

# Small island, big dreams

■ Inspiring Sri Lanka's next generation through the success stories of innovative leaders, entrepreneurs and drivers of change

■ Indira Kithsiri and Hashendra Wijesinha collaborate to write a book profiling the stories of successful entrepreneurs and inspirational leaders with Sri Lankan roots, from within the country and abroad

Sri Lanka is at the cusp of a paradigm shift. The country is poised for rapid growth, with aspirations to position itself as the vibrant economic hub of South Asia. In recent years, Sri Lanka has made robust efforts in establishing itself as a knowledge-based economy, with strong emphases on education and skills development. Driven by their passion for the country and for social entrepreneurship, authors Indira Kithsiri and Hashendra Wijesinha are collaborating to write a book profiling the stories of successful entrepreneurs and inspirational leaders with Sri Lankan roots, from within the country and abroad. Indira began the project after recognising the lack of an adequate local platform to highlight these exciting individuals and their achievements. Her collaboration with Hashendra was born out of their closely aligned interests and goals, particularly Hashendra's aspirations to establish a non-profit organisation focusing on mentoring young Sri Lankans in the areas of entrepreneurship, personal and career development, specifically for youth from disabled and low socio-economic backgrounds. The non-profit is at the crux of the book project, as sales from the book will be used to set up the organisation. Indira and Hashendra spoke to us about the initiative, and how it could help shape Sri Lanka's success story:

**Q: What is the book about and what are you trying to achieve with this initiative?**  
**A:** The book will feature the life journeys of Sri Lankan entrepreneurs, drivers of change and inspiring leaders from varied spheres. It will be the first component of an ecosystem of initiatives we will build to engage both the private and public sectors in supporting the nation's burgeoning young and innovative talents. We truly hope that our publication will provide insights, direction and guidance to bright young Sri Lankans who have the aspirations to turn their

**FT Profile**

**Indira Kithsiri, Project Initiator and Co-Author**



Indira Kithsiri is a bona fide social entrepreneur and youth empowerment advocate. Born in the mountains of Switzerland to a Swiss mother and Sri Lankan father, she founded SAHANA Sri Lanka, a non-profit organisation aiming to improve the living conditions and educational opportunities of underprivileged youth and women in Sri Lanka. Indira's professional career has spanned more than eight years working on project development, relationship management and communications across Switzerland, India and Sri Lanka. Today, she is a Community Specialist for India and South Asia at the World Economic Forum, in Geneva, Switzerland. "It is now in the hands of Millennials to weave the fabric of societal change, and drive innovation in constructing a better world. However, it is our responsibility to engage, inspire and empower them to reach their full potential through education and exposure to life-changing opportunities."



**FT Profile**

**Hashendra Wijesinha, Co-Author**



Hashendra Wijesinha is a third-culture nomad, having spent his childhood between Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Arts from the Australian National University. He has a diverse skillset built across the corporate and non-profit sectors, including areas such as risk and management consulting, project management, communications, and research with organisations like KPMG, The United Nations Development Program, and the ANU. He is currently pursuing his post-graduate studies in Sustainability and Accounting at the University of Sydney. "After years of war and instability, Sri Lanka is truly rising like a phoenix. We need to do what we can to instill hope and possibilities in the minds of the youth, and provide them with a platform to ensure that their drive, not their backgrounds, are what defines them."

**MENTORS**

**Razeen Sally, Chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies and Associate Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, leading the Public Policy & Governance chapter.**



"Sri Lankan public policy and governance demand rejuvenation, and this can only come from the ideas and activism of the younger generation. This project brings together young professionals who aspire to do something better for their country. For this reason it is a welcome contribution."

**Hiran Cooray, Chairman of Jetwing, leading the Tourism & Hospitality chapter.**



"Sri Lanka continues to go from strength to strength in tourism and hospitality. As such, we need to highlight the stories of those who have made a difference in the sector and further motivate the youth to enhance, enrich and pioneer the breaking of new ground in their fields of passion."

**Muttiah Muralidaran, Cricketer and Reconciliation-through-sports Activist, leading the Sports & Adventure chapter.**



"Sports unites us, regardless of race, gender, or social standing. A publication like this is crucial in identifying the individuals taking Sri Lanka to the next level as a brand, through achievements in their game, or through their pursuit of challenging quests."

ideas into powerful and impactful realities. An essential part of this project will be the involvement of the broader local and diaspora Sri Lankan community in selecting the most accomplished talents as exemplars for the local youth.

**Q: How do you hope to involve the community in selecting the profiles?**

**A:** We have created an online nomination process for selecting the individuals who will be featured in the book, on our website, www.iaminspired.lk. We have generated a selection criteria to assist us with evaluating potential candidates. Anyone can nominate an individual who inspires them, and is within the parameters of the selection criteria. We especially urge all Sri Lankans, and the international community to help highlight the unsung heroes who continue to make a positive impact on our society. Once the nomination process is over, we will shortlist and select five individuals, diverse in background, experience and outlook for each chapter of the book.

**Q: What are the topics you are hoping to focus on in the book?**

**A:** The book will cover chapters anchored on topics like Start-up, Business & Digital, Arts & Culture, Tourism & Hospitality, Public Policy & Governance, Human Rights & Philanthropy; providing insights into sectors where Sri Lanka has seen tremendous progress in recent years. Each chapter

will feature one or two advisors, recognised as influential leaders or established experts in their fields of work. For example, we are incredibly thrilled to have cricketer veteran Muttiah Muralidaran for the chapter on Sports & Adventure.

Similarly, we are honoured to receive the endorsement of Rosy Senanayake, a renowned women and children activist, who will lead the Young Stars & Exceptional Women chapter. Senanayake, who is also the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Sri Lankan Prime Minister stated: "I am confident that this book will contribute to the local ecosystem of creativity, innovation and leadership cultivated by the talent chronicled in these chapters. These individuals are a powerful source of inspiration to the youth, especially the many deserving young women who continue to break the glass ceiling in the private and public sectors." By joining this initiative, advisors are given the opportunity to engage in discussions, share critical lessons learned, build innovative ideas and commit their knowledge and passion to nominees they select.

**Q: What type of profiles are you planning to feature in the book?**

**A:** We hope to strike a balance between established figures, and comparatively newer industry disruptors. We are thrilled to partner with Dilmah Tea's non-profit organisation, the Merrill J. Fernando

Foundation (MJF) and the Foundation of Goodness to identify and feature promising young men and women from less privileged backgrounds throughout the chapters. We hope it will give them fantastic exposure to the Sri Lankan community at large, and will be crucial to cultivating a connection between young rural readers and the book's purpose. We are also in discussions with other international organisations in Sri Lanka on how this project

may increase its impact from a grassroots level.

**Q: What is the audience you are targeting? Are you also planning to launch a local version of the book?**

**A:** Our dream is to see a copy of our publications in Sri Lankan households both on the island and internationally! While written by us, we hope that getting the public involved with the nominations will ensure we have a finished product regarded by

Sri Lankans with pride on what we can achieve, both young and old. The book will first be published in English, but we hope to collaborate with the Sri Lankan government to distribute Sinhala and Tamil versions in textbook format to high schools across the country. We believe this initiative could support the current Government's reforms in the education sector, by providing innovation to school curriculums.

**Central Bank of Sri Lanka**

**Public Lecture on**

**"State of the Economy as Reflected in the Central Bank Annual Report - 2016"**

(Medium - English)



**Speaker**

**Dr (Mrs.) Y M Indraratna**  
 Director of Economic Research  
 Central Bank of Sri Lanka

**Thursday, 04 May 2017 at 3.30 p.m.**  
 At the Atrium, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Colombo 01.

*Entrance Free. All are Welcome*

**Centre for Banking Studies**  
 58, Sri Jayewardanepura Mawatha, Rajagiriya.  
 TP: 011 9477811, 9477840, Fax: 9807384 / 9477887  
 E-mail: director@cbst.lk

## STAIRS TO CEO

### For Senior Managers on their way to be CEO



This unique training course offers insights and sure-fire speaking techniques that can make you an outstanding CEO.

**Resource Person**  
 Yukthi K. Gunasekera  
 Analytical thinker on CEO Communication,  
 Observer of world's finest CEO Communicators in action,  
 Communication Coach to CEOs.

**Date:** Thursday 18th May 2017  
**Time:** 8.30 am to 5.30 pm  
**Place:** Cinnamon Grand Colombo  
**Course fee:** Rs. 40,000 per head

**Registration / Info:** 077-999-2442 / yukthigunasekera@gmail.com

YKG Associates specialises in 1-on-1 coaching on *CEO Communication*. Its general practice focuses on speaking and writing skills for executives.  
[www.ykgassociates.com](http://www.ykgassociates.com)