



New Zealand Lanka

Newsletter of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Incorporated

Volume 18 Summer 2002 / 2003

From the President....

Reasonable progress seems to have been made at the second round of peace negotiations that took place in Thailand recently. An agreement had been made to set up a special task force to carry out humanitarian and development projects in war affected regions without further delay. A decision to directly go into the 'secondary issues' at this relatively early stage of the peace process indicates the high level of commitment from all parties involved in the negotiations towards an amicable settlement. This doesn't mean that a quick solution has been found to the main problem. However it is clear that 'all issues' in the conflict are being given an equal level of priority so that the final goal can be achieved smoothly. This gives us a good indication of the positive direction of the peace negotiation so far.

The past few months would have been a very busy time for Sri Lankans in Auckland with a fair number of social and cultural events organised by various organisations. It is important to note that most of these events have achieved a reasonably high level of standard in all areas. It is an indication that the organisers have clearly identified the level of expectation of our community and we would like to see the continuation of the same spirit in all our future community activities.

The Foundation completed another highly successful event in September, *Sri Lanka Fest 2002*, Arts and Crafts festival. It was well attended by Sri Lankans and non Sri Lankans alike. The main feature of the event was the opportunity provided to Sri Lankan entrepreneurs to promote their businesses in New Zealand. On behalf of the organising committee I would like to thank guests, members, well wishers and all children who participated in the Art competition, for their valuable contribution to make this a successful event. Our next major event in the calendar will be the Dinner Dance to be held at *The Commerce Club of Auckland* on 31 December 2002 to welcome the dawn of the year 2003. I can assure you that the organising committee will be taking all possible measures to ensure everyone attending the Dinner Dance will have a highly enjoyable time.

As we are approaching the end of the year 2002, some of our members and readers will be planning to visit Sri Lanka during the December-January period. I would like to take this opportunity to wish them a safe journey and a good time with their friends and loved ones back home.

Sarath Pannila



Sri Lanka Fest 2002, Arts and Crafts festival. It was well attended by Sri Lankans and non Sri Lankans alike.

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Next Event:

On 31 December 2002, Foundation will be organising Lanka Nite 2002, Dinner Dance at The Commerce Club of Auckland, 27-33 Ohinerau Street, Remuera, starting from 7.30pm. There will be a delicious buffet dinner with a contemporary touch as well as a Sri Lankan flavor and dancing to the music of our very own Auckland based Kirthi Pasquel and his Ceylanians group. The venue is accessible from the Greenlane East motorway exit and has ample parking.

Please contact any Committee Member for table reservations.

Calendar of Events:

31 Dec 02: Lanka Nite 2002

15 Feb 02: Summer Outing

12 April 03: Sri Lankan New Year

Lanka Nite 2002

The Foundation has organised the annual 31st Night Dinner Dance to be held to welcome the dawn of the New Year 2003.

It will be held at the Commerce Club of Auckland, 27-33 Ohinerau Street, Remuera from 7.30 pm to 1 am and the Foundation would like to extend a warm invitation to all our members and well-wishers to attend this evening. Bring all your friends and family and attend it.

There will be a delicious buffet dinner with a contemporary touch as well as a Sri Lankan flavor and dancing to the music of our very own Auckland based Kirithi Pasquel and his Ceylanians group. The venue is accessible from the Greenlane East motorway exit and has ample parking.

Tickets are prized very nominally at \$35 per adult and \$ 20 for a child under 12. Dance only tickets will be priced at \$15 to be admitted after dinner. The dinner will be served at 8.30 to 10.00pm. Those who attend dance only will be permitted after 10.00pm.

Please book your tickets early to avoid disappointment as tickets are very limited. Bookings can be made with any committee member.

Sri Lanka Fest 2002

The Foundation held the second successful Art and craft festival – Sri LankaFest 2002 at the Mt Eden War Memorial Hall on Saturday the 28 September. The Chief Guest was Dr Ashraff Choudhary, MP who is the first Member of Parliament of Indian origin and the only Muslim MP in the NZ parliament. The Foundation is grateful to Dr Choudhary for his encouragement to our community by attending the event travelling all the way from Palmerston North. He has had a long association with The Foundation from its early days and we acknowledge his presence with grateful thanks.

The official part of the ceremony consisted of the ceremonial lighting of the oil lamp, a short cultural festival, welcome speech by the President of The Foundation and the address by Dr Ashraff Choudhary. Thesara Jayawardena and her students and a talented young dancer Performed.


The children's art exhibition, "Memories" was a huge success with a large number of entries of a very high standard. Children who won prizes were awarded gifts courtesy of several well wishers and all participants were awarded certificates. The Foundation appreciates the patronage of the judges, NZ Artist Mrs. Anne De Silva, award winning author and scriptwriter Mrs Sumithra Rahubaddha and artist Brigadier Percy Wijekoon for their time and input in judging the competition.

An unforgettable highlight of the event were the paintings, photographs, sculptures and artwork of the late Dr Norman Amerasinghe and we were fortunate to be able to give a glimpse of the vast talent of this Sri Lankan to our community.

NZSLF family for making this possible and sharing the work of this talented Lankan with the community.

Foundation acknowledges the contribution of Mrs. Vishakha Amerasinghe and family for making this possible and sharing the work of this talented Lankan with the community.

There were many varied trade and food stalls and some trade stalls as far away as from Sri Lanka. There was also a demonstration of hair products and hair styles, display of Aurvedic Products, a rare collection of stamps and coins by a young enthusiastic,



Prime Minister

13 November 2002

Sarath Pannila
New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation
10 Maclaurin Street
Blockhouse Bay
Auckland

Dear Sarath Pannila

Members of ethnic minority communities throughout New Zealand can be reassured that attacks on the Asian community, and on any other community, are viewed by this government as being ill informed and repulsive.

New Zealand has a proud history as a tolerant and open minded nation, accommodating difference and celebrating diversity.


Our government has an immigration programme which aims to meet New Zealand's development needs. It is important to look at how we actively recruit the people we need to fill the gaps in our labour market. It is also important to recognise the economic, social, and cultural contribution which ethnic communities make to New Zealand. Overseas students for example, now contribute more than a billion dollars to New Zealand each year.

Over the past three years we have made significant progress in developing our migrant settlement policies. We have:


- Appointed the first Minister for Ethnic Affairs.
- Begun to establish telephone interpreting services to enable non-English speaking New Zealanders to communicate more easily with government departments.
- Supported a range of settlement projects to help new migrants to find work.
- Begun the process of reconciling with descendants of early Chinese migrants.
- Started to develop the 'Ethnic Perspectives in Policy' document which will guide government departments on creating policy which is sensitive to the needs of ethnic New Zealanders.
- Encouraged skills-based migration which meets New Zealand's development needs within a capped quota.

We will continue to do all we can to promote New Zealand as a tolerant and inclusive nation.

Kind regards



Helen Clark
Prime Minister



Chris Carter
Minister for Ethnic Affairs

Parliament Buildings, Wellington, New Zealand.

A success story of a migrant doctor in New Zealand – Dr Gershu Paul

Finding jobs in New Zealand is a problem that most migrants face when they arrive in this country. Contrary to that common dilemma, there is one professional of Sri Lankan origin who has made it to the top in his chosen new country. We would like you to get to meet Dr Gershu Paul, the recently appointed CEO of the Southland District Health Board. He assumed duties of this position this year. An article written about him in the Southland Times by Health reporter David Cosgriff says that the board appointed Dr Paul for his passion and vision.

Sri Lankan born Dr Paul, who studied at Wesley College Colombo and speaks Sinhala, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada in addition to English is a success story but his journey to the top has certainly not been one strewn with rose petals all the way. He was born in Wattala, Sri Lanka and his father was a consultant to the ILO and UN. He was the third of four boys. His mother died when he was 3 and his father passed away when he was 17. His younger brother Arodi died a year later. He says that he was brought up by his elder brother Shimrath and his nanny Kalli Amma. He spent his schooling days at the Wesley hostel with his brother Arodi. He still keeps in touch with his Alma Mater. He says that he contributes to the old Wesleyite club in its current and also supports the college with its Internet programme.

Like most Lankan boys, he developed an interest in cricket early and played under 14 and under 16 cricket and captained the under 14 team. He also played hockey and played at national championships. He was also the best junior school student in 1972.

After leaving Wesley, young Gershu left to India to do his pre medicine. He attended Kerala University and obtained a BSc in Physics before pursuing medical studies. He met his future wife Anila who is an Indian from Kerala during this time.

Gershu represented the university in both hockey and cricket. He returned to Sri Lanka in 1989 with his wife Anila, an Indian from Kerala and baby daughter Ruth. He took care of his family business and worked as a resident doctor in Sri Lanka before he migrated to NZ in 1993 and settled in Dunedin.

Initially he did a Sport Diploma from Otago university and then completed and MBA at the same university. His first job in NZ was working for Southern Health in Invercargill as a consultant project person. Then he worked at the same company as its Manager Research and Development and commercial services for another year before becoming the General Manager, clinical services there. In 1998, He was appointed the General Manager of Radiology Services for Taranaki Health Limited where he worked until 1999. Then he was appointed the CEO of Fulford Radiology Services in New Plymouth and was appointed the General Manager of Southland District Health Board.

His career development seems to have gone up very quickly and he is probably the only Sri Lankan who is heading an organisation of such magnitude in New Zealand. He certainly has come a very long way from being a newly qualified doctor who worked as a Resident Doctor at a small nursing home in

Wattala Sri Lanka to heading a prominent organisation in his adopted country New Zealand. He says that his inspiration and source of strength has been Ani and Ruth along with his brother and his family in addition to a cousin Ann who saved his life in 1979. Ann lives with her family in Kerala, India.

Dr Paul enjoys reading and still play sports. He also enjoys his wife's cooking. He says that , "the key to where I am has been my faith in God and an attitude of never give up as I never have had a hidden agenda while being honest and up front. He is the first coloured Asian to head an institute of this nature in New Zealand. The hospital he heads has its origins in 1962 and employs approximately 1300 people and has a budget of nearly NZ \$ 120 million.

David Cosgriff says that Dr Paul wanted to assure Southlanders the management team at the board and the hospital was first-rate and committed to getting the best for patients.

There was a feeling that nurses and doctors were the only ones who cared about patients and that management was on some kind of misguided seek-and-destroy mission. But people should know management was just as patient-focussed as the doctors and nurses.

He also quotes Dr Paul on how most of us expected too much from the health system.

Communities had high expectations and were generally outraged when health services did not come up to the mark, he said. But what people had to realise was that New Zealand was a small economy? "In the lower quarter of countries in terms of output and growth"? and it was unrealistic to expect this country to buy first-class services on a no-frills budget.

Dr Paul's vision for his organisation includes that technology would play a large part in shaping Southland health services and help the board achieve closer co-operation between its staff (secondary services) and doctors, nurses and groups offering care in the community (primary services). The new hospital gave the board a chance to upgrade communication systems within and outside the hospital's walls. Digital radiology, the electronic storage and transmission of X-rays, would be just one part of a package. It was also the time to overhaul the entire hospital patient information system and make all patient records instantly available from any computer in the hospital. Eventually, the aim was to link up general practitioners so they could access the records and the X-rays from computers in their own surgeries. Such developments would be a step towards true integration of the secondary and primary care sectors, Dr Paul said.

He seems to be having big plans for his organisation and he would most certainly achieve them if you go by his past track record.

His ambition is to work as a volunteer in either Sri Lanka or a similar developing country with Ani once Ruth is grown up and settled. He says that he loves everything that is old, old friends, old music and old wine.

We should be proud of this son of Lanka who has made it good.

References

Hospital Chief shares passion and vision. By David Cosgriff. 7 August 2002. The Southland Times.

Curriculum vitae, Dr Gershu Paul with his permission.

From our Roving Ambassadors.....

Dr Anne Perera the first president of the NZSLF is well known to most Sri Lankans in New Zealand. She is probably the only person to head two Sri Lankan organizations in Auckland. She was a president of USLA. She is a food technologist by profession and is also a well known consultant in food technology as well as being a food writer. She ran her own consulting company before she left New Zealand to work in Singapore. Anne has had an illustrious career as an academic and a food technologist but her talents are not confined to science. She is a poet and a writer and also an avid art and music lover. Anne has published poetry as well as many scientific publications. Many people are probably not aware that she is also a talented crafts person and a doll maker as well. Anne is married to Dr Conrad Perera who is an academic staff member at Singapore National University and has one son Conrad Jr. who lives and works in Auckland.

The Editor

Dear Friends....

It is with great pleasure that I write to you from Singapore. Having lived in New Zealand as adopted Kiwis for 20 years (1980-2000); we got the opportunity in April 2000 to experience life in this very fascinating country of the Merlion. I am sure most of you may have had the opportunity to visit Singapore and know what I mean by this ‘fascinating country.’

On the one hand there are four prominent languages that are used in Singapore, namely, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. While the children of each of the ethnic groups are expected to learn their native language, English is maintained as the official language of the country, which came into existence only in 1965.

The country proactively promotes racial and religious harmony among its diverse groups. Temples, churches and mosques are in close proximity to each other. All religious festivals are celebrated with much glamour and they serve as great tourist attractions.

While the population is similar to that of New Zealand, the area of Singapore is equal to that of lake Taupo. That is why most of the people live in high-rise buildings with no gardens to grow your own vegetables, let alone fruit trees. Most of the food and beverage items are imported by Singapore including water, which comes from Malaysia.

Majority of the people here don't own cars. Systems are in place to discourage too many cars in the country. This is well balanced by providing easy and comfortable public transportation including reasonably priced convenient taxi service throughout the country. The place could be described as very orderly and well managed.

Banners saying, “Low crime does not mean no crime” are seen hung in public places. “If you drink, go public” is another common slogan. No eating, drinking, smoking and carrying ‘Durian’ in buses and trains. Chewing gum and graffiti are banned.

In spite of its small size, the country excels as a ‘garden city’ with well-manicured parks and beautifully maintained trees. Singapore believes that the standard of a country is reflected by that of its public toilets. Even competitions are held to encourage orderliness in public places. Eating is like the favorite pastime of the people here. Although I still enjoy cooking, at times I feel that it is cheaper to buy ready to eat food than to cook at home. Food Courts are all over and the variety of food they serve are diverse.

With all these and more in this fascinating country, I still do miss some of my favorite places in New Zealand like the tranquil Taranaki, where I had the privileged of spending 2 out of my 20 years there. On the 25th September 2002, the New Zealand High Commission organized a cultural show called “Kiwi – Merlion Extravaganza” in which I had the opportunity to recite three of my poems, which I did as a tribute to New Zealand and in particular to Taranaki, where I discovered the gift of writing poetry.

Anne Perera, Singapore

Virtues of Fasting , A Pharmacist's Perspective

The observance of fasting during Ramadan constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. The experience of fasting is intended to teach Muslims self-discipline and self-restraint, and understand a little of the plight of the less privileged (eg, the hungry, thirsty, and the poor). Furthermore, Ramadan is not just about disciplining the body to refrain from eating and drinking from predawn until sunset but is also about exerting control over the mind.

This involves restraining anger, doing good deeds, exercising personal discipline, and preparing oneself to serve as a good Muslim and a good person. Ramadan is a month of peace and love in which individuals are encouraged to bury differences, to forget and forgive and to renew both human and spiritual relationships.

To remain healthy during Ramadan, one should consume food from the major food groups: bread cereal, milk and dairy products, fish, meat and poultry, beans, vegetables and fruits. Intake of fruits after a meal is strongly suggested.

In view of the long hours of fasting, the so-called “complex carbohydrates” or slow digesting foods should be consumed at sahur (predawn) so that the food lasts longer (about eight hours) resulting in less hunger during the day. These complex carbohydrates are found in foods that contain grains and seeds like barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils, whole meal flour and unpolished rice.

In contrast, refined carbohydrates or fast digesting foods last for only three hours and may be taken at iftar (sunset) to restore blood glucose levels rapidly. Fast-burning foods include those that contain sugar and white flour. Dates are an excellent source of sugar and magnesium and have been recommended since the days of the prophet Mohammed as a good way of breaking the fast.

Fried foods, very spicy foods and foods containing too much sugar, such as sweets, can cause health problems and should be limited during Ramadan. They cause indigestion, heartburn, and weight problems. Fasting can often increase

gastric acidity levels causing a burning feeling, and a heaviness in the stomach, and a sour mouth.

This can be overcome by eating foods rich in fiber such as whole wheat bread, vegetables, hummus, beans and fruits. These foods trigger muscular action, churning and mixing food, breaking it into small particles, and thus help reduce the build up of acid in the stomach.

Drinking of sufficient water and juices between iftar and sleep to avoid dehydration, and for detoxification of the digestive system, should be encouraged in fasting individuals. However, the intake of large amounts of caffeine containing beverages should be avoided, especially at sahar. For example, drinking too much tea will increase urine output and inevitably cause the loss of valuable mineral salts. Fruits such as bananas are a good source of potassium, magnesium and carbohydrates.

Diabetic patients taking insulin should consult their doctor to see if their dose can be adjusted to allow fasting during Ramadan. In all cases of fasting with diabetes, blood sugar levels should be closely monitored, especially before and after meals.

In summary, Islam offers an exemption to the sick from observing their fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Saghir Akthar, PhD, MRPharmS

Impressions....

It is one of the visits you have been yearning for, for a long time. Finally you are about to land on New Zealand soil. You take a peep from the flight window. What a panorama stretches below you!. You are thrilled to see the green abundance of nature, stretching itself to touch the horizon. The distant lakes, trees that stand sentinel along the routes, blooms of various hues nodding in the cold breeze make you feel so welcome.

Above all to a person coming from a war-torn island, from the sounds of distant bombings and screaming sirens the impressions that pervades the soul is the peace and tranquility of the atmosphere. You at once get the feeling that this may be the reason for many from troubled areas like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and some from dark continents seek New Zealand as a haven.

If we analyse a little deeper, we realize various other factors, like the political stability, racial tolerance to an extent, the financial benefits, an environment for healthy living, educational facilities for children and adults too, impress one tremendously.

On a very personal note I may say it is the marvelous natural beauty of the place and the abundance of clear blue water surrounding you that thrills. Apart from this, the verdant foliage, the blossoming blooms of myriad hues that just mesmerises you all the time.

Wherever you turn to it is the hills and dales spotted with mostly single storey houses, surrounded by lovely little gardens, fenced in with timber walls. The web like roads weaving through holds your breath. Just a few km from Auckland city, beyond the unending carpets of green Rolling Meadows, where harmless white sheep in thousands lay basking in the sun, transports you to the life of a past peaceful world.

The alien communities are of various multi-cultural backgrounds, yet the individual communities whether they are Sri Lankans, Indians, Pakistanis or others seem to interact well within their own communities.

In areas where I was fortunate to travel and appreciate the scenic beauty, I noticed there was not much corruption evident. The colour-bar rudeness is not so obvious as in certain western countries. The natives seem to be tolerable by nature. Their often smiling faces are so touching.

One important factor that impressed me is the observance of road rules and the discipline on the roads. Very rarely did I hear the tooting of horns or impatient driving. The well maintained roads, highways and the overhead bridges to enhance the physical beauty of New Zealand. The places of worship, churches, mosques, temples etc too have a subdued calm atmosphere. These hallowed buildings seem to be waiting patiently for worshippers to walk in, in search of peace and soul-searching. Yet at times there is an overdose of religious preaching on TV.

For people who are domiciled and earn their living in NZ. The cost of living is not a heavy burden. Foodstuff available is appreciatively clean. The luscious fruits are such a temptation!

The weather patterns are most unreliable. It blows hot and cold very often. The unprepared visitor is taken unaware. Still you love to experience it all. The most cherishing memories for me will be the cute faintly accented chatter of my little three grandchildren. With such a panorama of picturesque landscapes, warmth of people, the inviting beaches, it makes New Zealand a place worth visiting and carrying back delightful memories.

Nafeela Mukthar

In Lighter Vein....

A routine police patrol parked outside a local neighbourhood tavern. Late in the evening the officer noticed a man leaving the bar so intoxicated that he could barely walk. The man stumbled around the car park for a few minutes, with the officer quietly observing. After what seemed an eternity and trying his keys on five vehicles, the man managed to find his car which he fell into. He was there for a few minutes as number of other patrons left the bar and drove off. Finally he started the car, switched the wipers on and off (it was a fine dry night), flicked the indicators on and off, tooted the horn and then switched on the lights. He moved the vehicle forward a few inches, reversed a little and then remained stationary for a few more minutes as more patrons left in their vehicles. At last he pulled out of the car park and started to drive slowly down! the road. The police officer, having patiently waited all this time, now started up the patrol car, put on the flashing lights, promptly pulled the man over and carried out a Breathalyzer test. To his amazement the breathalyzer indicated no evidence of the man having consumed alcohol at all! Dumbfounded, the officer said "I'll have to ask you to accompany me to the Police station this Breathalyzer equipment must be broken." "I doubt it," said the man, "Tonight I'm the designated decoy."

Mother!

The young mother set her foot on the path of life.

"Is this the long way?" she asked.

And the guide said: "Yes, and the way is hard. And you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning."

But the young mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and bathed them in the clear streams; and the sun shone on them, and the young Mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."

Then the night came, and the storm, and the path was dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close and covered them with her mantle, and the children said, "Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come."

And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the mother was weary. But at all times she said to the children, "A little patience and we are there." So the children climbed, and when they reached the top they said, "Mother, we would not have done it without you." And the mother, when she lay down at night looked up at the stars and said, "This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned fortitude in the face of hardness."

Yesterday I gave them courage. Today, I have given them strength."

And the next day came strange clouds which darkened the earth, clouds of war and hate and evil, and the children groped

and stumbled, and the mother said: "Look up. Lift your eyes to the light."

And the children looked and saw above the clouds an everlasting glory, and it guided them beyond the darkness. And that night the Mother said, "This is the best day of all, for I have shown my children God."

And the days went on, and the weeks and the months and the years, and the mother grew old and she was little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And when the way was rough, they lifted her, for she was as light as a feather; and at last they came to a hill, and beyond they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide. And mother said: "I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk alone, and their children after them."

And the children said, "You will always walk with us, Mother, even when you have gone through the gates." And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said: "We cannot see her, but she is with us still. A Mother like ours is more than a memory. She is a living presence."

Your Mother is always with you. She's the whisper of the leaves as you walk down the street, she's the smell of bleach in your freshly laundered socks she's the cool hand on your brow when you're not well. Your Mother lives inside your laughter. And she's crystallized in every tear drop. She's the place you came from, your first home; And she's the map you follow with every step you take. She's your first love and your first heartbreak, and nothing on earth can separate you. Not time, Not space...not even death!

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 thank everybody who sent contributions to this newsletter and apologize for not being able to publish all contributions due to the limitation of the available space. Please send your contributions to the Autumn Issue by the end of February 2003 to the correspondence address below, Attn: Editorial Committee or by email to: **omarf12@hotmail.com**

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