

Joys of Cross-Cultural Values

Perspectives of Public Service

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LALITH WEERATUNGA
PRINCIPAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA

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PRESIDENTIAL
INITIATIVES



PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN GOVERNANCE

Governance is an art. It yields the best results when the public becomes a part of the process. This is why a consultative and a participatory focus is the best approach to effective governance. 'Gama Samaga Pilisandara' (Dialogue with the Village) programme takes the bureaucracy to the village. People are given the opportunity to present their grievances to the top hierarchy of the bureaucracy in the presence of the President. This is a two way mechanism where both the citizen and the bureaucrat engage in a constructive dialogue to resolve public issues. Citizen engagement contributes to enhancing accountability and responsiveness in governance. This is precisely what President Gotabaya Rajapaksa seeks to establish, in his flagship programme 'Gama Samaga Pilisandara'.



Kiwlekadawala

Fair and pragmatic solutions need to be given for issues relating to land and water.

About Kiwlekadawala

Located in the Divisional Secretariat of Gomarankadawala in the Trincomalee district, Kiwlekadawala houses a total population of 1192. The major livelihood of these villagers is paddy cultivation. Honey hunting from wild bee colonies is also a common practice. Villagers face severe shortages of water for drinking as well for agriculture.

Kiwlekadawala is one of many areas in the Eastern Province that had faced long term consequences of the LTTE terrorism. Around 95% of the elderly population of Kiwlekadawala has not had any formal education due to the conflict that prevailed for nearly 30 years. Persistent shortage of the teaching staff and the lack of facilities in schools have contributed to a significantly low standard of education among the children as well.

Pulse of the people

- Opening the discussion, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa spoke of the need to enhance facilities for education, especially by addressing the shortage of teaching staff in schools. He instructed that vacancies for teachers in the streams of Mathematics, Science, Computer Science and Technology in particular be filled as early as possible.
- Reading is an essential component of education. The President gifted 500 books in all three languages to the library of the nearby Madawachchiya Vidyalaya. It was also decided to construct an assembly hall, a sports ground as well as a tube well to provide clean water to this school.
- Secretary of Education said that five computers will

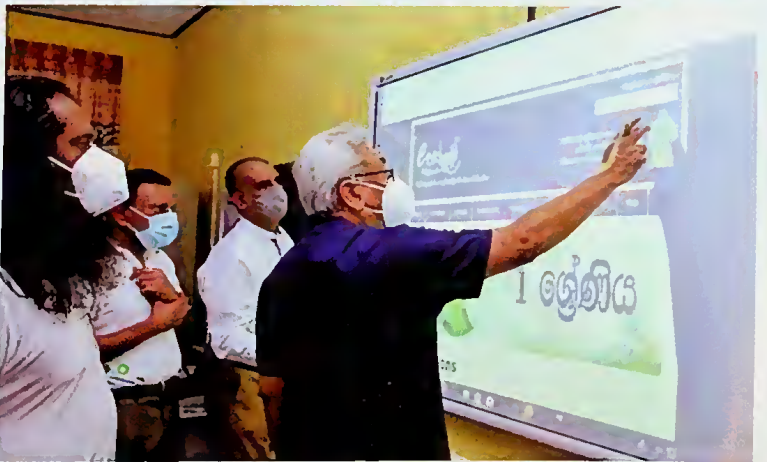
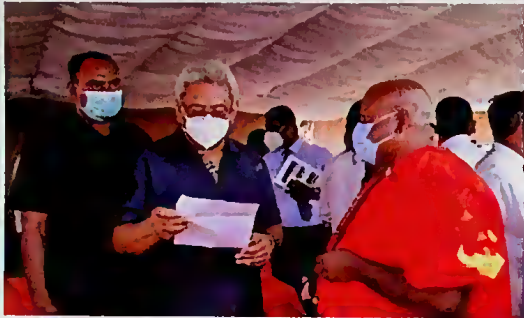


be provided to each Pirivena Institution in the area. He revealed that a plan is underway to provide sports grounds to Pirivena Institutions as well.

- Kivlekadawala and surrounding areas often experience the human-elephant conflict. The existing electric fences do not provide sufficient protection and some have even excluded paddy cultivations from the protected areas.

Secretary to the State Ministry informed the villagers that the new fence will be constructed after due consultations with the aggrieved parties. In response, villagers of Madawachchiya offered to assist with the construction of an electric fence in their area, if the necessary material and the assistance of an officer of the Department of Wildlife could be given as suggested by the Secretary.

- Another major concern of villagers of Kivlekadawala





was the agricultural roads. It was revealed that the dilapidated condition of certain agricultural roads has even hindered the paddy harvesting. President Rajapaksa said that funding will be provided to the local government authorities to rehabilitate agricultural roads.

- The Secretary of Health pledged to improve facilities in the regional hospitals in Mahadiwul Wewa and Wan Ela. Nursing and minor staff will be provided as required. He also stated that steps have been taken to establish a kidney disease and dialysis treatment unit in Padavi Sri Pura, in the near future.
- The President observed that the Yan Oya project has given rise to a number of issues, which require sustainable and pragmatic solutions. He instructed the Governor of the Eastern Province and the Divisional Secretaries to visit the

project site and attend to the grievances that the public raised. He emphasized the need to give lasting and fair solutions to the issues relating to land, water as well as appropriate compensation for the private lands acquired for the project.

- The importance of rehabilitating the lakes and reservoirs in this area in order to provide sufficient water for drinking and cultivations was emphasized by the President. Farm lands that had been cultivated for decades have recently been demarcated as forest reserves, villagers complained. Since they had not been given deeds, they find it legally impossible to claim for the ownership of the lands where they had lived for several decades. The President reiterated the importance of providing land deeds to the rightful owners, especially to those who have been internally displaced due to the conflict.

Weragala

All roads in Weragala are to be rehabilitated.

About Weragala

Weragala is located in the Divisional Secretariat of Giribawa in the Kurunegala district. It is a small village with 149 families and a total population of 445. Except for a few serving and retired public servants, all residents of Weragala are farmers whose main livelihood is paddy or chena cultivation. The shortage of water often compels them to cultivate only in the Maha Season. Even then, cultivated lands get frequently destroyed by wild elephants.

Weragala is relatively isolated from the rest of the district with no proper access to main roads. Children travel with their parents on foot cycles, or simply walk for over two kilometers to go to school. The main access to this village is the gravel road from Sangappaliya, along the bund of the lake, Wannikuda Wewa. The two kilometer stretch that runs by this beautiful lake with surrounding greenery looks refreshing and appealing to any newcomer. The life of these villagers,

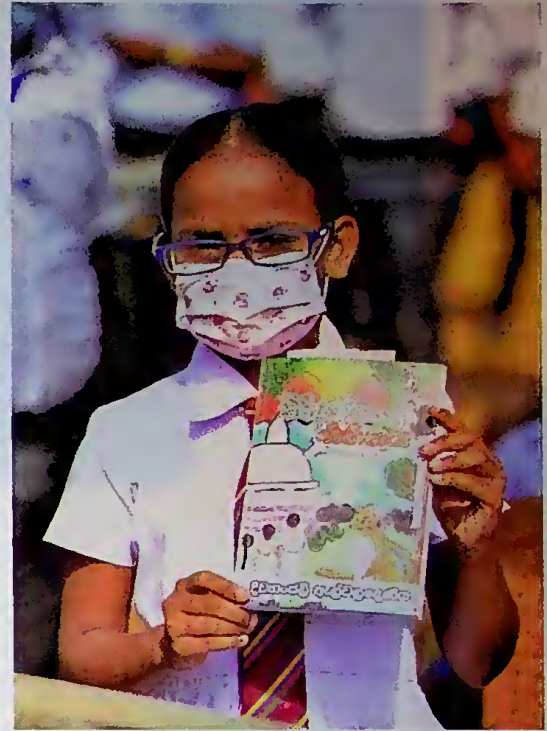
The life of these villagers, however, has not been so beautiful.

Pulse of the people

In his opening remarks, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said that the programme 'Gama Samaga Pilisandara' (Dialogue with the Village) aims at improving the standard of life of the rural communities. He observed that the country has advanced considerably along multiple fronts during the past year, despite the issues and difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Agriculture and industrial activities have continued. The tourism sector of Sri Lanka, however, suffered greatly, with lockdowns and travel restriction imposed in a number of countries. Even though many developed countries reduced salaries and curtailed employment in the state sector, Sri Lanka did not. Opportunities for graduate appointments as well as for unskilled labour were made open in the government sector throughout the pandemic. Over 60,000 graduates and 35,000 unskilled labour from poverty stricken families were given employment in the public sector during 2020.

- The President emphasized the need for providing drinking water to Weragala and the surrounding villages





and instructed the Water Supply and Drainage Board to initiate a water supply project accordingly. On the request of residents of the area, the President also directed to establish two water treatment plants in Thammitagama and Weragala.

- Galgamuwa hospital, which is in close proximity to Weragala will be given a sufficient strength of medical staff. Secretary of Health informed that the facilities of the

hospital too will be improved.

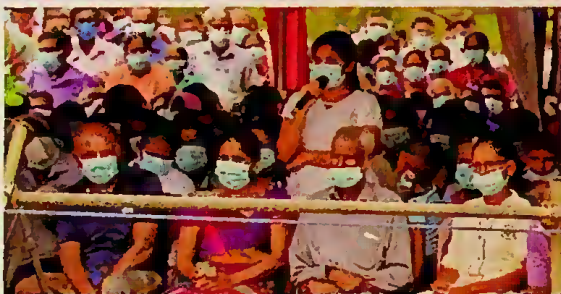
- Dairy farmers of Weragala expressed their grievance of not having sufficient grazing lands for their cattle. This has affected the dairy yield throughout the past. The President directed the Chairman of the Giribawa Pradeshiya Sabha to see the possibility of developing suitable grazing lands for this purpose using state lands within the area.
- On the request of students, it was decided to construct

a building with classrooms, and an accommodation facility for teachers of the Gampola Primary School. Assistance of the Sri Lanka Army will be given to construct buildings for Dhamma Schools in three temples in the area.

- A student of Giribawa Vidyalaya requested that a 'Sisu Seriya' bus service be provided for school children in Weragala and Ihala Maradankadawala. Chairman of the Road Passenger Transport Authority pledged to arrange for this within a week. Considering the deplorable state of the existing roads, the President instructed the authorities to rehabilitate and improve all roads in Weragala.
- It was revealed that the available communication services do not have a sufficient coverage, creating difficulties for online studies of school children. On the request of the President, Regional Managers of two private sector service providers agreed to construct new communication towers to provide full coverage to the area.
- A common grievance of the people in and around Weragala was the recent demarcation of the lands that they had been cultivating for decades as forest or wildlife reserves. The President requested the authorities to

consider releasing such lands back to the owners, taking into account the difficulties that they were facing in sustaining their families after losing their livelihood.

- A persisting issue related to the local administration was also resolved when a villager presented his grievance in the presence of the President. Inhabitants of Katupothana have to travel a long distance through a forest sanctuary to reach the Grama Niladhari office in the nearby village, Kokmaduwa. This is a dangerous journey with a distinct threat from wild elephants. Their request for demarcating a separate Grama Niladhari Division for Katupothana was accepted by the Divisional Secretary.
- A villager from Rajanganaya complained that unauthorized cultivations in the catchment area of the Rajanganaya reservoir have caused sedimentation there. No legal action has been taken against the wrongdoers despite repeated complaints. The President directed the Police Department to take immediate action for this complaint.
- The President also informed that funds will be provided to establish a lift irrigation system from the Rajanganaya reservoir and instructed the Irrigation Department to initiate action expeditiously.



Galagoda

Land issues of Tsunami settlers are to be resolved soon.



About Galagoda

The Southern village of Galagoda, in the Hikkaduwa Divisional Secretariat of the Galle District has a total population of 3711. The 1072 families of this village include 471 families that were resettled from Paraliya, Kahawa, Thelwatta, Madampe and Kurawatta areas after the Tsunami occurred in 2004. Fisheries and Agriculture are the main livelihood of the people. In addition, cinnamon peeling and making coir ropes are popular income generating activities.

Anchorages that were functional before the tsunami occurred such as that in Paraliya have not been rehabilitated in the recent past. Abandoned paddy lands are in abundance everywhere with no irrigation water to cultivate. Villagers who engage in cinnamon peeling and make coir ropes need a stable market for their products.

The villagers were seeking help for all forms of their livelihood.

Pulse of the people

Opening the discussion, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa recalled his efforts to conserve the environment as the former Secretary to the Ministry of Urban Development. Facilities were given for agriculture while striking a delicate balance between environmental conservation and economic development. The aim of the government is to gradually develop the local economy while empowering the local farmer and the local entrepreneur. However, revival of the local economy and local entrepreneurship based on nationalism often generates resistance and criticism.

National security of the country is given the foremost priority. The President assured that no recurrence of similar incidents of the past when national security was compromised, will ever take place again.

The public sector of Sri Lanka is considerably large with well over one million employees, paid by the public. The President emphasized that they are obliged to provide their



best services in order to improve the standard of life of the public.

- Fishing communities of the area requested that anchorages in Akurala and Paraliya be developed in order to continue with fishing activities as before. The Department of Fisheries informed that this will be attended to.
- Beach seine fishing, one of the oldest fishing methods in Sri Lanka is facing numerous challenges. The number of landing centers for beach seine crafts have markedly reduced due to coastal erosion. Responding to queries made by the fishing community, Secretary to the Ministry pledged that construction of the fisheries harbour in Dodanduwa will be completed in 2021.
- People of the area presented a number of grievances related to education, in particular the lack of infrastructure facilities in schools including sports grounds. In response, the President instructed the Army to construct the sports ground of the Kularatne Vidyalaya, and build a protective wall for the Sri Dhammarakshitha Dhamma School, which is in a perilous location.
- Some lands in Galagoda and surrounding areas which had been inhabited and cultivated by villagers for decades have been newly demarcated as wildlife sanctuaries. This has affected their livelihood. The President enquired about the rationale for including the areas already inhabited by the people, inclusive of the land where the primary school has been situated for years, within the newly demarcated wildlife reserve. He instructed the authorities to provide fair and pragmatic solutions for such situations, without

creating difficulties to the public.

- Villagers of Galagoda and a few surrounding areas, occupying the lands given to those affected by the Tsunami raised a concern about the rightful ownership of their lands. This has created additional difficulties to them including entering their children to schools. In response, the President directed that all issues pertaining to those lands be resolved en bloc, and expeditiously.
- Galagoda and surrounding areas in the Galle district are facing an acute shortage of drinking water. Secretary to the Ministry said that a treatment plant with a capacity of 10,000 m³ will be constructed in the area. The first component of this will be established by April and the entire project will be completed by September 2021.
- The problem of paddy lands increasingly becoming unsuitable for paddy cultivation was also discussed. Officers observed that the increase in the salinity of water and the lack of maintenance of the canal system has caused this situation. The President observed the necessity to use appropriate technology to mitigate this situation. He instructed the officials to find suitable means of cultivating those abandoned paddy lands again.
- Producers of coir ropes in the locality were given a relief for the issue of finding suitable materials. It was decided to request tea factories in the area to purchase gunny bags and coir ropes produced in Ratigama and nearby villages, to be used for tea storage in place of nylon-based products that are imported at present.

by Jeevanthie Senanayake