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## Happy New Year to all our readers

(SundayTimes.lk) - The Sinhala and Tamil New Year or the Aluth Avuruddha goes deep into the roots of Lankan history. With astronomy and astrology tied to rituals that touched the lives of Lankans, the Aluth Avuruddha has survived. And withstanding foreign conquests, it has emerged as Sri Lanka's premier national festival. According to anthropologists, the Aluth Avuruddha



**Making Aasmi:**  
A delicacy on the Sinhala New Year table

has its origins in the "kamatha" - the threshing floor in the paddy field where took place the joyful celebration of the Maha harvest. The Maha harvest was the outcome of the laborious work in the paddy field which provided people their staple food. The Aluth Avuruddha therefore, is a reflection of a well organized, vibrant agrarian society that once existed. Our ancestors may have been craftsmen, rulers, administrators or ingenious engineers who built giant reservoirs, amazing irrigation canals and the largest dagobas on earth.

Yet, they were all essentially paddy cultivators. With their harvest season happily coinciding with the completion of the sun's journey, they began the New Year when the sun from the twelfth zodiac sign of Pisces moved to Aries - the first zodiac sign.

To commence the New Year in accordance with astrological directions, they chose rituals that affect their daily lives. And these rituals, which over the years gained mass participation, took root and have now been practised for several thousands of years.

And being an event of merriment, their joy made way for many Avurudhu games to take shape. "Olinda keliya", "pancha dameema", "daan adeema" were essentially indoor games while the giggling damsels found fun swinging in the "onchillawa". Group games were part of the Aluth Avurudhu Ulela or Sanakeliya, held once again on the paddy field which served as a play field till the next season of paddy cultivation began.

The present generation, rural or urban, may not be as familiar with the fun and frolic and the gaiety associated with the Avuruddha, unless these come alive at places of work or are sponsored by commercial outfits. We however, find Avurudhu rituals and traditions being practised in homes as vigorously as was in the past and the Aluth Avuruddha, an authentic folk celebration, inherited from our earliest ancestors, is being continued. Robert Knox called the Aluth Avuruddha, the greatest feast of the Sinhala race in his "An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon." Describing the historical scenario of the peasants of the Kandyan kingdom in the 1660s he wrote: Men who had been toiling in the fields had brought

the paddy home from the Maha cultivation. It was thereafter the turn of the womenfolk to pound the paddy, winnow and have the rice ready for the array of preparations to be made from kiribath, the festive meal to the making of numerous "avurudhu keவில்".

During the days of the Kandyan kingdom, the Sinhala and the Nayakkara kings observed New Year customs and led the anointing of nanu, an act which displayed the patronage of kings in the observation of Avurudhu rituals. Eminent writer Martin Wickremasinghe (1890-1978) sees the Aluth Avuruddha as the ideal



**Kolam:** A custom associated with Hindu New Year celebrations

occasion to bring about national harmony. In an article he wrote on "How the Aluth Avuruddha became the National Festival" to Rasavahini in 1970, he had stated that the Avuruddha should be celebrated by the Sinhalese, Tamils and the Muslims unitedly and should be an event that infuses a nationalistic ethos.

Very socialistic in his views he had besides

pointed out that the avurudhu celebration is a great leveller as it had no class distinction. Within the household, the family as well as all those who served in the household or in the paddy field celebrated the Aluth Avuruddha together.

"They all stood around the festive table or sat around the festive mat when they partook of the festive meal and observed the rituals. The Chief householder fed kiribath to those who served them at the same time he did his family members." Once the feast was over, it was the turn of the younger members to offer betel leaves to the elders and worship them, going down on their knees. Showing respect to elders was a hallmark of Lankan culture. This followed transactions or "ganu denu" after which the younger members proceeded to play avurudhu games. The anointing ceremony was the last ritual that took place before setting out to work.

Wickremasinghe's celebrated "Gam Peraliya" takes you back to a scenario of the early 20th century which shows as to how people of the deep south celebrated the Avuruddha, the customs they followed, games they played and sweetmeats they savoured - indeed a wealth of cultural information for those interested to learn as to how the Aluth Avuruddha was celebrated 200 years ago.

### Sri Lanka give ultimatum to sloppy fielders

by Rex Clementine

(Island.lk) - They didn't quite use the words Disce aut Discede, but Sri Lankan cricket bigwigs have given an ultimatum to the members of the national cricket



Cricket Manager of the national team Asanka Gurusinha chats to Chairman of Selectors Sanath Jayasuriya and captain Upul Tharanga ahead of the second T-20 International against Bangladesh at RPS.

team that sloppy fielding will no longer be tolerated. The hard hitting message was conveyed at the tail-end of the disastrous bilateral series against Bangladesh.

The national cricket team was unofficially ranked as the worst fielding unit in the world after poor catching cost them dearly in the second Test against the tourists at P. Sara Oval. Although initially the authorities distanced themselves from the tag as world's worst fielding side, they couldn't run away from reality. The first ODI at Dambulla was a case in point where Sri Lanka were beaten by 90 runs. The current Sri Lankan team has at least six sloppy fielders in their rank and not a single player, who could be ranked world class, a far cry from the glory days when Sri Lanka were one of the best fielding units in the world alongside South Africa.

There was a passionate effort to put fielding right after the humiliating defeat at Dambulla, but what Sri Lanka lack is consistency to search for excellence in this vital discipline. When Sri Lanka set Bangladesh a target of 281 to win the third ODI and the series at SSC, someone said that the target was actually 241. The joke being that when a team plays against Sri Lanka they start their innings with 40 runs assured as that's the approximate amount the Sri Lankans give away due to their sloppy fielding.

"We have already put some plans for the players when it comes to fielding. Although the Provincial Tournament (one-dayers) is starting on the 9th of April, we

want certain things to happen with regards to fitness and fielding," the national cricket team's Cricket Manager Asanka Gurusinha told journalists after Sri Lanka were thrashed by 45 runs in the second T-20 International at RPS Thursday night.

"The Chairman of Selectors, the Trainer and myself we are looking at certain things. There was a clear message from Chairman of Selectors and myself. We are not going to select players simply because they have scored heavily in domestic cricket. They need to achieve certain standards in fielding. When the Provincial Tournament finishes, we will start training from 2nd of May. We have to select the Champions Trophy side by 25th of April. So from 2nd of May we have time till 17th of May before we go and we will have training sessions which are specific with fielding," Gurusinha added. There were also questions asked as to why SLC's fielding expert, former South Africa international Nic Pothas wasn't used to fine tune the team's fielding skills during the last four weeks. "We have discussed that. Next week or so we will finalize our support staff to England and beyond. I have heard about Nic Pothas and we want the best support staff to go to England with us and beyond,"

Gurusinha said.

In the last five years, Jayasuriya has been the Chairman of Selectors for four years and you often wonder, what it took him so long to put his foot down and demand more commitment to fielding. Better late than never. Gurusinha and Jayasuriya have talked the talk and now it's time for them to walk the walk.



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