

Hela Viru Rasa Udanaya: A Taste Of Sri Lanka



Hela Viru Rasa Udanaya or the Sri Lanka Army Food Festival is a novel approach taken by the Sri Lanka Army to bring out the talents of war heroes while strengthening the bond between the forces and the general public. The concept was the brainchild of Lieutenant General R M D Ratnayake, Commander of the Sri Lanka Army. The core idea behind this concept is to popularise food and recipes that are unique to each province in the country while showcasing them on a common platform as food that has been a part of Sri Lankan gastronomy for generations.

The food festival was organised as part of the vision of Gotobaya Rajapaksa, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development in order to utilise the diverse talents of the soldiers and encourage them to interact with the community. The ceremonial opening of the festival was held under the patronage of Lieutenant General R M D Ratnayake in the presence of Vice Admiral Jayanath Colambage, Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy. In line with the food festival, a recipe book, which contains Sri Lankan recipes unique to each province of the country was also

launched.

“The idea was put forward by the Commander, since the Secretary of Defence had a vision to showcase the hidden talents of the soldiers. That is why these reality shows are coming to place and today soldiers are involved in urban development work as well. Thus, when this idea was brought out, I thought to work out a concept as to what and how we should accomplish it,” explained Major General U A B Medawela, Commander, Security Force – Central, commenting on how the concept came to being.

He added that with the aim of studying the food cultures of each province in the country, the army worked out a plan of action where the provinces were divided among the regiments, who were asked to conduct studies that looked into the traditional dishes in the respective areas. The regiments were selected according to their deployment around Sri Lanka and each province had around two regiments that got involved in conducting a month-long research on the food cultures of the province they were located at. This research was carried out according to the guidelines laid out by the organising committee of the Hela Viru Rasa Udanaya.

“Each Group Went To The Villages And Did A Thorough Study On How To Prepare Each Dish. Of Course This Was Welcomed By The Majority Of The Villages And The Soldiers Had The Opportunity Of Interacting With The Villagers To Get To Know The Recipes And The Method Of Preparation”
At the conclusion of the research, a comprehensive analysis on the findings was carried out to select the dishes that were most unique to each area and to ensure that each stall at the festival contained a diverse assortment of dishes different to each other. As such, the layout was planned in a manner that the main dishes were confined to one stall.

“We had about one month during which time each group went to the villages and did a thorough study on how to prepare each dish. Of course this was welcomed by the majority of the villages and the soldiers had the opportunity of interacting with the villagers to get to know the recipes and the method of preparation of the dishes,” said Major General Medawela. Each team was also given the task of designing a layout for their respective stall and costumes for the chef and supporting staff.

Once the main organising activities were completed, the construction of the exhibition (festival) premises were carried out within a span of seven days, followed by the decorations which took around a week and a half to conclude.

The festival that was unveiled after such dedicated preparation was a great success. The event saw the participation of over 10,000 visitors on the first day itself while a total of around 93,000 graced the festival premises during its total span. The 48 calypso bands representing the regiments livened up the atmosphere with their cheerful calypso music. “The festival held a carnival atmosphere. Regardless of the age, everyone enjoyed themselves. We had games for children as well,” added Major General Medawela.

“Many school children visited the exhibition. And response on the part of the parents was immense since they considered it to be more of an educational experience for their children. Some of the children had not seen some of the traditional dishes that were displayed. There were over 600 dishes there.”

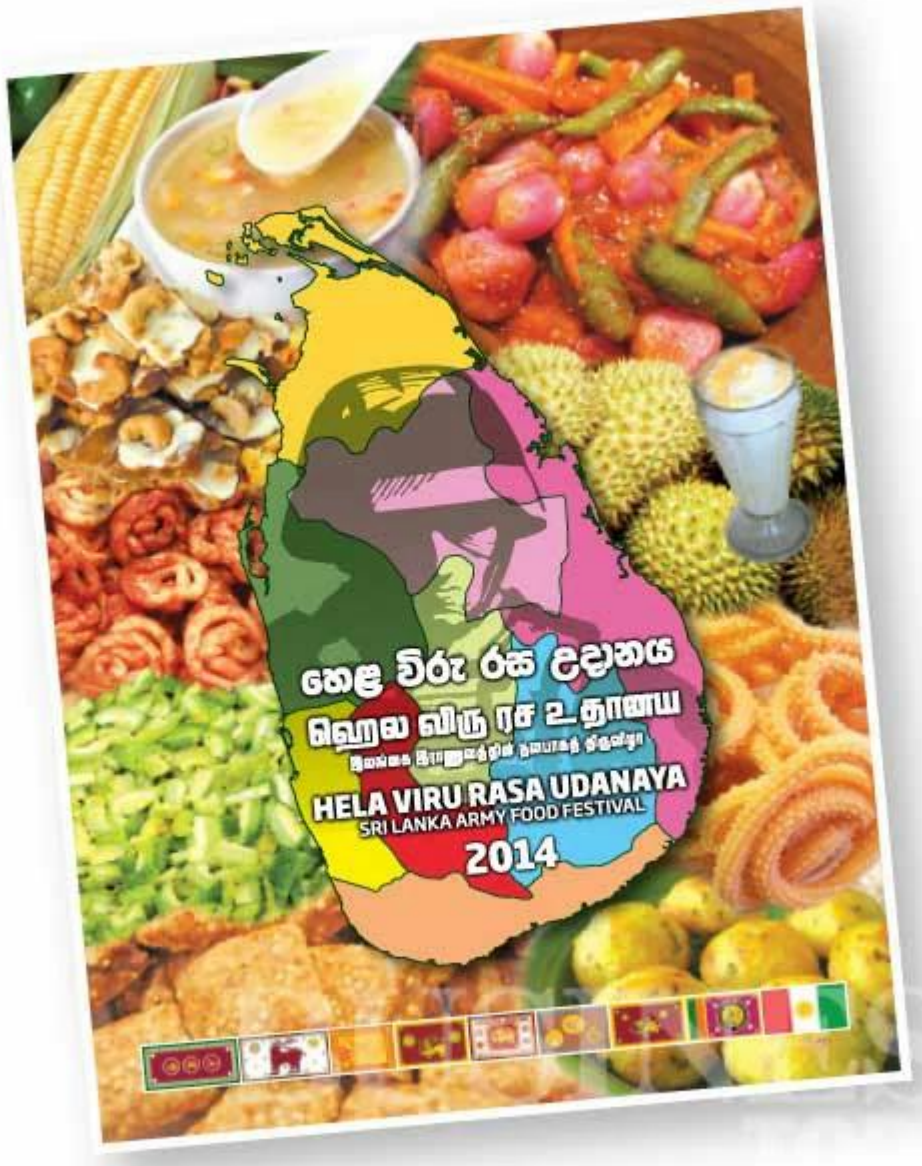
Hela Viru Rasa Udanaya will be organised as an annual event in the army calendar given the overwhelming response received by its inaugural edition.


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HELA VIRU RASA UDANAYA
SRI LANKA ARMY FOOD FESTIVAL
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