



New Zealand Lanka

Newsletter of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Incorporated

Volume 24 Winter 2004

From the President....

New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation is completing yet another very successful year and it is holding the Sixth Annual General Meeting in July 2004. All of us in the committee look back at the yester year with a sense of pride and satisfaction. Whilst maintaining its integrity and standards in its highest form we have brought the Foundation to new heights during this year.

The year began with a bang staging one of the most popular stage dramas 'Putrasamagama' in October 2003. This was followed by a very successful employment workshop organised in association with the Sri Lankan Engineers Association in November and then a vastly entertaining December 31st night dinner dance 'Lanka Nite2003'. In February 2004, the annual cricket encounter between Hamiltonians and the Sri Lankan Cricket Club was held with our sponsorship in Hamilton. During the same month the Foundation took a leading role in the protest campaign against the biased NZ media coverage on Sri Lanka. In March we took part in the 'Taranaki Multi-Cultural Extravaganza' held in New Plymouth and in April we organised our second employment workshop. Last month, Sri Lanka's most popular musical group 'Gypsies' entertained a packed audience in Auckland with our sponsorship. We also launched our own website in January this year and continued to facilitate the running of the Sri Lankan Badminton Club.

We consider that it is a privilege working with other sister organisations in and outside Auckland. We have no doubt that the comradeship and the understanding built during this year will take our community from strength to strength.

Personally, I am proud to have lead a highly talented committee with diverse strengths and ideas. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the committee members and their families for their dedication and support extended to the Foundation during this year.

I also like to thank all of you who took part in all our events, supported us, appreciated our efforts and encouraged us. I have no doubt that the incoming committee is equally passionate and capable. I wish them all the very best in their endeavours and request you all to extend your fullest support to them.

Jayasiri Basnayake



'Gypsies in Concert' The Musical show played to a packed audience on 7 June 2004 at Dorothy Winstone Centre, Auckland. Presented by New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation.

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Next Event:

New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Annual General Meeting

New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation is holding the Sixth Annual General Meeting on the 24th July 2004 at the Senior Citizens Hall, Mt. Albert, Auckland at 6.30 pm.

We like all our members to participate at this meeting to felicitate the outgoing committee and welcome the new committee. Members are requested to bring a plate for a shared tea.

Notices of the AGM and Nomination papers are enclosed with this Newsletter.

Calendar of Events:

- 24 Jul 04: Annual General Meeting
- 11 Sep 04: Employment Workshop
- 24 Oct 04: Musical Show
- 31 Dec 04: Lanka Nite'04- Dance

Gypsies in Auckland ...

The Gypsies Group, labeled Beatles of Sri Lanka, which had been playing to packed crowds in Sri Lanka and abroad for 34 years continuously gave a lively concert at the Dorothy Winstone Centre, Auckland Girls' Grammar School on Queen's birthday holiday, June 7.

Their blend of Sinhala, Tamil and English songs, and fun dazzled the audience beyond expectation.

A capacity crowd of 800 Sri Lankans spent a lively evening either enjoying the songs or singing with the Gypsies Group, the most loved musical group in Sri Lanka. It was an unforgettable fun-filled evening.

Organized by the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Incorporated, in keeping with its aim to bring in the best performing artists from Sri Lanka for the benefit of New Zealand Sri Lankans, the group turned the entire audience into raptures with its rendering of 'oldies'..

This is the Gypsies' second visit to New Zealand. Hitherto they have been playing in Australia, Canada and Europe.

The curious thing about the Gypsies Group is its songs are immortal and are enjoyed both by the young and the vintage groups. In part, this almost perfect matching of musical display on both sides of the footlights is due to the special equipment the Gypsies bring to the stage. They have their own recording studio in Sri Lanka. Their albums are snapped up like hot cakes.

The Gypsies group was started in the early 1970s by an enterprising business named Anton Perera. He had five boys who showed incredible musical talent. These five boys, Nihal, Sunil, Nimal, Piyal and Lal along with their cousins Neville and Kanthi gave birth to the Gypsies Musical Group in 1970. Later on they brought in other talented musicians into the group.

The present group of six males and one female singer included Judith Anne who prefers to use her stage name Ginger, a female vocalist singer gyrating to a selection of her dances and songs, Ronnie Leitch, a well known and most sought after comedian, who is referred to as "Thattaya" for proudly exhibiting his bald pate, Sunil Perera, son of the founder of Gypsies, who is the Manager. He is a very versatile musician and composer. He is much sought after for commercial advertising. He was the lead guitarist and vocalist.

The other members of the group were Cumarana Peiris, keyboard/vocals, Dushan Jayatilake, keyboards/vocals, the youngest member of the group and Niresh Perera, drums/vocals.

Though balla dance medleys generated interest, a golden oldies tribute to musical legends such as Annesley Malewana, Eddie Jayamanne and others who preferred to remain anonymous brought in memories of yesteryear.

The Gypsies' whirlwind tour ended in Auckland, NZ to a most appreciative audience. Their rendering brought back nostalgic memories to many members of the audience. They are looking forward to more tours in the coming months or years.

M.C.A. Hassan

A Scenic Attraction every one falls for...

We in New Zealand look forward for a long weekend to set out on a weekend adventure. We love the outdoors, the greenery and New Zealand's clean and green image.

If you are on holiday in Sri Lanka and if you have not had a breather; a break from civilization; a hideout and a place that makes you long for things you never knew you missed in the rat

race of life, then the Ella Adventure Park is just the place for you. There nature beckons boisterously. Nestling in the Uva-Karandagolla area, it is Sri Lanka's first adventure park.

During my last holiday in Sri Lanka, I had the good fortune of spending four days there. To see Ella Adventure Park for the first time is to experience nature in its pristine form. It is sheer greenery, the deepest and most vivid shades of green, just tree upon tree as far as the eye can see. It is what I would call a "shrubbery haven" with the towering Namunukula Range beyond it.

A friendly ex-army officers team guides you along for scattered facilities such as rock climbing, abseiling, trekking through forests, bird watching trails, canoeing, canyoning and kayaking.

The park is a fine place to visit all year. It is becoming very popular with foreign tourists and now locals are forsaking Nuwara Eliya and taking to the Ella Adventure Park. The rooms are all placed through trees. The furniture from the lamp shade to the bed post flaunted knotted timber as if freshly sawn from a tree. The bathroom is a bigger surprise. It is a roofless rocky enclosure in which you shower.

For those fond of hiking, there is a six kilometer trek through which one can go into the thick, damp jungle and the rest of the resort.

The campsite is at the end of this trek. The Kirindi Oya skirts the campsite. Its bank is used for the construction of cabins. Here one lives with more nature and cut off from civilization. The waters of the Kirindi Oya give unlimited swimming exposure and many stunts like flying fox, suspension bridge and other adventures using rope are found here. The campfire at night keeps us warm and at the end of it there is an eerie silence. A few minutes outside will make you realize why they named it solitude. The only sounds one could hear are the cracking of branches of trees, the chirping of birds and your own breathing.

I had done for the four days I stayed there more adventure than I had undertaken in my scouting life for the past 50 years. It is an ideal venture for both young and old who love nature.

"Anyone who is keen on doing something different and be on a 'wild' holiday can come down to Ella to do what seems impossible", according to Shehan Pilapitiya, Manager, Operations of the Ella Adventure Park.

We may be miles away from the modern conveniences but not away from the bountiful comforts of Mother Nature.

M.C.A. Hassan

Rhymes for the Times

A Sad Tale

This is the sad tale of
That dauntless pair
Known to the world as Bush and Blair
Who sent troops to Iraq
To oust Saddam Hussein
A tyrant they thought was quite insane.

They found him to be really bad
But by no means a man who was mad
The horrible consequences of this colossal blunder
Of waging an unjust and illegal war
Are gradually unfolding and must fill its perpetrators
With justifiable Awe.

O V Gunatilleke, Hillisborough

The Fernandos of Taranaki...

It was in 1997 while working on a project in the beautiful region of Taranaki, that I had the privilege of meeting the Fernandos – Dr Hirantha, his wife Pretheeva and the daughters, Shanika, Harini and Tishani. In fact it happened to be on Hirantha's birthday that year that I first went to their place with some friends. Though I was a stranger, they made me feel welcome immediately. That led to a long lasting friendship that I treasure very much.

Dr Hirantha Fernando arrived in NZ in 1978 soon after their marriage in Sri Lanka to Pretheeva, who has been in NZ with her parents since 1975. Their three daughters were all born here.

Hirantha has been in General Practice in New Plymouth and has been a Rotarian since 1982. He became President of the Fitzroy Rotary Club in 1993 and was appointed as Taranaki Co-ordinator of the world-wide Polio eradication campaign called Polioplus in 1985. He is now the Taranaki Area Co ordinator for the Rotary Foundation, responsible for ten clubs in the province. He was awarded the coveted Paul Harris Fellowship of Rotary in 2002 for his work for Polioplus and other Rotary involvement.

Hirantha and Pretheeva were instrumental in organising a music festival for Rotary called "Make Music '93" when he was president. This raised \$13000 for the child cancer support group in Taranaki.

He got involved in ethnic activity when the Dept of Internal Affairs came to New Plymouth in search of people interested in forming an Ethnic Council in New Plymouth. He was appointed the Chairman of the steering committee and he inaugurated the Taranaki Multi-Ethnic Council in June 1994 and was elected the first president.

In 1995 he adopted the concept of the 'Make Music 93' event to organise the first ethnic festival which was held indoors at a hall, with school groups performing and a few food and craft stalls. A last minute idea of his to have a small parade to publicise the festival was the beginning of the now famous Extravaganza street parade.

The Ethnic event came to be known as the Extravaganza in 1997 when it was held at the New Plymouth racecourse complex.

At the invitation of Hirantha, the traditional dance troupe of New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation took part in the parade and the Extravaganza in 1999 and practically every year there after.

The size of the event soon outgrew the space at the racecourse and was moved to the newly built Yarrow Stadium in 2003. This year was the best Extravaganza with an estimated crowd of 13000 attending the day's event. Pictures of the Extravaganza can be accessed on the web www.pix2C.net

Hirantha was presented the New Plymouth Citizen's award in 2003 at an impressive ceremony at the District Council Chambers, for his services to the Multi Ethnic Council and to Rotary.

In 2002 in addition to his own medical practice, Hirantha took over, & is Managing Director of an After-hours medical centre that was running at a loss and re employed all the staff who were to lose their jobs. Now called 'Phoenix Urgent Doctors', the establishment is running quite satisfactorily drawing praise and gratitude of the public.

As for Pretheeva, she has been the accompanist of the New Plymouth Ars Nova Choir for fifteen years till she retired recently and was awarded the Life membership.

She is also a qualified pipe organist (& pianist) and has given several organ recitals in New Plymouth and accompanied many great soloists and has been the organist at the Catholic church since their arrival in New Plymouth. Now she conducts the church choir and also the Taranaki Youth Choir. Pretheeva was the co ordinator of the music section of the annual Taranaki Music Competitions for many years.

Pretheeva is a Chartered Accountant and works for Staples Rodway Accountants (formerly Ernst & Young) in New Plymouth. Now she is also the Accountant (& Director) for Phoenix Urgent Doctors & the Practice and Manager for Hirantha's General Practice.

Both of them with the support of some senior Sri Lankans in New Plymouth have organised many Sri Lankan functions over the past several years. They were part of a Sri Lankan camp that was held annually at a camp site outside New Plymouth, where many Sri Lankan families spent the weekend in huts having fun, playing games, white-water rafting etc followed by a concert on Saturday night when children, adults and the elderly had their own items of comedy. This was held for six years before the Sri Lankan community decreased in number.

Hirantha and Pretheeva support each other in all the activities each of them undertake. They make a good team together. Shanika, their eldest is now a Chartered accountant working for Ernst & Young in London having graduated from Oxford University in 2000.

Harini, the second daughter is studying Law and Psychology at Victoria University in Wellington. Tishani is in the final year at school. All three girls have excelled in piano, speech & drama, singing & Violin/cello.

What a lovely citation!! It is an honour for us to know your family. Congratulations on your achievements!!

Anne Perera

Year 2003-4 in Retrospect...

Looking back over the last year, it has certainly been a very busy one for the Foundation. The new committee organised their first event, stage drama "Putrasamaga" by veteran Sri Lankan drama producer and actor Jayalath Manoratne at the Dorothy Winston Centre followed by an informal "Peduru Paatiya" in October. The Peduru Paatiya was a very popular event which covered the history of Sri Lankan drama from it's inception to current times.

This was followed by another successful employment workshop organised in association with the Sri Lankan Engineers Association in November. Sri Lankans are probably the first community group which has been holding an employment programme for their community and has been hailed as a model in the migrant employment arena. This programme is being funded by the Lotteries Grants Commission and is held with the collaboration of agencies such as the Auckland Chamber of Commerce, Work and Income, Career Services etc. Many Sri Lankan new migrants and others have appreciated this series of workshops held over the years.

The annual 31st night dinner dance "Lanka Nite 2003" was held at the Auckland Normal Intermediate school hall with music from "Cream" attended by a large number of Aucklanders in December. This was held with a difference to make it more

affordable by providing Sri Lankan food stalls instead of a traditional dinner.

The annual cricket encounter between Auckland and Hamilton and the get together with the Hamilton Sri Lankans was held in February in Hamilton. Many Aucklanders and Hamiltonians braved the weather and attended this enjoyable event which consisted of ladies as well as gents cricket matches which were both won by Aucklanders followed by a barbecue hosted by the Hamiltonians.

Also in February, the Foundation took a leading role in the protest campaign organised in collaboration with other Sri Lankan organisations against the adverse and biased media campaign against Sri Lanka. Several leading politicians including the Minister of Ethnic Affairs Chris Carter, National Party immigration spokesperson Dr Wayne Mapp, Green Party spokesperson Keith Locke and MP Pansy Wong were present at the public forum and the protest march was well attended by Sri Lankans in Auckland.

In March, some of the Foundation members and a group of dancers trained by Thesara Jayawardena participated in the Taranaki Multi Ethnic Festival in New Plymouth for the third time. The group was hosted by the Sri Lankans in Taranaki.

The second employment workshop was held in March at the Auckland Regional Migrant Resource Centre in Three Kings.

The final event for the year was "Gypsies in Concert" with popular Comedian Ronnie Leitch and vocalist Ginger held in June 2004. Tickets for this event were sold out within two weeks and the event was voted to be a very entertaining one by the majority of the attendees.

Another major achievement for the year was the launching of the Foundation website <http://www.nzslfoundation.com/contact.html>. Our website has a feature which enables Sri Lankan businesses to advertise FREE of charge and Sri Lankans are encouraged to use this facility to reach others in our community.

Asoka Basnayake

Murali's record marvel should drown out the din

Few world champions have divided opinion like Muttiah Muralitharan. For every person who proclaims him a wonder of the age, there is another lining up to condemn him as a cricketing pariah.

When Murali broke Courtney Walsh's record of 519 Test wickets at Harare Sports Club on Saturday afternoon in a defeat of Zimbabwe by an innings and 240 runs, the need to take sides became irresistible. So it is best to adopt a position from the outset: Murali is a genius, a flawed genius perhaps, but a bowler who deserves to have his greatness universally recognised.

Sadly, this will never be the case. His world record will forever be tarnished by the endless debate over his bowling action. He is a bowler on probation after official scientific tests proved last month that his doosra - the ball that spins away from the right-hander - is a throw. But many observers remain adamant that he throws just about everything. From the moment that he had Zimbabwe's Mluleki Nkala caught at silly mid-off, his detractors declared Saturday The Day of the Chucker.

It is appropriate to recall - not to demean him but to seek some perspective - that they muttered the same about Walsh's quicker ball. But Walsh never suffered the same vindictiveness that Murali has withstood, especially in Australia, where the condemnation has not stopped since he was no-balled by Darrell Hair on Boxing Day in Melbourne nine years ago.

The most extreme stance has come from Barry Jarman, a former Australia wicketkeeper and the International Cricket Council match referee who first expressed misgivings about

Murali's action a decade ago - and who has never accepted the studies eight years ago that declared his off-spinner legal.

"It makes a joke of the game - it makes me sick talking about it," he said at the weekend. "Everyone knows he bowls illegally. I saw a photo in the paper the other day and put my old school protractor on his arm. It was bent at 48 degrees. I put it up in the pub to show everybody."

Briefly, to recap: thanks to new technology, cricket has realised that hardly anybody bowls with a straight arm, so the ICC has dreamed up arbitrary tolerance levels for arm straightening: five degrees for spin bowlers, 10 degrees for fast bowlers.

Murali's newly developed doosra was proved by University of Western Australia tests to be above 10 degrees but neither Sri Lanka Cricket nor the ICC will confirm how much. Sri Lanka wants all acceptance levels to be 10 degrees, which seems perfectly reasonable, and it believes that will salvage Murali's reputation.

The image of an ageing former Test cricketer scrabbling around for his old school protractor illustrates how ridiculous the Murali debate has become. Strap sensors to Murali's arm, film him from innumerable angles and make computer calculations, and Jarman still prefers the evidence of his protractor.

Cricket is a highly technical game predominantly watched by incurable romantics, and, in Murali's case, there's the rub. That is why most former players, steeped in orthodoxy and priding themselves as hardened realists, condemn Murali's action as illegal while a majority of spectators sigh: "Leave him. He's a delight to watch."

Murali is a champion for disability, born with an elbow he cannot fully straighten and the compensation of an exceptionally flexible wrist. He is a champion for minorities, a Tamil who has become a national icon even as secessionist war raged between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamil Tigers. He is a champion for how cricket should be played, with endless dedication and a perpetual sense of fun.

His statistics are mind-boggling. He has passed Walsh's record in 89 Tests, whereas Walsh needed 132. At 32, if his body holds, he could become unassailable.

Perhaps I should declare a bias here. I love Sri Lanka, have interests in a tour company specialising in trips there, and value the feel-good that Murali has brought to a beautiful and troubled land.

But for the most tested bowler in history, here is one final test. It's called the Rocking Chair Test. Sit yourself in your rocking chair, at 80, and have your grandchild ask you if you ever saw Murali bowl. Do you rail at one of the cons of the age or do you say, rheumy eyed, that you were privileged to witness it? For me there is only one response.

David Hopps, The Guardian

EXCHANGE RATES

EXCHANGE RATES ON 29.06.2004 IN SLRS


Average Rates at which the following currencies were quoted by Commercial Banks in Colombo for telegraphic transfers at 9.30 A.M.

Currency	Buying (Rs.)	Selling (Rs.)
US Dollar	101.78	102.82
Sterling Pound	185.73	188.28
Euro	123.66	125.51
Swiss Franc	81.00	82.75
Australian Dollar	70.93	72.32
Japanese Yen	0.9375	0.9537

From Hon. Consul of Sri Lanka...

We publish in full a letter received by Rudra de Zoysa, Honorary Consul of Sri Lanka in NZ from the Associate Minister of Immigration in reply to the submissions made by the Sri Lankan National Child Protection Authority.

We thank the Hon. Consul for sending this letter for our reader's information.



Office of Hon Damien O'Connor
MP for West Coast-Tasman

Minister for Racing
Associate Minister of Agriculture
Associate Minister for Rural Affairs

Associate Minister of Health
Associate Minister of Immigration

12 MAY 2004

Mr Radar de Zoysa
Honorary Consul
for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in New Zealand
22 Bloomfield Terrace
LOWER HUTT

Dear Mr de Zoysa

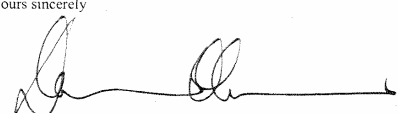
Thank you for your letter of 12 March 2004 which included submissions from the Sri Lankan National Child Protection Authority (NCPA).

I can assure you that the views reflected in the New Zealand media, and held by some members of the public, regarding the availability of protection in Sri Lanka for children and victims of sexual abuse, are not sentiments shared by myself or the New Zealand Immigration Service.

I have read the submissions from Professor de Silva and they reflect my own views that Sri Lanka has adequate infrastructure in place to take care of and protect children and victims of sexual abuse. That is why I chose not to intervene on behalf of the Sri Lankan girl at the centre of all the recent media attention and to allow her to return to Sri Lanka to receive the care that she requires through the NCPA.

I understand your consternation, but I can assure you that I am not party to the harmful beliefs that have been expressed by some people about your country.

Yours sincerely



Hon Damien O'Connor
Associate Minister of Immigration

Parliament Buildings, Wellington, New Zealand. Telephone: 64 4 470 6574 Facsimile: 64 4 472 8054

Oil Exploration in Sri Lanka...

Sri Lanka will call its first bidding round for oil exploration in the first quarter of 2005, with committed interest from US and UK based oil firms and two of the biggest in China.

"We have commitment from three oil majors in the United States, one from UK, and last week in Beijing we were able to convince two of the biggest firms in China to definitely come here when the bidding round starts", Director General of Petroleum Resources at the Energy Ministry, Titus Jayawardena said.

Beijing based Sinopec International Petroleum Exploration Corporation and China National Offshore Oil Corp has said they will take part in the bidding. Sri Lanka rolled out its fiscal terms and conditions at a promotional road show for prospective investors held in Texas and London in December last year.

Eight blocks are to be offered in the Mannar Basin, with a four to eight kilometre thick sedimentary basin promising oil potential of

about 10 to 50 mn barrels. Investors will be given five months for international due diligence, buying available data packages prior to submitting technical and financial proposals for evaluation. Targets are to select investors by end 2005, so that further surveys and drilling of cat wells could begin by 2006. In general, any project takes four to five years to commercial production.

Meanwhile, a second round of seismic surveys will begin by December this year when monsoon rains end and choppy seas of the North West coast settle. "The data and information we have is not sufficient to start drilling or to make realistic evaluations as yet. We are going to acquire a further 4000 square kilometres in the Mannar basin for more seismic surveys", Jayawardena says.

Norwegian based TGS Nopec and Swedish Petroscan have been carrying out offshore seismic surveys and satellite gravity surveys off the Western coast since 2000. All necessary paperwork such as model petroleum resource agreements, and development licenses has already been drawn up, with legislation also in place.

Each license will cover recovery, storage, transport and sale of oil or natural gas, with royalty payments made to the government on the market value of the resource. Exploration licences will be for a maximum of seven years in three commitment phases with the option to terminate after each phase.

"A 25 percent extent of the acreage has to be relinquished at the end of each phase. We give them the opportunity to find jumbos, so at the end the state ensures that they get back the land area and if unsuccessful, can give back to another company", Jayawardena said. It is quite common that another company is successful where one wasn't".

State royalties are generally five percent on the gross sale value of profit oil, with a profit share split as well between state and contractor on the oil recovered. Successful bidders will also be given a five-year tax holiday. "In any petroleum development project, 75 percent of the reservoir is depleted in the first five years, so this gives the contractor time to recover his cost. Profits are made after that and then the better part will come to the state", Jayawardena said.

In most countries, including in Sri Lanka, the state will end up taking less than 65 percent. In countries like Norway and Indonesia where geological prospects are also high, the state take is about 85 percent.

But drilling for oil is an expensive, high-risk business. One test well can cost in the region of US\$ 10-15 mn, not recoverable if the well turns up dry.

The equation is often one successful well for every ten. "If we succeed, this will be the biggest development project in Sri Lanka, even bigger than the Mahaweli project", Jayawardena says. Sri Lanka imports all its oil needs, with importing 2 mn MT of crude and 1.5 mn MT of refined products, with demand growing at eight percent a year. But spiralling oil prices has also meant that the import bill has been upped from US\$ 750 mn a year ago to US\$ 1.2 bn to date.

Courtesy of Lanka Business Online (1 July 2004 01:20 hours)

Kandy Esala Perahera...

A multifaceted cultural pageant: Soon it will be Perahera time in Kandy. The floodlit Temple of the Tooth, resplendent across the light reflecting water of the Lake, will once again be the focus of the annual Esala Perahera.

The history of the Kandy Perahera runs concurrently with the history of the Kandyan monarchy, from the time King Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-80) added the Dalada Maligawa perahera to the already existing Nathe, Maha Vishnu, Kataragama and Pattini Dewala processions.

In those times the First and Second Adigars were responsible for the conduct of the whole perahera. Once the procession had been duly formed in Temple Square, the King himself with all ceremony would bring the sacred relics of the Buddha in the relic casket and place them in the Karanduwa on the Temple Tusker's back.

Today it is the Diyawadana Nilame or Lay Custodian of the Dalada Maligawa who places the sacred relics on the Temple Tasker and is responsible for the conduct of the whole perahera over a period of ten nights and one day.

Anticipation: When the boom of the thunder flash proclaims the start of the procession, the huge crowd jammed together in the streets for several hours will breathe a sigh of relief in anticipation of the multifaceted cultural pageant that will soon be passing them. The whip-crackers who lead the procession are followed by men swinging blazing double ended torches like drum-majors' batons, and the Hewisi drummers beating out the martial rhythms of a bygone age.

After the flag bearers of the 13 provinces of the Kandyan Kingdom pass by, come the elephants in their colourful nethimalay (trunk-dresses) and the dancers in their fascinating variety. There can be no more dramatic setting for these dancers. Their groups fit in so neatly between the elephants, providing an exciting contrast to the calm and sedate movement of the animals.

One of the charms of Sri Lanka is its widespread range of dances, many of which can be seen in this Perahera. Stick dancers, sword dancers, cane dancers, harvest dancers and the traditional Udeki, Pantheru and Ves Kandyan dances. Udeki dancers drum and dance at the same time. Their hour-glass shaped drums are played by hands. They wear pleated white cloths tucked in at the waist, over which there are white frills edged in red. Their bodies are bare except for bead ornaments. Silver earrings and tinkling ankle bells complete the outfit with a turban that hangs down loosely.

Spectacular: Ves Netuma is the most spectacular. The term "ves" does not signify "vesham" in the sense of a mask worn by dancers of the south in exorcist rites and magic rituals, who are seen in the annual Devundara Festival.

"Ves" in this instance refers to the ceremonial regalia of the fully fledged dancer, from his ornate silver headdress to the ankle bells on his feet. The glow from the flaring torches which flank the procession highlight the silver headdresses like conical shining suns, allowing you to see the tiny silver heart-shaped leaves dangling from them like raindrops.

Large bean-shaped silver ornaments fit over their ears, shoulders and biceps. On their wrists are silver bracelets. The body above the waist is bare of clothing, except for a beadlike harness fastened at the back. The dancers wear a voluminous white cloth skirt, held at the waist by a silver studded clasp, and hanging down in front is a decorative red apron clustered with silver motifs and ornaments. The drummers and pipers who accompany them are barebodied except for a close fitting white skirt.

The ves-dancers move in a stylised walk with arms held at shoulder level, bent at the elbows, their bodies exulting in the rhythmic beat of the drums. At halts they perform in a more spirited manner, whirling and leaping in the air.

Take note: You should take particular note of the two rows of ves-dancers facing each other behind the Temple Tusker carrying the sacred relics. They are the very best. So is the Temple Tusker - the best dressed of all the elephants. He is expensively caparisoned in a beautiful batik outfit, comprising a jacket (ath hattaya) a trunk covering (honda wesuma) ear whisks (kan wesuma) anklets (gigiri walalu) and a pair of bells.

And on the other side is the splendid Diyawadana Nilame with his lance and umbrella bearers. He is dressed like an aristocratic noble of the Kandyan kingdom, draped in a tuppoti of 47 yards of soft cloth over his frilled trousers, with the last 7 yards embroidered in gold lace.

A wide gold belt of lace encircles his waist, the handle of an elaborately carved dagger appearing above it. On his head a four-cornered hat and gilt-edged pointed shoes on his feet. This cultural ensemble of Temple Tusker, Ves-Dancers and Diyawadana Nilame is perhaps the piece de resistance of the Dalada Maligawa procession. The four Dewala processions follow, each with its own lay administrators dancers, musicians, and elephants, with a special elephant carrying the flower-wreathed golden symbol of the God.

Derrick Schokman

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 Spring Issue by the end of September 2004 to the correspondence address below, Attn: Editorial Committee or by email to: nzslf@nzslfoundation.com

Correspondence: Editorial Committee, NZSLF, P O Box 41191, St Lukes, Auckland, New Zealand, www.nzslfoundation.com



NewZ Lanka

Newsletter of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Incorporated