



# New Zealand Lanka

## Newsletter of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Incorporated

Volume 39 Autumn 2008

### From the President ....

Our annual event Lankanite dinner dance on 31 December was a huge success filled with fun and excitement. The enthusiastic dancers didn't feel the dawn of the New Year; they were all engrossed in winning prizes for a variety of activities and enjoying the Sri Lankan meal which was served in traditional clay pots in a buffet style. The table filled with Kiribath and sweetmeats was something which everyone enjoyed just before they left. Wasn't that a fantastic opportunity for all of us to welcome and celebrate the New Year as a family?

New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation took pride in inviting the Sri Lankan High Commissioner for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific His Excellency Mr. K Balapatabendi as the Chief Guest on the occasion of commemorating Sri Lanka's 60<sup>th</sup> Independence Day along with our new Honorary Consul Aruna Abeygunasekera and Hon Chris Carter, Minister of Ethnic Affairs as our guests of honour. The traditional oil lamp was lit by the leaders of all Sri Lankan organizations and ethnicities. As I stated in my speech, the celebration was organised as a sign of unity, invoking blessings from all religions for peace in Sri Lanka. We are an organisation committed to peace and harmony among all Sri Lankan ethnicities, and thus it is our mission to keep the lamp of hope burning brighter. This is why when the Foundation was established 10 years ago, we chose our motto as "Unity is the key force that brings harmony and understanding." Everyone who enjoyed the event had an opportunity to have a traditional Sri Lankan breakfast with kiribath, lunumiris, malu ambul thiyal, kavun, munkavun, kokkis and malupan with the finest of home grown tea. As keynote speaker, Gamini Jayasooriya reflected on our past achievements whilst Mr. Balapatabendi detailed the government's vision and shared some of his personal experiences as the former Presidential Secretary and also as the current Ambassador.

Our annual Summer BBQ blended with a different flavor this year. The West Indies Community joined us for an inaugural Twenty 20 Cricket Match and shared their style of spicy BBQ and music. With this get-together we have found lots of common grounds in our food, music, dancing and the two cultures, and have forged a fruitful bond with the West Indies community. Sri Lankans won the childrens' and the mens' matches whilst the West Indies ladies were too strong for ours. I like to thank Amitha Weerakoon of the Sri Lankan Cricket Club for putting together a strong team for us and winning the Foundation Cup thereby putting the West Indies into a challenging position for next year. Live music was played by The Carribean Stars Steel Pan Band to everyone's enjoyment.

We are in the months of celebrations in our Sri Lankan calendars. Month of April celebrates the Sinhala Tamil New Year, and month of May celebrates the Vesak. May I take this opportunity to wish each and everyone happy celebrations of our cultural events.

**Manjula Sanis Walgampola**



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### Next Event:

### 'Annual General Meeting'

### Calendar of Events:

July 2008 - Annual General Meeting

September 2008 – Gypsies



## Sri Lankans in Auckland, New Zealand celebrate Independence in Grand Style

The Minister of Education and Ethnic Affairs, Hon. Chris Carter praised the efforts of Sri Lankan Children in New Zealand schools. Speaking as a Distinguished Guest, he said last year at the elite Auckland Grammar School, that out of 40 prize winners, eight were Sri Lankans.



He also had a good word for the service done by Sri Lankan medical professionals. He commended their selfless service to the maintenance of public health standards in hospitals in New Zealand. He said they have been known to have rendered commendable service from 1976.

The celebration was held at the SGI International Cultural Centre in Ellerslie Auckland on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2008 in commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence from British Rule

The celebration was organized by the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation. Children of all communities living in New Zealand added to the grandeur of the occasion. A large gathering of new Kiwis, Sri Lankans from the adjoining province of Hamilton, friends and well-wishers graced the occasion. It was truly a multi-cultural event.

The High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Australia, His Excellency Kusumsiri Balapatabendi, was the Chief Guest and the Honorary Consul for Sri Lanka in New Zealand, Mr. Aruna Abeygunasekera was present as a distinguished guest.

In her welcoming speech, the President of the Sri Lanka New Zealand Foundation, Manjula Walgampola, warmly welcomed the Hon. Minister, the Chief Guests and the distinguished guest and all Sri Lankans on the occasion of this important national event. The program included items by children from the Sinhalese, Tamil, Burgher and Muslim communities.

There was a Maori Powhiri (welcome) in the Maori language which added an extra aura of religious fervour to the celebration.

The national flag of Sri Lanka was hoisted by the Chief Guest, His Excellency Kusumsiri Balapatabendi and the national flag of New Zealand was hoisted by the Hon. Minister of Education and Ethnic Affairs, Chris Carter.

Prior to the cultural dances, there were multi-religious observances by the Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Islamic Faiths.

A highlight of the prayer by the Islamic preacher was: "O Allah, we are grateful to you for all the goodness, love and

grace you lavishly bestowed in our lives. The unity you nurtured among communities. Strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice. Help us to abolish violence. Overcome economic injustice. Hasten the day when all races in our country can live together in true peace and unity.

"Give unto our government a due respect for your Sovereign rule over all nations. Enter their hearts that they may govern by compassion for peoples everywhere. We pray for our children, youth and adults. Strengthen their wills to have a successful experience and good citizenship.

"Give victory and aid our forces who are defending the land and providing protection to the people. Make them triumphant, make their feet firm, their hearts strong, unite their word, gather their ranks, guide them to the ways of peace and take them out of darkness to the brightness of light. Dissipate the efforts of the enemies to cause mayhem in the country."

Mr. Gamini Jayasuriya, a long term resident of Auckland, gave the Key note address.

There were performances by the children of the Sinhala, Burgher, Tamil and Muslim communities. The Muslim children enacted a now famous welcome song that the Medinite Arabs sang when the Prophet Muhammad arrived in Medina as a migrant after escaping the Quraish persecution.

A kapingna dance to the tune of "Aaji tapara La hi ya, biscu, biscu Lahiya" by a set of triplets kept the audience active and interacting. There was joyous audience participation in their singing and dancing.

The celebrations ended with the singing of the National Anthem of Sri Lanka, that of New Zealand both in English and Maori in which too there was wide audience participation.

By M.C.A. Hassan

## We are on correct path to resolving conflict'

Sri Lanka's top diplomat in the Pacific region Kusum Balapatabendi paid a visit to New Zealand recently on the occasion of Sri Lanka's 60 years of independence. Incidentally it was his first trip to Auckland at the invitation of New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation. The Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Australia in this exclusive interview with Darpan-The Mirror gives an insight into the conflict and talks about the current situation in Sri Lanka.

Darpan -The Mirror: 60 years of independence and there's a big celebration out here in Auckland-what exactly are your feelings after this long journey?

Kusum Balapatabendi: Well, I feel that we have had successes, achievements and also failures. As a nation we have had failures and achievements. So, taking it to a balance, we feel that we have achieved more than what we have failed because failures are our own creation.

So this creation of failures could be recovered and corrected by unity among all the peoples of our nation. This is exactly what we achieved by getting independence. That was a united action of all the communities in my country.

So the failure started when the disunity arose 25-30 years ago; so this disunity has to be corrected-that correction has to go through our own efforts-no one from outside can do

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that. It has to be our own action among our own communities as one nation. That's how it can be restored.

**Q:** You raised a very important point when you said the problems started about 25-30 years ago, could you be specific on that?

**A:** The problem started when the terrorists started working against their own people. If you analyze what they have done, they have done more damage to the Tamils than anybody else has done to the Tamils. They have killed the largest number of Tamils in their own country, their own people; and not only the people of our country but even the Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi.

So this is something that is unforgettable, this is unpardonable because this is a destruction of a nation. Destruction of natural assets of our country, destruction of the assets of 20 million people in our country.

We cannot allow 5,000 terrorists to ruin the country. We cannot allow the 12 per cent population of Tamils to go under the hammer of the terrorists and suffer. And they also must have a future; and their future generations have to survive. And they have to survive in an atmosphere of harmony and peace.

This is exactly what we are trying to do.

So while we try to suppress them in one way, the other way we are trying to resolve the conflict. And we are on the correct path. We are on the track to finding a solution a solution acceptable to all the people. And that solution can come only by talking to all the minorities and all the majority people in our country.

This is what exactly our President has done President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka.

He appointed a committee of 13 political parties, representatives of the Parliament that's called the APRC. And they have worked out a solution.

Now the President has said "we now start working on a working paper." The working paper is based on the 13th Amendment which was brought in 1987. It's a verbatim record of the Indian Constitution brought by Rajiv Gandhi. Now that will be the beginning.

So whatever additions or whatever improvements necessary to suit the minority communities- Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and Malays- as much as resolve and as much as to satisfy the majority. To satisfy everybody there's going to be a solution in that.

**Q:** In the conflict, it has been brought to the attention by several sources from the media, one of the British journalists (Yvonne Ridley) that had gone in there; she was of the opinion that the Muslims are caught in the cross-fire between the government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) you need...

**A:** Well, I must say this when the last government that was a temporary government for two years of the present Leader of the Opposition, he entered into a CFA ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. He had never thought of the position of the Muslims in that context who were living in the eastern province of the country and in many parts of the country. So, they were shut out.

And this ceasefire agreement was between the government and the LTTE only. They recognised the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamils when there were 5,000 odd people in our country and he gave an equal status to the terrorists.

And the Muslims were forgotten; they agitated; the Muslims agitated; where are we, let us also come to discuss this, this affects us also; we are in the Eastern Province of the majority; why are you allowing all the terrorists to discuss about this?; why are you joining North and East together when we are in the eastern province?

So this abrogation of the CFA (ceasefire agreement) enables the Muslims to come forward and put up their stake in this whole problem. And this allows all the minority peoples in the country and all the majority people to find a compromise solution. And the solution is available through the majority community 74 per cent of Sinhalese, want this problem resolved, want this problem resolved; they do not want military resolution.

My President never wants a military solution. He is always for peaceful negotiation. It's on the cards.

**Q:** Yes but how come now the Muslims are being subjugated and terrorised by, you know, both the entities...

**A:** No. They can't do that because we have liberated the Muslims...we have liberated the Eastern province through war we have to liberate. And they are no longer under the LTTE. They are liberated and they are autonomous group of people and they have the right and stake to come up in the Local Government politics which are round the corner.

**Q:** The Ceasefire was being observed for such a long long time and only till recently...it has been forsaken and the Government issued a statement saying that it has run out of patience.

**A:** Well, I must say it was never observed. It was a dead letter. From the very beginning it was a dead letter.

They (LTTE) never came to settle. They never raised one issue with the then government at that time.

It was breached 7,000 times, more than 7,000 times by the LTTE. So there was no agreement to breach. There was no agreement in existence in the first place. And it was the right step that was taken to abrogate it... at least on paper because it was not available in action. It was a dead letter.

**Q:** Why this problem has cropped up of (demand for) a separate nation - a nation within a nation?

**A:** Yes. This is exactly the point you know. There is no need for a nation inside another nation. And there cannot be one country in another country.

That's a very small area in which they are living - they have confined themselves in.

But they were not alone by themselves; what they did was ethnic cleansing; they threw out all the Sinhalese, they threw out all the Muslims out of the Northern Province to show that this is their old native land when it was not so.

And they say this is our homeland; there is no homeland.

That is the homeland of all the Tamils, the whole of the country is the homeland of all the Tamils; the homeland of all the Sinhalese and the homeland of all the Muslims. There are no separate places for anybody. It is one nation.

There are Tamils living in the south of Sri Lanka, 54 per cent of Tamils are not living in the North and East. So that is the situation. So there's no need for a small state in one part of the country. That's a very small country of just 65,000 square kms.

**Q:** So Sri Lanka is absolutely not seeking any outside mediation from friendly countries?

**A:** We welcome any foreign country coming to help us in this matter. We welcome. We are inviting India our great neighbour to come and help us.

We are inviting any country who wants to come and help us, yes, we welcome. Because- it is something that they should do because of global terrorism now. It is raising its head; it's raising its ugly head and it is causing lot of problems in the entire world.

So all nations must get together not only Sri Lanka but the other neighbouring countries in the SAARC region, and even the European countries must get together, and in fact they have the EU and 25 countries together they have banned the LTTE.



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USA banned the LTTE; UK banned the LTTE; India banned the LTTE; Japan banned the LTTE; so they have proved that these are fellows who do not want peace; that is why they have banned the LTTE.

So there is a kind of cooperation from the rest of the world but it is not easy for us to give up, you know, retaliating when they attack.

As a Government we cannot do that. We cannot allow them to destroy busses, we cannot allow them to destroy trains, we cannot allow them to destroy our resources which they are doing.

They are killing innocent civilians-people can't go in a bus; people can't go in a train today-that's the situation. In such a situation the Government has to act. The Government has to respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country; that's the top priority.

**Q:** It might be so fascinating to see all the different religious ethnic groups live in peace and harmony outside the shores of Sri Lanka but in Sri Lanka itself there is another picture...

**A:** Well, that is confined to a particular area only. But the rest of the country if you take 95% of the population, they are united, there's total harmony. These 5000 fellows (LTTE) are creating problems in the North, not in the East as they were totally thrown out.

In some parts they come as small suicide bombers, you know, suicide kits that ladies come with the bombs tied to their breasts and they explode.

We have lot of inter-marriage in our country between people of all religions. Even here and even there we have Sinhalese getting married to Tamils and yesterday I was talking to somebody about this. There is a kind of harmony existing. All the unpleasantness and the problems are created by the terrorists. That is not the order of the day. That's more the exception than the rule.

**Q:** Are you looking anything in specific from New Zealand?

**A:** I expect all the Sri Lankans out here to live together-united whatever their differences be and help their country Sri Lanka to achieve prosperity and peace.

**Q:** Just a couple of weeks back a Sri Lankan independence day was celebrated by a different organisation and then we have this celebration out here-your thoughts?

**A:** Well that's the fundamental freedom people have. Freedom of expression is there, anybody can get together. And that is your freedom of expression and freedom of association is

there. And it may be the identity that they maybe in their own country that they have come together here and have different roots. But they are not differently together or differently opposed.

They have their own views but of course all working towards the same aim targeted to achieve peace and prosperity to the country.

[Appeared on Ceylon Daily News 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008]

### Sinhala Singer Par Excellence

I read with interest the letter of Humaira Harim Kamlanathan on 'Thai Air Hostess par excellence' (Daily New 25 Sep 2007). It is indeed a rare occurrence for a Thai hostess to speak in Sinhala and even assist the less literate in filling forms. The local airline management should commend her for kindness and consideration for others.

Last Saturday, I experienced a similar performance by a young Japanese lady; who occupied the same table with my family, at the dinner dance organised by New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation. We were allocated seats at this table by the Foundation President, who was a schoolmate of my daughter. During the dance, the President came to our table and invited the Japanese lady in Sinhala to sing.

To our compete surprise, she fluently replied in Sinhala for the Band to back her up. Some moments later, the compere announced that a little Japanese lady would sing for us.

Although we expected her to sing in her language or in English; she did two very popular Sinhala songs including the famous 'Ganga Addara'; with the gusto of a professional singer.

After the performance, she received an ovation but not a standing ovation, as deserved. Hence, this letter to appreciate the contribution made by Midori Hara, whose name I later gathered from the newsletter brought home to read at leisure.

I regret not being bold enough to congratulate her personally after her splendid performance. Thank you Midori for being an encouragement to our Sinhala lasses, while making us all happy.

[Appeared on Daily New on 11 Oct 2007]

Views expressed in articles are those of the contributing authors and may not necessarily reflect the views of the NZSLF

### Contributions

This newsletter is published quarterly. We welcome contributions to this newsletter and apologize for not being able to publish all contributions due to the limitation of the available space. We reserve the right to edit submitted material. Being a not for profit agency, we do not make any payments for articles. Please send your contributions to the Autumn Issue by 29 February 2008 to the correspondence address below. Attn: Editorial Committee or by email to: [nzslf@nzslfoundation.com](mailto:nzslf@nzslfoundation.com)

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