

On behalf of the IPS let me extend a warm welcome to all of you to this event.

We are pleased to have with us the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy, who is also a Member of the Governing Board of the IPS as our Chief Guest to launch the Felicitation Volume in honour of Prof. Premachandra Athukorala.

Today's event will feature the said Felicitation Volume launch with a Lecture on a topic of contemporary interest.

Most of us who have been working at the postgraduate level on the Sri Lankan economy since the mid-1980s, have always come across Premachandra Athukorala's work on the Sri Lankan economy. The reference to Premachandra's work was mostly found via citation to his work in various articles. After the mid-1990s, when the internet and with it the Google search engine became a popular tool among research students and academics, it became easy to search Premachandra's work either on trade, macroeconomic, industrial or migration issues of Sri Lanka. In fact, Premachandra's articles on such issues always stood among the first 2 articles in a Google search. This is the influence his writings on the Sri Lankan economy made in the international sphere.

Not only his writings on Sri Lanka, but also his work on other countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, and others have featured prominently in international literature. Premachandra has authored and co-authored 10 books, edited another 5 books, published 63 chapters in books and authored and co-authored more than 100 articles in refereed journals. He did not sacrifice quality for the quantity of papers he produced. The number of citations in literature is a good indicator to judge quality. For example, in 2005, a paper on product fragmentation trade by Premachandra in the then relatively new MIT Press journal called "Asian Economic Papers", was one of less than a handful of papers that received so many citations that it helped the journal to receive Social Science Citation Index accreditation – the most reputed citation measure – relatively early in its life. In sum, Premachandra's work has gone a long way in influencing global thinking on policy issues and he has stood tall – the *premus interpara* – among his fellow Sri Lankan economists.

We are having this felicitation event in honour of Premachandra due to two reasons. First, the close association that the IPS has had with Premachandra over the last two-and-a-half decades -- an association that developed in the early 1990s that has grown

over the years, so much so, that Premachandra finds his second home at the IPS during his visits to Sri Lanka.

In the early 1990s, the IPS collaborated with Premachandra on the work he did on industrialization and trade issues in Sri Lanka, in particular, on agriculture tariff liberalization, backward linkages from ready-made garment industries, labour productivity in manufacturing sector, and so on. When the Australia-South Asia Research Centre was established in the ANU in 1994, some of us in the IPS participated in its inauguration and commenced joint work with the Centre. Later, the IPS assisted the Centre in launching a study on Australia-Sri Lanka trade and investment relations titled: 'Cultivating the Pearl'. This study was jointly authored by Premachandra with the late Ric Shand.

In the 2000s, a number of IPS junior economists who received admissions in the ANU for Master's degree were privileged to be taught by Premachandra in some of the courses they followed. With some of them, Premachandra initiated work on various topics, including that of Sri Lanka's Ready-Made Garment industry and in 2014 we brought out a joint publication with Premachandra titled: 'Repositioning in the Global Value Chain in the Post-MFA Era: Strategic Issues and Evidence from Sri Lanka'. Many of the IPS researchers have benefited from interacting with Premachandra, in expanding their understanding on the subject, for searching new literature, networking with fellow economists, and gaining experience in field work and surveys. Premachandra gives high importance to interviews in his field visits and through him, IPS has managed to cultivate lasting and strong links with entrepreneurs working in the EPZs in Biyagama and Katunayake.

The second reason why the IPS is hosting this event is that we feel that Sri Lankan expatriate economists do not have a solid local platform to share and disseminate their research in Sri Lanka. The IPS would like to fill in this gap by highlighting some of their work at seminars and events of this nature.

Given these reasons, we consider that we owe Premachandra a felicitation and with this comprehensive volume edited by Hal Hill and Jayant Menon – in honour of him, we think an all-encompassing Felicitation event is the need of the hour.

We will be launching the said Felicitation Volume at this event and one of the co-editors of the Volume, Prof. Hal Hill, who is present here, will speak about the Volume shortly. But let me say this, the contributors to this Volume almost had to take an oath of secrecy with the two editors not to speak about the Volume with anyone else until

the Volume is released. So Premachandra got somewhat of a shock when the Volume was handed over to him at his residence about 10 days ago, because he was totally unaware that such a volume in his honour was on the way. So the contributors should be acknowledged for being faithful to the two editors, and Hal Hill and his co-editor Jayant Menon needs to be appreciated, for making it a surprise for Prema-chandra, which was their original objective. Premachandra wrote to me last week saying, he does not deserve such a Volume where 27 economists who are familiar with his work have contributed Chapters, but his colleagues felt otherwise. One of the contributors to the Volume, i.e., Sarath Rajapatirana who worked with Premachandra during the last three decades will be paying a tribute to Premachandra today and after that we will have a few words from Premachandra and with that we will end the Felicitation event and move on to a lecture on an interesting subject which will be delivered by Prof. Hal Hill.

The topic we will be dealing with is, 'Where are the South East Asian Economies Heading ?' Prof. Hal Hill has done a significant amount of work on Southeast Asia and we could not think of a better person than him to address this topic.

This is an important topic in the context of Sri Lanka's current global outreach and development strategy. Closer to the region, Sri Lanka is increasingly losing its interest in SAARC and now looking to the Bay of Bengal region for a Free Trade Area. Sri Lanka is currently a Member of BIMSTEC that includes Myanmar and Thailand in Southeast Asia, in addition to five SAARC countries. The economic connectivity-led regional economic integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) in Southeast Asia is also a model Sri Lanka is closely looking at, with the development of the Hambantota Export Processing Zone linked to both the Southern sea and airports. Vietnam is another country that inspires Sri Lanka – which underwent a similar experience of war and came out of it remarkably well. Both Vietnam and Sri Lanka were in par on exports in 1990, but today Vietnam's exports are 13 times more than that of Sri Lanka. How did Vietnam become an export success story compared to Sri Lanka? I am sure we will be able to get deeper insights to the Southeast Asian region economies from Prof. Hal Hill's lecture today.

With these brief introductory remarks, let me once again welcome all of you and hope you will benefit from our deliberations today. I thank you.