

Beauty of cultural diversity

Sri Lanka is a country of many races and religions, observing many different cultural practices. If a tiny island like ours was home to such cultural diversity, imagine the wide variety and diversity that must be prevalent in many countries!

The time is opportune for us to celebrate this variety of cultural differences in our island as well as in the world in view of 2010 being the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

Many events related to inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace including a high-level dialogue and/or informal interactive hearings with civil society have been organised in connection with the event. The main activities will be spearheaded by UNESCO, the lead agency for the event which has over 60 years of experience working for advancing "the mutual knowledge and understanding of people". It will put its plans into action through the areas of education, science, culture and communication.

In its diversity, culture holds value for development, social cohesion and peace. Cultural diversity is a driving force of develop-

ment, not only with regard to economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. Therefore, it's an indispensable asset for poverty reduction and the achievement of sustainable development.

At the same time, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity - in particular through innovative use of the media and ICTs - are required for dialogue among civilisations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding. Recognising this, the UN General Assembly encouraged its member states to consider initiatives that identify areas for practical action at all levels of society to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, tolerance, understanding and cooperation. It also encouraged the promotion of dialogue among media from all cultures and civilisations.

UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, in her special message for the International Year said, "Cultures encompass not only art and literature, but also lifestyles, value systems, traditions and beliefs. In this globalising world, marked by increasingly rapid exchanges and greater



complexity, the protection and promotion of this rich diversity present numerous challenges.

"Though culture is not included among the Millennium Development Goals in its own right, the links between culture and development are so strong that development cannot dispense with culture. The objective of this

International Year is to help dissipate any confusion stemming from ignorance, prejudice and exclusion that create tension, insecurity, violence and conflict. The task will be, in campaigning for dialogue and mutual knowledge, to foster respect for each other's culture and break down the barriers between different cultures. Exchange and dialogue be-

tween cultures are the best tools for building peace." Accordingly, action will be taken in the following areas:

Promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity;

Building a framework for commonly shared values;

Strengthening quality education and inter-cultural competences;

Fostering dialogue for sustainable development. A poster competition to promote better communication and understanding between all peoples and cultures is one of the main events UNESCO has organised in connection with the Year. The competition will select 50 posters to be displayed in the UNESCO website. Thirty of these will be printed for an exhibition

to be held at the UNESCO Headquarters in May in the framework of the UNESCO International Festival of Cultural Diversity. The declaration of 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures was made by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2007. It is the culmination of the International Decade for Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World which spanned from 2001 to 2010, and is the starting point for new strategies. It has as its goal the demonstration of benefits of cultural diversity by acknowledging the importance of constant transfers and exchanges between cultures and the ties formed between them since the dawn of humanity.

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Queer patterns!

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When we observe the behavioural pattern of some creatures in and around our home garden, we can learn many hidden aspects of their lifestyles. For instance the system followed by the deaf and slow-moving creatures, tree snails or 'Veda-Gotubellas' in connection for their security is marvellous.

During the day tree snails hang themselves on branchless tree trunks such as arecanut or undercover of plantain leaves.

They do so mainly to avoid being caught by the partridge or 'Etikukula'. On the other hand this early morning cackling wild fowls favourite dish is the boneless flesh of tree snails.

These slow-moving innocent creatures hide themselves throughout the daytime in secure places and climb down to the ground at night in search of food.

A partridge waiting for its prey



The snails cling on to the trunk of an arecanut tree to avoid being caught by the partridge.

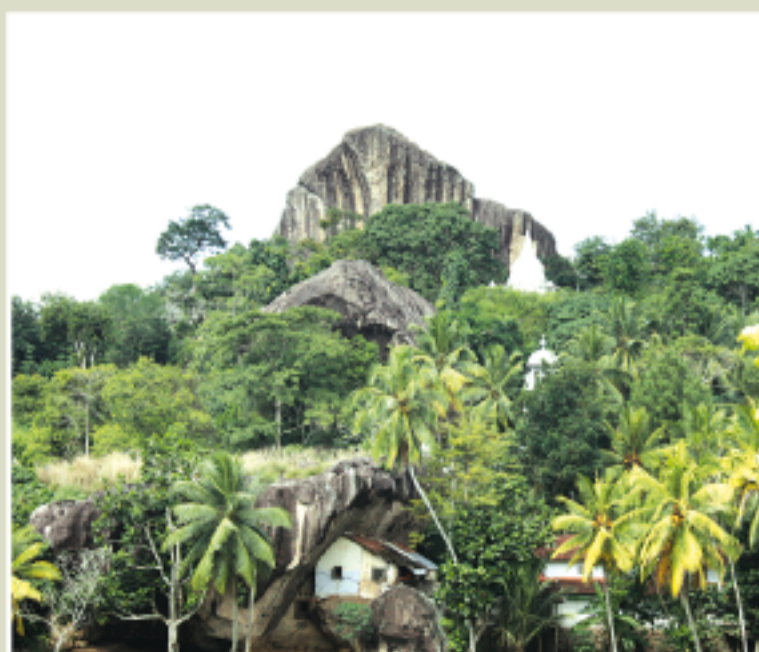
Partridge or 'Etikukula'.

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Pic: Gihan Pieris