



In Memoriam: Saman Kelegama

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Dr Saman Kelegama, prominent Sri Lankan economist and the co-editor-in-chief of this journal since its inception in 2000, passed away on 23 June 2017. His illustrious career was sadly cut short when he succumbed to a cardiac arrest in Bangkok where he was attending an international conference at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Saman was born on 6 April 1959 in Kandy, Sri Lanka as the eldest son of Dr Jayantha Kelegama (an Oxford-educated economics professor) and Mrs Padma Kelegama (nee Yatawara). After schooling in St. Thomas Preparatory School and Royal College in Colombo, he entered the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kanpur, where he completed an integrated bachelor's and master's degree in mathematics with first class honours. In 1983, he proceeded, following his father's footsteps, to the Oxford University to study economics in St. Catherine College and graduated with MPhil in 1986 and DPhil in 1990. He researched his Oxford doctoral thesis on trade liberalization reforms in Sri Lanka under the supervision of two eminent economists, Sudhir Anand and David Bevan.

On return from Oxford to Sri Lanka in 1990, he joined the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) as a research fellow. The IPS was then a two-year-old small research outfit in the Ministry of Finance, which had been established with financial and technical support from the Government of Netherlands. Saman made the risky choice of joining the fledgling institution after giving up an attractive job offer from the Central Bank because of his desire to pursue policy-oriented research in an independent setting in collaboration with international experts. He became the executive director of IPS in 1995, a position he held until his untimely demise.

Saman was a great institution builder. No single individual defines a whole institution, but Saman's contribution to the development of IPS to the premier 'think tank' in the country was unique and profound. He built a sizeable endowment fund for IPS with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA), brought together an able team of researchers to work with him and relocated the IPS from a cramped commercial building in a noisy Colombo street in a newly constructed building with modern research/conference facilities in a prime location at the Independence Square of Colombo. With financial autonomy gained by setting

up the endowments fund and income from research projects undertaken for various international agencies, Saman was able to preserve the independence and integrity of IPS, notwithstanding its quasi-governmental status. Under his leadership, policy-oriented research of IPS filled the needs of various government bodies, international developmental organizations and the general public; IPS was the 'first port of call' for international scholars and consultants visiting Sri Lanka.

With his intellectual prowess, integrity and deep respect for others, Saman had created a name for himself in Sri Lankan policy circles as a well-respected economic analyst, advisor and commentator on economic issues. His father belonged to the centre-left of the political spectrum and always associated with one political party in the country. But, Saman was open-minded and receptive to alternative ideas, reminiscent of the Keynesian dictum that 'when the facts change, I change my mind'. Therefore, political parties from both sides of the spectrum sought his advice, when in government and otherwise. He served under governments of all political parties on a number of high-profile government boards and committees, including Industrial Development Board, National Enterprise Development Authority, Presidential Taxation Commission, National Economic Council and the Board of Investment. During the past two years, he led the Sri Lankan teams involved in negotiating an Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) with India and a free trade agreement with China. In the private sector, he was a director and then the chairman of the director board of Singer Sri Lanka, and served on the director boards of the Colombo Stock Exchange and Sampath Bank, a leading commercial bank in the country.

Saman was a public intellectual who gave his enormous talents and energies to serve with devotion the economic profession in Sri Lanka and in the South Asian regions. He was the president of the Sri Lanka Economics Association and the editor of its biannual journal *Sri Lanka Economic Journal* during 2001–2003. He was a member of the governing board of Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre, Gamini Corea Foundation, the Institute of Management at the University of Jayewardenepura in Sri Lanka and the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies based in Kathmandu. In 2008, he formed the South Asia Economic Summit, an annual forum for regional economic issues. In 2000, he co-founded (jointly with Dr Nagesh Kumar of the Research Information System [RIS], India) this journal, which is now well established as a major outlet for scholarly work on economic issues in the region. He served on editorial boards of a number of scholarly journals, including the *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* (Routledge) and *Asia Pacific Development Journal* (ESCAP). He was an advisor/consultant to a number of international developmental organizations, including the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Asian Development Bank Institution (ADB).

In spite of the burden of duties at IPS and wide-ranging public affairs, Saman was prodigiously productive as a researcher. According to his CV, which he had updated a few weeks before his passing, his publications included 12 books and edited volumes published by reputable international publishers, 42 papers in scholarly journals, 55 contributions to multi-authored volumes and numerous other policy papers, consultancy reports and op-ed pieces. Starting with his doctoral research on

trade policy reforms, he had extended the coverage of his research to encompass topical issues such as public enterprise reforms and privatization, international labour migration, foreign aid, poverty and equity, and regional economic cooperation.

A final tribute to Saman's personality: He liked people and ideas, and he did so without thoughts of private aggrandizement or personal vanity. He was a great raconteur and a man with a fine sense of humour. He was a 'man of conviction', but he was never aggressive or incoherent even in heated arguments; reasoned calmness was a hallmark of Saman's character as a public intellectual.

Saman is survived by his wife Eranthika, their daughter Jayathri and son Chandana, a budding economist who aspires to fill his father's shoes.

We shall all miss him dearly.

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