



On Sirasa TV:
Thursdays
at 10.45 pm

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Armed by Nature? *Sri Lanka 2048* probes how healthy ecosystems can protect us from disasters

The December 2004 tsunami was Sri Lanka's biggest disaster in recent times: it consumed nearly 40,000 lives, displaced over half a million, and caused massive property damage. In the mega-disaster's wake, researchers noticed how certain locations along the eastern and southern coasts were impacted considerably less than nearby areas. The reason: there were some mangroves or sand dunes intact, which had buffered and reduced the tsunami's tremendous force.

Such protection from disasters is only one of many 'ecosystem services' from Nature which have gone unnoticed and unvalued until recently. For example:

- Mangroves, coral reefs and sand dunes significantly reduce shoreline erosion, minimizing the impact of cyclones, storms and tsunamis.
- Wetlands such as marshes and swamps are important for water storage, storm protection, flood control, shoreline stabilization and erosion control.
- Forests and shrubs can protect against landslides, soil erosion, floods and avalanches.

This week in *Sri Lanka 2048*, we explore these links and ask: How can we use Nature's free ecosystem services to safeguard lives, property and infrastructure from disasters? The one-hour debate, to be shown on Sirasa TV at 10.45 pm on Thursday 26 June 2008, agrees on one point: healthy ecosystems are far more likely to look after human welfare; degraded and unhealthy don't have a chance.

Sri Lanka 2048 is an innovative series of TV debates exploring prospects for a sustainable future for Sri Lanka in the Twenty First Century. It involves -- as panel and studio audience -- a cross section of Sri Lankans from academic, civil society, corporate and government backgrounds.

This week's panel comprises: **Dr Buddhi Weerasinghe**, Consultant, National Disaster Management Centre; **Prof Kapila Dahanayake**, senior geologist at University of Peradeniya; **U W L Chandradasa**, Director (Technology and Mitigation) at Disaster Management Centre; and **Menaka Wijesinghe** Project Director of Sarvodaya Community Disaster Management Center. The debate is moderated by Sirasa TV's versatile presenter **Kingsly Rathnayaka**.



The debate raises several important questions, such as:

- Are Sri Lanka's disaster management policies and strategies taking into account the natural protection provided by healthy ecosystems?
- How does our disaster management policy coordinate with other relevant policies, for example those in forestry or land use planning?
- Have we learned the tsunami's environmental lessons, and is action being taken to conserve remaining coral reefs, mangroves and sand dunes?

Sri Lanka 2048 debates are co-produced by TVE Asia Pacific, an educational media foundation, and IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in partnership with MTV Channel (Private) Limited. This TV series is supported under the Raising Environmental Consciousness in Society (RECS) project, sponsored by the Government of the Netherlands.

For more information on *Sri Lanka 2048* series, visit: www.srilanka2048.com

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