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## THE FRIENDS OF SRI LANKA ASSOCIATION

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### Newsletter Summer 2016

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Since the last Newsletter there has been little progress to report on the political front. The President is still trying to bring the SLFP together by exhortation and the appointment of two new state ministers but this did not stop Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) and his supporters in the party from pushing ahead with plans for a new party, although this has been somewhat stymied by the delay in holding the local government elections. They were due this year, but postponed by the extra time demanded by the Demarcation Committee for redrawing the constituency boundaries (see last Newsletter). It is now likely that it will be well into 2017 before these are held. Despite this MR is reported to be working on a new party. The newly formed "Joint Opposition" (JOP) led by Dinesh Gunawardena -- again see last Newsletter - which takes in the dissident SLFP MPs is also flexing its muscles. This is making life difficult for the President. The SLFP's problems are well illustrated by the holding of two separate May Day Rallies at which the main focus was not the rights of workers or policy issues but which group got the bigger turnout. The JOP held a rally at Kirulapone, organised by the District Organisers recently sacked by the President from their posts in the SLFP. It reportedly had twice the turnout of an earlier pro-MR rally in March at Hyde Park. The rallies were seen as tests of popularity and not unexpectedly led to competing claims and counter-claims. The UNP held its own rally at Campbell Park in Colombo.

Other than that; the Constitutional Assembly, comprising all the members of Parliament, held its first meeting in April. It is tasked with revising the constitution. The Chair is the Speaker, Karu Jayasuriya. A Steering Committee headed by the Prime Minister was also agreed. The membership of 21 covers a range of political persuasions, including Nimal Siripala de Silva, Rauff Hakeem, Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe, Richard Bathiudeen, Lakshman Kiriella, Sampanthan, Sumanthiran, Douglas Devananda, Dinesh Gunewadena, Malik Samarawickrema and Dilan Perera. Already differences have re-emerged between the two main partners in the United Front government over timing - which comes first, electoral reform or the revised constitution. The UNP want the new constitution to incorporate electoral reform. The President is for settling the electoral issue first. He has also made it clear that he is in favour of abolishing the Executive Presidency.

#### **Problems with the Economy**

The main news in this second quarter has been the long expected crisis in the financial field. Previous Newsletters have drawn attention to the problems facing the government caused by the lack of revenue and the reliance on borrowing, especially from overseas. This is to pay for capital projects as well as to repay existing loans. In the 2016 budget the government was criticised for resorting to short term fixes and not producing a long term reform package. Tax increases, including the budget proposal for a new VAT rate of 15% and a capital gains tax,

were put on hold while the IMF considered its response to the government request for a \$3 billion loan. This was reported in the last Newsletter and in early April the IMF team was ready to make a proposal to its Board. It cautioned the government to end "its haphazard spending" and get the huge losses of the state owned enterprises (SOEs) under control. In mid-May it recommended an Extended Financial Facility (EFF) of \$1.5 billion to be disbursed in tranches over three years.

This was a positive step but did not by any means meet the total needs of the government. Government debt, which had been \$9 billion in 2000, was \$44.8 billion in 2015. Capital repayments in that year were \$3.46 billion taking some 45% of export earnings, of which interest alone was \$1.22 billion. If interest rates increased this would be an unsupportable burden and there are fears now that, following the UK decision to leave the EU, rates for borrowers such as Sri Lanka could rise. Professor Columbage noted that the Central Bank report showed that the budget deficit for 2015 was 7.4% of GDP as against a target of 4.4%. He also noted that the heavy expenditure on projects by the previous government had kept GDP growth at a relatively high level, but that was before repayments had started. As a result the government had no option but to bring in the new taxes, although the President fought hard to protect low paid workers from the effect of the 15% VAT. Confusingly, various changes were made including adding liquor and cigarettes but excluding water, electricity and pharmaceuticals. Commentators noted the devastating effect on low and middle income groups as well as, for instance, on soldiers who had to pay VAT on telephone calls when contacting their families. Shops in some districts have closed in protest against the new rate and the MR faction is exploiting public dissatisfaction.

In order to meet the future repayment schedule on the overseas debt, the Cabinet approved, after protests from the Attorney General over terms covering the repayment of the loan in the case of sanctions, a foreign currency financing facility to be provided by four, later five, international banks for some \$3 billion. The PM argued that the money was urgently needed so the cabinet agreed with only Ranawaka voting against. It is an indication of the depth of the financial problem, which the PM has now publicly admitted is serious. The loan is due to be floated before the end of the month, but, as noted above, the timing is now problematical. For the government the agonising problem is that the new borrowing is necessary almost entirely to repay the loans incurred by the Rajapaksa administration.

Committees have now been set up to look at the debts of the SOEs and to consider the conversion of some loans into equity. The sums involved are very substantial. While on his visit to China in early April, the President discussed this matter and China was asked to consider this for the troubled Norochcholai coal fired power station. Further moves include the cancelling one of SLA's Airbus A-350s and discussions are now reported to be in progress with Turkish Airlines about leasing three more. Following criticism of SL Ports Authority's (SLPA) management of the Jaya container terminal, the equity interest of the SLPA in the new East Container Terminal in Colombo is to be cut to 15% from a proposed 51%. This will be the port's second deep water facility. The Cabinet Economic Management Committee will probably decide that it should be run by a private partnership agreement like the South Asia Gateway Terminal or the Colombo International Container Terminal. In addition the government plans to cut expenditure by up to Rs.626 billion. Three government owned hotels are to be put up for sale - the Hilton, the Grand Oriental and the yet to be finished Grand Hyatt.

### **Controlling the debt**

As the Sunday Times economic correspondent notes, the government does not have to repay the whole debt, but just bring it down to a manageable level. There are a number of steps that

can be taken, such as avoiding commercial borrowings as much as possible, limiting short term debt and increasing foreign direct investment. This has lagged because of concern about the policies of the previous administration. The government is to set up a debt management unit with help from the World Bank. With care, a balance of payments surplus of up to \$2 billion is possible in 2016 as workers' remittances are still strongly positive and tourism is flourishing. A further plus point is that the EU has just lifted the ban on Sri Lankan fish exports after the government has met the standards for controlling illegal fishing. Talks are also in progress to reinstate GSP+ - the concessionary tariff rate which should be a boost to apparel exports. Further heavy expenditure on infrastructure projects is now less likely, although the burden of repaying existing loans remains. However some of the projects, such as the new port at Hambantota and the Mattala Airport, will be a burden unless the Chinese agree to swap some of the debt for equity.

For the moment the President has stalled the opposition and the no confidence motion against Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake was defeated. However the question of reappointing the Central Bank Governor, Arjuna Mahendran, resurfaced in June. Mahendran was appointed to fill the remainder of the term of the previous Governor, Cabraal. He was involved in a serious controversy about the sale of a large government bond issue (see Newsletter Spring 2015) which concerned a company, Perpetual Treasuries, in which a relative had an interest. An SLFP group was strongly against the re-appointment, as were a number of civil organisations. The President agreed to wait until Parliament's Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) had completed its report, but in late June Mahendran apparently said that he would not seek re-appointment. The President has now appointed Indrajit Coomaraswamy to be the new Governor. He is a respected economist and has recently been working as Director of Economic Affairs at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

### **Other Economic and Social Problems**

In other issues with a serious economic as well as social impact, the country has suffered from the worst flooding for some 27 years when the monsoon broke in mid-May. 19 districts were badly hit including Kandy, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, and Kalutara. Colombo and Gampaha also suffered. There were some serious landslides with a death toll in mid-May of at least 84 with 116 persons missing. Over 6,000 families living in flood prone areas, including 2,000 in Kegalle, were resettled.

Another social and economic blow was the huge explosion at the Salawa ammunition storage area at Kosgama. The hospital in the town was destroyed and some 650 houses destroyed or badly damaged. A lot of the munitions were very old and were in the process of being re-sold. Most were supplied by China. There were queries about the way some of the bombs had been stored and a Court of Inquiry has been set up to find out how it happened.

### **The UN and Human Rights**

Turning to the political scene, as already noted the President and MR continue to struggle. Apart from that, the UN Human Rights Council opened its summer session in June. Prince Zeid, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, was due to give an oral report on Sri Lanka's progress in meeting the requirements of the UNHRC's resolution. The government's policy is clearly to work with the UN, but it has to be mindful of the opposition to internationalising the issue. Three UN Special Rapporteurs have visited Sri Lanka but in May the President caused considerable consternation with a statement that, while technical assistance would be sought from abroad, only Sri Lankan judges would take part in the "domestic mechanism" investigating HR abuses and war crimes. (See previous Newsletters for details of the UN's insistence on impartial investigations.) The Prime Minister later spoke to

military commanders in the same sense, saying that charges would be individual and not collective. Enlarging on the government's policy, Foreign Minister Samaraweera said that Sri Lanka backed the UN resolution because the government had committed itself to most of the points contained in it. However there would be public consultation before designing the "mechanism" and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be used to make sure mistakes of the past were not repeated. The government is now a party to the UN Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances and an Office of Missing Persons (OMP) has been established to handle such cases. In June the government admitted for the first time that some 65,000 persons were missing.

Clearly the government is playing for more time and, while the outcome of the Geneva meeting is not yet known, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of the western countries to press too hard. On the question of foreign judges and officials participating in the investigatory "mechanism", the TNA has only said that all parts of the Resolution should be met. The Global Tamil Forum has insisted, however, that foreign and Commonwealth participation is crucial.

### **China**

Following his visit to China there has been a review of relations with China. The President has set up a small committee to consider the future of the Port City project. It is envisaged that this will become a joint venture and part of the Megalopolis project. Some 40% of the project will eventually be floated on the stock market. Meanwhile, at the beginning of May the government confirmed that all the Chinese contracts were back on track. The Board of Investment (BOI) is now trying to encourage more direct investment by Chinese firms and it appears that a number of projects are in the pipeline. At the end of May a newspaper story reported that Chinese firms were getting work in the Polonnaruwa area without a tender process.

### **Relations with other Countries and MR's Travels**

There has not been much to report about relations with India. Jayalalitha, Chief Minister in Tamil Nadu, complained about work being done on a building on Kachchativu. She called it a "calculated provocation". The island has been Sri Lankan since the 1974 agreement. The Indian Coast Guard said there was no evidence of a naval base being set up by Sri Lanka. To the dismay of some of its supporters, the TNA has remained mute on issues outside those immediately affecting the Northern and Eastern provinces.

In early June the President went to Japan at the invitation of Prime Minister Abe to be a guest at the G-7 meeting at Ise. While there he met President Obama, who reportedly congratulated him and said that the US was there to help. Prime Minister Cameron said that the UK was working on the Sri Lankan request to probe the overseas assets of the previous administration. Prior to that, MR caused surprise by turning up in Thailand and meeting Udayanaga Weeratunga, former Ambassador to Russia and wanted by the FCID for questioning about the MiG 27 purchase. According to the press there was no record of Weeratunga having entered Thailand, and the meeting became public only because a photo of the two was posted on Facebook. Later in May MR requested assistance for his party to attend the inauguration ceremony for President Musaveni of Uganda and in June for a trip to Japan. Protocol help only was offered.

### **Corruption Investigations**

So far the FCID has had no success in tracing MR's alleged overseas funds and there is growing impatience over the lack of progress in the corruption enquiries. In late May four Ministers pressed the government to make a report, noting that MR is using the delay to create the feeling that he is the victim of politics. According to the press, the FCID has completed 42

investigations and details have been given to the President and the PM. At the end of June there was a news report that early in that month the President had requested a moratorium on the arrest of senior officials. The Attorney General said that they would ultimately be brought to trial.

A further development was the publication of the so-called Panama Papers involving secret deals by a wide range of persons from many countries. The Papers were organised by a Panamanian company called Mossack Fonseca and eighteen Sri Lankan names have appeared so far with more revelations said to be expected, including some diplomatic staff, especially Consul Generals.

The role of Sajin de Vass Gunawardena re-surfaced when the President questioned why he was given a security escort. He was the Monitoring MP overseeing the Foreign Ministry and he left the post with a string of corruption allegations against him. He has now lost the security detail, and at the end of June has been arrested.

### **Miscellaneous**

The compulsory school leaving age is to be raised from 14 to 16.

The Gratiaen Prize for literature was won by Thiyarajah Arasenayagam for his unpublished book of poetry entitled "White Lanterns - Wesak 2011". He is an English teacher in Kandy.

A rise in leopard deaths in the upcountry was reported. It is seemingly a result of leopard/human conflict. Ten animals have died in the past 7 months.

The annual drama festival presented by the Sunera Foundation, established by Sunera Bandaranaike, was presented at the Lionel Wendt Theatre in Colombo in June. The performers are all disabled in some way and over one thousand participants have appeared in the nine regional events.

### **Business Briefs**

Volkswagen has acquired land in Kolupitiya for a vehicle assembly plant.

Mandatory warnings about sugar content are to be put on soft drink containers. They will be in the form of a traffic signal with red indicating the highest sugar content. The WHO says that the incidence of diabetes in the country is showing a rise.

The President visited the De La Rue factory, which is a joint venture between the British firm and the government. It employs some 300 people and has been in business in Sri Lanka for 30 years. The plant is to be one of three key international centres for banknote production.

Aitken Spence is to expand its power generation capability following the CEB's decision to resume purchases from private generating plants. Power cuts during the drought revealed the need for such facilities.

The Plantation Minister has said that there is a consensus that out-grower production should be the model for the Regional Plantation Companies. These are the government owned plantations, which have consistently had production problems. Another report says that tea production has been hit by flooding.

A news story reports that preliminary moves have been made to wind up Sri Lanka's second international airline, Mihin Lanka. It has run up massive debts since its establishment by the previous administration.

These are the last paragraphs that John Field, our chairman from 1999 until 2012, will write for our newsletter. John's wisdom and wide-ranging experience has shone throughout all his words and his vast contribution has been widely praised. Our fellow member, David Robson, calls this moment the **End of an Era** and has written the following appreciation:

Members of the Friends of Sri Lanka Association probably take for granted the regular appearance of a quarterly newsletter. One wonders how many of them actually read the detailed report on current events in Sri Lanka which fills the first six to eight pages of each newsletter or query its provenance? These reports, which are published anonymously, are the handiwork of former FoSLA chairman John Field and have appeared regularly since 1999. But the report that appears in the next Newsletter will be his last: John Field is laying down his pen after seventeen years as the Newsletter's main contributor.

John served as British High Commissioner in Sri Lanka between 1991 and 1996 and chaired the Friends of Sri Lanka Association between 1999 and 2012. Since writing his first report he has produced an average of four reports per year, each containing about 4,000 words: this works out at over sixty reports containing a total of around a quarter of a million words.

Each report offered a summary of the main political events in Sri Lanka from the previous three months with additional commentaries on Business and the Economy. The reports were unique in that they offered detailed accounts of the events of the previous three months in a totally even-handed and un-biased manner and provided information that was not generally available in any other place. When quizzed John would claim that they were based completely on his trawlings of the Sri Lankan and international press, but their insightfulness suggested that he also relied heavily on his detailed knowledge of Sri Lanka and that he maintained a network of informants from his days as a diplomat. His reporting covered the tragedy of the Tsunami, the final decade of the Civil War and its bloody conclusion in 2009 and the eventual fall of the Rajapaksa regime. What made it all the more valuable was the fact that, during much of that period, the Sri Lankan press was muzzled and its journalists were working under duress.

I, for one, found John's reports invaluable and will miss them. I would like to thank him for his efforts on our behalf. I wish that I had kept them all. Perhaps he might be persuaded to edit them and publish them as an anthology: they would offer a fascinating account of a critical period in the history of modern Sri Lanka.

Our **Annual General Meeting** was held on 30 June, by kind permission of the Acting High Commissioner Mr. Sugeeshwara Guneratna, in the Sri Lankan High Commission.

Our Committee is unchanged:

Chairman	Sir Peter Heap KCMG
Vice Chairman	Linda Duffield CMG
Honorary Secretary	Vimal Perera
Membership Secretary	Bruce Rawlings
Honorary Treasurer	Ranil Perera

Events Secretaries Chamali Fernando (evening events)  
Ananthi Paskaralingam and Sue Marsh (daytime events)  
Lt. Col. Peter Cameron MC RM (Annual Lunch)

Amal Abeyawardene  
Mike Bunston OBE  
John Field, CMG  
Patrick Gallagher  
Peter Gregory-Hood  
Mohan Samarasinha

As members will know, both from John Field's paragraphs and from personal sources, cyclonic storm Roanu caused severe flooding and landslides across much of Sri Lanka. Mohan Samarasinha visited many of the afflicted areas and was deeply saddened to witness such distress. 39 destitute families living by the canal in Rajagiriya lost most of their belongings and suffered severe damage to their houses when a surge in the floodwater caused the canal to rise by 6 feet. Cyclonic winds in Anuradhapura had brought down trees onto already flood damaged houses and in Mannar fisher-families were severely affected when their highly specific nets were totally destroyed. As well as making financial donations of over £3,000 received from individual members of FoSLA, the Ceylon Association, friends and family through his charity, *We are One Sri Lanka*, Mohan visited all the beneficiaries in Rajagiriya and Mannar and gave practical assistance.

He had been guided throughout by *Candle Aid*, his government approved local partner charity. *Candle Aid*, which has regional co-ordinators throughout Sri Lanka, has been careful to select those most in need of help and disburses 100% of all donations directly to them.

The Annual General Meeting then agreed a resolution, submitted by Mohan Samarasinha, that the Association should donate £2,000 to *Candle Aid* for flood relief in Sri Lanka.

[www.candleaid.org](http://www.candleaid.org)

Our Chairman welcomed members to the 29th AGM of the Association, reminding them that it had been founded on the initiative of the then Sri Lankan High Commissioner in London, and on the suggestion of the then Foreign Minister, and that those close links between the Association and the High Commission rightly continue today. The Association's objectives are to promote good relations and understanding between the two countries, and the Sri Lankan High Commission knows that it can count on the Association's support.

The Chairman noted that since the last AGM Mr Sugeeshwera Guneratna had arrived as Sri Lanka's Acting High Commissioner, and that the new High Commissioner, Ms Amari Wijewardena, would arrive shortly, when the Association hoped to arrange an introductory event for members to meet her.

Sir Peter warmly thanked the outgoing Treasurer, Annette van Maurik, for her contribution and welcomed Ranil Perera as her replacement. He reported that John Field's accounts of political, economic and commercial developments in Sri Lanka in our Newsletter would end with the current edition, and that Amal Abeyawardena had agreed to contribute this feature in future. He thanked John, his predecessor as Chairman of the Association and a former High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, for this major contribution and was grateful he would remain a committee member.

The Chairman recorded the various activities, talks, tours and social events held by the Association during the year and thanked the Events Secretaries for arranging them, and mentioned other Sri Lankan events at the High Commission and elsewhere that he himself had attended. He thanked the Deputy Chair, Linda Duffield, and other office holders and committee members for their support and dedication during the year, and the Acting High

Commissioner and his staff for allowing us to use the High Commission for this and other functions and for their support. He reported that membership, at 404, was down slightly on the year before, and that recruiting new members, especially from the Sri Lankan community, was a priority. He concluded that he looked forward to another active year ahead.

We were then addressed by the Acting High Commissioner, who assured us of his continuing friendship and set out developments in the country we all love.

We completed our meeting with wine and short eats before adjourning to The Sekara for a delicious Post AGM supper.

### **Sri Lanka Cricket Tour of England**

Sri Lanka arrived in England in May for a 3 Test Match, 5 One Day Internationals and a T20 match.

The first test was held on 19th/23rd May at Headingley.

England scored 298 in their first innings and bowled Sri Lanka out for 91 and 119, winning by an innings and 88 runs.

In the second Test (27<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup> May) at Chester Le Street, Sri Lanka fared better and although England scored 489 for 9 declared in their first innings and Sri Lanka only 101 in their first innings. Being made to follow on they produced a prodigious innings of 475 with Chandimal scoring 126. However it was not enough and England made the 80 for the loss of only one wicket, to take a 2 match lead and the series.

In the final match at Lords England made 416 in the first innings, but Sri Lanka only managed 288. In the second innings England were 233 for 7 declared, leaving Sri Lanka to get 362 for a win. However in a rain interrupted match they were only 78 for 1, when the match was declared a draw.

The first ODI was played at Trent Bridge and was extremely exciting, with Sri Lanka scoring 286 and England needing 6 off the last ball of the over, which they achieved to make it a tied match.

Second ODI was at Edgbaston on 24th June. Sri Lanka scored 254, but England made 256 (Roy 112 Hales 133) with the loss of no wicket and overs to spare.

In the third ODI at Bristol Sri Lanka scored 248. England were only 16 for 1 when the match was abandoned due to rain.

The fourth ODI was at the Oval on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

Despite a good batting performance in a rain interrupted day, reduced to 42 overs Sri Lanka's 305 (Gunathilaka 62, Mendis 77, Chandimal 63 & Mathews 67 not out) was not enough and England made 309 in 40 overs (Roy 162 & Root 65).

5th ODI at Cardiff

England got off to a good start making 324 (Root 93). Sri Lanka struggled all the way to catch this total, but fell well short and were all out for 202 (Chandimal 53), with England winning the series 3 to nil.

In the T20 on 5<sup>th</sup> July at Southampton, Sri Lanka made 140 but England were 144 for 2. So a clean sweep for England.

Thus ended a rather disappointing tour with no wins to their name. However they showed signs of improvement as the series progressed. Clearly the conditions did not help with cold wet weather leading to many interruptions.

The Sri Lanka A Team have commenced their tour of England with a solid performance against Durham. They are scheduled to play two 4 Day Games and a 50 Over game with counties followed by two 4 day games against Pakistan A. Later in the month they will take part in a triangular 50 over tournament with England Lions and Pakistan A. There will be 4 matches at Cheltenham, Northampton (2 matches) and Canterbury.

The Sri Lanka under 19 team will also be touring England later this summer, from 26<sup>th</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> August, with 2 youth test matches (4days) against England under 19 at Fenner's and Northampton.

Also 3 One Day games at Chelmsford and Canterbury. The venue for the first one day on 10<sup>th</sup> August has yet to be decided.

Sri Lanka have appointed Kent's Simon Willis to oversee their cricket Academy based at the Khetarama stadium and is expected to play a key role in identifying talent and developing cricketers within the Sri Lanka system.

### **Talangama Wetland, a wildlife sanctuary in Colombo's suburbs**

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne



**Clockwise from top left: Asian Openbills in aggressive interaction, Black-headed Ibis bathing, Little Egret with Frog (all photographed within half an hour in Talangama). Purple-faced Leaf Monkey (photographed in Colombo).**

On the outskirts of Colombo, a few kilometres as the crow flies from the Parliament complex, is the Talangama Wetland. It is very rich in wildlife and is one of the best sites for wildlife photography for anyone based in Colombo. In the early 2000s, wildlife tourism companies such as Jetwing Eco Holidays introduced it to standard wildlife itineraries for wildlife tourists from overseas. Over the years many wildlife tour operators have begun to take clients there to bird watch. In the Sunday Times (Sri Lanka) I published an article in which I wrote about a morning bird watch when migrant birds were still present at the end of March in which I recorded 70 species of birds. On my visits to Colombo I often visit the wetland. Sometimes I am visiting friends nearby and my visit is as brief as half an hour. The images of the birds in this article were taken on such a short visit and illustrate how rewarding it can be for a photographer.

Talangama also illustrates the issues of habitat loss and the loss of wildlife. I had a period of residency in Sri Lanka between December 1999 and June 2010. I was given reliable eye witness accounts of sightings of the endemic Slender Red Loris on a block of forested land (the 'One Acre') adjoining the smaller of the two lakes known as Aluth Wewa (literally the New Lake). The Slender Loris was lost by the time I discovered the wetland. I was told accounts of a python that was a regular on this block of land but I failed to see it. However, as of 2016 people still see pythons. Another example of the conflict with wildlife is the loss of tree-lined avenues in which the endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys used to move between groves of trees. There were several troops present which would have been ideal subjects for students studying for a Masters or a PhD in zoology. With the demand for housing, large blocks of land get divided into smaller blocks, are clear felled and houses constructed. The old blocks often had their boundary lines marked with old trees in a similar fashion to the way in which hedgerows mark boundaries in the British countryside. New owners often cut the trees down and put up brick walls or wire mesh fences cutting off the free movement of the monkeys. As domestic dogs are a serious threat, the monkeys are fearful to come to the ground and use roofs for movement, often dislodging tiles. Architects and house builders who are not wildlife aware put on tiled roofs rather than roofing sheets which are less prone to damage from monkeys. The ensuing conflict even leads to some people shooting these protected animals.

The future for this intelligent and social animal is grim, with only a few troops still holding on. When I left Sri Lanka in 2010 the area still had the endemic Yellow-striped Chevrotain, also known as mouse-deer. But with more people, more dogs and less wooded thickets for a day-time hide out, they may eventually be lost. On a more positive note, Fishing Cat and Porcupine still hold out. The latter however may be lost when the last remaining plots of secondary growth are grubbed out for housing.

The Talangama Wetland is now protected as a sanctuary and it is likely to remain a hotspot for birds if protection continues. The Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL) organise a number of events to introduce families to bird watching.

### **Directions**

For those who do not rely totally on Google maps, I have provided below some supplementary directions.

1. Assume you are coming from the city centre passing the Parliament complex on your right-hand side, passing the Sri Lanka Japan Friendship Road to reach Pelawatta Junction. (At the Pelawatta Junction, the right turn will take you past HSBC, KFC etc. to Talawathugoda). A left turn will take you towards the Overseas School on Pannipitiya Road.
2. Go straight through on to D. P. Wijesinghe Mawatha (a.k.a. Akuregoda Road).
4. Travel about 2 km past YATV and an army camp until you come to a 'Right hand T Junction' with a Buddha statue.
5. Turn right into Wewa Para (Lake Road). Keep following this for another 1-2 km till you reach paddy fields and then the main lake of Talangama.

6. For the Aluth Wewa, take the left turn at the first bridge (people bathe at the spill on the right here). The road runs parallel to a canal linking the Aluth Wewa to the main lake.

### **Further Reading**

de Silva Wijeyeratne, G. (2010). **The little known bird paradise**. The Sunday Times Plus. Sunday 11 April 2010. Features. Page 6.

### **Association events in the last quarter**

#### **Sri Lanka, Island of Gems 18 May**

Sri Lanka is known to produce more than 50 varieties of gemstones, second only to Brazil. One of the most famous gemstones in the world is the Ceylon Blue Sapphire housed in Catherine Middleton's engagement ring (formerly belonging to Princess Diana) and leading gem experts the world over have claimed that the stone itself can be traced back to the district of Matale in Sri Lanka.

On Wednesday 18 May leading British gemmologist Stuart Pool explained the process a stone undergoes from mine to market. A brilliant evening with an informative speaker passionate about Sri Lanka and its vast array of semi-precious stones from rubies, spinels, catseyes, the famous padparadscha sapphire and many more. Guests were able to view a small collection of extremely rare stones that had been mined and cut in Sri Lanka.

FoSLA was pleased that the current British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr James Dauris, was also able to attend and meet and mingle with some of our members.

*Chamali Fernando, Evening Events Secretary*



*Photograph provided by Stuart Pool of Nineteen48.*

## Association events in the next quarter

### **Butterflies and moths of Sri Lanka**

#### **11 am on Thursday 28 July at the Natural History Museum**

There are a few places left on this most delicious of outings. Dr. Blanca Huertas, Senior Curator of Lepidoptera in the Life Sciences Department, and one of her colleagues will be taking us “behind the scenes” of the museum to see the collection of Sri Lankan butterflies and moths. This is a very rare, and exceedingly beautiful, treat.

After we have had lunch (at our own expense), we shall re-convene at the pavilion in the grounds of the museum, where we shall see Sri Lankan butterflies (and some moths) flying! The pavilion is planted with the flowers and bushes that the butterflies love and the whole experience is really most wonderful.

Tickets cost £15 and an application form is attached.

### **An evening of Music, Portuguese Culture and History**

#### **6.15 for 6.30 pm on Tuesday 6 September at Senate House, University of London**

Dr. Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya is a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Britain. Formerly she was a Research Associate in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at King’s College, University of London.

She is the author of eight books covering a wide range of expertise from diaspora studies, cultural history, historical linguistics to ethnomusicology.

We are delighted to invite Shihan to speak to us at the prestigious Senate House in London about her latest book, *Portuguese in the East: Cultural History of a Maritime Trading Empire* at the prestigious Senate House in London.

Her talk will focus on the Portuguese influences on Sri Lanka, ranging from baila music, song and dance to linguistic impressions in the local languages which signal the areas of cross-cultural contact.

Shihan’s publishers, I B Tauris, London, have generously offered her book to our members at the absolute bargain price of £25 on the night.

This book usually retails for £65 and so this exclusive discount is very special.

Tickets cost £8 per person and include a glass of wine.

An application form is attached and Chamali looks forward very much to seeing you at Senate House on 6 September.

### **Jack the Ripper**

#### **A walking tour with Stan Medland from 2 to 4 pm on Tuesday 27 September**

Why Jack the Ripper? Because, after 128 years, this is the most popular walk in London, because the crimes are still unsolved and because the reverberations from the terror spread from royalty to strangers in the streets of London.

And haven’t we all been strangers in a foreign land, all felt slightly scared and all been regarded with slight suspicion? (I remember, soon after I arrived in magical, extraordinary Sri Lanka, a Pera Hera passing the house in the very middle of the night and a stilt walker hanging her bag on the gate. Was it a sign? Of course not, but that was how it felt at the time.)

Stan hardly needs introduction. He is a Blue Badge guide of great charm and vast knowledge who has led us on three occasions; it would be hard to think of a better guide.

At 1.45 pm on 27 September we shall meet at Tower Hill Underground Station and hear how the Tower was involved and why the police were so inept.

As we walk slowly through the streets where the crimes were committed, we shall hear quotes from the Ripper himself and see contemporary police photographs. These are very nasty and

we shall have earned our tea and crumpets in the English Restaurant in Spitalfields shortly after 4 pm.

An application form is attached.

### **Annual Lunch**

**12 noon for 1.15 pm on Wednesday 16 November at The Rifles Club**

Once again we shall return to the ever welcoming Rifles Club in Mayfair to enjoy another of Philip Gunasekara's excellent curry lunches.

With 4 bottles of Lion Lager and one bottle each of red and white wine on every table of ten, the ticket price of £27:50 must represent one of the best bargains in London!

An application form is attached and we look forward very much to seeing you there.

### **October/November talk on Terrorism**

Terrorism tore Sri Lanka apart during the periods of the Civil War (1983 – 2009) and the first and second JVP insurrections (1971 and 1987-89). The country experienced some of the worst known acts of modern terrorism from suicide bombings, civilian massacres and political assassinations all of which posed a significant threat to society, the economy and the development of the paradise island. Terrorism has since become a global threat.

The Friends of Sri Lanka Association is excited to announce that Professor Rohan Gunaratna has indicated that he will be able to speak to our membership sometime in October or November this year.

Professor Gunaratna is the world-renowned expert on counter-terrorism and heads the largest training and research centre in the world for counter-terrorism. The Professor was invited to testify at the 9/11 Commission on the structure of Al Qaeda and he also led the specialist team that built the UN Database on Al Qaeda, the Taliban and their entities. Professor Gunaratna has authored 12 books on terrorism including books about the conflict in Sri Lanka. We look forward to arranging this event, which has to fit in with the Professor's busy diary. He lives in Singapore so it is not an easy task but watch this space for updates!

Chamali Fernando  
Evening Events Secretary  
Chamali.fosla@gmail.com

### **Membership Dues**

Annual membership subscriptions for the current year fell due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016. About 30 members have not yet paid their subscriptions for 2015 or 2016 and, worryingly, one third of these normally pay by standing order. This seems to indicate that they may not wish to continue in membership but, obviously, we hope this is not the case!

**If you normally pay by standing order** but for some reason have not done so this year, please contact Bruce Rawlings, membership secretary, to discuss – email address [rawlings@mistral.co.uk](mailto:rawlings@mistral.co.uk). Alternatively, you can telephone Bruce on 01903 264150.

**If you normally pay by cheque but have not already done so**, please forward your cheque immediately to the Honorary Treasurer, **Ranil Perera, 51 Fitzjames Avenue, CROYDON, Surrey, CR0 5DN** – cheques to be payable to 'The Friends of Sri Lanka Association'

Reminders will be sent out later in the year to non-payers but we would naturally prefer to avoid the added cost of such reminders.

Just to remind: the **single subscription is £15.00 and the joint subscription is £22.50.** Alternatively, if you prefer to change to payment by standing order (an altogether easier method of payment for all concerned), please contact the Hon Treasurer or Bruce Rawlings for the necessary form. **This method of payment is much preferred by the Association** because it minimises costs and valuable volunteer time.