

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

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RC WIJEGUNARATNE

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**THIS SHORT STORY BOOK
DEDICATED TO MY SON RAVI JUNIOR
AND MY WIFE YAMUNA
*TWO PILLARS OF MY LIFE***

Author's note

When Covid - 19 pandemic began spreading at the Naval Base, Welisara two years ago, I was on holiday with my family at Tangalle. My residence was in Elapitiwala which was situated next to the Naval base, Welisara and my staff were housed at that base. Hence, we did not want to return to our Elapitiwala home due to Covid- 19 fears; so we decided to remain in Tangalle for almost two months.

Other than looking at the Tangalle Bay all day, there were no other activities possible due to the lockdown (other than my one-hour sea swim daily). So, I began writing personal memoirs of unsung heroes of our Armed Forces and sent them to Mr. Prabath Sahabandu, the editor-in-chief of The Island newspaper. Prabath was kind enough to publish them in his esteemed newspaper which has one of the largest circulations in Sri Lanka.

With his encouragement, I continued writing at the rate of one article per week for almost a year. Eventually, all the articles were published in the “ The Island ” newspaper, thanks to Prabath.

This book is a compilation of some of those articles.

I am failing in my duty if I do not mention my son who was my research assistant who did his duty diligently. Thanks Ravi junior. Then my wife Yamuna who was very happy to see me sit at one place at home and write something worthwhile rather than wasting my time on retirement traveling around the country. She says that happened thanks to the Covid - 19 pandemic lockdown. She had been the most critical reviewer of my articles which helped me improve my writing skills drastically. Thanks Ammi!

Then I would like to thank my IT Assistant Chanaka Weerasooriya and photographer Master Chief Petty Officer Bandula for their excellent support and advice.

I should thank Mr. Senaka Senaviratne (USA) and Mr. Ana De Silva for helping me by correcting my grammar. Of course, Mr Prabath Sahabandu did a fantastic job by “polishing” the articles and editing them prior to publishing. Thanks, Prabath once again.

I thank Captain (SBS) Chaminda Wijesiri, a highly decorated Naval Special Forces officer, who is the Officer in Charge of the Naval Printing Unit and his staff for excellent printing work.

All articles in this book are true narrations published for your reading pleasure. Those were the days!

Admiral Ravindra C Wijegunaratne
R 75, Elapitiwala,
Ragama.

15th August 2022

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MRS WILLY BACK AT CORAL COVE BEACH

Source: Island



Lieutenant (MDC) Shanthi Kumar Bahar receiving President's Cup for Practical Pistol Firing from the then First Lady Elina Jayewardena in 1984.



On the full moon Poya Day of 1st May 2017, Isuru, the younger son of Rear Admiral YN Jayaratne (present Director General Operations) touching Mrs. Willy, as his elder brother Anjana looks on at the Coral Cove beach, Trincomalee.

When you read the above headline, you must be wondering what this article could be about. This story is about someone who has made the officers (and their families) who know her at the Naval Base, Trincomalee very happy. Mrs. Willy is a huge Green Sea Turtle, who comes to lay her eggs at the Coral Cove beach, a private beachfront within the Naval Base in Trincomalee. As far as I could relate, she has been coming to the Coral Cove beach to lay her eggs for the past 38 years!

When I was a young Midshipman, then Lieutenant (MCD) Shanthi Kumar Bahar, detailed me for a very unusual task. That was to lay an ambush at the Coral Cove beach at night during the last two weeks of April and first two weeks of May (almost one month), and be on the lookout for the arrival of a huge Green Sea Turtle coming there to lay her eggs. She was known as Mrs. Willy. At first, I felt it was a kind of punishment because the Coral Cove beach was in the jungle next to our firing range, away from our main naval complex. To get there you have to walk approximately one kilometre along a jungle track.

Within a few days, I started to love this task. I had to leave my accommodation soon after dinner (in the Navy, lunch is called dinner, and the dinner is called supper, thanks to Royal Navy terminology!), walk up to the beach, and lay an ambush for Mrs. Willy to appear from the sea and crawl up about 10 metres to

lay her eggs. Most of the days I was not alone. One of my friends also joined to spend the night on the beach. We really enjoyed sleeping in the open air on the beach listening to the waves breaking.

The April-May period is inter-monsoonal in the Eastern area. The sea is calm with light breeze. We waited on ambush and sometimes would fall asleep, but suddenly wake up when you see Shanti Bahar's face in your dreams! Shanthi was a terror at that time.

An distinguished old boy of Trinity College, Kandy, who excels both in studies and sports, young Shanthi joined the Sri Lanka Navy to 3rd Intake of Cadets in 1974. Then he was 19 years old. He was a UK qualified Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) underwater expert and Mine Clearance Diver (MCD) besides being a crack marksman, both rifle and pistol and winner of the first President's Cup in Practical Pistol firing meet in 1984. The late President J.R Jayewardene was so impressed - it was his son, Ravi, who introduced Practical Pistol Firing Sport to Sri Lanka - with Shanthi's ability and presented him with a .45 Colt Gold Cup Pistol as a gift. It is is now displayed at our Olympic standard Navy firing range at Welisara. In addition, he was a Navy Coloursman in Sailing and Rowing, who took part in International Sailing Regattas. His knowledge on jungle warfare and small arms was considered exceptional. He was an avid reader. There was no Internet and he used to order Jungle Warfare and gun manuals and magazines through his mother in Hawaii, USA.

All junior officers, especially under trainee ones like me at that time were very much afraid of him. However, after I worked under him onboard the Light House Relief Vessel Pradeepa, and after taking part in Basses Light house relief work, he had a lot of faith in me. When we anchored our ship at Uda Potthana bay, we took a Gemini craft and go to the Yala National park (Yala block 2). I used to follow him in this jungle terrain. I became his follower at very junior level. He had noticed my love for the fishing rod and guns, and started teaching me about guns and jungle warfare. I am yet to see a marksman holding a six- battery torch with one hand, .22 caliber rifle with other hand, aim and fire at night. That was the caliber of Lt. Bahar's marksmanship. To develop such skills you require very strong upper body strength and agility. Anyway, he was a Mine Clearance Diver, trained in the UK with huge lung capacity and very strong arms. His breathing was controlled to near perfection when he fired the weapon. This hand-eye coordination of Lt Bahar came with hard work and training. He would never miss his target.

When in action against enemy in close quarters he believed more in accuracy of his repeater shotgun on his right hand than the US manufactured 5.56mm M-16 Carbine slung on his shoulder. With MCD and EOD knowledge, he made his own IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices).

I am extremely grateful to him for what he taught me because these skills and knowledge stood me in good stead while I was training Special Boat Squadron (SBS – Naval Commando Unit) in November 1993.

It is sad that Lt Commander Shanthi Bahar died during small group operation in Ichchantivu, Muttur on 15th Jan. 1986. He led a 10-man team to target EROS local terrorist leadership and terrorist safe house in Muttur/ Ichchantivu sector. All 10 in his team were junior sailors trained by him personally for months. The Divers of SLN helped him to travel from the Naval Base Trincomalee to Muttur in their Diving Unit Dinghy boat and silently landed them near target the area at night. They were able to kill eight terrorists (including their leader), but Lt Commander Bahar and his Muslim informant died of an enemy grenade attack. We lost a great naval officer that day.

It is extremely commendable that senior most among these brave 10 junior sailors, Naval Patrolman (then) KG Samaratunga took over command following the demise of Lt Commander Bahar, regrouped the men and returned to R/V point of Diving Unit boat, carrying body of Lt Commander Bahar. Later, Samaratunga said with tears welling up in his eyes, “Sir, I did exactly what Bahar Sir had asked me to. He said that if he died, I had to take over the Command and take the boys back to safety.” Samaratunga rose up to Master Chief Petty Officer later and was my Master-at-Arms while I was commanding the SBS in 1993. He gained his commission in 1999 and retired as a Lieutenant. He is now engaged in organic farming in Pannala. Great sailors! Unsung heroes!

Lt Commander Bahar was promoted to rank of Commander posthumously and awarded the Rana Wickrama Medal for individual bravery in the face of enemy.

I lost my guru!

Back to the main story. I first met Mrs Willy, 38 years ago on 2nd May. She appeared like a ghost from the sea around midnight. She crawled through the waves, on the coral-sandy beach of Coral Cove with difficulty and settled down near a Banyan (Nuga) tree on the beach.

The path she travelled on the beach resembled “tractor tracks” and shined in the moonlight. The moon was on the waxing gibbous phase, which means more than 50% illumination of the moonlight was available throughout the night. Mrs. Willy, under my watchful eyes from a distance, dug a few places for about an hour. However, she did not lay eggs on that day and returned to sea. What a wonderful friend I made at the Coral Cove beach that night!

Mrs. Willy became a life-long friend. She returned to the beach two days later, and this time she laid eggs. I had been instructed by Lt Commander Bahar not to disturb her while laying eggs, but could touch her while she was returning to the sea. We in the military are sometimes superstitious. We mariners believe touching a fully grown sea turtle would bring us long life. So, I touched Mrs. Willy, this graceful lady, on that day 38 years ago for the first time.

Time passed, and from 15 April to 15 May every year we laid ambushes for Mrs. Willy’s arrival at the Coral Cove beach. Our ambushes later became family outings as we went up in the ranks and got older. First with my wife, Yamuna and I camped out in the Coral Cove beach, with food and wine! Sometimes we would fall asleep in the open air while counting stars-my favourite hobby! This is what you live for in this beautiful and God given, beloved country. The Foul Point light house (which was built in 1863 by the British to show entrance to the Trincomalee harbour) was functioning at that time and you could see the looming light from time to time.

Our children joined us later, and it became a family outing. Children with flashlights were watching the sea. They had their own plans for the night. Luckily, school holidays coincided with this period. Ladies would bring delicious food and snacks. Men were busy imbibing. All were waiting for Mrs. Willy’s arrival. There would be complete silence until eggs were laid. Children whispering to each other and waiting to touch her one by one while she was returning to the sea. Mrs. Willy got quite used to children touching her over these years. She would sometimes stop moving when approached by a child reluctant to touch her. That was her way of saying, “Baby, Don’t be afraid. Please feel free to touch me”.

Gradually, we rose up in our ranks and were transferred out of the Trincomalee Naval base. Our children also grew up and they had more important things to do than waiting for Mrs. Willy’s arrival on the Coral Cove beach. Around that time, there was intense fighting with the LTTE, and we started placing Naval sentries on the Coral Cove beach at night. One of their tasks during sentry duty

at night was to ensure the safety of Mrs. Willy.

It was another delightful occasion to see the baby sea turtles coming out of hatching after 60 to 62 days and crawling to the sea. How many baby sea turtles? Sorry! I always lost count. So many during the last 38 years!

Sadly, Mrs. Willy did not appear during the egg laying period for the last two years. It had happened few times earlier also. Marine Biologists say, some times these huge Green Sea Turtles may not lay eggs every year. But, if they come, like an inbuilt GPS guiding them, they will come to exactly the same spot where they laid their eggs last time. Mrs. Willy's egg laying location is on the Coral Cove beach, under a large Nuga tree. The place was kept very clean during this period. We kept her "delivery room" on the beach clean and ready for her to lay eggs safely and we guarded it until baby sea turtles come out of soft sand and head towards the sea.

I was worried. Mrs. Willy lives in a very dangerous environment at sea, mainly due to human activities. Fishing nets are the biggest threat to sea turtles. The bigger the size of the sea turtle, the greater the danger! So, at Mrs. Willy's size, she faces the danger of getting caught in a fishing net and dying from suffocation and cut injuries. In addition, Sea turtles may eat floating polythene (mistaking it for jellyfish) which would cause their digestive system to get clogged, and die a painful death. I prayed for her.

Good news came from the Eastern Command. Deputy Area Commander (DAC) Commodore PDS Dias on 28th April night around 2230 hrs he had spotted Mrs Willy while she was returning to the sea after laying eggs at the Coral Cove beach at her usual place. Moon was in waxing crescent. With visibility of 20% or less, the DAC was extremely lucky to see Mrs Willy on that day.

Long Live Mrs Willy! Please come back next year. We will be waiting for you my dear friend ...

WHEN THEFT IN LONDON TURNED OUT BE A STROKE OF LUCK



Those were the days...

I was selected to undergo training at the prestigious Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, UK (commonly known as Dartmouth or BRNC) in January 1982, on completion of a one-year training course at Naval and Maritime Academy in Trincomalee. I was 19 years old, and the course I had to follow was “International Midshipmen Course”. Fifty two foreign officers, mainly from the Commonwealth countries and Arab nations attended the course with me. I received a Commonwealth scholarship and my fees and payments were handled by the Commonwealth Office.

BRNC, the initial Officer Training Institute is located on a hill overlooking the port Dartmouth, Devon, England. It is the place where beautiful Dart River meets the sea. Training Naval Officers in Dartmouth goes back to 1863, when HMS Britannia, a wooden hull ship was moored at river Dart used for training Royal Navy officers.

A foundation for a new Naval College was laid in March 1902 by King Edward VII (King of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Emperor of India from 22nd January 1901 to 6th May 1910 and elder son of Queen Victoria). Sir Aston Webb designed the College and built by M/S Higgs and Hill. Work completed in 1905 and the first batch of trainees joined in September 1905.

King George V and King George VI were naval cadets trained at Dartmouth. Prince Phillip of Greece and Princess Elizabeth (Present Queen) met for the first time in Dartmouth when Prince Phillip was a Naval cadet. Prince of Wales, Duke

of York and Prince William has undergone training in Dartmouth. The best Naval Cadets from the Commonwealth countries go through training at Dartmouth. A large number of them became Navy Commanders.

The motto of Dartmouth is “To deliver courageous leaders with the spirit to fight and win”.



BRNC : The writer as a Midshipman in 1982

I met Defence Adviser of British High Commission in Colombo, and he gave me all the air tickets and the train warrants (which were to be changed into tickets at the Railway Station in London). And some cash for my journey. He categorically informed me no one would come to receive me and I had to travel to Dartmouth on my own. All necessary instructions were given in writing, which he said, I might need to read time to time during the journey. Another letter was given, indicating that I was a visitor of the UK government and I should be given maximum assistance in case of an emergency.

I flew from the BIA to Muscat (Oman) to Roissy Charles De Gaulle airport Paris by Union de Transport Airlines (UTA) flight number UTA 567, and then took Channel crossing by Air France aircraft (flight number AF 8110) flight and landed at the Heathrow airport. By the time, I landed there, I was tired, but full of excitement. I had two bags, and one was large. My mother bought me a belt with a small pouch before my departure. She advised me to carry my passport, air tickets, money and any important documents in it.

I hate wearing ties. So, first thing after boarding the plane was to remove the tie and put it in the hand bag. After disembarking at the Heathrow airport, I took the tube, reached the Paddington railway station and got my warrants changed to a railway ticket. There were a few hours for the train and I had some snacks. Now I wanted go to the toilet.

I went to a closeby toilet in Paddington station. I had to take a few steps down to enter the toilet. So, I left the trolley carrying my bags (both hand bag and large bag) at the entrance to the toilet and went in. After a few minutes when I came out, the bags were missing! Someone had stolen them! I panicked. All my uniforms, civilian clothes and other belongings were in those bags. Luckily,

thanks to my mother, my passport, tickets, important travel instructions and money was on my hip pouch.

I went to the Police post at Paddington railway station and lodged a complaint. When the policeman saw the letters issued by the British High Commission, he became very serious and took my statement and advised me to travel to Dartmouth. The Police assured me if they found the bags, they would be delivered to BRNC Dartmouth.

Now, I reported to BRNC Dartmouth that evening, without uniform and other belongings, even without a necktie. I had reported a few days before the course started and thankfully that gave time for me to settle down.

The following day I found myself in front of the Training Commander. I explained to him what happened and also said that I never knew London had such thieves. Training Commander had a discussion with my Divisional Chief Petty Officer Quick. CPO Quick, was a huge hulk of a man, a rugby player but very kind-hearted towards foreign officers. He was very upset. Poor Midshipman Wijegunaratne from Sri Lanka had been robbed in London! (He could not pronounce my name. He used to call me Midshipman Wije!). The following day, I went with Chief Quick to “Marks and Spencer’s” shop in Dartmouth town. CPO Quick selected the following civil clothes for me,

Two suits – one pinstripe and one light colour
Blue blazer
Evening jacket
Four shirts – light colour
Four ties
Two pairs of Oxford shoes (one black and one brown)
Four trousers (two light colours and two dark colours)
Four pairs of socks
Two leather belts (black and brown in color)
Four T-shirts
Four sports shorts
Track suit
Good pair of running shoes, socks and underwear
Night dress
Other necessary items

All my uniforms, caps, uniform shoes, belts and epaulettes were purchased from M/S Gieves and Hawkes shop in the college and uniform makers stitched my uniforms. All payments were made by the College!

To be very frank, I should thank that thief at Paddington railway station for the favour he had done for me. Otherwise, I would have been wearing a suit stitched by a Sri Lanka tailor.

Most of the Royal Navy and foreign midshipmen at the time (1982) did not know where Sri Lanka was. They thought Sri Lanka was a part of India. When I donned the newly-bought expensive clothes, they thought I was a son of a wealthy Indian Maharaja!

Those were the days

LOST IN SEA AND BELIEVING IN GOD



Sub Lieutenant Technical course India. The writer is on extreme left, Immediately next to him is Sub Lieutenant Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas of Nigerian Navy, He is currently an Admiral and Chief of Nigerian Navy (from 2015).

It was in 1984, 36 years ago, that I returned to Sri Lanka, from India, after completing my Sub Lieutenant Technical course. My new appointment was at the Northern Naval Command and I was based in SLNS Elara shore establishment, in Karainagar.

Six batchmates of mine were also transferred to the North. It was in mid-1984. I now feel that transferring seven batchmates-boisterous Sub Lieutenants-was a very big mistake on the part of the Navy. We had just completed three and a half years in service. Whatever the situation, our parties went on till late night. Thanks to the Indian food, which we ate for nine months, all of us were very thin.

It is believed that if you want to gain weight you have to drink toddy from the same palm, every day, before lunch. So, we owned one palm each at the Karainagar base. Our toddy tapper, Kandaiah, was given 30 rupees every month (one rupee per day per one bottle). Kandaiah will mark our bottles and hand them over to the Officers Mess steward to keep them in the refrigerator. (The Navy Officers Mess is called as the the Ward Room in the Navy parlance). The Naval base in Karainagar, followed the “summer routine” due to the very hot weather in Jaffna. The working hours were from 07.30 hrs to 13.30 hrs. We

gathered for lunch around 14.30 hrs, after all senior officer had left. First, the bottle of fresh chilled Thal toddy, then delicious Navy lunch with sea food or mutton, followed by fruit salad or caramel pudding,

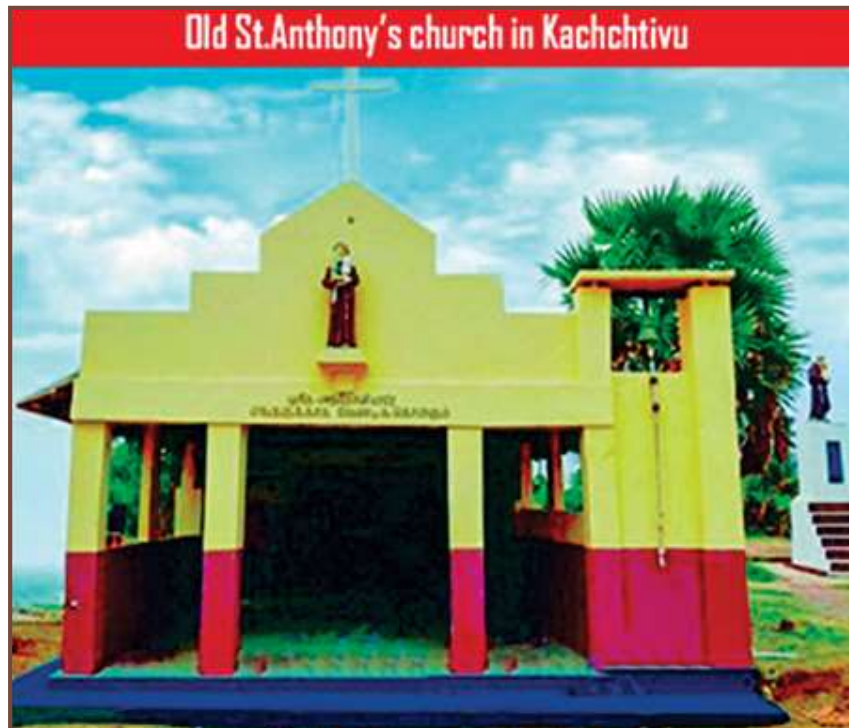
After our heavy lunch, we will rest for one hour in very warm weather and then go to the basketball or tennis courts by 16.00 hrs. Games would go on till sunset. Whether we gained weight that way is a moot question. Soon our 'Christmas' came to an end. We were detailed to 'Mothership-daughter craft operation'. Seven sub Lieutenants were in Command of seven boats, fiberglass dingies (FGDs) fitted with 40 HP out Board Motors. (OBMs). They move faster than fishing boats and our mission was to be attached to bigger ships (Gunboat, OPV or to trawler A521) and chase away any Indian bottom trawlers poaching in Sri Lankan waters and catch any smuggling or terrorists boat coming from India. Terrorists camps were situated in the Tamilnadu coast at that time. On 1 July 1984, (Sunday), my crew consisting of three junior sailors were due to proceed to sea. Senior most among my sailors was Leading Seaman Hikutugoda with eight years' experience in the Navy. Able Seaman Buddhakorale, Marine Engineering Mechanic Bandara and I had been in service for less than four years in service. I was leading this young boat crew to action. During the daily briefing, I was told our boat was to join SLNS Jayasagara. (Off Shore Patrol Vessel) anchored off Kachchivu on the Indo-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) by afternoon.

It was a fairly long sea journey for an FGB fitted with 40HP OBM. But that is how we started fighting terrorists out at sea in 1984!

We left the Karainagar base soon after breakfast at 07.00 hrs. and reached Nayanativu (Nagadeepa temple) pier by 09.30 hrs. I met Podi Hamudruwo, (young priest) who was my close friend and worshipped the place, which the Buddha visited. Then we had tea at our Naval Detachment and proceeded back to sea. It was the height of the South West monsoon and usually sea South of Delft Island was very rough during this period. The funnel effect of Delft channel further made the sea even more furious. Leading Seaman Hikutugoda suggested that we turn back and return to base due to rough seas. I was not in agreement. Young and enthusiastic, I was determined to intercept terrorist craft or a smuggling boat in my first patrol on a FGD. So, we continued at slower speed heading towards SLNS Jayasagara. Our only Navigational aid was a boat magnetic compass. The sea was very rough. As per my calculations, we should reach Mothership (SLNS Jayasagara) by noon. We packed all our weapons and radio set in polythene covers and kept them safely under the bow- locker of the

boat. We were riding the head sea, which tossed our boat up and down like a rubber ball. By 13.00 hrs, I knew something was wrong. Mother ship was not in sight, which was unbelievable. Our efforts to contact mother ship by our 10 Watts radio Communication set was unsuccessful. When we sighted the tall radio mast of Danuskodi (India), we realised that we had come too far away from the Mothership. (Later, we learnt the Mothership had moved to the North of Delft Island due to rough seas and the Naval base at Karainagar had failed to inform them of our departure). We were in Indian waters! We immediately turned back to our reciprocal course and headed towards Nayanativu, none of these Islands were within our sight. All our calculations were done on the basis of our speed, boat compass directions and a photo copy of the Northern area sea chart.

The situation took a turn for the worse. After we started heading towards Sri Lankan waters, the wind and the sea coming from the stern of the boat made the handling of the boat on a steady course extremely difficult. After a few minutes, waves broke on to boat, which started sinking. We jumped off. Marine Engineering Mechanic Bandara held on to a lifejacket. Others were swimming in various directions. The boat disappeared in deep waters within a few minutes. Wooden floorboards of the boat were floating. I grabbed one wooden floorboard and gathered others around it.



Now we were all together. Bandara was a non-swimmer and he wore a life jacket. Others were in a state of shock, even though they could swim. What they saw around them was only the sea with no land in sight.

What about me? I am a good swimmer thanks to Late Master Chief Petty Officer (PTI) PPR Silva, who was our swimming instructor during our cadet time. Further, my training at Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC), Dartmouth, UK, where Royal Navy take 'survival at sea' training very seriously. They put you in a liferaft and keep you out at river Dart for a whole night during winter. Midshipmen from Asian and African countries who did the International Midshipman Course at BRNC with me cursed the Royal Navy instructors the whole night for keeping us exposed to very cold weather in river Dart. I realised the importance of that training in BRNC. However, the situation there was different. We were on a liferaft in River Dart, and not floating in water. Due to the cold weather in the UK during winter, if you fall into water, you will survive only a few minutes. You will die of hypothermia. The situation here in warm Sri Lankan/Indian waters is different. We would survive a longer period, maybe 24 hours.

I ordered all the sailors to stay together by holding on to the floor board and reassured them that help would be forthcoming even though I knew it would take hours to both CO SLNS Jayasagara, my CO SLNS Elara and Commander Northern Naval Area to realise our boat was lost at sea and to initiate Search and Rescue (SAR) mission. Then, I ensured that Bandara was comfortable with his life jacket. I instructed my sailors to just hang on to the wooden floorboard, not to expend energy by trying to swim. My instructions and reassurance had a calming effect on the sailors. We were riding waves, holding onto the floorboards. I told my sailors, that a rescue team would come searching for us before sunset. Time as per my waterproof watch was 14.00 hrs.

I had one fear. After returning from India a few weeks back, I watched Steven Spielberg's award winning film 'Jaws', on man-eating great white sharks. The film based on Peter Benchley's 1974 novel JAWS. I thought such a shark would appear and each one of us whole. Further I knew for sure that there were no man-eating Sharks in our waters, but silently prayed that sunset would come fast in the hope that sharks would not see us in the dark.

Thankfully, at sun set, we saw an SLAF Aircraft on the horizon. It was patrolling along the India-Sri Lanka IMBL. We were in the Indian waters. Our morale went down to the lowest with sunset. No search would be conducted at night because aircraft and ships/boats could not sight us. We had to keep

going. I told the sailors, “The aircraft must have seen us, but as you know, help would not come at night. We should somehow survive till next morning July 2, 1984)”. Something told me I was hoping for the impossible.

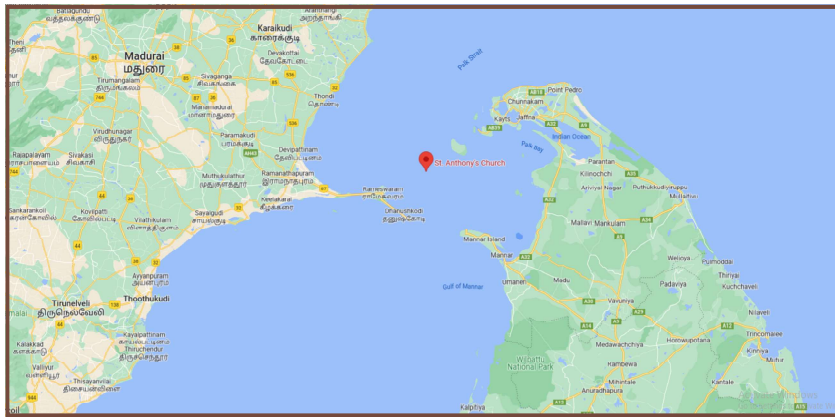
I prayed that it would not be the last sunset I was watching. I thought of my parents, my brothers and sisters, especially my sister closest to me, Lalani, who would die in an accident in Russia two years later. She was so close to me and I was her hero in uniform. I was determined to live and keep my sailors also alive till morning.

As soon as the sun set, the new moon rose. The new moon was in the waxing crescent phase with only 7% illumination. That meant we were heading for a very dark night. I started singing, joined by my sailors. Leading Seaman Hibusugoda grabbed the ‘mike’ from me. He is a very good singer. I regretted having disregarded his advice that we turn back at Nayanativu. A wonderful sailor, he mentioned it again. I respect him even today for his discipline. They were “old school” sailors who believed that “officers were always right”. The new moon started dipping down by the time Hibusugoda stopped singing. I wished if I had my hip flask filled with rum. If I had been able to give him a tot, Hibusugoda would have gone on singing till dawn.

It became one of the darkest nights after the moon set at 9.00 pm. It was so dark that we could barely see each other. During my training at BRNC, I learnt that our body temperature would drop if we were in water for a long time and body fluids transferred to sea water by natural osmosis; we would get dehydrated, feel drowsy and then drowned. I was worried about my sailors, specially of Bandara, who started shivering. I told the sailors to keep talking and if anyone felt drowsy to inform others without falling asleep. I had the worst fear that one of them would feel drowsy and drown. To keep them alert, I showed them how to find North by reading stars and how to trace the star- constellation of ‘Orion’. Then, I asked them to count stars, and anyone whose count was the same as mine, would get a bottle of rum from me when we reached the base. They kept counting and recounting stars! It was the longest night in my life. The sunrise of 2nd July 1984 was the most beautiful one I have seen. I suddenly realized 1st July was Sunday and Indian trawlers would not go fishing on Sundays.

Morale, however, was up with the sunrise. I saw a few smiles. We did something unbelievable. We survived one whole night in water! We had broken all previous records by the Sri Lanka Navy on survival.

I saw Kachchtivu Island on horizon, where a small church was built by a fisherman, who was a survivor of a storm, and dedicated it to St. Anthonys. We were too weak to swim towards the island. I told my sailors that help would come soon. I am a Buddhist, I am a firm believer in God Skanda (God Kataragama) and St. Anthony. When we get a sea appointment, we go to St. Anthony Church, Kochikade and light a candle because St. Anthony is the Saint who looks after seafarers like us. Our ships in the Colombo harbour, before proceeding to the sea on patrol first, turn towards St. Antony's Church to invoke its blessings. Before taking over my sea appointment in the North, I lit a candle there. I prayed to St. Antony.



A book written by the late W. T. Jayasinghe, the former External Affairs and Defence Secretary, titled, Kachchtivu : And the Maritime Boundary of Sri Lanka, says: "The sea surrounding Kachchtivu are fertile fishing grounds and

fishermen from Sri Lanka have from time immemorial been venturing into these waters. It is recorded that fishermen of Point Pedro went as far as Kachchtivu to catch turtles during particular seasons. The Portuguese administered Kachchtivu as part of Jaffna and Sri Lanka has been exercising sovereignty and jurisdiction over Kachchtivu and its adjacent waters without interruption." (Page 18)

We were very weak by morning. Around 9.00 hrs / July 2, 1984, we saw a fishing trawler at a distance. They saw us floating and came towards us. I silently prayed again that it should not be an Indian trawler. We the SLN are not the best friends of Indian trawlers poaching in our waters.

It was a Sri Lankan trawler which came from Gurunagar. They took us on board. I looked at my water proof watch. Time was 10.20 hrs. We had been floating for 20 hours and 20 minutes. All of us survived. The Tamil fishermen were very kind to us. They gave us water to drink, which tasted very sweet. We had not taken any water or food for almost 24 hrs. Most of us were shivering from the cold and had signs of dehydration. The fishermen gave us sugar and

bread. This was the breakfast of these humble people. I ate a piece of bread with sugar with tears in my eyes.

I thanked St Antony for being kind to us. I was determined to come back to the small St Antony's Church in Kachchtivu soon to light a candle. Soon we were spotted by a SLN ship. The happy news communicated to the Naval Base, Karainagar "Ravi and his boys are safe. We are bringing them home". A reception at the Naval base was unbelievable, led by my senior batch Lieutenant Parakrama Samaraweera (Pol Samare or Nalaka who died in Mullaitivu in 1996) and six of my batch mates. All these happened when I was a 21-year old, way back in 1984. Thank god for allowing me to live. Thanks St. Anthony.

My mother was 82-years old and she broke her hip in 2017, when I was Navy Commander. She gave me most of the valuable documents she was keeping with her. One of those documents was my horoscope, written by a world-famous astrologer who was a very close friend of my late father. My horoscope was written only up to 1st July 1984, and the astrologer had said the remaining part of it would be completed some other day. My late father or mother did not know why the astrologer had postponed writing the second part. Now, I know why he did so. However, I survived on July 1, 1984.

When I was the Navy Commander, I was given the opportunity by His Lordship, Rt Rev Dr Justin Ganapragasam, Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna to build a new St Anthonys Church at Kachchtivu. I was more than happy to do so. The present Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Piyal De Silva was the Northern Naval Commander at the time. I grabbed this golden opportunity with both my hands. Piyal did a wonderful job and built a beautiful church for St. Anthony in six months. I do not miss attending yearly feast, which attracts thousands Indian and Sri Lankan devotees. On 1st of July, I remember how lucky we were to survive in the sea.

WAITING FOR MY FRIEND, MRS. WILLY



The Navy deployed small groups on the enemy-held beaches for reconnaissance during the war against the LTTE. These highly trained four-member groups of the Special Boats Squadron (SBS) personnel infiltrated the LTTE-held terrain under cover of darkness, risking their lives. They stayed there either for reconnaissance or setting up caches of ammunition and other supplies needed for future operations in the areas concerned.

When dangerous operations were conducted behind enemy lines, I, as the CO SBS, committing my best men for such missions, confined myself to a cell of sorts; I stayed in operations room with a secure communication set, eating the same rations as my boys-on some days only chocolate-until they accomplished their missions and returned to base safely. Then, I would share cooked meals (mostly rice, chicken curry, dhal curry and pol sambol) with the brave men, who have helped make this country safe for everyone.

Different vigil

I am keeping a vigil, again, these days. Not because naval commandos have been deployed on a dangerous mission, but because my friend, Mrs Willy, is in apparent danger. Unlike my SBS boys whose movements I could track, I do not know where Mrs. Willy is-whether she is in the Andaman-Nicobar island chain, 690 nautical miles East of Sri Lanka or in the Maldivian archipelago, 425 nautical miles West of us. Further, I have failed to meet her in her 'labour room' under a huge Nuga tree in the Turtle Bay, Coral Cove, this year. I am worried of

your safety, my dear friend!

There has been a lot of bad news these days; a large number of dead marine creatures such as dolphins and turtles have washed up on our beaches. We now know for sure these tragic deaths are due to toxic materials released from the ill-fated MV X-Press Pearl.

First, the sea turtle carcasses found on our Western and Southern beaches were small. Gradually, big turtles began to die. Most alarming was that on 30 June, a huge sea turtle (Leatherback) carcass was found on the Panadura beach. All these carcasses bear evidence of very painful deaths.



Leatherback sea turtles are the largest among turtles and capable of swimming long distances and diving very deep. The one found on the Panadura beach must be at least 100 years old. It was sad to see the carcass of such huge sea turtle, at her prime egg-laying age.

Startling facts about turtles

Do you know that the longest recorded journey of leatherback sea turtle by satellite tracking is 12,774 miles (20,558 km) from Indonesia to Oregon (US Pacific North Western region). Satellite tracking of the fully-grown Green sea turtle has shown that it swims 4,000 km continuously without a break even for eating!

Mrs Willy is a green sea turtle.

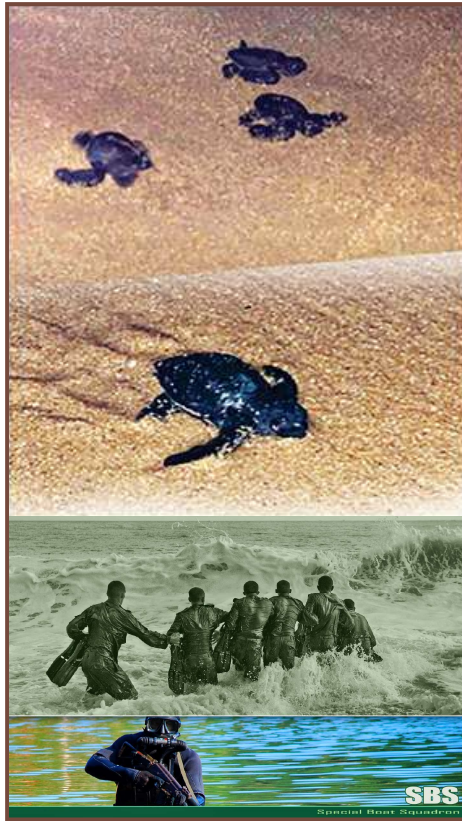
I am worried about my friend, who has visited Trincomalee Naval Base, Coral Cove, Turtle bay annually to lay eggs for the last 40 years.

Human interaction with a sea turtle for 40 years is very long time, probably one of the longest in the world. Please, go to the archives of The Island newspaper e-paper dated 18 June 2020 and read about this huge green sea turtle, fondly known as Mrs Willy.

40-year-long friendship

Mrs. Willy lays 30-35 eggs in Turtle bay, Coral Cove, Trincomalee every year

during May-July season. That means she has produced more than 1,200 children! What a great lady! She is striving to prevent her species from being driven to extinction!



She knows me well. When I talk to her from a distance, and walk towards her after she finishes laying eggs, she stops her crawl towards sea and allows me to touch her. I see tears in her eyes, which may be due to the pain of laying eggs.

My son and other children of naval personnel know her well and have even touched her since they were very young. They keep asking me whether Mrs Willy is safe. I tell them she is, but I have my doubts.

Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG) protects sea turtles. It protects their breeding sites and eggs and ensure that baby sea turtles find their way to the sea safely. It maintains records of sea turtles it releases into the sea. In 2017, it released 5,440 baby sea turtles from Wellawatta, Hikkaduwa and Mirissa. From February to June, mother sea turtles come even to Wellawatte and Galle Face beaches to lay their eggs. Those detected by the SLCG beach patrols are protected day and night for next 60-65 days until they are hatched and babies crawl into sea.

In 2018, the number of turtle babies released by SLCG was 8,469. In 2019, a staggering 13,641 babies were released! In 2020, the number was 9,934. More than 7,370 turtle hatchling have been released so far this year.

These hatchlings do not include those born at Turtle bay, Coral Cove, Naval Base, Trincomalee.

I am keeping my vigil for my dear friend. I cannot cry for you, dear Mrs Willy. I have seen enough and more death and devastation during the war years without shedding tears. Please, come back to Turtle Bay one of these days, my dear friend. All of us are awaiting your arrival, and you can rest assured that you will receive a rousing welcome.

PATRIOTIC SURGEON WHO VOLUNTEERED TO WORK ON BATTLEFIELD



In 1991, I was selected to one of the prestigious sea appointments in the Sri Lanka Navy. After a short familiarisation course, I was appointed to P 467 (old pennant numbers), Fast Attack Craft (FAC) Super Dovra Mk II, one of the fastest FAC of the Navy at that time. Built in Israel at a cost of US \$ 30 million, it was the vanguard of our Navy throughout our conflict with LTTE Sea Tiger terrorists.

P467 was commanded by LT Cdr Ariyadasa, an officer senior to me, who has intercepted the highest number of smuggling boats in SLN in Western Naval Command. So, my sole intention was to work hard and capture more smuggling boats than LT Cdr Ariyadasa.

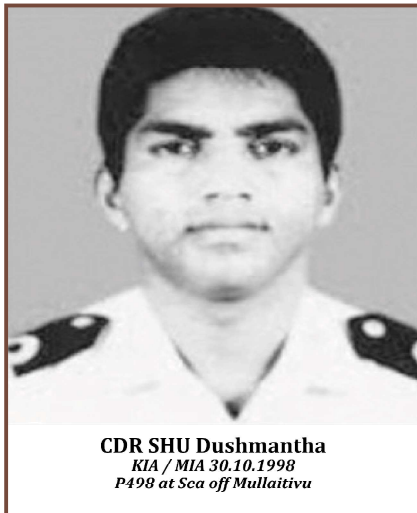
Two days after my appointment, my FAC was attached to Eastern Naval Command to patrol the Northern waters. It may have been done by someone in the Naval Headquarters who didn't want to see me in Colombo?

We had to deal with not smugglers but LTTE Sea Tigers operating in the northern waters at the time. The LTTE had some camps on the Southern Indian coast; it was their main logistics route to the Northern peninsula. They had boats moving at an excess of 30 knots (30 nautical miles per hour-approx 40mph) and our FAC had a slight speed advantage over terrorist speed boats.

The distance between India and Sri Lanka is approximately 24 nautical miles. Indo- Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) has been marked at equidistance, approximately 12 nautical miles. So, terrorist boats

moving at 30 knots could cross our waters in 24 minutes ! That's the time the Navy had to detect, chase and to destroy them. If you had got too close to land, which was held by my enemy at that time, you would have been fired upon with enemy's shore gun batteries. The FAC would have become a "sitting duck" in such an eventuality. The enemy always kept their tractors with the trailers in the water ready for their boat arrivals.

As soon as their boats hit the shore, they were loaded into tractor trailers and moved to safety. This was done in reverse order when the boats were launched. It was more difficult for us to detect the boat launching pads as they were done at night. However, those days when LTTE Sea Tigers saw an Israeli built Dovra, they used to run away at maximum speed. Most of our chases of sea tiger boats ended up in a "stern chase" and with slight speed advantage, we destroyed the enemy boat with 20mm Oerlicon cannon we had as the main weapon.



The FAC had a crew of two officers and 12 sailors at that time. It was a very close "family". My Second-In-Command was LT SHU Dushmantha, fearless and an excellent officer. He was an outstanding tennis player, an old Anandian and from the KDU Intake 4. Sadly, he died in action out at sea on 30/10/1998. He was a recipient of three gallantry medals for his bravery and valour out at sea namely, Weera Wickrama Vibushanaya (WWV), Rana Wickrama Paddakkama (RWP) and Rana Soora Paddakkama (RSP). I had Leading Seaman Newton as my coxswain (later rose to Master Chief Petty Officer rank and excellent photographer), and Leading Marine Engineering Mechanic Premaratne (also rose to MCPO rank later and excellent cook) looked after the engines. Our FAC during her first patrol to Northern Naval Area was able to destroy a enemy boat, which was a great achievement to me personally and to my crew.

The FAC was a time-tested craft in the SLN. From time to time, we upgraded our weapons and sensors on board FACs. When we were onboard an FAC, we had only a radar to detect enemy boats at night. Later, we had MSIS (Multi Sensor Integrated Systems) and better forward main guns such as US-made 30mm Bush master chain gun, but the platform, the FAC hull remained the same.

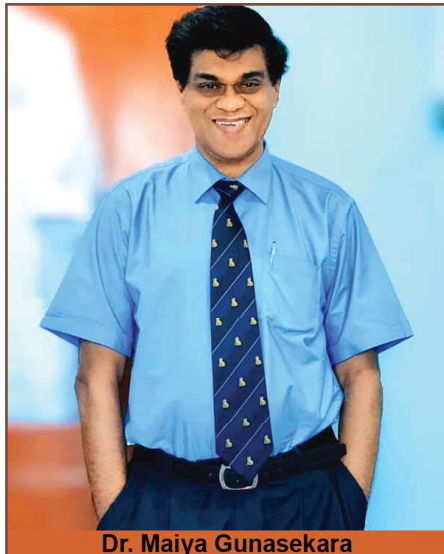
When we fought with Sea Tigers, there were no suicide boats. The enemy fled at their maximum speed when they saw an FAC, Then enemy developed their suicide cadres and speed boats later loaded with explosives and started to steer towards us at excessive speed on suicidal missions.

We had to rewrite and develop our fighting tactics and manoeuvres against the new threat. We lost some of our best FAC Commanders and crews due to those deadly attacks. I salute them and all those who worked tirelessly during this period and special thanks to our gunners, electrical/electronic engineers and marine engineers for keeping FACs operational and battle-prepared.

There is a unique difference in fighting at sea that on land. There are no covers in sea battle. Whoever fired effectively first won. Sea battles are very short and decisive.

There is a special bond between your shipmates (FAC mates), whether you are an officer or a sailor. You go to battle together in Fast Attack Craft and come home victorious ,or perish at sea together. OIC take decisions and he had to be brave and knowledgeable.

My FAC command period was eventful and enjoyable. I was married and my wife Yamuna was expecting our son. We lived in married quarters at the Naval Base Trincomalee. Those Royal Navy time officers quarters are specious and beautiful.



Dr. Maiya Gunasekara

Our patrols to Northern waters lasted seven days. If everything went well, you got a seven-day break for maintenance, repairs to get ready for next patrol. Before heading for the North, I would leave my wife with my brother officer's family living at the Naval Base, Trincomalee, where she would stay until my return. She preferred to be with LCdr (L) Sarath Silva's family. Sarath is from my junior batch and his wife Chandrani looked after Yamuna very well. They were very close friends. Such is the camaraderie among Naval families!

When your FAC is non operational, you have to take some other Operational FACs on patrol. This is not a good arrangement as you are going

out to sea with an unknown crew. However, in September 1991, I had to take P468 (my batchmate Shirantha's FAC) as mine was under repairs on slipway. Further, my 2IC, Dushmamtha was also on leave. I decided to go to sea on board P468 without a 2IC, on a six-day patrol to Northern waters.

Fast Attack Craft have two very powerful inboard engines. They required large amounts of low sulphur diesel (LSD). One engine consumed approximately 100 litres of LSD per hour. Two engines running, its 200 litres per hour. It takes four hours for us to sail from Trincomalee to KKS. About 800 litres consumed per one run to Northern waters from Trincomalee. If Rs 100 a litre of LSD, FAC consumes approximately Rs 80,000 worth of LSD per one run. Then we do seven days patrolling and returning back to Trincomalee. Navy has 36 Fast Attack Craft. So you can imagine the fuel costs.

Navies are very expensive!

So, two days of my patrol onboard P468 was uneventful. On 13 June 1991 around 10AM, we were returning to KKS for rest and refuelling from the Mulativu sea area. Sea was calm and I was keeping about two nautical miles from the land and moving North at approximately 20 knots speed. I was on the flying bridge and enjoying bright sunlight and very clear weather. My lookout sentry on Port side (land side) reported two open jeeps moving on Manakkadiu road, one fitted with a gun. The area was held by enemy. I sounded action stations and told the crew that I would turn towards the jeeps and increase speed.

I told them when I was turning away from land they had to engage the targets with our 20mm cannon. The sea was deep enough for the FAC to go up to 400m from shore. Forward gunner was very good. His third shot hit a jeep and it started burning. Other jeep took cover behind a sand dune.

We saw some movements on the beach with enemy cadres getting into boats on land. When we were breaking away from targets and headed towards deep sea, our boat was hit by enemy fire from boats. Crack and thump of 50 calibre machine gun fire was very clearly heard.

Do you know how to identify someone is firing at you? You hear two noises (in military terminology known as a crack and thump. Every shot fired at you makes two noises for one shot. As bullet velocity is faster than the speed of sound, you first hear sound "tuck" (or crack) when bullet goes through air

closer to you. Then you hear sound “Dum” (or thump) after some time. That is the sound made by bullets leaving the gun barrel. A well trained Special Forces person will be able to say the approximate distance of firer by the interval between crack and thump.

Enemy gun fire rained on the FAC, but we were almost beyond enemy’s effective gun range. Suddenly, one enemy gun shot hit the guard rail of the FAC. It’s splinters hit my left shoulder and upper arm . A sailor who was standing next to me at Open bridge was also hit in the leg. Blood soaked my left arm and multiple injuries were visible.

I knew I was hit badly. Sailors onboard panicked. I steered the FAC to a safe distance from land and informed my colleague Rohan, who was on another FAC on patrol and steered towards KKS.

After bleeding was controlled by a sailor trained on combat medicine, I found no major damage to my bones. I felt a bit dizzy, but able to walk into a waiting ambulance at KKS harbour to be taken to Army hospital at Palaly for immediate medical treatment.

On arrival at the Palaly Army Hospital, I saw a tall figure in a surgical gown waiting for me. He was non other than Dr Maiya Gunasekara, Consultant Surgeon. Dr Maiya took a few hours to remove whatever shrapnel he detected. He said others would remain inside the bones as they posed no threat. They are still inside my left shoulders and upper arm.

I consider them as gifts from the LTTE but they prevent me from through any Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines!

I invited Dr Maiya on board to my FAC that evening and took him to sea and showed him Point Pedro and VVT (home town of LTTE leader Prabhakaran) from sea.

Dr Maiya volunteered services as a surgeon at the battle front and saved a number of officers and men who were severely injured.

Dr Indrajith Maithri (‘Maiya’) De Zoysa Gunasekara, FRCS, FICS, Consultant Surgeon was born on 22nd August 1951 and educated at Royal College, Colombo 7. He was a College coloursman in Basketball and Rugby Football and represented Royal College in Athletics as well. He represented the

Royal College rugby team for a number of years and later entered the Medical Faculty of Colombo University. He was the recipient of Leslie Handunge trophy awarded to the best sportsman at both.

Colombo and Peradeniya Universities in 1974. He excelled in both studies and sports, graduated from both Royal College of Surgeons of England and Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and captained CR and FC rugger team and represented the National Rugby team and the National Rugby sevens team for a number of years . He was President of the Sri Lanka Rugby Football Union and Chairman of National Sports Council.

Now, he is the Consultant Surgeon at the Nawaloka Hospital, Colombo. He will sits in his consultation room (Room 55) at Navaloka Hospital daily.

However his dedicated service to the Nation in treating our Armed Forces personnel at the Battle front in Palaly Army hospital is not known to many.

Former South African President Nelson Mandela once said “There will be no greater gift than that of giving one’s time and energy to help others without expecting anything in return”

Thank you Dr Maiya – we salute you !

PROTECTING MOGUL EMPEROR AURANGZEB'S SILVER COIN SHIP

In 2008, I was the Commander Southern Naval Area. It was my first appointment as an Area Commander. In May 2008, I received an email from an unknown foreigner to my official email account. The sender was a Dutch National who had travelled to Sri Lanka in month the of April 2008. The email read as follows: "As I was a keen SCUBA diver, I joined diving expedition arranged by KALU from Hikkaduwa on Great Basses reef off Kirinda fishing village. We traveled in a van from Hikkaduwa early morning on 14th April. There were five more foreigners and three locals in our group. KALU carried all diving equipments required for dive. I became friendly with KALU and he spoke of the Basses reef and its underwater beauty."



Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir
(3rd November 1618-3rd March 1717)

"On arrival at Kirinda, we hired a fishing boat to reach our first day diving site near the Great Basses lighthouse. Sea was flat calm and visibility underwater was excellent. While others were observing the underwater beauty and caves in the reef, I dived closer to KALU. He stopped at one place, took out a chisel and a small hammer from his diving bag and broke the pieces of rock, which looked like a part of coral reef. When he showed me the piece of these corals, there were small coins inside it. I was surprised."

That evening, at my hotel room I logged into Internet and found details of Silver Coin ship wreck in Great Basses reef. KALU told me not to tell about the incident to anyone and offered me a few coins he recovered that day. I declined the offer knowing it was a crime. I have seen a few of his assistants also wearing these coins on their neck chains. Dear Sir, please stop this day light robbing of historical shipwreck of Indian Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb." Alarm bells rang at Southern Naval Command! Most important historic shipwreck in our waters being plundered! That came to light thanks to a law-abiding Dutch tourist.

The Basses reef is approximately seven nautical miles away from our

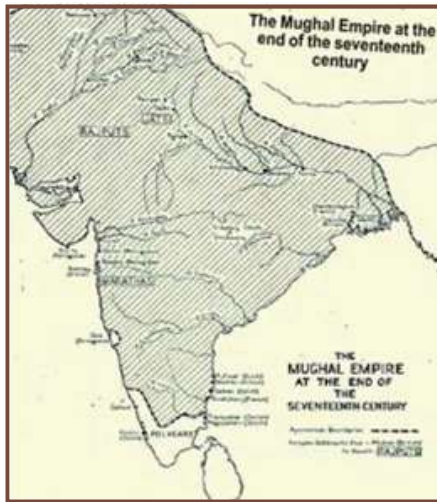
Southern coast off Kirinda/ Yala area. Until this reef was marked during British time with two light houses, the Great Basses Lighthouse commissioned in March 1873 and Little Basses Lighthouse in March 1878-it had a dangerous navigational hazard for ancient ships that moved on the East-West trade route. A large number of ancient ships perished hitting this reef. These shipwrecks are burial grounds for brave and enterprising sailors who went down to “Davy Jones’s Locker” (naval term for sea bottom). So, these are ancient grave yards at sea. As seafarers, we do not allow anyone to dig watery graveyards. These brave sailors who perished out at sea should Rest in Peace. Some mythological stories say this was the kingdom of King Rawana, which went under water.

Mughal Emperor’s ship loaded with “Surat-minted” pure silver coin ship with 14 cannon was one of these grave yards.



The story of this silver coin ship is fascinating and a clear indication that the sixth and last Mughal Emperor of India, who ruled from North of Kaveri River (present-day Karnataka/ Tamilnadu) to Kabul (Afganistán), the largest and most richest Mughal kingdom, had ships going from the old port city of Surat to Mecca carrying Muslims on holy pilgrimage, who ruled his Empire for 49 years. He was the sixth child of Emperor Shah Jahan (who built the Taj Mahal) and queen Mumtaz Mahal, Emperor Aurangzeb “Alamgir” (in Persian – Conqueror of the World) had intentions to find out trade routes to China and Japan. His ship left the Port city of Surat with wooden chests full of silver coins in cloth bags, each carrying one thousand coins. The 41st year of his reign over four million square kilometers of land and 158 million subjects fell in 1701. With US \$ 450 million equal (then) annual revenue, his Empire was the world’s largest

economy and biggest manufacturing power at that time. His earnings were 10 times larger than his contemporary, King Louis XIV of France.



However, Emperor Aurangzeb's best Captain and sailors, who were new to the waters south of Sri Lanka, had no clue of the Basses reef. Going by the location of the shipwreck, it is clear that the Captain had sailed inside the reef, not outside of it. The Emperor was informed of the loss of his valuable ship in the Bay of Bengal. Everyone thought at that time, it had been caught by the pirates operating in Mallaca area (off today's Malaysia/ Indonesia).

History says, in 1703, Mughal Commander at Coromandel, Daud Khan Panni spent 10,500 coins to purchase 30 to 50 war elephants from Ceylon. These purchases were approved by Sinhala King Wimaladharmasooriya II in Kandy, according to the book, "Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers to Highroads to Empire 1500 to 1700" by Jos Commans (page 122). So, was the ship sailing to ancient Trincomalee harbour (Gokanna Thitta) from Surat (on Western side of India), rounding up Sri Lanka to reach the Gokanna Thittia harbour to purchase war elephants? We do not know. Anyway we were the main supplier of war elephants to the world at that time until muskets and mobile cannon came into being.

In 1961, two enterprising young Sri Lankan/American persons, namely Mike Wilson and Arthur C Clarke diving in the Basses reef looking for suitable underwater filming locations for famous Sinhala film "Ranmutu Duwa" found this valuable shipwreck. At that time they did not know the origin of the ship.

Arthur C Clarke wrote, "Nothing except perhaps a landing of a flying saucer in one's backyard, quite as disruptive of everyday life as the discovery of sunken treasure. There are very few people who can confirm this, but by a series of most unlikely events, I happened to be among them"

As the area was not within territorial waters of Sri Lanka at that time (1961), (12 nautical miles limit of territorial waters came into effect in early 1980s,) those who found the shipwreck were allowed to take away what they found. It was reported that more than 750 lbs. of silver coins were removed during that time. Today world renowned coin collectors buy one coin at rate of US \$ 1,200 to 1,500. Just imagine the total value of a 1,000-coin lump!

The wooden chests and cloth bags decayed over 250 years but the silver coins were held together by coral and calcium deposit. What KALU found and what the lawful Dutch tourist reported to the Southern Naval Commander was only part of such a lump.



Action by late Dr Arthur C Clarke, where he sent a 1,000-coin lump to Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, USA, in the 1960 s, for research work has

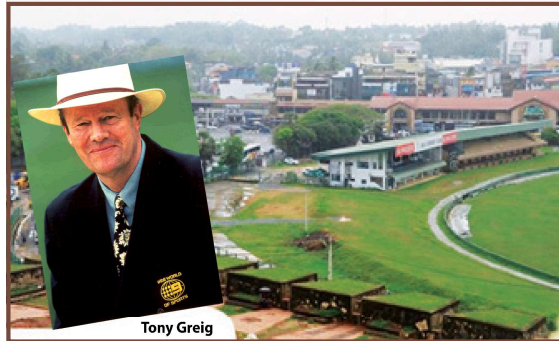
helped confirm that the ship belonged to Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Later action by our own Archeology Department to use Dr Peter Throckmorton, a pioneer underwater archeologist, commonly known as the Father of Underwater Archeology on this project shed more light on the history of the ship. The discovery carefully documented by Dr Clarke later became the basis of his famous book in 1964, "Treasure of Great Basset".

However, this incident, in 2008 April, showed us that the world famous and invaluable shipwreck in our waters available for underwater archeology studies was being systematically plundered. The Navy acted swiftly and started patrolling this sea area. A Navy/Coast Guard diving centre was established in Kirinda and anyone going for diving has to be registered with it. They are frequently checked by the Navy and no artifacts are allowed to be removed from these ancient shipwrecks.

The Weather Gods have protected these treasures for centuries. The sea is extremely rough with unpredictable currents during the North-East and South-West monsoons which make it extremely dangerous to dive around Light Houses and the reef. Two windows are available for competent divers a year in December and March-April. Now, the Navy is extremely alert during these times and no more KALU s.

Please, help the Navy to protect these national treasures and graveyards of brave sailors who perished under tragic circumstances. You can visit the Coast Guard Diving Station Kirinda to learn more about Basset reef from experienced Diving Officer there, Ship salvage diver, Commander Godakanda, when you visit south next time. Please come during December or March/April to dive under Navy's supervision to see beauty of mythical King Rawanas kingdom underwater.

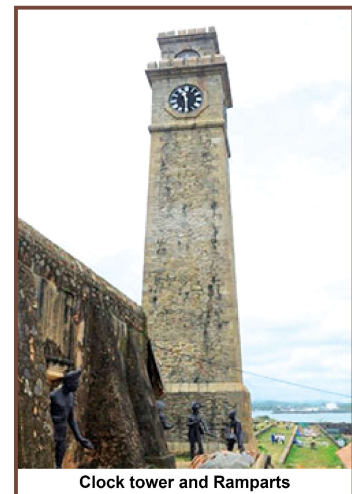
FROM THE TALLEST CLOCK TOWER TO SMALLEST SAND CLOCK IN SRI LANKA



Tony Greig

Galle is a fascinating place to work in. I was the Commander Southern Naval Area (Comsouth) from 3rd August 2008 to 10th August 2009. For me nothing was more refreshing than the early morning beach run on the world famous Unawatuna beach as well as the one-kilometer swim (before tourists invaded the beach).

The other great thing was the opportunity to watch a number of Test cricket matches played at the Galle International Cricket Stadium. One day, a brand new super-sopper vehicle brought by the Galle Cricket Stadium officials to dry the grounds during rains developed a mechanical defect. Navy Engineers stepped in and repaired the machine in next to no time. Thus, they saved the Cricket Board from a major embarrassment in the middle of a test match. So, from that day, whenever international matches were played at the particular venue, five passes to the VIP enclosure were sent to Comsouth. Who could refuse to watch a test match (or at least part of it) in the VIP enclosure and interact with Sri Lankan and foreign players, ex-players and commentators? It was a great opportunity.



Clock tower and Ramparts

From 4th to 7th July 2009, Sri Lanka played against Pakistan at the Galle Stadium; the game was won by Sri Lanka by 50 runs. Rangana Herath was adjudged the Man of the Match. Legendary cricket commentator, the late Tony Grieg spoke eloquently about the history of Galle Fort, the damage Galle had suffered due to Tsunami waves on December 26, 2004 and the resilience of the

people of Galle. Then cameras panned across the ground and zoomed in for a close-up of the historical Galle Clock tower sitting majestically on the ramparts of the Fort. Alas, the clock had come to a standstill. It was a shame that the TV crew showed three out of the four faces indicating three different times! The entire cricketing world realised our inability to put even a clock right.

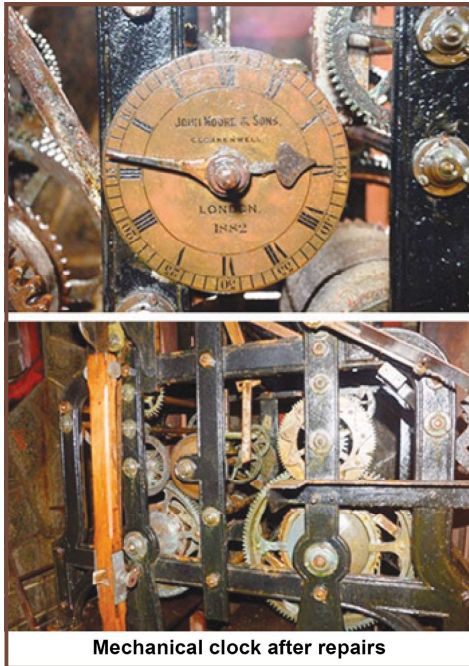


The Galle Clock Tower (or Dr Anthonisz Memorial Clock Tower) was built in the central moon bastion of Galle Fort, in 1883, and the clock was presented by Maha Mudaliyar Samson de Abrew Wijegunaratne Rajapakse of Kosgoda (1831-1888) in appreciation of Dr PD Anthonisz, (1822-1903), who served as Colonial Surgeon in the Southern Province and had treated Maha Mudaliyar Rajapakse, a well-known philanthropist who donated three and a half acres of land in Colombo for the construction of Ceylon Medical College in 1875. The clock tower is 83 feet high and people could see the clock from the Galle town. The clock was made by John Moore and Sons, a well-known clock maker in London, in 1882.

I checked with the Galle Mayor at the time, what was wrong with the clock. He said it could not be repaired, and the Galle Municipal Council members were planning to replace the clock faces with digital ones. Various attempts to repair the mechanical clock had proved futile, and a reputed clock repair company had asked for a very large amount of money for the repair. As the Galle MC could not afford that amount, it had given up the idea of repairing the historical clock.

I requested Mayor to give the Navy a chance to try to repair the precious clock. Our engineers from the Southern Naval Command and a team from in our instrument repair workshop of the Naval Dockyard, Trincomalee had a careful look at the clock. It was sad that some brass parts of this 1883-UK built clock had been removed on the pretext of repairs. However, our team was determined to repair it.

Missing wheels and bars were manufactured in our workshops, and clock was put back into operation at a cost of just Rs 12,000! Swingers in the pendulum



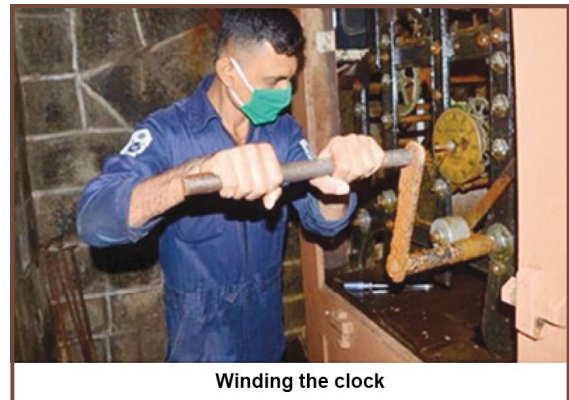
Mechanical clock after repairs

were replaced with ropes until proper wire rope was purchased. The clock became operational by 16th July 2009!

The Sri Lanka-New Zealand test match was played on 18th to 22nd August 2009. It was a memorable match for Sri Lanka as Mahela and Thilan Samaraweera scored centuries in the first innings (114 and 159 respectively), and Dilshan was not out on 123 in the second innings; Sri Lanka won by 202 runs. Muralidharan bagged seven wickets in the Match and Dilshan became the Man of the Match. The TV crews showed the clock tower with the clock working in precision and the commentator gave due credit to Sri Lanka Navy Engineers. Bravo Zulu to Navy Engineers! The Navy looks after the clock.

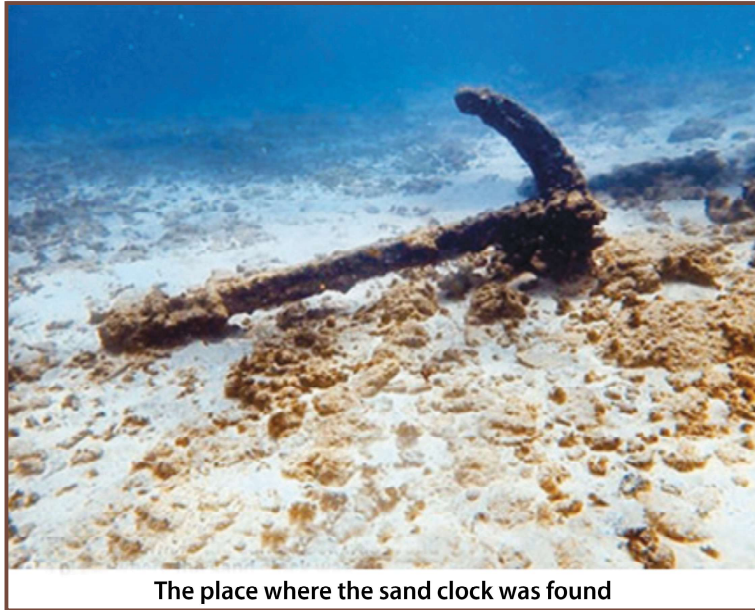
The officer who coordinated the clock repair project was Lieutenant (then) Buddhika Godakanda. He was a foreign-trained ship salvage diver. On 1 February 12, 2009, he joined me in demarcating the protected areas, in the Great Basses reef, of ancient shipwrecks before the commencement of the diving season in April.

About 200 metres away from the famous silver coin shipwreck, he found a small glass object, approximately 10 centimeters long, and it looked like a torch bulb. When we brought it ashore and closely inspected after cleaning it, we found it was a tiny sand clock! It had not got damaged and could measure exactly 15 seconds in single run through.



Winding the clock

Site where sand clock was found Sand clocks are thought to be more than 500 years old. (Mechanical clocks came into existence approximately 500 years ago.) As the silver coin shipwreck is 320 years old, this sand clock must have been from a ship much older than the silver coin ship, which sank in the area, where the Great Basses lighthouse was built about 300 years later. In astronavigation, taking timings in every 15 seconds as well as measuring the angle of star from



horizon by using sextant is necessary to draw position lines on the chart to find out the ship's position when the ship is away from the shore. This method of finding the position is known as 'Rapid Sights'. Ancient navigators, especially, Arabs, were very competent in navigating ships by using stars. So, was the sand clock from an ancient Arab ship? Are there more ancient shipwrecks which have not yet been found? We do not know. Are there more mysteries like Mogul Emperor

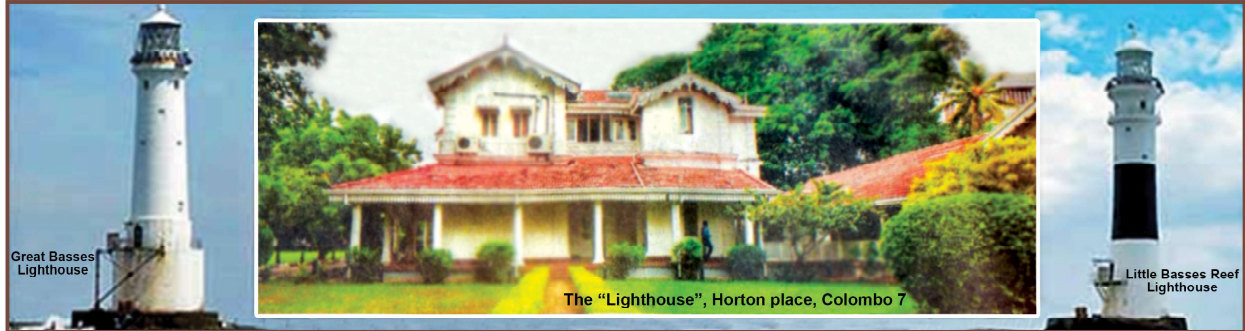
Aurangzeb's silver coin ship? Only expeditions by maritime archeologists will provide answers.

Just imagine a tiny little glass sand clock remained intact even though the ship carrying it broke into pieces after hitting the reef in rough weather and sank to the bottom of the sea, where it lay until it was brought ashore by a Navy diver! It's a miracle that the sand clock is still working!

This is an eye opener to us, the seafarers and mariners of this country. There is a pressing need to invest more on maritime archeology. The country needs many more marine archaeologists.

When we recollect these incidents, it gives us an immense pleasure. We have repaired a century old massive mechanical clock and recovered a small sand clock, probably the smallest of its kind to have been found in Sri Lanka.

COURTING WITH FABULOUS GRANITE GIANTESSE



There is a saying in the Sri Lanka Navy that if you want to be a real seaman, you should do the Basses light-house relief operations, which are unnervingly tough. That assignment requires excellent navigation skills, seamanship knowledge, boat handling and team work in very rough sea conditions. The slightest mistake will cause your ship, or boat, to be smashed on the devilish reef.

Two of my batchmates and I became ‘real seamen’- or so we thought-by doing the Basses lighthouse relief operation almost 40 years ago, as cadets, in the month of April 1981. So, our “baptism of fire” occurred at the Basses.

One of the “Three Musketeers” was Dushyantha Amaranayake, a Logistic Officer, who rose to highest position in the Naval Logistic branch, Director General, Naval Logistics, and to rank of Rear Admiral. He is now retired and living in Kandy. (As an aside, if you want to meet him during daytime, do not go to his residence but to the Victoria Golf course, Digana, or the Nuwara-Eliya Golf Club). The second one was Rohana Perera (who rose to Rear Admiral rank, commanded three Naval Areas and after retirement functioned as the Chairman, Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) for a number of years with much dedication. He is now living in Ragama. The third one was yours truly. We were ‘all for one – one for all’.

We were selected by late Lieutenant Shanthi Kumar Bahar, the Officer in Charge of Lighthouse relief vessel, ‘Pradeepa’ and Officer-in-Charge of Naval Diving Unit for the lighthouse relief operations. We had been in the Navy only for six months!



Those days 'Pradeepa' operated from Trincomalee and her task was to help change lighthouse keepers, every three months, transport food items, fuel and fresh water to the Great Bases and Little Bases light houses, which are six to seven nautical miles away from the land off Kirinda/Yala/Kumana area. The three lighthouse keepers lived in the lighthouse for three months, cut off from the rest of the world. It was a very difficult job, but I came to know that they were highly paid.

When the British left our shores, after Independence in 1948, and our Defence Pact with the UK came to an end in 1957. (From 8th January 1782 to 1st October 1957, the Naval base, Trincomalee, had been under British.) Imperial Lighthouse service handed over to the Royal Ceylon Navy the lighthouses -there were 14 active lighthouses around the country - the relief vessel and the fabulous mansion in Colombo 7, where the Head of Imperial Lighthouse Service (Ceylon) had lived; it was also known as "Light House". This mansion currently houses the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for Strategic Studies.

The lighthouse relief operation was a very tough task, especially during the monsoon seasons (North-East and South-West). The two relief operations during inter monsoon seasons (April/May and December/January) were very enjoyable with calm seas and crystal-clear waters. We were lucky that we did 1981 April relief operation and Pradeepa was anchored close to the lighthouse with two shackles of anchor cable. (A shackle is 15 fathoms). You see the anchor and the cable lying on the sea bottom from the ship's bow! We, the young cadets, used to jump into sea and swim to the Great Bases lighthouse while Lt Bahar and other Navy divers were engaged in spear fishing.

Evening B-B-Qs were full of fresh sea food at our camp site in Kirinda (while doing the relief operation at Great Bases lighthouse) and in Udda Pottana (at Yala block 2) while we were engaged in relief work for the Little Bases lighthouse. After a seafood pig-out, the three carefree cadets would sleep on the beach in open air, next to our camp fire. I indulged in my favourite hobby-counting stars.

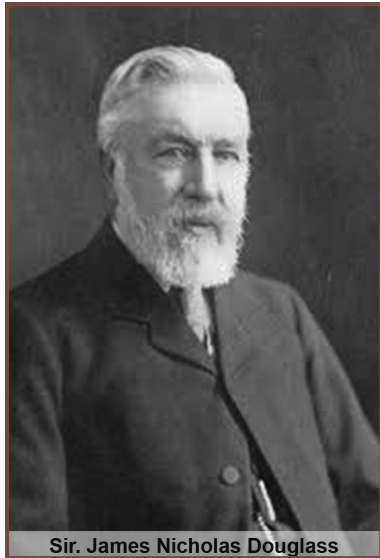
There were these three lucky cadets working hard on seamanship and navigation during daytime and enjoying the night with good food while their not-so-fortunate batch mates in Trincomalee were polishing shoes, chipping and painting the deck of old gunboat SLNS Ranakamee and running around the dockyard!



The need for the lighthouses in Basses reef had been felt by the British in 1856 as ships had to avoid the dangerous Basses reef known as Ravana Kotte in Sinhala-the mythical sunken city of King Ravana. To be on the safer side, ships kept well away from this reef, thereby spending more time on passage and burning more coal. It was argued by mariners that if lighthouses were constructed to show the ends of the dangerous reef, a large amount of funds spent on extra coal and time could be saved. An iron tower on a granite base was proposed but that project did not get off the ground.

Sir James Nicolas Douglass, renowned Engineer and Lighthouse designer with Alexander Gordon, submitted a design, in 1867, to Trinity House (official authority for lighthouses in England, Wales, Channel Islands and Gibraltar) involved in the project. Those were the days when the construction of lighthouses was a family business. Sir James's brother, William Douglass, was the executive engineer of the Basses lighthouse construction project, and travelled to Sri Lanka. The stones required for construction of the lighthouse were cut into required sizes, numbered and shipped in two steamships with lifting gear. Each stone was 2-3 tons and 120 tons were shipped from the UK. The load of 37, 256 cubic feet of granite used for the Great Basses lighthouse weighed 2,768 tons. The tower was 121 feet in height.

These granite blocks were carried all the way from the UK in specially designed two twin-screw steamers fitted with lifting gear.



Sir. James Nicholas Douglass

The first stone was laid on 28th December 1870 for the Great Basses lighthouse and work completed with light fitted in March 1873. There are six circular rooms in the Great Basses lighthouse with a 13-foot diameter. The little Basses lighthouse of the same size as the one at Great Basses was completed in 1878. Both lighthouses were identical; the Great Basses lighthouse is pure white and the Little Basses is white with a black strip around the centre. Two lighthouses flashed two different light signals at night as per Admiralty List of Lights. The characteristics of the lights indicated in navigational charts also.

The Little Basses lighthouse is closer to Corona shipwreck. (It had nothing to do with coronavirus!) Corona was a 40-gun frigate originally owned by the Italian Navy; it was built in Venice in 1807. The Royal Navy captured her and named her HMS Daedalus; she sank hitting the Little Basses reef while escorting a convoy, in 1813.

A wooden whaler (boat handle by oars) was being towed by Pradeepa and tow was released closer to light house. The whaler was thereafter pulled by a civilian crew. They were led by their coxswain, Taalif Mohammad Rajeem. He came from a family British brought from Jawa (Indonesia) for this job. He was living in Kirinda. Rajeem was extremely adept at what he was doing. He kept the whaler with oars closer to the lighthouses, not hitting the reef and transferred goods and men by using a manually operated crane at the lighthouses. Rajeem did this with a vessel controlled by oars, something that even present-day power boats could not do!

Rajeem was an excellent cook as well. His 'fish soup' was delicious. It is the best fish soup I have tasted in my life. Rajeem died at 84, about five years ago. We miss the great man.

When we visited the two lighthouses, we found that they were very well maintained by the keepers. They were like five-star hotels. The brass parts of the buildings were shining. Now the lighthouses are controlled by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

It is very unfortunate that these two lighthouses were abandoned following the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004. The killer waves reached the third floors of

the lighthouses and their keepers had to be rescued by the Sri Lanka Air Force helicopters. They refused to work there thereafter. Now, the lights are automated and mainly depend on solar panels.

I visited the two lighthouses with the present lighthouse keeper, Nizar, who is based in Kirinda, when I was Director General Sri Lanka Coast Guard in 2014. You feel sorry of these majestic granite giantesses that were strong enough to withstand the ferocious tsunami waves.

I will conclude with one incident that happened in Udda Pottana during our lighthouse relief operation in 1981.

While walking on a dried Villu in the Yala block Two with Lieutenant Bahar in lead, we came across a huge crocodile in the middle of the place. It looked dead. Lt Bahar asked me, “Cadet Wijegunaratne do you know how to find out whether a crocodile is dead or not?” I said, “No Sir.”

He said the crocodile had its last strength in its tail-end. “So, you have to bite the tail end and if it moves, it’s alive. If this crocodile is alive, we will carry it to a water hole and release it. I said, “Aye, Aye, Sir!”

Lt Bahar shouted at me again, “So, why are you waiting?” What do you think? So, I went up to the huge croc and bit its tail! Luckily for me, there was no movement. It was dead.

If any Navy Officer asked a present-day Cadet to do such a thing, the cadet’s parents would go running to Human Right Commission and log a complain against the officer!

Those days we were told “comply and complain”. Yes! We complied. But to complain? To whom?

Those were the days!!!

NAVY'S PEACETIME WAR AGAINST INSIDIOUS KILLER



If someone asked me what the senior appointment, I really loved most was, my answer would be Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Navy (Second-in-Command of the Navy)-CoS. The CoS has all the perks-an official bungalow in Colombo 7, vehicles and staff-that the Commander is entitled to, but does not have the same responsibilities as the Commander. He has all the freedom to travel the length and breadth of the country on inspections of major bases, ships and craft. He does not have to attend all important meetings with VVIPs. Actually, the CoS runs the Navy at the ground level. So, you can work according to your own schedule, of course, with the Commander's approval.



President Rajapaksa visiting Kebithigollewa in the immediate aftermath of the massacre carried out by the LTTE on June 16, 2006

I served under Admiral Jayantha Perera as his CoS for more than one year. He was happy about my frequent travel to the North and the East and looking into issues at the ground level and in situation.

As the CoS, I attended the funerals of close relatives (child, wife, father or mother) of our officers and sailors. I observed at funerals in North Central Province, where large number of naval personnel come from, parents of most of our young sailors from that part of the country died of kidney failures. A large number of them were middle-aged or in their early 50s. The disease is known as the Chronic Kidney Disease

(CKD). It was sad to see the farmers who feed the country contract CKD at a relatively young age, suffer for years and die. The reason is contaminated water they use for drinking and cooking. Scientists and medical experts have cited various reasons—excessive use of fertilizer/pesticides, the contamination of groundwater and tank water—but the real cause is still not known.

The only way to prevent the disease is to make clean water available for drinking and cooking for the people in areas with a high CKD burden. Upon inquiry from Senior Health Ministry officials in 2015, we came to know that there were 30,500 CKD patients in the North Central province alone and the number was on the rise. All the patients had to undergo dialysis regularly.

As the CoS, I discussed the issue with Navy Commander Admiral Perera, and on his instructions, tasked the outstanding Marine Engineering Officer, then Commander MCP Dissanayake (Dissa) with manufacturing a low-cost water purification plant. Dissa was well known for his research and development projects he headed during the war; they were very effective and helped save many lives. He was the Command Engineering Officer in North Central Naval Command, based in Poonawa, Medawachchiya at that time. He proposed the manufacture of an RO plant (Reverse Osmosis water purification plant). The Navy has been using imported RO plants in its large ships for decades and our engineers are adept at repairing them.



The cost of an imported RO plant with a 10-ton (10,000 litres) output a day is approximately Rs. 3.8 million. The installation of an imported plant costs approximately Rs. 5 million. Dissa's plant cost only Rs 950,000 and the total cost including installation was Rs. 1.4 million.

The problem was funding. Every officer and every sailor contributes Rs. 30 from his/her pay every month to the 'Social Responsibility Fund' of the SLN. With approximately 55,000 personnel, the collection is about Rs 1,650,000 a month. We could produce one RO plant per month! Work started immediately. On 11th July 2015, Admiral Perera retired and I was appointed as 20th Commander of the Navy by then President Maithripala Sirisena.

One of my tasks during my visit to North Central Naval Command was to declare open the Navy's first RO plant on 22nd December 2015 at Kadawath Rabewa, the village of Leading Marine Engineering Mechanic Premaratne. This small village alone had 250 CKD patients.

From that day, I made use of all the fora I attended, both here and abroad, to raise funds for this worthy cause. Funds poured in, from foreigners, Sri Lankans, here and overseas and the business community and we could manufacture at least two plants a month.

Then, President Sirisena ordered the Presidential Task Force on CKD to provide sufficient funds for the Navy's project. We started a production line in our R and D Project Factory in Welisara under the able guidance of Dissa.

In 2016, we manufactured 344 plants and installed them in various places, especially in schools, temples and churches. 344 plants were manned by 344 trained sailors. Every plant is capable of producing 10,000 litres (10 tons) of clean drinking water daily, and the quality of this water is better than bottled water you drink. That came to 3.44 million litres of clean drinking water per day to public free of charge. Three mobile service teams with vehicles were formed.



I opened the RO plant at the Kebithigollewa Madya Maha Vidyalaya on 16 June 2016, exactly 10 years after LTTE claymore mine attack that killed 60 civilians, who travelled in a bus in Kebithigollewa. Addressing the children, who gathered in the hall, where the victims' bodies had been kept, I said, "Our armed forces will ensure your safety. What happened 10 years back will not occur in the future. You'll have a great responsibility to study hard now without any fear. We will fight this deadly disease of CKD with the help of our expertise. Dear children, please bring empty bottles when you come to school. Drink and carry home safe drinking water from the RO plant we have installed. Give this water to your siblings, parents, relatives and friends". I saw tears of happiness, especially in the eyes of GCE

Advanced Level students.

The schoolchildren usually carry drinking water from home to school, but the children in the North Central Province carry safe drinking water home from school! Bravo to Navy's research engineers. Bravo Zulu, Disa.

I am happy that the safe drinking water project I initiated has continued under successive Navy Commanders who have evinced a keen interest in it. We have installed more than 760 RO plants in the North and North Central Provinces. I thank the Navy and all those who have contributed to this worthy cause. The project is on, and many more people will benefit from it.

An expert in CKD/CKDu treatment process, Dr Asanga Waruna Ranasinghe, in his research article, The Incidence, prevalence and trends of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and Chronic Kidney Disease of uncertain aetiology (CKDu) in North Central Province of Sri Lanka : an analysis of 30,566 patients' on page six, refers to a decrease in the number of CKD patients. He says it is probably due to the availability of safe drinking water.

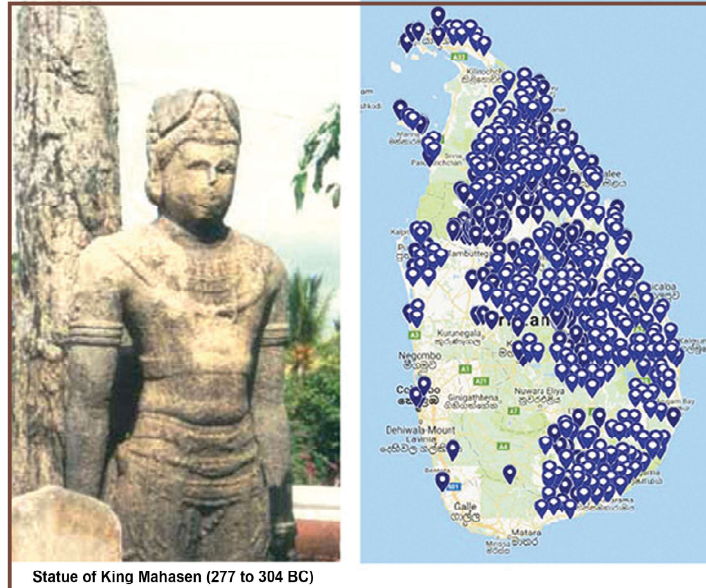
Do not forget the Navy is a silent force. No one notice what they do. Today, more than 760 plants produce 7.6 million litres of safe drinking water free to the public. The Navy went a few steps further, manufacturing two medical RO plants required for dialysis machines in Colombo and Kandy General Hospitals. The Navy also manufactured mobile RO plant installed in a truck for use in disaster situations.

As a result, the spreading of CKD has been controlled and most of North Central Province children want to join the Navy Engineering branch.

Some history teachers in the North Central Province have compared the Navy to King Mahasen's Army. King Mahasen, who ruled Sri Lanka from 277 to 304 AD, constructed 16 large tanks or wewas. He was deified following the construction of the Minneriya tank and for giving water to needy people.

If our Navy is compared to King Mahasen's Army for providing more than 7.6 million litres of clean drinking water to people daily, I compare our Engineering Officer, Captain (E) MCP Dissanayake as Commander Meghavannabaya, King's main advisor and Chief Engineer.

NAVY PROVIDES 9,000,000 LITRES OF DRINKING WATER DAILY TO PEOPLE, FREE OF CHARGE



Statue of King Mahasen (277 to 304 BC)

what you see on the right. It is the GPS coordinates of locally-built reverse osmosis (water purification) plants. Nine hundred plants have already been installed and they are working efficiently. Each plant is run by a specially trained sailor and can provide up to 10,000 litres of clean drinking water daily. It is a countrywide project, which provides 9,000,000 litres of clean drinking water daily, free of charge, to the general public.

The project was inspired by a conversation that took place at the funeral of the father of a sailor, in Medawachchiya, who died of Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown etiology (CKDu), a deadly disease which is spreading fast in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka, known as the Rice Bowl of our country. The use of contaminated water for drinking and cooking is believed to be the main cause of the disease.

The Navy took the initiative by designing a low cost RO plant at its Research Wing. The architect of the project was then Commander, M. C. P. Dissanayake, (Dissa), an Indian trained Marine Engineer. He has since been promoted to Commodore (one star) and heads the Marine Engineering Department at KDU. An imported RO plant with a 10,000 litre daily output would have cost approximately Rs 3.8 million. Building and full installation cost would have

amounted to approximately Rs. 5 million. Dissa's indigenously built a plant at a cost of Rs 1.4 million.

Every officer and sailor contributed Rs. 30 from their pay each month and this money went into a non-public fund known as 'Naval Social Responsibility Fund' (NSRF). The first plant was installed in Rambewa, Kadawatha, on December 22, 2015. In 2015, 250 CKDu patients were reported from this small village alone.

The project is to provide 900 RO plants, mainly covering the North Central Province, where CKDu is most widespread, with over 30,600 patients reported in 2015. Most of them were farmers in their early 50s, the rice producers to our country.

The Navy took six years to complete the project, under five Navy Commanders, namely, Admiral Ravi Wijegunaratne, Admiral Travis Sinniah, Admiral Sirimevan Ranasinghe, Admiral Piyal De Silva and present Commander Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenna. The total cost of the project is approximately Rs 1,260 million (1.260 billion). The main contributors to the project were the Presidential Task Force on Prevention of Chronic Kidney Disease (under then President Maithripala Sirisena), NSRF and MTV Gammedda, in addition to individual local and foreign donors and various organisations. Their contributions are for a very worthy cause to save the lives of innocent people.

The Navy's untiring effort has shown the world what it is capable of. The Navy is a silent force. What they do at sea is seen only by a few. This great effort by the Navy is also noticed by a few but appreciated by the humble people who have benefited from it.

The reverse osmosis process requires power. Each plant consumes approximately Rs 11,500 worth of power from the main grid, monthly. This amount was brought down to an affordable Rs 250 per month by installing solar panels at the RO plants. Another project was to install 50 medical RO plants at hospitals with dialysis machines. The cost for each unit was Rs 1.5 million, whereas an imported plant would have cost Rs. 13 million each.

Commodore (E) MCP Dissanayake won the award for the best paper presentation at KDU-14th International Research Conference 2021 for his research paper to enhance RO plant recovery from 50 percent to 75 percent. He will make this modification to RO plants in the near future, further enhancing

their efficiency. Clean drinking water is precious to mankind and the Navy recognises this fact.

King Dutugemunu, who reigned from 161 BC to 137 BC, united the country after 40 years and developed agriculture and Buddhism. But King Dutugemunu was never considered a god or was idealised. However King Mahasen (277 to 304 AD), who built more than 16 major tanks, was considered a god (Minneriya Deviyo) after building the Minneriya tank.

The Navy can be proud as the people of North Central Province already are ever grateful to it for providing clean drinking and cooking water absolutely free of charge. That gratitude is for saving them and their children from deadly CKDu.

Well done Navy! Bravo Zulu!

SAVE OUR ELEPHANTS



The killing and dismembering of the tusker in Block 3 of Yala National Park recently brought tears to the eyes of elephant lovers. This poor animal stayed within the boundaries, marked by us to say “you are safe here”, and was still killed with a single shot to the head by inhuman poachers operating within the National Park. Further his small tusks were removed using a chainsaw. The tail was also removed because its hair is in high demand.

Why is this happening? Why can we not catch these culprits? We should do our best to stop these inhuman activities. Sri Lanka Army’s elite units can help the Wildlife Department in this effort.

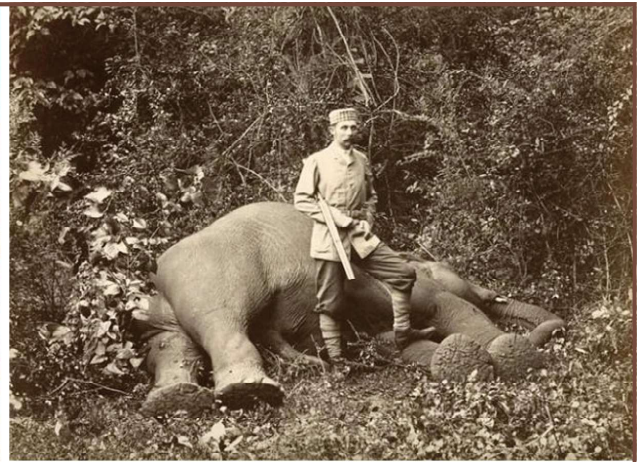
As a local saying goes, you never get fed with watching ‘Bali and Ali’. ‘Bali’ is a traditional dance form and ‘Ali’ are elephants. An elephant herd is such a delightful sight; baby elephants always playing under the watchful eyes of mother elephants; the leader, although a bit aloof, always protecting weaker ones.

My wife Yamuna’s late maternal grandmother carried the longest registered name in Sri Lanka in her birth certificate - Akkada Mukkada Weera Rabukkada Rubuke Jayagath Diyathilaka Koralege Illanganthilaka Mudiyanseelage Leelawathi

Illanganthilaka. She was from a noble house of the Kandyan Kingdom, which was tasked with protecting the Buddha's sacred Tooth Relic. She lived in a Walawwa behind the Hanguranketha Raja Maha Vihara, where the Tooth Relic was taken when Kandy fell to the British in 1815. Her relatives used to worship the Relic and offer Jasmine flowers.



War Elephant Kandula



Elephant shooter in British time

You must be wondering what all these names that prefix her surname means. They denote honours conferred on her house, for bravery, by various Sinhala kings for fighting the enemy, to protect the Buddha's Tooth Relic, which was the most important possession of any Sinhala king. These prefixes were conferred by the Head of State for long dedicated service and bravery. For example, I am Admiral Ravindra C. Wijegunaratne, WV, RWP and Bar, RSP, VSV, USP, NI (Military). These letters that affix my name denote Weerodara Vibhushanaya, Rana Wickrama Paddakkama, (twice), Rana Soora Padakkama, Vishista Seva Vibhushanaya, Uttama Sewa Paddakkama and last Nishan-e-imthiyas (Military) awarded by Pakistani Head of State.

Late Mrs Talatha Gunasekara
(nee Abeykoon)King Edward VII playing Golf
when he was Prince of Wales

Hanguranketha Walawwa produced beautiful ladies for generations. I used to say they were like Jasmine flowers which signify fragrance, delicacy and elegance. It is probably the merits of worshipping the Tooth Relic with jasmine flowers and offering jasmine flowers to the Temple of the Tooth. My significant other was 'Miss Sri Lanka for Miss Asia Pacific contest 1989'. Her mother late Talatha Gunasekara (née Abeykoon) was a famous actress

in the 1970s, who resembled famous Hindi actress Vyjayanthimala. My wife has photos of her playing tennis at Hillwood College, Kandy wearing a half-saree (lama saree) in 1952. She was very beautiful.

This noble family were elephant lovers for generations. When my wife's grandmother used to visit our home with my mother-in-law. She used to tell me: "You know Ravi, I was married off to Abeykoon (grandfather) with enough land, three servants and one and a half elephants!"

My son, who was about six years old at that time would ask, "Muttattama (great-grandmother), how do you measure half an elephant? By cutting a big elephant in two? Aiyo!" And she would reply, "No my dear great-grandson, what I meant by one and a half elephants is an elephant and a baby elephant!"

In the 1940s, her younger brother who attended Trinity College at the time suddenly disappeared. He was not to be found. They later came to know that he had gone with those who catch and tame wild elephants in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. He came back home after 30 years. We used to call him Lanka Attha (Lanka grandfather) because he knew all the jungle areas of Sri Lanka, having worked so well with wild elephant trainers, and all the tactics of taming an elephant. He loved elephants.

We, as a nation, never killed elephants. We protected them. Some were tamed and used for heavy work. Other tamed elephants and tuskers were used in processions. The tusker carrying the Buddha's Tooth Relic during the Kandy Perahera is highly respected by the public.

We are a nation that trained elephants for war during ancient times, trained and guided by our trainers for combat. Elephantry is a term for a specific military unit that had elephant-mounted troops.

Pliny the Elder, a famous Roman author stated that in Mediterranean markets, there was high demand for Sri Lankan elephants. For example, Sri Lankan elephants were larger, fiercer and more suited for war than any other type. This superiority, as well as the proximity of supply to seaports, made Sri Lanka's elephants a lucrative trading commodity.

When Arahat Mahinda Thera arrived in Sri Lanka to disseminate Buddhism, under the aegis of the great Indian Emperor Asoka, our King Devanampiya Tissa, (247 BC – 207 BC) invited Arahat Mahinda Thera to teach the Dhamma to his

wives and court. According to the Dipawansa, the oldest record of Sri Lanka, due to the lack of space in the King's palace to accommodate such a larger gathering, the elephant stable was cleaned and prepared for Arahat Mahinda's sermon. This shows that even King Devanampiya Tissa kept tamed elephants and an elephant stable.

The famous battle between King Dutugemunu (101-77 BC) and Chola King Elara, the final battle at Vijithapura, where King Dutugemunu's elephant Kandula killed King Elara's elephant Maha Pabbatha, is vividly recorded in Mahawansa, a historical chronology of ancient Sri Lanka written by Buddhist monks.

My article in The Island newspaper of 29 August 29, 2020, 'Protecting Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb's silver coin ship', relates how even in 1703, Mughal Commander at Coromandel, Daud Khan Panni, spent 10,500 silver coins to purchase 30 to 50 war elephants from Sri Lanka. This purchase was approved by our king at the time, Wimaladharmasuriya II, in Kandy, according to the book, 'Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers to High roads to Empire 1500 to 1700' by Jos JL Gommans, Leiden University in the Netherlands (page 122). The great Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605 AD) had 32,000 elephants in his stables, more than one third imported from Sri Lanka! Moghul Emperors were elephant lovers.

It was the British, who invaded our country, introduced elephant killing in the 1820s.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my movements have been restricted to Nuwara-Eliya for months. I have no complaints, cool weather and fresh air being enjoyed by myself and my family, especially my son, who drives up to Nuwara-Eliya Golf Club, which is deserted, and plays nine holes every day, with no crowd and at his own pace.

A small sign next to the Golf Club drew my attention a few days ago. It gives directions to the grave of late Major Thomas William Rogers, who killed more than 1,400 elephants within eleven years, until he died struck by lightning at Haputale Rest House on June 7, 1845. Thousand four hundred elephants killed by one person in eleven years. What a crime!



Sir Samuel Baker of the early British colonial era, who was famous for Nile expeditions in Africa, was a notable elephant hunter in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon. One day he killed 11 elephants before breakfast and 104 elephants in three days. Colonial Office papers indicate that rewards were offered for killing 5,500 elephants during this time. Further Colonial records show that Baker complained when the Colonial Secretary reduced his rewards for killing elephants.

It is recorded that Major Skinner and Captain Gallewy killed 700 elephants each, but they were no match to Major Rogers. There is a connection between elephant killing and golf! Those days if you had a golf bag made out of the skin of a bull elephant's penis, you were considered an important man. Your importance was further elevated if you were the hunter who killed that bull elephant. Such cruelty! Such vanity!

According to Wikipedia, King Edward VII owned a golf bag made from the skin of an elephant's penis, a gift from an Indian Maharaja who had heard of the king's fondness for golf and big game hunting. The elder son of Queen Victoria, who waited 60 years as Prince of Wales to become king, King Edward VII laid a golf course in Windsor and was a keen golfer.

Our elephants underwent untold suffering under the British. Major Rogers' crimes did not sit well with Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindu estate workers who worshipped Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu God. They cursed him and he was struck dead by lightning. The story goes that even now lightning strikes his grave from time to time.

I asked how true these stories were from an old worker at the Nuwara-Eliya Golf Club. He confirmed it! Once lightning had struck the grave and even the Golf Club workshop had caught fire, he said. The poachers who killed and dismembered an innocent elephant in Yala Block 3, close to the Lord Skanda's and Lord Ganesh's temples, in Kataragama deserve similar punishment from God.

Please raise your voice to protect our elephants.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the research support provided by my son Ravi junior, a keen golfer and animal lover, for this article.

SPLICE THE MAINBRACE AND NAVY FOOD



At last MILAN 2022 International Naval Exercise at Visakhapatnam port - food festival onboard SLNS Sayururala.

Navies are famous for excellent cooks and serving delicious food the world over. The best food is served during naval fleet exercises in overseas ports and on special days when the Navy usually serves “splice the mainbrace followed by ‘Bada Khana’ (big meal in Hindi).

Braces are the lines in sailing ships that control the angle of the yards. In square rigged sailing vessels, mainbrace is the longest line in all running riggings. It was common to aim cannon fire at riggings during sea battles. If mainbrace was hit, it had to be repaired immediately. ‘Splice the mainbrace’ was performed by experienced able seaman on knots and splices under supervision of Boatswain on sailing ship’s mainbrace.

This was a very tedious emergency repair until the completion of which, the sailing ship cannot change her tack (direction of sailing). It becomes much more difficult when these repairs have to be done under battle conditions. As an appreciation to his hard work, an extra ration of rum is given to the sailor concerned.



The modern-day Navies have no sails and no mainbraces; but they have “splice the mainbrace ceremony “drinking a tot of rum.

So, in celebration of the Navy Day, ‘splice the mainbrace’ is performed by giving our sailors extra tot of liquor (in Sri Lanka Navy-old arrack) prior to Commanding Officer and other officers

sitting with sailors in the General Mess (junior sailors dining room) to have delicious ‘Bada Khana’ prepared by excellent Navy cooks.

The menu for ‘Bada Khana’ is always, mouth-watering vegetable fried rice, fried chicken curry, dhal dry curry, potatoes tempered, brinjal moju, boiled egg and battered/crispy crumped sheer fish. Dessert is always Wattalappam.

Our sailors love this food. They always work hard and look forward to ‘splice the mainbrace’ and ‘Bada Khanna’. Those are the traditions of the Navy.

At other times, our Navy’s culinary skills are displayed when our ships sail abroad and take part in international maritime exercises. We carry our traditional food stuffs on board and participate at international food festivals.

With the Navy band in attendance and our traditional dancers performing Kandyan, Sabaragamuwa, low country and Jaffna dances, we are considered cultural ambassadors of Sri Lanka.

Our Navy has ships capable of performing long-distance voyages and carrying its cultural troupe and band. It is also equipped with a state-of-the-art kitchen with a bakery at the Supply and Secretariat school in Trincomalee to train cooks and stewards. For further training, they are sent to Indian and Pakistan Navy catering schools. The Navy has provided cooks and stewards both to the President’s House and Temple Trees to serve very long periods and they are capable of handling day-to-day dining and banquets held in honour of visiting Heads of State.

Cooking out at sea is a difficult task. In rough sea conditions, it becomes a nightmare with the ship or craft rolling and pitching in gale-force winds. But our cooks never keep us hungry!

Anyway, only a few people can eat in such sea conditions as others fall 'sea sick'.

If you are in a small craft or FAC (Fast Attack Craft), there are no cooks. The crew members get together to prepare their meals whilst on patrol. Some seamen and marine engineering mechanics are excellent cooks. I had one such sailor, Leading Engineering Mechanic Premaratne, when I was OIC P 467 (Dovra); he rose up to Master Chief Petty Officer. He used to bring fresh vegetables from his village when he returned after leave and prepared delicious meals onboard.

Cooks like Premaratne are assets to the Navy.

Where can one relish this unique 'Navy Food'? Visit the Light House Galley restaurant at Chaithya Road, Colombo 1. Best quality food is available there at fair prices. It is becoming more and more popular among young office workers in the Fort area, especially on Friday evenings. Safe parking is available next to the Port city with Navy protection.

**DIDI'S CAMPAIGN THEME SONG BASED ON YOHANI'S
'MENIKE MAGE HITHE' ARE WE PATRIOTIC AS A NATION?**



I served as the First Secretary/Defence Adviser at the Sri Lanka High Commission in New Delhi, India from November 2001 to April 2004. I served under two High Commissioners, namely late Professor Senake Bandaranaike and late Mangala Munasinghe, and two Foreign Ministers, Lakshman Kadirgamar and Tyronne Fernando.

I was occupying a house inside the High Commission complex in Kautilya Marg, Chanakyapuri, in the Diplomatic enclave of New Delhi. Our chief gardener was Perry Ram. He was a very experienced gardener who had served the High Commission for the past 30 years. A very dedicated person, he worked tirelessly to maintain the High Commission premises with beautiful flower beds and flower pots. From February to April, New Delhi looks beautiful with flowers blossoming in mild cold weather. The Sri Lankan High Commission garden looked magnificent during this period, thanks to Ram, who had been to school only up to Fifth Grade, and his two assistants. Our High Commission garden had won the 'Best Garden in New Delhi' award three times in the 1990s, thanks to then young Ram. He is old now and the award has been conferred on him for the garden in the residence of the Indian Chief of Air Staff (Indian Air Force Commander).

I had a CD containing Indian patriotic songs presented to me by the then Indian Chief of Naval Staff (Indian Navy Commander). I used to play those songs loud at my residence, because they were beautiful and could be heard even from my garden.

I noticed something unusual when the song ‘Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon’ sung by great Indian singer Lata Mangeshkar was being played. Ram, who was working in the garden, would stop work and stand at attention until the song was over. It is not the Indian National Anthem! Then why did Perry Ram stand at attention? I inquired about this from an Indian Naval officer I was acquainted with. He said, “Ravi, this song was sung by Lataji in honour of the Indian Armed forces personnel who died in the Sino-Indian War in 1962. So, everyone stands at attention when it is sung in honour of those brave service personnel who paid the supreme sacrifice.”

‘Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon’ (available on YouTube, please listen) was written by Kavi Pradeep saddened by the considerable loss of Indian Army personnel in the Sino-Indian War in 1962, according to Wikipedia. The bravery and valour of the Indian forces, at stopping the Chinese advance, were heard throughout India. The Indian public was saddened by the supreme sacrifices made by their army.

The inspiration for a new song, which could be dedicated to these gallant men, emerged during lyricist Kavi Pradeep’s morning walks on Mahim beach in Mumbai. He immediately borrowed a pen from a fellow walker and wrote down a few verses of the new song on the back of the foil paper in his cigarette pack. The initial plan had been to have the song sung, as a duet, by Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle. However, the composer Kavi Pradeep had opposed the idea and it was sung only by Lata Mangeshkar.

The song was first sung, at the National Stadium of New Delhi on January 27, 1963, during the Indian Republic Day celebrations, by Lata Mangeshkar in front of the then Indian President S Radhakrishnan and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The stadium was filled to capacity and it was only a few months after the end of the Sino-Indian War. The song had become an immediate hit. The story goes that Jawaharlal Nehru’s eyes brimmed with tears. Later, when inquired by a reporter, the PM had said, “Those who don’t feel inspired by ‘Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon’ don’t deserve to be called Hindustani.”

Artistes, technical staff and Mangeshkar agreed to donate the income from the song to the Indian Army welfare fund for the welfare of the families of Indian Army personnel killed in action.

The song received considerable public appreciation and even today, when it is sung, everyone stands at attention. At the end of the song, it says ‘Jaya

Hind Ki Sena' (Long live Indian Army!)

I wish we also had a song dedicated to our war heroes.

At the time of writing, Sri Lankan singing sensation, Yohani Diloka De Silva has set new records with her cover song 'Manike Mage Hithe', making a name for Sri Lanka in the world of music.

We military parents are always happy and delighted to see our children do so well in their lives. Her father, Major General Prasanna De Silva (Retired), a much-decorated war hero of our nation, provided leadership to the elite Sri Lanka Army Special Forces during a difficult and most crucial time in history. I can still remember how he came to Trincomalee in a civilian lorry and demanded he be airdropped with his Special Forces troops, when late Colonel Fazly Laphir, the Commanding officer of SF was killed on the battlefield in July 1996. It was a true display of patriotism, valour, bravery and comradeship.

Credit should go to daughter Yohani for inspiring all military children with her achievements.

Her song, dedicated to her father, brings tears to any military father who fought in our conflict against LTTE terrorists. Dear daughter, all our children feared for our safety. I can imagine your fear as a young girl. We wholeheartedly wish you all the success in future endeavours.



Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of Indian State of West Bengal from 2011, of All India Thinamoor Congress, fondly known as 'Didi' (elder sister in Bengali) faced a 'do or die' battle at the election last week. She defeated the Communist party of India (Marxist) after 34 years. This 66-year-old Iron Lady is from a Bengali Hindu Brahmin family with a basic degree in history, education and law and Masters in Islamic history. She was later honoured with a Doctorate of Literature (D. Litt.) from Calcutta University.

Even though her party won the last State election with a huge majority, she lost her seat Nandigram. Still her party appointed her the Chief Minister. As

per Indian Constitution, she should be elected to the State Assembly within six months. Consequently, the Bhabanipur by-election was a 'must win' for her to remain Chief Minister. Six days ago, she won the seat with more than 58,300 votes.

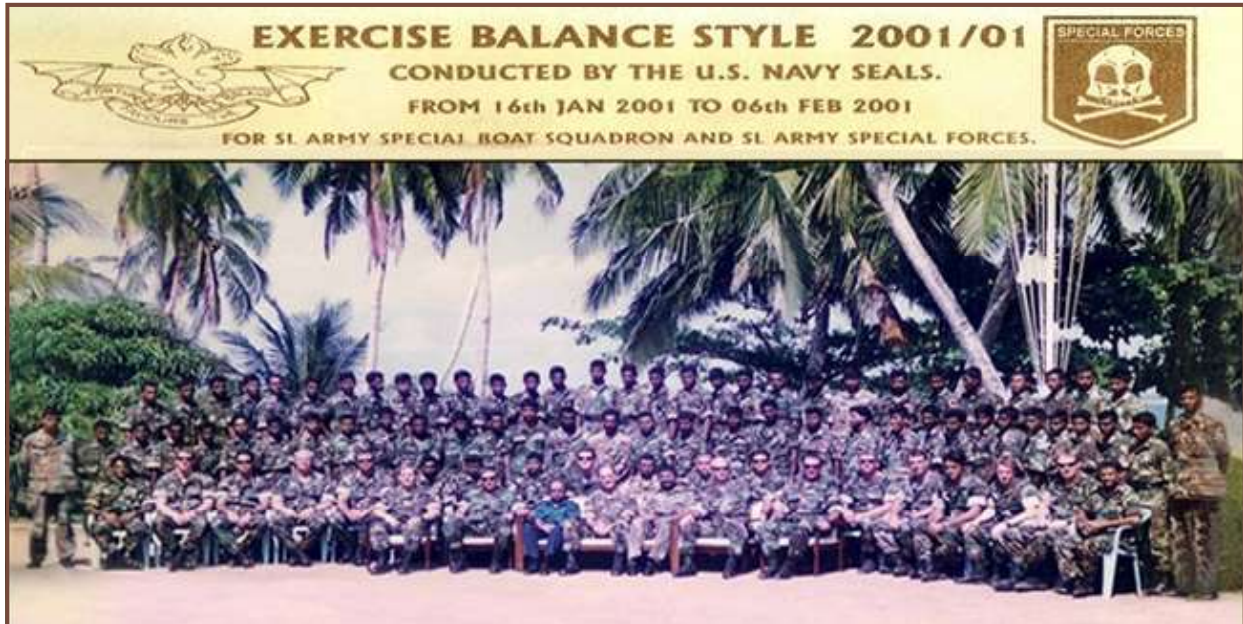
What is significant here is that Didi's campaigners based the election theme song on Yohani's 'Manike Mage Hithe' melody. It was widely broadcast during the by-election campaign and crowds danced to the music and immensely enjoyed it. (Google the YouTube version of the song).

A father-daughter duo had remixed the chartbuster as a tribute for Didi. We are so proud of you Yohani! Do not forget that our ancestors came from West Bengal. Prince Vijaya with his 700 followers in seven ships (circa 543 – 505 BCE) came from Kalingadesha (present day West Bangalore) as per Mahavamsa, historical chronology of our country. In my opinion, your tour of India was to visit our relatives. Do visit West Bengal also in the near future.

Dear Yohani, keep singing and reach greater heights.

Most significant is that all this time you were introduced as 'General Prasanna De Silva's daughter'. Now, you have changed it. In the future, your father will be introduced as 'Yohani's father'. What a great achievement by a young lady. I wish the same for my own son.

HOW 'BARBECUE GOATS' SAVED SOLDIERS' LIVES



I was at the Naval Detachment Talaimannar attached to Special Boats Squadron as Squadron Commander in the early 1990s and carried out ambushes at sandbanks against the LTTE. That was a Sunday afternoon. The OIC of Talaimannar informed me, over the radio set, that the Commander of the Navy wanted to see me at the Naval Headquarters, Colombo the following day itself.

The “Wise old man of the Navy” seemed very angry with me! I always found fighting with the enemy easier than explaining our SBS role and behind-enemy-lines operations to senior Naval officers. There had been some misunderstanding, again, I thought.

The sea was calm north of Talaimannar, and the OIC of FAC patrolling the area agreed to take me to KKS early in the morning on his return. I booked a seat in the first SLAF flight from Palaly to Ratmalana. What a way to go back to Colombo! It was a circuitous route—from Talimannar to KKS by FAC, from KKS to SLAF Base Palaly in a jeep, from Palali to the SLAF Base Ratmalana by AN -32 aircraft and from Ratmalana to Navy Headquarters in a jeep.

However, I reached the Navy Headquarters by afternoon, quickly changed into No-5 white uniform and reached the office of the Navy Commander’s office

by 1400 hrs. The PA to Commander ushered me in promptly. The Commander’s orders had been very clear: “Bring him in as soon as he arrives!”

The Commander looked very angry, and there was a barrage of angry questions: “Why do you need goats? For a barbecue? How dare you buy your barbecue goats with PUBLIC funds?” I saw a defence column in a Sunday newspaper lying on his table. He banged the bell, and his PA materialised before us. “Where is the file?”

The Commander took out a letter I had sent to NHQ, specifying what the SBS needed for the forthcoming SBS-US Navy SEALs Combined Exercise called “Exercise Balance Style” in Hambantota. “You have asked for three live goats for the joint exercise! Are you planning to have a barbecue with the Americans after the exercise?”

Finally, the penny dropped! Someone had leaked my letter to the media, and I explained to the wise old man that the poor animals were not for a barbecue.

During preliminary discussions with US SEAL instructors prior to the joint exercise, I informed them of our poor knowledge of combat medicine and how some injured personnel died while being transported. A two-week-long Intensive Combat Medicine module was included in the exercise. The SEALs promised to bring their best Combat Medicine instructors from their base in Guam. They were also ready to bring combat medical equipment and donate them to the SBS for future training and battlefield deployment in Killai/Jaffna naval detachments. For the final phase of the exercise, they needed three live goats!



They would shoot one goat in the leg, and the SBS trainees had to reduce its pain, stabilise it with IV, stop bleeding and treat the poor animal and keep him alive. After its recovery it had to be looked after at the SBS Headquarters or the Tangalle base. If the goat died, SBS trainees would be deemed to have failed the test and the dead goat would be dumped in the sea. The second goat was used in exercises to train the SBS personnel in managing leg injuries caused by anti-personnel mines, and in field amputation operations. The goat would suffer multiple gunshot injuries.

(The blood circulation systems of goats and humans were almost the same, we were told.)

I explained to the commander what we were planning to do with the US SEALs. He was surprised. He understood the value of the exercise. That marked the end of questioning, and I walked out from the Navy Commander's office smiling. Soon after my meeting, a message went to the Directors General: "Ravi is doing a great job with SBS! Support him!"

Combat medicine became a vital part of our training with the SEALs.

Soon, the SBS medics reached the required competence level. US SEALs were very happy with our progress and kept helping us with required medical equipment; we always kept them at Kilali with our boat deployments in the lagoon.

Operation Agnakeela in Muhamalai, Jaffna was to be launched on 28 March 2000, but the LTTE staged a preemptive strike on our defence lines two days earlier. The Army faced heavy casualties. The SBS volunteered to evacuate casualties in boats to the Kilali naval detachment from there they were helilifted to the Palaly Army hospital and then to Colombo. Combat medicine training imparted to the SBS by the US SEALs stood us in good stead. Severely wounded soldiers were given best combat medical care. The casualties categorised as P1, P2, and P3 were helilifted immediately. The SBS and other naval personnel at the detachment led by then S/LT Karandenigoda worked hard to save lives.

We received a number of commendation letters and telephone calls from surgeons and doctors at the Palaly and Colombo hospitals commending SBS personnel for combat medicine procedures prior to medical evacuation (MEDIVAC) of injured army personnel.

Let the US SEALs be commended for making our SBS extremely competent

and capable of saving so many lives of gallant army personnel.

Special thanks should also go to the BARBECUE GOATS for bearing the pain to train us.

If you see a limping goat near our Navy Base Tangalle or Hambantota, please be kind to it.

(The writer, the founder of the SBS, commanded the elite unit in 1993 and 2000)

VIGOUR, VALOUR, VICTORY



The month of August 2006, 15 years ago, was a very eventful month for the Sri Lanka Navy. I was the Commandant of the Naval and Maritime Academy (NMA) and Flag Officer Naval Fleet (FOCNF) based in Trincomalee, both were busy appointments.



Cdr (Marines) First Marine of Sri Lanka
WMUI Wijeratne, RSP

The NMA routine suited me. NMA starts work at 0730 hrs and goes up to 1330 hrs. The afternoon and evening were allocated for sports and water related activities. So, I was able to have my lunch at 1330 hrs and spend my afternoon till 1700 at the FOCNF office. As Commandant, I enjoyed teaching swimming and sailing to young cadets. It was always delightful to see young cadets learning to swim and become good swimmers.

The LTTE was very active in the Eastern sea in 2006. They had their grand strategy very well laid out with plans to capture the Trincomalee harbour and thereby cutting off the lifeline to the North, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). As there was no land route to the North, (Vanni was under LTTE Control then), Trincomalee was vital to keep our ships and craft to carry men and material to the North by sea.

The LTTE strategy came to light when it ordered civilians living closer to the naval base to vacate their homes. We were very aware of the impending

danger. The Trincomalee Naval Base was developed by the Royal Navy during World War II to station and repair a large allied fleet. The naval base is huge. It has a land area of 850 acres. It has quarters for married personnel and families, bachelor accommodations, training institutes, workshops and slipways and accommodates a large number of naval personnel and their families.

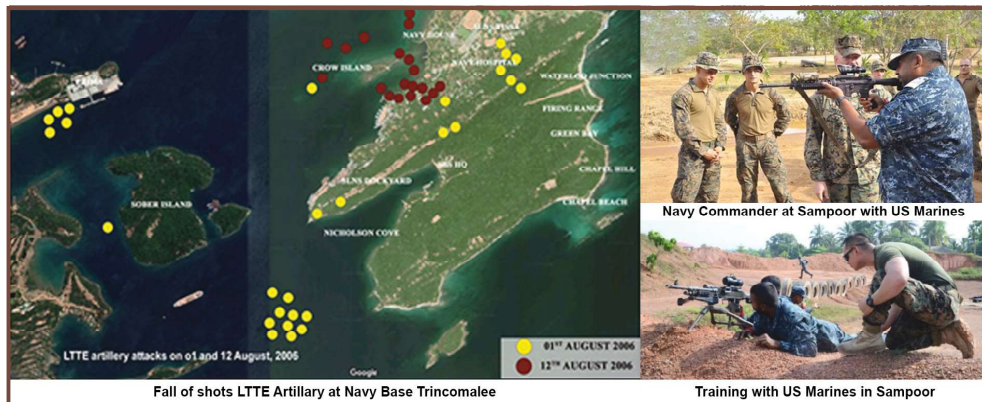


Cdr (Marines) First Marine of Sri Lanka WMUI Wijeratne, with President Maithripala Sirisena

The British captured the Trincomalee harbour on 01 January, 1782, taking it from the Dutch during the fourth Anglo-Dutch war. Trincomalee was the only place in Sri Lanka the French occupied during their colonial rule. The ownership of Trincomalee changed from the Dutch to the French and to the British on the same day! Even after we won our Independence on 04 February, 1948, the British continued to

occupy the Trincomalee Naval Base (then expanded to China Bay air field and the oil tank farm) and Katunayake airfield as per a Defence agreement signed with the British. On 15 October, 1957, the Trincomalee Naval Base was taken over under the leadership of late Prime Minister S. W. R. D Bandaranaike. The British had ruled this beautiful and strategically important deep-water harbour and its facilities for 175 years.

Coming back to our main story, in my assessment, closing off the Mavil Aru water distribution point in the Eastern Province (south of the Trincomalee) and the attack on the Trincomalee Naval Base with long-range artillery guns were the biggest mistakes the LTTE made, pushing the government to declare war.



LTTE artillery attacks on 01 and 12 August, 2006

Fall of shots LTTE Artillery at Navy Base Trincomalee

Navy Commander at Sampoor with US Marines

Training with US Marines in Sampoor

Anticipating an imminent LTTE attack on the Trincomalee Naval Base and in order to detect LTTE suicide boats waiting to ambush at Trincomalee harbour mouth, we fixed the old Chapel Hill naval communication centre with radar and a thermal camera. With this arrangement, we could surveil the harbour mouth and the LTTE occupied Sampoor area quite well, day and night. (Please read my article Remy and Chappella – Canines War Veterans article on The Island dated 22 September 22, 2020.) When the temperature difference was significant at night, we could even detect a dog walking along the Sampoor beach, which is eight kilometres away, thanks to our thermal camera fixed on top of Chapel Hill.

The first artillery attack by the enemy was made on the naval base on 01 August 2006 around 1230 hrs, killing one instructor and four sailors at NMA. The enemy simultaneously targeted the Jetliner ship returning from the northern area, carrying 700 military personnel. The Jetliner escaped due to the vigilance of the OIC and fast attack craft that escorted her.

That evening the enemy attacked both the Muttur Naval Detachment and Kattaparichhan Army camp, two outposts to the south of Trincomalee harbour. The Army and Navy personnel in these two detachments, fought valiantly and held their positions. Army and Navy reinforcements were rushed immediately. Both Captain UI Serasinghe (at present, the Deputy Director General of Civil Security Department, holding the rank of Rear Admiral) and Lt Cdr Roy Raymond (currently a Captain serving as Naval Officer in Charge Trincomalee South) from the Naval Patrolmen branch (Naval Infantry) volunteered to lead the reinforcement troops to the besieged Muttur Naval Detachment. Raymond was on his honeymoon at the time! Leaving his wife at the Trincomalee Naval Base he boarded the inshore patrol craft to go to Muttur under enemy attack. The leadership, valour and bravery exhibited by these senior officers of the naval patrolmen branch in leading their men into battle was unbelievable. Such was the tradition of our 'silent force', the Sri Lanka Navy.


Another officer volunteered to go with reinforcement troops to Muttur. He was Lieutenant Indika Wijeratne also from the Naval Patrolmen Branch. Wijeratne joined the Navy as a Direct Entry Sub Lieutenant after completing his degree from the University of Colombo. He came under my radar in 1999, in Oddusuddan. He led a small group of sailors from our Navy bunker line to enemy lines, killed four LTTE cadres and seized their weapons. His bravery was well known in the Naval Patrolmen branch.

When our reinforcements reached Muttur, they found that the Bravo


sector of the detachment was already occupied by the terrorists. The elite SL Army Commandos led by then Major Ravindra Hadunpathirana (who died in a vehicle accident later) and the SLN Special Boat Squadron (SBS) personnel were holding the enemy at bay. Things were really bad the following day (03 August). Lt Cdr (SBS) Anura Weerasinghe, second in Command of the SBS was injured and five SBS men made the supreme sacrifice.

"Special Boat Squadron (SBS)-Sri Lanka Navy Commandos"


Dear Comrades NVJHP (Ukkawa) ,Premalal and Wijeweera. On a day like today (02nd August 2006) we lost you three at the same time few others were injured whilst Matur (Strategic location in the Eastern area)rescue mission. You paid supreme sacrifice to protect our motherland If we could not save Matur that day, the whole country would have upside down,



Fleet Chief Petty Officer (SBS)
NVJHP KUMARA
KIA 2006.08.02.
MUTTUR RESCUE MISSION.



Fleet Chief Petty Officer (SBS)
HMP WIJEWERA.
MIA 2006.08.02
MUTTUR RESCUE MISSION.




Chief Petty Officer (SBS)
SPA PREMALAR
KIA 2006.08.02.
MUTTUR RESCUE MISSION.


*"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."*

"Special Boat Squadron (SBS)-Sri Lanka Navy Commandos"

Dear Comrades NVJHP (Ukkawa) ,Premalal and Wijeweera. On a day like today (03rd August 2006) we lost you three at the same time few others were injured whilst Matur (Strategic location in the Eastern area)rescue mission. You paid supreme sacrifice to protect our motherland If we could not save Matur that day, the whole country would have upside down,



Fleet Chief Petty Officer (SBS)
JMS RUPASINGHE.
KIA 2006.08.04.
MUTTUR RESCUE MISSION.



Leading Seaman (SBS)
THV AMARASINGHE.
KIA 2006.08.04.
MUTTUR RESCUE MISSION.

*"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."*

When things went from bad to worse on 04 August, Lt Indika Wijeratne, who was tasked with holding on to the Bravo sector with reinforcement naval troops, decided to carry out an assault on enemy positions and retake the entire Bravo sector. This is the first and last time in Sri Lanka Navy history an assault on enemy lines over land was performed. Indika's buddy, Leading Patrolman Premalal XP 23303 died during this assault. The brave sailor followed his senior officer until death.

Indika and his troops recaptured the Bravo sector. The enemy withdrew with their casualties. Indika positioned two snipers, one from SBS and one from Army Commandos with their 7.62x51 mm sniper weapons overlooking the Kattapparichchan Aru to target enemy fighters crossing the waterway with their casualties.

Once the conflict was over in May 2009, the Patrolmen branch, or Naval Infantry branch, lost their significance. As they were trained only to fight on land, these officers and sailors could not be assigned to Navy ships and craft.

When I was the Commander of the Navy in 2015, the Navy's Board of Management decided to convert this branch into Naval Marines. During my visit to San Diego, California, US, for the US Pacific Command Amphibious Leaders Symposium in 2016, I had discussions with US Marine Commanders and the US 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit was tasked with training volunteer Patrolmen officers and sailors of the Naval Patrolmen branch, to raise the first battalion of Sri Lanka Marines.



Training with US Marines in Sampoor

Under the watchful eyes of US Marines instructors, after vigorous training exercises, 164 marines, consisting of six officers and 158 sailors, were inducted into the first battalion of SL Marines on February 27, 2017 at Mullikulam, with then President Maithripala Sirisena as the Chief Guest. Our hero Indika Wijeratne was given the badge as the first qualified

Marine of Sri Lanka and Commanding Officer of the First Battalion of SL Marines. Rear Admiral UI Serasinghe became the first Director of Marines.

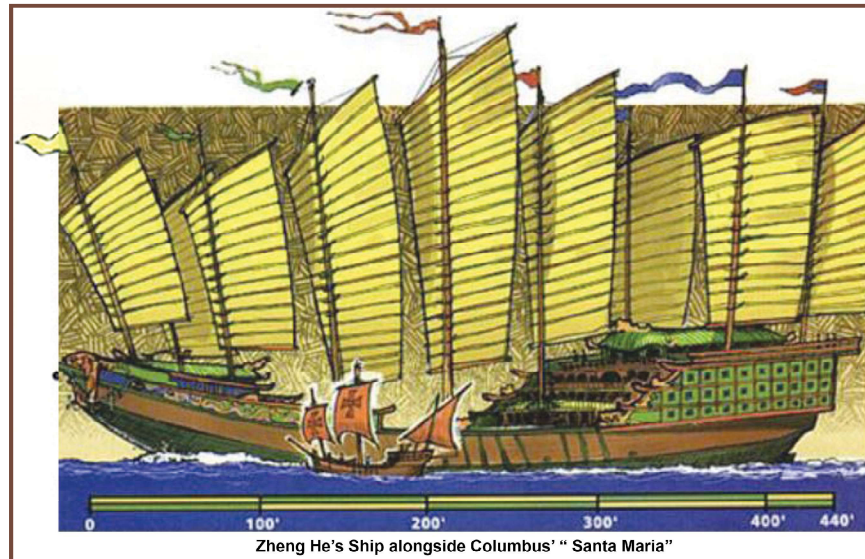
US Marines were very impressed with our boys. An invitation was extended to one SL Marines platoon to take part in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Multinational Naval Exercise 2018. RIMPAC is the biggest Military/Naval exercise in the World. Australian helicopter carrier HMHS Canberra carried our Marines platoon onboard during the two months long exercise. They were very well trained to respond to Natural Disasters and returned home keeping Sri Lanka Marines flag flying high.

The SL Marine base was established in Sampoor, the same area where Indika led his assault on the enemy. Today, SL Marines do periodic training exercises with US and Australian Marines and are first responders to any natural disaster.

Vigour, Valour, Victory – motto of SL Marines. Long live SL Marines!



CHINESE ADMIRAL ZHENG HE'S TRILINGUAL STELA IN GALLE



A plaque erected to mark the opening of a new electronic library at the Attorney General's Department was removed because the writing thereon was only in Sinhala and English, and Tamil had been left out. This reminded me of a stone plaque bearing the date 15th February 1409 put up by Chinese Admiral Zheng He at Galle harbour during one of his grand voyages to Sri Lanka, India and the African Continent.

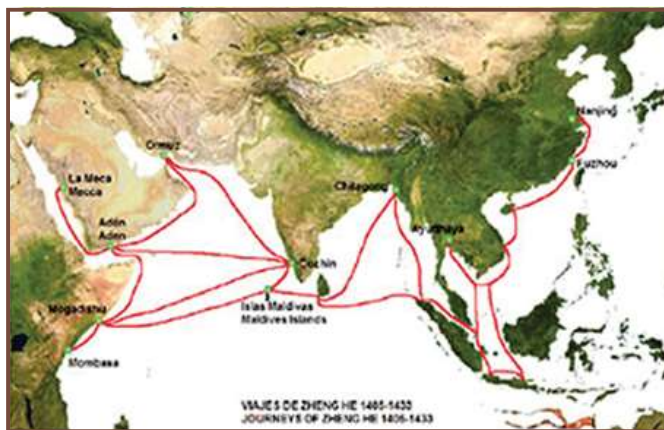
Zheng He was a Chinese mariner, explorer, diplomat, fleet admiral, and court eunuch during China's early Ming Dynasty. Born as Ma He or Ma Sanbao into a Muslim family in 1371, he later adopted the surname Zheng conferred by the Yongle Emperor. He completed seven historical voyages to do trade and gather knowledge from other parts of world. He died in 1433, at the age of 62, during his last voyage near Calicut (now Kozhikode), India. His remains were dropped to Davy Jones' locker (buried at sea) off Corramandal coast of India.

Zheng He had his voyages a long time before the European powers visited this part of the world. (The Portuguese first landed in India on 20 May 1498). Zheng visited Sri Lanka almost a century before him, and his stone stela is about the offerings he made to the Buddha, Allah and Hindu God Vishnu seeking their blessings for successful trade with Sri Lanka.

Sinhala omitted

Now, this historical stela is at the National Museum, Colombo. What he offered to Buddhist temples, Mosques and Hindu temples is fascinating and the whole list has been inscribed on the stela, which erected in a predominantly Sinhala area, is in three languages—Tamil, Persian and Chinese; he omitted Sinhala!

Admiral Zheng He's fleet was unbelievably large. He had sailing ships which were more than 120 metres in length (longer than the Sri Lanka Navy's flag ship) and had five decks each. Unconfirmed stories say their crews grew fresh vegetables on the top decks and had piggeries in the bottom bilge decks, where pigs were fed with leftover food of the crew during passage. These ships were floating fortresses.



Admiral Zheng He had more than 100 ships of this size and smaller vessels; his fleet consisted of 217 ships and 28,000 sailors/marines. In comparison, Columbus in 1492 had only three ships and 90 sailors. “Santa Maria”, the flag ship of Columbus, was only 30 meters in length.

Admiral Zheng He's big ships carried valuable cargo like silk, gold and silver coins, porcelain vases and plates for trading around the world.

When Admiral Zheng He first visited Sri Lanka in 1405 at the Beruwala harbour, which was popular among Arab traders at that time, he visited the Kotte Kingdom and climbed Sri Pada. His first visit was only limited to India and Sri Lanka. During his second voyage in 1411, he clashed with the Kotte kingdom, and King Alakeshwara tried to attack his ships. The Admiral launched a counterattack with his expeditionary forces and captured Alakeshwara, who was subsequently replaced with King Parakramabahu VI. He sailed to China with the Sinhalese prisoners, including King Alakeshwara.

According to historical records, Admiral Zheng He presented captured King Alakeshwara and his followers to Yongle Emperor (third Emperor of Ming dynasty), only to be told that the Chinese went on voyages to promote their trade

and not to wage war, and ordered to take the captives to Sri Lanka during his next voyage itself. The Admiral took them back to Sri Lanka, as ordered by the Emperor. They were looked after well during their stay in China.

The present-day Chinese leaders have said the same thing as regards their Belt and Road initiative: “We are for trade and investment and not war.”



After his sixth voyage Admiral Zhang He concluded that there was nothing China could learn from the outside World. True enough, China was very much advanced compared to the outside world at that time. He reported this to the Emperor, who later had the fleet dismantled after the Admiral’s last voyage and funds were utilised for keeping the Mongolian invaders at bay. Admiral Zheng He spent 28 years of his adult life on voyages.

Puzzle

In 1911, S.H. Thomlin, a British engineer working in Galle along the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka, found the stone tablet lying in a culvert.

I am only a seafarer and not a historian. Can someone enlighten me on why the Sinhala language was not used in this plaque?

Were the Sinhalese upset and angry then as there was no inscription in Sinhala. Let us have a discussions on this interesting subject.

(I will be failing in my duty if I do not mention the help I received from Ravi junior for gathering some historical details.)

NAVY SIGNALS



Messages transmitted among ships or from ships to shore are known as signals in naval jargon. Some of these signals are secret messages. Others are routine signals, such as ship's victualling requirements and personnel transfers. Signal men, or present-day 'communicators', are a group of proud people who work closely with Commanding Officers and other officers. As the old Navy mostly communicated in English, and in Morse Code, in English, their English knowledge was always impeccable. Furthermore, communicators dressed very smartly. The famous writer, the late Kalakeerthi Karl Muller, in his novel, 'Spit and Polish, vividly describes the job of communicators in the Navy.

Long before radio technology and telecommunications were invented, sailing ships communicated with one another with the help of flags. Those ships required to get close to harbours to communicate with shore. There are numerical and alphabetical flags of various colours and shapes in the Navy. These flags were hoisted in various ways on the 'signal mast' of a sailing ship. One such flag signal, hoisted by Lt James Pasco, the Signal officer of Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, just before engaging the Franco-Spanish Fleet in the Trafalgar Sea Battle, on 21st October 1805, on board his flagship 'HMS Victory' was 'England expects every man to do his Duty'. Most of the Admirals, who commanded these sailing ships, had weak eyesight due to their age, all were passing 40 years! So, a young, smart and bright Naval officer was appointed as assistant to the Admiral to assist him in reading flags and always remain in close proximity to the Admiral. He was known as a 'Flag Lieutenant' regardless of his rank.

That's why Aide to Admiral is known as Flag Lieutenant. When I explained the 'history of Flag Lieutenants' to my wife, Yamuna, she very rightly said, "Present-day flag Lieutenants do all the work of an Admiral other than reading the flags.

How true!

When radio technology, and telecommunication, was found, ships started to communicate in "Morse Code " in series of Dids and Dahs. Did means dot (.) and Dah means dash (-). Every letter in English and numbers 1 to 10 had code of "dids and dahs". This system was first used in telecommunication by Gotthard Railway and soon became popular among shortwave radio operators. This system was named Morse Code in honour of Samuel Morse, one of the inventors of telegraph.

As naval Cadets, we were supposed to learn both flag signals, semaphore (another way of signalling with two flags) and Morse Code (both in Morse Key and Flash Light). Practice makes perfect. Regular competitions on signals were held between our fleet and foreign naval fleets; our junior officers and communicators proved their class by winning them. However, it's a continuous process, doing such exercises and increasing your speed in transmitting and receiving. Do you know what 'Nelson's Eye' really means? Vice Admiral Lord Nelson lost the sight of one of his eyes in Corsica, in 1795. In 1801, during the Battle of Copenhagen, when his fleet Commander ordered to withdraw, he showed his unwillingness to his Flag Lieutenant, keeping his telescope to his blind eye and saying he could not see a withdrawal flag signal and continued fighting until victory was assured. Then you have the secret codes in communication. Codes are very easy to implement, but code sheets had to be kept safely. History says US code breakers' efforts, in decoding secret messages of the Imperial Japanese Navy, after its attack on Pearl Harbour, in WW 11, made things easier for the US fleet. The easiest way to make a secret code is to have an alternative code word for the actual word.



The sweetest code I received was from my duty officer at Naval Headquarters on the night of 6th/7th September 2007, when I was Director, Naval Operations. Our fleet led by then Captain (later Admiral and Navy Commander) Travis Sinniah sailed thousands of miles away from home, looking for LTTE floating weapons warehouses. Coded Message said over the

telephone 'Delaware Oregon'. When decoded it meant 'Enemy Located'! I knew we had completed the most difficult part of our operation, in the vast Indian Ocean, with help of friendly nations, and Travis and others would do the needful. Obviously, our Senior Staff Communication Officer at that time, Lt. Commander (now commodore) Buddhika Liyanagamage, has used 'names of US Cities' as his code for keywords on our Operation Order. Communicators had to be perfect. Any mistake in transmitting or receiving a signal is likely to end up in total disaster. A hilarious incident happened in the mid late 1980s on transmitting and receiving a logistical signal from the Northern Naval Area, to the Eastern Naval Area. The biggest supplier of victuals, POL (petroleum oil and lubricants) and spare parts to ships/ craft to the Northern Area was the East. Logistic ships were assigned for this task. A long logistic requirements list was received by the Naval Commutation Centre (East) from the Naval Commutation Centre (North).

It included 1000 kilos of coconut husk! Eastern logistic Commanders were surprised with this requirement, but no one bothered to contact the originator of the logistic signal over the telephone. They all thought the coconut husks were for some defence construction. Naval trucks were sent to Kurunegala area from Trincomalee to collect the coconut husk. It was a huge load. Patriotic people in Kurunegala area, thinking that it was a requirement for the North (may be to cover bunkers of our gallant sailors fighting the LTTE), collected coconut husks and gave most of them free of charge. Eastern logistics Commanders were very proud of their great effort in providing much needed coconut husks to the North. The ship load (1000 kg) of coconut husk ended up in the Karainagar Naval Base. Loading and unloading of the coconut husk was a tedious task due to their sheer volume, even though light in weight, which took a lot of time and energy of officers, both in Trincomalee and Karainagar.



But why so many coconut husks? To build a new type of protection for bunkers? No one exactly knew until the originator of the logistic signal, the Logistic Officer of Karainagar Naval Base, returned after leave. He never ordered coconut husk! He ordered 'coconut husked' (coconuts without husks). During the signal communication, 'ed' had been dropped! Whom to blame? Originator of signal or Communicators who received signal without 'ed'? My Deputy Principal at Royal College, Mr EC Gunasekara (fondly known as 'KATAYA' among students) always used to tell us. "Best sense is COMMON SENSE).

COMBAT EXPERIENCE WITH INDIAN NAVY MARINE COMMANDOS



I was the Security Officer of the Naval Base, Trincomalee in 1987 September. My phone rang. It was Chief of Staff from the Naval Headquarters, Colombo.

“Ravi, Indian Navy wants help from one of our officers who has in-depth knowledge on Jaffna and Gurunagar lagoon area to assist their Commandos operating in that area. I think you are the best. Would you like to go?”



“Yes Sir !” I was delighted. I wanted get out of this monotonous job of Security Officer of the Naval Base, Trincomalee. Chief of Staff further said, “OK, be ready to travel to KKS tonight. I will tell Comeast (Commander Eastern Naval Area) of your new mission and will arrange a gunboat for you to travel to KKS. Take all your fancy weapons and other stuff. Travel light.” Chief of Staff knew of my weapons, US made Colt M-16 Carbine, repeater shot gun and 40mm grenade launcher.

The following afternoon, I was on board SLNS Edithara, which was anchored off South of Punkudativu. Commander (then) J S K Colombage, one-time my training officer onboard when I was a Cadet, was waiting for me. Commanding Officer of this Surveillance Command Ship (SCS) was Captain Suraj Munasinghe, a colourful Naval officer, who was loved by all. Commander

Colombage looked after me very well. SCSs are very comfortable ships, one-time Merchant Navy Container Carriers (Roll-on/roll-off ships) which were modified for specific purposes of carrying troops, providing logistics support to our fleet and carried out maritime surveillance with excellent “Selsmar” radar fitted on board. Thanks to Jayanath (Colombage), I was given airconditioned cabin and 24 hours fresh water supply, which is we consider a super-luxury at sea.

I was given another precious gift by Captain Suraj and Commander Jayanath. That was an UK- built Cougar craft, ultra speed small boat, which can move at maximum speed of 40 knots exclusively for my use. I was not sailing, but “flying” in and out of Jaffna lagoon at 35 knots.



As you are aware, Commander Colombage rose to the rank of Admiral, Commanded the Navy, became a Professor and is now our Foreign Secretary.

So, I was ready with all aspects to meet my friends from the Indian Navy, the 18- member unit of the Indian Navy Marine Commandos, then known as Indian Marine Special Force (IMSF). They were raised few months ago in 1987, with two Indian Naval officers (divers) who did basic (BUDs) the US Navy SEAL course successfully.

The task for the team was to avoid LTTE cadres crossing the Jaffna lagoon in boats and reinforcing their troops fighting with Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) in Jaffna. Moving in the Jaffna lagoon in boats was very tricky, if you did not have a good local knowledge of it. There are navigable canals and mud flats. If you do not move on canals, your boat will run aground.

My local knowledge in operating in these waters when I was Officer in Command at Naval Detachment, Nagadeepa stood us in good stead. Operating in those restricted waters to catch smugglers day and night during that period paid dividends. Long nights waiting on mud flats, half wet and shivering by cold wind at night, watching the flooding and ebbing currents has suddenly become very useful.

I was very happy. I thought this is what I want to do as junior officer. Be independent and do what I wanted.



But soon I realized the gravity of my responsibility when I saw the Indian Marine Commandos. I was supposed to take them to the Jaffna lagoon safely to fight the LTTE. They were the finest officers and sailors of the Indian Navy. The responsibility for ensuring their safety in the mine-infested enemy waters fell on my soldiers!

The eighteen Indian Marine Commandos were led by Lt Aravind Singh. His deputy was Lt Anoop Varma. Aravind was a US Navy SEAL-trained, competent and brave young Officer. The operation going to be his first real combat experience. Same with second in command and rest of the team.

Lt Aravind Singh and I became very close friend within a few days. We both respect our professional competencies. I showed him how to move in restricted waters of the Jaffna lagoon during day and night and how tricky the mine-infested waters could be and how to avoid strong flow of water during flooding and ebbing of the lagoon. Further, I informed him of the enemy snipers hiding in two high-rise buildings in Gurunagar and the advantages of operating at night.

We targeted the LTTE boats parked at Gurunagar jetty and destroyed a large number of them. The Indian Marine Commandoes gained competence in next to no time. They informed their Commanders that they were ready to operate alone.

Within one week my job was over! Aravind and Anoop were thankful to me for my support. They said they were competent enough to work without their dear channel pilot "Ravi". We said goodbye and departed after working in dangerous waters of Jaffna for two weeks.



By conducting very successful operations against the LTTE, the Indian Marine Commandos earned respect of the IPKF troops, and their action in the Jaffna lagoon earned them gallantry medals. Aravind was awarded Maha Vir Chakra, (MVC), second highest Gallantry medal of India, highest awarded to an Indian Naval Officer during the IPKF operations. He was the youngest to receive MVC in the Indian Navy history. His deputy Anoop was awarded with Vir Chakra (Vir C).

The experience I gained by working with these brave officers and sailors of the Indian Navy helped us a lot when we raised our own Maritime Special Force, Special Boats Squadron in 1993.

Today Indian Navy Marine Commandos (MARCOS) are among the best Naval Special Forces of the World.

The few, The Fearless

motto of MARCOS

Lt. Anoop Varma, VrC retired from Indian Navy prematurely and joined Merchant Navy and rose to rank of Merchant Navy Captain. Lt. Aravind Singh, MVC, NM remained with the MARCOS for long years and ensured it reached World-class and retired from Indian Navy with rank of Commodore.

I salute these officers and sailors of the Indian Navy for coming to help us during difficult times to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country.

WHEN KACHCHATIVU COMES ALIVE

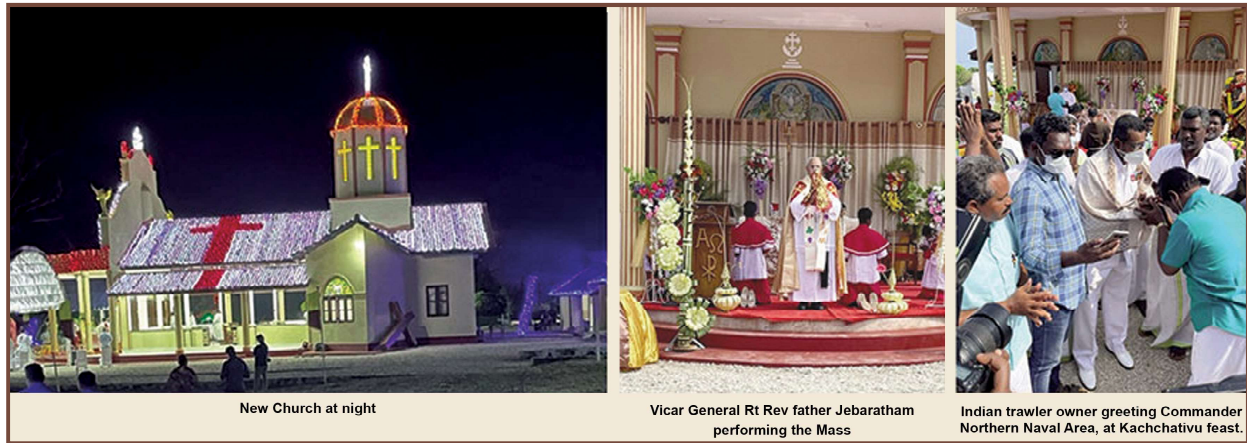


The St Antony’s Church feast at Kachchativu was celebrated on 10 and 11 March 2022. As usual, I was looking forward to this annual pilgrimage. I travelled to Jaffna, stayed at Fort Hammenhiel, a Dutch miniature Fort on an islet in Karainagar; previously used as a Navy detention centre it has now been converted into a four-bedroom boutique hotel. On that evening, I was alone on Fort Gun turret enjoying the beautiful sunset, with two “Sundowner” cocktails, a unique cocktail (Rum-based) prepared by a Navy Bar steward.

The following day by 0500 hrs I was up and headed to the Fort Hammenhiel jetty for angling. It’s only a sport now! Fort Hammenhiel jetty is an ideal place to catch 2-3 kg Paraw (trevaillies) before sun rise. All fish were caught, weighed, photographed, and released into the water. So, this is the new trend in angling.

On 10 March, after lunch, I headed to Kachchativu on board an Inshore Patrol Craft (IPC) with Commander Northern Area, Rear Admiral Priyantha Perera. Priyantha is a deep sea diver, who has canoed his boat, a small canoe (small rowing boat) around Sri Lanka. He was a former Commanding officer of Navy’s elite Special Boat Squadron (SBS). The sea was “Mirror calm”, and the locally built IPC moved at the speed of 32 knots (32 nautical miles per hour). We reached Kachchativu in around one hour and 40 minutes.

The islet was very busy making preparations for the feast. However, due to health regulations, only one hundred devotees from Sri Lanka and India were allowed to attend the feast.



South Indian Catholics had already arrived in their fishing trawlers and the Navy provided all the requirements of fresh water and food. They were happy with the excellent arrangements by the Sri Lanka Navy. Regardless of the number of devotees, the Navy always looks after them; it brings fresh water, generators, tents, cooking utensils, victuals and fuel from the mainland in their Landing craft and IPCs. Northern Naval Command, under Priyantha, had done an excellent job. The coordinator, on ground, was Lt Cdr Peiris, who spent the last one month on this remote island, coordinating logistics. Commander H A C Fernando, Commanding officer of SLNS Wasaba, in Delft Island, was overall in charge of Kachchativu operation and the safety and security of all devotees. This decorated senior naval officer, a devoted Catholic, carried out his task diligently.

At night, the new church looked very beautiful.

The new church symbolises the Navy's devotion to St. Anthony, the patron saint who looks after seafarers and fishermen. The new church was built, within four months, in 2016, on the request of Jaffna Bishop Rt Rev Dr Justin Bernard Gnanapragasam, and the Navy handed over the church to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jaffna on, 23 Decembe, 2016. The total cost to built this beautiful St. Anthony's church was Rs. 7.7 million. Funds were contributed by the officers and sailors of the Navy, in 2016. Almost all contributors were Buddhists!



Old Church

The Navy improves facilities on the islet every year. This time they erected wooden lamp posts and electrical cables were rigged this time by the Navy and this permanent rigging will remain there even after the feast.

Many Catholic devotees made contributions silently to make the mission a success. The wooden lamp posts were purchased for Rs 50,000 and handed over to the Navy by a female official, attached to the Delft AGA Office. She wishes to remain anonymous. Such are the true devotees of St Anthony!

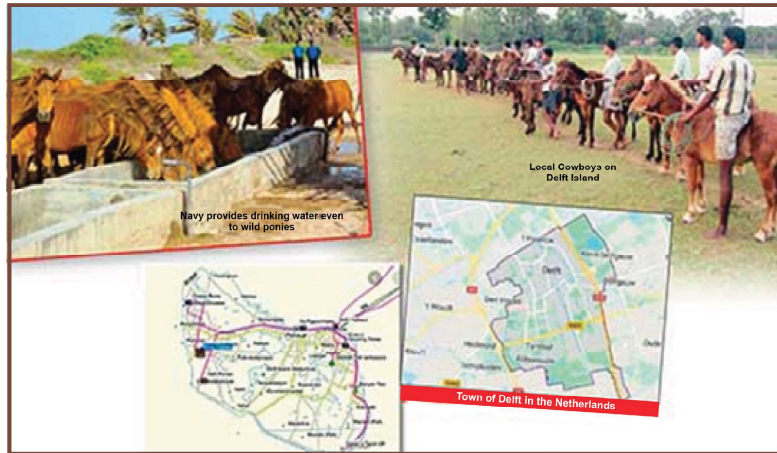
The Indian fishermen, they wanted Indo-Sri Lanka fisheries issues to be resolved early. I always say that if the two neighbouring countries have any irritant, it is the issue of Indian bottom trawlers poaching in our waters. The trawler owners met Northern Naval Commander and thanked him.

The Mass was led by Rt Rev Father Pathinatar Josephthas Jabarathnam, the Vicar General of Jaffna as Jaffna Bishop was not available (as he was on a pilgrimage to India). He blessed everyone present. Well done Navy for excellent work ! I have made a request to St Antony: I need strength to visit next year also to this tiny Island.



New Church seen from sea

FOUND MEMORIES OF DELFT ISLAND



In 1986, as a 23-year-old naval officer, I received my first sea command as Officer-in-Charge of P 432; Colombo Dockyard-built Coastal Patrol Craft in Karainagar, Jaffna. It became my third consecutive appointment in the Northern naval area. I thought that someone in Naval Headquarters didn't like my face! Anyway, I really enjoyed my time in the North and sailed the length and breadth of Northern waters, besides visiting all tiny islands and local channels in restricted waters of the Jaffna lagoon and gathering information about amphibious landing sites. That stood me in good stead when I operated with Indian Marine Commandos (MARCOS) during "Operation Pawan" in 1988/89 and subsequently commanded the Special Boats Squadron (SBS), planning and executing "behind-the-enemy-line" operations.

So, as a very junior naval officer, patrolling the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and Delft Island area, which has a very large stock of fish and export quality tiger prawns, I always wondered why the Dutch rulers who controlled our coastal areas had named Neduntheevu (Tamil name) as Delft.

When I visited the Netherlands, in 2010, on a study tour, I found that a 750-year-old Delft town (also called Prinstenstad) had almost the same shape as Delft Island.

Now, I know why Rijckloff Van Goens, Governor of Zeylan (Dutch Ceylon)

and Governor-General of East Indies, who served three terms here, from 1660 to 1675, named eight islands in the North after Dutch cities. (I thank Professor KM De Silva for his History of Sri Lanka).



Rajckloff van Goens,
Governor-General of Dutch
East Indies from 1678 to 1681

Delftware or Delft Blue
pottery

The Dutch city, Delft, is famous for Delftware, Dutch blue pottery, inspired by famous Chinese porcelain and Spanish pottery and associated with the Dutch Royal family. The city of Delft is internationally known, today because of its technical university.

The name, Delft Island, was first used in a Dutch Government proclamation on 16th

May 1665, providing protection for the pearl banks and chank bed fisheries in the Gulf of Mannar, the Palk Bay and the Palk Strait.

Delft Island is a remote fishing village, which is home to 4,800 people, belonging to approximately 1,468 families. Most of them are Roman Catholics. Hindus and devotees of the Christian Church of India are also there. The mainland is about 30 km away, and a ferry ride from the Kurikattuwan jetty to Delft Island takes about one hour; the sea may be very rough at times. The island is 8 km in length and 6 km in width; with a land area of approximately 50 square kilometres. It is located a few nautical miles from the IMBL.

Delft Island is the ONLY place in the world where we can see wild ponies, believed to have been brought by the Portuguese for breeding. I have seen some enterprising youth catch and train them for riding. So, you may see local 'cowboys' riding ponies on Delft Island. These wild ponies are mainly found in the Delft National Park, which encompasses about 4,562 acres.

When I was appointed the Commander Northern Naval Area (Comnorth), in 2010, I was determined to develop Delft island and help the people there. The Commander Northern Naval Area is a very prestigious and important appointment in the Navy.

The first Northern Naval Commander (then known as Commander Northern Area or CNA) was Commander Rajan Kadirgamar in 1955 (elder brother of the late Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar). Late Lieutenant Commander (C) E P Wickramasinghe, father of former First Lady Shiranthi Wickramasinge Rajapaksa, was CNA in 1965/66.

My staff, led by my deputy at that time, Commodore (then) Piyal De Silva (who is the Commander of the Navy now) conducted a very good research. We found the biggest issue in the Delft Island was unemployment. The majority of men in Delft Island are fishermen. Indian poachers catch export quality tiger prawns much to the consternation of the Delft fishermen, who stopped going to sea for three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday) because big Indian trawlers crossed Indo-Sri Lanka IMBL and poached in our waters during those days.

The SLN arrests or chases away these Indian trawlers but still they come back in large numbers. Further, the Delft fishermen have their fish catch being depleted fast due to bottom trawling by Indian fishers. Very soon we will be left with a “Dead Sea” South of Delft Island, thanks to bottom trawling. That has already happened on the Indian side of IMBL.

My staff decided to help the women of Delft find employment. The Parish priest of the Roman Catholic Church, on Delft Island at that time, my dear friend, Rev Father Amalaraj, promised his fullest support. We erected a large aluminium prefabricated building near the Delft jetty. Part of the land belongs to the church but approval was granted by His Lordship Jaffna Roman Catholic Bishop for us to use it. We brought some used sewing machines which were removed from the Naval Sewing Centre (South) at Boossa, Galle. Our idea was to run a Naval Sewing Centre on Delft Island to stitch uniforms for the Navy and provide employment to women.

There were many applicants, but only 35 could be provided with employment. They were sent for a two-week training at the Naval Sewing Centre (South), Boossa.

Out of these 35 women, 30 had never travelled beyond Jaffna. Their excitement on seeing Colombo and Galle was unbelievable. Some of their parents accompanied them. They learnt to how to operate Juki sewing machines. Their instructors were Sinhala women, but language was not a barrier for them. They became friends. I was there on the last day of their training at Boossa. They cried, hugging each other.



The Naval Sewing Centre (North) was opened by the then Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral Somathilaka Dissanayake on 2nd Aug 2012. It was a happy day for all Delft Islanders.

The Navy Commander was kind enough to give a bicycle each to all employees. During the one hour lunch break they rushed back home on their bicycle, cook lunch, feed the children and returned to work.

Our Delft sewing team started stitching simple things like bedsheets and pillow cases at the beginning. They graduated to stitching overalls and camouflage uniforms soon. I invited my friend, Rev. Father Amalaraj, as Chief Guest, on their first pay day.

I asked the priest what they would do with the money. He had this to say: “If they were Delft boys, they would take the next ferry to Jaffna, spend all their money on drinking and partying, and return home empty-handed. But these girls are different; they will buy food for their families and frugally manage their money. In a few months, you will see them wearing gold necklaces and earrings”.

Since August 2012, the Naval Sewing Centre (North) has been the ONLY employment generating project for the Delft women. Whenever I visit the Centre, I remember Rev. Amalaraj, whose prediction has come true. We installed brand new Juki machines within one year to increase the productivity of the women and help them earn more.

Our internal audits have questioned the economic viability of the Naval Sewing Centre North because of the transport costs. But I consider it a very profitable venture. Its profit, in my opinion, is the economic wellbeing of the women in that part of the country and the happiness of their families. It is the responsibility of the state to look after such people in abject poverty if we are to achieve national integration.

You can visit the Naval Sewing Centre North, at Delft Island, when you visit Jaffna next time.

HOW NINE SIBLINGS WERE STEELED TO BEAR EXCRUCIATING PAIN

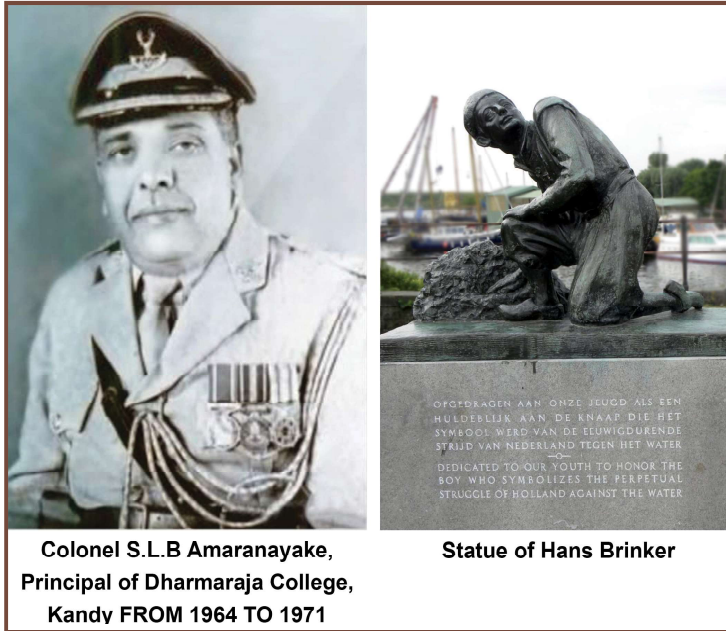


Madduma Bandara as a source of inspiration:

Inspired by my friend Captain Elmo Jayawardena's story in *The Island* about the grave and headstone of late Ehelepola Adigaram in Mauritius, I thought of writing about the late Adigaram's younger son, Sri Lanka's child hero, Madduma Bandara, and how stories about him can be used to inspire the younger generation of Sri Lanka to be brave and patriotic.

Captain Elmo's much-researched book, *The Last Kingdom of Sinhalay*, won the State Literacy Award in 2005. I have read it several times to understand what went wrong with our nation.

When asked by a reporter on 27th October 2015, when he received the highest honour, "Sahitya Ratna", at the State Literary Festival in 2015, he said, "I simply write for the love of it and it gives me a voice to reach the people". Well said Sir!



My story about Madduma Bandara starts with my good friend, fellow Navy Officer and now retired Commodore Nawan Tennakoon. Nawan and I played for the Navy rugby football team, commanded the same type of ships and craft and enjoyed our naval careers. In mid 1980s, the Navy had a rugby team, which sprang quite a few surprises in the 'A Division' rugby tournaments with a number of hard-fought wins. Our team was led by Commander H K Sisira, Sri Lanka Sevens captain and a

proud product of Isipathana Collage, Colombo; he captained both the rugby and cricket at College. The rugby team consisted of brilliant players in the calibre of the late Commander Parakrama Samaraweera (towering figure and former Kingswood rugby captain), Lt NKD Nanayakkara (who was a product of Vidyarthi College, Kandy, and later rose to rank of Rear Admiral), the late S/Lt Anjana Dissanayake (Trinity Lion), S/Lt Gamage (Royal College rugby coloursman, who later rose to rank of Rear Admiral), double International, brilliant place-kicker and full back, the late Petty Officer Bin Galif, Brilliant hooker and former Sri Lanka wrestling captain and the current coach of the Sri Lanka Wrestling team, Petty officer Piyaratne and martial arts expert, Sri Lanka pistol shooter, Master Chief Petty Officer Rodrigo and Sri Lanka prop forward Chief Petty Officer U K Ranjith.

Nawan, a product of Nalanda was our vice captain and played at the pivotal position of scrum half.

This story was narrated by Nawan. His family, with nine children, is unique in that only his elder brother was born alone. All others are twins: Nuwan and his sister, two sisters, sister and brother and two brothers. His father was a top bureaucrat working in Matale.

One day, his sisters brought home a puppy, from the roadside. After a few days, the puppy suddenly died. Vet surgeons suspected puppy had rabies and

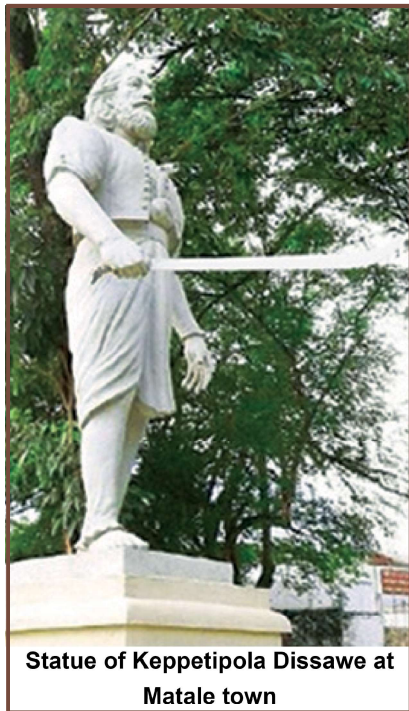
recommended that all the children be given the rabies vaccine.

That was the time when one had to be administered with 21 anti-rabies injections around one's navel. It was a nightmare, given the excruciating pain they caused. Nawan's parents had a hard time, taking the children to hospital, daily, for injections. The third day, Nawan's father took all of them to the Veera Keppetipola statue at the Matale town.

He narrated the story of Brave Keppetiploa Disawe and then told them about Madduma Bandara Ehelapola, who was the nephew of the great man.

Nawan's father told them how Madduma Bandara, who was only nine years old, had walked up to the executioner, on 17th May 1814, and fearlessly asked the latter to sever his head with one strike of the sword while his elder brother was shivering.

From that day, all Tennakoon siblings, inspired by Madduma Bandara's bravery, bore the pain of the injections without crying.



Statue of Keppetipola Dissawe at
Matale town

My batchmate, Rear Admiral Dushyantha Amaranayake's father was a great educationist in Kandy-Colonel Senaviratne Loku Bandara Amaranayake, who became the Principal of Dharmaraja College, Kandy, in 1964. He, himself, an old Rajan, took over from Mr E W Perusinghe. Within seven years, he made Dharmaraja College, Kandy, one of the best schools in Sri Lanka. He retired in 1971. In mid-1960s, as a member of Veera Madduma Bandara Commemoration Committee, he strongly recommended the construction of a statue of this great child hero of Sri Lanka. A well-known sculptor was selected for the task.

The sculptor is said to have asked, "What did Madduma Bandara look like?" Nobody could answer that question. Nothing resembling the child hero was available,

Colonel Amaranayake gave a photograph of his own son, Dushyantha, to the sculptor, saying Weera Madduma Bandara may have looked like that.

Two statues were made by the sculptor; one was erected opposite Sri Dalada Maligawa and other presented to Colonel Amaranayake. This beautiful brass statue is in the possession of Rear Admiral Dushyantha Amaranayake. The statue is kept at his home in Aniwatta, Kandy.

I have heard of another child hero, when I was a Grade One student at Royal College, Colombo, in 1968. Our class teacher, Mrs Samaraweera (who is 83 years old now) was a great story teller. She told us the story of Dutch child hero Hans Brinker, who used his hands to plug a leak in a dyke and saved his country. American author Mary Mapes Dodge, who first published her book in 1865, popularised the story of this little Dutch boy.

Wanting to know more about this story, I told my son, Ravi junior, to surf the Internet for more information. He informed me it was not a true story.

I learn something new from my son! Please check whether his conclusion is correct.

A BRAVE OFFICER WHO LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE COUNTRY



The 24th death anniversary of Lt. Commander (SBS) Samantha Gallage, WWV, RWP and Bar. RSP fell on 20 oct.2020

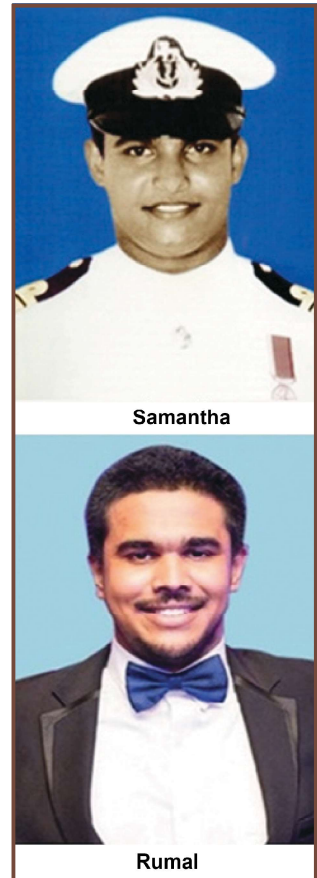
(An extracts from book “Read Between the Lines” By Admiral Ravindra C Wijegunaratne (Retired from Sri Lanka Navy) Former Chief of Defence Staff

Twenty-seven years ago, in Fort Hammenhiel, Karainagar, two officers and 42 sailors, volunteered to undergo a special training to start a new unit in our navy known as the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) or the Naval Commando Unit.

SBS was formed to fight against LTTE Sea Tigers in lagoons and waterways. I was fortunate enough to command this unit and train my men to be the “Bravest of the Brave” in the Navy. I was a young Lieutenant Commander at that time and my Second-in-Command was an officer more than 12 years junior to me. He was Acting Sub Lieutenant Samantha Waruna Gallage, who hailed from Dehiwala. He was an excellent swimmer and a fearless fighter. Samantha was also an excellent boat handler and a top marksman.

We trained together for three months in the Karainagar lagoon with the intention of taking over boat operations in the Jaffna lagoon from our small detachment at Nagadevannturai.

On November 2,1993, our Naval Detachment in Nagadevanthuri and the Pooneryn Army Complex came under heavy attack from the enemy. One by one, small detachments around the main Pooneryn Army Complex fell into the enemy’s hand like a house of cards and more than 700 military personnel were trapped in Poonaryn.



Samantha

Rupal

As there was no possibility to reinforce the besieged Army Complex from the air, Military Commanders decided to send reinforcement troops through an amphibious landing. My unit SBS, the brand-new Naval Special Force was tasked with carrying out the first wave of landing.

Landing at an enemy beach is a suicidal task. If you want to see how it looks like, please watch first half an hour of Steven Spielberg's award-winning film "Saving Private Ryan". It is bloody and chaotic. There is no cover for you until you get to find some by crossing the beach area. Enemy obstacles and gun positions will be there to slow down your advance and there is a 90 percent probability of getting killed or injured during this dangerous crossing.

Orders were issued. Samantha and I were commanding two Inshore Patrol Craft (commonly known as Water Jets) which carried fifteen Commandos each, followed by fiberglass boats carrying six Commandos each. My orders were very clear to Samantha. I told him, that I would land first because I wanted to assess the situation myself.

The Navy Gunboats started bombarding the beach early morning with their 37mm guns, and we were given clearance to do the landing with a lull of heavy gunfire. Our two Water Jets raced towards the Poonaryn beach. Two machine guns of enemy started firing towards us and suddenly Samantha increased the speed of his Water Jet and landed first and neutralized the enemy machine gun position with his grenade launchers.

I was very angry with Samantha. My orders were very clear as I told him that I would be landing first. However, I was very happy that he had destroyed enemy gun positions in quick succession preventing any casualties on our side. The landing was successful and we established the beachhead for our landing craft to beach and reinforcements poured in. Poonaryn landing was a huge success. The SBS was hailed as the "Bravest of the Brave" in the Navy.

After accomplishing our given task successfully, we returned to Karainagar that evening to rest and relax. That night I asked Samantha why he had disobeyed my orders and landed first. He said with tears in his eyes, "Sir, I was afraid that you would be hit by enemy machine gun fire! I did not want you to get killed." I told him that he would have had the same fate. He said, "Sir, I can die. That's not a concern. My father and mother will cry. But, not YOU! You have a wife and a son (my son was one year old at that time). That was Samantha.

You should live Sir! I want to protect you, Sir! (Ironically, I was the only married person in the SBS at that time.)

This was the calibre of officers and men with whom we went to war. We as Commanders were fortunate to have officers like Samantha as our subordinates. They were ready to sacrifice their lives to protect us.

One day, I saw Samantha going through the Navy List, which is a book denoting the seniority and qualifications of naval officers. I asked why he was perusing the Navy List and he said as per the seniority gap between two of us when I became a Rear Admiral, he would still be a Lieutenant Commander. I promised him if I rose to the rank of Rear Admiral one day, I would take him as my Flag Lieutenant [Aide-De-Camp (ADC)]. He was very happy and he had mentioned this even to the SBS senior sailors. We wanted to be together.

In 1995, Samantha got married to Nishika, a young lady officer of the navy who was a teacher at our Naval Pre-school. Samantha took part in another difficult landing operation in Nallatantituduwai with then Commanding officer of SBS, LCdr (SSD) Piyal De Silva (who went on to become the Navy Commander). An enemy RPGs snuffed out the lives of Samantha, Lt (SBS) HKI Nishad and three Sailors. Piyal was lucky; RPGs fired at his boat did not explode. He and his boat crew were very lucky to survive on that day. Samantha made the supreme sacrifice in this SBS and Army Special Forces joint operation at Nalathannithuduvai in Chalai, Jaffna 20th October 1996. His only son, Rumal was only eight months old when he sacrificed his life for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our motherland. He was awarded the Weera Wickrama Vibushanaya for his valour and bravery during this operation. His wife Nishika died in 2011, leaving young Rumal alone in this World.

Today, 24-year-old Rumal is following his higher education in Australia. He misses his parents about whom he is very proud of. Today, the SBS is his family.

Keeping my promise to Samantha, I never took a Flag Lieutenant when I became a Rear Admiral. Even though Samantha was dead, I kept my promise to him. The desk of Flag Lieutenant next to my office were kept empty as an honour to my buddy, the late Lieutenant Commander (SBS) Samantha Waruna Gallage, WWV, RWP and Bar, RSP, who was ready to sacrifice his life for my protection.

May he attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana!

TRIBUTE TO MY GRADE ONE TEACHER



She is no more. She passed away on 28 April 2021 peacefully at home, with her beloved husband, only daughter Kumaree, in-laws, grandchildren and relatives around her. Samitha, her only son, who is an aeronautical Engineer, was working in the UAE. He somehow came for the funeral. Samitha was three years junior to me at College and both of us were President's Scouts in the same Scout troop.

She joined Royal Junior School as a teacher on 11 January 1963 and served there for the next 27 years. When Royal College Teachers' Association was established in 1994, she was given the membership number one, in recognition of her dedicated service to the College. She was 84 years old at the time of her demise.

Our Grade 1B class teacher, Mrs Padma Samaraweera was always close to our hearts. When I wrote about her in one of my articles a few months ago, even though she was bedridden, she was very happy that her students remembered her vividly and even after half a century. She was a great teacher for five-years-olds (in 1968) and was a fantastic storyteller.

When we joined the Royal Junior School in January 1968, she looked after us like a mother. Her love and affection to all 30 of us in class 1B, in 1968, was the same. Within one week, she knew all our names. Our class room, which was decorated with paintings we did on our first day of school, was filled with fun and smiles.



She taught us to dream and work hard to make these dreams a reality.

The second month in school, we planted a tree. Saplings were given to all Grade One classes by our Junior School Principal, Mr Jayawardena and we planted our saplings in a row, two metres apart near the junior school cricket ground terrace. From that day, every morning we watered our trees and monitored their growth. Mrs. Samaraweera encouraged children to bring organic fertilizer. She explained to us that like small children, small saplings too required nutritious food to grow tall and stronger. She explained to us not only planting a tree would suffice, It is equally important to water it and give “good food” for the tree to grow fast. My late grandfather, who was an award-winning planter and paddy cultivator in Matugama, gave me two bags of best carbonic fertilizer he produced in his farm.

The magic worked, our tree was outgrowing all other ‘class trees’ after a few months; it grew taller than Sujeewa Cooray, the tallest boy in our class! Her lesson, not only to plant, but also to look after a tree, was a clear message to all of us during our life time. These 53 year old trees are still standing tall on the Terrace of Royal Junior School cricket ground. Our class 1B tree is the tallest and the strongest!

One day, Mrs Samaraweera said, “Children we are going to Africa tomorrow.” There was a lot of excitement in the class ! When asked, what we should bring? “You come in the usual dress, but bring more food and drinks for the interval”, Mrs Samaraweera explained. So, the next day with a box of “egg, butter and mustard paste” sandwiches and a bottle of “Halib-orange”, we embarked from Katunayaka airport to Nairobi in Kenya on our dream trip to Africa. Mrs Samaraweera explained to us the procedures at the airport and how to board an aircraft, going through Customs and Immigration counters, sit in our allocated seat and to wear the seatbelt.

We saw a lot of animals and birds, unique to Africa. She had all pictures of them. Zebras, Giraffes, Orangutans and Lions. She explained to us all about Africa. We children shared our short eats and drinks at our dream African camp site and landed back in Katunayaka airport in time to go home a few minutes before the school was over.

Our “dream trip to Africa” was a complete success with fun and frolic.

I met my dear friend, Saman Athaudahetti, who was two years senior to me

at College, a few days before Mrs Samaraweera's death and he explained his trip to Africa with Mrs Samaraweera, when he was in her class. He said even today, whenever he boards an aircraft to travel abroad and buckling his seat belt, he remembered Mrs Samaraweera and his trip to Africa with the classmates. That was the impact of her lessons to us.

I can very clearly remember, she had a fall from a CTB double-decker bus on her way to school and had to wear a neck collar for a very long time. We children were very angry with that bus driver because he injured our beloved teacher due to his careless driving. I can remember we all wanted to become Police officers when we grew up to punish these reckless drivers!

When I became the Commander of the Navy, six years ago, the Principal, teachers and students invited me to a felicitation ceremony at my alma mater. I ensured my class one teacher Mrs Padma Samaraweera was present at the ceremony. She was very proud as one of her students reached the pinnacle of his chosen career.

For her, all of us were good boys. We became "naughty boys" for a few days when we happened to fight each other, but she ensured that we would become good boys soon. Among us, there were "cry boys" and "kaka boys" also as per our own assessments. Cry boys are the ones who start crying in the class as soon as their mothers left them in the class room, in the morning.

I am not going to disclose who were the 'cry boys' and 'kaka boys' of class 1B in 1968, as it will be an embarrassment to them, but I will confess myself, I became 'kaka boy' only once!

Now these good boys, naughty boys, 'cry boys' and 'kaka boys' are doctors, engineers, corporate heads, accountants, politicians, professors and top military officers. They all miss our teacher Mrs Padma Samaraweera.

Mrs Samaraweera within the first three months of 1968, 53 years ago, assured that all naughty boys, 'cry boys' and 'kaka boys' would become very good boys and she laid the foundation for moulding them into good citizens of Mother Lanka while they were still in Grade One.

May she attain the Supreme

Bliss of Nirvana!

REMEMBERING A FATHER FIGURE WHO MOULDED US

Fifteen years ago, I was commanding SLNS Saurya, the flagship of the Sri Lanka Navy, stationed at the Colombo Port. I had just returned from India after finishing my tenure as Defence Adviser at our High Commission in New Delhi. Our task was to sail into deep sea towards the equator in search of LTTE arms smuggling ships. We used to patrol for 21 days at a stretch and be in the harbour for 10 days for our much deserved break.

I vividly remember that day-Friday 12th August 2005. We had our Inter Command Volleyball tournament at Welisara, followed by a dinner. Our ships are 'dry' at sea (meaning no liquor is served onboard when out at sea) and this party following the volleyball tournament was a good opportunity for us to relax after a 22-day dry spell.

It was around 9 PM on that day when I received a call from Madura, the Personal Security Officer of then Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. The Minister had promised me that he would visit my ship when I met him last time. My vessel was due to sail to Vishakapatnum Indian Naval Dockyard for medium refit-a US\$ 20 million job arranged free of cost to the Sri Lankan government due to skilled negotiations of our Foreign Minister Kadirgamar! I thought the call was about the minister's visit.

But what I heard from Madura was shocking. He said in a voice choked with emotion: "Sir, Minister was shot. His body is lying in the Colombo Mortuary.

I am going back to his residence with the madam. Please come.”

So, LTTE has ultimately taken their prime target!

I rushed to the Colombo mortuary from Welisara.

On my way, my mind went back to the day that I had met Mr Kadirgamar. I had been selected to the post of Defence Adviser, Sri Lanka High Commission (SLHC), New Delhi, India in November 2001. I was given an appointment to meet the Minister prior to my departure to India 9 AM at his residence. Half an hour was allocated for the meeting. There were also two clerical workers who were going to an Embassy in a Western country also waiting to see the Minister after me. I was surprised to note that the Minister used to meet all our staff (diplomats or the clerical staff) posted to foreign missions prior to their departure. When he saw me in uniform, he asked the others to meet him first, finished their calls fast and sat with me for a long interview. He knew the Navy well; his elder brother had once commanded it. He inquired about my foreign training exposures and advised me on the important appointment I was going to hold for the next three years. His briefing aptly covered the importance of India to us.

Our half-an-hour meeting went on for one and half hours. Minister who was extremely busy but ready to spend time with a newly appointed diplomat to brief him and motivate him before he took up appointment in a foreign country! I was so impressed and determined to do my best in my new post.

When I reached the mortuary, the Minister’s body was lying on the postmortem table. The postmortem was over and the staff at mortuary were preparing the body to be transferred to an undertaker. They allowed me to see the body. His chest had been opened for the postmortem. One gunshot had gone piercing the heart damaging the main arteries. Lying on the table was the heart that had won love and respect of all Sri Lankans, Trinity rugby colours (1948/1949), the captaincy of the college cricket team (1950), Sri Lanka schools record in 110 meters hurdles, Trinity Lion in Athletics (1950), the first Duncan White Challenge cup for Athletics in 1948 and prestigious Ryde Gold Medal for best all round student at Trinity College in 1950.

Achieving glory

In 1950, young Kadirgamar went to the University of Colombo and then to the Peradeniya University to study law and graduated with an LLB (Hons) degree.

He travelled to India in 1951 and 1952 for all-India university games and won 110 metres hurdles title in both years. He passed the Law College exam with a first class and took oaths as an Advocate at Supreme Courts of Ceylon. He then won scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. In 1960, he obtained a BLitt from University of Oxford and became a barrister at Inner Temple in London. He was the second Sri Lankan (after Lalith Athulathmudali) to become the President of Oxford Union.

Kadirgamar was working abroad as a reputed international lawyer until President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga invited him to serve this country. She made him a National List Member of Parliament and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I consider it a privileged to have served under such an eminent Foreign Minister. He very well understood the importance of India in our foreign policy. He had so many friends there. We who served at SLHC, New Delhi, as junior diplomats always benefited from Mr Kadirgamar's visits to New Delhi. Ministers Natwar Singh, Jaswant Singh, Yashwant Sinha, Pranab Mukherjee or Ministers Mani Shankar Iyar or Kapil Sibal were our Minister's close friends. He always introduced us, the young diplomats, to those eminent Indian leaders.

The usually calm SLHC would become a hive of activity when our Deputy High Commissioner, Chinnaiah announced, "The Minister is coming next week". All important briefs and reports were prepared and updated. The Minister had the habit of listening to us and getting our views. My friend Saj U Mendis, who was a First Secretary at that time, would continue his brief until the Minister said, "I got your point Saj". He stayed with our High Commissioner, Mangala Moonasinghe at the latter's official residence. Mr and Mrs Munasinghe looked after the Minister and his wife with love and affection. When he stayed in a hotel, I was responsible for looking after his security. He was a prime target of the LTTE. The Indian government was aware of it and provided him with maximum security.

Minister Kadirgamar was a great orator. He would come to New Delhi, taking the Srilankan flight that left Colombo in the afternoon. He used to rest for four hours in the flight and have a light dinner prior to landing at New Delhi around 7 PM. Then, he went straight to the hotel and prepared his speech to be delivered the following day. With his trusted lieutenant and personal assistant Lenagala (Lena) on his side, he would work till late in the night. When his wife accompanied him, she would ask him to go to bed. We would take over the

hotel business centre and convert it into our Secretariat temporarily during the ministerial visit.

Once after Minister Kadirgamar's speech, The Hindu editor and Ranji trophy cricketer, N Ram, who is the Minister's personal friend, had this to write in an editorial: "When Lakshman speaks India listens." The minister's speeches were brilliant; he understood India well and Indian leaders respected him. He was a dear friend of India, and Sri Lanka gained tremendously from that friendship.

Among impromptu speeches the Minister has delivered, the one he made in London in September 2004 when he met the Sri Lankan cricketers during a dinner reception stands out. He highlighted the difference between National cricketers and our politicians in his speech replete with wit.

(It is available at <https://www.cricketmachan.com/cricstories/witty-speech-late-lakshman-kadirgamar-2004/>)

While working under Minister Kadirgamar, I learnt three important things about India:

No protocol for friends: the Minister's best friend was Pranab Mukherjee, very senior Politician from the Congress party. He was the Minister of Defence in 2004. He became India's Finance Minister, External Affairs Minister and later the President of India. During one of the visits by Minister Kadirgamar to New Delhi in 2004, a meeting was scheduled at the meeting room of the hotel where the Minister was staying (Taj Palace Hotel) with Pranab Mukherjee, the Minister of Defence of India. Our Minister informed me to tell him when Mukherjee was leaving his office. When I did so, Minister Kadirgamar came down in the lift from 5th floor and received Mukherjee at the entrance to the hotel. Then they went to the meeting room together. After the meeting also Minister Kadirgamar walked up to the car of the Indian Minister. Later, when I told him that as per protocol he had to receive Mukherjee at the meeting room, he said: "Pranab Mukherjee is my friend. There is no protocol for friends!"

In a democratic country, do not forget the Opposition: When our Minister visited New Delhi, he made it a point to meet government leaders such as the PM, Minister of External Affairs, Defence Minister, etc., and thereafter the Opposition leaders.

One day, I asked him why? He said "Ravi, do not forget, India is a

democracy. In a democracy, one day the Opposition will come into power. It may be weeks, months or years. But when they come to power, they will remember you.” How true! It was a BJP-led government that was in power then. When we defeated the LTTE in 2009, India had a Congress-led government.

Indian monsoon is very important to Sri Lanka: Minister Kadirgamar would call and inquire about the monsoon in India. He would ask whether rain was heavy or mild and whether sufficient water had been received in agricultural areas or not. One day, I asked him why he was so keen about Indian monsoons. He said, “Ravi, the Indian economy depends on the monsoon. When they get enough water, they will have a good crop of rice, wheat and vegetables. So, the government does not have to give grants to farmers and will have money to help neighbouring countries like us”. Brilliant thinking!

We miss the great Minister who groomed us. The diplomats recruited during Minister Kadirgamar’s tenure are now holding high positions as Ambassadors and High Commissioners today, due to excellent training they received from him. He wanted us to observe, learn and perform well for the country.

One day, Minister Kadirgamar was rushing to the President’s House with a junior diplomat at the time (I think its Chanaka Talpahewa) to meet President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. They were scheduled to meet the Russian Foreign Minister. Suddenly, the Minister stopped, looked at Chanaka carefully, walked up to him and adjusted his tie knot, saying, “Now you look better.” That was how the great man groomed the junior diplomats.

He was a wonderful person-a father figure. We miss him.

RE-FORESTING IN NORTH AND DE-FORESTING IN SOUTH



My former Personal Security Officer (PSO), Commander Chatura Gamage, RSP and five Bars, from the elite Sri Lanka Navy Special Boat Squadron, who has an MSc in GIS and Remote Sensing from the Peradeniya University, gave me a call. He was delighted. ” Sir, it’s working! I can see our Jaffna islands growing in size! I will get you the Google pictures soon.”

I was very happy. A small project we started in 2011 in Northern islands, Karainagar, Eluvativu, Analativu, Nayanativu (Nagadeepa), Punkudativu, Kyts and Mandativu is giving rich dividends after 10 years.

In 2011, we saw the mangroves on the Jaffna islands being destroyed by some persons. They were driven by a desire to make money. As there was a shortage of firewood, especially for bakeries on the Jaffna main land, the mangroves were cut for firewood. Mangrove wood is ideal for bakeries as it is hard. Those days (2011) we observed heavy loads of dry mangrove wood being transported on bicycles via causeways.

With the support of the police, the Sri Lanka Navy (in charge of security on the Northern islands) put an end to this illegal practice. Now, the mangroves are growing freely and lavishly, increasing the size of the islands and protecting the shell fish breeding grounds. You may be aware that crabs, shrimps and prawns lay their eggs in mangrove areas so that they will be safe from the big fish and other predators.

My deputy in Northern Naval Area in 2011, when I was Commander Northern Naval Area, Admiral Piyal De Silva (former Navy Commander and now

our Ambassador to Afghanistan), came up with a unique plan to grow mangroves. We started the project near the Karainagar causeway. A few hundred of mangrove saplings were planted as per instructions given by the experts on the subject. Within three months, the project became a failure. I told Piyal to try again. He did but we failed again. Only six out of hundred saplings survived.

Following a careful study, Piyal when he was the Northern Commander in 2017, figured out what had gone wrong and found a solution. Due to flooding and ebbing water of the lagoon every six hours, the roots of the newly planted mangrove saplings were disturbed. This will not allow saplings to grow in muddy waters. The solution was to plant four-foot sticks in the mud and tie the saplings to them to make them stable. This method worked, and now Karainagar lagoon has more than 600 fully grown mangrove plants.

One of the people who were extremely happy about our successful project was Chinnama, an elderly woman who harvest crabs in the lagoon to eke out a living. Those days when we were young officers, we used to buy fresh prawns and crabs from her during weekends. This seafood goes well with Thal palm toddy. A crab exporter to Singapore buys her catch at the rate of only Rs. 120 a kilo! But she is happy.

Re-planted mangroves and Chinnama's catch were improving. She has become a tireless campaigner for protecting mangroves in the Karainagar lagoon.

The Navy has done something good for the people inhabiting the Northern Islands. They now protect their mangroves from illegal felling. As Chatura observed from a satellite image, the northern islands are growing in size!

In South ...

In my book, *Read between the lines*, I have written in page 42, :When you reach Kumbukkan Oya, you will realise why this river is called 'Kubukkan Oya'. All you see around are Kumbuk trees, hundreds, if not, thousands of them, on either side of the river. It is a beautiful sight that you will never forget. Thank God ! It's away from the human gaze; otherwise, all these trees would disappear soon and the timber will be used to construct the floors of wealthy mansions!

I have realised that nature's worst enemies are the wealthy humans."

That was in December 2018. I do not know whether my predictions were

correct or not. But I saw a huge Kubukkan tree, may be more than 300 years old uprooted by strong winds, miraculously saving “Kuda Kabillitha “Murugan temple, being cut into pieces on the Eastern banks of Kubukkan Oya when I did “Pada Yathra last year (2020). Who is doing this in most protected jungle of our country.

It's time to learn from the North !

PS : please read my articles dated 26th May 2020 (Sri Lanka expects every man to perform his duty) and 30th July 2020 (Pada Yathra with a difference) in The Island e- paper archives for more details).

SRI LANKA: NAVY AND CUSTOMS

Let our experts on maritime law and Customs Ordinance take the lead to fill our government coffer as they did from small naval department in Talaimannar few scores of years ago

As you know both Navy and custom officers wear white uniforms. The relationship between two old services also unique. When we caught contraband smuggled by sea routes, we handover to Customs for public auctions. We get a part of this income to government revenue as “ Catch money” or official appreciation to our good work. So, our relationship with Customs is unique.



Sri Lanka Navy Diving team with HNS Perera

Sometimes in bigger raids on intelligence/ information received by Customs, we help Custom officers happily as we know our names also included in “ Catch money list”. most of the Senior Custom officers has sweet memories of their first posting at Talaimannar. Even though defunct today, Talaimannar was a busy landing point in Sri Lanka when India-Sri Lanka railway connection was there through ferry named “ Ramnujam” . Mostly the young Custom officers, specially new Cadets as their first appointment comes to serve in Talaimannar obviously due difficulty due rough living conditions in this remote posting. However I yet to meet an Customs officer who complained about harsh conditions. They all had happy and enjoyable posting at Talaimannar, which was very good for them when they rose up in ranks. You should love your job from very young age.

My reading in to Talaimannar was the chapter on Naval Detachment Talaimannar by “Kalakeerthi “ Carl Muller, award winning writer and poet, our own (he was in the Royal Ceylon and Sri Lanka Navy for very long time - serving in our Communications branch) in his hilarious episodes in his book on Navy life, “Spit and Polish.”

By the time we joined the Navy in 1980, Naval Detachment was withdrawn from Talaimannar, Ramnujam ferry has stopped coming and SL Customs also locked their properties and moved to Colombo. Obviously, as Indo-Sri Lanka ferry is not working, no point to have Customs officers stationed there.

On 19th March 1985, when I was serving as OIC of Naval Detachment Nagadeepa, I received a message to report to CO of our main base SLNS Elara, in Karinar. I was a young Sub Lieutenant. What I have done wrong ? As far as I knew the Chief Incumbent of Nagadeepa Purana Raja Maha Viharaya, Most Rev Rajakeeya Panditha Brhammanawatte Dhammaketti Tissa there gave a very high recommendation on my dedication to duty few days back. But why this sudden call on ?

When I met CO Elara, he explained, “ Ravi, as you have established Nagadeepa detachment so well, I can run it with some other Officer. Further, I can always visit there in short time. I want give you a bigger task. “



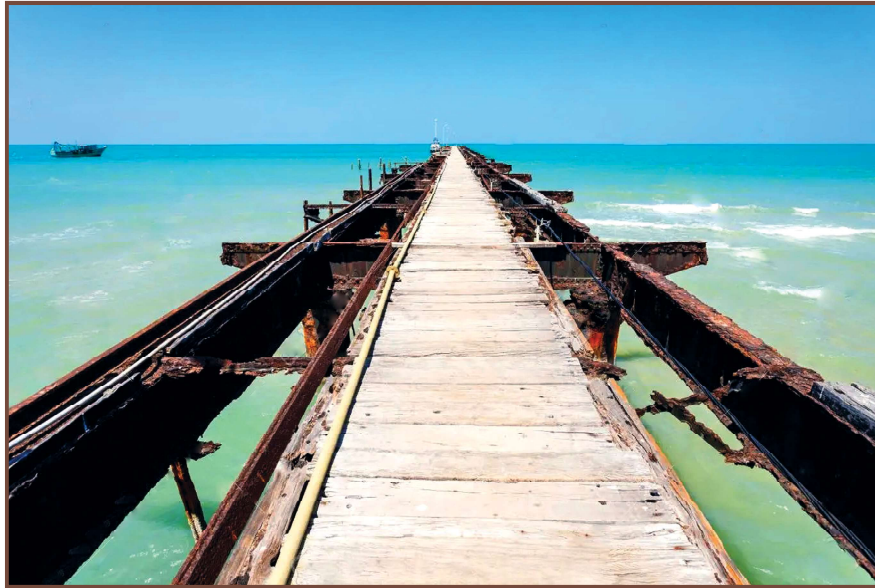
Sea Chart of Talaimannar

“ Navy Headquarters want us to start a detachment in Talaimannar on request of Army. It’s a different area, much different living conditions. I want you to be the OIC of this new Naval Detachment in Talaimannar. Army will provide you food and other supplies. I will give you sixteen sailors and one senior sailor. Gunboat of Lt Commander S G Weerasinghe is ready to take you to Talaimannar.”

That’s how Navy re established at Talaimannar!

Thanks to Army I was provided with two brand new boats fitted with two 40 HP outboard motors. I shifted to Custom housing Complex Talaimannar Customs Headquarters in Colombo has been very kind and handed over their properties on temporary loan. We got five fully furnished houses of Customs and one very big house by the side of beach owned by Immigration Department (where earlier immigration officers housed) as my office/ Chalet cum Gymnasium. What a luxury ! Happily settled down, we started our work. Anticipating next Rugby Football season and intention of playing a full season for the Navy team without any injuries, my fitness regime started with Long Beach runs in the early mornings and weight training at my personal gym in the evenings. Fresh fish, shell fish and dry fish plenty with Army ration, we dined well. Time to time on Sundays had two glasses of Thal toddy. Wild boar in plenty. My point 22 gun had enough work during weekends. Army personnel were surprised to know I hunt Wild boar with point 22 caliber (.22 of inch caliber) gun. No sound - it’s a technique where to aim and shot down fully grown wild boar with single shot. Thanks my guru for your training.

At nights we laid our ambushes at sand banks, discreetly reaching in our boats like fishermen and awaited for boats loaded with smuggling goods to pass by. Within no time, our stores were filled with Indian sarees, sarongs, cloths bundles, zips (which used for trousers - packed in thousands) smuggled from India and video decks, TVs , electronic goods, lux soap and sunlight soap (packed in thousands) smuggled to India. The more sleepless nights you spent in sand banks of Talaimannar/ Danuskodi area, more you caught smugglers and punish them under Sri Lankan law with support of SL Customs. The smuggling goods, boats, outboard engines were confiscated and sold in public auction in Colombo by Customs.



Depleted Talaimannar pier - once bustling trading post of India-Sri Lanka

Catch money? Yes, our Customs had been very efficient in getting us the catch money we were entitled as per Customs Ordinance, added into our monthly pay. I thanked my CO SLNS Elara profusely for sending me to such an enjoyable and well-paid job of catching smugglers.

Smugglers also became smart to find out what we were up to and to avoid us, but I had my informants well planted, to whom I used to pay lavishly from my share of catch money. Please do not ask me the amount I received, because you may feel jealous. I can assure its lot of money at that time. As OIC of Naval Detachment Talaimannar during this eventful 15 months of my junior Naval career, I became very rich. However money was not that important for us during those young ages, it was the self satisfaction and pride in catching the wrongdoers which make us very happy. Anyway, being only person employed among our classmates in 1985, I spent lavishly when we met during leave periods and during Rugby season. It is irony that this small detachment which Navy restarted in 1985, became a Commissioned Naval base(SLNS Themmena) in 1996. I was fortunate enough to Command it in 1997/8 as a Commander and today it's Headquarters of North Central Naval Command, Commanded by a senior officer of rank of Rear Admiral. I firmly believe in SBS motto " Fortune favor our Brave".



Indian PM Hon. Narendra Modi opened new Railway station, Talaimannar in 2015



Godawaya stone inscriptions-probably the oldest Customs document in the World



Godawaya granite bench

Do you know probably the first Customs Ordinance in the World established by Sri Lankan King ? The Godawaya inscriptions by King Gajabahu (114 to 136 AD) stated at Stone tablet inscriptions in Ancient Godawaya harbour (closer to Hambantota near the mouth of Walawe River) ordering that all dues from ships to be given to Godawaya temple as donations to maintain this temple. This ancient harbour functioned from 2nd Century AD to 12th Century AD on ancient maritime silk route. The replica of this historical stone tablet is available in beautifully built new SL Customs Museum in their Headquarters, Colombo.

In 2008, when I was the Commander Southern Naval Area, Sri Lanka Navy with intention to helping newly formed Maritime Archeology unit of Archeological department, loaned one of Navy's most qualified diving officer, Lt Commander (then) H N S Perera, US



Godawaya ancient clay pots

(Florida) and China trained ship salvage diving officer and who has done a tenure at Royal Malaysian Diving School as an diving and salvage instructor, to Maritime Archeology unit in Galle. One of their missions was to find a wreck of very old (Anuradhapura period) ship at seas two miles off Godawaya ancient port, at depth of 100 feet. They used SCUBA diving sets, which carry normal air. It is always advisable to use Helium- Oxygen mixture diving sets as 90 meters (where four atmospheric pressure) is the maximum depth a SCUBA set can used.

HNS with two civilian Marine Archeologists went in a civilian fishing boat to do the dive at probable place of the ancient shipwreck on 21st October 2008 afternoon. Boat anchored at location and they started diving without a lifeline from boat and surface supervisor, who is supposed to hold the boat end of life line. Our competent divers able to reach the wreck for the first time. It was a invaluable finding for our Nation's Maritime Archeology!



Commodore (SSD) HNS Perera

They found ancient pot and when they surfaced after proper decompression stops in various depths to avoid "Bends" , the boat was missing.

The untrained civilian boat operator has drifted away due to rough sea and he has not dropped his anchor and he could not locate the surfaced divers!

HNS took command over two other divers, they ditched their diving equipments and start floating on their inflated emergency life vests.

The emergency SOS was sent to all. We deployed all available boats, Navy and civilian for search and rescue of three divers. Air Force also being informed and bell 212 helicopter from Rathmalana took off.

Luckily we were able to detect HNS and two other divers few minutes before Sunset and to brought them to safely ashore. They brought this priceless artifact (clay pot), which they did not ditch with their diving equipments, knowing the historical value of this pot, to research into unknown area of our Nation's early Maritime history. Later we found after carbon dating (C- 14 dating test) that it is belongs to 2 nd Century AD period.

HNS was very lucky. We would have lost him out at sea with other two that day. When ever we meet, he always mentioned this incident and thank me for prompt SOS operation that day. So, our Customs has long history and being on

ancient silk route and later international shipping network hub, earned major portion of our State income.

It is sad to see today we argue about shipping laws and compensations from ship wrecks on electronic media. Some who appear in these programs do not know what they talk about.

We are a maritime nation. Our forefathers came to Sri Lanka from India by sea. Prince Vijaya's arrival by sea was our start, but now we act like completely aliens to sea.



Nagapoosan Amman Hindu Temple , Nayanativu Island , Jaffna

Our King Parakramabahu 1, (1123 to 1186 AD) wrote in stone tablet how ships become wrecks should pay dues to ancient port Urattuturi (port of Kytes) as per the cargo they carry (elephants, horses or general cargo). This ancient stone tablet now kept at Nayanativu Naga Poosan Amman Koviil Museum. Not now, thousands years ago we had laws and King's orders how to obtain compensation to government coffer from wrecked ships closer to our harbors. History teaches us, but we should be prepared to learn from the history.

Let our experts on maritime law and Customs Ordinance take the lead to fill our government coffer as they did from small naval department in Talaimannar few scores of years ago. Let every single cent tickle down to government coffer which is almost empty now. As per Annual Performance Report of Sri Lanka Customs 2018 (available in open sources) former SL Customs Director General , Mrs PSM Charles said in her message, " During the year under review, (2018) SL Customs able to secure tax revenue of Rs 919.05 billion. This is 53.7% of total tax revenue of the government.

I am failing in my duty if I do not mentioned Ravi junior for his diligent research work in to Historical details.

Well done! Bravo Zulu to SL Customs !

SRI LANKA: ISLANDERS ARE FOOTBALLERS

Suku have gave something to these humble children to dream about! Most of the young children must have dreamed that night - One day to play for Sri Lanka Football team!

*‘Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.’ - **Mother Teresa***

My previous article on Naval Sewing Centre (North) at Delft Island got tremendous response. Therefore I decided to tell you about another small project Navy have initiated in Northern Islands for children when I was the Commander Northern Naval Area in 2012, but really gained momentum when I was Commander of the Navy. When I became the 20th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy on 12th July 2015, other than my family members the most happiest group was “Royal College class of 80”, that is my class/Grade mates in 1980 Advance Level class.



Two teams from islands ready for match. Suku as referee

We decided to embark on tour to Jaffna to celebrate. I had one plan in my mind for betterment of the children in Islands, mainly for boys. On my courtesy call to His Lordship Jaffna Catholic Bishop, Rt Rev Dr Bernard Gnanapragasam few weeks after becoming Navy Commander, his Lordship emphasized on curbing drugs problem in Jaffna and explained to me how youth were dragged in to this menace. As we all aware, best thing to get youth away from drugs is to introduce them into sports activities. The Commander Northern Naval Area at that time, Admiral Piyal De Silva, after his usual research told me Football (Soccer) is the most prefer sport in Jaffna. Selection of Football, which is not costly (you require football and two goal posts) and very physically demanding sport was a

good choice to start my dream project. Our target area was children in islands whom does not have proper sports facilities.

Retired Lieutenant S. Sukumaran, who was a superb footballer produced by the Navy and who was my physical training instructor when I was a Cadet in 1980 was an ideal coach and roped to this project. He agreed to do the job with small allowance paid by our Navy Sports Fund. Lt Sukumaran is very fit, even though he was in late 50s and his ethnicity (Tamil) was an added advantage when communicating with children of Northern islands in Tamil language.

Sukumaran (Suku) selected five islands for his coaching programme. In each island he mustered male children's force. Age group we were looking at was 12 years to 17 years. Children in islands were delighted. They are going to play football. That is also under a proper Navy coach.

These humble fishermen's Children, who were looked down by their own community leaders going to play football. The children asked what they should bring for training? Suku said, come in short and t-shirt and carry a water bottle. That's all? Yes! If you have sports shoes please wear them. If you do not have shoes, no issue. We will give them if you come for practices regularly.

Then Suku in his crisp Tamil explained at every island (five islands were selected- Punkudativu, Karinagar, Eluvativu, Analativu and Delft) children how he started playing football at Anuradhapura long time ago as seven year old child without shoes and how he was selected for Sri Lanka junior national team, how he joined the Navy to continue play football, the support given by the Navy and how he played for Sri Lanka Navy for number of years and how he missed the opportunity to represent National Football team.

Suku have gave something to these humble children to dream about! Most of the young children must have dreamed that night - One day to play for Sri Lanka Football team ! Suku is a very well qualified and an experienced PTI , who has trained me when I was a Cadet. He was part of our PTI team led by late Master Chief Petty Officer PPR De Silva. Suku was given all required equipments from Navy Sports fund , the balls, cones, mini goal posts. Young junior PTI also appointed as his Assistant. Suku started practice with simple drills on dribbling the ball and passing. He wants physical strength of young children slowly to built up to required standard.

I used to call Suku to ask progress on his project time to time.

One thing was worry Suku. That is the nutrition requirements for these boys, which has hampered their growth and built up of stamina drastically. Suku has found some children turning up for practices after school empty stomach, because nothing to eat at home for lunch! Others ate Pittu and soodai curry as lunch. Few eat or afford to eat rice.

When I explained this to Commander Northern Naval Area, Commanding officers of large Naval bases in North came to my rescue. They agreed to give each child a ration pack consists of one kg each of dhal, peas, green peas, sugar, two kg of rice and one packet milk powder from the rations they receive weekly. Cost of each pack was around Rs 1200/=. This weekly victuals package had a huge impact. Our Command medical officer arranged free supply of vitamins.

Parents, specially mothers of these children were very keen on sending their children for football practices, because the ration pack they bring home weekly was a huge relief not only to the child, but to whole family.

Suku had his hands full. He visited five islands once a week. Other than to Karainagar and Punkudativu, he has to take a ferry or small boat to reach there in time (3.30PM) to be conduct practice sharp at 4PM. Punctuality was very important for Suku. Practices continued till Sunset. Then a pep talk with children about their problems. By the time Suku return to Naval Base KKS, where his accommodation is provided, its well passed 8PM. He did this routine for five days a week.

His commitment was unbelievable. He used to say he is doing something worthwhile now rather than wasting his retirement life. Suku says the children in remote islands wait near jetty until his arrival. When boat reach the jetty, they come running to help Suku and his assistant with carrying balls and other equipments. Small children start dancing on the jetty. They were so happy to see their Football coach. Suku knew how to boost the moral of children. I knew his efficient method of inspiring trainees. That is why he was an excellent PT instructor who trained number of Cadet batches in our Naval and Maritime Academy, Trincomalee when he was in service.

Impact on these humble children due to Football program, both on their physical fitness and character building was tremendous. They loved the game. They loved their equipments given for training and protect them well. They were more united. They start to love their country.

Suku teach them to respect the referee when game is played during practices. Suku explained them “Referee is always correct! Every player should respect him.” Further explain “ his decision should be respected. It’s like your parents or teachers decision. Some time they give wrong decisions, but we do not argue. We respect that decision. Same here”. Suku thought them to respect each other. Football is a team game. “Your team has good and weak players. You should protect the weak and play as a team”. Suku thought them the most important thing in any sport. Respect the players of opposite team. Shake hand with them at the end of the game. Play the game hard as per the rules.

Suku singlehandedly ran the program very successfully. Some Saturdays interIsland football matches were organized by respective Commanding officers/ Officer in charge of the islands. Whole island come to stand still on that afternoon. Parents, relatives and friends of these children were at the grounds to cheer. Grounds were not very good. More corals and sand than grass in these grounds. It’s amazing how these children play there barefooted.



Meeting His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Justin Gnanapragasam, Bishop of Jaffna at Kachchtivu. In background His Lordship Rt Rev Kingsley Wickramasinghe, Bishop of Galle

Complimentary boat services arranged by Navy for small crowd go and see the match. It’s a small Carnival in very humble way for these islanders. The remote island Eluvativu football team became Champions most of the times. It was a complete surprise to other islands which has better living standards. We gave something to these downtrodden children of islands. Hope, discipline and physical fitness. Thanks Suku for your great work!

My classmates visited North on holiday in 2016. Knowing my small program, they want to contribute. They donated football boots and bags to these children.

We played two match at KKS. First, two teams from islands consists of children.

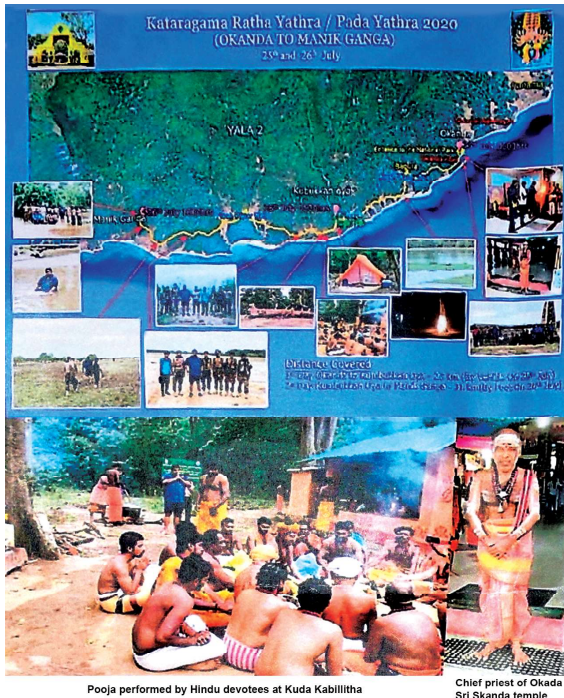
Then champion team of islands verses our “Class of 80” team. On Suku’s instructions, our game restricted to 20 minutes. Suku mummurs me that he do not want any of us getting a heart attack! I think very wise decision by him.

All former Royal College Rugby players, athletes and other sportsmen from class of 80 were huffing and puffing after ten minutes. No way we can keep phase with these young children. They were very good in their Basics of the game thanks to Suku. Their passes and placements were correct and they played as a team. All fun for our ladies and children to see how we, class of 80 were struggling and blaming each other for missed scoring opportunities. Most of us felt that day we are getting old!

Class of 80 again visited North last year, just before I retired as Chief of Defence Staff. Now the children who stared this program in 2016 has grown up. They are strong and discipline. Some are already employed. But Suku said they all gathered at football ground in the evening to play and keep fit.

We were able to keep drugs away from these precious children of islands. I felt that I did something small to request of His Lordship. Again boots and bags were donated by class of 80 during their last visit. PG Nimalasiri, our own “Marty” sponsored bags from PG Martin leather products. All others members of class of 80 contributed handsomely to buy T-shirts, shorts and boots.

Unfortunately, the program is discontinued during last five months due to Corona virus pandemic. When health officials give green light, Our Suku will be back to bring joy and happiness to children of these remote islands.



Pooja performed by Hindu devotees at Kuda Kabillitha

Chief priest of Okada Sri Skanda temple

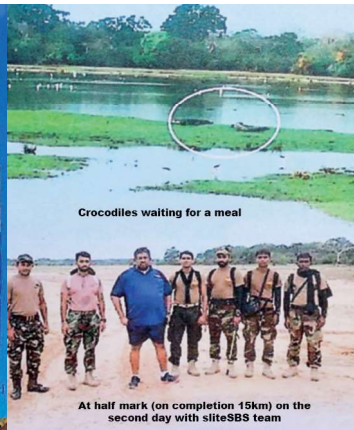
This year's Pada Yathra to kataragama was stopped when it reached Mankulam due to Corona virus pandemic. Devotees were turned away by the police. Further, the gatherings of devotees in kataragama during the festive season were also not allowed. The kataragama Esala perahara took place without the participation of devotees.

The Special Boats Squadron (SBS) has block approval to operate inside the Yala National Park for training. I joined them to cross Kumana and Yala 2 to reach the Manik Ganga. I was determined to hold the Pada Yathra. The Navy Commander was kind enough to give me a few SBS Officers and men for the mission. My former personal security Officers (PSOs) when I was the CD-Lieutenant Commander Lilith Karunarathne and Lieutenant Commander Teranga Gamhewa-were detailed to look after me Inside the jungle by CO SBS. Captain Daminda and Director Naval Operations Commodore priyantha perera.

The trek through the jungle was the least of my problems, given what I had to tackle on the domestic front. I had to overcome immense pressure from my wife, Yamuna, who persistently asked me not to venture into the jungle. She warned me that I was now a retired person and had to give up such arduous expeditions. She also warned that age was catching up with me. I told her in no uncertain terms that I was young at heart. And she was besides herself with rage.

Then there were my younger brother, my sister-in-law and my twin nephews-Abhishek and Avishka-whose 12th birthday fell on 25th July. I am their hero, and I was going to miss the Birthday bash. "Do you really want to do it this time, machan?" they asked (They call me Machen!) Only my dear son Ravi junior remained diplomatically noncommittal-as always. I asked him to look after his mother while I was away.

Nothing was going to stop me from conducting the Pada Yathra. I was determined to walk 55 Km through the Kumana / Yala jungles in two days from Okada to the banks of the Manik Ganga. I am a firm believer in God Murugan or God Kataragama.



At half mark (on completion 15km) on the second day with sliteSBS team

There was another problem at the kumana National Park entrance. The wildlife warden at Kumana National Park refused to give permission for us to walk through the Kumana National park up to Kuda kabillitha (small temple of God Kataragama) on the banks of Kubukkan Oya unless we travelled in vehicles.

So, the first leg of our Pada Yathra became a Ratha Yathra. We were determined to allow nothing to stand in our way.

It never rains but it pours ! Torrential rains had left all villus in Yala 2 (between Kubukkan Oya and Manik River) brimful. It is extremely dangerous to cross them as they are infested with hungry crocodiles waiting for prey. I did not want to end up being their lunch or dinner.

Our SBS team led by Lieutenant Commander Pushperkumara in Hambantota volunteered to commence their journey from Yala 1 side in a tractor to give us updates and guide us. These SBS teams know the terrain well: they operate deep inside Yala in search of cannabis plantations, which they are tasked with destroying. Needless to say these well - trained. brave men are experts in jungle navigation and jungle warfare.

Heavy rains are unusual in that part of the country in July. It usually rains in mid August. Mostly after August Full Moon Poya day. (This year Esala Full Moon Poya is on 3 August). This enables Pada Yathra pilgrims to cross a number of villus in Yala 2 easily as they are dry and without Crocodiles. Why have the rains come early. This year? Is it that rain gods are angry at the cancellation of the annual Pada Yathra? Except during the conflict the

yearly *Pada Yathra* was not performed only once way back during the British rule in 1921. That was also due to and epidemic which killed hundreds of people in kataragama.

We had a pooja at the God Sri Murugan temple at Okada early on 25th July early in the Morning. The Chief Priest wished us a safe journey. I was happy to see people drinking clean drinking water now thanks to the RO (Reverse Osmosis water purification) plant established in 2017. when I was the Commander of the Navy. A large number of Hindu devotees flock to this shrine during July. but this year they had to turn back because the *Pada Yathra* was cancelled. They were very sad.

I was very upset as this time because we were not allowed to walk during the first leg of our pilgrimage. But rules are rules. Everyone has to obey them. So, the distance from the Kumana National Park entrance to Kuda Kabilitha took only two hours! If we had walked. It would have taken at least five hours to complete 22Km-approximately 23,500 steps.

Why was I on the *Pada Yathra*, this time ? It did not seek anything for me from God Kataragama. The Navy went through a vary bad period due to the corona virus pandemic .About 960 Sailors rested positive for COVID 19, but, thankfully there were no fatalities. I wanted to thank God Kataragama for the recovery of all our sailors and their family members. I also invoked divine blessings on my nephews. Whose birthday fell on that day.

The Navy is now under a new Command. I beseeched God Kataragama to bless the new Navy Commander and his family. I spent almost my entire audit life-39 out of 58 years in the Navy So, the Navy is my life and family.

Our camp site for the night only 25 July was near the Kuda kabilitha God kataragama temple. It is a very small temple. The area is usually full of people during the Kataragama season. As per the Navy's count last year 27,700 devotees took part in *Pada Yathra*. They included men, women, Children and even newborns. Almost all of them are from the North and East. All travelled through this rugged and dangerous terrain to receive the blessings of God Skanda or God Murugan. This Year the place was empty. What about other good camp sites of Eda Kubukka 1 and 2 ? They are booked by the Colombo elite, Who came in expensive SUVs and party at night. It is wrong to allow the rich to travel inside the park in vehicles while humble devotees are banned from conducting *Pada Yathra*. Maybe the rich have a set of different health guidelines.

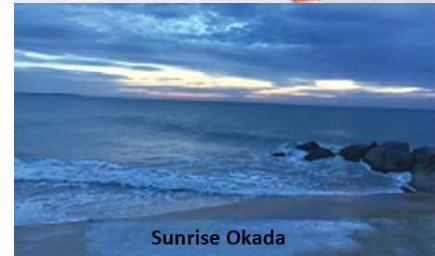


The writer with his team on completion of Pada Yathra on the Banks of Manik Ganga

A Pada Yathra with a difference



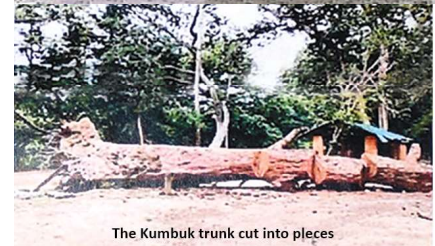
Receiving blessings prior to the commencement of Pada Yathra at Okada



Sunrise Okada



The writer's tent at the Kuda Kabilitha campsite



The Kumbuk trunk cut into pieces



Commencement of Pada Yathra from the Kumana National Park gate. Our team



On completion of Pada Yathra: yours truly taking a dip in the Manik Ganga

GREAT FRIEND ACROSS PALK STRAIT



Bipin Rawat visiting Sri Lanka on May 14, 2018 as Chief of Army Staff, India

General Bipin Rawat

My mobile rang around noon on 08 December. It was former Army Commander General Mahesh Senanayake from Dubai, “Sir did you hear the news? General and madam no more. Helicopter crash!” Mahesh knew my close relationship with General Rawat. We took a one-year National Defence College course (NDC) at New Delhi in 2010.

I turned on NDTV. They were reporting the tragic helicopter crash, near Ooty, a few kilometres from the Indian Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington, in the Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu, in detail. India’s first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, ADC (the senior most serving military officer of India), his wife Madhulika Rawat and eleven others, most of them the General’s personal staff, all died on site, except one, who later succumbed to his injuries.

Sixty Indian Army brigadiers took the course with me. I sat next to him in the auditorium listening to eminent Indian scholars, retired top military commanders, diplomats and businessmen. Our friendships extended to our families when my family was invited to dinner at his place. Madhulika was friendly as well as graceful.

The descendant of an erstwhile affluent family, Madhulika Raje Singh was the daughter of Kunwar Mrigendra Singh, an Indian National Congress member of the local assembly. She was educated in Gwalior and graduated in Psychology from Delhi University. She married Bipin in 1985 and had two daughters, Kritika and Tarini.

Before he was appointed India's first CDS, he was the Army Chief for three years. In May 2018 he visited Sri Lanka as India's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), on invitation of then Army Commander General Mahesh Senanayake. I was the CDS of Sri Lanka at the time. He made only one request from Mahesh—he be allowed to reserve the last night of his visit for me. As agreed, I hosted him at my official residence. He and Madhulika were so happy and relaxed. The Navy band played beautiful old Hindi songs, having rehearsed earlier, under the guidance of my wife Yamuna. It was a lovely evening with delicious food, drinks, great company and melodious old Hindi songs. At the end the General wanted to thank all the members of the SLN band personally.

When the time came for them to leave my residence, he wanted to see my dog, Rexy, his friend from New Delhi. All present that day were surprised! He could remember the name of the dog he had met eight years before in New Delhi. So sharp was his mind.

Bipin was born on 16 March, 1958 in the Pauri town of Pauri Garhwal District (present day Uttarakhand State). His family served in the Indian Army for several generations. His father, Luxman Sing Rawat, from 11 Gorkha rifles, retired as Deputy Chief of Army Staff of Indian Army in 1988, rose to the rank of Lieutenant General. His mother was the daughter of Kishan Singh Parmar, ex-member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Uttarkashi.

All the pomp and pageantry was nothing new to him as his father was the Deputy Chief of the Indian Army. He was the recipient of the 'Sword of Honour' from the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun. He was a true follower of the Chetwode Motto, written in gilded letters at the IMA hall of fame, "The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next. Your own ease, comfort and safety come last, always and every time." Dear General Sir, you lived up to it throughout your life. You are a role model for all juniors.



Madhulika Rawat and Yamuna Wijegunaratne

Madhulika Rawat and Bipin Rawat with my dog Rexy

Following his visit to Sri Lanka, he arranged for Sri Lankan military personnel to visit Bodh Gaya every year, with their spouses. He ensured that Indian Air Force's largest transport aircraft, C-17 Globemaster, was available for this pilgrimage every year. As Buddhists we appreciate this gesture with the highest respect.

His last gift to me, through Vice Admiral Anil Kumar Chawla, former Flag Officer Commanding at the Indian Navy's Southern Naval Command, last month was a beautiful white marble Buddha statue. It is placed prominently in our shrine room. When my wife Yamuna and I see this statue every day, we remember General Bipin and Madhulika. Om Shanthi!

I decided to attend the funeral of my dear friend and his wife. Media announced that the funeral was fixed for 11 Dec. at the Brar Square crematorium in Delhi Army Cantonment.

The Chief of Defence Staff and Army Commander General Shavendra Silva also took the same flight to New Delhi as I to attend the funeral. It was an appreciable gesture by the Sri Lankan military, at this hour of grief of India. Our CDS sat next to Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the parade.

The remains of General Bipin and Madhulika laid side by side in a single gun carriage, left their official residence at K. Kamraj Marg for Brar Square crematorium. Eight hundred Indian Army, Navy and Air Force personnel took part in the parade, with tri-forces bands taking the lead.

I saw something I had never seen in my four year and eight month stay in New Delhi (three years as Defence Adviser and eight months and one year taking

the NDC course). Thousands of people carrying tricolour Indian flags and photos of General Bipin and Madhulika followed the funeral parade amid chants of 'Jab tak suraj chand rahega, Rawat ji ka naam rahega' and 'Indian Army Zindabad', while others stood by the roadside showering the passing convoy with flower petals. The General was very popular with the public as a tough military leader who protected his country with vision and wisdom.

The two daughters of General Bipin and Madhulika conducted the last rites. A 17-gun salute, befitting a senior most Indian Military officer who died in uniform, pierced the air. The fire of the funeral pyre mixed their souls with the thick New Delhi winter air. The next morning their ashes were taken to Haridwar (door to heaven) and immersed in the Great River Ganga by their children. We salute you General, dear friend of Sri Lanka.

A TRIBUTE TO GRAY DOLPHIN OF INDIAN NAVY



Late Vice Admiral Srikant, AVSM

I was watching NDTV news on my cable TV recently. One news item shocked and saddened me beyond measure. It said Vice Admiral Srikant, of the Indian Navy, had died of COVID-19 complications at the Delhi Army Cantonment base hospital.

Srikant was a dear friend of mine. An outstanding Officer from his batch at the National Defence Academy, Kurukshetra, Pune, India, he joined the Indian Navy Submarine Arm more than 38 years ago. He was due to retire on 31st Dec 2020, on reaching the age of 60.

He and I underwent a one-and-a-half month-long Senior Executive Course at Near East Asia Centre (NEA Centre) at the National Defence University,

Washington DC.

The then Captain Srikant and another Indian diplomat were the students from India. We stayed in the Holiday Inn hotel, next to the Pentagon. Our rooms were large and had kitchenettes.

I was delighted. I had an opportunity to put my cooking skills to good use with groceries brought from a nearby supermarket: I invited my Indian friends to share wine and food. Mano was with his charming wife Thila, who sadly passed away four months ago. Srikant joined us in the evening. He brought a bottle of wine.

The following week, Srikant invited us to his room. My cooking was nowhere near Srikant's. He had all Indian masala powders his wife had sent for preparing delicious Indian dishes.

Our friendship grew stronger thereafter. He was a much-respected Submarine Commander, who spent most of his naval life in cramped submarines with limited fresh water supplies and basic food supply. He was living with his crew and patrolling the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal and protecting his country from seaborne enemies. His dedication, commitment, hard work and patriotism was an example to all his juniors in the Indian Navy. Ultimately, he reached the most respected position among Submariners of the Indian Navy, the "Grey Dolphin", the most senior Submariner of the Indian Navy.

His jet -black hair and mustache had also turned grey by that time. He was a mentor and role model to his junior submariners.

His achievements in commanding surface ships were also exceptional. His work in 2009/10 as Commanding Officer INS Delhi, indigenously built Guided Missile Destroyer at "Indian counter-piracy task group" off the coast of Somalia; his contribution to keeping pirates at bay was highly appreciated by the maritime fraternity. Srikant served in one of the most difficult positions in the Indian Navy with an excellent record, the Naval Adviser at Indian High Commission in Islamabad, Pakistan.

When I met him last year, for the last time before his untimely demise, he was the Commandant of the National Defence College, New Delhi, the highest Military training institute in India, which offers MPhil (Defence and Strategic Studies) degree for senior Indian Military officers, Indian Diplomats, Indian civil services officers and senior officers of friendly foreign countries. Sri Lanka has two officers in each one-year-long course and Vice Admiral Srikant has groomed them to be better senior administrators. His dedication and commitment are worthy of emulation by his students.

Srikant was a top Golfer of the Indian Navy. I am thankful to him for inspiring me to teach my son this beautiful game at the Indian Army Golf Club at Delhi cantonment under a highly qualified coach at a very young age who always very happy of my son's golfing achievements.

He wholeheartedly supported us when we set up our own National Defence

College in Sri Lanka, which is going to be a reality soon at the beautifully renovated mansion, Mumtaz Mahal at Colombo-3, the former official residence of the Parliament Speaker. We are going to miss him as a guest lecturer to our National Defence College.

We lost a great friend to the Sri Lankan Military and dear friend to me personally.

The Indian Defence Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh tweeted “Deeply pained at the untimely and sudden demise of DG Seabird, Vice Admiral Srikant. “The MoD and the Indian Navy will always remember his stellar contributions and remarkable service to the nation. ” My deepest condolences to his bereaved family and friends. Om Shanti!”

Former Indian Defence Minister and now the Finance Minister of India Shrimathi Nirmala Sitharaman tweeted “Sad to know that the Director General of Project Seabird Vice Admiral Srikant has passed away. Earlier, as Inspector General Nuclear Safety and Commandant of NDC, he set high bench marks in service. @indiannavy has lost a fine officer. Condolences to his family and friends.”

extend our condolences to his beloved wife, Sudha, and only daughter, Shraddha.

140 YEARS OF CADETTING AT ROYAL



A long time ago, on 01 April 1881, Royal College (then known as the Colombo Academy) in Mutwal, Principal Mr John B Cull started a School Cadet Platoon. The idea was to train students on drill so that they would be more disciplined. Mr Cull believed such students would become responsible and disciplined men when they grew up. He received unstinted support from the then British Lieutenant Governor and Commanding Officer of Ceylon Light Infantry (CLI) (Volunteers), which started in the same year and consisted of British Officers and largely Burghers as soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel John Scot Armitage was the first commander of CLI (V).

Cadetting was introduced to other schools also, which included S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia, Trinity and Kingswood, Kandy.

When World War 1 started in 1914 in Europe, volunteers were called from Cadets and Cadet masters. 330 volunteers from above mentioned four schools were ready to sacrifice their lives for King George V and for the British Empire. Our cadet group from these four schools consisted of 186 Burghers, 95 British/Europeans, 41 Sinhalese, five Tamils, two Malays and one Colombo Chetty. About 105 of them were killed in action.

The book, "Volunteers from Ceylon – who served in British Forces during World War 1 (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945)" has recently been compiled by Group Captain (Retired) Kumar Kirinde, yet another Royalist; the project was supported by Brigadier Hiran Halangode (Retired), Wing Commander (Dr) Narme Wickramasinghe (Retired), Major Anton Edma (Retired), Chief Petty Officer Quintus Andradi (Retired) and Mr Sidath Abeywickrama. The book

contains information about the school cadets who volunteered to serve in the British Army. Most of them were recruited as officer cadre as they were fluent in English. The Royal College contingent was the largest (88). Out of them, five were killed in action, 13 wounded in action and three taken as prisoners of war by the Germans. The first Ceylonese to pay the supreme Sacrifice was young Royalist W E Speldewine, who drowned when French Troop Carrier “SS Villa De-La Ciotat” was torpedoed by a German Navy Submarine on 24 December 1915 in the Mediterranean Sea.

Today, more than 120 schools have Cadet platoons attached to Battalions, determined as per administrative districts. The Royal College Cadet platoon has been attached to the Third Battalion. The District Judge Badulla, Mr Herman Loos in 1917, presented a beautiful trophy to be awarded to Best Cadet platoon in Sri Lanka in an annual competition.

Competing with 120 schools and to win this prestigious trophy was the ultimate aim of every cadet platoon in Sri Lanka. Similarly, some Cadets achieved personal glory by becoming the Company Quartermaster Sergeant, Company Sergeant Major (CSM), Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant (RQSM) or (Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of the Third Battalion, the higher positions in their respective battalions.



Herman Loos Champions Sgt Janak Weerakoddy 1984, L/Sgt CHSK Piyaratne 1970, Sgt NDU Mahamoor 1980, Sgt S Kulatunga 1988



Admiral Basil Gunasekara with Admiral Ravi Wijegunaratne, Admiral Thisara Samarasinghe and Rear Admiral Nandana Jayaratne (Chief of Staff of Navy and ex-Royal College cadet)

However, during the last 105 years, (from 1917), the Royal College Cadet platoon has been able to win the Herman Loos trophy only a few times. That was in 1963, under Sergeant Manik Jayakumar, in 1970 under late Sergeant M R Moosa, in 1980 under Sergeant Naeem U D Mahamoor and in the Centenary year of Sri Lanka Cadetting, in 1981 under Sergeant Pradeep Edirisinghe.

Yours truly was the senior Corporal of 1980 Herman Loos winning platoon!

In 1982, 1984, 1985 and 1988 the Royal College Cadet platoon won the Herman Loos trophy, but not in the recent past. In 1966, Sgt Jayakumar's brother Sgt Panithakumar was adjudged 'Best Commander Cup Squad Drill' commanding in Sinhala. Great achievement for a Tamil boy!

A large number of ex-cadets from Royal College joined the Ceylon /Sri Lanka Armed Forces. General Jagath Jayasooriya, General Krishantha De Silva and the writer reached the highest positions, the Chiefs of Defence Staff.

Three IGPs, corporate tycoons (like Ken Balendra), politicians (both Sir John Kotalawala and President J R Jayewardene were College Cadet Sergeants; ex- Minister Malik Samarawickrama was the Regiment Quartermaster Sergeant – RQMS of third Battalion), senior police officers (of the calibre of Senior DIG M R Lathiff, former Commandant Special Task Force), doctors (such as Dr LAW Sirisena, famous Gynaecologist, Captain of Royal College Rowing team and Cadet CSM in 1963), engineers, diplomats, bureaucrats and successful businessmen were Royal College cadets

The 140th year celebrations were held at a Hotel in Mount Lavinia last month organised by old Royalists Cadet Association, headed by Admiral Thisara Samarasinghe, former Navy Commander and RSM of Third Battalion in 1973. The chief guest was the oldest Royal Cadet living, Admiral Deshamanya Basil Gunasekara, former Navy Commander (1973 to 1979), who is 93-years-old and Corporal of 1947 Royal College cadet platoon.

It was a marvellous gathering of former Royal College cadets. It's always nice to see senior citizens of our nation interacting with the young generation of Royal College Cadets.

We missed one person-present Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne, who was on an official visit to Russia. He was a legend in Royal College Cadetting. Member of two Herman Loos-winning platoons. He rose to the

rank of RSM of Third Battalion, but prefers to say he was RQMS.

The story is that in 1985, he was appointed new RSM of the Third Battalion and received the appointment letter from the Royal College Principal. When he reached home with this good news, another of good news was awaiting at home – to say he had been selected as a cadet officer to the Sri Lanka Navy and for him to report to Navy Headquarters the following day for enlistment and training.

He returned to the College and stepped down from his post as RSM of the Third Battalion.

I am sure that during the past 140 years Royal College Cadet Contingent has lived up to Mr Cull's expectations.

“Long live Royal College cadetting “

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF PAKISTAN NAVY WAR COLLEGE: REMINISCENCES OF A GREAT INSTITUTION



The Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore, celebrated its 50th anniversary, last month. The Pakistan Navy War course conducted by this prestigious College is ten months long and includes a number of industrial visits, military exercises and a foreign tour. Approximately 70 students, majority of them from the Pakistan Navy and two each from the Pakistan Army and Air Force attend the course besides 10 officers from friendly countries. I followed the 24th course in 1995/96. The College was then located in Karachi and known as 'Pakistan Navy Staff College'.

Foreign officers and their families were provided with accommodation. I was there with my family. My son was only three-years-old and he started attending Kindergarten while I was following the course.

Pakistan military personnel are very fond of their Sri Lankan counterparts. They always help us. Thanks to a generous stipend from Sri Lanka, we lived very comfortably in Karachi and I had the opportunity to take part in Inter-Staff College sports activities.

Out of the distinguished foreign alumni of the War College, eight officers commanded their navies during the last 50 years-Major General Rowland Leslie Makandu of Tanzania Navy in 1989, Staff Brigadier Khaflan Al Room UAE Navy in 1996, Major General Said Shusan Omary Tanzania Navy in 2006, Staff Major General M Al Muhammad Ahmed UAE Navy in 2005, First Admiral Dato Seri

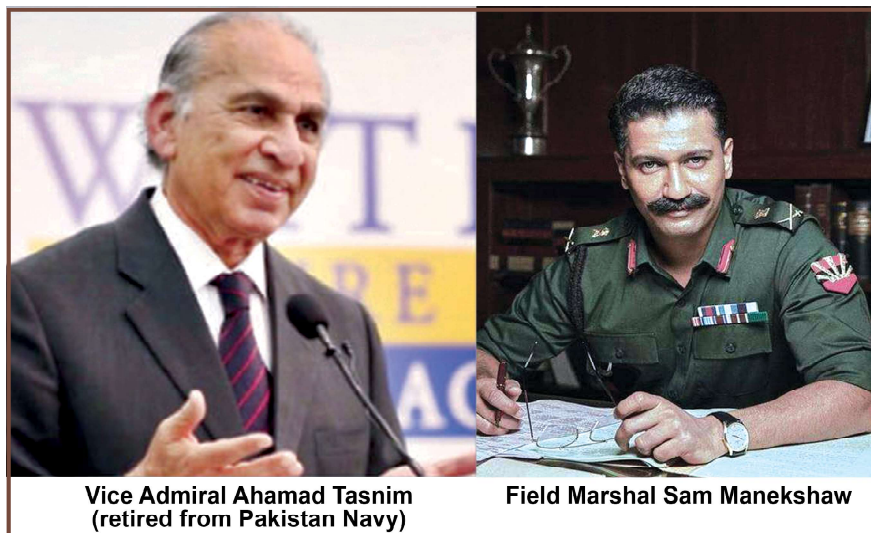
Pahlawan Haji Othman Bin Hj Suhaili Royal Brunei Navy in 2005, Rear Admiral Houssain Khamzadi Islamic Republic of Iran Navy in 2007 and Colonel Hishan Kharkiv Aljarrah Royal Jordanian in Navy 2013. I became the Commander of the Navy of Sri Lanka in 2015. I am the only foreign alumnus to become a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of the Armed Forces. Further, I am the only recipient of the highest medal awarded by Pakistan-Nishan-e-Imtiyaz (Military) medal (Order of Excellence) from the Pakistan President at a special investiture Ceremony in February 2019 in Islamabad.

I was invited to the celebrations as a guest of the Pakistan Navy Chief.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations commenced with the alumni dinner. The Chief Guest was Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi, the Chief of Naval Staff, Pakistan. He has been the Commandant of PN War College.

Seated next to me was a tall, very smart elderly gentleman who introduced him self as “Vice Admiral Tasnim retired from the Pakistan Navy”. During our brief conversation at dinner, he mentioned that he was 86 years old and he had undergone his basic naval training at Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC), Dartmouth, UK with “Midshipman Asoka De Silva” in 1950! I immediately recognised his class.

Old Royalist rugby player Asoka de Silva represented Navy Rugby team as full back. He has commanded ships and craft and served in high positions in Trincomalee, Jaffna and Naval Headquarters. When he was Chief of Staff of our Navy, he encouraged me to join them.



Vice Admiral Ahmad Tasnim
(retired from Pakistan Navy)

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

Admiral Asoka de Silva was the 9th Navy Commander of Sri Lanka from 1983 to 1986. His son, Sajith, was one year senior to me at Royal, and we both were keen scouts. Vice Admiral Tasnim said he had been in PN Staff College serving as Directing Staff member (instructor) and later became the Commandant.

That night with the intention of finding more details about this veteran Pakistan Naval officer, I consulted Google Guru. I keyed in “Vice Admiral Tasnim of Pakistan Navy”. What a surprise!

He and his crew became heroes in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. He Commanded Pakistan Navy Submarine PNS Hangor and patrolled the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan lost the war and the new nation, Bangladesh, was born.

Exactly 50 years ago, in 1971, Indian Army led by General (later Field Marshal) Sam Manekshaw, (fondly known as “Sam Bahadur” to his troops-Sam the fearless) walked into the then East Pakistan to stop refugee influx into India from her Eastern borders. Indian action in this 13-day war (from 3 to 16th Dec 1971) made Pakistan surrender and withdrew all its troops from East Pakistan.

Indian troops were supported by freedom fighters of Bangladesh, Mukthi Bahini. More than 93,000 Pakistan troops surrendered to the Indian Army.

The fight for creating Bangladesh was led by Mukthi Bahini leader Shiek Mujibar Rahaman.

However, naval action was somewhat different. Indian Admirals towed three missile boats by bigger war ships and targeted the Karachi port and fuel tanks there; the port was in flames for many days.

However, the action of Pakistan Navy Submarine PNS Hangor (S- 131) (nickname Shark) led to the sinking of Indian Navy ASW Frigate on 9 Dec 1971 off the Gujarat coast. It was the first time following the World War II, a submarine was able to sink a warship!

The then Lt. Commander Ahamad Tasnim was the submarine Commander. It is very difficult for surface ships to detect submarines. Main sensor on surface-and-air warfare does not work underwater as electro-magnetic waves (radar) do

not travel through water. Electro-magnetic waves move at the speed of light in air. Therefore, we use sound waves, which, however, have a very limited range.

The speed of sound moving through water depends on three factors- pressure (which increases with depth), temperature and salinity. The greater the pressure, the higher the speed. The same is true of temperature and salinity. So, detecting a submarine by using equipment called SONAR is a very difficult task. There are two types of SONARs- active and passive. Active SONARs are the ones that transmit sound waves and enable us to listen to the echo of the target. Passive SONARs are just hydrophones that help us listen to under water sounds. (The present-day Bangladesh Navy Chief (Admiral Sheen Iqbal) and I were Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) specialists, following the same course in 1989/90 at ASW school, Cochin, India.)



INS Khukri and late Captain Mullar, MVC

During the 1971 war, on 09 December Pakistan Submarine PNS Hangor targeted two Indian Frigates, INS Khukri and INS Kirpan . INS Khukri was sunk with two torpedoes whereas INS Kirpan survived the attack. The Captain of the sinking Indian Ship Khukri, Captain Mahendra Nath Mullar decided to go down with the ship following the tradition of seafarers. He was awarded with second highest gallantry medal of India, Maha Vir Chakra (MVC) posthumously. INS Khukri is the only ship Indian Navy has lost in battle to date. Eighteen officers and 176 sailors of Indian Navy died in this attack. Only 64 survived.

There is so much to learn from sea battles. The Sri Lanka Navy also should also build up a small submarine unit as Bangladesh and Myanmar have done.

NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE OF SRI LANKA



I was invited to deliver a lecture at the Diners Club of the National Defence College (NDC), the highest Defence learning establishment of Sri Lanka, by its Commandant, Major General Amal Karunasekara, highly decorated officer from the Sri Lanka Light Infantry. Our inaugural NDC course started on 14 November, 2021, and 14 senior officers from the Army, seven from the Navy, six from the Air Force and four from the Police took part in the one-year-long course.

I was very happy about the invitation, as the Chief of Defence Staff, in 2017 to 2019, I was involved in securing this mansion, known as 'Mumtaz Mahal,' Colombo 03 the former official residence of the Speaker of Parliament, from 1948 to 2000, until a new official residence for the Speaker was built, close to the Parliament. From year 2000, this mansion, located on a land extending up to the Marine Drive, from the Galle Road, had been neglected, and when the Defence Ministry acquired it for establishing the NDC, it was badly in need of repairs. Further, the once beautiful garden had been used as a junk yard of the Presidential Secretariat, which owns the property.

It was great an achievement by the Defence Secretary and the CDS, at that time (2016), to secure this invaluable property, in the heart of Colombo's residential area, especially when all three services were losing their prime land, in Colombo, and moving out of Colombo, to Akuregoda, including their Headquarters.

The task of repairing the building, and to bring it back to the previous glory, was vested upon the Navy Civil Engineering Department and they did a wonderful job, in spite of the work getting delayed, due to lack of funds. The Air Force took the responsibility of landscaping.

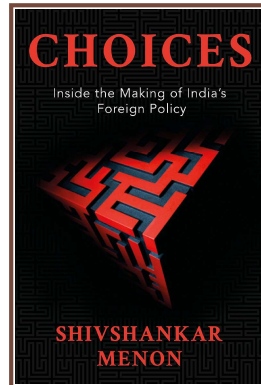
'Mumtaz Mahal' was built by Mr Mohomad Hussain, well known businessman, in 1928. He commissioned well known architect, at that time, Homi Billimoria, who designed the Colombo Town Hall. This was an Italian design house where Count de Mauny was commissioned to the design garden and furniture.

On a suggestion made by Hubert Sri Nissanka, QC (a founding member of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party), a close friend of Mr Hussain, the mansion was named, under the name of his youngest daughter Mumtaz. History says the overseas business of Mr Hussain was badly affected, during the Great Depression, and he hired the mansion to the French government, in 1943, and the French Consul occupied it till the start of the Second World War. During War, the mansion was sold to the government and, in 1943, the Governor General of Ceylon at that time, Vice Admiral Godfrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief, occupied it as his residence, fearing that the Japanese may bomb the Governor General House, in Fort.

During interactions with our new President, at Security Council meetings, when he was PM and I was CDS, he mentioned some of these historical details ,and the War Cabinet, during World War Two, under Vice Admiral Layton, has met in this Mansion, in the room which is the present day auditorium.

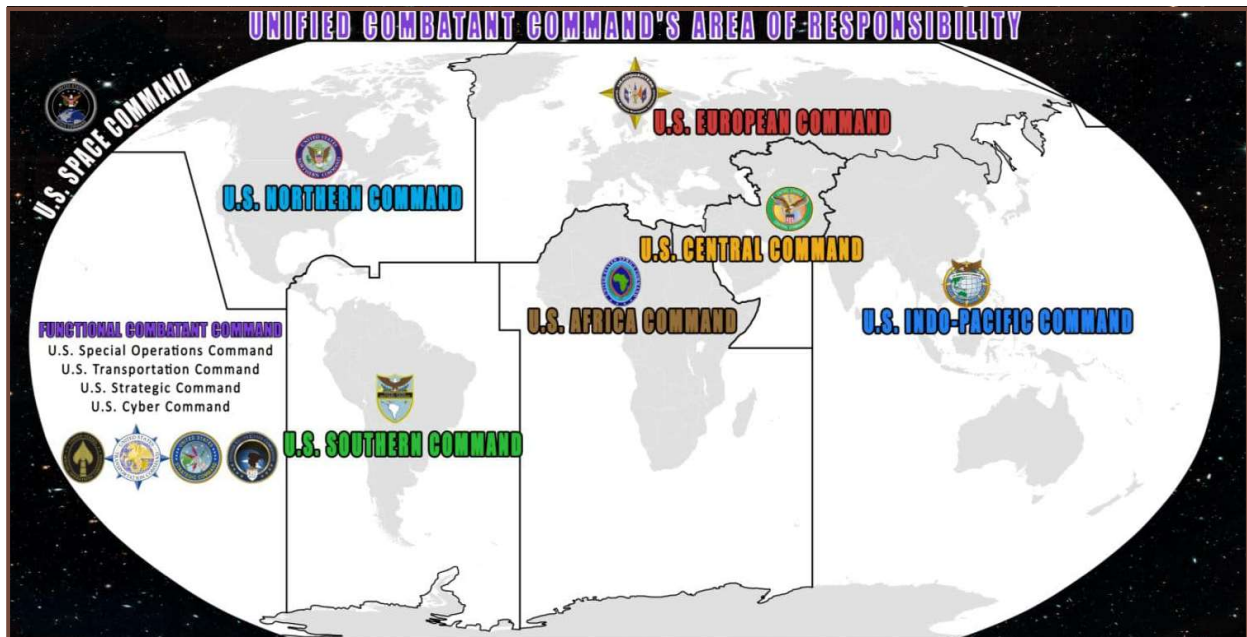
My lecture heading was **Sri Lanka and Indo-Pacific Maritime Strategies** and extracts from the lecture are given below.

The former U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander, Admiral Harry Harris, delivering his keynote speech at the Galle Dialogue 2016, attributed Sri Lanka's strategic importance to the US on three factors; "Location, location and location".



book cover by Shivshankar Menon

These words by Admiral Harris amply highlight the geopolitical importance of Sri Lanka in the Indo-Pacific region and in the global context. Former Indian National Security Adviser (NSA) and Foreign Secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon, in his book Choices, described Sri Lanka as a permanent aircraft carrier for India, in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Though this claim could politically be contentious, it transpires a geopolitical reality of the region. It is no secret that other global powers, like China and Russia, also look at Sri Lanka through a similar geopolitical lens. On the other hand, this island nation is also located amidst major sea routes in the world; just a few miles South of the Dondra head lighthouse, over 120 ships pass daily, carrying goods upon which the health of global markets depend.



US Commands

In this context, it is essential for Sri Lanka to hold a pragmatic policy on strategic defence diplomacy engagements with regional and global superpowers while ensuring its sovereignty and integrity is preserved all the while respecting the national foreign policy stance of remaining non-aligned and neutral. Thus, defence diplomacy should be a considerable concern of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. What is Defence Diplomacy? It refers to the pursuit of foreign policy objectives through the peaceful deployment of defence resources and capabilities

In the post-Cold War period, western defence establishments, led by the UK, created a new international security arrangement, focused on defence diplomacy. Although it originated many centuries, before the world wars, defence diplomacy is now used successfully by both the global West and the developing South to further national strategic and security interests.

The work of defence diplomacy is not limited to 'track-one diplomacy' (official government-led diplomacy) engagements such as defence / military attaches/ advisors at diplomatic missions abroad. Engagements, such as personnel exchanges, bilateral meetings, staff talks, training, exercises (air, land and naval), regional defence forums and ships / aircraft visits are also key in fostering track-II diplomatic engagements to bolster defence diplomacy.

Some experts note these extended engagements can be considered one of the best strategies in regional and global conflict prevention, since these interactions would enhance understanding, while diluting misconceptions between nation states.

Sri Lanka's position at the centre of the Indian Ocean makes it an important maritime hub. The island nation's deepwater harbours, relatively peaceful environment and the democratic governing system, have been the main attractions for many countries with strategic interests in the Indian Ocean.

Empty oil tankers sail from the East to the West to replenish, while the products from Japan, China and South Korea sail to Europe, the Gulf and Indian markets, through the major maritime routes across which Sri Lanka falls, thrusting this island nation into the heart of the global economy. But the importance of the location is not limited to economic gains; the strategic significance of Sri Lanka's ports, due to their access to some of the key regions of the world, has garnered the attention of the world.

The popular belief is that China may soon become the most powerful global superpower. But I argue otherwise mainly due to four main factors.

=USA is still the global economic giant; its GDP still exceeds that of China by a marked difference

=The USA still dominates in terms of global military strength ranking – China comes in third

=The USA is the only country that has actively engaged in strategic areas of the six regions in the world, with its Army, Navy, Airforce and Marines deployed in all these six regions. No other country has that capability of already deployed combating forces.

=The US Navy has 11 aircraft carriers for its power projection out of the world's 43 active aircraft carriers, but China has only two in active service while a third is being manufactured. Therefore, China has a long way to go to become a global superpower even mainly from the defence perspective.

But, one could easily argue on the fact that China is also fast aspiring to become a global superpower through a different strategy. Its overseas investments, mainly on constructions of harbors and ports as well as also ship/submarine building programs are impressive new tactics in achieving maritime prowess mainly in the southern hemisphere of the globe. Being a heavy dependant on energy supply from the Gulf to keep its economy afloat, China has two strategies in dominating the Indian Ocean, which has now become its lifeline.

The first is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September 2013 while speaking to the Indonesian Parliament. The BRI has now become China's ambitious foreign policy objective for the 21st century. It's a vision encompasses over 60 countries with a combined population of over four billion people throughout Asia, Central Asia, Indian Ocean Littoral and Europe. Sri Lanka is a major stakeholder in this BRI initiative.

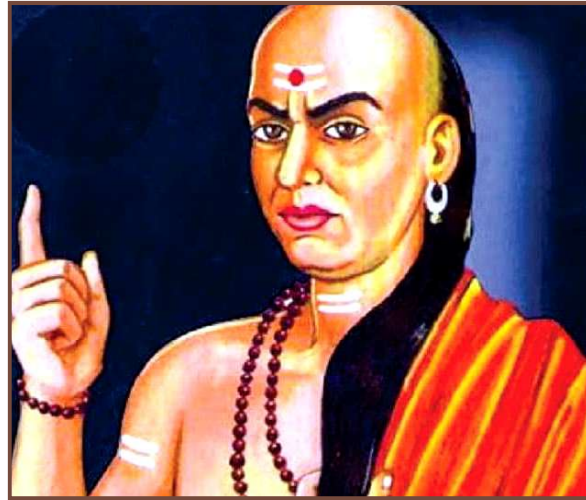
China's second strategy is not announced by China but remains a geographical hypothesis projected by the US and other western researchers in 2004 – the 'String of Pearls'. The term refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial maritime facilities (harbors and ports) along its sea lines of communication, which extends from mainland China to the port of Sudan in the Horn of Africa. The US and Indian strategists claim that the Colombo and Hambantota harbours where Chinese presence and investments are highly visible are major parts of this strategy. Of course, China denies this hypothesis

and claims that those engagements are mere investments through bilateral arrangements and insists they have nothing to do with its military interests. Nevertheless, we noticed a concerning narrative even in Sri Lanka with regard to the Chinese military presence at Hambantota port during its initial stage which was vehemently denied by both governments of Sri Lanka and China.

In this context, one can notice several defence and maritime alliances are emerging in a bid to contain China, mainly due to its aforesaid two-pronged developments. One such regional collaborative defence response is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) – a strategic dialogue between the United States, India, Japan and Australia. The leaders of these four nations met for the first time in Washington DC in September 2021. Among these four players, Australia has adopted a much more aggressive posture, a few weeks ago in signing the AUKUS (Australia, UK and US) pact, which allows Australia to develop nuclear submarines. Though it is not publicly announced, it is clear this move is to operate in the Indian Ocean against the Chinese presence. However, this AUKUS deal did not go well due to objections from many traditional allies like France and NATO.

On the other hand, the US, Japan and India have separate collective Indo-Pacific strategies to respond to China. , outlines a strategic plan for the country's defence interests and has awarded a special place to Sri Lanka. Accordingly, a Defence Adviser to the Australian High Commission in Colombo was appointed three years ago. It shows that our Defence diplomacy with Australia is also becoming a higher priority in our bilateral diplomatic agenda.

In this context, balancing the existing supremacy of the US and the emerging powers such as China mainly through defence diplomacy has become one of the most important aspects of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. We may learn from Singapore, which presently serves as a logistics hub for all US Navy ships. Providing logistic support to warship visits is also a very lucrative business. It is noteworthy to mention the fact that security and stability of a country is extremely important for foreign warship visits.



Kautaliya

Another concerning factor is the influence by our neighbor India, which does not want Sri Lanka to become a playground for its rival superpowers. Furthermore, Colombo harbour is an extremely important venue to India where 60 percent of its containerized cargo transshipments are handled. Last week, we showed the World that even the largest container-carrying ship in the world can enter and load/unload at Colombo harbour, showing promise and capacity as one of the most important ports in the world.

The most important aim of India's foreign policy is to become a permanent member at the UN Security Council. Indian Foreign policy is said to be influenced by the teachings of Kautilya's Arthashastra – a statecraft treatise written by the ancient Indian philosopher and royal advisor to Emperor Chandraguptha Maurya in the 4th Century BCE.

Under whatever circumstances, Sri Lanka should be cautious to ensure that its actions do not jeopardize the security interests of India. The closest neighbor is the most important player even in our domestic lives and that argument is even greatly applicable in a country's foreign policy formation. Next door neighbor is the fastest respondent when you are in danger or in crisis than allies thousand kilometers away and recent incidents such as the Xpress Pearl disaster have taught us that. Therefore, it may be a lesson well-remembered by Sri Lanka in deploying its foreign policy and defense diplomacy strategies in the age of the Indo-Pacific.

“WILL SHE, OR WON’T SHE”

A story that immediately caught my eye, as it has been written by a member of the “Senior Force” (Navy), about a giant sea-turtle affectionately known as Mrs. Willy.

It is a most nostalgic tale, also about the Sri Lankan Naval Base in Trincomalee, surrounded by the largest natural harbour in the World, sparkling blue water under what seemed like perpetual sunny skies. “Trinco” , as I remember it, when I served in the Royal Ceylon Navy for almost nine years, was a beautiful little Town on the east coast of the Island, and although I was never “drafted” there, for any length of time, I did go there, on occasion, and what I remember most, is the fact that on visiting the beaches there, one could then walk out into the Indian Ocean to a distance of many hundreds of metres before having to actually swim out any further, if one so wished.

Mrs.Willy was not sighted there in my era. She could possibly have been a younger turtle in the area, at the time, and I have no idea on the lifespan of these beautiful creatures, but I would like to say a big “thank you” to this retired Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne for this superb, touching story about Mrs,Willy. She is quite possibly responsible for thousands of green sea turtles, still swimming in those beautiful seas today. I hope that she is still living and laying those eggs, but even if she is now no more, I am sure that this grand old lady of the sea will never be forgotten.

Desmond Kelly - (Editor-in-Chief) eLanka

A Beautiful Wonderful Fabulous story about an amphibian filled with pathos love and LIFE