

**SPINNERS RUN RIOT TO PUT LIONS ON TOP**



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# the morning

**THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PILL**  
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**THE TRIAL, AND ERROR, OF THE POLITICAL 'OUTSIDER'**  
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**RETAILERS REQUEST GOVT. TO RETHINK TAX PROPOSALS**



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## 'Officials disagreeing with 100% organic agri policy can leave'

- Prez wants 'honest' team for policy's success
- Says no change in ambitious plan



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Emphasising that the policy of the Government is to direct agricultural activity in the country entirely towards the use of organic

fertilisers, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said that the officials who do not agree with it are free to leave.

"Stressing the need for officials to seek solutions for the protesting farmers within the green agriculture policy, Rajapaksa said that there is

no impediment for officials who do not agree with the Government's policy to leave. He said that the support of an honest team of officials is needed for the success of this programme," stated the President's Media Centre (PMC).  
Contd. on page 2

## Chemical fertiliser permitted for vegetables

- Prez instructs Agriculture DG to import
- Mahindananda says decision only due to the heavy rains
- Says no such imports for paddy

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has instructed Agriculture Director General (DG) Dr. Ajantha de Silva to take necessary steps to import specialised chemical fertilisers and pesticides required for vegetable cultivation, in limited quantities, for a limited period, owing to the lack of organic and liquid fertilisers for the same, and the prevailing rains, *The Morning* learnt.

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

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PHOTO SAMAN ABESIRIWARDANA

## Ranjan to stand before tribunal after phone found in cell

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Prison officials have, on Sunday (21), taken into their custody a mobile phone that was in the possession of former Samagi Jana Balawegaya Opposition Parliamentarian Ranjan Ramanayake, and have initiated a preliminary investigation into the matter, following which Ramanayake would be charged under the Prisons Ordinance and then be produced before a prison tribunal.

Contd. on page 2

## Basil to visit Modi for investments

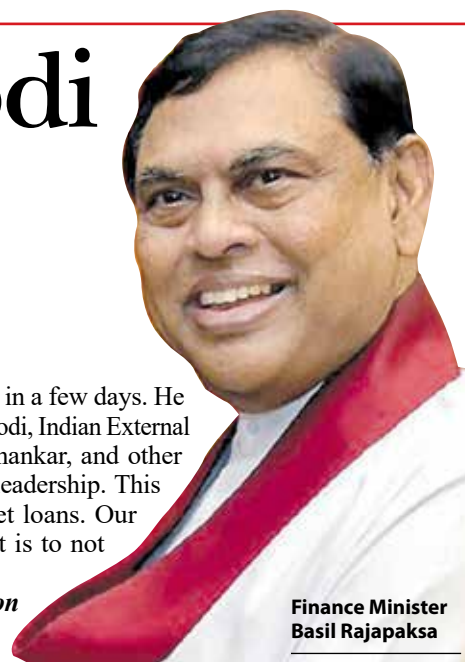
- Preparations underway to fly to Delhi soon

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa is due to visit India in the coming few days for discussions with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to procure foreign investment into the country, Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris said yesterday (22). "Rajapaksa will be going to New Delhi,

India, on an official visit in a few days. He will meet with Premier Modi, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and other members of the Indian leadership. This visit is not merely to get loans. Our policy as a Government is to not just get loans."

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Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa

## 'Untraceable source' infections rising

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

The Health Ministry has stated that the number of cases of Covid-19 infections, of which the source is difficult to identify, has increased over the past few days, amidst a rising daily infection rate of 700 cases.

Speaking at a media briefing held yesterday (22), Health Ministry Communications Director, Public Health

Services Deputy Director General (DDG), and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head Dr. Hemantha Herath said: "Currently, the number of Covid-19 infections of which we find it difficult to identify the source has increased as a percentage. However, we don't see it as serious enough to change the existing disease control mechanisms."

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## New Constitution draft and electoral reforms by end January

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris said yesterday (22) that the draft of the new Constitution will be presented to Parliament by the end of January, alongside the recommendations on the electoral system, which are to be made by the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) to identify appropriate reforms of the election laws, headed by Education Minister Dinesh Gunawardena.



Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris

Contd. on page 2

**COVID-19 CASES**

ACTIVE CASES: 15,389

TOTAL CASES: 556,626

DEATHS: 14,127

RECOVERED: 527,110

SOURCE: HEALTH PROMOTION BUREAU

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**COVID-19 TOTAL VACCINATION**

1ST DOSE: 15,911,983

2ND DOSE: 13,707,519

THE ABOVE STATISTICS ARE CONFIRMED UP UNTIL 7.30 P.M. ON 22 NOVEMBER 2021

SOURCE: PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT

## Russia's Security Council Secretary meets Prez

Russian Federation Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev called on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the Presidential Secretariat yesterday (22), the Presidents' Media Division announced.

The President had thanked Patrushev for providing 5,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines...

Contd. on page 2

Russian Federation Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev



## Second Reading of Budget passed in Parliament

The Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2022 was passed in Parliament yesterday (22), by a majority of 93 votes.

Announcing the results of the division taken following the conclusion of the Second Reading debate, the Speaker said that 153 MPs had voted in favour and 60 had voted against the Bill.

Contd. on page 2

## AG reads out indictment against ex-IGP

The Attorney General (AG) yesterday (22) read out before the Colombo Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar, the indictment consisting of 855 charges against former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Pujith Jayasundara, regarding his failure to take action to prevent the Easter Sunday bombings.

Contd. on page 2

## Rice and curry and plain tea prices rise

The Canteen Owners' Association announced yesterday (22) that the prices of a packet of rice and curry and plain tea will be increased from today.

Accordingly, the price of a packet of rice and curry will be increased by Rs. 20 while the price of a plain tea will be increased by Rs. 5, the association announced during a press briefing.

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## SJB complains to the UNHRC about Fr. Cyril Gamini grilling

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

As National Catholic Social Communication Centre Director Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando appeared before the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) for the third day yesterday (22), the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) lodged...

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The Catholic clergy staged a silent protest on both sides of the road in front of the CID yesterday (22)

PHOTO ESHAN DASANAYAKA

## Drunk SLPP politician tied to lamp post

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) spradeshiya sabha (PS) member Harsha Jayasri was tied to a lamp post yesterday (22) and later taken to the Kalutara North Police Station after consuming alcohol...

Contd. on page 2

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The Connection



# { NEWS }

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### Chemical fertiliser...

When contacted by *The Morning* for confirmation and further details, Dr. de Silva said that this decision was taken yesterday (22) as there are no organic fertilisers and liquid fertilisers that can be used for vegetable cultivations as at present.

“This decision does not mean that the policy of organic farming mentioned in the President’s manifesto has been abandoned, but considering the current situation, the President instructed to take necessary steps to import a limited quantity of chemical fertilisers as there are no organic and liquid fertilisers that can be used for vegetable cultivations,” he explained.

Dr. de Silva further said that the import of chemical fertilisers will be carried out due to the current demands of the farmers and the limited space available for the use of other alternative solutions for vegetable cultivations, but that it will be limited to a short period of time.

The President has given these instructions during a meeting held at the Presidential Secretariat yesterday to discuss the situation with regard to the provision of fertilisers. Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage; Promoting the Production and Regulating the Supply of Organic Fertiliser, and Paddy and Grains, Organic Foods, Vegetables, Fruits, Chillies, Onion, and Potato Cultivation Promoting, Seed Production, and Advanced Technology Agriculture State Minister Shasheendra Rajapaksa; President’s Secretary Dr. P.B. Jayasundera; Senior Advisor to the President Lalith Weeraratunga; and other officials had attended the said meeting.

Meanwhile, Aluthgamage, responding to a question in Parliament yesterday as to whether chemical fertiliser will now be imported or not, stated that the President has given permission to import “specialised fertilisers” and pesticides for vegetable cultivation in view of the prevailing rains. However, he said there will be no import of organic fertilisers for paddy cultivation.

A proposal to ban the use and importation of chemical fertiliser, pesticides, and herbicides/weedicides was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers by President Rajapaksa and the same was granted approval, following which the relevant gazette notification was issued in May 2021.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Ministry Secretary Prof. Udith K. Jayasinghe-Mudalige stated on 21 November 2021, that steps will be taken to re-import standardised, second-generation chemical fertilisers, agrochemicals, and essential plant nutrients required for paddy, maize, vegetables, and other plantation crops.

### ‘Officials disagreeing...

He made these remarks during a special meeting held at the Presidential Secretariat yesterday (22), where the Maha cultivation season and the supply of organic fertiliser were discussed.

Rajapaksa also pointed out that the reason why farmers are protesting these days and delaying their cultivation activities is that they are not properly aware of the use of organic fertiliser. He expressed his displeasure to the officials for not educating the farmers properly.

He also said that in implementing the Government’s policy, the existing chemical fertiliser mafia should be identified. The commitment of officials is essential to fight it and to achieve the right objective, Rajapaksa said and added that hereafter, the Government will provide subsidies only for organic fertiliser.

He then inquired from officials at the district level about the cultivation of paddy and other crops in all parts of the country, and the officials informed him that the heavy rains and delays in the distribution of organic fertiliser have affected the harvest of many crops, including vegetables. However, at the district level, the cultivation of nearly 70% of the total farmlands has commenced now, the officials told the President.

A proposal to ban the use and importation of chemical fertiliser, pesticides, and herbicides/weedicides was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers by President Rajapaksa and the same was granted approval, following which the relevant gazette notification was issued in May 2021.

However, during the same meeting yesterday, Rajapaksa has instructed Agriculture Director General Dr. Ajantha de Silva to take necessary steps to import specialised chemical fertilisers

and pesticides required for vegetable cultivation, in limited quantities, for a limited period, owing to the current lack of organic and liquid fertilisers that can be used for vegetable cultivation, and the prevailing rains.

“This decision does not mean that the policy of organic farming mentioned in the President’s manifesto has been abandoned, but considering the current situation, the President instructed to take necessary steps to import a limited quantity of chemical fertilisers as there are no organic and liquid fertilisers that can be used for vegetable cultivation,” Dr. de Silva explained to *The Morning*.

On an earlier occasion, the Finance Ministry, through the gazette notification number 2238/45 of 31 July 2021, relaxed regulations on the importation of chelated (a type of bonding of ions and molecules to metal ions) minerals and micronutrients for the purpose of producing fertiliser. Accordingly, nitrogen (N) fertiliser, phosphate (PO<sub>4</sub><sup>3-</sup>) fertiliser, potassium (K) fertiliser, and fertilisers containing such minerals and chemical fertilisers containing a combination of fertilising elements, which were previously banned from being imported, were brought under the import control licence (ICL) by the aforesaid gazette notification.

### ‘Untraceable source’...

He also said that the number of Covid-19 cases reported daily has risen to about 700 at present and that it is a serious condition. Therefore, he said that it is very important for the people to abide by the health guidelines for the further control of the disease.

According to the Sri Lanka Epidemiology Unit, as of 8.30 p.m. on yesterday (22), has recorded 14,158 Covid-19 deaths while the total number of infections stood at 557,361, of which a total of 527,110 patients have recovered.

Dr. Herath recently told the media that even though the people are adhering to health guidelines, it is not possible to control the spread of Covid-19 if there are large gatherings. Further claiming that the adverse results of such activities cannot be seen instantly, he said that it would take a few weeks to see the results. He also said that Covid-19 infections were being reported in some areas that had not been anticipated by the health sector. Pointing out that the travel restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation were lifted to carry out essential social and economic activities, he said however that with the removal of these restrictions, there could be a serious situation if the people act in a way that the disease will spread again. “There should be no deviation from the health guidelines in any way,” he noted.

### Basil to...

“But we are also focused on getting capital and foreign investments through other means – investments, business relationships, and the development of the tourism sector,” said Prof. Peiris yesterday.

Prof. Pieris noted that since Sri Lanka is currently trapped in the biggest economic crisis post-independence, Sri Lanka should not isolate itself diplomatically.

“The economic crisis is due to many reasons, including mainly international ones such as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, to face this crisis, we must not act in solitude. We have many good relationships with many countries. There is space for us to arrive at some agreement with friendly countries. We especially have a very good relationship with India, our neighbouring country, who has come to our support in times of both economic and other needs,” he noted.

Preparations are already underway between Indian High Commissioner (HC) to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay and Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India Milinda Moragoda to facilitate this visit.

### New Constitution...

“We hope that by the second week of January, the draft of the new Constitution will be ready, which is now being worked on by an expert committee chaired by President’s Counsel (PC) Romesh De Silva. In about three weeks, the committee will prepare the new Constitution – not proposals, not recommendations, but the complete draft. The country is also very focused on changing the electoral system as both political parties and the public are

of the opinion that it is unsuitable. The Select Committee led by Gunawardena is looking into it already, meeting about twice a week, in discussions spanning more than two hours. Those recommendations will also be given to the Parliament at the end of January or at the beginning of February, and they will also be very helpful,” said Prof. Peiris whilst addressing the media yesterday.

He added that once the draft of the new Constitution is ready, it will be sent to the Legal Draftsman’s Department, prior to it being presented to Parliament. A bipartisan Parliamentary Select Committee, representing members of all political parties, will analyse the said draft before Parliament debates it, he explained.

The expert committee was appointed in September of last year. In addition to De Silva PC, its other members include Gamini Marapana PC, Manohara De Silva PC, Sanjeeva Jayawardena PC, and Samantha Ratwatte PC; Dr. A. Sarveswaran; Prof. Wasantha Seneviratne; and Prof. G.L. Peiris.

### Ranjan to...

Prisons Department Spokesman and Commissioner Chandana Ekanayake told the media yesterday (22) that a mobile phone and a hands-free phone were found during an emergency search carried out on Ramanayake’s cell on Sunday at 10 p.m.

Ramanayake, who was being detained at the Angunakolapelessa Prison, was transferred to the Welikada Prison Hospital on 10 November 2021, to be admitted to the Orthopaedic Clinic of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL) in Colombo for the treatment of a knee injury and is currently receiving treatment.

The Supreme Court, on 12 January 2021, sentenced Ramanayake to a four-year term of rigorous imprisonment over contempt of court. The case was filed by Ven. Magalkande Sudaththa Thera and Air Force Officer (Retd.) R. Sunil Perera in 2017 following some remarks made by Ramanayake, allegedly insulting the reputation of the Judiciary when commenting to the media on 21 August 2017.

### Second Reading...

Ministers and MPs representing the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and other allied parties of the Government had voted in favour, while Opposition parties including the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) voted against.

Parliament was subsequently adjourned until 9.30 a.m. today (23).

Parliament sittings commenced at 9.30 a.m. yesterday (22), with time allotted for the Second Reading debate on the 2022 Appropriation Bill (seventh allotted day) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., after which the vote for the Second Reading was held.

Meanwhile, the Committee-Stage Debate will commence today (23) and will continue for 16 days, including Saturday, until 10 December. The Third Reading vote will be held on 10 December.

The 2022 Budget was tabled in the House by Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa on 12 November, followed by the budget speech.

This is the 76th Budget of an independent Sri Lanka. It is also the second Budget of the incumbent Government and the first-ever Budget presented by Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa.

When questioned about the upcoming Budget earlier this month, Minister Rajapaksa said that this year’s Budget will be unable to provide increased welfare to the people, adding: “We won’t be able to give, only take.”

The Appropriation Bill for FY2022 was presented in Parliament on 7 October, with budget allocations for the education, defence, and finance sectors being increased, whilst that of the health sector being reduced when compared to FY2021.

The Appropriation Bill notes that the total expenditure of the Government allocated for the year 2022, including for both recurrent and capital expenditure, has decreased by Rs. 33 billion compared to the 2021 fiscal year.

Thus, the total expenditure for 2022 is estimated at Rs. 2,505.3 billion (Rs. 2.5 trillion).

The Ministry of Defence has been allocated Rs. 373.1 billion for the year 2022, a Rs. 18 billion increase from the fiscal year 2021, making it the highest-allocated sector. Following the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Public Services, Provincial Councils (PCs), and Local Government (LG) has been allocated the second-highest expenditure of Rs. 286.7 billion.

The Ministry of Highways has been allocated Rs. 250.1 billion, while the

Ministry of Education has been allocated Rs. 185.9 billion for the year 2022, which is a Rs. 28 billion increase from the fiscal year 2021, but still below the amount allocated to the Ministry of Highways, which was the case last year as well.

### SJB complains...

...a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) office in Colombo, alleging that the present Government was harassing Fr. Fernando by summoning him to the CID.

The complaint was handed over by Parliamentarian Dr. Kavinda Heshan Jayawardhana, who told the media afterwards that Fr. Fernando had been speaking based on the final report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into the Easter Sunday terror attacks and certain comments made in Parliament regarding the said terror attacks.

“The Government is currently harassing people who are demanding justice for the victims of these terror attacks. As of now, Fr. Fernando has been summoned to the CID for three days. He only asked the Government and law enforcement agencies to serve justice to the people. Therefore, we strongly condemn the CID summoning him in this manner and will always be there to support him,” he said.

Fr. Fernando provided a nearly five hour-long statement yesterday with regard to the complaint lodged by State Intelligence Service (SIS) Director, Maj. Gen. Suresh Sallay, against the former, after having appeared before the CID and provided statements on 15 and 16 November as well.

Fr. Fernando arrived at the CID at around 9.30 a.m. yesterday, and was accompanied by more than 100 Catholic priests. During his time inside the CID, the Catholic clergy staged a silent protest on both sides of the road in front of the CID, holding photographs of people killed in the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 21 April 2019. They displayed various banners that read: “How disgraceful is it to hurt a victim?” and “We stand to defend the value and dignity of human life”. The Catholic clergy staged silent protests in front of the CID on the previous two occasions also.

Speaking to the media yesterday, Colombo Archdiocese Social Communications Director Fr. Jude Chrisantha condemned the questioning of Fr. Fernando.

“How unfortunate we are to be under this corrupt regime? When someone in another country gives information about a crime, the authorities in those countries would go after it and find out the root cause of the crime. They would even give rewards to the person who provided that information. But in our country, Fr. Fernando, who gave this information, has been summoned to the CID for the third day.”

He also commented on a recent statement made by Police Media Spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Nihal Thaldudwa to the effect that Fr. Fernando was being summoned to the CID to investigate the Easter Sunday terror attacks and to bring justice to the victims.

“SSP Thaldudwa said that Fr. Fernando is being summoned by the CID to investigate the said crime and to bring justice. Does he think that we have studied only up to Grade Four? The PCoI, which was appointed by the then President Maithripala Sirisena, investigated this matter for more than a year and prepared a report. Does Thaldudwa know the information contained in it?” Claiming that the PCoI report contained all the details related to the Easter Sunday terror attacks, Fr. Chrisantha said that the relevant authorities should follow the information and arrest those involved. “We would like to tell Thaldudwa that this PCoI report contains all the information. It recommends that the law be enforced against incumbent MP Maithripala Sirisena and former SIS Director Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Nilantha Jayawardena,” he said.

During a discussion between the Catholic church and a group of Sri Lankans living abroad held late last month, a presentation was made, which alleged that there is credible evidence that Maj. Gen. Sallay and other intelligence agencies had provided financial and other forms of support to the National Thowheeth Jama’ath (NTJ) terror group, including its Leader Mohamed Cassim Mohamed Zaharan alias Zaharan Hashim, prior to 2015. Zaharan was one of the suicide bombers at Shangri-La Colombo on 21 April 2019.

On 25 October, a complaint was filed at the CID by Maj. Gen. Sallay against Fr. Fernando and others who attended the online forum, requesting an investigation into an allegation made against him during the said forum that the NTJ terror group, which was behind the Easter Sunday terror attacks on 21 April 2019, was supported by the intelligence

services, including him (Sallay) in his former capacity as the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) Director.

### Russia’s Security...

...for Russia’s assistance in making the Covid-19 vaccination drive a success, and for the 49,379 Russian tourists who arrived in Sri Lanka last year even during the Covid-19 epidemic.

The statement mentioned that Sri Lanka wishes to expand its export product range under the Russian Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) scheme. The President said Russian investors are invited to invest in the Colombo Port City, and in the energy, pharmaceutical, ICT, agriculture, infrastructure, oil and gas exploration, and logistics sectors.

During the meeting, President Rajapaksa had commended Russia’s role as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council in promoting the interests and concerns of developing countries in the areas of peace and security and expressed gratitude for Russia’s strong support to Sri Lanka in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) sessions.

President Rajapaksa had said that Sri Lanka is ready to deepen bilateral co-operation in addressing extremism, terrorism, and cyber threats, including sharing of intelligence information and countering terrorist financing, as Russia has in the past extended immense support in Sri Lanka’s fight against terrorism.

Patrushev has served as the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation since 2008, having previously served in the Committee for State Security (KGB) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and of the Federal Security Service of Russia.

Bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Russia will mark the 65th anniversary on 19 February 2022. President Rajapaksa said that Patrushev’s visit will further strengthen the ties between the two countries.

In attendance at the meeting was Russian Ambassador in Sri Lanka Yury Materiy, Russian Federation Security Council Deputy Secretaries Aleksander Venediktov and Oleg Khramov, Secretary to the President P.B. Jayasundera, Principal Advisor to the President Lalith Weeraratunga, Foreign Secretary Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, and a team of Russian diplomats.

### Drunk SLPP...

...and harassing the residents of the Galpatha area in Kalutara, according to Kalutara North Police Officer-in-Charge (OIC) I.G. Fonseka

Speaking to the media, OIC Fonseka yesterday (22) stated: “Harsha Jayasri, who is a pradeshiya sabha member, has been doing this repeatedly for a long time. People have been inconvenienced by his drinking and behaviour. He has been drinking excessively and then acting quite badly. Yesterday, he had broken two window panes of a house while causing chaos in the neighborhood. Because of this, the people of the village have caught him, tied him to a lamp post in the town, and later dragged him to the police station.”

He went on to say that when Jayasri was brought in by the village people, he was intoxicated and was injured from the window panes he had broken.

“Jayasri was taken to a hospital for the injuries on his hands and is now in remand. He has paid Rs. 15,000 for the damages to the window panes, and the people of the area have dropped his case, whereas the Sri Lanka Police is taking up the case as he has been behaving inappropriately while under the influence of alcohol, and that itself is an offence,” Fonseka concluded.

Jayasri is to be produced before the Kalutara Magistrate’s Court next week.

### Rice and curry...

Accordingly, the new prices of rice packets will be as follows:

- Rice and curry (fish) – Rs. 200
- Rice and curry (vegetarian) – Rs. 160
- Rice and curry (chicken/beef) – Rs. 230-250

### AG reads...

The case was taken up today before the Trial-at-Bar comprising High Court Judges Namal Balalle, Aditya Patabendige, and Mohamed Irshadeen.

The indictments against the defendants were then read out by the AG.

The former Police Chief is accused of failing to take appropriate action to prevent the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 despite adequate intelligence information being received beforehand.



**AT A GLANCE**

**AASL URGES FLYERS TO COMPLETE ONLINE HEALTH DECLARATION FORM**  
Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) (Pvt.) Ltd. (AASL) requested passengers to complete their online Health Declaration Form before landing, so that they could obtain the appropriate QR code and their health check at the airport could proceed smoothly.  
An Online Covid-19 Health Declaration System was introduced at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) with the initial step of moving to touch-free and paperless boarding technology, while reducing the level of congestion generated by the need to verify the health of all passengers.

**THREE ARRESTED WHILE ATTEMPTING TO SELL ELEPHANT PEARLS**

Three individuals who were attempting to sell 10 elephant pearls ("gajamuthu") were taken into custody in the area of Varipathanchenai in Ampara.  
The arrest was made based on a tip-off received by the officers of the Police Special Task Force (STF) at Kalmunai camp on Sunday (21).  
According to reports, the suspects had tried to sell the elephant pearls in question for nearly Rs. 10 million. The arrestees and the seized contraband were handed over to the Eragama Police for further investigations.

**SHOWERY CONDITIONS TO INTENSIFY FROM TODAY**

The Meteorology Department stated that due to the low-level atmospheric disturbance developing in the vicinity of the island, showery condition over the island is expected to enhance from today (23) onwards.  
Moreover, showers or thundershowers may occur at several places in the sea areas extending from Puttalam to Pottuvil via Mannar, Kankasanturai, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa during the afternoon or night. Winds will be north-westerly and speed will be 20-30 kmph in the sea areas around the island. Wind speed can increase up to 40-45 kmph at times in the sea areas extending from Galle to Matara and Trincomalee to Pottuvil via Batticaloa, while the sea areas extending from Galle to Matara and Trincomalee to Pottuvil via Batticaloa may be fairly rough at times.  
The general public is requested to take adequate precautions to minimise damages caused by temporary localised strong winds and lightning during thunder showers.

**Japanese envoy calls on Chief Govt. Whip**



Minister Johnston Fernando and Ambassador Mizukoshi Hideaki

Chief Government Whip and Highways Minister Johnston Fernando yesterday (22) met the new Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Mizukoshi Hideaki, at the Chief Government Whip's office in the Parliamentary Complex.  
Envoy Hideaki presented his credentials to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on 16 November, after assuming office as the new Japanese Ambassador to the country, succeeding Sugiyama Akira.

**Public paying for losses of 32 state enterprises: COPE Chairman**

The general public is now paying for the serious losses that have been incurred by 32 state-owned enterprises, stated Parliament Committee On Public Enterprises (COPE) Chairman and Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Charitha Herath.  
Speaking to the media yesterday (21), he noted: "Thirty-two enterprises of the Government have incurred serious losses, and these are now being recovered through the general public's funds. This is a big problem. This is why we are looking at ways and means to reduce these losses and cut down the additional expenses that must be recovered from the general public, which will be beneficial to them. We are also looking at strengthening the government enterprises so that they will not be in a state of loss." Herath added that the Government's job was to inform the respective ministries of these pitfalls, and it was the duty of the ministry and the ministers to attend to these matters and look into prospective alternatives to improve and reduce losses.

**IUSF urges expeditious university reopening**

**● Calls for add'l. facilities for lecture halls, hostels, canteens, quarantine**

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

**T**he Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF) has emphasised the need to expedite the reopening of universities, which are currently closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



IUSF Convener Wasantha Mudalige

Addressing a media briefing yesterday (22), IUSF Convener Wasantha Mudalige said that the Government should formulate a programme to expand the existing facilities in universities, given the Covid-19 pandemic situation, thereby paving the way for the reopening of universities.  
"When we queried about the reopening of universities, University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof. Sampath Amaraturge said that the Vice Chancellors (VCs) of the universities have been given the power to do so. However, the

universities cannot be reopened just because the VCs were given the powers. The Government should provide or expand the necessary facilities," he added.  
Speaking further, Mudalige said that the Government should take immediate action to improve facilities, particularly the lecture halls, hostels, canteens, and quarantine facilities.  
When inquired about the plans to reopen universities, Prof. Amaraturge told *The Morning* that even at present, 25% of the total number of students at certain

said: "Universities can be fully opened when there is no Covid-19. Because in one room, five or six people are there, while in hostels, there are about 2,000 to 3,000 students; therefore, in such a situation, we cannot call all students to universities."  
In response to the IUSF's request to expand facilities, Prof. Amaraturge said that the relevant universities should look into such matters.  
"It is the responsibility of the relevant university to look into any facilities that need to be developed. There is a way for them to get the necessary provisions for such," he explained.  
The UGC in October 2021, stated that it is planning to reopen universities that are closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation at any given date, in a few stages. Speaking to the media at the time, Prof. Amaraturge said that under the first stage, universities are planned to be reopened for students who are scheduled to sit for the written examinations and practical examinations. He also said that students who received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccines would be able to return to university about two weeks after taking the second dose.  
"Only students who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 will be called to university and they will be required to produce their vaccination cards," he added. Speaking further, Prof. Amaraturge said that the relevant VCs would decide as to which students from the aforesaid groups should be called back to the universities in the first stage.

**Pfizer to supply 3 m vaccine doses to SL weekly from Dec.**

**● 1.5 m doses arrived yesterday, another 400 K due today**

The US-based pharmaceutical company Pfizer Inc. has agreed to supply Sri Lanka with 3 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine – which has been stated by health officials to be the vaccine of choice in delivering a third/booster dose to citizens – on a weekly basis starting from December, according to State Minister of Production, Supply, and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals Prof. Channa Jayasumana.



The Pfizer vaccine PHOTO LALITH PERERA

Speaking to the media on Sunday (21), he stated: "From the month of December, the company Pfizer has given us a commitment that they will supply 3 million doses of their vaccine on a weekly basis."  
On 1 November, the Government began administering a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine to health workers, front line workers, and military personnel to ensure they would remain protected against the effects of the virus. At the time, Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr. Asela Gunawardena said the Pfizer vaccine would be used for the third dose, and that its rollout would follow the same priority list designated at the start of the national vaccine drive.  
Subsequently, on 17 November, the third dose rollout commenced for those over the age of 60, while last Saturday (20), the administration of the third dose to vaccinated individuals with co-morbidities over the age of 20 began. The Pfizer vaccine was used in all instances. Accordingly, as of Saturday, just over 203,000 Sri

Lankans were administered a third dose of Covid-19 vaccine. Last Friday (19), Deputy Director General of Health Services (DDG) Dr. Hemantha Herath was quoted as stating that the Pfizer vaccine would be the only choice for the third dose in the national vaccination effort.  
Prof. Jayasumana announced the commitment from Pfizer Inc. at a media briefing held on Sunday to announce that a consignment of 1.5 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was scheduled to arrive in the country yesterday (22), while another batch of 400,000 doses of the same vaccine is scheduled to arrive today (23). Accordingly, the consignment of 1.5 million doses touched down at Bandaranaike International Airport yesterday morning.

At the media briefing, Prof. Jayasumana went on to state that the vaccination programme is progressing successfully, and that around 90% of the country's population above the age of 20 years had been fully vaccinated.  
According to data from the Health Ministry's Epidemiology Unit, just over 13.7 million citizens have received both doses of a Covid-19 vaccine, while just over 15.9 million citizens have received a single dose.  
Prof. Jayasumana also said that it has been observed that the new sub-lineage of Delta variant of Covid-19 detected in the country, named B.1.617.2.104, is spreading among the country's youth and schoolchildren. He therefore urged parents to make sure that their children are aware of the need to constantly adhere to health guidelines.

**Foreign Ministry limits walk-in services, causing crowds outside**

**● Consular Affairs Division suffers system failure**

Although Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry on Sunday (21) issued a notice stating that its Consular Affairs Division will be providing services for only 150 walk-in customers daily from Monday (22) onwards, a large crowd of people seeking to go abroad were seen gathered outside yesterday.  
The Foreign Ministry said that due to a breakdown of the Electronic Document Attestation System (e-DAS) in the Consular Affairs Division of the Foreign Ministry, attestation services during the past week were disrupted resulting in long delays in providing services. In addition, the Branch Attestation System at the Regional Consular Offices and

Sri Lanka Missions overseas are also affected, it said.  
As these issues are yet to be rectified, the crowd that had gathered was unable to be attended to, leaving them inconvenienced, although a technical team from the Ministry is still working to sort matters out. Normal services for certificates/documents attestation could be provided once these issues are rectified. Updates will be notified to the public as soon as the system maintenance is completed, the notice said.  
**The public is requested to contact the Consular Affairs Division via 011- 2338812 or dgcons@mfa.gov.lk for more information.**

**Harin points out lack of facilities at Badulla General Hospital**

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Harin Fernando, who underwent heart surgery recently, noted that he would have undergone the operation at the Badulla General Hospital, but was unable to do so due to its lack of facilities.  
Speaking in Parliament yesterday (22), he stated: "I wanted to do my heart surgery at the Badulla General Hospital, whereas the hospital does not even have a cath-lab.  
This is not acceptable. If the Government can talk big about giving medical care to the citizens, they better have the facilities in the hospital to boast as well. A hospital is useless if it doesn't have the necessities."  
As Fernando made this

statement, several Government MPs objected to his claims and stated that since the Badulla District was where Fernando was elected to his post through the National List, it was his responsibility to develop the area.  
Fernando went on to say that the Government is now acting erratically and irrationally, as it is in a state of panic and confusion.  
"The Government is acting erratically and irrationally as they are confused, threatened, and in a state of panic. They know that they are now proven to be failures and are scared. In short, the Government has not delivered what it had promised to the people, and is now afraid that they will be kicked out. The whole bunch is mad," he charged.

**Taliban unveil new rules banning women in TV dramas**

Women have been banned from appearing in television dramas in Afghanistan under new rules imposed by the Taliban Government.  
Female journalists and presenters have also been ordered to wear headscarves on screen, although the guidelines do not say which type of covering to use.  
Reporters say some of the rules are vague and subject to interpretation.  
The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in mid-August and many fear they are gradually imposing harsh restrictions.  
The militant Islamist group, which took control following

New guidelines set out by the Taliban prohibit female presenters from appearing on TV without headscarves PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES



the departure of US and allied forces, almost immediately instructed girls and young women to stay home from school.  
During their previous rule

in the 1990s, women were barred from education and the workplace.  
The latest set of Taliban guidelines, which have been issued to Afghan television

channels, features eight new rules.  
They include the banning of films considered against the principles of Sharia – or Islamic – law and Afghan values, while footage of men exposing intimate parts of the body is prohibited.  
Comedy and entertainment shows that insult religion or may be considered offensive to Afghans are also forbidden.  
The Taliban have insisted that foreign films promoting foreign cultural values should not be broadcasted.  
Afghan television channels show mostly foreign dramas with lead female characters.  
A member of an organisation that represents journalists in Afghanistan, Hujjatullah Mujaddedi, said the announcement of new restrictions was unexpected.  
He told the *BBC* that some of the rules were not practical

and that if implemented, broadcasters may be forced to close. The Taliban's earlier decision to order girls and young women to stay home from school made Afghanistan the only country in the world to bar half its population from getting an education.  
The mayor of the capital, Kabul, also told female municipal employees to stay home unless their jobs could not be filled by a man.  
The Taliban claimed that their restrictions on women working and girls studying are "temporary" and only in place to ensure all workplaces and learning environments are "safe" for them. (BBC)



# Holding up a heavy Cabinet

No other system in Sri Lanka has come under fire for incompetence, egoism, and dishonesty as much as the country's political system. Changing this situation is an overused election promise that remains valid even today, and the people are ready to take the initiative to change it.

Last week, for the first time in Sri Lanka, a citizen challenged the constitutionality of the Cabinet of Ministers. The petitioner, engineer Kapila Renuka Perera of the Professionals' National Front, had filed a fundamental rights (FR) petition claiming that the number of incumbent Ministers is not in accordance with the number allowed by the Constitution.

Perera also claimed that the appointment of the present Cabinet is a violation of Articles 47(1)(a) and 47(1)(b) of the Constitution, which reads that the number of Cabinet Ministers should not exceed 30 and that the number of non-Cabinet Ministers or Deputy Ministers should not exceed 40. He alleged that two Cabinet Ministers and four State Ministers have been appointed above the stipulated numbers.

In addition to the concerns raised by Perera, the other major issue is the large amount of public funds spent to maintain these Ministers and their Ministries including staff. The truth is, Constitutional or not, Sri Lanka has too many Ministers. In fact, some of the Ministerial portfolios the Government said were scientifically determined are actually ridiculous, and having several Ministers for the work that should come under one Ministry is not just a waste of money, it is also a hindrance to countless other necessary work that could have been done with that money.

Due to these unscientific appointments of Ministers, recently, the country saw Ministers clashing, especially when it comes to power and energy, agriculture and fertiliser, and health and medicines-related matters. There were also times when Ministers questioned the rationale behind their own Ministerial portfolios, as their subject area was merely a small part of another Ministry.

The Guinness World Records identifies Sri Lanka as the country that has had the largest Cabinet, and that was the 52-member Cabinet established in 2005.

This petition comes in a context where the Sri Lankan Government has proposed to slash funds allocated for Parliamentarians, including Ministers, as part of Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's attempts to reduce expenditure on the part of the Government. Also, the Budget paid greater attention to reducing the expenses of the public sector, compared to those of the MPs. During this process, he made a statement that the public sector has become a burden to the country, and failed to recognise how the public representatives, who consume a greater amount of funds, have become a burden to the country.

It leaves a question as to whether the Government is incapable of realising, or not willing to realise, the burden the political system has become.

The said petition is also a reminder that not only those who have political power, but also those who give that power, i.e. the citizens, can play an active role in guiding the Government, or making sure that the power they have is being used for the intended purpose. In fact, one opinion most people considering leaving the country share is that migration is the better option than trying to change the country or how the country is being governed, and that what they can do by exercising their franchise is very limited. Even though not everyone has the resources and knowledge to leave aside their personal lives and protection to change the so-called system, this petition is a message that changing and challenging an unsuitable rule does not have to wait for an election.

The solution is, having a proper mechanism to make the process of appointing Ministers and establishing Ministries truly a scientific process. However, expecting the political system to make such changes voluntarily is impractical, and the people too should take a stance.

The bottom line is, these are all realities the citizens have had to live with, and politicians promise to change before every election. In fact, the reasons behind the appointments of a lot of Ministers boil down to political motives and favouritism, and there is hardly any science behind them. Almost every government is ready to forget the gravity of their responsibilities, but the citizens who assigned those responsibilities should keep pushing for change.



BY RAJPAL ABEYNAYAKE

# The trial, and error, of the political 'outsider'

**P**resident Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected not despite his lack of political experience, but because of it. On the campaign trail, he was seen as the outsider who was not tainted by politics. He was Defence Secretary, but that was a public office, not a political office.

The outsider element became especially important after the cry "all 225 are useless" became a dirge for political venality during the Yahapalana era.

The slogan was seen as a death march for politicians that had failed the nation. It was clear in the fact that people were disenchanted with politicians, after it became obvious that the then Government could not even put up a united front, let alone govern.

The ugly goings-on in Parliament during the 52-day crisis and other scenes of unruliness in the legislature also contributed to the idea that a proper leader would be one that was never tainted by previous political experience.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa fit the role. He was not a politician – hitherto – but also had a reputation for being an efficient administrator as Defence Secretary and the moving force behind the UDA (Urban Development Authority) drive for beautifying the city of Colombo.

The flip side that he had no prior political experience was not seen as an impediment by many. Donald Trump had no previous political experience either. However, the example of Trump was not cited, though he ran a great economy, because the former US President was seen as too unorthodox and perhaps unrepresentative for a president of the US.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his own right was seen as an exemplar of the new truism – that the political outsider is the best solution for the problem of the ineffectual and corrupt politician. Lack of prior experience in political office, in this context, was seen as a virtue, not an impediment.

Fast forward two years into president Rajapaksa's tenure since the assumption of office, and the consensus seems to be that a wrong call was made. The outsider without political experience has become a liability, many of the commentators are convinced.

Some of these assessments may be through a partisan lens, but even so the opinion-makers who say that the President's inexperience is a liability are definitely making a compelling case.

Whether he would, if he had held previous office, been considered by the voters for the presidency is a moot point. If he had held previous office and made decisions such as the one to ram through the organic fertiliser policy in one go without phasing it out, voters would have had a foretaste of his impulsiveness, and may have kept him out of office.

In this instance, voters had no idea.



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

The President, having not held political office prior to becoming President, had never indicated that he is capable of appointing pardoned convicts such as Duminda Silva to high public office. There was no inkling that he would appoint someone who was also convicted and behind bars, but pardoned, a head of a Presidential Task Force on a matter as important as the country's personal laws, i.e Muslim law, Thesawalamai law, etc.

**If the transformation in the political culture of considering an outsider for political office fell in a heap due to the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, that's a pity, as in the future, there may be many outsiders who make the cut. But now they are complaining about**

Of course, the flip side of it is that those with political experience also made decisions that smacked of impunity. Ranil Wickremesinghe appointed a dubious character who was not a citizen of this country to head the Central Bank, with disastrous consequences.

It's because of this erratic behaviour of conventional politicians that the people opted for an outsider. But the medicine has proved to be worse than the malady it set out to cure. A good deal of the fundamental (core) principles of governance have been jettisoned, it appears.

To aspire to high office, people feel, for instance, that there are two criteria these days. Either the appointee needs to have done a stint in prison for some egregious crime or written a book

praising the president. No amount of merit or efficient public service suffices unless one is not a bad egg, a jail-bird, or a sycophant who wrote a massive tome exalting the president.

The fact is that the current presidency seems to have done serious damage to the notion of the advantage of the outsider. People would be cautious about voting for any future political outsider in electoral outings to come, because of the current experience.

This is a pity. Totally inexperienced or relatively inexperienced politicians have done well in the past, and these may include Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike, depending on where a person is located on the political spectrum. Some may consider Mrs. Bandaranaike to have been a good politician, and some may not.

History records that great US presidents such as Abraham Lincoln were relatively inexperienced and, of course, many such as Dwight Eisenhower, Herbert Hoover, and Donald Trump had no previous political experience whatsoever. Imran Khan, the current Prime Minister of Pakistan, had no previous experience in political office, though he was a politician for a long time, albeit on the losing side.

The quest for an outsider comes particularly at any time people lose faith in the political process, and there is disenchanted and partisan rancor among the major political players. It's why Trump was able to emerge from nowhere as an answer to the acrimonious politics that surrounded the Obama era.

Losing faith in the political outsider, therefore, doesn't necessarily bode well, but it seems the Sri Lankan voters burnt their fingers trying out

a neophyte. Now, after two years of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President, the refrain seems to be that a politician has to be experienced and should have had some sort of previous management record in political office, such as ministerial office or as chief minister of a province.

If the transformation in the political culture of considering an outsider for political office fell in a heap due to the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, that's a pity, as in the future, there may be many outsiders who make the cut. But now they may find entry into politics after the bad experience many people are complaining about having elected the current President, whose actions are often considered beyond the pale such as the appointment of Ven. Gnanasara Thera to the Task Force, which are seen as emblematic of the unpredictability of the political neophyte.

People had already lost faith in the probity and integrity of politicians, which is why they elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. They thought, here was a man with some integrity, because after all there was a no-nonsense air about him. But what he has done is to further erode people's faith in the integrity and probity of politicians. As stated earlier, the young and impressionable may fight each other to become bad eggs or jail-birds in the future because they would begin to see that as a ticket to high office.

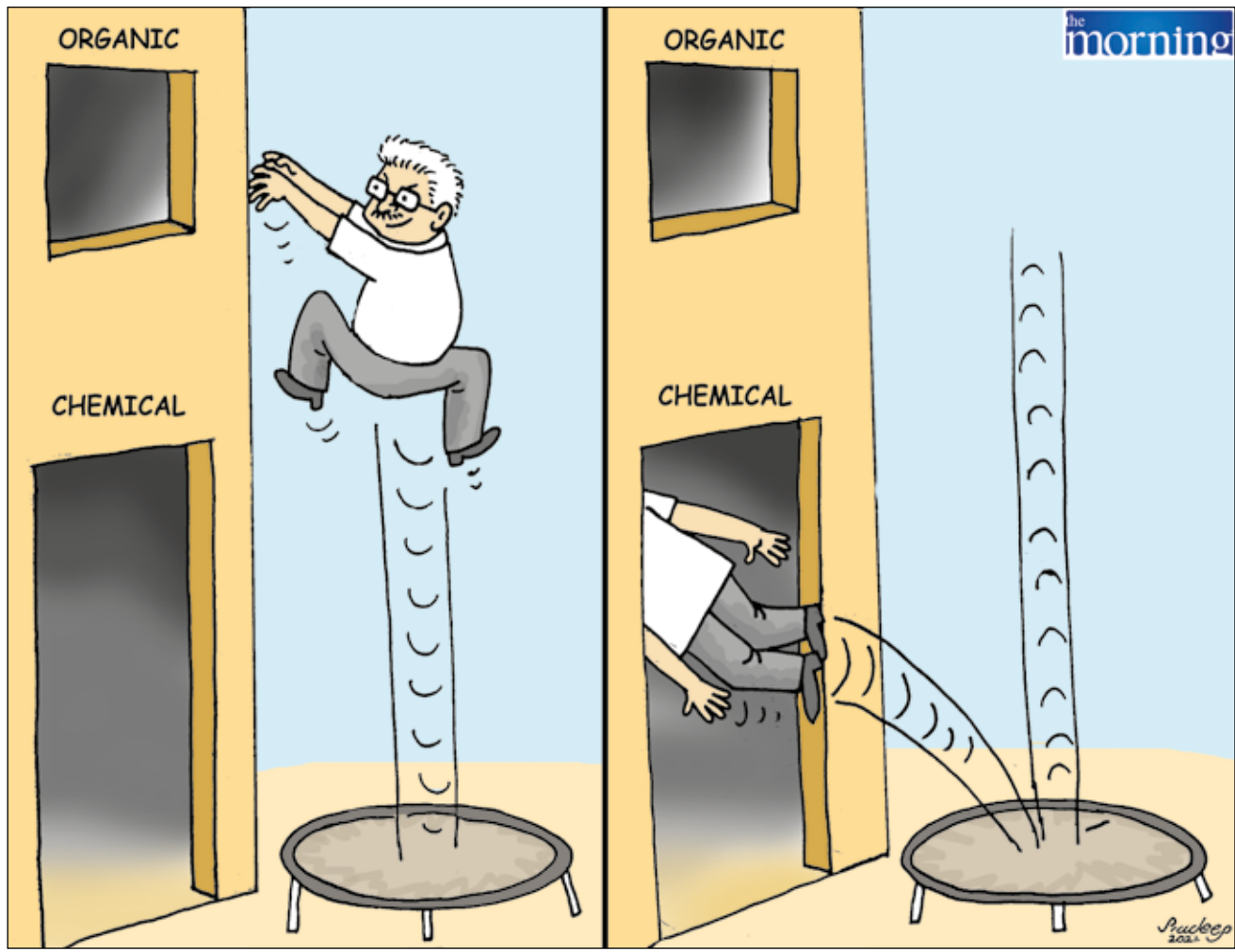
The effects of such erosion of moral standards are incalculable. Public standards of morality deteriorate, and the President cannot claim he is not corrupt as he had done recently. He may be uncorrupted in money terms because he has not diddled state funds.

But the appointment of convicted individuals to public office has the reek of corruption that goes with it; such acts, even if they are not strictly defined as "corrupt", are certainly venal. So those who had expectations of integrity from a political outsider have had it all turn topsy turvy, and it may take a long time for people to regain their faith in any type of political actor – insider or outsider, politician veteran, or neophyte.

Worse, it can have an effect on people's faith in democracy in general. It's when democracy fails that tyrants emerge and military despots begin staking a claim. The possibility of a political outsider was hitherto seen as an option, but now that too seems to look as if it's a really bad idea, which means people's choices are that much more limited. It's not the outcome people hoped for when they elected Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the man they thought was untainted by politics.

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*The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.*







The antiviral pill molnupiravir, manufactured by pharmaceutical company Merck and Co., was the first to be approved by the UK for the treatment of Covid-19

# The possibilities of the

# PILL

## ● Assessing the new oral Covid-19 treatment methods

BY SUMUDU CHAMARA

**A**midst opinions for and against the ongoing Covid-19 management efforts, Sri Lanka is moving forward with the vaccination programme. Last week, the health authorities commenced administering the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as the booster dose for those who are 60 years or older and are residing in several parts of the country, and this was, after the commencement of the administering of the same for frontline healthcare workers earlier this month.

Even though the booster dose, or a third dose, was thought to be what could provide extra protection that could elevate immunity against Covid-19, the scientific community has come up with newer solutions to curtail deaths and severe complications caused by Covid-19. One such solution is an antiviral medicine called molnupiravir, and the Sri Lankan authorities are also considering using this pill.

Recently, it was reported that the Covid-19 Technical Committee had granted approval for the use of this medicine in Sri Lanka to treat Covid-19. However, the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) is yet to grant its approval for this medicine, and even though the authorities, including the Production, Supply, and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals State Minister Prof. Channa Jayasumana expressed hope that a final decision in this regard would be reached last week, it is yet to receive approval to be used in Sri Lanka. For it to receive approval to be used in Sri Lanka, according to Health Ministry officials, either the NMRA has to give permission for the emergency use of this medicine without registration, or the NMRA has to register it and give full clearance, while further studies are required to grant or deny permission for this medicine.

### Demand for molnupiravir

However, several countries are considering approving molnupiravir to treat Covid-19, and the UK medicines regulatory bodies have approved it, making the UK the first country to do so. Foreign media outlets report that under the initial stage, the UK has ordered 480,000 courses. In the initial stage, molnupiravir will be given to both vaccinated and unvaccinated Covid-19 infected persons through a national study.

The US has also planned to purchase \$ 1.2 billion worth of 1.7 million courses of molnupiravir, and

foreign media outlets reported that the country is considering buying 1.4 million more courses.

Molnupiravir (brand name Lagevrio) – manufactured by the Pharmaceutical Companies Merck (known as Merck Sharp and Dohme [MSD] outside the US and Canada), and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics – completed clinical trials just a few months ago, and is awaiting approval from several regulatory authorities to commercially manufacture and distribute this medicine.

Molnupiravir received first regulatory approval globally in the UK on 4 November, even though it is still under review in the European region, while it is awaiting approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Merck, in a press release, said that in addition to those countries, it has entered into supply and purchase agreements for molnupiravir with other governments worldwide, and that it is expecting regulatory authorisation from these governments. In order to increase the availability of this medicine, Merck has also entered into non-exclusive voluntary licensing agreements with established generic manufacturers, and this endeavour will focus on making molnupiravir easily accessible in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries. It is, however, awaiting approval or emergency authorisation by regulatory agencies of those countries.

According to foreign media outlets, Merck has already signed agreements with more than six countries to sell molnupiravir, and the countries that have entered into purchase agreements include Australia, Singapore, and South Korea. According to *Reuters*, among the countries that have expressed willingness to buy molnupiravir are, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

It is also reported that Bangladesh will be the first country to start selling a generic version of molnupiravir, and it is reported that the producers of molnupiravir are anticipating to produce 10 million courses by 2021.

### How it works; effectiveness

It was originally developed to treat the flu, and it works by replicating the genome (the full set of genetic

**UK the first country to authorise molnupiravir**

instructions found in a cell) of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus Two (SARS-CoV-2) which is the virus that causes Covid-19 and is made of ribonucleic acid (RNA), once the virus enters the body. The medicine introduces errors into its genetic code, and it, in turn, prevents the virus from multiplying. Molnupiravir also helps to keep the virus level in the body low, which, in turn, is expected to reduce the severity of the symptoms and complications. The final result is reduced hospitalisations and deaths.

According to the European Medicines Agency (EMA), molnupiravir can be given within five days of the first symptoms to treat adults who are not in need of oxygen support and are at risk of severe disease.

A number of studies have found that molnupiravir can reduce the risk of hospitalisation or death by approximately 50%.

A study conducted by Merck – which involved 775 Covid-19 infected persons who had shown mild to moderate symptoms and had noticed symptoms for the first time within five days – had shown consistent efficacy across different viral variants such as Gamma, Delta, and Mu. Of the participants who were given the medicine, 7.3% had been hospitalised, while no deaths had been reported from among those who were given molnupiravir. However, at the end of the 29-day study period, of those who were given a placebo (a substance given to a person claiming that it is an authentic medicine, usually to study and compare the results given by the actual medicine), 14.1% had been hospitalised and eight persons had died. A total of 53 hospitalisations had been reported from those who were given a placebo. The participants of the said study were non-hospitalised adults, and were from 170 planned locations including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, Guatemala, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Ukraine, the UK, and the US. The Delta, Gamma, and Mu variants have accounted for nearly 80% of the evaluable cases in the trial, it said, adding that recruitment in Latin America, Europe, and Africa accounted for 55%, 23%, and 15% of

the study participants, respectively.

According to studies, to benefit from molnupiravir, it needs to be given to infected persons as soon as symptoms begin to show. This recommendation comes in a context where another study, which involved Covid-19 infected persons who had been hospitalised owing to severe symptoms or complications, did not result in promising results.

As far as side-effects are concerned, according to Merck, there have been no serious side-effects during the clinical trials. However, in a context where molnupiravir works by the process through which the virus replicates its RNA, there are severe concerns as to whether it can result in a similar impact on human's deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) or RNA. However, foreign media reports that Merck is in possession of laboratory study data showing that this medicine does not have an impact on humans.

American scientist William A. Haseltine, in an article published in *Forbes*, expressed concerns about the adverse effects of molnupiravir. He said: "My misgivings are founded on two key concerns. The first is the drug's potential mutagenicity, and the possibility that its use could lead to birth defects or cancerous tumors. The second is a danger that is far greater and potentially far deadlier; the drug's potential to supercharge SARS-CoV-2 mutations and unleash a more virulent variant upon the world."

Even though molnupiravir was mostly given to people who were over 60 years or younger persons who had other conditions that increase the risk of contracting Covid-19 during the clinical trial, there are varying opinions about who should be the target groups for this medicine.

### Medicines for Covid-19

Even though vaccines are becoming popular, scientists have started developing several medicines to treat Covid-19, and one of the objectives is giving to the world a Covid-19 treatment easily and at a lower cost. To do that, several medicine producers have come forward.

Molnupiravir is not the only medicine that is being tested to treat Covid-19. US-based medicine producer Pfizer has also started trials of two different antiviral tablets, and the Swiss company Roche has also commenced working on a similar medication. In addition, Gilead Sciences infused antiviral called remdesivir is also being used to treat Covid-19, mostly after an infected person has been hospitalised.

It is said that Pfizer's Covid-19 pill PF-07321332 (brand name Paxlovid) is more effective than molnupiravir. Pfizer has halted clinical trials for the same after the results showed that the medicine can reduce the risk of Covid-19 related hospitalisations and deaths by 89%. The Pfizer medicine, known as a protease inhibitor, treats Covid-19 by blocking an enzyme the virus needs in order to multiply. Experts say that when taken alongside a low dose of another antiviral pill called ritonavir, Pfizer's medicine can stay in the body for longer.

Recently, Pfizer announced that it would permit generic manufacturers to supply the pill to 95 low- and middle-income countries through licensing agreements with the international public health group Medicines Patent Pool (MPP).

According to *Reuters*, among the countries that have expressed interest to purchase Pfizer's Covid-19 pill are, Australia, Italy, the UK, the US, South Korea, and Thailand.

However, there is a discourse on the use of the said medicines, particularly who should receive it. While some experts say that unvaccinated people

should be given priority, some say that vaccinated people too should receive the same opportunity because the efficacy of the vaccine wanes in a few months.

However, ethicists have opposed giving the Covid-19 pills only to those who have not been vaccinated as of yet or have refused to get vaccinated. The *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* cited New York University Professor of Bioethics Prof. Arthur Caplan, as saying that refusing a medicine to a vaccinated person with a breakthrough infection while giving it to a vaccine refuser in the next room is impossible to justify. He had further said: "No healthcare provider will comply. The goal of pandemic management is prevention, to prevent transmission. Any step that weakens efforts at prevention that lacks a scientific base is unethical in that it risks undermining support for prevention."

According to medical experts, the vaccine is still necessary, and will continue to remain the main way of protecting against Covid-19. Also, even though molnupiravir or other similar medicines have been proven to reduce the risk of Covid-19-related hospitalisations or deaths, when it comes to reducing the spread of Covid-19, the vaccines will continue to play a key role.

If approved, molnupiravir would be the first oral medicine permitted to be used for the treatment of Covid-19 at home. One of the reasons why this medicine receives more attention than others which are currently being tested, is because some of the other treatments such as remdesivir are given intravenously (giving a medicine directly into a vein using a needle or a tube), and the ability to purchase conveniently, which according to medical experts, could help people to protect against severe complications caused by Covid-19 with or without getting vaccinated.

**Differing opinions among international medical experts on who should receive molnupiravir**

Medical professionals also fear that if molnupiravir becomes available, people, especially those who do not wish to get vaccinated, will make the availability of molnupiravir a reason to refuse vaccination. They note however that the pills and the vaccines play roles which cannot be replaced by each other, and therefore, vaccination is still a priority.

From the beginning, medical experts have maintained that getting vaccinated is still the best precaution people can take to be safe from Covid-19. In this context, even if molnupiravir or any other medicine was permitted to be used in Sri Lanka, it will be limited to a measure that prevents serious complications, similar to the vaccines.

It is the people's responsibility to consider the benefits of different types of measures aimed at protecting against Covid-19, and to make wise choices based on the experts and authorities advice.

Even though there are certain other medicines that are currently being used to help Covid-19-infected persons recover, they are not to be taken without or against the instructions of qualified medical practitioners.

**Large number of countries considering approving and obtaining molnupiravir**





There are instances in which people suffering from severe mental distress may resort to multiple methods of death by suicide, which warrants further study to prevent such occurrences

# Local case report delves into unplanned, complex suicide

BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

**When taking measures to prevent death by suicide, there is a need to look into cases of unplanned, complex suicides where more than one method of suicide is utilised, forensic academics noted.**

This observation was made in “A case report on a complex suicide of a drug addict” which was authored by H.K.R. Sanjeeva (Postgraduate Trainee) and Prof. M. Vidanapathirana (attached to the University of Sri Jayawardenepura Medical Sciences Faculty’s Forensic Medicine Department) and was published in the *Medico-Legal Journal of Sri Lanka* 5 (1) in December 2017.

Death by suicide, as Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana noted, are divided into simple and complex suicides with the latter being explained by S. Demirci, K.H. Dogan, Z. Erkol, and I. Deniz in “A series of complex suicides” as a suicide where more than one method of suicide is applied. It is further classified by Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana as planned (primary) and unplanned (secondary) complex suicides. In the case of the former, two or more methods are employed at the same time, per M. Bohnert’s “Complex suicides” in order to ensure death even if one method were to fail.

According to Bohnert, in such situations, generally the common combination of methods involve drowning, the ingestion of medicinal drugs, hanging, the use of firearms, and jumping from a height. In the case of unplanned, complex suicides, several other methods of suicide are attempted, as pointed out by S. Kucerova, P. Hejna, L. Zatopkova, and L. Straka’s “Primary and secondary complex suicide”, upon the failure of the chosen first method.

Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana elaborated that in such instances, injuries inflicted by sharp force, in particular,

cutting the wrists, are oft found as the first act while in other cases, the infliction of cut wounds to the wrists changes to the infliction of stab wounds on the area of the chest. According to Kucerova et al., other frequently used methods following the failure of the first method involve hanging and jumping from a height.

Hence, Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana discussed a local case of a death involving two methods of suicide.

## Case report

The body of a 20-year-old, unmarried, male, drug addict (per the Police) was recovered from a river. According to the deceased’s mother, he had cut his neck at home (a blood stained table knife was found in his room) and then jumped into the river. There were no features of a struggle at the scenes. The body was recovered 24 hours after the initial incident. The victim had no previous history of suicidal attempts. The autopsy examination revealed that the deceased was a person of average build. His dominant hand was the right and there were several superficial, multiple, parallel scars on the front aspect of the left forearm.

There were however no macro or microscopic evidence such as venipuncture sites (the process of obtaining intravenous access where a hollow needle is inserted through the skin and into a superficial vein), lung fibrosis (the development of fibrous connective tissue as a reparative response to injury or damage), and foreign body granulomas (a small area

of inflammation). There were four cut injuries on the front aspect of the neck which were superficial and parallel, and were not associated with any deep injuries on structures such as the strap muscles (a group of four pairs of muscles in the frontal part of the neck), airways or neck vessels.

Fine continuous froth was found in the nose and mouth. The lungs were hyper inflated. There were no defence injuries. According to the histopathological (the diagnosis and study of diseases of the tissues) studies, there were foreign bodies beyond the secondary bronchi (the first subdivision of the main/primary bronchi, the latter being the two large tubes that carry air from the windpipe to the lungs) and the other organs did not show any remarkable findings. The toxicological analyses of blood and bile were negative for common poisons, alcohol, narcotics, and drugs.

The cause of death was given as drowning.

Explaining the post-mortem findings, Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana added that injuries caused by propellers, animal predators, or water monitors can mimic cut throat injuries in bodies recovered from the water; However, in post-mortem animal bites, in addition to the teeth injuries, there are associated claw marks which are haphazardly placed, and in this case, the absence of such teeth or claw marks excluded possible post-mortem animal bites.

Furthermore, even though propellers could cause multiple, parallel cuts to the body, the presence of such injuries at an elective site of suicide favoured ante-mortem cut throat injuries and should have been received before entering into the water, a fact which was,

Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana added, also confirmed through eye witness evidence.

Cut throat injuries, Vidanapathirana and J.C. Samaraweera explained in “Homicidal cut throat: The forensic perspective”, are found in different circumstances, namely, accidental, suicidal, and homicidal. Since distinguishing this aspect of the cut throat injuries is challenging for forensic pathologists evaluating such neck injuries, T. Ohshima and T. Kondo emphasised in “Eight cases of suicide by self cutting or stabbing: Consideration from medico-legal viewpoints of differentiation between suicide and homicide” that the scene investigation findings, the deceased’s medical history, the autopsy, and toxicological findings must be considered with a sceptical approach before establishing the manner of death.

Per Vidanapathirana and Samaraweera, homicidal cut throats are commonly associated with defence or bizarre type of injuries and such were not found in the instant case, whereas suicidal cut injuries are usually multiple, parallel, and superficial and found at elective sites such as the neck, as was the case in the deceased. While suicidal knife injuries to the neck can be cuts or stabs, per B. Solarino, C.T. Buschmann, and M. Tsokos’s “Suicidal cut throat and stab fatalities: Three case reports”, in this case, there were only cut injuries.

Explaining further, Vidanapathirana and Samaraweera pointed out that suicidal cut throats are accompanied by tentative or hesitant cuts or stabs, which are also multiple, almost parallel, and superficial. W.U. Spitz’s “Sharp force injury” further noted hesitation cuts which are usually found on the wrists, the front of the neck, and less commonly in the elbow or on the ankles. In this case, of the four cut throat injuries, the lowest and most superficial cut could be, as per Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana’s analysis, considered a hesitant cut.

Moreover, Vidanapathirana and Samaraweera elaborated that in homicidal cut throat injuries, the scene is usually disturbed while the weapon is taken away by the perpetrator, whereas

in suicidal cut throat injuries, the scene is undisturbed and the causative weapon is usually found at the scene as was the case in the present matter.

For Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana, death by suicide is more commonly associated with psychiatric illness, substance abuse (in this case, the deceased was a drug addict), or a history of previous suicidal attempts (in this case, while there was no previous suicidal attempt, there were scars of several previous self-inflicted injuries).

Hence, Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana noted the circumstance of the cut throat as suicide. That said, since the neck injuries did not penetrate deep structures and there were no major vessel or airway damage, there was also no corresponding autopsy evidence of the mechanisms of death of cut throat injuries such as haemorrhagic (bleeding) shock, air embolism (a blocked artery caused by a foreign body such as an air bubble), or the aspiration of blood.

Moving on to the fact of the body being recovered from the water, Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana explained that when a body is recovered from the water, in order to diagnose drowning as the cause of death, there is a need to exclude fatal injuries or natural diseases that occur before or after entering the water while the toxicology screening too should also be negative. In this regard, there was no macroscopic or microscopic evidence of any significant natural pathology. Moreover, the diatom (a type of plankton called phytoplankton) test was negative.

“However, the fine froth with inflated lungs and microscopic evidence of foreign bodies beyond the secondary bronchi indicated that emphysema (the gradual damage of lung tissue, specifically the destruction of the tiny air sacs) aquosum (hyper expanded and waterlogged lungs) is a mechanism of death in this case. Foreign matter beyond the secondary bronchi in a non-putrefied body may also indicate that the person was alive when he entered the water,” the duo added.

Therefore, the manner of this particular immersion was ascertained as suicide.

In conclusion, Sanjeeva and Vidanapathirana emphasised that when two potential modes of death are present (cut throat and jumping into a river), the real cause of death must be ascertained. In this case, they noted, since there was no evidence of any mechanisms of death due to cut throat injuries (inflicted prior to entering the water), and the only available mechanism of death was emphysema aquosum due to immersion, the cause of death was ascertained as drowning.

Due to the use of two suicide methods, namely cut throat and jumping into a river, this is a complex suicide, but since the initial cut throat injuries had failed to cause death and subsequently the victim decided to jump into a river, this has the element of being unplanned, thus making this an unplanned, complex suicide.

*If you're affected by the above content or if you/someone you know may be dealing with a similar situation, the following institutions would assist you:*

**The National Institute of Mental Health: 1926**

**Sri Lanka Sumithrayo: 0112 682 535**

**Shanthi Maargam: 0717 639 898**

**Courage Compassion Commitment (CCC) Foundation: 1333**

## New briefing documents impact of enforced disappearances in Pakistan

The Pakistani authorities must end their abhorrent use of enforced disappearance, said Amnesty International, in a new briefing detailing the practice’s devastating impact on the families of those vanished.

The briefing, *Living Ghosts*, documents how enforced disappearance – a crime under international law in which state agents deny holding an individual or refuse to provide information on their fate or whereabouts – not only violates the human rights of the individuals who are disappeared, but also impacts affected families’ mental and physical health, financial status, and security, as well as leading to stigma and social isolation.

Although cases have been documented as far back as the mid-1980s, the practice has been routinely used by Pakistan’s intelligence services since the inception of the so-called “War on Terror” in 2001, to target human rights defenders, political activists, students, and journalists, with the fate of hundreds of victims still unknown. A proposed amendment to outlaw enforced disappearance has been mired in the

legislative process for more than two and a half years and the current iteration does not conform with international human rights law and best practices.

“Enforced disappearance is a cruel practice that has caused indelible pain to hundreds of families in Pakistan over the past two decades. On top of the untold anguish of losing a loved one and having no idea of their whereabouts or safety, families endure other long-term effects including ill-health and financial problems,” said Amnesty International’s Acting South Asia Researcher Rehab Mahamoor.

“It’s a punishment without end that Pakistan’s authorities must consign to history. As well as expediting the criminalisation of enforced disappearance through legislation in line with international human rights law, the authorities must immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of all victims to their families and release those still being held.”

Amnesty International is also calling for all those suspected of criminal responsibility for committing an enforced disappearance

to be brought to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to the death penalty.

Amnesty International spoke to the family members of 10 people whose fate remains unknown after they were abducted by Pakistan’s security services. Each of them described resultant stress-related health issues including high blood pressure, cardiac conditions, and gastro-intestinal illnesses.

Affected families also suffer financial consequences, as the disappeared are invariably the main breadwinner. In three cases documented by Amnesty International, the children of those disappeared had been forced to drop out of school due to the loss of family income or stigma.

Sultan Mahmood, whose two brothers were abducted in 2014 and 2021 respectively, told Amnesty International that losing two sources of family income, combined with the legal costs of trying to secure the return of his brothers, had left him in debt of PKR 2.5 million (approx \$ 15,000), forcing him to sell all of his assets, including his home.

In another case, the younger sister of Sammi Baloch, a prominent activist against enforced disappearance whose father was disappeared by the authorities in 2009, was prevented from sitting exams at a college in Balochistan managed by the army, after officials became aware who she was related to.

The families of those forcibly disappeared often face an impossible choice between staying silent in the aftermath of an abduction or risking the loss of their loved one forever. Intimidation and harassment from the authorities can follow them for years after a disappearance has taken place and sometimes continues after the person is returned. This can be in the form of heavy-handed surveillance, threatening calls from blocked numbers and even phishing attacks on personal devices.

Amnesty International also interviewed victims of enforced disappearance, including Inaam Abbasi, who was held for 10 months following his abduction in August 2017. The physical torture he was subjected to has left him with a host of health issues, including

chronic joint pain, high blood pressure and suspected post-traumatic stress disorder, which can be triggered by events such as a doorbell ringing. “I believe that someone has come to take me away again,” he told Amnesty.

Last month, Amnesty International criticised a range of proposed reforms to the amendment to the Penal Code of Pakistan to end the practice of enforced disappearance, which does not currently conform with international human rights law and best practices.

On 8 November, the Minister of Human Rights, Dr. Shireen Mazari, tweeted that the National Assembly had passed the proposed legislation. According to her tweet, one of the controversial sections in the proposed amendment, which sought to protect state officials, department heads or heads of institutions from being held accountable for disappearances, had been removed. The legislation remains in contravention of international human rights law and standards.

(Amnesty International)



# China's long march to the West

*An opportunity for South and East Asia?*



BY AJITH D. PERERA

## Impact of BRI on South Asia

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through land and sea, which stretches over 8,000 miles to Europe passing East and South Asia, is China's modern, long-term vision to accomplish its geopolitical, economic, and social objectives. This also includes economic co-operation, building infrastructure, and creating bilateral relations to revive the trading system along the ancient Silk Road.

On the other hand, economically least integrated SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) countries, which have a population of 1.8 billion representing 25% of the world population, need such strategic economic co-operation to uplift its economies and the quality of life of the people. It's a well-known fact that South Asia struggle in attracting investment within the region. In the recent past, South Asia and Southeast Asia got the lion share of Chinese outbound foreign direct investment (FDI) to BRI countries.

## Chinese investments in South Asia as of 2018

Country	New construction contracts signed in 2018 (USD)	Total of construction (cumulative) projects signed by end-2018 (USD)
Afghanistan	470,000	1.28 billion
Bangladesh	9.11 billion	45.9 billion
Bhutan	0	0
India	2.89 billion	73.48 billion
The Maldives	1.39 billion	4.39 billion
Nepal	910 million	5.45 billion
Pakistan	4.32 billion	72.11 billion
Sri Lanka	3.63 billion	23.42 billion

(Blue Book on Economic and Trade Investment Promotion and Co-operation between China (Yunnan) and South Asia, 11 June 2019. Kunming, China)

## Challenges posed by BRI to China

Even though the BRI is a success, it also faces some challenges internally and externally. The internal issues include the absorption of overproduction during crisis situations like the pandemic, trade diversion through trade agreements by aid recipients, and externally mounting pressure by political and civil activities on issues such as depriving job opportunities for locals, increase in green field projects, and issues over land clearance and alleged permission granted for military involvement to protect Chinese investments in South Asian countries, etc.

Despite China's visionary BRI, which amply demonstrates its farsightedness and the might of China to the world, it still takes no chances but consolidates its local development too to meet the global competition. In February 2019, China launched another initiative within its territories: It is the formation of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA). Under this move, China wants to strengthen the strategic development prototyping and fast engineering through creating synergies under one country, two systems.

In fact, the GBA provides opportunities for multinational companies with regional headquarters in Hong Kong to leverage the connectivity within the GBA. Furthermore, if the plan works well, under the GBA, the redefined role of Hong Kong will be a competitor to Singapore where most of the multinationals have set up their head offices in the region. Hong Kong will provide the space for headquarters while Guangdong with nine cities will provide the space for plants and factories.

China's efforts to build a formidable economy on its own land while flexing its muscles to win the trade war with the West through BRI and other measures like the GBA remind us of a famous quote of ancient Chinese writer and philosopher

Sun tzu (544 B.C.-496 B.C.), which goes as: "The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy." Today, in the South and East parts of the globe, China has an unbeatable edge over the US or the European Union (EU) on trade due to the robust approach of its foreign trade policy and opportunities provided by regional trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), along with bilateral trade agreements signed with other countries.

## RCEP, regional trade agreements, trade policy implications for SL

Sri Lanka is now in the process of formulating a new trade policy. In this context, Sri Lanka needs to be mindful of the latest trends and new developments taking place in the region due to RCEP or any other regional/bilateral trade agreement between China and other countries. At present, after India, China has already become the second-biggest sourcing destination for Sri Lanka. China's imports from Sri Lanka recorded a nominal volume (\$ 252 million only during 2020). China's exports to Sri Lanka stood at \$ 3.58 billion in 2020 (UN Comtrade).

Sri Lanka's main exports to China as of 2020 were apparel, tea, paper yarn and woven fabrics, activated carbon, electronic integrated circuits and microassemblies, retreaded/used pneumatic tires of rubber, and fish (frozen). In fact, except for Ceylon Tea, RCEP members produce almost every product in the above list. Therefore, it is a moot point whether policymakers have analysed the impact of trade in the RCEP vis-à-vis the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) free trade area, and the implications thereof to Sri Lanka's interests in the region. Moreover, considering that the direction of Sri Lanka's major markets are neither in the ASEAN nor in the RCEP, it is vital to conduct studies into the trade competitiveness and compatibility between the countries of the Far East that are engaged in these regional agreements and Sri Lanka.

Now, the interesting question is: What will be the short-term and long-term impacts on Sri Lankan exports to China and East Asia due to RCEP? The writer's answer is that even if Sri Lanka retains its market share in the short term, Sri Lanka's chances for future export growth to China and other RCEP countries can be substantially affected if no remedial action is taken by Sri Lanka.

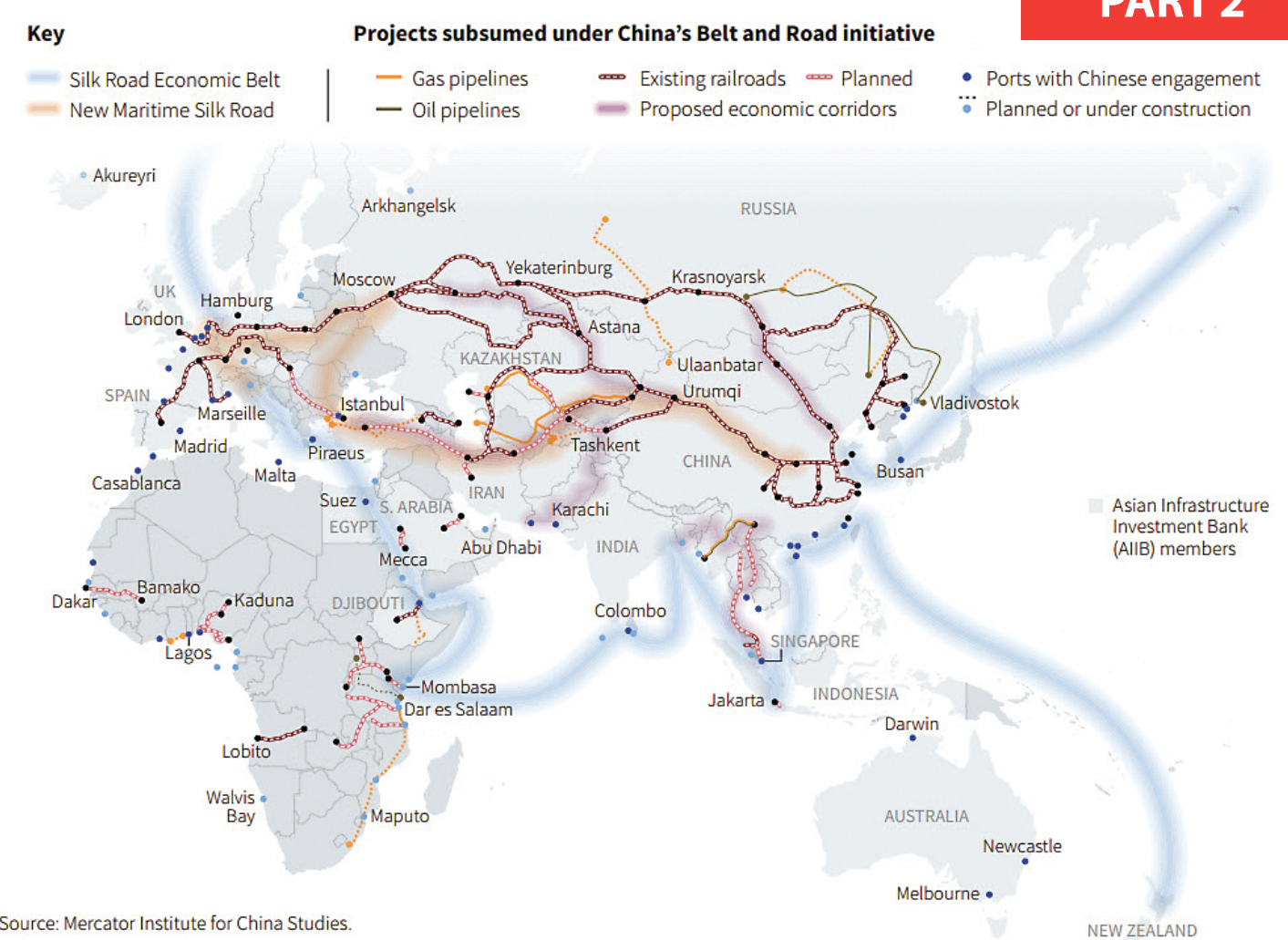
## Strategic approach and remedial actions available for SL

Sri Lanka needs to first develop a strategy to retain the current export market share and secondly to develop a strategy to capture more export volumes through new markets.

### Option A: Use of APTA (includes India, Bangladesh, South Korea, Lao, and Mongolia) to promote export to China

- (1) The Sri Lankan Government needs to address the issue of non-tariff barriers with China and win more concessions available under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement's (APTA) Special and Differentiated Treatment (SDT) and Small and Vulnerable Economies (SVE), both within an agreed time period
- (2) The Sri Lankan Government can consider subject to World Trade Organisation (WTO) compliances on the granting of subsidies, granting incentives/marketing arrangements for selected Sri Lankan products to enter into the Chinese market for a particular period
- (3) Aggressive trade awareness campaigns could be arranged through Sri Lankan missions in China and elsewhere to meet buyers and sellers (not only confined to the Chinese market) to secure more volumes for Sri Lankan products. Available resources and the commitment of Sri Lankan Foreign Service and the Department of Commerce have to be effectively used through motivation and recognition. Inclusion of capable professionals from other streams may be a good option, but what is finally important is building competences required to achieve the goal
- (4) Such trade awareness campaigns should include making the prospective exporter to China obtain a detailed knowledge of

FIGURE 1. REVIVING THE SILK ROAD



the process, procedures, and regulations involving entering the Chinese market. Understanding and communications between Sri Lankan exporters and Chinese importers/traders should be given additional focus through detailed exposition of Chinese language/provincial dialect for business communications/actual business practices in China

**Option B: Negotiating an early harvest agreement to reduce the trade deficit gap as a precursor for any future comprehensive trade agreement**

This is especially the case with China and India, where already there is a big trade deficit unfavorable to Sri Lanka. This could take the form of a bilateral preferential trade agreement on goods, which was earlier mooted, between the two countries. The primary advantage of a bilateral preferential trade agreement on goods over a more comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA) that covers an array of sectors is that it takes into account the vast asymmetries existing between the giant Chinese economy and the SVE of Sri Lanka. This would then allow Sri Lanka to liberalise in accordance with its capacities and also lend mutual compatibility between imports of selected products in return for export market access between the two countries.

Under the multilateral trade rules of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or the Enabling Clause of WTO, it is possible for developing countries such as Sri Lanka to liberalise only selected sectors in keeping with its status as a small developing trading partner without undertaking vast-scale liberalising initiatives that would make its domestic production vulnerable to massive influx of cheap and competitive imports of trading partners who have advantage of vast economies of scale.

## Suggestions to improve capacity of SL's trade

- (a) Establishment of a national single window: This is to expedite the much-talked-about digital platform for trade to reduce the cost of transaction and improve the efficiency for exporters and importers, especially SMEs. Meanwhile, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCI) is to introduce a trusted trader platform to Sri Lankan trade in collaboration with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) to address the issue of credit worthiness and repayment capacity between traders in both countries
- (b) Rationalisation of HS codes: Sri Lanka's HS codes are very complex by nature, so the identification of products using HS codes is very difficult. When this situation exists, Sri Lanka is at a disadvantage at trade negotiations and the threat of agreeing to undesirable tariff lines

remains high. In this context, as a matter of national priority, we have to rationalise the HS codes before negotiating any trade agreement. This measure would also help the country to comply with WTO requirements

(c) Appointment of a productivity commission: This is needed to be set up to address the issue of low productivity of our major industries. The commission can appoint relevant experts and industry leaders who know about productivity improvement. This unit should be used as the advisory body to improve the macroeconomic policy of the government.

## Framework for a new trade policy

Any future trade policy of Sri Lanka must have a robust and practical approach to solve the issue of exports to China and India as well as the SME contribution to export. The writer suggests that the Ministry of Trade firstly focus on an export-oriented framework for foreign trade based on the creation of wealth, technology, innovation, inclusiveness, investments, and productivity. Therefore, any new trade policy document needs to provide provisions for a proper study on economic modelling for future trade agreements; assessing the overall export competitiveness of the Sri Lankan product offer and how good Sri Lanka is in matching the competitors' product offers come from RCEP or any other bilateral trade agreements signed by countries such as China and India.

It's also pertinent to have an impact analysis of existing trade agreements, review of rules of origin to avoid circumvention and fraud that happened in the past, and future prospects. The country also needs to set up a high-powered National Advisory Committee for trade. The writer also suggests approving transparent procedural and regulatory infrastructure for the implementation of rules of origin prior to FTA negotiations.

Some time back, the Department of Commerce developed an International Trade Negotiations' Toolkit in collaboration with WTO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the International Trade Centre (ITC) to give the proper direction to the negotiation process, and it is the responsibility of the government to create a conducive environment to use these guidelines for the betterment of the country.

It is an apparent fact that general trade negotiations are entered into by Sri Lanka at the behest of narrow geopolitical interests without actually engaging in economic and pragmatic business outlook for such decisions. More often than not, "joint studies" are done merely to wrap up a decision to enter into trade agreements without conducting a proper analysis,

assessment of the ground situation, and cost-benefit analysis – e.g. in the case of the negotiation on the India-Sri Lanka FTA on Goods, it was found out that inter-state non-tariff barriers and regulations were not even thought of long after the agreement was inked, but only when such impediments via the media and trade sources were brought to the attention of exporters/investors who became the actual trade practitioners of this agreement.

It is also recommended to study the policies of other countries' regional trade agreements, giving direction to the involvement of the country's legislature, selection of countries for agreements, appointment of negotiators, stakeholder consultation, provision for periodical review of the trade agreement, etc.

In fact, the checklist for Sri Lanka to upgrade the capacity goes on and on – e.g. Sri Lanka's position in the global value chain, developing the country's production capacity, and productivity. Further, a mechanism to promote a point of difference/overseas protection of branding for Sri Lankan products and services (GIS), paying a "reward" for encouraging innovation and a strategy to mitigate the ill effects of Covid-19 (such as clearance issues at ports and freight rates) need to be considered without hesitation. The production of high-tech items and the extensive use of the exclusive economic zone at sea perhaps can create a change in Sri Lanka's export landscape.

The writer is of the view that the new trade policy has to help Sri Lankan trade agencies and the private sector reach the required capacity to join a big league like RCEP, or sign effective trade agreements within a specific period. Signing any trade agreement without enhancing the country's capacity will only result in another ineffective trade agreement like the Indo-Sri Lanka FTA or the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

Finally, it's worthy to note the saying of British politician, Exchequer Chancellor (2016-2019), and Foreign Minister (2014-2016) Philip Hammond: "While I believe firmly in open markets and free trade, I also believe an open market needs a level playing field."

*(The writer is a scholar, writer, and speaker on trade agreements and holds an MBA [UK], EDBA [SL], PGDA [UK], and Diploma in Credit Management [SL]. He presently serves at FCCISL in the capacity of Secretary General and CEO. He can be reached via ajithspeak@gmail.com)*

*The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.*



# What happens to drugs seized by the Police?

● SSP Thalduwa explains official process and the need for laws to be formed for large-scale disposal



Sri Lanka's Police Narcotics Bureau has been responsible for thwarting several large-scale drug rackets, but a common question is: What happens to the drugs apprehended in the process? PHOTO © AP

BY RUWANI FONSEKA

**S**ri Lanka has seen many police raids, where millions of rupees worth of drugs are seized, but once these are no longer on the headlines, what happens to the drugs? Speculation on this process is rife, with some people even assuming that these drugs eventually make their way back onto the streets through corrupt officials.

To lay these rumours to rest, Police Spokesperson Senior Superintendent of Police Nihal Thalduwa spoke to *The Morning* in detail, explaining

how this process is carried out in a manner that ensures these drugs are kept off the streets for good.

He noted that the initial step

of the process involves the drugs being moved to a secure location, which is overseen by the Police Narcotics Bureau, after which – if the seized drugs are of a small quantity – they are destroyed at a Magistrate's Court to ensure there are witnesses to the operation.

SSP Thalduwa stated: "The seized drugs are always destroyed in front of the Magistrate's courtroom, so that there are witnesses to the destruction. However, this can only be done with smaller quantities of seized drugs, such as less than 250-500g."

However, he noted, this has proven somewhat impractical in certain cases over the past few years, where increasing quantities – sometimes amounting to several kilogrammes – of illicit drugs have been seized in the process of thwarting large-scale drug smuggling and distribution operations.

"Recently, we have seized kilos and kilos of drugs such as cocaine, ice (crystal methamphetamine), and heroin, and these cannot be destroyed the same way, as they are seized in much larger



Police Spokesperson SSP Nihal Thalduwa

quantities. Additionally, there isn't a law in place to stipulate exactly how these drugs should be destroyed," he pointed out.

Another reason such a law is needed is that when these seized drugs are sent for testing at the Government Analyst's Department, or produced in Court as evidence, different amounts tend to accumulate in these places, Thalduwa stated, adding: "These can't be handled in the same way as smaller quantities of drugs, for instance like 250-500g of heroin, nor can they be kept in storage indefinitely."

For this purpose, the Sri Lanka Police is working with the Ministry of Justice towards the formulation of laws regarding the safe, regulated

disposal of large quantities of seized drugs, Thalduwa further stated.

"There are many aspects that need to be thought of. The drugs need to be disposed of in a manner that does not damage the environment, and also in a way where these drugs cannot be recovered. These suggestions need to be made by scientists, who will then advise the Ministry of Justice about appropriate ways to dispose of the drugs," he explained.

The Police Spokesperson went on to state that a more important factor in eradicating the drug menace in Sri Lanka is the education and proper rehabilitation of drug users.

"Drug addiction is a psychological problem. We have to understand that these addicts either use or deal drugs because they either generate an income by dealing, or it meets their need to forget their problems. The only way forward is to understand this, and educate addicts on how their lives would and can be if they choose the right way to earn money and live a clean life."

Similar sentiments have been expressed by Minister of Justice Ali Sabry PC, who, upon announcing on 17 November that the capacity of drug rehabilitation centres around the country would be increased to accommodate up to 8,000 people, had noted: "Drug addicts should be rehabilitated, and not just put in prisons. The addicts must be educated on the adverse effects of drugs and the wrong decisions they make. From this, future generations can be protected, and we can ensure that people will not turn to drugs later on in their lives. We

should avoid relapses."

Sabry had also pointed out the need for the rehabilitation process to include some form of vocational training so that rehabilitated addicts could become productive members of society, and even have the opportunity to acquire employment abroad.

Thalduwa also appreciated these efforts made by Minister of Justice Ali Sabry, stating that his way of thinking was progressive and modern.

"Sabry is a positive person. He is progressive and has a modern way of thinking. This is very important if we are to help the addicts to recover and be rehabilitated. They should not be left out of society and treated like criminals. Instead, what Sabry is doing in his awareness campaigns and his rehabilitation methods is that he is giving hope to the addicts that they can live a full life once they are out of the rehabs and back in society, if they are educated and given chances to do proper jobs," Thalduwa stated.

*If you're affected by the above content or if you/ someone you know may be dealing with a similar situation, the following institutions would assist you:*

The National Institute of Mental Health

1926

NDDCB emergency hotline

1927

Mel Madura (Sumithrayo)

0112694665



A protestor throws stones toward riot police as clashes erupt during a demonstration against Covid-19 measures in Brussels on Sunday (21) PHOTO © AFP

## Protests against Covid-19 rules and lockdowns erupt across Europe

BY HOLLY ELLYATT

**P**rotests against fresh Covid-19 restrictions have rocked Europe over the weekend, with demonstrations breaking out in places such as Brussels, Vienna, Rome, and Amsterdam.

There were protests in Vienna on Sunday (21) after Austria entered its fourth national lockdown due to the current pandemic wave, with people now being asked to work from home and non-essential shops closing.

Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg has said that the lockdown would run for a "maximum of 20 days". Covid-19 vaccinations will be mandatory from 1 February next year, making Austria the first European country to introduce compulsory vaccination. In Belgium, protesters clashed with the Police after tens of thousands of people gathered in a march through Brussels' city centre on Sunday. The "Protest for Freedom" march, primarily aimed at protesting against stricter Covid-19 restrictions, was attended by around 35,000 people, the Police estimated.

Meanwhile, demonstrations continued for a third day in the Netherlands, following violent scenes and dozens of arrests in Rotterdam, with thousands more gathering in Amsterdam over the weekend.

After Rotterdam's riots, there was further trouble in various neighborhoods in The Hague on Saturday (20) night, as well as reports of disorder in several other smaller Dutch towns. Over 50 people were arrested in Rotterdam last Friday (19) after fierce demonstrations that were described as an "orgy of violence" by the city's mayor.

Dutch Police used water cannons and fired warning shots, injuring at least two people, after rioters against

the country's partial Covid-19 lockdown – imposed amid surging cases – torched a police car, set off fireworks, and hurled rocks at police officers. Many Dutch people oppose the lockdown measures that have seen shops, bars, and restaurants forced to close at 8 p.m.

Covid-19 passes, which restrict access to venues like museums and bars to the vaccinated or recently recovered from Covid-19, are now compulsory in more venues. Protesters are opposed to government plans to make Covid-19 passes mandatory in more sectors of public life. For now, tighter Covid-19 measures are due to last until at least 4 December.

Covid-19 passes are also fuelling protests in Rome, where large crowds gathered this weekend, objecting to the enforcement of Italy's version of the Covid-19 passport, the "Green Pass," which became mandatory for all Italian workers on 15 October. Workers must either show proof of vaccination, a negative test, or recent recovery from infection, or they could be suspended from work without pay or face a fine. Thousands of people also marched in Croatia's capital Zagreb on Saturday, demonstrating against mandatory vaccinations for public sector workers and Covid-19 passes.

In Germany, politicians are beginning to debate the need for mandatory vaccinations, a move which could prompt protests if implemented.

The country's seven-day coronavirus incidence rate has hit record highs in the past two weeks, while only around 69% of the population is fully vaccinated. The Government imposed nationwide restrictions against the unvaccinated last week, but lawmakers from across the political spectrum have said stricter rules may be needed. (CNBC)

## Budget 2022 allocates millions on roads, but neglects women: Eran

**S**amagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Parliamentarian Eran Wickramaratne said that although 52% of the population in our country comprises women, their labour force participation is a mere 35%. He said it is thus imperative that favourable conditions need to be created to increase their contribution, but that the Budget has not addressed this issue.

"Today, more than 50% of the graduates from our universities are women. At the same time, women are the ones who mostly get through competitive exams for higher posts in the civil service, administrative service, and the teaching service. Under an SJB Government, we will provide a maternity leave cost subsidy to the private sector to increase women's labour force participation," he said.

Speaking at a press conference held at the Opposition Leader's office last Sunday (21), Wickramaratne alleged that the 2022 Budget did not provide anything significant for women, reiterating concerns over how the Government had abolished the Cabinet-level Women's Ministry established for the first time by the United National



SJB Parliamentarian Eran Wickramaratne

Party (UNP) Government after 1977.

"Even at a critical time such as now, with the drop in overall domestic production, disruption of agricultural production, and lack of foreign investment due to the economic mismanagement of the Government, it is women who are engaged in sectors that bring in the most foreign exchange to the country," he emphasised.

Noting that 80% of employees in the export-oriented garment industry

comprises women, he stated: "Women also dominate the tea industry, and the majority of our expatriate workers are women. These industries and remittances are the largest foreign exchange contributors."

He further said that poor economic management by this Government has increased the burden of women as housewives as well, adding that inflation, which is calculated annually, needs to be computed monthly due to the skyrocketing prices of vegetables and other essential goods.

Wickramaratne also pointed out that people have been waiting in long queues for gas, kerosene, petrol, milk powder, and other food items. "There is a developing shortage of goods even if you have the money to purchase. But the Government has been boasting since 2020 that the country is moving towards a 'manufacturing economy'," he said.

Further, he reiterated that women's rights and representation would require new laws, making it mandatory to allocate 25% of the representation in the provincial council and Parliament for women, just as in the case of local government representation.

Highlighting that Budget 2022 proposes to take over Rs. 8.5 billion out of the Rs. 11 billion held by the Central Bank from Perpetual Treasuries Ltd. on the alleged involvement in the Bond Scam, Wickramaratne warned that the Government should follow a judicial process on the Bond Scam, fulfilling their campaign promise.

Responding to a question from a journalist, Wickramaratne said that the previous Government had pursued many corruption-related cases, whereas more recently, the present Government gets the Attorney General to withdraw their cases and free suspects from appearing in courts.

Referring to the country's future development by attracting investment, he charged that investor confidence has eroded due to the absence of rule of law, violation of human rights, and undisciplined fiscal management.

"With or without the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the right policies need to be followed. As the global investor community has lost confidence in the present Government, they will need IMF endorsement," Wickramaratne concluded.

## Modi's U-turn on farming laws reflects anxiety over looming elections

BY AMY KAZMIN

**N**arendra Modi never admits to missteps, even when Indians have suffered intense hardship owing to his policies. But the Indian prime minister made a rare apology last week when he made a stunning reversal by pledging to repeal contentious farm laws after a year of protests.

Modi maintained that the agricultural reforms – intended to open up the market to greater corporate participation – would have raised farmers' incomes. But he conceded that his Bharatiya Janata party government had failed to build a consensus for changes that would have had consequences for millions. "I want to say with a pure



Farmers have been demonstrating near New Delhi for a year, in one of the biggest challenges to Narendra Modi's authority, and celebrated the decision to repeal the laws PHOTO © REUTERS

heart that maybe there was some shortcoming in our efforts that we could not explain to some of our farmer brothers a truth that was as clear as a flame," Modi said in a special television broadcast.

The prime minister's abrupt decision to roll back one of

the biggest economic reforms of his second term followed a protracted political stand-off with farmers, who have blocked highways into New Delhi for a year in a show of determined force.

Analysts said the climbdown reflected the

ruling party's growing anxiety about its prospects in elections next year in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state and current BJP stronghold. Results in that vote will set the tone for nationwide general elections in 2024.

The BJP's landslide victory in state elections in UP in 2017 helped the party project the image that it was an unstoppable juggernaut bound to win the 2019 general election. Modi's party hopes to create a similar perception next year, which would help with fundraising and keep disgruntled allies in line.

But Uttar Pradesh's farmers, especially from the more prosperous western region, have been a driving force for the anti-farm-law protests, raising the prospect they

would desert the BJP. That would be a further blow to the party, already stung by a disappointing defeat in state elections in West Bengal in May. "The election will be framed as a midterm referendum on the Modi government's second term," said Milan Vaishnav, director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's South Asia programme. "They don't want to just squeak through – they want to come with a bang and create an aura of invincibility." Modi's farm laws sought to open India's tightly regulated agricultural markets to greater corporate participation, allowing companies to buy directly from farmers, and setting out terms for contract farming. (Financial Times)



ASPI	S&P SL20	Market
10,817.24	3,698.12	Market Closed
158.52	23.54	Share Volume
↑1.49%	↑0.64%	223,972,805
		Turnover
		6,154,934,438.60

## Retailers request Govt. to rethink tax proposals

- Calls for social security contribution to be abolished
- Says they are a high-turnover, low-margin industry
- Seeks a simplified tax system

**Local retailers have appealed to the Government to reconsider some of the tax proposals announced in Budget 2022, as the industry claimed they would have an adverse impact on the profitability of retailers which will curtail the growth of the industry which is already affected by the prevailing economic situation.**

Speaking to *The Morning Business*, Sri Lanka Retailers' Association (SLRA) Founder Chairman and President Hussain Sadique stated that retailers have appealed to the Government for the new 2.5% social security contribution to be abolished as it is an added burden on the industry and will impact cash flows. However, the Government is yet to respond to their appeal.

He further asserted that this tax will have a disproportionate effect on retailers and will put retailers out of business as the industry as a whole is a high-turnover, low-margin industry.

Explaining further, Sadique claimed: "This is how we make

the right product at the right time at the right place affordable. We provide the necessary quality and convenience because of our organisation as retailers. We do not work on high margins and low turnover; we are not boutiques. Retailers are basically looking to get people to consume more and therefore, we make the product affordable and thus our margins are low. Our priority is volume. We will look to sell 3 kg of sugar over 1 kg or to sell three shorts over one shirt. Therefore, the Government is putting us in a dangerous situation by subjecting us to such a tax considering the nature of our business."

He further stated that this social



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imposed during the previous regime and that it is contrary to the tax policy favoured by his organisation, as retailers are seeking for a simplified tax system and to minimise multiple taxation. He further claimed that this is not a good time to impose such an added burden on retailers considering the fact that they have been severely impacted by Covid-19.

security contribution is similar to the Nation Building Tax (NBT)

Contd. on page 10

## JKH to raise \$ 80 m through 'Proposed Private Placement'

- 122.5 m shares to be issued in two phases
- First phase to raise \$ 50 m; second to raise \$ 30 m

The Board of Directors of John Keells Holdings PLC (JKH) stated that the company resolved to raise funds through a private placement for a maximum amount of Sri Lankan rupees (LKR), equivalent to \$ 80 million, to Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Issuing an announcement to the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE), JKH said that the aforesaid fundraising is to be done through the issuance of up to a maximum of 122,500,000 new ordinary shares of the company in two phases, collectively the "Proposed Private Placement".

Accordingly, it is to be a maximum post-issue dilution of 8.5%.

"The Proposed Private Placement would be for an upfront issue of ordinary shares for an initial issue size of LKR equivalent to \$ 50 million (Phase 1). At the time of issue of the initial placement shares, the company will also issue to ADB non-tradable/non-



JKH Chairman Krishan Balendra

transferable options which will entitle ADB, at its option and discretion, to subscribe for additional new ordinary shares of the company within a period of 12 months from the date of subscription for the initial placement shares, for an investment amount of up to the LKR equivalent of \$ 30 million (Phase 2)," JKH noted, issuing a statement.

In the second phase, the issue is LKR equivalent to \$ 30 million while the option exercise price is subject to a minimum of Rs. 165 per share and maximum of Rs. 200 per share. The announcement further said that the options are to be exercisable during a three-month window post the completion of nine months from the date of subscription of the initial placement shares. This entitlement will expire 12 months from the date of subscription of the initial placement shares.

Accordingly, the total placement shares would be up to a maximum of 122,500,000 new fully paid ordinary shares to be issued by the company under Phase 1 and Phase 2, collectively.

Moreover, both initial placement shares and option shares will rank with the existing ordinary shares of the company while maximum post-issue dilution is to be up to a maximum dilution of 8.5% post issue of ordinary shares under Phase 1 and Phase 2, collectively.

## Vallibel Finance profit triples in H1 2021/22

Vallibel Finance PLC ended the first half of the 2021/22 financial year (FY 21/22) with a profit of Rs. 1.3 billion from Rs. 0.5 billion recorded in the corresponding period in the previous year which reflects a 158.1% growth.

Commenting on the financial performance, Vallibel Finance PLC Managing Director Jayantha S.B. Rangamuwa stated: "We are pleased to report strong results for the first half of FY 21/22. Vallibel Finance PLC has successfully sustained its total asset base at Rs. 65.5 billion as at 30 September 2021. The company's capitalisation levels and liquidity levels remain above regulatory minimums. Moreover, the loan portfolio reached Rs. 54.9 billion as at 30 September 2021, showing a solid growth of 15% over 31 March 2021. This performance infuses further confidence in our stakeholders."

It also reflected an upsurge in gross income by as much as 22.8% to reach Rs. 5.4 billion in comparison to Rs. 4.4 billion achieved in the first half of 2020/21. This stellar performance was secured by way of opening its loan book, expanding margins and ensuring competitive cost of funds.

Company reported a net interest



Vallibel Finance PLC Executive Director Dhammika Perera



Vallibel Finance PLC Managing Director Jayantha S.B. Rangamuwa

income of Rs. 2.7 billion for the first half of the financial year, up by a robust 52.1% from the same period in 2020, which demonstrates that the company continued to extend loans to customers to help them tide over the liquidity crunch and financial hardships caused by lockdowns and economic slowdown.

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### RESPONSE TO FRIDAY'S LEAD ARTICLE

## 'We never bid for alcohol breathalyser tender'

- Securatec Lanka CEO says company didn't even collect bid document

Responding to *The Morning Business*' lead story published on 19 November 2021, under the title "Alcohol

breathalyser tender of police mired in fraud, deceit allegations", Securatec Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd. CEO Lalindra

Danawardena stated that the company had no interest in the Sri Lanka Police breathalyser tender, did not submit a

bid for it, or did not even collect a bid document from the relevant authority.

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## SL an ideal location for real estate investment: Rohan Parikh

- Adds post-pandemic era is best time to invest

Driven by the demand in the local market, Sri Lanka is an ideal investment space with 70-80% of the buyers being Sri Lankans, 25% being non-residential Sri Lankans, and just 5% being foreigners, said Iconic Developments Managing Director Rohan Parikh.

He made this remark during a recently hosted webinar titled "Why Sri Lanka is Becoming the Ideal Real Estate Investment Attraction", focusing on



understanding and exploring real estate investment opportunities in the country, hosted by the Ceylon

Chamber of Commerce (CCC) in partnership with Iconic Galaxy.

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## Event Management Assoc. commends Govt.'s move to compensate industry

- Budget allocates Rs. 500 m for pandemic losses

The Event Management Association of Sri Lanka (EMA) applauded the Government's decision to allocate Rs. 500 million in the next year's Budget (Budget 2022) to compensate for losses incurred during the pandemic, the association stated, issuing a statement.

"We thank Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa and the Government for recognising our industry and allocating Rs. 500 million to compensate for the losses incurred during the pandemic with our industry being shut for 18 months. The EMA, being the legally registered body of the events industry, trusts and hopes that the Finance Ministry will consult and work with the EMA on how these funds will be disbursed to the professional event management companies," EMA Secretary Seniya Samarasekera said.

Sri Lanka's event management industry has been a major contributor to foreign exchange earnings by driving the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) tourism industry. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the earning potential of the industry due to inevitable mobility restrictions that ensued. "Over the last two years the Event Management Association

has been working very hard to get our industry recognised by the Government and we were first recognised when the Central Bank included us for the moratorium. The EMA is registered with the SLTDA (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority) and we are also a member of the FCCISL (Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Sri Lanka). The Government's fund allocation to the industry is a welcome respite to industry players in these challenging times. We believe that this monetary compensation will enable us to sustain and plan to revive the industry in the post-pandemic economy," noted EMA President Roshan Wijeyaratne.

In the year 2018 alone, the global MICE industry was valued at \$ 1,100 billion and it is projected to grow to \$ 2,300 billion in 2026. Sri Lanka's event management industry enjoys the potential to grow in the post-pandemic economy. As such, it is imperative that all stakeholders strive to sustain the industry and keep investing and developing it to retain the competitive edge, and remain competitive in the region to bring much-needed foreign exchange to the country.

Bringing in foreign exchange to boost the economy, the event management industry has provided employment to thousands of people.

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## Cabraal foresees 6% growth this year

- Says rate not a challenge if exports perform well
- International rating agencies' forecasts remain below 4%



BY IMSHA IQBAL

Despite a negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2020 amidst a prevailing pandemic, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal expressed the possibility of Sri Lanka reaching over 6% of GDP growth in 2021.

He made this remark during his speech at an event held in Jaffna last Saturday (20).

"Sri Lanka was growing at nearly 7% per annum from 2006 to 2014, after which we (Sri Lanka) hit a slow patch," he further remarked.

According to World Bank (WB) data, Sri Lanka had been able to reach a GDP growth of 5% in 2015, and since then the GDP growth indicates a gradual decline towards a lower rate while a significantly negative GDP growth was reported last year.

The CBSL Governor further noted that it is not a challenge for Sri Lanka to reach such growth levels once again, while elaborating that the country must continue to leverage its capacity to perform in the export market.

When it comes to last year's GDP growth, statistics provided by the WB indicates that it is -3.56%.

In terms of the GDP growth in the first quarter

(Q1) of this year, Sri Lanka has reported 4.3%, in accordance with statistics provided by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS). At the same time, it was reported that in Q2 of 2020, the GDP growth was -1.8%.

CBSL data further shows that in Q2 of 2021, the country has been able to achieve a GDP growth of 12.3%.

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CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal at an event in Jaffna last Saturday (20)



# Pandemic-induced scarring in developed markets less than feared

**The Covid-19 pandemic will reduce major developed markets' (DMs) medium-term supply-side potential gross domestic product (GDP) growth but the damage will be significantly less than initially feared in the early days of the health crisis, said Fitch Ratings.**

Investment is more resilient than we expected and actual and long-term unemployment have not increased as much as initially forecast, helped by unprecedented policy support. The medium-term economic recovery of the DMs will be much faster than in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009.

The scale and speed of the macro policy response to the pandemic was unprecedented, cushioning private-sector balance sheets and supporting aggregate demand. The strength of policy-driven demand has prompted businesses to boost manufacturing capacity. The pandemic has also accelerated information technology usage.

We expect the pandemic to knock only 0.1pp per year off potential growth across most large DMs from the pre-pandemic period.

The small hit to potential growth stems from our expectations of slower labour force growth, driven by more older workers leaving the labour force permanently, and lower net immigration in some regions. Also, the time it takes for labour to re-allocate from shrinking to growing industries may increase labour market mismatch.

Core inflation pressure has intensified over the past few months, reflecting short-term bottlenecks in global goods markets. However, our latest estimates of supply-side potential suggest output gaps will remain negative in most major DMs in 2022, limiting upward pressure on inflation. Nevertheless, our estimates show a significant positive output gap in the US in 2022. We see underlying inflation gradually easing unless policymakers keep macro support elevated for longer than expected.

# Huawei to explore role of digital innovation in Asia Pacific region

Huawei Technologies (Thailand) Co., Ltd., Bangkok Post Public Company Ltd., the ASEAN Foundation, and over 50 ICT industry partners from across Thailand have come together for "Powering Digital Thailand 2022: Huawei Cloud and Connect and Asia Pacific Innovation Day", running from 17-19 November 2021 in Bangkok.

The event considers how digital technologies can unlock new potential, markets, and business models, as well as support post-pandemic economic recovery in Thailand and the Asia Pacific region, while affirming Huawei's confidence in the country. The company is also using the three-day event to illustrate its readiness to drive ASEAN into the digital age through investment and its local partner ecosystem. Further, the event thoroughly explores the practical application of technologies like Cloud, 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital power in all industries through digital transformation, particularly Thailand's agriculture, manufacturing, and renewable energy sectors.

Launching the event, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan stated: "Digital technology is crucial to Thailand's digital economic development, post-pandemic recovery, and social wellbeing. I am delighted that Huawei Thailand, Bangkok Post, and ASEAN Foundation have organised the Powering Digital Thailand 2022 event, aligning with the Government's policies for digital development. The collaboration between government and industry to integrate technologies and evolve the country will enhance business potential, government efficiency, and Thailand's sustainability."

"Under strong policies to develop the national digital economy and technology, Thailand's digital infrastructure and data economy have made great strides in the past several years. We believe that Thailand's digital economy can reach 30% of its GDP (gross domestic product) by 2030 or even earlier. In this endeavour, we look forward to continuing working with Huawei and deepening our collaboration to use digital innovation in promoting Thailand's digital economy," Minister of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand Chaiwit Thanakamansorn said in his keynote speech.

Thailand's Ministry of Industry Department of Industrial Promotion Director-General Nattapol Rangsitpol delivered a speech on "Leveraging Industry 4.0 to Accelerate Economic Recovery", where he emphasised that in a post-pandemic Thailand, the country's economic structure is being transformed by technology and innovation. He said that new digital innovations such as 5G, AI, and Internet of Things (IoT) are rapidly driving industrial transformation and the manufacturing sector to help Thailand embrace the Industry 4.0 era.

Huawei Rotating Chairman Guo Ping delivered the opening speech at the event, where he spoke on



Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan

how Covid-19 has accelerated digital transformation in Asia Pacific and expressed his strong belief in post-pandemic economic recovery and digital economic growth in the region. He stressed that digital technology, especially 5G, cloud, and AI, will surely become a pillar for economic recovery and resilience in many countries.

"Huawei will continue innovating and building a tech ecosystem to help the Asia Pacific region go digital faster. We use 5G, cloud, and AI to help industries go digital and we will keep innovating our cloud and AI solutions to create steady value for local enterprises, especially SMEs. We plan to invest \$ 100 million over the next three years to help build a start-up ecosystem in the region," Ping said.

At the end of his speech, Ping reiterated Huawei's commitment in the Asia Pacific region, adding: "We believe all countries in the Asia Pacific region will succeed in their push to go digital. We will extend our roots deeper and do our part during the region's 10 golden years of digital transformation."

During the event, industry leaders and regional organisations across the Asia Pacific region also shared their insights on how to build a thriving and sustainable community in the digital era.

ASEAN Foundation Executive Director Dr. Yang Mee Eng stated that the event brings together government leaders, industry thought leaders, and think tank scholars to spark new ICT innovations that can pave the way for more resilient post-Covid-19 recovery in the Asia Pacific region.

Further, ASEAN Secretariat Assistant Director and Head of ICT and Tourism Division Dr. Le Quang Lan emphasised that the power of the digital economy lies in its ability to enable companies to scale their business models throughout the region, and that a common approach for digital transformation should be adopted throughout the Asia Pacific region.

Huawei Asia Pacific President Lin Baifeng emphasised: "As one of the most populous and diverse regions in the world, Asia Pacific is marching to the forefront of the global digital landscape. With over 20 years of partnership with and contributions in the region, Huawei is committed to supporting Thailand and the region's digital vision in three key areas: Connectivity and intelligence, low carbon development, and digital inclusion initiatives."

Addressing the digital transformation trends and Huawei's mission in the Thai market, Huawei Technologies CEO Abel Deng noted: "We are inspired to see Thailand become a leading digital force in the ASEAN region. Huawei will support to power a low-carbon digital Thailand through four main layers: The first is to enrich 5G adoption for ubiquitous connectivity. In 2022, Huawei will help to expand Thailand's 5G rollout and adoption in vertical industries. Secondly, Huawei will support Thailand to strengthen its digital platforms and data localisation. Huawei Cloud is the only international cloud service provider with local data centres in the Thailand market, and our third availability zone is officially ready for service this November. The third layer is supporting Thailand in realising its Carbon Neutrality 2050 Roadmap with digital power innovations. Finally, we will create a thriving innovation ecosystem in Thailand through our 5G Ecosystem Innovation Centre, Spark Programme, Huawei ASEAN Academy, and Digital Talent initiatives."

Discussing Thailand's low carbon development, Deng added: "Huawei is fully committed to supporting Thailand in becoming ASEAN's low-carbon leader, and we are confident in achieving this goal. We have over 30 years of experience in the power industry, with 6,000-plus dedicated R&D (research and development) employees in this field, and we devote nearly 15% of our total revenue to R&D every year."

"The Asia Pacific region is the home to the world's largest population, thus the transformation of the region to digitalisation backed by industries with low carbon footprint, smart energy, and smart society will be vital for the future growth of the digital economy and to far-sightedly manage the resources in the world we live in. It is indeed great that Huawei being in the forefront of ICT innovation in the region is bringing all of us to this event to discuss and explore the future of the digital era with practical applications of user cases. This also help us to understand (how) to explore the avenues on how Sri Lanka could fast track to digitalisation," said V. Maheswaran, a global economic and equity analyst from Sri Lanka.

Digital power smart energy is one of the most exciting innovations during this event. Combined with existing energy business, Huawei

introduced a digital power business to Thailand, which focuses on developing clean energy to replace fossil fuels through digital and power electronics technology and aims to build a low-carbon smart society. Huawei digital power business drives industries low-carbonisation, electrification, and intelligentisation by applying applications such as Smart PV and Battery Energy Storage, Intelligent EV Charging Network, Smart Data Centre Facility, and Green Site Power Facility.

The Powering Digital Thailand 2022 event showcases key technologies and innovations for industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and smart energy, which can be easily applied by Thai businesses. One exhibition highlight is Cloud Tractor Training, where visitors can experience a tractor training course enabled by a low-latency 5G network and cloud rendering server. This innovation can be implemented by Thai farmers to improve and optimise their cultivation of agricultural produce.

The event also highlights inspiring business cases and solutions related to digital transformation, including how to develop a green, low-carbon, and open ecosystem, which is split across three areas. The first of these is "Redefine Infrastructure", which showcases how 5G, cloud, and AI technologies can converge across all industries to unleash new value. The second area focuses on "Industry Digital Transformation", including smart transportation, smart campus, and smart finance. Finally, the third area exhibits major global partners and businesses that are collaborating with Huawei to build a prosperous ecosystem for the intelligent era.

Another event highlight is the Intelligent World 2030 White Paper, which cites upcoming technological trends from Huawei to look out for, including Cloud, 5G Bullet Time, Cloud and 5G VR Gaming, Smart Healthcare, Smart Finance, and Smart Education. The Hands-on Lab course is also impressing visitors, where experts from Huawei Cloud provide technical and practical sessions for IT professionals, as well as skills development workshops for deploying and operating cloud computing technology. Finally, the second Huawei Cloud Developer Competition in Thailand is being showcased at the event under the theme of "Creating value for Thailand and society; for a better future for this beautiful country".

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### Retailers...

Speaking to *The Morning Business* previously in September, Sadique claimed that 2020 was a year of survival, and the retail industry has learnt lessons from earlier waves on surviving the third wave. Unlike the earlier pandemic days, now online sales can also contribute in minimising the impact of the pandemic even though it is "challenging and unpredictable", through online shopping sites in Sri Lanka such as Daraz. Thus, Sri Lankan retail can reach the global online market as well.

The industry was growing and, by 2023, was expected to continuously grow 20% with the establishment of shopping malls, the Port City Project, hotels, and tourism. Moreover, by 2025, Sri Lanka being a regionally competitive country with quality products and having reasonable prices, the retail industry was expected to thrive. Therefore, Sri Lanka could attract consumers from Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Bangkok, especially in electronics and the garment sector. However, the pandemic has disrupted the industry.

SLRA is the apex body of Sri Lanka's Organised Retail Sector (ORS) consisting of last-mile retailers and represents 47 leading national-level retail firms, with countrywide reach across various product segments.

All our attempts to reach the Treasury for a comment proved futile.

### Cabraal...

However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised Sri Lanka's GDP growth in September from 4% to 3.6% due to the uncertainties that emerged with the rise in the Covid-19 cases during May-August while prolonging the third wave.

The report issued by the Fitch Ratings warned the results beyond a mere contraction in GDP growth, explaining that shock in GDP would possibly lead to "scarring" due to the lesser number of business investment as well as credit availability, bankruptcies overall, and losses in human capital in the labour market.

Moreover, ICRA Lanka too downgraded the GDP forecast for the year 2021 from 3.6% to 3.4%, with the anticipation that no major shock would consequently influence the Q3 and Q4 of 2021.

### Event...

Over the past 30 years, the event management industry grew organically while industry players invested billions of rupees in developing the industry by upgrading equipment, introducing technology, and training people, according to the association.

### Vallibel...

Meanwhile, interest income showed a growth of 13.9%. Total operating income grew by 62.6% to Rs. 3.5 billion from Rs. 2.1 billion in the 1H 2021/22.

Notwithstanding the challenges that abounded during the year under review, especially with regard to recovery and collections due to lockdowns and lower levels of economic activity, the Gross Non-Performing Loan (NPL) ratio was successfully maintained well below the industry norm at 5.51%.

Vallibel Finance has built a reputation as a highly-trusted financial services partner which is evident in the fact that during the year under review, the company grew its deposit base from Rs. 32.1 billion to Rs. 35 billion despite the challenges emanating from the pandemic.

Vallibel Group Chairman Dhammika Perera added: "I am proud of Vallibel Finance for forging ahead as a market leader in the footsteps of the Vallibel Group. Its performance in the first half of the financial year under review despite the challenges from the pandemic reflects its strong management expertise and exceptional team."

### SL an...

He added that this post-pandemic era would be the best time to invest in Sri Lanka.

"The main reason for this is because, in Sri Lanka and Colombo, the construction cost is higher than the land price, which is usually the opposite as opposed to countries like India and Malaysia. Therefore, when we make investments in Sri Lanka, it is sure to be a safe investment because it will not be exposed to price fluctuation," he noted.

The expert panel comprised of Iconic Developments Managing Director Rohan Parikh, Jones Lang LaSalle Head of

Sri Lanka Jerry Kingsley, and National Development Bank (NDB) Vice President – Branch Network Management and Product Development Zeyan Hameed, and was moderated by KPMG – Sri Lanka Senior Manager – Real Estate Advisory Division Gihani Hewavitharana.

The floor opened with Kingsley on an advisory front as he dove into the specifics of how the priorities of a typical Sri Lankan homebuyer, office space buyer, and investor had changed following the Covid-19 pandemic.

"For office buyers, it was noteworthy that health and safety have become a top priority since Covid-19. Another thing that has changed is the flexibility in office spaces. Many are focusing on their office spaces' co-working aspect and have taken steps to revitalise and ensure optimum workspace is utilised. For the average homebuyer, their home has turned into a workspace, a school, or something greater. Therefore, it is important that their homes are bigger, with more amenities and smart home configuration to adjust to the technological increase in the new normal," said Kingsley.

From an advisor's perspective, Kingsley noted that investors are looking at multi-asset classes, industrial logistics, healthcare, and hotels as a part of their diversification initiative. Another eye-catching difference between developers and investors is the increased focus on sustainability. Most investors are now taking steps to integrate sustainability solutions into all their projects.

He also noted that new concepts for adapting homes to the new realities have already started to emerge. For one, the healthfulness of a building and its shared spaces is now considered a vital amenity. More inventive designs will continue to appear and put the richness of architecture at the heart of change.

Jerry Kingsley noted that the super-luxury market might not gather as much velocity as the luxury condominium market due to the high construction costs.

"The current global pandemic has had a significant effect on the construction industry, and the challenges faced are manifold. The most obvious being delays caused to construction companies. Idling workers and escalating interest result in increased costs for the companies. Restarting sites while ensuring social distancing and other safety measures prescribed by the Government, will be time consuming and costly, leading to an increase in costs and prices," he said.

Looking at the banking sector, the CCC opened the floor to Zeyan Hameed of NDB. He immediately debunked the myth that people request home loans purely due to their limitation of income.

"We are often under the impression that most people request for home loans due to their lack of income, but many investors and developers are also part of our target audience. As a bank in the post-pandemic era, we are committed to giving the maximum support to consumers. Interestingly, in the past few months, the property search in Sri Lanka has gone up by 79%, which is directly proportional to the number of people who have requested home loans since. Meanwhile, 95% of the investors that we see are Sri Lankans or non-residential Sri Lankans," he said.

Hameed also noted that the bank could also facilitate that properties are valid; the legal aspects of a purchase are also fully vetted to ensure that the consumer gets as much transparency as possible. He also explained some of the payment schemes that NDB offers to those looking to invest in and purchase home loans for residential purposes.

Overall, this could prove to be an optimal time for smart buyers as developers offer discounted prices to buyers. Those choosing the right project to invest in could see a strong return on their investment in the long run. However, picking the correct developer and project is key.

### 'We never...

"These allegations are absurd. Securatec does not bid for alcohol breathalyser tenders for the moment since our high quality breathalysers are more expensive and we certainly did not bid for this particular one. We did not even collect a bid document," Danawardena told *The Morning Business* yesterday (22).

Allegations were levelled by Lanka Industrial Services Agencies (Pvt.) Ltd. and its associate company, Assent International (Pvt.) Ltd., which took part in the tender process for the supply of alcohol breathalysers to the Sri Lanka Police in 2020, that Securatec Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd., which is further claimed to have taken part in the tender process, had fraudulently represented itself as a foreign supplier of alcohol breathalysers with the intention of deceiving the former and causing reputational damage.

*The Morning Business regrets the above-mentioned factual error.*



## Arpico Insurance launches Arpico HealthCare



Arpico Insurance Chairman Vilv Perera lighting the oil lamp

Arpico Insurance PLC recently launched Arpico HealthCare in a bid to empower Sri Lankans and their families to live life to the fullest by ensuring the best possible protection for their health and wellbeing.

This comprehensive solution from Arpico Insurance provides unprecedented benefits such as the cashless and reimbursement hospitalisation benefit for assured, spouse, children, and parents; hospital cash per day benefit for assured, spouse, children, and parents; and critical illness cover for 40 illnesses for assured and spouse, among many others. Moreover, the new product offers an additional life protection benefit, spouse life protection benefit, accidental death cover for assured and

spouse, total permanent disability cover due to accident or sickness for the assured and spouse, among others.

Policyholders can also enjoy a host of special benefits that set the Arpico HealthCare apart from the rest. The cashless hospitalisation benefit covers hospitalisation charges including room, nursing, ICU, laboratory tests, medicines, miscellaneous hospital services costs and other medical care.

The cover also includes a daily income cover of up to Rs. 25,000 per day in case the assured is hospitalised impairing his earning capacity as well as pre and post-hospitalisation expenses cover, free periodic health check-ups after every two claim free years, and dental care costs.

## More choices for Sri Lankan customers with Cathay Pacific's new Economy fares

Cathay Pacific has redesigned its Economy fares, offering Sri Lankan customers greater choice and flexibility when booking flights. The airline has developed new and simple-to-understand light, essential, and flex fares tailored to customers' travel needs and will be introduced in Sri Lanka on 9 November 2021.

Light fares enable customers to enjoy great value when they have confirmed travel plans and are travelling light. One piece of checked-in luggage is included and customers can always pay for additional luggage and other benefits like seat pre-selection after their booking is made.

Essential fares offer the perfect balance of everything customers need, such as an extra piece of luggage, seat pre-selection, and the option to upgrade using Asia Miles. This fare type is ideal for those travelling with family, heading for a longer trip, or simply seeking more comfort and convenience.

Flex fares give customers maximum flexibility for their

next business trip or holiday, with full control over their travel plans as and when changes are needed. Greater convenience and peace of mind is assured.

Cathay Pacific will also progressively introduce the redesigned Economy fares across the network in phases. In addition to this, the airline is also shifting its baggage policy from a weight-allowance to a piece-allowance system that provides a more generous baggage allowance in the majority of fare types and cabin classes.

For more information, visit: [www.cathaypacific.com/cx/en\\_HK/book-a-trip/book-flights/new-economy-fares.html](http://www.cathaypacific.com/cx/en_HK/book-a-trip/book-flights/new-economy-fares.html).

## Remote control washing machine with Samsung SmartThings app

The AI Ecobubble™ washing machine from Samsung joins the club of connected devices, and with the help of the SmartThings app, you can control your washing machine from anywhere at any time, making laundry a hassle-free job.

With the SmartThings app, your smartphone, Samsung Smart TV, or Family Hub refrigerator can alert you when the wash cycle is done, if the Smart Control status changes, or if any errors occur. You can also disable the notification from the settings under the menu section of the app. The SmartThings app allows you to control your washing machine



by selecting the cycle you want to run.

The Samsung AI Ecobubble™ washing machine is available at Softlogic, Singer, Singhagiri, and Damro outlets and the Samsung e-store at a starting price of Rs. 149,999.

## CEAT radials designated OEM for Mahindra Bolero City Pik-ups

CEAT Kelani Holdings has been appointed as an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) for Bolero City Pik-up vehicles assembled in Sri Lanka by India's Mahindra and Mahindra, in collaboration with Ideal Motors.

All Mahindra Bolero City Pik-ups rolling off the assembly line at the Mahindra Ideal Lanka Automotive Assembly Plant in Welipenna, Matugama are fitted with CEAT

Milaze HD radial tyres in the size of 215/75 R15, manufactured at the CEAT Kelani plant in Kelaniya, under an OEM agreement between the two companies.

The CEAT Milaze tyres feature profiled shoulder lateral grooves that provide better heat dissipation and wide-angle circumferential grooves that resist cuts and chips. Angular transversal notches and sipes provide enhanced grip and uniform wear,

while the angular notched four-rib high-land area design provides longer tyre life and durability.

No stranger to the OEM segment, CEAT Kelani Holdings has been the exclusive original equipment tyre supplier for Mahindra KUV100 compact SUVs assembled in Sri Lanka since 2019. All locally assembled Mahindra KUV100 vehicles are fitted with CEAT FUELSMARRT 185/60 R 15 tyres.



# KPMG Sri Lanka recognised as 'Best Corporate Advisory Firm'

The Global Economics Awards pave a way forward for enterprises globally, to showcase the immense efforts put in place to uplift regional and global economies. The globally-recognised awards stand as a marquee of the recipients' perseverance and credibility in the global arena.

Global Economics is the pioneer in recognising market leaders who are performing at their peak to sustain global economic growth responsibly. The process of recognising the cream of enterprises is carried out across the globe irrespective of the domains of the various entities. Global Economics is well known, and a highly respected publication established

in London. The publication provides valuable insight and up-to-date news on commercial and investment banking, wealth management, and advisory.

KPMG in Sri Lanka was awarded "Best Corporate Advisory Firm" for the year 2021 in the domain of Finance. As one of the prestigious award winners in the finance domain, KPMG in Sri Lanka

has demonstrated the potential economic growth that can be leveraged with the help of enterprise leaders.

KPMG in Sri Lanka, with its highly capable professionals, has continued to provide services to clients maintaining the highest quality leveraging the KPMG global network of firms. The diverse set of professionals in KPMG have helped both the local and regional economies to implement, manage, and optimise opportunities in a digitally transformed era by addressing complexities with integrity and sustainability to add more value in order to utilise the full potential economic

growth opportunities.

The advisory line of business at KPMG is headed by Partner and Head of Advisory Priyanka Jayatilake. KPMG in Sri Lanka has excelled in the past years enduring the wide spectrum of challenges resulting from economic uncertainty and the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the economic challenges, with the leadership of Priyanka Jayatilake, the advisory teams at KPMG in Sri Lanka have delivered with excellence in the domain of finance and IT, enabling clients to persevere and push forward through tough times while being responsible in a sustainable manner.

## DFCC Bank signs MoU with JAT Living to offer home loan scheme



DFCC Bank Senior Vice President - Retail Banking and SME Aasiri Iddamalagoda and JAT Holdings Non-Executive Director Anika Williamson exchanging the MoU

DFCC Bank recently announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with JAT Living to offer an exclusive home loan scheme to customers who purchase properties at 146 Residencies, a residential neighborhood in Thalawathugoda developed and owned by JAT Living.

146 Residencies is the latest development introduced by JAT Living. It is a captivating super-

tower complete with 112 apartments that include two, three, and four-bedroomed spaces with three floors of parking and a vast rooftop ranging up to 8,800 sq. ft., also comprising a zen garden, walking path, yoga deck, children's playground, infinity pool with breathtaking views, and a fully functioning entertainment clubhouse complete with a bar.

This special offer is valid for all

customers who purchase property from 146 Residencies, subject to meeting the necessary credit evaluation criteria. Customers can enjoy a grace period of four years and will also be able to access a special structured repayment plan to suit their requirement. On top of this, DFCC Bank will extend further benefits to customers, from early settlement fee waivers to credit approval within three working days.

## MiHCM celebrates two years in its joint venture with MyHCM Pakistan

MiHCM, a global human capital technology company, recently marked the completion of its second-year operation acquiring over 50,000 users in Pakistan. MiHCM operates as MyHCM through a joint venture that offers MiHCM's digital HR solution to businesses across Pakistan.

MyHCM now has become a progressive digital HR solution in Pakistan, which automates HR activities and processes, creating a completely paperless environment. It enables HR leaders to work efficiently and manage their employees in a way that enhances collective productivity.

The joint venture was established in November 2019 after both companies



MiHCM Founder/CEO Harsha Purasinghe



MyHCM CEO Shahrukh Nadeem

signed an agreement to offer MiHCM's Cloud HR platform and its plethora of other digital experiences to enterprises and SME businesses in Pakistan. These integrated solutions provide businesses and employees with a unified experience that is designed

to address demands such as workforce and talent management.

MyHCM customers are now able to integrate MiHCM's time and attendance, scheduling, onboarding, payroll, engagement tools, and more as a result of this

partnership. Customers can manage staff, decrease excess labour expenses, and create a modern employee experience with the integrated solution. The solution provides a smooth flow of employee data, HR, payroll, time, and comprehensive talent management.

MyHCM has an ambitious vision for the future to introduce more employee experiences to businesses in Pakistan. These include an all-new mobile experience integrated with Siri™ and Google Assistant™, chatbot and video-based candidate shortlisting for recruitment, powerful analytics for the digital workplace and workforce, and MiA – the latest workplace virtual assistant for Microsoft Teams.

## Kurunegala gains momentum for real estate investment

A new investment hub for real estate has been identified in Kurunegala, CBH Lands Chairman Yatila Wijemanne driving real estate investment in the area. With a strong belief that Kurunegala is the next investment hub in Sri Lanka, Wijemanne

expounded on the advantages of real estate in comparison to other investment opportunities and the ways in which the perception of investment has changed following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Investment witnessed a sudden shift in the eyes of the general public following the pandemic. Influenced by the reduction in interest rates and the lowered taxes, far-sighted investors rapidly progressed towards real estate. While a natural reduction in investments occurred at the onset of the pandemic, society has now eased towards the new normal with investment once again on the rise.

With the current potential growth of the real estate industry in Sri Lanka, a substantial increase in prices is to be expected. In addition, with the increased occupancy in areas in the vicinity of the expressways, Kurunegala is an ideal area for affordable and accessible investment. The long-term sustainability in real estate investment and the value additions pertaining to it make it a viable option for the future.



CBH Lands Chairman Yatila Wijemanne

## e-wis storms ahead in IT



e-wis specialises in computer assembly and manufacturing and is the only Sri Lankan company to launch computer assembly within the country. The company has garnered a high reputation for the high quality of factory-made computers and other devices it offers. At present, most of the government institutions, schools, universities, and banks in Sri Lanka as well as many private companies and banks opt for e-wis computers.

To cater this growing demand, e-wis has launched a programme to make their computers easily accessible to the average Sri Lankan consumer. Partnering with the world-renowned Intel company as its Technology Partner and Microsoft as its Software Partner, e-wis has boosted their production output to a high standard to fulfil the needs of the buyers. Moreover, e-wis has provided the opportunity to purchase any e-wis product online via their website <https://buyewis.lk>, where the products will be delivered to the customer's doorstep.

The University of Moratuwa looks after e-wis' research and development (R&D) standards to make sure the best products and services will be presented to the company's trustworthy clientele.



## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"It is always the simple that produces the marvelous."  
— Amelia Barr



### Kala Keerthi Abhimani for Yohani

Sri Lankan singing sensation Yohani de Silva, who became the first Sri Lankan female singer to surpass a total of 3.14 million subscribers on YouTube, was awarded the Kala Keerthi Abhimani award recently. She is also all set to sing her famous cover *Manike Mage Hithe* in Hindi for the 2022 Indian film *Thank God*.

# the morning brunch

# A Conscious CHRISTMAS

*Who We Are on their vision for a happy, responsible Christmas season*

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

**With Christmas around the corner, for many of us, it is time to start thinking about giving, both in gifts and in kind. Amidst a pandemic, and in the middle of one of the biggest economic crises we have seen to date, it is of vital importance that we think about how we shop and what we buy this Christmas season.**

In this spirit, Who We Are is promoting "A Conscious Christmas", encouraging customers and shoppers to spread the joy of Christmas by supporting small local businesses and their families.

*The Morning Brunch* chatted with Who We Are Founder Otara Gunawardene for a little more insight into what A Conscious Christmas means and how we as Sri Lankans can all contribute to celebrating this season consciously.

Who We Are, the online platform Gunawardene started just shy of a year ago, is all about living a conscious life the Sri Lankan way. Not too much, not too little... just the right amount of local, environmentally aware, sustainable,

ethical, stylish, healthy, and happy!

As a platform, Who We Are celebrates creators and their products, from small businesses and young entrepreneurs just starting out to communities who come together to create unique products in a bid to empower themselves. Through A Conscious Christmas, Gunawardene hopes to encourage shoppers to purchase from these creators, small businesses, and communities during this joyous time of giving and celebrating a conscious Christmas.

Speaking on the thought process behind the campaign of A Conscious Christmas, Gunawardene explained that it's all about encouraging people to gift consciously. Gunawardene shared: "The retail environment as a whole is now changing to become more conscious. As consumers, we are becoming more conscious of what we buy and how we shop and to try to make a more direct impact on the people and communities around us.

"The basic idea of A Conscious Christmas is to help customers be more conscious, aware, and responsible when buying and giving gifts this season."



*These homemade products are made with good intentions from the heart, by people sitting individually and developing them*

**Who We Are Founder Otara Gunawardene**

This year, Gunawardene shared that Who We Are is working with over 100 creators on a range of Christmas decor, Christmas cards, and other Christmastime products that are unique, harking back to the Christmases of years gone past when hand-made gifts and gifts from local businesses and communities had greater value.

"We have very small businesses



and individuals doing things from home, using their creativity, and making a lot of items that are planet-responsible, using natural materials and no plastic or polythene. These homemade products are made with good intentions from the heart, by people sitting individually and developing them," she said.

The Christmas collection of Who We Are can be purchased through their website under the tab "Christmas Decor"; in addition to products from small businesses, the website also includes products from communities like the students from the Chitra Lane School, a community of lace-makers from Dickwella and another community from Kandy.

Who We Are also encourages shoppers to buy local with Gunawardene, sharing that it is now more relevant than ever to really focus on supporting Sri Lankan businesses and products made in Sri Lanka.

"All businesses are struggling to build themselves up again, and there is no better time than now to start changing our focus to things made in Sri Lanka and directly help uplift communities and families by

supporting them to earn more money and directly help small businesses grow," she said, adding that now, in this troubled economic time, supporting local businesses and creators helps keep money flowing within the country and also helps boost the economy and help Sri Lanka strengthen itself.

Gunawardene also stressed that every purchase, especially through conscious platforms like Who We Are, makes a difference, strengthening our communities and nurturing a more just future for all – the makers and their families, those who use the products, the animals, and the environment.

Reflecting on this past year and sharing her hopes for the future, Gunawardene said the last two years have seen all Sri Lankans face many challenges, but that this challenging time has also seen many people find new ways to develop themselves amidst this adversity, especially creatively.

Gunawardene said: "Through Who We Are, we've seen quite a lot of people discover talents and skills of theirs which they didn't know they had while they were doing regular jobs. They're now starting to grow their own businesses and they're enjoying it as well."

"I think there'll be a lot more of that in the future and you will see people becoming more and more creative and innovating and developing new ways of doing things. In that sense, I think there will be a lot of change in the year or two ahead, and I hope, through Who We Are, I can help them reach a wider audience."

**The Christmas collection of Who We Are can be purchased through their website under the tab "Christmas Decor".**

Who We Are LK

www.whoweare.lk

## THE ISLAND MARKET TO HOST HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE

*Nisreen Dissanayake speaks on the inspiration behind the brand and what to expect*



The Island Market held last year

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

The Island Market is a brand story that started with a simple idea that came to Nisreen Dissanayake's mind while she was staying at home during the lockdown period.

That was when Dissanayake, an accountant by profession with a keen eye for charitable events, began an event which would help serve the community: The Island Market.

In conversation with *The Morning Brunch*, Dissanayake told us that the first vendor market was initiated under the name "Weekend Bazaar at 570" back on 6 February 2021. The "Weekend Bazaar at 570" is now rebranded as "The Island Market" to make the brand feel closer to the event objective of focusing on home-based business vendors while promoting local products made in Sri Lanka.

The event was organised in an open environment with canopies shading the vendor stalls



Nisreen Dissanayake

at a prominent location in Colpetty. Initially, they began with 18 stalls and consisted of all home business vendors selling unique products such as handcraft, wooden household items, clothes, bags, organic spices, wooden toys, and many scrumptious food stalls.

When talking about what inspired the business, she explained that during the lockdown, she

saw the difficulties the people and community were going through with many people losing jobs, small businesses unable to open physical stores and losing sales, and the community stuck at home and missing out on how life used to be pre-Covid-19. This is when she thought that we need to somehow bring back the smiles of all these people by doing a fun activity and remind them that no matter what, life goes on. "With this simple notion, I decided it would be a great initiative to have a marketplace opportunity for many small business ventures which have been affected by the pandemic and also have a carnival atmosphere for the general community to enjoy life once again," she commented.

The main goal behind The Island Market was to give the vendors a fair opportunity to offer their products and Dissanayake explained that vendors were carefully selected to ensure that

unnecessary competition was avoided; the selection process was also carefully screened in order to show support for persons with disabilities, slow learners, and others. On this topic, she stated: "We decided to offer free stall space and give them an equal chance to succeed. We are happy that we have made an environment where we are approachable to discuss such sensitive matters." She also added that a further step was taken to provide free stalls for vendors with financial constraints as they requested for stall space even though they were unable to pay.

The event drew over 300 people from all age groups and it was indeed a joyous occasion for everyone. Drawing confidence from the first event, another bazaar was organised during 3 April 2021 alongside the Avurudu and Ramadan celebrations, with over 50 stalls and generating a crowd of well over 500 people with DJ

music playing in the background to create a carnival atmosphere. Both events were conducted under strict Covid-19 health guidelines for the safety of vendors and all attendees.

The next The Island Market event is the "Holiday Boutique", which is a fundraising project organised along with the Bohra community, with the total proceeds of the event being used for the upliftment of families affected by the pandemic. Hemas Holdings Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kasturi Chellaraja Wilson will be in attendance as the Chief Guest at the event.

Additionally, Dissanayake told us that the organising committee is happy to be a part of such an event where the community can be supported. When asked what's next for The Island Market, she

informed us that the upcoming event will have over 35 stalls from many local brands, covering a range of products with super discounts for the season. This market would be the perfect place for those shopping for the season to give back to small businesses and make everyone happy, and also honour the true meaning behind the season.

"We hope all of you will visit the 'Holiday Boutique' to have a unique shopping experience as well as support this worthy cause," she concluded.

**The event will be held on 4 December 2021 from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., and will be located at 570/3 Galle Road, Colombo 3, which was the same venue as previous events. There will be ample parking for attendees on Marine Drive.**





{ PEOPLE/ARTS }



The band DoubleJinxx: Chrischale Panditharathne (left) and Janine Wright

# J. (Double) Jinxx!

Sri Lankan indie-pop duo DoubleJinxx releases their first single 'Meraki'

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

**"Meraki" is a word modern Greeks often use to describe doing something with soul, creativity, or love – when you put "something of yourself" into what you're doing, whatever it may be. It's something all creative people aspire to and Sri Lankan pop duo DoubleJinxx, a new kid on the block who have just released their first original single (which is called "Meraki"), have managed to achieve this with Meraki (the song, not the concept).**

DoubleJinxx sees two young women who have known each other for most of their lives coming together to make beautiful music. Schoolyard friends, Chrischale Panditharathne and Janine Wright began DoubleJinxx in 2018, starting off singing covers on Instagram. Fast forward to the pandemic, and the duo decided they wanted to take the plunge and write

their own music. "It was something we were always doing, but we were waiting for the right time," Chrischale recalled. Meraki was then released in July this year, on YouTube, Spotify and SoundCloud.

Off the release of their first original single, *The Morning Brunch* chatted with Chrischale and Janine to learn everything we could about Double

Jinxx and how they work, which is interesting given that Chrischale is currently based in the US and Janine is in Sri Lanka.

The name DoubleJinxx draws its root not just from the normal use of the word jinx, but also from the term used when two people say the same thing at the same time and the person who says jinx first makes the other person not speak until somebody says his or her name. It's a reference both to how Chrischale and Janine are in sync with each other and also as a message of sorts, to show that even if people curse them or do not like their music, they will persevere and come back twice as hard. "Jinxes can be good or bad," Chrischale explained, "you can jinx someone in a good way, and that goes against our goal of making music you can feel instead of music that you can only hear. Whatever feeling or emotion our music makes you feel, good or bad, we want to double it and give it back and ensure that feeling is amplified."

A soulful musical piece, Meraki does a lot to evoke emotion. It deals with the lack of meraki, or passion in the world, Chrischale and Janine explained, it talks about how people do their jobs and live their lives for the sake of it without love or passion and how, as kids, people dream big and want to do great things, but as adults go on to live small lives, tackling the frustration of a life without meraki.

Speaking on how the duo composes their music, DoubleJinxx shared that they split the process, with Chrischale being the lyricist and vocalist of the pair and Janine focusing more on the production, the melody and the more musical aspect of their music.

Defining the genre they work within, Chrischale shared that it was mainly indie pop, but that as a band, DoubleJinxx is very experimental and they like experimenting and trying out different things. They function as a completely independent band and are not signed to a label, and work mainly with friends of theirs who serve as their managers, videographers and their extended team when making something new.

One of the many interesting things about DoubleJinxx is the fact that from their inception, they've been long-distance, barring a few performances when they were both in the same country on university holidays and similar. On how this works when they're making music, Janine shared

that this is a challenge, but that they realised early on it was something they could do. "We started off on different continents," Janine said, "We tried it long-distance and the result was quite good, and we realised we could give it a shot."

Giving us some insight into how making music works for them on a practical level, Chrischale shared that she and Janine collaborate on writing a new song, which Chrischale then records the vocals to in her (very minimal) home studio in the US before sending this to Janine who goes into the studio in Sri Lanka to work with the instrumental part of the track, add vocals and do the ultimate assembly.

With their first single out and about, DoubleJinxx is now working on two more singles which they hope to release in the near future. "We want to do an album, but don't know if we have the resources yet. At the moment we're working on a single and more on finding our sound," Janine shared, adding that DoubleJinxx hopes to release their next single in late 2021 or early 2022.

Giving us a glimpse of what inspires them, Chrischale explained that DoubleJinxx's lyrics are a mix of the two's personal experiences and also topics they want to discuss but don't see people talking about in general. "We want whoever listens to our music to feel they're not alone," Chrischale



said, "I take a lot of inspiration from different mediums around, and from the people around me, from music I listen to, art I see, and galleries I go to. I do a lot of people-watching and get inspiration to write different songs that explore how they are feeling."

With Sri Lankan music, in general, having made a recent (big) splash on the international stage, we also checked in with DoubleJinxx on their views of how Sri Lankan musicians and music, especially indie pop, can make a mark internally. Sharing her perspective, Janine said that Sri Lanka has a lot to offer with its music and definite potential to reach a global audience.

Chrischale shared that while, to her, in Sri Lanka, indie pop doesn't feel like a very common genre, but she has recently seen that Sri Lankan music is definitely branching out into different, more experimental genres. "I hope Sri Lankan indie-pop comes up as a strong feel-good contender internationally. In general, even locally, people are trying to see the entire creative and artistic side of people who make music in Sri Lanka and appreciate them as artists and as singers. In terms of going global, I don't see why not. One of the pros of the pandemic is that it has removed all geographical barriers. Across the world, people are branching out into listening to different music genres and languages. We don't need to look that far, Yohani has reached global status with her music, and I don't see why Sri Lankan indie-pop too can't make a wave globally."

**Meraki is available to listen to on YouTube, Spotify and SoundCloud. To see more of DoubleJinxx's work and to keep updated with their music, please follow DoubleJinxx on Instagram (@thebanddoublejinxx)**



BY VENESSA ANTHONY

Vithushan Thayaparan, known in the field as Vidushaan is a Sri Lankan rapper and singer, who stepped into the field with his debut song *Cinderella* at the age of 16.

In 2020, he formed the musical band Est4Lyf and thus became the CEO of it.

He was also the first rapper from Batticaloa and the Eastern Province, who had taken the scene to Malaysia and India.

Vidushaan told *The Morning Brunch* that in 2020, when he founded Est4Lyf, he created this band with the intention of creating a platform for all rappers/artists

within the eastern part of the province. "Through Est4Lyf, I invested in creating music with these artists and marketing it on digital platforms to help create a Tamil hip hop culture in Sri Lanka that is non-existent at the moment," he shared.

He is also the first Sri Lankan Tamil music composer to release a single under Sony Music South in 2012 along with IBP studios, Malaysia. He's currently working on his new album under Jaya Records, Serandip music group.

In conversation with *The Morning Brunch*, he told us that music has always been a part of his life: "From a very young age, watching my mom and

## 'I WANT TO CREATE A TAMIL HIP HOP CULTURE IN SRI LANKA'

### Vidushaan on his music, band, and more

uncle sing for the church choir grew my interest in music and I started singing along with them." He added that this continued into his school career, when his idols and teachers Sangeetha Poosanam Jeeva Joseph and Latha Jayakumar, helped him discover his musical talent and encouraged him to participate in school events such as Tamil Day and English Day in order to hone his skills further. He also participated in an islandwide singing competition and was awarded first place three times: "Through participating in these competitions, I gained more musical exposure and an interest in continuing music as a full-time career as a full-time career."

In 2012, he composed the song *Oneside* with playback singer Sathya Pragash and later in 2015, he collaborated with playback singer Santhosh Hariharan and composed the song *Lucky Anthem*. That same year, combining with Malaysian artist, Ram Nath RNB, he released three songs in the album *Vanthuvidu*, under Sony Music South.

Vidushaan also performed at Malaysian Moksha, MMU events in 2014. Aside from that, he has also performed at Singapore Sense Club in 2015. In the years 2016, 2018, and 2019, he told us he performed at the Revolution show which is conducted by Red Bull India.

#### Challenges

When asked if he ever had to face any challenges and how he overcame them, he explained that one of the main challenges he faced in the music industry was the lack of musical exposure in Sri Lanka, specifically Batticaloa

at the time. He told us that even though being the first ever rapper in Batticaloa was an honour, it also came with more challenges than he anticipated, because no one before him knew what mixing and mastering, producing or any aspect of music that further the quality of the sound. "Because we didn't know how to up the quality of music, despite having good lyrics and melody, when I sent the samples of the songs to media agencies they rejected it because it lacked quality," he shared. As a beginner in the independent music stream, it was exceedingly difficult to get local radio stations and music channels to play the songs, so it was a struggle to gain credit as well as an audience for his songs.

Working from scratch, Vidushaan told us that he struggled with creating a name for himself, creating an audience, and gaining exposure to develop his talent. "After 10 years of constant struggles and challenges, I have finally been able to create an audience for myself as well as create a lot more music," he commented, adding that his two recent releases, *Kassu* and *Naan Oru Muttalunga*, have both crossed 100,000 views.

#### What's next?

Taking a quick glance at his social media, he has over 35,000 followers on Instagram filled with a worldwide audience from Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Europe.

He now has over 9,000 followers on his Facebook page and he informed us that Jaya Records is currently working on handling the verification process for it. On YouTube, his two recent songs *Kassu* and *Naan Oru Muttalunga* have hit 155,000 and

102,000 views, respectively. Apart from Facebook and Instagram, he has songs with over 100,000 listens on SoundCloud.

In recent times, more platforms have been introduced in Sri Lanka that have definitely helped in growing the reach of his songs, such as Spotify. However, what continues to be a struggle for someone who chooses music as a full-time career is the financial aspect, as it is very difficult to find producers and gain royalties/revenues from songs that get

broadcast on TV or the radio.

Currently, he is working under the music label of Jaya Records to release many of his songs on several digital streaming platforms such as Apple Music and Spotify. Within the next 10 years, he hopes to have established a Tamil hip hop culture in Sri Lanka, hosted several live-in concerts, and had approximately 100 rappers represent the country with millions of views and streams.

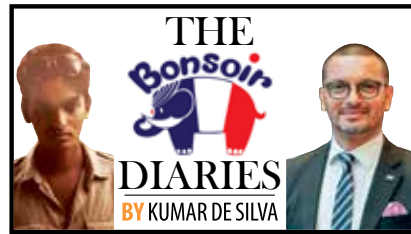
@vidushaanofficial





# Fête de la Musique

## The musical train to Kandy



**If May is the month of Roland Garros and the Cannes Film Fest, then June is the month of World Music Day, or "Fête de la Musique".**

This popular event began in 1982 when French Minister of Culture Jack Lang (yes, I spelt his name correct) declared 21 June as Fête de la Musique. 21 June is the first day of summer, the day of the Summer Solstice, and the longest day of the year, when the sun sets well after 9 p.m.

On this day, the whole of France explodes into one musical extravaganza with amateur and professional performances taking place at every imaginable venue – village squares, railway stations, churches, hospitals, town squares, the banks of River Seine, etc.

Since then, Fête de la Musique has spread beyond France and is now a worldwide musical festival, with Sri Lanka also celebrating Fête de la Musique for many years. The Alliance Française takes the lead each year and celebrates an infectious Fête de la Musique, while the Alliance Française de Kandy, Jaffna, and Matara follow suit.

Back in 1992, we wanted to do something different... something daring. What better idea than a musical train to Kandy. With the French Embassy and the Alliance Française teaming up, we booked two entire compartments of the Colombo-Kandy Intercity Express.

We invited musicians, music lovers, music journalists, and Bonsoir's music fans on this musical ride to Kandy. Twenty years ago, at that time, this was one hell of an experience; there was the Bonsoir team with Yasmin, Chintha, and hired help; personnel from the French Embassy; and the irreplaceable Angela Seneviratne and Ronnie Lietch. There were also Priya Goonetilleke, Drucille Bertus, and lots of others whose names I unfortunately don't quite remember now.

We all gathered at the entrance of the Fort Railway Station with an assortment of instruments and began to make music.

Saner passengers were astounded while the more adventurous ones joined in by clapping to the beat of the music. Music making then spilled onto the platform and continued into our two carriages and all the way to Kandy!

The other passengers thought we were mad – what with Angie and Ronnie, and their crazy antics, and deliberately singing flat. We unloaded ourselves at the Kandy station and, much to the disbelief of onlookers, sang and danced on the platform! The poor Station Master didn't know which song hit him from where – English, French, Sinhala, Hindi, Tamil, and a bit of German too for good measure.

The Alliance Française de Kandy headed by Fabrice Mongiat took over and two waiting buses whooshed us to the grounds at the other end of the Kandy Lake. Students' Committee President Ayesha Imbuldeniya had got her members activated at the grounds where we were joined by Kandy's musicians such as Michael Sansoni and the Hezonites, I think.

From that point onwards, it was non-stop music, song, and dance in the hot sun. Kandy was cool, the sun was not. We danced in the noonday sun as clouds of dust circled us, but no one cared a damn. Music was the unifying force that held sway that morning.

The ambiance was fabulous and infectious that we totally forgot that there was a train to catch back to Colombo. Lunch was very rushed, but we were still VERY late. We had to somehow stop that intercity train from leaving. The perfect solution presented itself in Angela Seneviratne, always ready to take up a challenge, and revelling in daring ones at that!

We rushed headlong her to the Kandy Station where she very calmly sat on a filthy sleeper in the middle of the dirty railway line, right in front of the engine. She composed herself, smiled, and refused to budge. Given her heavy celebrity status, the station staff was in a quandary. The Colombo-Kandy Intercity Express could not run over Angela Seneviratne. That would have amounted to voluntary manslaughter. This gave us ample time to collect our team together and rush back to the station.

Once we were all inside the carriages, Angie got up, dusted her pretty self, and as

"The Bonsoir Diaries" by Kumar de Silva is a cocktail of chapters bursting at their seams with pithy asides, a trail of faux pas, and tit-bits from behind the scenes, marinated with anecdotes and drizzled with nostalgia, revealing everything you never saw on your favourite television show... from the '80s through the '90s to 2000.

though nothing had ever happened, did a *roopa sundari* toss of her mane, gave the onlookers her most innocent smile, and with her Brigitte Bardot pout stretching all the way down to Kadugannawa, said "api yanawaaahhh". The whistle was blown, the carriages convulsed, and we were safely en route to Colombo after Fête de la Musique (indeed) in Kandy!

**P.S. A decade-plus years down the line, Angie recalls thus...**

One can get away with the craziest things when one is young, me thinks! When Kumar rambled about this particular train stopping incident when the *Bonsoir Diaries* was only a plan, I didn't even murmur (out of shock), and what I hoped was a forgotten tale was soon to be published, right there in your faces, as it were, and worst of all, yikes – for my children to read! Now, how can I ever be a role model? Gasp!

Note to self: Never do anything without missing yourself into the future by at least 25 years! But then, I suppose, I haven't changed much. I reckon I'd yet plonk myself in front of a stationary train and cause a stir, and a very flummoxed station master, if it meant that my team had to catch up. Never for the love of a fluttering blue, white, and red flag would I forget the purple face of the station master, spluttering "madam, aney madam...epaaaa madam" and the spectators gathering around him, pleading with me to clamber back onto the platform. I demurely raised my hand as if to say "wait" while I fretted that the gang hadn't arrived yet. Ah, how long would I have to carry this on?

I was indeed relieved to see the delayed gang with their instruments, and someone assisted in pulling me up to the platform and, in the rush, asked for my address! Many months later, I received a letter in the post from this fan saying how worried he was that I was going to do something drastic to myself and he wanted to cry. Bless him!

Those were lively days. I remember the journey itself, perched on the window of the compartment, butts out, heads in, hollering out non-stop bailas, hindi pop, rock and roll, and sing-alongs all the way from Fort to Kandy. It was the same all the way back as well. It was a wonder we didn't run out of songs! Of course, we all behaved very well in Kandy, much to the surprise of our own fellow teammates.

Sadly, I never heard of a repetition of such spectacular entertainment thereafter, so I guess we made history in some strange way.

Vive la France, you are etched in my life forever!



Rainforest Alliance Global Board Director Anisha Rajapakse and Director – South Asia Dr. Madhuri Nanda handing over the donation to Nuwara Eliya District Hospital Director Dr. Mahendra Seneviratne

## Rainforest Alliance extends support to Nuwara Eliya, Bulathsinghala Hospitals

The Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and resulting supply chain disruptions have created a tremendous strain and a destructive impact on the tea industry, especially on smallholders and women-led farmers in Sri Lanka. These challenges continue despite the slowing down of the pandemic spread. It is in this backdrop that the Rainforest Alliance donated vital Covid relief

medical equipment to the Nuwara Eliya and Bulathsinghala Hospitals.

This level of support and strengthening of capacities will enable the hospitals to effectively carry out the treatment and care of communities in the areas for Covid-19. The Rainforest Alliance remains strongly committed towards protecting and safeguarding the wellbeing of its stakeholders in these unprecedented

times, and hopes that this level of long-term strengthening of capacities will help the smallholder tea growers and plantation communities receive uninterrupted medical services both now and in the future.

The Rainforest Alliance is an international non-profit organisation working in 70 countries at the intersection of business, agriculture, and forests.

## Rakuten Viber partners with Lasith Malinga to deliver unique cricket experience

Veteran Sri Lankan fast bowler Lasith Malinga partnered with Rakuten Viber to launch his first official community on Viber. His fans can now experience his iconic style through augmented reality (AR)-powered lenses and his popular cricket lingo through custom sticker packs.

Malinga, also known as "Slinga Malinga" for his unorthodox bowling action and toe-crushing yorkers, made his international debut in 2004 and stands as the third-highest wicket-taker for Sri Lanka in One-Day International (ODI) history, scalping 338 wickets. He is also known as one of the greatest bowlers to have ever played in the Indian Premier League (IPL), where he picked up 120 wickets in 122 matches he played for Mumbai Indians, making him the highest wicket-taker in the IPL tournament history.

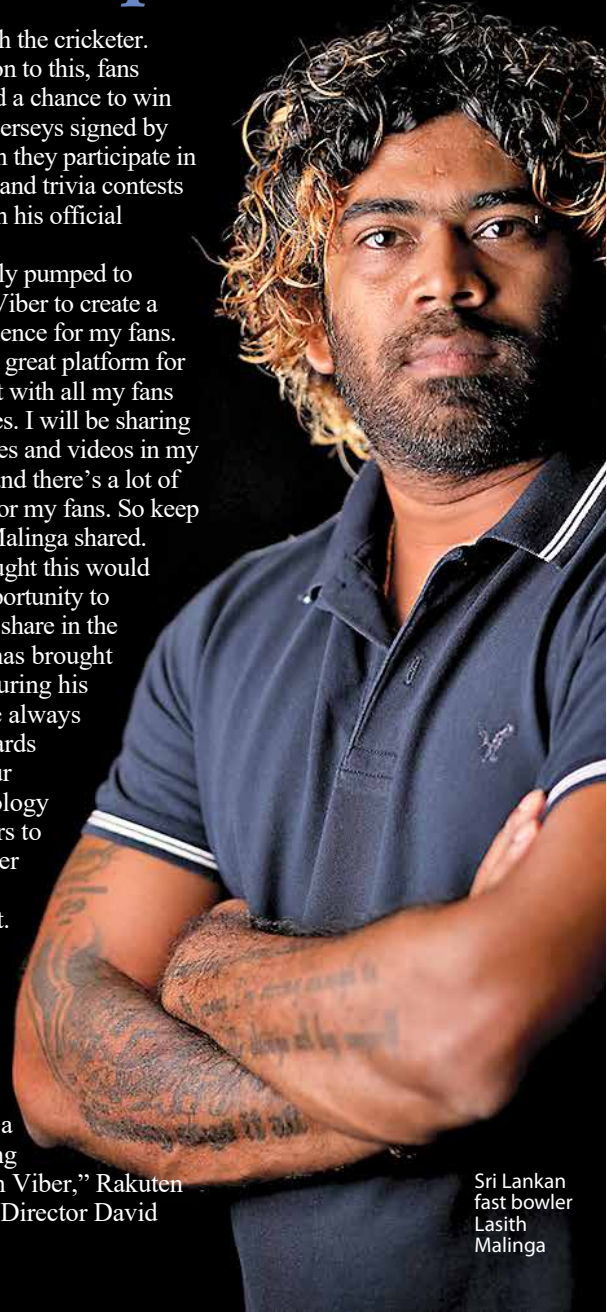
Viber cricket fans can look forward to custom sticker packs featuring Malinga and an official community to engage with him, share comments, and be a part of his daily life. Fans will also be able to engage with the legendary fast-bowler through the Viber Cricket Talks Community during the World Cup, where 10 lucky fans who share a message for him using the custom Malinga lenses will have an opportunity to get on a

video call with the cricketer.

In addition to this, fans will also stand a chance to win personalised jerseys signed by Malinga when they participate in daily quizzes and trivia contests exclusively on his official community.

"I'm really pumped to partner with Viber to create a special experience for my fans. This will be a great platform for me to connect with all my fans and loved ones. I will be sharing a lot of pictures and videos in my community, and there's a lot of fun to come for my fans. So keep following," Malinga shared.

"We thought this would be a great opportunity to celebrate and share in the joy Malinga has brought for his fans during his career. We're always working towards leveraging our digital technology to enable users to discover newer aspects of entertainment. We're also really honoured to partner with Malinga to allow cricket fans to enjoy a total cricketing experience on Viber," Rakuten Viber Senior Director David Tse said.



Sri Lankan fast bowler Lasith Malinga



{ SPORTS }

# John Michael Arthur and his stint in Sri Lanka: An analysis

● He says Sri Lanka's cricket is in a better place now than when he started

BY REVATHA S. SILVA

**O**kay. What really did happen during his two-year tenure? Here is a statistical analysis for our readers' assimilation:

"Sad that it is the end of the road with Sri Lanka after the West Indies test series! I have loved every minute of coaching this great country! To the players and people of Sri Lanka a big thank you! I know Sri Lanka cricket is in a better place now than when I started!" – Mickey Arthur

Arthur's coaching staff included Grant Flower (as Batting Coach), David Saker (Bowling Coach who left the position early 2021 to take up as Head Coach of Melbourne Renegades at the men's Big Bash League in Australia), and Shane McDermott (Fielding Coach).

Later, Piyal Wijetunga (Spin Bowling Coach since July 2021 India tour of Sri Lanka) and Chaminda Vaas (Fast Bowling Coach since March 2021 Sri Lanka tour of the West Indies) joined the Sri Lanka coaching staff.

## Mickey Arthur's career in Sri Lankan cricket

**(A) Overall record – 1 December 2019 to 20 November 2021 (up to two-match Test series in Galle, which is his last assignment)**

Mickey Arthur took over from Chandika Hathurusingha in December 2019 as Sri Lanka Head Coach for a two-year period (Dec. 2019-Dec. 2021). That time he was in a short-term contract with Central Stags in the Super Smash T20 league in New Zealand since September 2019.

**Arthur's overall period –** (from 1 Dec. 2019 to 20 Nov. 2021)  
55 Matches / Won 17 / Lost 31 / Drawn 5 / No Result 2 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.548\*

**Formats breakdown –** 1 Dec. 2019 to 20 Nov. 2021:

- **Tests** – 12 Matches / Won 2 / Lost 5 / Drawn 5 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.400
- **ODIs** – 18 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 10 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.700
- **T20Is** – 25 Matches / Won 8 / Lost 16 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.500

**(B) Record from 1 December 2019 to June-July 2021 England Tour**

This is a period where there were no major structural changes that had taken place in the Sri Lanka national ranks. No leadership changes. Generally, Sri Lanka's record across all formats continued to be poor, extending the dismal run that was evident since 2015-16.

**Arthur's initial period –** (from 1 Dec. 2019 to 4 July 2021)  
35 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 21 / Drawn 5 / No Result 2 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.333

**Formats breakdown –** from 1 Dec. 2019 to 4 July 2021:

- **Tests** – 12 Matches / Won 2 / Lost 5 / Drawn 5 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.400
- **ODIs** – 12 Matches / Won 4 / Lost 7 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.571
- **T20Is** – 11 Matches / Won 1 / Lost 9 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.111

**(C) Record from June-July 2021 England Tour upto 20 November 2021**

Many structural changes took place in



Mickey Arthur is now on his final assignment with Sri Lanka in Galle in the Test series against the West Indies

the national ranks since July 2021. Three leading players were banned from the game on disciplinary grounds and newcomers took their place. National selectors went for a clear youth policy whilst leaving aside a few seniors. White-ball cricket captaincy went to Dasun Shanaka.

**Arthur's latter period –** (from 5 July 2021 to 20 Nov. 2021)  
20 Matches / Won 10 / Lost 10 / Drawn - / No Result 0 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.000

**Formats breakdown –** (from 5 July 2021 to 20 Nov. 2021):

- **Tests** – 0 Matches
- **ODIs** – 6 Matches / Won 3 / Lost 3 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.000
- **T20Is** – 14 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 7 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.000

### (D) Conclusion

Mickey Arthur's coaching record drastically improves from July 2021 (win ratio improves from 0.333 to 0.500). Those changes were not purely due to coaching, but (i) administrative (appointment of a new selection committee), (ii) structural (employing a new youth policy and change of captaincy etc.), as well as (iii) accidental (three players being caught smoking in England which led to their banning).

### Notes:

- **The win-loss ratio** is found by dividing the number of wins by the number of losses. If there is more than the figure 1, only if there are more wins than losses.

\*\* *ODIs* – One-Day International  
\*\*\* *T20Is* – Twenty20 Internationals



Did this disappointing incident in June during the England Tour become a major reason for the change of fortune in Sri Lanka's cricket in recent times, rather than anything else?

## LOCAL NEWS IN BRIEF

### Gamer.LK announces Mercantile E-sports Championship 2021

Gamer.LK, a leader in e-sports and digital entertainment experiences in Sri Lanka, has announced the return of the Mercantile E-sports Championship 2021, powered by Samsung. The championship, to be held in its sixth edition, is recognised as the largest annual mercantile sporting event, with 20 different game titles to choose from.

### Sri Lanka PUBG Mobile teams amongst best of Asia

"Sri Lankan Gamers" who have qualified for the "Red Bull Mobile



E-sports Open (MEO) Season 4 Asia Regional Final" are revving up to fight for the Asian PUBG MOBILE crown, which was set to take place yesterday (21). During the Asian qualifiers held earlier, over 900 teams across 30 countries competed in a series of hard-fought games. The four winning teams representing Sri Lanka are "WG – NRC E-sports", "nA – FRag", "nA – ERBIV", and "Team VP". "NRC" currently holds the No. 1 position on the official national PUBG Mobile ranking in Sri Lanka while "FRag"

and "ERBIV" hold Nos. 4 and 6 respectively.

### CICT continues to support Sri Lanka's wheelchair tennis

Wheelchair tennis, a sport that has consistently earned international recognition for Sri Lanka, recently received more support from Colombo International Container Terminals (CICT) and China Merchants Foundation



Dambulla Giants Owner Qamar Khan

(CMF) in the form of a donation of \$ 30,000 (approximately Rs. 6 million).

### LPL 2021: Dambulla Giants aiming to lead the way

Qamar Khan, CEO of London-based Hamro Foundation, are

the owners of the franchise Dambulla Giants, which was named Dambulla Vikings last year. "I have always been a supporter of cricket, from grassroots teams... An opportunity arose for me to purchase the Dambulla franchise and support the T20 league in Sri Lanka, a country I fell in love with during my first visit in 2010," Khan said in a statement last week.



Softlogic Holdings PLC's Founder and Chairman Ashok Pathirage

### Softlogic gets Colombo Stars in LPL

LPL's Colombo franchise has a new owner as Softlogic Holdings PLC's Founder and Chairman Ashok Pathirage has entered the second season of the country's premier cricket league. He has acquired Colombo Stars, led by Angelo Mathews. The team was formerly known as Colombo Kings, and was owned by Mufad Mustafa, a Dubai-based Indian businessman. LPL 2 will be held from 5-23 December.

## ON THIS DAY



- 1960** Birth of Sri Lankan spinner Jayananda Warnaweera who was an effective bowler in his limited Test career. An off-spinner, Warnaweera bowled the ball at a quick pace but questions over the legality of his action eventually saw him sanctioned from the international arena. Following the conclusion of his playing career, he became involved in the preparation of the Galle Stadium. One of his proudest moments was when the ground hosted the second Test against Sri Lanka and New Zealand, its inaugural international fixture
- 1961** Birth of Australian legend Merv Hughes. Not even the most ardent Hughes devotee would claim he was a great bowler, even though he took 212 Test wickets, but through his love of hard graft, beer, and a scrap he became a hero to a nation, and went on to become a selector
- 1964** Birth of Sri Lankan seamer Kapila Wijegunawardene. His gentle medium pace was effective back in the day and in his second and final Test, he managed match figures of 7/98 while almost helping Sri Lanka to a win against Pakistan at Faisalabad in 1992
- 1967** Birth of South African opening batter Gary Kirsten



Today is the birthday of former Sri Lankan spinner Jayananda Warnaweera



Happy birthday Kapila Wijegunawardene!

- 1989** The "Bounty Bowl": Philadelphia Eagles defeated Dallas Cowboys 27-0 at Thanksgiving in an ill-tempered game, after which Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson accused Eagles coach Buddy Ryan of placing bounties on players
- 1991** Evander Holyfield TKO-d (technical knockout) Bert Cooper in the seventh round for the heavyweight boxing title
- 2003** After three tied playoff holes between Tiger Woods and Ernie Els, Captains and players decided the Cup was to be shared at the Presidents Cup
- 2013** Manny Pacquiao defeated American Brandon Rios to win the World Boxing Organisation (WBO) welterweight title
- 2014** British Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton won the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit to clinch his second Formula 1 World Drivers' Championship, 67 points ahead of team-mate Nico Rosberg



Manny Pacquiao defeated American Brandon Rios to win the WBO welterweight title in 2013

## Out of Focus

### The background

Artists of Sri Lanka playing friendly cricket matches annually had been a long-running practice probably since the 1970s. The two gentlemen here, geared to face the leather ball, are not cricketers. On left is Karunaratne Abeysekera,

one of the leading lyricists Sri Lanka produced in her post-independence history and the other is none other than a pioneering popular songs icon of the country, C.T. Fernando.

### What the photo reveals

The two are coming back to the pavilion after a knock in the middle.

### Analysis

Abeysekera would have played some cricket but obviously not C.T. The way he is holding the bat says so! Yet the two are enjoying the moment – a rare one for those

who had committed most of the time to their arts.

### Photographer

Unknown.

### An afterword

This interconnection between two of the most popular mediums in Sri Lanka, arts and cricket, had been flourishing during the 1970s and the '80s. It evolved until recently till the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc. It is interesting to think that the fans here who loved *Mihikatha Nalawala* (sung by C.T.) or *Buddhan Saranam Gachchami* (penned by Abeysekera) loved their cricket as well.





# the morning sports

## Hamilton vs. Verstappen's title battle on a knife-edge

Lewis Hamilton's second win in succession, in a largely dreary Qatar Grand Prix, has left the Formula 1 championship battle on a knife-edge heading into the final two races of the season. A comfortable win from a dominant pole position was Hamilton's seventh of the year and reduced the Mercedes driver's deficit to leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull to eight points. Neither driver is in a comfortable position.



## WTA says concerns remain for Chinese tennis star

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has said that a call between Peng Shuai and the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) does not address its concerns over the Chinese player's wellbeing. An IOC statement after the call said Peng appeared to be safe and well. Peng, 35, disappeared from the public eye for almost three weeks after she made sexual assault allegations against a senior Chinese minister. Her absence triggered widespread international concern. Sports stars and governments called on China to provide proof that she was safe.



## SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA 1ST INNINGS	
Dimuth Karunaratne st Da Silva b Chase	147
Pathum Nissanka c Cornwall b Gabriel	56
Oshada Fernando c Bonner b Chase	3
Angelo Mathews c Holder b Chase	3
Dhananjaya De Silva hit wicket b Gabriel	61
Dinesh Chandimal c Cornwall b Chase	45
Ramesh Mendis c Da Silva b Warrican	13
Suranga Lakmal lbw Warrican	11
Dushmantha Chameera c Brathwaite b Warrican	3
Lasith Embuldeniya c Blackwood b Chase	17
Praveen Jayawickrama not out	8
Extras (b 5, lb 6, nb 8)	19
<b>Total (all out in 133.5 overs)</b>	<b>386</b>
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-139 (Nissanka, 49.1 ov), 2-164 (Fernando, 57.3 ov), 3-170 (Mathews, 65.1 ov), 4-281 (De Silva, 94.4 ov), 5-296 (Karunaratne, 99.5 ov), 6-331 (Mendis, 112.6 ov), 7-355 (Lakmal 124.4), 8-361 (Chandimal 127.4), 9-361 (Chameera 128.1), 10-386 (Embuldeniya 133.5)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Shannon Gabriel 19-2-69-2 (nb 5), Jason Holder 19-9-24-0, Rahkeem Cornwall 27-3-91-0, Kyle Mayers 3-0-9-0, Jomel Warrican 32-5-87-3 (nb 3), Roston Chase 28-5-83-5, Jermaine Blackwood 1-0-6-0, Kraigg Brathwaite 4-0-6-0	

# Spinners run riot to put Lions on top

● Sri Lanka vs. West Indies first Test in Galle

## WEST INDIES 1ST INNINGS

Kraigg Brathwaite c Nissanka b Mendis	41
Jermaine Blackwood lbw Embuldeniya 2	0
Nkrumah Bonner c De Silva b Jayawickrama	1
Shai Hope c Fernando b Mendis	14
Roston Chase c Fernando b Mendis	
Jomel Warrican c Chandimal b Jayawickrama	
Kyle Mayers not out	22
Jason Holder not out	1
Extras (b 8, lb 4, nb 2, wd 1)	15
<b>Total (for 3 wickets in 42 overs)</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Did not bat:</b> Joshua Da Silva, Shannon Gabriel, Rahkeem Cornwall	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-46 (Jermaine Blackwood, 20.1 ov), 2-51 (Nkrumah Bonner, 23.5 ov), 3-80 (Kraigg Brathwaite, 31.6 ov), 4-83 (Shai Hope, 33.1 ov), 5-86 (Jomel Warrican, 36.5 ov), 6-100 (Roston Chase, 39.6 ov)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Suranga Lakmal 5-1-6-0, Dushmantha Chameera 4-0-8-0 (wd 1), Lasith Embuldeniya 15-4-39-1 (nb 1), Praveen Jayawickrama 12-4-25-2 (nb 1), Ramesh Mendis 6-1-23-3	



Sri Lanka Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne (left) celebrates the fall of a West Indies batter off the bowling of Praveen Jayawickrama yesterday (22), the second day of the first cricket Test in Galle

PHOTO © SLC

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The Windies had a testing few overs to see through before tea. Apart from two close LBW appeals, skipper Kraigg Brathwaite and Jermaine Blackwood survived until tea.

## Mendis takes three at the death

Sri Lankan spinners lost the trick in the first few overs after tea by bowling too short.

However, once they adjusted the length, scoring became much harder for the Windies. While the runs dried out, the Windies lost two quick wickets of Blackwood and Nkrumah Bonner which put them under a bit of pressure. However, Brathwaite and Shai Hope steadied the ship for a few overs. Nevertheless, the Sri Lankans finished strong with Mendis taking three wickets to put the visitors six down at stumps

## Concussion sub in play

The young debutant Jeremy Solozano who got hit on his head on day one, was released from the hospital after scans were clear of any internal bleeding. However, adhering to the concussion protocols from the International Cricket Council (ICC), he was not allowed to continue and Shai Hope was added as a like-for-like sub for the Windies.

## De Silva with an unwanted record

Dhananjaya De Silva once again proved his class in the longest format. He was lining up yet another century before he clattered his own stumps, from his own bat, while trying to take the ball away from stumps. He became only the second Sri Lankan batsmen to be dismissed twice by a hit-wicket.

BY RANJKA PERERA REPORTING FROM GALLE INTERNATIONAL STADIUM

Sri Lankan spinners created havoc in the final session to shift the game towards the home side at Stumps on day two of the first test against West Indies here at the Galle International Stadium yesterday (22).

The hosts were only able to add another 119 runs to their overnight total as the West Indies bowlers found their mojo to restrict Sri Lanka to 386 runs in the first innings. In response, the Windies openers added 46 before Sri Lankan spinners ran riot and put the visitors in a spot of bother at 113/6 when play concluded for day two. The Windies still trail by 273 runs.

## Chase shines with the ball

Sri Lankan spinners took their time to find their rhythm and when they did, the visitors were left wanting in the final few overs of the day. However, it was Roston Chase who took centre stage on day two with his fourth Test five-for and helped his side take the last seven wickets of Sri Lanka for just 119 runs.

## Both teams share the first session

The Windies started and ended the first session strongly. Shannon Gabriel's fiery spell priced the wicket of Dhananjaya De Silva. Dimuth Karunaratne was only able to add another 12 runs to his overnight score before a smart bit of glove-work from Joshua Da Silva found him millimetres short of the crease. Despite losing to a set batter, Dinesh Chandimal guided Sri Lanka through the session without any more damage and took Sri Lanka up to 341/6 at lunch.

## The Windies turn the tables

After lunch, the Windies had the best phase in the game with the ball in hand. They were disciplined and it paid dividends as wickets tumbled in quick succession. Lakmal was the first while Chandimal followed shortly afterwards attempting a reverse sweep. The tail added a

few more runs thanks to Lasith Embuldeniya who added a run-a-ball 17 before Roston Chase dismissed him and completed his five-for.



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The Japan women's team received the Dialog-sponsored Asian Rugby Sevens Women's Cup Championship trophy from Youth and Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa and Asia Rugby President Qais Al-Dhalai

PHOTO © ASIA RUGBY

# 'Women Tuskers' finish sixth

● Asia Rugby Sevens in Dubai

After a promising start from the Sri Lanka women's rugby team, aka the Women Tuskers, at the Asia Rugby Sevens series held in the UAE on Friday (19), they had a disappointing last day on Saturday (20) and had to settle for a sixth place finish, similar to that of their counterparts in the men's series.

The Women Tuskers started day two with a thrilling win over the Philippines in the Plate semi-final: 19-15. However, in the Plate finals they were up against Thailand, who scored a staggering 45 points while the Women Tuskers failed to trouble the scorers.

Given the short preparation and the lack of match practice for the women, they surely made the nation proud with their performance in this tournament.

## Japan all the way

Defending champions Japan made it six-in-a-row after beating China in the cup final 12-10. Along the way, they

dominated all their games, beating Kazakhstan 21-7, Thailand 17-5, the Philippines 61-0, and Hong-Kong 29-0 (in the cup semi-finals).

Runner-up China's performance in the tournament turned out to be a real surprise. They managed to beat Hong Kong 22-5, Sri Lanka 47-0, and

Malaysia 45-10 in the group stages.

In the cup semis, Kazakhstan, who were one of the favourites to win the trophy, were stunned by the Chinese who beat them 24-19. Despite giving their best in the finals, the Japanese women proved far more superior to beat.



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