Vidurava: 50 years of journey towards promoting a scientifically literate nation

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History of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Sri Lanka

The National Science Foundation (NSF) of Sri Lanka has a distinguished history of spanning more than five decades, reflecting the country's evolving commitment to science, technology, and innovation (Figure 1). The journey of the NSF began in 1968 with the establishment of the National Science Council (NSC) under Act No. 9 of 1968. The inaugural meeting was held on the 28th May 1968, chaired by Prof. Sir Nicholas Attygalle, the first Chairman of the NSC. The Council was mandated to coordinate scientific activities and formulate a national science and technology policy, laying the foundation for organized scientific development in Sri Lanka.

In September 1969, Dr C.R. Panabokke took over office as the first fulltime Chief Executive Officer of the Council.

In 1981, the NSC was restructured into the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority (NARESA), broadening its scope to include natural resources and energy alongside science. This transformation reflected the growing importance of integrating scientific research with national development priorities.

1968 - National Science Council (NSC)	Established under Act No. 9 of 1968, the NSC was Sri Lanka's first national body for science policy and coordination. Chaired by Prof. Sir Nicholas Attygalle, it laid the foundation for organized scientific development.
1981 - Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority (NARESA)	The NSC was restructured into NARESA, expanding its scope to include natural resources and energy. This reflected the growing importance of science in national development.
1994 - Science and Technology Development Act No. 11	Provided the legal framework for a modern institution to strengthen research and innovation.
1998 - National Science Foundation (NSF)	NARESA was transformed into NSF, tasked with initiating, facilitating, and supporting both basic and applied research. NSF also became the focal point for science popularization, education, and international collaboration.
Present Role	NSF operates through six (06) Divisions viz., Research Division; Technology Division; Science Popularization Division; Science and Technology Policy Research Division; International Affairs Division; Journal Publication Division; and the National Science Library and Resource Centre. It funds research, supports STEM education, popularize science, conduct policy research and connects Sri Lanka to global scientific networks and taking research to international level.

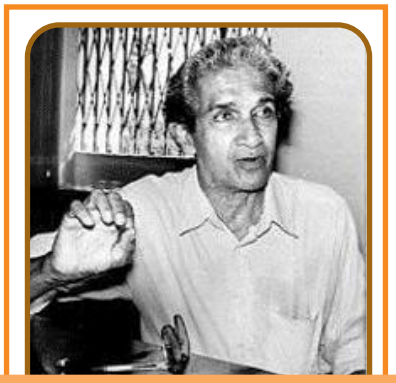
Figure 1: The historical development of the National Science Foundation (NSF)



As the first Chief Executive Officer of the National Science Foundation, Dr C. R. Panabokke provided visionary leadership in advancing science education and science popularization in Sri Lanka. An internationally renowned soil scientist, he was instrumental in promoting scientific knowledge beyond academia, fostering scientific literacy among students, teachers, and the wider public. His dedication helped nurture a culture of scientific thinking and inquiry that continues to inspire future generations.



The late Sir Nicolos Attygalle served as the 1st Chairman of the National Science Council from 1968 to 1970



The late Vidya Jyothi Prof. Osmund Wickrama Jayaratne was a prominent Sri Lankan physicist, left-wing politician, and academic. He served as the President of the Colombo Campus of the University of Sri Lanka and was the Chairman of the National Science Council (NSC) of Sri Lanka from 1972-1977. During his NSC tenure, the Vidurava Science Bulletin was initiated and he chaired the Editorial Board of the Bulletin

The dawn of the Vidurava era: taking science to the community

Since its establishment in 1976, the Vidurava Science Bulletin has served as a flagship publication of the National Science Foundation (NSF), dedicated to making science accessible to all (Figure 2). Over the past five decades, it has evolved from a modest printed bulletin into a nationally recognized science magazine, with its upgrade in 1997 marking a significant

The National Science Council (NSC) from its Act was mandated not only to fund and facilitate research but also to popularize science among the public and to promote science education in the country. Accordingly, the institution has been employing several strategies to popularize science using different instrumental approaches. The publication of Vidurava was one such initiative taken in 1976.

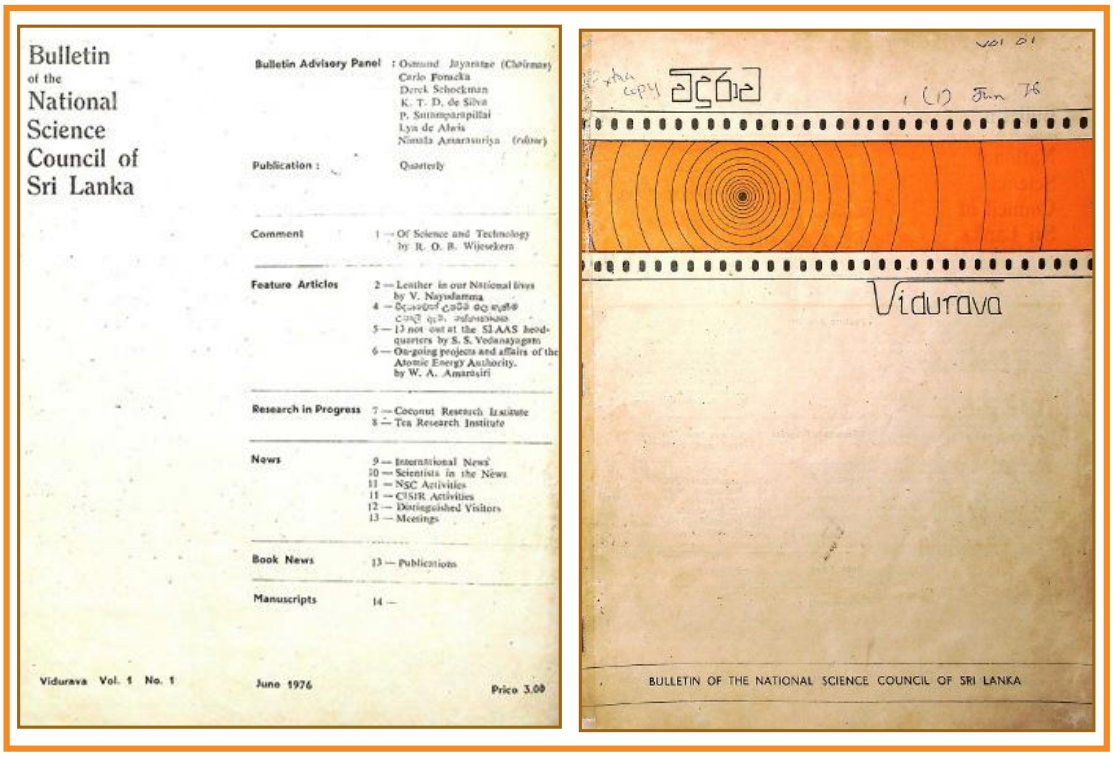


Figure 2: Content page of the 1st Vidurava Science Bulletin

milestone (Today, Vidurava stands as a leading platform for science communication in Sri Lanka, bridging generations through knowledge, curiosity, and innovation while fostering a broader public engagement with science and technology.

The inaugural issue of Vidurava, published in June 1976, marked the launch of Sri Lanka's national science bulletin. The publication was guided by an Advisory Panel chaired by Prof. Osmund Jayaratne, with other distinguished members including Prof. Carlo Fonseka, Derek Schockman, K. T. D. de Silva, P. Sittamparapillai, and Lyn de Alwis. Mrs. Nirmala Amarasuriya served as the Editor of the first issue.

Published on a quarterly basis, Vidurava brought together commentaries, feature articles, and updates on ongoing research, with the aim of linking scientific knowledge to everyday life and promoting public understanding in science. The opening article, authored by Prof. R. O. B. Wijesekera, presented his perspectives on science and technology and set the tone for the publication's mission. It was followed by a range of feature articles and a dedicated section on "Research in Progress," highlighting current scientific investigations and developments in Sri Lanka. An interesting feature of this inaugural issue was its first feature article, "Leather in Our National Lives," written by Prof. Y. Nayudamma, an eminent Indian scientist and renowned leather technologist who was awarded the Padma Shri in 1971 for his outstanding contributions to science and technology in India. The article reflected his lifelong commitment to connecting science with society and demonstrated how scientific knowledge could contribute to national development. Through his discussion of everyday applications, durability, economic importance, and cultural significance of leather, Prof. Nayudamma highlighted the vital role of science and technology in improving livelihoods and supporting industrial growth. The inclusion of such a distinguished international scientist in the very first issue added considerable prestige and value to the inaugural volume of Vidurava, reinforcing its vision of fostering scientific awareness through both local and international perspectives.

The inaugural issue of Vidurava was published in a bilingual format, featuring articles in both Sinhala and English, thereby broadening its reach and accessibility among Sri Lankan readers. Among its notable contributors was Dr. Upali M. Senanayake, one of Sri Lanka's leading scientists, researchers, and science writers, who played a significant role in the popularization of science in the country. His Sinhala-language article on "Maximizing the Benefits of Science" emphasized the importance of applying scientific knowledge for national development and improving the quality of life of the public.

The issue also provided updates on research activities undertaken by key national research institutions, including the Coconut Research Institute (CRI) and the Tea Research Institute (TRI), highlighting their contributions to Sri Lanka's agricultural and economic development. In addition, Vidurava carried a range of international science news, giving special attention to the 1975 Nobel Laureates, the developments in the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, and the Soviet space probe missions to Venus, among other scientific advancements of global significance.

By combining local research achievements, science policy perspectives, educational articles, and international scientific developments, the inaugural issue of Vidurava demonstrated a strong commitment to science popularization, scientific literacy,



Dr. Yelavarthy Nayudamma (1922–1985) was a distinguished Indian scientist and leather technologist, widely respected both in India and abroad where leather is a major industry. He served as Director General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

and informed public engagement with science and technology. This broad and inclusive approach laid a solid foundation for the magazine's enduring role as a bridge between the scientific community and society.

While the first issue was published in English and Sinhala, the second issue included an article in Tamil written by E. E. Jeyaraj of CISIR, in which he shared his thoughts on environmental pollution in Sri Lanka and its potential future repercussions. This issue also featured a Sinhala-language article based on a discussion between the Chairman of the NSC, Dr. Osmund Jayaratne, and Prof. Carlo Fonseka on the topic, "Science Policies in Developing Countries."

This multilingual approach continued until 2006, eventually evolving into separate editions published in Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

The writers, editors, translators, designers, and type-setters of Vidurava have made immense contributions to sustaining this science magazine and maintaining its quality over the past 50 years. The Editorial Committee in the early years, and later, the Working Committee on Science Education that succeeded the Working Committee on Science Popularization, provided significant guidance by advising the NSF Science Popularization Division on annual themes and nominating experts for contributing articles.

Table 01 - Editorial Board of the Vidurava

Year(s)	Editor(s) of five decades
1976–1992	Mrs. Nimala Amarasuriya
1993–1996	Mr AWJ Karunasinghe and Mr Amal Udawatta
1997–2000	Mr AWJ Karunasinghe, Mr Amal Udawatta, Mrs. Thakshila de Zoysa
2005–2006	Dr. Kumara Hiriburegama, Dr. S.R. Krishnaraja
2007–2012	Mr Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr Asoka de Silva, Dr. Shalini Ranganathan, Prof. S. Mohandas, Dr. Kadirawetipillae
2013–2014	Mr Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr Asoka de Silva, Dr. Kadirawetipillae
2015–2017	Mr Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr Asoka de Silva, Dr. R. Senthilnithy
2018–2024	Mr Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr Asoka de Silva, Dr Gowry Moorthy, Dr N. Karthikeyan
2025–2026	Mr Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr Asoka de Silva, Dr Gowry Moorthy, Dr Seetha I. Wickremasinghe

As editors, Mrs. Nimala Amarasuriya played a key role during the inception of Vidurava from 1976 to 1992, serving for 16 years as editor of the Bulletin and laying a strong foundation for science communication. Mr. Thusitha Malalasekera, the present editor of the Sinhala edition, and Mr. Asoka De Silva, former editor of the English edition, have been serving since 2007. Over nearly two decades, they have not only guided the magazine as editors but also contributed as authors and members of the editorial board prior to assuming editorial leadership. Their dedication has ensured the continuity, inclusivity, and relevance of Vidurava across generations.

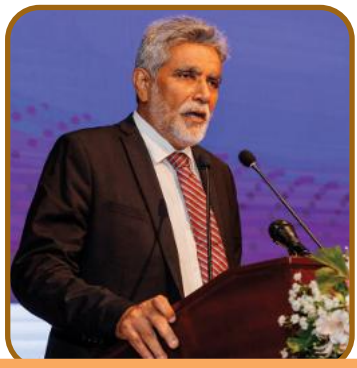
Vidurava - 50 Years of Science Popularization

Over the past five decades, Vidurava has evolved into Sri Lanka's flagship science magazine, reflecting the country's changing priorities in science and technology. Launched in 1976 as a bulletin published by the National Science Council, its early issues focused on practical themes such as agriculture, environment, health, and national development projects like the Mahaweli Scheme. These editions were widely used by teachers and rural communities, embedding science into everyday life.

From the late 1980s to 2000s, Vidurava expanded into multilingual editions (Sinhala, Tamil, & English), covering emerging topics such as computing, biotechnology, and environmental



Prof. M. T. M. Jiffry made an outstanding contribution to advancing science popularization in Sri Lanka, guiding the NSF Working Committee with vision and dedication. His leadership expanded NSF outreach activities and made Vidurava a strong platform for sharing science with diverse audiences. During his tenure as the chairman of the Working Committee he was able to secure several national and international awards for NSF science popularization programmes.



Dr. Jayantha Wattevidanage assumed the role of Chairman of the NSF Working Committee on Science Popularization following the passing of Prof. Jiffry and has continued to serve with dedication up to the present. Under his leadership, the Committee has expanded outreach initiatives, strengthened the Vidurava magazine as a flagship platform for science communication, and promoted inclusive engagement across schools and communities. His sustained commitment has ensured continuity in Sri Lanka's mission to build a scientifically literate society and advance the goals of science popularization nationwide.

Table 02 - Vidurava Milestone: a remarkable journey through five decades

1976 - 1985: Foundation

- Launch of Vidurava as a bulletin under the National Science Council.
- Early themes: Science and Technology, Food and Nutrition, Mahaweli Development.
- Widely used in schools and rural communities to embed science into daily life.

1986 - 2000: Expansion

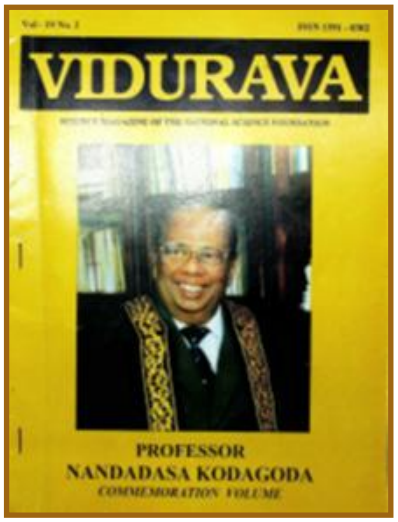
- Multilingual editions (Sinhala, Tamil, English).
- Landmark issues: AIDS Volume (1993); War and Peace Volume (1994).
- Stronger alignment with NSF's school science competitions and societies.
- Transition from bulletin to full science magazine in 1997.

2001 - 2015: Modernization

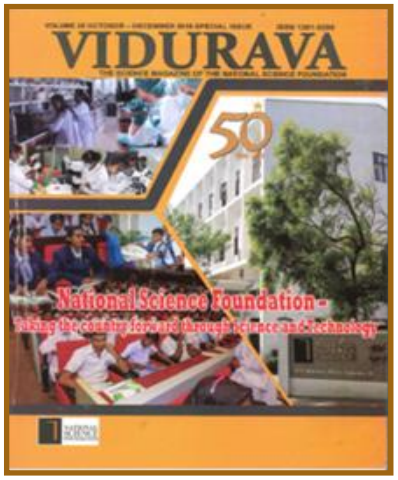
- Focus on global challenges: Climate Change, Biodiversity, & Sustainable Development.
- Integration with NSF's School Science Research Project Competition.
- Youth-focused content inspiring STEM careers.

2016 - 2026: Digital transformation

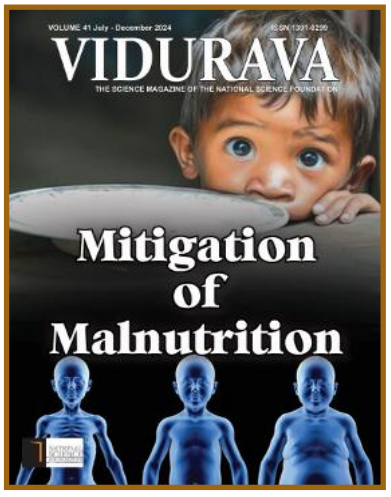
- Online editions and interactive features
- Themes: Artificial Intelligence; Nanotechnology; COVID-19, STEAM Education.



Vidurava Vol. 19 No. 2



Vidurava Vol. 35 special issue



Vidurava Vol. 41 special issue

challenges. The landmark issues included the AIDS volumes (1993), which provided vital public health awareness, and the War and Peace issue (1994), which situated science within the realities of conflict and reconciliation. During this period, the magazine also aligned closely with NSF's the school science competitions and the school science societies, nurturing young talent and raising science literacy.

Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda who was one of the pioneers in science popularization in Sri Lanka, was the Chairman of the Committee on Science Education during 1990-1997 while serving as an active member. He chaired the Editorial Board of Vidurawa from 1993-1997. He passed away in 1997. As a token of appreciation for his contributions to science popularization in the country, a special issue of Vidurava Vol. 19 No. 2 was dedicated to him and was named 'Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda Memorial Issue'. In 2018, another special issue of Vidurava was published (Vol. 35 special issue) to commemorate the NSF 50th anniversary on the theme "National Science Foundation: taking the country forward through science and Technology".

In the 21st century, Vidurava embraced modernization and outreach, addressing global themes such as climate change, biodiversity, sustainable development, and later, digital transformation. The recent issues have explored cutting-edge topics including food safety, artificial intelligence, concept of minimalism STEM/STEAM education, and COVID-19, while continuing to highlight local knowledge and traditional practices.

The magazine's enduring value lies in its ability to raise science literacy, nurture young talent, and foster dialogue between scientists, educators, policymakers, and the public. By presenting science in multiple languages and formats, it has reached classrooms, homes, and communities across the island, ensuring that knowledge is not confined to laboratories but becomes part of everyday life.

Today, Vidurava stands as a bridge across generations; parents recall reading about soil fertility in the 1970s, while their children engage in reading robotics and AI in the 2020s. As Vidurava embraces digital transformation and looks to the future, its mission remains unchanged to serve as a trusted voice of science popularization in Sri Lanka. In doing so, it continues to strengthen the foundation for a society that values innovation, sustainability, and evidence-based progress fulfilling its role as a flagship magazine that bridges the nation through science and technology.



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