



Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2009

On receiving many compliments for the article 'Education Beyond "Self": Rejuvenating the True Spirit of Visakha Vidyalaya' by Avanti Perera in the last issue, I am happy to showcase another member in this issue as well. Your feedback is most welcome.

Editor: Priya de Silva

Looking back, looking ahead

Nothing has stirred the hearts and minds of parents palpably, as much as the education of their children. Nothing has demanded the urgent attention of visionary leaders, as much as policies on education.

A cursory glance at the Sri Lankan education system poses some pertinent questions:

- Have increased resources and the widening network of education delivery resulted in improving equity and strengthening the quality of education?
- Does the system produce employable students with a competitive edge in local and global markets?
- Do students from vulnerable and underprivileged sections of society have access to classrooms and lecture halls?
- At the end of thirteen years of schooling do our students imbibe fundamental learning tools required to be wholesome citizens able to function in a pluralistic society?

Certain statistics speak for themselves. The National **literacy** level is 96% while disaggregated figures for districts are much lower (Moneragala 86%, Nuwara Eliya 82.6%, Badulla 85.2% & Ampara 85.9%, whilst no official data is available for seven districts in the N & E). National **Primary Enrolment** rates range 90-96% while Moneragala (71%) and Polonnaruwa (74%) are much less and there is no data for seven districts in the N & E. For many years >50% of students failed the GCE

Cont...

Message from the new Principal of Visakha & the new President of our OGA – Mrs Sandamali Aviruppola

As the new Principal of Visakha it is necessary and pertinent that all of you get to know me and my background. It is also most important that we forge a supportive and understanding relationship to achieve our common ambition – the growth and development of Visakha Vidyalaya.

I had my earliest education at Anula Vidyalaya, Nugegoda, and thereafter joined St Joseph Convent, Gampola from where I sat the GCE A' Level examination. Having obtained my BA degree from Sri Jayawardenapura University, I served on the staff of Maliyadewa Vidyalaya, Kotmale in 1988, before becoming a SLEAS Cadet Officer. From 1989 to 1992 I served as the Deputy Principal of Sri Sumangala Boys' School, Panadura.

From thereon my life took a different turn when in 1993, I joined the Policy Planning and Monitoring Division of the Ministry of Education. As a Deputy Commissioner of Examinations attached to the Research & Development branch from 2000 to 2008, my work involved administration, academic activities related to school based assessment and research to enhance the quality and development of question papers at national examinations.

My appointment as Principal of Visakha is the culmination of a life of varied experiences in education. It is with much joy, expectation and hope that I begin my tenure as principal of this school. It is a monumental challenge and I look forward to benefitting from the experience, understanding and support of the VVOGA, in this rewarding endeavour so close to all our hearts.



Continued from overleaf

O' Level and failure rates in 2007 for Maths (51.5%), Science (51.8%) and English (60.06%) are dismal.

Annually, out of 250,000 school leavers about 110,000 qualify to enter university and most compete for 17,000 places in fifteen universities. Thus Sri Lanka has the lowest *Age Specific Participation Rate* in Tertiary Education in South Asia. It is also significant that every year many students with A & B grades at A' Level are unable to secure University placements. Prohibitive policies that disallow the establishment of private universities and higher education institutes have led to increasing migration of clever students coupled with a massive drain of foreign exchange. Sri Lanka is one of the lowest spenders on Education. The 2009 budgetary allocation is **<2.8 % of GDP** (OECD average 5.5%) and the estimated **total Education Expenditure** is **<6.8 % of total Government expenditure** (OECD average 13.3%). Startlingly >95% of all allocations are used for wages, procurements, travelling and miscellaneous expenditure, leaving <2% for improvements in education quality.

Most importantly, generations of students trapped within the chaos of the war continue to be deprived of learning. Such academic deprivation together with deep seated fears and prejudice rooted in their formative minds will have irreparable consequences - to themselves and to the nation.

While Sri Lanka grapples with its multitude of problems, at a global level innovative educational advancements are speeding ahead. Decentralization and devolution of powers to schools and universities giving greater autonomy have improved decision making and efficiency of service provision. Whilst Governments have retained responsibility for financing education, performance-based-funding, expenditure tracking and capitation financing have proved to be enormously successful. Internationally, educational attainments are measured using *Learning Scores* and post-school/university employment patterns. Correlating them to education expenditure enables Governments and private providers to make careful judgments on the efficacy and quality of service.

As a nation we need a loud wake-up call, a call that will shake us into thinking deep and thinking far about this crisis in education. Sri Lanka will not achieve economic growth or prosperity without educational advancement. And educational advancement will not be a reality unless populist policies and mediocrity are shed, and integrity and efficiency are restored into the system.

Dr Tara de Mel (MBBS, MD, MPhil) Former Secretary Ministry of Education & Higher Education

NEWS FROM THE OGA CALENDAR

Universal Children's day celebrations on 11 October 2008 for the Visakha Hostellers

The hostellers were treated to a day's programme of fun and laughter organized by the Social activities sub committee of the VVOGA

The day began with the handing over of a fully refurbished toilet & changing rooms for the hostel donated by the Visakha Alumnae Association of Southern California.

The evening continued with quiz and magic shows, educational lectures, games, stage performances, presentation of gifts for every child culminating in a sumptuous dinner for the hostel children.

Donation to the Army Hospital

Being informed of the urgent need of air mattresses for the ever burgeoning numbers of the injured army personnel, the Religious activities sub committee organized the donations of 11 nos. air mattresses & a suction apparatus of a total value of Rs 166,000 in lieu of the Founder's Day contribution by the VVOGA.

These were handed over to the Army Hospital, Narahenpita on the 14th October at a ceremony at which the then Principal, Deputy Principal & members of the VVOGA were present...

Benefit shows as a fund raiser

The inevitable cancellation of the annual 'Avurudu Pola' due to security reasons has had the OGA resorting to alternative avenues of fund raising.

Benefit shows screening popular films were organized by the fund raising sub committee, on 30th November to the public & 1st December 2008 for the students at the Jeremias Dias Hall. The screening of the films was sponsored by Mr Tissa Nagodawitharna and a tidy profit of Rs 434,490 made to fund the salary payment of staff members on the OGA payroll.

Farewell luncheon to the outgoing Principal, Mrs Rukmani Gunaratne

Held at the Jubilee Room of the Galle Face Hotel, on the 29th November 2008, Mrs Gunaratne was felicitated by a large crowd of OGA members & many past Principals of the school.

Bodhi Pooja & Bana to commemorate the 92nd anniversary of the founding of Visakha Vidyalaya

Organized by the Religious activities sub committee, religious observances were held in the beautiful precincts of the Visakha Bodhi.

The Bodhi Pooja was followed by chanting of "pirith" & an inspiring sermon by Rev. Thrikunamale Ananda Thera of the Maharagama Bikkhu center. .

PICTURES FROM THE OGA ALBUM



The hostel toilets after renovations made courtesy of the generosity of the Visakha Alumnae Association of Southern California.



A competitor at the newspaper dressing game at the Universal Children's Day celebrations for school hostellers

URGENTLY NEEDED

Graduate Teachers of History & Civics for the O' Level classes of the English Stream
Inquiries: Srini Karunaratne 2699870

Volunteers for the OGA Secretariat & the school cafeteria
Inquiries: Sharmali Kodagoda 2712817

GET UPDATES ON VVOGA NEWS

Send your name, contact number, membership number and e-mail address to darshinn@sltnet.lk and get 'Breaking News' of Visakha Vidyalaya Old Girls' Association regularly.

Donation being made to the Army Hospital, Narahenpita by the OGA



The Chief Guest, Mrs Rukmani Gunaratne arriving at the farewell luncheon held at the Galle Face Hotel.



Bodhi Puja & Bana sermon at the Visakha Bodhi on 16.01.09 in commemoration of the founding of our school 92 years ago.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS TO REMEMBER

February 21st OGA Members' Reunion trip

Venue - Villa Ocean View, Wadduwa

Price Rs 1,600/ per head all inclusive

Inquiries: Ishani Ariyapperuma 0777769060

March 25th Founder's Day - Pirith & Dana

May - Wesak Project – Donation to Cancer Hospital

Inquiries: Buddhini Medawatte 0777385764

June 20th VVOGA Annual General Meeting

July 6th Esala Sil Program

Inquiries: Buddhini Medawatte 0777385764

July 16th 75th Anniversary celebrations of VVOGA

Inquiries: Ishani Ariyapperuma 0777769060

Darshi Neelawathura Bandara 0773084142

OGA PROJECTS IN THE NEWS

The Visakha Archives

A small but loyal band of old girls have taken over the responsibility of refurbishing and updating the school archives maintained by the OGA. Documents, old log books, newspaper articles pertaining to our school or the students of yesteryear etc which could be of value in the recording of the milestones of our school are urgently needed. The safety & preservation of these documents are assured.

Measures are now being taken to preserve many documents that have suffered in the course of these years. **Cash donations & volunteers for the archives sub committee are most welcome.**

Inquiries: Ramya Wanniarachchi 0714 150730 or Kumari Wickramasuriya 2888026

OLD GIRLS IN THE NEWS

Kishani Jayasinghe – Soprano

A former Head Prefect of Visakha & a winner of prizes in many extra curricular activities, Kishani has not only a LLM from the University of Nottingham but is the first Sri Lankan soprano to perform as a soloist at the Royal Opera House in Covent Gardens.

A highlight of her short and meteoric rise to fame was her performance at Prince Charles' birthday at Buckingham Palace a month ago. She vowed a packed house, winning a standing ovation at "An evening with Kishani" presented by the Sunera Foundation at the Lionel Wendt theatre on 9th January 2009.

The OGA salutes this enormously talented Visakhian who has brought fame to her country & her Alma Mater. Bravo Kishani!

Mrs Maggie Witharna nee Perera

Possibly the oldest Visakhian, Mrs Witharna celebrated her 100th birthday on the 1st November 2008. The VVOGA wishes this beautiful lady good health and comfort amidst her loving family.

OBITUARIES

The OGA records with sadness the passing away of Mrs Prema Perera nee Abeywardena, an old girl and a past member of the staff of Visakha.

A HIT AD

THE OGA REUNION TRIP – Long awaited, not to be missed, when age is best forgotten, stress gets de-stressed, past athletic skills brought to surface, vocal cords get fine tuned and every Visakhian what ever age, size or temperament become a friend for a day & for life! (Kids allowed at a discounted rate)

See Forthcoming Events to Remember

