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Jaffna to receive several benefits from agreement signed with city of Toronto

Economic development, administrative assistance, library facilities included

Toronto Mayor Tory promises more future benefits with diaspora assistance

Mayor Tory with the wooden carved Souvenir of the Jaffna city presented to him

By Siva Sivapragasam

The city of Toronto considered as one of the world's finest capitals has entered into a bilateral agreement with Jaffna city in Northern Sri Lanka to provide a long line of benefits to a city that has been battered as result of a long and prolonged civil war.

- *Full news on page 3*

Ragavan Paranchothy, PC candidate for Markham-Thornhill by-election on April 3rd

By Siva Sivapragasam

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"Our foreign policy must ensure the needs of women and girls are fully accounted for in everything we do"

Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs on International Women's Day

March 8, 2017 - Ottawa, Ontario - Global Affairs Canada

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today issued the following statement:

"On this International Women's Day, we celebrate women's and girls' progress all over the world and also recognize that our work to end gender-based discrimination and violence is not done yet.

"As Canada's minister of foreign affairs and a proud feminist, I know that our foreign policy must ensure the needs of women and girls are fully accounted for in everything we do. Whenever and wherever required, Canada will advocate for women and girls to have equal rights and representation and fair access to all leadership positions and opportunities.

"Improving the health—including reproductive health—education and safety of women and girls is proven to have a positive effect on families and communities. It is both a responsibility and a necessity. When women and girls are fully engaged in decision making, our societies become stronger, our economies and middle class more prosperous and our countries more secure.

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland

"Canada does—and always will—give a voice to women and girls everywhere. We know that the world can only reach its full potential if women and girls have every opportunity to reach theirs too."

Premier Announces Support for Affordable, High-Quality Child Care Across the Country

Winnipeg, Manitoba

March 29, 2017

Canadians should have the opportunity to raise their children as they wish, but many of them do not have access to the affordable, high-quality child care they need. With increased support for early childhood education and child care, more Canadian parents will be able to seize the opportunities to work and learn who will be available to them and build a better future for themselves and their children.

That's why Prime Minister Justin Trudeau today emphasized that the 2017 budget proposes investments of $ 7 billion over 10 years, starting in 2018-2019, to fund and create more child care spaces Affordable and high quality products across the country. These funds are in addition to the initial investment of $500 million announced in the 2016 budget for 2017-2018.

These investments would increase the availability of affordable, high-quality child care spaces for low- and middle-income families, and help more parents to enter or return to school. Over the next three years, these funds could help create up to 40,000 new subsidized child care spaces.

The government is working with the provinces and territories to develop a national framework for early learning and child care that focuses on best practices and innovative approaches to better serve families. We will also establish a separate framework for early learning and child care for Aboriginal children in collaboration with Aboriginal partners that will address the cultures and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children across Canada.

With the 2017 budget, the government will continue to offer Canadians what is important to them: good jobs, healthy living, strong communities and better opportunities for future generations.

(pm.gc.ca)

Jaffna to receive several benefits...

Contd. from page 1...

The agreement is the result of a recent visit to Jaffna by Toronto Mayor John Tory. The agreement Mayor Tory signed will advance cooperation & partnership on governance, education, library and economic development. The agreement was signed by Mayor Tory and Mr.C.V.Wigneswaran, Chief Minister of Northern Province, at the Auditorium of Public Library in Jaffna. Mayor Tory also indicated to Mr.Wigneswaran future benefits too with the support and assistance from the diaspora in Toronto.

Funds flowing from this agreement will be used for the development of healthcare facilities, educational facilities and other infrastructure development. Similar agreements were signed sometime back between the City of Markham and Brampton when Chief Minister Wigneswaran visited Canada sometime back.

Mayor Tory also visited the Jaffna Public Library and donated books from the City of Toronto. The Jaffna Library was burnt several years ago and was rebuilt sometime back. Chief Minister Wigneswaran reciprocated with a gift of a wooden carved Souvenir of Jaffna city. Mayor Tory was accompanied in his trip to Jaffna by Economic Development Committee Chair and Toronto City Councillor Michael Thompson and newly elected Toronto City Councillor Neethan Shan.

(Seen here are some pictures taken of Mayor Tory's visit to the North)

Chief Minister Wigneswaran looking through one of the books presented by Mayor Tory to the Jaffna Library

Mayor Tory, Chief Minister Wigneswaran and Jaffna Municipal Commissioner Vageshan. Also in the picture is Chief Minister's Secretary Nimalan Karthikeyan

Mayor Tory and Chief Minister Wigneswaran at a memorial in Mullivaaikaal of those who died in the civil war

from the publisher's desk

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Sport as Social Progress:

April 6, International Day of Sport for Peace and Development 2017

From the Super Bowl to the World Cup to the Olympics, these and other similar events have from time and again brought various people together due to one thing: the love of sport. Sport has not only been a phenomenon that encourages us to demonstrate the best of our physical and mental ability, but it has, and should ideally so, be a subtle tool for creating meaningful social bonding amongst one another. This can be especially conveyed with the International Day of Sport and Development. As one of the younger days of observance instituted by the United Nations (UN), it has been annually held on April 6 after being proclaimed in August 2013. The former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, in his 2016 message, stated of the particular value that sport has in driving tolerance, mutual respect, and female empowerment among people across the globe. Additionally, it is powerful in effecting healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and solidarity, with values such as teamwork, discipline, and respect for the rules of the game

These sentiments were echoed by Karina LeBlanc, a former professional soccer player who played on the Canadian women's national team, in her service as a UNICEF ambassador promoting the game of soccer in countries like Honduras and Dominica. "Soccer is more than just a beautiful game. It's also a beautiful language that we all speak: a language of peace, of tolerance, of inspiration," proclaimed LeBlanc in 2016. Additionally, this day notes how sport can be powerful in effecting healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and solidarity, with values such as teamwork, discipline, and respect for the rules of the game, among others.

In nearly the last four years, whilst collaborating with the United Nations, the non-governmental organization Peace and Sport led by Joel Bouzou, a former Olympic medalist has ran the online #WhiteCard Campaign, where individuals, such as athletes, have held up white cards in various locations as a way to express peace and development through sport. #iplayfortheSDGs and #idsdp2016 are also part and parcel of a digital campaign spearheaded by the United Nations in its efforts to successfully implement the SDGs for the worlds' most vulnerable populations. Whether it through Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, global citizens can use the extensiveness of social media to participate in this day, and symbolize sport as social progress and human development. The International Olympic Committee has also been integral in advancing sport as a tool for peace and development with its numerous initiatives. One such measure pertains to ending childhood obesity by leveraging programs that promote physical activity on a global level.

Another is their enhancing of human rights protections for organizing the Games in the Host City Contract by 2024. As I witnessed in Windhoek, Namibia during my volunteer trip in 2013, a sport like tennis was positive in stimulating tolerance and social inclusion among young Namibian students. So while recognizing and pushing its significance within lesser developed countries, we as Canadians can also do our part in commemorating this event locally by getting out and playing.

Contributed by Harrish Thirukumaran

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~ April 14, 2017 ~
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"Honesty with one self is the condition of spiritual integrity" - *Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan* (Sep 5,1988-Apr 17,1975) First Vice President (1952-1962) and the second President of India (1962 to 1967)

Printing the Winds of Change around us All lands home, all men kin.

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Welcoming refugees at our borders: a moral and legal imperative

Statement by Canadian Council for Refugees

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) urges Canadians to respond positively to refugee claimants who have been arriving at our borders in increased numbers in recent months. We have the opportunity and the obligation to give protection to people whose lives are at risk and who come with the urgent hope that Canada will offer them security. Only a tiny percentage of the millions of refugees in the world will ever make their way to Canada: but for those who do, we must live up to our reputation as a haven for refugees by giving them a warm welcome.

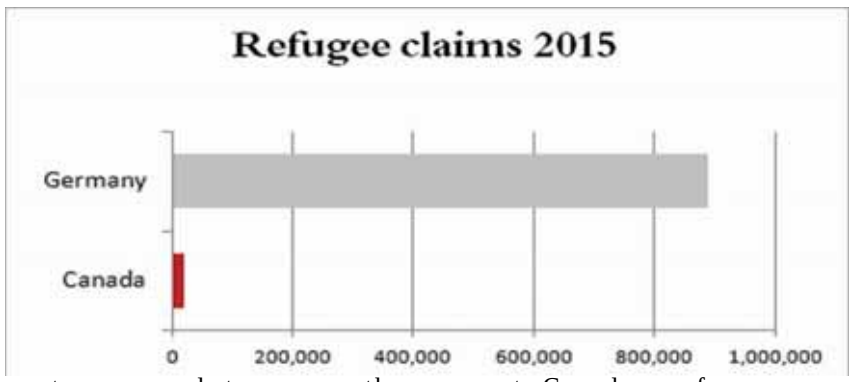
Although there has been an increase in refugee claims, the numbers remain well within the range of what Canada has seen in the past. After a period with unusually low numbers of claims, Canada is returning to the more traditional rates. Even if numbers were to go higher in 2017, we are confident that Canadians are fully able to meet the challenge, building on past experience and taking advantage of the positive energy around welcoming Syrian refugees.

We must respond because refugee claimants have an even higher call on us than resettled refugees, including the 40,000 Syrians welcomed in recent months. This is because we have legal obligations towards claimants who arrive at our borders. Under international law and as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada must not send refugees back to face persecution. This is the central principle of the Refugee Convention, which was carefully crafted after the Second World War. Some people have wrongly spoken of refugee claimants arriving "illegally", but in fact they are asserting their legal right to seek asylum. It is Canada that would be acting illegally if it denied refugee claimants the right to be heard, or sent refugees back to face persecution.

Canada acts honourably when we protect additional refugees through resettlement, by which we select refugees from a third country. However, our primary and legal responsibility lies towards the protection of refugees at our borders or on our territory.

All refugees deserve the same welcome, whether they are resettled to Canada or they make their own way to our borders in search of asylum. We must not make distinctions between human beings in need of protection.

Because of Canada's geographic location, we receive very few refugee



claimants compared to many other countries. In 2015, Germany received close to 900,000 refugee claimants. Lebanon hosts a million Syrian refugees. The UNHCR anticipates the number of Burundians fleeing to neighbouring countries will reach 500,000 in 2017. In this context, the numbers of refugee claimants in Canada seem very modest (the highest number in a year was under 45,000 in 2001).

The CCR commends the many communities, organizations and individuals that are already working to ensure a warm welcome is offered to refugee claimants. In some centres, there are meetings to plan and coordinate. People involved in private sponsorship are stepping up to support refugee claimants, as are settlement agencies and faith communities. Among those responding are people who themselves came to Canada as refugees.

Unfortunately community efforts are particularly necessary as the federal government does not fund settlement services for refugee claimants: the CCR urges the government to extend eligibility to cover refugee claimants. (Full Text of Media Release: Mar 9, 2017 - ccrweb.ca)

(The Canadian Council for Refugees is a national non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. The membership is made up of organizations involved in the settlement, sponsorship and protection of refugees and immigrants. The Council serves the networking, information-exchange and advocacy needs of its membership.)

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Canada News

Mayor John Tory visits Sri Lanka North

Toronto Mayor John Tory visited Sri Lanka North on March 19th as part of his recent trade mission to India and Sri Lanka. The Mayor was accompanied by Scarborough councillors Michael Thompson and Neethan Shan. The following social media posts give a glimpse into this groundbreaking journey:

@ Councillor_ Michael Thompson

Councillor Michael Thompson, Chair of Toronto's Economic Development & Culture Committee captured a moment with an elephant in Colombo, Sri Lanka and posted on Instagram: "With my new friend. This beautiful elephant was so gentle and strong"

@JohnTory

We made a donation of books from Toronto authors to Jaffna Library. It was burned down during Sri Lankan civil war and continues to rebuild.

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@Neethan Shan

The City of Toronto delegation reached Jaffna today afternoon, after visiting Killinochi and Mullaithivu. I was happy and proud to join the Mayor of Toronto John Tory and City Councillor Michael Thompson today to sign a historic agreement with Jaffna. The Mayor, on behalf of the City of Toronto, signed an agreement (MoU) with the City of Jaffna, in the presence of Chief Minister of Northern Province, Hon. C.V. Wigneswaran. Just based on the initial conversations alone, I am very confident that a number of much-needed initiatives will come out of this agreement, including potential collaborations at universities, library services, city planning, city infrastructure and responsible economic development. We also made a symbolic donation of books to the Jaffna library and will launch a project to assist the library once back in Toronto. This was the main objective for travelling to Sri Lanka for two days in between the 10 day trade mission to India. I will share more details soon.

@Pirgal Thiru:

A promise made is a promise kept! Thank you Mayor John Tory for following through. An MOU was signed between City of Toronto and Jaffna, an initiative that has been in the works since 2014. This is a poignant moment in our journey and many thanks to everyone including Mr. C. V. K. Sivagnanam who was our first contact with Northern Provincial Council in 2014 and Ruby Latif my fellow thought leader, all who gave shape to this initiative and of course Mayor Tory, for his relentless commitment towards ensuring that we build strong economic and social ties between Jaffna and Toronto. This is just the beginning. We have much more to do!

UNHRC Resolution does not dilute the earlier

Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran stated the following in an interview with Taylor Dibbert of "The Diplomat" recently, regarding the new resolution being adopted at the 34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council:

"The resolution that will be passed is to our [TNA's] satisfaction, since it does not dilute [UN Human Rights Council] HRC 30/1 which was passed on October 1, 2015. Sri Lanka has not completely implemented even one of its obligations under 30/1. In fact, some of those have not even been touched yet. In this scenario, our first task was to ensure that Sri Lanka re-commits itself to those obligations. Second, the international monitoring mechanism should be extended for a further period. I think both those objectives are met with the consensus resolution being adopted now. That is not to say that we are satisfied with the progress made by Sri Lanka – far from it. But, knowing the available tools at our disposal at this time, I think we have made progress".

M.A. Sumanthiran

Canadian Tamil Congress meets with United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid R'aad

Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC) President Raj Thavaratnasingham along with members of Global Tamil Forum (GTF), USTPAC and British Tamil Forum (BTF) met with United Nations High Commissioner Zeid R'aad in Geneva on March 22nd just before the High Commissioner's oral presentation.

The UN Commissioner was accompanied by Mr Thomas Hunecke, Deputy Chief of the Asia/Pacific Division of OHCHR, and Ms Mona Rishmawi, Chief of the Rule of law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch and Mr Anton Nikiforov of the HC's cabinet.

CTC thanked the High Commissioner and the OHCHR staff for their work on Sri Lanka that brought about 7 important reports and recalled the hope it instilled on the victims for justice.

We brought to his attention the dangerous erosion of trust in the Sri Lankan government and the Human Rights Council process due to the lack of progress on implementing Resolution 30/1 and the need for it to get it right this time.

United Nations High Commissioner Zeid R'aad and Members of Global Tamil Forum (GTF), Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC), United States Tamil Political Action Council (USTPAC) and British Tamil Forum (BTF) in Geneva-March 22, 2017

GTF team along with CTC, USTPAC and BTF also had a joint high level meeting yesterday with the Swiss, US, UK and German missions in Geneva on Tuesday. We made a case for explicit references on time-bound process during the interactive dialogue (ID) on Wednesday. 27 countries spoke at the ID following the High Commissioner's oral report, and many reflected our requests during the meetings.

CTC, USTPAC and BTF also had a very productive meeting on March 22nd with a team from the Northern Muslim civil society that came from Sri Lanka. We have agreed and identified some joint measures that will help to build good relationship between the Muslim and Tamil communities in the North East.

CTC takes this opportunity to thank its team that was in Geneva for the past one month during the 34th session. (Full Text of Media Release via Canadian Tamil Congress)

Vital for Sri Lanka to send message that 'impunity is no longer tolerated' underlines UN rights chief

22 March 2017 – Presenting an oral update on the rights situation in Sri Lanka, the top United Nations human rights official today said that a general lack of trust in the impartiality of the justice system in the country regarding past violations and continuing "unwillingness or inability" to address impunity reinforces the need for international participation in a judicial mechanism.

"It is important for the country's future to send the signal that impunity is no longer tolerated," Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the UN Human Rights Council today.

"For this to be credible, [the judicial mechanism] should include a special counsel, foreign judges and defence lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators," he added, noting that national consultations had also identified international participation as a way to gain the trust of the victims. He also said that while the design of truth and reparations processes appear to be underway, such efforts needed to be in consultation with victims and the civil society, and that the repeal of the terrorism prevention act and its replacement with legislation that complies with international human rights law is to be concluded.

Also in his remarks, the UN rights chief hailed the work of the civil society and human rights defenders in the country and underlined that they must be protected from harassment and intimidation.

Making particular reference to the reports of intimidation of members of civil society at the Palais des Nations (the UN Office at Geneva), the High Commissioner said that his office (OHCHR) would be looking into the issues closely.

He also called on the Sri Lankan Government to consult the independent commissions in the country, the Human Rights Commission, which he said play an invaluable role in strengthening good governance.

"I encourage respect for their mandate and autonomy, adequate financing, and implementation of their recommendations," he added.

Mr. Zeid also welcomed a number of directives made by the President of Sri Lanka regarding detention but noted that reports of torture, excessive use of force and failure to respect due process are a cause for worry.

"There is clearly a need for unequivocal instructions to all branches of the security forces that any such conduct is unacceptable and that abuses will be punished," underlined the High Commissioner.

In conclusion, the UN rights chief said that victims should be kept at the centre of the efforts in the island nation and noted that justice for them was vital to ensure sustainable peace.

(UN.org)

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Around the World

As Drought Slashes Rice Harvest, 900,000 Face Hunger in Sri Lanka

Mar 13, 2017, COLOMBO — The worst drought in five years has pushed 900,000 people in Sri Lanka into acute food insecurity, the World Food Program (WFP) says.

An unpublished survey conducted by government agencies and relief organizations in February found that both food insecurity and debt were rising sharply among families hit by drought, the WFP office in Sri Lanka confirmed to Reuters.

The country's rice harvest could be the worst in 40 years, charity Save the Children predicted. The just-completed harvest was 63 percent below normal, it said. The survey found that over one-third of the drought-affected households had seen their income drop by half since September, and 60 percent of the households surveyed were in debt.

The average amount of debt was about 180,000 Sri Lankan rupees, or $1,200, WFP said. The survey findings are expected to be formally released later this month.

Sri Lanka's government said over 1.2 million people have been affected by the country's current drought, which began last November and continues despite some occasional rainfall over the last two months.

Save the Children estimates that over 600,000 of those affected — two-thirds of the total — are children.

The Western and Northern Provinces have been worst hit, with over 400,000 people struggling with drought in each province.

Government and WFP assessments suggest Sri Lanka's 2017 rice harvest could be less than half the 3 million metric tons recorded last year.

The government has already taken steps to increase rice imports to stave off shortages, Disaster Management Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said. "We have a shortfall in the rice harvest. We have been taking action to prevent any shortfalls and will allow for tax-free rice imports until the harvest recovers," he said.

Worst-affected by the drought have been farmers and those relying on agricultural work for income. The joint WFP and government survey indicated that one out of five farmers and one out of four farm laborers is now classified as food insecure in the drought region.

Preliminary data in the survey also indicated that female-headed households in drought areas were faring worse than others, with almost 20 percent reporting "poor" to "borderline" ability to access enough food as a result of the drought.

Yapa said that the government was devising a plan to help those affected and "we will begin cash assistance very soon."

The initial plan is to provide 500,000 persons with cash assistance, he said. The government has so far set aside 8 billion rupees ($52 million) for cash-for-work programs in drought-hit areas.

Over 50 million rupees ($300,000) has been allocated to distribute water to affected populations in 22 of the island's 25 districts, he said.

The drought is expected to continue into April, according to seasonal forecasting by the Meteorological Department.

"The big rains will come with the next monsoon," which is expected to arrive in late May, said Lalith Chandrapala, director general of the Meteorological Department.

– VOA News.com

Tamil Nadu CM greets PM Modi on BJPs poll win

Tamil Nadu CM Palanisamy with Prime Minister Modi, In New Delhi on Feb 28, 2017 – pic via PTI

Chennai, Mar 11 (PTI) Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami today greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the big wins of his party in the assembly elections in states including Uttar Pradesh.

"I would like to convey my congratulations to you on the resounding victory of your party in the recently concluded Assembly Elections. This victory is the testimony of your able leadership and hard work," he said in his congratulatory letter to him.

The UK's Financial Times reporting on the poll result said India's Prime Minister Modi has tightened grip on power with Uttar Pradesh poll win and added that the voters disregarded the banknote disruption to hand BJP landslide victory in bellwether state.

Full Text of new Resolution adopted at the 34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council regarding Sri Lanka

The resolution on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was passed without a vote in Geneva on March 23.

The resolution was submitted by the United States with Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland the main sponsors and Sri Lanka a co-sponsor.

Titled "Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka" the resolution gives Sri Lanka two years to show more progress on implementing the 2015 resolution on Sri Lanka.

Full Text:

Human Rights Council

Thirty-fourth session

27 February-24 March 2017

Agenda item 2

Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Australia,* Canada,* Germany, Israel,* Japan, Montenegro,* Norway,* Sri Lanka,* the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,* United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America: draft resolution

Document A/HRC/34/L.1

Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka

The Human Rights Council,

Reaffirming the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, Guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other relevant instruments,

Reaffirming Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 of 1 October 2015 on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka,

Recalling Human Rights Council resolutions 19/2 of 22 March 2012, 22/1 of 21 March 2013 and 25/1 of 27 March 2014,

Reaffirming that it is the responsibility of each State to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of its entire population,

Reaffirming also its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka,

Welcoming the visits made to Sri Lanka by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, from 6 to 9 February 2016, and by the Secretary-General, from 31 August to 2 September 2016,

Welcoming also the visit made by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances from 9 to 18 November 2015, the advisory visits made by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, the joint visit by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment from 29 April to 9 May 2016, and the visit by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues from 10 to 20 October 2016,

Welcoming further the steps taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to implement Human Rights Council resolution 30/1, and recognizing in this context the need for further significant progress,

1. Takes note with appreciation of the comprehensive report presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-fourth session, as requested by the Council in its resolution 30/1,1 and requests the Government of Sri Lanka to implement fully the measures identified by the Council in its resolution 30/1 that are outstanding;

2. Welcomes the positive engagement of the Government of Sri Lanka with the High Commissioner and the Office of the High Commissioner since October 2015, and with relevant special procedure mandate holders, and encourages the continuation of that engagement in the promotion and protection of human rights and truth, justice, reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka;

3. Requests the Office of the High Commissioner and relevant special procedure mandate holders, in consultation with and with the concurrence of the Government of Sri Lanka, to strengthen their advice and technical assistance on the promotion and protection of human rights and truth, justice, reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka;

4. Requests the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to assess progress on the implementation of its recommendations and other relevant processes related to reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, and to present a written update to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-seventh session, and a comprehensive report, followed by a discussion on the implementation of Council resolution 30/1, at its fortieth session.

* State not a member of the Human Rights Council.

Syria 'worst man-made disaster since World War II' – UN rights chief

Onboard an Italian ship, a Syrian father holds his one-year-old son as they wait to be checked by doctors. They were rescued in the middle of the Mediterranean. Photo: UNHCR/A. D'Amato

14 March 2017 – The conflict in Syria is the "worst man-made disaster the world has seen since World War II," the United Nations human rights chief today said, calling for an end to all tortures, executions and unfair trials, and at the very least, for the names and localities of people held in detention or information about where they are buried.

"Today, in a sense the entire country has become a torture-chamber: a place of savage horror and absolute injustice," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein told a high-level panel discussion at the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Syria.

The entire conflict is "this immense tidal wave of bloodshed and atrocity," Mr. Zeid said.

The High Commissioner said that he had recently met with a group of Syrian women whose relatives had been detained or are simply missing. Their relatives are among the "countless people" in Syria to suffer arbitrary detention, torture, kidnapping, and enforced disappearance.

The Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) has been refused access to the country, and no international human rights observers are admitted to check on sites where "very probably tens of thousands of people are currently held," Mr. Zeid said.

Despite a limited access, OHCHR is working alongside the Commission of Inquiry to collect and analyze evidence, building up the basis for criminal proceedings against individual perpetrators.

In his statement, Mr. Zeid noted that the conflict started with torture which spawned "rebel movements, fueling violent extremists and setting the stage for a regional and proxy war."

Nearly 6.3 million people have been displaced and an additional 4.9 million people – mostly women and children – were forced to seek refuge since 2011, according to UN figures.

His comments come as the conflict in Syria is entering its seventh years, triggered on 15 and 16 March, 2011, when authorities clamped down on demonstrations in Damascus, setting off massive anti-Government protests.

Mr. Zeid called also for "ensuring accountability, establishing the truth and providing reparations," if Syrians are ever to find peace and reconciliation.

– UN.org

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Around the World

Sandya Eknelygoda: International Woman of Courage

Media Release by U.S. Embassy Colombo

Each year, the U.S. Department of State recognizes the exceptional courage and commitment of women who serve as advocates for human rights, justice, peace, and gender equality. Today, Sri Lanka's Sandya Eknelygoda joins twelve other women from across the globe to receive the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage award for 2017. First Lady Melania Trump and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas A. Shannon will present the award to Mrs. Eknelygoda for her tireless pursuit of justice for her husband, and on behalf of missing families from across Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Sandya Eknelygoda joins 12 other women from across the world in Washington, D.C. to receive the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage award for 2017. The 13 honorees were chosen for their advocacy on issues as diverse as combatting early child marriage, gender-based violence, huma

"Sandya represents the dedication and perseverance of women from all ethnicities across Sri Lanka who are seeking information about their missing loved ones," said U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Atul Keshap. "The American people support their efforts as a step towards a brighter future of truth, reconciliation, and lasting peace for all Sri Lankans."

Sandya Eknelygoda

Since the disappearance of her husband, Prageeth, in 2010, Sandya has made over 90 court appearances to find answers and hold perpetrators accountable. She travels regularly throughout Sri Lanka to support families of disappeared victims, including those from the war-torn Northern and Eastern provinces. "Pursuing the truth is not a crime. Protecting the perpetrators is," said Sandya about her campaign.

Sandya Eknelygoda joins 12 other women from across the world in Washington, D.C. to receive the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage award for 2017. The 13 honorees were chosen for their advocacy on issues as diverse as combatting early child marriage, gender-based violence, human rights

The 13 honorees were chosen for their advocacy on issues as diverse as combatting early child marriage, gender-based violence, human trafficking, improving interfaith relations, and preserving the environment. They will travel to cities across the United States to discuss the challenges they have faced and inspire others to action.

Since the inception of this award in 2007, the Department of State has honored nearly 100 women from 60 different countries, including Jansila Majeed of Puttalam in 2010 for her advocacy on behalf of internally displaced persons.

"It's all about never giving up," said Sandya, discussing leadership and courage. "No matter what difficulties you face now, know that something positive is in store for you."

Britain Opens Formal Divorce Proceedings With Europe

By Luis Ramirez

Wednesday, March 29, LONDON — Britain's decision to leave the European Union has been a divisive issue, but its passage has called attention to a question that many people of varying political persuasions around the world are asking these days: Has globalization been good for communities?

The process of leaving the European Union officially got under way Wednesday when British Prime Minister Theresa May triggered Article 50, kicking off two years of negotiations for what promises to be a lengthy, messy and complex process of ending four decades of engagement with the European Union.

Addressing the British parliament's House of Commons, May called it a "historic moment from which there can be no turning back."

"The effect of European Union law is all pervasive, from constitutional level questions to the regulation of bananas and cucumbers at the bottom end of the spectrum. So, it is a mammoth task that will not be negotiated within two years. It will take a decade or decades to give full effect to EU withdrawal," said Jo Murkens, a law professor at the London School of Economics.

After May gave her statement at parliament Wednesday, she received a stern warning from Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who called on her government to "consult the whole country" in its Brexit negotiations and get a "deal that delivers for the whole country." He accused May's Conservatives of turning Britain into a "tax dodgers' paradise."

The triggering of Article 50 and the launch of Brexit negotiations is yet another milestone in what appears to be a growing war against globalism, a factor largely behind the Brexit movement, including by those who feel left behind and victimized by corporate cronyism.

One battle in that movement has been fought in the English city of Bristol, where a group of citizens, paradoxically including Brexit opponents, have begun to do their share to stop the flow of money and jobs out of the city, and preserve the local culture.

In Bristol, the strike against globalism and homogeneity began five years ago with the launching of the Bristol Pound, a currency whose value is equal to the Pound Sterling, but can only be spent in the city.

For local businesses like Roll For The Soul, a non-profit bike repair shop and café, it is about keeping money in the local economy — and quality of life.

"Not having the money that's taken in the city kind of siphoned off, going up the chain of command in some big corporation. It's about, you know, paying people for the labor that they do in the city that we live in," said Rob Wall, the shop's manager.

"It's important to resist to some extent that kind of homogenization and every town or city looking the same, I don't see that as particularly interesting or particularly good for the people who live in any of those places," he said.

Wall and other backers of the Bristol Pound voted against Brexit, but with mixed feelings. He and others in Bristol say they want integration with Europe and free trade, but also a system that protects local economies and cultures.

"We all value that stuff. Nobody kind of disagrees with it, but we don't have an economic system at a global level that's allowing it to flourish. So we have to make interventions and that's what we decided to do here in Bristol," Ciaran Mundy, executive director of the Bristol Pound enterprise, told VOA.

Brexit is now a reality, and for Rob Wall, going it alone does not seem as scary as it did only a few months ago.

"We don't yet seem to have seen the kind of enormous economic catastrophe that was predicted. That said, we haven't actually left yet. We've only just triggered article 50, so how it plays out over the next few years, I don't know," he said.

Across Europe, uncertainty spread as the remaining 27 EU nations prepared for two years of deal-making that will encompass the thorny tasks of agreeing on a fair migration system, security arrangements, workers rights, and a new trade relationship.

"There's no reason to pretend that this is a happy day," said European Commission President Donald Tusk to reporters in Brussels after receiving Britain's six-page letter that formally notified him Brexit is underway.

"We already miss you. Thank you and goodbye," said Tusk.

For the time being and amid the uncertainty, the people of Bristol have spawned a revolution of their own.

(VOA News)

US First Lady Presents International Women of Courage Award to Sri Lanka's Sandya Eknelygoda

U.S. first lady Melania Trump presented the International Women of Courage Award to 13 women in Washington on Wednesday, March 29.

"These honorees on the stage with me have fought for their rights and for the rights of others. Each battle forces, such as governments, the courts, gender bias, terrorism, war and corruption, and were willing, in each moment, to face harsh penalties including imprisonment and death," Trump said.

"Together, with the international community, the United States must send a clear message that we are watching. It is therefore our duty to continue to shine

the light on each miraculous victory achieved by women - all capable of trying, truly leading the change to fight for those that cannot fight for themselves," US first lady Melania Trump said.

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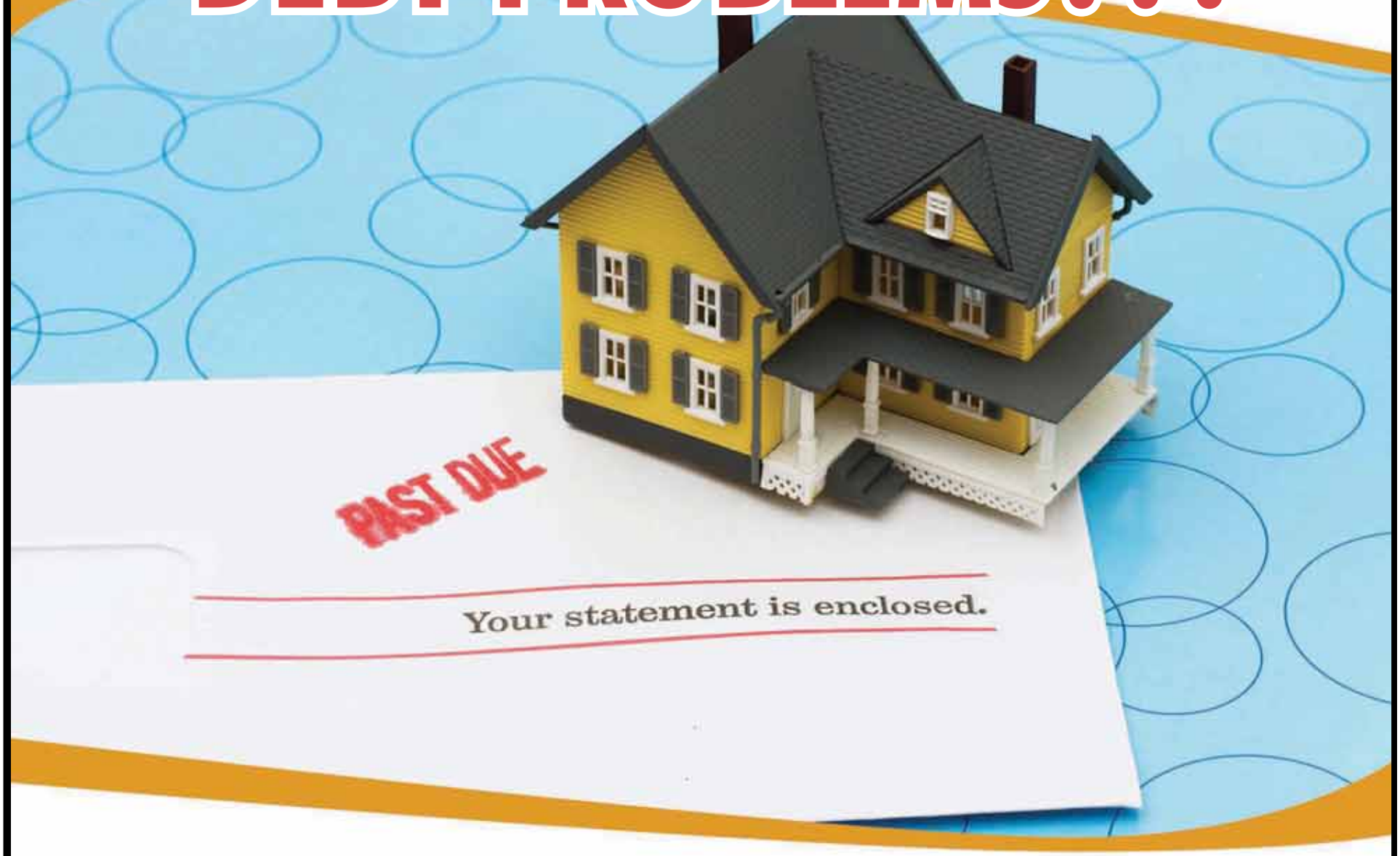

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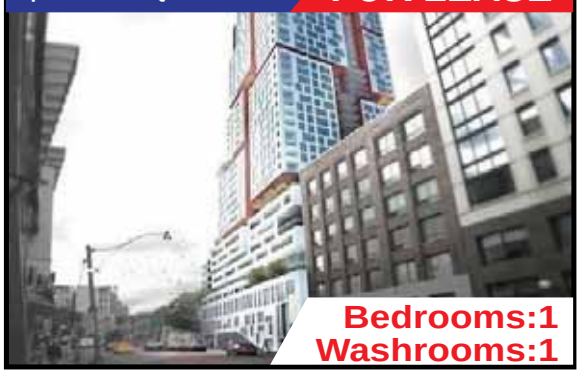

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Corey, Victoria, and their daughter, Leah-Rose

"A TOUCHING MOTHER AND DAUGHTER CELEBRATION IN PALLIATIVE CARE... A TRUE SPRING "BLESSING" TO LAST A LIFETIME

Victoria and her mother, Rose

"A TOUCHING MOTHER AND DAUGHTER CELEBRATION IN PALLIATIVE CARE... A TRUE SPRING "BLESSING" TO LAST A LIFETIME

As a little girl, Victoria dreamed of her wedding day. She would be the most beautiful bride, walking through the church doors with her father beside her. She would walk up the aisle and glance at her dear mother, who taught her everything she knew about life and love, before taking the hand of her handsome groom, Corey. It would be the most wonderful day, surrounded by everyone who mattered to her.

Victoria and Corey have been sweethearts since they were 18 years old. A year before they met in person, Corey had seen her photo through a cousin, and said "I'm going to marry her one day." Eleven years and one beautiful baby daughter later, they finally set a wedding date.

Without warning, plans suddenly changed for this young family.

In November 2016, Victoria's mother Rose was suddenly diagnosed with aggressive Stage 4 cancer and became gravely ill. At only 60 years of age, her prognosis was bleak, with less than a few months to live. **She was admitted to Palliative Care at Providence Healthcare to spend her final days in comfort and peace.**

With Rose's health rapidly deteriorating, the harsh reality was that she likely would not attend her only daughter's September wedding. Without a second thought, Victoria and Corey decided that this monumental part of their journey would not be the same without Rose.

With the encouragement of the Providence staff, Chaplain David Rebelo, and resident priest, Father Ed McGovern, they came together to give Rose the opportunity to witness a blessing for her beloved daughter and future son-in-law. Without time on their side, almost thirty family members gathered in the Palliative Care Living Room where Victoria and Corey, accompanied by their toddler daughter, exchanged their love for one another in a "Blessing" ceremony. While most brides-to-be look to their future husband during that moment, Victoria first looked at Rose. Too shy to speak, Rose's presence comforted Victoria, calmed her nerves, and allowed her to get through the bittersweet ceremony with grace.

Raising a child, working two part-time jobs, and still managing to be at Rose's bedside each day had undoubtedly taken a toll on the family, but both Victoria and Corey relied on each other for strength. They echoed that the support they received at Providence had been wonderful, despite sorrowful circumstances. ***"We love it here. Mom loves it there. It doesn't feel like a hospital. The staff even offered me the use of a private bedroom for overnight visits with mom,"*** expressed a tearful Victoria, when describing her dramatically-changed life and schedule.

Palliative Care Redefined.

Because of the generous donor community, October 2016 marked the official opening of Providence Healthcare's new Palliative Care unit. These improvements in quality of experience for patients and their families make a strong statement about the sacredness of the celebration life, and human dignity.

Their collective goal is to continue the mission of fostering compassionate care for the community. With a legacy that spans 160 years in Toronto, Providence Healthcare helps thousands of people flourish in their healing, ensuring excellence in rehabilitation, palliative care, long-term care and community programs. In just a short time, the new Palliative Program has provided families with something that cannot be found in traditional institutions - a place where loved ones can gather, reflect, share, and celebrate life despite the brief time remaining. The focus is on caring for the "family", not just the patient.

People like YOU gave Rose and her family the gift of being able to celebrate a new beginning during a time of heartache and sadness.

You are invited to please consider making a contribution to the families in their care, both present and future, so Providence can continue to provide peaceful "last days" moments for those like Rose. Moments that will be treasured by family members long after their loved ones are gone.

Spring is a time of renewal and new beginnings. Your support is NEEDED to help more people flourish, both at Providence and within the community. Please contact Stephanie Mann at Providence Healthcare Foundation, *smann@providence.on.ca* or **416-285-3666 x 4032,** to make a difference today.

Remember… because of YOU, their endeavor to advance care and compassion within hospital walls IS possible and that is the Providence dream.

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HOW OUR PATIENTS BECAME OUR PARTNERS

By: Liora Krinsky, Ettsa Papalazarou, and Farzana Premji, Best Practice Guidelines Team Leads, with support from committee members at Scarborough and Rouge Hospital

Shifting organizational culture is challenging, but Scarborough and Rouge Hospital (SRH) is finding creative ways of embedding the philosophy of patient- and family-centred care (PFCC) – the concept of doing things "with" patients, rather than "to" or "for" them – throughout the hospital; a concept described in the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) best practice guidelines.

"I absolutely have been involved in my care here. That should be the way we do things in our community hospitals," said patient Barbara Marco. "We can't just expect to sit back and let everyone else do for us; we have to contribute to that care and the needs of keeping ourselves healthy."

At SRH, work geared towards improving the patient experience began many years ago. Then, in 2015, "Patients as Partners" was identified as one of four strategic directions in the hospital's strategic plan. This occurred in tandem with the organization becoming a RNAO Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) candidate.

However, the PFCC Steering Committee quickly discovered that the patient advisor toolkit developed to support the process of recruiting patient advisors to hospital committees wasn't quite resonating with the local population of Scarborough, Ontario. This is one of Canada's most culturally diverse communities, but not everywhere in the world are patients used to being active participants in their care.

The committee needed to truly understand the unique perspectives held by community members (more than half of whom hail from outside Canada and speak a primary language other than English or French) to embed PFCC into patient care. They made sure that patients and their families knew that the hospital wanted to hear their voices and that they understood their value in helping to inform its path with PFCC.

"As a patient advisor participating in the process of this cultural shift, and experiencing the change in care practices first-hand, I feel my voice is being heard," said Merritt Burstein, a patient advisor on the PFCC Steering Committee.

Partnering with clinical staff was equally important in creating a culture of PFCC. The initial plan relied on developing an interactive online module describing the four principles of PFCC and how to practice, until technical difficulties forced the committee to find another approach.

They developed a PFCC Roadshow, joining clinical huddles to engage staff and influence practice changes in real-time. During the roadshow, they asked clinical staff, "What can we change today?"

"This is when we realized that face-to-face interaction was far more effective than technology," said Liora Krinsky, Clinical Resource Leader, Medicine and Specialized Geriatrics. "It was a 'lightbulb' moment: we needed to engage with our staff the way we wanted them to engage with our patients!"

The roadshow evolved to include an interactive game. Clinical staff received cards describing a range of patient scenarios. They were asked to identify if these situations illustrated care that was done to, for, or with the patient. Playing the game revealed that many staff believed they were already delivering PFCC, when they were actually caught between doing "for" and "with" patients. Setting daily goals with patients became one of the first steps in active patient participation and collaboration.

Spreading PFCC to clinical areas challenged the hospital to ensure that PFCC is front and centre in the organization, from new staff orientation to the patient's bedside. And, with help from the Rising Stars program for emergent leaders, the committee is also determining how to demonstrate to non-clinical staff the deep connection between PFCC and their roles, even though they may not work directly with patients.

Every creative step will be taken with patients to continue this culture shift across the organization. The patient voice is essential.

This work is part of the BPSO designation, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. For more information about the RNAO BPSO Designation, please visit www.rnao.ca.

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Local families get more than a day of fun out of Teddy Bear Clinic

The Centenary site of Scarborough and Rouge Hospital (SRH) hosted over 140 children at their fifth annual Teddy Bear Clinic last week. The hospital welcomed children eager to oversee the care of their stuffed toys within a hospital environment.

While it is a day of spring break fun for the kids, it is also educational, teaching kids about tests and procedures and how their bodies work. "The clinic is an event where kids get to come to the hospital from the community to learn about the different areas of the hospital that they might experience if they need to come in," said event organizer Alex Frankel, a child life specialist with SRH. "They get to take their stuffed animal for bloodwork, x-rays, learn about MRIs and CTs, and lots of other things."

Annie Vadivelu brought her daughter Nalynie, 9, who wants to be a family doctor. Nalynie's favourite part of the clinic was helping her stuffed toy Fluffy get an intravenous (IV). "She likes to find out what's going on with the body," said Vadivelu. "She learned a lot."

Sherr Wright shared the clinic experience with her three kids Andrew, 11, Toni, 10, and Mercedes, 2. "I heard about it on the news last year, and had to come this year for sure," said Wright. The family brought along their "injured" bear Pedro, a bear almost as big as Toni. The two older children said they loved everything about the clinic. Andrew, who has required emergency care in the past, shared that if he were to come back to the hospital again he had learned two things: not to be scared of an IV, and how to take deep breaths to calm him down.

Kristen Cabanatan and her daughter Meghan, 3, were first-time attendees to the clinic. Meghan, who self-described as a "princess doctor," was wearing a pink and purple stethoscope. She brought Mousey, and was excited that he had received X-rays and a cast. Her mom loved how interactive the clinic was for kids. "I think the clinic was successful in preparing Meghan for a potential doctor visit, especially for bloodwork, because that's something she'll eventually have to do," said Cabanatan. "We can say 'Remember, Mousey had his blood taken, and Mousey was brave.'"

For mom Linda Shaw-Gamble, while the event provides a day of entertainment for her children, she has seen the long-lasting educational benefits of the clinic that far outlast the event itself. The local family has attended the past two years, and the clinic has helped them with their visits to the doctor, as they now know what to expect. "They used to be really nervous going," said Shaw-Gamble. "They are a lot calmer now, even 'chill.' They're practically jumping on the scale. They even bugged me to get their flu shots this year!"

For some more highlights of this year's event, click here for a video and photos.

SRH Board meets to discuss quality and access to services

March 28, 2017 – Last week the Board of Directors for Scarborough and Rouge Hospital (SRH) came together for their monthly meeting. This was a productive session which included discussion on important topics related to quality, enhancing access to services, and delivering patient-centred care.

The meeting included a master planning presentation by Rick Gowrie, Vice President, Capital Planning & Facilities Operations for SRH. The Board reviewed early stage planning procedures for acute health-care services in Scarborough, and discussed the upcoming Master Planning exercise. Community engagement was identified as a key priority for the Board.

The meeting also focused on SRH's 2017/18 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), and change ideas that will strengthen the quality patient experience. A vote to approve the 2017/18 QIP passed unanimously. The plan will be posted next week on the hospital's website, and will be accompanied by a letter to the community.

The Board discussed financial results following an audit of both legacy organizations. The audits were accepted into official record, marking the final financial statements of Rouge Valley Health System and The Scarborough Hospital.

The next board meeting will take place on Thursday, April 27, 2017 from 4 to 7 p.m. in the Mabel Crolly Boardroom at the Birchmount site. All are welcome to attend.

Special Feature

Toronto Mayor John Tory promises action to solve issues of displaced Tamils in the North

By: Raymond Rajabalan

The civilians groups of Mullaitivu who met the Mayor of Toronto during his recent visit to North Sri Lanka while voicing their grievances appealed to him to save their region that is being systematically destroyed by colonization of Sinhalese civilians and by the atrocities committed by Sinhala fishermen as well by accelerated militarization of their traditional homeland.

Toronto Mayor Tory who was on a 10-day trip to India and Sri Lanka beginning March 15 was accompanied by a team officials including two city councilors Neethan Shan and Michael Thompson as well as four city staff. The Mayor's team was on trade mission to India and Sri Lanka and included 20 delegates from Toronto's business and academic communities.

This brief stopover of Toronto Mayor John Tory's tour of South Asia is also a homecoming for Neethan Shan. It will be the first time Shan, elected a councillor for Scarborough-Rouge River last month, sets foot in Sri Lanka since leaving for Canada as a refugee, fleeing civil war at age 16."I 'have been looking forward to this visit returning here as a city councilor," said Shan, acknowledging though his role is official, "you can't take away the emotional aspect of it."

During this historic visit that included one day stopover in the North Sri Lanka on March 18th, the Mayor's delegation was welcomed by a team of officials from the North including Hon. C. Wickneswaran , Northern Province Chief minister as well as some officials from his office.

During the meeting organized at Muliavalai Kalaimagal Vidyalayam in Mullaitivu, a large number of civilians gathered in the school premises presented their problems and appealed to the visiting Mayor to help them find a solution for their sufferings.

The appeal by the civilian groups included the following;

• While the militarization by the occupying Srilankan Army continues at an accelerated rate, the systematically planned colonization of Sinhalese continues at a very rapid in the name of Mahaweli L zone. In addition, a Regional Secretariat has been set up to look after the needs of the people who have encroached into our lands.

• Until recently 1400 Tamil fishermen were involved in fishing in the 73 kilometer zone in Mullaitivu district. However in the recent past nearly 800 Sinhalese fisherman has begun to fish in this same area with the active protection provided by Sri Lankan armed forces. Meanwhile , the livelihoods of the Tamil fishermen in this region has been getting worse since the arrival of fishermen from South who are engaged in fishing in Mullaitivu using prohibited fishing nets.

• Further the Mullaitivu area has become poverty stricken since most of the youth of the area are unemployed

Mayor John Tory also visited the families of the disappeared who have been protesting outside the Mullaitivu District Secretariat

The civilian groups appealed to Mayor Tory to take steps to provide jobs for the youths of this area as well as to prevent further destruction of this district.

Mayor Tory after attentively listening to the grievances presented to him was visibly moved but he quickly composed himself.

Speaking to those gathered on that occasion ,Tory said ' the people who have faced violence and destruction should develop greater confidence and expressed the hope that once the fundamental problems are solved there will be hope for the future based on reconciliation and the path of justice. He further stated that the Diaspora Tamils in Canada are working hard and are setting an example for the rest of the communities. Mayor Tory further stated that he has already observed first hand many aspects of the problems faced by the locals and in addition he has been briefed by the Chief Minister of the area. Tory concluded by saying that once he returns to Canada he will take the necessary action to address these issues and also will take definite steps to find a solution for the problems faced in pursuing the education by the youth of this area.

Mayor John Tory also visited the families of the disappeared who have been protesting outside the Mullaitivu District Secretariat

Special Feature

How Can Technology Help You?

By: Andrea Shanmugarajah

As time goes on, technology is becoming more and more immersed in our daily lives. In fact, it is no longer unusual to see young children, who are only beginning to learn to read and write, expertly navigate phones and tablets. It may seem as though technology is very much a tool of the young; they are born and raised surrounded by technology, and it is apparent in everything that they do. However, even people of the previous generation have had to adapt to the constantly changing demands of technology – both in the workplace and at home, it is near impossible to live without heavily incorporating technology into one's daily life. However, how does technology fit into the picture with the elderly? Seniors may not be under the same pressure to keep up with the newest and trendiest technological innovations, and in many ways, this is a good thing. However, technology is not, as many people assume, the danger it is made out to be. In fact, technology can improve and enrich our lives in a multitude of ways, regardless of age.

Because the primary modality through which people access technology in today's day and age is phone and tablet usage, one of the main ways that seniors can beneficially harness technology is through apps. Because of the ever-growing number and variety of apps, it is easy to see how one can tailor their technology usage to their own needs and interests. For example, an app like Luminosity contains hundreds of clever puzzles and games, all of which are created to improve memory and attention. Luminosity is popular for people across all age groups, but it can be particularly helpful for those who are aging, because the aging process can otherwise bring frustrations or poorer memory and concentration. Thus, the app keeps users mentally active, and is an easy and fun way to improve various aspects of cognitive performance. Phone apps not only help with mental health – they can promote physical health as well. While many people assume that technology encourages a sedentary lifestyle, it can actually be the opposite if you know how to use it. There a number of fitness apps that can be used to track changes in various aspects of health, such as blood pressure, weight, and caloric intake. Tracking your progress and seeing how these values change with time can be a great way to motivate yourself to stay physically active and healthy. Finally, there are apps that were created specifically for seniors. An example of this would be Pillboxie, which is an app that allows users to input all their medication information, and then sends notifications reminding them when they need to take certain pills. This can be especially useful for people who have a long list of medications, which can be difficult for anyone to keep track of, or for those who are notoriously lax with their medication regimen.

The impact of technology is not just limited to apps and games, however. It can do a lot more than that – namely, it can help connect people with friends and family around the world, with the help of social media. Social media is one form of technology that truly does transcend all age groups. Things like Facebook, Skype and Whatsapp are commonly and easily used by people of all ages. They provide a great way to connect with people you don't get a chance to see often. It is not uncommon for seniors to find themselves feeling isolated or lonely, especially if they don't drive. This can be exacerbated by being an immigrant, as friends and family may be spread across the globe. However, social media can largely ameliorate that, as it greatly reduces the perceived distance between people, making them seem more accessible. Through social media, one can share posts with loved ones, take part in phone or video calls, and participate in group chats with multiple people at once. Social media provides people with the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, make new friends and maintain active social lives when it would have otherwise been difficult to do so.

There are countless ways in which we all incorporate technology into our lives, each and every day. We are well beyond the time when technology use is limited to only the few who know how to use it or who can afford it. And, as target markets change with time, so too does the technology itself change, reflecting a broader and more varied consumer base. We are luckily now in a time where there is technology being specifically created and marketed for seniors, with the intention of improving some aspect of their lives. While regular technology usage is not necessarily for everyone, for those who are interested in incorporating it more fully into their lives, the opportunities are endless. Thus, seniors who have such an interest are urged to look into how technology can benefit them each and every day. The aforementioned examples of technology geared at seniors are really just a small taste of everything that is out there, so it is undoubtable that technology can have a sustained, positive impact on the lives of seniors, if they choose to allow it.

Andrea Shanmugarajah

Andrea Shanmugarajah is a student at McMaster University, where she is currently studying Medicine. She is involved with the senior community in Toronto, which she became interested in due to her own personal experiences with her grandmother. She hopes to eventually pursue a career in geriatrics, whereby she can help and advocate for the elderly on a daily basis.

Andrea hopes to educate others about the struggles that many elderly people may face in Toronto, and how people of all ages can work towards making the community a more accepting and compassionate place for seniors.

Special Feature

WORDS OF PEACE

Life Demands Peace

Prem Rawat, known the world over as an ambassador of peace, was once asked what he thought about the International Day of Peace. While he applauded the recognition that human beings everywhere need peace, he reminded his audience that "peace needs to be felt every single day, not just one day."

Mr. Rawat has dedicated his life to spreading his unique message of peace. Whether he is addressing international gatherings of government and business leaders or inmates in some of the world's largest prisons, his message is the same: the peace you are looking for is inside of you.

"Do you know what demands peace?" he asks. "Is it me? No. Some book? No. I'll tell you what demands peace. What demands peace is life itself. It demands that you have peace the whole time you are alive."

This is what it means to be alive, says Mr. Rawat––and this is why, as human beings, we need to understand the basic necessities of life, without which we will never feel complete.

"Understand," he says, "what this amazing thing called life is. Out of nowhere comes this breath. Do you say, 'Bravo'? Or do you say, 'I'm bored. Give me something exciting!'"

How about the universe, Mr. Rawat asks––is that exciting enough?

"We are sitting, standing, dancing on a planet that's made out of dust," he says. "From this dust comes the majesty of the stars; the majesty of the flowers, the trees, the fruit on this Earth; the majesty of human beings on the face to this Earth.

"Do you need some entertainment? Open your eyes. Look around. Look at us!"

Lost in illusion, Mr. Rawat says, we have forgotten how to respect the miracle that we are. Only when we regain this understanding will people begin to respect one another.

"Respect for others comes when people have respect for themselves," he says. "When that occurs, it's like a desert that has turned green when the rain has come. We need the rain of understanding, the rain of reality, the rain of clarity. Without that rain, this life is a desert. Without love, without feeling, without understanding, without respect, who are you?"

One drop of water may not seem significant, Mr. Rawat says, but added to other drops, it becomes powerful––"all the way to the point where it can cut metal as cleanly as butter.

"How can this be? That is the nature of that water. We too need to understand our nature––that the nature of the human being is to nurture. The nature of the human being is to feel good, to bring joy not only to yourself, but to others.

"When people are in touch with this magic called life, then they will know what life demands––and what life demands is peace. That's when it can dance, that's when it can flourish. That's when it can expand, can encompass us and be fulfilling."

Human beings, he says, are capable of understanding what fulfilment is––and indeed, have the potential to know themselves in the most fundamental way.

"Spend some quality time with yourself," Mr. Rawat suggests. "Not time in confusion, but time in clarity, time to embrace this gift of life—because it is a gift. Don't take it for granted." If it is part of our nature to be greedy, he says, people should be greedy for things that bring joy to the heart.

"If you have to be greedy, be greedy for generosity. If you have to be greedy, be greedy for gratitude. Be greedy to help each other. Be greedy for a smile on a child's face. Be greedy for a smile on each other's face. Be greedy for those things that truly matter.

"You are human. Congratulations! You are human––and the finest accomplishment of a human being will be peace on Earth."

To learn more about Prem Rawat
1 877 707 3221 Toll Free
416 431 5000 Tamil
416 264 7700 Hindi
www.wopg.org | www.tprf.org
www.premrawat.com

Kids' Blogging

By: Janani Srikantha

In an environment where students are consistently moving from one task to another, it is all the more important that there is time made for authentic reflection and development of voice. This is why blogging is a great idea for children.

In my experience, when students are asked to write, they sometimes, see it as a long, arduous task. However, a blog has a different appeal to children. It is informal and diary-like. It doesn't seem to be so "academic" on the surface. Yet, blogging does address a lot of literacy skills, as children learn to summarize their ideas, form conclusions, compose their thoughts into logical entries, and share their understandings. In addition, a blog can use multiple mediums to share information, and thus children can use videos, interactive posters, or whiteboard animation among a myriad of other ways to share their thoughts. Students have the freedom to be creative, while developing their literacy skills.

A child's blog is their space. It is a platform for them to develop their voice. It can be an area for them to showcase their achievements, but also a place for them to reflect and share their opinions on what they are passionate about. A blog that is student-centered will show their growth, their challenges, and their interests. Therefore, a blog should be viewed as an opportunity for us to teach children how to voice their opinions, how to be open to constructive criticism through comments, how to navigate digital safety and citizenship, and how they can share their passions and opinions in meaningful ways.

Not only are children improving their communication skills through blogs, but they are also building their confidence. A couple of years ago, my students were writing stories, which in previous years, I had always graded and given back. However, this time, I took the opportunity to ask parents' consent to upload their stories to a web-based platform where the others can read the books. Subsequently, the quality of writing that was submitted significantly improved. It was no longer just their teacher reading the work, but the students knew their words were going to be out there in the world. They were excited, and when those stories went online each child had a sense of pride in their work being published. They looked forward to reading the reviews, as this was more authentic feedback since people had chosen to read their stories. It was also a time when we worked together to form strategies to reply to comments in a manner that engages positive discussion. Some students asked if they could share more of their thoughts online, as they were empowered that their opinions were being viewed by others. As a teacher, reading twenty-five stories that weren't just assignments, but work students stood by is much more satisfying.

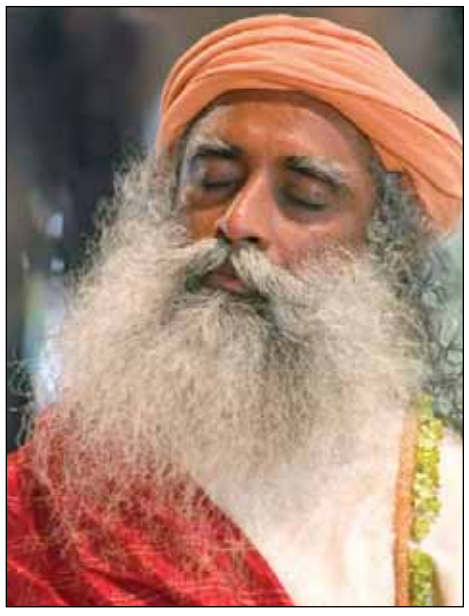
Being a student in today's world encompasses a lot of skills that go beyond the book and pen. By creating a blog, children are addressing the traditional literacy skills in their school curriculum while still developing digital literacy. In essence, we are using a powerful medium for students to share their voice in meaningful ways as they become global learners.

Janani Srikantha is a certified teacher who is experienced with the Ontario curriculum and the International Baccalaureate. She provides academic support using personalized learning plans based on students' needs. She is currently completing her graduate studies to further understand how the integration to technology is redefining how a student learns. The education landscape is changing, and she helps parents and families to engage their child in learning. Janani has led workshops for educators and parents on topics that address different facets of education. For more information or queries on how to help your child with learning, please email info@thinkshiftedu.com or visit Thinkshift Edu on Facebook.

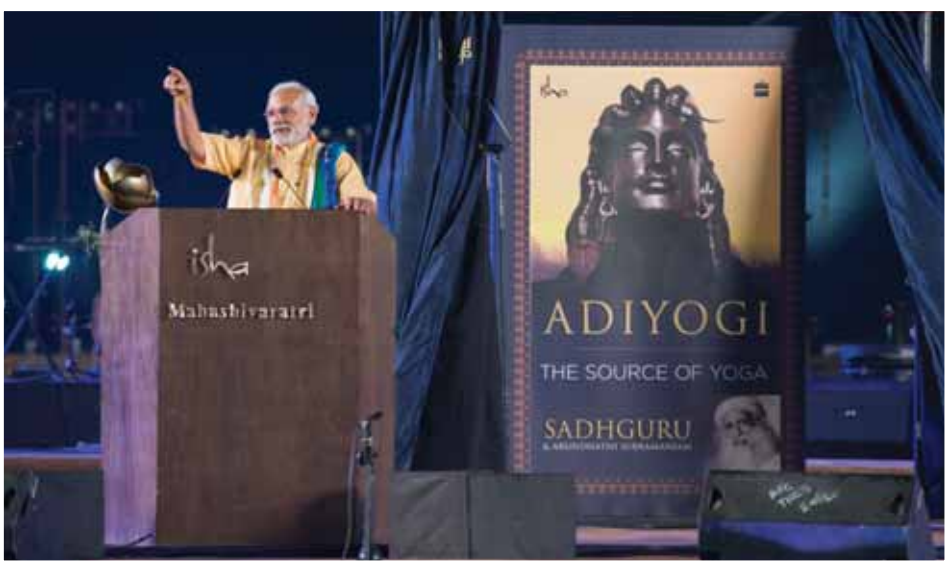
Special Feature

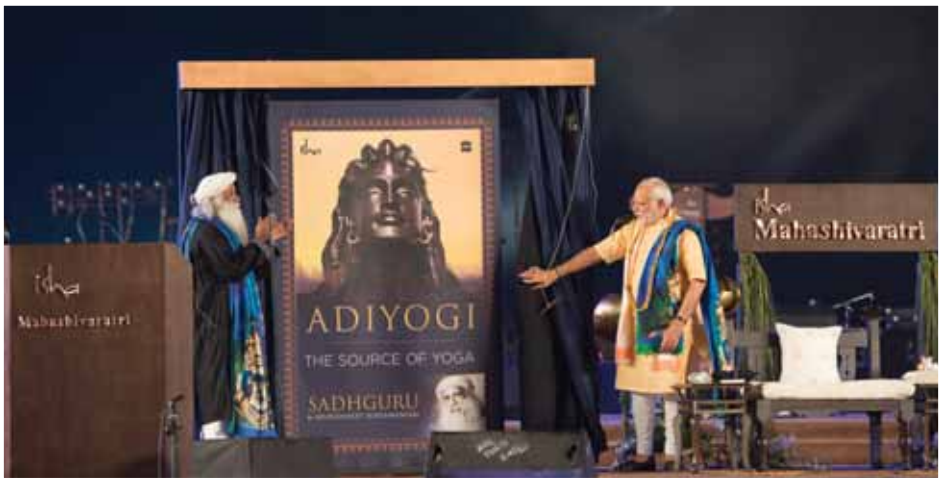
SADHGURU

Mahashivarathri Celebrations and unveiling of Adi Yogi statue in Isha Yoga Center, Coimbatore, India



Sadhguru Vasudev is a realized master, yogi and mystic, who has founded Isha Foundation, an international public service organization that strives for ultimate human well-being. For worldwide program information, visit www.ishafoundation.org





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SHORT STORY

Special Feature

CRAVING FOR THE ACCUSTOMED VILLAGE LIFE IN NATIVE LAND

Plight of the elders forcefully uprooted and settled in foreign climes

C. Kamalaharan

Like many others in the evening of their lives Chelliah too was uprooted and settled in Canada. The first thing a person does on arrival in Canada is to adapt him/her to the Canadian way of life. As it was the peak of the winter season Chelliah had to follow the dress code of the season. Accordingly he was wrapped up in warm clothing while staying indoors and was dressed as an astronaut with several layers of clothing whenever he ventured out. In Canada both husband and wife have to work to meet the domestic expenses and settle the mortgage bill. Chelliah's son Mohan and daughter - in – law Meena are no exceptions to this. In order to free themselves from the heavy work schedule during working days they prepare wholesome food during weekends and stock them in the fridge. After they leave for work Chelliah had to warm it in the microwave oven and have it for his lunch. The veggie items such as burger, sandwich, pizza, bagel, wrap and pasta served for dinner were nauseating for him. He longed for his traditional food items; idiappam, thosai, puddhu, appam, vadai etc. Life as such was miserable for him. Also the sedentary life with accumulation of fat deposits made his tummy and buttocks bulge. He also craved for the simple accustomed life he had spent in his native land. The mere mention of it was instantly turned down by the stern look from his son Mohan. Being severely subjugated he had no other alternative but to spend the time baby sitting and controlling the mischievous kids with strict orders not to harm them.

One day all of a sudden Chelliah picked up quarrel and said, "I want to get back to my native village." "Why do you want to go there," yelled the son. "We are providing everything why this sudden urge to go," said the daughter-in-law stepping in. "My BP has shot up and my sugar level too has risen owing to lack of physical exercise. Furthermore life is boring here and I am a virtual prisoner." "Here medical facilities are exceptionally good and they are cheap too. Your BP and sugar levels can be brought down to normal level within a couple of days. Look here, life is such in Canada you have to live with it. Hereafter don't come to me with impracticable demands, understand!" said Mohan in a severe tone. "Unable to confront his son further Chelliah retreated to his room threw himself on bed and spent the whole night brooding.

A couple of weeks later Suppiah a close relative Mohan while on a casual visit inquired, "Where is Chelliah Annai?" "Over there in the room living as a recluse," replied his son Mohan. "Why! is he not well?" "He is OK but he always bothers me to send him back to his native village. I am totally against it," said Mohan. When Suppiah entered the room Chelliah clasped Suppiah's hands and cried unabashedly. "Chelliah Annai! Why are you crying?" "Thamby I can't stay here, life is terribly boring and I feel sick. I want to get back to my heavenly life than staying here." "Don't cry, I'll try to convince your son and see that you are off to your native village," saying so he left the room and met Mohan in the living room. "Thamby, I feel sorry for Chelliah Annai, poor chap what can he do other than remaining here idling in this biting cold. Let him go and see his relatives and friends. The weather there will be more conducive for him and he will be in an upbeat mood moving about freely. You may go after a year and bring him back." "That sounds nice," said Mohan. "So why do you delay pack him off immediately," saying so Suppiah left the house.

The following morning after discussing with his wife Mohan called his father and gave him a pleasant surprise. "Appa you pack your bags and get ready. I will check with the travel agent and send you to your native village in the next available flight. I will come there after a year and bring you back." Chelliah's joy was boundless. The mere thought of returning to his village boosted his low morale. He said to himself, "First let me go and once there I will never ever dream of coming here."

On arrival at the Jaffna railway station Chelliah's younger brother Kanthiah received him and both proceeded to their village in a rented cab. Chelliah was impatient as the car fled through the busy streets. "Why Thamby the driving is so fast?" "Annai, see how our streets have been widened and carpeted." Excellent Thamby, those days the roads were narrow with pot holes as such driving was very difficult. Arriving at the Arasady junction the car slowed down and proceeded through the newly laid narrow road, took a right turn at the dead end proceeded a short distance and arrived at Kanthiah's house. Kanthiah's children rushed out of the gate in excitement and shouted, "Periappa has come!" Overwhelmed by their love and affection Chelliah hugged and kissed each one of them and presented the gifts he had brought for them. After a sumptuous dinner of Chelliah's favourite 'kurakkan puddu' and chicken gravy

both the brothers sat outside on a bench and went on reminiscing the past till late in the night. Later both of them retired to bed on mats spread on wooden beds outside under a spreading jak tree. "Thamby how nice to sleep here enjoying the gentle breeze and breathing fresh air!" But Chelliah was not able to sleep due to the time difference. At the pealing of temple bells Kanthiah got up and after ablutions approached his brother and handed him a cigar. "Oh! cigar from our tobacco," saying so Chelliah lit it and began puffing out the smoke. "Thamby in Canada I haven't seen anyone smoking cigars. They smoke only cigarettes. Just then Kanthiah's wife brought him hot coffee in their traditional brass tumbler with a nose outlet. Sipping it Kanthiah remarked, "Fine, a blend of coffee, coriander, dried ginger and milk from your cow. It's the traditional drink prepared and served in all Tamil homes. Tim Horton and Starbucks are no match to this medicinal brew."

The following morning after a shower Chelliah dressed in 'verty' and shirt set off to the nearby temple. On the way he was pleased to see most people passing by sporting a stretch of 'viputhi' on their foreheads a sight could be rarely seen in Canada. Arriving at the temple he washed his feet and entered the temple in piety. He was happy to see devotees decently attired; men in 'verty' and bare above the waist and women in sarees, sudidhars and frocks. After circumambulating the inner courtyard, paying obeisance to the various deities enshrined he arrived in front stood facing the inner sanctum and prayed to Lord Muruga. Later to his heart's content he applied a stretch of 'Viputhi' (Holy Ash) from one end of the forehead to the other covering the entire area and left the temple.

Back at home he had 'thosai' and his favourite hand pounded 'sambol' for breakfast and walked up to the library to read local newspapers. He was pleased to see children smartly dressed in school uniform going to school on foot or on bikes. On return he had a heavy lunch of boiled red rice, fresh vegetables obtained in his brother's farm, crab curry and 'rasam' a boiled mixture of spices. "It's awesome!" said he.

n evening hoping to meet his former friends he went out on a stroll to the temple area which was always bustling with activities. But to his utter dismay there weren't any familiar faces. As he stood there lonely an unknown person approached him and asked, "Who are you?" Chelliah got irritated and shot back, "You are asking me a son of this soil who are you!" "You seemed to be a stranger that's why…" "I am Chelliah brother of Kanthiah the cigar roller." "Oh our Kanthiah Annai! just now he passed this way towards his farm." As they spoke the private rickety passenger van arrived and someone alighting from it noticed Chelliah and shouted, "Chelliah Annai." Chelliah was thrilled to see his friend Sinnathurai after a lapse of several years. After the exchange of formalities both of them walked up to the farm. On the way Chelliah's another friend Apputhurai waved his hand in excitement as he drove past in his land master carrying farm produce. Arriving at the far stretched farm he was overwhelmed to see men women and children actively engaged in farming. "It's a common sight in villages to see members of a family engaged in farming to achieve a bumper harvest. The rich 'red soil' is a boon for our industrious farmers," said Kanthiah.

The following morning Chelliah asked his brother, "Where can I get toddy?"

"Don't worry Annai the toddy tapper is on top of one of our palmyra palms I'll get you as soon as he comes down." A few minutes later the toddy tapper arrived with the 'muddy'

(clay pot) frothing with toddy. Tasting it from an improvised palmyra container Chelliah commented, "What a delicious nourishing and cheap drink this is!" The expensive and injurious whisky, brandy and wine are no match to this." A week later his desire of tasting 'odial kool' (a poridge prepared with a mixture of Palmyra root flour dried fish prawns tapioca long beans and spices) was also fulfilled.

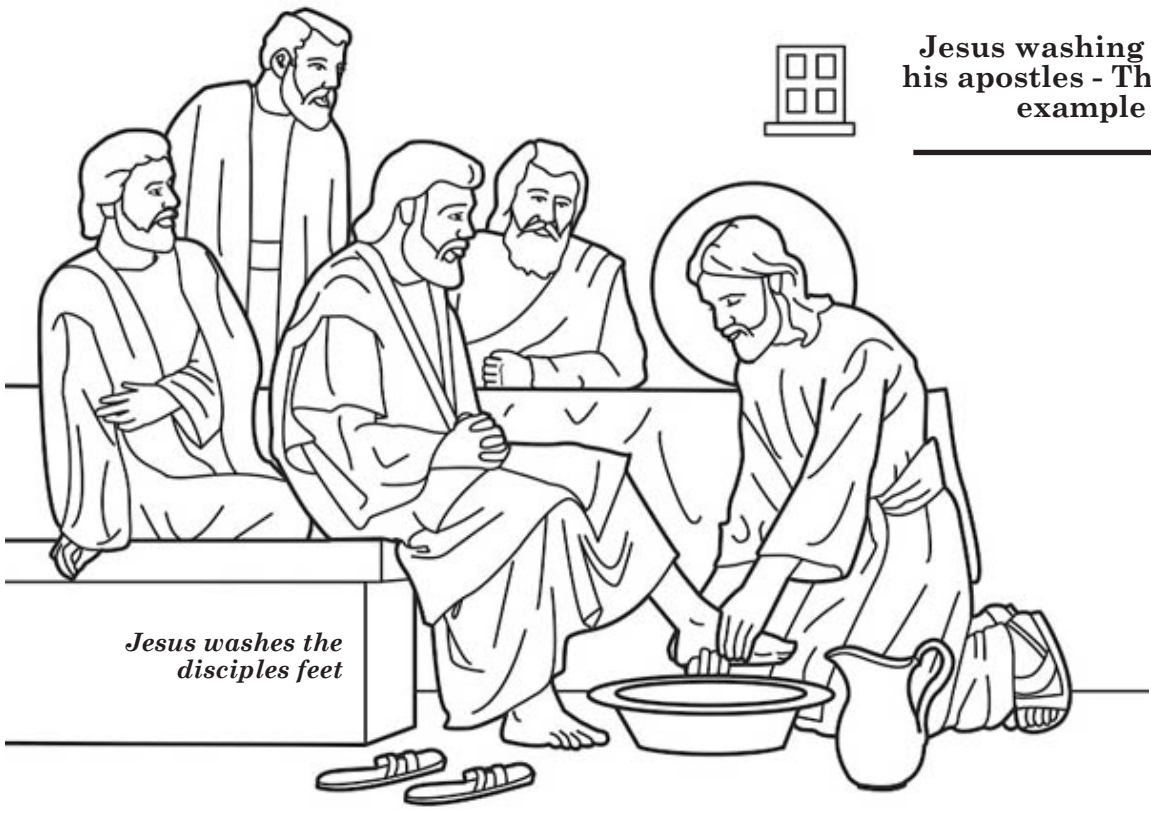
Chelliah spent the days happily; attending temple festivals literary meetings weddings and all other community activities. One day during a casual talk Kanthiah had asked him, "Annai its almost a year since you arrived here what will you do if your son comes to take you back to Canada?" "I'll never budge from this place. See how healthy and happy am I, my BP and sugar levels are back to normal. I am now a free bird enjoying fresh air unlike in Canada where I remained 'imprisoned' within the four walls without free circulation of fresh air. Does he want me there for my early exit? It's like taking me to the gallows." Just then a call. "It must be from your son," said Kanthiah as he took the receiver and answered "Hello." "Hellow Chitappa I am Mohan here, just to convey you that I am making arrangements to come over there and bring Appa here." "Why Thamby in such a hurry. See how happy and cheerful your Appa is. He is in fine health his BP and sugar levels are quite normal. To be honest he wishes to prolong his stay here. Let him stay, we'll look after him and attend to all his needs. When his health takes a bad turn I'll inform you. You can come and take him to Canada where medical facilities are excellent." "That sounds great, OK Chittapa let him be under your care, just call him I want to talk to him." Not sure as to what transpired between the two brothers Chelliah took the receiver with apprehension and began softly, "Thamby!" "Appa! Chitappa told me everything, you continue to stay there take care of your health and call me quite often." "Sure Thamby." Chelliah's joy was exhilarating. He hugged his brother and thanked him for mediating on his behalf. Getting a cigar from Kanthiah he lit it and began puffing in ecstasy saying, "I'll die here instead of going there, let it be heaven can it match our bountiful village life…."

Special Feature

LESSONS OF JESUS

LOVE ONE ANOTHER...

By: Raymond Rajabalan



Jesus washes the disciples feet

Jesus washing the feet of his apostles - The Master's example of serving

Peter looked down at Jesus. For the past three and a half years, he had followed Him all over Judea. He had learned firsthand of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and had seen the many miracles wrought by His hands. Now, his Lord had removed His outer garments, wrapped a towel around Himself and knelt down before him. He began to unfasten Peter's sandals. The basin of water nearby spoke volumes about what He intended to do. He had watched as Jesus had washed some of the other disciples' feet, and now here He was kneeling before him. He had to say something. "Lord, are you washing my feet?!" Peter blurted out. He knew that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus was his Lord! He was Peter's Teacher and his Master! Yet here He was, kneeling before Peter like a lowly servant—preparing to wash his feet. It just wasn't right. *"What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this,"* Jesus answered.

The Master's example of serving

As they had followed Christ throughout Judea, they had walked along the dusty roads, and much of the time their feet were filthy. Some houses didn't receive their message, and the disciples had been instructed to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them. Those who received them willingly often provided them a place to wash their feet, with sometimes perhaps a slave or house-servant to do it for them. That the Messiah had taken the position of such a lowly slave was unacceptable. He was a King, not a servant.

"Lord, you shall never wash my feet!" Peter protested.

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me," Christ replied softly.

"Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head also," Peter insisted.

"He who is bathed need only wash his feet . . . And you are clean, but not all of you." Peter didn't know what He meant by that. Realizing that Jesus would not be deterred by his protests, he relaxed and let his Teacher begin the task. Jesus took Peter's foot in his hands, unfastened the sandal and gently lowered his foot into the basin. The cool water gave Peter a start, and as Christ began to cup His hands and wash Peter's feet—wiping the dirt from them gently—what thoughts went through Peter's mind?

His protests tonight perhaps reminded him of the time that Jesus had told him and the other disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders and chief priests. Christ told them He would suffer and be killed, then raised the third day. Peter pulled Him aside and started to rebuke Him, letting his Master know that he would never let that happen. He wouldn't stand for it!

But Jesus had corrected him sharply and told them all that those who would come after Him must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. If they desired to save their life, He said they would lose it, but if they lost their life for His sake, they would find it.

Deny himself . . . lose his life for the sake of Christ . . . Peter had puzzled over his Rabbi's words. Jesus began to dry Peter's foot with the towel, bringing him back to the present. Jesus unfastened Peter's other sandal and began to wash the grime from his other foot.

A lesson from a child

The memories, one would imagine, came flooding back. Once, as they had all traveled to Capernaum, Peter and the rest of the disciples had gotten into an argument about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. They argued over who was the most important, or who would be the leader under Christ.

Jesus must have overheard them, because when they arrived at their destination, He asked what they were arguing about. Peter and the rest of the disciples had remained silent. They didn't want to admit that they had been arguing about which one of them would be the greatest.

Christ had sat down with them after arriving in Capernaum and told them that if a person wanted to be first, he must be last and the servant of all. He then brought a child before them and told them that whoever received a child such as this in His name would be welcoming Him and the Father who sent Him. Whoever humbled themselves as this little child was humble would be the greatest in the Kingdom.

"Blessed are you if you do them".

Jesus dried Peter's foot, picked up the basin and moved on from one disciple to the next, washing their feet and wiping them dry with His towel. When Jesus had finished washing all of their feet, He stood up, laid aside the towel and put on His outer garments.

He then sat down with His disciples. *"Do you know what I have done to you?"* Jesus asked them. Peter and the rest of the disciples were likely still stunned at what had just happened. "*You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet,"* Jesus explained. He continued: *"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is He who is sent greater than He who sent Him."* Their Master had provided the 12 disciples with an incredible example of humility and service. If anyone were owed special treatment, or if anyone were worthy of worship or greatness, it was Him. Yet He had lowered Himself to the position of a slave and washed the feet of His disciples, those whom He loved. Jesus had said it Himself—the servant isn't greater than the Master. Nor is He who was sent greater than He who sent Him. And Jesus had taught the need for serving in leadership before.

When the mother of James and John had requested that her sons sit at Christ's right and left hand in His Kingdom, what was Christ's response? That the gentile kings lord it over their subjects, but that this was not to be so among them. Jesus' disciples were not to be concerned with greatness or position. Instead, they were to focus on serving others. "If you know these things," Christ stated, *"blessed are you if you do them."*

A shocking turn of events

Jesus continued: "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'" Peter no doubt recognized the words of the psalmist and wondered what Christ was insinuating.

Jesus went on: "Now I tell you before it comes that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

He appeared troubled and then stated, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." Peter and the rest of the apostles looked around at each other in shock. The room grew louder as the disciples began to question Christ and one another about this stunning statement. Each was asking, "Lord, is it I?" Peter looked up and caught the eye of John, who was nearest to his Lord, and encouraged him to ask Jesus of whom He was speaking. Christ answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." Dipping the bread, Jesus handed it to Judas Iscariot, who asked Him, "Rabbi, is it I?" Jesus replied, "You have said it." He then told Judas, "What you do, do quickly." Judas moved to the door and disappeared into the night. Peter's mind probably began to race. What had Christ meant by betrayal?

Judas brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders

An example for Christ's disciples to follow

Christ had other urgent things to say: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Peter likely reflected on this new commandment in light of the evening's lesson of the foot-washing. The disciples' Master had personally demonstrated the kind of loving, humble attitude of service He expected of His followers, and now told them they must have that same giving and serving attitude toward one another. This attitude of selfless love and service, He said, would show all others that they truly were His followers. Jesus' actions and words were to help them see that being a disciple of Jesus Christ isn't a position of power and authority. It is a life of willing service. It requires a person to humble himself and to view the needs of others as greater than his own.

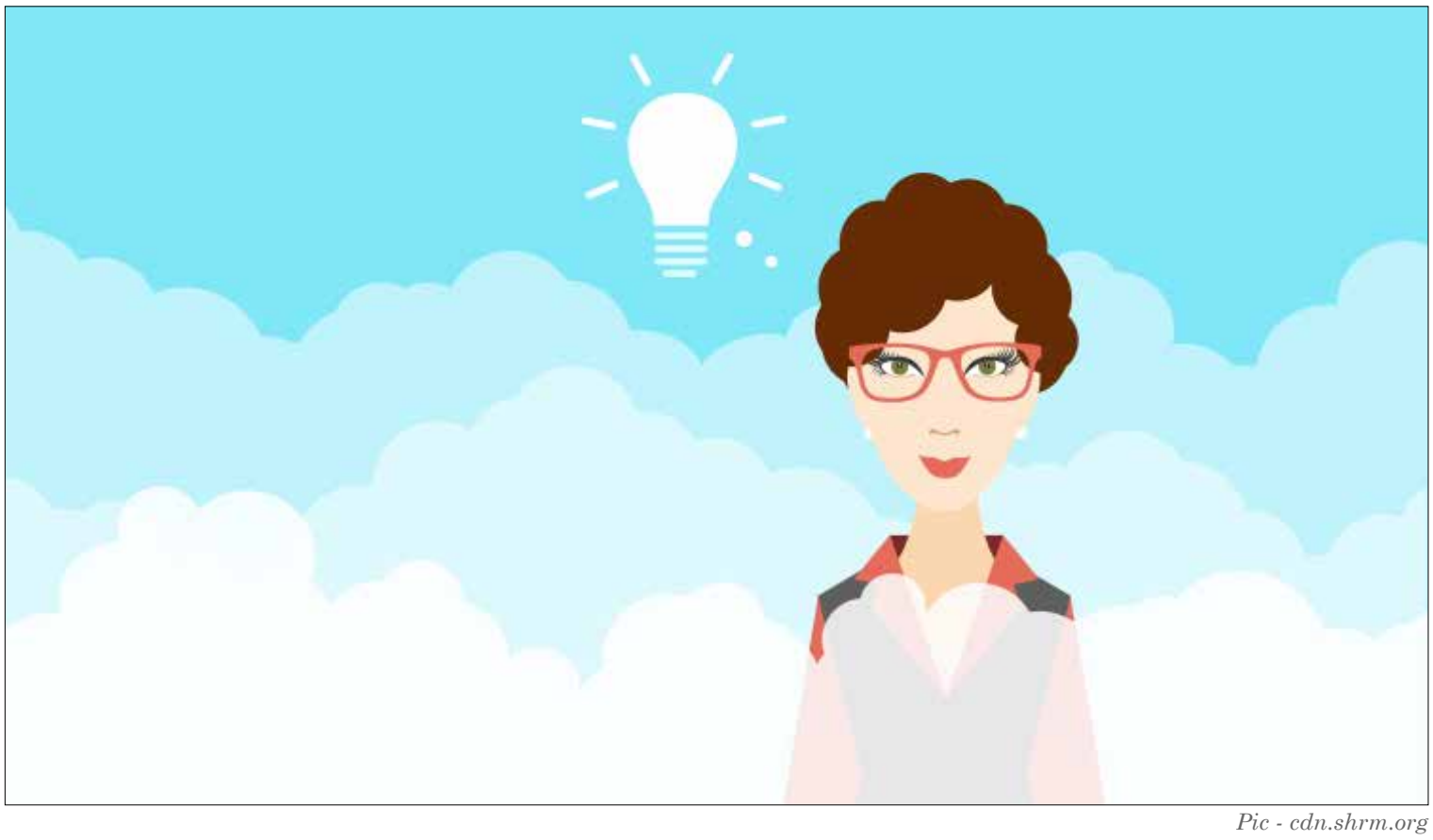
If the Messiah—the Son of God—was willing to humble Himself by showing His love to His disciples in such a way, how much more should Peter humble himself and become a servant to all? His Master had set the example tonight, and He expected His disciples to follow. It wasn't enough to simply know it. Peter and the others were expected to follow through and live this way, actively showing their love to others through serving. Peter was still processing the lesson as Jesus told him his personal commitment as a disciple would be challenged. And Jesus had still more troubling and astonishing things to say. As it got later, and Jesus' words became more alarming and pressing, Peter wondered what the night would yet bring, and what other important lessons would await. Jesus assured them it would all work out. While their faith would be challenged in ways they could not yet comprehend, they had to continue in what He had shown them to truly prove to be His followers.

That You Love One Another" by Ben Light, *Beyond Today* March-April 2017, page 32. Quoted with permission. ©2017 United Church of God, an International Association

Special Feature

Valluvar's Views

Enthusiasm/Zeal/Industriousness



Pic - cdn.shrm.org

By: JJ Atputharajah

Valluvar gives tremendous powers to enthusiasm as an instrument for profound achievements. He insists that we should hold always and in that context even if your thoughts do not materialize, your aspirations will keep you on a higher plane. Only those who possess enthusiasm co- existent with powerful will can be deemed as gifted with real wealth. Awaiyar puts the idea in a nutshell when she quipped 'Uookamathu kaividel". The most valued possession is the inner strength of mind; riches on the other hand will soon vanish. Men with a firm grip or unremitting courage and zeal, will never despair, even if they lose their wealth. Success and wealth will be easily accessible to a person who has inflexible will and systematic diligence. The stalk of a lotus plant will grow long enough to project the pretty flower above the water; similarly, a man's level of greatness is determined by his own will power. You should think lofty thoughts; in such a situation, even if you fail, your aspiration will keep you on a higher plane. Confronted with defeat, men of strong will not flutter; an elephant, pierced by an arrow will decide to take a firmer tread. The poor in spirit will not attain the noble feeling that they are capable of becoming winners. Though an elephant is possessed with sharp-pointed tuskers, it trembles before an attacking tiger. An aspiring spirit is a man's basic strength of mind, without which men are but imitation trees.

"Always keep thinking lofty or noble thoughts; In such a context, even if you meet with failure, your aspirations will keep you on an excellent frame of mind".

Ulluvathellam Uyarvullal Mattathu,
Thallinum tharlamai neerthu

(Kural: 591-600).

Education & Career

WINNING ESSAYS ORGANIZED BY RG EDUCATION FOR STORY/ESSAY WRITING CONTEST HELD AT YEAR END 2016

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY
2ND PLACE
ASHVINA ARIYARATNAM
GRADE 5

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ashvina Ariyaratnam, and I am here to talk to you about women's rights today. I think that women's rights is the social justice issue that interests me the most. I remember in Grade 5, we were talking about the federal election in Canada. We learned that men were able to vote in Canada in the year 1758-1866 (without any effort). But, women had no rights to do any of the things men did.

Some people said that women don't need jobs and that they are meant to be housewives. Some people had also asked what was the point of men working if women also worked? Is it even fair? I remember that my parents told me that in their home country, Sri Lanka, women were not allowed to step out of their house without their husband's permission. Also, if they were allowed out of the house, they could only go to the market to get groceries, to go to the temple to pray, or to pick up their son or daughter from school. Women had finally achieved one of their goals in getting rights in Canada.

The women of Canada back then had finally gotten a chance to vote after so many years of hard work and through many difficulties. Because of these women, the women who live in Canada today have the right to vote. We should be proud of the women who had been very brave and confident to achieve their goal. They got to vote in the years of 1867-1919. The women put a lot of effort to earn the chance to vote, as they had campaigned with politicians, made speeches, and public protests to this right.

Many thought that men were much better than the women back then in Canada. Well, guess what, we are all human. We are all mammals. So, we are only different by gender. That doesn't change who we are in the inside. Many people judge others based on how they look compared to others. And, that's what I think they did to the women back then. Is that even fair? If we look at Canada, we can see that it has become a better country. Each day, more and more people are coming to Canada. Nowadays, women are getting equal rights as men do.

Thank you everyone for making Canada a better country. This is all because of you.

Ashvina Ariyaratnam,
Grade 6

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INTELLIGENT CONNECTED LIGHTING SYSTEMS

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IS TRANSFORMING LED LUMINAIRE ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF MODERN LIFE

By: Uthayan Thurairajah

A single standard Ethernet cable provides power and data eliminate the need for separate power cabling. The Power-over-Ethernet (PoE) technology connect all the PoE luminaires to a complete integrated lighting system, delivering exceptional illumination experiences and value beyond lighting. A lighting control system gives office users personal control over their preferred light settings via a specially designed smartphone application. The integrated sensors in the PoE luminaires can track daylight levels, activity patterns, and in the near future humidity, CO2, temperature, or other data.

In a recent presentation at the Toronto Illuminating Engineering Society (IES), Shirley Coyle, the President of Cree's Canadian business unit, and the current President of IESNA painted a compelling picture of the game-changing Smart Connected Lighting system and the Value of Lighting Systems on Power over Ethernet.

She spoke not only of possible but shown examples of the connected lighting system including sensors, software, and how the building systems can deliver information that empowers users. Noting sample installation, Shirley drove that the smart connected lighting systems can give more energy gains and perform more secure, safer and productive environment. She further said that "a sensor network and operating system that allow not only better light, but also applications far beyond light to make more efficient and profitable system."

How it works:

- Every luminaire is directly connected to and individually identified, allowing to monitor, manage, and maintain individual light points via lighting management software.
- The connected luminaires become points of intelligence that share data on occupancy, activity patterns, and changes in daylight levels, temperature, and humidity through integrated sensors.
- The connected luminaires can deliver location-based services and in-context information to people in illuminated spaces via mobile devices and applications through wireless communications.

Benefits:

- LED lighting and control system with reduced cost
- Software applications optimize the processes, comfort, and asset management
- Data gathering on building usage via luminaire sensors
- Personal control of lighting and temperature settings
- Power and data over the same Ethernet cable
- Savings from LED lighting, occupancy sensor, daylight harvesting, and personal controls

The real-time monitoring:

With real-time occupancy data and trends over time, we can schedule for an entire floor shut down during off-peak hours or reschedule any maintenance activities if there is a last minute change in space occupancy.

The operational efficiency:

Lighting levels, cooling, heating, and cleaning can be reduced in small occupancy areas. Connected lighting thus supports businesses who wish to achieve the highest green building certification ratings and maximum energy savings.

The personal adventure:

Lighting has a profound effect on workers' well-being and vitality, influencing daily productivity. Connected lighting offers individual, personalized control of environments, creating a much more pleasant and comfortable workplace.

The digital environment:

The connected lighting can integrate with other systems in a building or city, create new synergies and efficiencies, and make lighting an integral part of the new digital ecology.

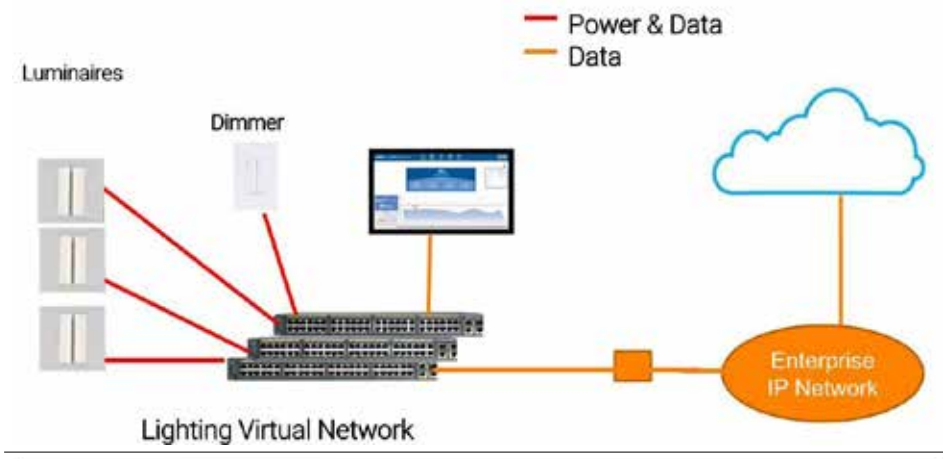
The advances in mobile technology, cloud computing, and data storage are creating an Internet of Things (IoT) environment a vast network of connected devices, people, data, and processes. The connected lighting with digital technology brings IT and illumination together. The connected lighting systems not only illuminate: they also serve as a platform for collecting and sharing data with the users and manage illuminated spaces.

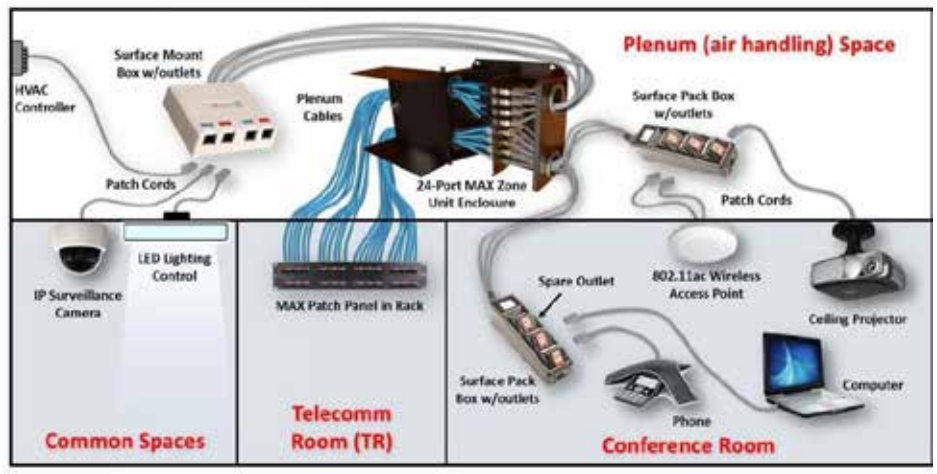
The data help to optimize the delivery of resources, enhance the experience and performance of occupants, and support improved asset management. The power and data can be delivered for the luminaire over a standard Ethernet cable with the help of PoE technology. The lighting system merged with the IT system. Each luminaire has a unique network address for two-way Ethernet-based communications like a computer.

Ability beyond Lighting

The lighting trade is undergoing its second major transformation in the past twenty years. The first change energy-efficient LEDs. The second change is opening to builds on the digital nature of LED technology to bring IT and illumination together, allowing lighting systems to participate in the Internet of Things.

The lighting industry is changing to include IT to interconnect between mobile phones and other equipment including thermostats which interact with each other and with the people who use them. The devices collect and share data about themselves, their users, their environments, and the other devices. The highly secure and proven network infrastructure with illumination and connected lighting systems provide the excellent environment. The potentialities of this connected lighting system are endless. There are so many capabilities of this system that we haven't even explored yet.





Each luminaire in the system sends and receives data, serving as a pathway to deliver value to both employees and facilities managers. Managers can track occupancy patterns, changes in temperature, light levels, and much more while employees can personalize the lighting around their desks. The system allows maximum visibility and better control, and allows reduce energy consumption in their office spaces.

How it was done

PoE is a technology delivering power over standard Ethernet data cables, eliminating the need for a separate power infrastructure. The luminaires provide much more than simply illuminated office space — they are a portal to data, energy savings, sustainability, and personal comfort. The luminaires merge with the base building's IT network and are uniquely identified by IP address, allowing them to be individually monitored, managed, and controlled. Building managers can mine data pertaining to work spaces captured by the sensors in the luminaires, to optimize building performance, and employees can achieve maximum comfort by controlling their lighting environment.

The Internet of Everything at work

The connected lighting system collects data from PoE-enabled luminaires equipped with sensors to capture temperature, light level, and activity for optimizing user comfort. The lighting management software to monitor and manage each light point. The system stores data over time to assess occupancy patterns and user requirement of lighting operations based on historical trends and findings.

The connected lighting expects to save up to 80%. The additional energy savings will result from analyzing the data and optimizing space usage. A personal lighting control helps us create a pleasing workspace of the future which is key to attracting the next generation of users.

The amazing reliable, secure, and proven capabilities of connected lighting can deliver a true end-to-end solution for customers. With revolutionary technology of lighting that can inform owners of maintenance requests, temperature control, occupancy trends, and offices will become more efficient, more sustainable, and more comfortable.

Uthayan Thurairajah, PhD, RSE, LC, P.Eng., is a Senior Engineer at WSP|MMM Group with over twenty years of experience in Electrical Engineering and Lighting field, and he also holds a Lecturer position in the Department of Communication and Design at Ryerson University. Uthayan is a member of several Canadian and international professional association including Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO), Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine (AIHM) and Association for Prevention Teaching and Research (APTR). He has worked on multi-disciplinary lighting and electrical projects for the Ministry of Transportation, several Towns, Municipalities, Regions and others. Ha carries out research on the subject of light and lighting and taken part in several projects. He also has extensive research experience in the value of lighting design in the mental, emotional, and social well-being of a person. He is a frequent presenter and author on lighting design & health. He is passionate about integrating science and health into the lighting design.

Business & Finance

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

2017 Federal Budget

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On March 22, 2017, Finance Minister Bill Morneau presented the 2017 Federal Budget which contains several measures of interest to individuals and businesses. This summary contains highlights of these proposals, which are not yet law.

Proposals Impacting Individuals

Public Transit Tax Credit eliminated - The public transit tax credit provides a 15% federal tax credit in respect of the cost of eligible transit passes. The Budget proposes to eliminate this credit effective July 1, 2017. Thus the cost of eligible public transit passes for use after June 2017 will no longer be eligible for the credit.

Tuition Tax Credit expanded - The Budget proposes to expand the application of the tuition tax credit to tuition fees paid to a post-secondary institution in Canada for occupational skills courses that are not at the post-secondary level. The course must be taken to provide or improve the student's skills in an occupation, and the student must be turning 16 or older during the year. This measure will apply to eligible tuition fees for courses taken in 2017 or later.

Employment Insurance Benefits expanded - The Budget proposes to allow employment insurance (EI) claimants to pursue self-funded training and maintain their EI status. In addition, the Budget proposes to create a new EI caregiving benefit of up to 15 weeks to help eligible Canadians caring for critically ill or injured adult family members. Parents of critically ill children will continue to have access to up to 35 weeks of benefits.

The Budget also proposes to make EI parental benefits more flexible, by allowing parents to choose to receive EI parental benefits over an extended period of up to 18 months at a lower benefit rate, and allowing women to claim EI maternity benefits up to 12 weeks before their due date, expanded from the current limit of 8 weeks.

Caregiver Tax Credit consolidation- The Budget proposes to replace the existing infirm dependent tax credit, the caregiver tax credit, and the family caregiver tax credit with a new 15% non-refundable Canada Caregiver Credit for 2017 and subsequent years. The amount of the credit available is based on the family relationship between the caregiver and the infirm dependent. The amount of the credit will be indexed to inflation and reduced on a dollar-by-dollar basis by the dependent's net income above $16,163 (in 2017).

Disability Tax Credit certification - The Disability Tax Credit (DTC) is a 15% non-refundable tax credit available to individuals with a severe and prolonged impairment in physical or mental functions. An eligible medical practitioner must certify the effects of the impairment as a condition of eligibility. The Budget proposes to add nurse practitioners to the list of medical practitioners that can certify eligibility for the DTC effective March 22, 2017.

Medical Expense Tax Credit expanded - Costs incurred related to reproductive technology are generally eligible for the medical expense tax credit where there is an existing medical condition such as medical infertility. The Budget proposes to extend the eligibility of the medical expense tax credit to include costs related to the use of reproductive technologies incurred by individuals, without a medical condition, who require medical intervention to conceive a child. This measure applies to 2017 and later years, but an individual may elect for this measure to apply to expenses incurred in the previous 10 years.

Principal Residence Exemption changes confirmed - The Budget confirms that the Government will proceed with a tax measure that had been announced on October 3, 2016 with respect to the exemption for capital gains on the disposition of a principal residence. These measures include the requirement to report the disposition of a principal residence beginning with the 2016 tax year, the limiting of the ability to claim the exemption to "eligible trusts", and the inability to claim the "plus one factor" (with respect to the exemption) for individuals not resident in Canada at the time of purchase of the property.

Home Relocation Loans Deduction eliminated - Where an employee has received a loan by virtue of their employment on which the interest rate charged is less than the prescribed rate, the employee will be deemed to have received a taxable benefit based on the difference between these two rates. If the loan is an eligible home relocation loan, a deduction may be available to reduce the taxable benefit. The deduction is limited to the benefit associated with a $25,000 loan. The Budget proposes to eliminate the deduction applicable to benefits arising in 2018 and subsequent taxation years.

RESP and RDSP anti-avoidance rules - The Budget proposes that the "anti-avoidance" rules that currently apply to RRSPs, RRIFs and TFSAs be extended to Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs) and to Registered Disability Savings Plans (RDSPs). The anti-avoidance provisions provide for taxes and penalties when one or more of the following occurs:

• The registered plan holds a "prohibited investment", which is an investment in an entity in which the owner of a registered account or a family member has a significant interest,

• A "swap transaction" occurs, which means that an investment held inside a registered plan is exchanged for an investment of equal value that is held outside the registered plan, or

• There is a transaction under the registered plan that could confer an "advantage" on the owner of the plan.

With limited exceptions, this Budget measure will apply to transactions occurring and to investments acquired within an RESP or an RDSP after March 22, 2017.

Proposals Impacting Business Owners

Billed-Basis Accounting eliminated - Certain taxpayers in designated professions (such as accountants, dentists, lawyers, etc.) are able to elect to not include the value of work in progress (WIP) in computing their business income for tax purposes. The election enables the expenses of incurring the WIP to be claimed without the corresponding revenue. Budget 2017 proposes to eliminate the ability for taxpayers in these designated professions to elect to use billed-based accounting effective for taxation years that begin on or after March 22, 2017, subject to certain transitional rules.

Ride Sharing Services to charge GST/HST - The Budget proposes to amend the GST/HST definition of a taxi business, effective July 1, 2017, to require providers of ride-sharing services, where the transportation is arranged for or coordinated through an electronic platform or system, to register for and charge GST/HST on their fares in the same manner as taxi operators.

Associated Corporation rules clarified - Under the Income Tax Act, "associated corporations" must share one $500,000 small business deduction limit. Association can occur in a variety of ways, including when one person either legally (de jure) or factually (de facto) controls two corporations. A recent court decision (McGillivray Restaurant Ltd. v The Queen, 2016) significantly limited the circumstances in which a person can be found to control a corporation as a question of fact by stipulating that one of the factors must be a "legally enforceable right and ability to effect a change to the board of directors or its powers, or to exercise influence over the shareholder(s) who have that right and ability."

The Budget proposes that for the taxation years beginning on or after March 22, 2017, the Income Tax Act will be amended to clarify that, in determining whether factual control of a corporation exists, factors other than those outlined in the recent court decision may be considered.

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Housing affordability trends in Toronto and Vancouver diverge: *RBC Economics*

Toronto's housing affordability eroded further in the fourth quarter of 2016 to worst level since 1990, elevating risks to worrisome levels

There was at last some relief in Vancouver but it remained the least affordable housing market in Canada by far.

Overall, Canadian affordability is stressed but unchanged from the third quarter

TORONTO, March 30, 2017 - While home ownership costs remained historically elevated in Canada, they levelled out in the fourth quarter of 2016 after climbing steadily for a year and a half, according to the latest Housing Trends and Affordability Report issued today by RBC Economics Research.

"Owning a home at market price in Canada still took an abnormally large bite out of household income, but RBC's aggregate affordability measure was unchanged in the fourth quarter after a string of six quarterly increases," said Craig Wright, senior vice-president and chief economist, RBC.

Housing affordability is calculated as a share of household income. A higher number means housing is less affordable. The affordability measure stood at 44.2 per cent in Canada -- still the most stressed level since late 2008.

There were minor changes within housing categories at the national level: the affordability measure for single-detached homes fell marginally to 49.2 per cent while the measure for condominium apartments edged up to 35.9 per cent.

Housing affordability deteriorated markedly in Toronto (to 64.6 per cent, from 63.8 per cent in the third quarter) along with other parts of Southern Ontario, and is bound to get worse in

these markets.

"Further policy intervention would be wise to cool surging home prices in Toronto, as the market has become disconnected with economic fundamentals," said Wright. "The last time affordability in Canada's largest city was this poor, in 1990, the housing market subsequently fell into a deep and prolonged slump."

Although affordability improved in Vancouver for the first time in more than three years (to 84.8 per cent, from 90.0 per cent in the third quarter), buyers in Vancouver still face the highest affordability hurdle in Canada, by a long shot.

In most Canadian markets outside Southern Ontario and the Vancouver region, fourth quarter affordability levels were close to historical norms. Two exceptions were Calgary, where affordability was better than usual, and Victoria, where the affordability measure was more strained.

(via RBC.com)

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Toronto's Torrid Housing: Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

Douglas Porter, CFA
Chief Economist
douglas.porter@bmo.com
416-359-4887

The latest round of home price and sales data reveals just how detached Toronto and nearby cities have become from both the economic fundamentals and the rest of country. Any lingering debate that Toronto is now in a bubble was put to rest by February's cannonading 24% y/y rise in benchmark prices *(Chart 1)* and drum-tight inventories (less than a month's worth). To show how outer-worldly prices have become, we will walk through an example of how even a high-income couple would struggle to now buy a home in the GTA. Given that the Federal Budget is coming out next week, and Ontario's will follow soon after, we will also point out how some folks who are subject to the lofty top personal marginal tax rate of 53.53% (and are thus considered "rich") would be unable to climb aboard the Toronto housing ladder.

Let's consider the case of Dudley and Darlene Doright, a highly successful young couple, looking to buy their first home. The couple listened to the Wealthy Barber and saved 10% of their gross income over the past many years and managed to cobble together an impressive down payment of $100,000. They just had a baby, and since the higher-income spouse earns $225,000, the other will stay home. This still places them on the very cusp of the legendary "top 1%" of all income earners in Canada, but of course also puts them on the cusp of paying the very highest personal tax rate of 53.53% on any additional income. (This example also holds if the Dorights are instead both well-paid civil servants who are both on the Sunshine List, i.e. make above $100k.)

Given that the Dorights are almost 1%-ers and that they have saved heavily, surely they can afford a decent place to live in Toronto? Not so much, as it turns out. Immediately they realize that any home above $500,000 will require mortgage insurance, because anything above that means that their down payment would be less than 20%. So, they will need to qualify at the posted 5-year rate of 4.84%, a key assumption. They also realize that anything above $1 million is immediately off limits, since it wouldn't qualify for insurance.

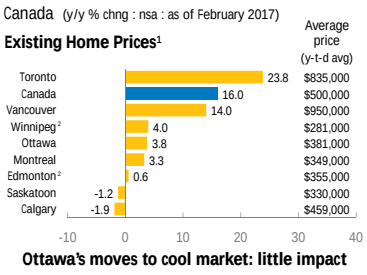
Working through some basic assumptions (*Table 1*) shows that the absolute maximum home they could qualify for would be just over $987,000. Surely, this will be enough to afford a reasonable place? That depends on your definition of reasonable. Lo and behold, the average detached home price in Toronto (the 416 region) is now a cool $1.57 million, putting it well out of reach for the Dorights.

Okay, they decide a longer commute wouldn't be such a bad thing, for now, so they look into the surrounding regions (the 905 belt) for a detached home. Turns out, the average price there is $1.11 million. Strike two. Okay, a semi-detached in Toronto would be acceptable, as long as the biker gang in the next-door unit is mostly quiet. Turns out, the average price is $1.08 million. Strike three.

Our fictitious couple *could* afford a semi-detached home in the surrounding suburbs, as these units in the 905 average just over

Chart 1
Canadian House Prices: Location, Location, Location

Canada (y/y % chng : nsa : as of February 2017)



Ottawa's moves to cool market: little impact

[1] HPI composite benchmark where avail. [2] Avg. price (3-mnth m.a.)
Sources: BMO Capital Markets, Haver Analytics, CREA

Table 1
How Much is That Duplex in the Window?

Assumptions:	Down Payment	$100,000
	Gross Income (monthly)	$18,750
	Posted 5-year Mortgage Rate	4.84%
	Amortization	25 years
	Property Taxes (monthly)	$800
	Heating Costs (monthly)	$120
Results:	Maximum Mortgage Affordability Monthly Payment	$5,080
	Maximum Mortgage	$887,289
	CMHC Loan Insurance	$21,298
	Maximum Affordable Home	**$987,289**
	Avg. Detached Home Price in GTA	$1.205 mln

Sources: BMO Economics, Haver Analytics

$700,000. However, they're not that common in that region, and their price has shot up by 33% in the past year. So, just to reiterate, **even people who nearly qualify for the top 1% of all incomes and will be paying over 53% in personal marginal tax rates—and would presumably be considered "rich"—are at best able to afford a semi-detached home on the fringes of Toronto, or maybe a low-end detached home verging on teardown status.** Now just imagine the predicament a more typical couple of more modest means faces in the current market environment.

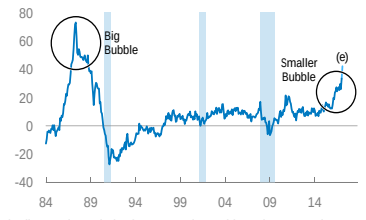
If this stylized example isn't proof enough that the housing market is out of control and in need of some serious intervention, consider some of the other indicators flashing red. Average transaction prices in the Toronto region spiked almost 28% y/y last month, while consumer price inflation and wages in the city are barely clocking above 2% increases. We estimate that real (or inflation-adjusted) home prices in Toronto have surged almost 40% in the past two years alone. While that's not quite as toppy as the late 1980s (a bubble by any definition), it is the highest in any other period since 1980 (*Chart 2*). And, just as a reminder, after peaking in 1989, it took Toronto home prices nearly two decades to fully recover their losses in real terms in the ensuing bursting of the bubble and slow recovery (*Chart 3*).

What can be done? Policymakers have a variety of options to try to cool the market—but it's obvious that Ottawa's measures to clamp down on mortgage insurance eligibility have not done the trick in Toronto (even if they may have worked in smaller cities). Clearly something a bit more targeted and atypical is needed at this point, and the mooted tax on non-resident purchases seems to offer a reasonable starting point. That tax seems to have done exactly what policymakers hoped to achieve in Vancouver; cool the market, without crashing it (*Chart 4*). While many rail against such a step, each argument against it simply doesn't hold up to even casual inspection. The Ontario Real Estate Association frets about the possibility that a foreign student won't be able to afford a house with the tax (and that is *some* student, looking to buy a $1.5 million *pied-a-terre*), but we wonder why they are not equally concerned about the Dorights' inability to buy a home under current circumstances. It will be incredibly tough to attract talented folks like the Dorights if they will struggle to buy a home and yet still pay taxes of over 50%.

Bottom Line: This note was meant to show (a) just how ridiculous Toronto home prices have become; and (b) just how ridiculous it is to consider people who are nearly in the 1% to be "rich", and tax them at marginal rates above 50%, even though they can't afford a home in Toronto.

Chart 2
Real Home Prices: Too Too Much in T.O.

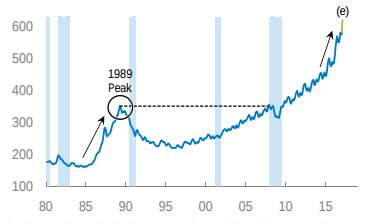
Toronto (deflated by CPI : 2-yr % chng)



Shading marks periods of U.S. recession (e) = Feb. 2017 estimate
Sources: BMO Economics, Haver Analytics

Chart 3
Real Home Prices (II): Real Acceleration

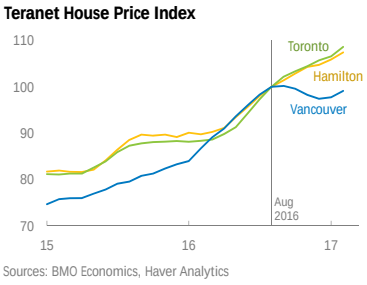
Toronto (deflated by CPI : 3-mnth m.a.)



Shading marks periods of U.S. recession (e) = Feb. 2017 estimate
Sources: BMO Economics, Haver Analytics

Chart 4
Spot the City with a Non-Resident Tax

(August 2016 = 100)

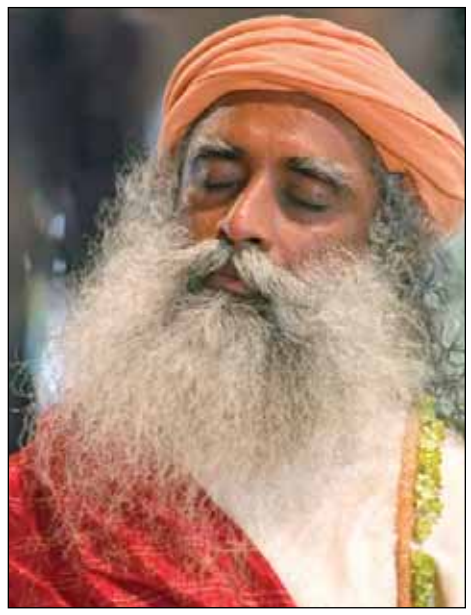


Sources: BMO Economics, Haver Analytics

Special Feature

SADHGURU

What is the Significance of the Number 108 & Why is it so Important?



Sadhguru Vasudev is a realized master, yogi and mystic, who has founded Isha Foundation, an international public service organization that strives for ultimate human well-being. For worldwide program information, visit www.ishafoundation.org

What is the significance of the number 108 in the yogic system? Sadhguru explains the relationship to one's chakras and the cosmic geometry. Yogi, mystic and one of the foremost authorities on yoga, Sadhguru is a spiritual master with a difference. An arresting blend of profundity and pragmatism, his life and work serves as a reminder that yoga is a contemporary science, vitally relevant to our times.

Sadhguru: Yoga is essentially understanding aligning your system with the cosmic geometry. There is a certain geometry to the physical existence and to the energy existence. Everything in the universe, from the atomic to the cosmic, works the way it does because of geometric perfection. One of the most fundamental and the most stable forms in geometry is a triangle. In the human energy system, there are two equilateral triangles – an upward-pointing one below, and a downward-pointing one above. Normally, these two triangles meet just above the anahata. To work with your mind and imagination, it is important to adjust the alignment of the two triangles at least some extent. The ideal alignment would be that the upwardpointing and the downward-pointing triangles intersect to such an extent that they form a perfect sixpointed star with six equilateral triangles on the outside.

See in the yogic system, There are one hundred and fourteen chakras in the body. The seventy two thousand nadis , or energy pathways in the system, have one hundred and fourteen significant junction points, where the nadis meet in substantial numbers and redistribute themselves. These points are generally known as chakras, which literally means "wheel" or "circle," though they are actually triangles. We call them "chakras" because that suggests movement – moving forward. Out of these two are outside your body, one hundred and twelve inside the body. Of these one hundred and twelve, there are four about which you don't have to do anything. They are like that. If other things work, they will flower by themselves. So there are only one hundred and eight with which you can work.

So, hundred and eight has become significant. If you wear any beads, people wear hundred and eight beads. If they say a mantra, hundred and eight because these are the hundred and eight chakras that you need to work with. This hundred and eight number is significant and you will see it in the East, everything is hundred and eight.

The distances between the Sun and the Earth, the distances between the Moon and the Earth, the way the planet rotates and the impact it has – all these things have been looked at with great care. The diameter of the Sun multiplied by 108 equals the distance between Sun and Earth, and the diameter of the Moon multiplied by 108 equals the distance between Earth and Moon. The diameter of the Sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth. That is why we have 108 beads in a mala.

And in this body, there are one hundred and eight chakras that we can work upon. So the cosmic geometry I can go into a lot of arithmetic which will match with your human system and these things we have been conscious of and that is how we came up with eighty four basic asanas. Out of these eighty four, if you do twenty one of them properly and you just master one, your system will be aligned with the cosmic system. Once it's aligned, everything that you need to know about the cosmos is right here.

Sadhguru will be personally offering the Inner Engineering Program in Tampa from April 29th 30th and in Vancouver May 28th 29th, 2017. This includes learning Shambhavi Mahamudra Kriya, which is a powerful and purifying energy technique using the breath. This practice aligns your entire system so that your body, mind and emotions function in

harmony, establishing a chemistry of blissfulness within you. To learn more and register

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GENIE SISTERS

SAMAYAL SANTHAI

Welcome to our recipe corner! We sisters will entice you with recipes that we have fallen in love with and teach you a little Tamil along the way, as all the ingredients will have their Tamil names. Both of us love to cook and we have developed very different styles. Niranjini has a very refined palate and cooks more contemporary world cuisine with an Asian touch. Rajini is a seasoned homemaker who loves making traditional dishes for her friends and family. Follow us on Instagram: @ninjaeatsfood and @ tamil_food

Eat more, learn more!

Egg bhurji

As we enter April two things may be dominating your mind, Easter and Easter Eggs. Now, even if the latter isn't something you think about as much as the anticipated extra days off, they do seem to be everywhere! Eggs have become synonymous with this time of year and so here is a recipe for you to enjoy.

Egg Burji is high in nutrition and can be a filling breakfast or a mid-day snack. It's super easy to make, you can change the vegetables according to your taste, and if you don't have fresh curry leaves- don't worry, it'll still taste amazing!

Ingredients:

2 large eggs, beaten (muttai)
1-2 green chillies, slit diagonally (patchai milagai)
4-5 curry leaves (kari vepilai)
1 small tomato, chopped (thakkaali)
2 ½ healthy pinches of pav bhaji masala or garam masala
1 pinch of red chilli powder (sivattha milagai thool)
¼ tsp turmeric powder (manjal podi)
Salt, to taste (uppu)
1 pinch paprika powder
½ tsp ginger and garlic paste (inji poondu vizhudhu)
1 onion, finely diced (vengaayam)
¼ tsp cumin seeds (seeragam)
Oil, as needed (ennai)

Method:

Add oil to a frying pan and once heated, fry the cumin seeds until they splutter or the aromas release. Then add the onions, curry leaves and chillies, fry until golden, then add the ginger and garlic paste and cook for 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes, pav bhaji masala/garam masala, red chilli powder, turmeric powder, paprika powder and salt, and cook so that the tomatoes become soft. Mix as necessary. When the oil separates from the tomatoes, pour in the eggs and scramble until eggs are cooked.

Optional: For added veggie intake, add ¼ cup of diced bell pepper, mushrooms and some spinach when frying the tomatoes!

Serve this on toast, with chapathis – anything!

Try making this recipe this month and do hashtag #monsoonjournal on Instagram and send us your pics, comments and feedback. Spread the love (and recipe!)

Sisters Niranjini Thirunesan and Rajini Nathan are both food enthusiasts from England. Niranjini, who lives in London, is a trained chef and founder of catering firm Inji Roots. Niranjini has a degree in Human biology and makes it her business to know everything about what she eats, from nutritional value to the source producers. Check out her recipes at www.ninjaeatsfood.wordpress.com and Inji roots can be found on Facebook and Instagram @Inji_roots. Rajini, lives in Toronto and has a background in psychology. Her speciality is in Tamil food from around the world, catch up on her meal ideas on Instagram @tamil_food.

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CTCC celebrates International Women's Day with "Women in Power" Event

By Siva Sivapragasam

The Markham Hilton Suites was the crowded venue of a women's event titled "Women in Power" sponsored by the Canadian Tamils' Chamber of Commerce to mark the International Women's Day this year.

The main theme of the event was a panel discussion where the following participated: Noeline Simon - CLH Insurance, Sumi Shan - Microsoft Canada, Dilani Rabindan - Viewfinder Consulting, Namita Kanishkan - Kanish & Partners, Renuka Selvakumar - RE/MAX Royal Properties, Roshni Mukherjee - Regional VP, RBC Royal Bank and Deepa Surendran - CEO of Paradise Print.

The guest speaker of the day was Cheryl Pounder, two - time Olympic Hockey Gold Medal winner and an All-star defenseman for Canada's World Championship Hockey Team. Her motivational speech on 'What does it take to excel" received a spontaneous applause and a standing ovation from the audience when she wound up demonstrating the power of a champion and shared her strategies on a powerful winning attitude.

The panelists at the seminar created enthusiasm and awareness among the guests when each one of them shared their experiences in their chosen subjects and demonstrated professionalism during the lively discussions that took place.

The musical performers of the night who entertained the guests were Luksimi Sivaneswaralingam, Swaraswathis - Suhaliya Ragunathan, Niirj Jaany, Shymala Ramachandran and Saibruntha Subramaniam.

Ms. Shalini Sathya, CTCC's Vice-President-Internal Affairs, moderated the proceedings of the day in a very professional manner and kept the audience in fits of laughter occasionally with wit and humour.

The guests were entertained to a sumptuous dinner with a variety of ethnic dishes turned out by professional chef Ramana.

Seen here are some pictures taken at the event.

(Picture Courtesy; Gayathiri Senthilrajan, Frame Studio)

Keynote Speaker Cheryl Pounder, two - time Olympic Hockey Gold Medal winner and an All-star defenseman for Canada's World Championship Hockey Team makes a motivational speech

Shalini Sathya, CTCC's Vice-President-Internal Affairs

Yaso Sinnadurai, a former Vice-President, longstanding member of the CTCC and lawyer speaks to the guests

Meleni David, Personal Injury Lawyer addressing the audience

Panelists

Soo Wong, MPP, Scarborough-Agincourt

Hon. Mitzie Hunter, MPP (Scarborough-Guildwood)

CTCC President Ajith Sabaratnam, VP Internal Affairs Shalini Sathya and Chef Ramana

Sumi Shan, Microsoft, Thiva Paramsothy, Nava Law Office & Senthooran Punithavel of the co-operators

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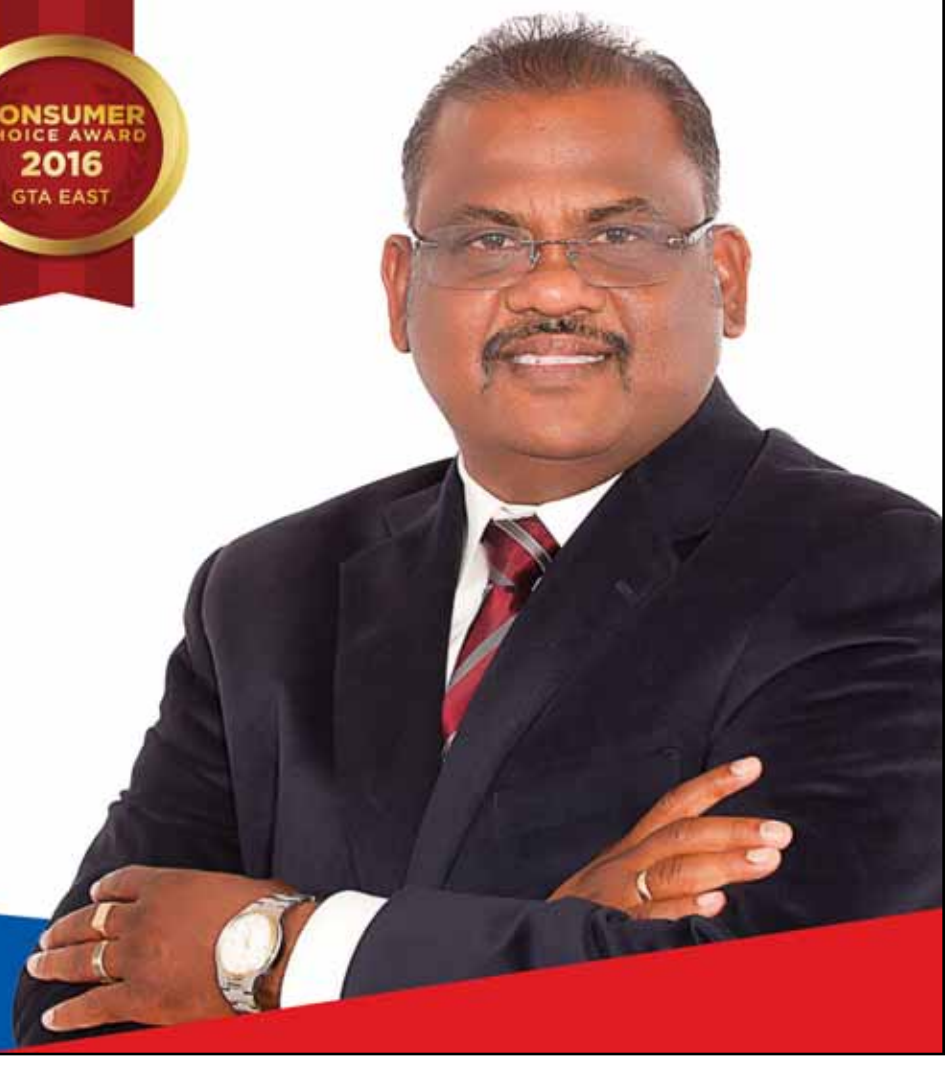

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Ragavan Paranchothy, PC candidate for Markham-Thornhill by-election on April 3rd

"International pressure ought to be ratcheted to bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice in Sri Lanka", says Ragavan

By Siva Sivapragasam

Ragavan Paranchothy, one of Canadian Tamil community's best known personalities in the fields of TV presentation and radio broadcasting, is the Conservative Party' choice in the upcoming federal election on April 3rd for the Markham-Thornhill constituency.

The by-election is the result of former Liberal MP John McCallum resigning his seat to accept a diplomatic posting as Canada's Ambassador for China.

As a veteran TV presenter and broadcaster, Paranchothy was one of the community's most recognized voices and faces who presented many programmes highlighting the community's interests.

The following are questions and answers in an interview done with Mr. Ragavan Paranchothy:

Q. What reasons motivated you to seek nomination for the election from the Conservative Party?

A. I have been an active member of the conservative movement for over a decade. I believe that as a Tamil, we are naturally aligned with the policies of the Conservative Party of Canada on matters such as saving for the future, working hard for our growth, believing in the rule of law and democratic process. We, Tamils like most other immigrant communities, work hard to ensure that our culture is preserved and respected. And unlike what the Liberals want us to believe, the Conservative Party of Canada is far more inclusive, practical and genuine. I am proud to be representing this party as a candidate.

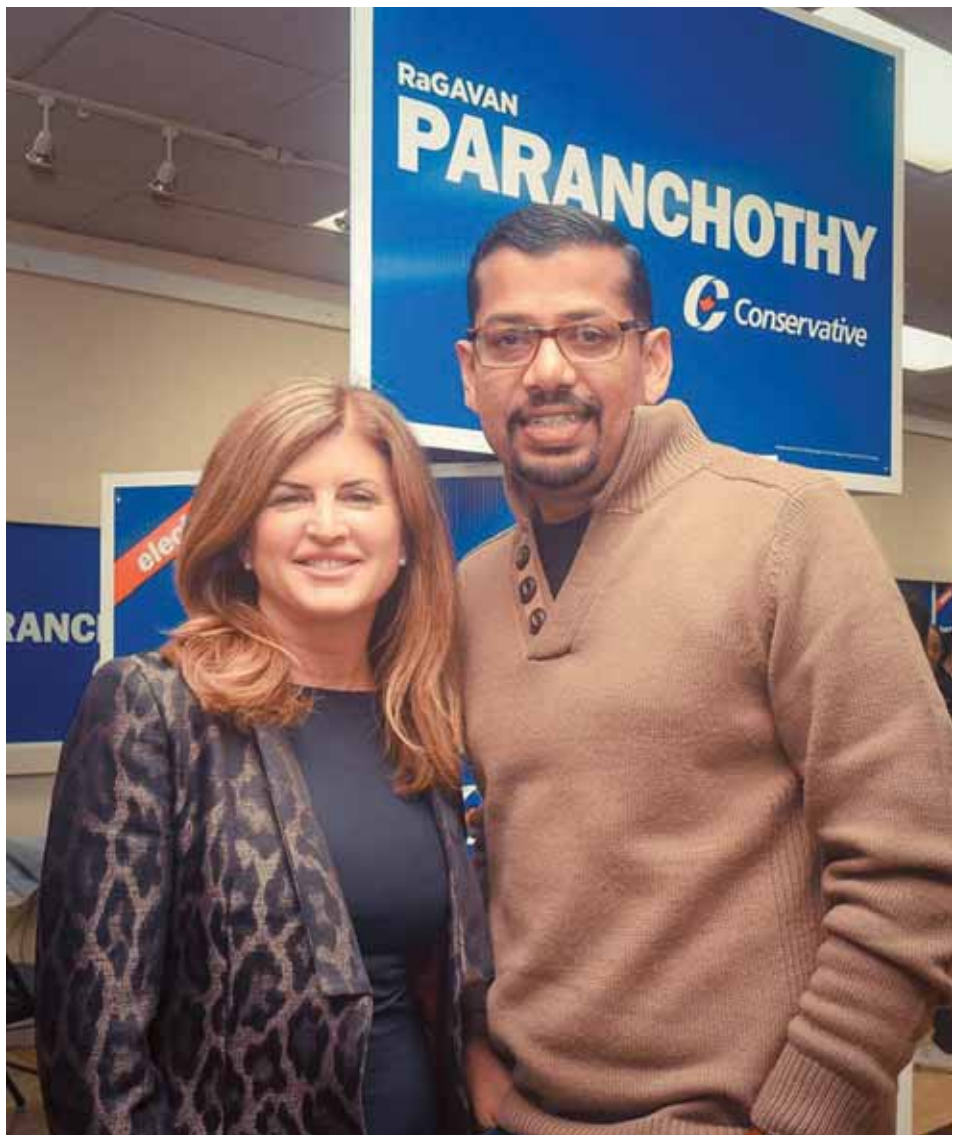
Ragavan Paranchothy

Q. What priorities of needs do you think will engage your mind for the benefit of your constituents in your electorate if you win in the election ?

A. Knocking on doors in this constituency has given me a good sense of the reality that a vast majority of the immigrant population was taken for granted by the Liberals as vote banks that they can rely on. And there is revolt!

People are displeased with the way the current government is managing affairs. Some priority concerns include marginalization of seniors, potential drug injection sites popping up in their neighborhoods, and the anticipated legalization of marijuana in 2018. And people are worried for the lives of their children who will be taxed to the hilt to compensate for the deficit and debt the Trudeau government is racking up. I will be voice for my constituents in the house addressing these concerns and more.

Q. Against the background of a need for an international inquiry regarding abuses committed in the last civil war in Sri Lanka, what will be your suggestion for a suitable mechanism to solve this issue and bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice?



Ragavan with PC Interim Leader Rona Ambrose

A. It was one of the highlights of my media career to interview the former Prime Minister Stephen Harper when he said he would boycott the CHOGM in Sri Lanka because of its lack of action on the concerns of human rights violations. I strongly feel, there will be no reconciliation without accountability. The international pressure ought to be ratcheted to bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice. The Conservative government championed that matter.

The Trudeau government on the contrary is making friendly visits and sharing pleasantries with the Sri Lankan government and the military. I understand the need for diplomatic relationships, but the Trudeau government is too soft and does not consider the matter of Tamil peoples grievances seriously.

April 3, Federal by-election day

Federal by-elections are taking place on April 3rd in Calgary Heritage (Alberta), Calgary Midnapore (Alberta), Markham–Thornhill (Ontario), Ottawa–Vanier (Ontario) and Saint-Laurent (Quebec).

For the four major political parties, the greater Toronto area riding of Markham – Thornhill is being contested by Mary Ng of the Liberals, Gregory Hines of the New Democratic Party, Ragavan Paranchothy of the Conservatives and Caryn Bergmann of the Green Party.

Caryn Bergmann

Gregory Hines

Mary Ng

Ragavan Paranchothy

BY - THULASI MUTTULINGAM

THE STORY OF RAVANA AND MANDODARI: GIVING WOMANKIND THEIR SAY

Prof Maunaguru at a workshop with his students

Victors it is said, write history. India might have its version(s) of the Ramayana but over in Sri Lanka, Ravana remains a tragic and misunderstood hero. A hero to this day loved and mourned by his people.

His tale continues to be enacted and re-enacted via drama and theatre in the Serendib isle. One of the foremost artistes of the isle to keep on studying and revising Ravana's character and story as he gains new insights on them, is Professor S. Maunaguru – an authority on Sri Lankan Tamil drama and theatre.

Professor Maunaguru was a youth of 22 when he first wrote a now iconic play in Sri Lanka called Ravanesan, produced and staged by his mentor Professor S. Vithiyananthan. He also acted the main character of Ravana in the play, staged at the University of Peradeniya back in 1965. Now a retired academic and veteran artiste of 73, Professor Maunaguru has rewritten and re-staged his play many times over, most recently in November 2016 during a countrywide reconciliation festival between the war-torn North and South of Sri Lanka.

There was a time in Sri Lanka's recent history he reminisces, when theatre artistes could not portray contemporary life without threat to their lives. Southern artistes faced the same kind of restriction but for their fellow artistes in the North and East, the threat was double. Neither the Sri Lankan Government nor the LTTE were open to criticism, and contemporary life being full of war and chaos caused by both, could not be well-reflected in the arts unless one was willing to risk one's life.

"Many of my colleagues and friends left the country and urged me to do the same but I preferred to stay on in Sri Lanka, even with its constraints rather than be free in exile. My consuming passion was theatre and the different art forms of Sri Lanka and I couldn't contemplate a life without it. Since times had changed to such an extent that I could not be a modern artist depicting contemporary situations, I turned to exclusively researching indigenous art and producing only mythical/historical productions. Which as in the case of Ravanesan could still land me in trouble," he says.

He explains how that came to be. As he evolved as an academic and artiste, the professor gained new insights about his main hero, which he infused into his character's interpretation in the script.

"I heavily re-edited Ravanesan for a year 2000 production; with insight as an older man, I tried to portray Ravana as a more human character. Rather than the usual arrogant portrayal, I depicted him as someone who brashly entered war, realised it was a mistake but was too proud to back out. The next thing I knew, I was getting angry calls based on some interesting and innovative interpretations of my meaning in the play. I had a lot of trouble defending myself against inferences in the contemporary context which I still don't want to talk about."

He might have chosen to stick to ancient, mythical lore rather than focus on contemporary stories – but a good artist will always elicit feelings of connectivity in the audience. To an audience undergoing a contemporary war, the enactment of an ancient mythical war upheld many parallels they could relate to. Which in turn led to inferences that he had obliquely critiqued a contemporary character who was very powerful at the time.

Mandodari and Ravana

Women's perspective

In the meantime, the Professor was also critiqued for not bringing in a perspective that was much needed, yet often side-lined. In Sri Lanka both during war and post-war, the women have been terribly affected in a myriad ways; yet their perspectives, their fears and pain, do not find much scope for expression in mainstream media or the arts. From the time of Ravanan to the times of Prabhakaran and Rajapaksa, the tale remains mainly that of men and their triumphs and losses. "Whether it was the story of Draupadi in the Mahabharatha, Helen in the Iliad or Sita in the Ramayana, men simply used the women as props to raise the tale of their own valour," explains Professor Maunaguru.

Mandodari and Ravana

What happens though when one of these male storytellers has a feminist wife? We don't know about Valmiki, Homer and Kamban but in the case of Professor Maunaguru, he had to re-write his script. Professor Chitralega Maunaguru, an academic and feminist leader in Sri Lanka did not let her husband get away with giving a bit part to Mandodari, Ravana's wife.

"The original Mandodari I wrote was a cry-baby but Chitra was scornful of my interpretation. Even as the war unravelled in Sri Lanka, she was traveling the country listening to and documenting women's stories. She let me know what women would have had to say in Mandodari's place, and I re-wrote my script accordingly," says Professor Maunaguru.

Thus in his new version, in tandem with the war-cries of Ravana are the anti-war cries of his wife, who relays firsthand the grief of women who have had their agency hijacked by men, yet pay the steepest price in the repercussions of war.

Many a war-affected person in Sri Lanka, especially its women across all ethnicities, tend to identify first hand with Mandodari's rage and anguish in this play. It depicts not only Ravana the tragic anti-hero too proud to back out of a war that he knows will devastate his family and citizens, but also his wife, the tragic feminist icon who knows all too well the repercussions of war, and seeks to counsel her husband that the concept of honour can take many forms. She like many women knows that there is no cowardice in backtracking or extending olive branches instead of thumping one's chest and raising battle cries; battle cries of the men that would end with the wails of their widows and children.

And so with the revision of this iconic play in Sri Lanka, we don't have the men alone telling the story of war from their vantage viewpoint. The women are being given their due space too. As a culture evolves, so do the voices of its legends. "The story of Mandodari and Ravana continue to live on in the minds of their people, but as living legends I told Maunaguru that they have to evolve with the times," says Chitralega, when asked about her input to her husband's famous play.

And thus this tale as old as time, reverberated with its audience in both North and South Sri Lanka where it was staged recently. The thespian has done his job once again in getting his audience to connect to his story. And this time we can put a name to the woman behind his success.

Audience participation in southern-Sri-Lanka at the Peace Festival, reviewing the play Mandodari

2017 ANNUAL ACCOUNTING FORUM BY SAAC

Sri Lankan Accountants Association of Canada hosted its 8th Annual Accountants Forum on Saturday, March 4th, 2017 at Courtyard Toronto Northeast Hotel. There were about 140 people mostly accountants from the community attended this event and here are some of the photos from the event.

RBC Royal Bank of Canada and Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario are the main sponsors. There were 4 different topics related to accounting and finance were presented by professional seminar leaders.

Community Watch

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA
Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple
March 11, 2017
HOLI

KIDAMBI RAJ, MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Holi is one of the major festivals of India and is celebrated with enthusiasm and gaiety on the iufull moon day in the Tamil month of *Maasi* (February – March) as per the Gregorian calendar.

Significance of Holi

In spite of it being a colourful and happy festival, there are various aspects of Holi that makes it so significant for our lives. Though they may not be so apparent but a closer look and a little thought would reveal the significance of Holi in more ways than meets the eye. Ranging from socio-cultural, religious to biological there is every reason why we must heartily enjoy the festival and cherish the reasons for its celebration.

The festival signifies the victory of Good over Evil, the arrival of Spring, end of Winter and for many a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair damaged relationships.

Mythological Significance

The Hindu festival Holi, has several legends associated with it. The foremost is the legend of demon King ***Hiranyakasipu*** who demanded everybody in his kingdom worship him and not the Gods. But his pious son, ***Prahalada*** became a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu. Since he was not able to convince his son, Hiranyakasipu wanted his son killed. So, he asked his sister ***Holika*** to enter a blazing fire with Prahalada in her lap, as Holika had a boon which made her immune to fire, so she thought. The legend says that Prahalada was saved by his Lord Himself for his extreme devotion and evil minded Holika was burnt to ashes, as her boon was only if she entered the fire alone.

Since that time, people light a bonfire, called Holika on the eve of Holi festival and celebrate as victory of good over evil and also as the triumph of devotion to God.

Children take special delight in the tradition, as it has another legend attached to it. It says there once was a terrifying person, ***Dhundhi*** who used to trouble children in the Kingdom of ***Prithu.*** She was chased away by the children on the day of Holi. So, children sometimes play pranks at the time of Holika Dahan (burning Holika).

The central ritual of Holi is the throwing and applying coloured water and powders on friends and family, thus giving the event its common name ***Festival of Colours.*** This ritual is said to be based on another legend based on Radha and Krishna. It seems Lord Krishna while playing Holi on the banks of the river Yamuna with Radha and other gopis is the most popular reason for celebrating this festival the way it is done. In Vrindavan and Mathura, Holi is celebrated in memory of Divine love of Radha and Krishna. It is said that when Lord Krishna was young, He often complained to Mother Yashoda about His dark complexion and wondered why Radha was so fair. One day, His mother playfully suggested that he can smear colour on Radha's face and change Her complexion to any colour he wanted.

It is celebrated for two days. On the evening of the first day of Holi, a public bonfire is held, commemorating the burning of Holika. Traditionally boys spend the weeks prior to Holi combing the neighbourhood for any waste wood they could find for the bonfire. The fire is normally lit between 10 pm. and midnight.

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA
Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple
March 1 - 10, 2017
LAKSHMI LAKSHARCHANA

KIDAMBI RAJ, MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WHAT IS LAKSHARCHANA ?

Nama Smarana (name repetition) is the repetition of the Gods/ Godesses names. ***"ARCHANA*** means Chanting and glorifying the Divine name". ***LAK*** means 100,000. Therefore Laksharchana is the name of repeating in a group, the name of the Deity in the form of a Mantra. According to spiritual leaders, this is the direct way to achieve the spiritual goal of life during this troubled ***Kaliyuga***. Hindus, Christians, Muslims and people from all regions have their own customs and rituals. However, what they all have in common is the glorification of their Divine Names. In terms of spiritual practices, nothing is more rewarding and sacred as Nama Smarana. It disperses illusion and is the key to the kingdom of peace for each and every one no matter where they are. Swami Sai Baba says, "This ***Kaliyuga*** is praised in the scriptures as incomparably conducive to the salvation of people, for they can now attain the Highest through the mere thought of God/ Goddess and remembering His Name. So, of all the yuga (eras) this yuga is described as the most holy, the most beneficent. ***Dhyana*** (meditation) was prescribed as a means of liberation in the ***Krita yuga,*** Asceticism as the means during Thretha Yuga and Ritual worship in the ***Dwapara Yuga***".

For the people of this Kali yuga, the simplest remedy prescribed is just nama smarana, constant awareness of the Names of Gods/Godesses.

GODDESS LAKSHMI

Goddess Lakshmi brings Good Things to life, and brings Material and Sspiritual Wealth our way. Lakshmi is such a special Goddess. She is magical and practical. Her consort is a Lord Vishnu, her best friend. She is a living Goddess worshipped around the world. In these times of challenge as in all times of challenge, She can be a comfort and a healer. She brings a sense of greater fortune even in the darkest moments. She is a powerful cosmic connection, a divine lady who looks like us and offers a sense of courage, hope and power.

As the Hindu Goddess of Good Fortune and Beauty, She represents and is seen as the personification of abundance, prosperity, wealth, well-being and harmony. She is actively worshipped daily by millions of Hindus and interfaith practitioners of Goddess spirituality around the globe. Because of her popularity, She is considered a Universal Goddess. Lakshmi is a Goddess who brings all good things to light and to life. She has one of the most colourful creation myths of all the Deities in the Hindu Pantheon. It is said, that Goddess Lakshmi was born, fully-grown, on a pink lotus that rose from the milky sea. She was immediately be-decked, be-jewelled and worshipped by the Gods and sages. They prayed that She would come to their abodes and to their worlds, for they believed that where Lakshmi is, you will find riches and fulfilment.

Laksharchanas are carried out not just for individual's good health and prosperity, but is for the good and welfare of all around the world.

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple March 28, 2017

YUGADI

KIDAMBI RAJ, MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

YUGAADI The name Yugaadi or Ugaadi is derived from the Sanskrit words ***Yuga*** **(**age) and ***aadi*** (beginning), that is beginning of new age or year. Yugaadi specifically refers to the start of the age that we are living now, the Kali Yuga. Kali Yuga began when Lord Krishna left this world.

In the **luni-solar** calendar used in Andhra and Karnataka, Yugaadi falls on the first day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra, which begins the day after the new moon after the Sun enters Aries. According to Gregorian Calendar in falls in the months of March or April. This year it falls on Tuesday, March 28th.

In ***Andhra*** and ***Telagana,*** people use the term Ugaadi whereas in ***Karnataka*** they use the term Yugaadi for this festival. The people of Maharashtra observe the same festival, on the same day, but call it ***Gudi Padwa.***

Preparations for the festival begins a week ahead. This festival is celebrated with much fervor and people clean their homes, buy new clothes. On this day, people wake up before the break of dawn and take a head bath, decorate the entrance of their houses with fresh mango leaves. The significance of tying mango leaves relates to a legend. It is said that both Lord Subramanya and Lord Ganesha were both were very fond of mangos. Lord Subramanya exhorted to the people to tie green mango leaves on the doorway signifying a good crop and general well-being. They also make a dish called ***"Ugaadi Pacchadi"*** which is prepared with ingredients like Raw Mango, Neem, jiggery and tamarind. It is a combination of six different tastes, sweet, sour, spicy, salty, astringent and bitter, symbolizing happiness, disgust, anger, fear, surprise and sadness, since life is a mixture of different experiences.

Recitation of the Panchangam

People traditionally gather to listen to the recitation of the religious Panchangam (almanac) of the new year and the general forecast for the year to come. This is called the Panchanga Sravanam, an informal social function where an elderly and respected person will read the almanac.

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THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple February 24, 2017

MAHA SIVARATRI

KIDAMBI RAJ, MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

What is Maha Sivaratri :

Maha Sivaratri means, ***The Night of Siva.*** The ceremony takes place mainly at night. This is a festival observed in honour of Lord Siva. Siva was married to Parvati on this day. This is the night when Siva is said to have performed the ***Tandava*** or the dance of primordial creation, preservation and destruction. It marks the convergence of Siva and Sakti.

When is it celebrated:

It falls on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the Tamil month Maasi (February-March) and is dedicated to the worship of Lord Siva. Of the twelve Sivaratries in a year, the Maha Sivaratri is the holiest.

Significance of Sivaratri in Hinduism:

The festival of Maha Sivaratri has tremendous significance in Hinduism. According to sacred scriptures, the ritual worship of Lord Siva on Maha Sivaratri festival, pleases Lord Siva the most. This fact is said to have been declared by Lord Siva Himself, when His Consort Parvati asked Him as to which ritual performed by His devotees pleased Him the most.

Devotees repeat the Panchakshara Mantra 'Om Mamah Sivaaya". It is said that one who utters the names of Lord Siva during Sivaratri, with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all their sins and reaches the abode of Lord Siva and lives there happily.

Origin of Sivaratri:

According to the Puranas, during the mythical churning of the Ocean of Milk by devas (gods) and asuras (demons), called ***Samudra Manthan,*** they came across a deadly poison ***Kalakuta.*** As soon as they touched the poison, it exploded into poisonous fumes and that threatened the entire universe by darkness. As the destruction of the whole universe looked certain, the Gods sought the help of Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu. Since neither one was able to help, they sought the help of Lord Siva. Lord Siva raised His trident and reduced the fumes. In order to protect the world, He drank the deadly poison but held it in His throat instead of swallowing it. This turned His throat blue, and since then He came to be known as ***'Nilakanta',*** the blue-throated One. Sivaratri celebrates this event by which Lord Siva saved the world.

Another Hindu Mythological story emphasizes Sivaratri's auspiciousness. The story goes on to say, on the Sivaratri day, a hunter, who had been hunting many birds in a forest, was chased by a lion. To save himself from the hungry lion, the hunter climbed a Vilva tree. The lion waited at the foot of the tree for the hunter to come down. To keep himself awake so that he may not fall off, he kept plucking the Vilva leaves and kept on dropping them down, without even realizing that there was Siva Linga at the foot of the tree. Lord Siva was pleases with the offerings of the Vilva leaves by the hunter though he did it without knowing it, saved the hunter, in spite of the sins he had committed by killing the birds. It shows importance of worshipping Lord Siva with Vilva leaves.

Even till date, devotees of Lord Siva perform the ritual worship of Sivaratri with care and devotion. They observe day and night fast and give sacred bath to Siva Linga with honey, milk, water etc. Hindus consider it extremely auspicious to worship Lord Siva on a Sivaratri as it is believed that worship of Lord Siva with devotion and sincerity absolves a devotee of past sins. The devotee reaches the abode of Lord Sankar and lives there happily. He is also liberated from the cycle of birth and death and attains moksha or salvation.

Community Watch

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple FEBRUARY 9, 2017

THAI POOSAM

BY *KIDAMBI RAJ,* MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A festival occurring in the Tamil month Thai, on the day of the star Poosam around Full Moon is celebrated as Thai Poosam. There are several legends about the festival Thaipusam. Here are a few of them There was a demon named Tharakasuran who gave a lot of trouble to the rishis and saints. Lord Muruga was called by his parents Lord Shiva and Parvati and given the job of destroying the Asuran.

Lord Muruga set off with the blessings of his parents to destroy the demon. He took with him twelve weapons, eleven of which were given by his father Lord Shiva and the 'Vel' given by his mother Parvati. Lord Muruga destroyed Tharakasuran on the Poosam Nakshatra day in the Tamil month of Thai and hence Thai Poosam is celebrated in all Murugan temples.

According to another legend, as Shiva was imparting a mantra to Parvati, Lord Muruga eavesdropped on them. For that error, Parvati laid a curse on him, in line with the rule that even a son, if erring, must be punished. To be redeemed from her curse, Lord Muruga offered hard penance at Thiruparankundram. Pleased with his penance, Shiva and Parvati appeared before him and lifted the curse. The day on which the curse was removed is Thai Poosam.

It is thus a special day for worship of Lord Muruga or Subrahmanya and is celebrated in a very grand manner at all Murugan temples, especially at the Six Battle Camps or 'Arupadai Veedu' of Murugan.

Significance of Kavadi

It is a Tamil word meaning flattened pole with loads at the ends. The Kavadi carried in a religious procession also has a pole with a semicircular arch. The arch is decorated with flowers and palm leaves. The loads attached to the ends of the pole are brass vessels filled with milk or other offerings. Peacock feathers and a vel are also attached. A brass pot filled with milk can also be carried for Lord Muruga as an offering and it is called "Paal Kodum".

The Kavadi prayer and penance is observed over 10 days by devotees. The devotee has to abstain from various things like alcohol, drugs etc. They have to observe celibacy and maintain a vegetarian diet for this entire period. The Kavadi procession is seen as an outward demonstration of mass devotion to God as Lord Muruga. There are various reasons for carrying the Kavadi but the two main categories are firstly to express thanks to Lord Muruga or to ask Muruga for help in overcoming a particular problem.

Legend:

According to mythology, Iduman, one of the disciples of Agasthiyai, was asked to bring to hills - representing the two forces inherent in all living beings (Siva and Shakti). Iduman, carried these two hills with a - Kavadi a beam across his shoulder with one hill suspended on each end. Mid way through the journey he sat his burden down in order to rest.

When he was ready to resume, he found that the hills were too heavy to pick up. As he prepared to forcibly pick them up he saw Lord Muruga in the way and he angrily asked him to move out of the way, Muruga refused. Iduman was annoyed a battle broke out between Lord Muruga and Iduman whereby Iduman was destroyed. Muruga through his eternal mercy revived and pardoned him, a change came over Iduman and he became Lord Muruga's greatest devotee. He carried the first Kavadi out of absolute devotion to the Lord. Lord Muruga also made Iduman his gate keeper. That is why when a devotee goes to the famous Pazhanimalai temple one must first pray to Iduman and then proceed to the main temple.

Another legend says that when Siva was passing on a Mantra to Parvati, Muruga eavesdropped on them. Parvati got annoyed and cursed Him. To save Himself from the curse, Muruga offered hard sacrament at Thirupparangkundram. Parvati was pleased with Muruga's penance. Both Siva and Parvati appeared before Him and relieved Him from the curse. The day on which the curse was removed is Thai Poosam. So, it is a very special day for Lord Muruga.

According to another legend, River Kaveri was jealous of River Ganga because of getting too much importance, especially with Ganga getting a place in the veil of Lord Siva. So, she prayed to Lord Vishnu and it is believed that Lord Vishnu appeared before her on Thai Poosam day.

It is believed that it was on this day (Thai Poosam) that Lord Siva and His Consort Uma Devi blessed the sages Vygrapadha and Patanjali with Their blissful dance in Chidambaram.

King Hiranyavarman abdicated his Gowda kingdom and crowned his brother to the throne to behold the blissful dance of Lord Siva in Chidambaram. When sage Vyagrapadha came to know this he crowned Hiranyavaramn as the Chola King and gave him the royal flag with the emblem of a jumping tiger. Saint Arunagirinathar refers to this in his Thirupugazh, praising him as an acclaimed just ruler.

THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF CANADA

Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple FEBRUARY 1, 2017

VASANTA PANCHAMI

KIDAMBI RAJ, MEMBER, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

VASANTA PANCHAMI, is the festival dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Vasanta means ***"spring"***. It is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the Tamil month of Thai.. (Magha). It is believed to be Goddess Saraswati's birthday. Yellow colour is given a very special importance on this day. In Hinduism significance of the seasons and religious festivals are interwoven, for example Makara Sankaranti and Vasanta Panchami. Seasons undergo changes and Vasanta Panchami indicates the coming of springtime and trees start displaying new shoots and new life is evident in the woods and fields.

Legends associated with Vasanta Panchami:

In the Vedas, Goddess Saraswati is a water deity and is revered for purifying, fertilizing and enriching powers. Saraswati's mythological history was her identification with the holy rituals performed on the banks of the river Saraswati. She is said to have invented Sanskrit, known as the mother of all languages, scriptures and scholarships.

According to ***Matsya Purana,*** Saraswati evolved from the mouth of Lord Brahma. It was her beauty and grace that made Brahma pursued her. As she fled in different directions a head appeared on Brahma and that is how Lord Brahma is attributed with five heads. Saraswati was the most unique creation of Brahma. The moon and the lotus associated with Goddess Saraswati are both symbols of eternal womanhood. In some parts of India Saraswati is believed to be Surya Kanya, daughter of Sun God.

Saraswati played a very important and vital role in the lives of the Aryans that lived along the banks of the river. All the early developments took place around her and hence Saraswati was known as the symbol of knowledge. These show the importance of the river Saraswati at the time of Aryan period.

Symbols:

Goddess Saraswati is the Goddess of intellect and learning. She has four hands which symbolize ego, intellect, alertness and the mind. She carries a lotus and scriptures in two of Her hands and She plays music on the Veena with Her other two hands. She rides on a white swan. Her white dress is a symbol of purity. Her swan signifies that people should have the ability to discern the good from the bad. Goddess Saraswati, sitting on a lotus, symbolizes Her wisdom. She is also well versed in the experience of truth. When the Goddess is seen sitting on a peacock, it is a reminder that a strong ego can be held back by wisdom.

There are several legends associated Goddess Saraswati. It seems once the two sages, Vasishta and Viswamitra were both violently opposed to each other. Viswamitra ordered the river Saraswati to wash away Vasishta along with everything the he possessed. But Saraswati refused to comply with his command. So, to punish Saraswati for not complying his order, he turned the water of the river into blood and later on, at the behest of Lord Siva, the two sages became amicable and Viswamitra then river pure.

Significance:

The significance of the day is worshipping Goddess Saraswati, a symbol of wisdom and the onset of the spring season. According to the popular belief, the origin of this festival lies in Aryan period. Aryans came and settled in India through Khyber Pass, crossing Saraswati river among many others. Being a primitive civilization, most of their developments took place along the banks of the river Saraswati. Hence, the river Saraswati started to be associated with fertility and knowledge.

யாழ் இந்துக் கல்லூரிச் சங்கம் - கனடா

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Community Watch

Fearless in Opposition

Foreword by Manmohan Singh – Former Prime Minister of India
Book Reviewed By Siva Sivapragasam

- Power and Accountability By P. Chidambaram (Former Finance Minister of India)

"Fearless in Opposition" is a collection of articles on Power and Accountability authored in fine writing and wit by P. Chidambaram, India's former Finance Minister and an influential political commentator.

Mr. P. Chidambaram was a former Union Minister of Finance and Home in the Government of India. Currently, he heads the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs. Harvard educated Chidambaram is an eminent lawyer practicing in the Supreme Court. A public intellectual and author, he is also the author of Standing Guard: A Year in Opposition—a collection of his essays published in 2016. He writes a weekly column on economy, politics, social issues, foreign policy and contemporary affairs in 'The Indian Express'.

The book "Fearless in Opposition" is a selection of the essays he has written to the prestigious Indian newspaper "Indian Express". Mr. Chidambaram's book, "Fearless in Opposition" analyses the important issues ranging from economics to politics in India. The book answers various questions that have risen into the minds of common people of the country. A variety of current issues such as nationalism, government policies and demonetization are essays that are analyzed in Mr. Chidambaram's book. Mr. Chidambaram's knowledge, experience and wisdom are amply demonstrated in this publication on some important aspects of public policy in India. As Dr. C. Rangarajan, former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India states about the book "In impeccable prose, Mr.Chidambaram presents a scholarly survey of the events which jolted the economy and polity in 2016, tracing their origins and offering answers to them".

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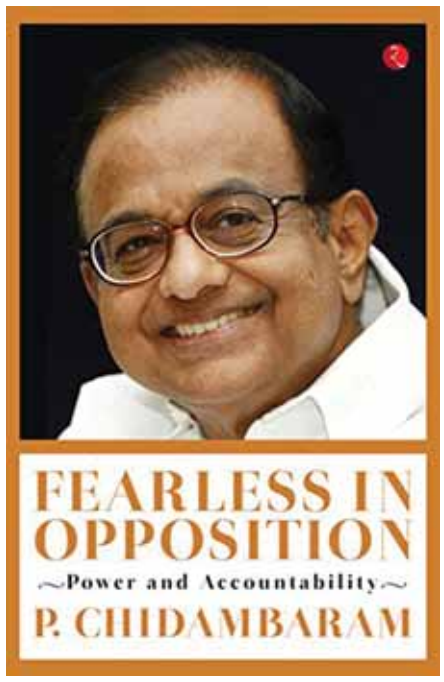

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The awards are sponsored through Direct Family Financial Support Canada, a nonprofit Organization founded by M C Francis, teacher and publisher. The appreciation ceremony will be held on the second day of July 2017.

Northern Province GCE A/L 2016

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Easter Joy

"Sing the joy of Easter day,
The Easer Triumph tell,
Jesus rose on Easter day,
The Lord who loves us all."

Jesus, killed, in tomb was laid,
Was guarded by soldiers all around.
Now missing from the place He lain,
He is risen! all trumpets sound.

Mary, His disciple, sobbed outside,
Thinking who will roll the stone,
Saw the tomb open, looked inside,
Found the saviours body gone.

Mary mistook Him to be gardener,
Asked; where His body, to search
He spoke to her as her eye opener,
She hailed loud, calling teacher.

Ye choirs of all churches,
Sing your sweetest songs aloud.
Sing the victory, all the ages,
Celebrate the Holy Easter, with pride.

- Kingsley

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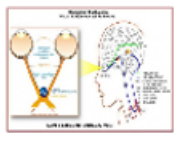

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