



Insight

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Sri Lanka A land like no other



Sri Lanka, known as the Serendib of Sindbad, the Seylan of the Arabs, and, Ceylon, during the Colonial rule of the British, has always been the splendor of many famous sea farers, travellers, and visitors, since ancient times.

Known for its lush green pastures of rice, rubber, coconut and tea, the white sandy beaches of the Indian Ocean that surround it, and the friendly smiles of its simple people, the Island has always intrigued the hearts and minds of many who seek to spend their time within a land like no other, miles away from their homelands.

Refreshed by the world's greatest teas that are grown on the hill stations of the central regions and the south, where the water and climate are most conducive for plantation, everyone knows the country as the homeland of the famous traditional, 'cuppa'.

A population of 20 Million comprising an ethnic mix of Sinhalese, Tamil, Moor, Malay, and Burghers (Eurasians descended from Portuguese, Dutch and British Colonial rule for over 400 years), makes up the life of the nation.

Being the nation with the highest literacy rate in South Asia, Sri Lanka has produced and distributed a ctd p/2

New envoy meets King



The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz receives the Sri Lankan Ambassador Abdul Ageed Mohammed Marleen when he received the credentials of the new envoy. Photo Courtesy SPA.

RIYADH- The new Sri Lankan Ambassador to the Kingdom, Abdul Ageed Mohamed Marleen, arrived at the King Khaled International Airport in April, where he was received by several embassy officials and members of the Sri Lankan community.

Mr. Marleen, an eminent Colombo-based lawyer, who has been in active practice for the past 36 years, was bestowed with the title of President's Counsel in 2001, an honor conferred on outstanding legal men. Since 1991 he has been the president of the Moors Islamic Cultural Home (MICH) and secretary general of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Association, which is based in Cairo. "My priority is to focus, initially, on the welfare of the migrant workers. It is the government's duty to look after their interest during their overseas stay, and help them lead a problem-free life", he said, stating that there are more than 500,000 workers in the Kingdom and a majority of them are domestic aides.

Foreign Minister's Best Wishes



COLOMBO - I congratulate the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Riyadh for publishing a monthly newsletter for the benefit of over 500,000 Sri Lankan expatriates working in Saudi Arabia.

Sri Lanka attaches immense importance to its cordial and long standing bilateral relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The people of both countries have been in friendly interaction for centuries. Thousands of Sri Lankan Muslims visit Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage every year. There are significant exports of tea, coconut products, garments, and other items from Sri Lanka to Saudi Arabia which exports petroleum related products to Sri Lanka. There are, also, a number of other areas in which the relationship between our two nations can be further enhanced, such as tourism, supply of skilled manpower and export of non-traditional, fresh fruits and vegetables.

I am confident that this newsletter will serve as an important instrument

ctd. ...p/4

New Board for Jeddah School

RIYADH- The new Sri Lankan Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Abdul Ageed Mohamed Marleen, has directed the Sri Lankan International School in Jeddah to hold a special meeting to elect office-bearers to the Board of Management. (BOM)

The members of the present board, who were elected in 2004, ended their tenure in June 2007 and have been awaiting the arrival of the new ambassador to hand over their task to a new board of management who will be elected at a general meeting of Sri Lankan parents. The outgoing members include Azmy Anverdeen, M.H.M.Jiffy, Asoka Jayantha and Zahran Aboosahid. School Principal M/s. Fareeda H Wahab, who has been appointed as Election Commissioner will conduct the elections.

"I have issued this directive following my consultations with the Supervisor of Foreign Schools Mueidh Al Qahtani, who said that the ambassador has the power to nominate or make arrangements for a meeting to elect the members of the BOM", Ambassador Marleen said, pointing out that he opted for an election which would help the parents to elect their own representatives to manage their own school.

The Sri Lankan envoy insisted that the school constitution cannot supersede the basic rules and guidelines of the ministry of education which stipulates that the Consul General has no power in terms of the ministry regulations to appoint members to the BOM and such power is vested only with the ambassador. He also said "Patron of the school, whoever he may be, cannot run the school even if there is an unanimous decision to that effect by the parents as it is contrary to the rules of the ministry of education".

Prince Alwaleed Contd. from P2

Mr. Marleen said, "We would like to have a person of Prince Alwaleed's caliber, who is a well-known international investor and philanthropist, to visit our country to find investment opportunities in the island," Ambassador Marleen said, adding that the prince is to be hosted and honored in a special manner in recognition of his yeoman services to the deserving people in all parts of the globe.

A bunch of grapes

Amal Ashraff who draped herself as a bunch of grapes, is seen receiving the first prize in the fancy dress competition from the Sri Lankan ambassador on the Kids day of the Sri Lankan International School held recently in Riyadh.



Foreign Minister's...

Contd. from p/1... in promoting new opportunities by reaching out to the Saudi public as well.

I extend my best wishes to Ambassador, A A M Marleen, the staff of the Embassy and the prominent community members, who are involved in bringing out this publication.

Hon Rohita Bogollagama, M.P.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka

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Readers news, views, articles and trade inquiries for publication may be sent to the Sri Lanka Embassy in Riyadh at:

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Sri Lanka... ctd from p1

number of skilled/unskilled manpower and professionals to many parts of the globe.

500,000 Sri Lankan expatriates living and working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sizeable number. Many are involved in service sectors providing the much needed strength and support for the development of the Middle Eastern region. They also remit back a large amount of money that helps to keep the economy moving, successfully.

Compulsory insurance for housemaids



SL Labor Minister, Dr Keheliya Rambukwelle with Dr Ghazi Al Gosaibi, Saudi Minister of Labor

RIYADH- Saudi Arabia will soon introduce a mandatory insurance scheme for Sri Lankan domestic workers who are working in various households throughout the Kingdom.

The decision was taken during the official talks between Labor Minister, Ghazi Al Gosaibi, and the visiting Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare Minister, Mr. Keheliya Rambukwelle, held at the Royal Conference Palace in Riyadh. The island's ambassador Abdul Ageed Mohamed Marleen and Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) Chairman Kingsley Ranawake also took part in the discussions.

Explaining the outcome of the ministerial talks, Rambukwelle said, on a suggestion made by the Saudi Minister to the government of Sri Lanka, that he agreed for a comprehensive insurance cover for all housemaids during their contract period in the Kingdom.

The Lankan minister said that it was agreed that the Sri Lankan government will appoint an international insurance company and the Saudi government will persuade the sponsor to pay the premium on behalf of his employee who will be working as a maid in his house. "

Such an arrangement will ease the problems of both the employee, employer and the two governments in

case of eventuality such as repatriation of dead bodies, medical treatment and accidents," the minister said. More than 80 percent of the 550,000 Sri Lankan workers in the Kingdom are housemaids who remit a sizable sum to the national coffers of their country. Remittances, from Lankan overseas workers is the second largest foreign exchange earner in Colombo.

Thanking Al-Gosaibi for giving a sympathetic consideration to the plight of the housemaids working in the Kingdom, Rambukwelle said the Saudi minister also agreed to take stern action against sponsors who do fail to give the maid's salaries stipulated in the work contract which is signed by the sponsor and attested by the Sri Lankan missions in the Kingdom. Beginning January this year, Sri Lanka had introduced a minimum wage of SR 650 for a housemaid who comes for employment to the Kingdom. To overcome the problem of non-payment or delayed payment of salaries to the housemaids, Rambukwelle said Sri Lankan government will in future open a Non-Resident Foreign Currency (NRFC) Account in one of the banks on behalf of the maid who comes for employment here and the sponsors will be asked to deposit the salary to the given account so that the authorities could keep track of the payments given to the maids.

During his discussion with the Deputy Interior Minister Mohammed Ibn Naif, Rambukwelle said that the interior ministry agreed to release the Lankan prisoners who had served their term of punishment and are still languishing in jail due to bureaucratic procedures. He said that the Saudi deputy minister had categorically stated that no prisoner should overstay their term. "Some of the Lankan prisoners have overstayed by more than six months in jail ," Rambukwelle noted.

Wrapping up his visit to the Saudi capital, the minister said that he did not take up Rizana Nafeek's case with the Saudi authorities since the case is currently before the supreme court. Nafeek's case is before the Supreme Judicial Council for allegedly killing a four-month old infant while she was bottle-feeding the baby. "Sri Lanka respects the laws of the host country and it is not proper for us to take up this issue when Nafeek's case is before the supreme bench of the Kingdom," Rambukwelle said. The visiting minister held talks with Deputy Interior Minister Prince....ctd on p/3

Investment talks with Prince Alwaleed



Ambassador discusses with the Prince

RIYADH: Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, chairman of Kingdom Holding Company, received new Sri Lankan Ambassador His Excellency Mr Abdul Ageed Mohamed Marleen, at his office in Riyadh during May.

The meeting began as the Sri Lankan ambassador relayed cordial regards to Prince Alwaleed from the government and people of Sri Lanka and thanked him for the opportunity to meet with him as it was his first official meeting after he presented the copy of his credentials to Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal.

Prince Alwaleed and Ambassador Marleen discussed the strong and warm friendship between their respective countries. The two also discussed a number of local and international economic and social issues.

The prince was ready to accept an invitation from the Sri Lankan government to visit the island at a convenient date. "I am ready to come to Sri Lanka at a date convenient to both parties", Prince Alwaleed said during the discussions. The prince also expressed his interest in investing in Sri Lanka in the hotel industry.

Prince Alwaleed visited Sri Lanka in May 2005 to see the reconstruction work carried out by the government in rehabilitating tsunami survivors out of the funds donated by him. Sri Lanka received the largest slice of the Prince's donation given to tsunami affected countries. During this tour, he also explored the investment opportunities available in the island in the tourism sector.

During his brief stay in Colombo, he met with former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge, Finance Minister Sarath Amunugama, and the late Tourism Minister, Anura Bandaranaike...ctd on p/4

Kingdom funds epilepsy hospital in Colombo

RIYADH- The Kingdom will fund the construction of a Epilepsy Hospital in Colombo and provide an extension to the Neuro-Trauma Centre at the Colombo General Hospital.

"Saudi Arabia will provide a soft loan of Saudi Riyal 75 million (approximately Rs. 2175 million) for the construction of a Epilepsy Hospital and a supplementary loan of Saudi Riyal 11 million (approximately Rs. 320 million) for the extension of the Neuro-Trauma Centre at the Colombo General Hospital", Riyadh Al Kheneini, charge d' affairs of the Saudi mission in Colombo told Arab News recently. He added that the funds will be provided through the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), to enhance the existing relations between the two countries.

An agreement for the two loans were signed by Yousef Al Bassam, Vice chairman, Saudi Fund for Development on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and by Dr. P.B. Jayasundera, secretary, Ministry of Finance and Planning on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka at the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

The new Epilepsy Hospital will be a specialized facility for epilepsy patients with a capacity of 242 beds and facilities required for intensive care and inpatient care treatment. The project includes construction of a new seven storey building with a total floor area of 15,000 sqm. within the premises of the Colombo National Hospital and provision of medical equipment including MRI & CT Scanners and X-Ray machines.

The hospital consists of operating theatres, intensive care units, high dependency unit, male and female post-operative wards, a pediatric ward, and a neurosurgical unit.

"At present there are no such facilities to treat epilepsy patients and the establishment of the proposed hospital will meet the long felt need of the health service in Sri Lanka", Dr. Jayasundera said.

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"If it doesn't look easy, it is that we have not tried hard enough, yet" - F Astaire

Al Jammaz to SL

New Saudi Ambassador to Sri Lanka



RIYADH- The new Saudi ambassador to Sri Lanka, Abdulaziz Ibn Abdul Rahman Al Jammaz, left for Colombo on April 22 to take up appointment at the Saudi embassy in the island's capital.

Prior to his departure Al-Jammaz met the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, HRH King Abdullah, Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, Interior Minister Prince Naif and Riyadh Governor Prince Salman and also called on the Sri Lankan Ambassador Mohamed Ageed Mohamed Marleen to discuss matters of mutual interests.

Speaking about his priorities in his new assignment, the envoy hopes to shift the present Saudi mission to a better location in Colombo to provide enhanced services to all visitors. "The mission will soon be moved to a place which is easily accessible to the members of the public as well as to the Saudi visitors who come for consular assistance", the ambassador said, adding that the mission needs a larger space in view of the extended services offered to the increasing number of Sri Lankans who seek consular assistance.

A graduate who had specialized in geography at the Imam Muhammed University in Riyadh, Al- Jammaz counts 27 years of experience in the Kingdom's foreign service. During his career, he had served in Accra, London, Brussels and Amman.

Comp. InsuranceContd. from P/2
Muhammad ibn Naif, Labor Minister Gosaibi, Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Abdul Rahman Al Jeraisy and GCC Assistant General Dr. Abdullah Al Hashim Explaining the purpose of his visit to the Kingdom, Rambukwella said that the Kingdom is home to more than 500,000 Lankan workers and his mission is to strengthen the existing bilateral relations and explore new areas of cooperation in promoting employment opportunities and working for the welfare of Lankan workers.

He pointed out, that problems of Lankan workers are minimal compared to the Lankan population in the Kingdom. "The Riyadh mission records around 10 runaway housemaids a day and a good number of them are settled following negotiations with the respective employers," he stressed.

SLTB award for Unique Choice



Mohamed Wazeer-director product-Unique Choice (left), Zawfir Ziard-CEO-Unique Choice (center) is seen receiving the award from Michael Elias-CEO-Walker Tours Limited at the recently held Arabian Travel Market in Dubai, and Sean Dwight-Manager-Walker Tours Ltd, (extreme right) .

Riyadh-based **UNIQUE CHOICE** was awarded a special memento by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board for their outstanding achievement in promoting Sri Lanka as a Tourist Destination in the Middle East .

UNIQUE CHOICE are the pioneers in promoting Sri Lanka in the region handling a major percent of the total tourists from the Middle East to the island in 2007 .

