

Anti-corruption heroes honoured

A packed house cheered lustily as three Sri Lankan heroes fighting corruption went up to collect their trophies from Transparency International Founder, Dr Peter Eigen, this year's chief guest at the presentation of the National Integrity Award by TISL.

The presentation was held for the sixth successive year at the at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) Committee Room B, on UN Anti-Corruption Day, 9 December.

Welcoming the gathering, TISL Executive Director J C Welliamuna said that the ceremony was being held at a very crucial period in the history of the country when highly powerful networks are engaging in all strategies to silence the anti-corruption movement in the country. He reminded that the time has come to outsmart corruption and be more strategic. "Sri Lanka has a lot of potential to move forward as a nation, mainly due to the resources and human capacity we have. However, an unfortunate trend has now set in to silence the dissenting opinions. Tolerance of free opinion is felt, all over. We have to do everything possible as a nation to arrest this trend," he said.

Introducing Dr Peter Eigen as "a visionary par excellence and a global icon on anti-corruption", Mr Welliamuna described him as the number one person in moving the global anti-corruption agenda forward.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr Eigen said that awareness is probably the basis of the struggle against corruption. He stressed on the need to build coalitions between civil society, the private sector and governments, between rich and poor, between the people in the rural areas and the people in the cities, between intellectuals and decision makers, the media and normal workers. "These coalitions can give us an answer. That's why I'm hopeful because it is more and more recognized that in global governance the reassertion of politics over the unfettered marketplace which seems to run the world right now is winning. So it is in this context that we have to focus very much on awareness building." (More inside)

Special Invitee, UNDP Resident Representative Neil Buhne said that although fighting corruption is something that seems very obvious, it is also something that's very difficult because there are so many vested interests that benefit from it. For corruption to be rooted out of a very broad coalition. (More inside)

Speaking on behalf of the panel of judges, renowned economist Ms Jezima Ismail said that theirs was a very zealous task. "We were extremely conscious about whom we were selecting. We were alert at every point."

After describing the selection process, she said that looking at the foundational values of society and at the Sri Lankan and the world context today, it is a wonderful gesture that these awards are taking place.



UNDP Resident Rep Neil Buhne, Inspector Deshabandu Senarathne, TI Founder Dr Pieter Eigen, NIA winners Thusitha Pitigala & Priyantha Fernando, and TISL Executive Director J C Welliamuna

Thrilled with the wonderful faces

"It is so energizing to stand in front of a hall like this with so many wonderful faces looking at us and our plans to eradicate corruption all over the world. I cannot tell you how much strength and how much enthusiasm this gives us." Dr Peter Eigen began his keynote address with these words.

Paying a tribute to TISL, he said: "I want to thank the National Chapter of Transparency International in Sri Lanka under the leadership of this wonderful group of people for the fantastic work they have done not only here in Sri Lanka but also as a model and an example for how manifold the battle against corruption has to be to the many other national chapters and civil society groups all over the world."

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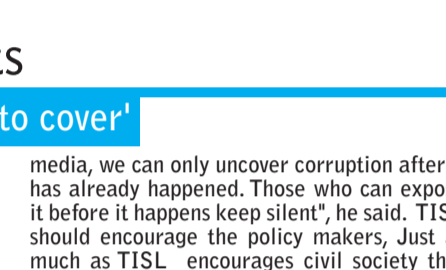
"Something can be done", assures TI Founder

"This room full of people from many different parts of your society, different religions, different groups, different professions. Their cooperation makes it possible to do something against corruption. Mr. Obama would have said "Yes we can." Not only do we build up awareness of the all pervasiveness of corruption everywhere in the world but also to the devastating damage it does, but most importantly, and this is what I would like to stress today, that something can be done by this powerful coalition of friends of honesty, of better governance, of justice and of protecting the world against destruction and climate change." So said Dr Peter Eigen, Founder of Transparency International (TI) in his keynote address at the NIA 2008 presentation ceremony.

quite necessary if you wanted to do business in the globalised economy.

"And at that time we started to work on building awareness firstly on the all pervasiveness of corruption, grand corruption in the international arena all the way down to petty corruption of a school teacher who is demanding money from the parent to allow the child to participate in education or a nurse asking for money or a doctor or an immigration officer. We wanted to build awareness of the devastating and deadly impact of this."

Referring to the large scale corruption witnessed today, he had this to say: "World Bank estimates \$ 1000 billion is stolen every year through corruption. This is a lot of money. This is only the tip of the iceberg. The real damage done is through perversion of economic decision making, the perversion of selection of large projects. So wrong decisions are taken by corrupt leaders in the south driven by unholy alliances with corrupt suppliers and promoters from the north. It's this amazing alliance between promoters from companies in Europe and other rich countries and the decision-makers in the south that has led, in my opinion, to the poverty in many parts of the world, to the underdevelopment, to the misery, to the death and destruction. 11 million children die before the age of five every year not because of difficult diseases but because of simple profane diseases based on poverty, on poor sanitation and unavailability of water. More than 2 billion people live without sanitation. A billion people live without drinking water. So how can we accept this? How can we accept a world which breeds so much despair and so much hopelessness and so much anger and so much violence. I believe our fight against corruption is the answer."



TI Founder Dr Pieter Eigen

Need for strong partnership and support

"Fighting corruption is not easy. It takes courage and strength to stand up against those more powerful than yourself and for this you need to have the strong partnership and support from other committed and likeminded people at all levels," said UNDP Resident Representative Neil Buhne at the NIA presentation ceremony.

them. It is compulsory now for all UN staff to complete an online ethics course. So the UN is not immune, but we're also taking action. I think that's something all organizations need to do.

not only governments and financial institutions that need to do more to prevent corruption and strengthen integrity. Corruption affects us all.



UNDP Resident Rep Neil Buhne

Referring to the United Nations Convention against Corruption which came into force in 2005, Mr Buhne said that the Convention embodies a comprehensive approach to corruption recognizing the importance of both preventive and punitive measures and provides a unique opportunity for a global response to a global problem that pervades institutions within countries and also crosses national borders. "It's very much to the credit of Sri Lanka that it was the second country in the world to sign this Convention. So that's a good start to build on."

"As well as being advocates for reforms the UN is also involved in partnering directly the national governments, the private sector and civil society outfits to support their efforts to implement the recommendations of the UN Anti-Corruption Convention and a number of other reforms. One partnership with the private sector is an initiative called Global Combat, which has 10 principles, one of which is a principle to fight against corruption, i.e that businesses will operate in a transparent and honest way."

It breaches democratic institutions, compromises the role of law and enables terrorists to finance their nefarious work. On this international day, let us all do our part to strengthen integrity, play by our rules and turn the tide against this global menace."



NIA Winners' thoughts

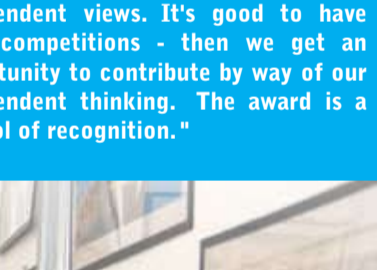
'Ample corruption for media to cover'

Investigative journalist Thusitha Pitigala, Winner of NIA 2008 is the producer of 'Vimarshana', broadcast over Sirasa TV daily exposing large scale corruption, miscarriage of justice, misdeeds of high officials, political interference and misuse of public property. His contribution as a journalist has been considerable. His revelations through the medium of television have created a wide interest and have had a large impact on the community.

media, we can only uncover corruption after it has already happened. Those who can expose it before it happens keep silent," he said. TISL should encourage the police makers. Just as much as TISL encourages civil society that opportunities for corruption to occur should be reduced, policy-makers should also be encouraged, he added.

people to report corruption. If they can't protect the person who reports, then how can we eradicate corruption? he said.

He hoped that the day would dawn when there wouldn't be a need for award ceremonies of this nature. "I hope we can create a country of people who work according to their conscience" he concluded.



'Education setup is corrupt'

NIA 2008 winner S. Priyantha Fernando is a government teacher and trade union activist. He has played a significant role in initiating change in the educational administrative setup in the Raja Rata. Recognised as a person with strong personal leadership qualities, he has been responsible for many anti-corruption initiatives which have had a significant impact.

corruption. "I was actually embarrassed because many of the cartoons drawn by the children (in the TISL sponsored competition) portrayed teachers. We live in a society where billions are stolen. One of the reasons why the education sector is so corrupt is because it is controlled by very corrupt officials. I believe that 198 of the 200 officials are unsuitable, so naturally they can't run a proper education system," he said.

a social organization to fight corruption. "More than winning awards, my aim is to cleanse the mechanism that steals from our people."



'Need to bring back Sri Lanka's glory'

Inspector Deshabandu Senarathne who won recognition with a Special Mention, is the QIC, Potuhera police station. His mission is to adopt a completely new framework to minimise corruption. With a vision to make the police a truly public institution, he has created a visitor-friendly environment in the workplace. His openness and leadership qualities as a junior officer have been highly appreciated.

In an emotional speech after receiving the award, Inspector Senarathne thanked his parents, family and colleagues for supporting him in his activities.

"Sri Lanka is a wonderful country, but it is sad to see where we are in the world today. May TISL have the strength to bring back that glory," he added.



Keen interest in anti-corruption cartoons

Invitees to the NIA 2008 presentation ceremony showed a keen interest in viewing the anti-corruption cartoons exhibited at the BMICH. A selection from the entries to the TISL organized cartoon competition including the award winning ones, attracted the attention of the viewers who were not only amused by what they saw but also realized the seriousness of the problem of corruption in Sri Lanka.

amusing. "The entries created serious humor in us - serious because it implied much more."

He believed the number of incidents of corruption that take place in our country in a day "may be equal to the amount of money we owe the World Bank."

'A most valuable experience'

TISL Coordinator Hasini Ratnamalala found the cartoon competition a most valuable experience. "Public response was massive with over a thousand entries being received from all over the country. It turned out to be a voice to the voiceless in the country against corruption," she says.

issues. "It was noteworthy that certain issues were typical to certain areas. For example, cartoons from the North and East symbolized corruption issues in war. Illegal felling of trees dominated those from Puttalam & Chilaw."

"Thank you, cartoonists for reminding us of the administrators as traitors, law makers as law breakers. Sometimes these people are described in high flow words as pillars of the nation. Pillars of the nation are portrayed as the caterpillars of the nation".

'Symbol of recognition'

The first prize winner of the Adult category, Preethi Sampath Kanagara is the cartoonist of 'Dinamina', the Lake House Sinhala daily. He bagged the top award of Rs 50,000 from among 566 entries in the adult category. (In total there were 1003 entries).

Once the winners were announced (they were selected by an independent panel of judges), some complained. "We told them it was very competitive and explained the whole process of selection. Then they accepted," Hasini says.

"At first I was not keen to participate but when I was told that newspaper cartoonists could also take part, I sent an entry," Preethi recalls.

'Collective Action Coalitions the Way Forward'

Dr Peter Eigen, Founder of Transparency International addressing the Round Table discussion on 'Governance Dimensions of the Global Financial Crisis' facilitated by Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) recently, emphasized the urgent need for collective action to prevent further escalation of the crisis and the consequential impact on the global economy, especially the under-developed economies. He added that poor governance was the underlying cause leading to the crisis and stressed that business and civil monitoring had a critical collective role to play in monitoring the implementation strategies, the governments come up with in response to the crisis.

Minister of Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion, Dr Sarath Amunugama described the present situation as "a crisis of confidence" due to the lack of regulations and supervisory framework. He pointed out that the financial crisis will affect Sri Lankan exports like garments, tea, rubber and tourism at a superficial level because of the decline in global demand for these products. "On a not so obvious level but more devastating, we will find that there will be a foreign exchange crunch simply because banks are not able to lend. They are not in a position to stimulate the economies of the developing world because there is money flowing from the developed world and businesses are finding it more difficult to get credit."

Chairman of Finlay PLC, Kumar Jayasuriya suggested that the private sector should reinvent themselves and strongly advocated productivity as a main driver of resurgence in situations like the present one. Looking at banks, he said that liquidity has dried up, cash is not available and as a result, banks jack up interest rates and makes borrowing much more difficult.

Positive response at journalists' workshop

Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) commended the government for the Cabinet decision taken on the eve of the UN Anti-Corruption Day (9 December), to take legislative steps to implement the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which was ratified by Sri Lanka four years ago.

Responding to the Interim Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Non Governmental Organizations, Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) highlights the need to have a more transparent and fair parliamentary committee system. While denying the allegations and insinuations made against the organization in the Report, TISL also states that the Committee has failed to follow the basic rules of natural justice and to ignore political rhetoric before arriving at conclusions. TISL reiterates the need to have a more objective committee system in which the members of the committees may not abuse parliamentary privileges to reach petty political gains.

The references to TISL revolve around a project on the Police where governance aspects were studied, and where no sensitive information was required. It is mistakenly suggested by the Committee that institutions such as the Police cannot engage in any collaborative activities with the public.

TISL Publications

Governance Report 2008

The Report captures vital areas and key issues relevant for any person or organization attempting to understand the status of governance in Sri Lanka during 2007/08. With the rise in the cost of living and an increased emphasis on national security, the year was fraught with governance-related issues and many allegations of corruption and mismanagement.

The Report seeks to highlight the issues that have been raised by the public, record both the successes and the failures of the government and in some instances comment on possible alternative measures that could have been taken.

Available at TISL office at 28/1 Bullers Lane Colombo 07 - Tel: 011 2501474

Anti-Corruption Cartoons

A selection of entries to the anti-corruption cartoon competition organized by TISL are presented in the publication. Over a thousand entries were submitted by males and females between the ages of 7-76. They belonged to different geographical districts, ethnicities and religions. They had a single message - Curb corruption in Sri Lanka.

