

Major Highlights from year 2023

Professor Ranjith Senaratne, as the General President of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) of the year 2023, is actively engaged in promoting science diplomacy to enhance national unity and foster relationships with neighbouring countries. Science diplomacy is an influential tool for bridging gaps between nations through scientific collaborations, research, and shared knowledge. The role of SLAAS in this initiative is crucial, as it is the premium scientific and professional body in Sri Lanka. During the year 2023, SLAAS facilitated several events that built meaningful connections between Sri Lankan Scientific community and policymakers with international counterparts.

Several specific events and initiatives SLAAS corroborated under the guidance of the General President, Professor Ranjith Senaratne are highlighted below.

The British Council and the SLAAS join hands with the NSF in hosting a mega British Alumni event to reflect on some complex real-world issues



The Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) and National Science Foundation (NSF) under the patronage of the British Council conducted a forum of the British Alumni to reflect on “Transdisciplinary Approach for Sustainable Development” at the Movenpick Hotel on 24 October 2023. The event was graced by UK-trained high-profile Sri Lankans, both in Sri Lanka and the UK.



His Excellency Andrew Patrick, British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka was the Chief Guest of this event.



Senior officials of the British Council including Mr. Orlando Edwards, Country Director, and Ms. Kate Joyce, Director, Cultural Engagement for South

Asia, were also present. Professor Eran Edirisinghe, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, University of Keele, UK, Professor Athula Sumathipala, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Keele University, and Emeritus Professor of Global Mental Health, Kings College London, Professor Saroj Jayasinghe, Professor Ruchira Cumararatunga,, Professor Ajith de Alwis, Professor P. Ravirajan, and Professor Prasad Jayaweera served as resource persons.

In addition, senior officials and scientists from the University Grant Commission, Universities, R&D institutions, government institutions, and members of the Boards of Management of the SLAAS and the NSF were present on this august occasion. Further information on this event can be found in the link below.

<https://www.sundaytimes.lk/231029/education/the-british-council-hosts-inaugural-alumni-uk-forum-with-transdisciplinary-approach-for-sustainable-development-theme-536913.html>

This historic event marked a beginning of a long journey of the SLAAS in partnership with the British Council and the NSF in a mutually rewarding and reinforcing manner to leverage particularly the British Alumni at home and abroad to address some high-priority real-life issues in Sri Lanka through a transdisciplinary and transnational approach.

SLAAS co-hosts the first ever symposium on green hydrogen in Sri Lanka

The Green Hydrogen Symposium organized by Greenstat was held on 21 November 2023 at Shangri-la Colombo under the patronage of His Excellency Ranil Wickramasinghe, the



President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The goal of the symposium was to pave the way for a greener and more sustainable future in Sri Lanka through transition from fossil fuels to net-zero emissions.

The main objectives of the symposium were:

- To present Sri Lanka's roadmap and actionable plan for accelerating the adoption of green hydrogen and its derivatives in our energy transition journey.
- To address challenges and seize opportunities in developing green hydrogen infrastructure.
- To facilitate the exchange of advanced technologies and expertise in green hydrogen production, storage, and utilization.
- To showcase Sri Lanka as an attractive investment destination for green hydrogen projects, encouraging partnerships with local and international investors.
- To discover the economic and environmental benefits of embracing green hydrogen - from job creation to emission reduction and energy resilience.



- To foster knowledge exchange and collaboration among industry experts, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders.
- To engage in fruitful discussions on integrating green hydrogen into our energy landscape, supporting affordable and reliable electricity supply for all.

The symposium was attended by the diplomatic corps, a galaxy of internationally renowned scientists from around the world, academics, and Heads of S & T institutions of the country.

SLAAS was a co-host of this event and Professor Ranjith Senaratne, General President, Professor Sumedha Jayanetti, and Dr. R. D. Guneratne of the SLAAS participated at the symposium.



SLAAS in collaboration with NSF conducted a workshop to review the current policy on the ban of oil palm cultivation in Sri Lanka



Oil palm has been grown in Sri Lanka since 1968. However, no degradation of soil or water resources has thus far been observed. Studies conducted in Sri Lanka and elsewhere have clearly shown that oil palm is about four times more productive than coconut and about ten times more productive than soybean in terms of oil yield per unit area. Thus, it is much more profitable than tea, rubber and

coconut. Notwithstanding the above, a ban on the cultivation of oil palm cultivation was initially imposed by the Central Environment Authority (CEA) in 2019, which was reaffirmed by the government in April 2021. This decision has led to far-reaching consequences for the country's economy. Given the current economic crisis of the country and the vast opportunities offered by the promising oil palm industry, it is crucially important to revisit this policy in the interest of the country and its people.

Therefore, the SLAAS and the NSF, two premier national institutions mandated to promote S&T for the economic development of the country, took the initiative to conduct a workshop to facilitate a review of the current ban on the cultivation of oil palm in Sri Lanka and to



formulate an objective, evidence-based, data-driven policy on its cultivation. To this end, scientists who have studied the effects of oil palm cultivation on biodiversity, soil fertility and water usage as well as the nutritional aspects of oil palm were engaged to address the purported concerns related to environment and health, and to provide their insights into the issues. The ambassador of Indonesia and the High Commissioner of Malaysia to Sri Lanka also shared their knowledge and experience with the participants. Dr. Suren Batagoda, Advisor to the President on Food Security, graced the occasion.





Nearly 100 persons participated in the workshop held on 28 November 2023 at the Waters Edge Battaramulla. It represented the key stakeholders including universities, R&D institutions, public sector institutions, industry, plantation companies, and small holder farmer associations. Resource persons made technical presentations which were followed by a panel discussion affording an opportunity for the participants to express views

and raise questions. There was active deliberation and reflection on the purported issues and other related matters. A consensus of opinion was arrived at and the main recommendations that emanated from the deliberations would be submitted to the government and relevant authorities for consideration.

The Art and Science of Colour: Optimizing Experience, Interaction, and Wellbeing



Colour has profound physiological and psychological effects on human beings, and it could affect the mood, emotions, behaviour, memory, and even productivity and performance. In addition, colour has therapeutic effects and a healing power. Therefore, the choice of the right colour/s for the right purpose is of prime importance, which goes far beyond the aesthetic and visual appeal. Consequently, disciplines such as colour chemistry, colour psychology, visual ergonomics, architectural psychology, neuro-psychology, and chromotherapy have developed in many countries. However, these aspects have thus far received only scant attention in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, the SLAAS joined forces with the NSF and conducted a national conference on "The Art and Science of Colour: Optimizing Experience, Interaction, and Wellbeing" at Waters

Edge, Battaramulla on 20 December 2023. It was attended by high-profile scientists and professionals in a wide range of fields



including visual arts, architecture, archaeology, physics, chemistry, psychology, communication, physiology, and medicine from home and abroad to reflect on the said theme.

Dr. Anishka Hettiarrachchi, Senior Lecturer in Architecture, University of Moratuwa played a pivotal role in organizing the event. Professor Emeritus Jagath Weerasinghe, University of Kelaniya was the keynote speaker while Professor Arthuras Kaklauskas, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania, Professor Emeritus Nimal De Silva, University of Moratuwa, Professor Emeritus K.D.N. Weerasinge, University of Ruhuna, Dr. Anishka Hettiarrachchi, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa and Dr. Ranjith Dharmathilake, University of Visual and Performing Arts served as resource persons.



It was noteworthy that several distinguished architects in the country attended the conference. It was held under the patronage of Nippon Paint and its proceedings will be published



79th Annual Sessions of SLAAS and the Inauguration ceremony

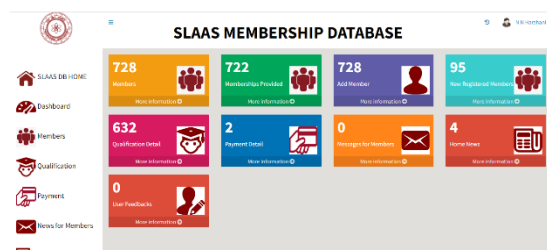
The 79th Annual Sessions of SLAAS under the theme “Science Diplomacy as a Powerful Force for National Unity and Friendship among Nations” was held from 10th to 15th December 2023 at the Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala.





The ceremonial inauguration of the Annual Sessions took place on 10th December 2023 at BMICH, Colombo, and Deshamanya Prof. Mohan Munasinghe, Chairman, Munasinghe Institute for Development (MIND) Group was the Chief Guest. The occasion was graced by the Council of SLAAS 2023, past General Presidents of SLAAS, and Heads of Higher Education Institutions and Universities. Further, more than 300 guests, school children, and university students participated in the inauguration ceremony.

General President of SLAAS Prof. Ranjith Senaratne, during his Presidential Address, highlighted the work carried out under the theme “Science diplomacy as a powerful force for national unity and friendship among nations”.



One of the highlighting moments of the inauguration was the launching of SLAAS Membership Database by the General President, Director General of NSF, and the staff members from the NSF who were involved in

establishing it. This newly established SLAAS membership database will strengthen the networks among scientific community in Sri Lanka leading to advancement of science.

At the award ceremony held in the inauguration, more than 95 awards were presented including the lifetime award of the General Research Committee. The list of awards covered a spectrum of awardees from those who made a significant contribution to the development

of science to budding youth who excelled in science-based competitions conducted by SLAAS committees and sections throughout the island.

Theme Seminar



The theme seminar entitled “*Science Diplomacy as a Powerful Force for National Unity and Friendship among Nations*” was held at the auditorium of the Open University of Sri Lanka on 11th December with the participation of international and national eminent scientists and diplomats. H. E. Sandile Edwin Schalk (High

commissioner of South Africa to Sri Lanka) graced the occasion as the Chief Guest at the event. The keynote speech was delivered by Prof. Sir Peter Gluckman (President, International Science Council (ISC)). Emeritus Prof. Saroj Jayasinghe (Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka) delivered his speech on “Elevating Sri Lanka's Global Influence: The Role of Sri Lankan Scientists in Science Diplomacy”. Prof. P. Balasundarampillai



(Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka) discussed about a nationally important topic “Science Diplomacy for Reconciliation, Peace and National Development”. Dr. Baskar Balakrishnan (Fellow for Science Diplomacy, Research and Information System (RIS) for



Developing Countries, India) spoke about “Science Diplomacy and the Asia Pacific Region: Challenges and Opportunities”.

Mr. Pedro Ivo Ferraz da Silva (Head of Science, Technology & Innovation and Technical Cooperation at the Embassy of Brazil in Berlin), Dr. Gihan Kamel Badie (Principal Scientist, Synchrotron-light Project for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME), Jordan), and Prof. Pierre-Bruno Ruffini (Professor of International Economics at the Faculty of International Affairs, University of Le Havre, France) delivered their speeches on the importance and role of science diplomacy to address global and regional challenges while creating a sustainable future.



The panel discussion on “Application of Science Diplomacy in Promoting National Unity and Friendship among Nations” was held at

the end of the theme seminar and it was chaired and moderated by Ambassador Sumith Nakandala (Former Secretary General of BIMSTEC and Former Additional Foreign Secretary). Ms Thilinakumari Kandanamulla (Scientific Officer, National Science Foundation, Sri Lanka) assisted in reporting the proceedings of the theme seminar.

Special Symposium on Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies (IDTDS)



History was made as the SLAAS Committee on Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies (IDTDS) organized the inaugural special session on IDTDS as an event under the SLAAS 79th Annual Sessions. The session was held on 14th December at the new auditorium of Faculty of Health Sciences of the Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala. The event marked a historical occasion as it was the first event

known to represent research and developments related to IDTD in Sri Lanka.

The event was graced by Prof. Ranjith Senarathne, General President of SLAAS, Prof. Sumedha Jayanetti, Chair of SLASS committee on IDTDS, and Professor Emeritus Saroj Jayasinghe, keynote speaker of the session.

Addressing the gathering, consists of authors, IDTDS committee members, and various interested scholars, Professor Emeritus Saroj Jayasinghe delivered his keynote on “Synthesis in Action: Exploring Frontiers of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research”. He emphasized how the IDTD approaches can be used effectively to look at real world problems as a whole and solve them rationally.





Nine oral presentations of the selected abstracts on IDTDS were presented afterwards indicating the potential of IDTDS in tackling various subject fields such as education, religion, anthropology, medicine, and environment.