

■ First group of 12 golf enthusiastic senior corporate executives from Japan en joy first visit to Sri Lanka following reciprocal agreement with Royal Colombo Golf Club and Tokyo's Taiheiyo Club

■ More corporate executive-golf groups to tour Sri Lanka this year

THE joint push by Japan's Bansei Securities and Sri Lanka's NWS Holdings Ltd. to promote golf tourism in Sri Lanka got a fresh boost with the first group enjoying the game over the weekend in Colombo.

A group of 12 Japanese senior corporate executives including chairmen and managing directors were in Sri Lanka on a four-day trip, their first ever. Among them were Masahiko Kamata, the President of SBS Holdings Inc., one of the biggest logistics firms in Japan.

The precursor to their trip is the landmark reciprocal agreement signed in October last year between the Royal Colombo Golf Club and Japan's Taiheiyo Club, Tokyo under an initiative championed by NWS Holdings, controlled by Japanese investor Takashi Igarashi and its partners Bansei Securities Ltd., a Tokyo Stock Exchange listed company. Bansei also has a Sri Lankan venture Bansei Holdings LK Ltd., with investments in financial services and tourism sector.

The Japanese executives group arrived late Thursday and held business meetings on Friday and thereafter spent a day at Bansei's newly opened resort in Hikkaduwa before enjoying a game of golf of Sunday.

Bansei Chairman Toyohiko Murakami told the Daily FT that among the group were some of its clients in Tokyo as well as other business partners. "When we promoted the idea of business-sports-leisure trip to Sri Lanka, they were excited. The visit is important since it is their first ever therefore all these 12 corporate giants got a chance to explore Sri Lanka first hand," Murakami added.

Bansei and NWS Holdings hopes to aggressively promote Sri Lanka among golf-crazy Japanese corporate executives. Murakami said the next group is planned for May this year whilst some of the members of last week's group said they will come on their own in the future along with business partners.

Kazuo Kishino, CEO of Mirai-Juku Co Ltd., of Tokyo, Japan said he was impressed by his first visit

Bansei, NWS Holdings walk the talk with boost for golf tourism



Kazuo Kishino, CEO of Mirai-Juku Co Ltd



were also impressed by the level of development in Sri Lanka as well as tourist attractions in the country.

In October last year, the 135-year old Royal Colombo Golf Club signed a reciprocal membership program with Tokyo's Taiheiyo Club which has 17 courses including one overlooking Mt. Fuji and 17,000 members.

At present golf crazy affluent Japanese travel to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to enjoy the game. Both RCGC and Taiheiyo Club expressed hope that around 1,500 members of the latter could be lured to explore and enjoy Sri Lanka and its golf. NWS Holdings as well as Bansei

Group are aggressively promoting golf tourism given the immense potential.

According to RCGC officials global golf tourism is worth over \$2 billion.

"Golf is a unique vehicle to promote Sri Lanka's tourism. Royal Colombo Golf Club is a cornerstone of the long tradition of golf in Asia. It is a sanctuary in Colombo. There are few golf clubs anywhere in Japan which can speak of such a proud history," Taiheiyo's President and CEO Shun Han said in October after signing the partnership with RCGC.

Under the partnership the Taiheiyo Club members will be



Bansei Chairman Toyohiko Murakami



Kazuo Kishino, CEO of Mirai-Juku Co Ltd



permitted to play on the RCGC course free of charge. In turn, RCGC members will enjoy the same benefit in Tokyo and moreover, the Japanese club will promote high profile players to visit Colombo.

Taiheiyo Club has hosted the popular Taiheiyo Masters for the past 37 years as well as the World Cup of 2002 which saw iconic Tiger Woods playing for the US team. Now owned by Japan's gaming and

FT Quote
 "This is my first trip and it is bit short. I hope to come back again and spend more time. I am keen to visit the heritage areas of Sri Lanka as well. The Royal Colombo Golf Club is excellent and Sri Lanka should have more golf courses. Fiji, a smaller country, has over 20 world class golf courses - Kazuo Kishino, CEO of Mirai-Juku Co Ltd., of Tokyo who travels to Thailand or the Philippines twice a year to play golf and enjoy a holiday"

entertainment company Maruham Corporation, Taiheiyo also has reciprocal arrangements with Hong Kong Clearwater Bay and Macau Golf Club.

Pix by Shehan Gunasekera



Etisalat empowers Sri Lanka Army rugby team

■ Continues its efforts to strengthen the game

ETISALAT Lanka further strengthened its association with Sri Lanka Army by acting as the principal sponsor of their rugby team for the second successive year.

The sponsorship was forged between the two organisations as a means to continue their joint effort of strengthening rugby in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka Army is an integral part of the growth initiative of Etisalat Lanka, which is a company which has strong brand association with diverse segments across Sri Lankan society. The Sri Lankan Army Rugby Club - which

was created in 1963 - brings more than the spirit of the game to the field. It boasts a team which evokes national pride and valour.

The Army Sports Club has been able to produce a strong rugby team, with the soldiers performing creditably on the club rugby circuit during the recent past.

During the past decade rugby has been identified as a sport which has gained immense popularity and a loyal fan base which includes both young and old alike. As a promoter of local sports, Etisalat is keen on enhancing the game throughout Sri Lanka by extending its global corporate strength.

TEXT AND PICTURES BY P.D. DE SILVA

MANY sessions of play at the Uyanwatta Stadium in Matara were lost due to the unavailability of covers. The few covers available were damaged and needed replacement.

The Uyanwatta Stadium is owned and maintained by the Matara Municipal Council while the Matara District Cricket Association is responsible for developing and promoting the game in the district.

The Uyanwatta Stadium boasts of 12 centre turf wickets of international standard laid by Sri Lanka Cricket for the T20 World Cup in 2012.

The first day's play of the match between St. Thomas College Matara and St. Patrick's College Jaffna was hampered due to a damp wicket.

Charith Palliyage, the coach of STC Matara, which is striving to secure a slot in Division One of the school cricket tournament, has been set back due to the loss of playing time and the possibility of forcing outright wins.

Unavailability of covers hampers cricket at Uyanwatta



Rev bro Francis



Charith Palliyage



STC coach Charith Palliyage



He said that the many requests made to the Matara District Cricket Association to provide covers for the 12 centre wickets had fallen on deaf ears.

Rev. Brother Francis, the Master-in-Charge of the St. Patrick's College team, said that the school has spent over Rs. 100,000 to send its team to Matara and it was a

big disappointment that play was lost due to the unavailability of covers at a venue where Sri Lanka Cricket conducts some of its international games.

It is time that the authorities concerned provide sufficient covers for the Uyanwatta Stadium and ensure that they are taken care of.