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NEWS LETTER OF NEW ZEALAND SRI LANKA FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

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Message from President

The run up to December is always an eventful period even if a little difficult. The year 2008 was no exception. The Foundation members, ex-Presidents included, very generously gave off their time and labour when organizing the Gypsies musical evening which attracted an unprecedented audience. In the latter part of the year the Sri Lankan community were kept on their toes most of the time.

Local parliamentary elections and of course the Presidential elections in the USA with its far reaching or ranging impact on all countries kept us guessing about the outcomes. The predictions, or should I say the arrival of recession woes to



New Zealand gave a feeling of the ground moving under ones feet to many a Lankan. However, we found that they all bravely soldiered on.

Come December, and many Lankans develop wheels or wings! But we wanted to keep our traditions alive and organized our customary New Year's dance. We were thrilled to have a large turnout and friends were able to exchange good wishes with a bite of delicious kiribath and lunumiris. .

Recently held Annesley Malewana and Dalreen show was a big hit too and many a Sri Lankan music lovers enjoyed the music and the dance.

New arrivals kept trickling into New Zealand and we became increasingly conscious of the teething difficulties newcomers make 'settling in' a more pleasant experience for them. An action programme has been worked out already to assist in overcoming problems in language communications and making newcomers familiar with government agencies and their services.

We also are using these pages to promote two activities which we feel will strengthen our cultural and social bonds. First we invite all our young ones with cricketing talent to get in touch with Sri Lankan Auckland Cricket Club who have big ambitions to play in the top league. We also have a professional dancing teacher back in our midst after a lapse of several years.

She is willing to conduct classes in dancing so that it will give an opportunity to children who are inclined to learn different forms of dancing to have fun while learning an art. It's our hope that a small beginning could be made which could be helped to grow into an academy later on.

I would like to invite our members to recommend more like-minded Sri Lankans to join our association and to let us know of your own ideas to strengthen the bonds that bind our communities.

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Next Event:

Sun 26 July 2009 - AGM
(Annual General Meeting)
at St Pauls Methodist
Church, St Vincent Ave
Remuera, from 4.30pm

Calendar of Events:

24 May 2009 - Sri Lankan
Business delegation forum

Sun 26 July 2009 - AGM

Being a great Nation...

"In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been

the path of the faint-hearted for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things – some

celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labour, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom"

President Barak Obama

SLACC minnows among the giants?

SLCC – Sri Lanka Auckland Cricket Club- has been around long enough to be noticed. It is a cricket club which was formed in 1990 on the initiative of Amitha Weerakoon who was a premier league cricketer himself and other keen Sri Lankan Cricketers. Over the years, the first XI of the club has graduated to play competitive cricket and appears to be 'punching above its weight category'. They have proven that they can hold their own even against Premier League Clubs in Auckland. They, not only play, but do actually win against well-established clubs!

Sri Lanka is one of the younger test playing nations along with Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. The game as we used to play it has been transformed since test status made players become professionals. Private corporate sponsorships have become a key element in the game in recent times. Until the 80's Sri Lankans played the 'gentlemen's' game for pleasure and recreation and a few continued to play club cricket in the capital. The Universities too played cricket at the highest level and we even saw some 'medicos' playing for their University. At least there was one doctor, H.I.K. Fernando who kept wickets for the Ceylon team. Sri Lankan cricket has come a long way since. Kumar Sangakkara, for instance virtually dropped out of Law Faculty to continue his cricket.

The enthusiasm of the young for the game has grown tremendously. The 1996 win in the World Cup could be considered a watershed year when the game became a national obsession. Well before this turning point, Sri Lankans played the game in the village green and on the paddy fields after harvest. The *pol piththa* and any globular object served as the only paraphernalia required for a great game for the village lads. In terms of fun and entertainment it came close to resembling the T20 game of modern times.

In Auckland, a group of friends have banded themselves to play the game – the way Sri Lankans used to play it. They play as amateurs for the sheer love of the game. Calling them the Sri Lankan Cricket Club it has attracted a number of talented cricketers over the last decade or so. The club counts kiwis and Indians too among their

membership although it was started by Sri Lankans.

Many of the players have played in High School and are now eager to play in club competition. They sustain their game by nothing more than their enthusiasm to play. They have to buy their own equipment; hire grounds and other facilities; find time for practices at common venues while engaged in their careers and studies; find resources to support the club. All these they have done admirably well.

The club relies heavily on members' subscription and contributions and so far have done a marvellous job. However the future is challenging as the club by their very success is now pitted against the big names in Auckland cricket. They have to be really competitive and that means attracting good cricketers, nurturing them and succeeding at the highest level.

The present committee of the club with Ruwan Premathilaka as helmsman have great ambitions for it. They are planning to expand the membership and raise more funds so that equipment and infrastructure would be available for members. Different age groups and different skill levels could be taken into account when constituting teams.

They wish to have not only players but all those who are interested in promoting the game to be enlisted as members. As we know the game offers a great opportunity to socialize with other enthusiasts of the game. As the club is growing it also presents excellent sponsorship opportunities for businesses looking for exposure, not only in the South Asian Community but the Auckland Cricketing Community.

Sports do bring communities together and the game of cricket perhaps has as much potential to integrate young Sri Lankans with other communities as much as or even more than other activities. In recent times, Sri Lankan cricket in the international arena has produced remarkable players. Their brand of cricket is appreciated by all those who follow the game.

The committee of SLACC strongly believe that the club is an ideal medium to achieve several objectives at the same time. It offers an opportunity for young people to continue playing and reaching excellence. The opportunity to play at representative level is kept open to a host of young players. It's recreation for both the old and the young, and who knows in the not too distant future they may have the ladies joining in.

Anyone wants to join?

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Reflections after Gypsies Show.....

Light and Serious

After several months of organizing the mid-winter musical event, the *Gypsies Show* reached the final stage on a Sunday evening. Gates opened at 6 o'clock in the evening of a cool, balmy day. Those who had bought tickets in advance and last-minute buyers at the gate were appearing at regular intervals. Then it became an uninterrupted stream of enthusiastic music lovers. Tickets were still being sold at the gate when a message was sent by the ushers from inside the hall that ticket sales should stop immediately! Tasman Room was running short of seats!

When the curtain finally fell it was a good half hour past midnight and for many who came undeterred by Monday being a working day, it was back to work after a few hours' sleep. The 'Gypsies' whiled away the last hours in New Zealand in pleasant conversation at the residence of the Vice President of NZSLF, then went directly to the airport. Their leader, Sunil Perera, on his return to Sri Lanka, wrote to the President of the Foundation, Manjula Walgampola, expressing their appreciation of the fine hospitality of the Sri Lankan community. They had enjoyed performing for us and would cherish the memory of that evening for many years.

Were there any surprises? Only pleasant surprises! There was a capacity crowd and as expected the dance floor gradually expanded on all sides to accommodate the number of dancers which kept increasing. Sunil proved that he was still an entertainer *par excellence* as he kept his audience captive in that jocular manner he alone can do. The atmosphere lifted the spirits of all, the young and not so young. Finally the show had to end- when time was up to hand over the hall!

Remarkably, many Sri Lankan of the younger generation could be seen

swinging to the rhythms of a medley of Sinhala and Western songs. They evidently were enjoying the evening and I wondered what attracted them in such numbers to a performance by Gypsies, who are not of the new generation. I had the opportunity to meet some of them later and enjoyed a chat with them in a relaxed atmosphere one evening. Most of them were students still in high school or studying at University and they were most courteous and enthusiastic to share their views.

While I tried to get an insight to the cultural aspects of their life, the girls and boys spoke frankly and openly. They admittedly were much focused on academic achievement and fulfilling the wishes of their parents. Perhaps they actually typify the aspirations of most parents back in Sri Lanka. Academic achievement takes priority. A preference is shown for and guidance given to enter professional career paths. However, they have a variety of pastimes which include music, sports, drama, films and of course meeting up and hanging out with friends. These extra-curricular interests are mostly what Sri Lankans traditionally engaged in. They feel that kids, who grew up in a New Zealand environment from a very young age, tend to take up other outdoor sports and pastimes so popular in this country. There may be activities they do not wish to take up as it may be too expensive to pursue them.

They love the New Zealand experience but do suffer nostalgic memories, particularly the ones who have left behind a life they had got used to in their early childhood. They make new friends in their adopted country with other Sri Lankans, Indians and Asians. Some of them have close kiwi friends.

To their young minds, there are still significant differences in the social life of those who have grown up in a New Zealand environment and those who migrated at a later stage. The former have grown with a degree of freedom in their social life which the later arrivals have not adopted yet. This suggests that cultural adaptation is easier when a child arrives here earlier and perhaps their attitudes to careers and life will be akin to a child with a New Zealand heritage.

There are many community organizations that form the fabric of

their social life. Youth Clubs, the temple youth clubs, Buddhist clubs and sports clubs such as the ones for cricket and badminton play a major role. The University students' organizations and their activities appear to be a welcome diversion and also bring them together. For instance a popular magician's performances appealed to them. The Buddhist meditation learning sessions hosted by an organization in the Auckland University is another activity that they felt should be valued and promoted.

Some evidently miss the flavours of Sri Lankan cuisine. Perhaps even the foods prepared in Sri Lankan style to Sri Lankan recipes do not have the authenticity they would like. But there are other compensatory aspects in the new environment. The climate is colder but they have got acclimatized and tolerate it well. Safety and security is relatively better in the New Zealand environment. New links with friends in the larger community have been made which gives them a feeling of comfort.

While we chatted about the lifestyle of young people it occurred to me that the expatriate younger generation are in an ideal position to nurture cultural values they've carried across from Sri Lanka while discarding and trashing some of the less seemly aspects which are best buried anyway. They gave me the impression that they are open to the new multi-cultural aspects of New Zealand society. They could blend and nurture the best of both traditions which would have potentially a wide impact as a paradigm of cultural integration in modern New Zealand society

At another level, the strife in Sri Lanka- by whatever names it is called- in the past few decades have undoubtedly soured the perceptions of each other within the Sri Lankan community. The younger generation carry memories only of a country in turmoil and have no memories or perhaps even knowledge of a peace and harmony which have characterized relations among communities historically.

Isn't there an opportunity for this generation to renew the harmony Sri Lanka enjoyed here in New Zealand? Wouldn't it have a ripple-effect back in the mother country? Cultural activities in its widest sense

could be a vehicle to achieve this much desired goal. All organizations whether they are religious, cultural, community or sports could make a conscious effort to promote activities which will tend to bring together all Sri Lankan communities and create the space for young people to interact.

The social life of this generation could be helped by strengthening the various organizations that have already begun functioning. It is an opportunity for all who are interested to give a hand in whatever way possible to enhance the experience of our younger generation.

Rohan Abey ???

LIFE'S LIKE THAT IN SRI LANKA...

In the wake of the Tsunami, Japan decided to send a special representative to Sri Lanka in order to expedite their aid programmes. So one Tamasaki arrived in Colombo to circumvent "red tape". First, he went to External Resources. The Director warmly welcomed him and straight away began to attend to his requests. Tamasaki listened intently as he was talking on the telephone: "This is urgent **machchan**, attend to this soon...." And at the end of the call "thank you **machchan**"

Then Tamasaki went to Central Bank to hasten up procedures to get millions of yen converted to local currency. Again the Central Bank officer was most helpful. The officer got in touch with his colleagues in other departments to get the approvals speeded through. Tamasaki heard the officer on the telephone saying: "**Machchan** ! Mr Tamasaki is before me and he is in a hurry to get this approval." etc and again the conversation ended: "...thanks a lot **machchan**...see you later".

Within the week, Tamasaki visited several key officers and he was afforded the same cooperation. In every office he heard very much the same telephone conversation and he noticed that the words at the beginning and end were identical. He returned to Japan enlightened about Sri Lankan bureaucracy.

Soon his sponsors called him in to debrief them about his experiences with Sri Lankan bureaucracy. He

made his presentation and finally said: "I don't know about the Sri Lankan Bureaucracy being good or bad. But I do know that there is a one great fellow whose name is **Machchan** and all you've got to do is give him a call... and all things get done"

Gypsies Message: One People of a Nation

The Gypsies are a legend in our own Motherland

Their event here today was a blessing at hand

The music was superb and they played as a band

Of world class musicians and entertained us grand!

No one really wanted the party to end

*Beyond midnight, the music did blend
With the dancers who wanted the time to extend
And danced happily more when the message was sent.*

The start time was planned at the setting of the sun

People came from near and far to have fun

To meet the legendary Gypsies and to hear their voice run

To create dancing moods to suit every one.

From Seven PM to well passed mid night

People kept dancing to the rhythm of dim light

Eating and drinking to get the energy level right

To last till the end when we had to say "Good Night."

The Foundation was happy that the event went so well

Both Gypsies and the crowd may have gone home with swell

Memories of the evening and some stories to tell

As they returned to their homes carrying the event's sweetest smell.

The Gypsies bring people together, that is true

Their philosophy is that "One Lanka" we do

Form with our diversity of cultures we brew

One People of a Nation – The Foundation's aim too

**Anne Perera,
28 September 2008**



The Annesley & Dalreen music and dance show

Entertained a large crowd at Alexandra Park. We had our own Sri Lankan New Zealanders up on stage with their own talent. The two veteran performers were given accompanying music by "Cream" who has time and time again provided music at Foundation events.

Our very own Kumar Velambalam who initially was persuaded to sing for friends at small parties and get-togethers. Now he is as unstoppable as a locomotive! The next stop for Kumar? How about **Star Light Express**, Kumar?!

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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-organization, we do not make any payments for articles. Please send your contributions to the Summer Issue by July 2009 to the correspondence address below. Attn: **Editorial Committee** or by email to: nzslf@nzslfoundation.com

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