

**Media Raising  
Environmental &  
Climate Awareness:  
HANDLE WITH CARE!**

**South Asia Media Visit  
Home Garden Systems in the  
Face of Climate Change**

13-14 July 2016 •

University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

**By Nalaka Gunawardene**

# Thanks for bringing us together!



# Where I come from...

- Trained as science writer
- Worked in print, broadcast and web media
- News, features, interviews, op-ed writing
- Researching, presenting, producing radio/TV
- Producing editorially independent video & web content on environmental issues
- Been covering climate change from 1988...
- Now a journalist trainer, media researcher & columnist

# Where Sri Lanka is...(July 2016)

- ❑ **Cyclone Roanu:**  
17-23 May 2016
- ❑ Heavy rainfall →  
worst floods in 20+  
years
- ❑ Worst landslide on  
record (100+ killed)
- ❑ Damage USD 1.7 -  
2 billion = 1.6% of  
annual GDP

FOR MORE UPDATES FOLLOW US ON  
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**MORE RAIN FOR MOST PARTS,  
CYCLONIC SYSTEM MOVING AWAY**

**WEATHER  
FORECAST**

EFFECTIVE FOR THE  
NEXT 24hrs  
FROM 17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2016

The low pressure area is moving away from the island, hence rainy conditions over the island will be reduced to some extent, but strong windy conditions will continue for some more days.

Showers or thunder showers will occur at times in the Northern, North-central, North-Western, Western, Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces and in the Galle and Matara districts.

Heavy falls (more than 100 mm) are likely at some places.

Showers or thunder showers will occur at several places elsewhere.

Issued by the  
Department of Meteorology, Sri Lanka

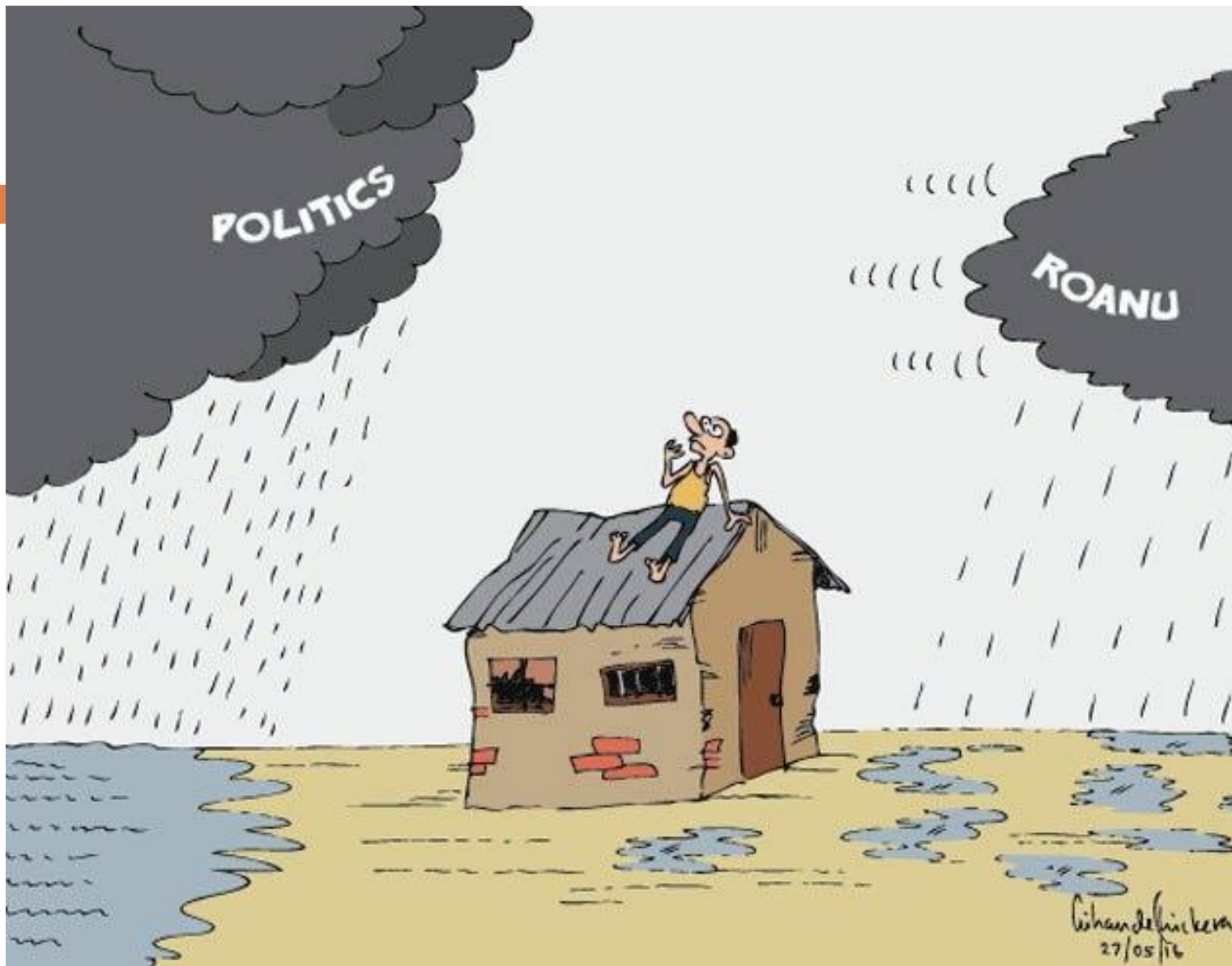
# Western Prov Floods: 5,000 homes damaged/destroyed; 300,000 displaced





Sri Lankan landslide survivors  
look at the patch visible  
on a mountain after a landslide in  
Elangipitiya village in Aranayaka  
19 May 2016  
AP Photos/Eranga Jayawardena





Cartoon by Gihan de Chickera, *Daily Mirror*



Cartoon by Awantha Artigala, *Daily Mirror*



# Media coverage of May 2016 floods + landslides

- Some good field reporting on incidents
- Memorable photojournalism too
- Some media companies started collecting and distributing donations
- BUT...follow-up has been poor: disaster recovery appears to be a forgotten story
- Why was preparedness so bad?
- Is this climate change impact? Not Many reflected on this aspect

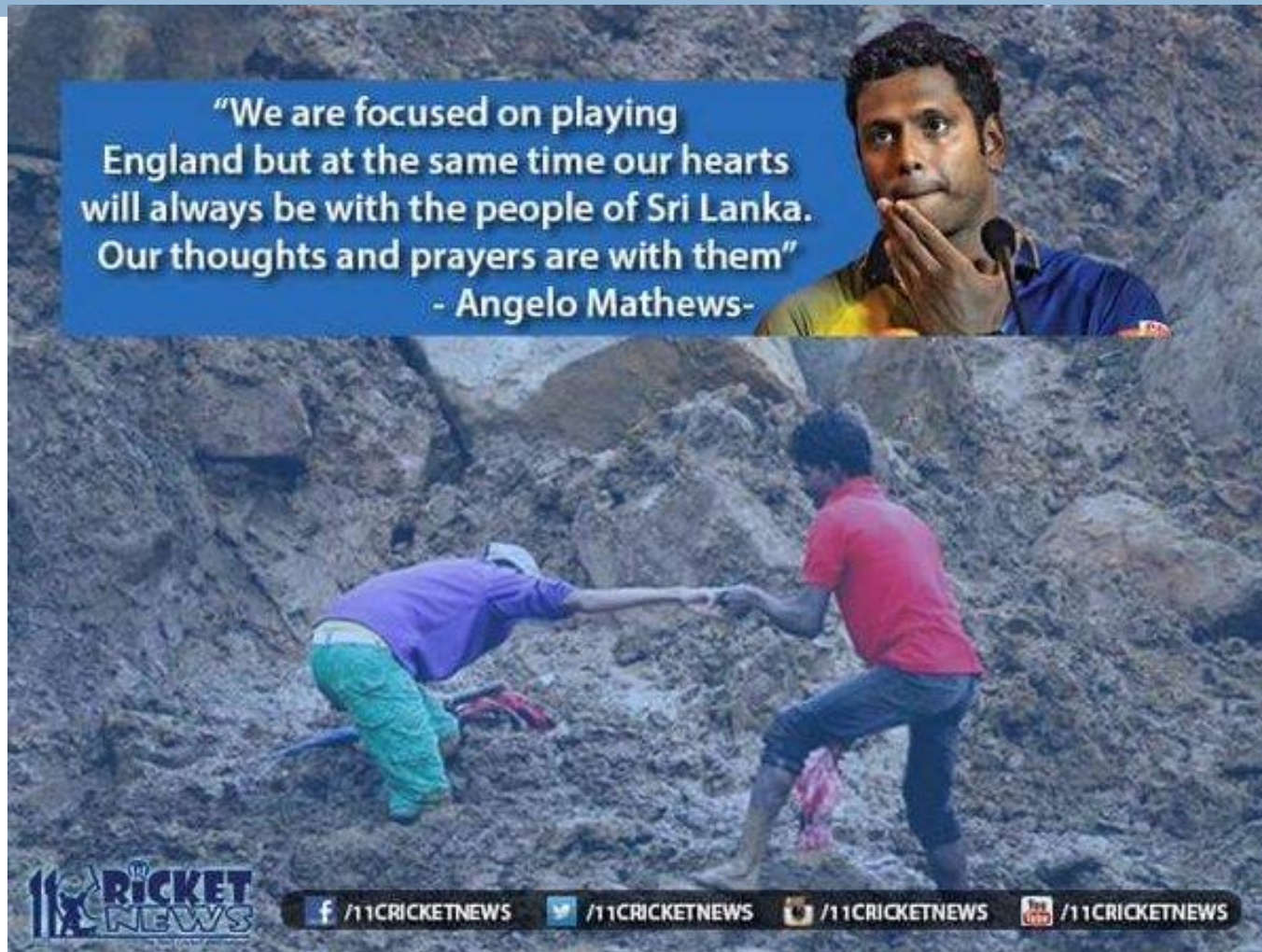
# Good coverage by web-based media



CURRENT AFFAIRS & REPORTS | EVERYDAY SRI LANKA | STARTUPS & TECH | IDENTITIES | LIFESTYLE & ARTS | ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE | TRAVEL +



# Disaster affected and others shared much on social media



# Disaster affected and others shared on social media...



- Never miss a good disaster go waste?

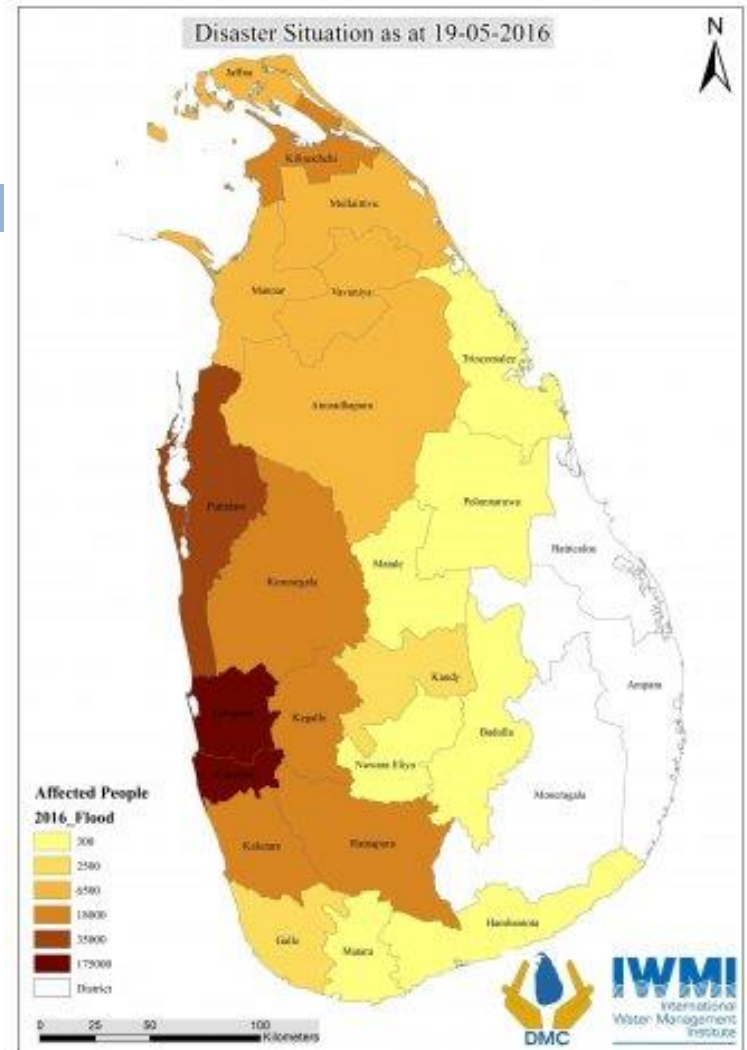


# Questions...

- Why is this happening?
- Is this climate change?
- Signs of worse things to come?
- How can we better prepare?
- Do policymakers grasp implications for development?

**NO EASY ANSWERS!**

**Media should be asking these..**

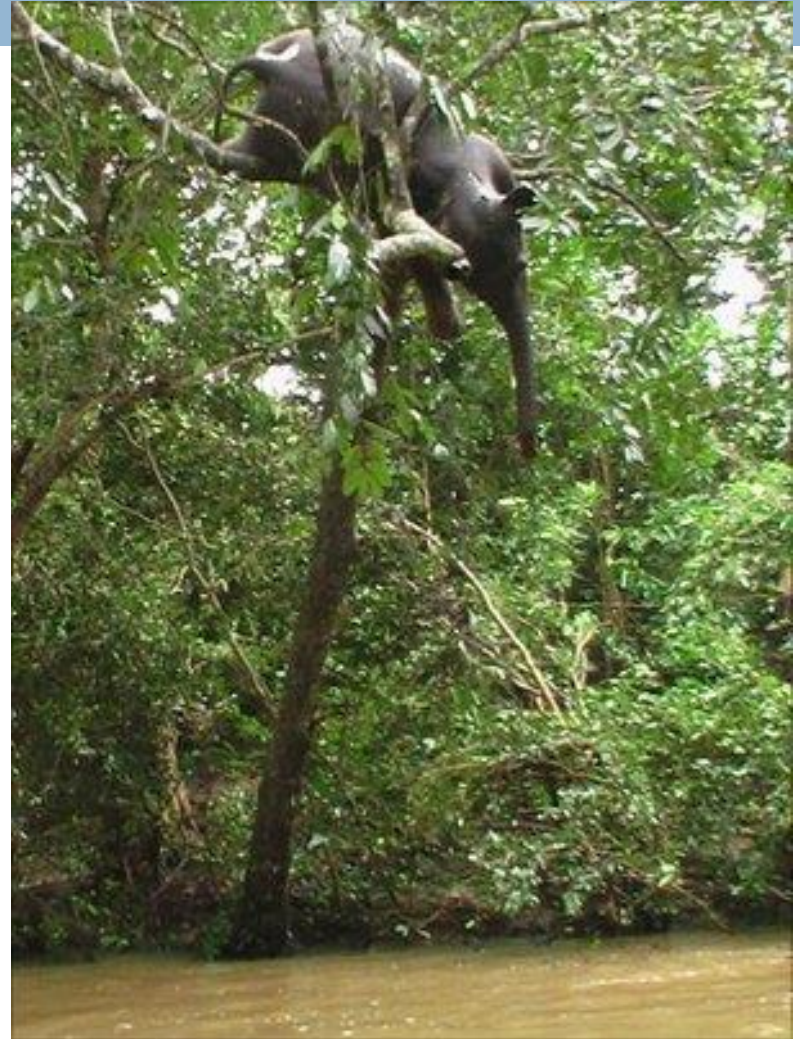


Interim map of flood affected numbers. As at 19 May 2016

# We've been here before:

## Jan – Feb 2011

- La Nina triggers massive rain in North, East and North-central provinces
- 400,000+ displaced
- 250+ reservoirs breached
- Floods covered a fifth of island's land area at peak
- Striking image: elephant washed away to tree top



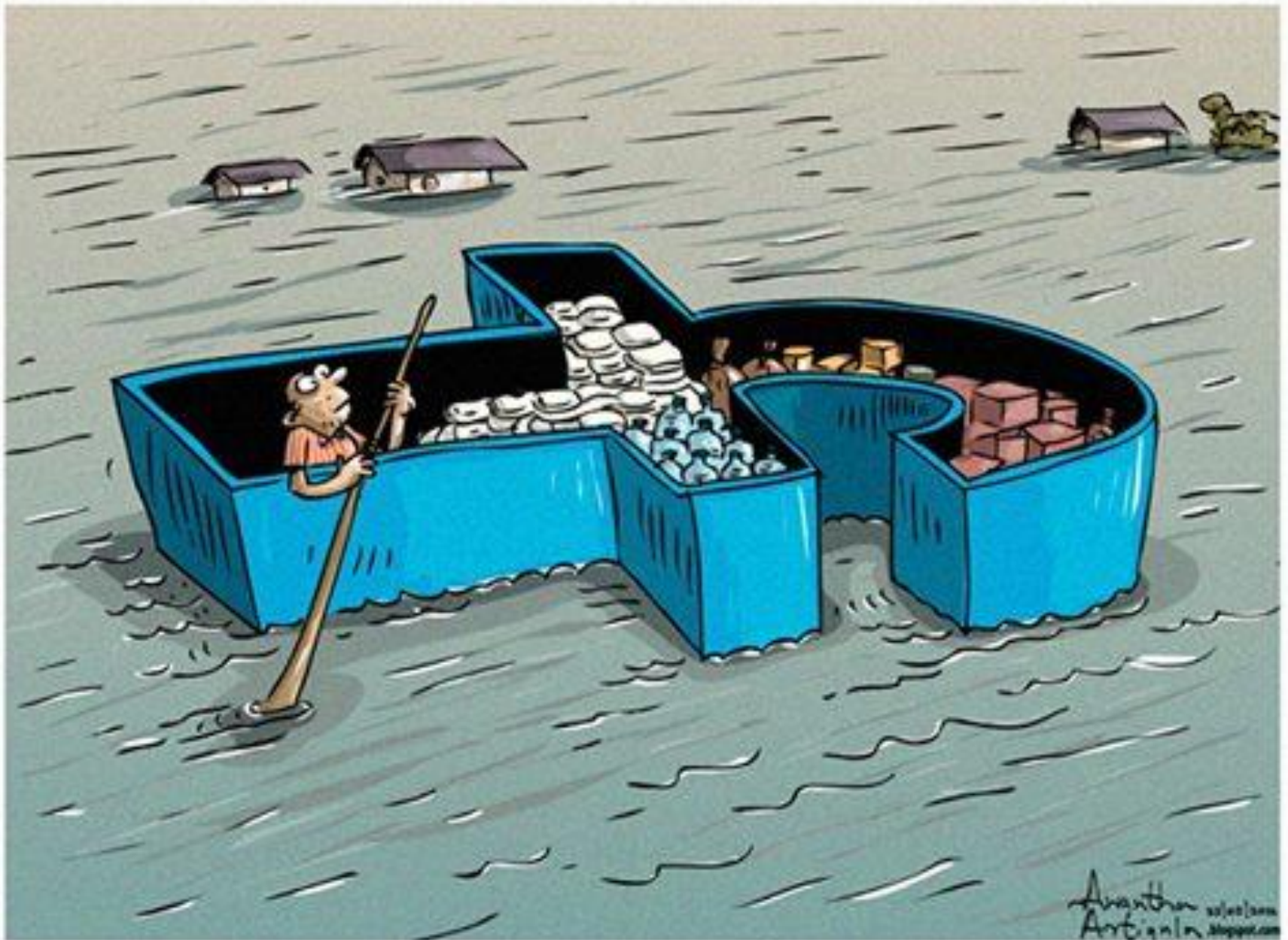
# Challenges journalists in Sri Lanka face when covering climate change

- **Technicalities:** policymakers and public not clear about science involved
- **Uncertainties:** further confusion caused by scientists not having all the answers
- **Politics:** Some environmentalists use c/c to bash industrialised countries
- **Language issues:** Sinhala terms for weather (kala-gunaya) and climate (desha-gunaya) get mixed up

# It's a multi-narrative world...

- Mainstream media: still important
- But many more voices thru social media
  - ▣ Citizens armed with smartphones (e.g. disaster affected)
  - ▣ Relief and advocacy organisations (Red Cross, Sarvodaya)
  - ▣ Bloggers, Tweepers, Facebookers and Instagrammers
- **Loud and contested space!**





**March 2016...**

**Drought forces power cuts**



# Mainstream media still has a big role...

- To connect random news events with underlying process: WHY?
- To provide context (often missing in SM)
- To aspire for greater balance
- To ask inconvenient questions...
- ...and go in search of answers!

# Journalists must connect...

“Most people live and work in day-to-day ‘**weather**’. They can’t relate to long-term ‘**climate**’. It’s our job [as journalists] to make those links clear, simple and accessible...”

**Tarzie Vittachi (1921 – 1993)**



Editor of Ceylon Observer &  
The Asian (Hong Kong);  
Columnist for: South (London),  
Newsweek

# In connecting the dots...

- Balance micro level details with the bigger (macro) picture
- Acknowledge nobody has all the answers (yet)...
- See climate as much more than an environmental or 'green' issue
- Climate justice is important, but we need to adapt to cope with impacts

# Responses to climate crisis...

## Climate Denialism:

We humans had nothing to do with it!

## Climate Alarmism:

Global warming an unmitigated catastrophe that must be stopped at any cost.

## Climate Realism:

weigh costs & benefits of emissions controls, and look at other options of living in a warmer world

# Climate reporting *sans* labels...

“Journalists don’t need to write ‘climate change’ stories to influence decision-makers and public opinion. They can write business stories, health stories, on economics and politics -- even sports and entertainment stories -- and **use these regular forms of journalism to introduce the concepts of climate change.** After all, almost every activity, every policy and every choice we make comes with a carbon cost or carbon saving...”



**Mike Shanahan**  
science writer;  
Now with IIED,  
London

# Which angle to take?

“An area as diverse as the Himalayas needs localised, 'toad's-eye' science if it is to learn how to adapt to climate change. The eagle-eye view needs to be complemented by view from the ground... "toad's-eye" science!

People were not sitting around waiting for an agreement... Millions are voting with their feet everyday at the grassroots level, reacting with civic science & traditional knowledge.”



**Dipak Gyawali**  
**Water Engineer;**  
**Former Water**  
**Minister of Nepal**

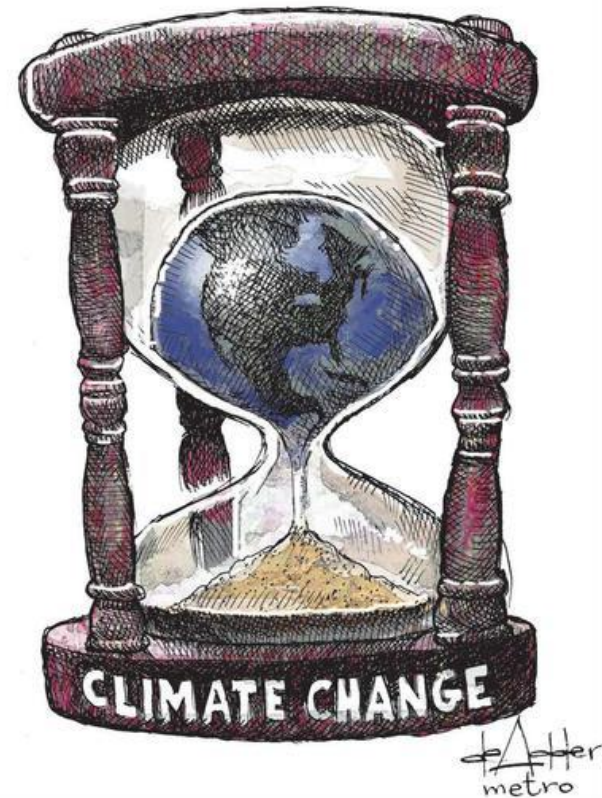


# Communicating Climate Change

- Understanding the science
- Keeping up with evolving science
- Grasping complexities, uncertainties
- Looking for what's: New, Interesting & True (NIT)
- Sense of proportion & balance
- Localising stories without losing global context
- Mix of mitigation & adaptation topics
- Avoiding myths, misconceptions & alarmism

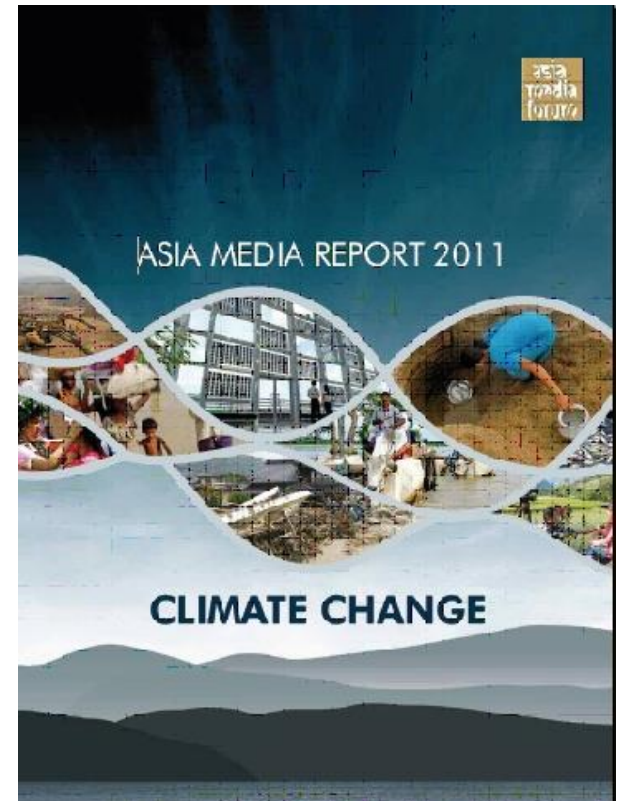
# My own Triple-S Formula...

- Informed by Good **S**cience (but not immersed in it!)
- Tell authentic, compelling journalistic **S**tories
- in **S**imple (but not simplistic) ways (using accessible text, images, infographics, audio, video, interactive media...)



# Asia Media Report 2011

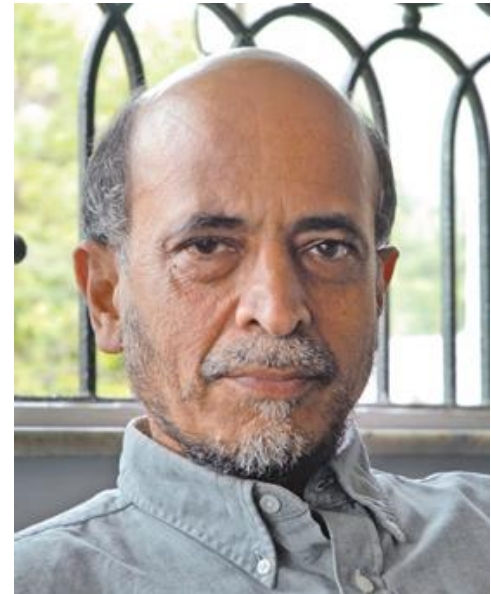
- Journalists looking at the state of climate reporting across Asia
- Taking stock of progress, challenges, gaps, etc.
- Turning the light on ourselves...
- Edited by Darryl D'Monte, India
- Free download from:  
[theasiamediaforum.wordpress.com](http://theasiamediaforum.wordpress.com)



# Look and Listen!

“One doesn’t have to depend on a glaciologist to report basic facts such as these, which are part of everyone’s lived experience. **Journalists, if truth be told, do not use their eyes and ears sufficiently** to pick up such commonplace corroboration of global phenomena...”

- **Darryl D’Monte**, environmental journalist; Ed. *Asia Media Report 2011*



# BD: Challenges at top & bottom...

“Reporting climate change in Bangladesh faces formidable challenges as it is hard to reach those affected in coastal regions. But the more important challenge is to put the story in a proper perspective. Influential people try to withhold information as they believe reporting on their failure will irk those higher in the administration...”

- **Mostafa Kamal Majumder**, editor,  
*The New Nation*, Bangladesh



Quoted in *Asia Media Report 2011*, chapter on Bangladesh by Syful Islam

# PK: Factors inhibiting CC coverage

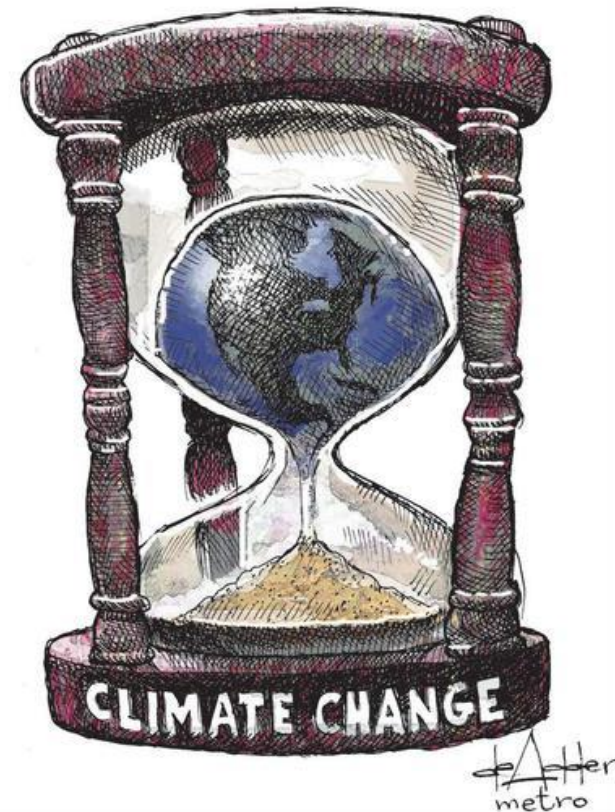
- Editors & publishers not interested
- Too much event reporting (what), **too little process reporting (how & why)**
- Media obsessed with: unravelling conspiracy theories; implicating govts/politicians for everything; blaming West and/or India for most problems
- Some journalists see **'natural disasters'** as **'divine phenomena'** = God's wrath



**Zofeen T. Ebrahim**  
writing on  
Pakistan in  
*Asia Media  
Report 2011*

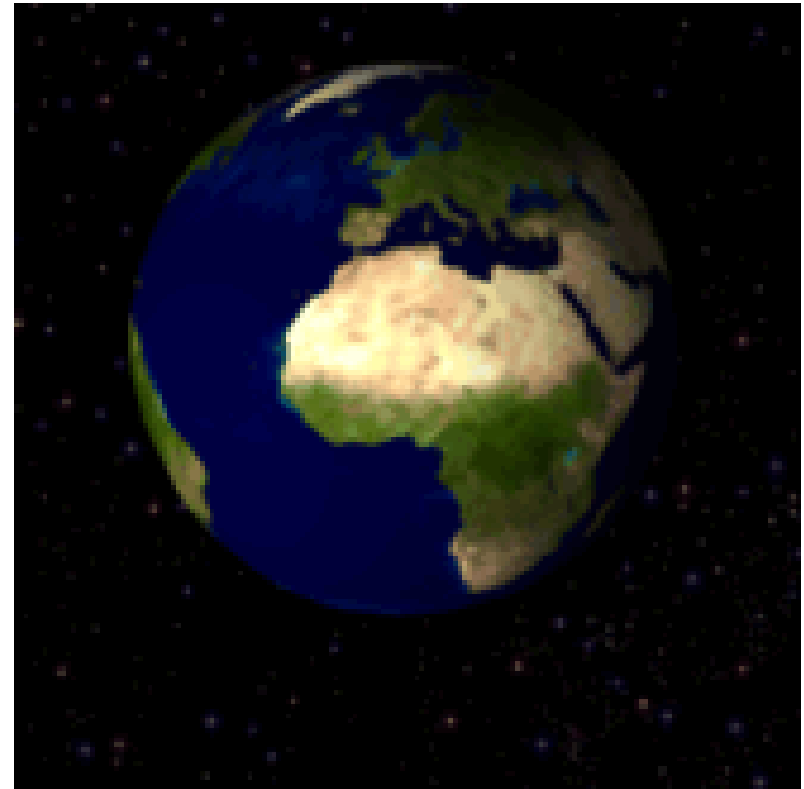
# SUMMARY: Balances to keep...

- Micro-Macro
- Today & Tomorrow
- Science & Society
- Media needs vs. public interest
- Sense of urgency vs. alarmism
- Good headlines vs. uncertainties
- Staying with long-term stories vs. advancing in media career



# Crisis Fatigue for our audiences?

- Global water scarcity
- Food shortages
- Energy crisis
- Increasing desertification
- Habitat & species loss
- Ozone layer depletion
- HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria
- Absolute Poverty
- **Run-away CLIMATE CHANGE**





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