



An Inspirational Leadership Journey at Sri Lanka's Largest Bank

The journey of Y. A. Jayathilaka — shaped by education, perseverance, and a belief in purposeful transformation.



Y. A. Jayathilaka, Chief Executive Officer/General Manager, Bank of Ceylon.

There are journeys that are measured by positions held and milestones achieved. And then there are journeys that carry a deeper meaning, journeys that demonstrate what education, opportunity, and perseverance can make possible.

The journey of Y. A. Jayathilaka, Chief Executive Officer/General Manager, Bank of Ceylon, belongs to the latter.

From a modest classroom in Embilipitiya to the leadership of Sri Lanka's largest bank, his story is not simply one of professional advancement. It is a reflection of the possibilities created by Sri Lanka's free education system, the value of determined effort, and the importance of remembering the communities and people who shape us along the way.

His recent return to the two schools that played a defining role in his early life,

Moraketiya Maha Vidyalaya, where he completed his formative schooling, and Embilipitiya Central College, where he pursued his Advanced Level studies, brought that journey into particularly sharp focus.

The Upahara ceremonies held in his honor were more than occasions of recognition. They were moments of reconnection with former teachers, classmates, friends, and communities, and with the beginnings of a journey that eventually led him to the helm of one of the country's most important institutions.

Returning to those classrooms as the CEO of the Bank of Ceylon, however, was not simply a return as a senior corporate leader. It was a return as a former student, one who had once shared the same aspirations, uncertainties, and hopes as countless young Sri Lankans.

One of the most poignant moments was his tribute to Piyadasa Kapuge, his former Head of the Commerce Section. In presenting an Upahara plaque to his former teacher, Jayathilaka acknowledged the guidance and encouragement that had helped him recognize the possibilities that education could offer.

That moment captured something fundamental about his journey: success is rarely achieved alone.

Education is the foundation

He began his education at Moraketiya Maha Vidyalaya before continuing at Embilipitiya Central College. His academic performance, including achieving the second-highest in the district, opened the way to university education at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

He subsequently obtained a Bachelor of Science (Special) in Business Administration from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a Master of Business (Finance) from the University of Kelaniya. His professional education was further strengthened through a Diploma in Banking and Finance, Associate Membership of the Institute of Bankers of Sri Lanka, and executive and professional programs at the Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, and the Advanced Management Program at INSEAD, France.

For him, education was never merely a pathway to a qualification. It was an opportunity to broaden horizons.

That perspective has remained visible throughout his career, particularly in his emphasis on developing people, sharing knowledge, and ensuring that technology and innovation create opportunities rather than barriers.



A memorable return to Moraketiya Maha Vidyalaya.

A career built from the ground up

Before entering banking, Jayathilaka gained corporate experience at John Keells Holdings and Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation. In 1997, he joined the Bank of Ceylon as a Management Trainee.

His early banking experience included service at a rural branch in Bibile, providing first-hand exposure to the realities of grassroots banking and the financial needs of communities outside the major commercial centers.

His career subsequently expanded across a remarkably broad range of banking functions.

He gained experience in branch banking, Treasury, and Treasury Back Office operations, international banking, and exposure to BOC UK. Along the way, his responsibilities expanded to include project management, credit and recovery, product development, process automation, and digital banking.

This breadth of experience became one of the defining characteristics of his leadership.

Rather than developing within a single specialist discipline, he accumulated an understanding of banking from multiple perspectives: the customer at the branch, the treasury dealing room, the credit function, the technology platform, and the international banking environment.

His progression through the Bank's leadership structure was equally gradual. He entered Executive Management in 2015 through key Assistant General Manager responsibilities and moved into Corporate Management in February 2020, taking on a broader strategic role in the institution. In August 2025, he assumed duties as Acting General Manager/Chief Executive Officer of the Bank of Ceylon. His appointment was formally confirmed on February 27, 2026 as the Bank's 24th General Manager/Chief Executive Officer.



Y. A. Jayathilaka, CEO/GM, BOC, receives a warm welcome from Moraketiya Maha Vidyalaya.

Innovation with a purpose

Modern banking is increasingly defined by technology. But technology alone does

not constitute transformation.

Throughout his career, Jayathilaka has maintained a practical view of innovation: technology must ultimately make banking simpler, more accessible, and more useful to people.

His experience in major technology and transformation initiatives has included core banking systems, trade finance platforms, workflow automation, and digital banking solutions. His Project Management experience at BOC UK Limited also provided exposure to large-scale system implementations and international banking practices.

At the Bank of Ceylon, this philosophy was reflected in initiatives such as BOC Digi Branches, Branch on Wheels, Smart Passbooks, and Cardless Withdrawals efforts aimed at taking banking beyond conventional boundaries and making services more convenient for customers.

His focus on innovation also extended to the Bank's employees.

Initiatives such as BOC Meta Banking, BOC e-Learning, and BOC Bankpedia were designed to improve access to information and knowledge within the institution. TV BOC (Sri Lanka's first dedicated television channel managed by banking staff) provided another platform for communication, learning, and staff engagement.

Perhaps more importantly, his approach has consistently linked technology with inclusion.

BOC Connect, the Agent Banking Service launched in 2021, sought to take banking services closer to communities that traditionally had limited access to conventional banking facilities. Its expansion through the postal network represented another step towards bringing financial services closer to the people. Furthermore, the expansion of agent banking services in partnership with the Sri Lanka Post Department was another important step towards bringing financial services closer to the people. Today, BOC Connect has expanded across all 25 districts, covering 331 Divisional Secretariat Divisions. Through such innovative initiatives, he has been able to respond to the real needs of the people and make banking services more accessible, convenient, and inclusive.

These initiatives reflect a broader philosophy: innovation is most valuable when it

addresses a real need.

Leadership beyond the balance sheet

Jayathilaka's leadership philosophy has also been shaped by the belief that a bank's responsibilities extend beyond financial performance.

His interest in developing communities was equally evident through initiatives such as "Ran Kekulu Chaarika", which provided children from rural areas with opportunities to visit Colombo and experience educational and cultural landmarks, including the BOC Currency Museum fully sponsored by the Bank.

The creation of Sri Lanka's first dedicated agricultural banking arm was another expression of this approach. By developing financial solutions specifically for farmers and agri-businesses, the initiative sought to connect banking with one of the fundamental sectors of the national economy.

For a state-owned institution with a nationwide presence, such initiatives carry significance beyond commercial returns. They speak to the role of banking in enabling opportunity, supporting enterprise, and contributing to inclusive economic development.

Leading BOC into a digital future

Today, as CEO of the Bank of Ceylon, Jayathilaka leads the institution at a time when the banking industry is undergoing perhaps its most profound transformation in generations.

Customers increasingly expect banking to be instantaneous, intuitive, and available wherever they are.

Against this backdrop, the launch of BOC Flex- the Bank's Internet and Mobile Banking solution marked an important milestone in BOC's digital journey. Launched on March 21, 2025, Flex has rapidly expanded its customer base and transaction volumes. According to the figures cited in the Bank's profile, the platform has reached approximately 2.5 million registered users, facilitating around 300 billion rupees in monthly transactions and approximately 400,000 transactions a day.

Yet the significance of Flex is not simply measured by transaction volumes.

For Jayathilaka, digital transformation represents a fundamental change in how a bank relates to its customers. The objective is not to digitize existing processes for their own sake, but to understand how people live and manage their finances and then redesign banking around those realities.

That philosophy is increasingly shaping BOC's future direction, with the Bank seeking to combine its traditional strength of trust and accessibility with technology, innovation and a more seamless digital customer experience.



Y. A. Jayathilaka presents an Upahara plaque to his former teacher, Piyadasa Kapuge.

Beyond the boardroom

Jayathilaka's contribution to the financial sector extends beyond his executive responsibilities at BOC.

Over the years, he has served on the boards of institutions connected with banking, finance, technology, and the wider economy, including BOC Property Development and Management, Ceybank Holiday Homes, BOC IT Solutions, LankaPay, BOC London Board, and the Credit Information Bureau of Sri Lanka.

His association with BOC UK Limited has provided additional international exposure, while his involvement with LankaPay and CRIB has connected his experience with two important components of Sri Lanka's financial infrastructure digital payments and credit information.

He has also contributed to the development of the banking profession through his role on the Governing Board of the Institute of Bankers of Sri Lanka, supporting professional development and the strengthening of banking capabilities.

These responsibilities illustrate the breadth of his professional journey, spanning rural branch banking to international finance, customer service to technology, and operational management to institutional governance.

Looking back on Jayathilaka's journey, perhaps the most enduring lesson is that the greatest measure of success is not simply how far one travels, but how much one can contribute along the way.