



# Insight



## ECO TOURISM



The Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) is the pioneer "Ecotourism Society" in Sri Lanka, and was established in 1998. It is registered as a non-profit Tourism NGO at the Ministry of Tourism, Sri Lanka and Central Environmental Authority (CEA), comes under the purview of Ministry of Environmental and Natural Resources, Sri Lanka. The vision of the project is, "To make Sri Lanka one of the most sought after ecotourism destination in the world and to built a professional ecotourism network, which serves as a model for ecotourism in the Asia and pacific Regions"

Long term goals of the Foundation are:

- To place Sri Lanka as an outstanding destination on the world ecotourism map
- To trigger the transition of Sri Lanka's tourism industry from the traditional "sun, sea and sand" based mass tourism to nature based tourism, with an emphasis on ecotourism
- To play a pivotal role in facilitating ecological preservation and community benefits, by educating communities, tour operators and ecotourists to contribute to the preservation of biodiversity.

The SLEF website link, given below, has very valuable information on this project

<http://www.ecotourismsrilanka.net/>

## Deputy Minister Leads Tourism Promotion



Sri Lankan Ambassador in Riyadh AAM.Marleen speaks at the road show. Sri Lankan Deputy Minister for Tourism Faiszer Musthapha, is seated at left. Pic Yasantha De Silva

Sri Lanka conducted road shows in major cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam to attract Saudis and expatriates to the island famous for its tourist resorts. The campaign was led by Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister for Tourism Faiszer Musthapha, who personally interacted with the Saudis to impress the island as an ideal tourist destination for a family holiday. The show was organized by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau who led the 12 tour operators group in cooperation with SriLankan Airlines.

"The tourist traffic from the Middle East has been increased by 30 percent during the past two years," Musthapha said pointing out that the island would be an ideal destination for Saudi families who believe in privacy during their holidays. He said that Arab travelers will feel home when they visit any part of the island since there are mosques and people to meet and greet them in their own style.

He said that the country's President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who founded the Sri Lanka-Palestine Friendship Society in Colombo, is a close friend of the Arab world and he is keen on promoting tourism in this part of the world. Quoting the president, Musthapha said, "We want our Arab friends to visit our island and get to know the rich heritage we maintain from the early days". He pointed out that the first mosque, Abraaj Masjid, located in the tourist town of Beruwela, was built by Arabs. He said that the Sri Lankan mission in Riyadh will process the visas for Saudis and expatriates in 10 minutes and Saudis are also given visas on arrival. ... p3



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## Leading Banker from p3

Back in Sri Lanka, Thassim was the former National President of the National Council of YMMAs of Sri Lanka, and, in appreciation of his services to the community, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1977. During his period of his stewardship, the YMMA initiated several constructive projects such as mass circumcision, mass marriages, and providing funds for self help projects for the youth in the island.

Former Sri Lankan Ambassador in Riyadh, Ibrahim Sahib Ansar, who is the present island's envoy in Cairo, described his retirement from service as an irreparable loss not only to the bank but also to the entire Sri Lankan community in the Kingdom. "Thassim was a tower of strength to the community and he was always there for any fund raising projects to contribute his maiden donation," a senior SLES past president said.



Guests at the Farewell Dinner hosted by SBC Thassim in Riyadh. Ambassador AAM Marleen, is seen seated next to SBC Thassim in the center

## Road Show from page 3



Presentation in Riyadh

Heba Al-Ghais Al-Mansoori, Middle East Director for Sri Lankan Tourism, said. The country is rich in tea, rubber, coconut and gems.

Besides Saudi Arabia, she said the show will tour Bahrain and Kuwait during this week. In Jeddah, Consul General ALM Lafeer was present at the road show, while in Riyadh and Dammam, Ambassador AAM.Marleen was present with SriLankan Airlines Manager Indunil Wijekone and Balakrishnan Piritaphan in the Eastern Province.



Presentation In Dammam

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Lecture By  
Educationist



"Parents and teachers should guide their children for proper use of the internet solely for educational purposes", according to a senior Sri Lankan academic. during a lecture program held at the Sri Lankan International School in Riyadh.

Jezima Ismail, former Principal of Muslim Ladies College, Colombo, and prominent social worker in Colombo, conveyed this message while speaking on, "The role of Parents in meeting the challenges of Educational Technology in the Modern World", at a lecture held at the school auditorium.

Sri Lankan Ambassador Mohamed Aged Mohamed Marleen introduced the speaker as a well-known academician, who had contributed a great deal to the uplift of the community back in Sri Lanka.

The evening program was organized by the school in cooperation with the Sri Lankan Expatriates Society in Riyadh. The School Principal MEM Farook and SLES President Nirone Fernando also spoke before the lecture was delivered.

Ms Ismail, who is also the chancellor of the Eastern University told the audience that they should keep track of the web sites browsed by children and set them a time table for the period they spend on the Internet".

She told the teachers that inculcating moral values in the minds of the children is an important aspect in their teaching methods. "Such moral education cannot be taught by the computer, only teachers can inculcate true and good moral values to be adhered to by students," she stressed, pointing out that human touch has become more indispensable in the light of the technological developments that is taking place in the world.

Ambassador Marleen presented a memento to Ms Ismail in appreciation of her services to the Sri Lankan community. Sameera Hisham compered the evenings program and the event concluded with a vote of thanks by Noura Rukshan.

WE WISH ALL OUR READERS A VERY  
HAPPY NEW YEAR



In April (the month of Bak according to the Buddhist Lunar Calendar), when the sun moves from the **Meena Rashiya** (House of Pisces) to the **Mesha Rashiya** (House of Aries) in the celestial sphere, Sri Lankan Sinhala and Tamil communities begin celebrating their New Year or **Aluth Avurudhu** (in Sinhala) and **Puththandu** (in Tamil). It marks the end of the harvest season and also coincides with one of two instances when the sun is directly above Sri Lanka. On the day of celebrations, the sun is directly above Koggala (where a Sun Devale can be found). A new year of the Saka era begins with each festival.

However, unlike the Western celebration of the New Year at midnight on December 31st, the Sri Lankan New Year begins at a time determined by astrological signs. Also unlike western traditions; the ending of the *old year*, and the beginning of the *new year* occur several hours apart from one another (this span is determined by astrology as well) - this period is, aptly enough, referred to as the **nona gathe** (neutral period). During this time Sri Lankans are, according to custom, encouraged to refrain from material pursuits, and engage solely in religious activities and traditional games.

The date upon which the Sri Lankan New Year occurs, while determined by astrological signs, also tends to coincide with the end of the harvest season - for this reason, many farming communities celebrate the new year while gathering fruits that have fallen from their trees.

Cultural rituals begin shortly after the beginning of the *new year* with the cleaning of the house and lighting of an oil lamp. In some communities, women congregate to play upon on the rabana (large drum played by many hands) to warn others of the incipient change in the year.

Families indulge in a variety of rituals which are carefully determined by astrological calculations - from lighting the fire to making the *kiribath* (milk rice) to entering into the first business transaction and eating the first morsels. Once these are done, the partying really begins as families mingle in the streets, homes are thrown open and children are let out to play. The ubiquitous plantain (banana) is dished out alongside celebratory feasts of **kavum** (small oil cake) and **kokis** (crisp and light sweetmeat, originally from the Dutch Colonial era).

**Aurudu** has become an important national holiday for both the cultures of the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Tamil Hindu Sri Lankans, and is unique as such, as it is not celebrated *in the same manner* by any other community elsewhere in the world



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Leading Riyadh  
Banker Retires



Saifudeen Thassim, well-known social worker who has been with the Samba Financial Group has retired following 29 years of illustrious service in the banking industry in the Kingdom.

In 1980, Thassim started his career at Citibank, Riyadh and in 1983 was appointed to a Supervisory position. His visionary leadership, extensive knowledge, and hands on experience helped him to move rapidly within SAMBA to high positions, viz; Authorized Signer, Assistant Manager, Manager, Senior Manager and finally as Vice President. At a time of Saudization of services in the Kingdom, it was an accomplishment for an expatriate to be considered for a top banking position as Vice President. In 1985, Citibank was converted to Saudi American bank on a 40/60 shareholding. and in 2000, it was made a 100% Saudi Bank and was named SAMBA Financial Group.

Since joining Citibank, Thassim developed an aggressive, market based growth strategy. He attended several Banking Seminars and Conferences abroad. One of the major projects was to establish remittance and money exchange service with Seylan Bank. SpeedCash, Saudi American Bank was the pioneer in the door to door banking remittance business started in 1991..

Thassim was the Secretary of the Saudi American Bank Sports Club and was also a Past President of the Sri Lankan Expatriates' Society in Riyadh. During his term as President in 1994 he was instrumental in organizing a Free Medical Clinic to assist the unfortunate expatriate community of Riyadh. He also founded the Benevolent Fund to help the needy expatriate. He organized a Fund Raising Project on the initiative of the then Minister of Health Mr. AHM Fowzie and collected approximately Rs. 5 Million for the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Children Specialized Hospital in Peradeniya. During the Tsunami debacle, he worked hard with his team to collect nearly Rs. 15 Million with the help of the Sri Lankan Embassy

ctd on p4

Tourism Road Show p1



Part of the large gathering at the Riyadh event

We have received many inquiries from Saudis who are interested in investing in our hospitality and other tourism projects", he noted, adding that Sri Lanka Tourism is currently in the process of developing some of the areas liberated from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and hopes to make the island state a "full-fledged value-for-money" destination sooner than expected.



Part of the large gathering at the Dammam event

"We are developing eco tourism resorts and concentrating on how best to serve the growing number of tourists from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arab and Middle East regions", Musthapha said, adding that there has been a 30 percent jump in the number of travelers from this part of the world in 2008. "The island's resorts are all a safe place for tourists", he said.

"In the central province, there are facilities for hiking and trekking and so many other new ideas and we will work together with the Tourism Ministry to raise the tourism industry, which is the fourth biggest grocer for the national economy,"

ctd on p4

SLES AVURUDHU  
CELEBRATIONS IN  
RIYADH



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