Embassy In Action

The American Embassy Reaches Out

Ambassador Robert Blake was the chief Guest at the opening ceremony of the New Textured Jersey Lanka Facility in Avissawella held on March 10.

Mr. Blake formally handed over specialized bomb disposal equipment to the Sri Lanka National Police (SLNP) in a ceremony Tuesday, March 18, at the American Embassy. IGP Victor Perera spoke at the event.

Ambassador Blake also spoke at a Ceremony which was held at BMICH on March 10th for launching of the Sri Lankan Youth Parliament Skills Manual for Young Social Change Activists.

“Perspectives on the U.S. Economy” was the topic of the Ambassador Blake’s address to the Sri Lanka Garment Buying Officers Association’s Annual General Meeting held on March 28th at the Waters Edge Complex Colombo.

Thursday, March 27th Mr. Blake joined in the Annual Cannonball run held at the Galle Face Hotel.

In addition, Deputy Chief of Mission to the U.S. Embassy Colombo Mr. James R. Moore participated at the launching ceremony of “Music of Sri Lanka” by Surya Sena held at Surya Sena Center March 28.

To view the full text of the speeches related to above stories visit: [http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/speeches.html](http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/speeches.html)

American Center Celebrates Women’s History Month

The American Center celebrated Women’s History Month on March 28, 2008 with a panel of distinguished Sri Lankan and American women speaking with an audience of 45 students from Girls’ High School Mount Lavinia, St. Paul’s Balika Vidyalaya, Waragoda, Kelaniya, and Good Shepherd Tamil Balika Vodyalaya, Kotahena.

Panelists were successful women from the business, academic, political and diplomatic world, including Professor Kshanika Hiriburegama, Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo;
Nishanta (Nishi) Rajakaruna fell in love with plants at 13 years old when he visited the Sinharaja Rainforest on a school trip with an influential teacher and mentor, L.B. Karunaratne. Sinharaja rainforest has such diverse flora and fauna that it is currently listed as a World Heritage Site. Nishi was overwhelmed by the diversity he observed and realized there was a whole new and mysterious world to discover in plants.

The next 20 years of his life were guided by a desire to learn more. As Nishi says, “I have gone wherever plants have taken me.” In his case that journey led to a groundbreaking University in the United States.

Nishi entered university in Sri Lanka in 1989 hoping to study botany, but civil war and political unrest led him to seek a more stable education outside the country. He visited the United States Information Agency (USIS) office in Kandy where an advisor recognized his love of nature and told him to talk with retired irrigation engineer, D.L.O. Mendis. Little did he know this formal gentleman who asked him for his CV would change his life. After assessing Nishi’s youthful qualifications, Mr. Mendis gave him a list of 15 universities he should apply to. College of the Atlantic (COA), a small liberal arts college in Maine on the northeastern coast of the United States, was at the top of the list.

Nishi applied to all the schools on his list (and was accepted with scholarships to many), but when he did not hear back from COA Mr. Mendis urged him to find the school’s latest contact information from USIS and fax them a letter. Eventually a battered application packet arrived from COA by ocean freight and Nishi desperately faxed in his application. Extraordinarily, he was one of the first foreign students, from his part of the world, ever to apply to COA. His letter of acceptance and offer of a partial scholarship from the school arrived much faster, by fax this time, with a welcoming headline in Sinhala! A COA employee had visited Sri Lanka on an American university exchange known as the ISLE program and had written the welcoming greeting to Nishi.

Eventually, with Mr. Mendis’ tenacious backing, COA granted Nishi a full scholarship, and he set off in 1990 to earn his BA in Human Ecology in America.

Of course, being an islander Nishi felt right at home on another island. With only 250 students, College of the Atlantic is located on Mount Desert Island, Maine, home to only 10,000 people. He was greeted by interviews with journalists from all the local papers upon his arrival and eventually came to know nearly everyone in his area. With small class sizes, personalized attention from his professors and lots of opportunities for research work at other schools and institutions Nishi found himself part of a close and supportive community.

Eventually his studies took him back to the Sinharaja Rainforest to work as a field coordinator for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. He went on to become a research assistant in plant biology at Harvard University’s Harvard Forest and later earned his MS and Ph.D. degrees at the University of British Columbia. Continuing his American education, he then went on to Stanford University as a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (Canada) postdoctoral fellow.

Continued on page 03
In the fall of 2004, Nishi returned to College of the Atlantic - this time as a member of the faculty, taking the place of his own admired undergraduate advisor, Dr. C. W. Greene, who had sadly passed away. Both his parents are dedicated teachers and he had always admired their commitment to teaching others about what they love. He now teaches several botany courses, and conducts research on how extreme soil conditions affect the biodiversity of plant communities. “I am not at all surprised by the fact I decided to pick teaching as a career but by the fact that after going all around the world I ended up at the same school where I first started my journey through North America,” he says. “I loved my time here as an undergraduate and am definitely enjoying my time here as a teacher.”

Nishi’s work grows more valuable every day, to communities in both Sri Lanka and America. Large areas of the world are contaminated with heavy metals and other pollutants. Plants growing on such sites are uniquely adapted to deal with the hostilities associated with contaminated soils. Nishi’s research with undergraduate students at College of the Atlantic is directed at examining how plants adapt to heavy metal rich soils and whether metal-tolerant plants can be used effectively to remediate contaminated sites. "Using technology to clean up metal contaminated sites is costly, even the developed world doesn’t have adequate funding to clean their many metal contaminated sites." says Nishi, "Plants may provide an economically feasible, environmentally friendly, and socially acceptable alternative to cleaning up many of our contaminated sites.”

In a happy twist of fate, one of the first undergraduate thesis’ that Nishi supervised as a faculty member was that of Nishad Jayasundara, another Sri Lankan student at College of the Atlantic, now doing his PhD at Stanford in California. “The same freedom and independence I admired as a student is what I appreciate now as a teacher,” states Nishi, “COA opened the world to me and I want to give the kinds of opportunities I had here as a student to my students and hope they too will be able to build on that foundation and go far with their dreams.”

College of the Atlantic offers a unique environmental education experience and international student scholarships.

College of the Atlantic was founded in 1969 to offer a new educational philosophy to prepare students to address the world's social and environmental challenges. Its one major, Human Ecology, studies the relationship between human beings and their environment through a distinctive interdisciplinary approach.

Last year College of the Atlantic (COA) became the first college or university in the United States to achieve carbon neutrality. COA students, staff and faculty have calculated the college's greenhouse gas emissions and researched ways to reduce, avoid and offset these emissions. As of Dec. 19, 2007, COA has offset the entirety of its carbon output over the past 15 months-2,488 tons-by investing in a greenhouse gas reduction project operated by The Climate Trust of Oregon. The college also reduced its projected annual greenhouse gas emissions by obtaining all of its electricity through a low-impact hydroelectric generator in Maine.

For more information about applying to College of the Atlantic, visit: http://www.coa.edu/html/admissions.htm

Since 2000, College of the Atlantic has been one of a special group of American universities to benefit from The Davis United World College Scholars program, giving valuable scholarships to students from around the world. The program's aims are twofold. It provides access to higher education for outstanding students who have experience, through enrollment in a United World College, in building communities of international understanding. Additionally, it enriches the diversity and promotes global awareness at American colleges and universities.

To learn more about how you can apply for this scholarship program, visit: http://www.davisuwcscholars.org/
“ISSUKI”
the new performance of nATANDA Dance Theatre of Sri Lanka

at Lionel Wendt theatre on 4th and 5th of April 2008 at 7:30pm.

For further information or for tickets, please contact Kapila Palihawadana (director) at 0722 911 703, the American Center at 0112498194, or the German Cultural Institute at 0114712636 (ext10).

Tickets prices range from Rs. 300, 600, 1000 to 1500 and are available at both the American Center and the German Cultural Institute.

Come and enjoy a great evening of dance while encouraging young artists of Sri Lanka!

American Hip Hop and Soul Music Stars !!

And the American Center Presents

MAYA AZUCENA BAND

April 28 6:00 pm Town Hall Galle
April 30 6:30 pm New Town Hall Colombo 07

Free passes from:
American Center, 44, Galle Road, Colombo 03
Tel: 2498129
(on show day tickets will be available at the venue entrance for both performances)
Hayleys & USAID in partnership to revitalise farming in East and Uva

March 27, 2008: Sri Lanka’s Hayleys Group and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will partner in a ground-breaking pilot project to revive and advance the potential for linking farmers in two poorer districts to commercial agriculture, the two organizations announced this week.

The six-month pilot project commencing April 1st will benefit 120 farmer families in the districts of Ampara and Moneragala through the introduction of the latest knowledge, techniques, and inputs for the cultivation of three cash crops with high revenue potential. Gherkins, pineapples and jalapeno peppers will be grown on 50 acres of land that have either lain fallow or been previously used for subsistence farming.

The objective of the project is to motivate farmers in these areas, some of which have been affected by conflict, to embrace modern agricultural practices and to empower them to substantially improve their incomes from agriculture by switching to cash crops that are in demand.

A formal agreement between USAID and Sunfrost for the implementation of the project was ratified on March 26 at the office of the latter in the Biyagama Free Trade Zone.

More details about the story appearing above available at following websites:
http://srilanka.usaid.gov

Visit USAID Sri Lanka’s new Website

http://srilanka.usaid.gov

Women’s History Month ........ from page 1

Deshabandhu Jezima Ismail, Commissioner to the Presidential Commission of Inquiry to Inquire and Investigate into the Serious Violation of Human Rights; Ms. Nirmali Samaratunga, Co-Chairman of the Mackwoods Group; Rebecca Cohn, Director of the United States Agency for International Development Sri Lanka; and Maria Brewer, Management Officer of the United States Embassy.

The panelists spoke with the assembled audience about their life experiences, their present occupations and how they achieved their goals in personal and professional life. They also spoke about the obstacles women face today, people who inspired them and they gave their advice and words of wisdom to young women facing the future.

Refurbishing American Center Library

The American Center Library will be closed from April 7 to 15, 2008 for refurbishing. We will be opening on the 15th of April. The books due to be returned during this period will not be fined and will be extended for two weeks.

"Wishing you all a Happy New Year"
**Fulbright News and Events**

### Free Group Advising for the Month of April

**April 7th 2:45 pm (Colombo)**
**Orientation for Undergraduate Studies** *(Prospective students for Bachelor’s Degrees)*
Covers background information, entrance requirements, how to select universities and application process

**April 9th 2:30 pm (American Corner Kandy)**
**Orientation for Undergraduate Studies and individual appointments** *(Prospective students for Bachelor’s Degree)*
Covers background information, entrance requirements, how to select universities and application process

**April 10th 10:00 am (American Corner Kandy)**
**Orientation for Graduate Studies and individual appointments** *(Prospective students for Post-graduate Degrees)*
Covers background information, entrance requirements, how to select universities and application process

**April 21st 3:00 pm (Colombo)**
**Orientation for Graduate Studies** *(Prospective students for Post-graduate Degrees)*
Covers background information, entrance requirements, how to select universities opportunities for financial aid, and application process

**Admission: Free. Please note that prior registration is necessary to attend the above.**

Please contact by visit, phone, fax or e-mail:

United States - Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission
7, Flower Terrace,
Colombo 7

Phone: 001-112-564176
Fax: 001-112-564153
E-mail: advising@isplanka.lk

---

### Student Advising for Galle Students

A regular Student Advising facility will be launched at the Mahinda College Old Boys’ Union Building in Galle, on Friday April 4th at 11.00 a.m. by the U.S. Ambassador and Honorary Chairman, Mr. Robert Blake.

The Counselor for Press and Cultural affairs, US Embassy, Colombo and Chairman, US-SLFC, Mr. Terry White and the Executive Director, US-SLFC, Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka, Governor, Southern Province, Academics from University of Ruhuna, Principals and teachers of schools in and around Galle and 700 A/L students will participate at this event.

---

### Did you go to University in America?

Then join the American Alumni Association of Sri Lanka.

AAA is an active group of US University Grads and we’re looking for new members!

For information about membership please contact Mukesh Shanker at mukesh@sltnet.lk

---

### Education USA Weekly Update

“Education USA Weekly Update” is a weekly newsletter publishing by EducationUSA is now available online at the U.S. Embassy Colombo website:

http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/educationusa_weekly_update.html
Earth Day and the Rise of Environmental Consciousness

By Timothy Brown, USINFO Staff Writer

Earth Day, April 22, is the annual U.S. celebration of the environment and a time for Americans to assess the work still needed to protect the natural gifts of our planet. Earth Day has no central organizing force behind it, though several nongovernmental organizations work to keep track of the thousands of local events in schools and parks that mark the day. It affirms that environmental awareness is part of the country's consciousness and that the idea of protecting the environment -- once the province of a few conservationists -- has moved from the extreme to the mainstream of American thought.

This was not always the case. In the 19th century, Americans, blessed with a vast land rich in natural resources, lived with the notion that fresh fields were always just over the horizon. When one exhausted the soil or forests or coal of a given place, it was possible to move on to another. As industry boomed in the early 20th century people accepted without question skies blackened from smokestack emissions and rivers fouled with industrial waste. As early as the mid-1930s -- and again in the 1950s -- Ohio's Cuyahoga River, running through America's industrial heartland, was set ablaze by burning chemical waste from factories built upon its banks. There was no public outcry. Few people even noticed.

During the 1960s public attitudes began to change. In 1962 a marine biologist named Rachel Carson published Silent Spring. The title referred to a future without birds and described in plain language devastating long-term effects of highly toxic pesticides and other chemical agents then commonly used in American agriculture, industry and daily life. The book was a surprise best-seller.

In 1968 Apollo astronauts, returning from their pioneering orbital flight around the moon, photographed the planet Earth as a whole for the first time. This image of the Earth -- small, fragile, beautiful, and unique -- quickly was imprinted on the psyches of millions. In 1969 industrial runoff in the Cuyahoga River again caught fire. This time the public reaction was immediate and intense. Cleveland, where the fire occurred, became a national laughing-stock, and the satirical song "Burn On, Big River, Burn On" was heard on radios across the country. In that same year the U.S. Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), establishing a "national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment."

Concurrent with this slow building of environmental awareness was the increasingly vocal opposition to U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam. Public demonstrations against the war -- particularly on college campuses -- gave impetus to the idea that organized challenges to the "status quo" could in fact change public policy and behavior.

Origin of Earth Day

Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin and a longtime conservationist, was one who understood that the methods developed for use in the anti-war protest could succeed in other areas as well. "At the time," Nelson later wrote, "there was a great deal of turmoil on the college campuses over the Vietnam War. Protests, called anti-war teach-ins, were being widely held on campuses across the nation ... It suddenly occurred to me, why not have a nationwide teach-in on the environment? That was the origin of Earth Day."

Nelson returned to Washington and began promoting Earth Day to state governors, mayors of big cities, editors of college newspapers and, importantly, to Scholastic Magazine, which is circulated in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. In September 1969, Nelson formally announced that there would be a "national environmental teach-in" sometime in spring 1970. "The wire services carried the story nationwide," recalled Nelson. "The response was dramatic .... Telegrams, letters, and telephone inquiries poured in from all over the nation. Using my Senate staff, I ran Earth Day activities out of my office. By December, the movement had expanded so rapidly that it became necessary to open an office in Washington to serve as a national clearinghouse for Earth Day inquiries and activities ....

Continued on page 8
Earth Day . . . . .

"Earth Day achieved what I had hoped for. The objective was to get a nationwide demonstration of concern for the environment so large that it would shake the political arena. It was a gamble, but it worked. An estimated 20 million people participated in peaceful demonstrations all across the country. Ten thousand grade schools and high schools, two thousand colleges, and one thousand communities were involved .... That was the remarkable thing that became Earth Day."

Groundbreaking federal legislation followed the success of the first Earth Day. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, followed by the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Among the many far-reaching provisions of these bills was the requirement that automobiles use unleaded gasoline, achieve a minimum number of miles-per-gallon of gasoline and be equipped with catalytic converters to reduce the amount of toxic fumes released by automobile exhaust.

Then, in the wake of this legislative success, Earth Day seemed to disappear. Though annual celebrations continued, they failed to match the size and enthusiasm of the first year. Earth Day seemed to have become a relic of the protest days of the early 1970s.

Yet the spirit of Earth Day continued. Environmental organizations grew in size and power. Groups such as Greenpeace, formed in Canada in 1971, adopted principles of nonviolent civil disobedience to raise public consciousness about dwindling whale populations and the risks of nuclear power. The Nature Conservancy, formed in 1951, rededicated itself in the early 1970s to the "preservation of natural diversity" and began to buy undeveloped land for use as nature preserves. Venerable institutions such as the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society vigorously brought suits against logging companies to slow the destruction of old-growth forests. Funded by public contributions and staffed with lawyers and educators as well as scientists and naturalists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) became aggressive watchdogs for the environment.

At home, Americans, often prompted by their children, began to separate their household trash for recycling. By the late 1980s recycling programs were established in many communities. By the mid-1990s these municipal recycling programs were paying for themselves, the amount of trash dumped into landfills was in noticeable decline, and more than 20 percent of America's municipal trash was being converted into useful products. Corporations, ever conscious of the desires of the consumer -- and the bottom line of profits -- began to promote themselves as being environmentally friendly. Many firms adopted sensible business practices that increased efficiency and reduced the amounts of industrial waste.

Resurgence in 1990s

Earth Day came back in a big way in 1990. Led by Dennis Hayes, a primary organizer of the first Earth Day, Earth Day 1990 was international in scope. More than 200 million people around the world -- 10 times the number in 1970 -- participated in events that recognized that the environment had finally become a universal public concern. The global momentum continued in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where an unprecedented number of governments and NGOs agreed on a far-ranging program to promote sustainable development.

The 25th anniversary of the first Earth Day in 1995 was a time to assess environmental progress. In Western countries the news seemed good -- air and water were cleaner, forests were expanding and many other environmental indicators were up as well. The sometimes volatile combination of legislation, lawsuits brought by NGOs, public education and more efficient business practices had made a noticeable and positive effect on the condition of the environment.

But there were conflicting views on just how good this news was. Environmental reporter Gregg Easterbrook wrote in The New Yorker magazine that environmental laws "along with a vast array of private efforts spurred by environmental consciousness ... have been a stunning success .... Environmental regulations, far from being burdensome and expensive, have proved to be strikingly effective, have cost less than anticipated, and have made the economies of the countries that have put them into effect stronger, not weaker."

Environment magazine, a leading NGO journal, offered a gloomier assessment: "Earth Day ... has neither spawned a permanently active citizenry nor transformed the general malaise that undermines faith in democratic accountability. Although environmentalism has made great strides since 1970, institutionally as well as in public consciousness, environmental security... today remains even more elusive than 25 years ago."

Courtesy USINFO
American Information Resource Center (AIRC)

ARTICLE ALERT : April, 2008
A bimonthly compilation of abstracts of current and significant articles from leading American periodicals available at the American Center.

Please contact the American Center Library if you wish to receive this issue with abstracts.
Email: amcentersl@state.gov Tel: 2498133

DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES (DGI)
1. **Big Foot.** Specter, Michael *(New Yorker)* February 25, 2008, pp. 44-53
4. **Rare Breed.** Gugliotta, Guy *(Smithsonian)* vol. 38, no. 12, March 2008, pp. 38-47

ECONOMIC SECURITY (ES)

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY (IS)
11. **Connecting Terrorist Networks.** Magouirk, Justin; Atran, Scott; Sageman, Marc *(Studies in Conflict & Terrorism)* vol. 31, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-16

U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES (SV)
14. **Corporate America in a Post-Ada World.** Cole, Yoji *(DiversityInc)* vol. 6, no. 10, November/December 2007, pp. 70-76
17. **One Nation Under Elvis: An Environmentalism For Us All.** Solnit, Rebecca *(Orion)* March/April 2008
18. **THE GREENING OF MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE.** Litt, Steven *(ARTnews)* vol. 106, no. 9, October 2007, pp. 190-193
Film Screenings at the American Center

Every Tuesday at 6.00pm

April 2008 – Environment

April 1: Soylent Green (1973, 97 minutes)

Richard Fleischer directed this nightmarish science fiction vision of an over-populated world, based on the novel by Harry Harrison. In 2022, New York City is a town bursting at the seams with a 40-million-plus population. Food is in short supply, and most of the population's food source comes from synthetics manufactured in local factories -- the dinner selections being a choice between Soylent Blue, Soylent Yellow, or Soylent Green. When William Simonson (Joseph Cotten), an upper-echelon executive in the Soylent Company, is found murdered, police detective Thorn (Charlton Heston) is sent in to investigate the case. This film won 3 awards and 1 nomination.

April 8: The Day After Tomorrow (2004, 124 minutes)

Directed by Roland Emmerich, this mega-budget, special-effects-laden epic revolves around the onset of an international series of crises brought on by the long-term results of the greenhouse effect. At the eye of the storm is paleoclimatologist (a professor dedicated to the study of weather patterns throughout the ages) Jack Hall (Dennis Quaid), who voluntarily takes on the preservation of the world in the dawn of the next ice age and all the disaster that comes along with it -- violent hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, massive floods, etc. Hall must also contact his son, Sam (Jake Gyllenhaal), who was in the middle of an academic competition in New York City when the chaos begun. The Day After Tomorrow won BAFTA film award, another 3 awards & 8 nominations.

April 22: An Inconvenient Truth (2006, 94 minutes)

Former Vice President Al Gore shares his concerns on the pressing issue of global warming in this documentary. A long-time environmental activist, Gore first became aware of evidence on global warming in the 1970s, and since leaving public office he has become a passionate advocate for large- and small-scale changes in our laws and lifestyles that could help alleviate this crisis. An Inconvenient Truth records a multi-media presentation hosted by Gore in which he discusses the scientific facts behind global warming, explains how it has already begun to affect our environment, talks about the disastrous consequences if the world's governents and citizens do not act, and shares what each individual can do to help protect the Earth for this and future generations. This film won 2 Oscars, another 21 awards and 5 nominations.

April 29: The Simpsons Movie (2007, 87 minutes)

Springing from Fox's hit series, the movie expands the adventures of the Springfield residents into a feature-length film. Here Homer's selfish antics (and a hankering for free donuts) are responsible for a horrific ecological disaster that could spell the end for Springfield. So it's up to the paunchy patriarch to save his family and the town from the mess that he has created. Just as in the Emmy-winning show, The Simpsons Movie skillfully combines smart satire with inspired silliness. Dan Castellaneta, Harry Shearer, Hank Azaria, and other regulars of the series provide laughs with their vocal talents, while Albert Brooks is hilarious as the film's villain. Though The Simpsons Movie is best seen after a lifetime of watching reruns of the show and repeating its endlessly quotable lines, viewers don't have to be die-hard fans to get the jokes. Screenwriters Matt Groening, James L. Brooks, and Co. are at the top of their game here, channeling the show at its best. This film was nominated for a Golden Globe, another 2 awards and 15 nominations.