

# *Sri Lanka*

**Emerging Opportunities and Perspectives**

**Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria**



## **Study Tour Report**

**July 2016**

*Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria – Sri Lankan Study Tour 2016*

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## **Sri Lankan Study Tour 2016**

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## Sri Lankan Study Tour: Executive Summary

Sri Lanka is a country of great beauty and abundant natural resources, so much so that when legendary Venetian explorer Marco Polo visited in the 13<sup>th</sup> century he deemed it “the finest island of its size in all the world.” It now finds itself well placed geographically to benefit from India’s growth and the dynamism of the broader Asian region. Despite Sri Lanka’s rich history and enduring promise, it was hit hard by the devastating 2004 tsunami and is only now emerging from decades of civil conflict.

Twenty delegates from the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) Victorian Branch undertook a study tour of Sri Lanka from 10 to 22 July 2016, with myself acting as tour leader. The purpose of the study tour was to gauge the extent to which Sri Lanka has been able to recover and rebuild after the civil conflict, and advance socially, politically and economically. More broadly, delegates sought to understand the country’s extraordinary history and experience the rich culture and hospitality of the Sri Lankan people. The group was given privileged access to leading figures in politics and civil society, and to institutions and sites throughout the country. Thanks to the generous support received from the Sri Lankan government, the Australian High Commission and various prominent Non-Government Organisations, that exposure allowed delegates to explore the key issues facing the country.

Ultimately, it was the general consensus of the delegation that the future for Sri Lanka is bright, with significant recent reforms and progress in areas such as the economy, constitutional reform, gender equality, education, reconciliation, and its bilateral relationship with Australia. Despite this cautious optimism, and while recognising progress, it is also important to acknowledge that the country still faces many challenges in ensuring that hard won gains are not reversed and that it maintains strong forward momentum towards realising its potential as a vibrant, prosperous and harmonious society.



*David Ritchie*  
**Former High Commissioner of  
Australia to Sri Lanka  
1996-1999**

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## Sri Lanka: Reconciliation

Seven years after the end of Sri Lanka's bloody civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who sought an independent homeland for the minority Tamil population, reconciliation remains the central challenge for the country's future as a prosperous and peaceful nation.

The many dimensions of reconciliation – economic development, healing of war-damaged families, relations between ethnic communities, political representation - featured prominently in the Study Tour's inquiries throughout the country. Colombo showed few outward signs of war damage, or of the brutal terrorist attacks which had marked life in the capital; it was the visit to the north which in particular provided on-the-ground examples of the progress of reconciliation.



Destroyed Water Tower in Kilinochchi

Reminders of the war persist throughout the north, in the form of bullet-riddled buildings and derelict houses, particularly in Jaffna, which had once been the LTTE's administrative and military centre. Equally, however, there were an unexpected number of attractively renovated private residences, possibly refurbished with funds from the Tamil diaspora. The government has done a great deal to develop infrastructure such as roads, the railway



Sri Lankan Civil War Memorial: Former LTTE  
Improvised Bulldozer

connection to the south, and public buildings. We saw little overt military presence, and were told that the military had largely been confined to barracks. As an example of the military's diminishing footprint, the high-security zone had been reduced from 63 square kilometres in 2009 to just under 20 square kilometres in 2016. Our visit to a village near the high-security zone, where land and funding had been allocated to internally displaced people for the building of new homes, reinforced that affirmative action

was being taken to rehabilitate many of those adversely affected by the conflict.

An authoritative international organisation told the group that the situation in the north was broadly moving in a positive direction, and that people were becoming increasingly optimistic. The tour group heard that the vast majority of Sri Lankans were not 'communally minded' and shared the desire to live peacefully together in a multi-ethnic state. Indeed, it was put to us on several occasions that incidents which arose between the communities were sensationalised by the press, and that politicians also tended to play on such differences in an attempt to gain political capital.

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In a telling coincidence, only a day after the delegation's visit, the University of Jaffna was forced to close down for several days following a student fracas, which several media outlets depicted as an outbreak of communal conflict. At least one well-placed interlocutor told the



Delegates meet the UNHCR in Jaffna

group that the incident had been more an 'inter-faculty brawl' than an inter-communal clash. It was certainly reassuring, and perhaps indicative of the approach of young Sri Lankans, that student organisations throughout the country immediately called for a return to peaceful relations and cohesion.

However, experiences by members of the group indicated that resentment and animosity remain under the surface, as does apprehension of the military. Reports of arbitrary detention and disappearances have largely halted, but there remain a large number of past disappearances (18,500) which have not been resolved and which remain a constant source of anxiety and an obstacle to healing and recovery.

An important element of reconciliation will be the generation of economic opportunities in the north. Unemployment levels are disturbingly high, although the commercial bustle we observed in Jaffna and Kilinochchi indicates the restart of small-scale economic activity. And from our discussion with the Governor of the Northern Province, the Hon. Reginald Cooray, the government is focused on attracting job-creating investment.



Governor of the Northern Province Hon. Reginald Cooray

The positive contribution of private commercial enterprise, non-government organisations and foreign aid agencies in helping to stimulate employment and development was apparent. The Taprobane crab meat processing factory, in the small coastal town of Mulankavil, provided a good insight into how investment had helped to spark economic activity in this war-ravaged region. Through assistance from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), backed with Australian aid funding, this project has been able to provide good employment opportunities for war-affected families and particularly for local women, many of whom were widowed during the conflict. While the project is an excellent step forward in terms of reintegration and development, illegal fishing from neighbouring Indian Tamil Nadu trawlers continues to pose a real threat to the sustainability of the fishery. Also, notable, not more than a few hundred metres from the factory was a Sri Lankan Navy watchtower, which according to some accounts, was more preoccupied with observing the movements of the local population (largely to prevent illegal emigration) than with illegal fishing.

Another significant example of development helping to bring about reconciliation was the MAS apparel factory in the town of Kilinochchi. The factory, which produces high-end sportswear for Nike, provides both jobs and a future for many of the local Tamil population. Kilinochchi's infrastructure was heavily damaged during the war and the area continues to suffer unemployment of over thirty-eight per cent. The MAS factory employs 1,650 staff, ninety-five per cent female, many of whom were forced by the LTTE to fight or marry young; its contribution remains crucial in healing both economic and societal wounds.



'Visit to reconstruction site near Palali'

A visit to the Foundation of Goodness in Kilinochchi, where women (and some men) are able to gain basic skills and earn money demonstrated the potential for success of an energetic and committed Sri Lankan NGO. The learning facility will move to its own premises, but its current location at a military facility deters Tamil families suspicious of the military – a restriction our delegation discovered for itself when questioned over the purpose of our visit. Hence, the visit to the foundation epitomised the many challenges facing both the government and the war-ravaged people of northern Sri Lanka.

Ultimately, it was the general consensus of the group that, despite significant ongoing issues and continuing international concern over alleged human rights violations perpetrated by



Jaffna: 'Say No To Destruction Never Again.'

both parties throughout the conflict, genuine efforts were being made, and progress achieved, in terms of development, reintegration and reconciliation. The Sirisena government's conciliatory tone is important in bringing about reconciliation and accountability. Nevertheless, despite its cautious optimism, the delegation thought that much still needed to be done.

This remains particularly the case given that President Sirisena finds himself in a complicated political dynamic with much of his backing coming from an opposition split, and his political support among Sinhalese in the south fiercely contested.

While the Sri Lankan Government was able to win the war militarily, an equitable political settlement is also necessary if the grievances that led to the emergence of the conflict are to be alleviated. Thus, although post-conflict economic and infrastructure development in the north is indispensable, significant issues in relation to displaced persons, justice and accountability, along with the protection and advancement of minority rights, remain equally crucial. The peace remains to be won.

## Gender Equality and Equal Opportunity

The Sri Lankan Civil War left some 40,000 women widowed and increased the number of Female Headed Households (households where women are the sole provider). In addition, our group learnt that Sri Lankan women generally work in 'traditional' roles and that the female workplace participation rate sits around 35%. This is quite low when compared with Thailand; whose numbers are around 60%. Unsurprisingly, World Economic Forum recently ranked Sri Lanka 79 out of 142 countries in gender equality. The two issues that influenced the ranking were poor female economic participation and a lack of female political empowerment.

*What steps have been done to promote female engagement and employment in non-traditional areas in Sri Lanka?*

The engagement and employment of women, predominately in the East and Northern Provinces is seen as essential to the recovery of these regions, where the unemployment rate sits at a remarkably high 38.1%. The group visited two different private enterprises in the Northern Province that are employing and supporting rural women. MAS Holdings' Vaanavil factory, which manufactures well known clothing brands, and a local crabmeat processing factory in Killinochi, have employed women and



implemented workplace policies to encourage and retain female workers who make up 95% (former) and 85% (latter) of their workplaces. These policies range from onsite crèches, medical care and counselling to flexible working hours. In addition, the group also visited The Foundation of Goodness, a non-for profit, non-government organisation that provides free basic skills training and funding for women and which we were told had already led to employment.

The newly elected Sirisena government has also taken steps to address this issue, establishing in 2015 a National Centre for the Empowerment of Widows and Women Headed Families. Based in the Northern Province, this centre aims to support widows and females in Female Headed Households in the North and East.

From an educational perspective, the University of Jaffna provided insight advising that primary, secondary and undergraduate tertiary education is free to all Sri Lankans. Our group was surprised to learn that females had a resounding presence on campus as they outnumbered males in all study areas except medicine and engineering. Unfortunately, we were unable to compare numbers at the renowned University of Peraduniya in Kandy, as the statistics were not provided.



Foundation of Goodness, Killinochi



We have to also surmise that there is a social aspect at play here. Upon arriving in Colombo, our group was advised that Sri Lankan women are subjected to harassment in public areas and on public transport. Additionally, in the private sphere, domestic abuse is widespread. When our group did meet Sri Lankan women (outside of tourist areas), we were taken by their genteelness and timidity.

In the public sphere, there is as a noticeable absence of females in management and leadership positions. This is best illustrated in the current demography of parliament with females only holding 13 out of 225 seats (despite having the first female Prime Minister of a modern nation) and only 23% of judges are female. The consultations undertaken by the Constitutional Committee found that the Sri Lankan public made a resounding call for a mechanism to ensure greater representations of women in political and decision-making bodies. They also demanded action on women's rights and to establish a basis for legal action in the event of any discrimination against women. We hope that these considerations will be discussed and debated in Parliament and that any future constitution may increase the inclusion of women in Sri Lankan society.



Foundation of Goodness, Killinochi

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## Sri Lanka's Economy

One of the group's first impressions was of the commercial buzz about Colombo. New construction was much in evidence, and boutique shops, restaurants, cafes and the like indicated increased disposable income and commercial activity, at least in the capital. Former residents of Sri Lanka were impressed that the quality of roads and infrastructure had improved. Our visit to the Colombo Stock Exchange, housed in the World Trade Centre, impressed as a modern, professional institution with strong ambitions for growth and development.

The situation is of course different in other parts of the country, notably in the North and West, where unemployment is still severe and recovery from the war has a considerable way to run. The group was impressed by the employment opportunities generated in the north by three sites we visited: a crab processing factory, part of the Local Empowerment through Economic Development Programme, funded by Australia and implemented in partnership with the International Labour Organisation; the MAS Active factory which employs 1,650 women and produces high-tech sportswear for Nike; and the Foundation of Goodness which provides basic skills training to enable village women (and some men) in very straitened circumstances to earn a livelihood.



The efforts of the Governor of the Northern Province to organise an investment forum, and to set up a one-stop shop for investors, also aim at generating economic activity and making inroads into unemployment.

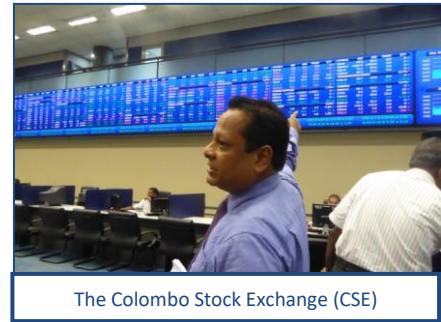
While the improvement in public infrastructure is impressive, we heard on several occasions that much of the development we had seen had been financed on credit, and that the country needed now to tighten its belt.

### *What is the state of Sri Lanka's economy?*

Sri Lanka had an early growth dividend after the end of the war in 2009, with growth in the order of 8%. That level of growth has now reduced to closer to 5%. A part of previous growth was fuelled by large infrastructure projects, some of dubious value. The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, which services two international flights a day, and the Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa port, both built with sizeable loans from China, were mentioned in this context.

Given this spending on infrastructure, it is not surprising that the government runs a fiscal deficit. Total Government spending amounts to some 18% of GDP, while taxation revenue is less than 12%, leaving a sizeable deficit. Government debt, currently amounting to 76% of

GDP, is being exacerbated by each annual deficit. Thus, the servicing of this debt becomes a further problem. The government has introduced a number of measures to reduce the deficit, but confidence has been shaken by a botched attempt to increase the rate and coverage of the value-added tax.



Added to these domestic considerations are a number of international challenges. The slow pace of global recovery affects exports, the economic relationship with China has now to cope with the moderation of China's growth, and falling oil prices have led to a decline in remittances from the Gulf, which, at 9% of GDP, are an important source of foreign exchange and of household income. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka enjoys several advantages. We were told that there is a bipartisan agreement that the private sector is the engine of the economy, which indicates a move away from earlier socialist policies. In this context, we note, however, that the state still dominates certain sectors of the economy – banking, insurance, utilities, railways, ports and the national airline.

The country is strategically well placed in a fast-growing region, has an educated workforce with literacy at 91% (although several of our group noted a weakness in English competency), and reasonable health indicators. Low female participation in the work force constrains output and household income, but at the same time holds the potential of providing a fillip to economic activity if the government can find ways of mobilising this source of labour. With the war now behind the country, tourist numbers are increasing, as visitors are attracted by Sri Lanka's natural beauty, its cultural sites, and its peaceful environment.

The International Monetary Fund recently concluded a loan agreement of US\$1.5 billion over three years. The facility is tied to a programme of reforms, including reduction of the deficit, reforms to the trade and investment regime, and various other objectives. This partnership with the IMF, if combined with political and policy stability, should provide investors with a higher degree of confidence that Sri Lanka is intent on working towards a more outward-looking and productive economy.

A member of our group thought that the major challenges facing Sri Lanka would be to deliver change before the elections in 2020, particularly in widening the tax base and making progress in eliminating corruption. Without this, the private sector would be constrained in providing the stimulus and commitment required for an improvement in economic conditions for Sri Lankans. A further question raised was whether the caste system is a major factor in access to employment and whether it impedes social and economic mobility.

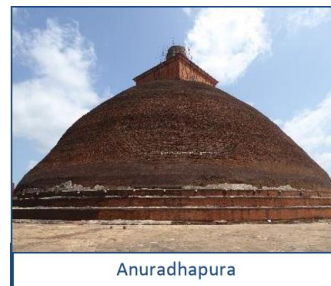
## Sri Lanka: A Cultural Overview

*For the purpose of this report, "culture" is the attitudes and attributes that define and differentiate distinct groups of people.*

### **The Diverse Communities:**

#### **The Sinhalese**

Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism seem closely and potently intertwined. This was evident to us throughout the country during our visit, and found expression in the emphasis given to and money spent on old Buddhist sites including Sigirya, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, as well as on new statues of the Buddha. The Buddha's image was prominently displayed between elephant tusks on entrance to the President's official residence. Following his victory over the LTTE, President Rajapaksa's vainglorious project of building a new stupa at Anuradhapura referenced the tradition of ancient Buddhist kings (Post-conflict funding has been overwhelmingly in the form of Chinese loans that will be difficult to repay, and brings into contention Chinese influence over Sri Lankan policies). Despite awareness of the need for unity and reconciliation following the thirty-year war, there continues to be a strong streak of Sinhala nationalism that excludes the Tamil and the Muslim minorities. It was observed that the younger generation are more open to reconciliation and unity.



Anuradhapura

#### **The Tamils**

In our limited interactions with Tamils we saw a determined work ethic and a will to grab any opportunities to get ahead, despite them being the most affected group in years of conflict. This was particularly observable in the case of the girls studying beauty courses at the Foundation for Goodness, and the women, many single heads of family, at both the simple



Tamil Fisherman, Mulankavil

crab meat factory and the more sophisticated MAS clothing factory. However, we are aware of the high level of unemployment in the Jaffna district (37%), and the potential problems, including drug use, from disaffected youth. This is a potentially explosive situation unless addressed. Rebuilt highly decorated Hindu temples seem to reinforce separate Tamil identity. We did not meet the formerly lower caste Plantation Tamils, relatively recent arrivals, brought in to work on the tea plantations by the British, but have been told that the current generation having gained access to better education and standards of living are increasingly not prepared to continue with the family trade.

## The Muslims

Those at the meeting with Muslim leaders at the Meera Makkam Mosque in the heart of Kandy, were impressed by the apparent moderation of Islam in Sri Lanka, and of its relative freedom from outside influences. While the country's Muslims, mostly descended from Arab traders, are believed to be Sunni, our group was told that "there is only one Islam." This was in response to our comments on the carpets, a gift from Shia Iran. It was observed that there seemed to be an increasing number of more conservatively dressed women by those of the



group that had visited or lived in Sri Lanka in previous years. Though our guide noted that there was an increasing number of tourists from Middle Eastern nations. The Muslim leaders commented that in Sri Lanka the mosque while stipulating appropriate dress code, left it up to the families to determine the form it should take according to their cultures and customs and that there was no aspect of this that was enforced. The highlight of this meeting was to understand the cordial relations and co-existence of these religious communities in general with some minor pockets of religious violence over the years.



## The Christians and other minorities

Christians, a small minority, are a mix of Sinhalese and Tamil converts over generations. We saw some evidence of the rebuilding of churches in the Jaffna area.

## General Cultural Comparisons

**Rules and Relationships:** A strong culture that favours relationships over rules makes transparency difficult, and what we would call corruption rife. While this was particularly prevalent in the previous Rajapaksa Government and is at least recognised and to some extent tackled by the current government, our Cambridge interlocutors were almost unanimous in saying that they found it difficult to contribute their skills to the country's development because the levers of power were tightly held and wielded.

**Hierarchy or Egalitarianism:** While we have observed a valuing of education, there seemed to be an acceptance of hierarchy in both of Sri Lanka's major cultures, perhaps more formalised among Tamils with a more overt caste system. While there is free education and a high rate of literacy, this seems rarely to translate to social mobility. The tiny number of elite schools continue to give opportunity to the privileged few. The others we are told produce graduates without employment skills, and without English, whose aim is a

government job for life. Educational reform seems to us to be a prerequisite for both social mobility and economic development.

**Attitudes to time:** Is it a commodity to be spent or saved, or is it more like an endlessly flowing river? Our observation in tourist spots and hotels was that foreign tourists, while delighted by the friendliness, were often frustrated by a more relaxed attitude to time.

**Past, Present and Future Orientation:** We were privileged to meet some forward thinkers who were anxious to move the country beyond the sectarian horrors of the recent past. But we were also aware of ongoing fear and resentments, and constantly reminded of the pride in the past glory of the country as a place of great Buddhist kings and princes, an exclusively Sinhalese pride. It would be good to think that the country can look to the future, reconcile, rebuild and unite, but that would take great will and leadership and prolonged effort from all sides.

**Conflict Resolution:** Do we like to bring things out in the open and deal with them, or do we bury them under a veneer and hope it'll all work out? Dealing with the realities of the atrocities committed by both sides risks bringing a lot of bitterness to the surface. But not doing so risks a festering of discontent. This will need skilled handling by a brave government.



**Direct or Indirect Communication:** While Australians think it a virtue to be clear and direct, we would expect an old and complex society like the Sinhalese to be subtler. Yet in our meetings we felt that there was an openness and honesty on most issues.

**Individual or Collective:** As great individualists (despite Melbourne's footy tribes!) we can overlook the importance that community identification plays, and in Sri Lanka that strong identification with community of course plays into the ethnic strife. Without a unifying loyalty (NB Sukarno's success in introducing a national language that wasn't Javanese!) it is hard to see a prosperous united nation emerging. The nearest is looking at accepting Tamil on the same level as Sinhala. Our group felt that giving English primacy could perform this role and also benefit the country economically, though it would be difficult to find enough competent teachers.

**Final Cultural Observation:** Sri Lanka is still a collection of different cultures in which the Sinhalese are dominant, rather than part of a unified whole. While there have been some

commendable moves towards reconciliation and rebuilding, this is an issue that still needs urgent attention and leadership.

Unemployment, or underemployment, particularly of Tamils, could lead to another explosive situation. While literacy rates are high, often leading to a demand for higher status work (particularly in government jobs-for-life) the education system does not seem to prepare the young for jobs in the real world.

## Higher Education Response

Education institutions notably Sri Lanka's top universities are desperately trying to address this disparity. The group was privileged to visit the University of Jaffna and the University of Peradeniya (Kandy). The Vice-Chancellors of both universities addressed the issue of cultural integration of all communities and various strategies to achieve this through education, post conflict.



Executives of the University of Peradeniya

The University of Jaffna while academically highly advanced, is working through several infrastructure development projects with slow progress. While most facilities were under upgrade, the Vice-Chancellor emphasised that the support from Australian institutions could be via research collaboration opportunities, and that facilities development was on track.

The University of Peradeniya, probably Sri Lanka's premier University, showcased wonderful facilities and a list of strong international partnerships and collaborations with several Australian institutions and further partnerships under development. The Vice-Chancellor reiterated strategic focus on enhancing the youth of Sri Lanka's academic excellence both in terms of employability for the industries of the future as well as research capabilities.



Vice-Chancellor and Executives at the University of Jaffna

## Sri Lanka: Tourism

### **Impressions of The Sri Lankan Tourist Experience**

Sri Lanka is undoubtedly a beautiful tropical island. With its ancient world heritage sites, picturesque beaches, abundant native wildlife, rich history and Ayurvedic medicine, it is unsurprising that the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority ('SLTDA') expects 2.6 million tourists in 2016.

Our tour was very capably organised by a Colombo based tour company, Pan Global Travels & Tours and we were fortunate to have an excellent and very knowledgeable local guide, Chaminda. In our limited time on the island, we visited the bustling Colombo, the great ruined city of Anuradhapura, Jaffna to observe the devastation of the civil war, Dambulla and the historic former kingdom of Kandy before returning to Colombo.

Prior to arriving we were warned of major health issues/diseases and in particular mosquitos and the risk of Dengue fever. Despite the Dengue risks, which had increased with the recent flooding, no-one in our group was struck with the virus. Our travel company was also aptly prepared and provided what seemed like an unlimited supply of safe drinking bottled water.

Our group stayed in a variety of hotels, (Jetwing in Jaffna only opened in April 2016) and that were run by very pleasant people with varying degrees of English. The lack of fluent English sometimes led to confusion as we found that many of our

requests were met with a very pleasant smile and nod but no action. We observed that any developments in the tourist sector should focus on the English language in order to raise general service standards. The joint-venture between Australia hospitality school William Angliss Institute and the Colombo Academy of Hospitality Management is likely to have an impact on this as graduates supply some of the biggest hotel names on the island.

We observed that for the tourism industry to develop, there is a need for safe and comfortable transport on the Island. The government have made some head way with newly constructed roads which we were told significantly decreased the travel time.



Sigiriya Rock Fortress



Galle Face Hotel, Colombo



Dambulla Cave Temple



We travelled around Sri Lanka in a 30 seat, fairly old but clean bus and shared the roads with a variety of vehicles including trucks, cars, buses, tuk tuks and taxis. Those sitting in the front of the bus witnessed many scary traffic episodes and close calls that were skilfully manoeuvred by our sharp and experienced drivers.



Our experience on the train between Kandy and Colombo was a similarly shocking experience, with a bumpy, almost ‘theme-park’ ride even in the first class carriage. While the Bandaranayike International Airport is well appointed with very comprehensive security and the national carrier, Sri Lanka Airlines has daily international flights including direct flights to London.

Sri Lanka has undoubted potential as an international tourist destination. It is obvious that private investment is being made in hotels across the island but transport and public facilities are still under-developed. The SLTDA plans to market Sri Lankan tourism globally through a digital online marketing campaign as a small, safe island



with many attractions and easily reached from transport hubs such as Dubai and Singapore. In a competitive tourism region, the country must address their services standards in relation to value for money if they are to further develop this area of the economy.



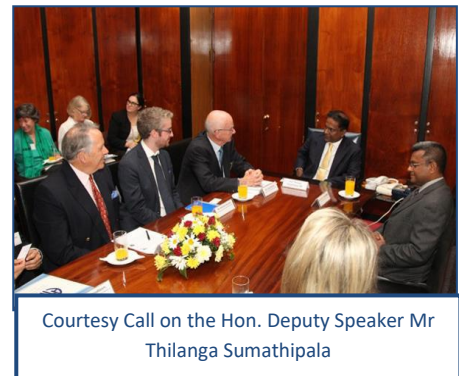
## Sri Lanka: Constitutional Reform

President Sirisena came to power in January 2015 on a platform of good governance and major reform, including to Sri Lanka's constitution.

Before Sirisena's election, many Sri Lankans had felt that the constitutional framework vested excessive powers in the executive presidency and was not well adapted to meeting the aspirations of different communities in the country.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, adopted in April 2015, went some way towards limiting the powers of the executive presidency and restoring the independence of key government institutions. This was a major achievement, but the reform process has only just begun. The focus now is on efforts to draft an entirely new constitution, with Parliament converted to a Constitutional Assembly in January 2016 to bring this about.

The reform process was a subject of discussion in many of our meetings, particularly in an informative exchange with the head of the Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reform, Mr Lal Wijenayake, and several members of his committee. The committee had undertaken extensive consultations with the people of Sri Lanka, had taken submissions from the Sri Lankan diaspora, and provided a report to government with recommendations on the possible content of a new constitution.



It was put to us by many of our interlocutors that the people of Sri Lanka want to see peace and reconciliation, and greater democratisation of the State - power less concentrated in the executive presidency, and government that is more transparent, accountable and representative of the diversity of the country. A new constitution is seen as an important step in the reconciliation process, and as providing a political framework for more harmonious inter-communal relations in the future.

In particular, many see a new constitution as providing a guarantee of the rights of Sri Lanka's various communities, and as a means of protecting minorities against the imposition of the will of the majority (majoritarianism).

A central underlying tension in the discussion of constitutional reform relates to the nature of the State – whether it is to have the characteristics of a federal state or to remain a unitary state. Federalism is broadly resisted by many in the Sinhalese community as opening the door to separatism in the north and east. A unitary state is regarded with suspicion by many Tamils as providing no guarantee against the imposition of majority rule and domination by the Sinhalese community.

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Nevertheless, there seems to be broad agreement on a number of issues – promotion of basic human rights, inclusiveness, and some degree of power-sharing between the central government and provincial administrations. But the number of qualified recommendations from the Public Representations Committee shows the difficulties of finding consensus on the most sensitive issues, both within the committee and within Sri Lankan society.

For example, members of the committee did not agree on the place of Buddhism in the constitution (in the existing constitution Buddhism has ‘the foremost place’); whether or not to refer to Sri Lanka as being a unitary state; the powers of the Presidency; the powers to be devolved to the provincial and local levels of government; or the nature of the electoral system.



The debate on the new constitution now takes place within Parliament, which reconstitutes itself as a Constitutional Assembly for the purpose. After passing the Constitutional Assembly, any new constitution would then need to gain a two thirds majority of the Parliament and be put to the people of Sri Lanka at a referendum.

As the focus of debate moves to Parliament, the tone of exchanges can be expected to sharpen considerably. And the composition of the Government – a coalition between the United National Party and a faction of its traditional rival party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party – points to a degree of volatility in political alignments which makes piloting change of such a fundamental nature problematic.

Our group was seized of the size of the challenge facing Sri Lanka in its search for a constitution that would equip it for the future, but equally impressed by the good will of interlocutors in their attempts to find a way forward. This is very much a Sri Lankan debate on which foreigners, no matter how well intentioned, would do well not to enter into the detail. But we were of one mind in wishing the country well in this endeavour.



## [Australia and Sri Lanka Relations](#)

Wherever we went we were struck by the good will extended to us as visitors, and particularly as Australians. There are no doubt historic factors to this warmth, from the days when ships from Australia to the UK made port in Colombo. There are also broad international and geopolitical factors at work at the official level, such as our common membership of the Commonwealth, our shared interest in the Indian Ocean, and the cooperation between our governments on regional issues. But it is also clearly the case that relations between the two countries are close and positive at the very basic people-to-people level.

A striking example of these links was the amicable exchanges some of us had at the Galle Face hotel with the Australian cricketers visiting Sri Lanka. Our shared passion for the game is just one indication, in the field of sport, of the many habits, traditions and indeed values the two countries have in common.



These links are underpinned by the Sri Lankan diaspora in Australia. There are over 130,000 Australians of Sri Lankan background, many of whom have founded active community groups. One of our tour members, Chris Ludowyk, is chairman of the Australia Sri Lanka Council, a professional body which aims to promote relations in trade, investment, tourism, culture, health, education and sport between Australia and Sri Lanka. The number of senior political, public service and business people in Sri Lanka who told us that they had children now studying, and family living, in Australia indicates that these links are set to continue and expand.

We had a sense from our visit to the High Commission, and from the afternoon tea offered by the High Commissioner, of the breadth of business conducted between the two governments. Cooperation on transnational crime, including people smuggling, is an important issue, as is Australia's support for human rights in Sri Lanka and post-conflict reconciliation. A presentation by a young academic at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies gave an indication of possible areas of further cooperation, such as offshore resource protection, transnational maritime crime, and shared advocacy for rules-based international frameworks. While the existing official bilateral relationship is busy, there are potentially areas for further development.

Our visits to two universities – Jaffna and Peradeniya (Kandy) – gave us an insight into some of the links between our respective tertiary institutions, even if we also thought that this was a field ripe for further development. Any further links in tertiary education would build on a solid foundation. Australia is the second most popular destination for Sri Lankan students, of whom there are around 6,000 studying in Australia. A number of Australian education

providers operate in Sri Lanka, and there are opportunities for further collaboration between universities and in the field of technical and vocational education.

Australia supports these education links, and Sri Lanka's wish to build its education sector, through the official aid program. Twenty new Australia Award scholarships were offered in the last financial year, to join the existing 63 scholarship holders in Australia. And in country, Australia has provided \$49 million to the World Bank-managed Transforming School Education Project that has increased retention rates and the quality of school education. Under this project, over 32,000 primary and secondary teachers were trained in 2014-2015.

It was encouraging to meet several newly arrived Australian volunteers at the High Commissioner's afternoon tea on the final day of our visit. Their qualifications and activities appeared to us well attuned to the needs of the groups that they worked with. Their efforts represent very good value for money in the aid programme, and disseminate a positive image of young Australians keen to contribute their skills to the development of neighbouring countries.



Our visit to the crab-processing factory at Vellankulam (covered elsewhere in this report) gave us a good insight into an effective Australian aid program, generating employment opportunities for people in great need. The three stated objectives for Australian aid – expanding economic opportunities for the poor, supporting government to be more responsive to the needs of citizens and the private sector, and increasing gender equality – struck us as appropriate to Sri Lanka's circumstances and, in the case of the crab-processing factory, very well targeted. The group was concerned that aggressive poaching by large trawlers from Tamil Nadu in India would affect the sustainability of the fishery in short order. We would support any assistance or encouragement Australia is able to give Sri Lanka in its negotiations with India to stop this illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and to manage the fishery sustainably.

Our group of 20 was a small part of the over 62,000 Australian visitors to Sri Lanka each year. There is scope for this number to increase, given Sri Lanka's attractions. The trade relationship also has room to grow, with two-way trade in goods and services approaching the \$1billion mark. Investment is curiously lop-sided, with Sri Lanka investing \$209million in Australia and Australia just \$62million in Sri Lanka (DFAT – Sri Lanka economy fact sheet). We would agree with Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, in his address to the institute in April 2016, that there appears to be further opportunities for Australian businesses in areas such as tourism and leisure, dairy industry, fishing and aquaculture, and, as we have noted, in education services.

# Appendices:

## AIIA Sri Lankan Study Tour Leadership Team



Title	Name/Position	Affiliation/ Designation
Mr	<b>David Ritchie (Tour Leader)</b>	Former High Commissioner to Sri Lanka (1996-99), High Commissioner to Western Samoa (1991-1994), Deputy High Commissioner to London (1999-2002), and Ambassador to Paris (2008-2012) and Australian Government's Special Representative for Cyprus.
Mr	<b>Sean Jesudason (Deputy Tour Leader)</b>	Council Member AIIAV, former Partnerships Coordinator at Deakin University –Victoria and Sri Lankan Expatriate.
Mr	<b>Patrick Moore (President AIIAV)</b>	Former investment banker, former Chairman of Lloyd's Information Services for Australian Names.
Ms	<b>Kelly MacDonald (AIIAV Study Tour Intern)</b>	Holds Bachelors in Law/International Studies, Law Graduate at Lloyds of London Underwriting Agency.
Mr	<b>Warren Evans (AIIAV Study Tour Intern)</b>	Lecturer in International Politics Swinburne University of Technology, Member of the Australian Army Reserve.

## **AIIA Sri Lankan Study Tour Delegates**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation/ Designation/Position</b>
<b>Ms</b>	<b>Carolina Venegas</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australian Passport Office).
<b>Mr</b>	<b>Chris Ludowyk</b>	Engineer, Defence Science & Technology Organisation (DSTO), Jazz Musician, Committee Member/Chairman Australia Sri Lanka Council Inc. and Sri Lankan Expatriate.
<b>Ms</b>	<b>Eileen McInnes</b>	Council Member AIIAV, holds BA in Arts, Masters of International Relations and Journalism from Monash University. Employed in Information Technology Transformation Project at National Australia Bank.
<b>Mrs</b>	<b>Isobel Morgan</b>	Singer, pianist, Court Networker (Supreme Court), special events organiser Opera Australia. Community work for various organisations.
<b>Dr</b>	<b>Jonathan Hooper</b>	Doctor and Orthopaedic Surgeon.
<b>Mrs</b>	<b>Kathie Derham Moore</b>	Former Commercial Lawyer and Tutor in Constitutional Law at Monash Law School.
<b>Mr</b>	<b>Lachlan Wills</b>	Student of Masters in International Relations at the Australian National University. Former intern with the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Melbourne.
<b>Mr</b>	<b>Manfred Claasz</b>	Manager, Haputale Estate, Haputale from 1967-1972 (Scottish Tea and Lands Company of Ceylon Limited) and Director, CSIRO's Australian Centre of Precision Optics, Lindfield, NSW (2006-2008) and Sri Lankan Expatriate.
<b>Mrs</b>	<b>Margaret Pocock</b>	Cross-cultural Consultant, former Australian Volunteer Abroad in Indonesia.
<b>Ms</b>	<b>Melissa Liberatore</b>	BA in French and Japanese, student of Master of International Relations and Master of Journalism at Monash University and plays clarinet with Monash University Philharmonic Orchestra
<b>Mr</b>	<b>Ray Miles</b>	Civil Engineer, undertaken numerous assignments for AusAID, UNDP, FAO, World Bank, ADB and private companies in Africa, Middle East and South East Asia. Presently focussing on Water Supply and Community Development Projects in Vietnam.
<b>Ms</b>	<b>Robyn Byrne OAM</b>	Council Member AIIAV, Former officer at the Department of Immigration, Member of Community Health Centre and Legal Service Boards.
<b>Ms</b>	<b>Rosie McCormack</b>	Former midwife, Director of Australian Nanny & Au Pair Connection, Guide at National Gallery of Victoria.
<b>Mrs</b>	<b>Sue A'Beckett</b>	Former Librarian at The University of Melbourne, cattle and sheep grazier, and of Shire Councillor.
<b>Mrs</b>	<b>Sue Kimpton</b>	Holds a BA in Fine Art, French and Art History. Former book publisher and beef/agricultural farmer in the Macedon Ranges.

# AIIA Sri Lankan Study Tour Itinerary

July 2016

Date	Approx. Distance	Approx. Time	Time	Program	Location/Organiser
9-Jul	40 km	01 hrs	TBA	Bandaranayake International Airport Sri Lanka	Pan Global Travels
10-Jul			07:30AM - 08:30 AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Galle Face Hotel
			10:00AM - 12:00PM	Colombo City Tour	Guide Chaminda
			At leisure	Lunch in Colombo	Delegates organise own lunch
			04:45PM - 05:30PM	Welcome & Briefing	"The Library"- Galle Face Hotel, David Ritchie
			05:30PM - 07:30PM	<b>Cambridge Society Cocktails</b>	Hosted by Patrick Moore
			07:30PM - 09:30PM	Welcome Dinner	Galle Face Hotel
11-Jul			07:30AM - 08:30 AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Galle Face Hotel
			08:15AM - 8:45AM	Travel to Australian High Commission	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			09:00AM - 10:00AM	<b>Briefing at Australian High commission - HE Bryce Huchesson, Australian High Commissioner</b>	Australian High Commission - David Ritchie
			10:10AM - 10:45AM	Travel to Parliament of Sri Lanka	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			11:00AM - 11:30AM	<b>Courtesy Call on the Hon. Deputy Speaker Mr Thilanga Sumathipala</b>	Parliament of Sri Lanka - Sean Jesudason
			11:30AM - 12:00PM	Tour of Parliament	Parliament of Sri Lanka
			12:00PM - 01:00PM	<b>Luncheon hosted by Mr. W.B.D. Dasanayake, Secretary General of Parliament</b>	Parliament of Sri Lanka - Sean Jesudason
			1:10 - 2:45PM	Travel to Visumpaya	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			02:00PM - 03:00PM	<b>Meeting with the Chairman - Public Representations Committee on Constitutional reforms, Mr Lal Wijenayake</b>	Visumpaya Colombo - Sean Jesudason
			3:10PM - 3:30PM	Travel to LKIIRS	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			03:45PM - 05:00PM	<b>Australia- Sri Lanka Forum and Networking Evening Hosted by the Laskhman Kadiragamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies</b>	LKIIRS Dr Dinusha Panditharathne, Director - Sean Jesudason
			5:10PM - 5:45PM	Travel to Galle Face Hotel	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner	Galle Face Hotel
12-Jul			06:30AM - 07:30AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Galle Face Hotel
	225 km	5 hrs	08:00AM	Leave for Anuradhapura	Panglobal Travels
			12:00PM - 01:00PM	Lunch at Wilpattu	Panglobal Travels
			02:00PM- 06:00PM	Jeep Safari at Wilpattu National Park	Panglobal Travels
			06:30PM	Check into Rajarata hotel in Anuradhpura	<a href="http://www.rajaratahotel.lk/">http://www.rajaratahotel.lk/</a>
			At leisure	Dinner	Rajarata Hotel
13-Jul			07:00AM - 08:00AM	<b>Breakfast Briefing by Mr Tim O'Rilley, CEO Taprobane Seafood Company</b>	Australian High Commission - David Ritchie
			08:15AM - 11:30AM	Sightseeing tour of Anuradhapura	Panglobal Travels
			12:00PM - 01:00PM	Lunch at Anuradhapura	Panglobal Travels
			01:30PM - 03:30PM	Visit the Mihintale Sanctuary	Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner	Rajarata Hotel
14-Jul			06:30AM - 07:30AM	Breakfast	Rajarata Hotel
	200 km	3 1/2hrs	08:00AM - 11:00AM	Leave for Jaffna (via Mulankavil)	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			12:00PM - 1:00PM	<b>Visit Australian Aid Project in Mulankavil</b>	Australian High Commission - David Ritchie
			01:30PM - 02:00PM	Light (packed) Lunch in Killinochi	Panglobal Travels
			02:00PM- 03:00PM	<b>Visit to MAS Factory In Killinochi</b>	MAS Holdings - David Ritchie
					<a href="http://www.jetwinghotels.com/jetwingjaffna/">http://www.jetwinghotels.com/jetwingjaffna/</a>
			05:30PM	Check in to Jetwing Hotel in Jaffna	<a href="http://www.jetwinghotels.com/jetwingjaffna/">http://www.jetwinghotels.com/jetwingjaffna/</a>
			06:00PM - 07:00PM	Relax at hotel/ or Sightseeing	Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner	Jetwing Jaffna

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# AIIA Sri Lankan Study Tour Itinerary

Continued

<b>15-Jul</b>			07:30AM - 08:30AM	Light breakfast at the hotel	Jetwing Jaffna
			8:30AM - 9:00AM	Visit Jaffna Fort	Office of the Governor of the Northern Province - Sean Jesudason
			9:30 AM - 11:00PM	Visit the Nallur Temple	Panglobal Travels
			11:30AM - 12:30PM	<b>Meeting with UNHCR Field office in Jaffna</b>	UNHCR Geneva - David Ritchie
			12:30PM - 01:30PM	Lunch in Jaffna	Panglobal Travels
			2:00PM - 3:00PM	<b>Meeting with the Governor of the Northern Province</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
			03:30PM - 04:30PM	<b>Visit to Jaffna University and meeting with the Vice- Chancellor Prof Arasaratnam and University Executive.</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
			4:30PM - 5:15PM	Travel to Reconstruction Sites	Office of the Governor of the Northern Province
			05:15PM - 06:30PM	<b>Visit to Reconstruction Sites and communities - near Palali</b>	Office of the Governor of the Northern Province - Sean Jesudason
			At leisure	Dinner at the hotel	Jetwing Jaffna
<b>16-Jul</b>			6:00AM - 07:30AM	Breakfast	Jetwing Jaffna
	250 km	4 1/2 hrs	7:30 AM	Leave for Dambulla	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			9:00 AM - 10:00AM	<b>Foundation of Goodness - Killinochi</b>	Harmony Centre Mr Arnold - Patrick Moore
			1:00PM - 02:00PM	Lunch in Habarana/Dambulla	Panglobal Travels
			3:00PM - 05:00PM	Climb the Sigiriya Rock Fortress	Panglobal Travels
			6:00PM	Check in to Heritance Kandalama	<a href="http://www.heritancehotels.com/kandalama/">http://www.heritancehotels.com/kandalama/</a>
			At leisure	Dinner	Heritance Kandalama
<b>17-Jul</b>			6:30AM - 07:30AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Heritance Kandalama
			7:30AM - 08:30AM	Geoffrey Bawa Architecture Tour of the hotel	Heritance Kandalama
			09:00AM - 12:30PM	Sightseeing tour of the Polonnaruwa	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			12:30PM - 01:30PM	Lunch in Polonnaruwa	Panglobal Travels
			2:30PM - 05:00PM	Jeep safari at Minneriya National Park	Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner at the hotel	Heritance Kandalama
<b>18-Jul</b>			06:30AM - 07:30AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Heritance Kandalama
	95 km	3 hrs	07:35AM	Proceed to Visit Dambulla Rock Cave Temple	Panglobal Travels
			08:00AM - 10:00AM	Climb Dambulla Cave Temple	Panglobal Travels
			10:00AM	Leave for Matale	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			11:30PM - 01:00PM	Lunch at the Spice Garden in Matale	Panglobal Travels
			01:00PM	Leave for Kandy	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			03:00PM - 04:30PM	Visit the Temple of the Tooth	Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner	Amaya Hills

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# AIIA Sri Lankan Study Tour Itinerary

Continued

<b>19-Jul</b>			06:30AM - 09:00AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Amaya Hills
			09:00AM	Proceed to Hill country	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			10:00AM - 12:00PM	Visit a tea factory and plantation in Geragama	Panglobal Travels
			12:00PM - 01:00PM	Lunch in Tea Factory	Panglobal Travels
			01:00PM - 02:00PM	Visit Arts and Crafts and Bazaar	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			03:00PM	At leisure	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			At leisure	Dinner	Amaya Hills
<b>20-Jul</b>			07:00AM - 08:00AM	Breakfast	Amaya Hills
		Optional	8:30AM - 9:00AM	Travel to Peradeniya University	Amaya Hills Shuttle Bus
			9:00AM - 9:30 AM	<b>Meeting with University of Peradeniya, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Prof R L Wijeyweera and Executive Director International Affairs Dr Nanda Gunawardana</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
		Hotel Departure	10:30AM - 11:00AM	Optional Visit to Peradeniya Botanical Gardens	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
		Option A	11:00AM - 12.45PM	Royal Botanical Gardens	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
		Option B	11:30AM - 12:15PM	<b>Visit to Meera Makkam Mosque and discussion with Mr Abdeen, Chairman of the Board of Trustees</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
			12:45PM - 1:45PM	Lunch	Panglobal Travels
			02:00PM	Arrive at Kandy Station	Panglobal Travels
	120 km	3 hrs	3:00PM - 05:30PM	<b>Travel to Colombo by Train - afternoon journey</b>	Panglobal Travels
			7:00PM	Group Dinner	Galle Face Hotel
<b>21-Jul</b>			07:00AM - 08:00AM	Breakfast at the hotel	Galle Face Hotel
			8:30AM - 9:00AM	Travel to Colombo Stock Exchange	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			9:00AM - 10:00 AM	<b>Visit to Colombo Stock Exchange &amp; Roundtable with Mr Renuke Wijayawardhane, Chief Operating Officer</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
			10:30AM - 11:30 AM	<b>Exclusive Tour of the President's House</b>	Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sean Jesudason
			11:30AM - 12:00PM	Travel back to Hotel	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			12:00PM - 1:00PM	Lunch	At hotel delegates organise their own
			1:30PM - 2:30PM	<b>Meeting with Dr Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives</b>	The Library - Galle Face Hotel, Sean Jesudason
			2:30PM - 03:00PM	Travel to Australian Residence	Tour Bus - Panglobal Travels
			03:00PM - 05:00PM	<b>Afternoon Tea with the Australian High Commissioner and Colombo Plan Scholars</b>	Australian High Commission Residence - David Ritchie
			5:00PM - 5:30PM	Travel back to Hotel	Pan Global Travels
			06:30PM - 10:00pm	<b>Farewell Gala Dinner</b>	Galle Face Hotel
<b>22-Jul</b>	40 km	01 hr	07:00AM - 08:30AM	Breakfast at the hotel	airport 03 hrs prior to your departure time

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# Political Map of Sri Lanka



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