HRD network

25 ATR



Sri Lanka

15-22 SEP 2026

Build Climate Resilient Communities:
The Journey of Self-Discovery

Contents

1 Foreword and summary

2 Why this journey, and how it was designed

3 The delegation: profile and analysis

4 The road through Sri Lanka

5 In the training room

6 Learning across borders

7 Voices from the journey

8 Outcomes, recommendations and thanks

A Appendix: official itinerary, entrance fees and notes

B Appendix: references

1 Foreword and summary

> **"Who am I, and how do others experience me? Who are we together, and how do we perform?"**

Most organizations say they want stronger leaders and stronger teams. Fewer stop to ask the earlier question: do we know ourselves? From 15 to 22 September 2026, the 25th Annual Trainers' Retreat took a delegation of HRDN members from Pakistan to Sri Lanka to ask it together, as individuals and as a team, in a country far enough from the office to make honest answers easier.

The retreat travelled from Colombo down the coast to Bentota and Galle, up through the hills to Kandy, and out to the sea again at Negombo. Its working heart was at Tree of Life Nature Resort in Kandy, where Dr. Roomi S. Hayat, Chairperson of HRDN, led the training. The programme ran under the banner **"Build Climate Resilient Communities: The Journey of Self-Discovery"**, and the days were arranged so that the place always spoke to the theme: a capital to look outward from, a coast to learn interdependence from, and a hill country to look inward in.

A day of heavy rain on 20 September cancelled the planned excursion to Sembuwatta Lake and Hunnas Falls. The group moved indoors, held its training sessions at the resort, and found that the lesson of the day had arrived on its own: plans change, and resilient people and teams adapt without losing the purpose.

The retreat at a glance

Item	Detail
Event	25th Annual Trainers' Retreat (ATR), Human Resource Development Network
Theme	Build Climate Resilient Communities: The Journey of Self-Discovery
Dates	15 – 22 September 2026 (8 days, 7 nights)
Route	Lahore – Colombo – Bentota/Galle – Pinnawala/Kegalle – Kandy – Negombo – Lahore (SriLankan Airlines)
Stay	Hotel Mandarina, Colombo (3 nights) · Tree of Life Nature Resort, Kandy (3 nights) · Beachfront hotel, Negombo (1 night)
Delegation	23 members (including 5 women)
Facilitator	Dr. Roomi S. Hayat, Chairperson, HRDN
Team competition	Winners: Group Three (Sharif Khan, Shahmeer Shoaib, Nauman Butt, Tahir Ali, Robeela Bangash) · Runners-up: Group Two (Rizwan Javed, Feroz Shah, Ashiq Kalwar, Ishtiaq, Islam Gul)

What the retreat achieved

- Participants compared how they see themselves with how others read them, and found the gap larger, and more useful, than expected.
- The qualities they admire in leaders became a personal development map.
- Four rounds of team challenges showed, in practice, how planning, role allocation and trust decide results.
- A week of shared travel, meals and music-built bonds across seniority, organization and membership category.
- Contact with Sri Lankan students, hosts and international fellow guests turned the trip into practice in cross-border communication.

2 Why this journey, and how it was designed

The ATR is HRDN's annual chance to learn together away from the desk. The 25th edition, a quarter-century milestone, was designed around one idea: self-knowledge is the starting point of both leadership and teamwork. A leader who cannot see their own habits cannot change them; a team whose members cannot see one another cannot coordinate.

Three ideas behind the theme

Self-discovery. Professionals are valued for what they deliver and rarely assess how self-aware they are. The retreat paired two questions: the individual one (Who am I, and how do others experience me?) and the collective one (Who are we together, and how do we perform?).

Climate resilience. The theme borrows the language of communities facing a changing climate, because the skills are the same at every scale: read the situation honestly, adapt, look after the most vulnerable and keep going together. Pakistan's own recent experience of floods gives the phrase weight for any development professional. Sri Lanka made it tangible, through mangroves, a turtle hatchery, tea hills that depend on rain and, as it turned out, a monsoon-season downpour that rewrote the day.

Experiential learning. Adults remember what they do and reflect more than what they hear. David Kolb's learning cycle (experience, reflect, make sense, try again) shaped the format: every exercise was followed by a plenary discussion so that experience became insight. Being caught pointing the wrong way with eyes closed is remembered long after a lecture on perception is forgotten.

How the route supports the learning

Each leg of the trip had a job in the story. Together they form an arc from outward looking to inward looking, and back to celebration.

Phase	Place	Role in the journey
Look outward	Colombo, 15–17 Sep	Meet a new country and its people; see the whole picture from height; practise being ambassadors
Learn interdependence	Galle, Madu River, turtle hatchery, 17 Sep	Ecosystems and heritage as models of teams and stewardship
Travel and transition	Road to Kandy, 18 Sep	Leave the city behind; informal bonding on the road; arrival in hill country
Look inward	Kandy, Tree of Life, 18–21 Sep	Quiet setting for training, reflection and honest feedback
Celebrate and return	Negombo, 21–22 Sep	Release, laughter and a shared farewell by the sea

The choice of Tree of Life Nature Resort was part of the design. Reflection needs quiet, and the resort's garden setting removed the noise of offices and phones. By the time the groups competed in the training room, they had already spent days on buses and at dinner tables learning one another's humour, pace and habits, which is the informal trust that formal team exercises draw on.

3 The delegation: profile and analysis

A retreat is only as rich as the people in it. The 25th ATR brought together 23 members of the network, from nine organizations and categories, who ordinarily meet in committees, workshops and email threads. For eight days they shared buses, dining tables and a training room. The mix was no accident: it gave every exercise a realistic spread of experience, styles and loyalties, and it is the first thing to understand about why learning worked.

23	9	5	17	8
Members Participants	Organizations and member categories	Women	Men	Days, 7 nights together

SRSP 5	JWS 5	HRDN 3
Yasmin Kamran	Islam Gul	**Dr. Roomi S. Hayat** · **Facilitator**
Rani Andaleeb	Nauman Maqsood Butt	Muhammad Sharif Khan
Feroz Shah	Rizwan Javed	Robeela Bangash
Ihsan Ullah	Waleed Raza	
Tahir Ali	Shahmeer Shoaib	

SRSO 2	BRSP 2	GBTI 2
Ashiq Kalwar Qalander	Nasrullah Jan Haji Qaisar Khan Jamali	Ishtiaq Fahim Ahmad Siddiqui

IRM 1	SF 1	Individual Members 2
Hammad Zafar	Ghulam Abbas	Nuzhat Shaheen Shazia Hayat

4 The road through Sri Lanka

This section follows the route day by day and says, for each stop, what the delegation saw and what it meant for the theme. The full official itinerary, with timings and fees, is in Appendix A.

Colombo: 15–16 September 2026

The delegation landed at Bandaranaike International Airport late on 15 September and was met by the local team. From there they drove to Colombo and settled into Hotel Mandarina. Colombo, a port shaped over the centuries by Arab, Portuguese, Dutch and British influence, offered an early lesson in Sri Lanka's layered identity.

Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Lotus Tower (with a heritage documentary)	A view over harbour, Beira Lake and sea from one of South Asia's tallest structures	Stepping back to see the whole picture is what self-reflection asks of a leader





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Gangaramaya Temple	A Buddhist temple blending Sri Lankan, Thai, Indian and Chinese influences	Identity can be layered; strong cultures and teams absorb diversity without losing themselves





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Independence Memorial Hall and Square	Commemorates independence in 1948; the setting for a conversation with local students	Shared purpose turns a population into a nation, and individuals into a team





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Red Mosque (Jami Ul-Alfar)	Red-and-white brick landmark of Pettah, a symbol of Colombo's multi-faith life	Different faiths sharing one street: a model for diverse teams





The Southwest Coast: 17 September 2026

A full day along the Indian Ocean coast turned heritage and ecology into a lesson on how things last.

Galle Fort. A UNESCO World Heritage Site begun by the Portuguese in the 16th century and strengthened by the Dutch in the 17th. It endures because people still live, trade and worship inside it. Institutions, HRDN included, last the same way: strong foundations, kept alive by those who use them.








Madu River boat safari. Mangroves and small islands (among them Cinnamon Island, an island temple and the fish-massage stop) show an ecosystem in which every species depends on the others. Remove one part and the whole system changes: the climate-resilience theme in its plainest form.





Habaraduwa Turtle Hatchery. Eggs are protected, hatchlings nurtured and released to the sea. Holding a baby turtle was, for many, the day's most memorable moment. Leadership, too, is nurturing others until they can survive on their own.






Experiencing Beach. Time to rest together. Teams that never pause rarely reflect.






From Coast to Hills: 18 September 2026

The road to Kandy was a lesson in itself. The group stopped for king coconut, red bananas and mangosteen at roadside stalls, watched monkeys along the way, and spent time at an elephant sanctuary in the Pinnawala–Kegalle area, where it fed, bathed and rode elephants. A herd survives through shared responsibility and the strongest protect the most vulnerable; teams are judged by how they treat their weakest link.













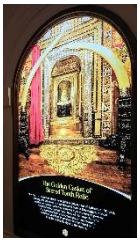


Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Tree of Life Nature Resort	Reached at about 5 pm	The starting point for the evening in the sacred city





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic	An unplanned visit that evening	A change to the plan that brought the quiet of the sacred city to the first night







Kandy: 19 September 2026

Kandy was the last royal capital of the Sinhalese kings, and its sacred city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The theme of self-discovery found its home here.

Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya	About 147 acres, founded in 1821, with more than 4,000 plant species; warm conversations with local visitors and students	Growth needs care, space and time, for plants and for people





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Ceylon Tea Plantation and Factory	The leaf followed from plucking to withering, rolling, drying and grading, ending with a tasting	Every stage matters: quality depends on each hand along the line







Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Gem museum	How the island's gems are mined, cut and graded	Raw stones become valuable through patient refinement, as talent does through development






Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Kandyan dance	Drums, costumes and firewalking built on precise coordination	Excellence is discipline, rehearsal and timing between partners, as in the cup-tower exercise





Kandy: 20 September 2026 When Rain Changed the Plan

The programme had marked 20 September as the "Journey of Self-Discovery Experience", with a guided reflection at Sembuwatta Lake and a walk to Hunnas Falls. Heavy rain in the central highlands made the excursion impractical, and the group stayed at Tree of Life, where the training sessions described in Section 5 took place. Laughter and discussion filled the day so completely that the missed excursion hardly mattered. When the weather eased, the evening went shopping at Laksala, Kandy City Centre and tea and spice boutiques.

> **A lesson no one planned**
> A retreat on climate resilience was asked to adapt to the climate. The group changed the setting, kept the purpose and found that the learning travelled with it. That is resilience in miniature, and it is worth recording as one of the retreat's real findings.

Negombo: 21–22 September 2026

Negombo: a vibrant fishing town near the airport, where golden beaches, outrigger boats and "Little Rome" churches reflect Sri Lanka's layered coastal heritage.

Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
St. Mary's Church, Negombo	Nicknamed "Little Rome" for its many churches	A reminder of the layered faith and heritage of the island





Stop	What it offered	Link to the journey
Angurukaramulla Temple, Negombo	A temple visit alongside the church visit	Different faiths, one town: the same layered identity seen in Colombo





Beyond the sites: people, Food and Music

Hospitality. Sri Lankans met the group with courtesy and quick smiles. In the capital's streets, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian places of worship stand close together, and that daily evidence of diversity living side by side reinforced a point made in the training room.

Table. Rice and curry, coconut sambol, hoppers, kottu and fresh seafood, with Ceylon tea at nearly every turn. Breakfast and dinner were provided throughout the tour.

Dinner with the world. At Tree of Life, the dining hall was shared with guests from Europe, China and Korea. Greetings and stories were exchanged over a wide range of dishes. For many delegates it was a first practical test of the theme: in a room of strangers, how do others read us, and how do we present ourselves as representatives of our country and organization?

A folk-song evening. At the music night, Mr. Ghulam Abbas stood up and sang Pakistani folk songs. The audience listened, applauded and joined in. He did not wait to be perfect; he offered something real from his own culture, and the room answered. In the language of the Johari Window (Section 5), he moved something from the hidden pane into the open, and everyone gained.

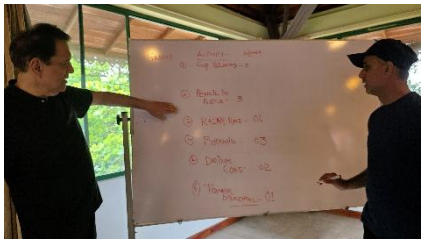
5 In the Training Room

The training moved from inward reflection (Part A) to collaborative competition (Part B).

Part A built self-awareness while Part B showed how that awareness plays out when people have to plan, trust and win together. Dr. Roomi S. Hayat facilitated both parts, and everything in this section, from objectives to outcomes, sits in one place so that it can be read, and reused, as a whole.








Learning objectives

- See the gap between self-image and how others perceive us.
- Identify the leadership qualities we admire and set them against our own development areas.
- Experience, not just discussing how planning, roles and trust decide a team's results.
- Carry home exercises that can be run in our own organizations.

Two frameworks that gave the sessions their spine

The Johari Window, devised in 1955 by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, sorts what can be known about a person into four panes. Self-discovery is the work of enlarging the first pane by seeking feedback and by being willing to share.

OPEN Known me and others. The more of this we have, the easier we are to work with.	**BLIND SPOT** Known to others, not to me. Only honest feedback reveals it. The Three-Minute Introduction was built for this.
HIDDEN Known me, not to others. Sharing it builds trust, as the folk-song evening showed.	**UNKNOWN** Known to no one yet. Found through new experiences: a challenge, a new country.

Tuckman's stages of team growth (forming, storming, norming, performing, 1965) describe how a group becomes a team. The ATR compressed the cycle into days: the bus rides and dinners were forming; the rivalry and argument about who should play next was a healthy storm; the rotation rule forced norming; and by the last exercises the groups were performing.

Part A · Self-discovery sessions

Session 1 · "How do others perceive us?"

Participants were asked to sit comfortably, close their eyes, breathe slowly and, when the room had settled, point a finger toward north. Eyes stayed shut. Arms rose, some confident, some hesitant. Then came the instruction: open your eyes and look around. Twenty-odd fingers pointed to twenty-odd places. The room erupted in laughter, and in that laughter the first wall of formality came down.

The facilitator drew the meaning: everyone had received the same instruction in the same room, yet no two answers matched. We face different directions, and each of us must select our own path.

> **What it taught**
>
> Each person follows an individual compass, even when the instruction is shared.
>
> A team needs an agreed "true north", or members will move differently however good their intentions.
>
> Laughter lowers defences and prepares minds for honest reflection.

Try it at work: open a planning meeting with the exercise and ask, "What is our north?" Write the agreed reference point on the board before discussion begins.

Session 2 · The three-minute introduction

Chairs were drawn into a semicircle and participants paired with someone they knew only slightly. They had three minutes to talk, listen and observe. Then each person wrote, honestly and privately, an impression of their partner, and noted strengths and weaknesses on folded slips of paper.

The plenary was the most revealing moment of Part A. Some listeners had read their partners exactly; some partners nodded, surprised to be so accurately seen; others heard a description far from their own self-image, and sat with it. Participants noticed how much of the impression came not from words but from posture, eye contact and tone.

> **What it taught**
>
> We judge within minutes, and others judge us. Psychologists Nalini Ambady and Robert Rosenthal found that observers' judgments from very short clips of behaviour can be surprisingly close to those formed after long acquaintance, which is both a warning and an opportunity.
>
> Perception can be right or wrong; only unbiased feedback from friends, family and colleagues tells us which.
>
> Self-discovery is a comparison: how I see myself against how others see me, then a decision about what to keep and what to change. Body language colours every message, though the popular claim that most communication is non-verbal overstates the research.

Session 3 · The personality I admire most

Each participant thought of the most impressive person they had known (a teacher, a boss, a relative, a public figure) and wrote down the qualities that made the impression. In plenary the qualities were collected one by one on the whiteboard, and a pattern appeared that no one had planned. The facilitator named it: these are leadership qualities. The people who shaped each of us had led, whatever their title.

> **What it taught**
>
> What we admire, we can build: the list is a development map for ourselves.
>
> A missing quality is a goal, not a verdict.
>
> There is wide agreement, across ages and sectors, about what good leadership looks like.

Part B · Team-building challenges

After the stillness of Part A, the room changed gear. Participants were divided into four groups, and a warm-up of tongue-twisters repeated five times, quickly, moved the mood from reflection to readiness. Then the facilitator set the rule that changed everything.

> **The rotation rule**
> A member who took part in one exercise could not take part in the next. Groups had to decide, round by round, whom to field, whom to hold back and how to keep everyone involved. The group that won the most exercises would be the winner overall, and every result was written on the board for all to see.

The rule forbids the easy strategy of sending the strongest player every time. It forces a team to know its people, to trust the next person, and to treat the contest as a series of decisions: how organizations spend scarce talent.

Exercise 1 · Blowing The Cup

Each group had to move a paper cup across the table using only a pencil and breath. Grown professionals, senior managers among them, bent over the table with puffed cheeks. Some blew too hard and sent the cup rolling; some blew too softly and nothing moved; one or two found that where you aim matters more than how hard you blow.

Lesson: technique beats brute effort, simple tasks reward focus, and at the table everyone, whatever their seniority, was equal.





Exercise 2 · The Cup Tower

Two members per group: one built a tower from paper cups, the other dismantled it and restored the cups. The two jobs fought each other, because every cup placed was a cup to be undone. A builder who raced ahead left a wobbling tower; a dismantler who grabbed too soon toppled it. The pairs who did best slowed down together and agreed a rhythm.

Lesson: roles must be clear and partners must trust each other; speed is shared; the best teams manage the handover, not just their own task.





Exercise 3 · The Ball Throw

Four Sri Lankan rupee notes lay on a table. Each participant could throw a ball, and if it came to rest in line with a note, the note was theirs. It was the loudest exercise of the retreat. Some balls sailed past, some stopped a finger's breadth short and drew a collective groan, and then one stopped exactly right and the room roared. Three participants won cash prizes.

Lesson: only those who throw can win; energy is contagious; a miss is data for the next thrower.





Exercise 4 · The Long Straw

Each group received three straws and one rule: join them into one long straw without cutting, damaging or reshaping them with any other object. After a preparation period, one member from each group stood before a bottle of fizzy drink and tried to empty it through the home-made straw. The preparation room became a design studio: fold one end into the next, wedge it tighter, test the seal. Then the pressure fell on one person with the whole group watching. Two participants from two teams stayed neck and neck to the last sip.

Lesson: preparation decides performance; constraints focus creativity instead of killing it; the pressure moves to one person, but the result belongs to the team.





The hidden exercise: The Line-Up

Beneath the four games ran a fifth: the line-up. Because no member could play twice in a row, success depended on matching people to tasks. Before each round the groups huddled: who is steady enough for the cup, who has the touch for the throw, who should hold back for the straw? Groups that planned their line-ups early and encouraged one another performed best.

Exercise 5. The Pencil In The Bottle

Each participant held a pencil between the upper lip and the nose, with no help from the hands. Starting from a point marked by the trainer, 8 to 10 feet from a Coca-Cola bottle, they walked to the bottle and dropped the pencil in. The first to succeed won. Rushing made the pencil fall; the steady walkers won.

Lesson: balance and patience beat speed, composure under the eyes of colleagues is a skill, and a small failure is shared and laughed at, so it is easy to try again.





Exercise 6. The Rally Race

Four groups took part, and each nominated two members, who stood at opposite ends of the room. One took a folded paper roll, ran swiftly to the other end, handed it over and returned it to their original place. The first group to complete the race won.

Lesson: a race is won or lost at the handover, so speed alone is not enough. Each nominated member's part counted, and one weak handover cost the whole group.





Results and recognition

On the evening of 21 September, the second-last day of the retreat, the group gathered at Negombo for the certificate distribution ceremony. Every participant received a certificate recognizing their participation in the training, a small but lasting record of the days spent together.

Group Three, which won by taking the most exercises, and Group Two, the runners-up, were then called forward for special recognition, and the third-place team was also honored. All three teams were presented with small local Sri Lankan souvenirs as keepsakes of the retreat. The ceremony was held in a warm and light-hearted spirit, with applause for every team.

The visible scoreboard mattered as much as the result: it told every member that the contest was fair, that effort was counted and that the result belonged to everyone.

WINNERS

Group Three

Muhammad Sharif Khan
Shahmeer Shoaib
Nauman Maqsood Butt
Tahir Ali
Robeela Bangash

RUNNERS-UP

Group Two

Rizwan Javed
Feroz Shah
Ashiq Kalwar
Ishtiaq
Islam Gul




Certificate Distribution Ceremony






What the exercises showed about high-performing teams

Ingredient	What it means	Where it appeared
Shared goal	Everyone knows what winning looks like	Each group worked to win the most exercises
Trust and psychological safety	Members speak up and take risks without fear	Pair introductions; honest feedback; laughing at the wrong-north moment
Clear roles	Each person knows what they own	Cup tower: one builds, one dismantles
Communication	Information flows quickly and accurately	Straw preparation under a time limit
Resource strategy	Limited people and time used wisely	One member per exercise, no consecutive turns
Transparency	Results are visible and fair	Scores on the board
Energy and morale	Enthusiasm sustains effort	Ball throw; warm-up; shared meals

Harvard professor Amy Edmondson uses the term **psychological safety** for a climate in which people feel able to speak up, admit mistakes and take risks without fear of embarrassment. At the ATR it was built the simplest way: by laughing together at pointing in the wrong direction until being wrong became ordinary and safe.

Facilitator's toolkit: run these exercises yourself

Exercise	Materials	Time	Core debrief question
Which way is north?	None	10 min	What is our shared reference point?
Three-minute introduction	Paper, pens	30 min	How did my partner's view differ from mine?
The personality I admire	Paper, pens, whiteboard	30 min	Which of these qualities will I work on?
Blowing the cup	Paper cups, pencils	10 min	What is a better method than more effort?
The cup tower	Paper cups, timer	15 min	Where do our handovers slow us down?
The ball throw	Ball, small prize	10 min	What happens when we dare to try?
The long straw	Straws, bottles of drink	25 min	How do constraints and preparation shape results?
The pencil in the bottle	Pencils, Coca-Cola bottle,	10 min	How do calm and patience shape our performance under pressure?
The rally race	One folded paper roll per group	15 min	How does each member's part shape the team's result?

Materials and times are suggestions for use in your own organization; they are not the timings used at the ATR.

6 Learning Across Borders

A retreat abroad is more than a change of scenery. Being a visitor and being seen as a representative of one's country and organization, forces the same self-awareness the training room aimed to build. The first-hand encounters below are what made the cross-border dimension real.

Encounter	What happened	What it practiced
Students at Independence Square, Colombo	Curious Sri Lankan students questioned the delegates about Pakistan, practised English and talked about their studies. Handshakes and photographs followed.	Listening, giving a fair picture of one's country, curiosity about another's
Local visitors and students at Peradeniya	Warm, unscripted conversation among the plants and trees.	Informal rapport across languages and ages
Dinner with guests from Europe, China and Korea at Tree of Life	Greetings, stories and shared dishes in one dining hall.	Self-presentation and cross-cultural small talk
Folk-song evening	A Pakistani folk performance brought applause and participation from guests of other countries.	Authentic sharing of one's own culture
Markets, shops and guides	Bargaining and conversation in Pettah, Laksala, Kandy and Negombo.	Reading unfamiliar cues; courtesy; patience
Multi-faith Colombo and Buddhist Kandy	Temples, a mosque and churches within a short drive; visitors moved quietly through the Sacred Tooth Relic temple.	Respect for other beliefs and etiquette

Why exposure of this kind matters?

Social psychologist Gordon Allport argued in 1954 that contact between groups reduces prejudice when it is cooperative, between equals and backed by shared goals. The ATR's exchanges met those conditions: friendly, unforced, and ending in photographs rather than arguments. A well-known idea from intercultural learning is that you notice your own habits most clearly when you step outside your home context: a custom that was invisible becomes visible when others do it differently.

For development professionals, who work with communities, donors and partners across cultures, this is a working skill. The delegates also carried home something practical: Sri Lanka's mix of heritage and conservation, its tea and tourism economy, and its coastal and wetland ecosystems offer comparisons for community resilience work in Pakistan.

Cross-border themes and their link to the journey:

Theme	Where it showed	Why it matters to self-discovery
Many identities, one nation	Gangaramaya, Red Mosque, Galle Fort, Kandy	Our own identity has many layers; seeing another country's makes ours visible
Environment and resilience	Madu River, turtle hatchery, tea hills, the rain day	Communities, like teams, adapt together or not at all
Craft and patience	Gems, tea, Kandyan dance	Excellence comes from process, not accident
Ambassadorship	Students, dinner guests, music night	How others perceive us is shaped by how we show up

7 Voices from the journey

Beyond the exercises and the itinerary, the retreat was a personal journey for each member. For several delegates it was a first international trip, or a first flight. For senior members, it meant stepping out of routine, settling into a group of very different backgrounds and ages, and keeping up the energy through eight full days. The reflections below, grouped by stage of the journey, record what stayed with the group.

A reflection

We came to Sri Lanka expecting a good retreat. We left with a changed view of what a team can be. In Colombo and Galle, we watched colleagues We knew mostly from meetings become travel companions, sharing jokes and helping one another. For some of us it was a first journey abroad, and for others a first flight; no one was left to manage it alone. At Tree of Life, the training turned the journey inward. The wrong-north exercise made me laugh, and then it made me think about how rarely we check which way others are facing. When the rain cancelled our lake excursion, we simply carried on together, and we understood what "building resilient communities" truly asks of us. We return with warm memories, new friendships and one resolution: to ask for honest feedback, and to give it.

Colombo

"From the top of the Lotus Tower the whole city lay open at once. It made me think how rarely we step back to see our own work as a whole."

LOTUS TOWER · **Mr. Tahir Ali**

"A temple and a mosque, each with its own beauty, only a short drive apart. Colombo showed me what respect between faiths looks like in daily life."

GANGARAMAYA AND THE RED MOSQUE · **Ms. Nuzhat Shaheen**

"Talking with Sri Lankan students, I realised we were not just visitors but ambassadors for Pakistan, and I wanted them to carry away a good picture of us."

INDEPENDENCE SQUARE · **Ms. Rani Andaleeb**

The coast

"Walking the ramparts of Galle Fort, I saw that the structures that last are the ones people still live in and look after. The same is true of institutions like HRDN."

GALLE FORT · **Mr. Fahim Ahmad Siddiqui**

"Drifting through the mangroves, I saw how every plant and creature depends on the others. It was the best lesson on teamwork I have had outside a classroom."

MADU RIVER · **Mr. Muhammad Sharif Khan**

"Holding a baby turtle, so small and so ready for the sea, I understood that good leadership is protecting others until they can stand on their own."

TURTLE HATCHERY · **Mr. Haji Qaisar Khan Jamali**

"Standing in the sea waves, laughing with colleagues I had known only in meetings, I felt the group become a team."

BEACH · **MS Yasmin Kamran**

The road to Kandy

"We stopped for king coconut and red bananas by the road, and somehow that simple moment did more for the group than any plan could."

THE DRIVE TO KANDY · **Mr. Ihsan Ullah**

"Washing an elephant by the river, I saw how a herd protects its young and its weakest. A good team does the same."

ELEPHANT SANCTUARY · **Mr. Feroz Shah**

Kandy

"Stepping into the temple at dusk, in total quiet beside the lake, I felt the noise in my head fall away."

TEMPLE OF THE SACRED TOOTH RELIC · **Mr. Nauman Maqsood Butt**

"Among trees older than my career, I was reminded that growth needs time, patience and care, for people as much as for plants."

PERADENIYA BOTANIC GARDENS · **Mr. Waleed Raza**

"Following the tea leaf from the hillside to my cup showed me that quality is the work of every hand along the way."

TEA PLANTATION · **Mr. Qalander Bux**

"The drummers and dancers moved as one. Precision like that comes only from trust and long practice."

KANDYAN DANCE · **Mr. Hammad Zafar**

"When the rain cancelled our excursion, the group simply moved the learning indoors and carried on. For a retreat on resilience, it was the perfect lesson."

THE RAIN DAY · **Mr. Ishtiaq**

The Training Room

"Pointing north with my eyes closed, then opening them to see fingers going everywhere, taught me that every one of us follows a different compass."

WRONG-NORTH EXERCISE · **Mr. Nasrullah Jan**

"In three minutes, my partner read me almost perfectly. It made me wonder how many people form an impression of me without my knowing."

THREE-MINUTE INTRODUCTION · **Mr. Shahmeer Shoaib**

"In the cup tower we only won when we slowed down together. Speed means nothing if the handover fails."

CUP TOWER · **Mr. Ashiq Kalwar**

"Our winning straw was won in the preparation room, long before the drink was poured."

LONG-STRAW CHALLENGE · **Mr. Rizwan Javed (JWS)**

Negombo

"Watching a kite rise as soon as someone held the string and the wind came; I thought that is a team."

BEACH AND KITES · **Mr. Islam Gul**

8 Outcomes, recommendations and thanks

Key learnings

1. **Perception is reality to others.** How we are seen shapes our influence, so we should seek honest feedback.
2. **Each of us chooses a path, but a team needs a shared north.**
3. **What we admire, we can build.** The qualities we value in leaders are a roadmap for ourselves.
4. **Strategy decides team results.** Planning, role allocation and preparation outperform effort alone.
5. **Every member is a resource.** Teams excel when everyone contributes.
6. **Environment shapes learning.** A calm setting supports reflection and honest conversation.
7. **Connection builds trust.** Shared meals, music, travel and conversations with local people turned colleagues into companions.
8. **Adaptation is a skill.** The rain day showed that a good team keeps its purpose when the plan changes.

Recommendations

- Participants should seek structured feedback from colleagues and set one self-development goal to apply at work this quarter.
- Members should adapt two or three of the exercises (see the toolkit in Section 5) for team meetings and workshops in their own organisations.
- HRDN may hold a short follow-up session or online meetup to share how members have applied the learning.
- Future ATRs should keep venues that support the learning theme and build in a guided reflection day, with an indoor alternative for bad weather.
- HRDN may wish to encourage wider participation of women and younger professionals in future retreats.
- Future retreats may include a formal pre- and post-retreat reflection form so that learning can be measured as well as remembered.

Conclusion

The 25th ATR met its aim. Through reflection, honest feedback, leadership discussion and spirited team challenges, the delegation learned that self-discovery and team performance are two parts of one journey: people who know themselves build teams that achieve more. And a journey through another country, with its students, hosts, hills and rain, reminded members that learning is not confined to a training room.

Thanks

HRDN thanks Dr. Roomi S. Hayat for inspiring facilitation; the participants for their openness and energy; the Sri Lankan hosts, guides and drivers who made the programme run; and everyone whose support made the 25th ATR possible.

> **The Journey Ends Here. Learning Lasts a Lifetime. Lead with Purpose. Return with Impact.**

A Appendix A · Official itinerary

Leadership, Learning & Sustainable Development through Self Discovery in Sri Lanka (Colombo & Kandy) · 8 days, 7 nights · Sri Lankan Airlines · Departure Lahore–Colombo, 15 September, 18:25–22:50 · Return Colombo–Lahore, 22 September, 13:50–17:15.

Day	Date	Programme
1	Tue 15 Sep	Departure from Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore, 18:25. Arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB) 22:50. Meet and greet; transfer to Hotel Mandarina, Colombo.
2	Wed 16 Sep	**Colombo city tour.** Breakfast 07:00–08:30; depart 09:30. Lotus Tower, Gangaramaya Temple, Independence Memorial Hall, Galle Face Green, Red Mosque, Old Parliament Building (outside only), Pettah Market and malls.
3	Thu 17 Sep	**Colombo – Bentota excursion.** Depart 08:30. Galle Fort, Habaraduwa Turtle Hatchery, Madu Ganga Boat Safari, Bentota Beach. Back at the Colombo hotel about 19:30.
4	Fri 18 Sep	**Colombo – Pinnawala – Kandy.** Depart 09:00. Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage; scenic drive; arrival at Tree of Life Nature Resort about 17:00.
5	Sat 19 Sep	**Kandy heritage and cultural experience.** Depart 09:30. Royal Botanical Gardens Peradeniya, tea plantation and factory, National Gem and Gemological Museum, Kandyan cultural dance performance, Kandy Lake and the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic.
6	Sun 20 Sep	**Nature, reflection and scenic escape.** Depart 09:00 through the central highlands. "Journey of Self-Discovery Experience": Sembuwatta Lake (guided reflection in nature), Hunnas Falls. Shopping at Laksala, Kandy City Centre, tea and spice boutique.
7	Mon 21 Sep	**Kandy heritage, leisure and farewell.** Check-out 07:00–09:30; depart for Negombo 09:30. Negombo city tour in the evening; leisure shopping.
8	Tue 22 Sep	Breakfast 08:00–09:45; depart Negombo 09:55; arrive CMB 10:00–10:30; check-in and immigration from 10:30. Departure 13:50; arrival Lahore 17:15 (PKT).

As run: the Sacred Tooth Relic temple was visited on the evening of 18 September; the Day 6 excursion was replaced by training at the resort because of rain (Section 4).

B Appendix: References

This report draws on the following established works on learning, teamwork and intercultural exchange. They are acknowledged here with gratitude to their authors.

- Allport, G. W. (1954). The Nature of Prejudice. Addison-Wesley.
- Ambady, N., & Rosenthal, R. (1992). Thin slices of expressive behavior as predictors of interpersonal consequences. Psychological Bulletin, 111(2).
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2).
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Prentice Hall.
- Luft, J., & Ingham, H. (1955). The Johari Window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness. Proceedings of the Western Training Laboratory in Group Development.
- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63(6).

"We came as individuals and left as a team."









Address: IRM Complex, #7, Sunrise Avenue, Main Park Road, Near COMSATS University, Islamabad Pakistan.

Contact: 051-8742208

Website: hrdn.net

Email: info@hrdn.net

Facebook: HRDN.Net

Youtube:@hrdnpk