

A club with a mission

Where have you seen a galaxy of speakers of various disciplines discussing for example the forbidden subject of private channelled practice or bringing three protagonists and competitors (at the time) in the LPG industry – Shell Gas, Laugfs and Mundo Gas, and hold your breath – astrologer Piyasena Rathuvithana – who predicted some frightening (possibly end-of-the-world) moments in 2012?

The Sunday Times Business Club (STBC) of course! Of the three products, only Laugfs has survived while Shell was bought over by the government and is now marketed as Litro Gas. Mundo wound up some years back.

The club, now in its 17th year, has seen a galaxy of speakers of the calibre of Sarath Amunugama, Chandra Jayaratne, Ajith Nivard Cabraal, Rienze Wijetilake, Ken Balendra, Malik Fernando, Hans Wijayasuriya, Hiran Cooray, Kishu Gomes, among others who discuss a range of national, economic and social issues.

The club has been a wonderful meeting place for young professionals to interact and network and this year came a full circle in terms of its lead sponsor.

Recalls Priyal Perera, a founder member of the club in 1995, "our first sponsor was Celltel". Celltel went on to become Tigo and then the brand changed to Etisalat.

The company recently tied up in a fully fledged sponsorship contract with the Business Club, returning to its roots in one of the first sponsorship contracts with a business club.

Perera, now a veteran human resource specialist reflecting on those early days of the club, said:

"We saw this advertisement in the Sunday Times inviting young people to join a new club and some 150 people assembled at the Taj Samudra. Here a

Celltel representative explained the focus and the objectives of networking, interaction, expanding one's knowledge and awareness on professional issues.

Each participant was given an umbrella by the company. "Do you still have it?" "You must be joking... it went with the wind," Perera laughed. Within three months of the inaugural meeting, a committee was formed and the rest is history.

For over a year (2000/01) the club was inactive until being revived in 2002. Romesha Senerath, another founder member along with current President M.R.A. Hakeem, led the revival of the club and became its President at the revival meeting on July 22, 2002. The activities of the club not only increased but the calibre of speakers also improved. There have been panel discussions and heated argument over current issues -- all finally cooled down with a chilled glass of beer!

A key element of the club has been its focus on social responsibility, taking on many small projects over the years to help in needy causes while families joined when the annual year-end party was held or annual outing took place. One of the high points of the club has been a collaborative effect with CIMA to reward companies that have excelled in the field of community leadership. For two years running the CIMA/Sunday Times Community Leader awards were presented in the fields of waste management and recognizing private sector initiatives in the field of education.

The club has had its own highs and lows and found its feet at many venues – starting off at the Taj Samudra, moving to the Galadari, Hilton, onto the TransAsia, Cinnamon Grand and then coming home to the Taj, the club's host hotel. Hameedia is the co-sponsor of the club.

cance, and using the forum to vent their grievances and express an opinion.

As we join the Sunday Times in embarking on another 25 years as watchdog of the people, the business desk looks forward to serving the community as best as we can: promoting an honest private sector enhanced by transparency and accountability and serving the community sincerely and honestly!

A day after scores of respondents to a Business Times poll urged NSB Chairman Pradeepa Kariyawasam to quit for his alleged role in the sordid deal, the latter on Monday, May 22, resigned after defying calls for two weeks from trade unions to quit.

The BT email polls have become an integral part of our readers and the public at large, responding to issues of national, social and economic signifi-



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