

SRI LANKA SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND Inc *NEWSLETTER*

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Sri Lanka Society of Queensland, I wish all members, friends and their families a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I hope that the New Year will bring health and happiness to you.

This is the 35th year of the Sri Lanka Society and I feel very privileged to be part of an organisation which values the rich traditions of Sri Lanka.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for their energy and positive support leading to the wonderful job they have done this year. I also am very grateful to the members and friends of the society who have supported us during the various events and activities.

The Sri Lanka Society cordially welcomes any new members and the Committee hopes to meet you at our New Year Function on the 26th of April.

Hermin Goonetilleke

FROM THE EDITOR

Year 2013 whisked away as quickly as it arrived, with everyone's life full on nowadays and preceding two months no different pace wise. During the last two months, the world saw a couple of significant events taking place, tropical Cyclone Haiyan making landfall in Philippines with devastating effects and a heavy loss of lives and passing away of Nelson Mandela who fought against all forms of domination and for equal opportunity, one of all time great leaders the world has seen. South Africans are now reaping the benefit of Nelson Mandela's sacrifices, twenty seven years behind bars out of which 18 years in Robben Island off Cape Town. During my sailing days in eighties, I was subjected to apartheid myself in South Africa when everything was racially segregated which now is history, though Mandela's legacy will remain for a long time to come.

Whilst Christians all over the world celebrating Christmas, Sri Lankan community in Brisbane had the rare opportunity of witnessing the opening of stupa and bodiya, which have been beautifully constructed at Goodna temple according to Buddhist traditions and artistic sculptures. It was a pleasing sight to see all walks of life gathering to grace the occasion at Goodna Temple. On the home front back in Colombo, all Sri Lankans should be proud of the way Sri Lanka successfully conducted CHOGM though not without some unwanted controversy which overshadowed the good work to a certain degree. It was encouraging to learn the extraordinary support extended to Sri Lanka by our own Prime Minister Tony Abbot for which all Sri Lankans should be grateful.

While having a yarn to my not so young neighbour recently he said, "It's the time of year when Christmas lunches, dinners, parties, fine dining are abundant or even take away when the time pressure is on. My New year's resolution is to shed extra energy in the gym or water front jogging, walking, trekking, dancing or what it takes to keep healthy and fit". How appropriate is that for all of us! I wish my New Year's resolution be the same and probably yours too.

Thank you for the patronage over the year.

Merry Christmas, All the Best Wishes for a Safe and a Happy New Year 2014!

Hambantota HarbourWhat's the Future!

It's been over a couple of years since Hambantota harbour was commissioned with much publicity claiming over a considerable number of ships passing each day South of Dondra, in East – West shipping route and its potential to attract these vessels for bunkering, provisions etc. Bunker fuel Storage tanks have been built and completed over six months ago, pumps and associated pipework said to have been tested, commissioned in preparation for bunkering, though not much put into use yet for bunkering. Car carriers have been diverted to Hambantota from Colombo to provide some occupancy to the harbour. Additionally, cabinet approval has been granted for several investment projects, a US\$220 million Sugar Refinery, raw sugar to be imported mainly from South America for refining and exporting, cement grinding / bagging plant, fertiliser plant, petro chemical plant and warehouses.

Port of Colombo with high number of ship arrivals, yet the total bunker sales per month is about 30000 tonnes. Hambantota will have some bunker sales on completion of aforementioned projects and commissioned though not expected to be closer to Colombo sales. Bunker sales in Colombo is reasonably high mainly due to bunkering fast turn around ships (feeder container ships and container ships) whereas Hambantota as can be seen, will mainly be catering for general cargo ships with slow turn around time combined with much less shipping traffic. Car carriers may or may not take bunkers at Hambantota as these ships usually call Middle Eastern ports and Singapore on its voyage where the bunkering is cost beneficial to the ship owner. This is probably due to the fact that Sapugaskanda refinery is not producing sufficient Heavy Fuel Oil for bunker sales even for Port of Colombo requirement with the gap quantity being imported by various bunker operators. Daily operation cost of ships being very high nowadays as such ship owners adopting various cost cutting measures to maintain the bottom line. It's a fact to say that over 250 ships are passing daily just South of Dondra though usually, ships prefer to take bunkers from either load port or discharge port, therefore under the current port strategy it is unlikely ships sailing South of Dondra would call Hambantota diverting from its normal route adding more time to its voyage, just to take bunkers unless in urgent situations, as loosing even six hours for bunkers (diversion and bunkers costing more) means an additional expense on top. Therefore as can be seen, it is likely that under the current port strategy, Hambantota will be seen mainly as a general cargo port with some bunkering though not as high as claimed. The scenario probably would make Hambantota a port not fully occupied like any other small port in the region. However all's not bad news for Hambantota as there is potential to increase the occupancy and productivity to make the port viable by different means other than already stated.

So what's the possible solution to make it work!

Aging refineries in Australia are being closed down due to high operations and maintenance cost. Shell Clyde Refinery has already closed down and Caltex Kurnell will be closing its gates in less than a year while Caltex Refinery in Brisbane still up in the air for the decision. This well may be the case in other Western countries too in the near future. Therefore, having a refinery closer to Hambantota port will be beneficial, as countries like Australia will be importing finished products, which could well be the

cheaper energy option than refining. Refinery will also help to keep the bunker prices at Hambantota competitively lower which then will provide an additional marketing tool for future offshore bunkering (bunker barges) operating from Hambantota. This will also provide energy security for the country as Sapugaskanda Refinery is aging too. However, there will be challenges for a refinery project in Hambantota. Building a refinery involves a huge capital cost. As for the funding, Sri Lanka (BOI) should try, negotiate and convince a big oil company, the likes of Chevron, BP etc to build and operate a refinery. Offshore discharging (Single Point Mooring Buoy) method can be utilised to bring in crude oil as Port of Hambantota may not be big enough for large crude oil tankers. This is the summary of the refinery project without going much into details.

There is a huge demand for the dry dock in Colombo, the waiting period for a ship at times as long as two years, particularly for smaller ships. There will be many private enterprises willing to consider building a dry dock at Hambantota. No doubt, future dry dock at Hambantota will be fully occupied and business will be booming. There are provisions to build a dry dock at Port of Hambantota.

Hambantota port cannot afford any blind decisions taken without due considerations to the overall picture as it is not possible to reverse any decisions seems not right in future due to contractual obligations. Therefore, Sri Lanka should ideally take steps to set up a Port Development Committee drawn from various experienced shipping and commercial professionals to review current Hambantota port strategy and also to brainstorm in order to recommend new projects where warrants to optimise the profitable occupancy of the port for the best outcome for Hambantota and Sri Lanka.

By a Master Mariner Ex-Pilot Port of Colombo, Trincomalee and Galle



A film on faceless plantation workers

Behind every cup of the famed 'Ceylon tea' is a faceless labourer toiling in a plantation in Sri

Lanka all year. And when Sivamohan Sumathy zoomed in, undervalued labour was only one of the problems she saw.

"Plantation Tamils are never plotted within the story of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. I thought there was space for this kind of film," The Hindu correspondent in Colombo Meera Srinivasan quoted Ms. Sumathy, director of *Ingirunthu* (from here), which will soon hit Colombo cinemas as having said.

Upcountry Tamils or plantation Tamils, who the British brought to Sri Lanka from southern India — largely from Tirunelveli, Tiruchi, Madurai and Thanjavur — as labourers in the early 19th century, seldom figure in political discussions on Sri Lanka.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Ms. Sumathy explains that it was the urge to tell the story of a community that historically got very little attention, which led to the film.

The Hindu report: "Their story, Ms. Sumathy soon realised, was not just about labour and exploitation. She was then prompted to look at the role of the state, the idea of citizenship and belonging and how oppression — both by external and internal factors — works. "Conceptually, this is a war and peace film, you know."

The film, screened to the media here recently, does not employ a conventional narrative. It oscillates from being a feature film and, at times, a documentary that seeks to capture reality as it is.

"I did not want a narrative around three, four main characters. I consciously retained the feel of a documentary. I wanted to convey an overarching idea about the community itself. My protagonist is the community," says Ms. Sumathy.

She worked with the plantation community for some time before she made the film. Her

interaction with the workers made her a virtual "insider" who felt a strong connection with the people, who would gradually give her insights into the layered complexities of their lives. "The actors in the film are from the community itself," says Ms. Sumathy.

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Given the strong Indian connection the community has — though India and Tamil Nadu express their solidarity more often with the Sri Lankan Tamils inhabiting the war-torn Northern Province — the film looks at historical developments in the Indo-Lanka relationship that led to repatriation of some of the plantation Tamils critically, without any imposing commentary. There is no explicit plot or resolution in the narrative in the movie.

As the title "*Ingirunthu*" connotes, the film seeks to encourage the viewer to simply journey with a certain lesser-known reality. "I did not feel compelled to answer all the questions I have raised. In real life, do we have answers all the time?"

The actual shoot spanned about 18 days, but the post production work took much longer, says Ms. Sumathy, who has almost single-handedly raised funds to make the film. "About 80 per cent of it is my own money, but friends and family have chipped in."

Most beautiful butterfly's habitat in danger



One of the most beautiful butterflies in the country, Baronet Euthalia nais, found only in the Nilgala area, particularly in the Gal Oya National Park, is facing a severe threat due to the beedi industry destroying its habitat, says naturalist cum author Rajika Gamage. Beedi (the poor man's cigarette) makers destroy thousands of plants, which annually host these magnificent butterflies, to take their leaves for wrapping beedi, he said. To make matters worse, Wild life and Nature Conservation

Minister has decided to give away some 300 acres from this area for traditional cultivations.

Gamage strongly believes that the authorities should reverse such decisions for the sake of these species that attract thousands of visitors. Gamage, who had conducted comprehensive studies on butterfly host plants, said that Coromandel Ebony or East Indian Ebony (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) is a species of flowering tree in the family Ebenaceae that is native to India and Sri Lanka. Its common name is derived from the coast of southeastern India, Coromandel; locally it is known as kudumberiya or by its Hindi name tendu. In Odisha and Jharkhand it is known as kendu.

The leaves can be wrapped around tobacco to create the beedi. He also said that the leaf of the tree contains valuable flavones. The pentacyclic triterpene compounds found in leaves possess antimicrobial properties, while the bark shows anti-hyperglycemic activity.

The bark of the four species found here also contains significant anti-plasmodial effects against *Plasmodium falciparum*, which causes malaria in humans.

- Sources: Sri Lanka Media

Migration to Australia – Some Early Historical Facts

People have always been migrating from one country to another over land, sea or flying. Shipping companies in Europe employed migrant ships from last quarter of nineteenth century, across Atlantic Ocean to thrive on those wanting to migrate to America. Many people from as far as Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Turkey and Lebanon travelled over land to France to board migrant ships. Businesses employed migrant agents to convince people to migrate to America for greener pastures from last quarter of nineteenth century. Titanic, the infamous ship that sank in Atlantic Ocean in April, 1912 was one of those ships that had a lot of lower deck accommodation for migrants to America. Migration to Australia from Sri Lanka had begun in the nineteenth century. Below are a few facts.

- There is sufficient evidence to suggest that as far back as 1870, predominantly Cingalese (Sinhalese were known as Cingalese then) migrated to Australia at the time, particularly to North Queensland for work, mainly in sugar plantations.
- A group of Ceylonese arrived in Ormiston, Brisbane in 1870 to work on a sugar plantation. Many people boarded ships from Port of Galle, as this was the major port then, and people migrated to Australia mainly from the Southern coastal areas.
- There were various reasons as to why the Ceylonese decided to migrate in that era, such as collapse of coffee industry, unemployment and then Ceylonese government's certain decisions with regard to move off villagers from their land to make way for plantation etc.
- Method of recruitment of Ceylonese was such that when a planter or any other employer in Australia, wanted to recruit a group of people from Ceylon, local agents in Queensland had been employed who then contact an expatriate agent in Ceylon, probably an Australian living in Ceylon then. Expatriate local agent in Ceylon then had appointed a few Cingalese to recruit potential workers.
- It has been recorded that potential migrants said to have been given false information at times to attract them for migration.
- Contracts were often written and signed prior to recruitment. Some migrants had come on three years contracts with the option of sailing back to Ceylon upon completion of the contract.
- SS Devonshire had in 1882 said to have brought over five hundred workers from Ceylon to sugar plantation in Queensland.
- It is recorded that an interpreter and a medical officer too, were employed on board migrant ships.
- It was not always plain sailing for early migrants as they sometimes met with some resistance from local workers.
- Some migrants opted to sail back to Ceylon on completion of their contracts while others opted to stay back.

Reference : History of Australian Migration – W. Weerasooriya



News & Events

01.01.2014	Goodna Temple	Special New Year Pinkama
02.02.2014	Sri Lanka Society of Qld	Annual General Meeting
02.02.2014	Richmond Mahinda OBA	Family Fun Day
08.02.2014	Sri Lanka Sports Association	Valentine's Day Dinner Dance
16.02.2014	Olcott Day Dana	Nalanda College OBA
22.02.2014	Japura Alumni	Japura Alumni get together



Rumassala – Out of place hill and the Jungle beach off Galle Harbour

Anyone walking or driving down Marine Drive in Galle wouldn't miss the hill adjacent to Galle Harbour Bay, known as Rumassala with a beautiful stupa on top of the hill. Looking at the terrain of the surrounding area, it seems that Rumassala Hill is noticeably situated out of place with no other hills of similar nature close by.

It has been stated in the history that during Rama and Rawana war, Hanuman was sent to Himalaya to bring medicinal herbs for treatment to Rama's brother who was injured in the war. Hanuman just couldn't remember the name of herbs he was asked to bring when he arrived Himalaya, therefore decided to take a chunk of Himalaya peak containing medicinal herbs. The chunk of Himalaya Hanuman brought slipped and broke into five pieces, out of which one fell to Rumassala. "Kalunika" the magical plant believed by ancient Sri Lankans and extremely hard to find plant, is said to be in Rumassala.

There is also a beach down Rumassala, access by steep trekking down the hill passing beautiful trees and

herbs etc. It is sometimes hard to imagine the existence of a beautiful jungle beach so close to Galle town with Galle Dutch Fort and town in sight.

The Cricketer – Had the potential to play for England or Sri Lanka

Gehan Mendis born in Colombo, right hand batsman played 366 first class matches for Lancashire and Sussex between 1973 and 1993. Gehan scored 21436 runs with an average of 36.83, scoring 41 centuries and 108 half centuries. Gehan was very unfortunate not to be selected for England cricket team with his excellent first class batting record. He probably kept trying for a berth in English Cricket Team. He could have easily played for Sri Lanka.

Gamini Malini

Legendary artist Hon Dr Malini Fonseka needs no introduction. Recently she was in Brisbane to attend a Film Festival as an adjudicator. She was kind enough to find time in her busy schedule to have dinner with Sri Lankans at La Kandy Restaurant, hosted by Anton Swan, Hon Consul for Sri Lanka in Queensland.

Legends Gamini and Malini were pretty much household names in sixties and seventies. Exceptionally talented Gamini Fonseka was known for calling spade a spade. If you got a few minutes to spare, listen to the legend's last public speech. Gamini and Malini !

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abp9u6ZEFcw>

Poor quality, possibly contaminated drinking water has affected nearly half a million people in Sri Lanka consequently suffering from deadly kidney disease with lot of lives lost, particularly in North Central Province. People have been drinking water from the same sources for a long time nevertheless it is within last two decades, the deadly disease suddenly cropped up. So what's the root cause? Some say excessive use of certain Agro chemicals and fertilisers. Whatever the cause may be, a group of Sri Lankans mostly professionals have got together with the hope of setting up water purifications plants to provide much needed clean drinking water.

Please refer to the attachment as to how you can help to save our school children from being affected with the deadly disease by water not suitable for drinking. The attachment through Sri Lanka High Commission in Canberra, gives a run down to the background of the problem and how you can help!

Please donate generously for this worthy cause!