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The Three Wonderful Sisters (Then and now)

Your edition of the 23rd April carried a tribute to the Railway's Ruhunu Kumari, Udarata Menike and the Yaldevi which completed 50 years of service to the travelling public.

It was Mr. B. D. Rampala, whose tenure of office as General Manager could be termed as the golden era of the Railway Department. He inaugurated the three express services which were a boon to the travelling public.

The trains could be identified by their blue and silver painting, with their names boldly painted across the length of the carriages in all three languages. Canadian locomotives gifted under the Colombo Plan aid scheme powered the trains. The locomotives which carried the names of the Canadian states such as Nova Scotia, New

Brunswick and Manitoba, some of which are still on the rails, bring nostalgic memories to those who travelled in the "Silver lined expresses" drawn by them. It was a pity that one such locomotive was damaged beyond repair on the day of the Tsunami.

The trains when they berthed on the platforms to commence their journeys were on time, well cleaned, and the crews could be easily identified as they were impeccably attired in their uniforms. There were hygienic cafeterias on all trains.

It was told that those living close to the railway line would always know the exact time as the trains always ran to schedule and delays were very rare. The General Manager saw into the running charts of all trains the previ-

ous day and the silver lined expresses in particular, and the crews had to give comprehensive explanations for any delays.

The Three Wonderful Sisters if they could harmonize will join in singing. Irving Berlin's "Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay" and bemoan with the travelling public to see the abyss to which they have fallen, as trains are frequently cancelled and do not run to time. A spate of derailments occurred. Compartments are in a state of neglect and carry merchandise inside toilets under the eyes of the security officers. The Yal Devi which originally ran up to Kankesanthurai now plies only a part of its original journey.

- Merril T. M. de Silva

Important personalities behind the scene

Reading through the article about the inaugural trips of the three fast expresses, I find the writer has omitted a very important bit of information regarding the person who was responsible for this.

It was none other than the late Bamunu Arachchige Don Rampala, the illustrious General Manager Railways of the time. Mr. Rampala who became the General Manager in 1952 was a very capable man and lost no time in introducing diesel engines in place of the slower coal fired engines. It was on his initiative that the government imported the M 1 and M 2 locomotives from Canada, and this led to the running of these fast expresses. Encouraged by the performance of the Yal Devi, Ruhunu Kumari and the Udarata Menike, Mr. Rampala did a trial run from Colombo Fort to Nanu Oya, with a double Hitachi power set unit in August 1959. Together with engineers from Hitachi, Mr. Rampala and his engineers did a run from Colombo Fort to Nanu Oya and being satisfied with the performance,

Mr. Rampala introduced the Podi Menika. This train did a run to Nanu Oya and back. Later on diesel locomotives replaced the power set units.

This article would not be complete without referring to the intercity expresses which were introduced by a later G.M.R. Mr. G. P. S. Weerasuriya. This writer was on the four wheeled motor trolley in which Mr. Weerasuriya travelled along with his assistant Mr. W. H. Jayasinghe, for the purpose of timing the intercity. This express train ran from Colombo Fort to Kandy and returned the same day, in the afternoon. Another express that was introduced was the Viceroy Special. The late Mr. Anandattissa de Alwis who was the Minister of State at the time in 1978, was approached by Mr. Hemasiri Fernando, Sri Lanka's own Olympic committee representative and who had a tourist agency, with a request for steam locomotive powered engine and carriages for the purpose of running a train exclusively for the benefit of foreign tourists. The car-

riages had to be old ones of the Colonial era. These were personally selected by Mr. Fernando and repaired at the Maligawatte Railway workshops. Since the steam loco needed a lot of water, the Railway Department had the overhead water tanks repaired and put to use. Mr. Weerasuriya G.M.R., at the time headed a committee consisting of the heads of sub-departments, to finalise arrangements for the inaugural run, which if I remember right was in August 1982. With a certain amount of nostalgia I recall the moment of departure of the first trip from Colombo Fort. There were two Sri Lankan Navy Bag-Pipers marching up and down the length of the Viceroy Special stabled on No. One platform at For Station, and playing a soul stirring tune to the delight of a vast crowd of onlookers, and Mr. Weerasuriya flagging off the train. This was indeed another milestone in the history of the Sri Lankan Railway.

- George F. Silva