partner in that work. I've spent almost my entire life thinking about economics and how it can help people during hard times.

My father was a doctor in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. It was more of a working-class

**I've spent almost my entire life thinking about economics and how it can help people during hard times.**

neighborhood back then. His patients would take the bus up from their jobs at factories or docks, and they'd come to our stoop because that's where my dad's office was – in our basement.

He was the kind of doctor who treated the whole patient. He knew about their lives; about when they'd been fired or couldn't pay. Those remain some of the clearest moments in my childhood. My parents had been children of the Depression, and they had a very visceral reaction to economic hardship.

Economics is sometimes considered a dry subject, but I have always tried to approach my science the same way my father approached his: as a means to help people. And this



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As Treasury Secretary, I think there will be a dual mission, too: helping Americans endure the final months of this pandemic; keeping people safe while getting them back to work. That's our first task. But then there is the longer-term project. We have to rebuild our economy so that it creates more prosperity for more people and ensures that American workers can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy.

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committee, I believe, has viewed it the same way – especially during these last few months. When economists look back on the pandemic, I expect they'll conclude that Congress' actions averted a lot of suffering.

But more must be done. Economists don't always agree, but I think there is a consensus now: Without further action, we risk a longer, more painful recession now – and long-term scarring of the economy later.

The pandemic has caused widespread devastation. Whole industries have paused their work. Eighteen million unemployment insurance claims are being paid every week. Food bank shelves are going empty. The damage has been sweeping, and as the President-elect said last Thursday, our response must be, too.

Over the next few months, we are going to need more aid to distribute the vaccine; to reopen schools; to help states keep firefighters and teachers on the job.

We'll need more funding to make sure unemployment insurance checks still go out; and to help families who are at risk of going hungry or losing the roof over their heads.

Neither the President-elect, nor I, propose this relief package without an appreciation for the country's debt burden. But right now, with interest rates at historic lows, the smartest thing we can do is act big. In the long run, I believe the benefits will far outweigh the costs, especially if we care about helping people who

have been struggling for a very long time. People worry about a K-shaped recovery but well before COVID-19 infected a single American, we were living in a K-shaped economy, one where wealth built on wealth while working families fell further and further behind. This is especially true for people of color.

At the Fed, I became accustomed to the institution's dual mandate – to promote stable prices and maximum employment.

As Treasury Secretary, I think there will be a dual mission, too: helping Americans endure the final months of this pandemic; keeping people safe while getting them back to work. That's our first task. But then there is the longer-term project. We have to rebuild our economy so that it creates more prosperity for more people and ensures that American workers can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Members of the committee, these are very ambitious goals, and I know we will need to work together. You can count on me to do that in a bipartisan way.

My husband and son are watching us on C-SPAN from the other room. They are not only wonderful people; they are also wonderful – and opinionated – economists themselves. So, I am used to debate about these issues in the house. I'd welcome it in the Senate.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions. ☐



# BANKERS TO THE NATION AND THE RESILIENT LEADER



(L-R): R M N Jeewantha, Deputy General Manager, International, Treasury and Investment, BOC; M P Ruwan Kumara, Deputy General Manager – Finance & Planning, BOC; W P Russel Fonseka, Chief Financial Officer, BOC; Kanchana Ratwatte, Chairman, BOC; D P K Gunasekera, General Manager, BOC; K E D Sumanasiri, Senior Deputy General Manager – Human Resource, BOC; W N P Surawimala, Deputy General Manager – Corporate & Offshore Banking, BOC and Priyal Silva, Deputy General Manager – Sales and Channel Management, BOC.

**B**ank of Ceylon entered 2020 as the undisputed market leader with hope and enthusiasm. However, with the pandemic that engulfed the entire globe, BOC had to change gear and focus as the unfolding situation compelled to innovate fresh strategies to face the situation. The Bankers to the Nation, Bank of Ceylon continued to perform, playing a lead role in keeping the wheels of the economy moving as the crisis continued to the New Year as well. Following the concessions announced by the Government as well as the Central Bank of Sri Lanka with the advent of COVID-19, the Bank strengthened its capabilities to cater to customers in the best possible way. BOC has disbursed more than 39 billion rupees under the 'Saubagya COVID-19 Renaissance Facility' by extending working capital to COVID-19 affected businesses. The Bank also disbursed 128 billion rupees for development and agriculture sector including credit facilities under 'BOC DiviUdana' loans scheme. The Bank is moving forward with a stable performance and reported a Profit Before Tax of 16.6 billion rupees and Profit After Tax of 11.7 billion rupees, for the nine months ending at September 30, 2020. The total income of the Bank for the period was 181.8 billion rupees with a marginal increase of tow percent YoY. The non-fund-based income for the period

amounted to 12.9 billion rupees showing an increase of 1.7 billion rupees YoY, and an exchange gain of 3.6 billion rupees, which contributed to this growth. The Bank's assets base grew by 17 percent to 2.8 trillion rupees, backed by an increase of 25 percent in the loan book. BOC's loan book stood at 1.9 trillion rupees, the government and private sector lending contributed to growth, including lending to major infrastructure development projects initiated by the Government, funding requirements for mid-corporates for business expansion, SME sector, and priority sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and related industries. Term loans, scheme loans, personal loans and overdrafts are the key contributors to loan growth during the period. The term loan portfolio grew by 28 percent demonstrating the Bank's support in terms of working capital requirements.

The Bank's deposit base increased during the year, despite low interest rates. The deposit base of 2.3 trillion rupees represents 33 percent of the current and saving deposit base, which generates funds at low cost. BOC recorded the highest in terms of inward remittances of USD 2.7 billion as at end December 2020, an increase of 1.2 percent YoY. In addition to the latest 10 billion rupees AT1 Bond issue on December 1, 2020, the Bank successfully

executed issuance of its first Additional Tier 1 (AT1) Bond of five billion rupees during the month of July 2020. These bond issuances have resulted in further strengthening the capital base of BOC by providing the required capital base for the business expansion. The Bank's Tier I Capital and Total Capital ratio stood at 10.4 percent and 14.0 percent respectively as at September 30, 2020. BOC's liquidity position was at a favorable level, reporting 29 percent statutory liquid assets ratio above its norm of 20 percent. BOC managed to maintain its Fitch local rating as AA+ remaining steady as a resilient market leader. BOC maintains its international rating on par with the sovereign. The Bank expanded its customer service by opening one new branch and two new 'Limited Service' branches, relocated 22 branches and installed 132 new CRMs. BOC increased its focus on digital service channels with customers showing a notable shift from physical banking to digital banking channels, marked by an increase in online transactions through B-app, Smart Pay, and online banking. BOC also conducted SME entrepreneur knowledge enhancement forums outside the western province, sharing key experiences and knowledge to help rebuild businesses, amidst the challenges of the pandemic.



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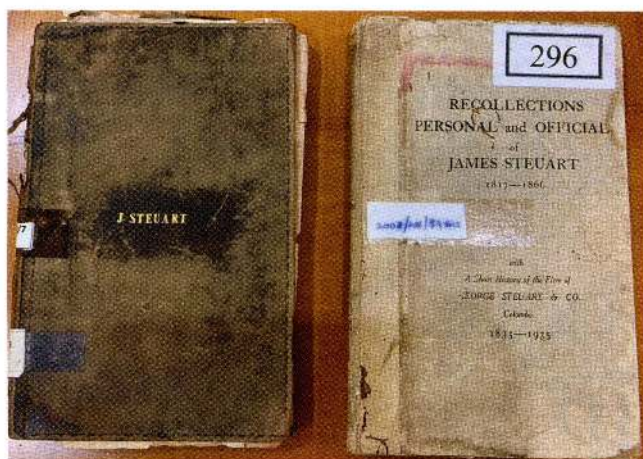
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# GEORGE STEUART & CO COMMENCES RESTORATION OF CENTURIES OLD ARTIFACTS



Some of the artifacts include diaries and journals belonging to the founders, ledgers, profit and loss accounts, company seals, employment records and many more documents from the early 1800s.

George Steuart & Co, Sri Lanka's oldest mercantile establishment has commenced an exciting project to restore a repository of artifacts that trace back to its founding in 1835 and its early operations. The recently uncovered artifacts include diaries and journals belonging to the founders, ledgers, profit and loss accounts, company seals, employment records and many more documents from the early 1800s. The restoration is being conducted under the careful guidance and expertise of the National Library and Documentation Services Board Sri Lanka in order to preserve and archive the rare collection.

Of particular interest is a collection of documents that belonged to the three founding brothers of George Steuart & Co, Captain James Steuart, Joseph Steuart and George Steuart, who first sailed to Ceylon in 1806. The records pertaining to the company itself offer a rare glimpse into the day to day workings of mercantile Ceylon during the Empire. There is evidence of George Steuarts preeminence within the economy of the time, including its

enrolment as the first member of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Included in the restoration are a trove of items of historic interest such as monetary notes and coins the company had used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, correspondence with officials in Britain, furniture, books and journals with handwritten notes that offer a first-hand glimpse into the establishment of the early commercial ventures, a handful of which continue in some form to this date. The collection also comprises newspapers from the 1800s as well as first editions of poetry books and lithographs that depict reflections of early Ceylon by travelers and merchants.

Sonala Gunawardana, Chairman of the National Library and Documentation Services Board under whose guidance the project has been initiated expressed, "It is a delight and an honor to be involved in the restoration of the George Steuart collection of artifacts. A collection such as this adds rich detail to our knowledge of how early Ceylon functioned. There is a great necessity to find, restore and archive artifacts of this nature in order to have a more



thorough understanding of the building blocks of our socioeconomic history. It is admirable that over the centuries, George Steuart & Co has maintained this collection through the many changes that have taken place in the nation as well as in the company. We hope more companies with similar heritage will partner with us to preserve their archives." □



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# DIMO CULTIVATES LOVE FOR HOME GARDENING WITH 'FOOTPRINTS' DIY KITS



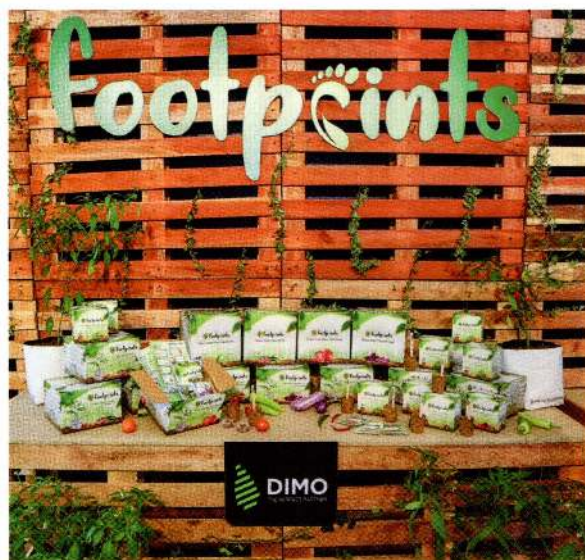
Ranjith Pandithage, Chairman and Managing Director, DIMO; Gahanath Pandithage, Group CEO, DIMO and Asanga Ranasinghe, Director/CMO, DIMO with the popular social media content creators at the footprints launch.



Attendees at the launch of footprints.



The footprints Do-It-Yourself home gardening kits offers a range of products.



**D**IMO, one of Sri Lanka's leading conglomerates, continues to demonstrate its respected credentials as a responsible corporate entity with the launch of its latest venture footprints Do-It-Yourself (DIY) home gardening kits for the whole family.

The virtual unveiling of footprints took place with the patronage of Ranjith Pandithage, Chairman and Managing Director, DIMO, distinguished guests and a team of social media content creators. Having built a strong reputation for its unmatched expertise and trust in different sectors, DIMO has made a significant impact in the agriculture business with the vision of leading the

way in the space of next generation agriculture. The purpose of footprints is to promote home gardening as a family bonding activity, which helps the holistic development of children and as a way of relaxation, which in return delivers happy and joyful memories and moments with loved ones. To facilitate this, footprints has made home gardening a very convenient process through the novel concept of all-in-one DIY home gardening kits that consist of all the resources necessary to start growing a plant from the seeding stage and up until it bears fruits.

The footprints home gardening kit comes in two types 'Nursery Care Kit'

and 'Complete Care Kit'. The Nursery Care Kit is a convenient home gardening combo pack, which includes seeds, coir pots, peat pellets and plant markers. This can be used as a starter kit to grow your own vegetables at home. It is recommended for those who have a backyard, home garden or plant pots.

While the 'Complete Care Kit' is a comprehensive all-in-one convenient home gardening combo pack. This is recommended for those who live in apartments and with a very limited outdoor space at home.

The footprints product range is now available at leading supermarkets, e-commerce stores and at [dimoretail.lk](http://dimoretail.lk).





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Our Commitment. Your Success.



# THEME RESORTS & SPAS WINS 'SUSTAINABILITY RISING STAR' AWARD



(L-R): Janith Iddawala, Assistant Manager - Group Business Development and Sustainability; Maxime Wickramasinghe, Director; Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman; and Chamin Wickramasinghe, CEO with the award.



Environment & Sustainability Society after a cleanup project.

Theme Resorts & Spas' unwavering commitment to sustainability was reaffirmed at the Asia Corporate Excellence & Sustainability Awards 2020 by winning the award of 'Sustainability Rising Star' under the sustainability category. ACES awards is organized by MORS group and is considered to be one of the most reputed accolades that recognises inspiring leaders and sustainability advocates cross-industry and across Asia. Amidst tremendous competition from across the region, the jury panel admired Theme Resort's commitment to sustainable development by actioning diverse solutions to sustainability challenges faced by the company especially during a pandemic centric time period. The award was presented to Theme Resorts & Spas in recognition of its efforts in creating new pathways and piloting change especially through grassroot sustainable initiatives.

The overarching sustainable policy of Theme Resorts & Spas is based on two fundamental pillars: environment and social, highlighting its formal pledge to the protection, conservation and upliftment of the environmental and social bottom lines within and beyond the company whilst driving sustainable economic growth. The twin pillars of sustainability have been developed to encompass some of the key impact areas of the tourism industry; such as the environment, employees, local community, culture and heritage. Some examples of its environmental sustainability efforts include the usage of renewable energy, comprehensive waste management systems (including the company's very own paper recycling plant located at Aliya Resort & Spa) and the maintenance of in-house organic gardens that contribute to the overall fruits and vegetables requirement in

most of its hotels. Given the downtime created as a result of the persisting pandemic situation, the company has ventured into new avenues such as Agro-tourism with the active participation of company staff members as well. Moreover, some initiatives undertaken for the upliftment of the local community includes generating employment through the creation of job opportunities within the hotels where it prioritizes hiring from the local community, sourcing hotel day-to-day requirements from surrounding communities to stimulate local economy and having dedicated corporate social responsibilities initiatives specifically aimed at the marginalized rural communities. They provide employees with sustainability education and training to improve their knowledge on sustainable business operations, and encourage employees to actively take part in the company's sustainability initiatives through its resort-wide environment and sustainability society.

Reconstruire et Vivre (Rebuild & Live), the long-standing CSR arm founded and run by the founders and directors of Connaissance De Ceylan and Theme Resorts & Spas is an umbrella initiative that collectively conducts as well as coordinates a number of socio-economic development projects in various parts of the country with the aim of bettering the lives of marginalized local communities. The company's latest sustainability initiative - Biodiversity Educational Research Initiative (BERI) is developed to address one of the longstanding sustainability related concerns in Sri Lanka - biodiversity conservation. The main scope of BERI is to facilitate research promotion and education for local and international students, researchers as well as other interested stakeholders on Sri Lankan biodiversity. 





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## DFCC Bank launches Affinity Credit Card



Thimal Perera, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, DFCC Bank (fifth from left) handing over the symbolic DFCC Bank - Trinity College Old Boys' Association, Colombo Branch Affinity Credit Card to Romesh Jayawardena, President, Trinity College Old Boys' Association, Colombo Branch (sixth from left) in the presence of (l-r): Achintha Hewanayake, Chief Operating Officer, DFCC Bank; Samathri Kanyawusam, Vice President General Legal, DFCC Bank; Aasiri Iddamalgoda, Senior Vice President Branch Banking and SME, DFCC Bank; Denver Lewis, Vice President/Head of Card Centre, DFCC Bank; Clifford Shadrach, Treasurer Trinity College Old Boys Association Colombo Branch; and Duminda Silva, Vice President Retail Assets & Liability Sales, DFCC Bank.

DFCC Bank has partnered with the Trinity College Kandy Old Boys' Association, Colombo Branch (TCK OBA, Colombo Branch) to launch an Affinity Credit Card for its members. Primarily, a percentage of the joining and annual fees will be contributed by DFCC Bank to the TCK OBA, Colombo Branch. A percentage of spending

through the card by the primary and supplementary cardholders will be contributed to TCK OBA, Colombo Branch.

Thimal Perera, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, DFCC Bank commenting on the partnership said, "This partnership between DFCC Bank and the TCK OBA, Colombo Branch is a timely reminder that an Affinity Card

is able to create a sense of pride to the loyal alumni, while also supporting a cause that works towards nourishing the future leaders of Sri Lanka. With the DFCC Affinity Credit Card, not only are the cardholders enjoying various benefits with the Bank, but they are able to financially support their alma mater with the percentage

contribution made from their annual fees and card spend."

The cardholders can enjoy a wide array of other benefits from the Bank. The Affinity Credit Card allows DFCC cardholders to save as they spend, earning one percent cash back on every transaction, which is then credited to a DFCC savings account. They can also avail a plethora of benefits throughout the year, with the DFCC partner merchants available island-wide.

Cardholders will be able to set up flexi payment plans, transfer other credit card balances and take quick cash advances up to 75 percent on their credit card limit and pay in installments of up to 36 months with attractive interest rates in the market through a hassle free setting up process.

DFCC Bank was ranked amongst Business Today's Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.

## DFCC Credit Cards Offer Greater Financial Freedom



DFCC Bank, through the use of new technology and innovative solutions, offers convenient payment processing options to cardholders and merchants alike.

Accordingly, DFCC Bank offers its credit cardholders flexibility and convenience through a range of financial solutions to enhance their lifestyle and purchasing power, while also reducing financial costs.

Zero percent Easy Payment Plans offered at selected partner

outlets and on transactions enables DFCC credit cardholders to 'Buy Now, Pay Later' with installment plans extending up to 36 months. Easy Payment Plans are also offered for other transactions with the lowest processing fee in the market. Furthermore, the loan on card facility enables cardholders to obtain an instant cash loan on the credit card up to 75 percent of the available credit limit and settle it in installments up to 36 months, also at the lowest

processing fee in the market. This is a hassle-free and swift solution, which is ideal for any urgent financial requirement, said the Bank. Appealing to cardholders of other institutions, DFCC Card Balance Transfer scheme enables customers to transfer the balance of other credit cards to a DFCC credit card and settle the amount in equal monthly installments up to 24 months with a low processing fee. DFCC credit cardholders are also re-

warded with one percent cash back 365 days of the year on every transaction and it could be credited to the cardholders own or kith and kin's DFCC Bank savings, current or junior saving account. Cardholders also earn an interest on the CashBack amount when credited to a savings account, making it a double reward.

Now applying for a credit card has been made easier. Applicant's could visit DFCC's award winning website [dfcc.lk](http://dfcc.lk) and apply online for a credit card by filling the form with required information and submit. A staff member will establish contact with the applicant to complete the process.

DFCC Bank was ranked amongst Business Today's Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.

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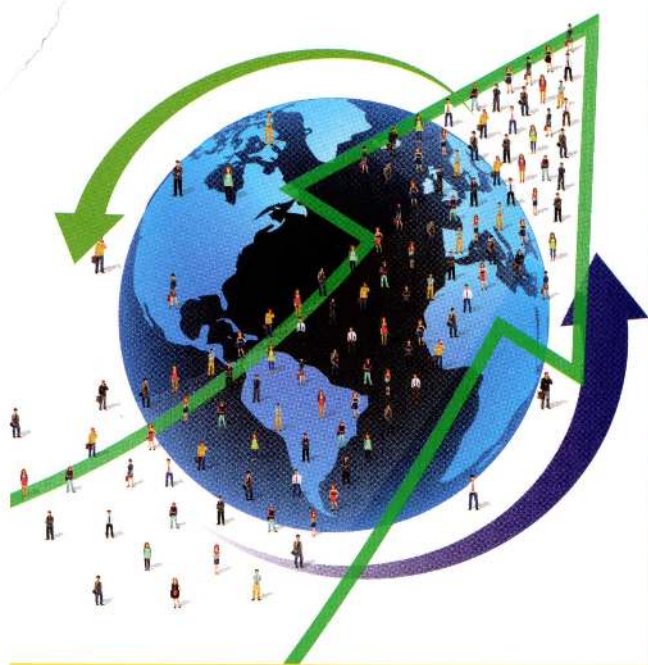


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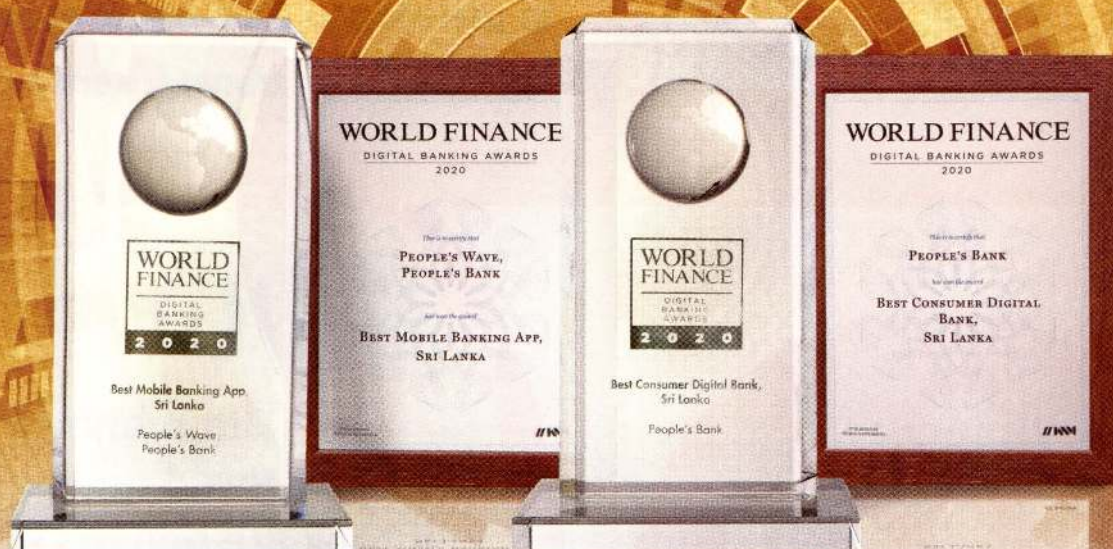


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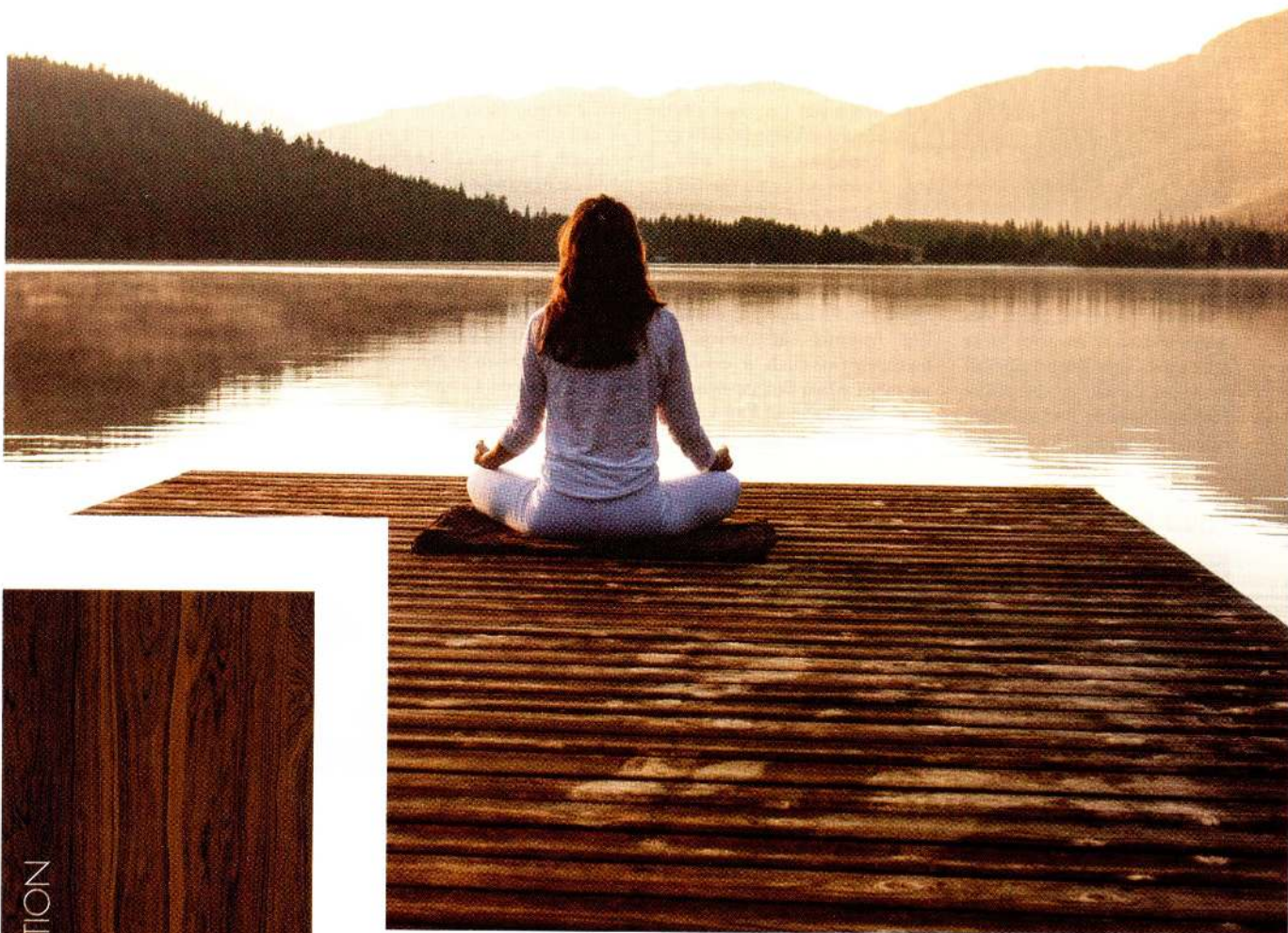
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## HNB as the Best Managed Bank During COVID-19 in Sri Lanka



Jonathan Alles, Managing Director and CEO, HNB with the awards.

Hatton National Bank was acknowledged as the 'Best Managed Bank During COVID 19 in Sri Lanka' by the Asian Banker Magazine, and Jonathan Alles, Managing Director and

CEO, HNB was awarded the Leadership Achievement Award for having delivered the Best CEO response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. Commenting on the recognition, Jonathan Alles, MD/CEO said, "I am indebted to my staff for their sacrifices and tremendous dedication in ensuring smooth continuity of business at such a critical moment when our customers needed us the most. Our strategy during this time was fo-

cused on providing essential support to those who were most severely impacted by the COVID crisis, while extending our assistance to all customers to rapidly transition into digital banking channels. We are proud to say that these efforts have been very successful. As a nation, we still have a tough road ahead, but we remain optimistic that if we continue to work together, we can overcome any challenge and support a grassroots recovery in key sectors of the national economy."

HNB provided essential relief to over 85,000 customers, covering 40 percent of the Bank's lending portfolio, through moratoriums and has thus, far approved working capital financing of approx. 24 billion rupees under the Central Bank relief schemes. HNB also set up a five billion rupees' fund to support the SME customers who were not eligible under the CBSL schemes. This scheme was launched utilizing the bank's own funds.

HNB was ranked amongst the Business Today Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.

## HNB Fund to Support 200 Microfinance Customers



G A A Niluksha, Kadawatha Microfinance Customer presented with a cheque by Jonathan Alles, Managing Director/CEO, HNB and HNB Sustainability Foundation Chairman, with (from left) Kailavasan Indravan, Head of SME and Microfinance, HNB; Vinodh Fernando, Assistant General Manager - Network Management, HNB; L Chiranthi Cooray, Chief Transformation Officer/DGM and HNB Sustainability Foundation Trustee; and Sanjay Wijemanne, Deputy General Manager - Retail & SME Banking, HNB.



K S Malkanthi, Homagama Microfinance customer presented with a cheque by Bandara Rekagama, Head of Microfinance, HNB in the presence of Mahinda Seneviratne, Regional Business Head - South Western Region; Ajith Thatawatte, Homagama Customer Center Manager, HNB; and Hasitha Suresh, Microfinance Relationship Officer, HNB.



S Selvarajah, Batticaloa Microfinance customer presented with a cheque by Balakrishnan Giritharan, Regional Business Head - Eastern Region, HNB in the presence of Mylvaganam Raveendran, Batticaloa Customer Center - Microfinance Relationship Manager, HNB; Alfred Nirmalakumar, Batticaloa Customer Center Manager, HNB and Ramanathan Gobinath, Microfinance Relationship Manager - Eastern Region, HNB.

HNB has launched a 20 million rupees grant fund to support 200 microfinance customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic across the country. The fund, established by the Bank through the HNB Sustainability Foundation will offer microfinance customers up to 100,000 rupees to upscale their businesses and work

towards achieving SME status. HNB will grant funds in two phases to chosen microfinance customers with a view to revive as well as continue businesses impacted by the pandemic.

"I am very pleased to announce the launch of this vital source of funding through our Sustainability Foundation in support of microfinance en-

trepreneurs. 2020 has been extraordinarily challenging for all and this initiative comes at a most opportune and appropriate moment when businesses across the island are seeking the capital necessary to restart work. Our expectation is that our customers will make good use of this grant, for working capital, recapitalizing their business and get back on their feet. As we have worked with the microfinance sector for more than three decades and SME sector since our origins, we have come to understand that we need to scale up our support by providing them with the necessary financial assistance and literacy to uplift them from the grassroots to become a SME," expressed Jonathan Alles, MD and CEO, HNB and Chairman of the HNB Sustainability Foundation.

The Bank's Sustainability Foundation drives corporate citizenship through its strategic pillars, with customer centers across the island, undertaking location-based CSR projects involving the community and staff. The Foundation's strategic pillars includes - education, healthcare, empowering entrepreneurship and the environment.

"It has been a long-term goal of the HNB Sustainability Foundation to establish an impact fund to create more opportunities for customers at the grass roots by collaborating with partners locally and internationally. With this fund we hope to provide livelihoods and act as a catalyst in Sri Lanka's journey towards sustainable development," said L Chiranthi Cooray, Chief Transformation Officer/DGM and HNB Sustainability Foundation Trustee.





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(+94) 718 10 99 89  
[info@arugambayroccos.lk](mailto:info@arugambayroccos.lk) | [arugambayroccos.lk](http://arugambayroccos.lk)



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## Arugambay PodBay

Arugambay PodBay is a novel concept that comprises compact convertibles (NapPods) in pastel hues, HomePods and Bay rooms. The seaside hotel has one of the largest swimming pools in the area (WaterPod), and the restaurant PotPod serves a range of cuisine and beverages in an area ideal for relaxation.

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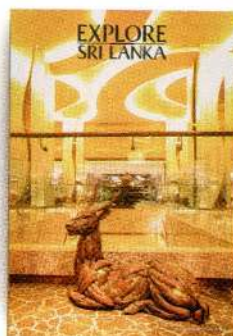


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