

Thursday, December 20th 2018

Dear Mustafa,

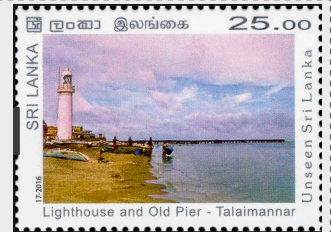
One of my grandparents' favourite travel destinations, was Ceylon, modern day Sri Lanka, and I have just returned from a wonderful week there.

The Portuguese, in some inexplicable game of 'Chinese whispers' called the island 'Ceilao'. From there it was a relatively simple matter to arrive at 'Ceylan' under the Dutch and finally 'Ceylon' under the British.

But perhaps the Arab traders name for the island is most apropos - 'Serendip' - and this is actually where the word serendipity comes from. In this way Sri Lanka becomes the island of unexpected discovery and delight, and I can attest to this, for on one day we drove 100 miles from a tropical beach to arrive at a cold and windy hill station surrounded by tea bushes.

The tea plantation that we visited is known as Lipton's Seat as it was from here that the Scottish tea baron, Sir Thomas Lipton, would survey his vast real estate. It all felt very much like home, tea, cake and changeable weather! Even Sri-Lanka's current politics has a British resonance. In short, the Sri Lankan President had removed the elected Prime Minister, put in his place an unelected (and very controversial) rival; Parliament was

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dissolved and no one knew who was running the country. The voters were factionalised, angry; the tourist economy seized up. Ultimately the courts had been given the final say in the outcome. Sound familiar?

At least on the day we left the judges reinstated the old Prime Minister and the people got on with repairing their lives and businesses....but at this point, for our two island nations of tea drinkers, the similarity ends.

This visit has clarified a few things for me:

1. A split electorate will need its courts to break a deadlock.
2. A weary populace needs stability not demagoguery.
3. Island nations need to trade. For Sri Lanka it is tea and for the UK it is managing the world's payment systems.

Let's look forward to a UK resolution in 2019 and, until then, as they say in Sri Lanka, "Ayubowan".

See you after Christmas - Chris