

RCSS NEWSLETTER

JULY-DECEMBER, 2022



Together for a Secure
and Safer South Asia

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2023

The Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo wishes all our partners a wonderful 2023 and success in all endeavors. May this year strengthen cooperation for more fruitful efforts towards a "secure and safer South Asia".

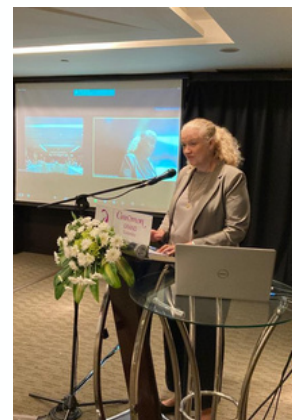
Message from Professor Nayani Melegoda, Executive Director, RCSS

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm I accepted the position of the Executive Director at the Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in November 2022.

RCSS is a think tank that has been a part and parcel of my university career, working with Professors R.A. Ariyaratne (Co – founder of RCSS) and Amal Jayawardene (Executive Director RCSS) serving as a member of the RCSS International Research Committee few years back.

I look forward to taking RCSS to greater heights in 2023 with more visibility in Sri Lanka and in the region. At present RCSS research and training is focused on South Asia: From a strategic lens, Indian Ocean resources, digital connectivity, and as a zone of peace; From a non – traditional security lens, human insecurity, environmental and climate change issues; From democracy lens, good governance, and peacebuilding, especially regarding youth and gender. Current research, advocacy, networking focus remains on youth, gender equality, peace, rule of law, environmental governance, climate security and change.

I take this opportunity to Wish the RCSS members, alumni, colleagues and friends Happy Holidays and a Wonderful New Year.



The Annual General Meeting of the RCSS

The Regional Centre for Strategic Studies held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 05th December 2022 at the RCSS premises. Dr. Sanath De Silva, Lecturer, Department of Strategic Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, was unanimously elected to chair the meeting. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 10th December 2021 were confirmed and approved by the Chairman.



Professor Nayani Melegoda, the newly appointed Executive Director, submitted a report on the activities of the RCSS for the period from January 2022 to December 2022 during which the Centre was engaged in several activities such as workshops, webinars, conferences, research, and networking. A significant outcome of the first half of the year was the "Post-war Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka (2015-2019): Lessons Learned" book published under the Think Tank Capacity Building (TTCB) project funded by the Rule of Law Collaborative, University of South Carolina, USA through Strategic Inspirations Limited, Colombo.

The Executive Director announced that Professor Rasul Rais from Pakistan and Professor Shanthie D'souza from India had completed their tenure in the Board of Directors. Therefore, RCSS appointed Professor Varun Sahni, Professor of International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India and Professor Nazir Hussain, Professor of International Relations, University of Wah, Pakistan as new members to the Board of Directors of RCSS.

The Executive Director stated that the tenure of office of the majority of IRC members had also expired on September 30, 2022. Therefore, steps have been taken to appoint new members based on the approval of the Board of Directors.

It was also announced that the RCSS website has been revamped to make it more interactive and now it is available for the public to access.



The Statement of Audited Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2022, together with the Auditors' Report, was tabled. The audited accounts were unanimously proposed by Dr. Sanath De Silva and seconded by Dr. Asantha Seneviratne.



The RCSS in line with the Women's Voice and Leadership project implemented by the Asia Foundation Sri Lanka with support from Global Affairs Canada organized advocacy meetings for women empowerment on Sustainable Development Goals. From October to December, four advocacy meetings were held onsite at the RCSS and virtually for women in higher education, health, and governance. The final advocacy meeting for women in Small and Medium Enterprises will be held in mid-January.



Advocacy Meeting for Female Undergraduates

The first advocacy meeting was held on Saturday, 15th October 2022, at the RCSS boardroom from 09:00 am - 03:00 pm. The resource persons of the advocacy meeting were Dr. Nirmali Wijegoonawardana, Senior Lecturer, Department of History, and Dr. Pavithra Jayawardena, Senior Lecturer and Coordinator, Postgraduate Diploma in Gender and Women's Studies, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo. 31 female undergraduates participated in the event.

Purpose

- Empower female undergraduates on realizing Gender Equality (SDG 05) & Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).
- Create awareness among young female students on their rights and equip them with confidence to face the wider society after they graduate.
- Create a platform to share and learn from each others' experience.

Advocacy Meeting for Female Trainee Police Officers

The second advocacy meeting was held on Saturday, 29th October 2022, at the RCSS boardroom from 09:00 am - 12:30 pm. The resource persons of the advocacy meeting were Professor Chandrika Wijeyaratne, former Vice Chancellor and Senior Professor in Reproductive Medicine, University of Colombo, and Ms. Ramyalatha Kodikara, Psychological Counselor and Psychotherapist, Women in Need and De Soysa Hospital for Women. Twenty-three female trainee police officers participated in the event.

Purpose

- Educate female trainee Police Officers on the significance of "Good Health and Well-being"(SDG 03).
- Encourage them to give importance for their well-being as they engage in an active role in the society, and to contribute to secure the well-being of vulnerable women in the society.

The third advocacy meeting for female postgraduates was held on 12th November 2022 from 09:30 am - 12:30 pm. The resource persons who conducted the workshop was Dr. Kumudika Boyagoda, Senior Academic Expert of the AHEAD Project and Senior Lecturer, Department of Demography, University of Colombo and Dr. Pavithra Jayawadena, Senior Lecturer and Coordinator, Postgraduate Diploma in Gender and Women's' Studies, Department of International Relations, University of Colombo.

- A platform for female postgraduate students coming from different backgrounds to learn, share and contribute to the realization of SDGs through their capacities.
- Discuss gender inequality norms and look to the significance of peace, justice and strong institutions.



Purpose

- Educate female local council members on Gender Equality (SDG 05) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).
- Empower female local council members to advance as women representatives in order to address gender-biased socio-political and economic structures.
- Educate them on the capacity they possess to contribute to the society from a grassroots level.



Author's Conference SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE AND DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA

21ST SEPTEMBER 2022



The Author's Conference on Shrinking Civic Space and Democracy in South Asia: Civil Society perspectives was held on the 21st of September 2022 at the Cinnamon Grand, Colombo, Sri Lanka. This conference was organized by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS). It is another activity funded by the grant provided by the Global Secretariat of GPPAC to GPPAC-SA. The objective of the conference was to present a series of South Asian country papers depicting concrete examples of shrinking civic space.

Professor Nayani Melegoda, Executive Director RCSS introduced the Chief Guest Speaker, the Ambassador of Norway, Mrs. Trine Jorani Eskedal. H.E. Trine Jørnli Eskedal spoke of democracy being under threat, not only in South Asia, but also many places across the world. She spoke about questioning democracy, how it can be under threat, the actors responsible for such threats and the situations that lead to such threats. Most importantly she stated what can civil society do if democracy is under threat. She further addressed that democracy in South Asia has been a difficult path. Despite Sri Lanka being the oldest democracy in the region and India being the largest democracy in the world, democratic development has been constrained in this part of the world. When looking at the recent history of South Asian, we can see that almost all South Asian countries have significant events or even turning points have had a noteworthy impact on their civil society and the space for civil activity.

When looking at Sri Lanka, the three- decade long war had already stifled the space for civic activity, despite that Sri Lankan civil society actors have persisted. The 2019 Easter bombing Sunday attacks as well as the recent political instability in the country are examples how extremely hostile the environment can be for civil society to operate in.

Similarly, India is experiencing a shift in democratic backsliding with growing authoritarian tendencies and increasing minorities communities coming under threat.

THE TALIBAN'S RETURN TO POWER HAS IN FACT LEFT NO ROOM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY TO FUNCTION IN AFGHANISTAN. SHE FINALLY ADDRESSED THAT IN ORDER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY TO REACH JUSTICE, THERE ARE MANY WHO NEED TO SUPPORT THEM, TO SAFEGUARD THEIR RIGHTS. THIS INVOLVES THE PROTECTION OF SALIENT FREEDOMS SUCH AS THE FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION, PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES AMONG OTHERS. SHE ENDED HER SPEECH BY STATING THAT CIVIL SOCIETY ACROSS SOUTH ASIA FUNCTION UNDER SEVERE CONSTRAINTS. DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, THE UNTIRING WORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY SOUTH ASIA HAS ACHIEVED SO MUCH. THEREFORE, IT IS UP TO US TO FIGHT, TO SPEAK UP AGAINST INJUSTICE, TO STAND UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, TO STAND UP FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE A VOICE THAT HAS PROTECTED SOUTH ASIA'S DEMOCRACIES AND CIVIC SPACE, EVEN IN THEIR IMPERFECT FORMS.



The Regional Steering Group Meeting

The Annual Regional Steering Group (RSG) meeting of GPPAC South Asia was held at the Cinnamon Grand, Colombo, Sri Lanka on the 21st of September 2022. This meeting was organized by RCSS, the Regional Secretariat of GPPAC SA in partnership with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) based in The Hague, The Netherlands. This was the first hybrid RSG meeting where members attended the meeting, both in person and via zoom conferencing.



It was attended by six countries within the region with the exception of Maldives and Bhutan. GPPAC South Asia is a collective of non-governmental organizations involved in promoting peace in the region and are engaged in efforts to mitigate and prevent violent conflicts from taking place in their respective countries. The network of South Asian organizations has been active from 2003 onwards and is part of the global umbrella network of the Global Secretariat Network also known as GPPAC where it works to prevent violent conflict and build more peaceful societies.

The Regional Steering Group of GPPAC SA, is the core decision making group for the South Asia network. The members of the RSG met this year to plan out the activities that will be implemented for the year 2023 and to review the progress of the activities conducted for the year 2022. This time, the Regional Steering Group decided to on SDG Goals that will be pertinent for the year 2023 and climate change was one of the favourite SDG's. It was also decided to conduct activities to expand the existing youth peacebuilding network in GPPAC-SA. The meeting enabled a fruitful discussion amongst the members and it strengthened the network's integrity.



Shrinking Civic Space and Democracy in South Asia

A collection of seven country chapters (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, The Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) providing civil society perspectives on democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space in South Asia was articulated by seven country paper writers. This research activity was also conducted to build better capacity for GPPAC South Asia to draft stronger funding proposals on the subject. The seven country papers were articulated by Dr. Lailuma Nasiri, representing Afghanistan from the Afghan Justice Organization (AJO), Mr. Ashish Banik representing Bangladesh from the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Dr. Samata Biswas representing India from the Calcutta Research Organisation (CRG), Ms. Shahindha Ismail from the Maldivian Democratic Network, Dr. Nischal Pandey from the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS), Dr. Salma Malik and Dr. Saeed Rid representing Pakistan from the Quaid-i-Azam University and Ms. Shavini De Silva and Ms. Nimmi Jayathilake representing Sri Lanka from the Regional Centre for Studies (RCSS).

Advocacy meeting funded by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)

SPEAKERS



A Network of People
Building Peace



Dr. Jehan Perera
Executive Director,
National Peace Council (NPC)



Ms. Visaka Dharmadasa
The Founder and Director,
Association of War Affected Women
(AWAW)



**Date: "Thursday
03rd November 2022"**
Time: 2.00 p.m - 4.00 p.m.

Moderated by Professor Nayani Melegoda

Senior Professor in
International Relations,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Twitter Café

The Twitter Café on Civic Space and Democracy was held on the 23rd of November 2022 at 10am. This session was organized by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), The GPPAC – SA secretariat in collaboration with the members of GPPAC-SA. The objective of the Twitter Café was to identify young people from seven South Asian countries and engage them in a Twitter Café session. The Twitter café was conducted by participants engaging in tweeting their opinions, ideas and issues on shrinking civic space and challenges to democracy. GPPAC-SA conducted this session with the hopes of broadening and strengthening its network through this session. The session was attended by two expert speakers and a youth speaker. The two expert speakers were Dr. George Cooke of the AWARELOGUE initiative and Dr. Pavithra Jayawardene, Senior Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo while the youth speaker was Mr. Umilinda Perera, Regulatory policy and compliance officer at the Colombo Stock Exchange. In order to garner reach and generate engagement, RCSS along with GPPAC-SA country focal points invited youth participants to actively participate in the Twitter Café. RCSS hosted a few planning meetings with the members of GPPAC-SA during the months of September, October and November. During the planning sessions, the concept note was articulated, the expert speakers, the youth speaker and the participants were finalized. The GPPAC-SA country focal points were requested to nominate 10 young participants from each of their countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, The Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) to engage in the Twitter Café. After the participants of each country was finalized, the concept note along with a briefing of the event was circulated with the participants. The GPPAC-SA Twitter account received a total of 75 followers which included 2216 impressions and 383 engagements.



REGIONAL CENTRE FOR
STRATEGIC STUDIES

TWITTER CAFÉ on Civic Space and Democracy



23rd NOVEMBER 2022

Wednesday - 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.

**Join as via @ GPPACSA
for a lively discussion**



A Network of People
Building Peace

✉ rcss@rcss.org | ☎ (+94)11 269 09 13 / (+94)11 269 09 14 | 🌐 www.rcss.org

Post-War Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka (2015–2019): Lessons Learned

CONTRIBUTORS

"Post-War Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka: Lessons Learned (2015–2019)" is the outcome of the research conducted by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies funded under Think Tank Capacity Building Project implemented by the Rule of Law Collaborative, University of South Carolina. The Research Team included Prof. Gamini Keerawella, Prof. Sarjoon Athambawa, Dr. Menik Wakkumbura, Dr. Ramesh Ramasamy, Ms. Shavini De Silva, Ms. Nimmi Jayathilake and Ms. Savithri Sellapperuma. The tenure of the National Unity Government (NUG) stands as a unique democratic reform experience in Sri Lanka since independence. The research report examines why the 2015–2019 democratic reform agenda in Sri Lanka stalled during the middle of the course despite all the hype and popular support for political reforms at the beginning. The dilemma of democratic reform initiatives of NUG in the post-war context is unpacked by raising the following research questions:

1. What are the positive and negative elements of the democratic reform agenda in 2015?
2. How to account for the setbacks in the democracy-building endeavors during 2015–2019?
3. What are the main lessons to be learned from the democracy building experience during 2015–2019?

The research is a theoretical and analytical study. The point of departure of the study is the survey of analytical literature on democracy-deficit and democratic reforms in post-conflict settings to posit the Sri Lankan dilemma in a proper theoretical/analytical context. The key element of the project was desk research. The second layer of the research consisted of 24 Key Informant Interviews and a Focal Group Discussion. The report is organized in nine chapters, the first and last being the introduction and the conclusions. The introduction traces the momentum of the political whirlwind in the period 2015–2019 that resulted in defeating President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the Presidential election held in January 2015. The second chapter traces the authoritarian tendencies, political corruption and nepotism of the regime. In the third chapter, the report identifies the main elements of the democracy-building initiatives of the NUG and their evolution. The fourth chapter concentrates on the role played by external actors in influencing democratization process and the responses of the NUG. The initiative taken by the NUG in the direction of achieving national reconciliation forms the scope of the fifth chapter. In the sixth chapter, the report traces the role of civil society during and after the Presidential Elections. The change of political priorities of NUG in the period 2015–2019 is dealt in chapter seven. The crisis and disintegration of social and political alliances for democracy at the later of the NUG tenure is discussed in chapter eight. In the conclusion, the report identifies key lessons learned from democracy building experiences in Sri Lanka under the NUG from 2015–2019.



"Sri Lanka was standing on a critical historical juncture at the end of the long-drawn civil war in May, 2009, with many crossroads before the victorious regime. The end of the war in 2009 could have been a turning point in post-colonial Sri Lankan history if President Mahinda Rajapaksa had used this historic opportunity and the space to embark on much-needed democratic political reforms. The continuation of the same political practice for five years after the end of the war created a widespread popular urge for political reforms. Hence, the tenure of the National Unity Government (2015–2019) stands as a unique democratic reform experiment in Sri Lanka since independence. It marked the first substantive political reform initiative in the post-war context. In this backdrop, the research examines why the 2015–2019 democratic reform agenda in Sri Lanka stalled during the middle of the course despite all the hype and popular support for political reforms at the beginning..."

To read the full text click the link:

https://www.rcss.org/content_images/2022111113038Final%20Research%20Report%2010-06-22.pdf

The RCSS organized a series of knowledge disseminating activities based on the research report titled "Post-War Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka (2015-2019): Lessons Learned" submitted to the the Rule of Law Collaborative, University of South Carolina, USA in July 2022.

The activities were as follows;

- **Book Review Discussion**

A book review discussion (hybrid event) was held on 21st October 2022 from 05:30 pm - 07:00 pm. The invited Reviewers were Dr. Peshan Gunaratne, State Counselor, Attorney General Office, Sri Lanka and Professor S.I. Keethaponcalan, Professor of Conflict Resolution, Salisbury University, Maryland, USA.



(based on a research study of the Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS) funded by Think Tank Capacity Building Project implemented by the Rule of Law Collaborative, University of South Carolina)

DISCUSSION

Dr. George I. H. Cooke
Awarelogue/ Host of Sri Lankan understanding on Hi TV

Ms. Nimmi Jayatileke
Programme Officer at RCSS, BA (Hons) in English from the University of Pondicherry and an MA in South Asian Studies from the University of Pondicherry, India

Ms. Shavini De Silva
Programme Officer at RCSS, BA in International Relations from the University of London and a MSc. in International Relations from the University of Colombo.

Date:
"Friday
04th November 2022"

Time:
2.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.

University of South Carolina
Think Tank Capacity Building (TTCB) Project

PANELISTS

Dr. Jehan Perera
Executive Director,
National Peace Council (NPC)

Professor Chaminda Padmakura
Department of International Relations,
University of Colombo

Dr. Pavithra Jayawardene
Department of International Relations,
University of Colombo

Dr. Sharmini Chandran
Department of Political Science,
University of Colombo

Dr. Shantha Gamlath
Department of Political Science,
University of Sri Jayawardenapura

Moderated by Professor Nayani Melegoda
Senior Professor in
International Relations,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

10th November 2022
Thursday | 2.00 PM. to 4.00 PM.



- **Democracy at work: Youth perspectives of Post-war Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka 2015 - 2019**

This discussion was held on 22nd October 2022 from 09:30 am - 12:30 pm with the participation of 25 undergraduates at the RCSS. The session was moderated by Dr. Nirmali Wijegoonawardana and Dr. Pavithra Jayawardena.

- **Advocacy Meeting: Post-War Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka 2015-2019**

This virtual event was held on 04th November 2022 from 02:00 pm - 04:00 pm. The two discussants Ms. Shavini De Silva and Ms. Nimmi Jayathilake was interviewed by Dr. George Cooke, Awarelogue/Host of Sri Lankan Understanding on Hi TV.

- **Panel Discussion: Post-War Democracy Building Initiatives in Sri Lanka 2015-2019**

The Panel discussion held on 10th November 2022 with the participation of the following panelists; Professor Chaminda Padmakura, Dr. Pavithra Jayawadena, Department of International Relations, Dr. Shamini Chandran, Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo; Dr. Jehan Perera, National Peace Council, Colombo, and Dr. Shantha Gamlath, Department of Political Science, University of Sri Jayawadenapura, Sri Lanka.

- **Youth dialogue on "Post - War Democracy Building initiatives in Sri Lanka 2015 - 2019"**

A youth dialogue was held on 14th November 2022 at the RCSS Boardroom with the participation of more than 25 youth. The session was moderated by Dr. George Cooke, Senior Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Colombo and Awarelogue/Host of Sri Lankan Understanding on Hi TV.

Professor Rasul Rais from Pakistan and Professor Shanthie D'souza from India completed their tenure in the Board of Directors. Therefore, RCSS appointed Professor Varun Sahni, Professor of International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India and Professor Nazir Hussain, Professor of International Relations, University of Wah, Pakistan as new members to the Board of Directors of RCSS.



The RCSS also welcomed new members to the International Research committee. They are Dr. David Brewster, Senior Research Fellow, National Security College, Australian National University and distinguished Research Fellow with the Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne. Prof. Sanjay Chaturvedi, Professor in International Relations, Chairman of Indian Ocean Research Group, Inc. (IORG), and an Observer in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Prof. S.I. Keethaponchalan, Chair of the Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution Department at Salisbury University, Maryland. Prof. Mannesha Wanasinghe Pasqual, Professor in International Relations at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and Prof. Sharad K. Soni, Director, International Collaboration, Centre for Inner Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

"The Monarch's Message", the newly published book of Dr. George Cook, Senior Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Colombo, Awarelogue/Host of Sri Lankan Understanding on Hi TV and RCSS member was published on 10th December, 2022. The event was held at the Department of National Archives Auditorium. "The Monarch's Message" is a collection of Christmas messages issued by Queen Elizabeth for 70 years. In fact, these messages issued by Queen Elizabeth II were not simply Christmas wishes, they included significant messages in relation to Foreign Policy, International Relations, Christianity and of course Christmas.

