



December 2017

*Season's Greetings & Best Wishes for the New Year!*

### U.S. MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION RESELECTS SRI LANKA TO CONTINUE GRANT PROGRAMME

The Board of Directors of the United States Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) reselected Sri Lanka for its grant programme at its meeting on December 19. This will enable MCC to continue developing its compact programme with the government of Sri Lanka for which Sri Lanka was selected a year ago, in December 2016.

MCC compact programmes are large, five-year grants for selected countries that meet MCC's eligibility criteria of good governance, economic freedom and investment in their citizens. The selections are based on performance indicators compiled by MCC in an annual scorecard for countries under consideration.

As required by MCC procedure, MCC reselects countries already in compact development as part of its annual selection process. Sri Lanka's reselection bears testament to the country's continued progress on policy performance and reforms, including on democratic rights and control of corruption, and the strength of

the government's partnership with MCC since 2015. MCC's recognition of Sri Lanka's progress provides further impetus to the government's political and economic reforms aimed at achieving sustainable peace and economic prosperity. Since being selected eligible for a compact programme in December 2016, the government of Sri Lanka and MCC have been working together to develop projects with the aim of fighting poverty and promoting economic opportunity for the Sri Lankan people. In July, MCC announced \$7.4 million in funding to support the development of the compact, including identifying and analyzing specific projects for potential investment. This amount is in addition to the total MCC compact funding amount, which is to be determined. Based on an analysis of the constraints to economic growth, Sri Lanka and MCC are currently conducting due diligence on potential projects in the transport and land sectors. [More](#)

### SRI LANKA SHARES ITS PEACEBUILDING EXPERIENCE WITH THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

Foreign Secretary Prasad Kariyawasam, joined by the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Indrajit Coomaraswamy, and Secretary-General of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms Mano Tittawella, shared information



on Sri Lanka's journey of peacebuilding with the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission in New York on 20 November.

The briefing focused on the holistic approach including comprehensive reform required for sustaining peace and the prevention of recurrence of violence, that is essential for realizing the National Unity Government's vision for a reconciled, peaceful, stable, and prosperous nation.

The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, Ambassador Cho Tae-yul, presided over the meeting that was attended by senior officials of the UN, Assistant Secretary

General of the Department of Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary General of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco,

and UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Una McCauley. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council who was invited to present the civil society perspective of developments in Sri Lanka, made his contribution to the briefing through video conferencing.

The briefing was attended by members of the Peacebuilding Commission with representatives of EU, Japan, Norway, Belgium, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Canada, Kenya, and USA making interventions to express support for Sri Lanka and appreciation for sharing its experiences with the Peacebuilding Commission, which would prove useful for other countries to learn from as well. [More](#)

## A SRI LANKAN'S PHOTOGRAPH OF AFRICAN LIONESSES CAPTIVATES THE WORLD



A Sri Lankan won the Grand Prize at the world's preeminent nature photography competition.

Lakshitha Karunarathna's photo of a pride of huddling African lionesses was the Grand Prize winner of the 2017 Nature's Best Windland Smith Rice Awards held in Washington D.C. on Thursday, November 16. Karunarathna accepted the award at a gala event at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. This is the first time in the competition's two-decade-long history a photographer from Sri Lanka has taken home the award.

The Grand Prize winner was picked from 26,000 entries from the world over. The winning image was captured while Karunarathna was on a photography tour in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve. Karunarathna said the picture was taken in the blink of an eye, and when later he checked

the camera's viewfinder he instinctively knew it was a very special photograph.

A past pupil of Ananda College, Colombo and a tea-taster by trade, Karunarathna's passion for photographing nature has already won him many international accolades. He says he picked up photography as a hobby three years ago. The visual essayist has visited many countries, from Sri Lanka's wildlife parks to the Polar Regions and everywhere in between.

Priyanga Wickramasinghe, Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington D.C. who presented the citation and award to Karunarathne noted the photographer's extraordinary achievement in winning the Grand Prize and said how his Sri Lankan roots would have influenced his approach to wildlife conservation through his photography. She also commended him

for bringing honour to Sri Lanka and shining a spotlight on the country's talented young photographers.

A remarkable large print of Lakshitha Karunarathna's winning entry is on display until September 2018 at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C.

Launched in 1996, the Nature's Best Photography Awards is an endowed exhibition program run in partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, one of the most-visited museums in the world.

More of Lakshitha Karunarathna's work can be seen here: [www.lakshithak.com](http://www.lakshithak.com), [www.instagram.com/lakshithak/](http://www.instagram.com/lakshithak/)

Competition page:  
[Nature's Best Photography site](#)

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## SRI LANKA PARTICIPATES IN ANNUAL WINTERNATIONAL EMBASSY SHOWCASE IN WASHINGTON D.C.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington D.C. took part in the Annual Winternational Embassy Showcase held on December 6 at the International Trade Center in Washington D.C.

Now in its sixth year, the Annual Winternational Embassy Showcase has proven to be a vibrant and successful platform for countries represented in the U.S. capital to project and promote their cultural and culinary traditions among the public.

The participating diplomatic missions in this year's showcase included – Afghanistan, African Union (representing 55 countries), Australia, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, European Union (representing 28 countries), Ghana, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malawi, Malta, Moldova, Mo-



rocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and ietnam.

The Sri Lanka Embassy has been participating in the event for the past five years, making use of the “bustling global marketplace” to promote Ceylon Tea and Sri Lanka as a holiday destination; and the display of eye-catching and colourful Sri Lankan handicrafts have proven to be a crowd magnet over the years.

Visitors to the stand were served a popular Sri Lankan snack and a cup of Ceylon Tea. The tea was provided courtesy of Euro Asia Corporation (Pvt.) Ltd and Dilmah Ceylon Tea PLC.

Over 3000 visitors attended this year's event. [More](#)

## UNITED STATES AND SRI LANKA STRENGTHEN TRADE AND TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP



On December 4, U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives Atul Keshap and Secretary of Civil Aviation Mr. G. S. Withanage signed an agreement to amend the U.S.-Sri Lanka Open Skies Agreement of 2002 to facilitate the movement of cargo goods more efficiently and profitably. The amendment strengthens global express delivery cargo networks, enhances bilateral connectivity and competitiveness, and facilitates economic growth and job creation.

“This amendment to our bilateral Open Skies Agreement further

strengthens the robust and longstanding trade relationship between the United States and Sri Lanka,” said Ambassador Keshap. “As Sri Lanka’s largest trading partner, the United States seeks economic growth that provides employment and opportunity for the citizens of both our nations.”

The signing took place during the Tenth International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Air Services Negotiation Event (ICAN 2017) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from December 4 – 8, 2017. [More](#)

## MINISTRY CONSULAR AFFAIRS DIVISION WINS E-SWABHIMANI AWARD



The Consular Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs won an award in the category of “government and citizen engagement”, at the Seventh e-Swabhimani 2017 awards ceremony, held at the Hotel Galadari in Colombo on Thursday, 30th November 2017. The award was in recognition of the Division’s Electronic Document Attestation System (e-DAS), which was developed to integrate greater citizen engagement in consular services and deliver innovative digital solutions to the public.

The online e-DAS

enables the Consular Affairs Division to effectively serve more than 450 persons a day, and reduce processing and waiting time per document to a maximum of one hour, in contrast to the previous manual system, whereby a minimum of four hours was required to process and attest one document. The e-DAS has helped greatly reduce the time taken for document attestation and provide more efficient and effective service delivery to the public seeking these consular services.

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