30th October 2026

CEREMONIAL SITTING TO WELCOME HER LADYSHIP LAKMALI KARUNANAYAKE, PC, HIS LORDSHIP NAWARATHNE MARASINGHE AND HIS LORDSHIP MANJULA TILAKARATNE TO THE COURT OF APPEAL

My Lord Justice Rohantha Abeysuriya, PC, President of the Court of Appeal, The Attorney General, Your Ladyship Justice Lakmali Karunanayake, PC, Your Lordship Justice Nawarathne Marasinghe and Your Lordship Justice Manjula Tilakaratne, Your Lordships, the Justices of the Court of Appeal, Learned President's Counsel and Learned Senior Instructing Attorneys, Honourable Judges of the High Court, District Court and Magistrates' Courts, Registrar of the Court of Appeal, Colleagues at the Bar,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather this morning to welcome Justice Lakmali Karunanayake, PC, Justice Nawarathne Marasinghe and Justice Manjula Tilakaratne as Judges of the Court of Appeal, the penultimate Court of jurisdiction in our Republic.

In keeping with longstanding tradition, allow me to supplement to the introduction of our three new Justices.

Her Ladyship Justice Lakmali Karunanayake, PC was educated at St. Bridget's Convent, Colombo, where she participated in music, drama and literary competitions.

Your Ladyship obtained First Class Honours at the Final Examination of Sri Lanka Law College and was admitted to the Bar in 1997, having trained under Justice Ranjith Dheeraratne and Justice Shirani Thilakawardane, and at the Attorney General's Department.

Joining the Attorney General's Department in 1998, she rose through its ranks to become Additional Solicitor General in February 2025, and took silk in November 2025.

Over twenty-five years, she prosecuted serious criminal cases, supervised child abuse prosecutions in the Uva Province, and appeared before the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.

Your Ladyship's academic achievements include a Diploma in Transitional Justice and Human Rights from Cape Town and a Master of Laws in Public International Law from the University of Colombo.

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She represented the Attorney General before the Udulagama Commission investigating serious human rights violations.

Justice Karunanayake has been particularly committed to combating human trafficking. She served on the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, contributed to police training and helped develop procedures for identifying and protecting victims, especially children.

Your Ladyship has trained prosecutors, police officers, immigration officials and diplomats on trafficking, fair trial rights and criminal procedure. Her scholarship includes a UN published article on trafficking and a co-authored work on criminal trial procedure.

Your Ladyship's international engagements have taken Your Ladyship to Geneva, Vienna, New Delhi and numerous other cities. As recently as October 2025, she represented Sri Lanka at the United Nations Working Group on Migrant Smuggling in Vienna.

We warmly welcome Your Ladyship Justice Lakmali Karunanayake, PC, to the Court of Appeal.

His Lordship Justice Nawarathne Marasinghe was born the youngest in a family which did not have background in the legal profession, in Sapugaha Ulpatha Ihala Kotawera, Welimada, in the Badulla District.

Educated at Yahala Arawa Maha Vidyalaya and Welimada Central College, he captained the debating team and won national honours in oratory and painting.

Your Ladyship graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, in 1995, where he also distinguished himself in Kandyan dancing, and was admitted to the Bar in 1997, having apprenticed under Mr. Neville Abeyaratne, PC, and Mr. Jayatissa de Costa, PC.

Justice Marasinghe holds postgraduate qualifications in forensic medicine, intellectual property and public international law.

From 2009 to 2011, he served as a Senior Prosecutor at the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption and was admitted as a Barrister and Solicitor in Fiji.

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Your Lordship subsequently received the prestigious Fulbright–Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship, studying international criminal law and human rights at the University of Minnesota, where he also received a Community Service Award.

Justice Marasinghe is presently reading for his PhD at the University of Colombo, researching the rights of rape victims in trial proceedings. We are both in the same PhD batch, and I hope we will somehow find the time to complete our respective PhDs soon.

Justice Marasinghe won the Gold Medal at the BASL Millennium Legal Writing Competition in 2000 and has contributed extensively to medico-legal scholarship, particularly concerning child abuse, torture and sexual violence. He was also the youngest speaker at the 12th Commonwealth Lawyers Conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Justice Marasinghe is fluent in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Between 2015 and 2018, while serving in Kalmunai and Batticaloa, he conducted High Court proceedings entirely in Tamil, enabling litigants to participate in proceedings in their own language.

This rare linguistic versatility reflects his commitment to making justice accessible to all communities.

He also undertook one of the most demanding judicial responsibilities in recent times, presiding over the Trial-at-Bar concerning the Easter Sunday attacks.

Justice Marasinghe is also a longstanding friend of the Bar. For many years he performed traditional Kandyan dance at our Neethiranga cultural evenings, and last appeared in the BASL theatrical production Kerella, alongside our present Secretary, Mr. Nalin de Silva.

We warmly welcome Your Lordship Justice Nawarathne Marasinghe to the Court of Appeal.

His Lordship Justice Manjula Tilakaratne was educated at Royal College and Sri Lanka Law College, winning the Gold Medal in the G.L.M. de Silva Address to the Jury Competition in 1994.

Your Lordship apprenticed under Mr. R.I. Obeyesekere, PC, and served as State Counsel in the Attorney General's Department from 1997 to 2000.

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Entering the Judiciary in January 2000, Justice Tilakaratne served for sixteen years as Magistrate and District Judge in several parts of the country.

Your Lordship served as Secretary of the Judicial Service Association in 2009, and subsequently joined the Judicial Service Commission, becoming its Secretary in May 2012.

It was during this period that his courage and commitment to judicial independence were severely tested.

In September 2012, he publicly raised concerns about interference with the Judiciary and threats to the safety of judicial officers.

On 7th October 2012, he was assaulted in broad daylight in Mount Lavinia
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Those were turbulent times for our Judiciary. Yet he did not retreat. He continued to discharge his responsibilities with courage and an unwavering commitment to judicial independence.

Those of us who value that independence owe Justice Tilakaratne a debt of gratitude.

Elevated to the High Court in January 2016, Your Lordship served in Anuradhapura, Galle and Colombo. He was Secretary of the High Court Judges' Association in 2017 and its President in 2025.

Your Lordship served on the High Courts at Bar, becoming Chairman and Presiding Judge in 2025, and was Administrative High Court Judge of Colombo until his elevation to this Court.

Justice Tilakaratne has also contributed extensively to judicial education through legal publications, lectures and training programmes, and has been a valued contributor to Bar Association programmes.

We warmly welcome Your Lordship Justice Manjula Tilakaratne to the Court of Appeal.

Your Ladyship and Your Lordships,

You assume office at a time when the demands upon our justice system are considerable. Allow me to share a reflection from last Sunday.

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I visited the New Magazine Prison at Welikada during a Legal Aid Camp organised by the Bar Association, following a request from the Prison Monitoring Board to assist persons in custody without legal representation.

The conditions I witnessed were appalling, and for many prisoners, inhumane and degrading.

Our prisons, designed for approximately 11,000 persons, now accommodate around 40,000. Nearly 30,000 are on remand, presumed innocent until proven guilty. And almost two-thirds of prisoners are held in connection with drug-related offences.

That experience reinforced the importance of due process, avoidance of delays and the presumption of innocence.

Every decision to deprive a person of liberty before trial affects a human being behind prison walls. It is a responsibility shared by Judges, lawyers and the State.

I appreciate recent efforts made by the Minister of Justice and National Integration together with the Secretary to the Ministry, towards addressing prison overcrowding, and I fervently hope that these initiatives will achieve the desired results.

Imprisonment may deprive a person of liberty, but it must never deprive them of human dignity.

Under our constitutional arrangement, the Judiciary carries the unique and onerous responsibility of dispensing justice. It is the ultimate safeguard against arbitrary power and a guardian of individual liberty.

The Bench and the Bar are not rivals. We are partners in the administration of justice.

Yet our duties differ.

The lawyer must present the client's case at its strongest, within the law and with candour to Court.

The Judge must belong to no side, listen to all, and answer only to the law and conscience. The lawyer brings the argument; the Judge brings the judgment. Justice requires both.

It is often said that, above all, a good Judge must have courage.

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The hardest decisions are not always the legally difficult ones. Often, they are the unpopular ones.

That courage matters most in turbulent times, when power is tempted to exceed its limits and public pressure demands convenient outcomes.

It is then that the country most needs an independent Judiciary, neither swayed by the crowd nor intimidated by authority, guided solely by the law.

The Court of Appeal occupies a particularly important position because it hears many of the grievances citizens bring against the State.

It is often here that public confidence in the rule of law is either strengthened or diminished.

That confidence rests upon a simple expectation: that every grievance will be heard fairly and resolved within a reasonable time.

Citizens who approach our Courts do not necessarily understand legal technicalities. They know only that they have suffered a wrong and seek a remedy.

Procedural objections have their legitimate place. But when technicalities are resolved and the underlying grievance remains unanswered, the citizen may leave Court without justice, and sometimes without hope.

If that trust is lost, no judgment, however well reasoned, will restore it.

Our Courts must remain places where justice is not merely discussed, but meaningfully delivered.

Ultimately, a Judge is remembered not simply for the number of cases disposed of, but for the justice dispensed, the independence demonstrated, and the dignity extended to lawyers and litigants alike.

That is the legacy I hope Your Ladyship and Your Lordships will leave.

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Your Ladyship and Your Lordships,

The Bar welcomes you with respect, cooperation and candour.

We undertake to appear before you prepared, to argue our cases vigorously and honestly, and to uphold the dignity of this Court.

In return, we ask what every Attorney-at-Law seeks from every Judge: a full hearing, an open mind and a reasoned judgment, so that justice may truly be dispensed.

May your years on this Bench be long and distinguished, and may your legacy be one that our country remembers with gratitude.

Thank you,

Rajeev Amarasuriya
President
Bar Association of Sri Lanka

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