Service To The Nation



A former Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Army, with over three decades of service that included serving during the height of the war in Sri Lanka, Major General (Retd.) G A Chandrasiri is the Chairman of Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka). Major General Chandrasiri spoke of the enormous role he played as the first Governor of a liberated Northern Province after 2009. He focused on rebuilding the

conflict-affected Province through the Northern Spring initiative, his prominent induction into civil administration, executed successfully. Having held many positions, Major General (Retd.) Chandrasiri is currently also on the board of Directors of Bank of Ceylon. The Chairman spoke of the large-scale projects in progress and planned for the future to develop airport and aviation services in Sri Lanka while fulfilling the vision of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Government's "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor" Policy Agenda.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene. Photography Menaka Aravinda.

Can you tell us about the role you played during the last phase of the war and your subsequent role as the Governor of the Northern Province in the rebuilding efforts of the Province?

Yes, I served as the Security Forces Commander of the Jaffna Peninsula from 2005 to 2009. I remember I had just returned from a year-long course at the National Defence College in India on December 5th. I received my appointment as the Jaffna Security Forces Commander on the same day I returned. In less than 12 hours of landing, I traveled to Jaffna to take up the posting.

My primary responsibilities during this time were to firstly carry out the operational task of ensuring that the LTTE did not infiltrate Jaffna. Secondly, it was to preserve law and order in the district. I had responsibility for over 700,000 residents of the Jaffna Peninsula, which was a severe undertaking. I remember at one point during this time, the conflict had completely blocked off the Jaffna Peninsula. The LTTE was attacking us from the southern side and the forward defense line in Muhumalai. At the same time, we were dealing with several LTTE infiltrations within the area. The entire Jaffna Peninsula and its people were directly under my purview, and I had to manage the situation with the 40,000 men under my command and the assistance of the Government Agent. During this time, I commanded four infantry divisions, including the Special Forces. It was a very challenging time. We managed to control the situation under the guidance of the Commander of the Army and His Excellency, the President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was the then Defence Secretary.

After I returned to Colombo in 2009, I was elevated to the position of Chief-of-Staff in the Army, a position I held from March 1st, 2009, to July 12th, 2009.

Simultaneously, the Governmentappointed me as the Competent Authority for the Protection of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the Northern Province in April 2009 and continued to hold that appointment until my retirement from the Army. Taking care of 325,000 IDPs was again a massive undertaking. We had a series of centers to house these people, the main one being at Chettikulam, which housed nearly 100,000 to 150,000 IDPs. We had to fulfill many requirements to support them. We conducted a series of programs with the Government's assistance, aided by the military and civil organizations. Our work included providing accommodation to the IDPs and logistical requirements for adults and children, such as education and medical treatment. With the Government's support, I had to ensure that they received all necessities. During this time, at the Government's request, the Army undertook to clear landmines in the area. Later, the Provincial Council took over relocating the IDPs to their original homes, and re-establishing their livelihoods. I recall we even had a visit from the then United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency, Ban Ki-Moon.

Having around 100 non-governmental organizations (local and foreign), working under my direct administrative control was challenging. I had to ensure that the day-to-day administrative and logistical functions were carried out by them effectively. Of course, there were issues, but overall, we ensured that the systems and processes functioned as smoothly as possible.

I was involved in these tasks until I retired from the Army on July 12th, 2009. The current Secretary of Defence, General Kamal Gunaratne, succeeded me as the Competent Authority.

I was appointed as the Governor of the Northern Province the same day I retired from the Sri Lanka Army. Within 24 hours, I was traveling to Trincomalee to take over my duties as the Governor. At that time, the entire administration of the Northern Province was from Trincomalee. Except for the Government Agent's presence, no proper administration took place on the ground in Jaffna. We began by establishing the Provincial Council administrative structure in the Northern Province. Many officers traveled to the Northern Province to carry out their tasks. In the absence of an elected Provincial Council administration, the Governor becomes the sole authority for governance matters. Therefore, all the Northern Provincial Council officers were under my administrative control until the elected Provincial Council came into being in 2013.



Generally, the Central Government funds the regional councils. After the war ended, the Government launched “Uthuru Wasanthaya,” the Northern Spring Program under former Hon Minister of Economic Affairs, Mr. Basil Rajapaksa’s leadership. He was the Chairman of the Presidential Taskforce for the rebuilding and development of the Northern Province. Under the Chairman of the Presidential Taskforce’s guidance, I began work on developing the Northern Province. You must understand that when we embarked on this effort, we were dealing with a part of our country that was war-ravaged for almost 30 years. In the last few months of the war, the LTTE had destroyed all of the Northern Province infrastructures. The LTTE had taken the vehicles, the bicycles, even the roofs of the houses. We had to build the Province’s entire infrastructure from scratch, de-mine the Province and restore people’s livelihoods. Demining was a big responsibility undertaken by the Government, which we did very methodically, area by area. The reconstruction of

the Northern Province was a joint effort of the Central Government, Military, and the Northern Provincial Council officers. All officials were intensely involved, wholeheartedly committed to rebuilding the North, and I, as the Governor, had a significant role to play.

With much support from the Government and the Northern Provincial Council, we achieved a great deal of success in the North within five years. Ninety percent of the infrastructure, from Government buildings, communication towers, schools, and right down to water tanks, were rebuilt. During this period, we built the Kokilai transmission tower. The main railway station in Jaffna, which was destroyed due to conflict was also rebuilt during this period.

We also had to resettle people in their original homes and help them to restart their livelihoods. We had to ensure that the children could get back to school and resume their education. Except for a few schools, the entire education sector was under the Provincial Council's purview. There were 672 damaged schools in the Northern Province, and we had to rebuild all of them.

Rebuilding hospitals was another task. There was a shortage of doctors. We solved this obstacle by recruiting retired medical practitioners on a contractual basis who were enthusiastic about rebuilding the area and hence supported our initiatives.

Also, the conflict had destroyed the entire road network. It took four hours to travel from Vavuniya to Jaffna. Today, it would only take about two hours because of the developed roads and infrastructure. Traveling from Paranthan to Mullaitivu or Mankulam to Mullaitivu was a nightmare because all roads were depleted. Today, there is a well-established road network. We also have a route from Mullaitivu to Kokilai, which leads to Trincomalee, which was also the result of the Government's rebuilding efforts.

All of these development initiatives in the North were a collective effort by the Central Government, Northern Spring Presidential Taskforce, the Northern Provincial Council, the Sri Lanka Army, the Government Agents, and even the non-governmental organizations. What you see today is a result of everyone's collective commitment.

I completed my tenure as the Governor of the Northern Province on January 14th, 2015. My final engagement was to meet with Pope Francis during his official visit to Mannar.

I have been serving as the Chairman, Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) since December 18th, 2019. My varied and extensive experience in operations and administration during my various roles as the Chief of Staff in the Army, the Competent Authority for the Protection of the Internally Displaced Persons, and the Northern Province Governor has prepared me for the position I hold today. But still, I spent the first six months of this new role studying the aviation industry and gaining a thorough understanding of the particulars of this organization.



What is the significant role played by Airport and Aviation Services in Sri Lanka today?

Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) (AASL) is the statutory service provider for the operation, development, and maintenance of civil airports in Sri Lanka. We have five airports under our control: the Bandaranaike International Airport, the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, the Colombo International Airport, Ratmalana and the Jaffna International Airport, which became an international airport in December 2019. Quite recently, the Batticaloa Airport (BTIA) also received global airport

status.

AASL is one of the best blue-chip companies in Sri Lanka and our annual revenue (in a regular year) is around 25 billion rupees. We envision being the friendliest aviation service provider connecting the globe for sustainability. Our mission is to "provide competitive, safe aviation services and superlative guest experience with best practices and latest technology to ensure stakeholder satisfaction." 2019 was the best year in the history of the aviation industry in Sri Lanka. We had 9.96 million international passengers, 62,195 global flight movements at the Bandaranaike International Airport, Ratmalana, and Jaffna airports, and 259,890 metric tons of cargo movement. When I took over as Chairman in December 2019, there were sometimes 220 -240 aircraft movements at BIA daily, which was the peak. Also, in 2019, our annual revenue had increased to 27 billion rupees.

Of course, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have not been doing that well. However, I believe with the recommencement of tourist arrivals we will soon get back on track. For instance, just in the last few days, our cargo exports have exceeded 300 tons per day, which is an excellent sign of things to come. On the other hand, due to restrictions on imports, we have experienced a decline in imported cargo quantity. We have to continue to work very hard to get back to where we were, and we are committed to this effort.

Every time an aircraft flies over a country's airspace, it must pay a fee to that country – this is called the overflying fee. In 2019, we had 45,674 overfly movements over our airspace. In 2019, our revenue from providing aviation-related services was 25,716 million rupees. Considering our operating costs, the airport's maintenance costs, spending on our 4,050 strong workforces, and our infrastructure projects, we still made a net profit of ten billion rupees in 2019.

The Commercial and Property Division manages the duty-free shops. We earn revenue from the 298 duty-free shops at the BIA. When the pandemic hit, we made specific policy changes to ease the burden on these duty-free shops. We have not charged a single dollar from any of the duty-free shops from March 2020 up to now. Our objective is to allow them to come out of this crisis first before we resume charging rent. Now that tourist arrivals have begun, we will start invoicing them from next month, which of course, will be only ten percent of their revenue. The few co-category duty-free shops that sell chocolates and liquor have continued to pay their rent.

We must keep in mind that we have a responsibility to our tenants at this challenging time. We have to support them through this pandemic to have a business to return to when things normalize.

AASL handles all the technical requirements of the industry as well. Above the wing, this means air traffic control. We are responsible for every aircraft that enters our airspace right up to its landing. We also control our Flight Information Region (FIR) from Ratmalana. Once an aircraft is within a certain radius of our airspace, it is under our control until it lands safely on the tarmac. We have state-of-the-art air traffic control facilities available at our airports. As we come under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), we have to maintain our standards according to their requirements. It is a serious task, and we can't afford to make a single mistake. Representatives from the ICAO visit us regularly for an audit to check on all our airports and our systems. They continuously assess whether we maintain these international standards in conducting our operations.

The ground handlers carry out the below wing operations, and SriLankan Airlines operates the ground handling system. There's a tremendous amount of work involved. When a passenger enters the airport, the operations on ground handling begins and continues right until the passenger leaves the airport or boards an aircraft. Our ground handlers work tirelessly to ensure that the passenger experience is smooth and seamless.

Security is one of our primary concerns, and we have a vast security apparatus controlled by the Sri Lanka Air Force, Airport, and Civil Aviation Security. Continuous monitoring and surveillance of the entire airport occur through a massive network of cameras and multiple operation rooms.

As we are operating amid COVID-19, we have to follow specific strict health procedures and monitoring, which we carry out carefully. For instance, every passenger who enters this airport must go through many scanners, followed by a disinfection procedure, and fill health-related forms. The repatriation process is also taking place under similar guidelines. As we come out of the crisis, we are trying to ease some of these procedures. Especially since we have reopened the country for tourists, today you will see that the way we manage tourists is different. With more people worldwide getting vaccinated, we hope to continue to ease these restrictions in the future safely.

What are the development activities happening concerning the airports?

There are many development projects at the BIA, Mattala International Airport, and the Colombo International Airport, Ratmalana.

BIA's current terminal capacity is for six million passengers. Having evaluated the passenger movement in 2019, we realized the need for more terminals to cater to nine million passengers. We believe that we should develop further to cater to 15 million passengers in the next few years. The Government initiated the concept for a new terminal around 2006. Hon. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, during his last tenure as President, laid the foundation stone in 2014. Unfortunately, there was no progress since then until we took over at the end of 2019. Under the Government's guidance and with cabinet approval, together with the AASL Board of Directors, my office began work on the new terminal building in February 2020. The onset of COVID-19 has resulted in some delays. We have signed the necessary agreements and laid the foundation stone for the second time on We will develop Mattala Airport into a regional hub in the future. September 18th, 2020. Today we are working according to a plan, and we closely monitor the project's progress through fortnightly check-ins. This massive project is worth 107 billion rupees. We have to ensure that we have a completed terminal by the end of 2023.

We are also in the process of developing the airport apron, which began three years ago. We will complete it by August 2021. The new apron will provide space for 28 more aircraft to park, increasing the number to 54. We will also be adding two new piers, which will have state-ofthe- art facilities, and we will also construct a car park with seven levels. We have already started building a new structure for import cargo. It was a plan made around four years ago. In less than two years, we will have this state-of-the-art building completed.

The most significant limitation at the BIA is the lack of land for expansion. Therefore, we aim to make maximum use of the land available to us. We are considering the prospect of constructing a hotel. This plan is likely to be executed at Mattala as well.

AASL funds pay for all these projects, and it is the responsibility of AASL to repay any loans taken. We are a State-owned organization. Therefore, there is oversight and control over our spending. There are several regulatory procedures we have to follow, including proper audits. We require Cabinet approval for our projects beyond certain financial limits.

If we talk about the Mattala Airport, it was not functioning for some time. It has

been receiving more facilities of late, and we have introduced certain concessions to airlines as well. Many repatriation flights have been landing at the Mattala Airport. Simultaneously, seafarers have also begun arriving at Mattala. Tourists from Kazakhstan and Ukraine have been coming to the Mattala Airport regularly.

We don’t foresee daily passenger traffic at Mattala increasing to the level of BIA. However, we will develop it into a regional hub in the future. We want to attract tourists from the Maldives, India, the Far East, and the Middle East to Mattala. Accommodations and attractions these tourists need, whether it is the beach or wildlife, are available locally. At the same time, the hill country is only five hours away. We are currently working with the Tourist Board on executing our plans. As far as the airlines are concerned, we have already begun discussions with major airline companies who have expressed interest.

Another plan we have for Mattala is to offer Maintenance, Repair and Overhauling, facilities there. If done correctly, this massive operation can generate a great deal of revenue for the country. There was an effort back in 2014 to have Lufthansa come here to work with SriLankan Airlines and another company, which didn’t materialize. But we will be advertising again to follow through. Of course, we have to follow proper procedures and advertise these opportunities correctly to attract the best talent to Mattala.



We will also focus on transforming Mattala into a cargo hub. Currently, Mattala can handle 50,000 metric tons of cargo per annum, which we want to improve by adding new infrastructure facilities.

We have already advertised commercial activities inside the terminal building. Eighteen businesses will receive their slots for various operations. For instance, we have received tenders from the State banks, the Tea Board, baggage wrapping facility, and restaurant spaces. Cocategory shops will also commence operations by the end of the month.

We also want to establish an aviation school in Mattala. We have connected with the Alpha Aviation Academy in the UAE. Their representatives are expected this month for further discussions to develop a flying school in Sri Lanka. The academy will bring in much revenue for Sri Lanka as many Middle East countries will send young people for training. They will first establish the proposed flying school in Ratmalana and, depending on its success, select Mattala for a second location.

The AASL has an excellent training center that provides training in sectors related to the aviation industry. We recently realized that we need to develop this training

center into an academy. We have recognized the need to be of international standard as far as training in this sector is concerned. Next year, we plan to establish the International Aviation Academy in Sri Lanka and make it a well-recognized academy in the future. We also intend to establish links with academies like Alpha Aviation in the UAE. We do engage in such collaborations right now but in a minor way. We do have several courses but will increase after establishing the new academy. We also conduct aviation-related studies online for international students.

Recently we trained 26 men and women in air traffic control; having completed a year of training, they will move over to more rigorous training. We have very few air traffic controllers in Sri Lanka, around 30. As the current personnel retires, we will require recruits for this position. So what we have embarked upon is a good move for the future, and we intend to extend this course to international students.

The Mattala Airport has come a long way in a short time. When we went to Mattala in January 2020, the airport premises had turned into a jungle. Wild animals had entered those spaces. We had to clear all this, and today, we have turned it into a beautiful space. We have to control the infiltration of wildlife, including elephants, which we are in the process of doing by erecting a fence around the airport with the Department of Wildlife Conservation’s assistance.

Hon. D V Chanaka, the State Minister of Civil Aviation and Export Zone Development, is very keen on developing the Mattala Airport. We intend to establish a separate marketing team under the State Minister’s direct supervision, focusing on developing the Mattala Airport.

As for the Colombo International Airport, Ratmalana, we intend to make it a hub for corporate jets. We have been interacting with Maldivian Airlines. They are prepared to come to Ratmalana with their 50-seat planes. There is an encouraging trend of returning to domestic tourism. We see that there is a desire for one-day travel to places like Batticaloa and Trincomalee. We are in discussions with several airlines like FitzAir, Cinnamon Air, and Sakurai Aviation to be ready for this increase in demand for domestic flights from Ratmalana.

I also spoke about the flight school earlier, which will start at the Colombo International Airport, Ratmalana.

The Jaffna International Airport was functioning until March 2020. With COVID-19,

we have suspended flights. We have begun developing the Jaffna Airport. The High Commissioner for India in Sri Lanka visited the airport a week ago. Recently, we also conducted an audit on the airport to determine further improvements.

The BIA has had a good standing for a long time, but there have been challenges. How do you plan to change this?

When I began my tenure, a significant challenge we decided to tackle was touting at the airport. These touts were harassing our passengers, and we had to systematically implement a plan to take care of this long-standing problem. We worked with the Police and our airport security three months before the COVID-19 lockdown to gradually eliminate these practices. With the lockdown, the airport has naturally become inaccessible to these touts. Once travel normalizes, we will continue to work on this. We have no hesitation in apprehending these individuals and handing them over to the authorities. We have a separate Police post at BIA that supports us very well, and we discuss how to eradicate these practices in the future altogether. I am confident that we can ensure our passengers to be safe and free from harassment.

We also have severe concerns about smuggling narcotics and other prohibited items through our Airports. We are using all state-of-the-art facilities and detection systems with the Police and other relevant authorities' assistance to counter it. The latest addition to our deterrent activities is introducing well-trained sniffer dogs trained and owned by Sri Lankan Air Force.

The AASL Board of Directors administratively controls every airport. Our Board members include officers who are ex-pilots and officers who have served in this organization for many years and are very knowledgeable about airport administration. A board member in charge of a particular airport has their team handling the various operations for that specific airport. I run the administrative and operational aspects at the BIA, as this is our primary and largest airport. As Chairman, I am also the topmost executive and have oversight over all the airports under the purview of AASL. I have to ensure that the system runs smoothly. I have already talked about the many logistical and security aspects that we have to handle very carefully. At BIA, two directors under my direct supervision administer projects and operations.

Under my supervision, two other directors control the administration, operations, and logistics at the Colombo International Airport, Ratmalana and the Mattala

Airport. Hon. Prasanna Ranatunga, Minister of Tourism, and Hon. D V Chanaka, State Minister of Civil Aviation and Export Zone Development, guides us.

The Sri Lanka Air Force supports the security of BIA and other Airports. SriLankan Airlines, the Sri Lanka Customs and Immigration, and the animal quarantine unit work within the BIA organizational structure. Together, we are a committed team. We face many new challenges every day, and we are fully aware that a failure on our part has significant repercussions. The gravity of COVID-19 was a challenge we could not have anticipated. Yet, because of our commitment, we were able to mobilize quickly and put the necessary processes in place to protect our people as much as possible.

Since taking office, I have ensured that every employee has a responsibility. The employee is held accountable for his or her duty. This way, the systems will function properly. We have certain grey areas in human resources, which we are working on at the moment. We have very tight controls in place for our finances. We have completed one year, and we will continue to improve our organization and face and overcome challenges together. With improved processes, enhanced security, and many development projects in progress, together with our dedicated workforce, we have great hope for our success as an organization in the coming years.

Before you, there have been individuals with military backgrounds serving in this position. How different is it now?

AASL was established in 1982 by the Late General Sepala Attygalle, the Armored Corps Regiment’s founding father, and Colonel C A Dharmapala, who was Secretary to the Ministry of Defense.

The objective of AASL was to provide superior aviation services at our airports. Later, General Cyril Ranatunga was the Chairman of AASL, and he was also from the Armored Corps. I’m the third officer from the Armored Corps to head the AASL and its 17th Chairman. Three other retired Navy, Air Force, and Army officers have also held Chairman’s position at AASL. My objective as Chairman remains the same as every Chairman before me, regardless of my background, that is, to realize AASL’s founding mission of providing superior aviation services to the best of my ability.



You bring diverse experience, first as a military officer and then moving into administration as Governor. Can you tell us about that experience?

I have talked about my experiences as the Security Forces Commander of the Jaffna Peninsula, my work as the Competent Authority for IDPs, and the Northern Province Governor. If I trace my career experiences even before that, I have held many leadership positions. I joined the Sri Lanka Armored Corps as a Second Lieutenant in 1976. Unrest in the country started emerging in the same year. I was the first officer with Lieutenant Wijeratne to take an armored vehicle from Anuradhapura to Jaffna for internal security. That was my earliest involvement with an internal security scenario. I have spent most of my life in the military in the Northern Province, especially in Jaffna. I have tenured in Jaffna as a Troop Leader, Squadron Commander, where I commanded about 100 men and around 20 armored vehicles. Places like Pooneryn and Mankulam are very familiar to me. I was overseeing quite a few areas in the Northern Province at the time of becoming a Commanding officer.

Later, I commanded the Fourth Armored Regiment, the only tank regiment in the Sri Lanka Army. I was also the Armored Brigade Commander, where I commanded three Armored Regiments together. That was the time we carried out many operations in Vavuniya and Mankulam.

As Divisional Commander, I commanded an infantry division as well. While I was holding the Security Forces Commander position in Jaffna, I also held the appointment as the Regiment Commander of the Special Forces. I was also the Principal Staff Officer at the Joint Operations Headquarters at one point. I have two military degrees from the Defense Services Command and Staff College, Bangladesh, another from India's National Defence College. My training in the military has prepared me to react to unexpected scenarios like the pandemic quickly.

My first posting in a civilian position was with my appointment as the Competent Authority for the IDPs. Being a gazetted appointment, I had much authority in my job. That was the first time I began working with civilians and nongovernmental organizations. I learned a lot about civil administration as a result. I drew on this experience after I was appointed the Governor of the Northern Province.

As the Governor, I functioned in an entirely civil capacity and engaged in much more in depth administration and development work. I have brought these 30 plus years of experience with me to my current role.

Can you tell us about your work with the Northern Spring initiative?

As the Competent Authority, our task was to take care of the IDPs in a single location, ensuring that they were fed and taken care of and the children sent to school. Mr. Basil Rajapaksa's directive under the Northern Spring Initiative focused on establishing livelihoods before resettling the IDPs. It meant rebuilding their houses, preparing employment opportunities for them, and de-mining their areas. There was much work taking place at that time. The Government was doing infrastructure development supported by many organizations and non-governmental organizations. We also worked on re-establishing communication modes, opening post offices, restarting schools. All this had to be in place before resettlement began. We started this work from Mannar, moving from Vavuniya through Mankulam, from Welioya to Mullaitivu, and extended gradually to other areas. Concurrently, we developed the road network and communication, the Kokavil transmission tower being an important one. We completed the relocation

program within one and a half years.

At the time, there was no Governor’s residence in Jaffna. I was living in the former Jaffna Rest House with a tiny attached office and living room. I lived there for one and a half years before building a Governor’s residence later on. I worked throughout the day, traveling from Mullativu to Mannar and back to Jaffna, making sure the work progressed. What was important to us at this time was developing the Province. I believe we were successful in doing that.

We had a rehabilitation program for 12,000 former LTTE combatants who surrendered. We conducted this program under the purview of His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the fifth President of Sri Lanka, and the direct supervision of His Excellency President Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the Secretary Ministry of Defence at that time and with the support of the Sri Lanka Army. We had separate camps in Chettikulam and Vavuniya just for these men and women. We don’t hear of the LTTE’s presence in the North to this day because the Army conducted a rehabilitation program for three years. We drove the rehabilitation program methodically; we provided livelihood training, vocational training, and discipline to the surrenders; it was a complete package. They were good citizens by the time the Government reintegrated them into society. The Government gave them jobs and loan facilities; some are today employed abroad; some are graduates. As Governor, I gave scholarships to 12 former LTTE child soldiers, who eventually went to university. In addition to supervising the work that came under the Northern Spring initiative, I was involved in other civilian programs.

What has been your experience working with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa?

His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa looks for integrity, honesty, and hard work when choosing a senior officer for a post. He expects the selected person to have the ability to use one’s imagination to create optimistic scenarios where you develop the systems and maintain them working for the future. When I served as the Security Forces Commander in Jaffna, His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was the Defence Secretary. He had an excellent understanding of our capabilities, honesty, integrity, commitment to hard work, and our love for our country. I was appointed as the Governor to continue this work. As Chairman, we are dealing with susceptible operations, large infrastructure projects, and security risks. The same maturity, skills, and commitments are needed to ensure everything is operating smoothly. His Excellency the President recognizes that and always supports that. As

Government officials, we are committed to furthering President Rajapaksa’s vision for the country as laid out in his Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor policy document.

What are the plans for AASL?

We reopened the BIA on January 21st, 2021. We have to increase tourism gradually. The Government wants to ensure that tourism and its associated initiatives work successfully in the future. We are still dealing with the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19, such as requiring multiple PCR tests and mandatory quarantine periods that are continuing to affect tourist arrivals. But I feel we are heading in the right direction, and things will improve in the coming months. We remain positive and feel optimistic about the future. I along with my board of management and staff are determined to do our best to the aviation industry in line with the vision of His Excellency the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.