

Lakshman Hulugalle Trust, Commitment And Responsibility



Lakshman Hulugalle is the Director General of the Media Centre for National Security (MCNS), Director General of the NGO Secretariat and Deputy Chairman of the National Livestock Development Board (NLDB). His portfolios are diverse and varied but his commitment and dedication are constant. Lakshman Hulugalle led the MCNS since its inception and was pivotal during the height of the conflict. His responsibility entailed providing accurate information and disproving false propaganda of those who were aiming to discredit the Nation. As the Director General of the NGO Secretariat he stresses the need for the NGO sector to work with the Government in line with the master plans for development. Though livestock development is a completely new sector for him, Lakshman Hulugalle takes each challenge as a new experience that strengthens him as a person. He recognises that trust, commitment and responsibility in everything that one does will always result in success.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe
Photography by Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara

The Media Centre for National Security is the brainchild of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Can you tell us the aim and primary responsibilities of this organisation?

The Media Centre for National Security was established on May 1, 2006. During the time the President was the Leader of the Opposition and as Prime Minister he had noticed that the LTTE propaganda machinery had defeated us. There were ups and downs during the 30-year conflict, but the media and the publicity aspect of the Sri Lankan Government failed in their duty. The reason for this was that there was no responsible organisation that was in-charge of media related matters.

Therefore when President Mahinda Rajapaksa formed the new government he established a separate media centre for defence related matters under the Ministry of Defence. This organisation was established directly under the President and the Secretary of Defence. A special cabinet approval, endorsed the establishment of the

Media Centre for National Security (MCNS) and also myself as the Director General who reported to the Secretary of Defence. Therefore my role was totally under the direction of the President and the Secretary of Defence. There were individual media units under the Forces – Army, Navy, Air Force, Police and also under the Joint Operations. We immediately brought all these individual units under one umbrella, to form the Media Centre for National Security. We had to recruit about 25 civilian journalists, editors and photographers while the Officers who were attached to the various media units were brought under this organisation.

There Was No Responsible Organisation To Disseminate Information. My Role And The Role Of The MCNS Was To Provide Correct Information To The Public, Media Organisations And To The Embassies.

Prior to the formation of the MCNS, for 25 years there have been spokesmen for the different Forces, all of whom were brought under the MCNS. In addition to that the President appointed a cabinet minister to be the defence spokesman for the Government. Minister Keheliya Rumbukwella was appointed to this task. On occasions when the Minister was not available I was given that task and when there were incidents each spokesman was to give more details. That is how we started this organisation and at the initial stages there were about 140 staff working under me.

You spoke about everyone coming under one single umbrella. How important was that?

It was very important. All Sri Lankans including Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people and journalists were in the habit of checking LTTE websites to gather information during the war because there was no organisation to give accurate information. Everyone was practically depending on the false LTTE media campaigns. Furthermore there was no organisation that was linked with the embassies; therefore everyone was receiving false information. There was no responsible organisation to disseminate information. My role or the role of the MCNS was to provide correct information to the public, media organisations and to the embassies.

We immediately initiated dialogue with the foreign embassies in Sri Lanka. We

started sending information to foreign agencies and other organisations and also to our embassies abroad so that they could disseminate information through them.

During the first few months that the MCNS was established, there were some doubts about this institution. First of all everyone thought that the MCNS was formed to control the media – the private media and also to censor defence related news. That was the attitude of both the private media institutions and the general public. However we were able to overcome that situation, in about five months. Minister Rambukwella played a major role in changing the attitude of the people; we were able to convince everyone that it was the MCNS that was giving the accurate information.

We would release the information within a very short time frame but during certain instances there would be a delay because we wanted to confirm prior to releasing the news item. For example when there was a bomb blast certain media institutions would announce within seconds without any responsibility. But we took few more minutes so that we could confirm the incident. We first break the news stating that there has been an incident but we give the details later. We give the confirmed news to the public and the journalists and that is how we were able to gain their confidence.

Finally the strong LTTE publicity unit was practically demoralised after 25 years. We were able to break their strength and everyone was depending on the MCNS for news. We were further strengthened by our two websites; defence.lk, which came directly under the Secretary of Defence and nationalsecurity.lk, the website of the MCNS. These two websites became the most popular websites in the world and during the final days of the LTTE and the Humanitarian Operations the two websites secured record hits. Our achievement was that we were able to give accurate information.

To give you one example; the LTTE training camp in Sencholai was attacked by the Air Force. During that time there were questions asked by various organisations including international agencies such as when was Sencholai used as a training centre by the LTTE? Then they said that the Sencholai facility was a school, then a Montessori, then a hospital. However we were able to prove to them within 48 hours

by showing photographs and aerial images that we had indeed attacked a LTTE training facility. Therefore we were able to prove that the MCNS is a credible source of information giving firsthand information and at times live information as well. This was done when the people started pouring out of the area where they had been kept as a human shield by the LTTE. We were able to show various photographs and give live feed to the public, diplomats and journalists and were able to win their confidence.

How crucial was the MCNS to the Humanitarian Operations?

From 2006 till May 2009, the MCNS was the most important source of information on the Humanitarian Operations. We came into the limelight with the closure of the Marvil Aru anicut. The MCNS is a 24-hour working organisation. Minister Keheliya Rambukwella and I were always available day or night and whenever there were attacks or incidents we were stationed here giving information. We were in the media everyday. I believe that the MCNS played a major role in this operation.

You have a huge responsibility to ensure that the correct information goes out, how do you ensure that?

I have the full cooperation of the three Forces and the Police. They give me the information directly. The most difficult task I had at the initial stages was when the Marvil Aru sluice gate was re-opened. The gate was opened around seven in the evening. I knew that this was a major victory for us. At that time the President was in Kandy, when I informed him, the President's first question was 'are you sure?' Minister Rambukwella was also out of town therefore it was my duty to make the announcement to the public. That was the information I had received but it would take 12 hours to confirm because the water had to flow through LTTE controlled areas. After informing the President I took the chance and announced it to the public. That was the first announcement from the MCNS. I was up the whole night because I was not sure. Around half past five the next morning I received the confirmation from the Army where they had seen the water flowing. Then I informed the Defence Secretary with the confirmation. During those 12 hours we were on pins but we had to take such chances.

From 2006 Till May 2009, The MCNS Was The Most Important Source Of Information On The Humanitarian Operations. We Came Into The Limelight

With The Closure Of The Marvil Aru Anicut. The MCNS Is A 24-Hour Organisation.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

It was a great challenge. At the beginning no one wanted to take this post because there were many threats and no one thought that the Government was going to, first of all defeat the LTTE. Actually no one wanted to believe it. It was a risk to be the head of the MCNS. Some of my friends asked, “why do you want to take a position like this? one is the risk involved and the other is that you will never get a good name.” However, because of the Secretary of Defence – his will power, I knew that he was going to defeat the LTTE terrorism and win the Humanitarian Operations. I work very closely with him. We were not sure exactly when we were going to win, but we were 100 percent sure of winning the war. Each of us had a task to perform and we were confident that his operations would succeed.

Right throughout my life I have faced challenges. Maybe not of this scale but I have taken up challenges and successfully overcome them. I have always wanted to take up a position like this because my experience and background is in media. I am motivated by challenges and I am happy to say that we overcame all obstacles and were able to win the war. The greatest difficulty at that time was countering LTTE terrorism and their propaganda machinery. The LTTE was very strong, internationally because of the Tamil Dispora. They were very organised and had strong links all over the world. Though it took time to break this network we were victorious in the end.

Since the war is over, what is the role of MCNS now?

The war is over in Sri Lanka, but this is the media arm of the Defence Ministry. Today the role of the Ministry of Defence is much more. Earlier the work of the Ministry entailed only defence related matters. Now, the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the NGO Secretariat come under the Ministry of Defence. Today the role of the Ministry of Defence has become much larger. Earlier we had about 15 organisations under the Ministry; now it has grown to about 25 organisations.

The UDA covers the entire Island. Therefore even the MCNS has a bigger role, because we have to give publicity to all constituent organisations. In a very short time we have cleared the garbage in the Colombo city, we have to give publicity to that. Again no one believed that we would be able to accomplish this because it was another war, but it could be done and we proved that it could be done. Therefore the role of the MCNS is becoming bigger and bigger. During the war, every hour there was news coming in, but today our role is not that, it is a bigger role and we have to educate the people on how the Ministry of Defence functions and what our role is.

However, Because Of The Secretary Of Defence – His Willpower, I Knew That He Was Going To Win This War. I Work Very Closely With Him. We Were Not Sure Exactly When We Were Going To Win, But We Were 100 Percent Sure Of Winning The War. Each Of Us Had A Task To Perform And We Were Confident That His Operations Would Succeed.

If we move on to the NGO sector, you are the Director General of the NGO Secretariat as well. Can you tell us what this role entails?

After April 2010 elections, additional duties have been assigned to the Ministry. My workload has also reduced substantially as the Director General of the MCNS after the end of the conflict, therefore I was appointed as the Director General of the NGO Secretariat. The NGO sector was under the Ministry of Social Services and then it was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Security before it came under the Ministry of Defence in April 2010.

During the last couple of years, especially after the Tsunami, many NGOs came into the country and were registered. They came into the country to implement projects, but once completed they did not return to their countries. At the beginning they came to Sri Lanka with funds.

Today they do not bring funds but work with funds available in Sri Lanka. Thus their portfolio is over. Practically after two or three years they should go back. Lets say they came to Sri Lanka to build 500 houses. They do not need six years to build these houses. However even though their portfolios have ended since they have found that Sri Lanka is a good place to live, they do not go back to their own countries. For the past few years there has been no control on the work that the NGOs have been doing. During the last 25 years, there has been no proper

supervision on the work done in the North and East. They have come to Sri Lanka saying that they will build houses, schools, dig wells and other such activities but after the Humanitarian Operations we found that most of the promised work has not been done.

A certain NGO had come to build a school. After the Eastern province operations were over, we found that they had not built a school, but built a small hospital, including an operating theatre. Though the name of the building was of a school, it had been given to the LTTE as a hospital. This was brought to the President's notice and we had to inform the relevant Embassy. Their reasoning for it was that the LTTE had taken over the building. But, how can the LTTE have the equipment for the hospital? You can convert a hospital into a school. But you cannot convert a school into a hospital. If these organisations had completed their work and done what they had promised to do then the Government would not have to spend so much on the provision of infrastructure to the North. Therefore today, under the existing laws of the country – we have not changed or introduced new laws – we are supervising the work done by both local NGOs and INGOs.

There are two units; one is the NGO Secretariat, which comes under the Ministry of Defence. Then there is the Presidential Task Force (PTF) for the North headed by Minister Basil Rajapaksa who is the Chairman of the PTF. Any NGO or INGO working in the North has to register their project with the Presidential Task Force because they have a master plan. The NGOs cannot say that they are building a school or a house. They have to work according to the master plan. If their project is approved by the Presidential Task Force, then we will give permission for them to work in the North.

There are many foreigners coming into the country as experts and consultants and they are paid huge salaries. There are many experts in Sri Lanka today, and their salary is one tenth of what is paid to an expatriate. Sometimes you find that these organisations spend excessively on vehicles so at the end of the day the funds sent to the country are not utilised in the regions that the funds are allocated to. The funds are being used for administration work in Colombo. During the last 20 years we could not monitor the work because we did not have access and it was only the NGO workers who were allowed to go. They had taken various people including journalists and unauthorised people to those areas. Today that has been stopped.

There will be new laws coming in, however we want the NGOs and INGOs to function. There are genuine NGOs who are working for the public and we want them to stay and work for the people. But others who have been doing nothing, who are looking after themselves, we have asked them to submit progress reports, because what we have found is that most of the NGOs have not been doing what they are supposed to do.

Prior to the election of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005, the Non-Governmental sector had significant power, they were able to influence decisions. But that was stopped after President Mahinda Rajapaksa came into power. Currently, what is the role of the NGO sector?

There are certain countries and organisations that wish to fund projects in Sri Lanka but they may not be too confident in the Government sector and its regulations. However they are genuine and they want the funds to go directly to the people and for development work. We have no problem with that and we will cooperate with those organisations.

Yes there was a time when certain individuals and countries were able to pressurise the Government to make decisions through the NGO sector. That will not happen now. All decisions pertaining to Sri Lanka are taken by the President and the Government . We do not want other countries or different organisations exerting pressure on us to make decisions because as Sri Lankans we know what is in the best interest of our people. The funding agencies though they are providing the much needed liquidity they do not understand the needs of the people. His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa has experience of over 40 years and has been in active politics. He was a Member of Parliament, and then he was in the Opposition for five years. Then he became a Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister and then became the President of the country. Therefore the President knows the pulse of the people and he believes that the Government sector is capable of achieving the required goals.

The War Is Over In Sri Lanka, But This Is The Media Arm Of The Defence Ministry. Today The Role Of The Ministry Of Defence Is Much More. Earlier The Work Of The Ministry Entailed Only Defence Related Matters. Now, The Urban Development Authority (UDA) And The NGO Secretariat Come Under The Ministry.

If you look back, these are the organisations that forced certain leaders to privatise Government institutions. Now we believe that we can sustain these on our own. During the last five years we have not privatised a single organisation and we were able to keep to the decision that we made. If you look at the time period from 1990 to 2005, around 150 organisations were privatised. Then what happened? Certain institutions that were privatised went bankrupt. If you take Thulhiriya, it was given to the private sector, they have taken loans and after they became bankrupt they left. Today, it has been taken back by the Government.

We believe in the Sri Lankan method and the President has trust in the people. The President takes the decisions that the people want. That is the reason why certain NGOs are not happy. They cannot pressurise the Government and they are not the deciding force. Today the deciding force is the people. The people have given the President a resounding mandate. Every year he has had an election; it may be provincial or parliamentary elections, the President believes the people and people have trust in him. Therefore the President takes the decision; he does not allow others to force the decision. That is the difference between the last few Governments and the present Government. Certain NGOs using the power of their money influenced the decision making of the previous Governments. Today, that has stopped. Nobody can pressurise the Government, because they are bringing funds or because they are representing a large country.

Currently, in the post conflict environment how are the local NGOs and INGOs working with the Government and what is being done now with regards to reconstruction and rehabilitation?

I have had many discussions with NGOs and INGOs. I found that only a minority of the NGOs are unhappy because they want a free hand, they do not want to be monitored and are reluctant to submit reports. The genuine NGOs who are working in those areas are happy to provide progress reports, they are happy to show what they are doing, and to give the information to the Presidential Task Force, register and work with them. Certain NGOs are not happy because they want free movement to all areas, but we cannot give such free movement. They say that they want to travel without having to stop at checkpoints when going to the North and that they should be able to take any passenger who is a foreigner and take them around, but we cannot allow this. As I said there is a minority who are not happy but the majority are very happy.

The NGOs Cannot Say That They Are Building A School Or A House. They Have To Work According To The Master Plan. If Their Project Is Approved By The Presidential Task Force, Only Then Will We Give Permission For Them To Work.

The Government has a master plan for the North and East, so the projects by the NGOs have to be absorbed into that. Under the supervision of Minister Basil Rajapaksa, there is a separate master plan each for the North and East. The Government provides the infrastructure. Under these master plans there will be no duplication or overlapping of work. NGOs would not be allowed to do any projects out of the master plan, whatever they do has to be part of the plan, if not the projects will not be approved. Majority of the NGOs are supportive of this move. We want them to work with us and have a good relationship, we are prepared to work, we know the importance of their contribution, but we do not want them to decide what is needed for the people of Sri Lanka, because we know what the people of Sri Lanka need.

How important is it for the Government to work with this sector?

Local NGOs and INGOs are very important. The present trend is that many countries do not directly provide aid or grants to other governments. The funds are channelled through local NGOs and INGOs. We like that mechanism because then there is supervision; whatever money is given to the country, there is a person to look after the interest of that money from his or her own country. However the funding agency needs to see what our requirement is today. A western country can decide something, but if that is not what we want, then there is no point. We want the NGOs and INGOs to be in Sri Lanka. Many NGOs have been functioning for the last 40 years; they have been doing a good job. Like that there are so many organisations. We want these organisations to continue working. There are hundreds of thousands of people working in the NGO sector. We are not going to ban NGOs and INGOs, but we want them to work with us. Their role is very independent and we want countries to send the funds through them. Their activities and their role in Sri Lanka is very important. We do not want to control them; we do not want to bring unwanted laws or authorities to control them. We have no such plans to do anything of that sort.

Can you tell us about any future plans in the pipeline for the NGO sector?

In short, every district or province has a master plan for infrastructure for the next five years. Therefore anyone who is coming with funds will have to work within those master plans. They would not be able to work without being absorbed into the master plan. They will have to submit their project plan and also progress reports regularly. They will have to show the Government where they are working and what they are doing. We will not encourage the sourcing of foreign consultants to do the work because we have a very high literacy rate in Sri Lanka, we have the technical know-how and we have educated young people, so they can recruit people from our country. If not they will be unnecessarily spending money and the funds will be going back to another country.

You hold diverse portfolios. Each one is different from the other. If we move on to the NLDB, can you tell us about your role there?

From January 2006 to April 2010, I also functioned as the Deputy Chairman of the Fisheries Corporation. During that time I did not have much time to work there because I was extremely busy at the MCNS during the height of the Humanitarian Operations. At the time we took over the Fisheries Corporations in January 2006, the corporation was functioning at a loss. With the guidance of the Board of Directors, we were able to turn it into a profitable organisation within the first five months. I was concentrating on the marketing aspect of the fisheries industry but honestly after May 2006 when I took over the position at the MCNS I didn’t have enough time.

In May 2010 I was appointed as the Deputy Chairman of the NLDB. Since I have not been in this sector before it is a new challenge. Therefore upon being appointed to the position I did a thorough study of the subject. Livestock and dairy is the need of the hour, because today, we are spending about 20 billion rupees on powdered milk per year. That is a large amount of foreign exchange. NLDB is only producing and servicing a small percentage of this from fresh milk. Sri Lanka has always produced milk. In the good old days, when we were small every villager had a cow or two, and we had fresh milk. But today, everyone is using milk powder. Our task is to introduce and popularise fresh milk.

Minister Arumugam Thondaman is very focused; within a short period of time he was able to visit all 31 farms of the NLDB. The Minister spoke to all the relevant

authorities in the farms and the head offices and told them that the role of NLDB is to produce more milk. Certain farms are making profits from plantations such as paddy and coconut, therefore they do not concentrate on the production of milk. The Minister said that if the farms are focusing on coconut then it should come under the Coconut Development Board, not the NLDB.

Livestock And Dairy Is The Need Of The Hour, Because Today, We Are Spending About 20 Billion Rupees On Powdered Milk Per Year…We Are Currently Producing About 9,000 Litres Per Day. We Want To Increase The Production Up To 20,000 Litres Per Day.

Our aim is to produce more milk and as such we are concentrating on increasing the number of cattle. Initially we had few milking centres and milk sales outlets and the balance milk was sold to MILCO or sent to produce powdered milk. After my appointment I proposed to the Board of Directors that we should introduce a new packet of fresh milk. Within a very short time we were able to introduce that to the market. There are few other private sector organisations that have introduced fresh milk to the market. However within the first three months, we were able to introduce a packet of milk, and today we have our own tetra milk pack named Delite and it is becoming very popular.

People do want to have fresh milk, but fresh milk is not available. Out of the 150 sales outlets many are defunct and only about 40 to 50 are functioning. These things have to be reviewed. The marketing of the NLDB has to be looked into very seriously in order to revive the sector. The Chairman of the NLDB Ranjith Allegala is an experienced planter who has vast knowledge on planting and livestock. We had a discussion where the Chairman would focus on the production of milk and I would see that the product is marketed well. We are currently producing about 9,000 litres per day. We want to increase the production up to 20,000 litres per day within a short time.

What mechanisms have been put in place to increase the production of milk?

We are purchasing cattle from identified countries. 2,000 cattle will be coming from Australia in three batches. The first 500 cattle will arrive in December. Minister Basil Rajapaksa during his visit to India organised another 5000 cattle to be brought from

India. We are currently having discussions with a Dubai based project and if it is successful we will be getting 5,000 cattle from there.

With the Dubai initiative they require 50 percent of the milk produced in Sri Lanka to be sent to them. In Dubai they do not have a place to produce milk. We have the infrastructure, therefore we will be able to produce milk and export it to Dubai.

If you take the statistics of cattle, in 2001, according to the census there have been one million cattle, in 2009 again the census recorded one million cattle. There is no increase in the production of cattle. There is no issue whether it is the private sector or the Government who is talking about the milk industry; we have to get more cattle into the industry. We are trying to produce at least 20,000 litres per day. That is our target in the next six to seven months.

In Sri Lanka the average milk produced per cow is about eight litres. With new technologies, the production should be about 20 litres. India and Pakistan are producing in the range of 18 to 20 litres a day from a cow. From Israel, their average daily milk harvest is 45 litres. It will take time to reach that level but we are aiming to reach at least half of that, which is close to the Indian and the Pakistan averages. If we can produce in the range of 15 to 20 litres per day from a single cow, then we can immediately reach the level of 20,000 litres per day. We want to promote fresh milk that is our prime target. Therefore I am looking forward at least within one and a half years to reach those targets. At the moment the private sector and the Government is producing about 38-39 percent of the requirement of milk. If we can increase up to 80 percent – both the private sector and the Government together that would be good. We do not need to have competition for the fresh milk. Even if they produce any amount of milk, the market is there. The only thing that we will be doing is stopping the foreign exchange from going out of the country. If we succeed in producing more milk and supply 75 to 80 percent of the consumer need, then we can reduce 20 billion rupees going out of this country. That is the target of NLDB.

With economic development going ahead in full gear, tourists are going to come into the country and the need for diary products and livestock is going to increase. There’s a huge market. How will NLDB respond to that demand?

That is the most important aspect that we are looking at. One of the most developing sectors in the country is tourism. I have been talking to many hoteliers and one of the things that they need at hotels is fresh milk. The production of ice cream and biscuits requires fresh milk. Coming from a hospitality background I know the types of food that is prepared at hotels. There is a big difference in the taste when it is made with fresh milk. Today ice creams and biscuits are made totally out of powered milk. However if we can produce fresh milk and give that to the hoteliers and industries then they can do the rest. That is why I said there is no competition, because the market is available.

With more tourists coming into the country, the tourism industry has the demand for fresh milk. Therefore if we concentrate on the general public and the tourism sector that is more than enough to develop the dairy industry.

With More Tourists Coming Into The Country, The Tourism Industry Has The Demand For Fresh Milk. Therefore If We Concentrate On The General Public And The Tourism Sector That Is More Than Enough To Develop The Dairy Industry.

If we move on to you as a personality, you were the first to introduce satellite TV to Sri Lanka, can you speak about yourself and your journey?

Although my background is in media, I am a graduate from the Ceylon Hotel School. After graduating, I did my in-service training at the Galle Face Hotel, and at Hunnas Falls, which was one of the best hotels in Sri Lanka in the 80s. Thereafter I entered politics and have been working with senior ministers and the head of the country since then. Till 1990, I worked for Minister Gamini Dissanayake in the Ministry of Lands, Land Development and Mahaweli Development. until he was removed from the Ministry of Plantation Industries during President R Premadasa’s time for a short period of one year. At that time I did a Diploma in Marketing and Advertising at the Institute of Management of Marketing. In 1997 I wanted to start my own media institution. However my license was denied by the Government of that time even though I brought an investor and the project proposal. I fought back, filed action in court, which I won during the latter part of 2000, and subsequently brought satellite television technology to Sri Lanka. My company introduced the first satellite television channel in 2001 to Sri Lanka.

Till 2005, I was involved in the company but now my family is running the business. I brought STAR TV to Sri Lanka. Today, our company holds the agency for Dish TV and STAR TV for satellite distribution in Sri Lanka.

In 2006 we obtained the license for free-to-air television, radio broadcasting and satellite uplink. We are in operation with DTH Satellite broadcasting, which covers the entire country and it caters to many five star hotels, and individual subscribers. SATNET has two radio stations, one in Sinhala named Sath FM and Hitz FM in English. The English station was started recently. Since 2005 I have not been part of the company because I hold a Government position.

You have held so many diverse portfolios, what are your experiences?

After my primary education at St. Anne's and Maliyadeva Colleges Kurunegala I graduated from Ceylon Hotels School as a hotelier. I have been involved in politics since my school days. As a student I was elected as President of the Youth Organisation and Students' Federation in the United National Party in the Kurunegala district. After I graduated from the Hotel School, Minister Gamini Dissanayake invited me to become his Coordinating Secretary. I was his Parliamentary Coordinating Secretary for 12 years until 1990, during the Mahaweli Development project period and for a year when he was the Minister of Plantation Industry. During this time Mahaweli accelerated programme was implemented and was completed. For me working with Minister Gamini Dissanayake was a very good experience and a challenge as I had just graduated and did not have much experience; working under him made me very strong and gave me the ability to face any challenge. Being involved in the Mahaweli Accelerated programme was a once in a lifetime experience.

You Have To Trust Your Leadership And You Have To Maintain That Trust. That Is What I Always Feel. Trust, Commitment And Responsibility, Should Be There.

During this period of time, I got much exposure by being able to experience such large-scale development, and to travel all over Sri Lanka and abroad. Through that I was able to learn how development is done, how people can participate in the development process and also the benefits of development. I established my state

sector base under Minister Gamini Dissanayake. In 1990, with the introduction of the impeachment motion against President Premadasa we left the United National Party. I was the first Political Bureau Secretary of the newly formed Democratic United National Front (DUNF) under Ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake.

Our main aim was to counter President Premadasa's dictatorship and to bring democracy back to the party and the country. After the untimely deaths of Minister Lalith Athulathmudali and President Premadasa, when Minister Gamini Dissanayaka decided to go back to the UNP, the majority of the members of DUNF did not want to go back to the UNP. I joined the SLFP because I knew President Mahinda Rajapaksa as a Member of the Parliament in the Opposition and a senior member of the SLFP. I got to know President Rajapaksa and the other members of the Rajapaksa family in the late 80s through Minister Basil Rajapaksa, whom I have known for the last 27 years.

I was part of the 1994 election campaign with President Rajapaksa in Hambantota and I became the Coordinating Secretary to him in 1994 for a short time when he became the Minister of Labour and Vocational Training. Then, with his blessings, President Chandrika Kumaranatunge appointed me as the advisor and consultant to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Rural Development which included the Samurdhi programme. I was there for one year, after which I did not want to continue.

Then I came into the private sector and started as a partner for an advertising company. Then, in 1998, I started the Channel Nine television project, in which I was involved till 2000. I had to continue on my own once the investors left due to the interferences by the then Government. I did not want to accept any portfolio under any Government until President Mahinda Rajapaksa came into power. Even when he became the Prime Minster, he offered me a position under him, but I told him that I will work for a President only when he is in that position. I had lost faith in all leaders. Until 2005, I was in the private sector and had my own business.

You also have a creative side to you and you have produced many teledramas and edited books, can you tell us about that aspect of your life?

During my tenure at the Mahaweli, we produced few teledramas on the Mahaweli

project, with Dharmasena Pathiraja. Then in 1988, he gave me a proposal to produce a teledrama, it was the first teledrama to be translated from Russian to Sinhala. The teledrama was called Pura Sakmana, which I produced in 1988 and it won the Best Teledrama Award. Thereafter I produced Sankranthi Samaya directed by Ananda Abeynayake and Sandagiri Pauwwa directed by Parakrama Niriella. My last teledrama was in 1997, a production of the story of Anna Karenina in Sinhala with Andrew Jayamana. All those four dramas won awards in many catergories and became the most popular teledrama of that year. I have stopped producing teledramas now because my work takes up most of my time.

In 1992, for Minister Gamini Dissanayake's 50th birthday, Dr Sarath Amunugama and I edited a book called "50 Year Beginning". Then in 2006, when I joined the MCNS, we compiled a book, which was edited by me about the experiences of the President Mahinda Rajapaksa's first year as President. I brought together many incidents in that book to show the public that President Mahinda Rajapaksa has not changed. My observations were from my personal experiences with various Presidents in this country such as, President Jayawardena, a short time period with President Chandrika Kumaratunga then with President Rajapaksa, I have always noticed if a person is changing because of power it will happen during the first two years. If not, he will not change at all. President Mahinda Rajapaksa has not changed and he will not change, he has not absorbed power into his system. Based on that the book titled Ohu Mahinda Rajapaksa Wiya was published. Ape Kale Weerayo, is a book focusing on the last five years during the war describing the leadership and the guidance given by President Mahinda Rajapaksa as the Commander in Chief and the major role played by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa in defeating the world's most ruthless terrorist organisation. I will be launching this book very soon.

As a person with immense responsibility, how do you maintain that balance in your life?

Right throughout my life, I placed great importance on time management. I am very careful and if I give an appointment to anyone I try to maintain that. I work a minimum of at least 15 hours a day. Even on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays I work. But I always manage my time. During the weekends I come and sit in my office, go through my emails, websites, papers and even in the night, when I finish work, I always watch the last news of the day, staying at least till 11.30 pm or 12 midnight.

I always like to use the latest technology and by doing so, I manage my time. I have three offices. Mostly I am at the MCNS, but I go to the NGO Secretariat at least two or three days a week and to the NLDB four times a week. My only problem is the traffic, other than that I love to maintain my timing. For anyone who can manage time, it is easy to work.
You also need to have commitment; this is the most important thing. Whatever job you do, whether it is big or small, you should, always in your mind, know that you are responsible for that job. If you have the responsibility and the commitment, then you can do that job successfully. Always, you have to have the will power as well and what I believe is that you have to be faithful to your leader. You cannot work at one time for two people. You have to take the guidance from one person. I am very happy that right throughout at MCNS I have been working under President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. I take orders from them, and you have to be faithful to them, because the day that you are not faithful to your leader, it is very difficult to work, and with it, the commitment will not be there as well. You have to trust your leadership and you have to maintain that trust. That is what I always feel. Trust, commitment and responsibility, should be there.

I am a very strict disciplinarian. I am very strict on my staff , but I am also very good to them. I always look after my staff, whenever they want something; I look into their needs and welfare. Discipline is maintained in my office. Friendship and administration cannot be maintained together. If you are a good administrator, you have to have discipline. To discipline your staff, one must first be disciplined yourself. Therefore, I always believe and maintain that in my office. In my personal life, I can have different opinions, but in my office as an administrator where I am guiding my staff, I am very strict on discipline.

What are your future plans?
I feel that I have a few years more to serve the country. I do not think that I should be in one place, but I always love to take up challenges, because I do not want to be in a place where I am not given a challenge. If I am given a challenge in the public sector I will take up that challenge, if I am given a challenge in the political field, still I am prepared to take that. In the next few years I want to achieve something more than what I am today, to serve the country under His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

I Love To Take Up A Challenge…In The Next Few Years I Want To Achieve Something More Than What I Am Today, To Serve The Country Under His

Excellency The President Mahinda Rajapaksa





