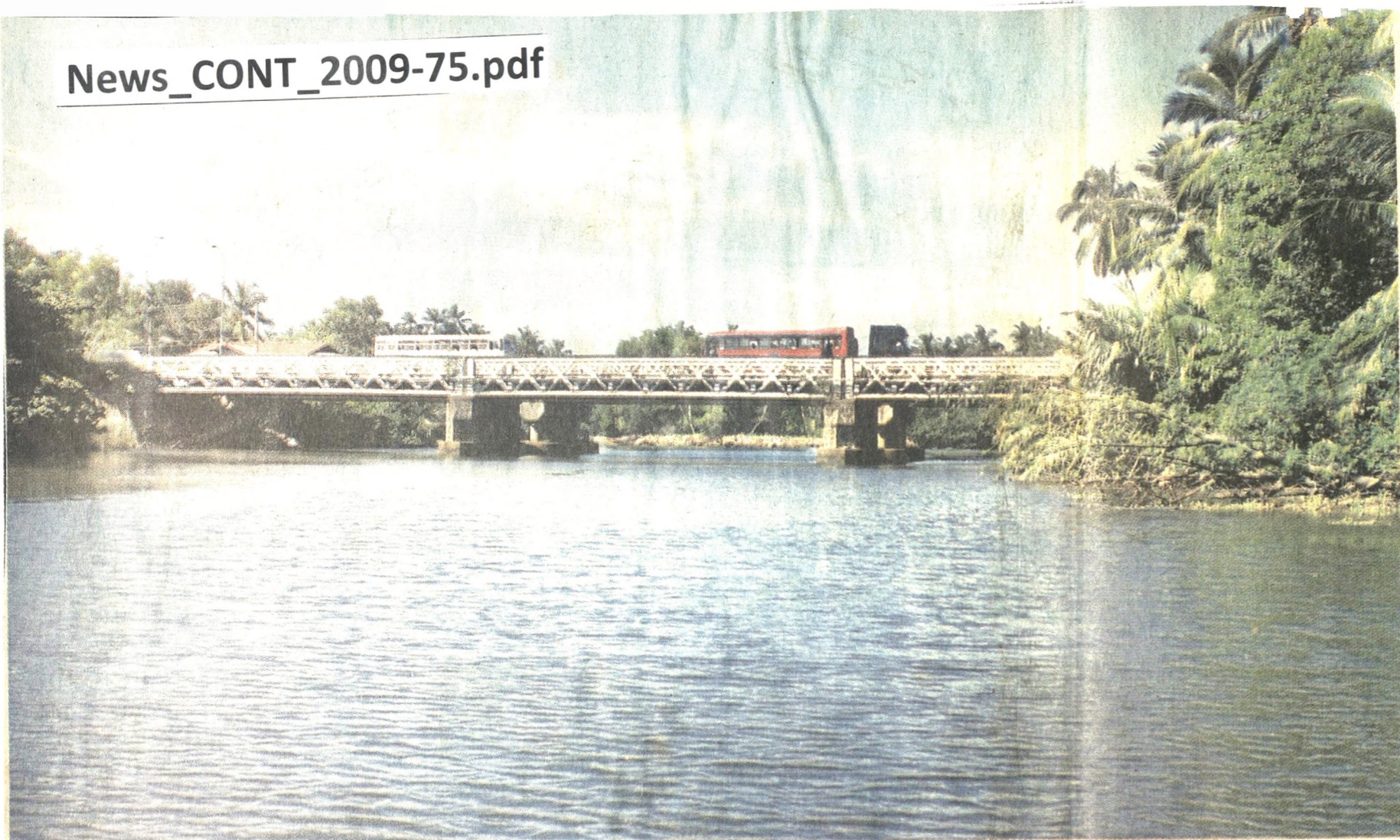




The bridge on the Hamilton canal

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Hamilton canal

a Dutch creation

Text and pictures
GANGA PRADEEPA

The arrival of Dutch apparently have had a somewhat distasteful influence in Sri Lanka's history. Our freedom, culture and unity had been affected. Despite these observations there are those who believe that benefits have come this country's way due to the arrival of the Dutch settlers. One such is the Dutch canal.

For the Portuguese and Dutch colonial rulers, Negombo was an ideal collection point and export harbour for cinnamon. Inland, and parallel to the coast, they built a canal from Kelani Ganga to the lagoon in Negombo (called the Hamilton Canal or Dutch Canal) and then continued it northwards to the lagoon at Puttalam.

This 100 kilometre waterway not only provided access to the cinnamon gardens, but also meant that shipping was not affected by the weather during the southwest monsoon period.

Before the Dutch, Portuguese and English came to



The Dutch canal

rule we had a great irrigation system indeed which was unmatched and far more advanced than theirs. Compared to 1000 km of magnificent 12th century irrigation canals (renovated and in service to date) leading out of inland seas like rainwater reservoirs (The Sea of Parakrama - 2100 ha) built in the 12th century by the Sinhalese, Dutch canals fade away into insignificance.

The Dutch wanted to provide both easy and cheap transport of goods from out-

lying areas to their ports. In Negombo the Dutch (17th century) found a way to reveal their love for canals. It was by way of these



The river mouth at Kammal Thotupala

On a recent visit, I reached the river mouth at sunrise which is called Kammal Thotupala. Apart from two Sri Lankans with their child, I met many foreigners during a three hour journey

from the interior to the Negombo harbour. Through this canal Dutch people transported our valuable resources to their countries easily.

The Hamilton canal is the perfect evidence those countries such as China, Burma, Rome and Greece traded with the rulers of our country at that time. The purpose of the original waterways was to transport the export produce to seafaring ships leaving from the port of Negombo; the cargoes con-

sisting of precious stones, pearls and spices, cloves, cardamoms, pepper and above all, cinnamon.

On a recent visit, I reached the river mouth at sunrise which is called Kammal Thotupala.

Apart from two Sri Lankans with their child, I met many foreigners during a three hour journey.

After a few minutes we passed Maha Oya and came to Hamilton canal.

Then again we entered the Gin Oya through the Hamilton canal and we passed hotels such as Ranweli and Club Dolphin.

"Four to six people can go on this boat. The foreigners who visit Negombo enjoy this Hamilton canal ride but sadly only a minimum number of Sri Lankans enjoy this boat safari," said the boatman, Sarath Nishshanka.

Through the green branches I was lucky to see different varieties of birds such as Little Herons, Egrets, White-throated kingfisher, Common kingfisher, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Paradise Flycatcher, Barbet and monitors, green garden chameleon...