

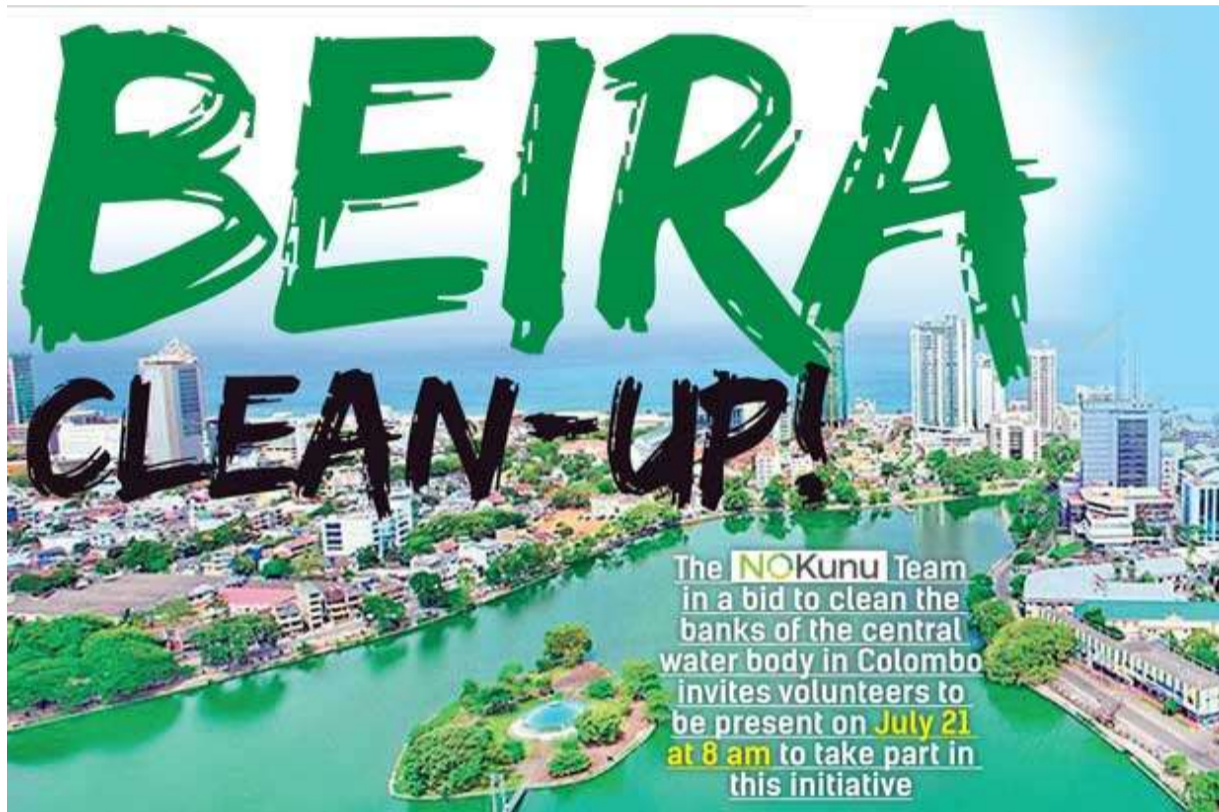
Beira clean-up !

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- The 12 km stretch of Beira banks will be divided into 500 metre slots and cleaned in groups, together with the CMC and experts from Abans and Carekleen.
- Volunteers are expected to bring with them personal safety items such as gloves.
- No volunteers will be permitted to clean the water of the lake. The drainage division of CMC, the Navy, Ports Authority and SLRDC will continue to clean the waters of Beira.



Colombo's iconic Beira Lake has long provided travellers and locals alike, a moment's refuge away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Although tranquil at sight, the central water body is also known for its seasonal stench. The putrescent green waters paired with the littered banks constantly remind passers by, that disposal of garbage is still a problem encountered by this rapidly developing city.

The Guardians of the City: The No Kunu Team is preparing to help rid Beira Lake of the mounting litter on its banks. Founder of the No Kunu Initiative, Retired Engineer and activist for sustainable solutions, Sumi Moonesinghe spoke to the on why such constant efforts are the need of the hour.



CMC performance impressive

The No Kunu Initiative began with the team visiting slums and the tenements of the city of Colombo, where they taught the ordinary city dwellers to segregate their garbage. "As you know, the Kerawalapitiya garbage disposal site will not accept any unsegregated waste. The Colombo Municipal Council only collects segregated waste. Clear and precise notices have been displayed to inform residents of when the garbage trucks arrive to collect which type of the garbage. The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) has therefore done a commendable job. Come rain, sunshine or even floods, they have continued to collect garbage while maintaining the city's cleanliness," Moonesinghe said.

She believes however that such efforts are often disregarded. "This is a thankless job. Nobody appreciates what they are doing for the city. People only complain of garbage dumps and lament that the city is unclean," she said. However, it is no secret that a handful of short-sighted individuals in the community are littering the streets with bags of unsegregated garbage. "I suspect that such people have the luxuries of travelling by vehicles, but still opt to dump their garbage on the streets away from their home. In fact we have footage of a lady who issues parking tickets in Colombo speaking of what she has witnessed. As she is regularly on street duty, she has seen a number of people travelling in vehicles, throwing bags of garbage on to the road and taking off. Unfortunately we don't have a system of fining, or any other deterrent to stop people from doing this!" she said.

The No Kunu Team's initial efforts were no mean feat. The team decided to start with the tenements as they felt that this group were in need of their assistance. "We started by giving residents of these areas a bucket with the lid and handle along with a polysac bag to segregate the garbage. Food waste goes into one and the other one takes the recyclable garbage," Moonesinghe detailed. "This effort has been very successful as we have already covered about 2,000 shanties. We have covered many areas including Layards Broadway, Wanathamulla and Vithanage mw just to name a few," she said.

Gradual effort

On World Environment Day which fell on June 5, the No Kunu Team with the support of the CMC and the Chief Incumbent of the Gangarama Temple Ven. Galaboda Gnanissara thera, cleaned Muttiah Park in Slave Island. This was shortly after a trial run polythene bag-free shopping experience at the Staple Street Cargills Food City outlet. Moonesinghe notes that all three major supermarket chains in the country, including Cargills, Keells and Arpico, are working towards providing customers with a polythene-free shopping experience at their respective outlets island-wide.

To accelerate this process, the No Kunu Team has also started issuing an eco-friendly reusable cloth bag to residents of Colombo's tenements. The green bag which comes with a convenient pouch fold is easily fitted into a pocket or bag. The Team advises never to leave home without it. "Our team has already called upon all FMCG companies to consider giving a free cloth bag through their promotional activities. We have also called upon the telecommunication companies, banks, utility services etc. to switch to electronic statements and billing. This way we save paper which adds to garbage," explained the founder of the initiative. She added that corporates were also urged to suspend the printing of calendars and diaries and invest in more eco-friendly solutions. "We have reached out to the entire country through these companies and their branch networks. If they all respond to the No Kunu Team's requests, it would be the start of a very successful movement to rid Sri Lanka of garbage," she added.

- **Sangakkara volunteered to do a video clip calling upon all citizens to take the No Kunu pledge and to keep our country clean**

The No Kunu Initiative relies heavily on social media to raise awareness for this cause. The project shot to public attention following a viral video featuring Sri Lanka's beloved cricket icon Kumar Sangakkara urging Sri Lankans to keep Sri Lanka clean.



"Sangakkara volunteered to do a video clip calling upon all citizens to take the No Kunu pledge and to keep our country clean. This is a very powerful message which helped us gain much attention," Moonesinghe said. It was however not a single-handed effort according to the founder. "There were many people who helped the No Kunu Team to get this video done, from the storyboard, recording and until the final production. We are very grateful to all those who helped us to get Sangakkara aboard on this project and to take the message to our citizens across Sri Lanka," she said.

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The littered banks of Beira (L) are already being cleaned by the the No Kunu Team prior to the July 21 project

Cleaning up Beira

Even with rising awareness and encouraging responses, the No Kunu Team's mission is far from complete.

The team will come together once again to clean the banks of Beira Lake on July 21.

The 11.2 km Beira lake has been divided into half kilometre stretches or blocks for this purpose. A list of corporates, schools and other stakeholders have been prepared to take up the task. "We are calling upon all these institutions to respond to our call to volunteer and clean the perimeter of their premises on the banks of Beira," Moonesinghe explained.

Asked of the feedback regarding this project, Moonesinghe beamed that the response has been tremendous. "The Beira Lake cleaning project has been announced on No Kunu Facebook page. Various organisations from all around the country have joined hands with us to volunteer on that day," she said.

The Beira Lake is owned by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority while only the Navy and the Sri Lanka Land Reclamation and Development Corporation (SLRDC) are the only authorities permitted to clean the waters of the Beira lake. Moonesinghe revealed that the regular cleaning of the water body is a costly exercise.



Volunteers are kindly requested to wear appropriate clothing as suggested in the above image and bring with them personal safety items such as gloves

“Many parts of Colombo are owned and maintained by various institutions and their responsibilities are bifurcated. For instance the beautiful arcade at Torrington square and the walking track are owned and maintained by the Urban Development Authority (UDA), while the Galle Face Green is owned and maintained by the Ports Authority. Meanwhile there are many Government owned low cost housing schemes under the UDA and National Housing Development Authority. Because of this bifurcated nature in responsibilities, it is imperative for one person to co-ordinate this operation,” said Moonesinghe explaining the need for a figure of authority in steering the project forward. “This need led to our decision to request the Ven. Galaboda Gnanissara Thera (fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo of Gangaramaya Temple) to oversee co-ordination of this project. Podi Hamuduruwo has lived on the banks of the Beira during the past 60 years, hence he is the most suited to steer this project,” she explained.

A meeting chaired by Ven. Galaboda Gnanissara Thera to discuss the cleaning of the waters of Beira and led by the Navy Commander is scheduled to be held at the temple premises on July 5.

“We’re launching this campaign from the Seema Malaka at 8 am on July 21 with Podi Hamuduruwo, the Mayor Rosy Senanayake, Navy Commander, Chairman of the Ports Authority together with many more government officials and volunteers. The CMC teams will arrive at their designated stations within the 500 metre stretches at 8 am and assist the clean up operation by the residents,” Moonesinghe said.

This need led to our decision to request the Ven. Galaboda Gnanissara Thera (fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo of Gangaramaya Temple) to oversee coordination of this project. Podi Hamuduruwo has lived on the banks of the Beira during the past 60 years

The founder of the No Kunu Initiative did not hesitate to add that garbage and it’s proper disposal were a responsibility of every citizen in the country, including corporates. “What we expect from the corporates is for them to come forward with volunteers on this day to clean the banks. Come with large polysacs, rakes, mammoties, wheel barrows etc. to clean up the perimeter of your respective premises. ” she urged.

The No Kunu Team calls upon the Ministry of Finance and Mass Media, the Department of Inland Revenue, the National Housing Development Authority, the People’s Bank branches on Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha and Kew Road, The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, the Ministry of Transport, Sri Lanka Railways, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the State Trading Corporation, the Air Force, Army Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Regiment, the Ports Authority, State Engineering Corporation and Bank of Ceylon to participate in this massive people’s initiative of cleaning the banks of The Beira Lake.



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