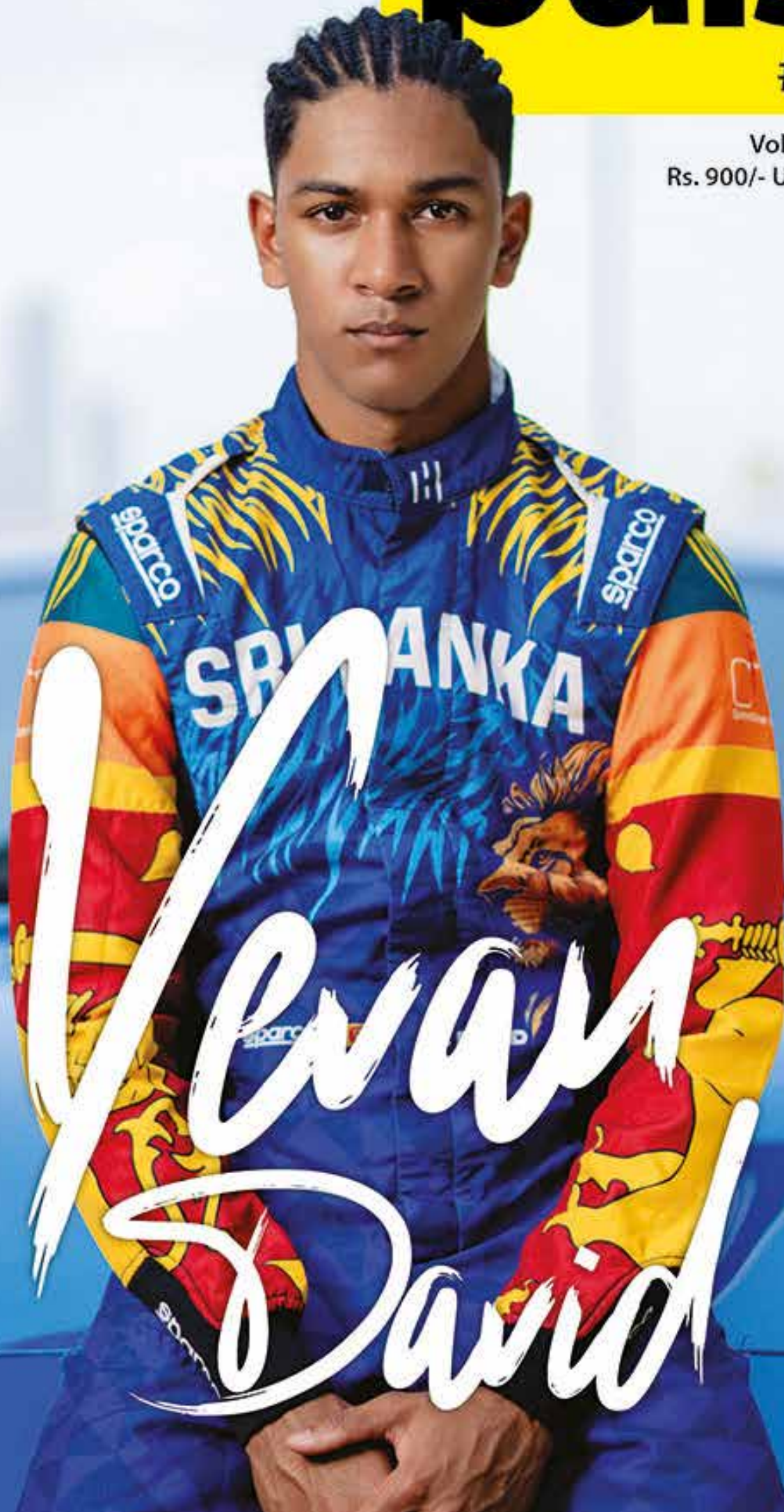


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#LivingIt

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#LivingIt

2025 has been nothing short of eventful, and just like that, we find ourselves in September. Colombo has been buzzing with energy, with events, launches, and celebrations filling the city, and Pulse has always been at the heart of it all. With this month's issue, we bring you a collection of stories that are as vibrant and inspiring as our times.

At Pulse, we have always believed in the power of storytelling—shining a light on the creativity of Sri Lankans. Every edition is a testament to those who dare to dream and make a difference, from artists and entrepreneurs to pioneers and visionaries. This September, we continue that tradition with a line-up of stories that deserve the spotlight.

Our Cover Story feature celebrates young icon Yevan David, Sri Lanka's first Formula 3 driver. From his early days as a five-year-old behind the wheel of a go-kart to a record-breaking debut at Monza, Yevan's meteoric rise has taken him across continents and into the history books. He opens up to Pulse about his journey, passion, and dreams of racing towards even greater heights.

We also honour the legacy of Ramani Fernando, a name synonymous with beauty and style in Sri Lanka. Marking 50 years of building an empire with scissors, strength, and vision, Ramani's story is one of resilience, innovation, and a lasting influence on generations.

From beauty to fitness, we spotlight Joel Tillekeratne, the powerhouse behind Carnage. In just five years, Carnage has grown from a homegrown fitness brand to one of Sri Lanka's most celebrated, now making its bold entry onto the international stage.

This issue is also packed with powerful voices and inspiring journeys, including Johann Peries, the first Sri Lankan to conquer the Seven Summits, and psychologist Rashmi Sooriyabandara, who shares deep insights into the roots of mental health challenges in today's world.

As always, we bring you the best of the season's events — Dhananjaya Bandara's show-stopping showcase, the magical Derana Kite Festival, FitCon 2025, Charini's elegant store opening at One Galle Face, the launch of Campus footwear, and of course, the glamour of the Derana Music Awards.

For those who thirst for wanderlust, our travel pages will take you from the serene shores of Hiriketiya to the captivating landscapes of Japan, offering both local escapes and international adventures to inspire your next journey.

This edition is a true celebration of talent, perseverance, and creativity—stories that entertain and inspire. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Here's to celebrating resilience, passion and the spirit of Living It—always.

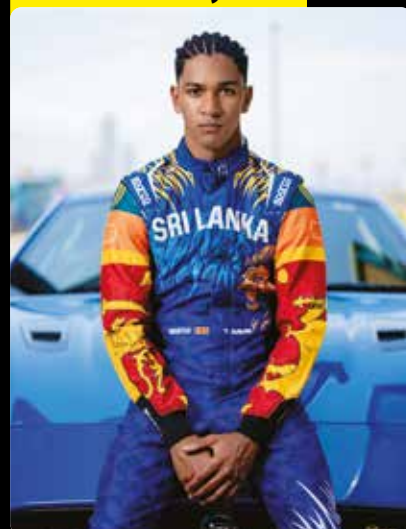
Editorial,
Shafiya Nawzer

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Grit, Growth, and Going Global

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Full Throttle to History

Yevan David

SRI LANKA'S FIRST FORMULA 3 DRIVER

From a five-year-old in a go-kart to a record-breaking debut at Monza, Yevan David's meteoric rise has taken him across continents, into the history books, and onto the starting grid of FIA Formula 3, and he's just getting started.

By Naveed Rozais

Last year, on a wet weekend at Monza (the Autodromo Nazionale Monza), one of motorsport's most legendary circuits, a 17-year-old Sri Lankan driver lined up for his first-ever Euroformula race. The conditions were complex - a slick track, unpredictable grip, and the kind of weather that can make even seasoned racers nervous. But for that young Lankan racer, Yevan David, Monza was more an enjoyable weekend than a nerve-wracking race.

"I love wet conditions," he says with a grin. "When I raced in Monza, I just drove by instinct. Even if I'd finished last, I would have still enjoyed it. I approached it with no pressure. My perspective was it was my first weekend there (as a Euroformula racer) - and it went really well."

That win at Monza last year was one of many and part of a rapid ascent that has taken Yevan from a five-year-old in go-karts to now becoming the first-ever Sri Lankan driver signed to compete in the FIA Formula 3 Championship with AIX Racing for 2026. At just 18, he's made Sri Lankan racing history - and he's only getting started.

Fresh from this most recent announcement, Pulse sat down with Yevan to discuss what keeps his wheels turning, both on and off the track.



That first taste of speed

For Yevan, the racing spark came early – and fast. It all began in December 2013, when a family friend took him to try karting for fun. He was five years old. “My very first memory of racing is that feeling of driving fast, and to the limit - it’s still mainly why I love racing,” he recalls. “After that, I went to Singapore and drove proper karts when I was six. By the time I did my first race in 2015, I’d been practising for a whole year.”

That first race was a turning point. “I finished seventh, and I knew it would be a long journey even from then. But I enjoyed it so much because I was racing for the first time.”

He made the decision a few months later, and so did his parents. “After about three or four months of driving consistently every week, I decided this is what I want to do. My parents decided too. In 2015 and 2016, we raced in Asia and locally, and I just kept going. By my teenage years, I realised I had a genuine shot at going all the way. I didn’t know how far it would go, but I would keep going.”

By the time he was eight, Yevan was racing internationally. The lifestyle meant significant changes. At 13, he switched to online schooling to manage the demands of racing. “It was difficult at first – managing my time between racing and studying – but after a few months I managed. I did my O/Ls at the end of 2023, and 2024 was when I entered Formula cars. I finished my first year of A/Ls too. It’s been a big change from go-karting to O/Ls, to A/Ls, to Formula cars. I feel like I’m growing up very fast.”

From go-karts to racing cars

Yevan began with go-karts, which he explained is something most racers do. Ironically, despite being an award-winning race car driver, he doesn’t yet have an official driving license since, where Yevan is based, he can only qualify for a driving license at 18.

That hasn’t hindered him from racing one bit, though. “You’re allowed to start racing at eight years old. I started entering go-kart teams in Asia first – Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and so on – and then in 2021, I started racing in Italy, much like I went to Asia,” Yevan shares of his evolution.

He built a network through racing in different countries and with other teams, eventually introducing him to his manager and guide Horia Totu. “My manager’s role is to put me into a good team, onto a good path, and to manage my future. We applied for my racing car license, and just like go-karting, entered teams and went to races.”

Yevan began with go-karts, which he explained is something most racers do. Ironically, despite being an award-winning race car driver, he doesn’t yet have an official driving license since, where Yevan is based, he can only qualify for a driving license at 18.



Photo credits – Motopak



Switching from karting to cars wasn't simply a matter of switching speeds – it was also about learning a whole new language of racing, and this new world was one Yevan dived into enthusiastically. "Go-karting is on tiny tracks, no suspension, everything happens fast and aggressively," he explains the key differences between karting and racing. "With cars, you start on circuits where things are slower, and you have to think about weight transfer, which is more technical. It's not just about naturally being quick – you must know the car, be smart, and use both your mind and instinct."

Simulator work and testing also played a significant role in preparing to race. "You do a certain number of tests before the season. Sometimes it's just about getting used to the car, warming the tyres properly and working on the brakes. You start on all the little areas, then get to where you want to be. Even F1 drivers have pre-season and in-season tests – you never stop learning."

Off the track, Yevan trains like a high-performance athlete. "In a week, I do four gym sessions – weights, core exercises, arms, legs, neck – plus two runs. One run is pushing hard, the other is recovery. It's one hour of my day, four to six times a week. It helps me in racing, pushes me forward, and makes me a stronger driver."

Physical endurance is critical in motorsport. "If you're tired, you can still drive – but you're thinking about being tired. It's more difficult to turn the wheel, your core and neck start giving up, and you lose concentration. If you can drive without fatigue, your mind is freer to focus."

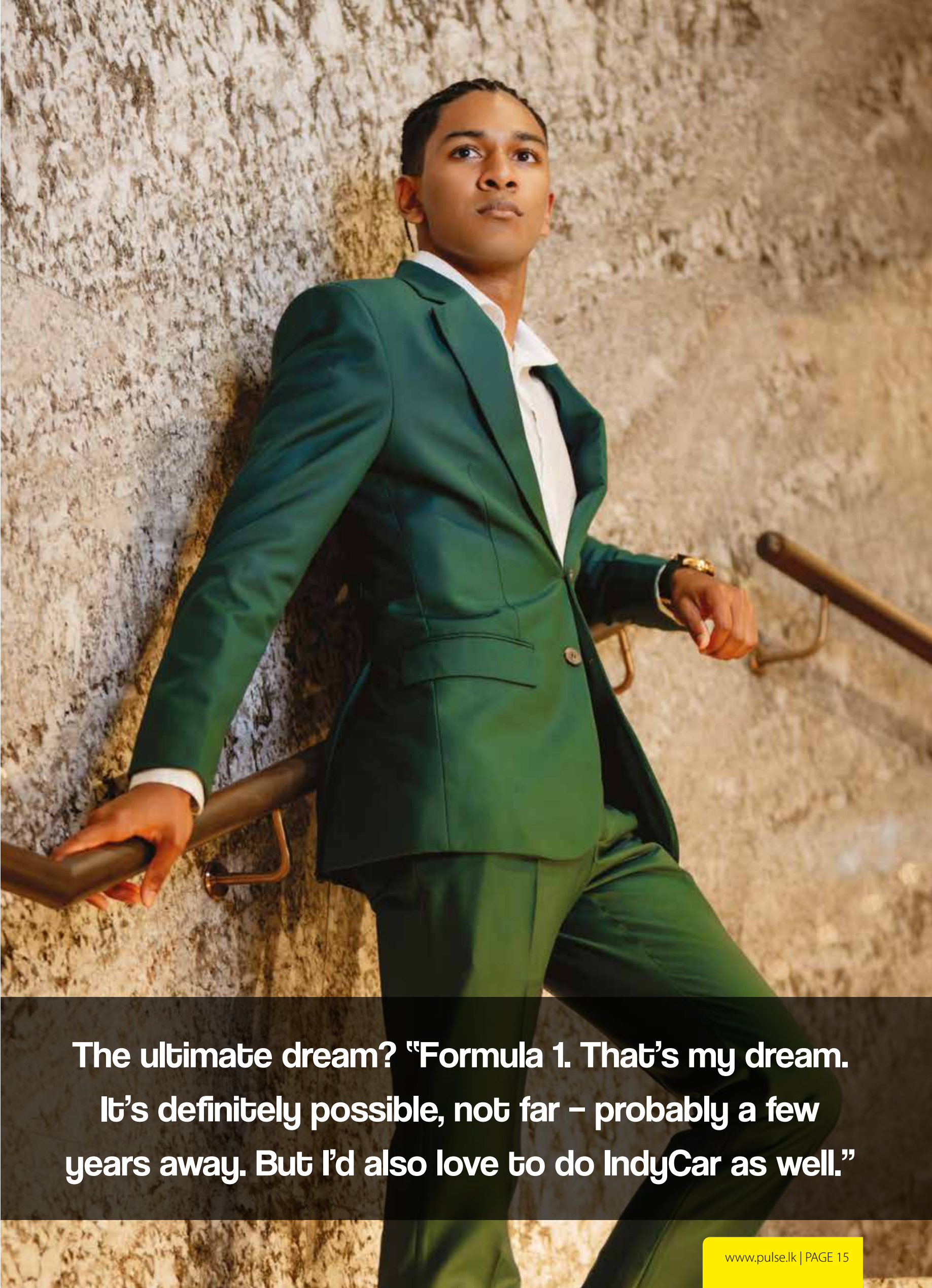
Monza, Euroformula, and making history

In 2024, Yevan stepped into the Euroformula series with the dominant Motopark team and made an immediate impact. On his debut weekend, he had two wins and a third place. By 2025, he had four victories, five other podiums, and a pole position.

He also became the first Sri Lankan to win in Euroformula – a milestone that carried more than just personal pride, because he had Sri Lanka rooting for him by now. "It makes me feel proud, honestly. I've been racing for years, but now I have a whole country backing me. I don't see it as pressure – it's more like support from my fans engaging with my racing. Seeing the Sri Lankan flag in the stands, people driving hours just to see me race – I can't explain how happy that makes me."

YEVAN'S BIO

BIRTHDAY:	11 July
BORN IN:	London; raised in Singapore, but always considered Sri Lanka home
SIBLINGS:	Two younger twin brothers and a younger sister
HOBBIES:	Basketball, Lego, and probably surfing
QUIRKY HABIT:	Always eats a lot — main course only, no dessert or ice cream
TOP BUCKET LIST ITEM:	To travel to as many countries as possible and see the world
BIGGEST INSPIRATION:	Lewis Hamilton - from karting to the top of Formula 1, his journey is a huge inspiration



The ultimate dream? “Formula 1. That’s my dream. It’s definitely possible, not far – probably a few years away. But I’d also love to do IndyCar as well.”

YEVAN'S QUICKFIRE Q&A

FAVOURITE RACE CAR:

The 2020 Formula 1 car – I would love to race it someday

PRE-RACE RITUAL:

One minute of quiet breathing with my helmet on to clear my mind before driving

MUSIC ON RACE-DAY PLAYLIST:

None on race day – but after races, it's usually a mix of rock, hip-hop, rap, and 2000s hits. Right now, I'm obsessed with Numb by Linkin Park

FAVOURITE CHEAT MEAL:

KFC chicken drumlets – especially the Sri Lankan KFC ones

ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE YOU ON TRACK:

Calm

FIRST THING YOU'D BUY WITH YOUR FIRST F1 CONTRACT:

A big Lego set

LIFE MOTTO:

Keep calm. Mistakes happen - learn from them and enjoy the ride

TOP RACING TIP:

Be focused, be calm, don't lose your head. Never get frustrated or angry - keep your cool

"A sense of pride comes with it – for the country and my family. We're Sri Lankan down to the core. I see the pressure of carrying the flag as full-on support. People now talk about races and understand them. It's not unknown anymore, and I find that so supportive."

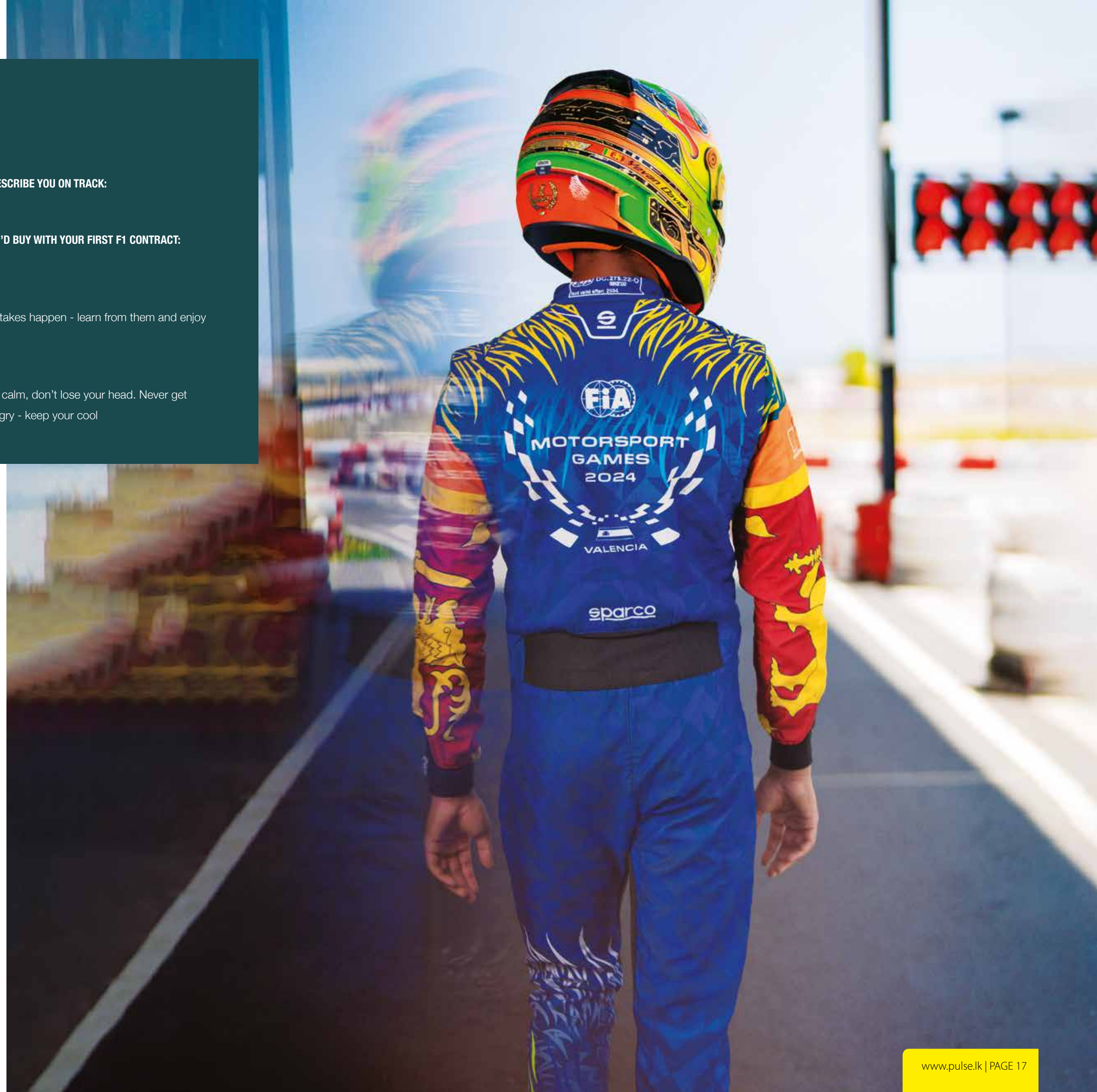
But what's the flip side? When asked about the most complex parts of racing, Yevan shares, "Professionally, the biggest challenge is not giving up. You can have tough weekends, bad races, bad moments and people disappointed in you. But in the end, you have to remember you're doing this for yourself. Everyone has the potential to win or lose. You have to keep working and keep finding areas to improve. The hardest thing is to keep going after those tough days."

Personally, it's about the distance. "Travelling and being away from family. I've done this 49 times already. Most of the time for testing and races, I travel alone at first. My manager or coach takes me to the track, but sometimes my mum or dad will come close to the weekend. Time with family becomes more meaningful."

Despite his youth, Yevan has a mature take on the mental game. "Sometimes the thought of giving up can cross my mind," he admits. "But it's never something that has clicked in my mind fully. This is what I've known since I can remember. There have been hard times, but never to the point of not wanting to do this anymore. I'm always going to keep going."

That mindset was the focus of his TEDx talk, '25 Wins, 503 Lessons: What Losing Taught Me About Greatness.' The talk focused on the surprising truth that Yevan's greatest growth as a driver didn't come from standing on the podium, but from the 500-plus races he didn't win. Drawing from his journey so far, Yevan spoke about how his setbacks forced him to analyse his performance, learn from competitors, and strengthen his mental focus, often through meditation.

It was about failure as growth. "What I meant was that losing is a real teacher. You always learn more about yourself and where you can improve. Losing doesn't feel good, but it's something that can help you move forward. Winning also helps, but losing shows you why you didn't win and how to improve."





“A sense of pride comes with it – for the country and my family. We’re Sri Lankan down to the core. I see the pressure of carrying the flag as full-on support. People now talk about races and understand them. It’s not unknown anymore, and I find that so supportive.”

YEVAN'S FAVOURITES

MUSIC:	Anything from the 2000s
FOOD:	Korean and Sri Lankan food
MOTORSPORT HEROES:	Lewis Hamilton and Ayrton Senna
CATS OR DOGS:	Dogs
FAVOURITE COUNTRY (OTHER THAN SRI LANKA):	Maldives
ESSENTIAL WARDROBE PIECES:	Gym shirts and shorts – always need my gym

Off the track

As a driver, Yevan's life off the track is still undecided. “I don’t have my actual driving licence, so I’m not sure how I’ll be off track,” he laughs.

Outside of driving, though, when he’s not racing, Yevan is into basketball, swimming, and Lego. “Lego was a big thing when I was a kid – Star Wars Lego especially. I’ve always loved building. Basketball is also a cool hobby; not many drivers play it, but I enjoy it.”

He’s also a bit of an adrenaline chaser. “I don’t quite have a fear of heights – it is something that lingers at the back of my mind – but I would still do something like bungee jumping because of the adrenaline.”

As the wins pile up and the attention grows, Yevan also spoke about how he’s managing fame and success. “I want to do the same thing as usual – wake up, run, go to the gym and go to school. Improve, of course, but still focus on the passion and do what I need to do to get there. I’ll prepare differently for races and give more interviews, but I’ll be the same person. I know I’m going to stay grounded.”

The road ahead

As the first Sri Lankan in FIA Formula 3, Yevan’s 2026 season will be a landmark moment for the country’s motorsport scene. But for him, it’s just one step on the path.

“To have this opportunity to be racing as the first Sri Lankan driver in Formula 3, and with AIX Racing – they’ve proved themselves, and I’m excited to achieve great milestones with them for the season ahead.”

The ultimate dream? “Formula 1. That’s my dream. It’s definitely possible, not far – probably a few years away. But I’d also love to do IndyCar as well.”

One race looms large on his bucket list in the shorter term: Monaco. “Racing Monaco would be really cool. It’s very different from the rest – tight, twisty, and when you think you’re close to the edge, it pushes drivers even further.”

As someone well on the way to pursuing his dreams, we ended our chat by asking Yevan what advice he would give to the other dreamers, especially those chasing non-traditional careers: “Simply follow your dreams. People will say no if you want to do baseball, racing, or golf. But try it out, do whatever you can to be the best. Nothing can go wrong. It’s your life – enjoy your passion.”



Location
SpeedBay, Port City Colombo & Hilton Colombo

Suit
Suit & Tie

Car
Merc-Stop & LX Automotive

Photography
Iraj Walisinghe & Trevon Perera

Formula images photo credits
Motopak



PANGO'S BUNWICHES EXPANDS TO MT. LAVINIA!

Sri Lanka's much-loved bunwich brand is growing! Pango's Bunwiches just launched its third, and biggest, outlet in Mt. Lavinia.

From humble beginnings as a ghost kitchen in Thimbirigasyaya in 2024, the brand has quickly made a name for itself in Colombo's foodie scene. Now, with a spacious new setup, a revamped menu, and a cool café-style atmosphere, the Mt. Lavinia branch is here to impress.

Here are some highlights from the launch!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe



Dush & Oshan



Trishala & Zuzi



Dilshi



Gayathrie



Rashmika



Nishara



Thushen



Priethiva



Hashani



Maheeka & daughter



Sajith



Oshanie

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BY citrus

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THE FOOD

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Harpo 20 YEARS OF BUILDING A HOSPITALITY LEGACY Gooneratne

Celebrating two decades of passion, people, and purpose — how Harpo built an enduring legacy in hospitality through resilience, innovation, and heart, crafting a 20-year journey of authentic, homegrown service that continues to stand the test of time.

By Naveed Rozais

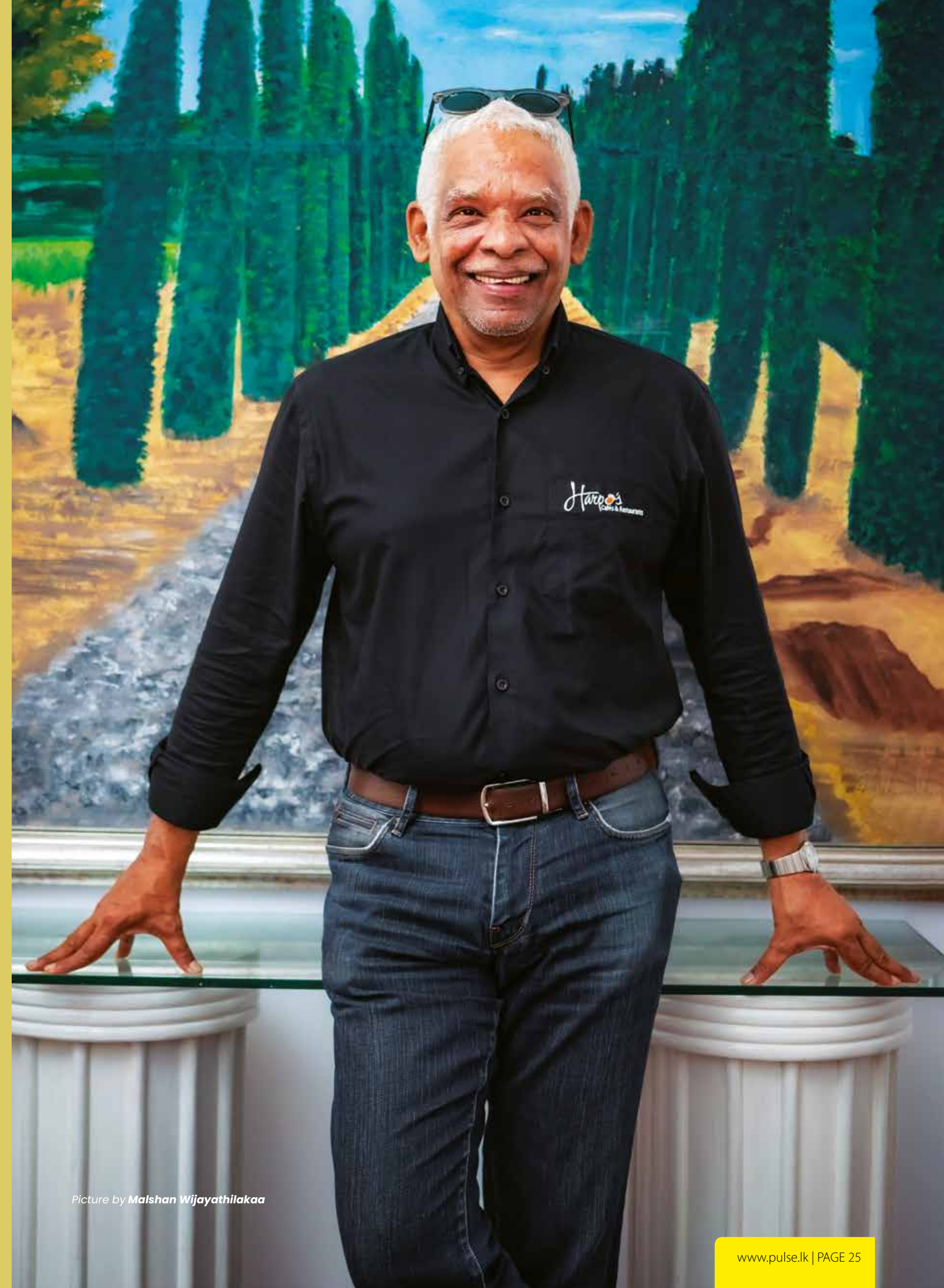
Few people in Sri Lanka's hospitality scene can say they have built a brand with as much consistency, resilience, and heart as Harpo Gooneratne. The man behind Commons Coffee House, The Bayleaf, Harpo's Pizza, Colombo Fort Cafe, and Shoulders by Harpo's, to name a few, Harpo is responsible for some of Colombo's most beloved restaurants and cafes.

This year marks 20 years since Harpo ventured into the hospitality business independently, and we sat down with the man himself to reflect on a journey that spans not only two decades as an entrepreneur

but also over 40 years of experience in entertainment, hotels, and hospitality.

Harpo's entry into hospitality was anything but conventional. He began in the early 1980s as a pioneering DJ in Sri Lanka's early club scene down south, while in hotel school. "Music and hospitality go hand in hand," he shares. "It's about entertaining people, making them feel good. Whether it's a dance floor, a hotel, or a restaurant — that's the goal."

He went on to work with some of the biggest names in the hotel world—Hilton Colombo, and Hilton Maldives, Hilton Osaka, and Hilton Dalian in China — as a consultant, and was instrumental in setting up



Picture by Malshan Wijayathilakaa



We're not fancy. You don't need to wear designer labels to come to my restaurants," he says. "I want people to feel at home. Hospitality is about making people happy, not about showing off.



some of Sri Lanka's most iconic entertainment and lifestyle spaces, such as Millennium He later became General Manager of Crescat Boulevard. Yet, even with an established corporate career, the entrepreneurial itch remained. "I was managing other people's headaches," Harpo laughs. "I realised that if I was going to pour my energy into something, I wanted to build something of my own — Harpo's Cafes & Restaurants."

That journey began in 2005 with Commons Coffee House, followed by The Bayleaf. Harpo's Cafes & Restaurants grew organically to include multiple restaurants and introduce many first-of-its-kind concepts, from pioneering Colombo's coffee culture with Commons to creating Sri Lanka's first homegrown wood-fired pizza brand, Harpo's to launching the famous Commons Roti Cart.

The Harpo touch

Ask Harpo what has sustained his business through 20 years, and his answer is clear: his team. Harpo and his team have weathered many a storm — from the Civil War, which ended in 2009, to the 2019 Easter attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 economic crisis, and the Aragalaya — and they've made it through together. "I've been very blessed—over 80% of the team who started with me are still with me today, from chefs to gardeners to front-of-house staff," Harpo says, adding that a committed and reliable team makes all the difference in genuine hospitality.

"Hospitality is not about beautiful spaces. You can build a stunning restaurant, but without the right people, it won't last," he says. Harpo strongly emphasises building a non-hierarchical, family-style culture in his businesses. "I'm hands-on—I'll move tables, carry plates. We all pitch in," he says. "My staff know they can come to me with any problem. If you treat your people well, they will treat your customers well."



Consistency, he believes, is everything. "When guests come in and see the same familiar faces, when a waiter remembers their favourite drink, when the chef knows exactly how they like their dish—that's what keeps people coming back."

Hospitality is about the 'soul'

What sets Harpo's approach apart is his deep belief in creating spaces with soul—places that feel welcoming, comfortable, and unpretentious.

"We're not fancy. You don't need to wear designer labels to come to my restaurants," he says. "I want people to feel at home. Hospitality is about making people happy, not about showing off."

This ethos extends to Harpo's interest in supporting young people and local culture. At Bayleaf, for instance, he recently launched Sri Lanka's first piano bar, creating a space for emerging musicians to perform.

Harpo is also passionate about building homegrown brands with a Sri Lankan identity. Harpo's Pizza — Sri Lanka's first homegrown wood-fired pizza brand — is now in its 18th year. He has also successfully taken the Harpo brand abroad, opening Seylone Ceylon by Harpo's in Bangalore, India, in partnership with Indian entrepreneurs.

Running an international restaurant isn't easy, he admits. "You need a great team and constant attention. But seeing Sri Lankan flavours being appreciated abroad is very rewarding."

Navigating the bumps in the road

The last five years, Harpo admits, have been the most difficult of his entrepreneurial life. "The Aragalaya period was, I would say, the toughest crisis we faced. It took a huge toll on all of us," he says, recalling how import blocks, fuel shortages, power outages and general scarcity affected all of the supply chain. "Once again, it was the team that pulled us through."

Harpo's philosophy during difficult times has always been to adapt, consolidate, and focus on what truly matters. "When you're going through a bad patch, you quickly realise what's important—your people, your values, your relationships with customers."

As for what's next, Harpo is exploring franchising opportunities for Commons Coffee House and Harpo's Pizza, with interest from both local and international partners.



His biggest lesson? Stay focused and build resilience. "When you hit roadblocks—and you will—stay the course and have the strength to execute your vision," he says. Even during the war years (2005-2009), Harpo expanded his ventures and maintained a positive outlook. "I've always been an optimistic person. There are good and bad days, but you must believe in your actions and keep moving forward."

Building something that counts

Harpo advises new entrepreneurs entering hospitality, or any industry for that matter, to lead with passion and purpose. "Do what you love. It's like throwing a party and you're the host. You have to be able to throw your own party. If you're not enjoying yourself, your guests won't either."

On the flip side, Harpo warned that hospitality is not for those chasing for glamour alone. "It's not a 9-to-5 job. There's a lot of work behind the scenes—inventory control, HR, menu planning, market analysis, back-end systems. You'll burn out fast if you're in it just for the image."

But at its core, his mission remains simple. "We're here to create spaces where people enjoy themselves — where they can have a great evening with friends, a glass of wine, good food, and leave happy, waking up the next day thinking about what a great time they had. That's what hospitality should be about."

Pictures by Malshan Wijayathilaka





Janik



Aseka



Channa



Danu



Yohani



Aseka, Bathiya, Santhush & Janik



Sachini



Sandun



Theruni, Vivek & Allen



Dhanushka



Jananath



Kasun & Ruven



Manusha

Celeste Marks Five Years in Style

Celeste, Sri Lanka's fastest-growing on-demand online supermarket, recently celebrated its fifth anniversary with a memorable evening at Shangri-La Colombo. Held under the theme "Strengthening Bonds," the event brought together partners, celebrities, well-wishers, and members of the media for a night of celebration and reflection. The evening also marked an exciting milestone, as Celeste announced a strategic partnership with music legends Bathiya and Santhush (BnS). With heartfelt speeches, special performances, and shared memories, it was truly a night to remember.

Here's a glimpse of the celebrations!

Pictures by **Kumara Boparachchi**



Pubudu & Mashi



Aseka, Vivek, Vasantha, Chamila, Hrithik & Janik



Aseka & Ranella



Dakshitha, Kumudika, Aseka, Janik, Pranath & Shehan



Hashinka & Sahan



Rashmika



Channa Upuli Dance Foundation





Commercial Bank Summit 2025 'Forward Together' - Shaping a Sustainable Future

The Commercial Bank Summit 2025, themed 'Forward Together: Creating a Sustainable Future', took centre stage at Cinnamon Life – City of Dreams, bringing together an inspiring mix of local and international voices championing sustainability.

This full-day Sustainability Summit served as a dynamic platform for leaders from government, finance, business, academia, civil society, and non-profits to exchange ideas, share experiences, and commit to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Sri Lanka's national sustainability objectives.

The event was graced by Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, as the Chief Guest. In his keynote, he highlighted the vital role of financial leadership in driving the nation's sustainability journey and aligning with the global SDG agenda.

Here's a glimpse into the moments from the event!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe





RAMANI FERNANDO

Fifty Years of Style, Strength and Scissors

How one woman, one vision, and a pair of scissors sparked a fifty-year revolution in Sri Lanka's beauty industry—building not just salons, but a legacy of empowerment, excellence and elegance. The story of Ramani Fernando, a pioneer who transformed hairdressing in Sri Lanka through heart, hustle, and human connection.

“Sri Lankans have a beautiful personal style that blends tradition with modernity. There’s a deep respect for natural beauty and a willingness to explore, especially when it comes to events like weddings or fashion. And I love a good transformation!”

By Naveed Rozais

Ramani Fernando is a household name. Her first salon opened in the 1970s and became the foundation of a brand that quietly revolutionised how Sri Lankans approached hair, beauty, and personal care.

When she first picked up a pair of scissors fifty years ago, she couldn’t have known that five decades later, she’d be helming one of Sri Lanka’s most recognised beauty brands, with her name emblazoned across multiple salon locations, a training academy, and a legacy of lived industry leadership.

Passion turned legacy

What began as a simple passion for hair and beauty evolved into a mission to raise the industry’s standards, especially after training overseas and recognising how little infrastructure existed locally. At the time, professional salons were rare, products were limited, and structured training was virtually non-existent. “It’s surreal—but I feel incredibly grateful. I never imagined this journey would span five decades,” she says, reflecting on this latest milestone and expressing her gratitude for the clients, staff, and opportunities that shaped it.

Ramani’s entry into the business was instinctive. There was a gap in the industry—few professional salons, very little access to quality products, and almost no structured training. For her, that was an opportunity to raise the bar. “Starting my own salon was a big decision, but I had a clear vision to create something professional, elegant, and lasting. I was also fortunate to have tremendous support from my husband and family. They stood by me from the beginning, giving me the strength to take the plunge and build something of my own.”

People first, always

Over the years, one of the most surprising things Ramani has found about hairdressing is just how emotional the work can be. “People think it’s about haircuts and styling, but it’s really about people. It’s about understanding people, listening to them, and helping them feel confident. We become part of their lives in small but meaningful ways — through weddings, transformations, or moments when they need to feel good about themselves.”

It’s a sentiment anyone who has ever had a good hairstylist will understand—trust in the person behind the chair is often more personal than transactional. Ramani has built that kind of trust at scale. And she has done that because of her team. “I always say: ‘I am nothing without them.’ They are the heart of the brand. Their passion, dedication, and loyalty make Ramani Fernando Salons what it is today.”

Over the years, she’s watched trainees become senior stylists, managers, and even salon owners. That kind of professional growth isn’t accidental—it’s built on mentorship, investment, and a culture that encourages excellence. Through her training academy, Ramani has helped shape hundreds of careers in beauty. However, her leadership philosophy remains simple: work hard, respect others, and stay humble.

Pushing through tough times

Any business that survives fifty years will have weathered storms, and Ramani Fernando Salons has weathered its fair share but made it through. “We’ve faced some challenging times as a country — the insurgency in the late

’80s, the 30-year civil war, the Easter Sunday attacks, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic,” Ramani shares looking back. “The ache of these had a major impact on our staff, our clients, and on how we operated as a business. But through all of it, we adapted, held on, and continued to move forward. That strength and resilience are something I will always value.”

The hair and beauty industry has grown in leaps and bounds since Ramani first entered it, both in terms of clients’ expectations and talent within the industry. “When I started, there were very few professional salons, limited access to products, and almost no formal training,” she explains, adding, “Today, we see so much talent, innovation, and awareness on both sides. Clients are more educated and adventurous, and there’s a real thirst for global trends; it’s wonderful to see.”

This mix of global and local is something that Ramani says defines the uniqueness of the local beauty industry. “Sri Lankans have a beautiful personal style that blends tradition with modernity. There’s a deep respect for natural beauty and a willingness to explore, especially when it comes to events like weddings or fashion. And I love a good transformation!”

The power of self-belief

Fifty years in, Ramani still believes in the basics — keeping things simple, being careful and above all, looking after yourself. “I think we often forget that beauty starts with self-care. Instead of chasing trends, it’s important to understand what works for you, your face shape, skin tone, and lifestyle. Confidence is the best accessory, which comes from feeling like your look represents you.”

That said, Ramani’s top three tips for a perfect hair day every day are:

- Invest in a good cut – A well-cut style that suits your face and lifestyle makes all the difference.
- Use the right products – Tailor your shampoo, conditioner, and styling products to your hair type.
- Protect your hair—Heat and the sun can do real damage, so always use heat-protectant sprays and don’t skip regular trims.

Ramani offers this advice on making it in the beauty industry: “Be patient. Hone your craft, stay humble and disciplined, and always keep learning. This is a people-first business; listen to their needs, and never compromise on quality. Build a name that stands for something, and success will follow.”





TAISHI CEMENT

Makes Its Debut in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka welcomed the launch of its first-ever Japanese fly ash cement brand – Taishi Cement – a joint venture between KPN Cement Lanka and Japan's Taiheiyo Cement Corporation.

Key board members from both companies attended the official launch event, emphasising the importance of sustainable and eco-friendly manufacturing as the nation advances in infrastructure and urban development.

Taishi Cement promises to offer durable, cost-effective, and environmentally conscious solutions, bringing a new dimension to the local construction industry.

Pictures by Vihanga Kavesha





JOHANN PERIES CONQUERS *the Seven Summits*

The mountains may be tall, but Johann's
legacy now stands taller...

You don't conquer nature—you partner with it. For Johann Peries, this wasn't just a lesson learnt on Everest, but a philosophy that guided him to the highest points on seven continents. Against tropical odds and geographical limitations, he became the first Sri Lankan man to complete the Seven Summits challenge. His journey—marked by setbacks, summits, and a spirit forged in resilience—has redefined what it means to represent a nation. With every peak, Johann reminded Sri Lankans that courage, not climate, shapes a climber.

By Venessa Anthony

He didn't come from snow. He came from sea breeze and monsoon heat. From a country with no alpine training grounds, and mountains that peak below the clouds. But Johann Peries had something rarer than access—he had audacity. And for ten years, he chased it higher than most would dare.

Now, Sri Lanka's mountain man has made history. With the completion of the Seven Summits challenge—scaling the highest mountain on each continent—Johann becomes the first Sri Lankan man to plant the Lion Flag across some of the world's most unforgiving terrains. His final climb, Denali in North America, tested his body and willingness to walk away from a summit when the mountain said 'no'.

And still, he returned home a conqueror.

The road less travelled (and steeply climbed)

The Seven Summits challenge, first conceptualised in the 1980s, is widely regarded as one of the most elite and gruelling undertakings in the world of adventure sports. The challenge includes summiting Everest in Asia, Aconcagua in South America, Denali in North America, Kilimanjaro in Africa, Elbrus in Europe, Vinson Massif in Antarctica, and Mount Kosciuszko in Australia, or sometimes, the even more challenging Carstensz Pyramid in Oceania, depending on the version attempted.

For most climbers, the Seven Summits begin with moderate ascents and culminate at Everest—the ultimate test of endurance, altitude, and will. But Johann's story doesn't follow that script. Everest, for him, came first. And it wasn't even a straightforward victory. His initial attempt in



2016 saw him turn back just 400 metres from the summit due to an oxygen malfunction—a moment he now regards as the most humbling of his career.

“That experience taught me a valuable lesson,” Johann reflects. “You don’t conquer nature. You partner with it. Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is turn around.”

He returned to Everest in 2018 and reached the summit, standing above the world with the Sri Lankan flag. For many, that would have been the happy ending. For Johann, it was merely the prologue.

From the tropics to the tundra

As he prepared for Denali, the final summit—a notoriously brutal mountain with unpredictable weather and temperatures that can plummet to minus 40—Johann carried years of mountaineering experience but also the aspirations of a nation.

“The hardest part,” he says candidly, “is that Sri Lanka has no environment even remotely close to these mountains. Pidurutalagala, our tallest peak, barely brushes the base altitude of most climbs I train for.”

So, how does a man from the equator prepare for arctic ascents? Through sheer discipline, cross-training, strategic acclimatisation, and an iron will. Each summit has brought new landscapes, new lessons. Antarctica’s Vinson Massif taught him about extreme isolation. Aconcagua revealed the punishing nature of altitude sickness. Each climb, he says, is a dialogue with the mountain and yourself.

“Mountains will strip you down to who you are,” he says. “They don’t care about ego or where you’re from. They force you to listen, to adapt, to persist.”

Reflecting on the journey, Johann shares: “The full spirit of the Seven Summits isn’t just about standing at the very top. It’s about the intensity of the expedition. The wisdom to know when enough is enough. And the courage to return.”

He reached the highest safe point allowed that season after a decade of pushing past failure, fear, and physical limits. The mountains may be tall, but Johann’s legacy now stands taller.

A national climb

Johann’s ambition isn’t a private pursuit. He envisions his climbs as a national movement—an opportunity for Sri Lankans to look beyond their borders and believe in the possibility of the extraordinary.

Through his virtual climb campaigns, Johann has redefined the meaning of inclusion in adventure. He invites fellow citizens to take part in the journey digitally, step by step.

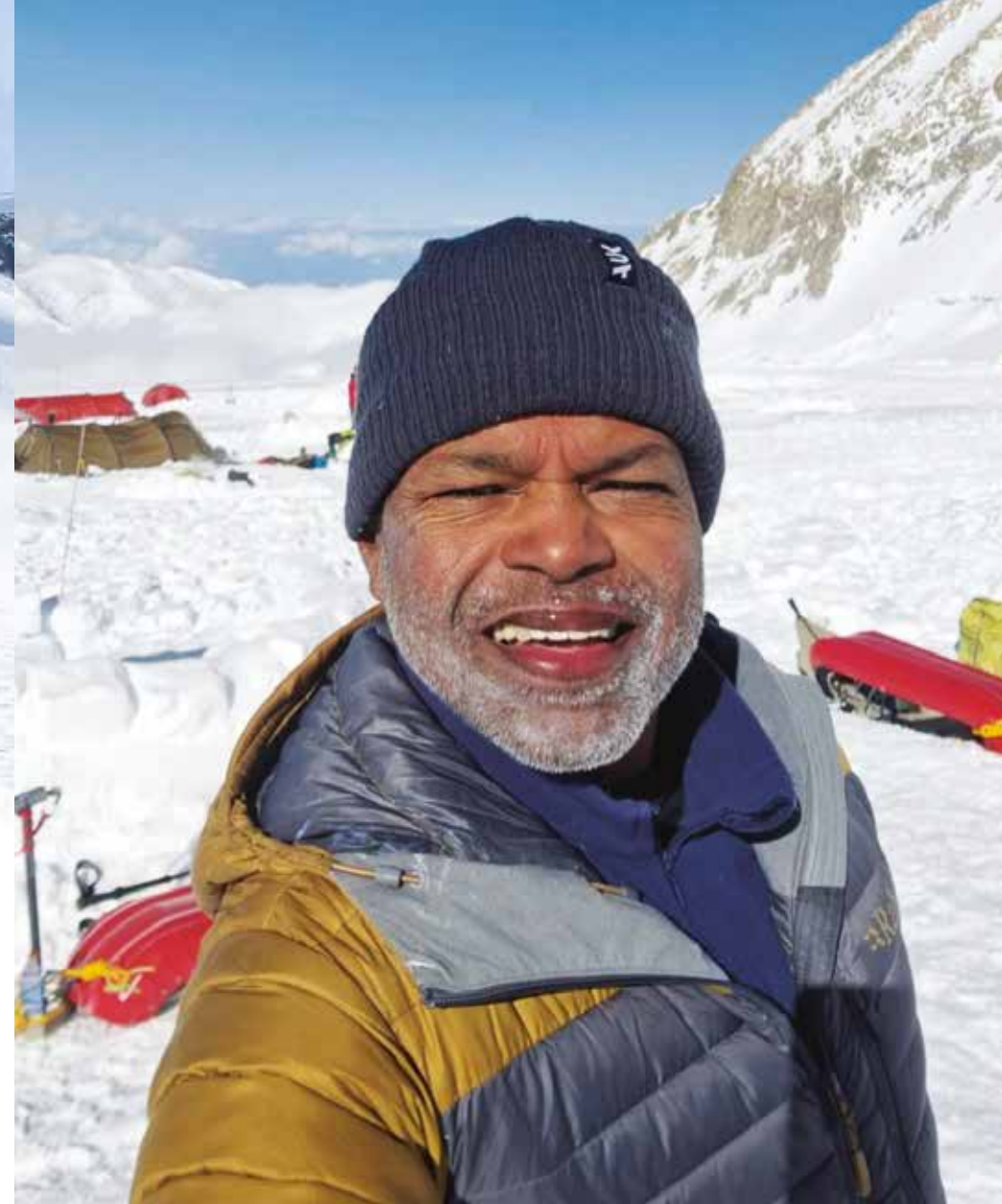
It’s an approach that turns mountaineering from an elite solo expedition into a shared national narrative of resilience, unity, and possibility.

Behind every climber

Though the view from the summit is often solitary, no climber reaches it alone. Johann is quick to credit the team that keeps him grounded. Chief among them is Sajeda Akbarally, his long-time supporter and current manager, who has been a part of his journey since that first, fateful Everest attempt.

“She’s been there through it all, from raising funds to coordinating logistics. Without her, this wouldn’t have been possible,” Johann says.

Throughout his journey, Johann wasn’t climbing alone—not really. With him were the dreams of a small island, often underestimated on the global stage. Global adventure brands or elite mountaineering clubs didn’t fund his climbs. He climbed with the backing of believers—sponsors like Cinnamon Life—City of Dreams, Link Samahan, Anlene, AUK Protection, Qatar Airways, Mastercard, W15, Wow Media Productions, and Wowlife Church.



After all, mountaineering isn’t just a physical test; it’s a logistical and financial jigsaw puzzle. Every expedition demands meticulous planning, from permits and gear to weather windows and evacuation plans. Johann has leaned on corporate sponsors, friends, and passionate supporters who believe in the symbolic and literal heights he’s striving for.

The mountain within

Perhaps the most compelling thing about Johann isn’t the number of peaks he’s summited but how he speaks of them. His reflections are often spiritual, deeply introspective. On a mountain, Johann explains, the real summit is usually internal.

“There are moments when you’re isolated for hours, in subzero temperatures, wondering what you’re doing there. But that’s where the growth happens. You realise what matters. You learn how little you actually need.”

His coping mechanisms—faith, meditation, and a fierce sense of purpose—have carried him through storms, both literal and



metaphorical. When the summit feels out of reach, he returns to the quiet conviction that first drew him to the mountains: a desire to test his limits and, in doing so, to show others that theirs might be farther than they think.

Denali: The final test

With the Seven Summits now behind him, Johann is ready to hand over the rope.

“I’ve carried this dream as far as I can,” he says. “Now, someone else will carry it further.”

He hopes more Sri Lankans will follow in his footsteps—not just in climbing, but in daring to want more. To go beyond what geography, history, or expectation dictates. You should know that even if your nation has no Everest, you can still stand on it.

What comes next?

When asked what he’ll do after the Seven Summits, Johann doesn’t give a definitive answer. But the glint in his eye suggests he’s already thinking about the next challenge.

“There’s always another mountain. It may not be physical. It might be something that scares you in your everyday life. But you climb it anyway.”

For now, though, all eyes are on Denali and a man who dared to believe that the peaks were always within reach, no matter how far they seemed from home.





MALIBAN & GASMA CELEBRATE *Avurudu* WITH THE CITY CARETAKERS

In the true spirit of Avurudu, Maliban partnered with Gasma to host a heartwarming celebration 'Maliban Presents ගැසම වැඩ අලමන අවුරුද්ද.'

This special event was dedicated to honouring the silent heroes of our city — the diligent workers of the Colombo Municipal Council, whose tireless efforts keep our streets clean and our communities thriving. Held amidst much enthusiasm and festivity, the day was filled with traditional Avurudu games, vibrant performances, giveaways, and engaging activities, creating moments of joy and recognition for those who often work behind the scenes.

Here's a closer look at this memorable day of appreciation, unity and celebration!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe





While the conversation on mental health seems louder today, the silent struggles of Sri Lanka's children and adolescents have long existed, hidden in plain sight. Pulse sat down with psychologist **Rashmi Sooriyabandara** to unpack the deep-rooted causes — from emotional neglect to institutional failures — and why social media's spotlight only reveals the tip of a far more complex issue.

CHILDREN IN CRISIS: UNPACKING THE SILENT RISE IN MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

By Haritha Athapattu

Although it may seem like a new phenomenon with the headlines, the sudden flurry of awareness posts, the talk shows, the social media outrage, and the rise in child and adolescent suicides and mental health struggles is not something quite new to the country.

Pulse sat down with Rashmi Sooriyabandara—psychologist, lecturer, founder of Maanasa Mental Health Service, and practising consultant at the Vida Medical Clinic—to unpack what’s really going on with the mental well-being of Sri Lankan youth and why we’re seeing more of these issues come to the surface.

“Many of these cases were happening before, too. However, without social media, they wouldn’t have received any attention. So we didn’t know about them,” she explained. In a way, the rise in conversation, painful as it may be, is a step in the right direction. Yet, that doesn’t mean the issue is exaggerated. She says, We’re only seeing part of the problem. “There are so many cases that still go unreported.”

The generation that lost its youth

A key turning point in this crisis, according to Sooriyabandara, was the COVID-19 pandemic. “It played a huge part in the mental health breakdown of teenagers and young adults. Gen Z especially lost almost five years of their lives that are crucial for emotional development, education, and career preparation.”

Adolescents missed out on what many would describe as milestone experiences, including finishing school, starting university, first jobs, friendships, heartbreaks, confusion, and discovery. All of these were interrupted by and affected different individuals on different levels. “That period of isolation caused them to become stuck, emotionally. Many of them still feel like they haven’t caught up. It’s like they’re frozen in time,” she explains.

Young people trying to navigate adulthood today are doing so with a warped sense of normality, fuelled by years of virtual learning, disrupted schooling, and a loss of social connection. “It’s no wonder they are struggling to concentrate, stay motivated, or feel hopeful,” she adds. “They were denied the social experiences that help young minds grow.”

Awareness vs. misinformation

Although it might seem unserious, another growing concern regarding mental well-being is the rise of self-diagnosis — a trend not unique to Sri Lanka, but one that is now growing rapidly here, too. TikTok reels, Instagram infographics, and personality quizzes have begun to replace clinical assessments in the minds of many, especially among the youth.

“I’ve had so many young people walk into my clinic and tell me, ‘I have bipolar’ or ‘I’m definitely ADHD’ because they read something online, saw a video, or even worse, because a friend told them so”, Sooriyabandara explains. The genuine concern, according to her, is not that people are talking about mental health — that’s a good thing — but that they are building their identities around labels, without proper diagnosis or guidance. “Once someone has identified with a label, it becomes extremely hard to help them move beyond it. They believe it’s who they are.”

What’s worse is when these self-diagnoses are reinforced within peer groups, where friends try to “diagnose” each other or share content that blurs the line between awareness and misinformation. It’s a complicated side effect of digital access that needs careful navigation.

Home is the base

When it comes to the root causes of poor mental health in youth, the discussion often turns to trauma. However, Rashmi Sooriyabandara points out something subtler and more insidious — neglect. “It’s not always physical, sexual, or verbal abuse that causes trauma. What I see most often is emotional neglect. Parents who are too busy, too distracted, too absorbed in their issues to see what their child is going through unknowingly make a negative impact on their children,” she says..”

This is a bitter reality to confront, especially for well-meaning parents who believe that providing education, food, and extracurriculars is enough. “What children need most is emotional connection,” she adds. Without it, they turn elsewhere. “They become vulnerable to harmful coping mechanisms, whether it’s toxic friendships, substance use, gaming addiction, pornography, or gambling. They’re trying to escape a reality where they feel unseen.” This is why adolescents must have a healthy and supportive home environment.

Institutional failure

In theory, schools and universities should act as support systems. In practice, however, they often fall short. Sooriyabandara quickly points out the consequences of having the wrong people being asked to provide are being made to serve as counsellors. That’s not just ineffective, it’s dangerous too,” she warns. In such situations, students hesitate to open up because the person they’re supposed to confide in is also dealing with them and their known acquaintances daily. “It breaks trust before it can be built.”

Instead, she suggests that every school and university have independent mental health professionals, at least as visiting staff, if not permanent. “Confidentiality is everything. If students are assured that what they say will remain between them and the listener, they’ll talk.”

She also emphasises that mental health services shouldn’t be limited to crisis moments. “Therapy isn’t just for when something is wrong. It can be a preventive tool. It can help someone explore their identity, understand their emotions, and build resilience before a breakdown happens.”

Destigmatising the conversation

Perhaps the most significant cultural shift needed is addressing the stigma surrounding therapy. In Sri Lanka, going to a therapist still carries the weight of shame, secrecy, and the assumption that something must be seriously wrong. Rashmi argues this couldn’t be further from the truth.

“You don’t have to have a disorder to seek therapy,” she says. “Even if you just want to talk, to clear your head, to understand your future better — that’s reason enough.”

Therapy can be a lifeline in the most literal sense, especially for young people navigating an increasingly complex, competitive, and overwhelming world. “If we can normalise it, we can prevent many future cases,” she shares.

The Road Ahead

If there’s one takeaway from our conversation with Rashmi Sooriyabandara, it’s this: the crisis in child and adolescent mental health is not a passing phase. It’s not hysteria and certainly not something that will fix itself. It is systemic, social, and very real.

It’s time we move beyond performative awareness and focused on real, solutions — including trained counsellors in institutions, emotional literacy in parenting, and early access to therapy without judgment. As Sooriyabandara reminds us, “Mental health is not a luxury. It’s a necessity, just like physical health. And the earlier

we understand that, the better chance we have of protecting our youth from silent suffering.”

Pictures by **Kumara Bopearachchi**

Location - **Vida Medical Clinic**



“Mental health is not a luxury. It’s a necessity, just like physical health. And the earlier we understand that, the better chance we have of protecting our youth from silent suffering.”



Anita & Jayendri



Prithiva & friend

LADY HILTON ROYAL BOLLYWOOD & RETRO NITE

Lady Hilton hosted its Royal Bollywood & Retro Nite at The Blue, Hilton Colombo, bringing an evening filled with vibrant music, dazzling dance, and desi glamour. Members and guests enjoyed a night of fun and entertainment, with iconic Bollywood beats setting the tone. Stylish performances lit up the stage, while attendees turned heads in stunning desi-inspired outfits.

Here's a glimpse of the colourful moments from this glamorous evening!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe



Thiyasha



Himmali



Latasha & Gigi



Harshini



Nishi



Gayathrie



Druki



Sashika, Prithiva, Karishma & Gothami



Roshini



Manel



Priyani



Neha Singet



Aida & Latasha



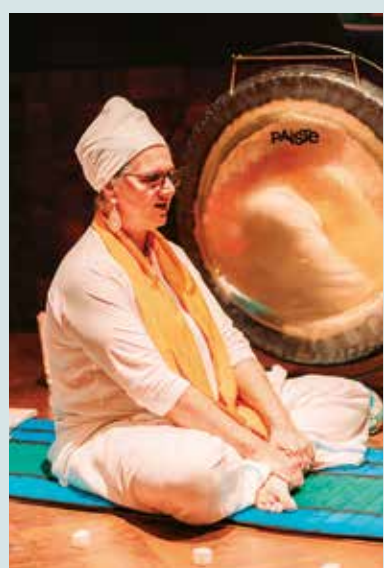
Jayendri



Salome, Munni & Prashanthi



Shahrana, Shezmina & Miroza



FITCON 2025

Sri Lanka's first-ever FitCon wrapped up in style at Cinnamon Grand Colombo, setting a new benchmark for wellness and fitness. Curated by Haut Monde Event Management together with Fit.lk and powered by Fitzky, the event brought together over 60 wellness brands, fitness experts and lifestyle leaders.

The day was packed with inspiration and activity from an energetic sunrise duathlon to interactive workshops, panel discussions, and a fitness fashion show. Guests explored four dedicated zones—Endurance, Mind & Body, Strength & Power, and Recovery—each offering unique experiences, from high-energy workouts to stress-relief sessions.

The event also featured a vibrant brand showcase and shopping stalls and ended on a high note with a lively after-party, making FitCon 2025 a true celebration of fitness, health, and community.

*Pictures by **Primal Fernando***





Alanki



Harshini



Ninuki & Anuki



Roshan & Kushlani



Shalini & Malaka



Prithiva & Treshan



Chrisanthi

FIT Walk

Fit Walk brought together fashion, wellness, and style in a unique high tea experience presented by FitCon and powered by Basilur Tea Sri Lanka. Held at Cinnamon Grand, the event celebrated body positivity, performance wear, and sustainable fashion in a luxurious setting.

The runway, choreographed with style and flair, showcased the latest collections from three Sri Lankan activewear brands — Astroid Activewear, 22.02 Active, and TRU Active. Guests also enjoyed an artisanal tea-tasting experience by Basilur, making it a truly one-of-a-kind evening. Fit Walk 2025 celebrated purpose, wellness, and style coming together.

Here are some highlights from the event.

Pictures by **Primal Fernando**



Himali



Punsara, Krista, Natalie & daughter



Nishi



Isuru & Natasha



Ruvini, Lakmi & Lakmali



Ninuki, Oshanie & Anuki



Fahad

FIT Splash

After the success of FitCon Sri Lanka, the celebrations continued in style with FIT Splash, the official after-party held poolside at the Breeze Bar, Cinnamon Grand. It was a night of fun and energy, bringing together fitness enthusiasts and partygoers for an unforgettable evening. Guests enjoyed lively DJ beats, exciting bottle deals, a vibrant cocktail hour, and a high-spirited Bollywood dance session by Naach Colombo.

Here are some moments from the after-party!

Pictures by **Primal Fernando**



Hashani



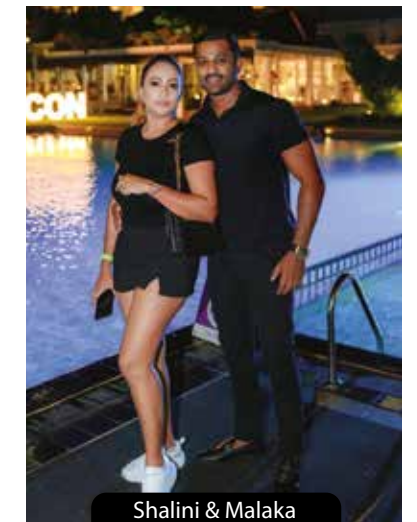
Lakmi, Sandy & Ruvini



Nishi, Gayathrie & Rossana



Oshanie & friend



Shalini & Malaka



Roy & Tharindu



Altat



Charini

CHARINI STORIES

Collection Launch at OGF

The vibrant launch of the Charini Stories Collection by renowned designer Charini Suriyage marked the opening of her second store at One Galle Face (OGF) Mall. The collection unveiled a striking new range of colourful, heritage-inspired pieces, celebrating Sri Lankan culture with bold designs, intricate detailing, beautifully crafted accessories, and elegant clutches.

Known for her eco-conscious approach and artistic flair, Charini has earned global recognition for blending fashion with architecture, art, and sustainability. This latest ready-to-wear line marks yet another milestone in her journey, reflecting the timeless charm of Sri Lanka's colonial past and cultural richness.

Here are some highlights from the elegant evening!

Pictures by **Primal Fernando**



Dilrukshi



Kanchi & Chamathka



Dilini, Charini & Pri



Nishi



Charini & Raffealla



Ambassador Julie Chung



Sandy



Darani



Sherusha



Ramani & Shashi



Gothami & Charishma



Gayathrie, Dinushika & friend



Harini & Asha



Eraj & Charini



Hash & Sajaira



Varuni



Charini & Nimmi



Kishani



Kalathma

TikTok Trending

By Haritha Athapattu

Meet Kalathma with TikTok Trending. Online, she's the social media personality you can't scroll past, but offline, she's the loud, book-obsessed friend with a knack for pep talks and questionable handmade gifts. A Project Manager by day and a creativity junkie by heart, she's equally at home dissecting the trolley problem, diving into Harry Potter, or getting lost in a novel. From storytelling to TikTok trends, Kalathma brings her mix of wit, curiosity, and unfiltered honesty everywhere she goes.

How did you first get into creating TikTok content, and what was your 'this could work' moment?

I've been making videos since I was a kid. Back then, I would upload silly YouTube clips or do livestreams with my friends on my private account just for fun. After downloading TikTok, I naturally started sharing things I liked, like talking about books, posting occasional memes, and doing outfit check videos.

I've always enjoyed creating videos, even just for myself. Sometimes, they never leave my camera roll. I never set out to 'make it work' as a career, and I still don't. Sponsorships and promotions are rare, and I only accept them if they're with brands or businesses I genuinely like.

Making videos has always been a hobby of mine. I do it because I enjoy it and want to keep it that way.

Which TikTok trend are you loving right now?

It's not a TikTok Trend but an ongoing joke about guys liking banana bread. And 'no', I will not elaborate.

If your TikTok account had a theme song, what would it be?

I think my theme song would change depending on the moment. I love many kinds of music, and my personality shifts to match. Some days I'm doing a pink, girly fit check to Beabadoobee; other days it's

head-to-toe black with Slipknot blasting. I would've said 'Silver Springs' by Fleetwood Mac a while ago. Right now, though, it's probably 'Ribs' by Lorde. I think it just fits the vibe of this moment in my life.

Do you prefer creating original concepts or adapting trending sounds and formats?

I post whatever I feel like. Sometimes I'll sit in front of the camera and talk about something I love straight from the heart. Other times, I'll hear an audio, get an idea, see a trend, and decide to join in. I don't make content to hop on top of the algorithm. I go with the flow and post what I want.

How do you connect with your audience and keep them engaged?

I honestly love my followers; they're so much fun. I get such a kick out of seeing videos they make using my audios or when they start a discussion about something I'm passionate about. The comments they leave and the DMs they send can be hilarious.

I also meet people in real life, and it's a blessing when they come to me to share their stories. You don't always think about it, but social media can impact people's lives. That's the part I truly cherish about being online, connecting with so many amazing people in such genuine ways.

What's the weirdest or most unexpected request you've ever received in your DMs?

Surprisingly, I've gotten a lot of messages about how nice my hands are. Some people have even suggested I should get into hand modelling. Not the career path I was expecting to be pitched in my DMs.

Have you ever filmed a TikTok that you didn't post because it was too funny or embarrassing? Spill.

I almost didn't post my Sinhalese parody of "Wait! They don't love you like I love you!" It was so ridiculous that I genuinely second-guessed posting it for hours. But I did it anyway, and I'm happy I did because people still make videos with that audio. And honestly, it still slaps every time.

If TikTok suddenly vanished tomorrow, what's the first thing you'd do?

Honestly? I'd carry on with my everyday life. TikTok's always been a fun extra, not a main mission. My degree, full-time job, and a handful of side quests keep me busy. If it disappeared tomorrow, I wouldn't mind.

Where do you see your TikTok presence heading next? More trends, more original content, or something totally unexpected?

Who knows? I just do what makes me happy, which is most important to me right now.

Social media can be a mix of love and criticism. How do you stay balanced and stay true to yourself when opinions get loud?

I just log out. I make what I want and post what I want, read the first two or three comments, and then disappear to do my own thing. I have friends and family to focus my energy on, and if I spent all my energy on internet criticism, I wouldn't have any left for myself or the people I care about most. The internet can be excellent, for sure! But being chronically online isn't the healthiest.

What advice would you give someone trying to get into TikTok trending content?

If you're starting, my advice is simple: ignore what everybody says and do it. Your friends, family, coworkers... everyone will have an opinion. But if it's something you truly love, don't let other people's thoughts get in the way.

When I first started, and even now, almost a year later, people still constantly comment on my appearance. I don't let it bother me because I know I'm more than just how I look. You have to trust yourself and go all in.

As for going viral, I'm no guru. Sometimes, the videos you put the least effort into blow up, and other times, people really notice and appreciate your effort. I stopped counting views and likes a long time ago. Comparison can kill your joy, and I'd much rather just enjoy creating and living happily.



Scan the QR code
for the full video

“

When I first started, and even now, almost a year later, people still constantly comment on my appearance. I don't let it bother me because I know I'm more than just how I look. You have to trust yourself and go all in.

”

Location - Mount Lavinia Hotel
Pictures by Malshan Wijayathilaka

Jay Princee

Grinding Between Coasts, Cultures, and the Come Up

Raised between continents and cultures, Jay Princee transformed the uncertainty of migration into a map for identity, artistry, and ambition. With nine independent projects, viral hits, and a creative hustle stretching from his bedroom studio to stages worldwide, Jay is living proof that you can wear your roots with pride, without being defined by them.



By Nirma Kumarasiri

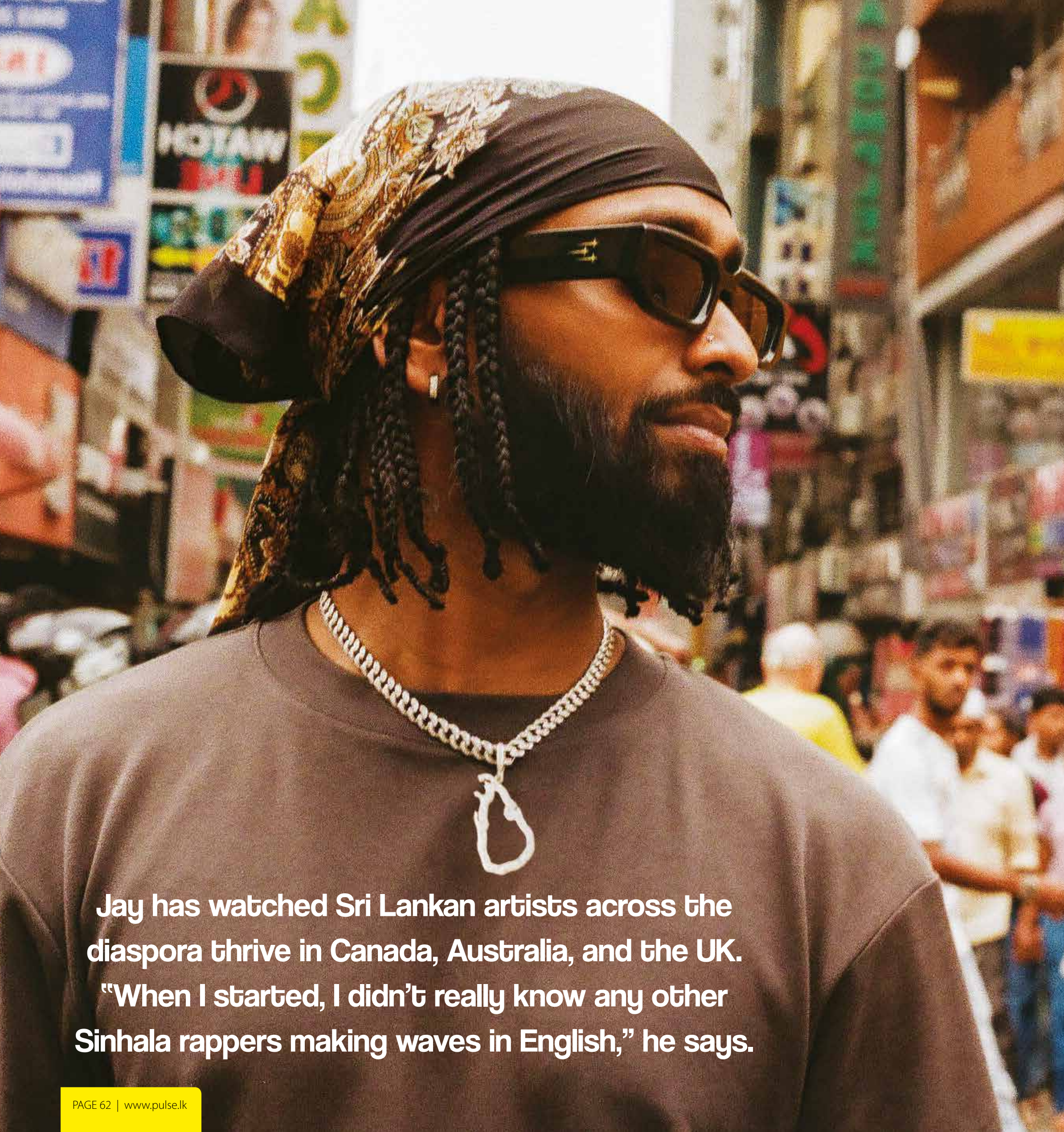
Jay Princee's journey didn't start in a studio or on a stage — it began in transit. Born in Sri Lanka and raised between New York, New Jersey, and California, the LA-based rapper carries multiple cultures like souvenirs. For Jay, music became more than a hobby when it turned into a map — a way to navigate identity, diaspora, and ambition. "I'm just a kid from Sri Lanka who got thrown into New York, then Jersey, then Cali," he says. "It wasn't just moving homes, it was shifting who I thought I was supposed to be."

Now, with viral hits, nine independent projects, and a growing audience at home and abroad, Jay isn't just putting Sri Lanka on the map — he's redrawing it.

From Colombo to Cali: building identity on the move

Jay moved to the US at 10, after his father won the Green Card lottery. New York was first, then New Jersey, where the cultural and literal landscape was nothing like Colombo. "I didn't even know what rap was when I left Sri Lanka," Jay admits. In Englewood, NJ — a predominantly Black and Hispanic neighbourhood — basketball introduced him to hip-hop culture.

California brought another reset. "It was a culture shock again," he says. "I went from a 90% Black school to a mostly white one. I had to figure out who I was, again." Through it all, his Sri Lankan roots, love for music, and appetite for storytelling stayed consistent.



Jay has watched Sri Lankan artists across the diaspora thrive in Canada, Australia, and the UK. “When I started, I didn’t really know any other Sinhala rappers making waves in English,” he says.

His first rap? A freestyle about basketball in high school. “I always told people about Sri Lanka, because no one knew where it was,” he recalls. “That’s something I carried into my music — just being proud of where I’m from.”

The bedroom studio that built a career

Music was a side passion until the 2020 lockdown. A friend gave Jay a microphone, and his bedroom became his studio. “I’ve recorded all nine of my projects in my bedroom,” he says. “It’s where I feel like my truest self.”

That DIY ethic birthed his first breakout track, ‘Where I’m From,’ a raw reflection on his connection to Sri Lanka and life in the diaspora. It gained traction in Sri Lankan communities abroad, but his feature on Pasan Liyanage’s ‘Nanaville’ made Jay a recognisable name back home. The remix of a beloved Sinhala folk song went viral, racking up millions of views across platforms.

“Bro, I didn’t even realise the song was blowing up like that in Sri Lanka,” Jay laughs. His lyrics, especially the ‘cinnamon skin’ line, sparked conversations about colourism. “That hit a nerve. People still deal with skin bleaching and all these beauty standards,” he says. “I want people to feel proud of who they are. Love your brown skin — that’s your power.”

The process: obsession with the details

Jay’s music might sound effortless, but behind it is a meticulous process. “I’m a perfectionist,” he admits. “I’ll write, record, listen, then rewrite if it feels wrong. I’ll loop beats for hours until I catch the feeling I’m chasing.”

Beats come from endless digging on platforms like BeatStars. Once something clicks, Jay maps out the structure, tests cadences, and refines each line. “You can’t just stack bars,” he says. “There has to be a method to the madness.”

His eye for detail extends to visuals. Jay was a videographer before fully committing to rap, a skill that sharpened his storytelling. “I’ve had a hand in editing almost every music video I’ve put out,” he says. Whether shooting in LA or under Colombo’s Lotus Tower, every visual carries his signature. “It’s not just about the song. The video is the extension of the story.”

Beyond labels: an artist, not just a Sri Lankan rapper

Jay is deliberate about how he’s perceived. “I’m a Sri Lankan who’s a hip-hop artist. But I’m not just a ‘Sri Lankan rapper,’” he says. “I don’t want to be boxed in like that — I’m an artist first.”

This distinction is important because Jay’s ambitions reach beyond any one place. “I don’t just want to be the guy that represents Sri Lanka. That’s a part of me, but I have more to say about life, struggles, everything I’ve lived through,” he explains.

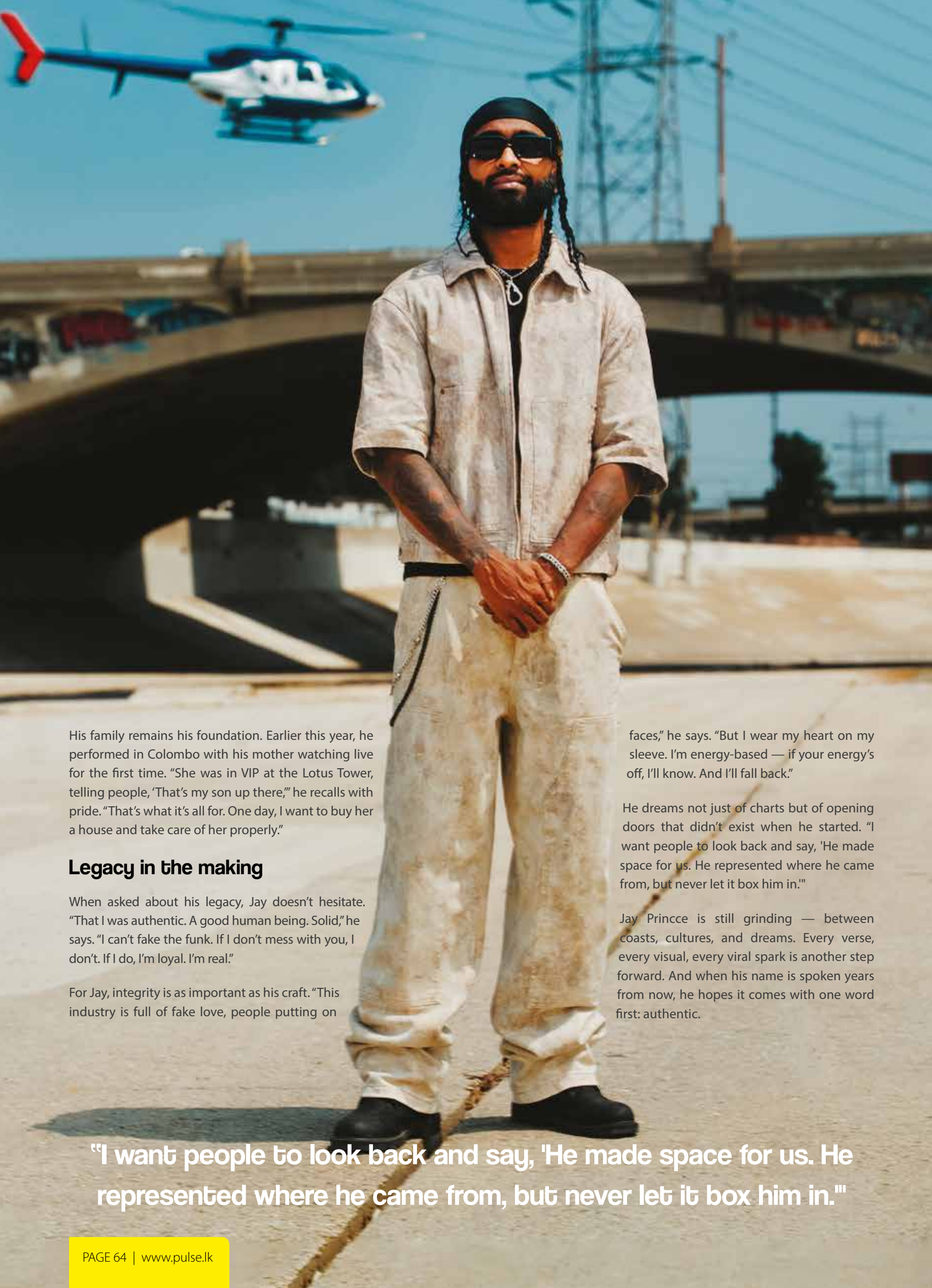
Still, Sri Lanka remains in his work. ‘Where I’m From’ bridges LA streets and Colombo memories. “When I say I want to put Sri Lanka on the map, it’s not just for visibility,” Jay says. “It’s about showing what’s possible — that a kid from there can go global without being confined to one identity.”

Jay has watched Sri Lankan artists across the diaspora thrive in Canada, Australia, and the UK. “When I started, I didn’t really know any other Sinhala rappers making waves in English,” he says. That pushed him to build connections, curating collaborations with Sri Lankan artists across Ottawa, Melbourne, Las Vegas, New York, and LA. “It was my way of saying — we’re here, talented, and belong on these stages too.”

Staying grounded, aiming higher

Jay’s life today is still a balancing act. He works a 6 a.m. shift, then dives into music at night. He has performed in LA and Sri Lanka and has his sights on Australia, Dubai, and Italy. “I’m not rich, bro,” he says, laughing. “But I’m grateful. I’m building.”

While money is necessary, Jay says success is about creative freedom. He’s open to signing with a label — but on his terms. “If signing means more exposure without sacrificing my creative control, then cool. But no one’s telling me how to make my art.”



His family remains his foundation. Earlier this year, he performed in Colombo with his mother watching live for the first time. “She was in VIP at the Lotus Tower, telling people, ‘That’s my son up there,’” he recalls with pride. “That’s what it’s all for. One day, I want to buy her a house and take care of her properly.”

Legacy in the making

When asked about his legacy, Jay doesn’t hesitate. “That I was authentic. A good human being. Solid,” he says. “I can’t fake the funk. If I don’t mess with you, I don’t. If I do, I’m loyal. I’m real.”

For Jay, integrity is as important as his craft. “This industry is full of fake love, people putting on

faces,” he says. “But I wear my heart on my sleeve. I’m energy-based — if your energy’s off, I’ll know. And I’ll fall back.”

He dreams not just of charts but of opening doors that didn’t exist when he started. “I want people to look back and say, ‘He made space for us. He represented where he came from, but never let it box him in.’”

Jay Prince is still grinding — between coasts, cultures, and dreams. Every verse, every visual, every viral spark is another step forward. And when his name is spoken years from now, he hopes it comes with one word first: authentic.

“I want people to look back and say, ‘He made space for us. He represented where he came from, but never let it box him in.’”



Michelle & mom Shanti



Rozanne & Kosh



Hasini & friend



Shamindri

Chokolaate

MOTHER-DAUGHTER FASHION DESIGNER 2025

The grand finale of the Chokolaate Mother-Daughter Fashion Designer (MDFD) 2025 event unfolded spectacularly at the Grand Marquee, Taj Samudra Colombo.

MDFD celebrates the beautiful bond between mothers and daughters through the universal language of style and design. This year’s edition was grander, bolder, and more breathtaking than ever — elevating the platform to new heights.

Launched 15 years ago, the contest was born out of a vision to honour the timeless connection between mothers and daughters.

Here are some highlights from the evening!

Pictures by **Vihanga Kaveesha**



Kumar & Sadee



Piyumal & Yameesha



Ramani



Natharlea, Maria Popova & Caroline



Danu



Layers of Russian Elegance A Fashion Celebration

To mark 25 years of the Russian Cultural Centre in Colombo, the Russian House hosted a dazzling evening titled Layers of Russian Elegance – Fashion Showcase 2025. Set against the charming backdrop of the Russian House lawn, the event blended culture, fashion, and art to celebrate the longstanding friendship between Russia and Sri Lanka. The showcase featured stunning creations by three of Sri Lanka's leading designers: Natharlea Liyanage, Shavindi Wijesuriya, and Pubudi Lawanya. Each designer brought their unique vision to life, infusing Russian-inspired elegance and symbolism with modern Sri Lankan style.

Here are some highlights from this graceful evening of fashion and cultural flair.

Pictures by Kumara Bopearachchi



Yohani



Thiyasha



Nishi



Taisia



Natharlea & Shavindri



Rozanne



Pubudi & friend



Maria Popova



Sachitha, Natharlea, Reshan & Anuki



Malsha, Caroline, Prithiva & Treshan

STARS & STRIPES

BY AAASL 2025

The American Alumni Association of Sri Lanka (AAASL) hosted Stars & Stripes Vol. III, its signature annual celebration marking American Independence Day at the Thuna Paha Lawn, Water's Edge.

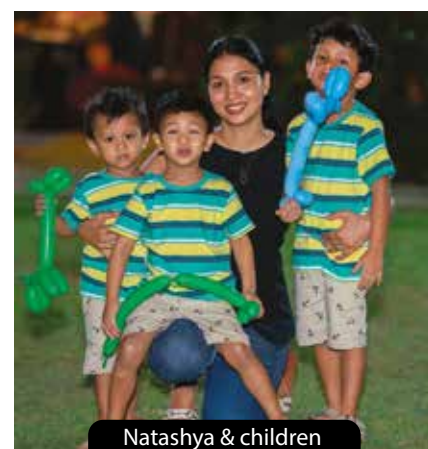
The lively evening brought together alumni, families, and friends for a fun-filled celebration of music, games, a classic American BBQ, and a dazzling fireworks display – all in true Fourth of July spirit. Since its founding in 1988, AAASL has continued to promote educational, cultural, and community initiatives while strengthening the friendship between the US and Sri Lanka.

Here's a glimpse of the festive moments!

Pictures by **Malshan Wijayathilaka**



Michael, Katherine & children



Natasha & children



Chinthaka & Sajeira family



Navam & Shehara



Chris, Nicky & Vid



Patrick, Aviva, Janaka & guest



Ruvi & Suhanya



Nadira, Sajeira, Rashmika & Sarah



Senal & Hansani



Sankhitha, Senaka & Ashan



Buwaneka, Lalith & Kosala



Sarah & Rashmika



Thanuki, Prabashi & children



Netali & Nadira



Sanjula & Rehan



Tessa, Lyanna, Danika & Suhanya



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Dilhan



Anudi



Jerusha



Yashasvi

t-Lounge & Bar by Dilmah Opens at City of Dreams

t-Lounge by Dilmah launched its latest t-Lounge & Bar at The Shoppes, City of Dreams Colombo. The vibrant opening introduced guests to a bold new way of experiencing tea — from cinnamon-inspired blends to Sri Lanka's very first alcohol-infused boba tea.

The new outlet offers a sparkling selection of tea experiences, including handpicked Ceylon Silver Tip teas, creative tea cocktails, and an exciting menu that reimagines how tea can be enjoyed.

Here are a few highlights from the launch!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe



Azra & friend



Christina & Natalia



Amrit, Dilhan & friends



Stephanie



Dushyanth & friend



Heshan

INDULGE IN THE ARTISTRY OF CULINARY PERFECTION

At Ceylon Curry Club, every plate is a celebration of Sri Lankan age-old recipes and contemporary elegance, bringing in whispers a story of home. The restaurant has hosted and catered to distinguished gatherings, offering an experience where local flavours and refined dining come together beautifully.

Lunch 11 AM to 3.30 PM | Dinner 6 PM to 10.30 PM

Prior reservations are recommended
For Reservations: 011 426 6363

HIRIK ETIYA

Sri Lanka's
HIDDEN COVE

of
Surf, Serenity
and **Sun**

Tucked along Sri Lanka's southern curve, Hiriketiya is a quiet surf haven where digital nomads, sun-seekers, and adventure-chasers find more than just waves—they find a way of life. From its barefoot cafés to its yoga shalas under swaying palms, Hiriketiya's unspoiled charm offers the perfect blend of rustic simplicity, community spirit, and tropical escape.



By Haritha Athapattu

Tucked away on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, Hiriketiya is a palm-fringed horseshoe bay that has quietly emerged as one of the island's most alluring beach enclaves. Once a sleepy fishing village, it has now evolved into a haven for surfers, digital nomads, and eco-conscious travellers from various parts of the world, seeking more than just sun and sea. While refreshingly less commercial than Mirissa or Unawatuna, Hiriketiya's understated charm is what sets it apart.

Laid-back yet lively

Hiriketiya offers a seamless blend of rustic relaxation and understated sophistication. It's where barefoot café-hoppers and those seeking relaxation mingle with surfers waxing their boards at dawn. What is lovely about

Hiriketiya is that there are no towering hotels or booming beach clubs — just a gentle rhythm of life set to the crash of waves and the hum of conversation under fairy-lit palms.

The evenings here are especially intimate and mellow. Imagine listening to acoustic music under a starry night sky and sipping a finely blended cocktail with a dish of seafood by your side, and that is exactly what Hiriketiya is. The scene is magnetic not for its noise but for its soul, which seals everyone in calm and connection.

Surf, snorkel, and stretch

Thanks to the bay's gentle left-hand break, which makes it an ideal spot for beginners and intermediate surfers, you will mostly find the coast dotted by surfboards like driftwood. Numerous surf schools offer easy rentals and



lessons if you are new and want to learn the art of surfing. Early mornings often begin with a golden-pink sky and silhouettes of surfers gliding over glassy swells.



Nonetheless, if you are not quite mesmerised by the idea of surfing, paddleboarding and snorkelling are popular alternatives. The clear waters reveal patches of coral and curious fish, while a short tuk-tuk ride away, the broader Dikwella Beach offers safer waters for swimming and long barefoot walks at dusk.

For those keen to explore beyond the coast, nearby temples, winding inland lanes, and the colourful Dickwella Saturday market offer glimpses into the local rhythm of life, where spicy snacks, fresh produce, and warm smiles are traded in equal measure.

Sunshine, year-round

Hiriketiya becomes a tourism hotspot thanks to its warm, tropical weather most of the year, with the high season stretching only from November to April. Clear skies, steady surf, and breezy evenings define these months. But even during the quieter off-season from May to October, the bay inviting — albeit with fewer crowds — as lush greenery and wilder waves beckon more seasoned surfers.

In addition, its naturally sheltered curve means the bay often stays calm, even when surrounding beaches face stormier conditions. Therefore, you can virtually surf there throughout the year, unless you are a complete beginner. Plus, the constant sea breeze keeps temperatures pleasant, never sweltering — perfect for sun-soaking without the scorch.

Sustainable and slow

More than just a scenic escape, Hiriketiya is part of a wider movement towards slow, sustainable tourism. Many of its cafés, homestays, and surf shacks are locally owned or built with sustainability in mind. Plastic



reduction, ethical sourcing, and community initiatives are common threads, woven quietly into everyday life rather than plastered as greenwashed slogans. There are no all-inclusive resorts or cruise crowds. Instead, there's a shared space between locals and visitors, between land and ocean.

A culinary scene that cuts through the noise

While the surf and scenery draw the initial crowd to Hiriketiya, the food keeps them around. One of the key trailblazers in putting Hiriketiya on the map is Smoke & Bitters, perched just above the bay. Ranked among Asia's 50 Best Bars for three consecutive years since 2022, this open-air cocktail bar and smokehouse has redefined what beachside dining can look like. With signature drinks that balance tropical flair and mixology precision, and dishes inspired by local ingredients with bold, smoky twists, it offers a dining experience as curated as the bay is raw. Sunset views here are best enjoyed with a drink and the scent of grilled jackfruit or smoked chicken wafting through the air.

A place to stay, surf, and stay longer

For many who arrive in Hiriketiya, it is very natural for a few days to stretch into weeks. Among the earliest pioneers of the area's current vibe is Dots Bay House — a homegrown favourite that has evolved into a cultural hub for surfers, backpackers, and creatives. With an open-air restaurant, yoga shala, hostel-style and private accommodation, a coworking space, and legendary open mic nights, Dots offers something for everyone, whether you're looking to work remotely, surf all day, or hang out by the pool. Moreover, Dots Bay House



is known for its open mic nights, where local artists and Colombo-based talent perform regularly, with hostel and surf camp crowds joining in. It's a natural base for those who want to experience Hiriketiya fully but casually.

The soul of the South

In a country famed for its cultural landmarks and bustling beaches, Hiriketiya stands out not for what it offers in abundance, but for what it chooses to preserve—tranquillity, authenticity, and balance. Whether you're looking to catch your first wave, sip coconut water under a palm tree, or simply do nothing at all, Hiriketiya provides the perfect backdrop. It is Sri Lanka at its most soulful—unhurried, sun-kissed, and quietly unforgettable.





Rosy & Dhananjaya



Asanka



Sabina

A Celebration by Dhananjaya Bandara

To mark 25 years of excellence in bridal and fashion couture, celebrated designer Dhananjaya Bandara hosted a dazzling showcase at the Hilton Colombo. The evening was nothing short of magical, as he unveiled his newest collection of timeless ethnic bridalwear and graceful fashion pieces that beautifully reflected his signature style and deep-rooted Sri Lankan heritage.

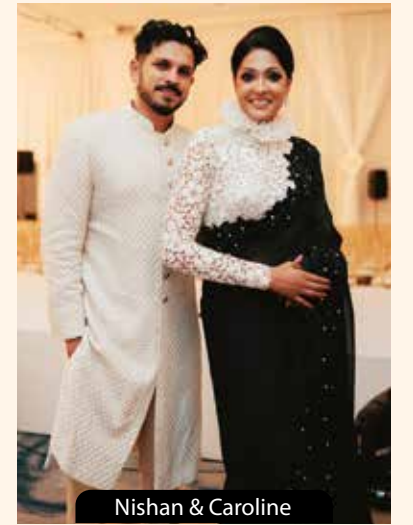
Adding to the excitement, the night also saw the official launch of DB Ceylon, his brand-new jewellery line. With an elegant setting and a stylish crowd in attendance, the event was a true celebration of local design, creativity, and collaboration.

Here's a glimpse of the stunning guests and special moments from the night.

*Pictures by **Vihanga Kaveesha Peiris & Iraj Walisinghe***



Namal & Limini



Nishan & Caroline



Senali



Shereen & friends



Geraldine



Senura & Shenelle



Shalini & Malaka



Dilki



Gangulee



Kavya



Kushlani



Sangeetha



Nishara, Gamini, Chamari, Paba & Hasanga



Tashiya



Ramzi



Heshan



Yasas



Sara & friend



Yohani & Dhananjaya



Ishadi & Romane



Pearlija & Saasha



Rozanne



CARNAGE

GRIT, GROWTH

AND

GOING GLOBAL

By Naveed Rozais

Carnage is one of Sri Lanka's most iconic homegrown brands—a movement defined by bold design and unapologetic energy. People don't just wear Carnage—they believe in it, live by it, and feel part of something bigger whenever they throw on a Carnage hoodie or walk into a Carnage event. And this year, Carnage turns five.

In honour of this anniversary, Pulse sat down with Joel Tillekeratne, the man behind the vision, to examine how this small online operation became a powerhouse with a flagship store, a fiercely loyal community, and a social presence that rivals international labels.

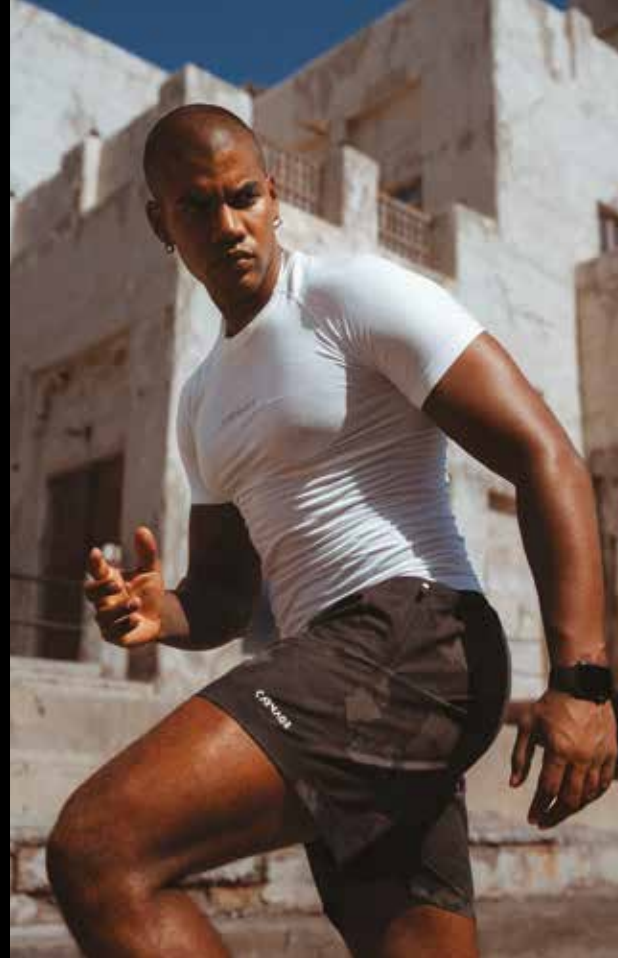
When Joel launched Carnage five years ago, there was no grand unveiling, glossy ad campaign, or celebrity-fronted photoshoots. Back then, it was a small operation run by Joel and a couple of friends, doing everything from designing to packing orders by hand. It started, as many things do, out of necessity—fuelled by instinct, grit, and a healthy dose of late-night obsession. Today, it's one of Sri Lanka's most recognisable activewear and athleisure brands, with a cult following of over 100,000 across platforms.

As Carnage turns five, Joel reflects on the milestone: "It's an incredible feeling. Hitting the five-year mark makes you reflect on everything—the wins, the chaos, the lessons, and all the memories along the way. It's been nothing short of a wild and fulfilling ride."

Building a Brand with Bite

All those who know Carnage know its energy. It's aggressive, raw, and confident. From day one, it's stood out for its bold drops, stark branding, and a tone of voice that feels more like a war cry than a marketing line. That distinct identity is part of what's kept its following fiercely loyal—and it wasn't shaped by market research or focus groups.

Joel Tillekeratne on
reaching the milestone
of five years and making
its bold way to the
international arena



"It wasn't fully intentional in the beginning," Joel shares. "One thing led to another, and we found our voice over time. But I always envisioned how the brand should feel—raw, confident, different. We've stuck to that energy from day one, and that consistency has become our DNA."

That unfiltered, self-assured, and honest voice has helped Carnage carve out a space across fitness wear, streetwear, lifestyle, and culture. Carnage doesn't just sell hoodies, tanks, and leggings—it sells a mindset.

"Sri Lanka had plenty of products, but no true brands," Joel shares of the gap he set out to fill. "We wanted to build something that stood for more than just clothes. A brand with meaning. A name people could relate to and be proud of. A homegrown brand with purpose, energy, and identity."

The Grind Behind the Growth

While Carnage may seem like an overnight success, the truth—as always—is messier. The brand scaled quickly, yes, but not without the kind of tunnel-visioned hard work most people don't see.

"We were obsessed with making every drop better than the last," Joel explains. "And we had a good understanding of branding and marketing from early on. Add to that a stupid amount of hard work, which pushed us forward."

Carnage hit the digital ground running. From the beginning, the team understood the value of platform-native content and creator marketing. Whether it was leveraging viral audio trends on TikTok, collaborating with micro-influencers on Instagram, or hosting branded events that generated hype and connection, Carnage treated social media as more than just a sales channel—it was their stage.

"We've always respected the uniqueness of each platform. Whether it's trends, timing, or tone, we tailored content to fit. And from day one, we stayed consistent. We leaned into creator marketing early, weren't afraid to experiment or take risks, and kept evolving with what's happening globally."

This agility paid off. The brand's social footprint exploded—over 100,000 Instagram followers, high engagement rates, and the kind of organic buzz most startups can only dream of. But beyond the numbers, Carnage built real affinity. People didn't just like the brand—they felt part of it.

A community more than a customer base

Carnage's core audience isn't just made up of fitness junkies or fashion-forward twenty-somethings. It's broader than that—people who connect with the brand's message of self-improvement, hustle, and individuality. That audience has grown into something bigger than a customer base—a community.

"At the core, it's always been about the product. And that's why people keep coming back," Joel explains. "That repeat customer base turned into a community. Beyond that, we host events and create real-life touchpoints that take the beyond a transaction. It's a relationship."

From 'No One Lifts Alone' workouts to pop-up runs and store meetups, Carnage has shown up offline, too. And for many fans of the brand, those real-world experiences—wearing Carnage to a gym class, spotting someone else in the same drop—are where loyalty deepens.

The opening of Carnage's first physical store in January 2023 was a significant milestone. After years of operating exclusively online, launching a brick-and-mortar space gave the brand—and its community—a place to call home. "Seeing people line up to walk into our store was truly special," Joel reflects. "After being online-only for three years, that was a huge moment—one of the most rewarding for me."

Lessons learnt

Of course, not everything has gone smoothly. Scaling a business without a blueprint, during a pandemic, and in an economy as volatile as Sri Lanka's is no small feat. Joel is upfront about the learning curve. "It's been non-stop learning. One of the biggest was supply and

demand—we've had to learn how to manage that balance the hard way. No playbook, just a lot of trial and error."

But those lessons, he says, have only sharpened the team's instincts—and toughened their resolve. As Carnage moves into its sixth year, the goal is clear: international expansion. Joel isn't shy about his ambition. He wants Carnage to be more than a local success story—he wants it on the global stage. "The ultimate dream is to take Carnage global. To go from a homegrown Sri Lankan brand to an international one. That's the mission now, and we're going all-in to make it a reality."

It's a bold plan - but bold has always been the Carnage way.



CRACKING THE CODE

ON *Arjun Jeger*

BUILDING SMARTER, MORE HUMAN DIGITAL BRANDS

Showing up with relevance, creativity, and clarity

By Nirma Kumarasiri

In 2008, digital marketing in Sri Lanka was more of a curiosity than a category. Television, newspapers, and billboards still dominated the advertising landscape. Social media existed in the form of Yahoo Chat and MSN Messenger, and the term ‘content strategy’ hadn’t even entered agency vocabularies.

But even then, Arjun Jeger saw digital media as more than just a side channel. With a background in mass communication and a focus on advertising and PR, he was drawn to the intersection of technology, communication, and storytelling. His first job at an e-learning company taught him a lesson that’s shaped his thinking ever since: technology isn’t just efficient—it’s transformative. It doesn’t just automate processes; it reshapes how we learn, express, and connect.

That early perspective helped him spot identify what digital platforms were quietly enabling—speed, scale, interactivity, and global reach—and why marketers would soon need to reimagine their playbooks.

Moving from visibility to engagement

Over the past 15 years, Arjun has helped legacy brands and fast-moving challengers navigate the shift from traditional to digital. Today, he leads DC Group alongside his co-founder, Prasad Karunaratne—a full-service agency offering integrated creative, digital, performance, influencer, and event capabilities. But even with this scale, his focus remains clear: helping brands use digital to stay visible and relevant.

“Digital forced brands to become more accountable, agile, and human,” he says. “Where they once broadcast messages, now they must respond, adjust, and build trust in real time.”



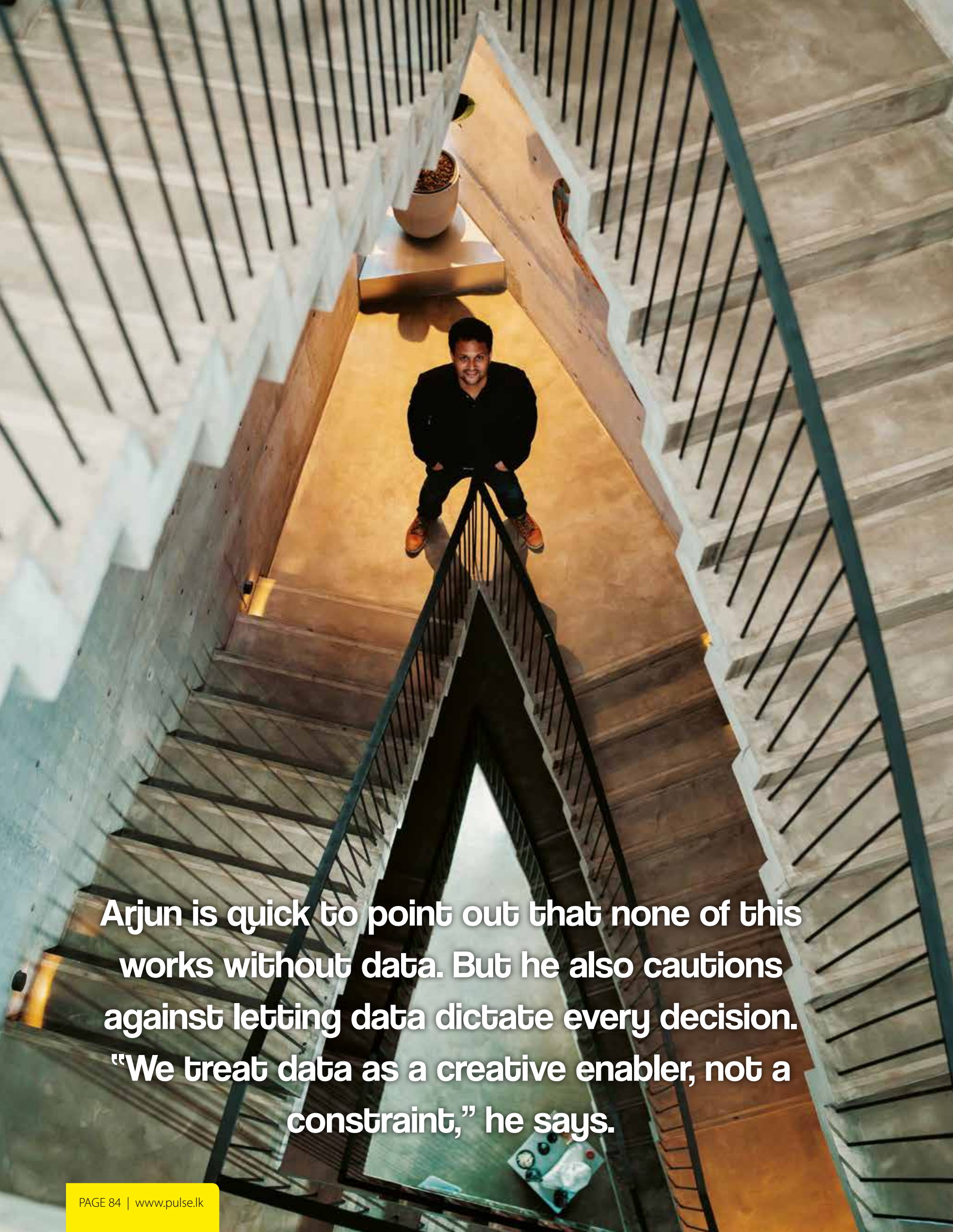
This shift created opportunities in Sri Lanka, where marketing budgets are often modest and teams are lean. Local brands didn’t need to outspend multinational competitors—they just needed to be faster, more culturally attuned, and more consistent online. It was no longer about who had the biggest budget. It was about who best understood the platform, the audience, and the moment.

That mindset has influenced how DC Group approaches campaigns by combining speed with substance, and technology with insight. The goal isn’t just impressions; it’s connection.

Understanding platform intent

One of the most essential distinctions Arjun makes—and one many brands still overlook—is that different digital platforms operate with fundamentally different user mindsets. Meta’s ecosystem (Facebook and Instagram) thrives on user intent, while TikTok is built on discovery.

On Meta, users engage with communities they’ve opted into. Content surfaces from pages they already follow or networks they’ve already chosen to join, making it well-suited for targeting, retargeting, conversion, and journey mapping.



Arjun is quick to point out that none of this works without data. But he also cautions against letting data dictate every decision. “We treat data as a creative enabler, not a constraint,” he says.

In contrast, TikTok is a discovery-first environment. Its algorithm rewards content that grabs attention quickly, holds it, and feels culturally or emotionally resonant—even if it comes from an account the user has never seen before. A strong TikTok post can go viral organically without needing a large follower base; the creative expectations are entirely different.

This isn't just a stylistic shift—it's a strategic one. “Treating TikTok and Meta as interchangeable is one of the most common and costly mistakes,” Arjun notes. His agency never recycles creative across platforms. Instead, they develop content specifically for each one, respecting the tone, pacing, and interaction style that performs best.

Their work often layer content across multiple objectives: organic visibility, creator-led storytelling, and paid amplification. This structure helps brands build awareness, foster engagement, and deliver measurable results, without relying on a single creative asset to carry the load.

Avoiding creative fatigue

Another challenge that digital teams face, especially in smaller markets, is sustaining engagement without overwhelming audiences. Running the same ad repeatedly is tempting when media performance looks strong. However, overexposure leads to audience fatigue—even the most impactful message can lose its power when seen too often.

DC Group addresses this by encouraging a ‘single message, multiple expressions’ approach. While a campaign may centre on one core idea, it's executed in varied formats, tones, and lengths to stay fresh and avoid performance drop-offs.

This creative discipline is essential in fast-moving platforms like TikTok, where attention spans are short and the scroll is relentless. Content that performs well today may underperform a week later. That's why Arjun's team treats TikTok like a content lab—constantly building, testing, and adapting fast based on real-time feedback.

Here, perfection takes a backseat to cultural relevance. In Sri Lanka, content that feels local—through language, tone, or even setting—tends to outperform imported or overly polished content. Humour, sentiment, and everyday authenticity are often stronger levers than high-end production value.

Letting data inform the narrative

Arjun is quick to point out that none of this works without data. But he also cautions against letting data dictate every decision. “We treat data as a creative enabler, not a constraint,” he says. The numbers reveal audience behaviour—what's working, when engagement peaks, and which formats drive action—but the final creative direction still comes from intuition, context, and brand voice.

DC Group holds a competitive edge in this balance of data and instinct. Many campaigns use data to shape the ‘what’—the topic, tone, or trend—but rely on human insight to determine the ‘how’—the execution, the emotion, the hook.

This principle also applies to how they use AI. While AI tools have become essential for scaling content, generating variations,

and assisting with copy and ideation, the emotional depth and storytelling still come from people. “You can't automate authenticity,” Arjun says. “Especially in influencer or brand-led content, audiences expect lived experience. They want to see people, not just patterns.”

Preparing for what's next

Looking ahead, Arjun sees the biggest shifts coming from three forces: AI-driven automation, hyper-personalisation, and the decentralisation of influence.

Automation will continue to simplify campaign execution—from content generation to media planning. But this will intensify the pressure on brands to remain human and emotionally relevant. Meanwhile, hyper-personalised marketing will demand a sharper understanding of micro-audiences, requiring brands to tailor content by demographics, mindset, and moment.

Perhaps the most significant change will be how influence is distributed. Arjun believes power is shifting from big platforms and macro-influencers towards niche communities, internal voices, and more trusted micro-networks. “Brands must go beyond surface-level visibility and become meaningful participants in smaller, more loyal spaces.”

To navigate this future, he recommends marketers develop two essential skills: data fluency and AI fluency. Not necessarily deep technical expertise—to interpret insights, experiment with tools, and translate findings into meaningful creative.

Building the industry, not just the agency

Beyond his role at DC Group, Arjun has helped shape the broader digital marketing ecosystem as the current President of the Digital Marketing Association of Sri Lanka (DMASL). What began as a small community of like-minded professionals has grown into an organisation with over 500 members, offering training, mentorship, and hosting one of the country's most important digital summits, which returned for its third edition.

For Arjun, the excitement lies in seeing the wider industry grow alongside his agency. “This space is still evolving. But there's real momentum and real talent across the country. We're not waiting for the future of marketing to arrive—we're. We're building it ourselves.”

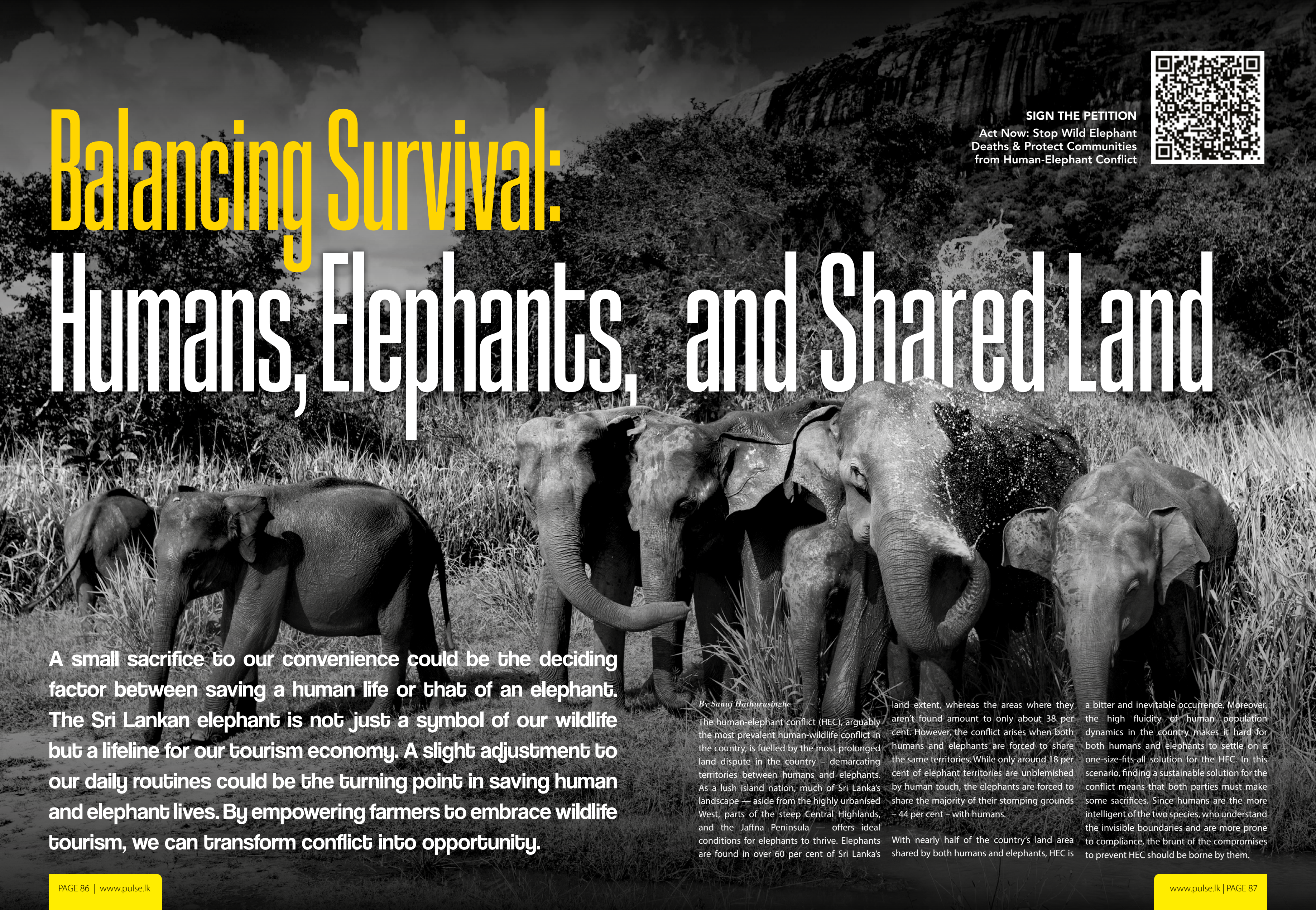
Relevance, at every touchpoint

Digital marketing in Sri Lanka has moved well beyond the realm of experimentation. It is now a strategic craft that blends data, cultural fluency, storytelling, and technical agility. For brands, the challenge is no longer just being present online. It's about showing up with relevance, creativity, and clarity.

As Arjun sees it, the winning formula hasn't changed. It's about combining insight with emotion, delivered in the right voice, at the right moment, on the right screen.

Because in a digital world driven by speed, scrolls, and split seconds, relevance isn't just an advantage—it's everything.

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe



Balancing Survival: Humans, Elephants, and Shared Land

SIGN THE PETITION
Act Now: Stop Wild Elephant
Deaths & Protect Communities
from Human-Elephant Conflict



A small sacrifice to our convenience could be the deciding factor between saving a human life or that of an elephant. The Sri Lankan elephant is not just a symbol of our wildlife but a lifeline for our tourism economy. A slight adjustment to our daily routines could be the turning point in saving human and elephant lives. By empowering farmers to embrace wildlife tourism, we can transform conflict into opportunity.

By Sanuj Hathurusinghe

The human-elephant conflict (HEC), arguably the most prevalent human-wildlife conflict in the country, is fuelled by the most prolonged land dispute in the country – demarcating territories between humans and elephants. As a lush island nation, much of Sri Lanka’s landscape — aside from the highly urbanised West, parts of the steep Central Highlands, and the Jaffna Peninsula — offers ideal conditions for elephants to thrive. Elephants are found in over 60 per cent of Sri Lanka’s

land extent, whereas the areas where they aren’t found amount to only about 38 per cent. However, the conflict arises when both humans and elephants are forced to share the same territories. While only around 18 per cent of elephant territories are unblemished by human touch, the elephants are forced to share the majority of their stomping grounds – 44 per cent – with humans. With nearly half of the country’s land area shared by both humans and elephants, HEC is

a bitter and inevitable occurrence. Moreover, the high fluidity of human population dynamics in the country makes it hard for both humans and elephants to settle on a one-size-fits-all solution for the HEC. In this scenario, finding a sustainable solution for the conflict means that both parties must make some sacrifices. Since humans are the more intelligent of the two species, who understand the invisible boundaries and are more prone to compliance, the brunt of the compromises to prevent HEC should be borne by them.

HEC Stats

Understanding the scope of the conflict is paramount in finding sustainable solutions. As mentioned earlier, the majority of elephant territories are shared with humans, resulting in disputes that have a significant impact on both parties. On average, every year, around 400 elephants and 100 humans die due to HEC. Alarmingly, that is more than one elephant death per day. In the South Asian region, there are five countries, including Sri Lanka, where the Asian Elephant is found. Notably, Sri Lanka is the country with the highest number of elephant deaths and the second-highest number of human deaths per capita due to HEC. According to the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) statistics, the human deaths due to HEC have increased by 42 per cent during the last three decades.

According to the 2011 Elephant Census, Sri Lanka is home to 5,787 elephants, comprising 1,107 calves and 122 tuskers. However, this number contrasts starkly with the estimates of the elephant population size in the 19th century, which was between 12,000 and 14,000. The DWC, however, stated in 2023 that the wild elephant population in Sri Lanka has increased to 7,000. Conversely, the human population of the country has also been on a steady rise, especially the rural population. According to World Bank projections based on the United Nations Population Division's World Urbanisation Prospects, Sri Lanka's rural population has continued to increase throughout recent history. With agriculture as their primary mean of income — which to elephants is a low-risk, high-reward source of food — the HEC in rural areas has also risen in recent years, somewhat understandably.

Causes of HEC

One of the primary causes of HEC is population growth. The population increase results in economic development and agricultural expansion, which brings changes to rural areas that both humans and elephants share. However, change doesn't necessarily lead to conflict unless it is not appropriately regulated. One such notable example is the development activities in the Hambantota District over the past decade. The rapid development, which involved the construction of harbours, airports, cricket stadiums, zoos, safaris, parks, and wide roads, disrupted the ecological balance and the harmony between humans and wildlife. The growing development process largely overlooked the elephant corridors that spanned across

shrublands, which aren't typically considered forests. Consequently, the projects continually progressed, paying little to no attention to these corridors, which connected several national parks in the vicinity, including Uda Walawe, Yala, and Lunugamwehera. When HEC increased, a special forest area for elephants — the Hambantota Managed Elephant Reserve — was declared to address the issue. However, the effectiveness of the reserve is again questioned by experts, as the main road towards the Mattala International Airport was laid across the dedicated forest reserve.

Lack of coordination and communication between government entities, as well as a tendency to resort too quickly to ad hoc solutions without conducting thorough studies, has also increased HEC. In Sri Lanka, several government institutions regulate forest lands, including the DWC, the Department of Forests, the Department of Irrigation, the Mahaweli Authority, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department of Railways. The common practice for addressing solutions to HEC has been to let the governing body of the land in question handle it. For example, suppose the land in question is governed by the Department of Water Conservation (DWC). In that case, the DWC is scrutinised for finding solutions, and more often than not, the governing government agency is pushed to establish a method of mitigation, such as erecting an electric fence. The success of an electric fence largely depends on its ability to separate elephants and humans, or at least its efficiency in keeping elephants on one side of the fence. However, a lack of communication between government institutions has resulted in the construction of electric fences everywhere. When multiple government agencies manage a forested area, each agency tends to establish a fence encompassing the land under its jurisdiction. As a result, numerous fences are erected, sometimes resulting in fences between fences. Needless to say, the effectiveness of a fence drops drastically if elephants are found on both sides of it. Moreover, if the area enclosed by a fence doesn't possess the bare minimum of resources — in terms of food and water — to sustain the elephant population it tries to limit to that area, sooner or later the elephants will inevitably roam beyond the fence, rendering it as a failure. Instead of each government agency washing its hands of the issue due to jurisdictional definitions, sound inter-agency communication and collaboration are much-needed, if the HEC is to be sustainably contained.

Another key reason for increased HEC is political intervention. It is natural for the affected

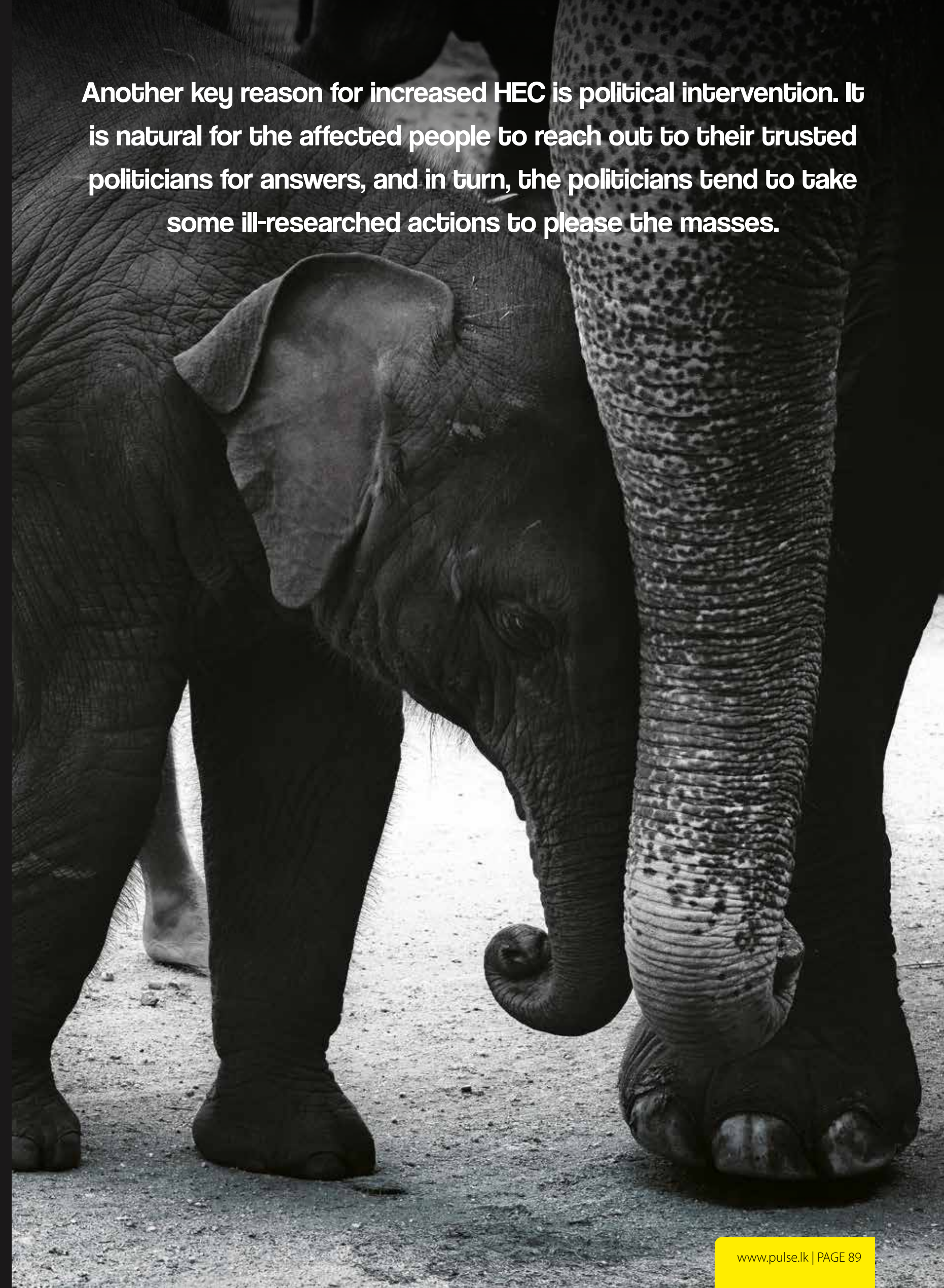
people to reach out to their trusted politicians for answers, and in turn, the politicians tend to take some ill-researched actions to please the masses. In the outskirts of the Flood Plains National Park in the Polonnaruwa District, where HEC is prevalent, a political intervention led to the digging of elephant trenches as a mitigation method. While the swiftness of action may have pleased the people for a short period, the ill-advised prevention method created more issues than it provided solutions in the long run. The soft, sandy soil of the area is not suitable for digging trenches, as they are prone to collapse. Moreover, the torrential rains courtesy of the monsoons also mean the trenches would be filled with water during the rainy season, which again results in 'wall collapses' and the ditch being filled with sediment and debris. Coupled with the ecological damage that the ad hoc digging can cause to a sensitive ecosystem, this type of short-sighted political interference aggravates the HEC instead of resolving it.

Solutions For HEC

In terms of finding sustainable solutions for the HEC, the first key reality that both the people and the authorities must realise is that the conflict cannot be resolved 100 per cent, realistically speaking. Suppose the elephant population is on the rise, as many wildlife experts believe. In that case, a definitive solution may never be found, as the issue is also evolving at an ever-increasing pace. The best course of action is to find a solution that fosters coexistence.

When finding solutions, whichever they may be, they need to be arrived at after a thorough scientific process that takes into consideration all the environmental, social, geographical, and zoological aspects of the issue. To find a sustainable solution, the aforementioned lack of communication between government agencies must be addressed, and the government should also be open to collaborating with civil society organisations, NGOs, and wildlife experts. Once such a solution is agreed upon, the public must render their support for the implementation of the solution. Moreover, critical thinking on their part is also needed to curb the damage caused by the HEC. Suppose the government regulation does not permit any human activities, such as cultivating, mining, grazing, and collecting firewood, within the protected forest areas. In that case, the people must obey these rules even if it 'irritates' their usual lifestyle. If human-elephant encounters are frequent during dusk and dawn, it is expected that people will limit their travel to daytime to avoid confrontation with elephants.

Another key reason for increased HEC is political intervention. It is natural for the affected people to reach out to their trusted politicians for answers, and in turn, the politicians tend to take some ill-researched actions to please the masses.



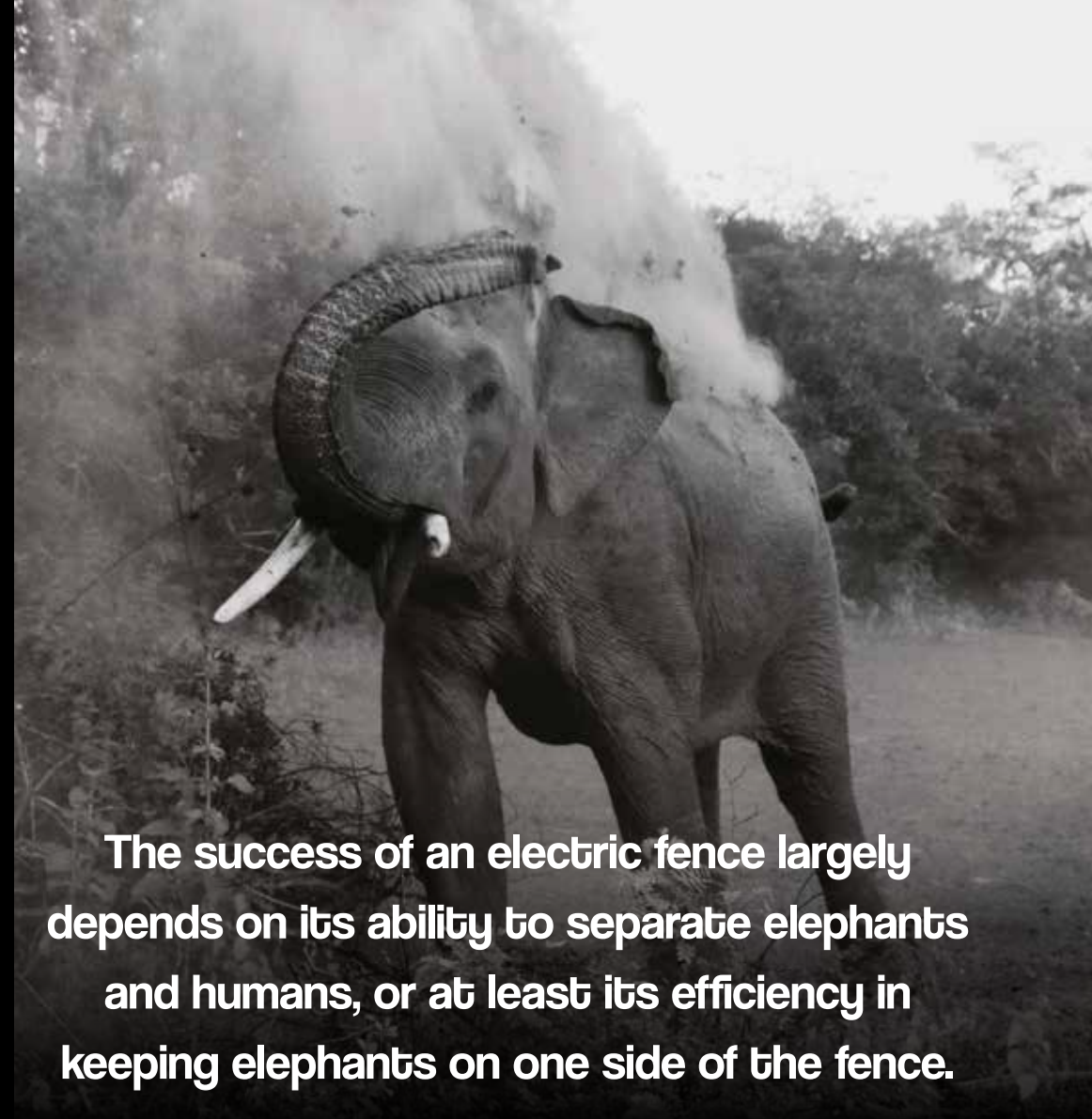
A small sacrifice to our convenience could be the deciding factor in whether a human life is saved or not.

Instead of seeing the elephant as an enemy, farmers in HEC-prone areas should be educated on ways to increase their income by perceiving the wild elephant as a means of generating income. Tourism is a key contributor to the country's economy, and wildlife tourism's contribution to the overall income generated is significant. Considering how crucial the Sri Lankan Elephant is to the country's wildlife tourism, farmers could also be taught ways to generate some extra income by delving into tourism. Instead of chasing the elephants away from paddy fields, perhaps they should be welcomed to eat the paddy residue after harvesting is done, which could be a huge tourist attraction. The direct and indirect income that the arrival of tourists could generate for the rural community could not only alleviate the financial woes of the people but also encourage them to see the elephant as an ally instead of an enemy.

Elephants aren't a pest that causes nuisances to humans, but a tremendous asset that could be utilised for financial gain. However, the people who have suffered the brunt of the HEC are under the impression that the elephant is the enemy and it should be gotten rid of. Hence, many illegal methods of elimination, such as using high-voltage live wires in fences, hakka pattas (edible explosives), and the use of illegal firearms. However, what people need to understand is that their fight against the elephant isn't justified solely because elephants cause some severe damage. Elephants are a protected species by law. The Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance (FFPO) clearly states the provisions needed to protect elephants. According to the Ordinance, even following or chasing an elephant without a permit or a licence is a punishable and un-bailable offence. The FFPO further states that an unlicensed elephant or a wild elephant is considered public property; hence, anyone who causes harm to a wild elephant could be brought before a Court of Law and punished for damaging public property. To prevent HEC, these laws must be implemented strictly, discouraging the public from taking an aggressive approach towards elephant encounters.

Solutions Need to Evolve

As the living conditions of both humans and elephants are constantly changing, it is understood that the solutions for the HEC



The success of an electric fence largely depends on its ability to separate elephants and humans, or at least its efficiency in keeping elephants on one side of the fence.

also need to be changed, evolved, improved, and developed accordingly. So far, the most effective solution for the HEC has been the electric fence, which also needs to be improved to remain effective. The traditional fence, featuring wooden poles and electric lines on one side, is likely to allow the elephant to collapse it. There are documented instances where wild elephants have been seen carefully dislodging electric fences without getting electrocuted even once. Therefore, the fence also needs to be developed accordingly.

Moreover, securing elephants in a national park or forest reserve via electric fences isn't the ideal solution, as the elephants tend to roam beyond the fence out of desperation when the resources within the fence eventually dry up. Perhaps it's time to think outside the fence and research the most effective place to establish it. Several years ago, the Centre for Conservation and Research conducted research and a pilot project in Galgamuwa, where an electric fence was established around human settlements instead of forests. The fence was kept open during the daytime for transportation purposes and closed and locked at night, when the elephants tend to enter villages. The results showed a drastic drop in property and crop damage, as well as loss of human lives due to HEC. The project also

suggested seasonal electric fences wherein an electric fence is erected surrounding a paddy field only during the farming season. Once the harvest is collected, the fence is supposed to come down, allowing elephants to enter the paddy fields to consume any residual paddy.

In terms of innovative solutions for the HEC, numerous technological inventions have been proposed, including flickering light systems to deter elephants, utilising high-frequency sounds as barriers, erecting biofences made of thorny bushes, and employing beekeeping to prevent elephants from entering villages. The effectiveness of these innovations may vary, but they should be encouraged nonetheless, as they could eventually lead to the most effective sustainable solution for the HEC.

HEC is 'bitterly' inevitable in a small country like Sri Lanka, where both humans and elephants share the majority of the land. As such, the sustainable solution for the HEC lies not within segregation but in coexistence.

(Information courtesy: Economy and Environment Programme for South East Asia, Eco-Collective Research Association, Colombo, Springer Nature Publishers, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Centre for Environmental Justice, Department of Census and Statistics, and Department of Wildlife Conservation)

Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Competition 2025

The Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Competition 2025 came to an exciting close with a vibrant awards ceremony celebrating Sri Lanka's finest culinary talent. From sizzling regional heats to the grand finale, chefs from across the island brought their A-game to the kitchen. Held in partnership with the Chefs Guild of Lanka and the Sri Lanka Hospitality Graduates Association, the competition showcased standout performances from all nine provinces.

Take a peek at the highlights!

Pictures by Vihanga Kaveesha



Bernhard Stefan, Gerard Mendis, Patrick Pereira, Jeroen Pluijmers, Dr. Siri Walt, Kalani Samadhi, Iresh Siriwardana, Ramindu Dilshan, Chalaka Janith, Kavindu Anuhas, Chanaka Janith, Reinhold Jakobi, Maduranga Perera & Saurabh Makhija



Bernhard Stefan, Gerard Mendis, Patrick Pereira, Dr. Siri Walt, Jeroen Pluijmers, Sadini Kaveesha Prasadi, Imasha Amandi Vithanage, Chathura Dilshan, K A D Fernando, Basilu Perera, Michael Gurusingshe, Reinhold Jakobi, Maduranga Perera & Saurabh Makhija



Gerard Mendis, Patrick Pereira, Kavindu Wickramasinghe, Sanuja Imantha, Maduranga Perera & Saurabh Makhija



Gerard Mendis, Jeroen Pluijmers, Janaka Hemantha, Yogaraj Prem, Maduranga Perera & Saurabh Makhija



Kartik & Amjad



CAMPUS

FOOTWEAR LAUNCHES IN SRI LANKA

Signature, the well-known menswear brand under the Hameedia Group, has stepped into the footwear scene with the exciting launch of Campus – India's No.1 sports and athleisure footwear brand.

The launch took place at H Sports in Colombo and marked the beginning of an exclusive franchise partnership with Campus Activewear Ltd., bringing the popular Indian brand to Sri Lanka for the very first time. With this new addition, Sri Lankan consumers can now find Campus footwear at selected Signature showrooms across the island.

Here are a few highlights from the evening.

Pictures by **Kumara Bopearachchi**



Akthab & Samaakhya



Ashen & friend



Dhanushka



Sameera



Dasun



Vihanga



Minelle



Nabeela & friends



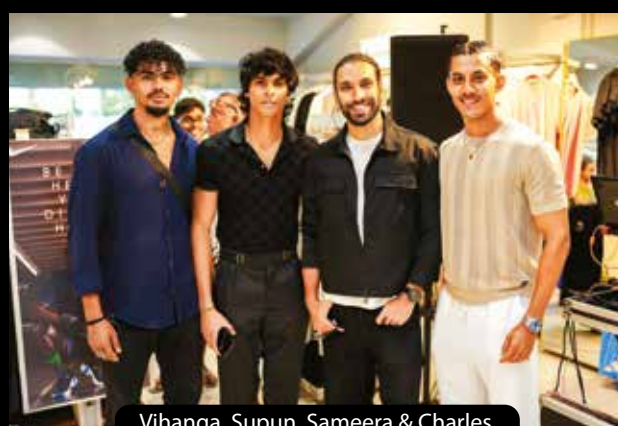
Binu & Dinendred



Upul & Amjad



Akmal & friend



Vihanga, Supun, Sameera & Charles



Kartik, Dasun & Amjad



Sanjana



Supun





Bathiya



Sanuka



Akila



Santhush



Raini



Jay, Iraj & Kasun



Yureni



Ashanthi

DERANA CLOSEUP MUSIC VIDEO AWARDS

The Derana Music Awards 2024, powered by CloseUp, unfolded in grand style at the Golden Rose Banquet Hall, celebrating and honouring the vibrant talents of Sri Lanka's music industry. The evening was a tribute to local artistry – a true celebration of Sri Lankan musical excellence, recognising the stars who continue to shape the nation's soundscape.

Spot the A-listers who lit up the red carpet!

*Pictures by **Malshan Wijayathilaka***



Piyath



Shanudrie



Udari



Senal



Ashanya



Brenda



Sarith & Surith



Rohitha & Rohan



Kavindya



Charuka & family



Dinakshie



Rashiprabha



Niranjani



Isanka



Gayantha



Indrachapa



Lahiru



Ravi



CHOCOHOLICS

Where
Belgian
Chocolate Meets
Sri Lankan
Sweet Tooth



The only premium chocolate dessert cafe in Sri Lanka



To create something unforgettable, the Chocoholics team focused on three things:

Belgian chocolate, straight from the source

The kind they'd dreamed of as kids: smooth, rich, and not the type you'd find at your corner store. This is the good stuff, finally available without needing a boarding pass.

Dessert as theatre

Think molten brownies served on sizzling skillets, crepes drizzled tableside, or that first bite of a cake that's almost too pretty to eat. With ambient lighting and lush interiors, every visit is its own little event.

No excuse needed

You don't need a birthday to indulge. Craving a Wednesday brownie? Go for it. Catching up with a friend over fondue? Even better. Chocoholics make room for joy in the middle of an ordinary week.

From a single outlet, Chocoholics has grown into a full-fledged dessert chain with four locations across Sri Lanka. But what really sets it apart isn't just the chocolate — it's how it makes people feel. Whether it's first dates, post-exam celebrations, or quiet Sunday slices, people keep returning because this place has become a part of their lives.

In a country where 'the good chocolate' was always something you brought back in your suitcase, Chocoholics flipped the script. They didn't try to imitate Europe; they built something uniquely Sri Lankan: a homegrown chocolate destination, a place where every bite tells a story.

And perhaps most importantly, it was ours.

Find fantasy-grade chocolate indulgence at Chocoholics outlets on Duplication Road, Havelock Road, One Galle Face, and Mount Lavinia.

Follow [@chocoholics.lk](https://www.chocoholics.lk) for your sweetest updates.

For most Sri Lankans, dessert isn't just a craving — it's a cultural reflex. After every Sunday lunch, birthday bash, or late-night family run to the supermarket, we always ended things the same way: with something sweet, usually ice cream. Always comforting. But one particular itch went unscratched; that deep, velvety, movie-scene-style chocolate indulgence we'd only ever seen in foreign films or airports.

Why wasn't that kind of chocolate — rich, creamy, unapologetically luxurious — part of our everyday lives?

Two dessert-obsessed foodies, bound by family ties and a shared sweet tooth, decided to stop wondering and start whisking. What began as a passion project quickly became a mission: to bring world-class chocolate desserts home. Just like that, Chocoholics was born.

But this wasn't just another café. This was a full-blown celebration of chocolate — a place where it didn't just appear on the menu, it stole the spotlight.

From the beginning, Chocoholics was built around a single belief: chocolate has no age limit. Whether toddlers sneaked spoonfuls, teens blew out birthday candles, or grandparents split cake on date night, there was always something about chocolate that brought people together. It makes ordinary moments feel special. It makes celebrations sweeter and comfort food even more comforting.

MON VIÈ

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LKR
69M
UPWARDS

THALAKOTUWA GARDENS

COLOMBO 05

SRI LANKA'S FIRST EVER
FLOATING
SKY RESTAURANT
& CANTILEVERED
VIEWING DECK

0702 777 777

P **PRIME**
RESIDENCIES

HILTON COLOMBO

A Legacy Reimagined for Today

Extends beyond its walls as a living institution
of Sri Lankan hospitality



When Hilton Colombo opened its doors in 1987, it became the city's pioneer of international five-star hospitality. For almost four decades, its presence in the heart of Colombo's business district has been more than iconic; it has been foundational. With views sweeping across the Indian Ocean, Port City Colombo, and the bustling harbour, Hilton Colombo has long been the hotel of choice for leaders, celebrities, and global travellers. Following the extensive refurbishment of its rooms in November 2024, this landmark has entered a bold new chapter that blends history with a distinctly modern, refreshed energy.

A hotel transformed

The centrepiece of Hilton Colombo's revitalisation is the refurbishment of 263 rooms and suites across nine categories, completed in November 2024. Inspired by the graceful unfolding of a lotus flower, the interiors create a serene retreat, styled to capture natural light from dawn to dusk and offering calm sophistication just steps from the bustle of the city.

Softened colour palettes, sleek furnishings, and textured finishes create an atmosphere of contemporary elegance. Large windows frame views of the Indian Ocean, harbour, or skyline, keeping every stay connected to Colombo's unique setting.

The upgrades went beyond aesthetics. Sustainability guided the redesign, integrating eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient lighting, and water conservation systems. Ergonomic workstations now support productivity, while HDMI, USB, and Bluetooth media hubs ensure seamless connectivity. A 55-inch smart TV in every room delivers entertainment on demand, and details such as pillow menus, curated minibars, and anti-frost cosmetic mirrors elevate comfort. Bathrooms feature thermostatic mixers, eco-friendly water closets, and the choice of a rain or hand shower. Digital key check-in completes the modern experience with a smooth, contactless arrival.

This was not simply a refurbishment; it was a redefinition of what it means to stay at Hilton Colombo.

A legacy that endures

While the new rooms are the highlight, Hilton Colombo's legacy provides the powerful backdrop to its transformation. For over 35 years, the hotel has hosted some of Sri Lanka's most significant moments: over 10,000 weddings, countless high-profile conferences, and milestone celebrations that have marked the city's cultural rhythm. The Grand Ballroom, Colombo's first pillarless ballroom, remains the crown jewel for weddings and events, accommodating up to 900 guests.

The hotel has also shaped Sri Lanka's hospitality sector by training thousands of students to lead hotels worldwide. This combination of heritage and innovation ensures Hilton Colombo is more than a hotel; it is a living institution of Sri Lankan hospitality.

A fresh take on dining

Hilton Colombo's dining portfolio continues to add layers of indulgence to its refurbished accommodations. Graze Kitchen offers an interactive, theatre-style culinary experience, blending cuisines from across the globe. Emperor's Wok presents authentic Cantonese and Szechuan flavours, while Café Kai caters to the city's coffee lovers and foodies with gourmet pastries and artisanal bites.

The L.A.B (Lounge and Bar) offers high tea and cocktails beside a tranquil lotus pond for relaxed socialising. Stella Karaoke Bar brings nightlife energy with private lounges and premium drinks, while SunsetBlu elevates the city's entertainment scene as Colombo's premier poolside day club. These venues reinforce Hilton Colombo as a complete lifestyle destination, perfectly complementing the hotel's refreshed accommodation.

Where Colombo connects

Hilton Colombo's transformation also extends beyond its walls. With 17 versatile event and meeting spaces, including the Grand Ballroom and the picturesque Lotus Lawn, the hotel remains the premier stage



for gatherings of every scale. It is equipped with advanced audiovisual technology, and a seasoned events team supports it.

Equally important is its unbeatable location. Steps from the World Trade Centre and Colombo Fort Railway Station, within walking distance of the city's cultural landmarks, shopping hubs, and entertainment districts, the hotel 'stays' at the heart of it all. Guests are immersed in the city's pulse, from the Gangaramaya Temple to Independence Square, the Colombo National Museum to the historic Jami Ul-Alfar Mosque. And with Bandaranaike International Airport just 40 minutes away via expressway, Hilton Colombo remains as convenient as it is iconic.

Looking ahead

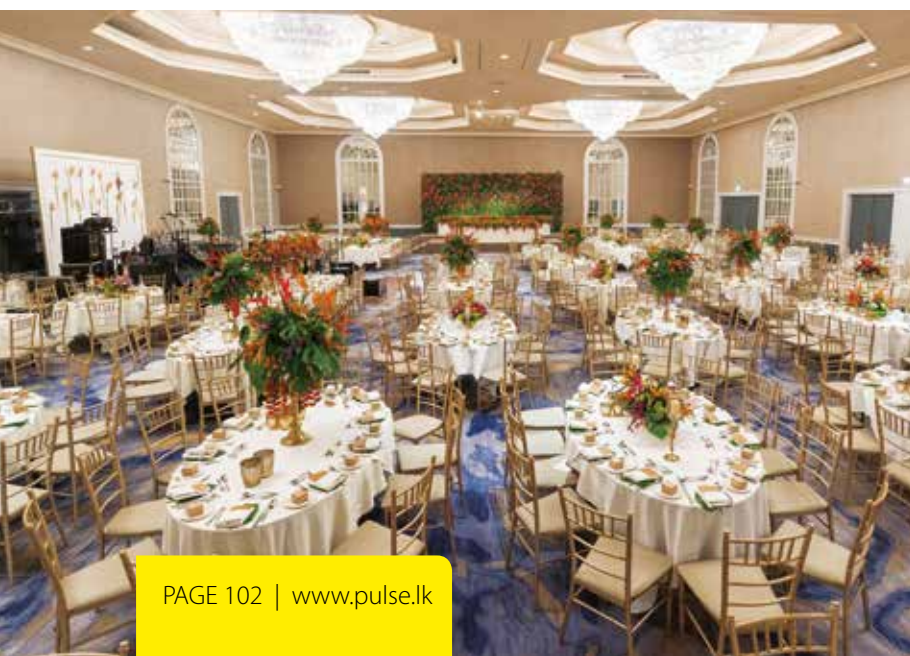
Manesh Fernando, Area General Manager at Hilton Sri Lanka, captures the essence of this transformation. He explains that the newly refurbished rooms perfectly blend style, comfort, and smart

functionality, designed for today's traveller. He emphasises that Hilton Colombo has been part of the city's heartbeat for almost 40 years and that these upgrades ensure the hotel remains the preferred choice for local and international guests.

The fresh face of a classic

Hilton Colombo's transformation is not about nostalgia; it's about evolution. The refurbished rooms stand as the heart of this new chapter, offering guests a reimagined experience that is as modern as it is meaningful. From its heritage of world-class hospitality to its future-ready accommodations, Hilton Colombo remains the city's ultimate destination.

The message is clear for those who thought they knew Hilton Colombo: come and experience it again. It's fresh, revitalised, and ready to redefine your stay in Colombo.



Adithi, Shaveena & Tesaarah



Liyara, Sanduni, Jessica & Induni



Ranali & Ashani



Safdar & Rakitha



Shaven & Ming Jay

TREEHOUSE ROOFTOP BAR OPENS IN STYLE

Colombo's nightlife scene just got a vibrant new addition with the opening of Treehouse Rooftop Bar, the city's latest rooftop destination perched atop Morven Colombo.

The launch event was vibrant, bringing together a lively crowd for a night of signature cocktails, energetic dance floors and tropical jungle vibes. With handcrafted drinks and music setting the tone, guests were immersed in a one-of-a-kind rooftop experience that perfectly blended city glamour with island flair. Set against the backdrop of the Colombo skyline, Treehouse promises to be the go-to spot for unforgettable nights, offering a refreshing escape high above the bustle below.

Spotted at the exclusive launch event!

Pictures by **Thenuka Perera**



Omali & Sonella



Dillon



Vojinee, Kiandra & Risini



Rochelle, Jayamal, Miquela & Indeera



Zellers Celebrates World Chocolate Day

Zellers Sri Lanka marked World Chocolate Day with a special screening of Jurassic World: Rebirth at PVR Cinemas, One Galle Face Mall. As Sri Lanka's first homegrown chocolate brand, Zellers brought together movie magic and chocolate indulgence for a one-of-a-kind celebration.

First time in Sri Lanka center filled premium chocolate range — rich, creamy, and memorable. A sweet treat paired with cinematic thrills, Zellers made World Chocolate Day an unforgettable experience.

Here are some clicks from the sweet gathering.

Pictures by **Primal Fernando**



ICONIC BLINGS

MADE BY SILVER SPARKLES



Scan the QR code for more



Shamran Zacky

In 2020, amidst global uncertainty, one Sri Lankan visionary decided to bring serious shine to the local jewellery scene, quite literally. And that was none other than Shamran Zacky, the founder and creative force behind Silver Sparkles, Sri Lanka's pioneering custom jewellery brand that introduced hip-hop iced-out jewellery to the island for the first time. Silver Sparkles specialises in custom jewellery crafted from gold, white gold, platinum and silver.

What started as a humble Instagram page has now become a full-fledged movement, redefining jewellery culture in the country. But Silver Sparkles isn't merely about the chains and diamonds they sell. It's about identity, self-expression, and pushing the boundaries of what local artistry can look like.

"From day one, I wanted to give people jewellery that speaks for them – bold, unique, unforgettable," shared Shamran Zacky, CEO of Silver Sparkles, with Pulse. "That's why our motto is 'Let the bling do the talking.'"

The rise of Sri Lankan hip-hop jewellery

Inspired by icons like Johnny Dang, known globally for iced-out masterpieces and diamond grillz, Shamran set out to replicate that level of craftsmanship locally. His breakthrough came with custom pieces for Sri Lankan rap legend K MAC, including a signature '44' pendant. From there, the client list expanded quickly. COSTA, KK, ADK, Pasan Liyanage, DKM, Dulan ARX, Shane Zing, Shan Putha, Kaizer Kaiz, and many others from music, sports, and entertainment circles followed.



Why Silver Sparkles?

Simply, because they are not just part of the industry, they are transforming it.

At Silver Sparkles, every piece is handmade with meticulous attention to detail. Whether iced-out pendants, custom wedding rings, diamond grillz, or fully iced watches, the brand uses natural gemstones (certified by Sri Lanka's NGJA) and high-quality lab stones, depending on client preference. Being the pioneer in the country, their mastery of micro-setting and invisible setting techniques ensures that each creation truly sparkles, offering craftsmanship that rivals international standards.



Clients also benefit from lifetime warranties and aftercare services, making Silver Sparkles not just a one-time purchase but a lasting relationship. "We give our best, always. Best prices, best service, best craft. Once you choose us, you'll never turn back," assured Shamran.

Bling with purpose

Nonetheless, beyond the glamour of its jewellery, what makes Silver Sparkles truly unique is its cultural mission. Shamran isn't simply selling jewellery. He is shaping a visual identity for Sri Lanka's hip-hop scene, allowing artists to wear their story, hustle and pride. In a world where image matters, Silver Sparkles goes beyond looks to offer confidence.

So, whether you are an artist looking to make a statement, a couple designing unique wedding rings, or someone ready to express yourself through custom-made jewellery, Silver Sparkles is the brand that understands how to turn identity into artistry.

Let the bling do the talking. The rest will follow. For more information visit www.silversparkles.lk.

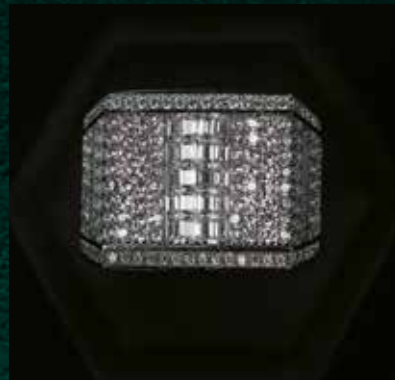


He has also worked with international stars like Malaysian rapper Balan Kash and Indian actor-producer Prem Jee, cricketers like Rahmanullah Gurbaz, and motorsport icon Dilantha Malagamuwa. Most recently, Silver Sparkles handcrafted the Cage Rage MMA Championship Belt, a dazzling piece made from silver, gold, brass, and diamonds.



Origin of a brand

Shamran's passion for business runs deep. A Trinity College Kandy alumnus, he studied in Malaysia and graduated with first-class honours from APU. After working abroad in the corporate sector for two and a half years, he returned to Sri Lanka in 2019 to join the family gem trade. His father, Zackydeen, is a long-time gem merchant. But it wasn't long before Shamran decided to create something of his own—a fusion of his childhood love for jewellery, his exposure to international hip-hop culture, and a bold vision to elevate local artistry with world-class pieces.



ESCAPE TO THE WILD

WITH O2 VILLAS

Truly memorable moments come when you least expect them. But at O2 Villas, you can expect a luxurious getaway to the wild corners of Yala and the mountains of picturesque Ella. Spacious and elegant villas provide a private haven surrounded by nature, setting the perfect stage for relaxation, a little adventure, and quiet indulgence.



O2 Villas Yala

Located at the edge of Yala National Park, these two villas provide a window into the wilds of Sri Lanka, where the highest concentration of leopards in the country exists alongside elephants, bears, and rare migratory birds during the winter months.

O2 Villas Yala

The two-villa setup creates a more bespoke experience with personalised service and greater attention and care from experienced staff. O2 Villas Yala proves that immersing yourself in nature doesn't have to come at the cost of modern comforts and convenience. When you're not exploring the national park, experience tranquillity while lounging in panoramic views, stargazing at night, and enjoying the sights and sounds of nature. When the weather is warmer, why not dip in the private pool built for each exclusive villa suite?

Of course, there are also the excursions. Set out on a Yala safari, experience a bonfire dinner surrounded by nature, or travel in buggy carts to a nearby fishing village and animal habitat. There's plenty of adventure when you want a break from relaxing.

O2 Villas Ella

One of the most beautiful locations in the country, Ella is home to some of the most exceptional attractions—from the iconic Nine Arch Bridge to Little Adam's Peak, Ravana Falls, tea plantations, hiking trails and more—all of which are minutes away from the property. Best of all, there's something for everyone, whether travelling solo, as a pair, or with family.

These adventures could include visits to Little Adam's Peak, the famous Ella Rock, Rawana Waterfalls, and the always Instagrammable Nine Arch Bridge. Why not experience Lipton Tea at its finest, straight from the plantations themselves?

Choose from 12 gorgeous boutique villas, including one with a garden view, one overlooking the mountains, or even one with a private pool. When you aren't relaxing in your private villa, you can dip in the infinity pool or relax in the spa—perfect for easing both your mind and body.



O2 Villas Ella

Plenty of Amenities

Whether at the national park or in the mountains, enjoy the all-day dining restaurant or a refreshing beverage at the terrace bar and executive tea lounge. Each private villa comes with alcohol-free minibars, complementary for those staying two nights or longer.

For those looking to unwind during their stay, there's also an unlimited selection of local beers and spirits as well as unlimited selected beverages, cocktails, mocktails, and tropical fruit juices. One excursion a day at Ella and one safari at the Yala national park are also complimentary.

You can indulge in luxury dining with local and international cuisine and afternoon tea, have a small snack, and have a fresh fruit smoothie, which is also free for those staying longer. There's also poolside service, and for those looking for even more comfort, a daily turn-down service is also available with a sweet treat to end the day on the perfect note.

Your Escape from the World

Life in the concrete jungle has its moments, but the stuffed schedules, endless meetings and everyday stresses often leave us more high-strung than we'd like to admit. You work hard, which deserves an occasional treat and an escape from the chaos to focus on enjoying a moment of stillness, and maybe even more. If nature is your ideal escape from everyday life, then O2 Villas may have precisely what you're looking for.

Japan's

Dual Pricing System for Tourists: Pros and Cons

By Sanuj Hathurusinghe

Japan introduced a dual-pricing system for tourists in July 2025, whereby foreign tourists visiting Japan faced higher charges than locals and residents at major attractions and establishments. Although the initiative aimed to resolve some key issues Japan's tourism sector was facing—such as addressing over tourism, promoting sustainable tourism, generating additional income for the betterment of the industry, tourism infrastructure development, and shifting the spotlight from some of the most popular tourist hotspots to lesser-known attractions—the move faced some backlash in Japan as well as on international forums.

A post-pandemic boom

A popular tourist destination in East Asia, Japan welcomed a record 36.87 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2024, marking a significant increase in numbers compared to previous years. The boost in tourism contributed significantly to the country's economy, with total tourist spending reaching 8.1 trillion

JPY. The increase in post-pandemic travel demand and the decrease in the Japanese yen contributed significantly to the recent boost the tourism industry experienced.

The yen had been on a steady downward slide, losing a third of its value between 2021 and 2024. As a country heavily reliant on imports, the weaker currency increased import costs and inflation. Still, conversely, it was a welcome change for exporters and tourists visiting Japan, who found much value for their respective currencies.

As a result, the tourism industry expanded in revenue generation, but simultaneously, it created issues that the country had to deal with.

Reasons behind dual-pricing

The influx of tourists increased the strain on local infrastructure and overcrowded popular tourist attractions. Moreover, the Japanese government had set a goal of attracting 60 million inbound tourists by 2030, which required dispersing crowds and encouraging

tourists to explore lesser-known attractions and rural areas of Japan. By implementing a dual-pricing system for tourists, the authorities hoped to address these issues and ensure the industry's sustainability.

Examples of implementation

Junglia Okinawa, a nature-based theme park that opened in Okinawa Prefecture in July, implemented a dual-pricing system. The admission fee for tourists was 8,800 JPY (60 USD), while inbound tourists and locals were charged only 6,930 JPY. According to Katana, an Osaka-based marketing company, the increased pricing was competitive and affordable compared to overseas theme parks' entry fees.

Tamatebako – a seafood buffet restaurant in Shibuya, Tokyo – also adopted a dual-pricing approach, where foreign tourists were charged 8,778 JPY for dinner. In comparison, locals and inbound tourists received a discount of 1,100 JPY. Justifying the decision, the restaurant stated that the higher prices for foreigners were due to higher operational costs



A popular tourist destination in East Asia, Japan has welcomed a record 36.87 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2024, marking a significant increase compared to previous years.

associated with serving foreign customers, such as the need for English-speaking staff and extended service times.

Concerns over fairness and feasibility

While private establishments were quick to embrace the dual-pricing system due to its obvious financial benefits, the public facilities managed by central and local governments remained coy about making the change, citing concerns over fairness and feasibility.

One of the main criticisms of the decision was its potential negative impact on Japan's reputation as a fair, hospitable, and inclusive destination. A survey conducted by Loyalty Marketing Inc., a Tokyo-based data marketing company, revealed that approximately 40 per cent of respondents opposed the two-tier system, citing fears of discrimination and potential harm to the country's image.

Critics also argued that distinguishing between tourists and residents was challenging and could lead to perceptions of discrimination. Considering that over 66 per cent of foreign

tourists visiting Japan hailed from China, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, distinguishing foreigners from locals proved tricky, especially if the visitors were semi-fluent in Japanese. Conversely, asking for proof of residence from local tourists irked them and made them feel discriminated against on their soil.

In June 2024, a plan was proposed to exclusively raise prices for foreign tourists visiting Himeji Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage site and national treasure. However, the plan was criticised heavily, accused of discrimination. Ultimately, the pricing system

was revised to differentiate between Himeji City residents and non-residents.

Economists at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute—a capital market company based in Tokyo—argued that it was reasonable for foreign tourists to bear additional charges. Since most of Japan's popular tourist attractions were public, their maintenance was directly funded by the taxes paid by the locals. Charging foreigners extra funds boosted the tourism industry and created a sustainable source of revenue for maintaining tourism-related infrastructure.

Global context

While Japan was new to the dual-pricing system, several other countries had already implemented such systems to enhance tourism benefits and ensure local community welfare. In Sri Lanka, it was quite common for foreign tourists to pay significantly more to enter tourist attractions. At the same time, the cost for locals was considerably lower and at times even free. Similarly, Thailand's Emerald Temple

charged foreign visitors 15 USD while entrance for locals was free. India's Taj Mahal charged foreign tourists 13 USD to enter, 22 times the fee for Indian nationals. In national parks in Madagascar, foreigners were usually charged 33 times the entry fee for locals, and France's Louvre Museum is set to introduce higher entry fees for non-EU citizens starting in 2026.

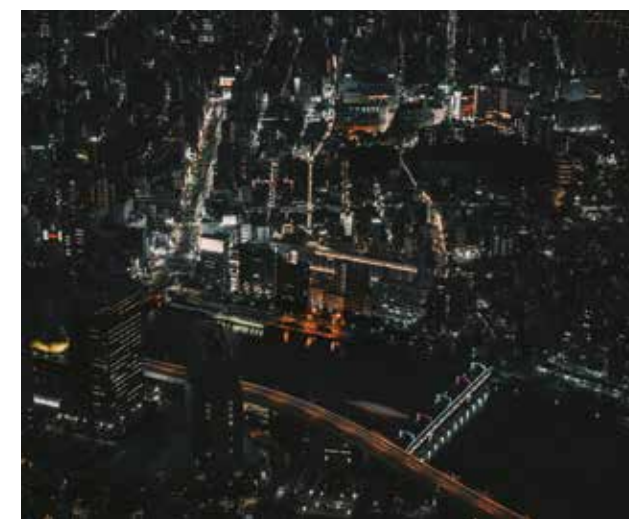
Tourist taxes were also becoming more common around the globe. Malaysia had a long history of taxing foreigners on accommodation reservations and practising differential pricing for foreign tourists at various attractions. Venice, Italy, trialled a tourist tax scheme in 2024 and continued with variations in 2025. Hawaii has had an 'accommodation tax' for foreigners since January 2018 and is considering adding a 25 USD 'climate impact fee' to accommodation charges for foreigners.

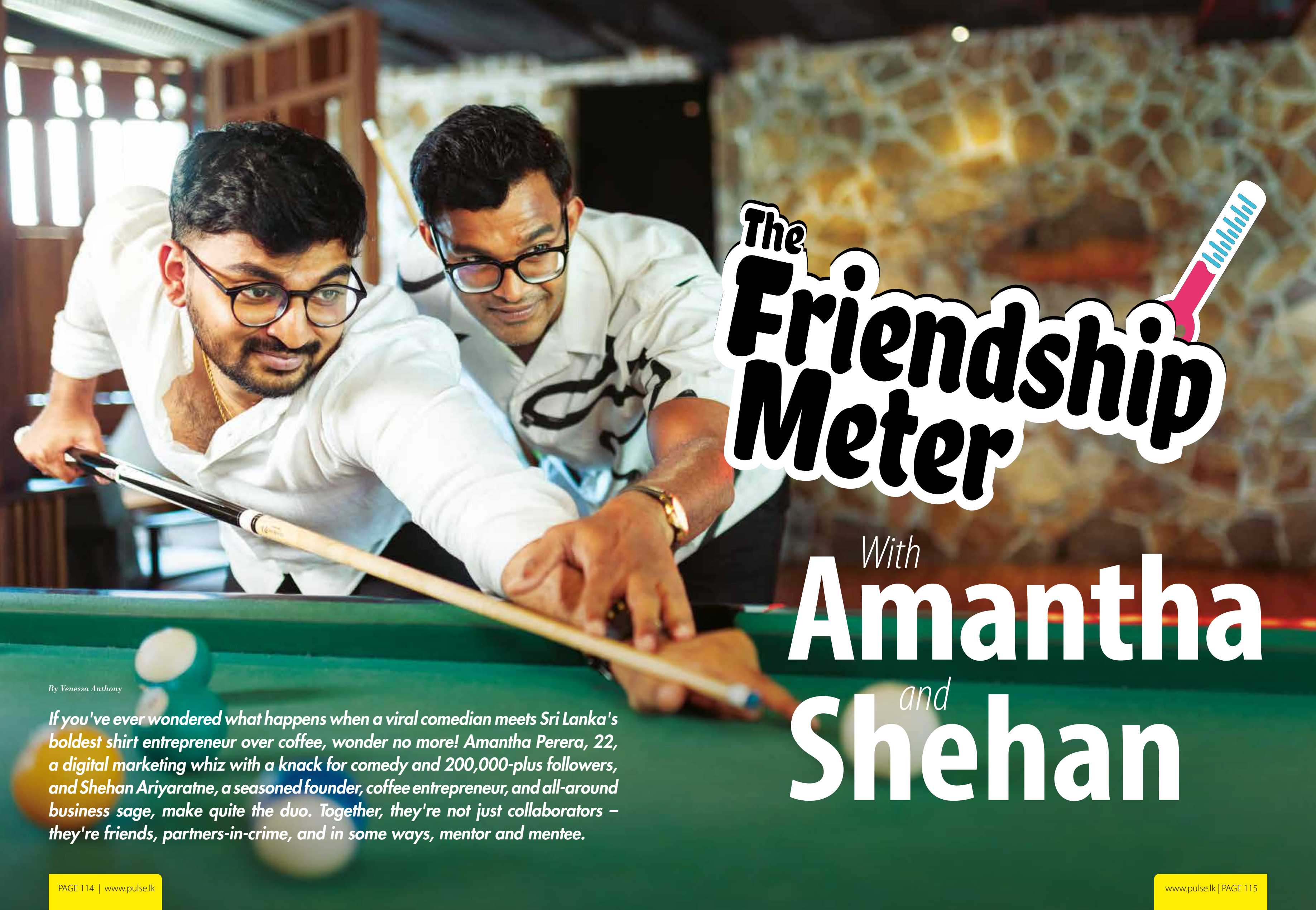
Japan's dual pricing

With Japan's dual-pricing system now in place since July 2025, foreign travellers visiting

Japan face higher costs at certain attractions and establishments. While this approach aims to address some of the key challenges the country's tourism industry faces due to increasing tourist numbers, it also raises concerns over fairness, the visitor experience, and the overall positive image Japan maintains as a tourist destination. Nevertheless, travellers are advised to stay informed about the changes and plan their visits accordingly to ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience in Japan.

(Information courtesy: The Sankei Shinbun, The Guardian, JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co., and Japan National Tourism Organisation)





The Friendship Meter

With
Amantha
and
Shehan

By Venessa Anthony

If you've ever wondered what happens when a viral comedian meets Sri Lanka's boldest shirt entrepreneur over coffee, wonder no more! Amantha Perera, 22, a digital marketing whiz with a knack for comedy and 200,000-plus followers, and Shehan Ariyaratne, a seasoned founder, coffee entrepreneur, and all-around business sage, make quite the duo. Together, they're not just collaborators – they're friends, partners-in-crime, and in some ways, mentor and mentee.

In this edition of Friendship Meter with Pulse Magazine, Amantha and Shehan discuss mixing creativity with business, the lessons they've learnt from each other, and why their connection is as much about laughter as it is about strategy.

What's the origin story of your friendship – was it a 'love at first vibe' or did it take time to click?

Shehan: It was immediate. From the first shoot, it clicked. I'd suggest an idea, and he'd add to it; no ego, no arguments. We shot a video for Culture by Ari that felt like a silly idea at the time, but it worked. People loved it; we had chemistry in our work.

Amantha: Yeah, it wasn't forced. We just bounced ideas off each other naturally. He was so humble that I thought he was the videographer during our first shoot!

Even much later, when I'd joke that I wasn't good-looking enough for a shoot, he'd make it work; it felt like collaborating with a friend from day one.

You both work in fields where creativity meets business. How do you balance being original with also delivering results people expect?

Amantha: It's just a matter of being realistic and honest. I can guarantee that a brand is promoted, and that every consumer knows what they need to know. Each piece of content has a purpose, rather than just following trends. I can't always tell a client how many views we'll get, but I can say their story will be told.

Shehan: For us at Organic, it's the same. We tell clients that we can't always promise numbers. What we can promise is that people will understand their brand. It's not about chasing vanity metrics – it's about clarity and purpose. As long as we keep things clean and authentic, the balance between creativity and business falls into place.

What would you say if you had to critique each other's work – Amantha on Shehan's fashion/coffee/branding, and Shehan on Amantha's marketing/comedy?

Amantha: Shehan is known as a prominent businessman, but people don't know how much he's done, even something like being a certified barista. Even with Culture by Ari, there's such a beautiful story behind how it all started, and not many people know that either. He needs to start telling those stories because they would inspire many people.

Shehan: Amantha has done so much at just 22. At his age, I didn't have half of what he's already built – from his comedy to his marketing presence, he's achieved a lot. What I'd tell him is to focus. He's fearless, but putting more structure and stability behind his actions will take him further.

What's the most significant similarity in how you approach your careers?

Amantha: I'd say we both think outside the box. When I started, people told me, 'You can't run a marketing company, what do you know?' But I just went for it. Shehan's the same. We don't sit on ideas — we execute. Everyone has ideas, but not everyone acts on them. That's where we're similar.

Shehan: Yes, execution. We faced doubt when we started, but didn't let it stop us. Honestly, at 22, I wasn't this brave. Amantha has something I

didn't — that fearlessness to say, 'Why not?' I admire that in him. That's our similarity.

Both of you have turned personal passions into careers. Do you think passion alone is enough to succeed – or is there more to it?

Shehan: Passion is vital, but it's not enough. You must be realistic, disciplined, and treat it like a business. Everyone wants to be a billionaire, but not everyone will wake up and do the work.

Amantha: Passion got me started, but it wasn't enough. I knew how to create content, but didn't know how to monetise it. Shehan showed me the business side: how to think about retainers, revenue, and sustainability. That was a game-changer. So yes, passion matters, but without structure and strategy, it won't last.

What's a moment, big or small, that made you think: "This friendship is one I can count on for the long run"?

Amantha: Shehan told me to think long-term, open businesses, and save. He kept me in check when I was being impulsive. I remember him saying, 'Don't be another 30-year-old influencer with nothing to show for it.' That advice changed me and showed me that this friendship is real.

Shehan: I've seen too many people crash because they didn't plan. I didn't want Amantha to be one of them. I told him, 'Learn from what we've already done wrong. When I saw him listening, reading the books I gave him, and applying the advice, I knew this was a friendship and a bond where I could help him avoid pitfalls.

If you were to imagine each other ten years from now, what do you hope your life and work will look like?

Shehan: I see Amantha running massive campaigns, maybe even internationally. With his mindset, he could be unstoppable. I want him to keep learning, stay humble, and focus on his mental health and stability. If he does that, he'll not just be successful, he'll be happy.

Amantha: For Shehan, I see him settled. He is a family man with kids, but still runs his businesses with the same energy. I think he'll be a fantastic father. He took me under his wing, and I'm flourishing right now. Culture by Ari and Divide will be bigger, maybe even global. And hopefully, we'll still be working together.

You both work in creative fields in different ways. How has being friends influenced or inspired your journeys?

Shehan: Amantha reminds me not just to take risks, but also to slow down. I naturally think like a businessman – stability, planning, the long game. Sometimes, that makes me too cautious, and I always think about the next step. But there are moments when Amantha will say, 'Machang, can we just be friends today?' That's when I realised it's okay to let loose. His energy is infectious, but so is his reminder that life isn't only about the hustle.

Amantha: Shehan is the opposite for me – he grounds me. I've always been impulsive and chasing the next idea, but he showed me the value of discipline, saving, and long-term thinking. Where I'd jump in headfirst, he'd remind me to plan. Without his influence, I'd probably still be chasing quick wins. So I think I give him energy and spontaneity, while he gives me structure and perspective. That balance is what makes this friendship so important.



"Passion is vital, but it's not enough. You must be realistic, disciplined, and treat it like a business. Everyone wants to be a billionaire, but not everyone will wake up and do the work."

How Well? Do You? Know Me

In this segment, we bring together a famous duo to interview each other in a round of intimate, never-before-asked questions that reveal sides of your favourite personalities you've never seen before.

Go-to excuse when
you're late (even if it's a lie)?
Blame it on the wife.

Order at Divide?
Double espresso.

What is the most ridiculous idea you
pitched that you believed in?
A very cringe, vulgar client video... which got taken down.

If you suddenly went viral, what would it be for?
Golf.

What's something people wouldn't
expect about you?
I'm actually pretty fun.

What's a scandal you could
be caught in?
Doing something haram.

Go-to drink on a night out?
All of them.

If you had 24 hours to spend LKR 1 million,
what would you blow it on?
A watch.

If you had to get a tattoo tomorrow,
what would it be?
'Help me!'

Do you snore?
Yes... and loudly.

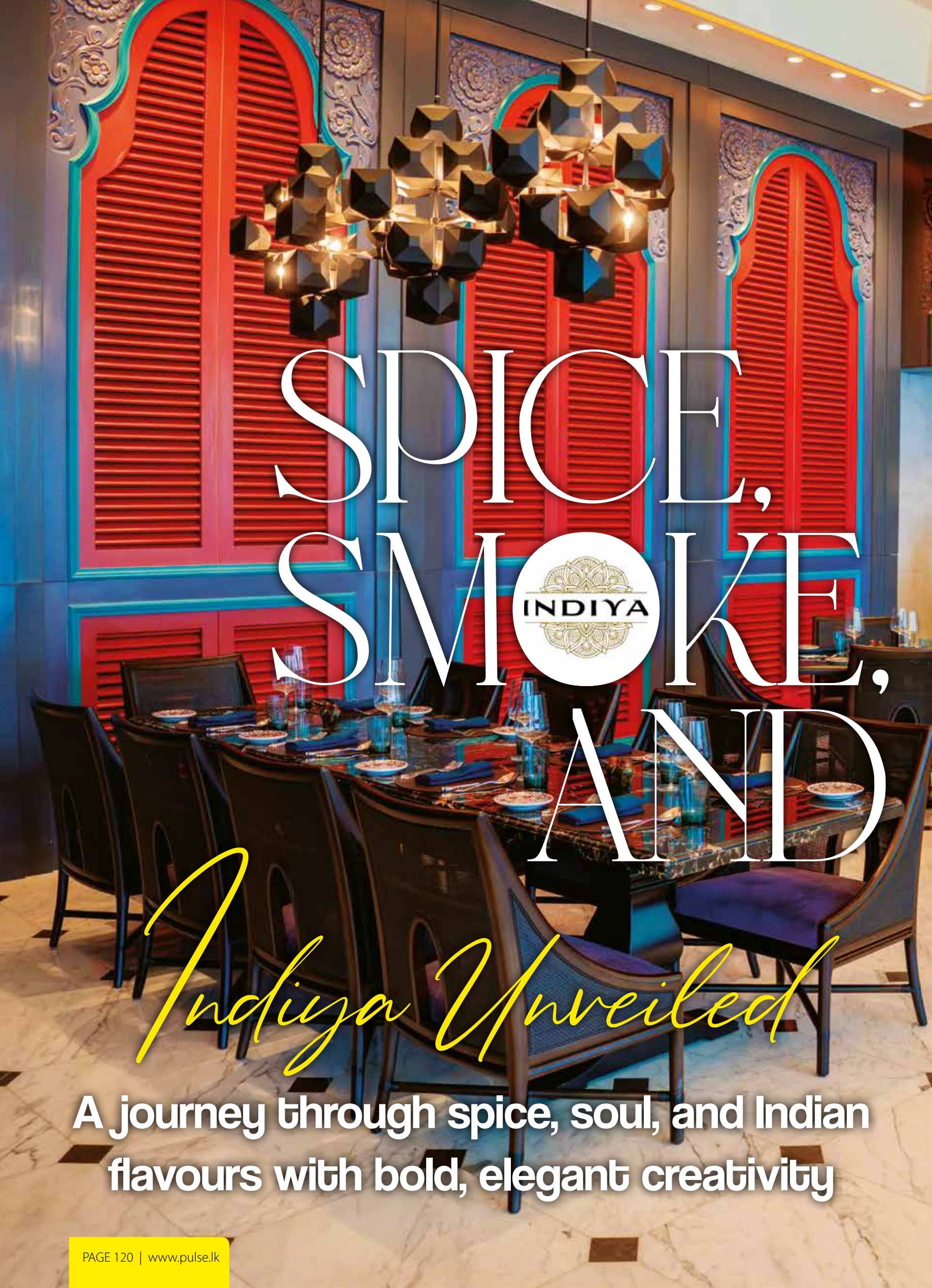


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for the full video

Credits

Location - Barista Nugegoda

Pictures by Sassanda Liyanaarchchi



SPICE, SMOKE, AND



Indiya Unveiled

A journey through spice, soul, and Indian
flavours with bold, elegant creativity



SAFFRON



By Venessa Anthony

If you’ve lived in Colombo long enough, you know that Indian food here tends to fall into two camps – the homely, no-nonsense curries you could eat with your hands in a small cafe, or the heavily buttered, cream-laden “North Indian classics” at hotel restaurants. Indiya at Cinnamon Life has clearly set out to carve a third path: refined plates with personality, unexpected combinations, and a touch of theatre without falling into gimmick territory.

We began our evening with drinks – not the kind you usually expect at an Indian restaurant. The Kashaya arrived first, an almost ethereal blend of pomegranate, masala chai, soursop, and lemongrass. At first sip, we braced ourselves for chaos – that many strong personalities in one glass seemed risky – but it turned out to be a gentle conversation rather than an argument. The masala chai element held the floor, offering warmth and spice, while the lemongrass slipped in with a clean, botanical sweetness that kept things bright. The pomegranate and soursop stayed politely in the background, smoothing the edges. It was refreshing without being sugary – the kind of drink you’d want on a humid Colombo evening.

Then came Katu, a drink with far less restraint but all the more charm for it. Indiya’s spiced rum combined dark rum, apricot, papaya, hot honey, and tamarind. This was bold – the tamarind and hot honey giving it an unapologetic punch while the tropical fruit rounded it out. If Kashaya was an afternoon garden stroll, Katu was the friend who insisted on going dancing on a Tuesday night.



Starters – a promising first act

The NH48 Chicken Tikka was as solid an opening note as we could ask for – smoky from the tandoor, with a chilli garlic marinade that didn’t hold back on either heat or flavour. Each piece was tender without being drenched in sauce, letting the marinade shine.

The Mini Cheese Naan Bites were precisely what they promised: little spheres of naan stuffed with smoked cheese. They were addictive in that “one more won’t hurt” way, but the richness made them better suited for sharing. We could imagine these being dangerously good alongside a cold beer.

Then there was the Jodhpuri Sangri Mirchiya—a dish we’d never seen on a Colombo menu. Plump fried chilli peppers stuffed with desert beans were served with garlic chutney. It was earthy, spicy, and slightly nutty—a starter that felt more rooted in regional tradition than hotel adaptation. It was also unapologetically spicy, which we respect deeply.

Mains – tradition meets imagination

From the vegetarian mains, the Saag Paneer Tikka was a highlight. Instead of the usual cubes of paneer swimming in creamed spinach, this dish grilled the cottage cheese in the tandoor first, lending it a smokiness that cut through the richness of the spinach. The chilli and garlic balanced the creaminess, making it feel hearty but not heavy.

The Kurkuri Bhindi – crispy okra in a spiced tomato sauce with raw mango dust – was another unexpected treat. Okra can go wrong in many ways, but here it was crisp, tangy, and light enough to eat long after we thought we’d stop. The mango dust gave it a tart lift, making the whole dish sing.

Seafood lovers would be happy with the Macchi Tamatar, a barramundi fillet curry with tomato, chilli, and lime. The fish was fresh and flaky, the sauce tangy with just enough heat, and the lime kept it bright instead of heavy.

And of course, there was Singh Sahab’s Butter Chicken. This wasn’t the standard “dessert masquerading as curry” butter chicken – it was smoky from the shredded tandoor chicken, the butter tomato sauce rich but not cloying. It felt like a butter chicken that had spent time over fire, not just in a blender.

The Thikri Dal was humble but deeply satisfying – yellow lentils tempered with garlic, asafoetida, cumin, and chilli. It was comfort food, pure and simple, perfect with tandoori roti or a hunk of butter naan. Speaking of breads, the garlic naan was a table favourite, crisp-edged and charred in all the right places.

Rice came as simple steamed grains for curry purists, or the far more indulgent Dum Mutton Biryani. This layered affair included basmati rice, tender mutton, mint, cream, and saffron. The meat was fall-apart tender, and the rice fragrant without being oily. It was the kind of biryani you eat slowly, partly to savour and partly because it’s so rich.

Dessert – ending on a sweet high

We weren’t sure we had room left when dessert rolled around, but the kitchen had other plans. The Lancha Jamun – warm milk dumplings in clove-spiced syrup – were as indulgent as they sound. The clove gave the sweetness a depth that kept it from being one-note.

The Gajar Halwa, a warm carrot pudding, was comfort in a bowl – buttery, spiced, and sweet enough. If you’ve never tried carrot pudding, this would be the place to start.

The Kaju Katli – delicate cashew marzipan squares – were smooth and almost buttery, a gentle counterpoint to the more decadent desserts.

Finally, the Churma Ladoo with Rabdi was the showstopper. The wholewheat dumplings, speckled with edible gum and raisins, sat in thick, condensed milk. It was indulgence turned up to eleven – the kind of dish you share, if only to avoid sinking into a sugar-induced daze.

Service and atmosphere

The service at Indiya matched the menu—polished but with a certain warmth. Staff were quick to explain unfamiliar dishes without overcomplicating things, and the pacing was just right for an unhurried evening.

The space leaned modern, with hints of Indian influence in the décor rather than a complete thematic immersion. It felt more like a restaurant that happens to serve Indian food than an “Indian restaurant” in the traditional sense – fitting for a place that wants to blend heritage with contemporary dining.

Our verdict

Indiya’s strength lies in its willingness to stretch the boundaries of what diners expect from Indian cuisine without losing sight of flavour. The menu isn’t afraid to go bold – whether with spiced rum cocktails or regionally inspired starters – and yet it never strays so far from the familiar that it feels alienating.

Yes, prices reflect its setting inside Cinnamon Life, and this is not your weekday takeaway option. But if you’re looking for an evening where Indian food feels comfortingly familiar and refreshingly new, Indiya is well worth visiting.

Pictures by **Iraj Walisinghe**





DERANA Kite Festival 2025

Galle Face Green came alive with colour and excitement as Derana together with Signal, hosted Sri Lanka's first-ever Night Kite Festival.

TV Derana, in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and the Sri Lanka Police, organised the festival, a dazzling celebration under the sky. The Kite Festival concluded with a spectacular music festival and performances by stars from Derana Dream Star and Little Star, along with live music from Boomtown and some of Sri Lanka's finest artists.

Here are some kites, music, and celebration highlights from this evening!

Pictures by Ramesh Roshan





PRIDE WALK 2025

Colombo lit up with colour, joy, and purpose as Pride Walk 2025 took over the streets from Narahenpita to Kirulapone. Organised by Equal Ground with support from local allies, the walk was a bold and beautiful celebration of love, identity, and LGBTQ+ rights. With rainbow flags waving high and music filling the air, the march brought together a spirited crowd united in their call for equality, dignity, and acceptance.

Here are some vibrant moments from the day!

Pictures by Iraj Walisinghe



Auntie D. is a full-time mom working a little magic in the kitchen whenever she's got time on her hands. She brings to you, easy and fast recipes with a twist of Sri Lankan spices and cooking techniques. Get cooking!



Scan the QR code

Marmite Chicken

Still hate Marmite? This will change your mind. We turned this love-it-or-hate-it spread into a crispy, sticky flavour bomb you'll want on repeat.

Ingredients:

- Boneless chicken 500 g
- Salt 1 1/2 tsp
- Pepper 1 tsp
- Egg 1 nos
- Corn flour 1/4 cup
- Marmite 1/4 cup
- Dark soy sauce 1 tbsp
- Sugar 1 tbsp
- Oyster sauce 2 tbsp
- Oil 1 tsp
- Garlic 4 cloves

Method:

- Chop chicken into bite-sized pieces. Season with salt and pepper.
- Crack an egg, add cornflour, mix in the chicken, and let it marinate for 20 minutes.
- In a bowl, mix Marmite, dark soy sauce, sugar, and oyster sauce to make the sauce for the chicken.
- Deep fry the chicken until golden brown and crispy.
- In a hot pan, add oil and sauté chopped garlic, then add the fried chicken and your Marmite sauce.
- Toss everything together until each piece is glossy and well coated.

Trust us, there's no going back once you try it out!



Scan the QR code



Pineapple Curry

Sweet, spicy and bursting with soul, this Sri Lankan Pineapple Curry brings a tropical twist that warms both the heart and the table. Juicy pineapples simmered in aromatic spices create a rich, vibrant dish that captures the spirit of home-cooked comfort.

Method:

- Peel the pineapple, and cut it into slices, and then into quarters.
- Add chilli powder, pepper, curry powder (unroasted), salt, and turmeric. Give it a good stir and let it rest for 10 minutes so the spices can soak in.
- Thinly slice the shallots, garlic cloves, and green and red chillies.
- Heat oil in a pot and add mustard seeds, a cinnamon stick, cardamom, sliced garlic cloves, shallots, green and red chillies, curry leaves, and pandan leaves. Stir well.
- Add the pineapple pieces, pour in water, and let it simmer.
- Finally, add coconut milk and some sugar.

Ingredients:

- Pineapple 1 nos
- Chilli powder 1 tsp
- Curry powder (unroasted) 1 tsp
- Pepper 3/4 tsp
- Salt 1 1/2 tsp
- Turmeric 1/2 tsp
- Oil 1 tbsp
- Mustard seeds 1 tsp
- Cinnamon stick 1 inch
- Cardamom 3 nos
- Garlic cloves 3 nos
- Small red onion (shallots) 3 nos
- Green and red chillies 5 nos
- Curry leaves
- Pandan leaves
- Water 1 1/2 cups
- Coconut milk 1 cup
- Sugar 1 tbsp

Pair it with a warm plate of rice and enjoy!



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ESKOBAR



Eskobar takes you on a sensory journey through South America — from its vibrant music to its bold, flavour-packed menu. Uniquely crafted Latin-inspired cocktails, infused with local produce and innovative techniques, set a new standard in Sri Lanka's bar scene. Perfectly paired with comida — tangy, crunchy, and meaty South American dishes that elevate pub favourites into restaurant-worthy creations — every sip and bite is a discovery. With a breathtaking rooftop view of Colombo, Eskobar is the ultimate spot to unwind, indulge, and let the evening unfold.

MUST HAVE DISHES

- TAMARINDO
- DUCK TACO
- COLOMBIAN CHICHARRÓN
- LORD OF THE SKIES
- VENEZUELAN CAMARONES A LA PARILLA



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THE FAT CRAB



The Fat Crab has arrived in Colombo to satisfy every seafood lover's cravings. Spread across four floors in a central location, the restaurant serves the ultimate seafood feast until 1 a.m. Building on the success of its Negombo and Mount Lavinia branches, The Fat Crab is famed for its Sri Lankan-style crab and a mix of local and international seafood dishes.

Signature highlights include the much-loved Murunga Leaf Crab Curry and Black Pepper Crab, alongside favourites like prawns, calamari, and fresh fish. Diners can also enjoy authentic Sri Lankan sides—from crusty kade paan with dhal and sambol to hearty rice and stir-fried kankun—making every meal a true seafood indulgence.

MUST HAVE DISHES

- CHILLI DUSTED SESAME PRAWN TOAST
- LOBSTER THERMIDOR
- SINGAPORE CHILLI CRAB
- SRI LANKAN JAFFNA CRAB CURRY
- MONGOLIAN RICE WITH SEAFOOD AND CHICKEN





Aaheli



Heshani



Gayathrie



Prithiva



Shannon & Reshan



Tharaka & Gothami



Ramantha, Theruni & Roshan



Nikki, Aaheli & mother



Treshan



Nishi



Hash, Chaminda & children

Noche LATINA

The Quizine Deck at Cinnamon Life came alive with Noche Latina unfolding in authentic Spanish-inspired flair. The evening was a lively celebration of Latin culture, filled with music, dance, and fashion. Guests were treated to soulful live music by Dillon Manuel, a glamorous fashion show featuring three talented designers, and an energetic after-party. Organised by Deshana Perera and Gayathri Soysa of Salsa Sensation, the event was a colourful tribute to the spirit and artistry of Latin America.

Here's a look at the moments captured from the night.

Pictures by **Kumara Bope Arachchi**



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Treshan & Prithiva



Thiyasha



Charini



Shehanka & Blesh



Dilrukshi



Cookie, Prithiva, Himali & friend



Nishi



Indi & Sahan



Apsara

The Sunset Social

A stylish rooftop affair came to life as The Sunset Social, powered by Mastercard, unfolded at Amari Colombo. Conceptualised and hosted by Treshan and Prithiva, the event brought together an elegant mix of cocktails, live jazz, upbeat DJ rhythms, and an indulgent Italian-inspired brunch buffet – all set against the stunning backdrop of the Colombo skyline. Guests enjoyed signature drinks, danced to sundown tunes, and savoured gourmet creations meticulously prepared by Amari Colombo.

Here are some vibrant moments from the evening!

Pictures by **Iraj Walisinghe**



Hashini & Dinesh



Chrisanthi



Danu



Rashmika & friend



Devin



Senali & Dhanushka



Hemal



Sajeira, Chinthaka & Prithiva



Desh & Roshan



Jaish & Chaya



Krista, Punsara, Natasha & friends



Malaka, Shalini & Treshan



Inuri



Nadun, Nipun, Rosanna, Sandy, Sajith & Hemal



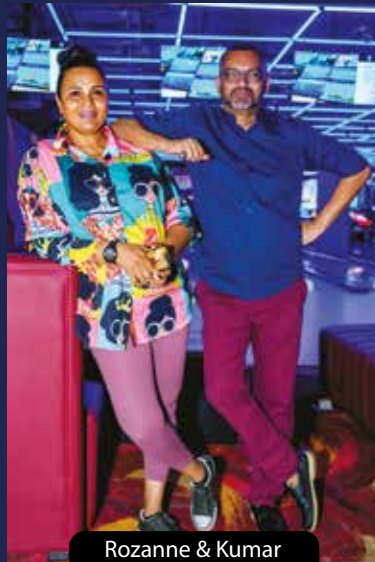
Harshani



Suneel, Ashan, Christalin & Keshika



Sanjiv



Rozanne & Kumar

PLAYDIUM OPENS at One Galle Face!

Playdium has officially opened its doors at One Galle Face, bringing a whole new level of indoor entertainment to Colombo!

The venue features exciting attractions, including bowling, multiplayer VR adventures, Sella bumper cars, and a soft play zone for the little ones. The grand opening was a fun-filled evening of games, laughter, and non-stop excitement as guests explored this fantastic new space for family fun and adventure.

Take a look at the highlights from the big day!

*Pictures by **Kumara Bopearachchi***



Gehan & Dino



Ranshan, Danielle & daughter



Kekuli



Jahn & Shanelle



Melody, Janith, Ranga & friend