

# Sri Lanka newlyweds cancel wedding party, help poor instead

By **Bharatha Mallawarachi**  
The Associated Press

**C**OLOMBO, Sri Lanka — As couples do all over the world, Darshana Kumara Wijenarayana and his fiancée, Pawani Rasanga, spent months planning a grand wedding.

And everything was on course for the Sri Lankan couple — until the coronavirus struck the island nation off India’s southern tip, leading to an indefinite lockdown.

“By that time, we had made all the arrangements. Clothes, rings, and cakes had been ordered. The reception hall was booked. We had planned to invite 250 guests,” Darshana told The Associated Press by phone from his home in Malimbada, a small town about 100 miles south of the capital, Colombo.

Family and friends urged them to postpone their April 27 wedding.

Instead, the couple chose to celebrate their love by feeding the poor.

The first COVID-19 patient in Sri Lanka was a Chinese tourist who fell sick in January during her vacation. She was discharged in February.

Until the first week of March, there was little panic about the disease. Then on March 11, the first Sri Lankan — a tour guide — tested positive for the virus, triggering fear and the closure of schools and universities and many businesses.

The ongoing curfew has curbed the spread of the virus, but also dealt a severe blow to many who survive on a daily wage.

As the couple’s wedding day approached, the local curfew was lifted during daytime hours, so they were free to host the wedding as planned, albeit under strict social-distancing guidelines.



But they’d hatched another plan.

Darshana, the 30-year-old owner of a small retail shop, and Pawani, 25, a lab assistant at a state-run school, decided to share their wedding day with some of their neediest neighbors.

After registering the marriage with a few close family and friends, the couple cut the wedding cake and fed each other a piece before getting to work.

The groom wore a dark blue, three-piece, western-style suit with an ivory tie and

**SPREADING KINDNESS.** Darshana Kumara Wijenarayana (top photo, left) and his bride Pawani Rasanga (top photo, right) walk with packets of food to distribute in the small town of Malimbada, about 99 miles south of the capital, Colombo. The Sri Lankan couple cancelled a wedding party and instead shared their wedding day with some of their neediest neighbors who have been economically hit due to the lockdown because of the novel coronavirus. (Darshana Kumara Wijenarayana via AP)

boutonniere, and the bride was in a white lace sari and a jewelled wedding headpiece with pink and purple flowers pinned above her chignon.

Both wore masks as they delivered plastic bags of goods to each home, some built of uneven wooden planks on mud floors. Little girls and their mothers beamed at the bride as she distributed colorful plastic headbands; they offered the couple blessings for a happy married life.

Darshana and Pawani presented children with toy cars. They even offered slices of their cake. Then, they applied hand sanitizer and moved on to the next home.

They have since received a flood of phone calls and visits at their home and shop from strangers who praised them for their generosity.

“By doing this, we got a great satisfaction,” Darshana said. “When you see the happiness on the face of these people, especially the kids ... you see .... I don’t have words to explain that happiness.”

*While nonstop news about the effects of the coronavirus has become commonplace, so, too, have the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others. “One Good Thing” is an AP series reflecting these acts of kindness.*

## China home-built aircraft carrier conducting sea trials

BEIJING (AP) — China’s Defense Ministry said the navy’s only entirely home-built aircraft is carrying out sea trials to test weapons and equipment and enhance training of the crew.

Ministry spokesperson Ren Guoqiang said the exercises were being conducted as planned, apparently unaffected by the country’s coronavirus outbreak.

The *Shandong’s* commissioning last year by Chinese President Xi Jinping underscored the country’s rise as a regional naval power at a time of tensions with the U.S. and others over trade, Taiwan, and the South China Sea.

It is the second Chinese aircraft carrier to enter service after the *Liaoning*, which was originally purchased as a hulk from Ukraine and entirely refurbished.

Both are based on a Soviet design with a “ski jump” style flight deck for takeoffs rather than the flat decks used by much larger U.S. aircraft carriers. It is powered by a conventional oil-fuelled steam turbine power plant, compared to the nuclear fuel American carriers and submarines use.

China is seen as striving to overtake the U.S. as the dominant naval power in Asia and already boasts the world’s largest navy in numbers of vessels.

Beijing says aircraft carriers are needed to protect its coastline and trade routes, but they are also seen as backing up its claims to self-governing Taiwan and the South China Sea.

The highly secretive Chinese military was credited with aiding in the response to the epidemic in the epicenter of Wuhan earlier this year, but no information has been released about cases among military personnel or any change in the armed forces’ readiness status.

The U.S. Navy, in contrast, saw a public controversy over the spread of the coronavirus aboard the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* and the firing of the aircraft carrier’s skipper in April.

The *Roosevelt* was operating in the Western Pacific when the first crew members fell sick in late March. About 1,100 crew members eventually tested positive for the coronavirus and one died. The ship was sidelined on Guam for nearly two months.

The Asian Reporter is published on the first Monday each month.

News page advertising deadlines for our next two issues are:

**July 6, 2020 edition:**

Space reservations due: Wednesday, July 1 at 1:00pm

Artwork due: Thursday, July 2 at 1:00pm

**August 3, 2020 edition:**

Space reservations due: Wednesday, July 29 at 1:00pm

Artwork due: Thursday, July 30 at 1:00pm

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5	3							
				8	4		7	
8		9	4	2				
				5			2	
9	8					7	1	
6			9					
			9	4	8		3	
1		5	3					
						4	6	

Difficulty level: Easy

#53847

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #23519 (Hard)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

7	2	6	3	4	9	8	5	1
9	3	5	6	1	8	7	4	2
8	4	1	5	7	2	9	3	6
6	7	2	8	3	1	5	9	4
5	9	3	2	6	4	1	8	7
4	1	8	7	9	5	2	6	3
3	6	9	1	5	7	4	2	8
2	5	7	4	8	3	6	1	9
1	8	4	9	2	6	3	7	5

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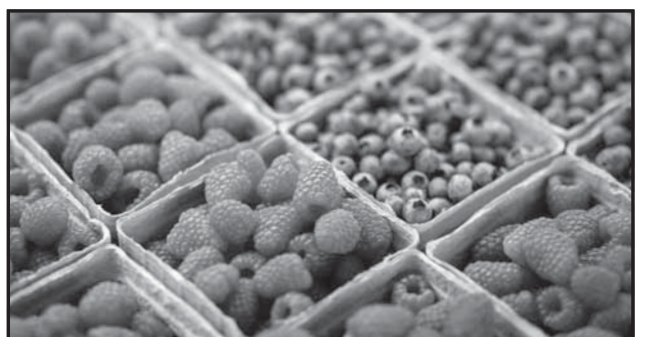
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