

THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA LECTURE ON
THURSDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2020

**“ASIA RE-EMERGES AS THE DOMINANT ECONOMIC POWER IN
THE WORLD: OPPORTUNITY BECKONS SRI LANKA”**

By Dr. Palitha Kohona

The 128th Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust - Sri Lanka will be delivered online at 6.30pm on Thursday 24th September 2020.

The lecture link is as follows

[Join with Google Meet](#)

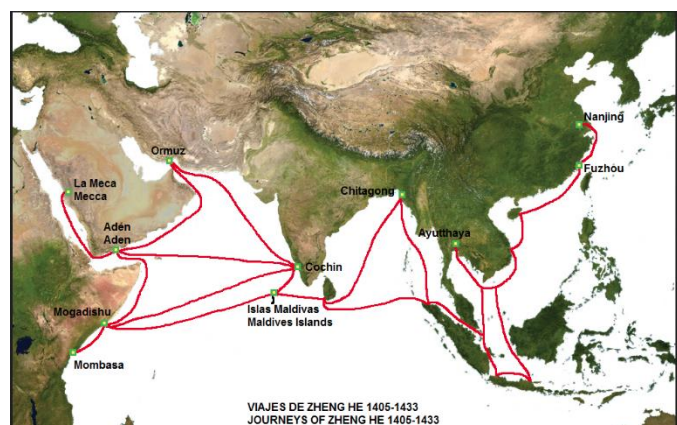
meet.google.com/biu-hona-jku

Asia, after having been accorded the dubious distinction of being the poorest continent in the 1960s, has within a very short space of time, transformed itself into the economic powerhouse of the world and is achieving prosperity at a dizzying pace. COVID19, like previous waves of infections that affected the continent, might only be a temporary phenomenon which may not arrest Asia's economic advance too drastically.

This rapid rise has caught the West off balance and many analysts find the transition difficult to accommodate in their existing frames of reference, not to mention the political class and the media. The much-flaunted and oft prescribed liberal democratic political structures and open economies and free trade have not been faithfully replicated by the majority of countries of resurgent Asia as they strive to catch up to the West. At most, only lip service is being paid by many to liberal democracy. Liberalized trade and open markets, an article of faith for so long in the West, have not been adopted in full and they are being gradually diluted even in the West, particularly in the face of Asian competition. More interestingly, the new Asian model, incorporating both economic and political dimensions, may pose a direct challenge to long accepted Western dogma.

The dominant economy of the West, the USA, is now being forced to backpedal on the trade liberalization and globalization Crusade of yesteryear and is busily putting up barriers. The noisy call to open doors to foreign investments is being replaced by strict monitoring of inward investments, ostensibly for security, environmental and sociological reasons. Security concerns provide the broad brush excuse for curtailing competition. Some entertain genuine fears that one of the pillars of the Bretton Woods institutional architecture, the World Trade Organisation, might collapse due to US actions.

The threat of reemerging Asia is also providing the excuse for confrontations involving military assets, especially in the Indian Ocean region, which may result in the unthinkable happening. Actual war, which would leave Asia's dreams of prosperity in tatters. The Indian Ocean region is rapidly becoming the theatre of confrontation for the protagonists. One hopes that good sense would prevail and the threats and vicious commentary would be replaced with more sensible talk and cooperation for the benefit of humanity.



Ambassador Dr Palitha Kohona

Dr Palitha Kohona, a Sri Lankan diplomat, was the former Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations (UN) from 2009 to 2015. Until August 2009 he was the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and was also the former Secretary-General of the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process. He was previously the Head of the UN Treaty Section in New York till 2006, the largest arm of the UN Office of Legal Affairs.

He is a member of the Board of Governors of the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy SIBA, Kandy (A private university).

Early life and education

Dr Kohona, who hails from Matale, Sri Lanka, received his secondary education in Sri Lanka at S. Thomas College, Mount Lavinia. He obtained a LLB (Hons) at the University of Sri Lanka, a LLM from the Australian National University on International Trade Law and a Doctorate from Cambridge University, UK, for the thesis 'The Regulation of International Trade through Law,' subsequently published by Kluwer, Netherlands. He is also an Attorney-at-Law, Supreme Court of Sri Lanka. Dr Kohona is an Honorary Professor of the Utah Valley University and an Honorary Fellow of the US Foreign Policy Association. He is an advisor to the NY Historical Society, the Sri Lanka Wild Life Conservation Society, and the Sustainability International. He has published papers on the Law of the Sea, terrorism, treaties, Indian Ocean rivalries, emerging Asia, etc. He has delivered visiting lectures at the NYU, Columbia, Fordham, Harvard and Yale.

Diplomatic Career

During the period in New York he was elected as the Chair of the UN GA Sixth Committee (Legal) in 2013. He was the Co-Chair of the UN Working Group on Biological Diversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, Chair of the UN Committee on Israeli Practices in the Occupied Arab Territories, the Chair of the Indian Ocean Committee and the Vice President of the UNCLOS Regular Process. He was a member of the triumvirate including India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the negotiations on the SDGs. He has led official level delegations to a range of countries on bilateral and multilateral matters, including during his period working for Australia.

United Nations

Prior to that he was the Chief of the United Nations Treaty Section in New York from 1995 to 2006. He experienced NY for over a period of 15 years, as a UN official and then as the Permanent Representative of SL. He worked closely with ESCAP in developing the Euro-Asian road and rail treaties. At the UN, he was responsible for introducing major managerial innovations at a time of difficult financial constraints and was awarded the UN 21 PIN for superior performance and efficiency. He managed the computerisation of the UN treaty database which contains over one million pages of information and which is now accessed over 1.5 million times per month from around the world. The UN treaty collection consists of over 55,000 bilateral treaties registered with the UN Secretariat and over 550 multilateral treaties deposited with the UN Secretary-General covering the spectrum of international interaction. The managing of the different intense pressures, whether from the US or China or Cuba, hardened him to the task of balancing competing interests for the common good.

The hand books on the treaty practice of the Secretary-General were prepared under his guidance. He also initiated the UN treaty training programme as part of an outreach programme for familiarising countries with the UN treaty collection. He also initiated the UN Treaty Event, now held during the General Assembly, which has become a regular feature of the UN calendar. Given his proactive approach to UN management reform, he was assigned to the results based budgeting spearhead group and to a range of other groups working on Secretariat reform. He was the leader of the UN legal delegation to North Korea at the invitation of the DPRK Government in 2005.

Australia

Prior to joining the UN, Dr Kohona was with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia. His last position there was as head of the Trade and Investment Section of the Department. In 1989 he was posted to the Australian Permanent Mission in Geneva with responsibility for environmental issues. In Geneva he chaired the negotiating group that developed the compliance mechanism under the Montreal Protocol to the Convention on the Ozone Layer and was a member of the Working Group on the liability mechanism under the Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes. In 1988 Kohona led the Australian delegation to the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board. He represented Australia on a range of bilateral issues, including aviation, trade, investment protection, fisheries and environment issues.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0778081214 at the Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology, 407 Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7.