

Run to Remember 2025



On September 13th, the streets of Colombo came alive with the footsteps of runners gathering at the Taj Samudra. Seasoned athletes, families, colleagues, and friends all united by a single purpose: to raise awareness of Alzheimer's and dementia, honor those living with the condition, and support the caregivers who devote their lives to others. Run to Remember, organized annually by the Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation during World Alzheimer's Month, began more than two decades ago as a small volunteer-led initiative. Today, it has grown into a respected platform for education, remembrance, and community action. Taj Area Director Sri Lanka and Maldives, Samrat Datta, along with the LAF board and volunteers, were present at the event, demonstrating how dedication to a cause can coexist with personal and professional commitments.

For Heshan Rajapaksha, this year's winner, the run held deep personal significance. He reflected on joining in 2023, when he also won, without knowing much about Alzheimer's. In 2024, his father was hospitalized with dementia and is now in a nursing home. This year, Heshan ran with his father in his heart, explaining that the race was no longer simply about winning.



Romany Parakrama, one of the directors of the Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation, highlighted the profound impact of the disease. Drawing from her experiences with her mother-in-law and brother-in-law, she explained that Alzheimer's is not merely age-related memory loss but a serious condition that reshapes family life, caregiving roles, and emotional wellbeing. Dementia affects not only those diagnosed but also everyone around them, creating challenges across households and communities.

Sri Lanka faces a growing challenge as its population ages. By 2050, one in four Sri Lankans is expected to be over 60. Professor Shehan Williams, President of the Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation, cautioned that this is more than a statistic; it is a real concern for the quality of life of older citizens. Alzheimer's is not a natural part of aging, and without awareness and preparation, the country may face serious consequences. Every year, nearly 10 million people around the world join the 55 million already living with dementia, each number a life, a family, a story. In Sri Lanka, where care is primarily provided by families, awareness and support systems are vital.

For long-time supporter and brand ambassador Johanne Pierris, Run to Remember represents more than awareness. He has participated for 20 years and recalls that in the early days, people questioned why a run would highlight such a serious disease. He explained that the event brings people together positively, celebrates life, and promotes physical activity. This blend of awareness, celebration, and wellbeing has made Run to Remember a meaningful tradition in Colombo each September.

Alzheimer's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder that progressively destroys memory, thinking skills, and behavioral abilities, interfering with daily life. It is caused by abnormal protein deposits in the brain that lead to irreversible neuronal damage. Dementia is a broader syndrome involving cognitive decline severe enough to affect everyday functioning, with Alzheimer's accounting for the majority of cases. September is recognized globally as World Alzheimer's Awareness Month, with World Alzheimer's Day on September 21. The month encourages education, reduces stigma, supports those affected, and advocates for better care and research. Awareness can be promoted through social media campaigns, community events, educational sessions, volunteering, and brain-healthy lifestyles.

In Sri Lanka, Alzheimer's and dementia are significant and growing health concerns. The prevalence of dementia in semi-urban and suburban areas is around four percent, higher than the South Asian average. Over 200,000 people currently live with dementia, a number expected to rise to 460,000 by 2050. Alzheimer's is the most common cause, contributing to thousands of deaths annually. Risk factors include age, gender, illiteracy, lifestyle choices such as smoking and poor diet, and medical conditions including diabetes and

cardiovascular disease. South Asians, including Sri Lankans, may have unique risk profiles that increase vulnerability.

Run to Remember 2025 stands as a moving reminder of the human stories behind the statistics. It is a celebration of resilience, a gesture of solidarity, and an urgent reminder for our society to recognize dementia as a public health priority.

Alzheimer's is not simply forgetting with age but a disease that demands understanding, compassion, and collective effort. Through initiatives like this, Sri Lanka takes another step forward in carrying memory, honoring lives, and building a future where dignity and care for those affected are never forgotten.



Written by Thaliba Cader for the Sun