NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Let us build a climate resilient nation for food security and nutrition
Let us build a food culture free from poison

For Healthy Sri Lanka
ARE WE LACKING NOBLE TEACHERS?

Teaching is a noble social service. It is not a profession that should be degraded or abused under any circumstances. The primary purpose of education is to produce a citizen who can assert his or her responsibility in accordance with his or her conscience and take responsibility for their actions. It is the result of a well-disciplined process. The driving force a child emulates in this disciplinary process is the teacher. The teacher has the responsibility to create a disciplined and knowledgeable social community to achieve the broader goals of a nation-state. Genuine teachers make great sacrifices in fulfilling this national responsibility. They work for the betterment of society by going beyond the call of duty without purely focusing on financial gain or myopic political objectives. A virtuous teacher with discipline is a national asset to any country.

Many are of the opinion that education in Sri Lanka is structured according to an internationally accepted methodology. Sri Lanka's education system is highly praised around the world for its ability to produce well-disciplined and knowledgeable students. The purpose of education is not to help them pass the exam, but also to cultivate the faith that the student needs to live a disciplined life based on true qualities of humanity.

In Sri Lanka, education system began to be shaped by a more structured methodology around the early 1940s. Until then, education, which had been active for a variety of purposes and intentions, had been scattered. Low-income families in the country did not have access to education. Records suggest that it was those who involved by representing every ethnic groups exist in the country fought for the independence took the initiatives to restructure the public education system in the country.

Accordingly, the Report of the Special Committee on Education was tabled in 1943 and approved in Parliament on 27 May 1947. The main objective of this was to ensure that all children from all walks of life were given access and opportunities for primary and secondary education without any hindrance. In 1905 the literacy rate was 5%. In 1947 it had a female literacy rate of 46% lower than the male literacy rate and today it has a female literacy rate of over 96%. Although the basic criteria for measuring literacy are debatable, the progress made by Sri Lankans in the general education system is exemplary.

Dr. Christopher William Wijekoon Kannangara, as we all know, was the pioneer in making education a fundamental right of the people in this country. He had a great vision for education in the country and he hoped to build a Sri Lankan nation with knowledge and skills based economy through social justice. His vision was not only to provide “free” education waiving the fees for schools and universities. He had a vision to redesign and reengineer the Sri Lankan nation with the aim of eradicating poverty and creating a unitary Sri Lanka through education. Records suggest that he was a staunch opponent of the tuition culture.

However, it is unfortunate that in the last few decades the education system in this country has deteriorated to such an extent that it has adversely affected the society. Later, the public education system in the country began to function to the tune of various political objectives. It is no secret that initiating schools based on religion is a fatal mistake in the education system of Sri Lanka. It created various divisions in the society. That division led to social mystification. Due to various changes made at the state level by rulers in the past to meet the short-sighted desires, education has become a victim of various frauds. They have taken the lives of children in this country hostage, pushing the future of the country into an abyss. As a result, the primary objectives of education were diminished.

The ongoing teachers’ strike in the country based on decades long wage inequality issue is illustrates the prevailing plight of the country's public education system. Many striking teachers continue to run tutoring classes that provides them extra income. But there are a large number of students in this country who are unable to attend tuition classes due to poverty. Their education was almost completely disrupted by the strike. Under any circumstances the deliberate destruction of the future of children who seek the only solution to their poverty through public education cannot be justified. Sabotaging the future of these children is a national crime.

The existence of a nation-state depends on its ability to sustain the basic needs such as food, education, health, housing and transportation, without interruption. Self-destruction is inevitable in any country when these sectors fall prey to fraudsters. Therefore, sustained national policies without compromising the principles of the nation-state are needed in these key sectors. Cynical manipulation to gain purblind political desires not only causes social instability but also makes Sri Lanka a vassal state. The true nationalism of every citizen is laying on the capacity to understand the ground reality and fulfill the individual responsibility. That is the beginning of humanity. In any nation-state, individual freedom is guaranteed when individual responsibility is properly fulfilled. Instead, there is no point in making empty criticisms and rhetorical noises to degenerate society by neglecting individual responsibility.
Since the first detection of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan Province in China in December 2019, the world has now spent nearly two years under the COVID-19 pandemic. Every country in the world is affected differently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Impact of the pandemic is not only limited to the global health security. It has largely impacted the global economy creating domino effects on many other spheres. Vaccines intended to provide immunity against the COVID-19 provided a major hope for the world to overcome the pandemic. Many countries undertook genetic sequencing of COVID-19 by early 2020, commenced developing vaccine candidates by March 2020 and by late 2020, a number of countries implemented vaccination programmes against the COVID-19.

Sri Lanka’s Approach For Covid-19 Pandemic

Vision of the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in combatting the COVID-19 has been “proactive intervention to prevent any outbreak of COVID-19 within Sri Lanka” whilst keeping the economy moving. Sri Lanka acted well before the pandemic hit the region and adjusted, readjusted strategies as
epicenters of the pandemic shifted from China to America, Europe and then to India. The Government promptly imposed many control measures from local and international travel restrictions to localized and countrywide lockdowns. This is whilst many other actions across several fields were taken covering (a) detection, isolation and contact tracing (b) medical surveillance, lab investigations and case management (c) right information to public, confidence building and consolidate solidarity and (d) supply of food and medicine and maintenance of essential service. The strategy adopted is a “whole-of-government approach”.

Sri Lanka’s Approach for Covid-19 Vaccination

The President’s vision in vaccination against the COVID-19 is “free vaccine up to the last citizen and nationwide vaccination at the fastest possible mean”. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) planned for the vaccination of its population parallel to any other country. It explored all possibilities to purchase different vaccine candidates and even to produce vaccines within Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan approach into COVID-19 vaccination focuses on (a) securing vaccines (b) administration of vaccines and (c) monitoring of the progress. (Figure 1)

Continuous Planning

The GoSL undertook studies on vaccine candidates as early as December 2020 and on 12 January 2021, the President appointed an eight-member committee headed by the Principal Advisor to the President, Mr. Lalith Weeratunga for national deployment and vaccination plan for COVID-19. Ministry of Health has been given the operational responsibility of vaccination drive. State Ministry of Production, Supply and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals has been given the responsibility of purchases and State Pharmaceuticals Corporation (SPC) of Sri Lanka was given the sole authority to procure vaccines thereby avoiding any third-party involvements.

Prioritization of Hotspots. National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOCPCO)
along with Vaccine Task Force, Health and Medical Experts and Intelligence Services deployed different mechanics to identify hotspots for vaccination. Theses hotspots ranged from Provinces, Districts upto smallest administrative area; Grama Niladhari Division. Extensive and careful studies of the COVID situation to include number of daily positive cases, deaths, inputs from contact tracing, number of people under quarantine, medical / health factors which include hospital, bedding and ICU capacities, population dynamics, mobility data, range of other social factors, inputs from genome sequencing and many others. This process was dynamic and was ever evolving with changes in daily situation. Number of modelling tools have also been extensively used for this purpose: (Figure 2)

Prioritization of Specific Groups. Prioritization of vaccination took place in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and first group to be vaccinated in Sri Lanka was the frontline health, community workers and Security Forces personnel engaged with pandemic control activities. High priority in the vaccination process was also given to the above 60 age group with more attention on those who have underlying health conditions / comorbidities. Many efforts were put in place to vaccinate above 60 age group to include priority vaccination line for them, mobile vaccination centers and special arrangements for in-home-vaccination for feeble community. As more vaccines were available, systematically, the GoSL shifted the efforts to include above 30 age groups with more attention to people with comorbidities, pregnant women, employees of entry / exit points, harbours, airports, economic sector employees, factory workers, employees in essential services, school and university teachers / lectures, tourism sector employees, students going abroad for higher studies., etc and even included above 18 age group in those categories as appropriate.

Approval of Vaccines. The National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) is the leading authority that ensures the standards, safety, quality and efficacy of medicinal products in the country. SPC engaged with NMRA as early as possible to register different vaccine candidates to be authorized for emergency use in Sri Lanka. Based on extensive review of the quality, safety, immunogenicity and efficacy data, NMRA has so far given the approval for AstraZeneca, Sputnik V, Pfizer, Sinopharm, Moderna and Sinovac vaccines. Inputs from scientific studies on changing dynamic of the virus, mutations, variants in circulation and their response to vaccine candidates under consideration have also been reviewed when selecting / approving different vaccine candidates. Further, Advisory Committee on Communicable Diseases in Sri Lanka also approved the use of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as the second dose of AstraZeneca. Details of vaccines approved by NMRA are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial</th>
<th>Type of Vaccine</th>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
<th>Date of Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AstraZeneca</td>
<td>Serum Institute of India Private Limited, India</td>
<td>22 Jan. 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sputnik V</td>
<td>Generium Joint Stock Company, Russia</td>
<td>4 March 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pfizer</td>
<td>Pfizer Inc., USA and BioNTech, Germany</td>
<td>7 May 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sinopharm</td>
<td>The Beijing Institute of Biological Products, China</td>
<td>8 May 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moderna</td>
<td>Moderna Biotechnology Company, USA</td>
<td>29 June 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sinovac</td>
<td>Sinovac Biotech Limited, China</td>
<td>16 July 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 : Approved Vaccine Candidates in Sri Lanka – 24 August 2021.

Vaccination Roadmap. Complete the nationwide vaccination at the fastest possible mean was the Government’s primary objective during the vaccination programme. The President outlined the framework for vaccination of 100% of above 30 population in the country (nearly 11.4 million) with at least a single dose by early September 2021 and fully vaccinate 50% of the same population by mid-September. The GoSL also earmarked to complete the vaccination of first dose to all over 30 years of age in the Western Province before 31 July 2021. These timelines were dynamic and were reviewed, readjusted and redefined as more vaccines were available and with the changes in the overall COVID situation in the country.

NOCPCO, Vaccine Task Force and Heath and Medical experts regularly meet to discuss and analyze the progress and improvements to the roadmap. Outcome of such discussions / meetings were used to accelerate the vaccination programme and to expedite the procurement. The GoSL, later set the objective of
Sri Lanka has one of the best track records of immunization in the region which goes back to the 19th century. It has made an excellent progress over the past decades in immunization, notably in terms of achieving high immunization coverage and disease control.

Allocation of Vaccines. Allocation of different vaccines based on the stock’s availability, future arrivals, needs of specific groups and hotspots were done with judicious planning and forecasting. This process is centrally controlled by the Vaccine Task Force under the strict supervision of the President Rajapaksa. Ministry of Health, NOCPCO and the Vaccine Task Force are to account the last dose of vaccine and to avoid misuse of a single dose. Consideration has also been given to assign a specific vaccine candidate to total population in a selected geographical area with medical considerations and administration dynamics. As cases in point, AstraZeneca was allocated for aged population with comorbidities and Pfizer for cancer patients. Puttalam and Mannar districts were also given the Pfizer coverage to protect that population from possible exposure into new variants across the sea.

Securing Vaccines

Process to secure vaccines through procuring, donations or COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) commenced in early 2021. Vaccine Task Force was to explore all possibilities of procuring different vaccine candidates from different countries; whether government to government purchases or otherwise, engage with the WHO for vaccines through COVAX facility and to explore cordial bi-lateral relations for vaccine-aids. Personal involvement of the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa himself to speak to Presidents and Heads of States in friendly foreign countries, contributed tremendously to realize the early arrival of vaccines to Sri Lanka.

As of August 2021, the GoSL has spent nearly 25 billion Sri Lankan Rupees for the purchases of vaccines and forecast 40 billion Sri Lankan Rupees for future deployment of vaccines. On 12 May 2021, Government also signed an agreement with the World Bank for additional financing of 80.5 million USD to access and distribute vaccines, strengthen vaccination process and pandemic response. Sri Lanka received its first consignment of free 500,000 AstraZeneca doses from India on 28 January 2021 and Chinese Government donated 3,000,000 Sinopharm doses in four occasions. Sri Lanka received 1,865,424 doses of AstraZeneca, 1,500,000 Moderna and 100,000 Pfizer through COVAX facility. As of September 2021, Sri Lanka has placed orders to secure 49.25 million of
vaccine doses which is even ample for booster shots. 

As of 5 September 2021, Sri Lanka has received 27,339,984 doses of vaccines out of which 3,500,000 were donations, 3,465,424 under COVAX facility and 20,374,560 were procured by the SPC. Sinopharm has been the main vaccine candidate in Sri Lanka with 22,000,000 doses, AstraZeneca has been the second with 2,865,424 doses and Moderna is the third with 1,500,000 doses. Total stocks received by mid-August is given below:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial</th>
<th>Vaccine Type</th>
<th>Cat.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinopharm</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>19,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AstraZeneca</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moderna</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pfizer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>664,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sputnik V</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>210,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
<td>3,465,424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Arrival of Vaccines – 24 August 2021.

19th century. It has made an excellent progress over the past decades in immunization, notably in terms of achieving high immunization coverage and disease control. Thus, administration of COVID-19 vaccines was not any different to Sri Lanka and Ministry of Health simply incorporated the COVID-19 vaccination into the already available immunization network. Medical services of the Army along with other forces were also augmented in order to expedite the process within the timeline.

Sri Lanka commenced the vaccination of front-liners with AstraZeneca first dose on 29 January 2021 and completed by 22 April 2021. Administration of second dose of AstraZeneca commenced on 23 April 2021. Initial roll-out of first doses of Sinopharm and Sputnik V commenced on 6 May 2021 and second doses of Sinopharm and Sputnik V commenced

Figure 4: Arrivals of Vaccines – 24 August 2021.
respectively on 8 June 2021 and 12 June 2021. Pfizer was first deployed in Sri Lanka on 9 July 2021 and Moderna on 18 July 2021. Detailed administration is given below: (Figure 5)

As Sri Lanka commenced the vaccination in January it was only 59,426 doses administered during the whole month. However, augmentation of the Army medical units with other forces in the vaccination programme accelerated the process in many folds and by June 2021, monthly administration was 1,852,311 and it reached 8,245,347 just in the month of July alone. Sri Lanka has also recorded 520,077 doses administered in a single day and had been placed as the first in rolling of 7-day average per 100 people in the total population by “Our World in Data” for 10 consecutive days since 27 July 2021. On 2 August 2021, WHO Sri Lanka and the Director General of the WHO have commended on Sri Lankan vaccination process. (Figure 6)

On 11 August 2021, Sri Lanka surpassed administering 11,496,904 first doses (100% of the total above 30 population) and administered 5,748,452 second doses (50% of the total above 30 population) by 24 August 2021. This marked the completion of the GoSL’s first two vaccination objectives. The GoSL commenced the vaccination of age group between 18 – 30 age group as the next step and hopeful of completing the first dose of the same age group during the September 2021. Present vaccine coverage with percentages is given below: (Figure 7)

Deployment of Vaccination Center. Achievement of vaccination objectives were possible due to the combined administration process by Ministry of Health, NOCPco along with Army Medical Service assisted by Navy and Air Force. 50 / 60 vaccination centers deployed daily as of January 2021, were increased upto 275 / 300 by July 2021. The GoSL implements (a) regular / static vaccination centers at selected hospitals / other locations for regular vaccination (b) ad-hoc vaccination centers at all hospitals / MoH Offices and (c) 24 x 7 vaccination centers manned by the Army Medical Service for mass vaccination and (d) mobile vaccination centers by the Army and Ministry of Health to vaccinate feeble community, specially above 60 age group.

Monitoring Of Progress

Monitoring of progress is an essential part of the whole vaccination process. The President weekly meets officials from Ministry of Health, NOCPco and the Vaccine Task Force to assess the progress of the
vaccination drive, attainment of vaccination objectives and to decide on modifications. This process is also important to determine future goals of vaccination drive and to forecast requirements of different vaccines candidates. Each dose of different vaccines arrived Sri Lanka is counted, accounted, charted, number of doses administered and stock levels are monitored on daily basis. The State Intelligence Service (SIS) plays a vital role in the data synthesizing process. (Figure 8)

Epidemiology Unit centrally controls the releasing of vaccines based on requirements and stocks are top-up to provincial / district level storages based on depleting stock levels. Stocks allocated to each province / district are daily monitored against numbers administered during the day. Vaccine requirement for first doses and second doses for each province / district are also daily monitored. The SPC is notified well in advance when the stock levels at the Epidemiology Unit deplete or requirement change based on the new vaccination objectives. Details of the vaccination process are also updated at the website of the President’s Office for the consumption of

Figure 6: Rolling of 7-day Average per 100 people by “Our World in Data”.

Figure 7: Vaccine Coverage with Percentages – 24 August 2021.
Walk-In Community COVID-19 Vaccination

Sri Lanka launched new “walk-in” community COVID-19 vaccination centres throughout the country to expedite the vaccination for all. The images show how health officials are leading this national programme by overcoming various challenges. (Photos: Special arrangement)

**Synergy of The Vaccination Process**

Vaccination of the population amidst the spread of pandemic is not an easy endeavour. Judicious planning, combined efforts by the health and defence, 24 x 7 commitment, detailed monitoring, forecasting and procuring are the pillars of success in the vaccination process in Sri Lanka. Role played by the Ministry of Health and the Defence Services, contributions made by NOCCPCO, the Vaccine Task Force and the SPC are major contributing factors to the success of the process. Numerous assistances given by all other line Ministries, Departments, Corporations, Authorities, Local Government Systems, all State and Private Sectors partners and the commitment of the population to the vaccination drive were also very much supportive to this achievement.

**Conclusion**

Since the first detection of the COVID-19 in December 2019, the world has now spent nearly two years under this pandemic. Vaccine candidates developed against the virus have provided a major hope for the world to overcome the pandemic and Sri Lanka planned as early as possible for the vaccination of its population. The President’s vision in vaccination against the COVID-19 is "free vaccine up to the last citizen and nationwide vaccination at the fastest possible mean". The GoSL commenced the COVID-19 vaccination in late January 2021 and completed vaccination of above 30 population by 11 August 2021 and intends to fully vaccinate them by mid-September 2021. There is no doubt that Sri Lanka, as a developing nation has done remarkable well in the COVID-19 vaccination unparallel to any other country in the world.

*by Kelum Maddumage*
Myth of Militarization
Unravelling the KDU Controversy

Kotelawala Defense University has been a hot topic in the society for the past few months. Lanka Courier Editor in Chief Nilantha Ilangamuwa met with its Vice Chancellor Major General Milinda Peiris RWP RSP VSV USP ndc psc MPhil (Ind) to discuss the objectives and prevailing situation of the university as well as the new act initiated to ratify through the Parliament.

Major General Milinda Peiris joined the Sri Lanka Army as an Officer Cadet in 1980 and had his basic training at the Officers Training School in Madras, India and at Sri Lanka Military Academy, Diyatalawa. He was commissioned into the 1st Reconnaissance Regiment Sri Lanka Armoured Corps as a 2nd Lieutenant on completion of his training. Since then, he held vital and important appointments in the Army commensurate with each rank held, and he reached the pinnacle of his military career in 2016 when he was appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Army. Major General Milinda Peiris is a graduate of National Defence College, New Delhi, Command and Staff College, Bangladesh and Armour School, Fort Knox, Kentucky, USA.

As a pioneer squadron commander of 4 Armoured Regiment, he led tank squadrons to many crucial battles, and he commanded the 5th Regiment of the Sri Lanka Armoured Corps with distinction. He was also the Commanding Officer of the Officer Cadet Wing at the Sri Lanka Military Academy. Subsequently, he commanded the 561 Infantry Brigade and 232 Infantry Brigade. Thereafter, he commanded the Armoured Brigade. He was the Director Operations at the Joint
Can you talk to us about your role as VC at KDU

I have always had an inclination to education and have served as VC at KDU for over eight years. In 2007 KDU was named as Defense University, nothing much had changed until 2009. It was after I came that I suggested to the board for KDU to be made into a university. Until such time it was still the KDA. There were five departments but there were no faculties, so we studied the structures and began implementing it.

What is KDU?

The KDU concept was mooted by founder of the KDU General Denis Perera, who was commander of the army then. The other two commanders, Navy Commander Admiral Deshamanya D. Basil Gunasekara and Air Force Commander Harry Gunathilake forwarded a white paper to the President at the time J.R. Jayawardena on establishing a tri-force academy. They studied the NDA model which is in Pune India, and the Australian Armed forces academy, the procedures and methodologies adopted and the suggestion was put forward. The land was given by Sir John Kothalawela.

There seems to be a lack in our education sector or a discrepancy in the ways nationalism is taught and practiced. How do we change it?

I think we need to assess the areas that we are not addressing and find ways and means to overcome it. KDU we try our best to impart such knowledge which is why we started off with strategic studies and international relations. We are now focusing on strategic communication. We have had student research forum and they are all directed to think of national security from various perspectives. Most of the degree programs in the country do not address these areas unless it is subject specific. But we need to start educating our children from secondary level of what problems the country is facing. The geography, past history is equally important. But what we do is always try to remove those subjects like history thinking it is not important but that’s not true.

Do you think free education exists in Sri Lanka?

In those days in the primary level we never saw many...
going for tuition but nowadays we see children going for extra classes from primary level. Free education is there for namesake but parents are spending a lot of money on secondary and higher education. Even when it comes to higher education, I know of instances where they go for extra classes because the tutor does not teach. Actually speaking free education does not mean free of charge. A lot of people think free education means it should be provided free of charge. For me however free education means the child having the right to decide which school he or she wants to go and the subject they want to study – where universities are concerned.

The other important factor is which subject area. In Sri Lanka if someone wants to study engineering only a small percentage gets that opportunity. The rest who do not make it are compelled to do or follow some other course. That is a child’s right to be able to choose. Here free education means that it should be given free of charge. As we know, 200,000 get through A’levels from 300,000. But only 42,000 make it into universities. But what of the rest? If those students who can pay go to universities, others should be given the chance.

What is this controversial KDU act all about?

As you may know act of parliament cited the Sri John Kothalawela Defense Academy No 68 of 1981, with that KDA was established. In 1988, Act no 27, elevated the Academy to University status. From there on KDA conferred degrees on students. In 2007, Act no 50, KDA was renamed as General Sir John Kothalawela Defense University. However, in 1998 and 2007, though it was given the authority to confer degrees the university structure had not changed. Because to be in par with local and foreign universities we needed a structural change. Earlier we had only five departments and then later wanted a faculty structures. We started off with medical faculty in 2007, followed by law, engineering, management – altogether we now have 49 degrees. Earlier we had only five. Why do we need an act? It is because we need to have a proper university structure. We don’t have space as it is now. We established two faculties in Sooriyawewa which
is faculty for built environment and social sciences and faculty of computing. Then it becomes a campus. We cannot have everything under one roof. However, the degree programs we do here are only related to the defense sector. We will not have agriculture or tourism as those are not core fields. If we don't have a act, there are difficulties in making decisions. Now in parliament, the opposition proposed to have two more educational experts to be included in the board of governors which we agreed to. UG to nominate two educational experts with expertise on administration. Some argue that apart from the three commanders and CDS along with VC will all be from the defense there will be more military officers. So there will be two others who are civilians. This includes UGC chairman, academics, treasury. It will be a balanced board by then. We also need to have quality assurance centers, research centers, international research office, gender and inclusion center. The act serves as the authority for us to establish these centers.

**Q** If it is so good, then why is there such opposition to this act?

**A** Some say this is a process of militarization. Anyone with little common sense will understand that this act is there only to govern KDU. We can’t govern any other organization from a KDU act. The same clause was there in 81 act as well. For 40 years we have been in existence. When it comes to militarization, we must bear in mind we have civilian students inside. Since the war ended we have been working on expanding the university. In 2012 we established day scholar scheme and the then secretary of Defense the current president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa approved this concept. Our idea then and even now is to foster comradeship, friendship, cooperation among the tri-forces. When cadets undergo training together, these things are inbuilt. So when they go into three different forces, there camaraderie remains. This was evident during the conflict. During the war we found conflict among certain personalities who were not very cooperative, they didn’t have the same interest, or the desire to do something. Civil military module is something we teach in the staff college and we do at KDU as well, which is equally important. Some have civic battalion which are an important facet as they are the first to go into any area. We felt this mix of cadets and civilians studying together is important and...
will enhance cooperation. These students however have to pay. We have nominal amounts and offer a laptop to everyone. We don’t there to be any disparities. It’s the same reason we give them the uniform. So they are all equal.

Then they say there’s no freedom here because its militarized. At KDU if you have the percentage of military and civilian academics. Its only 10 percent military and 90 percent civilian academic. Cadets have a strict routine. Day scholars come in only from 8am to 2:15pm and they learn to together. And there’s no military training for day scholars. And most of the time although classes are over in the afternoon, many stay back until their parents come and spend it studying together.

**Q** It is clear that due to limited resources we have also limited

**A** intakes and a bulk of students are going abroad. Will the expansion of KDU address this issue?

We are not going to do much expansion, but as we improve the infrastructure we can accommodate more. This year as well we got 6000 applicants but we can’t even take 600. There is stiff competition because we prioritize quality over quantity.

**Q** Is there any mechanism that we can apply to stop students from going abroad?

**A** One is the existing system including KDU, we can expand a little more. But I would suggest, even state universities should have a component for filtering students. The trade unions may go against it, but we can. Other means is to start off government owned few universities with collaboration with private sector and establish them with proper approvals and quality assurance. The quality accreditation and assurance council which we are planning to set up will be crucial in deciding which institutes and universities to confer degrees upon. This idea was mooted when the Prime Minister was the then President but it could not be accomplished due to opposition. People don’t realize the value of having these mechanisms. We have to develop and ensure capacity building of these places. The private sector must also get involved. Otherwise each time we will have to talk about people not getting education.

There are state, non-state and private universities. Many of the students who come to KDU, if not for KDU, they would have gone abroad.
The accepted opinion of the World Health Organization (WHO), the majority of medical experts and according to the global standardized methodology is that the vaccination is the only solution for the COVID-19 pandemic.

That is why, I made a special commitment to bring in vaccines to Sri Lanka in the recent past. I personally spoke to the Heads of Governments in countries like China and India. I personally wrote letters to several other Heads of State. Discussions were held with vaccine producing countries through our Foreign Ministry, Ambassadors and High Commissioners. Our officials coordinated with vaccine manufacturing companies.

All these efforts were made because I wanted to vaccinate all the people of our country. As a result of this effort, the country is now receiving a large number of vaccines that we need monthly.

Initially, we received the AstraZeneca vaccine manufactured in India. Afterwards, we were able to get the Sinopharm vaccine manufactured in China, but the administration of the vaccine to the public was delayed for about a month due to the delay in getting the vaccine approved by the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA). Nevertheless, the Government took measures to administer Sinopharm vaccine continuously since May 8 this year. In addition, we have received the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines from the United States, the AstraZeneca vaccines from Japan, and the Sputnik vaccines from Russia, placing us among the countries that administer the highest rates of COVID-19 vaccines to its people. As at the 19th of this month, a total of 12,019,193 vaccine doses have been administered as the First Dose.

Meanwhile, fifty one million twenty four thousand one hundred and eighty five (5,124,185) vaccines have been administered to the people as the Second Dose. In addition, we have approximately three million doses of vaccines to be given as the Second Dose. Another 3 million doses will be received later this month. At present, about 98% of the people who are above the age of 30, have been vaccinated while 43% have been given the both doses. By August 31, more than 81% of the population will be able to receive the second dose. By 10th of September, 100% can receive both the doses.

With this development, the number of patients and the number of deaths will decrease.

The Government took steps to vaccinate all frontline health workers, persons engaged in essential services such as ports, security services, and factory workers by giving them the priority. People over the age of 60 were also vaccinated by giving them the priority. In addition, more than a million factory workers under the age of 30 were also vaccinated.

We continue to follow the restrictive measures such as imposition of inter-provincial travel restrictions across the country, isolation of Grama Niladhari Divisions, imposition of curfew, summoning only the essential public service employees to work, halting the functions like...
I made a special commitment to bring in vaccines to Sri Lanka in the recent past. I personally spoke to the Heads of Governments in countries like China and India. I personally wrote letters to several other Heads of State. All these efforts were made because I wanted to vaccinate all the people of our country. As a result of this effort, the country is now receiving a large number of vaccines that we need monthly.
weddings, closure of certain businesses, ban on inter-provincial travel and prohibition of gatherings at places of worship.

We were able to successfully manage the first wave of the COVID-19 virus due to the actions that we took at that time. Such stern decisions had to be made at that time because there were no other options available at that time.

The country has to be placed under a complete lockdown for several months continuously. Through all these efforts, we were able to overcome the first COVID-19 wave.

Though we took measures to place the country under a lockdown occasionally, we should understand the consequences of this decision.

The lowest economic growth of the country since independence was seen during the first wave of COVID-19 as a result of placing the country under a lockdown.

Especially, the apparel sector that brought in a revenue of about USD 5 billion to Sri Lanka was gravely affected. Their orders were stopped. Many lost their jobs. Export earnings fell.

Our tourism industry, which generated over USD 4.5 billion and provided a livelihood to over 3 million people, completely collapsed. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost.

The occasional lockdown of the country dealt a severe blow to the construction industry. They are not able to bring in employees they require. It is not possible to obtain the raw material at the required time. Over the past one and half years, we have lost most of the expected local and foreign investments in this sector. Small and medium enterprises are another important sector of our local economy. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major obstacle for these businesses that contribute more than 50% of the GDP. Due to the continuous disruption of their business...
activities, these companies lost revenue and faced grave issues without being able to repay their loans or pay salaries.

Those who obtained leases for vehicles could not pay the installments. Housing loan borrowers could not settle the loan installments. Addition to this, close to 4.5 million self-employed personnel and daily wage earners became helpless since they lost their sources of income completely. Amidst all these obstacles, we also had the responsibility to keep the people alive. We did not abdicate that responsibility. Each time the country was placed under a lockdown due to COVID-19 risks, we spend around Rs. 30 billion in each round to provide an allowance of Rs. 5,000 to the people who have become helpless without a daily income. The government has borne this cost on a number of occasions.

In addition to the cost of quarantine centres maintained by the government, each family quarantined in their own homes is provided with a relief package worth Rs. 10,000 for two weeks.

Even under this dire situation, the government has never taken any action to reduce the salaries or curtail the allowances of more than 1.4 million public servants.

Though our foreign exchange earnings dropped, we did not default on the government’s loan installments. We had to pay a colossal loan installment of about USD 4 billion a year as a result of the loans obtained by various governments in the past. All these loan installments were settled on time.

The country’s economy would be in great crisis if the country was put under another complete lockdown. It is not a situation that this country can bear. A large number of orders have been received by the apparel industry in the export sector. If we are not able to deliver these orders on time, we may lose a large amount of foreign exchange.

We are also making great efforts to rebuild the collapsed tourism industry. At the moment, nearly 200 tourists enter the country on daily basis. If we close down the country, we will have to restart attracting tourists from the very beginning.

Moreover, by having to provide relief to the daily income earners, small and medium enterprises and companies once again due to a lockdown, the country’s economy will be gravely affected. The people should understand the impact of a complete lockdown. Today, except for a few countries, most others including economically powerful ones have fully opened up.

The tourism industry in the world is gradually recovering. The countries that are open today are taking advantage of that opportunity. Our country, which has a small economy should also take advantage of this opportunity. We can’t allow the country’s economy to collapse completely by refusing to take required action.

We have to understand the reality. This situation is not a rivalry or conflict between different ideologists, trade unions, doctors, other health officials and the government. This is a serious issue that the whole world faces. Today, all the countries are adapting to the method of ‘New Normal’. As a government, we have properly taken all necessary measures that need to be taken.

Although the government does everything it can to provide oxygen, establish intermediate treatment centers and administer vaccines, it is the role of the doctors to manage patients appropriately. Also, I highly appreciate the service rendered by the doctors, nurses and all other health sector officials so far, despite the risk to their lives. I also pay my respects to the health sector officials belonging to all ranks who have sacrificed their lives.

It is clear that this is not a time for strike actions and protests. Do not attempt to destabilize the country.

Although the health sector looks at this issue from one angle, as a government we will have to manage the small economy in our country if we are to continue to pay off foreign debts, pay salaries, and provide subsidies without any interruption.

Most of the people passed away from COVID-19 virus are over the age of 60. The majority of people out of them have been suffering from chronic diseases for a long time. And, they have not been vaccinated. People with these chronic diseases should seek treatment as soon as they develop COVID-19 symptoms. Therefore, I have advised the health sector to conduct Rapid Antigen Tests at least once a week targeting the people over 60 years who are suffering from chronic diseases.

I request everyone in the country to be prepared to make more sacrifices, if the country is to be placed under a lockdown for a longer period of time in the future.

At this crucial juncture, everyone should take the country forward strategically by acknowledging the gravity of the situation.

Therefore, I respectfully request everyone to work together in unity as a team to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic.
Tell us about your role as the Sri Lankan Ambassador in the United Arab Emirates.

Nowadays, the role of the diplomat has become more diverse and dynamic with the global challenges as well as the economic focus. Being the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the UAE, while enhancing bilateral political friendly relations between two countries, I am much focused on increasing foreign direct investments towards my country by attracting more investments through well-established business entrepreneurs in UAE.

As soon as I resumed duties a year ago, I personally met with the high level delegation from Chambers in Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah and Sharjah, in addition to conducting a virtual meeting with the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, from time to time our visits with high level delegations to Sri Lanka had to be postponed due to Covid-19 situation in Sri Lanka.

Apart from the above, being an Ambassador to a Middle East country where nearly 350,000 Sri Lankan expatriates are living in UAE, my role as the Ambassador for Sri Lanka has been more vital in terms of labour migration issues, especially during this world pandemic situation due to COVID-19.

During the peak of the pandemic, it was a real change for me to find out ways and means to address numerous quarries, issues that arose from the vulnerable Sri Lankan migrant workers, especially from our unskilled workforce, when they were at risk of losing their jobs. Every day, hundreds of Sri Lankan expatriates were at the doorstep of the Embassy, looking forward to returning to the motherland. Amidst many troubles, our Embassy was the first among the other Sri Lanka Embassies in the Middle East region where the repatriation process was successfully handled. Being the Ambassador to the UAE, I have self-satisfaction, as there is no single matter pending from my side with regard to the repatriation as of today.

Secret of my success is respect and communication. I have opened my office doors to all expatriates where they can meet me to discuss their grievances. Improving communication between expatriates and the Mission, providing respectful dignified services and equal treatment to all expatriates is important. I think I have won the hearts and the minds of our own. Frequently met with the Sri Lankan community associations, business leaders, and restaurant owners professionals to discuss how to improve our services and provide
efficient, professional service from the Mission. We started mobile services to far away cities like Al Ain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah to provide consular and labour services which saved a tremendous amount of time and money to our expatriates. We are going to commence an automated appointment system for consular division and labour division to provide more efficient professional services to our Lankans.

**Q** As per your reading, what is the secret behind the development of the UAE?

**A** I would simply answer your question by saying that the secret behind the development of the UAE is nothing else, that is the leadership. No doubt, UAE's growth and resilience is attributable to its former leaders and the current leaders. All the leaders are focused on Country first attitude and bring in the world's best systems to the UAE. Further need to point out the difference of Governance. We have a Democratic system where the public has a strong voice in electing their political leaders and UAE has a completely different system where the leaders have the sovereign power.

My personal view is that the proactive and the visionary leadership of former leaders, especially H.H. Shaikh Zayed Bin Al Nahyan, founder of UAE as well as H.H. Sheikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Vice President of UAE and the late ruler of Dubai were the main reason behind the success of the UAE.

The political stability will support a country to continue its development projects without disturbances. If a creative as well as foresight thinker with the strong capacity will have the full power for a longer period, it would ease a country to reach out its development goals. Not
only that but also the distribution of power among the subordinate administrative staff while holding them accountable for the outcome is somewhat important as the entire system should have to have one vision.

Further UAE is a country majority of the population is expatriate work force from many parts of the world, therefore providing each ethnicity, language, religion equal treatment is another secret for the success where they have a separate Ministry for Tolerance, Human Rights etc., In this regard UAE has a very high recognition of Sri Lankan expatriates who have contributed many years of expertise to the success of UAE in Construction, Banking, Insurance, Hospitality, Culinary, Engineering, Architecture, Quantity Surveying and many other trades.

I can clearly see that the powerful caliber leaders of UAE have geared the UAE to this end, where it stands today.

Q Understanding the UAE is impossible without understanding the life of Sheikh Zayed, Founder of the UAE and his faith, vision, determination and hard work. How do you see his leadership and the contribution of those who have sincerely worked with him to develop the UAE?

A The extraordinary inter-personal skills of H.H. Shaikh Zayed Bin Al Nahyan, the founding father of the UAE is impressive. The Spirit of the unity country is derived from the vision, determination and leadership of H.H Sheikh Zayed. I believe that the binding of the cosmopolitan community of the UAE, connecting under one flag while recognizing diversity at all levels, was the core factor of the Unity that was engraved by H.H. Sheikh Zayed.

Since the date from the formation of the Federation of UAE, Sheikh Zayed as the President, with a mandate to develop the entire country, he geared the State towards success with his past experience as well as his utmost determination. His handiness in the administration, the way he developed the State in all sectors health, education, economy and the infrastructure i.e is impressive for the leaders in the modern day. His character was further embellished with his attitudes on equity and equality for all people even for women. His strong will and the determination for the reformation of the country made him an iconic character and his name flourished with his attributes of humanitarianism and compassion towards the people. Not only among the Emirates but also in the international arena, H.H. Sheikh Zayed was well reputed due to his balanced foreign policy in which he showed a magnificent role being a dispute mediator in several political issues. He supported the truth and justice in all international political dilemmas which resulted in him being recognized as a balanced and moderate leader by the international community.

While giving due praises to H.H. Sheikh Zayed, I would like to highlight the significant role played by the late ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, with vast knowledge and the experience for the betterment of the country. His cooperation rendered to H.H. Sheikh Zayed for building a united country is a good example for the rest of the world leaders.

Q What lessons can Sri Lanka learn from the UAE on how to encourage foreign investments, attract skilled workers while promoting social cohesion for greater economic-social development?

A We cannot compare all corners of this expansive country in the same way with ours. One shoe is not fit for all legs. Based on the political factors as well as the geographical factors i.e potentials, resources that country’s have, it is needed to create their own mechanism to enhance opportunities for foreign investments, trade i.e.

But there are certain lessons that can be learned from the UAE. Rather than going through a cumbersome process, there should be a fast track for foreign investors to access the industry without fear. UAE has an investor-friendly policy.
which is very lucrative and due to that reason there are several Indian investors who are doing well in their businesses in UAE. UAE has a one stop shop for investors with an online facility to maximize the efficiency of their government departments.

Not only that but also the infrastructure i.e buildings, roads, transportation plays a big role in terms of attracting foreign investors towards the country. That's how the UAE has attracted global investors, beating other similar countries at the same time.

Q Do you think our foreign policy supports addressing global trends and market values?

A Rather than saying about the past, I would much like to say that following the election of His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the President of Sri Lanka, one of his main directives was to reform the Sri Lanka’s Foreign Policy, aiming to harness Sri Lanka’s determination to play a key role as a sovereign country in the international arena while converging economic development in the country.

Guided by the National Policy Framework “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor” and its sectoral policies, the Government has formulated “20 Point Key Foreign Policy Directives” and the Foreign Ministry is now governed by them. Under these policy directives, “foster and promote our traditional and non-traditional exports to the international market, develop economic and trade links with regional and global economic players and project Sri Lanka’s image as an investor-friendly country to attract sustainable foreign direct investments” have been identified as the priority areas that all Sri Lankan diplomats are required to work for.

Q Diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates were established in July, 1979 and in 1983, the Mission was upgraded to the Ambassadorial level. Tell us more about this long standing bilateral relationship and potential between two countries.

A As you mentioned, the Diplomatic relations between our two countries were established in July 1979 with the opening of the Sri Lankan Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Since then, bilateral relations between the two countries have been significantly enhanced over the decades with the exchange of high-level visits.

Further tightening the friendly relations, UAE opened an Embassy in Colombo in 1999 and the Sri Lankan Consulate was established in Dubai in 1993 and it was subsequently elevated to a Consulate General in 1993.

Coming through a long journey, the year 2019 was a landmark for both countries that marked the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the United Arab Emirates and Sri Lanka.

In view of fortifying bilateral relations through legal instruments,
both countries have entered into several Agreements as well as Memorandum of Understandings in various fields.

Not only in the bilateral aspect but also in multilateral perspective, both countries maintain friendly relations with the mutual understanding in various multilateral forums i.e. IORA, IRENA, UNSC, UNHRC, and other UN sub-organs. In view of further consolidating our bilateral friendly relations, several activities are in the pipeline to take place in the coming year. There are plans to arrange several high-level visits from the UAE to Sri Lanka and vice versa. Further, we are planning to convene the UAE–Sri Lanka 2nd Joint Committee in the coming year, in the COVID-19 new normal to open avenues in various fields to further collaborate.

Q. We are going through a difficult time due to the pandemic. What are your strategies to overcome the challenges you face in these uncertain times?

A. It is very clear that this is a hard time for the entire world, where economies have been hit by COVID-19 world pandemic. However, as an emerging country, Sri Lanka cannot further hold back its development projects, as our economy has been already beaten from thirty years of war.

As an Ambassador, I have a great challenge on how to attract more investors, business entrepreneurs towards Sri Lanka as each and every movement has been narrowed with COVID-19 restrictions. But, we need to find out ways to overcome these challenges.

In modern days, most of the services are run through the online system and the use of technologies would be useful to mitigate obstacles as a solution for not having physical presence. To provide a safe and better service to our fellow Sri Lankans in UAE, a consular automated system which makes it easier for people to get online appointments, will be implemented at the Embassy very soon. Amidst the COVID-19 situation, we are in action to convene consular mobile services in other Emirates constantly. Executing Sri Lanka’s traditional and non-traditional products, Ceylon tea and tourism sectors on a global platform, we are in the process of participating at EXPO-2020 in Dubai from October 2021 to March 2022.

Now in the post Covid era, we are soliciting major companies for new professional job opportunities for Lankans in view of increasing foreign remittance in the country.

Q. What are the areas in which mutual benefits between Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates can be further enhanced?

A. It is pleased to say that after several years of preparation, now both sides are about to commence the negotiations on the Investment Promotion and Reciprocal Protection Agreement in mid September 2021. I strongly believe that entering into this Agreement would create more avenues to attract more sustainable UAE investors towards the country as there are provisions prevailing in the Agreement to safeguard investors for safe and secure investments. Moreover, UAE is the 11th export market for Sri Lanka and tea is the main export item accounting for 19.96% of the value of Sri Lanka’s exports to UAE in 2020. Diversification of export products is one of the main goals that we are now focusing on. Targeting the high-end consumers, exporting eco-friendly food items would be beneficial to Sri Lanka.

Instead of sending unskilled labourers, it is more worthy and creditable if Sri Lanka could focus on sending semi-skilled, skilled and professionals to the UAE in the fields of health services, IT services, culinary, and engineering.

We are in discussion to enroll foreign Emirattee and expatriate students from UAE to private universities in Sri Lanka and also to commence a Sri Lankan School in the UAE which will mutually benefit both countries and mainly benefit the expatriate community.

Guided by the National Policy Framework “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor” and its sectoral policies, the Government has formulated “20 Point Key Foreign Policy Directives” and the Foreign Ministry is now governed by them. Under these policy directives, all Sri Lankan diplomats are required to work for.
“South Asian countries together comprise 1/4 of the world’s population. This region, however, is the least integrated in terms of regional cooperation,” Major General (Retd) Muhammad Saad Khattak, Pakistan High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, said in an exclusive interview with Lanka Courier.

Major General Muhammad Saad Khattak (Retd) has more than three decades of an illustrious career in various assignments both inside and outside Pakistan. He is a graduate of the French Army Junior Staff Course, Defense Intelligence Directors Course, UK, Command and Staff College Quetta, and National Defence University Islamabad. He possesses Masters Degrees in Political Science, War Studies and an M. Phil in International Relations.

He has remained extensively exposed to Counter-Terrorism challenges in Balochistan and KPK/FATA. His employment in Balochistan and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Islamabad/Rawalpindi at senior positions provided him a unique insight into the ongoing effort against War on Terrorism.

Excerpts from the interview;

Q You have earned around 35 years of an illustrious career in various assignments both inside and outside Pakistan. First of all, I would like to know, what triggered you to join the military?

A In our society Military has traditionally been seen as a profession of great respect and merit. Few members of my family had joined before me who also served as motivation for my opting to join Army. Moreover, as young students we were always under the illusion that the early you join military, the early one would get rid of formal education which later proved a fallacy as in the military one goes through so much of academic and professional education that far surpasses formal academic education in the universities.

Q Like many other countries, the military as an institution is one of the strongest state apparatus in Pakistan. You were a senior military officer who worked at various places of the country. What are the emerging threats and how does your military help to measure them to implement a proactive

Major General (Retd) Muhammad Saad Khattak, Pakistan High Commissioner to Sri Lanka.
Photo by Laknath Seneviratne
Q You are a military expert turned diplomat. How did you incorporate your military experiences with diplomacy?

A Given the evolving dynamics across all fields, no one in the first place can claim to be expert of any field. During the course of higher military education, we are exposed to various aspects of Diplomacy, be it defence, economic or public diplomacy. Practical application and manifestation of knowledge gained to a very dynamic environment like Sri Lanka has been a unique honour and privilege for me. Besides, as soldiers and senior commanders we are trained in human handling, across different cultures, utilizing the art of negotiations and interactions through effective communication skills that we learn over years of experience. Honestly, despite the restraints of Covid-19 over the last almost 2 years, I have been able to meet and interact with all segments of Sri Lankan society across the entire nook and corner of the country that has added a great deal to my learning besides further strengthening our mutual bonds. I am highly indebted to the Sri Lankan leadership and people for their wholehearted support.

Q Both Sri Lanka and Pakistan are members of a few regional bodies such as SAARC. Regional cooperation is vital to any country for achieving its goals. We would like to have your take on the prevailing situation of regional operation between South Asian countries and the challenges ahead? How can we overcome those challenges?

A South Asian countries together comprise 1/4 of the world’s population. This region, however, is the least integrated in terms of regional cooperation. SAARC has remained hostage to India’s bullying policies and desire to maintain regional hegemony over her smaller neighbours. Since India is the largest country in the region so unless it shows maturity, the region will remain hostage to poverty and underdevelopment. The world has felt a dire need for regional and multilateral integration post COVID-19. If we want to overcome these challenges, we need to strive for equality in mutual relationship to exploit our full potential for regional integration and development. In this regard China has recently launched a new initiative by the name China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation Initiative. Five out of seven countries who are already part of BRI have shown their willingness. India and Bhutan are so far silent. This initiative of China has tremendous potential to improve mutual trade promising greater integration of the region.

Q Pakistan is one of the trusted partners of Sri Lankans to improve their skills in many subjects, most importantly education and security. You have helped Sri Lanka during the brutal war against terrorism that lasted three decades. We would like to know more detail about this collaboration.

A Pakistan launched Pakistan-Sri Lanka Higher Education Cooperation Programme for Sri Lanka with the capital cost of approximately US$ 18.402 million. Under this programme, 800 fully funded and 200 partially funded scholarships are being offered to Sri Lankan students at graduate, post-graduate level. Under this arrangement, Allama Iqbal Scholarships have already been launched. 50 selected students are currently undergoing studies in Pakistan under this program in the field of engineering, basic & natural sciences and social & management sciences. During his visit to Sri Lanka earlier this year, the Prime Minister of Pakistan announced 100 special medical seats for Sri Lankan students in addition to the 1000 scholarships already being offered. Moreover, process for 250 seats for the year 2021-22 has been initiated. This program will greatly help in enhancing people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

The Government of Pakistan is also giving Jinnah Scholarships to Sri Lankan students for the past 14 consecutive years where top scoring O/Level and A/Level Sri Lankan students receive monetary handouts. So far, 2000 Sri Lankan students have benefitted from this scheme. Moreover, Defence
ties between Sri Lanka and Pakistan are time tested and built on a strong foundation. This bond is further strengthened after 2009 when Pakistan provided its unflinching moral and material support to Sri Lanka in LTTE War. This ever-growing defence relation is based on Capacity building of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces through training and provision of modern day military hardware. Pakistan provides over 600 vacancies annually to Sri Lankan armed forces on gratis basis in various training institutions of Pakistan. Both the country’s armed forces participate in bilateral as well as multinational exercises.

There are untapped areas in Pakistan and Sri Lanka yet to be explored, such as food production, tourism, and pilgrimage. Please let us know your plan to identify the potentials of these areas to enrich diplomatic relationships?

Both countries are tourists hotspots which could not be fully exploited due to security situation in the past few decades. Whereas Sri Lanka is home to beautiful beaches and natural beauty, Pakistan besides its beautiful coast offers a variety of attractions like the beautiful virgin Northern Areas, Swat etc. Remains

The future of Sri Lanka Tourism depends on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders both at home and internationally.

A documentary film on the glorious Gandhara Civilization and Buddhist heritage of Pakistan. We are in touch with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister’s Office for the joint launch of this documentary. It will further boost the understanding and friendship of the two countries as well as across all the Buddhist countries in the world. A number of initiatives have been taken to improve bilateral trade between two countries during recent years. Three editions of the Pakistani Single Country Exhibitions have been organized in Sri Lanka during 2016, 2017 and 2018, which translates into higher volumes of bilateral trade. The High Commission of Pakistan in Colombo also held the first virtual business forum in collaboration with Sri Lanka Export Development Board (SLEDB) to enhance awareness regarding trade and investment opportunities under the Pakistan Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement between the two friendly countries on 18th September, 2020. More than 100 companies from both sides participated in the Webinar and the event was a great success. A series of sectors-specific webinars and business forums have been planned for the next six months with public and private

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stakeholders from both sides across sectors such as Construction materials, pharmaceuticals, textiles, information and communication technology and Buddhist tourism development in Pakistan. Steps are being taken to facilitate Buddhist tourism from Sri Lanka to Pakistan, so that people can experience our rich Buddhist heritage as well.

The Trade and Investment Wing of High Commission of Pakistan, in collaboration with Ministry of Commerce and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), organized a promotional event for Pakistani Dates (Fruit) Exports in Sri Lanka, at the High Commission in Colombo on 08th April 2021.

Following the recent visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to Sri Lanka, a high-level 14-member Buddhist Monks’ delegation visit has been arranged by High Commission of Pakistan in Colombo during April 2021 to promote religious tourism to Pakistan and to enhance people-to-people contact between Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Pakistan is the second-largest trading partner of Sri Lanka in South Asia. Sri Lanka was the first country to sign a Free Trade Agreement with Pakistan, which became operational in 2005. We believe both countries have a long road ahead. What are the plans to improve trade and the economy?

After the signing of Pakistan Sri Lanka FTA in 2005, exports from Pakistan to Sri Lanka have seen an increase from US$ 100 million to US$ 369 million in 2019, but the mutual trade remains much below the potential. Exports from Sri Lanka to Pakistan have also witnessed a surge from US$ 46 million in 2005 to US$ 105 million in 2018. However, the figure has dampened to US$ 81 million in 2019, which can be attributed to the local economic and security challenges faced by Sri Lanka in the last year. The High Commission of Pakistan is fully committed to increasing bilateral trade under the FTA. We are in close coordination with the relevant Sri Lankan authorities in order to strategize enhancing Sri Lanka’s exports to Pakistan.

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Pak-Sri Lanka bilateral trade has the estimated potential of over US$ 2 billion. Some of the potential export products from Pakistan are Portland cement, denim fabric, woven fabric of cotton yarn, medicaments & surgical instruments, paper & paper boards, articles of silk & synthetic textile, knitwear, fertilizers, towels, bed wear, cutlery, leather products, sports gears and footwear. Top import products from Pakistan to Sri Lanka are Vegetable products and Betel Leaves, Coconut and Copra, Fiber boards, Natural Rubber and Tea. Sri Lanka’s exports to Pakistan only has a share of 0.7% in Sri Lanka’s total exports. A range of new products have also penetrated into the Pakistan market after the implementation of the PSFTA and these new products include items such as fresh pineapple, MDF boards, tamarind with seeds, edible oil, porcelain tableware & kitchenware, ceramic tiles, furniture, electrical switches & sockets, herbal cosmetic products, plastic articles, paints, glass paintings, leather products, frozen fish, prawns, lobsters, crabs, cut flowers & foliage and gems & Jewellery.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka have maintained a very cordial diplomatic relationship since the beginning. Can you give us a brief outline of this strong diplomatic relation between the two countries?

Pakistan and Sri Lanka have maintained a very cordial diplomatic relationship since the beginning. Can you give us a brief outline of this strong diplomatic relation between the two countries?

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 1948, the two countries have maintained a close, cordial and mutually supportive relationship. We have been helpful to each other during difficult times and always coordinate our positions on regional and international fora. Our relations are on a positive trajectory however, Pakistan wishes to expand its economic, trade, defence and cultural relations with Sri Lanka.
Sri Lanka is listed among Asia’s most exotic destinations, offering visitors a doorway into an ancient world, full of rustic treasures, natural beauty, and heady experiences. Ambitious new development projects have also transformed the country’s capital and major cities, giving visitors access to all the cosmopolitan pleasures you’d expect from a modern metropolis.

The effort made by Sri Lanka Tourism to transform the Island into a destination that appeals to a wider international audience has shown immense promise and within the last few years major changes to infrastructure, policy, and opportunity has elevated the island to one of the most coveted destinations in the world. As a chief export, tourism is of vital importance, Sri Lanka Tourism recognises that a strategically managed tourism sector supports the local economy, is a prelude to prosperity, and improves the quality of life while ensuring greater inclusivity, sustainability, diversity, and a more progressive society. Revitalizing the island’s already burgeoning tourism sector is a fundamental aspect of government policy and is a key feature in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s Manifesto ‘Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor’ containing ten key policies.

Taking the ten key policies and seventeen agenda items in the Manifesto, Sri Lanka Tourism identified ten key pillars which act as a strategic guide for Sri Lanka Tourism. Ms. Kimarli Fernando – Chairperson SL Tourism commented, “This all-encompassing formula elevates the status of Sri Lanka Tourism and transforms it into a truly world-class destination. The country has made tremendous progress in key areas of technology, sustainability, branding, promotions, and efficiency improvements. This
will enable the island to offer experiences and opportunities like never before. Of Course, there is so much more to be accomplished and this very positive start motivates us to achieve our objectives.”

These guiding principles guarantee future growth, manage its impact, and enable the efficient coordination of investments. The first pillar deals with consistently striving towards a people-centric tourism sector, focusing on guiding, and supporting segments of people linked with the tourism sector while recognising the industry potential to be an economic stimulator that enhances revenue generating sources, employment opportunities and foreign earnings. Numerous initiatives have been introduced including the entire sector being recognized as an export industry with VAT exemption. Additionally, there has been an unprecedented effort to support stakeholders through updated funding and grants especially with assistance
during the pandemic, training, skill development programmes, and a variety of other ongoing projects. Other developments include increased registration of SME’s in the accommodation sector converting informal to formal, health & safety protocols for post-pandemic travelers achieved through standardization, certification, and stringent controls and more inclusive dialogue with the industry.

Pillar two focuses on an efficient public service and the upliftment of industry standards where a consolidated effort to modernize the industry through technology and innovation has led to increased efficiency and productivity. The changes brought about at the level of policy and legislation make Sri Lanka more attractive to foreign investors. The entire process has now been centralized where investors liaise with a single department; the Investor Relations Unit (IRU), with resources, infrastructure, and professional expertise dedicated to making investments in the sector transparent and convenient. Additionally, there are several ongoing programmes aimed at a younger generation of Sri Lankans, whose involvement is crucial to a sustainable model of tourism. Pursuing this strategy, training, skill development workshops, recruitment drives and exposure to the industry continues to happen throughout the island.

Sri Lanka Tourism recognises that for the sector to grow sustainability, it is of utmost importance to focus on a technology-based tourism industry. Under pillar three, giant leaps have been made to integrate the latest technology into all aspects of tourism. By adopting an outlook of innovation, the sector can now respond to change much faster and offer visitors so much more. As the landscape continues changing, evolving, and advancing, numerous projects have already been completed. This gives the island a wider digital footprint and makes information more accessible. The tourist travel app, digital training, live events, couch safaris, and other digital outings have allowed prospective visitors to engage with the island and all it has to offer, even during the pandemic. With several exciting projects in the works, Sri Lanka is ready to attract the next generation of digitally savvy, technologically curious Millennial and Gen-Z traveler.

Pillar four envisions a safe and secure country for tourists. Significant effort has been expended to make visitors always feel safe and well looked after. A comprehensive array of health...
and safety measures have been implemented under the innovative concept of "Bio-Bubble" in anticipation of new arrivals. This includes an aggressive vaccination drive to ensure an inoculated host population. A special tourism police unit will be present throughout the island, dedicated to the safety and security of all travelers.

Establishing a sound legal and regulatory framework is essential for the efficient management, operation, and growth in the tourism industry and pillar five addresses this area under legal and regulatory framework. The entire system has been revamped to reflect international best practices, with a new organizational structure having been proposed. The new licensing and regulation allow for more transparency while promoting open and ongoing dialogue between the industry and its various stakeholders. Matters of representation and rights are also a vital aspect of this new outlook, which recognises the value and inclusivity of all players in the sector. Sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism is no longer an option if a destination wants to remain competitive in the international arena. Under pillar six, Sri Lanka Tourism is working towards a 'clean and green' future for tourism while securing Sri Lanka's unique natural resources and cultural heritage. With the onset of the pandemic, sustainable travel is growing more in popularity. Travellers are seeking destinations where their travel footprint is limited and localities where they can give back to communities. Sri Lanka Tourism is actively pursuing initiatives to position itself as a sustainable destination. Initiatives such as championing of the green building concept for all new tourism developments which will be made mandatory from next year, introducing GSTC accreditation – the Global standard for sustainable travel and tourism, a ban on single use plastics and the initiation of the National Sustainable Tourism Certification. On a strategic level, plans are afoot to develop a sustainability roadmap and appoint a special think tank unit to drive this initiative. Educating the public is also identified as an essential tool for a sustainable model Sri Lanka Tourism is pursuing, so individuals see themselves as guardians and stewards of nature and culture.

New product development and promotion is a critical component of tourism. Fulfilling the mandate directed under Pillar 7; New Product Development and Promotion, Sri Lanka Tourism...
has embarked on launching a comprehensive Global Communication Campaign, the last of which took place over ten years ago. The island has received excellent coverage from renowned global media such as BBC and CNN which has trickled down through regional media in the respective source markets. Positioning Sri Lanka as a top of the mind destination for when things return to normal is one of the key initiatives undertaken by Sri Lanka Tourism during the pandemic. Sri Lanka Tourism is actively looking at developing new markets including the digital nomad market, cruise development, wellness and Ayurveda, film tourism and adventure and sport tourism. In addition, Sri Lanka Tourism is actively promoting the destination through participation in trade fairs, including Expo Dubai 2020, scheduled to take place in October this year for a period of 6 months and is billed to be one of the most important events this year.

Pillar eight aims to position and market Sri Lanka, making the island relevant to the new age, post pandemic traveller. This will be achieved through the ongoing integrated Global communication Campaign that will reveal the diversity and multifaceted nature of the island. It will also employ influencers and e-celebrities to convey this message to the target market.

A focused effort has been underway over the last few years to enhance infrastructure, improve facilities and introduce new developments which supports the pillar nine framework. The assimilation of leading-edge technology is pivotal to the process. The projects completed and ones in the pipeline will guarantee an enhanced experience for all arrivals and make their stay so much more rewarding.

Pillar ten focuses on partnerships. The future of Sri Lanka Tourism depends on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders both at home and internationally. These partners and funding agencies have continued to act as ambassadors and advocates for the country. The cross-pollination of ideas has also enabled the island to inculcate global values and a more progressive outlook.

The giant strides Sri Lanka Tourism has made in just a few years is remarkable and is a testament to the resilience and determination of the country and its people. As Sri Lanka positions itself as the ideal destination for post covid travel, these strategies, and the subsequent revenue they generate will empower communities and benefit the local economy. The strategies in place will also ensure Sri Lanka is more accessible to the world, opening the country to new markets and countless possibilities which will in turn enable a faster post-pandemic recovery both for the tourism sector and the Sri Lankan economy.

Establishing a sound legal and regulatory framework is essential for the efficient management, operation, and growth in the tourism industry and pillar five addresses this area under legal and regulatory framework.
Living Heritage

STORY OF TEMPLE OF THE SACRED TOOTH RELIC
Temple of the Sacred tooth relic, Kandy is one of the most religious places of Sri Lankan Buddhists. It is situated adjacent to the royal palace complex of the historical kingdom of Kandy. With its artistic, architectural, cultural, and spiritual values, the Temple of Tooth Relic houses the left canine tooth of Lord Buddha. It can be recognized as a living cultural heritage that carries various cultural and religious practices for a long period.

The historical value of the Temple of the tooth relic

As recorded in history, the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha was brought to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Kirti Sri Megahavanna (301-328 AD) by Prince Danta and Princess Hemamala from the kingdom of Kalinga, India. The king enshrined the tooth relic in the present day Isurumuniya Viharaya in Anuradhapura. Since then, the legal guardian of the relic was the rulers of ancient Sri Lanka and it was precisely guarded by them in a special shrine built within the premises of the royal place, wherever the capital was located.


Safeguarding the tooth relic had become a responsibility of the monarch, and it was believed that whoever has custody of it would have the right and power to govern the country. Within the ancient capitals, including Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala, Kotte, and Gampola, the remains of the shrines where the tooth relic has been guarded can be seen. So, throughout the ancient monarchs of Sri Lanka, the tooth relic symbolized both religious value and political value.

Kandy, being the last capital of the ancient Sri Lankan monarch, Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic which we see today is the last place where the sacred tooth rests, after its journey across the capitals of the country throughout a long period. During the reign of King Wimaladharmasuriya I (1592 – 1604 AD), the temple of Tooth Relic was originally built as a two-storied building and it was destroyed during the invasions of the Portuguese. It was rebuilt and modified by King Rajasinghe II (1635-1687 AD) and it was also destroyed and burnt by the Dutch. During the period of King Wimaladharmasuriya II, another temple of tooth relic was built as a three-storied building instead of the old one at the same location.

With the march of time, this building was decayed and destroyed. Later King Parakrama Narendrasignhe (1707 – 1739 AD); the successor of King Wimaladharmasuriya II, constructed the temple of Tooth Relic as a two-storied building which we see today. Afterward, the tooth relic was also safeguarded by the South Indian kings called the Nayakkar kings who ruled Sri Lanka within the same shrine. During the time of King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe, the temple was finely renovated and remodeled to its present appearance. The last king of the ancient Sri Lankan monarch named King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe (1798 – 1815 AD) added the surrounding moat and the famous Paththirippuwa or the Octagonal pavilion to the vicinity of the temple from where the king was supposed to have addressed the people. It was believed to be built by Devendra Mulacari, the skilled Architect at the time.
The architectural and artistic value of the temple of the tooth relic

Along with its political and religious value, the architectural and artistic value of the temple of sacred tooth relic should be highlighted since it depicts world-renowned features. The building is constructed in close proximity to the ancient royal palace which is located to the North of the temple and the forest reserve known as Udawatta Kelaya to the East. To the south of the building there is the Kiri Muhuda; the famous Kandy Lake and on the West, there is the Natha and Paththini Devalaya. The temple is adorned with intricate carvings using gold, silver, bronze, and ivory.

The temple of the tooth relic is surrounded by a moat and a brick wall which is named the Wall of water waves or the cloud wall is also a special architectural feature of the Temple of the Tooth. Both were built during the reign of King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. The patterned windows on the wall are designed to light lamps at the time.

The main entrance called Maha Vahalkada is decorated with a large carved arch with two stone elephants on either side. A moonstone created in the Kandyan architectural style can be noticed at the base of the main entrance steps. This entrance was destroyed due to the bomb blast of L.T.T.E. in the year 1988 and has been renovated afterward along with several stone carvings. At the top of the staircase, there is a Makara Torana with two guardian stones.

The entire temple complex, from peaked tiled roofs to white walls with large windows, is built displaying the style of classical Kandyan architecture. In front of
the main building, there is a building named Hewisi Mandapaya or the Drummer’s hall and it can be reached through a tunnel after the main entrance. The main building consists of two stories; the Lower floor is known as Palle Malaya (Lower floor) whereas the upper floor is known as Udu Malaya or Weda sitina Maligawa. The lower floor is comprised of two sections as Digge and Maha Aramudala. The donations made by the kings and the people to the Tooth Relic from time to time are kept in the section called Maha Aramudala.

There are various chambers on the upper floor including the main chamber where the tooth relic is kept known as ‘Handun kunama’. In 1987, a golden canopy was constructed over the main shrine by then Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, and the golden fence which encircles the main shrine is also a notable feature. The door to that chamber is carved in ivory and inside the chamber there lies the sacred tooth relic on seven gemstone-studded golden caskets which are engraved with precious gemstones. The caskets have the shape of a stupa. The procession casket which is used during the Kandy Esala Perahera is also displayed in the same chamber. The narrow corridor nearby the main chamber is called Kavikara Maduwa where the chanting for the Sacred tooth relic is conducted in this place.

During the 1956 renovations, two-story buildings were erected on either side covering the Wedasitina maligaya. The building on the left is reserved for the functions of Kariya karavana rala, for the alms hall of the monks, and also for the chambers of the monks who are in charge of the service. The other building is reserved for the use of the Diyawadana Nilame and other officers.

Exhibiting the artistic features of the Kandyan period, the insides of the shrine are covered in beautifully detailed and elaborate paintings. King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe entrusted the task of creating the paintings of the Temple of the Tooth to Hiriyale Hithara Naidu. In 1973, these paintings were redecorated by Cyril Sittara. In addition to these designs, the other architectural feature of the Temple of the Tooth is the wooden pillars. These are made with central ridges and have shapes unique to the Kandyan period. The pillars

Kandy, being the last capital of the ancient Sri Lankan monarch, Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic which we see today is the last place where the sacred tooth rests, after its journey across the capitals of the country throughout a long period.
of the tower are decorated with various carvings. The inside of the temple is more beautified with low curved ceilings of corridors and paved floors with their stones polished. Devendra Mulachari, a renowned architect at the time, has completed the layout of the Temple of the Tooth in a very skillful manner.

In addition to the main shrine, there are other monumental buildings on the premises of the temple of the tooth relic. The royal palace is situated to the north of the temple and as the main entrances, there were three Vahalkadas and an 8 feet high wall used as main entrances. The section of the palace facing the Natha Devale is said to be the oldest. Today the building is preserved as an archeological museum. Ulpen Ge and Queens Palace are

“The Sacred Tooth Relic is being considered and worshipped as the living Lord Buddha and for this very reason, Buddhist people have utmost devotion towards it. There are daily, weekly and annual poojas and rituals conducted in order to worship the Sacred tooth relic."
the associated buildings of the palace. During the beginning of the British period, it was used by a government officer named Sir John D'Oyly, of Kandy, and later it has been continued to use as their official residence by the successors of D'Oyly.

The audience hall or Magul maduwa is where the Kandyan rulers have held their meetings. It was completed during the reign of Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. The carvings of the wooden pillars which support the wooden roof are an example of intricate wood carving during the Kandyan period. The hall was renovated for the reception of the arrival of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales in 1872. Originally the hall was 58 by 35.6 feet (17.7 m × 10.9 m); after renovation, its length was extended by an additional 31.6 feet (9.6 m).

Other nearby buildings to the halls were believed to be destroyed during the British rule. The audience hall was the venue where the Kandyan Convention was drawn up, it was where the convention was read out to the people and where the conference, about the convention, was held on 2 March 1815. That space was later used to erect the Kandy Kachcheri and Kandy Supreme Court. Today it is used for state ceremonies and conserved under the Department of archaeology.

A living cultural heritage

The Sacred Tooth Relic is being considered and worshipped as the living Lord Buddha and for this very reason, Buddhist people have utmost devotion towards it. There are daily, weekly and annual poojas and rituals conducted in order to worship the Sacred tooth relic. Monks of Malwatte and Asgiriya conduct daily worships which are commonly named as Dalada thevava in the inner chamber of the temple. The service held here is exchanged between the Asgiri and Malwathu monasteries once a year. Services are symbolized by the Hewisi Nada Pooja, which is held three times a day at the Hewisi Mandapaya. Rituals are performed three times daily: at dawn, at noon, and in the evenings. On Wednesdays, there is a symbolic bathing of the relic with an herbal preparation made from scented water and fragrant flowers called Nanumura Mangallaya.

Among the rituals conducted, the procession of the sacred tooth relic of the Dalada Perahera, famously known as the Kandy Esala Perahera held in the month of Esala (July) annually can be highlighted as the main ritual. At the very outset, with the arrival of the sacred tooth relic, it was honored and worshipped by King Kithsirimewan. The procession was then performed as an annual event during the Anuradhapura kingdom with the expectation of timely rain and good harvest. It is
considered the epitome of the country’s Buddhist celebrations and it has continued over a long period along with Sri Lankan Buddhist cultural practices and traditions. This is considered to be the oldest cultural event in the world and continues with its colorful and glamorous experience.

In the present day, the chief custodians of the Tooth relic are the chief monks or the Mahanayake theros of Malwatta and Asgiriya chapters; the main two monasteries of the country and the Diyawadana Nilame. Safeguarding the Sacred tooth relic and conducting the religious rituals that have been continued since the past are being carried out to the present day with the blessings and advice of these chief monks and the Diyawadana Nilame acts as the lay guardian. Over the years, the two monasteries are of significance concerning the guardianship of the Sacred tooth relic, and both play equal roles in the religious activities of the temple of tooth relic.

Being a living cultural heritage site in Sri Lanka, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic is venerated by thousands of both local and foreign devotees every day. Due to its universal value, the temple was designated as a world heritage site in the year 1988 by UNESCO.

by Sithani Jayatissa

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The traditional ceremony to inform the head of the state on the successful completion of the historic Esala Festival took place at the President’s House in Kandy in the presence of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The Sannasa (Scroll of Memorandum) on the successful conclusion of the Perahera was handed over to President Rajapaksa by the Diyawadana Nilame (Chief Custodian) of the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth Relic). The Sannasa formally announce the end of the Annual Sri Dalada Festival to the President and that the Perahera was held successfully in keeping with the age old traditions.

(Photos: Buddhika Roshan).
The President Gotabaya Rajapaksa offered fruits to the elephant ‘Bandhaa’ symbolically marking the offer of fruits to all elephants and tuskers that participated in the procession. (Photo: Buddhika Roshan)
The first – and for a while the only – investment I made in Cambridge was to buy a bicycle. Walking to Trinity and to the centre of the University from Priory Road took a long time. I also needed to get around to different parts of the town – to visit other colleges, to attend lectures, to reach libraries, to meet my friends and to go to political, social and cultural gatherings. Unfortunately my budget did not allow me to buy a bicycle with gears. I bought a simple, gearless bike second hand – and consoled myself that going up Castle Hill on my way back to my digs in Priory Road on this antiquated machine would give me just the exercise I needed.

I met Mahbub ul Haq from Pakistan even before I had managed to get a bicycle – he was at King's, a short walk from Trinity, and we met while I was on my way to the first Cambridge lecture I ever attended. The term had just started and I was hurrying along King's Parade to hear Joan Robinson, the famous economist whose book The Economics of Imperfect Competition (1933) I had read with much admiration in Calcutta, and whose lecture I was anxious to hear. It was a fine autumn morning, and Mahbub, elegantly (indeed nattily) attired, was walking rapidly down King's Parade on his way to Joan Robinson's lecture, like me.

We were both a little late (Joan Robinson was, in fact, even later) and we began to talk while keeping our pace. It is my good fortune that the conversation which began somewhat breathlessly during that encounter in October 1953 continued through our lives, right up to Mahbub's sudden and tragic death in 1998. Outside the classrooms, when we walked together on the Backs next to the river Cam, or chatted in his room or mine, we grumbled about mainstream economics. Why did it take so little interest in the lives of human beings? Mahbub and I were not only fond of each other (and, later on, I would come to know well his spirited wife Bani, or Khadija – a Bengali from East Pakistan) but shared many intellectual interests. Mahbub's pioneering work in launching the Human Development Reports in 1990 reflected his passion – a thoroughly well-reasoned passion – to broaden the coverage of economics.

Friends and Circles

Where is 'home'? For Professor Amartya Sen home has been many places - Dhaka in modern Bangladesh where he grew up, the village of Santiniketan where he was raised by his grandparents as much as by his parents, Calcutta where he first studied economics and was active in student movements, and Trinity College, Cambridge, to which he came aged nineteen.

Nobel Laureate Sen brilliantly recreates the atmosphere in each of these. Central to his formation was the intellectually liberating school in Santiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore (who gave him his name Amartya) and enticing conversations in the famous Coffee House on College Street in Calcutta. As an undergraduate at Cambridge, he engaged with many of the leading figures of the day. This is a book of ideas - especially Marx, Keynes and Arrow - as much as of people and places. Following excerpts adapted from Professor Amartya Sen's most recent book; Home In The World - A Memoir
and I would also form a lifelong friendship, combining affection with a shared commitment to try to extend the reach of economic thinking. Many years later Lal would give shape to that commitment as the founding director of the research institute of the United Nations University in Helsinki, established in 1985. For a while, I worked with him there, but even before that I helped him to choose an appropriate name for his institution. We settled on the World Institute for Development Economics Research, which gets nicely recognized by its acronym, WIDER – a good description of what Lal wanted from economics and the social sciences. When I look back at some of the global initiatives in which I have been involved, I realize how fortunate I was to meet as fellow undergraduates the people who would eventually establish and lead them – Mahbub and Lal in particular.

Yet another reason to frequent King’s in my first few weeks was to talk with Michael Bruno from Israel, then doing mathematics, but who would move to economics soon afterwards. His Jewish family had left Germany in 1933, when he was one year old, just in time to avoid the massive butchery that would follow. Bruno was an excellent economist, and among other roles served as a remarkably successful Governor of the Central Bank of Israel. As President of the International Economic Association, when he had to arrange the Association’s World Congress, he courageously – and successfully – located it in the Arab state of Tunisia, rejecting a number of alternative proposals from Europe and America. Given his democratic and left-leaning politics, we agreed on many issues in the world, but disagreed on what was likely to happen to the Arab residents of Palestine. Michael was very committed to peace and tolerance but he was, alas, much too optimistic about the Israel–Palestine situation. With my experience of the terrible Hindu–Muslim bloodshed of the 1940s, I was very aware how easy it is to generate hostility and violence by fanning the flames of division in artificially generated identity confrontations. When Michael and I argued about Palestine in the 1950s, I hoped that his optimism would be vindicated. It gives me no pleasure to find that my pessimism has been proved right.

Despite acquainting myself with many students outside Trinity, my main circle in my first year was inside the College. My college friends included some very engaging mathematicians, particularly David Epstein from South Africa and Allan Hayes. There were also historians – one of whom, Simon Digby, became a major scholar of Islamic studies, much admired in India and Pakistan. (His grandfather William Digby had famously denounced British rule for creating poverty in India.) And I was very lucky to meet, more or less immediately, Ian Hacking, who later had a major influence on philosophy. I have been able to draw on our friendship throughout my life.

I found that I often hung around with a group of recently arrived foreign students who arranged regular get-togethers, none of them particularly quiet. There was Salve Salvesen from Norway, Jose Romero from the Philippines, Hisahiko Okazaki from Japan (known to us as Chako) and a number of others in that very lively group. They were not, to say the least, tremendously involved in their studies (with the possible exception of Chako), which suited me fine, and we spent many hours chatting away in large and small groups. We were occasionally joined by Anand Panyarachun from Thailand, an extremely talented thinker, who had been in Trinity for a year already when we neophytes arrived.
21st century peacekeeping must be anchored in a strong ecosystem of technology and innovation that can facilitate UN peacekeeping operations in implementing their mandates in complex environments. After all, it helps them to adapt to changing conflict dynamics and take advantage of increased efficiencies. This is also in line with the Strategy for Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping which seeks to advance the use of technology across the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) themes, including performance, safety and security, politics, protection and peacebuilding.

Limited resources make the execution of peacekeeping mandates difficult even otherwise. When such mandates are expanded in an ad hoc fashion, the challenge becomes more complex. In recent years, peacekeepers have experienced a greater level of asymmetric threats, ranging from landmines to IEDs and we cannot remain indifferent to this prospect.

To execute their mandates, peacekeeping missions must be able to move fast to acquire and validate information from a wide range of openly available sources to enhance situational awareness, augment security, aid operational planning, and support decision-making. UN peacekeeping simply cannot afford to cede the information advantage to those actors determined to undermine prospects for peace by using modern technology to aid their violent cause. Let me therefore propose a four point framework that would lay out a possible architecture for securing UN peacekeepers to meet contemporary threats:

First, we must focus on operationally proven, cost-effective, widely available, reliable and field-serviceable technologies. These must also prioritize mobility, both in the sense of agile manoeuvrability of mission assets and in the sense of use of mobile digital / IT platforms. Where deployed, technologies should be environment friendly through the use of renewables and fuel efficiency, and use of environmentally-friendly construction materials.

Second, we need a sound information and intelligence foundation. Only this will ensure early warning and mobilizing a coherent and early response. It therefore gives me great pleasure to announce that India is supporting the UN in the rollout of the UNITE Aware Platform across select peacekeeping missions. This initiative is based on the expectation that an entire peacekeeping operation can be visualized, coordinated, and monitored on a real time basis. We should ensure that any attack on a peacekeeper or a civilian is predictable, preventable, or responded to immediately.

Thirdly, we must contribute to ensuring that technological improvements are continuous and are available on the ground, in the gear that peacekeepers carry and the weapons and tools that they use to enhance their mobility, performance, endurance, range, and load-carrying capabilities while guaranteeing their safety and security. This also includes strengthening of communication within missions and enhancing overall capacity to take informed decisions at the tactical or operational level. Fourthly, consistent training and capacity building of peacekeepers in the realm of technology needs attention and investment. I am pleased to announce that we have signed an MOU between the Government of India and the UN in support of the ‘Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping’ initiative and to UN C4ISR Academy for Peace Operations (UNCAP).

We would welcome other Member States to take active interest in this evolving paradigm. Political will, strengthened partnerships, and shifts in organizational culture are required to take it forward. Maximum transparency should remain a principle of the use of peacekeeping technology and in particular when used to enable information gathering and sharing. Peacekeeping requires continuous review, adaptation, and transparent engagement with all stakeholders, as also strong procedural safeguards and effective oversight mechanisms.
The world today is still in the grip of the COVID pandemic. As the virus continues to mutate and wreak havoc, putting it under control remains our top priority. In the battle, vaccines are of vital importance. They should be distributed around the world fairly and equitably with no country and no one left behind. They should truly serve as people's vaccines. This is essential for defeating the virus. It is also a matter of international justice.

In reality however, inequitable distribution and unbalanced vaccination remain prominent challenges. The immunization gap deserves high attention from the international community. To win this fight where humanity's future is at stake, solidarity and cooperation is the only right choice. President Xi Jinping has elaborated on the Chinese government's propositions and pointed the way forward for international vaccine cooperation. On that basis, let me share the following thoughts:

First, we must put life first and promote vaccine accessibility around the world. COVID-19 vaccination is the largest effort of this kind in human history. People's life and health must always be our first priority, and they must not be preceded by economic, political or other interests. Vaccines are first and foremost a global public good. We must ensure they remain so and reject rising vaccine nationalism. They are to be used as weapon to save lives, not a means by any country for selfish gains, still less a tool for geopolitical rivalry.

Second, we must uphold justice and step up support to developing countries. Three deficits need to be addressed. Firstly, the production deficit. While ramping up total supply, producing countries should also support developing countries through technology transfer and joint production, and safeguard the global supply chain of raw materials. Secondly, the distribution deficit. Vaccines should be shared with greater intensity and speed to make them accessible and affordable for developing countries as quickly as possible, especially the least developed countries. Thirdly, the cooperation deficit. This requires greater solidarity and sense of responsibility, and full mobilization of governments, businesses and international organizations, so as to form synergy.

Third, we must practice multilateralism and make international cooperation more effective. Coronavirus vaccination is like a touchstone of true multilateralism. The COVAX Facility needs to function with greater efficiency and transparency to deliver vaccines in greater numbers and more quickly. The World Bank and other multilateral financial institutions need to provide quick and inclusive financial support for vaccine R&D, production and procurement. The World Trade Organization (WTO) needs to speed up discussions on IP waivers to reach early consensus. All countries should respect such recognition systems as the WHO Emergency Use Listing Procedure (EUL), and take a science-based and fair approach toward vaccine mutual recognition and regulatory policy coordination.

Fourth, we must strengthen coordination and build multi-tiered defense. While continuing to educate the public, strengthen their confidence and speed up vaccination, countries should continue to coordinate pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions, targeted routine measures and emergency response, and pandemic control and socioeconomic development. In the meantime, joint response at the global level should be scaled up to minimize the risk of cross-border transmission.

I wish to underscore that in carrying out vaccine cooperation, China has no political motive or economic calculation, and China does not attach any political strings. The only purpose of China is to make vaccines a global public good that truly serves as people's vaccines and help the world defeat the pandemic at an early date. To this end, China will take further actions.

We will continue to steadily increase production capacity, provide more accessible and affordable vaccines to meet the needs of developing countries, and strive to provide two billion doses to the world in the course of this year.
WHY SHOULD YOU GET VACCINATED?

• It’s safe, simple and free of charge
• It could keep you from getting Covid-19.
• If you still get Covid-19, it could keep you from becoming seriously ill.
• It will help you do your part to slow the spread of Covid-19 and protect the health of your family, your friends, and your community
• It’s the first step toward life returning to normal