

VESAK
A RITE OF
ILLUMINATION

**REENGINEERING
NATIONAL SECURITY**

An Exclusive Interview with
General Kamal Gunaratne

**BLISS OF
TOGETHERNESS**

Transformed Life of Selvarasa
Pathmanathan alias KP

**SRI LANKA AND TURKEY
WARM FRIENDSHIP**

ISSN 2773-6962



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PRESIDENTIAL
INITIATIVES

Strong Institutions for Sustainable Development

Sri Lanka's advancement towards sustainable development has been noteworthy, especially since the end of the three-decade long conflict. In order for the development to reach all strata of the society, government institutions need to take all inclusive and pragmatic approaches with sufficient freedom to exercise their due authorities.

The strength of government institutions is showcased in their ability to serve all segments of the society representing any area without any discrimination. It is this capability that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa seeks to reinforce, when facilitating the interaction between government institutions and the rural public, during the programme 'Gama Samaga Pilisandara (Dialogue with the Village)'.



Yombuwel Tenna

“Laws are enacted to facilitate serving the public – not to intimidate them.”



About Yombuwel Tenna

Yombuwel Tenna is situated in the Walapane Divisional Secretariat, in the district of Nuwara Eliya. This village is a landmark in the history of the Kandyan era as the location where Adigar Monarawila Keppetipola left the British troops to re-join the Sinhalese Army during the Kandyan rebellion. Following this, Yombuwel Tenna had been a major support ground for the Sinhalese forces during the Uva-Wellassa rebellion.

Today, Yombuwel Tenna is a relatively isolated village with no major road access, housing only 139 families. Farming, which is their primary livelihood

needs much assistance. Schools and hospitals in and around the village need infrastructure facilities. Youth need the vocational training assistance to move towards other types of employment than farming.

Yombuwel Tenna needs to be uplifted to its former glory.

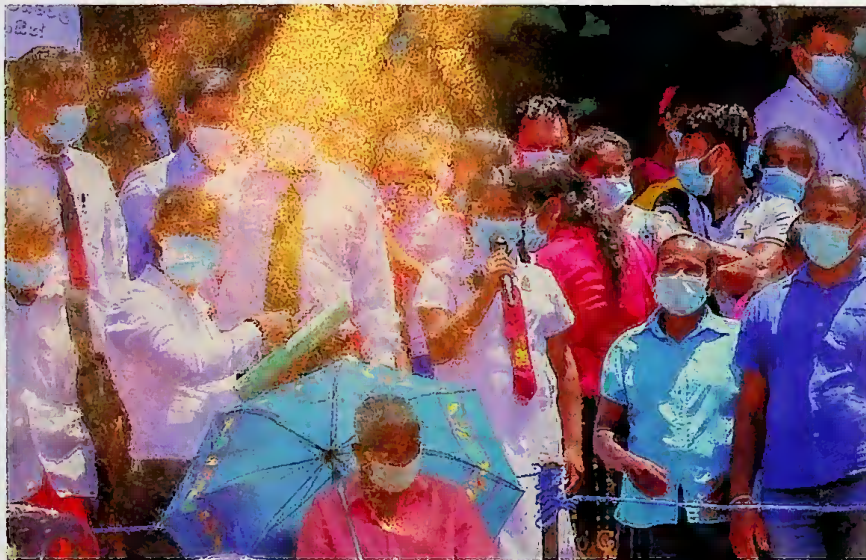
Pulse of the People

Opening the discussion His Excellency stated that the aim of these dialogues with the villages is to eventually achieve the complete eradication of poverty. This is a goal that can certainly be achieved, if we plan and work smart.

The need for the public service to take pragmatic approaches to solve problems in the grassroots level was emphasized by His Excellency. The strength of public institutions depends on their ability to strike a balance between requirements of the existing rules and regulations, and demands of the public. Cultural nuances that have withstood the test of time for thousands of years cannot be overlooked as well, when delivering public services. This is where the difference between deforestation and cleaning the premises of a forest monastery needs to be distinctly understood when taking punitive action.

Chief incumbent of the village temple raised the concern of children





getting addicted to smoking and the use of liquor, especially due to the cold weather of the area. The Thero requested that a sports ground be provided to the area so that the youth have a means of recreation, which will take them off the unhealthy habits. In response, Governor of the Central Province pledged that this will be provided.

A concern was also raised about the Pinus, Cyperus and Eucalyptus plantations in the area which drain all

the ground water, creating a scarcity of drinking as well as irrigation water. Responding to this, the Conservator General of Forest stated that Pinus plantations are being converted to those with indigenous plants, while exploring the possibility of retaining Eucalyptus plantations for commercial purposes. The President noted the need for protecting the aquifers in the hill country and instructed that such commercial plantations at critical locations of high

elevation be replaced by indigenous plant varieties as soon as possible.

Responding to the grievances of the locals that ranged from the lack of facilities in hospitals to insufficient teaching staff in schools, relevant authorities promised that Tibbatugoda, which is in close proximity to Yombuwel Tenna will get a hospital with full facilities, which can provide medical services to Yombuwel Tenna as well. A protective wall will be constructed around the Galagamuwatta Secondary School. It will be provided with drinking water and teaching staff as well. The road access to Yombuwel Tenna will be improved by the rehabilitation of a number of roads and the construction of 15 bridges.

The President also informed that the number of existing police stations will be revisited to be increased in number, making the area of each police station, smaller than at present'. This will enhance their service as well as the strength.

During the extensive discussion centering the need to provide these villagers with access to modern facilities, it was decided to develop the nearby townships of Walapane and Pudalu Oya in their full scope'.

Derangala, Pitabeddara

"Achieving self-sufficiency is critical for the country's long term sustenance."



About Derangala

Derangala has a total population of 1980 with a mix of both Sinhalese and Tamils. It is situated in the Pitabeddara Divisional Secretariat in the Matara District. Derangala is a scenic area with beautiful landscapes,

frequently patched by tea plantations. It houses a considerable number of Sinhalese families who had resided in Jaffna until the 1980s, and had left the area as a result of the conflict. Agriculture is the main livelihood here while tea and cinnamon cultivations are equally important. Over a 175 acres of paddy lands are not cultivated at present due to the lack of irrigation water. The

villagers accuse the bureaucracy for not facilitating agriculture and complain that they have to travel long distances to obtain services of the Divisional Secretariat, Pradesheeya Sabha, the nearest police station and the hospital.

Derangala needs to be connected with the major service providing institutions at all levels.



Pulse of the people

Opening the discussion, His Excellency observed that government institutions sometimes tend to operate in isolation. Even to resolve a problem that several institutions take a stake in common, operations are carried out without coordination among the key stakeholders'. 'This has caused the public to move from pillar to post, between institutions, to get a specific task done. The President emphasized that this practice needs to change in order to provide a better service delivery to the public. During the discussion, His Excellency revealed that plans are underway to increase the percentage of the contribution of renewable energy to the national grid up to 70% by 2030. This will greatly reduce the fossil fuel usage, and in turn, will significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the country.

Recalling an issue that kept surfacing during all previous programmes, His Excellency stated that no legal or regulatory allowance had been made to promote

deforestation. However, it is only fair that lands that had been traditionally cultivated for generations and have recently been demarcated as forest or wildlife reserves be given back to their rightful owners for farming.

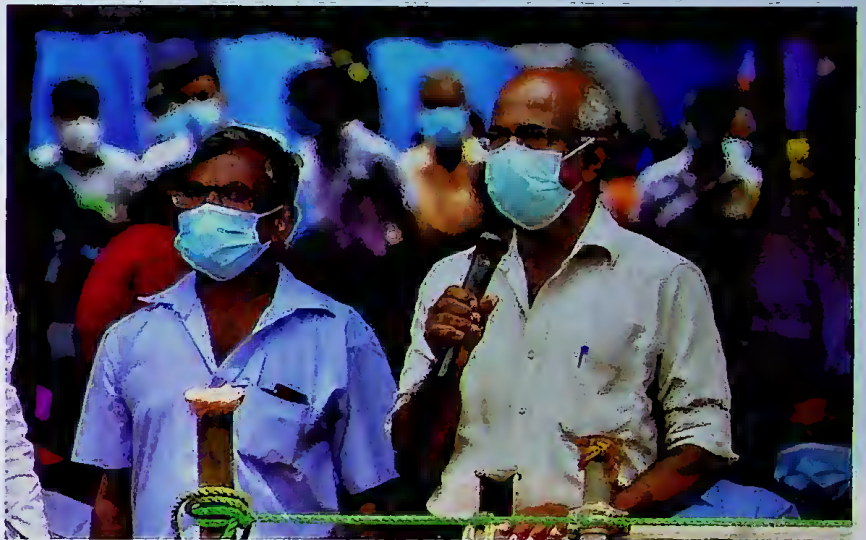
Villagers of Derangala raised the issue of a large extent of paddy lands being acquired by the government several years ago, to construct a prison. Since the acquisition had taken place, neither the prison nor the paddy cultivation had taken place.

In response, His Excellency observed that food security of the country is of foremost importance to ensure national security. The policy of the government is to build a green economy based on agriculture. Achieving self-sufficiency is critical for our long term sustenance. He instructed that paddy lands that had been acquired for the prison premises be released immediately and farmers be allowed to continue with cultivating.

Villagers also had numerous grievances in relation to lands, ranging from delays in surveying to the unavailability of title deeds. The President instructed all related institutions including the Land Commissioner General's Department and the Survey Department to conduct a field survey together to solve all land-related issues in Derangala and the surrounding areas without delay.

A few children of the local school Derangala Vidyalaya as well as a few nearby schools requested that their schools be provided with sufficient facilities and teaching staff. In response, those were promised to give sports grounds, an auditorium, teachers for agricultural science and technology subjects within the next few weeks.

The end of the event was marked by a donation of computers by SLT Mobitel to the Seelarathana Vidyalaya of Derangala and a Television, for the use of the Derangala Junior School.



Bogaswewa

“Public servants are duty-bound to serve anywhere in the country – especially rural areas.”



About Bogaswewa

Bogaswewa is a small village located in the Northern Province, close to the border between the Northern and the North Central provinces. It houses 2,934 families with a good mix of Sinhalese and Tamils.

As the name denotes, Bogaswewa has a number of small tanks that date back over a thousand years. These, however, have not been rehabilitated recently, causing difficulties for agriculture and other related livelihoods of the people. Road access to this village is poor due to the lack of maintenance. Archaeological

remnants are found in abundance in and around Bogaswewa, which need to be properly documented and preserved.

Bogaswewa suffers from a severe scarcity of water and an inadequate administrative support from the government institutions in the area, which are also heavily understaffed.

Pulse of the People

Opening the discussion, The President recalled that a large majority of the country's population still live in rural areas. The government's policy of giving subsidies for agriculture, and

establishing a minimum guaranteed price for paddy aim at improving the harvest of rural farmers, eventually enhancing the standard of life in the rural areas. The government strives to empower the local farmer and the local entrepreneur. All government institutions have to align their activities to achieve this objective. This becomes a special requirement when utilizing the limited resources, such as lands. Public institutions in agriculture are responsible for educating farmers about new technologies to obtain a high yield from small plots of cultivating lands. Assisting them to make the maximum use of the available limited resources is one way of promoting sustainable



development.

During the discussion it was revealed that Public institutions in this area suffer from a severe shortage of staff. The reasons were revealed as the unwillingness of recruits to serve in these remote areas with low facilities. In response, His Excellency observed that it is the duty of all public servants to be able to serve anywhere in the country as required. He instructed the senior officials present to educate their employees of this requirement and get the necessary staff transferred to offices in these remote areas without delay.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the lack of irrigation water in this area. Bogaswewa has a large number of ancient tanks and canals. However, the lack of rehabilitation has caused a scarcity of irrigation water, resulting in a considerable number of families leaving the area. Although 13 tanks have been earmarked for rehabilitation under the "Wari Saubhagya (Prosperity through Irrigation)" programme, many more need reconstruction and rehabilitation. A pragmatic solution needed to be given to the complex land and irrigation issues prevailing in this area, involving several government institutions. The President directed the Secretary to the Ministry of Irrigation to conduct a comprehensive study on the enhancement of capacities of tanks in the area and to submit a report within a fortnight in order to take further action.

The discussion concluded with the distribution of title deeds to a few representatives as a token, from the pool of eligible persons as a token, and the donation of computers, laptops, a television as well as a few other equipment to all schools in and around Bogaswewa.

by Jeevānthie Senanayake

