



# S E R E N D I B

A NEWSLETTER OF THE SRI LANKA ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON D.C.

VOL. 2 NO. 4

March - May 2003

## Message from the President

Coming on the heels of a highly successful year for our Association, which saw an unprecedented surge in membership and the propitious launch of the Association's tax-exempt affiliate - SLAGW, we closed 2002/2003 with a healthy financial record and heightened community awareness and participation. The past year has been good to Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Association of Washington, D.C. Much of the credit for the success of the Association belongs to our community and, in turn, to the able Board of Directors you elected as its stewards. On behalf of all the Board members who served in 2002/2003, I thank you.

At the same time, we also saw promising changes taking place in Sri Lanka to usher in the prospect of a lasting peace. The substantive relationship that has developed over this period between the United States government and Sri Lanka has been truly wide-ranging, and vitally helpful in the search for a political settlement of the ethnic conflict through negotiation. We've also seen a leadership transition at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington D.C. during this time with the arrival of Ambassador Devinda R. Subasinghe and a Deputy Chief of Mission, Ambassador Janaka Nakkavita, to facilitate the many faceted interactions of this most important bilateral relationship. Our community has applauded the positive developments taking hold in our homeland while watching the ebb and flow of the conflict resolution process with deep interest.

The Annual General Meeting of the Association on March 29 was a justifiable occasion to celebrate this success and elect the incoming Board for 2003/2004. Of the 15 positions elected by the membership, 13 were re-appointments. You have assured continuity and rewarded performance by reaffirming your confidence in our stewardship. A new member, Olga Ranaweera, and a veteran organizer of community activities, Iroshana Nanayakkara, were added to the Board roster by general election. I have all confidence that the new Board will serve with distinction, and deliver impressive results over the year.

The two vacated Board seats previously held by Dr. Hilarian Codippily, former SLAWDC President, and Mrs. Sheila Codippily were equally instrumental in the success of the past year. Dr. Codippily is credited with the resurgence of the Association and its restored financial stability. Mrs. Codippily has been a member of the Committee for Charitable Giving and a reliable Board associate throughout the year. We gratefully acknowledge their lasting contributions.

This year provides me the opportunity to realize some of the goals I've set for myself in accepting the chief executive role for a full term. Some of them are already well along while others need nurturing and teamwork by all members.

**Membership** is vital to develop a broad-based organization representative of our diverse community. The surge in membership brought us to 166 members last year. With your help, we can expand further and increase our roster to 200 members. Please send in your membership renewal forms and dues as soon as possible. We are woefully behind in this regard with only 100 members on record for 2003/04 to date. Our members will benefit from the incentives your Board has instituted through member discounts for SLAWDC events.

**Leadership** is the lifeblood of all thriving organizations. SLAWDC has had difficulty in the past in recruiting and retaining able directors to carry on the work of your Association. I have been nagged by this concern for many years after attending nearly 20 annual meetings.

I believe we have turned the corner, as evidenced by the desire of many able members to serve on the Board, sometimes for successive terms, and by others to take on non-Board responsibilities in Committees of significance. The recently formed committee for Youth and Young Professionals includes three volunteer leaders in addition to two directors, reporting to the Board. Many of the directors now take on principal responsibility for organizing and executing major events, either solely or in small clusters.

## Membership has its Rewards

SLAWDC members of record on August 10, 2003 will be eligible for a 25% discount on a limited number of tickets purchased no later than August 15 for the August 30 Dinner Dance at Holiday Inn – Gaithersburg, following the DC-NY Annual Cricket Encounter. All tickets sold after August 15 to members and non-members alike will be priced at \$40/ticket as advertised.

Each Individual Membership will be limited to 2 tickets @ \$30 each.

Each Life/Family Membership will be limited to 4 tickets @ \$30 each.

The sale of 150 member-discounted tickets will close on August 15, subject to availability.

My objective to build a deep bench of leadership among this group of emerging leaders seems to be taking hold. Our community will benefit from this experience for many years as today's leaders step up to take on larger responsibility in the coming years.

Community Response to SLAGW's Charitable Giving Programs, outlined below, and the Flood Relief Appeal has been most encouraging. The emergency response to our appeal for funds has mobilized many of our members to give generously to alleviate the plight of flood victims. They have done so in large numbers as shown elsewhere in this issue. Their rapid response in a space of 10 days, which brought in over \$3000 for our first tranche of assistance, speaks volumes for the generosity of spirit that has imbued our community. As a result, our slow but steady start in regard to charitable giving has taken a giant leap forward in recent weeks.

I have singled out these three aspects of community empowerment as ingredients vital to the long-term health of our Association and the community we serve.

**Nihal W. Goonewardene**

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Sinhala-Tamil New Year Celebrations**

It was a perfect spring day, April 19<sup>th</sup>. The Sri Lanka Association of Washington DC hosted its annual Sinhala and Tamil New Year event at the Argyle Community Center, and once again the Ranga Kala Kavaya participated in the celebrations.

In his welcome address, President-elect Lasantha Dahanaike thanked everyone for their presence and wished them a Very Happy New Year. He noted that he was happy to learn of the progress being made in Sri Lanka regarding the peace talks, and it was his hope that things would work out well for everyone.

The religious ceremonies commenced with the delivery of very inspiring homilies and prayers led by the Maha Sangha, Mrs. K. Ranganathan, Mr. Edward Peries, and Mr. Mohamed Muhsin, representing the Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities, respectively.

Mr. Nihal Goonewardene, President of the Sri Lanka Association, and Mr. Upali Perera, Vice President of the Ranga Kala Kavaya addressed the gathering. Wishing everyone well for the New Year, Mr. Goonewardene said he was happy and excited that the newly formed "Youth Group" was already up-and-running. He applauded them for their initiative in organizing the upcoming picnic.

Members of the audience participated in lighting the traditional oil lamp, and everyone joined in singing the National Anthem, led by Mr. Marcelinus Baddeliyanage and Mrs. Ramani Napoli.



I believe the kids heaved a sigh of relief when the formal ceremonies came to a close. They were impatient to parade in their elaborate outfits for the selection of the Avurudu Kumari/Kumaraya. All eyes were on the little ones. Judges were noticed observing in a pensive mood. It's down to the wire now, and the selection is made. The names are called. Miss Malsha Nanayakkara and a mystery guest, affectionately known as "Chandiya", is crowned the Consort.

Junior members of the Ranga Kala Kavaya's dance troupe, Dilini de Silva, Madawi and Udari Boralaliyanage, and Chanika Donpitiyagedon stole the show with one of their very special dance performances. We all have to applaud these kids for their dedication and eagerness to learn the traditional Sri Lanka dance routines, even though they were born in the United States.

"What time is it?" someone inquires, and all of a sudden I see everyone headed toward the food. It smells so good! The traditional kiribath, seeni sambol, kavum, kokis and other homemade goodies were served to remind us of our homeland. I even had real Sri Lanka style, iced coffee. For me, that was a treat! While the adults were savoring the goodies and catching up on old times, there were lots of indoor games such as musical chairs and the donut race to keep the kids happy.





It was now time to explore the outdoors on that beautiful spring day. The adults, seizing the opportunity of going back in time, participated in tug-of-war, the sack race and the lime and spoon race. It was great to observe both kids and parents having their fair share of fun. I am sure it brings back memories, and that's what this celebration is all about - tradition and memories. However, as an observer, I have one comment. The only missing item was the "Onchili". What a treat that would be! Sorry kids, maybe next time.

**Mrs. Shiela Codippily**

## Members' Corner

### Asian and Pacific Catholics of Washington heed the Holy Father's call to pray the Rosary for World Peace

Celebrating the Year of the Rosary, and answering the call by the Pope to pray for World Peace, representatives of the Asian and Pacific Catholic Communities came together for an "Afternoon of Rosaries", with an attendance of about one thousand people, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, May 4.

A group of volunteers, headed by Ms. Cecile Motus of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and representatives of each community, formed a Task Force to organize the event. Dr. Hilarian and Mrs. Sheila Codippily and Mr. and Mrs. Tony Thambinayagam were the Task Force leaders for Sri Lanka. It was decided that it would be ideal to have children participate in the program and 200 children were invited to recite twenty decades of the Rosary.

The celebration began at 1:30 p.m. with a procession of statues and banners of the Blessed Mother depicting the way she is represented in their motherland. Participants with the Sri Lanka Group were: Dr. and Mrs. Hilarian Codippily, Dr. and Mrs. Greg Fernandopulle, Mr. Edward Peries, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell Amithampillai, and Ms. Champa Soyza.

Children and adult leaders from the Filipino, Indian, Sri Lankan, Korean, Indonesian, Japanese, Lebanese

Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Vietnamese ethnic communities led the prayers.

Dr. Greg Fernandopulle led the meditation for the first Joyful Mystery. This was followed by the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in Sinhala, by Mr. Edward Peries. Mrs. Sheila Codippily commenced the Rosary with the Apostle's Creed. Sri Lankan children who participated in the first decade of the rosary were: Dilini de Silva, Niru de Silva, Fenoli Lowe, Mikhail Lawrence, Joshua Lawrence, Brandon Nedimala, Aditya Jayawardena, Chanika Munasinghe, and Nadika Wimalkantha. Mrs. Regina Amirthampillai recited "Glory Be to the Father" in Tamil.

The Sri Lankan Task Force thanked all volunteers who gave of their time, especially, Mr. Hemnath de Silva for providing video coverage; Ms. Yvonne Alexander for sewing the banner after it was printed on the silk fabric; and Rev. Fr. Sunil De Silva, Secretary to the Archbishop of Colombo, who promptly answered our call for a picture of Our Lady of Lanka. This was of great help in constructing the banner.

**Mrs. Sheila Codippily**

## Vesak

Vesak, which is the most important day on the Buddhist calendar, falls on the day of the full-moon during the month of May. On this day, Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and *mahaparini* of the Buddha. This year's annual Vesak celebrations by the Washington Buddhist Vihara was held on May 11.

The main event of the celebration was the observance of eight precepts (*Sil*) by Buddhist lay people. The Buddhist devotees who observed the eight precepts pledge to give up some of the luxuries they indulge in everyday and spend their day in the temple concentrating on disciplining one's actions, words and mind. Individuals who observed the eight precepts meditated, listened to sermons by the Buddhist monks and Buddhist speeches made by some lay people and chanted Buddhist devotional verses. 'Dana', or lunch, for the monks and the followers of eight precepts was donated by the Buddhist community in the area. In addition to Ven. Maharagama Dharmasiri, Ven. Pamburana Sobana, and Ven. Katugastota Rahula, who are resident monks at the Washington Buddhist Viharaya, distinguished guest monks such as Ajan Assaji from London, Ven. Yogavachara Rahula Mahera from West Virginia, and Ven. Samaneri Ani Kunga from Tibetan Center, Silver Spring, also participated in the activities. Mr. Devinda Subasinghe, Sri Lankan Ambassador to the US, and Mr. Anil Choudry, representative of the Indian Ambassador to the US also addressed the gathering. The younger students of the Dhamma school at the Viharaya sang Bhakti Gee (Buddhist devotional songs) and performed a play based on the famous Buddhist jataka story, 'Seri Vanija'.

In addition to approximately 50 individuals who observed 'Sil', there were over 400 people who attended the day's events at Washington Vihara. Several American, Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, and Cambodian Buddhist

devotees also joined the Sri Lankan Buddhist community for the Vesak celebrations at the Washington Vihara.

In addition, the Buddhist Bhavana Society in West Virginia held its Vesak celebrations on May 18.

The International Buddhist Committee of Washington DC will hold the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual International Vesak Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. Some of the activities that are planned for that day include offerings and circumambulations, prayers and homage to Buddha, Dharma lectures and guided meditations given by Buddhist teachers from around the DC area.

**Gayanga Opatha & Rajeeva Serasinghe**

### **3-month Dana for Walter Dias**

August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1996, was the happiest day of my life. That is the day I married the most important, loving and compassionate person I ever met. During our wonderful years together, Ramani had introduced me to many Sri Lankans who share the same morals and family values as she was raised to hold true in life. Among those people stand the pillars of the Sri Lankan community who teach those values. They are the elders. The Thatha's, Amma's, Uncles and Aunts are highly respected and given the family's utmost attention, care and love.

One of the Uncles who was very special to me was Walter Dias. Walter Uncle touched me in many ways. I truly felt he accepted me without reservation, completely and openly. There were never any walls to barter your way through when you met Walter. He welcomed everyone with open arms and genuine hospitality. No matter where we were or when we met, he would always smile and chat with me. From his warm demeanor and hospitality, to his innocent and sometimes "mischievous" sense of humor, Walter Uncle was one of a kind. There will always be a place in my heart, filled with the memories of him through the years and the warm reception he and his relatives extended to my Mother, Ramani and I when we visited Sri Lanka over 3 years ago.

It was an honor and an enlightening experience to be present for Walter Uncle's Dana at the Buddhist Vihara in Washington DC. I watched in silence, as Venerable Maharagama Dhammasiri addressed Walter's family and friends saying, "Pinvanthni." Then, after reciting the five precepts, the family presented the monks with robes and offerings on behalf of Walter Uncle. The monks humbly accepted the offerings by chanting, "Anicca vata sankhara" (Impermanent are formations subject to rise and fall. Having arisen, they cease: their subsiding is bliss.) Finally, Bhante Dhammasiri led the other monks in a chant as Walter's family poured water to the rim of a small silver pot. This symbolizes the transfer of merits collected by being virtuous people, (Sila) by offering things to the Sangha, (Dana) and reflecting on the impermanence of life (Bhavana.) The day before the holiest of days for Buddhists, Vesak was complemented by remembering the life of my friend Walter Dias. I doubt there could have been a more appropriate compliment to Walter and his family.

**Dominic Napoli**

*With permission from Ambassador Subasinghe, his thoughtful response to Mrs. Eva Hickman's letter, published in the Members' Corner of the previous issue of Serendib, is reproduced below:*

March 25, 2003

Dear Mrs. Hickman,

This is with reference to your letter dated December 4, 2002 which appeared in the Members' Corner of the "Serendib" issue of October 2002 – February 2003 Vol. 2, No. 3 which was received at this Embassy on February 24, 2003.

Having noted the observations made in your letter, I requested clarification from the Consular staff regarding the incident. I find that the Mission has not included the application and the instruction sheet that is sent along with the application form. We have instituted a procedure to verify that the correct documents have been mailed and that the relevant diplomatic officer is available to meet with in a situation such as yours. On behalf of the Embassy we deeply regret any inconvenience caused to you.

As I stated in my address to the community on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence celebrations on February 9, 2003 at the Ronald Reagan Amphitheatre, among the four objectives I have identified is the need to afford the highest quality of consular and information services. I look forward to working with the Sri Lankan community in Washington D.C. to achieve these objectives.

Sincerely,  
Sgd.  
Devinda R. Subasinghe  
Ambassador

### **In Memoriam**

**Mr. Charley Dias**, father of Mrs. Christine Wiratunga and father-in-law of Ranjith Wiratunga of Rockville, MD, passed away after a long illness in Sri Lanka. He was a veteran English teacher at St. Peter's college, and most recently taught English at St. Sebastian's, Moratuwa.

**Mr. Guy Amirthanayagam**, 75, a retired diplomat, teacher and writer who lived in Rockville passed away last month. He is survived by his wife Elizabeth; sons Aruna, Indran, Revantha, and A.P. David; and daughter Mareeni Stanislaus.

**Mr. Simon Jayaweera Adikari**, 80, retired employee of Ceylon Government Railway, beloved husband of Soma Gunawardana, loving father of Chandrapala (Sri Lanka), Kusum, Shanthi, Mangalika, Saman, Pulaneetha, loving father-in-law of Dias Amarawardene, Upali Perera, Newton Perera, Malani Adikari, Madusha Adikari, Aruni Adikari, passed away in Wheaton, Maryland.

## Community News

### Our Community Responds to the SLAGW Disaster Relief Appeal

The unprecedented rapidity of the response by SLAWDC members and friends of Sri Lanka, in a mere 10 days since we e- and slow mailed the appeal to our friends on May 22, has enabled us to reach the initial target of \$ 3,000 for immediate distribution to flood victims in affected areas. Our plans to raise a further \$ 2,000 for recovery efforts, primarily in providing school supplies through Sarvodaya, appears to be on track. The second tranche will be raised through contributions and pledges from others who will, no doubt, come forward to help.

We are proud to acknowledge the generosity of the first responders by recognizing their contribution.

### Tag Rugby Tournament



The Memorial Day Seven-a-Side DC Tag Rugby Tournament organized by the Old Boy's Associations of St. Thomas' College and Trinity College was held on May 25<sup>th</sup> at Gravelly Point. It was a full day of rugby with ten teams representing their old schools from Sri Lanka. Teams arrived from as far as Toronto/Canada and Boston, and players trekked to DC to strap their old boots from cities across the country such as Chicago, Miami and Los Angeles.

It was a 'paddy field' and the players and the fans all looked like they had scrimmaged by the end of the day. Trinity College-DC became the champions by defeating Maris Stella College in the finals. The celebrations continued until the early hours of the morning when all of the players and fans got together at the Penang in Bethesda for a superb dinner and a night of dancing and comradeship.

**Lasantha Dahanaike**

### List of Contributors to Disaster Relief Fund

Abeywarna, Mr. Mahil	Germantown, MD
Abeyegoonewardene, Mr. & Mrs. Clement	Silver Spring, MD
Amith, Mr. Rasan	Silver Spring, MD
Anonymous	
Arulampalam, Mr. Thikshan	Cambridge, MA
Baddeliyanage, Mrs. Mangala	Herndon, VA
Cash	
Cairnie, Mr. Hilary S.	Washington, DC
Codippily, Dr. & Mrs. Hilarian	Bethesda, MD
Copley Investment Management	Wilmington, NC
Dahanaik, Mr. Lasantha	Chevy Chase, MD
De Silva, Ms. Singithi	Derwood, MD
Faires, Ms. Diane	Washington, DC
Fernando, Mr. Chaminda	Rockville, MD
Fernandopulle, Dr. & Mrs. Greg	Potomac, MD
Finucane, Dr. & Mrs. James R.	Chambersburg, PA
Goonewardene, Miss Laliqe	Potomac, MD
Goonewardene, Mr. Srian	Potomac, MD
Gunatilleke, Dr. Nimal	Gaithersburg, MD
Hickman, Mrs. Eva R	Silver Spring, MD
Islam, Dr. & Mrs. Anwar	Ontario, Canada
Ismail, Mr. Reza Magdon	Silver Spring, MD
Karunaratne, Mr. & Mrs. Anura	Potomac, MD
Kuruppu, Mr. Terrence A.	Falls Church, VA
McCoy, Mr. & Mrs. Donald	Great Falls, VA
Meegama, Ms. Kavita K.	Rockville, MD
Nedimala, Mr. & Mrs. Edward	Silver Spring, MD
Odilatu, Rev & Mrs. Samuel	Randallstown, MD
Peiris, Mr. & Mrs. Lal S.	Gaithersburg, MD
Perera, Dr. & Mrs. Srilal	Vienna, VA
Perera, Mr. & Mrs. Cecil M.	Rockville, MD
Perera, Mr. Alexander J.	Silver Spring, MD
Perera, Ms. Nishanie	Washington, DC
Peries, Mr. Edward/Mr. Kumar	Silver Spring, MD
Post, Dr. May	Arlington, VA
Ratnayake, Ms. Ayomi S.	Athens, GA
Rodrigo, Ms. Meneka	Columbia, MD
Rowe, Elizabeth	Weston, MA
Rudran, Dr. & Mrs. Rudy	Silver Spring, MD
Salgado, Dr. & Mrs. M.R.P.	Bethesda, MD
Senanayake, Ms. Shivanthi N.	Hackensack, NJ
Silva, Mr. & Mrs. Sathyendre G.	Olney, MD
SLAWDC	Bethesda, MD
Wijeratne, Mr. & Mrs. Bope	Silver Spring, MD
Wiratunga, Mr. & Mrs. Ranjit	Rockville, MD

**Fund Total to Date 3324.55**

## CHARITABLE PROJECTS OF SLAGW

Sri Lanka Association of Greater Washington, Inc. (SLAGW) has launched three initiatives, requiring considerable resources to demonstrate our deep commitment to educational and humanitarian assistance. These three long-term programs have been tailored to assist educational endeavors and to alleviate human security concerns in Sri Lanka. An emergency response to the devastation caused by severe flooding in the South in general, and Ratnapura specifically, has resulted in our Emergency/Disaster Relief Fund for Flood Victims in Sri Lanka.

### *Prof Cyril A. Ponnampereuma Memorial Scholarship Fund*

The Fund was launched in the Fall of 2002 as our very own contribution to scholarship and academic excellence for students from Sri Lanka. This fund offers need-based students and scholars from Sri Lanka the opportunity to pursue studies at the University of Maryland in College Park. This is our tribute to the most prolific scientist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Sri Lanka, and a pillar of our community in the nation's capital until his untimely passing in 1994.

The Fund has been widely supported by our members and friends. We are pleased to have raised \$14,800 in the first eight months of the fund launch, bringing us closer to the eventual goal of \$50,000.

### *Canine Mine Detection and Removal Program*

SLAGW's de-mining program is sponsored in partnership with The Marshall Legacy Institute in Arlington, VA, an apt coincidence given the common legacy bestowed by this architect of the Marshall Plan. MLI is a non-profit, humanitarian organization, and a leader in the training and deployment of highly trained mine-seeking dogs to war ravaged, post-conflict areas. MLI needs to raise \$120,000 to send a team of six German Shepherds and trainers to Sri Lanka to begin an indigenous mine clearing operation in partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka.

This initiative owes its genesis to the indefatigable efforts of SLAWDC veterans, **Donald Y. McCoy** and wife **Billie**, their lifelong love of Sri Lanka and Don's relentless efforts to eliminate the scourge of land mines in Sri Lanka. He has appealed widely to his many friends and family to help in this effort. We all owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his devotion to our homeland and his tangible assistance for so many worthwhile initiatives to benefit the people of Sri Lanka.

Our goal is to provide a meaningful contribution from our community in the neighborhood of \$10,000 by the end of this year to supplement MLI's efforts on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka. We expect to appeal widely to the diaspora and sympathetic American friends. The response to date from diverse sources has been entirely promising. Contributions received to date exceed \$4000.

### *Volunteer English Teacher Program*

At the suggestion of a former SLAWDC President, Dr. Greg Fernandopulle, to look into the sorry state of English language instruction in public and government-assisted secondary schools in Sri Lanka, President Nihal Goonewardene initiated research on the scope of the problem in September, 2002. The dearth of trained English teachers in the school system was found to be acute, even extending to premier Colombo schools. The available few were found at the private international schools, which could afford to provide attractive remuneration. At a time when global competition compels Sri Lanka to provide an education commensurate with the competency challenges facing the workforce, the lack of proficient English instruction in most of the schools is patently unacceptable.

The Volunteer English Teacher Program was launched in October, 2002 in partnership with the Old Joes of America Foundation, Ltd. as a model program to test the premise at St. Joseph's College, Colombo 10. We plan to select teacher volunteers from the US, UK and Canada to reside on school premises and provide English instruction to GCE Ordinary and Advanced Level classes and the teaching staff. The school provides room and board for the volunteer, with SLAGW providing round trip airfare and a monthly stipend of \$200 over the one-year engagement at an annual cost of \$3,600 per volunteer. We anticipate recruiting certified instructors with experience in teaching English as a second language.

The Fund designated for the benefit of St. Joseph's College, Colombo by alumni of the school has raised \$ 1,000 at the close of this year, with pledges amounting to another \$3,600 from Old Joes on the West Coast. We plan to place the first two volunteers at SJC in January, 2004.

### *Disaster Relief Fund for Flood Victims*

The unprecedented scope of destruction and loss of life caused by the worst floods to hit Sri Lanka in more than 50 years has left nearly 300 dead and about 1,000 persons missing. Worse yet, the rains are expected to continue for two or more weeks. We have made a broad appeal to the Sri Lankan community in the national capital region and to our many friends in the US for contributions to provide relief and assistance. At the suggestion of the American Chamber of Commerce, SLAGW will work with two NGOs directly providing relief to the communities in the affected areas by providing drinking water, dry rations, cooking utensils, medicines, clothing and even school supplies.

We are fast nearing our immediate goal of \$3000 to be channeled directly to flood victims by June 10.

A further tranche of \$2000 will be raised by mid-July to assist in the recovery effort.

**Nihal W Goonewardene**

## COMMENTARY

### **Empowering Sri Lanka Through Constituency Building**

*Mr. Asoka Ranaweera works for a private business development group and serves also in a voluntary capacity as an Associate Director of the US-Azerbaijan Council which is based in Washington DC.*

#### **Time is Short**

It is arguably time for Sri Lankans in the West in general and in the US in particular to begin to become more politically active as a group to make our concerns heard amongst Western policy-makers. With Western support and our overseas communities involvement we will be able to promote more effectively a host of Sri Lankan national development priorities, which should contribute positively to our country's future, particularly at this very important juncture in our history.

#### **Identifying the Target**

Sri Lanka's overseas population compared to overseas populations of countries such as India, for example, is small. This does not, however, mean that our Diaspora cannot influence events. Before we can begin to think of influencing policy-makers we must make a firm and determined decision to commit our time and resources and set about identifying a small number of goals that we would like to initially accomplish.

#### **Persistence and more Persistence**

I for one, having lived in Washington, DC for a long time, have seen firsthand the ability of small sets of political constituencies access and influence US policy-makers. What distinguished the successful constituencies from those that were unsuccessful is persistence and continued unrelenting engagement.

#### **It's the System**

It is often mistakenly assumed by many countries and their Diaspora that the most important support you can have in Washington, DC, is that of the Presidential Administration. While that might be true, and is certainly not to be underestimated, other equally important institutions need to be engaged. These include the US Houses of Congress (both the Senate and Congress in equal measure), leading US research think tanks and academic institutions, the national media and, finally, non-governmental organizations such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), amongst many others.

It is by engaging all of the constituent levers of the American political system that Diasporas in the US in general have been able to keep their concerns and interests alive in the minds of US policy-makers.

### **Food for Thought**

One method of organizing the Sri Lankan community in the US could be as simple as organizing state chapters of the "US-Sri Lanka Friendship Committee". These chapters would be based in states where Sri Lankans live in relatively large numbers. The state chapters in turn could coordinate their activities with a national chapter of the "US-Sri Lankan Friendship Committee" based in Washington, DC. The job of the national chapter would be to work with state chapters towards getting our interests and concerns heard in for example the US Houses of Congress. To an extent this would work in reverse. For example our local state chapter in California would actively lobby Congressmen and Senators from California promoting our concerns and interests. In turn the national chapter would work with these Congressman and Senators in Washington DC. Let me take this one step further and propose the creation of the World Sri Lanka Congress. This Congress could be made up of national chapters of the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, serving as a coordinating body for the promotion of our international interests.

#### **Let the Debate Begin?**

Space consideration means that I must limit what I can write. However, all of the suggestions that I have made can be carried out at a surprisingly low cost. What, however, is required is voluntary time on the part of individuals and a very high degree of commitment. I have seen other Diasporas organize and influence and I do not see why we as Sri Lankans cannot do the same.

**Asoka Ranaweera**

#### **Events in the near future .....**

- 7-a-Side Cricket Tournament - June 28, 2003 at Lake Fairfax Park, VA. (Post-tournament bash sponsored by SLAWDC)
- Evening with A.T. Ariyaratne of Sarvodaya - July 13, 2003 @ 3 pm at Flower Hill Community Center.
- DC-NY Cricket Match - August 30, 2003 at Lake Fairfax Park, VA @ 11 am.
- Dinner Dance – August 30, 2003 @ 8.30 p.m. at Holiday Inn, Gaithersburg.

For details and more information ..... please check the website [WWW.SLAWDC.COM](http://WWW.SLAWDC.COM)

**SRI LANKA ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON D.C.**

**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP  
January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>  
Year 2003**

Regular membership (Individual)	\$15.00
Regular membership (Family w/ children under 18)	\$25.00
Associate membership (Temporary residents in the US for one year)	\$5.00
Sustaining Members – Life members paying dues – voluntary	\$25.00
Life Membership: Individual	\$200.00
Family	\$300.00

**Please mail membership checks payable to:**

*The Sri Lanka Association of Washington, D.C.*  
P. O. Box 30295, Bethesda, MD 20824-0295

*Address changes should be notified to the above SLAWDC address. The Board will not be responsible for lost mail unless address changes are notified by the member.*

Tax deductible donations are accepted only by **Sri Lanka Association of Greater Washington, Inc.**, an approved 501(c)(3) entity chartered by SLAWDC and governed by the same Board of Directors. All donors donating \$ 50 or more in a given year will be listed in a Honor Roll in the Annual Report.

Distinguished Donor Categories for SLAGW \*:

Benefactor	\$ 250 +
Founding Donor	\$ 500 +
Sustaining Donor	\$ 1,000 +
Leadership Donor	\$ 5,000 +
Endowing Donor	\$ 10,000 +

\* Donors of Distinction in the Benefactor, Founding and Sustaining Donor categories will be so honored for a 2-year period or until such time they graduate to an upper tier of charitable giving. The Board of Directors will extend membership in the parent SLAWDC to Donors of Distinction, at their discretion.

**Please forward SLAGW donations to:**

**Sri Lanka Association of Greater Washington, Inc.**  
c/o ISTI  
1820 North Fort Myer Drive  
Suite 600  
Arlington, VA 22209

**Tel: (703) 807-2080**

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**E-mail: [nihalg@istiinc.com](mailto:nihalg@istiinc.com)**

**FOR BOARD USE ONLY -**  
*Please note for future  
Membership card issue*

**Year:**  
**Category:**  
**Unit #:**  
**Member # :**  
**No. of Cards #:**  
**Date Paid:**  
**Check #:**

### APPLICATION FOR SLAWDC MEMBERSHIP

I/We wish to enroll as a member(s) of the Sri Lanka Association of Washington, D.C., subject to the approval of the Board of Directors and agree to abide by the constitution and by-laws of the Association.

**Membership Information:** New Membership     Renewal     Other  Year 2003

**Mailing Preference:** Postal Service  E-Mail     Fax

**First Name of Member:** .....

**First Name of Spouse:** .....

**Last Name:** .....

**Address:** .....

.....

**Home Phone:** ..... **Home Fax:** .....

**E-mail Address** .....

#### Children under 18 years

1. \_\_\_\_\_ M  F     *Date of Birth: Year* \_\_\_\_ *MO* \_\_\_\_ *Day* \_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ M  F     *Date of Birth: Year* \_\_\_\_ *MO* \_\_\_\_ *Day* \_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ M  F     *Date of Birth: Year* \_\_\_\_ *MO* \_\_\_\_ *Day* \_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_ M  F     *Date of Birth: Year* \_\_\_\_ *MO* \_\_\_\_ *Day* \_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE OF MEMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_