

# BRIDGE

APRIL 2024 | 19TH EDITION

**CAN WE BUILD A** <sup>33</sup>  
**WORLD-CLASS CITY**  
*with* **THIRD-WORLD**  
**PUBLIC TRANSPORT?**



<sup>26</sup>

Interview with  
**CASA Chair**  
**SHANO**  
**SABAR**

**SRI LANKA**  
**NATIONAL**  
**SEAFARERS'**  
**DAY**

<sup>11</sup>

**Sailing**  
**into the**  
**Future:**

**SRI LANKA'S RISE AS**  
**A MAJOR MARITIME**  
**PLAYER AMID**  
**GLOBAL SEAFARER**  
**SHORTAGE**

<sup>06</sup>

**ZONED OUT:**  
**EXPORT**  
**AMBITIONS**  
**HINDERED**  
**BY LAND**  
**LIMITATIONS**

<sup>36</sup>

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# Sailing into the Future:

**SRI LANKA'S RISE AS  
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A beacon in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is known globally as a nation with a rich maritime heritage and seasoned mariners. The island is strategically positioned amidst global trade routes, which has amplified its significance as a pivotal player and boosted maritime workforces for decades. But how has this landscape changed over the recent years? Kalinga De Silva, Managing Director of Centrum Marine Consultancy and Secretary of the Association for Seafarer Recruitment Agents (ASRA), provides an insight into today's Sri Lankan seafarer market, sharing his views on its potential to thrive and be one of the next biggest contributors to the economy.



## The Seafarer Industry of Sri Lanka Amidst Shifting Global Dynamics

The Maritime Human Resource sector of Sri Lanka provides a substantial USD 437 million to the country's economy annually. The industry comprises over 16,000 active seafarers, of which 96% are on board dry cargo vessels such as containers, bulk carriers, and multi-purpose vessels. The country stands out as a boutique destination for maritime crew as a result of its proximity to India – a global hub for major shipping companies operating in the region.

However, recent global trends have seen a vast change in the number of seafarers. "The crewing industry anticipates a shortage of 147,000 seafarers across the world by 2025, excluding the numbers on cruise and passenger vessels. This is a result of two black swan events – the Covid19 standstill, which saw older seafarers opt for early retirement; and the Russia-Ukraine conflict that decreased numbers from these two maritime giants," Kalinga highlights.

As such, this shortage presents Sri Lanka with a stellar opportunity to fill these numbers with local crew, especially in the engine and electro-technical departments. While the country's industry has been historically centered on dry cargo vessels, there is a noticeable shift towards a growing population on tanker vessels, encompassing oil, chemicals, and LPG; with a faint

emergence on LNG carriers as well. Moreover, Kalinga adds that the wages paid to Indian seafarers also apply to Sri Lankan counterparts, further enhancing the country's appeal in the global maritime labor market.


## How has Sri Lanka nurtured its Maritime Excellence?

Today, Sri Lanka boasts a robust maritime training infrastructure, with three state-owned entities, four private institutes, and two specialized catering training facilities ensuring the development of a professional maritime workforce. Despite its global prominence, Sri Lanka's seafarer population constitutes less than 1% of the 1.8 million seafarers worldwide. To address this, the ASRA was formed to actively promote the maritime profession in Sri Lanka and elevate the number of seafarers to a statically achievable 50,000.

The journey to becoming a seafarer starts with enrolment in a maritime academy, selecting from specializing in the deck, engineering, or electrical departments. In Sri Lanka, maritime education facilities up to the Master or Chief Engineer level are available, where courses encompass in-classroom study as well as out at sea. For passenger vessels, it is also possible for aspiring youth to obtain a catering rating with hotelier education and experience. "Despite having facilities in the country, youth migrate in numbers due to the

high entry-level onboarding requirements in Sri Lanka and the misconception that certifications from foreign countries, such as the UK, are more recognized in the industry," Kalinga shares.

"Sri Lanka has been on the STCW whitelist since its inception and passed the EU Maritime Safety Audit which is conducted globally. The latter is a certification that the Philippine Mariners market – one of the biggest in the world, has not achieved yet. As a result, EU shipowners are threatening to reject crew from the Philippines." He further adds that the current minimum standard for maritime crew in Sri Lanka is high compared to other countries. Therefore, he believes that it is essential that the local industry re-evaluate entry criteria to match global levels; increasing the supply of entry-level mariners onboard to gain experience that will effectively raise the standard of maritime crews from Sri Lanka.



Today, Sri Lanka boasts a robust maritime training infrastructure, with three state-owned entities, four private institutes, and two specialized catering training facilities ensuring the development of a professional maritime workforce.

## Creating an Ocean of Opportunities for Local Mariners

According to Kalinga, the Marine HR policy for local seafarers has been redeveloped by industry professionals, and a gazette reflecting the same is to be issued by the Government of Sri Lanka. This new policy is aligned to develop seafarer competence on passenger vessels, offshore vessels in oil and gas operations, and workboats. Additionally, he conveys that is the

responsibility of crew management companies to place trainees and cadets on board these vessels to gain experience at a young age, once they have completed the necessary prerequisites. "Opportunities on workboats could easily draw in youth from riding trishaws in Sri Lanka to find employment in countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia," he states.

With this, he emphasizes the need for the Government and Private sectors to work together in marketing Sri Lanka globally as an

attractive talent pool of seafarers. The emerging theme of inclusivity and gender diversity would also present more opportunities to female seafarers from the country across several industries. "We have seen an increasing number of lady seafarers on board cruise vessels as part of the hotel staff. Despite this, cultural hindrances and the laid-back nature of Sri Lankan households have shown that parents still show greater enthusiasm to fund their son's seagoing education, rather than their daughters," he expresses. By opening opportunities for the



funding of young girls to pursue their maritime education, the country can not only position itself as a gender-diverse labour market, but also create the possibility of cross-selling existing male seafarers for females.

### Charting a New Course for Sri Lanka’s Maritime Crewing Industry

Like in any industry, crewing in Sri Lanka grapples with several challenges that impede its optimal functioning. A significant hurdle lies in the scarcity of training slots and opportunities available,

which hinders the growth and development of the country’s upcoming seafarers. “Most crewing companies often limit their focus to providing experienced mariners and neglect the crucial nurturing of cadets and trainees, which is essential for a sustainable pipeline of skilled maritime professionals,” he conveys. Despite having the infrastructure capacity for more extensive training, the limited opportunities to place individuals on vessels constrain the industry’s overall progress.

Addressing this, Kalinga envisages that the next step for the Sri Lankan Maritime industry lies in the country’s transition into ship managers and owners. This involves forging partnerships and

alliances with established global ship managers, thereby leveraging their expertise and resources. Encouraging a percentage of these ship managers to allocate crew slots specifically for Sri Lankan seafarers is pivotal in establishing a foothold in the industry. Additionally, globalizing Sri Lankan companies and establishing overseas branches can contribute to providing multinational crews to match international budgetary considerations. Simultaneously, developing the investment banking sector becomes crucial to attracting ship ownership through Sri Lankan entities, fostering a comprehensive transformation within the country’s maritime industry.



**KALINGA DE SILVA (MCIM-UK , CSCM-ICSEA,USA)**  
Managing Director – Centrum Marine Consultancy Pvt Ltd  
Secretary – Association for Seafarer Recruitment Agents (ASRA)

**Kalinga De Silva** is the founder– Director of Centrum Marine Consultancy Pvt Ltd which specializes in Marine HR services (Crew Management), Ship Broking and Trading facilitation of bulk commodities. His main specialization lies in positioning Sri Lankan Seafarers with the global fleet, amongst ship owners and managers in Germany, Singapore, Dubai, Cyprus, Hong Kong, China and Greece.

In the past decade he has travelled extensively and has opened doors for Sri Lankan Seafarers with many ship owners such as Maersk Tankers, Maersk Lines, Costa Cruises, AIDA Cruises, Hamburg Sud, Swire Pacific, PACC, Eastern Pacific Lines, Reederei NSB, GMS Offshore and Peter Doehle Schiffarhts, Atlantic Lloyd and Asiatic Lloyd, GAC and Cosmo shipmanagement etc. These efforts have created close to 950 dedicated slots for Sri Lankan seafarers. Contribution to the Sri Lankan economy through these efforts amounts to more than USD 35 million per annum

by way of seafarer wages. He continues to his efforts in globalizing “ Sri Lankan Seafaring ” as a brand of excellence and has initiated the “ National Marine HR Policy” in conjunction with the Merchant Shipping Secretariat (MSS) of Sri Lanka and Ministry of Ports and Shipping.

Starting his career as a banker in 2003 with Pan Asia Banking Corporation, he has held diverse roles in the apparel industry before receiving the calling from the Maritime Industry. Since then he has held positions as

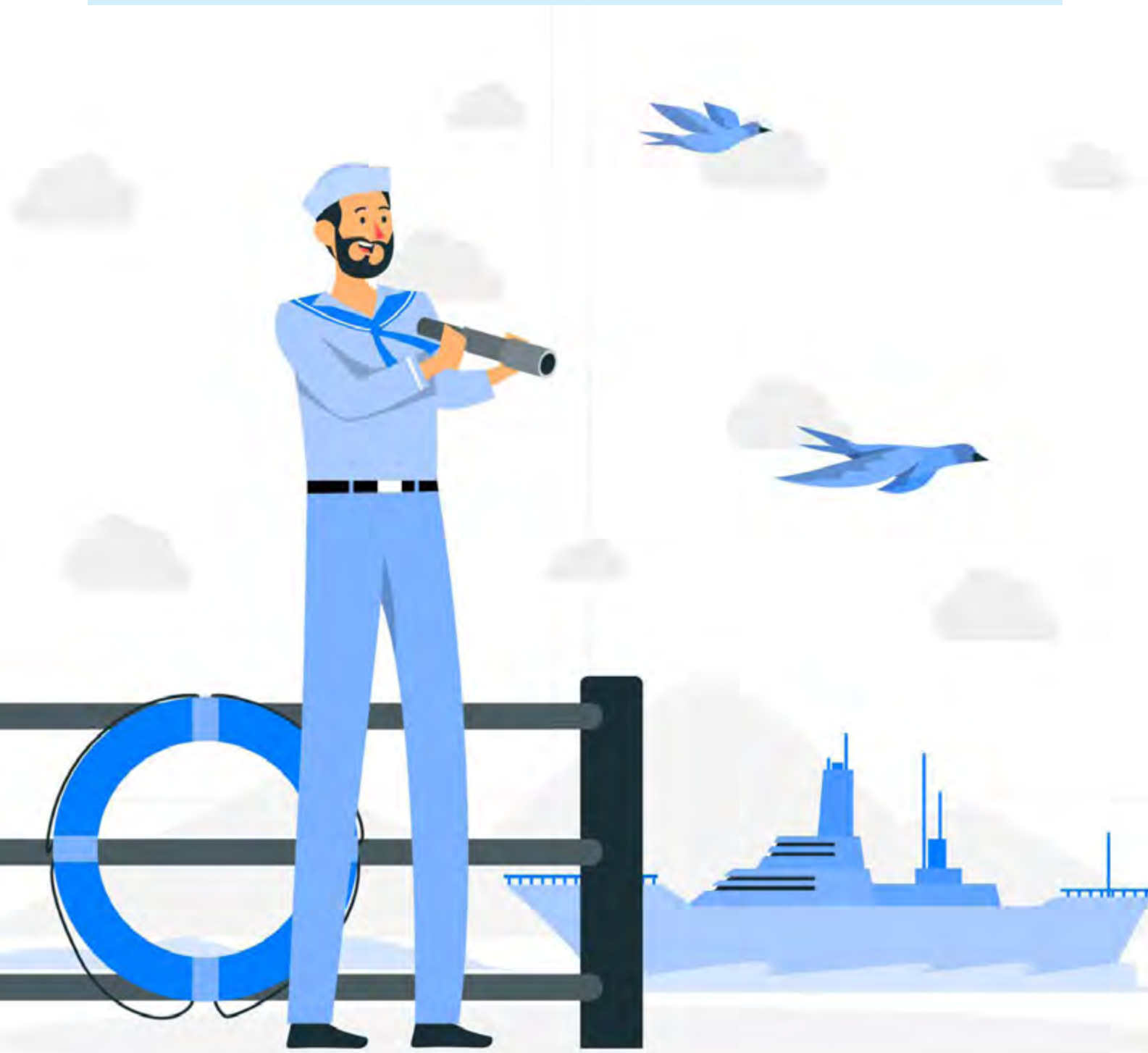
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3. Country Representative for Sri Lanka & Maldives – Hamburg School Of Business Administration
4. Principal Consultant – Crew Management for Hayleys Advantis
5. Senior Consultant – Lanka Marine Services ( John Keells Holdings )
6. Senior Consultant – Hili Ventures, Malta
7. Founder- Director – Centrum Marine Consultancy

# SRI LANKA NATIONAL SEAFARERS’ DAY

By Professor Lalith Edirisinghe



*Seafaring is a challenging and demanding profession that often requires seafarers to spend extended periods away from their families under vulnerable living conditions and often exposed to heavy risks. Their dedication and personal sacrifices contribute to the smooth functioning of the maritime industry.*



As a person who commenced the career as a Cadet in the Sri Lanka Merchant Navy the author firstly would like to appreciate the care and concern of Ministry of Ports and Shipping about Seafarers. Their vision is to "Produce high quality professional seafarers in order to enhance employment prospects". The declaration of National day for Sri Lanka underscores the government's commitment to enhancing the welfare of seafarers.

The shipping industry forms the backbone of global trade. Commercial shipping is integral to the well-being of nations. Their role in facilitating the movement of goods and resources across oceans makes them indispensable to the interconnected world we live in. They are vital to most goods transported internationally are done so by sea. Both seafarers and non-seafaring employees in commercial shipping ensure the smooth flow of goods, raw materials, and commodities across borders, facilitating economic activities worldwide. According to available statistics there are 16,000 qualified seafarers currently in Sri Lanka and nearly 12,000 are active at any given time. While China, Philippines, Indonesia, Russian Federation, and Ukraine have secured the rank of top seafaring nations Sri Lanka is lagging despite many strengths and opportunities. The government of Sri Lanka has a target

to increase the active seafarers to 50,000 by 2030. This would bring to the country more than USD one billion annual foreign exchange earnings. It is observed that these incomes are wisely invested for development of family, village, and SME. For example, this money has been reinvested in Sri Lanka on education and training institutes, shipping and non-shipping related businesses assisting the domestic economy. Some of these companies have won the Presidential awards as best foreign exchange earners to the country. As far as the social benefits are concerned, it can reduce the number of unskilled women going to Middle East by way of the male in the family taking up employment on board ships. The percentage of female officers globally is expected to continue increasing in the coming years and maritime training institutes in Sri Lanka also have made initial approach. This sector needs a lot of improvements, thus social awareness and capacity building is the key.

Seafarers currently bring more than USD 300 ML per year to Sri Lanka. Since this money mainly spent in Sri Lanka by their family members unlike those who migrate its impact to the economy is enormous. Given the current financial trend in the country the inward foreign exchange earnings is timely and very beneficial. Generally, one rating person earns more than 5 times of



when the society is unaware of evolving lucrative jobs like seafaring, parents and teachers cannot guide the younger generation in the right direction.



a foreign going domestic worker while an officer earns more than 10-15 times of a foreign going domestic worker. Therefore, recognising the value and its indispensability by the government is a timely decision.

The lack of awareness about seafaring industry and its reality has been a serious shortcoming. When the public is unaware of the unmatched benefits and evolving employee friendly culture due to technology advancements it directly makes a negative impact on capacity building efforts at sea. when the society is unaware of evolving lucrative jobs like seafaring, parents and teachers cannot guide the younger generation in the right direction. A similar scenario was noted about finding qualified people in logistics and transport sector sometime back. There was extremely poor demand for degrees in this area back in 2005 when the University of Moratuwa first started this degree followed by CINEC Campus in 2007. After incorporating logistics in 2017 as a part of subject unit "Business studies" under commerce stream in the G.C.E. (A.L.) a substantial increase was evident in enrolling to the logistics and transport related degrees. It is evident that women participation has also increased after these initiatives. Today, this degree has a high demand. These graduates have a huge demand locally and internationally. On the other hand, social awareness could play a major role to overcome the various challenges towards these capacity building initiatives. Therefore, recognising the value and indispensability of shipping business is a timely decision. The declaration of a national day that displays the government's

concern about facilitating to the enhancement about the inclusivity of this subject is a remarkable decision.

The maritime industry, driven by seafarers, is a major contributor to the economies of many nations. It provides employment opportunities, supports related industries (such as shipbuilding and logistics), and generates revenue through shipping fees and related services. While a comprehensive strategic plan needs to be drafted in which the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Aviation can take the leadership to improve the seafarer contribution to local economy in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the declaration of a National Seafarers' Day in Sri Lanka is a timely decision in the right direction considering the country's prime objective of increasing foreign exchange earnings to the country and improving maritime sector. Providing the due recognition by the government would be the key to create public awareness about the importance of seafaring industry. It helps the much-needed capacity building efforts in the country. Immediate results are expected from this sensitive approach as it directly links with a cross section of the society covering schools, universities, all sectors in the industry and public. It is possible to make the public aware through this type of strategies that how each citizen of the country could contribute to this national effort for mutual benefits.

Maritime education encompasses elements of both science and art, reflecting the diverse nature of skills and knowledge required in the maritime industry. It is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from various

## Teaching Commercial Shipping and Maritime Science as an academic subject in schools holds significant importance due to its pivotal role in the global economy.

scientific fields such as physics, meteorology, and engineering, while also incorporating practical and artistic aspects. This interdisciplinary approach reflects the complexity of the maritime industry and the diverse skills needed by professionals. It naturally aligns with Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM) subjects. Maritime education is aligned with the policy objectives of NEPF illustrated under Holistic education also.

The inaugural textbook on shipping education written in our national language has been launched on this memorable day. This textbook could be the foundation to enhance social awareness of this important subject towards sustainable capacity building. The initiatives by the Minister of Ports, Shipping, and Aviation Hon. Nimal Siripala De Silva is commendable. The President and a delegation from the Dalian Maritime University, the largest maritime university in the world, and many other key people in the international shipping industry and ambassadors from relevant countries attend this event. Teaching Commercial Shipping and Maritime Science as an academic subject in schools holds significant importance due to its pivotal role in the global economy. Shipping, as an academic subject, is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses various aspects related to the transportation of goods and people by sea. The importance of studying shipping lies in several key areas including (but not limited to) global trade and economy; logistics and supply chain management; environmental sustainability; maritime law and regulations; technological advancements;

risk management; employment opportunities; cultural and geopolitical understanding. It provides learners a comprehensive understanding of a critical component of the global economy. Students in this field gain knowledge that is not only relevant to the maritime industry but also has broader applications in international trade, logistics, law, and environmental sustainability. The maritime industry offers a wide range of career opportunities. Furthermore, studying shipping can prepare individuals for roles in ship management, port operations, logistics, maritime law, and international trade, among others. Teaching professional subjects at school with high employability is crucial for several reasons, as it directly addresses the needs of both students and the workforce. The importance of offering and emphasizing professional subjects such as shipping with high employability is multifaceted. There is an ongoing and evolving demand for shipping jobs due to global trade expansion, the rise of e-commerce, technological advancements, need for the supply chain resilience, cybersecurity in shipping, diversification of cargo types, ever increasing regulatory compliance that ensures the sustainability, economic growth and development, global competitiveness, career satisfaction for graduates, lifelong learning and continuous improvement, positive impact on society and infrastructure development projects. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has estimated the average annual growth of the shipping industry at 2.9%. The expansion and modernization of ports, shipping lanes, and transportation networks, can lead to increased demand for shipping-related jobs. These projects aim to enhance efficiency and accommodate growing trade volumes.

The senior secondary level (i.e. grade 10-11 and age of 15-16 years) could be the ideal timing to teach Commercial Shipping and Maritime Science because it facilitates students to consciously select science stream at the post-secondary leading to General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (i.e. grade 12-13 and age of 17-18 years). Therefore, teaching shipping prior to the selection of G.C.E. advanced level education is vital for the success of individuals, industries, and societies. It not only addresses the immediate needs of the job market but also contributes to long-term economic growth, innovation, and societal well-being. It is observed that many students who wish to enter to shipping industry are obstructed due to wrong selection of the G.C.E. (A.L.) academic stream. For example, students wish to become a ship Captain, or a Marine engineer needs to be qualified in the science stream at their A.L examinations. However, student/parents/teachers are unaware about this reality because only a limited people in the country have access to such information. It is common to observe



some students become helpless when they realise later their inability to enrol for higher education programs leading to ships Captains and engineers. Therefore, this message should be transmitted to the next generation at the G.C.E. ordinary level. Educating students about the right choice of most employable academic streams in the modern world is a prime responsibility of the administrators.

Learning Commercial shipping is not limited to become a seafarer. There are two types of jobs available for those who has qualification in shipping namely, seafarers and non-seafaring employees. There are many high paying shore-based jobs in ports, warehouses, manufacturing firms, shipping line offices etc. Both seafarers and non-seafaring shipping professionals play a crucial role in the global economy and trade, contributing significantly to the transportation of goods and fostering international commerce. These developments are aligned with the policy proposal to the Ministry of Higher Education few years ago suggesting a new education concept namely, education vertical integration (EVI). The first

project under EVI has been the incorporation logistics as a school subject which took place in 2017. It did not just end with that exercise. Providing direction to the Department of national languages to publish the most suitable term in Sinhala for logistics, publishing the first textbook on logistics in Sinhala, and establishment of national day for logistics through a cabinet paper through the Ministry of transport were some of corresponding initiatives. To make better social awareness the Department of posts issued a new stamp and a first day cover commemorating this event. These initiatives ensured the complete vertical integration from the school to the university, to the industry, and to the society. The country today enjoys its due benefits and the demand for logistics degree is ever increasing with the employability rate of 100%. Other key factor is that the women participation in the logistics sector has been increased by over ten times than before as a direct outcome of this. Accordingly, a systematic vertically integrated education on commercial shipping may be an ideal option in the current context in Sri Lanka We wish the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Aviation for their future endeavours.

## About the author

### Professor Lalith Edirisinghe



BRIDGE

**Professor Lalith Edirisinghe** commenced his career in 1981 as a Cadet in the Merchant Navy administered under the Ceylon Shipping Corporation. He has served in the commercial shipping industry in various state and private sector shipping and logistics organizations. He has obtained a PhD in Transpiration planning and Logistics Management from the Dalian Maritime University, the largest maritime university in the world. He serves as an Expert Consultant to the United National Secretariate and makes special emphasis on inclusivity and increasing women patriation in the transport sector in the ESCAP region. Currently he holds the position as the Dean in CINEC Campus. He and CINEC Campus has been instrumental in incorporating Logistics in the school curriculum and establishing a national day for logistics in Sri Lanka in 2021. He was the Project Chairman of the inaugural National Logistics Awards organised by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in 2018 and the Chairman of the Judge board of the National Logistics Awards organised by the Sri Lanka Logistics and Freight Forwarders Association in 2022.

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MARPOL AT 50  
OUR COMMITMENT GOES ON

# WORLD MARITIME DAY 2023 CASA MARITIME CONFERENCE 2023

Embarking towards a Blue Horizon:  
Exploring possibilities for the Sri Lankan maritime Community.



The CASA Maritime Conference 2023 was held on the 24th of October 2023 at the Kings Court Cinnamon Lakeside focusing on the theme "Embarking towards a Blue Horizon: Exploring possibilities for the Sri Lankan maritime Community" celebrating World Maritime Day 2023 and its theme "Marpol at 50"

The event was addressed by Chairman CASA Mr. Shano Sabar and Chief Guest for the event, Hon Nimal Siripala de Silva Minister of Ports, Shipping and Aviation. While speaking at the event the Minister recalled Sri Lanka's rich Maritime history and went on to emphasize on prioritizing the local investors when awarding projects in the maritime industry.

The keynote was delivered by Mr Kamal Dorabawila, Chief Investment Officer at International Finance Corporation & sector lead for Transport and Logistics, Asia Pacific Region. During his key note speech Mr. Dorabawila highlighted the importance of using sustainability linked financing instruments in funding the growth of the Shipping industry. He highlighted the renewable energy potential of Sri Lanka and explained how the country can produce zero carbon bunker fuels to be used by ships.

The 3 key focus areas of the conference were; MARPOL at 50 Our commitment goes on; Ensuring that the maritime sector delivers cargo safely and in an environmentally sustainable manner. The 2nd session focused on Unlocking the potential of the blue economy – how the development of the maritime industry would help the Sri Lankan economy unlock its true potential. And finally, the 3rd session was on Policies for a vibrant,

thriving and competitive maritime sector – Future proof SL's maritime proposition through policy, innovation and digitalization.

## The Green Transition of the Maritime Industry from a Terminal Perspective

The first Session of the day was on the lines of "MARPOL at 50 Our commitment goes on; ensuring that the Maritime Sector delivers cargo safely and in an environmentally sustainable manner. The speaker for the session was Capt Lasitha Cumaratunga – President – Company of master mariners Sri Lanka & Board Director Hayleys Advantis Ltd

In his speech Cpt. Cumaratunga emphasized the role CASA members should play in preventing maritime disasters through fulfilling safety related requirements such as safe packing, stowing and handling. He suggested a cycle of communication between the Agents, Principals and the Government in this regard.

Afterwards the panel discussion comprised of Mr Asela Rekawa – Chairman Marine environment protection authority, Capt Upul peiris – Director Navigation – Merchant Shipping secretariat, Capt Lakshi Siwaratne – Senior Deputy harbour master and Capt Laitha Curmaratunga. This session was moderated by Ricy Barnett – Director – Growth & international expansion – Hemans Transportation (pvt) Ltd & vice president – Evergreen shipping agency Sri Lanka





## Unlocking the potential of the Blue Economy.

Post-lunch session which was conducted in collaboration with Youngship Sri Lanka titled “Unlocking the potential of the Blue Economy – How the development of the Maritime Industry would help the Sri Lankan economy unlock its true potential” saw Chief executive officer – Standard chartered Bank Mr. Bingumal Thewarathanthri giving a very detailed presentation on the current state of the economy and what the near future holds. He spoke of three enablers to unlock the potential of the blue economy namely;

Policy Consistency, Land Reforms and Digitalization.

The panel discussion which followed comprised of Mr Saliya Wickramasuriya – Chairman Ceylon petroleum corporation, member of the board Petroleum development Authority of Sri Lanka, commission member Colombo port city economic commission, chairman Ceylon petroleum storage terminals Ltd, Mr Ayesh Indranath Ranawaka - Editor in chief ocean lust magazine, Mr. Mangala Yapa – Management Consultant, Dr (Ms) Vagisha Gunasekara, Senior Consultant, United nations Development Program Sri Lanka and Mr Kamala Dorabawila Chief Investment Officer at International Finance Corporation & sector



lead for Transport and Logistics , Asia Pacific Region along with the speaker of the session Mr. Bingumal Thewarathanthri saw Chief executive officer – Standard chartered Bank. The session was moderated by Ms Dhashma Karunaratne – Chief Operating Officer – Freight Sector; Assistant Vice President, Business development, Maritime Fright & Logistics Sectors Aitken spence Shipping, and Ms Maleena Awn – Director Operations – Meridian Maritime Services Ltd & Chairperson Youngship Sri Lanka.

## Policies for a vibrant , thriving and competitive maritime Sector.

Moving onto the final session of the conference, congenaised in collabaoration with WISTA sri lanka it mainly focused on “Policies of a vibrant , thriving and competitive maritime Sector – Future proof Sri Lankas maritime proposition through policy , innovation and Digitalisation.” For this unique and timely session the





speaker was Ms Shehara De Silva – Group Managing director , McLaren's holdings. She did an informative comparison of Sri Lanka with the Global Landscape and the Regional Landscape and highlighted the importance of transitioning from a paper based port to a more digitally integrated port.

In the subsequent panel discussion, which comprised of Dr (Ms ) Dulini Mudunkotuwa, Head Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Mr Saliya



Weerakoon Policy and political advisor. Mr. Thulci Aluvihare - Deputy managing director CHEC port city Colombo (Pvt) Ltd, Ms Subashini Abeysinghe

and the final session was moderated by Mr Aruni Wijepala Deputy managing director, SBU head Hayleys Energy services Lanka(Pvt) Ltd & executive committee member Youngship and WISTA Sri Lanka and Ms Anjalika Perera – Senior Manager – GAC shipping ltd & Executive committee member WISTA Sri Lanka.



Following the conclusion of the conference CASA hosted the Speakers, Panelists and Participants for a networking session with wine and finger foods. A special thank you to Hayleys Advantis our Network sponsor for sponsoring the session.

We would also like acknowledge and thank our sponsors of the event, Colombo Logistics, CWT Globelink, GAC and McLaren's Group our Main Sponsors, and co-Sponsors Aitken Spence Maritime, CL Synergy (Pvt) Ltd, Evergreen Shipping Agency Lanka, SAGT and Salota International.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Aviation and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority endorsed the CASA Maritime Conference while the International Maritime Organization authorized the use of their logo and theme for World Maritime Day.

## Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents

The Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents, well known by the acronym CASA, is the voice of the shipping industry of Sri Lanka and has served the industry with





unwavering focus and dedication since the association began as the Ceylon Shipping Committee in 1944.

Its members represent all international shipping lines who call Sri Lankan ports due to its very strategic location in close proximity to the main international shipping lanes.

Members of CASA are involved in vessel agency, husbanding services and act as manning/crewing agents for leading ship owners and managers. CASA members also provide various other services to ship owners/managers in the ports of Sri Lanka and at off

port locations.

CASA has regular dialogue with stakeholders, government institutions, regulatory bodies and other government and private sector agencies, CASA seeks to effect an interchange of ideas and information, represent and advocate the views of the association in all official fora and shape the future of the industry by investing in education and training for its members and working with maritime training academies to train seafarers



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INTERVIEW WITH

# CASA CHAIR SHANO SABAR

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**Mr. Shano Sabar** counts over 39 years of experience in the shipping and logistics industry, having joined Hayleys Group in 1985. His career path included at shipping agency offices of Advantis and he rose to the position of Director/CEO at one of their shipping agency Joint Venture companies in 1999.

In 2007, he was appointed as a Member of the Group Management Committee of Hayleys Advantis, overseeing the group's foreign shipping agency joint ventures. He then took a break from Hayleys to serve as Deputy Country Head of CMACGM Malaysia from 2008 to 2011.

Upon returning to Hayleys Advantis in 2011, he was appointed to the Board of Hayleys Advantis Group in 2013. Currently, he serves the Group as Deputy Managing Director whilst overseeing Sri Lanka and Maldives. He also serves as Chairman of The Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents (CASA) which is regarded as the Voice of the Shipping Industry in Sri Lanka.

Academically, he holds an MBA from the University of Wales (UK) and has also undergone leadership development programs with prestigious institutions such as the National University of Singapore, Indian School of Business, and Inchigo France's "Leaders at Peak" program.



## 1. WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO ADVISE ON THE ROLE PLAYED BY CASA IN THE MARTIME INDUTRY OVER THE YEARS?

As an Association formed way back in 1944, CASA is a pioneering industry body that has played a pivotal role in shaping the shipping industry in Sri Lanka. CASA played a leadership role in influencing policy related to the maritime industry and actively engaged in solving operational issues faced by the membership through regular meetings with Government departments and agencies. As an integral part of value chains, both within and across international borders, the shipping industry facilitates trade and commerce and help businesses get their products to customers. The role our members play in this value chain was evident during the pandemic and recent economic downturn in the country that all our members ensured minimum disruption during this challenging environment. As an Association we have been representing the interest of our members and sharing best practices with the government and other authorities to improve the Logistics performance in our country. Digitalization is also an integral initiative that we drive as an association as we believe that it will significantly improve Ease of Doing Business of Sri Lanka.

## 2. YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN CASA FOR MANY YEARS BREEFING ON THE MANTLE AS CHAIRMAN, IN YOUR OPINION HOW HAS CASA PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT THE YEARS AND HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE FUTURE OF CASA?

CASA has evolved from merely being an organization representing the interest of the members to an organization representing the maritime interest of the country. We have been advocating for transformational change in the industry while closely liaising with the government and other stakeholders to affect this change. Our aspiration is to make Sri Lanka reach the full potential as a fully-fledged maritime hub competing with hubs in the region. We have always highlighted the importance of embracing digitalization more rapidly to improve our competitiveness and our logistics performance. Our annual conference is a much sought after event as it sheds light on important topics which could shape the future of Sri Lanka's maritime landscape. So I consider CASA as a thought leader with a mission to promote the overall growth and development of the industry.

## 3. IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT THE CALL FOR DIGITALIZATION OF THE LOCAL SHIPPING FRATERNITY IS RESOUNDING- THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ACCELERATED THIS EFFORT, BEYOND THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC HAS THERE BEEN MORE PROGRESS TOWARDS DIGITALIZATION?

Leveraging Digitalization to improve service excellence and reduce costs is a pre-requisite to be competitive to face evolving challenges in the shipping industry. With Laws such as the Electronic Transactions Act supporting to embrace such efforts, we at CASA have actively engaged and extended unstinted support in many key initiatives in the recent past such as the E vessel clearance, Port Community System, Maritime Single Window, National Single Window, National Trade Information Portal to name a few and have committed with Pilot Members for the upcoming ASYHUB Project at Customs, the E-DO Project at SLPA and many other similar initiatives introduced by the government aimed at increasing efficiencies and carry out paperless business practices in order to achieve a faster trading cycle. CASA firmly believes that these initiatives will significantly improve our competitiveness and will point us in the right direction to achieve the maritime hub aspirations of Sri Lanka and we will continue to drive and support such digitalization initiatives across the industry. As revealed in the latest LPI index, Sri Lanka is categorized as a 'partial performer' and it is stated that greater transparency and predictability in Customs processes and transport related infrastructure are key focus areas to improve these rankings. Besides that, the Port Community System is also a key priority that could bring in great benefits along with other digitalization projects connecting relevant stakeholders specially government institutions to create a seamless platform for growth. We at CASA will focus on these and provide the necessary support to drive them under my leadership.

## 4. HOW CAN DIGITALIZATION OPEN NEW FRONTIERS FOR THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY?

Digitalization is opening new frontiers for the shipping industry by driving efficiency and cost reduction through automation, real-time visibility and tracking, and data-driven insights. This translates to optimized routes, reduced fuel consumption, improved decision-making, and better customer service. Additionally, digital tools like blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT) are enhancing transparency, risk management, and environmental sustainability. While the potential

*Sri Lanka possesses several key advantages that it can leverage to become a vibrant and mature maritime hub*

of digitalization is undeniable, challenges remain. The initial cost of implementing sophisticated digital solutions may pose a hurdle for smaller companies. Additionally, the lack of standardized data formats across the industry can hinder seamless data sharing and collaboration. Finally, the increased reliance on digital systems necessitates robust cybersecurity measures to safeguard against potential threats.

Despite these challenges, the shipping industry is actively embracing digitalization, recognizing its transformative potential. By addressing the existing hurdles through collaborative efforts and continuous innovation, the industry can navigate these new frontiers and chart a course towards a more efficient, sustainable, and resilient future.

## 5. WHAT ARE THE FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR OUR COUNTRY IN TERMS OF SHIPPING? WILL THE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN THE PAST MATERIALIZE WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE AND CAN WE EVER-BE ON PAR WITH WORLD CLASS MARITIME HUBS?

Sri Lanka's future in shipping holds both exciting prospects and significant challenges. Its strategic location in the heart of major trade routes positions it as a potential logistics powerhouse. This advantage, coupled with ongoing port expansions and government initiatives, fuels optimism for the industry's growth.

However, achieving this potential hinges on several factors. One crucial aspect is navigating competition. Regional players like Dubai and Singapore, with their well-developed infrastructure, pose a significant threat. Additionally, the success of past discussions surrounding free-trade agreements and bilateral shipping agreements will be critical to establish Sri Lanka as a competitive hub, offering preferential access and a robust feeder network.

Furthermore, embracing technological advancements is crucial. Streamlining customs processes, implementing automation, and investing in digital infrastructure will be essential to expedite cargo movement and attract international players.

The question of reaching the pinnacle of world-class maritime hubs like Singapore may not be answered within the next decade, but Sri Lanka has the capability to become a major regional player. By addressing its challenges strategically and capitalizing on its strengths, Sri Lanka can establish itself as a vital link in the global maritime supply chain, offering efficient and reliable services while carving its own unique niche in the ever-evolving shipping landscape.

## 6. SRI LANKA IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS A TRANSHIPMENT PORT, DO YOU THINK THERE IS MORE SRI LANKA CAN OFFER especially covering the facets of a vibrant and mature maritime hub?

While Sri Lanka's reputation as a transshipment port is well-earned, relegating its potential solely to this role drastically undersells the opportunities the country can tap into. Sri Lanka possesses several key advantages that it can leverage to become a vibrant and mature maritime hub. Its strategic location near major East-West shipping routes, coupled with existing port infrastructure, gives it a strong foundation for expansion. Investing in advanced port technologies, such as automation and digital solutions, can significantly enhance efficiency and attract major shipping lines. Furthermore, developing a comprehensive range of maritime services like ship repair, ship lay-up services, bunkering, crew changes, green recycling of ships and cruise tourism, will enhance Sri Lanka's appeal as a one-stop shop maritime or ship related service hub. Perhaps most importantly, cultivating a skilled maritime workforce and creating a business-friendly environment with favorable policies will drive long-term success. By embracing a holistic and visionary approach, Sri Lanka can elevate its status beyond a mere transshipment



point and establish itself as a multi-faceted maritime powerhouse in the region.

## 7. WITH THE END OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC THE CRUISE INDUSTRY HAS TAKEN OFF, IS THERE POTENTIAL IN THIS INDUSTRY FOR SRI LANKA AND WHAT CAN SRI LANKA DO TO ATTRACT MORE CRUISES LINE OPERATORS TO CALL THE COUNTRY.

While the COVID-19 pandemic initially stalled the cruise industry, its recent resurgence presents a golden opportunity for Sri Lanka. Strategically located along key shipping routes, Sri Lanka boasts a rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and a unique blend of exotic appeal that resonates with adventurous travelers. To become a major player in this thriving industry, Sri Lanka can invest in modernizing its cruise terminals, offering a diverse range of high-quality shore excursions, and streamlining visa procedures for disembarking passengers. Additionally, competitive pricing and active marketing efforts aimed at cruise line operators can further enhance Sri Lanka's appeal. Embracing sustainable practices and ensuring local communities benefit from this growth are crucial aspects of responsible tourism development, ultimately solidifying Sri Lanka's position as a must-visit destination in the Asian cruise circuit.

## 8. IN THE PAST SRI LANKA WAS A COUNTRY WHICH OWNED MANY MERCHANT MARINE VESSELS PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT TO ITS VERY OWN SEAFARERS. DO YOU THINK THERE IS POTENTIAL for SRI LANKAN MARITIME COMPANIES TO VETNURE INTO SHIPOWNING apart from those companies who have already done so?

While Sri Lanka once boasted a merchant marine fleet, venturing back into large-scale ship ownership beyond existing players presents a complex challenge. Nevertheless, the country's maritime heritage and existing infrastructure offer a promising foundation for a potential resurgence.

On the one hand, Sri Lanka possesses several advantages. Its well-established ports, skilled workforce, and ship repair facilities create a solid base for a renewed ship owning industry. Additionally, its strategic location along key shipping routes provides access to global markets and facilitates efficient operations. Owning ships could provide greater control over the shipping process, potentially leading to cost savings, increased profit margins, and job creation through international trade.

However, significant hurdles exist. Building or acquiring a fleet requires substantial capital investment, posing a major barrier for many companies. The global shipping industry is fiercely competitive, with established players dominating the market. New entrants face the challenge of carving out a niche in this landscape. Furthermore, the industry is susceptible to market volatility, with fluctuations in fuel prices, global trade patterns, and economic conditions posing financial risks. Navigating the complex web of international maritime regulations also presents a significant challenge for newcomers.

While the potential for Sri Lankan companies to re-enter ship ownership exists, it's imperative to approach it strategically. Conducting thorough feasibility studies, securing financing, building partnerships with experienced players, and navigating the regulatory landscape are critical steps for success. Exploring niche markets or specialized vessel types within the broader shipping industry may offer a more viable option compared to directly competing with established giants. Ultimately, re-establishing a thriving ship owning industry requires a balanced approach, learning from past experiences, and implementing a well-defined strategy for sustainable growth within the competitive global maritime environment.

In today's context, there are many setbacks and inconsistent government policies that discourage local companies to enter into ship owning industry that starts from building ships locally for local companies. If a ship builder imports required material from steel to an engine for a Sri Lankan based company to build a ship, every single part is subject to exorbitant duties & taxes whereas, if a foreign based company places an order for new ship from a local ship builder, importation of material for building their ship is exempted from duties & taxes. Then, the introduction of recent applicability of VAT. When a local company charters or hires a ship from local ship owner, it is subject to 18% of VAT of the daily charter hire where it was 0% until end of last year. And if the ship is chartered from a foreign ship owner, no VAT is applicable thus discouraging local ship operating companies to hire ship from local ship owners.

*In today's context, there are many setbacks and inconsistent government policies that discourage local companies to enter into ship owning industry*

Then comes the crew wages where all seafarers were exempted from paying personal taxes or APIT until March 2019. The introduction of personal taxes since then on seafarers have led to a huge challenge for local ship owners to hire especially experienced masters and engineers for their ships due to most of these officers opt to look for employment on foreign ships as most foreign jurisdictions allow seafarers an exclusion to personal tax liabilities. In addition to it as per local labour regulations, the local ship owning company has to contribute towards EPF/ETF for the seafarers they employ for their ships which makes administratively cumbersome for both ship owner and seafarers who join ships on short term contracts which are typically from 4 to 9 months to continuously re-register for new EPF/ETF numbers when they rejoin the ship after their 2 to 3 months' vacation. This can be easily overcome if seafarers are excluded from local labour regulations and create a special pension fund for shipowners to contribute, regulated by Director General Merchant Shipping. His Office could also administer this pension fund for timely repayment of pension claims to seafarers.

Although these anomalies that prevent local ship owners to have an environment as per global standards, have been taken up with relevant authorities, unfortunately the local industry players have not received a positive outcome for such appeals made in the recent past.

## 9. IS THE INDUSTRY LUCRATIVE TO THE YOUTH? WITH THE VETERANS OF THE TRADE SEEKING RETIREMENT, HOW INSTRUMENTAL CAN CASA BE IN RECRUITING THE YOUNGER GENERATION? Is the national curriculum catering to this field? if not what should casa need to do?

Sri Lanka's shipping industry presents a compelling career path for ambitious youth, offering competitive salaries, exciting travel opportunities, and a chance to contribute to the nation's economic growth. However, capitalizing on this potential workforce relies heavily on CASA and all stakeholders playing a pivotal role in bridging the gap between a retiring generation and a new wave of recruits. Through engaging awareness campaigns in schools and universities, forging partnerships with educational institutions to develop industry-aligned curriculums, and facilitating practical experience through apprenticeship and internship programs, CASA continues to equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the exciting yet demanding world of shipping. While the current national curriculum may not fully cater to the diverse needs of the industry, CASA, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, is in the process of advocating for curriculum development that incorporates vital technical, operational, and management aspects specific to shipping. By addressing skill gaps and promoting vocational pathways, CASA can ensure Sri Lanka has a well-equipped and enthusiastic young workforce ready to propel the nation's maritime sector to new heights.

## 10. Any observations you can make in regard to the Red sea crisis

The Red Sea crisis presents a multi-faceted challenge for Sri Lanka's shipping industry, requiring close monitoring and proactive measures to mitigate potential risks and ensure the continued smooth functioning of this crucial economic sector.

Firstly, the risk factor in the Red Sea is likely to lead to a surge in insurance premiums for shipping companies navigating these waters. This added cost will inevitably be passed on to Sri Lankan importers and exporters, translating to higher prices for both imported raw materials and exported goods, potentially impacting inflation and consumer spending.



*While this may circumvent security risks, it comes at the cost of increased fuel consumption and longer voyage times*

Secondly, the potential for disruptions in the flow of goods through the Red Sea could lead to critical delays in vital shipments. This poses a significant challenge for businesses in Sri Lanka that rely on timely deliveries of raw materials or finished products, potentially creating bottlenecks and hindering economic activity.

Furthermore, some shipping lines may choose to avoid the Red Sea altogether, opting for longer routes around Africa. While this may circumvent security risks, it comes at the cost of increased fuel consumption and longer voyage times. This, in turn, further pushes up shipping costs, squeezing profit margins for Sri Lankan businesses already navigating a complex economic landscape.

The crisis has also created an opportunity to Sri Lanka's position as a key transshipment hub to boost its throughput where some of the major shipping lines have chosen Port of Colombo as a redistribution center for transshipment volumes by carrying out delay in transit (DIT) and ship to ship relay operations for optimization of space on vessels and minimize cost. Although such additional volumes are welcoming to Port of Colombo, this situation has a flip side to it for services that bring in regular volumes who are challenged with operational delays.

## 11. What are your thoughts on conventional shipping such as breakbulk?

Breakbulk complements containerized shipping, offering flexibility for handling oversized or irregularly shaped cargo that wouldn't fit standard containers. This diversification strengthens Sri Lanka's overall shipping portfolio, making it a more comprehensive and competitive maritime hub. Breakbulk operations require specialized expertise in handling, loading, and securing cargo. This can create employment opportunities in various segments, including dockworkers, stevedores, and logistics companies, contributing to Sri Lanka's workforce development.

However handling breakbulk cargo requires dedicated infrastructure, including specialized cranes, storage facilities, and skilled personnel. Sri Lanka may need to invest in upgrading its infrastructure or developing dedicated breakbulk terminals to efficiently handle this type of cargo. With careful planning, infrastructure development, and strategic implementation, Sri Lanka can leverage the opportunities offered by breakbulk shipping while mitigating potential challenges. This approach can contribute to the nation's economic growth, job creation, and diversification of its maritime sector.

## 12. YOUR MESSAGE AS THE CHAIRPERSON OF CASA, THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY.

The industry is at cross roads where the winds of change are propelling our nation towards a vibrant maritime future. Sri Lanka's strategic location and ongoing port expansions position us to become a maritime and logistics powerhouse. However, capitalizing on this potential requires collective action and strategic vision. CASA is committed to leading the charge, advocating for policies that empower the industry, bridging the generational gap through education and training, fostering collaboration for infrastructure modernization and technological advancements, and championing sustainable practices. Together, we can attract foreign investment, diversify our services, create valuable jobs, and empower the next generation. The future of Sri Lanka's shipping industry gleams with potential. Let us navigate the challenges, celebrate triumphs, and solidify Sri Lanka's position as a global maritime leader

# CAN WE BUILD A WORLD-CLASS CITY WITH THIRD-WORLD PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

*By Sanjay De Silva*





Colombo is a city in a hurry. New hotels, shopping malls, and highways are mushrooming everywhere, and the skyline keeps growing upwards, promising to take us to a world-class future. I went to Galle Face and Port City recently to soak in the Global City in progress. As I was admiring a brightly-lit skyscraper, I was jolted back to reality by a rickety old bus pulling up in front of it. Somehow, the blueprint to make Colombo world-class seems to have forgotten all about public transport.

Buses and trains are by far the most affordable modes of transport in Colombo; a bus ride from Mount Lavinia to Pettah costs about LKR 85, about 1/10th the price of a three-wheeler, and trains are almost as inexpensive. Yet, the public transport system is so uncomfortable, inconvenient, outdated, and even unsafe that it has lost almost everyone who could afford private transportation. The result is endless traffic jams, a glut of three-wheelers, smog-filled skies, and a car culture Sri Lanka can ill-afford. As experts have long known, wider roads lead to more traffic, not less congestion, in the long-run, and one look at Parliament Road at rush hour, when average speeds plummet to 8 km/h by some measures, is all it takes to understand this paradox.

Cars, highways, and fuel also eat up a tremendous amount of foreign exchange, which, as the recent economic crisis reminded us, our

economy with its limited export base cannot really afford. With a weak rupee, tax hikes, slashed fuel subsidies, and import restrictions, a used car has become more expensive than a suburban house, and owning and operating a car is no longer a realistic possibility even for the middle class. Despite all the investments in highways, all but a handful of the urban elite now have no choice but to rely on a woefully inadequate bus and train system and expensive private alternatives like taxis and three-wheelers. As Gustavo Petro, the former mayor of Bogotá, the Colombian capital, famously said, “A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It’s where the rich use public transportation.” In Sri Lanka, the poor don’t have cars, and the rich don’t use public transport.

The economic case for improving public transport is straightforward. It is one of those rare investments that can make the economy

more efficient, equitable, and sustainable. Yet, it seems like we are stuck in a vicious cycle, since the infrastructure is expensive and the government is too broke to make such ambitious investments. Is there a way out of this predicament? If there is one area the government should seek the help of donors and foreign investors, this should be it. In fact, we already missed two opportunities: the light-rail transit (LRT) project funded by a generous Japanese loan, and urban transport development assistance in the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant. There is an ADB-funded railway improvement project that is still alive.

If the government is keen to avoid further debt traps like expensive highways, there are plenty of relatively low-cost, high-return options available. We can turn to the experience of other developing countries, and some of the most

interesting examples come from Latin American cities that have pioneered innovative ways to make public transport work. In the 1970s, Curitiba, a city in southern Brazil similar in size to Colombo, built a simple Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system at a fraction of the cost of a more technologically sophisticated subway rail system. Since then, other cities have followed this path, the most famous example being the much-studied TransMilenio BRT system in Bogotá, which managed to lower air pollution by 40 percent and commuting times by 32 percent, within just five years of operation. Each BRT system is different, but among their essential features are energy-efficient buses, dedicated bus lanes with right-of-way, accessible bus stands, and streamlined ticketing systems. While none of these systems are perfect and some have struggled to live up to their early promise, they offer valuable lessons for us to think creatively about what works for our own city. In fact, Sri Lanka’s own Urban Transport Master Plan of 2014 already incorporated many of these ideas, including upgraded rail and BRT systems for three urban-suburban corridors. What Sri Lanka lacks is action, not plans.

We can start with incremental improvements to the existing bus system. The first step should be to gradually replace the 1970s vintage diesel monsters with comfortable, accessible, and energy-efficient buses. The recent government proposal to introduce 200 air-conditioned electric-powered buses to routes frequented by middle-class office workers is a good step in this direction, although it might make more sense to go with hybrid buses that do not require expensive charging infrastructure. The next step should be new regulations for private buses; for example, unsafe forms of competition can be reduced by auctioning off exclusive licenses for each bus

route, where bus operators are paid for the distance they cover rather than the number of passengers they carry. At the same time, the busiest sections of the railway can be upgraded and electrified. In the longer term, a BRT, monorail, or LRT should be introduced, along main arteries such as Galle Road, High-Level Road and Parliament Road.

Whatever technology is adopted should adhere to the following principles. Different modes of transport – trains, buses, bicycles, three-wheelers, walking paths, pedestrian plazas – should be integrated, so that they seamlessly feed into each other. Upgraded public transport networks should be paired with public housing, so that low-income households in the urban periphery, especially those who have been displaced by urban regeneration projects, can maintain access to livelihoods. The system does not need to be completely self-financing. In fact, there are compelling reasons to heavily subsidize the use of urban public transport, due to all the positive externalities it generates. Rather than relying on user fees, property taxes can be utilized to finance maintenance, essentially

capturing a part of the increase in land value rents that results from infrastructure upgrades. We could also draw on taxes on automobiles, fuel, and congestion, which would further incentivize commuters to give up cars for buses and trains.

Whenever we hear about the government’s latest plans to make Colombo a tourist hub, let’s ask ourselves the following question; if a city is not livable for its residents, can it really be world-class for tourists and investors? The canceled LRT project would have reduced commuting time from Battaramulla to Fort by 30 minutes, saving the average commuter 20 hours of wasted time on the road each month. Reduced congestion would also help those who continue to drive, saving as many as 40 hours a month for someone commuting from 30km away, according to a study of a similar monorail project. Compare this to the tangible benefits from projects like the Lotus Tower. Due to misplaced priorities, Colombo now looks like a heart patient who has got carried away with cosmetic surgery. Let’s resolve to get our arteries unclogged, before we splurge on any more facelifts.



*Sanjay De Silva*

*Sanjay De Silva is an Associate Professor of Economics at Bard College, New York and Research Associate at Verité Research. He is currently working on the history of urban development and spatial stratification in Colombo.*



# ZONED OUT: EXPORT AMBITIONS HINDERED BY LAND LIMITATIONS



**BUDGET PROMISES TO  
OVERCOME THE PROBLEM  
REMAIN UNFULFILLED**



*By Subhashini Abeysinghe and Mathisha Arangala*

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The experiences of East Asian and Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand, show that foreign direct investment (FDI) into export-oriented sectors is critical to accelerate growth in manufactured exports. But, compared to these countries, Sri Lanka has a poor track record of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). The total yearly FDI inflows into Sri Lanka have remained below USD 1 billion for decades.

In contrast, during the last decade, average annual FDI into Malaysia was USD 10 billion, Thailand USD 9 billion, and Vietnam USD 12 billion. With an annual FDI track record of over USD 2 billion, even the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the region, such as Cambodia and Bangladesh, fare better than Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has known for a considerable time that the difficulty of accessing land, a basic requirement for any investment, is a key bottleneck investors face in Sri Lanka. For example, enterprises surveyed by the World Bank in 2011 identified access to land as the most critical challenge faced when investing in Sri Lanka.

Industrial zones, specifically export processing zones (EPZs), have been the blueprint for many East and Southeast Asian countries to create industrial land suitable for investments within a short period. These zones offer multiple benefits, such as pre-allocated land, reliable utility services, better road and port connectivity and unified customs services, eliminating the many infrastructure gaps and bureaucratic hurdles investors face in developing countries.

When Sri Lanka embarked upon an export-oriented investment drive in the 1980s it followed the same path and invested in EPZs. Today, it has 15 operational EPZs. However, a study by the Harvard Center for Development Studies in 2016 found that the country's



However, during the last twenty years, the BOI has only opened the first phase of one such proposed EPZ in Bingiriya (158 acres)

EPZs were operating at nearly full capacity. In the largest zones, namely in Katunayake, Biyagama, Koggala, Seethawaka, Horana and Mirigama, less than 10% of the land was vacant.

## PROMISES MADE, NOT KEPT

Despite having identified the problem more than a decade ago, to this day, the Sri Lankan government has failed to address it. An Auditor General report from 2020 stated that the country had failed to invest in any new EPZ since 2002. This is not due to a lack of plans or proposals to do so, but due to the failure of the Government to implement the proposed plans.

The Auditor General's report, for example, stated that proposals to build EPZs have been made since 2014. However, during the last twenty years, the BOI has only opened the first phase of one such proposed EPZ in Bingiriya (158 acres). This was opened in 2020, fifteen years after its foundation stone was laid.

Numerous promises to create EPZs/Industrial parks were also made in several budget speeches presented by the Minister of Finance. The 2017 budget speech proposed to develop free trade zones near expressway corridors with the private sector. The 2018 speech proposed to establish an industrial park in Milleniya with a USD 500 million investment from Rojana Industries of Thailand. The 2023 speech proposed to establish New Economic Zones in various provinces.

A dashboard run by Verité Research that tracks the progress of

budget promises, housed under publicfinance.lk platform, reveals that these promises didn't go beyond the planning stages. The 2020 Auditor General's report found many blunders even during the planning stage. For example, the Government spent billions of rupees to build infrastructure facilities without completing land acquisition, wasting public funds. The progress of the latest proposal made in 2023 remains unknown. The Right to Information request filed in August 2023 by Verité Research to determine the progress during the first six months has not received a response to date.

## A LAGGARD IN THE REGION

Many other countries in the region that compete with Sri Lanka not only have more land but have made far more progress than Sri Lanka in converting available land to industrial land suitable for investors. For example, Vietnam's special economic zones have expanded from 65 in 2000 to 397 by 2023. It also has ambitious plans to increase the number of zones to 558 within the next 10 years. Similarly, neighbouring countries in South Asia are getting in on the action. Bangladesh aims to establish 100 economic zones by 2030, with 97 approved, 10 already in operation and 30 under development.

The others in the region are moving beyond the traditional zones and are investing in eco-industrial parks (EIPs). For example, Vietnam has partnered with UNIDO to develop the technical guidelines for EIPs. The country plans to transform its existing industrial zones into

EIPs, an effort towards meeting its net zero emissions target by 2050. EIPs have surged globally, from fewer than 50 in 2000 to about 250 in 2018, in response to growing concerns about the climate impact of manufacturing.

Unlike Sri Lanka, these countries have also successfully used public-private partnership models to develop and manage industrial land without being entirely dependent on government coffers.

## BENEFITTING FROM EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

The current shifts in global supply chains further south in response to geo-political risks offer Sri Lanka a new opportunity to attract export-oriented FDI. To make supply chains more resilient to geopolitical risks, firms are looking for new investment locations to diversify their supply base and reduce over-reliance on China. South Asia and Southeast Asia have emerged as attractive destinations for these investors.

The Economist magazine coined the term 'ALTASIA' to map out 14 countries in South and Southeast Asia, including India and Bangladesh, it believes have the highest potential to accommodate such investments. Sri Lanka is notably absent from this map. Addressing the key bottlenecks the investors face, such as access to industrial land, is a vital first step for Sri Lanka to seize these emerging opportunities and position itself as a competitive player in 'ALTASIA'.

The Minister of Finance (who is also the President of Sri Lanka) will deliver yet another budget speech next month. To attract investments and boost exports, it is critical that the minister goes beyond merely promising to fix the problem in his speech, and focuses on fulfilling the promise he makes.

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# RUN FOR HER

INSPIRING  
INCLUSION TO RAISE  
AWARENESS ON  
MENSTRUAL HYGIENE  
AND PERIOD POVERTY



In a tremendous display of youth activism, YoungShip Sri Lanka organized 'YoungShip-WISTA Run For Her 2024'; an event in line with International Women's Day, shining light on the pressing issues of inadequate menstrual hygiene and period poverty in Sri Lanka. The event took place on 03rd of March 2024 at Independence Square, bringing together over 250 participants who took part in the charity run as a call to address the fundamental rights of girls and women in rural parts of the country. The event comprised a 5km Run for Men and Women, a two-person 5km relay, and a kid's run.







Period poverty, the inability to access sanitary products, and proper menstrual hygiene management due to financial constraints, is a pressing concern faced by millions of women worldwide. As a result of Sri Lanka's socio-economic inequalities, many women and girls in the country still grapple with the stigma, shame, and practical challenges associated with menstruation and obtaining the right hygienic products.

'Run For Her' 2024 brought together several organisations that showcased their shared concern for this cause and fostered a sense of unity and purpose across several industries. The Women's International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA) Sri Lanka joined hands with YoungShip Sri Lanka as the Title Sponsor for the event.

Silver sponsors included Fairway Colombo and Meridian Maritime Services, while Advantis and Cargills Food City showcased their support as the event's bronze sponsors.

- Other partners for the event included;
- Product Sponsor – Femography by MAS
- Medical Partner – Melsta Hospitals
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- Gift Sponsors – 4Planet, VOSKOM, Thyaga, Serenity, PowerCrunch, AdamExpo
- Partner Associations – Old Thomians Swimming Club, Women in Management
- Other partners – Aquafine, pulse.lk
- Event Designer – G360

As participants crossed the finish line and reflected on the significance of their collective efforts, 'YoungShip-Wista Run For Her' left a lasting impression on the hearts and minds of all involved. It served as a testament to the power of youth leadership in driving positive change in the country and empowering the future.

As a thank you for their endeavor, all participants received tokens of appreciation from the event's gift sponsors; in addition to a finisher's medal and certificate. The first 10 male and female runners, winners of the relays, and all participants of the kids events were commemorated, along with unique prizes for the event's last finisher, oldest participant, 100th registrant, and many more. As a special gesture to







all women participants, Femography by MAS donated samples of their latest menstruation product to hallmark the event.

In further commemoration of Women's Day, YoungShip Sri Lanka also set up a Donation Booth for the



collection of funds and sanitary products. Proceeds from the event will be used to organise workshops covering all aspects of menstrual education and carry out projects in distributing sanitary products to rural communities in the country throughout the year ahead.



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# YET ANOTHER EVENTFUL QUARTER FOR YOUNGSHIP SRI LANKA

Over the past three months, YoungShip has hosted a diverse array of events that have captivated and engaged industry professionals and enthusiasts alike. From entertaining networking events to giving back to society through CSR initiatives, YoungShip's events have been at the forefront of fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange within the maritime community. Over the past 03 months, these gatherings have provided invaluable opportunities for attendees to broaden their horizons and connect with like-minded individuals passionate about shaping the future of the maritime sector.

## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

YoungShip Sri Lanka organised its annual Christmas Party 2023 on the 14th of December at the Nondescripts Cricket Club (NCC) Colombo, marking the end of the year with an evening filled with fellowship, food, fun, carols, and acts of giving. With over 110 participants, the event was an evening filled with both entertainment and networking.

At the gathering, YoungShip Sri Lanka launched its Caring Hands Programme, aiming to support underprivileged children by providing them with the necessary resources, training, and awareness to build their future. The event was sponsored by M&M Militzer & Muench and featured Mayura and the band to keep the gathering entertained throughout.





# INITIATION OF CARING HANDS – A YOUNGSHIP INITIATIVE TO UPLIFT UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA



In December 2023, YoungShip Sri Lanka initiated its Caring Hands programme, an initiative that aims to support and provide disadvantaged children with the necessary resources, training, and awareness to build their future.

Its inaugural project saw the donation of stationery packs to 50 students at the Hermann Gmeiner School in Kesbewa, along with additional packs for further distribution at the school. YoungShip's Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer handed over these supplies to the school's Principal, Mrs. Nilmini Kariyawasum, and the committee promised its full support to the children in helping them overcome further challenges ahead.

The second project of their Caring Hands Programme was carried out in January 2024. The Executive committee visited the Shilpa Children's Development Centre in Nawala and donated stationery items and dry ration supplies for a one-month period to support 23 girls in foster care placed by the Child Probation Authority under the Government of Sri Lanka. The Shilpa Children's Trust, which was established in 1988, will receive full support from YoungShip Sri Lanka in the future to foster the well-being and growth of its children.





# OPENING OF THE FAMILY ROOM AT MISSION TO SEAFARERS CENTER, COLOMBO



YoungShip Sri Lanka had the privilege of hosting the Global Head of the Mission to Seafarers, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Princess Anne to the Mission to Seafarers Center in Colombo. During her visit, Princess Anne officially opened the family room, a project that the Executive Committee of YoungShip Sri Lanka had been diligently working on in collaboration with generous donors over the past months. The Committee hopes that the establishment of this family room would provide valuable support to the loved ones of seafarers, enabling them to meet during brief transits on their long journeys at sea.

The opening ceremony of the family room was also attended by Vice Admiral Sir Timothy Laurence,

Rev. Perry Brohier (Archdeacon of Colombo/ Port Chaplain Mission To Seafarers Sri Lanka), Rev. John Attenborough (Regional Director Middle East & South Asia and Port Chaplain Cyprus of the Mission to Seafarers), Mrs. Maleena Awn (Chairperson YoungShip Sri Lanka), distinguished members of the British High Commission Sri Lanka, the Mission to Seafarers Colombo staff, and many others.

During the ceremony, the YoungShip Chairperson had the opportunity to discuss YoungShip Sri Lanka's objectives, as well as their plans regarding youth education, empowerment, and awareness initiatives, highlighting similar efforts undertaken by their global counterparts.





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# 11TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

YoungShip Sri Lanka marked its 11th Anniversary with its Annual General Meeting held on 24 January at the Havelock City Clubhouse.

The event saw the appointment of a new Executive Committee under the continued leadership of Maleena Awn, the organisation's first female Chair.

The newly appointed Executive Committee comprises Chairperson – Maleena Awn (Meridian Maritime Services Ltd.), Vice Chair – Nirmal Dissanayake (Eastern Maritime (Colombo) Ltd.), Secretary – Aruni Wijepala (Hayleys Energy Services Lanka Ltd.), Treasurer – Sunera Wijesekara (Eastern Maritime (Colombo) Ltd.), Assistant Secretary – Shanga Jayawickreme (McLarens Group of Companies), Assistant Treasurer – Patali Karunarathne (Centrum Marine Consultancy Ltd.), Immediate Past Chair – Rishantha Mendis (Prudential Shipping), Shane De Alwis (Hapag Lloyd Lanka Ltd.), Prashan Fernando (Panama Shipping Ltd.), Kasuni Ahangangoda (Pership Synergy Ltd.), Aishwarya Paliawadana (Centrum Marine Consultancy Ltd.), and Adrian Jansz (Hayleys Energy Services Lanka Ltd.).

Addressing the gathering, Awn said that YoungShip Sri Lanka's focus for the upcoming year will be on four main pillars – Knowledge and Skills Amplification, Building Strong Maritime Communities, Championing Sustainability, Environmental Responsibility, and Community Outreach, and Operational Excellence and Innovation. Collectively, YoungShip Sri Lanka acknowledges the immense support received from all its support associations, sponsors, industry affiliates, and members as the community sets its sails for yet another eventful year lifting the maritime industry of Sri Lanka.









# SAFEGUARDING SRI LANKAN WATERS:

## VISION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY OF SRI LANKA

*As an island in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka's marine ecosystems stand as guardians of both its natural heritage and its societal prosperity. With a multifaceted role, these marine systems are rich in diversity and play a key role in protecting the island from harsh coastal weather and erosion of land. Within its massive web of life, countless species find sanctuary and contribute to the socioeconomic tapestry of the country. Anchoring livelihoods through fishing, aquaculture, and tourism, the marine environment sustains a delicate balance between humanity and nature, calling for its continuous protection and upliftment.*

*Having recognised its importance and a better understanding of the role of the country's maritime industry in the protection of Sri Lanka's marine ecosystems, the Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents (CASA) carried out fruitful discussions with Asela Rekawa and Jagath Gunasekera, the Chairman and General Manager of the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) of Sri Lanka, respectively.*



**ASELA REKAWA**  
Chairman  
MEPA



**JAGATH GUNASEKERA**  
General Manager  
MEPA





## How have Recent Maritime Activities affected Sri Lanka's Marine Environment?

"The Maritime Industry of Sri Lanka contributes significantly to the growth of our country's economy. However, vessel movements and operations in Sri Lankan waters need to be carried out without compromising the delicate marine ecosystems our country possesses," conveyed Asela. He elaborated that although maritime activities are in general compliance with international standards and regulations, recent catastrophic events such as fires on board the MT New Diamond and the MV Xpress Pearl have significantly highlighted the country's weaknesses in mitigating oil and chemical spills.

Despite two years passing, Sri Lanka is believed to still lack a comprehensive plan for handling various emergencies, be it fires, chemical spills, or plastic pollution incidents. The absence of a contingency plan beyond the scope of the MEPA Act, which focuses solely on oil spills, highlights a significant gap in preparedness. Although efforts have been made since 2006 with some minor adjustments over the years, these plans remain outdated and insufficient for the nation's territorial waters' diverse challenges. "Recently, MEPA has had several meetings with stakeholders, including consultations with a team from the EU for a gap analysis, which has underscored the urgent need for enhancement of our resources. While numerous reports in this regard exist, translating them into actionable plans has proven elusive. However, strides are now being made towards a digital dashboard to streamline stakeholder roles with

assistance from the Dutch Government," shared Asela.

Following the two major ship accidents in our waters, it has become evident that the level of preparedness to address such disasters is insufficient, particularly in terms of oil and chemical spill response capabilities. MEPA is therefore in the process of amending the existing National Oil Spill Contingency Plan to incorporate Hazardous and Noxious Substance (HNS) response mechanisms. In addition to this, air pollution from vessels and ballast water discharge has also raised ecological and social concerns that MEPA aims to mitigate in collaboration with the maritime industry.

## Working with Sri Lanka's Maritime Industry to Protect our Waters

According to Jagath, Sri Lanka is yet to become a party to several important international conventions related to marine pollution prevention and compensation. Therefore, MEPA is actively working towards agreements to key international conventions, including MARPOL Annex VI, the Ballast Water Management Convention, the Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Cooperation Convention, the Bunker Convention, the HNS Convention, the London Dumping Protocol, and the OPRC-HNS Protocol.

"Strengthening early warning systems and disaster preparedness measures is also prioritised to mitigate the risks associated with extreme weather events. Additionally, policy and governance frameworks are being developed and implemented to mainstream climate considerations into development planning processes, ensuring the sustainable management



of marine resources and the protection of coastal communities against climate change impacts," Jagath expressed.

"As a government agency, MEPA is facing challenges with funding for its operations and therefore has limitations for its resources. To address this, we propose to collaborate with CASA in developing a system, to implement an environmental protection fee on all vessels to fund incident responses and system development," shared Asela. Alternatively, he suggested that the enforcement responsibility could be state-owned or outsourced to a third-party company, which would oversee charging ship owners and recovering fees. This approach would ensure that the financial burden of environmental protection measures is distributed across stakeholders while facilitating efficient resource allocation and strengthening Sri Lanka's response capabilities for maritime incidents.

## Collaboration and Engagement: MEPA's Holistic Approach to Marine Conservation

Further to impacts from the Maritime industry, the coasts of Sri Lanka also face several threats from other human activities – affecting fishing communities and local turtle nesting grounds. Asela expressed that MEPA has also initiated several programmes in collaboration with local communities and international organisations to reduce emissions, manage coastal waste, and prevent pollution. These include digital initiatives, as well as mangrove and coral rehabilitation programs for the preservation of sensitive ecosystems and to mitigate impacts from climate change.





### A Novel MEPA Mobile Application

"In 2018, a Cabinet paper was issued, emphasising the vitality for all stakeholders to collaborate in coastal management. As a result, MEPA has established 84 units in coastal regions, forming beach sectoral committees. These committees were reorganized, each assigned specific tasks, including the proper disposal of waste collected during beach clean-ups," explained Asela. To address monitoring challenges, a mobile app is being developed to oversee the activities of the 84 committees, categorising zones on a map based on urgency (red, orange, yellow), and demonstrating stakeholder involvement. With this, initiatives such as mangrove projects, underwater beach cleanups, and coral restoration may also be organised through the application; with a certification issued through the platform to enhance accountability once the initiative has been completed. This comprehensive approach is slated for launch in June, aiming to foster sustainable coastal management and preserve Sri Lanka's marine ecosystems.

### The Beach Caretaker program

The Beach Caretaker Programme operates efficiently through a collaborative platform where local communities, NGOs, and the private sector actively engage in the cleaning of beaches, with MEPA overseeing operations. This initiative not only ensures the cleanliness of the coasts but also fosters community involvement and responsibility. "Although these efforts have been carried out over the years, they are now better monitored and managed efficiently through the mobile application. These efforts are designed to contribute to the national Blue Flag

Beach program, to uplift Sri Lankan beaches to meet international standards on water quality, environmental management, safety, and education," Asela pointed out. In addition to this, he conveyed that MEPA organises awareness sessions at schools, as well as targeted audiences like the fishing community, seafarers, industrialists, and the public.

### Fostering International Partnerships

"Achieving effective maritime regulation requires a harmonised approach, aligning with International Maritime Organization (IMO) guidelines to ensure uniformity across borders. This entails the establishment of international standard facilities and the adherence to frameworks that monitor compliance and enforce regulations," shared Jagath. By actively participating in the global dialogue, nations can contribute to shaping maritime policies that promote safety, security, and sustainability on a worldwide scale.

MEPA's collaborative efforts with the maritime industry of Sri Lanka signal the organisation's proactive stance towards safeguarding marine ecosystems. Despite its challenges, MEPA is actively pursuing strategies with all stakeholders, including CASA, to bolster responsibility and accountability in this regard. By enhancing international collaboration and embracing digital innovations such as its novel mobile application, the organisation strives to ensure sustainable coastal management and uphold environmental standards; thereby exemplifying its commitment to the preservation of Sri Lanka's invaluable marine heritage.

**CASA,  
THE VOICE OF THE  
SHIPPING INDUSTRY  
HELD ITS  
25TH ANNUAL  
SIX-A-SIDE  
SOFTBALL  
CRICKET  
TOURNAMENT  
ON THE  
10TH FEBRUARY  
AT THE  
NCC GROUNDS, COLOMBO.**





The tournament is the most awaited and looked forward to sporting event in the Calendar of CASA activities year in and year out. Since its inception in the year 1994 the popularity of this tournament has grown over the years among the members with the increasing number of teams participating in the gents and ladies segments of the tournament. The introduction of the Mini Tournament for the Stakeholders a few years ago has sparked more interest and enthusiasm in the event.

All the participating teams enjoyed the tournament due to the high standards maintained and the efficient organization done by the CASA Sports Committee.

In 2024, the event consisted of 62 gents' teams and 26 ladies' teams along with a large number of spectators who attended the event to support the participating

teams.

Salota International Pvt Ltd. emerged as the winners in the gents' tournament and Ceyline Shipping . won the ladies' tournament. Sri Lanka Ports Authority. won the Invitation Mini Tournament. Tharushi Nivanjali of Salota International - Ladies. and Mithun of McLarens. emerged as the Best Players of the tournament in the ladies and gents categories respectively.

At the completion of the tournament the awards ceremony followed with Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman Keith Bernard as the Chief Guest.

This year's event was graced by many distinguished personalities who also graciously attended the awards ceremony. Harbour Master Capt. Nirmal Silva, Colombo International Container Terminals Group



Chief Business Development Officer and Hambantota International Ports Group Chief Operating Officer Tissa Wickremasinghe, Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd. General Manager Commercial and Marketing Catriona Jayasundera and South Asia Gateway Terminals Chief Commercial Officer Ted Muttiah, Hambantota International Port Services CEO Capt. Ravi Jayawickrema were among the distinguished invitees.

Salota International Ltd. Managing Director Kolitha Wickeramasinghe, CASA Chairman Shano Sabar, CASA Vice Chairman Janesh Rathnadasa, CASA Treasurer Mushin Kitchilan, and CASA Secretary General Ralph Anandappa attended the awards ceremony.

Apart from CASA members, annually there's active

participation in the Invitation Mini Tournament with Sri Lanka Ports Authority, South Asia Gateway Terminals Ltd., Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd., Sri Lanka Customs, Colombo Dockyard PLC Hambantota International Port Group and Colombo West International Terminals Ltd. which contributes and strengthens in stakeholder bonding.

The success of this tournament is greatly attributed to the generous sponsorships received from the principal sponsor and other sponsors.

Also appreciated was the support extended by all CASA members, well-wishers and other stakeholders. The tournament was organised and presented by the Sports Committee and the Membership Activities Committee of CASA.







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