



Waiting for training to start



DAS Hearing and speech impaired girls

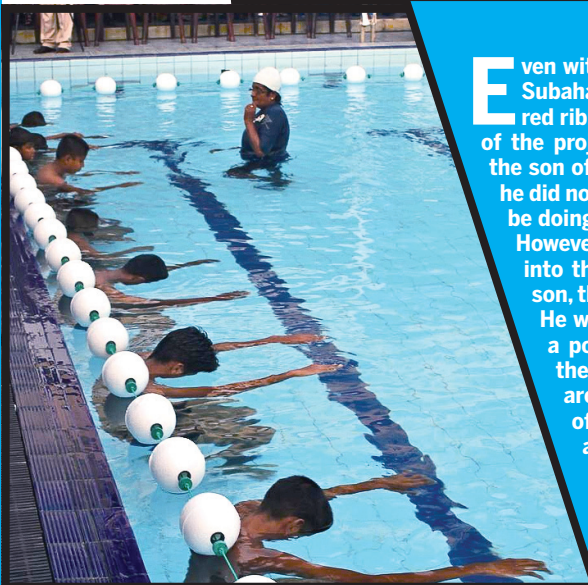


DAS blind swimmers

# A WHITE CANE walk to the Pool



DAS first swimmer Subakaran getting into the pool

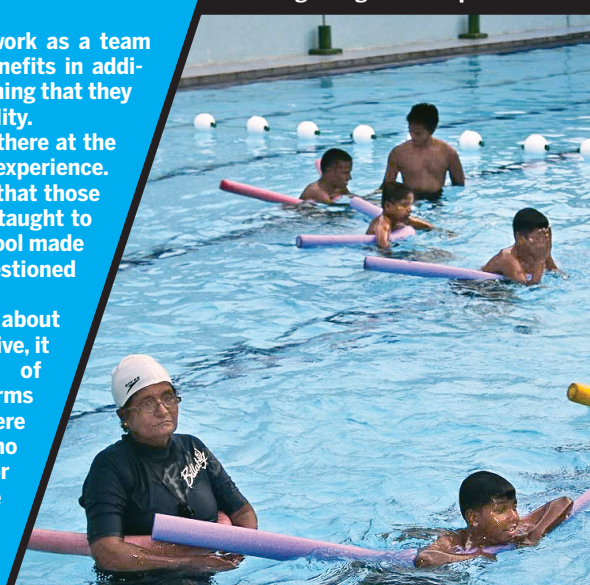


Learning the basics

**IROMI PERERA**  
**E**ven with the help of an adult, 10 year old Subakaran took three attempts to cut the red ribbon that symbolised the beginning of the project. This is because young Suba, the son of an estate worker is born blind, so he did not really know what he was meant to be doing.  
 However, half an hour later when he got into the pool for his first swimming lesson, there was no trace of that hesitancy. He was like every little boy getting into a pool for a lesson – commenting on the coldness of the water, splashing around a little, holding onto the edge of the pool until he felt more balanced. Truly, those who were watching this excitement taking place never probably realised that a swimming pool could make a lot of things so equal. If someone had just walked into the com-

ound at that moment they would have never for a moment imagined that the group of young boys in the pool were blind – their enthusiasm in following the instructor's directions and the skills they showed at such an early stage in their lesson could have definitely fooled anyone.  
 This was the beginning of Candle Aid's Differently Abled Swimmers (DAS) project – a project that will teach young children who are blind and deaf to swim. As the Principal of the Ratmalana School for the Deaf and Blind said in her speech at the opening ceremony, she had first seen blind children swimming ten years ago during a trip to Sweden but unfortunately she had not been able to make it a reality for the children in her school until Candle Aid came forward with this wonderful invitation. A lot of the children who will benefit from this project come from very low income households so therefore they have more than their disability that stands in their way compared to other children their age.  
 This project will contribute to better health, build-

ing their confidence, ability to work as a team and lot of other non tangible benefits in addition to the ability to swim, something that they never thought would be a possibility. For those of us who were sitting there at the ceremony it was a fascinating experience. None of us had ever even known that those who are blind and deaf could be taught to swim and watching them in the pool made us wonder why we never even questioned the possibility.  
 But this is the wonderful thing about this project and seeing it come alive, it questions one's perception of achievement and possibly reaffirms that if just one person is out there saying that you can, there is no reason to say you cannot – and for those who are familiar with the work of Candle Aid will find that this resonates across the board with regard to all their work.



DAS swimmers first day



CandleAid studnets bringing their DAS friends to the pool



Chief Guest, Justice Weeramantry addressing the gathering



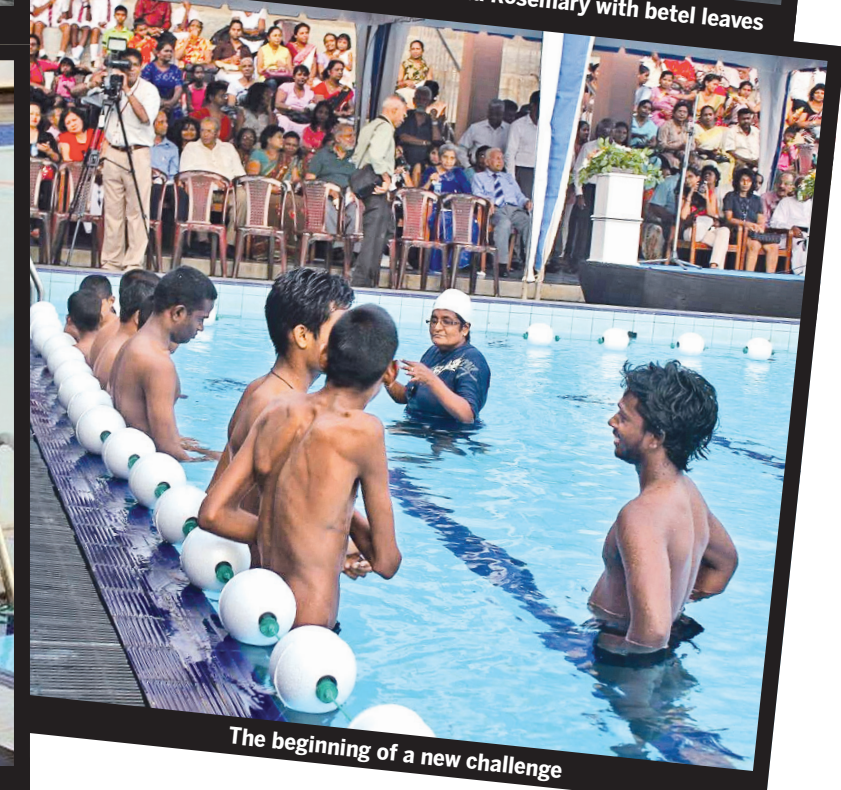
The blind and the deaf worshipping Justice and Rosemary with betel leaves



Ten year old Subakaran cutting the ribbon



CandleAid swimmers bringing their blind friends to the ceremony



The beginning of a new challenge