



UNFPA LAUNCHES 16 DAYS OF GLOBAL ACTIVISM

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the morning



THE HARVEST OF THE SIX-MONTH CHEMICAL FERTILISER IMPORT BAN

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SRI LANKA ON BRINK OF STUNNING WIN

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DIVISIONS WITHIN GOVT. ON SEEKING IMF HELP

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Cardinal suspects the authorities' involvement in Easter Sunday attacks

• Maintains attacks were a large plan, cites PCoI report in support

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Archbishop of Colombo His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has said that he suspects that the authorities are not implementing the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 21 April 2019 due to some involvement of theirs in the attacks. Speaking to the media during an event in Wadduwa, he alleged: "The authorities are not even going to implement what the PCoI has recommended. Even though we have been insisting on it, they are not doing it. It makes us suspect that if they are not implementing them, it is because of any involvement of theirs in these attacks."

The Archbishop further said that it is becoming increasingly clear that there was a larger plan behind the said terror attacks than what is superficially visible on the surface. Claiming that there were several reasons for it, he said the report of the PCoI also contained certain facts. "The terror attacks claimed 269 lives and left some with paralysis for the rest of their lives. The pain in those hearts cannot be described in words or anything. That can be done only by knowing the truth behind this. Who did this? Why did they do this? These questions need to be answered and our struggle will not stop till then," Cardinal Ranjith said.

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Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith

'GOLDEN GATE KALYANI' NOW OPEN



The New Kelani Bridge, named 'Golden Gate Kalyani', was declared open by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, and Chief Government Whip and Minister of Highways Johnston Fernando at 6 p.m. yesterday (24)

RTI Commission defunct for 2 months

The Right to Information (RTI) Commission has been defunct for nearly two months due to the failure to appoint members, with the entire process of ensuring the public's right to information, as well as the appeals presented by the people to the RTI Commission, now at a complete standstill, the National

Media Forum (NMF) announced. "Among the key appeals that are currently blocked in the process are the appeals made by the public on the Port City and the arbitrary acquisition of lands. Other processes undertaken by the RTI Commission include the inquiring of the veracity..."

Contd. on page 2

'All farmers will have to drink poison'

• Ex-Prez Sirisena slams 'overnight' 100% organic fertiliser policy

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Given the economic difficulties faced by farmers due to the Government's "overnight" 100% organic fertiliser programme, farmers will have to drink poison, claimed former President and incumbent Government Parliamentarian Maithripala Sirisena.

Speaking to the media yesterday (24), he stated that the agriculture sector has already been destroyed due to the Government's "overnight" 100% organic fertiliser programme.

Contd. on page 8



Former President Maithripala Sirisena

Archaic media laws to be amended

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Mass Media Minister and Co-Cabinet Spokesman Dullas Alahapperuma said yesterday (24) that a number of laws relating to the main institutions attached to the Mass Media Ministry will be updated to prepare them for the dynamic global changes in the media industry.

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Health unions on strike for 2nd day today

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

The token strike launched by 16 non-medical health sector trade unions (TUs), including those of the nursing and paramedical services, public health inspectors (PHIs)...

Contd. on page 2

COVID-19 CASES			
ACTIVE CASES	16,749	TOTAL CASES	558,860
DEATHS	14,182	RECOVERED	527,929
SOURCE: HEALTH PROMOTION BUREAU			
COVID-19 TOTAL VACCINATION			
1ST DOSE	15,916,995	2ND DOSE	13,721,117
THE ABOVE STATISTICS ARE CONFIRMED UP UNTIL 8.00 P.M. ON 24 NOVEMBER 2021			
SOURCE: PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT			

Chemical fertiliser imports permitted again

Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage

- Controversial gazette revoked after six months
- Private sector to import and sell in open market
- Mahindananda says Govt.'s green agri policy unchanged

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

The Government has decided to revoke the Extraordinary Gazette No. 2226/48 of 6 May 2021 which banned the importation of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals including pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides/weedicides, and to thereby allow the private sector to import the same.

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To LISTEN to our lead story, scan this QR code on your device

KINNIYA TRAGEDY

Kinniya UC Chair blames 'politicised' ferry services

BY PAMODI WARAVITA AND RUWANI FONSEKA

Amidst allegations that Kinniya Urban Council (UC) Chairman S.H.M. Naleem had authorised the operation of the unsafe ferry service on the Kuringankerni Lagoon in Kinniya Trincomalee, that ultimately led to six deaths this week in an accident that involved a makeshift barge capsizing, Naleem told *The Morning* that there were many different types of boats and makeshift barges operating in the Lagoon, on the basis of various political affiliations.

Naleem claimed that he had only authorised an "out boat service" with an affixed, standard motor to fulfil the public need, under several safety conditions.

Contd. on page 2

Booster dose for all over-20s soon

• Teachers' TUs urge expeditious delivery to school staff, citing high risk of Covid

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Sri Lanka will commence the rollout of booster doses of the Covid-19 vaccine soon, stated Minister of Health Keheliya Rambukwella yesterday (24).

He noted that further details would be disclosed in due course, while the Health Ministry is making the relevant preparations towards this end.

Contd. on page 2

CEB engineers to begin work-to-rule today

• Warn intermittent power outages possible

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Ceylon Electricity Board Engineers' Union (CEBEU) will be engaging in a work-to-rule protest action from today (25), demanding that the deal with US-based

energy company New Fortress Energy Inc. not be proceeded with and also to immediately stop the abrupt transfers of senior management in the backdrop of this deal.

Contd. on page 8

SIS requested Zahran's arrest in May 2018

- Warned Zahran was inciting Muslim youth to riot
- State Minister Kanchana Wijesekera publishes Ex-SIS Director's letter
- SJB says Zahran fled country and his pursuer was arrested by 52-day Government

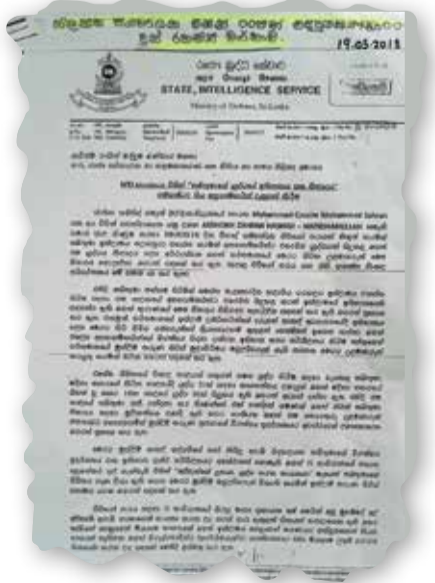
BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWERA

Ornamental Fish, Inland Fish, and Prawn Farming, Fishery Harbour Development, Multi Day Fishing Activities, and Fish Exports State Minister Kanchana Wijesekera has published on his social media account a letter dated 19 May 2018, which was sent to the then Law and Order Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara by former State Intelligence Service (SIS) Director Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (SDIG) Nilantha

Jayawardena, requesting the arrest of National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) Leader Mohamed Cassim Mohamed Zahran alias Zahran Hashim through a special police unit.

The said letter, which was seen by *The Morning*, read that Zahran was evading court after a clash between two groups in Kattankudy on 10 March 2017. Accordingly, SDIG Jayawardena has, in the letter, informed Madduma Bandara that it appears...

Contd. on page 2



The first page of the letter

SL's human rights situation has deteriorated, says UK

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office's (FCDO) updated assessment statement on global human

rights issues identified Sri Lanka as an "area of deterioration" and has raised concerns over the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No. 48 of 1979 (PTA),

increased deaths in custody, controversial appointments to the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), the surveillance and intimidation of human rights activists, deradicalisation regulations,

and the marginalisation of minorities.

"Security forces increased their surveillance and intimidation of human rights activists and their use..."

Contd. on page 2

AT A GLANCE

LANKAQR DIGITAL PAYMENT METHOD TO BE IMPLEMENTED AT EXPRESSWAYS

Cabinet approved the resolution furnished by Minister of Highways Johnston Fernando to implement the LankaQR payment methodology at expressways in a bid to minimise the use of physical currency in Sri Lanka.

The Government has joined hands with all licensed institutions in popularising and encouraging said payment method, the Department of Government Information noted.

Accordingly, as one of its initiatives, a proposal was tabled to introduce LankaQR methodology for manual paying counters in the expressways managed by the Road Development Authority (RDA). This will allow motorists utilising the expressways to pay the due amount within eight to 10 seconds by scanning the QR code through the LankaQR active mobile payment app of any bank at the paying gate by indicating the relevant amount of money on their mobile phone.

NEW ZEALAND TO REOPEN TO VISITORS FROM NEXT APRIL

New Zealand will keep its borders closed to most international travellers for a further five months, the Government said yesterday (24), outlining a cautious easing of border curbs that have been in place since Covid-19 hit in March 2020.

Fully vaccinated international travellers will be allowed to enter the country from 30 April 2022 onwards, with the re-opening staged over time, New Zealand's Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins told a news conference.

VASUDEVA SAYS GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO ACCEPT MISTAKES

Speaking about the ongoing fertiliser issue in the country, Minister of Water Supply Vasudeva Nanayakkara said that lessons are learnt from experience and that mistakes must be rectified.

"We must be humble enough to accept our mistakes if it has happened. It is our responsibility to provide a solution as well. I feel this is how the Government should act," the Minister had told the media.

He also reassured that following the decision to import chemical fertilisers, the same would be provided to farmers through agrarian officers under certain regulations, and not in a haphazard manner.

National oil and gas co. to be set up

● Commercial production from Mannar seabed M3 Block basins in the pipeline

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Government said yesterday (24) that a national oil and gas company will be established for the production of oil and gas, in a commercial capacity, from the M3 Block on the Mannar seabed, home to oil and gas basins.

"This company will be a public private partnership (PPP), and a subsidiary of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC). We have dreamt of the oil and gas basins in the Mannar M3 Block for decades now. Explorations from 2011 to 2013 confirmed the presence

of these basins. We are one step closer to this dream as Cabinet of Ministers approval was given on 23 November for the establishment of this company," said Cabinet Spokesman Dullas Alahapperuma yesterday.

Thus, the company will be involved

in storage facilities, the construction of pipelines, infrastructure facilities development, and the ownership and monitoring of local natural gas exploration and production with a commercial capability.

Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila earlier told *The Sunday Morning* about a 100% state-owned national oil company, to be established under the proposed Petroleum Resources Act (PRA), which would replace the Petroleum Resources Act No. 26 of 2003.



G.L. briefs UN on PTA revisions and reconciliation efforts

● UN Assistant Secretary General meets Foreign Minister

Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris this week briefed UN Assistant Secretary General (ASG) for Political, Peace building, and Peace Operations Khaled Khiari on progress made in domestic processes in relation to reconciliation and human rights, including the proposed revisions to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

Khiari, who is currently undertaking a visit to Sri Lanka, called on Prof. Peiris on Tuesday (23) at the Foreign Ministry.

Here, the Foreign Minister reiterated the Government's commitment to achieving tangible progress in the fields of reconciliation and human rights.

The Foreign Minister highlighted that Sri Lanka will continue to co-operate



UN ASG Khaled Khiari and Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris

with the UN in order to achieve sustainable peace and development, in line with the international obligations the country has voluntarily undertaken.

During the meeting, the Foreign Minister also discussed matters related to Sri Lanka's post-Covid recovery, including the economic challenges in the aftermath of the

pandemic, and progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka.

ASG Khiari was accompanied by UN Sri Lanka Resident Co-ordinator Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, and other UN officials. The Foreign Secretary and officials of the Foreign Ministry also participated in the meeting.

ASG Khiari is visiting Sri Lanka at the invitation of the Government of Sri Lanka as a follow-up to the bilateral meeting with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the UN Secretary General (UNSG) held in September this year on the sidelines of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

Appointments of several ministry secretaries approved

The appointment of several secretaries to ministries has been approved by the Committee on High Posts, the Communications Department of Parliament said in a statement.

Secretary to the Ministry of Defence Gen. (Retd.) Kamal Gunaratne was among the Secretaries to the Ministries who received approval of the Committee on High Posts chaired by the Speaker of Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, on Tuesday (23).

Also receiving approval for their appointments were W.H. Karunaratna as Secretary to the Ministry of Development Co-ordination and Monitoring, D.L.P.R. Abeyratne as Secretary to the State Ministry of Development of Minor Crops including Sugarcane, Maize, Cashew, Pepper, Cinnamon, Cloves, Betel-Related Industries, and Export Promotion, D.N. Liyanage as Secretary to the Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational Education, Research, and Innovation.

Meanwhile, the appointments

of M.A.B.V. Bandaranayake as Secretary to the State Ministry of Rattan, Brass, Pottery, Furniture, and Industrial Promotion, K.A.D.R. Nishanthi Jayasinghe as Secretary to the State Ministry of National Heritage, Performing Arts, and Rural Arts Promotion, and D.P.G. Kumarasiri as Secretary to the State Ministry of Estate Housing and Community Infrastructure were also approved by the Committee.

The Committee on High Posts also granted approval for the appointments of M.N. Ranasinghe as State Secretary to the State Ministry of Promoting the Production and Regulating the Supply of Organic Fertiliser, and Paddy and Grains, Organic Food, Vegetables, Fruits, Chillies, Onion and Potato Cultivation, Promoting Seed Production, and Advanced Technology Agriculture.

The Committee also approved the appointment of Sirimal Perera as Secretary to the State Ministry of Urban Development, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness.

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The disciplinarian of the House

Sri Lanka's Parliament is an interesting, yet highly serious place, and what those who were sent to Parliament by the public say and do is what gives the Parliament such qualities. Sometimes, they make decisions that steer the country forward, and at other times, their actions border on comedic – or tragic, depending on whom one asks. Such is the nature of the country's main law making institution.

There is an ongoing discussion in Parliament about Parliamentarians' conduct. It began after Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena and several MPs started criticising a certain statement that was said to be tantamount to verbal harassment, made by Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Thisa Kuttirachchi recently.

However, seeing MPs conduct themselves far below expected standards is not new to Sri Lankan voters. In fact, this is not the first time a MP used their freedom of speech in a manner that does not reflect the gravity of their role and responsibilities – hearing outright fallacies and uncouth insults from Parliament chambers has become a common occurrence.

What we must look into is, how did these things, which are looked down upon even in a regular societal context, become so normal among those tasked with building the nation? Who is responsible for maintaining their good conduct?

The Speaker, who has a unique and powerful role, is usually considered an unbiased person, and is responsible for running the show in Parliament. However, despite the said power, when it comes to guiding MPs, which is one of their main objectives, what we have seen from the current Speaker, as well as many of his predecessors, appears to be only lethargy, or at the very least, an unwillingness to bring down the hammer.

If a Speaker does not do what is expected of them, especially at a time when more rigorous and creative measures have become necessary to maintain decorum within Parliament and save MPs from further tarnishing its reputation, does that mean that the Speaker is actually powerless, or not as unbiased as we envision the role to be? These are questions asked by the public.

During the past few years, Sri Lanka has seen many incidents of poor behaviour on the part of MPs. There have been an astronomical number of other instances where MPs have made obscene and degrading statements, all of which were let slide with merely a warning issued by the Speaker, or an announcement that such statements would be expunged from the Hansard, which is the Parliamentary record.

If this is how the Parliament exhibits to the country the manner in which freedom of speech is exercised, it is not only a wrong message, but it also only serves to frame our so-called public representatives as a laughing stock among the international community.

The most embarrassing of such incidents happened in November 2018, when a brawl broke out in Parliament, leaving a lasting stain on Sri Lanka's Parliament and political system. The MPs, engaged in what could only be described as a typical bar-brawl, not only threatened the safety of police officers that entered Parliament to pacify the situation by throwing chairs at them, but also threw books and chilli powder-mixed water at others. Spilling water on the Speaker's chair and destroying the Speaker's properties were a few of the other unbecoming acts committed during this humiliating display.

What followed were the standard inquiries and investigations and valuation of the destroyed property. However, as far as action against the MPs who misbehaved was concerned, the results were naught. International media and rights groups then rightfully questioned the impunity enjoyed by MPs, despite having ample evidence to prove which MP committed which offence.

Protecting the Parliament's reputation is one of the duties of the Speaker, and when MPs do not do the same despite it being expected from them as well, the Speaker should be able to take a stance and exercise their powers for the intended purpose. There have been instances in Sri Lanka's Parliamentary history when the Speaker did not put the same effort to stop a misbehaving MP as he did to stop an MP that took a few more minutes than the allocated time to finish a speech. In the instant case of the matter concerning Kuttirachchi, Speaker Abeywardena had also rightly (yet only partially so) pointed out the need for the chief organisers of the political parties to act to ensure etiquette among their respective MPs.

The person appointed as Speaker usually comes from an existing political party, and therefore, expecting them to be completely unbiased might be somewhat impractical. However, the fact that the Speaker's role has not been performed to its fullest, as far as protecting Parliament's reputation is concerned, calls for a revisit of the qualities and responsibilities of the Speaker.

Two years on, escalating assault on freedoms by the administration



Under the pretext of preventing the spread of Covid-19, the Police have cracked down on protests by civil society actors and arrested participants

PHOTO LALITH PERERA

BY JOSEF BENEDICT

Two years on from the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President of Sri Lanka, the state of civic freedoms in the country continues to regress. Research undertaken by the CIVICUS Monitor organisation – which rates civic space in Sri Lanka as being “obstructed” – shows a worrying pattern of increasing restrictions on the freedom of expression, assembly and association, often with impunity.

Crackdown on protests

There have been systematic attempts by the authorities to prevent or disrupt protests and arrest peaceful protesters. In February 2021, Sri Lankan Magistrates across the districts in the North and East issued bans and injunctions against civil society members, journalists and other individuals ahead of a walk for justice organised by Tamil war victims families and civil society organisations. The protest was around demands for the United Nations (UN) and the international community to heed calls for justice and accountability.

In July 2021, the authorities imposed a ban on all protests and gatherings, claiming that this measure was necessary to “prevent the spread of Covid-19”. Following this, the Police cracked down on a number of protests including activists, workers, students and farmers. On 7 July 2021, the Police broke up a demonstration of the Joint Employees Association of the State Engineering Corporation members outside the corporation's head office in Colombo. Five people were arrested for flouting quarantine regulations.

On 8 July 2021, the Police arrested 31 people, including the Ceylon Teachers' Union General Secretary Joseph Stalin and several leaders of the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF), shortly after they began a protest against the Kotelawala National Defence University (KNDU) Bill, which seeks to militarise higher education in Sri Lanka. The arrested persons were produced before the Colombo Magistrate's Court. When the protesters were released on bail, the Police prevented them from leaving the court premises and they were forcibly taken to quarantine facilities.

Five activists were detained due to their participation in a peaceful protest on 3 August 2021 near the Parliament for education rights. They were denied bail until 11 November 2021, despite lawyers arguing exceptional circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, upcoming university examinations and underlying health conditions.

Arbitrary detention of activists

The notorious Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA) is used continuously to enable arbitrary detention, despite commitments made to repeal the Act. The PTA allows for the prolonged incarceration, based on mere suspicion, of any person who “causes or intends to cause the commission of acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups”.

Lawyer and minority and civic rights activist Hejaaz Hizbullah has been held under the PTA for 19 months. He was accused by the Police of aiding and abetting Inshaf Ahamed who was involved in the 21 April 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, an accusation that has since been withdrawn. Allegations against him have changed several times. The latest, filed in February 2021, is a speech related offence of “causing communal disharmony”, one of a number of overly broad offences provided under the PTA. Since the time of his arrest, Hizbullah has been repeatedly denied the right to due process safeguards recognised by international law.

Ahnaf Jazeem, a 26-year-old poet and teacher, has been under remand under the PTA since May 2020. He was arrested in connection with a

Tamil language poetry anthology called *Navarasam* (Nine Emotions), which he wrote and published in July 2017, as well as other unsubstantiated claims of exposing his students to extremist content with the intention of turning them into followers of extremist ideology. His legal counsel has alleged that they were denied meaningful access and confidentiality when meeting Jazeem and he has also allegedly been subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment whilst in detention.

In May 2021, 10 Tamil men and women were arrested under the PTA in the Eastern coastal village of Kalkudah for holding a vigil to mark the thousands of Tamil civilians who were killed in the final months of fighting between the Sri Lankan Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. Those who attended the memorial event lit a flame of remembrance and laid flowers on the beach.

Harassment and criminalisation of critics

Critics have also been targeted by the Government to stifle dissent. In January 2021, the Supreme Court found parliamentarian Ranjan Leo Sylvester Alphonsu known also as Ranjan Ramanayake, guilty of contempt of court and sentenced him to four years of imprisonment for an interview that was broadcast in 2017 criticising judges and lawyers for corruption.

People's Human Rights Protection Co-ordinator Asela Sampath, was forcibly taken away by a group of 20 people in civilian clothes, later known to be the Police, in June 2021. The group entered his house forcibly, tied Sampath's mouth with a cloth, allegedly physically assaulted him and took him away.

According to the Police, Sampath was arrested in connection with a false statement made on social media regarding the Oxford AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine.

In July 2021, Batticaloa-based Tamil journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan was interrogated by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID), for nearly three hours and he was asked whether he had any links to the LTTE and was questioned extensively about his work. Nilanthan has previously been interrogated for his coverage across the North and East.

In August 2021, former Spokesperson of the Health Ministry Dr. Jayaruwan Bandara was summoned by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) regarding comments he made in a television interview on the high prices of Covid-19 tests and the general handling of the pandemic.

In the same month, social activist

Shehan Malaka Gamage was summoned before the CID. He had been outspoken over the investigations into the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks and had claimed on Facebook that there was a political link behind the attacks and that the Government should therefore conduct an inquiry into the matter. He was questioned for five days.

International scrutiny

In March 2021, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a new Resolution on Sri Lanka, with a view to furthering accountability. In the resolution, the UNHRC expressed “deep concern” at the “deteriorating situation” in Sri Lanka, and criticised the erosion of judicial independence, the marginalisation of minorities, and impunity. It also strengthened the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Sri Lanka to collect and preserve evidence and to develop possible strategies for future accountability processes for gross human rights violations.

Following the Resolution, UNHCHR Michelle Bachelet updated the UNHRC on Sri Lanka in September 2021. She noted that “surveillance, intimidation and the judicial harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and families of the disappeared has not only continued, but has broadened to a wider spectrum of students, academics, medical professionals and religious leaders critical of Government policies”.

Bachelet also noted that several peaceful protests and commemorations have been met with the excessive use of force and the arrest or detention of demonstrators. She also raised concerns about the use of the PTA to arrest and detain people. The UNHCHR is due to deliver a written update on Sri Lanka to the UNHRC in March 2022 and a comprehensive report in September 2022 that includes further options for advancing accountability.

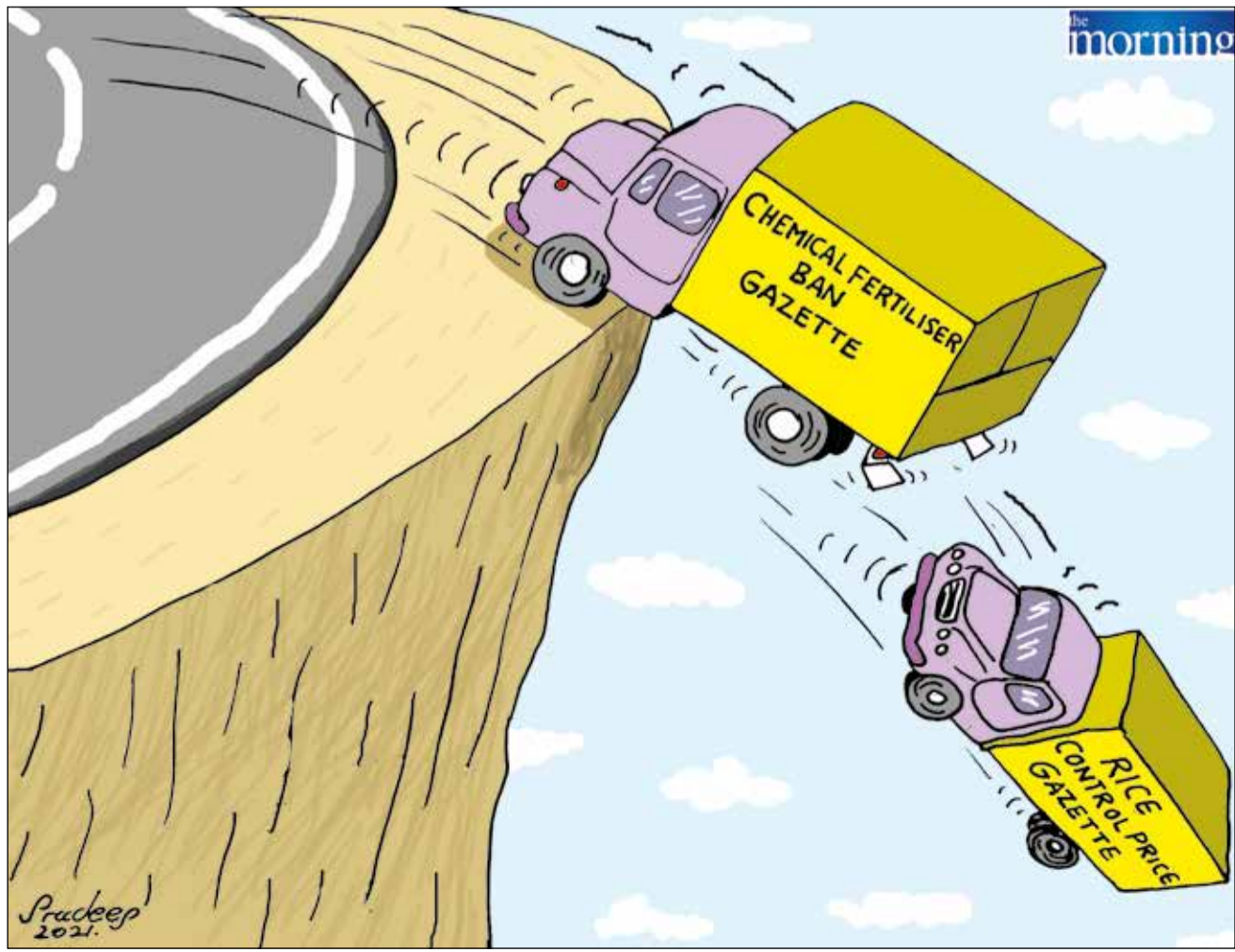
In June 2021, the European Parliament passed a Resolution on Sri Lanka, drawing attention to abuses under the notorious PTA, which has long enabled prolonged arbitrary detention, torture and sexual abuse.

We therefore urge the Government of Sri Lanka to undertake the following as a matter of urgency:

- Respect the rights of the freedom of expression and the freedom of peaceful assembly, including to participate in public protests
- Release all human rights defenders and activists currently in jail including human rights lawyer Hizbullah
- Repeal the PTA and ensure that future counter terrorism related legislation respects international human rights law and standards
- Put an end to the harassment, intimidation, unlawful surveillance and arrest of human rights defenders, journalists, students, union leaders and academics and ensure that they can freely express their opinions and dissent without fear of reprisals
- Ensure that journalists may work freely and without fear of retribution for expressing critical opinions or covering topics that the Government may find sensitive

We further urge the international community to ensure a robust response to Sri Lanka's human rights violations and its attempts to undermine UN mechanisms, including at the UNHRC. We call on the UNHRC to establish an international accountability mechanism which would deliver truth and justice to the victims of the conflict, and to take steps to protect those human rights defenders and activists on the ground, including those documented above, who face attacks and threats for speaking out.

(The writer is a Civic Space Researcher at the CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation) The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.



Among the main reasons for the chemical fertiliser ban was the possible health implications, but prominent experts have called this into question
PHOTO © SOUL SRI LANKA



The harvest of the six-month chemical fertiliser import ban

● A closer look at the health impacts of organic and chemical fertilisers

BY SUMUDU CHAMARA

Bringing to an end months-long disputes, uncertainty and protests, Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage yesterday (24) announced that the Government has decided to renege on its plan to establish a 100% organic farming culture, and make chemical fertiliser available as before. He also said that the gazette notification issued in this regard in April will be revoked.

However, Aluthgamage stressed that despite this decision reversal, the Government's policy with regard to creating a green agriculture will remain unchanged.

In fact, the Government's policy to go organic was never the main issue, and it received the support of a significant segment of activists and farmers who have spoken about the matter. What has begotten a number of issues after the Government's plan was announced, was the lack of a proper plan to make that policy the reality.

Adopting sustainable and flora and fauna-friendly agricultural practices is becoming a more pressing need every year, as world hunger, exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on agriculture sector-related industries, keeps intensifying. To end hunger, the world needs more food, but to ensure good health, what the world needs is healthy food, and the world is facing a challenge to meet and balance these two needs.

How the food we eat, and the way that food is grown, affects our health has been an interesting but never-ending discussion, and in a context where what scientists have found and what people say in this regard bear vast differences, these discussions will continue to remain the same. However, modern science has presented credible findings based on decades of studies about plants, humans, and fertilisers which can shed some light on what aspects of the food-growing process can affect our health.

When the decision to stop the importation of chemical fertiliser was announced in April this year, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa stated that the health sector has pointed out that the effects of chemical fertilisers have led to a number of non-communicable diseases, including kidney diseases, and that the expenses to treat those patients and the negative impact on human lives caused by chemical fertilisers was high.

That is also the notion most people hold about chemical fertiliser, which inevitably leads the people to believe that chemical fertiliser is always detrimental and harmful to one's health, and that non-chemical fertiliser, or organic fertiliser, is a better option as far as health is concerned. The purported basis of the Government's decision to go organic was also the above-mentioned notion, and when discussing the adverse effects, mainly diseases, and the use of chemical fertiliser in the Sri Lankan context, chronic kidney disease (CKD) of unknown aetiology (CKDu), plays a key role. However, in a context where certain prominent experts – including local expert, some of whom have called the notion that chemical fertiliser is poison a myth – have strongly opposed the widespread idea that chemical

fertiliser is responsible for a wide variety of diseases including the controversial CKDu, understanding the true nature of the relationship between chemical fertiliser and diseases, and what benefits replacing chemical fertilisers with organic fertilisers can bring about is vital.

Chemical fertiliser combined with additional factors lead to a number of severe health issues

While the term chemical fertiliser (also referred to as inorganic, synthetic, artificial, or artificially manufactured fertiliser) refers to fertiliser refined to obtain the necessary nutrients, with the latter mixed in specific ratios (sometimes mixed with other substances or fillers as well), organic fertiliser (also referred to as natural fertiliser) refers to fertiliser that has been obtained from natural sources in almost all cases and has been processed minimally with little to no added substances or fillers, which keeps the necessary nutrients in their natural form as much as possible.

Chemical and organic fertilisers and health: Popular opinion vs. facts

International farmers' groups claim that the processes of manufacturing chemical and organic fertiliser have a great deal to do with the notion that chemical fertiliser harms human health and that organic fertiliser does not. The misconception that anything artificial is bad and anything natural is good, according to them, has led people to believe that the outcome of fertiliser is dependent on the process of manufacturing fertiliser.

As far as the expected health benefits of organic fertiliser are concerned – i.e. not leading to the health complications chemical fertiliser is said to cause – experts say that sometimes, more than chemical fertilisers, the amount of chemical fertilisers used is the pressing concern, even though there is an erroneous idea that irrespective of the amount, chemical fertilisers can affect soil, plants, and humans (when food produced using chemical fertiliser is consumed) negatively.

This has been noted by certain local farmers rights activists who have spoken with *The Morning*, and they allege that farmers putting more fertiliser than the

approved amount, and in some cases, putting fertiliser more frequently than the approved number of times, thereby expecting a yield of high quality or quantity, is also a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Moreover, fertiliser overuse has been identified as a cause of soil pollution, and also, depending on the excessive amount used, it may lead to groundwater contamination. However, according to them, whether the consumption of such water can lead to health issues, and the severity of such health issues, have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. According to some, nitrogen, a nutrient commonly found in chemical fertilisers, is an example of this. They claim that most nitrogen applied to plants runs off into waterways, and according to Dr. Bill Schlesinger at the Duke Nicholas School of Environment (quoted by Leaf and Limb, a US-based tree care firm), nitrogen runoff can “render drinking wells unusable in some farming communities, and it can also encourage excessive plant growth, known as algae blooms, in streams and rivers”.

With regard to consuming food items grown using chemical fertiliser, health and agriculture experts noted that there is a plethora of misconceptions about this; the most prominent one being that such food items can be poisonous in the long run. They noted that this is a vague statement, because the extent to which the composition or nutrients of food items can be affected by the type of fertiliser used to grow it can vary, and also depends on a number of other factors such as how much fertiliser (nutrients) the plant can absorb and how many nutrients and other substances remain in or enter the produce.

More than the type of fertiliser, proper or improper usage impacts health

In addition, repeated applications or overuse may sometimes result in a toxic buildup of chemicals such as arsenic, uranium, and cadmium (in the soil), and these toxic chemicals can enter fruits and vegetables.

Chemical fertiliser-health issues relationship

Even though CKDu is the most discussed disease attributed to the use of chemical fertilisers in Sri Lanka, international researchers suggest a large number of diseases, some of which may even lead to health complications more severe than those caused by CKDu, and overall, it is accepted that chemical fertiliser poses a risk to human health and contributes to the development of chronic diseases, in addition to its harmful effects on animals and plants.

The health effects of chemical fertilisers are diverse and serious; some researchers have found that their direct toxic effect (experienced by farmers, plants, and animals), and also

indirect effects (through food or water contaminated with such fertiliser) have been found to cause a large number of health issues. However, since the circumstances under which people, plants, or animals are exposed to these fertilisers can vary, assessing their impact on health is a complex matter, according to them.

Overuse of both chemical and organic fertilisers can lead to health issues

A study conducted at the Warren Alpert Medical School of the Brown University in the US, suggests the substantial role of nitrosamine exposure in Alzheimer's disease (a brain disorder that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills), diabetes mellitus (a disorder in which the body does not produce adequate amounts of or respond normally to insulin), and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) (liver inflammation and damage caused by a buildup of fat in the liver), and that this exposure comes from a chemical reaction which occurs between nitrites and secondary amines or proteins and causes deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) damage, oxidative stress (a phenomenon caused by an imbalance between the production and accumulation of oxygen reactive species), and also lipid peroxidation (a process under which oxidants attack lipids containing carbon-carbon double bond/s), especially polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs). These, according to the studies, lead to increased cellular degeneration and also death.

Other studies, namely, “Nitrite in Soils: Accumulation and Role in the Formation of the Gaseous N Compound” by O.V. Cleemput and A.H. Samater, and “Nitrosamines and Pesticides: A Special Report on the Occurrence of Nitrosamines as Terminal Residues Resulting from the Agricultural Use of Certain Pesticides” by P.C. Kearney, note that while nitrite is used in all processed and preserved foods, it is used heavily in fertilisers as well and is a major component of contaminated water. In this context, researchers suggest that steps should be taken to eliminate the use of nitrites in food, and to reduce the nitrate levels in fertiliser and water used to irrigate crops. In addition, employing safe and effective measures to detoxify food and water prior to human consumption is also recommended.

These findings have been corroborated through a number of other studies that paid attention to the role of chemical fertilisers in Alzheimer's disease.

Toxic concentrations of cadmium and aluminium in the soil due to the use of chemical fertilisers, according to some researchers, also play a considerable role in Alzheimer's disease.

In addition, chemical fertiliser can also increase the risk of developing cancer, and can affect brain development negatively. Findings of a 1994 study conducted by the University of Wisconsin in the US, suggest that typical concentrations of nitrate, which is a common fertiliser as well as a pesticide, in groundwater, can affect the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems of young children and developing fetuses.

Moreover, a study by W.P. Porter, W. Jaeger, and I.H. Carlson, attributes high levels of sodium nitrate in groundwater

with the prevalence of gastric cancer, and another study by P. Kristensen, A. Andersen, L.M. Irgens, A.S. Bye, and N. Vagstad attributes the same to testicular cancer.

In addition, the consumption of food produced using chemical fertilisers can affect humans in other ways as well. For example, the excessive or long term use of chemical fertiliser, according to researchers, can change the soil pH (acidity or alkalinity) scale, which can then disturb beneficial microbial ecosystems and even cause the release of greenhouse gases.

When it comes to organic fertiliser, there is very little research about how or whether it can affect human's health in ways that chemical fertiliser does. However, there are a large number of studies that suggest that the use of organic fertiliser, especially the use of substandard fertiliser and overuse, may affect soil fertility and may even poison the soil, which in turn affects the quality of food. However, they are less likely to cause any health issues in humans.

According to researchers, even though contaminated (chemical fertiliser mixed) water and food grown using chemical fertilisers cause direct, short-term, or long-term health issues in humans, it can also result in similar issues through physical contact or inhalation. They may range from mere skin irritation to severe health issues caused by poisoning. Health experts also say that among other chemicals, nitrates, which can be extremely dangerous when in high levels in humans, cause poisoning, and that nitrates lower the ability of red blood cells to deliver oxygen in the human body.

In such events, being aware of which fertiliser the affected person was exposed to, how it happened (through inhalation, ingestion, or physical contact), the amount of fertiliser the affected person was exposed to, and when and at what time the contact took place, are of grave importance for medical professionals in order to treat the affected person promptly. Most importantly, being aware of and informing medical professionals of any health conditions or diseases the affected person may have, is crucial for treatments.

According to the health and wellness knowledge portal Healthline, in such cases, recovery depends on several factors including what type of fertiliser the affected person came into contact with; how much of fertiliser was inhaled, ingested, or touched; and how much time had passed since the exposure before medical assistance was sought.

In order to minimise the adverse impacts of pesticides and fertilisers, the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme, in its summary for policymakers titled “Environmental and Health Impacts of Pesticides and Fertilisers and the Ways of Minimising Them: Envisioning a Chemical Safe World” recommends incentivising healthy and sustainable consumer choices and consumption, fundamentally changing crop management and adopting ecosystem-based approaches, promoting nutrient circularity, using economic instruments to create a level playing field for greener products and approaches, promoting the use of direct finance to encourage sustainable agriculture, adopting integrated and lifecycle approaches for sound pesticide and fertiliser management, strengthening standards and adopting corporate policies for sustainable supply chain management, enacting comprehensive national policies for fertilisers, filing information and knowledge gaps for effective fertiliser and nutrient management, strengthening global policies on the sustainable and safe use of fertilisers, scaling up the training of all relevant stakeholders in fertiliser and nutrient management, and ensuring that suitable and affordable fertilisers are accessible.

With regard to the discourse on fertiliser and produce, in addition to the above-mentioned recommendations, Sri Lanka needs to pay more attention to sharing information and knowledge about what people eat and how they are grown. Most of the time, what people get to hear are blank and vague statements about how food, whether it was grown using chemical fertilisers or organic fertilisers, can be good or bad, and very little is said about exactly how it can be good or bad. The result is, people having to follow what the authorities say with or without adequate knowledge about what they were and are told.

Such steps are extremely important when it comes to taking informed decisions pertaining to chemical fertilisers and organic fertilisers, and also food items, because the healthiness of using fertilisers is connected to a large number of other factors, some of which have nothing to do with its chemical or organic nature.

Assault victims may require medical help for post-traumatic stress syndrome: Matara study



BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

Victims of assaults should be made aware that they may need to seek medical help for both anxiety and depression which may follow an assault, as the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome can be both protracted, and debilitating and disabling, a study conducted in the Matara District found.

This finding, citing a personal communication to the author from the Consultant in Accident and Emergency at the St. George's Hospital in London, England, K.L.H. Stevens, which noted that the said syndrome may affect patients more seriously in the wake of a personal assault than subsequent to involvement in a major incident such as a train crash, was made by R.H.A.I. Rathnaweera (attached to the Ruhuna University's Medical Faculty's Forensic Medicine Department) in an original article on "A study on the victims of assaults in Matara" which was published in the *Medico-Legal Journal of Sri Lanka* 2 (2) in December 2015.

Assault is a crime as per the law. Rathnaweera pointed out that the term is oft confused with battery, which involves

physical contact. While the specific meaning of assault varies among countries per their Penal Codes, it can, Rathnaweera explained, refer to an act that causes another to apprehend immediate and personal violence, or in the more limited sense, a threat of violence caused by an immediate show of force. And although assault in certain US jurisdictions is broadly defined as being any intentional physical contact with another person without their consent, in the majority of the US, and in England and Wales and all other common law jurisdictions, this is defined as battery.

On the other hand, certain jurisdictions have incorporated the definition of civil assault into the definition of the crime, making it a criminal assault

to intentionally cause another person to apprehend a harmful or offensive contact (per S. Bute's "Letter: The roots of violence"). A civil assault is an assault considered as a tort and not a crime where even though the same assaultive conduct can be both a tort and a crime, the civil assault isolates the legal elements that result in civil liability, and the assailant in such a case is liable in a civil action while the victim may be entitled to monetary damages from the assailant.

In Sri Lanka too, Rathnaweera noted, assault is an increasingly common cause of injury.

Hence, Rathnaweera conducted a retrospective study to identify demographic and social factors, assault characteristics and injuries sustained in a given population. Approximately 3,000 victims are referred to the Judicial Medical Officer's office at the Matara General Hospital for medico-legal examination following physical injury, with the majority of such being victims of physical assaults. This study considered all the

physical assault cases thus referred from 1 January 2012 to 1 December 2012.

The total number of trauma cases was 2,820, out of which, less than half (1,381-48%) were due to alleged assaults.

The majority of the victims of assault were male (67%) and had received the majority of the injuries (1,310/70% out of 1,857 injuries). Women comprised 33% of victims and had received 547 injuries (30%).

The age of the victims ranged from three years to 85 years. There were 339 victims between the ages of 21 and 30 years and 326 victims between the ages of 31 and 40 years. Adults between 21 to 50 years of age (67%) were the main victims of assaults. In both sexes, there was a progressive reduction in the number of victims with increasing age.

A civil assault is an assault considered as a tort and not a crime where even though the same assaultive conduct can be both a tort and a crime, the civil assault isolates the legal elements that result in civil liability, and the assailant in such a case is liable in a civil action while the victim may be entitled to monetary damages from the assailant

Of both the male and female victims, three quarter were unmarried.

The commonest form of injury was abrasions (666) followed by contusions (429), lacerations, fractures, cuts, stabs, burns and dislocations.

The upper limb was the commonest target (555), followed by the face (521), chest, head, lower limb and abdomen.

A total of 1,396 were blunt force injuries (86%) and 187 were sharp force injuries, followed by burns.

The majority of the assaults were carried out with fists and the feet, followed by clubs, while 8.5% of men and 3% of women were stabbed with knives or swords.

Women were most commonly punched and kicked and received proportionately more widespread injuries than men.

The category of hurt was non grievous in 1,023 (74%), grievous in 305 (22%), endangering life in 38 (2.5%) and fatal in the ordinary course of nature in 15 (1.5%).

There was a progressive daily increase in the number of patients who were assaulted throughout the week from Monday (8%), to Sunday (25%).

The majority of the cases were reported between 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. (510-36%) followed by incidents between the hours of 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. (307). Most of the incidents had taken place between 2 p.m. and 10 p.m. (59%).

One third of the male victims and all the female victims stated that they had not taken alcohol in the six hours prior to the assault.

Over half of the patients (54%) knew why they had been assaulted.

Men were most commonly assaulted in the street near pubs (40%) while women were at home (almost half - 47%) with one third of women being assaulted in the street.

A total of 1,242 (90%) assailants were known to the victim, 231 being relatives. The majority of the injuries were caused by a person known to the victim (90%). A total of 11 victims were unable to identify the sex of their attacker.

In 85% of assaults, the assailant was a man, in 8% a woman, and in 2% both men and women.

Over 80% of male assailants were estimated to be aged between 15 and 34-years-old, and a similar proportion

of female assailants to be between 15 and 24 years.

In half of the cases, men were assaulted by a single assailant while 69% of women were assaulted by a single attacker with all female domestic assaults being from a single hand.

Discussing the findings, Rathnaweera noted that the majority of the victims were single, young men, assaulted late at night, during the weekend, in the vicinity of, or inside, pubs. The majority of these victims had drunk alcohol prior to the assault, and its role as a major causative and contributory factor in the incidence of assault is generally recognized (Bute, and the Home Office Research Study 108 on "Drinking and disorder: A study on non-metropolitan violence"), showing a broad correlation between the stated recent alcohol intake and blood ethanol levels. Studies (R.N. Norton's "Mortality from interpersonal violence in Great Britain" and J.P. Shepherd, C. Scully, M. Shapland, M. Irish and I.J. Leslie's "Characteristics of victims attending an inner city hospital") have however shown that although the majority of victims who had been assaulted on the street had been drinking, one third of them had not been rendered more aggressive or more prone to attack through alcohol consumption.

With regard to the pattern of injuries, while a preponderance of facial trauma represented an appreciable work load, the physical injuries were mainly of the soft tissue.

If you feel that you or someone you know may be affected by this content or may require help 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

Do vaccines protect against long Covid?

BY HEIDI LEDFORD

Physiotherapist David Putrino's neurological rehabilitation clinics used to treat about 50 people each week with conditions such as chronic pain, Parkinson's disease, and sports injuries. Then came long Covid.

Now, Mount Sinai Hospital's Abilities Research Centre in New York City, one of three clinics that Putrino directs, treats another 50-100 people each week who are coping with issues such as extreme fatigue, breathlessness, difficulty concentrating, or any of the many other symptoms of long Covid - the long-lasting, poorly understood syndrome that can occur after infection with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. He has 1,600 clients with long Covid, and more on a waiting list.

Putrino has noticed that even being fully vaccinated doesn't necessarily protect against long Covid. Many of his clients were infected before vaccines were rolled out, and had been coping with symptoms for a year or more before they were referred to him. But he has seen about a dozen people who experienced long Covid from "breakthrough" infections - in which vaccinated people catch the coronavirus. "It is noticeably less common than in unvaccinated people, but it's still there," he said. He thinks that clinics could see more such cases as the months tick by.

Vaccines reduce the risk of long Covid by lowering the chances of contracting Covid-19 in the first place. But for those who do experience a breakthrough infection, studies

suggest that vaccination might only halve the risk of long Covid - or have no effect on it at all (1,2). Understanding the prevalence of long Covid among vaccinated people has urgent public health implications as restrictions that limit viral spread are eased in some countries. It could also offer clues about what causes lingering Covid-19 symptoms long after the acute infection has cleared.

At present, public health officials are flying blind when it comes to long Covid and vaccination. Although vaccines greatly reduce the rates of serious illness and death caused by Covid-19, they are not as effective at completely preventing the disease, and long Covid can arise even after a mild or asymptomatic coronavirus infection. Countries with high infection rates could still end up with many cases of long Covid, even if nations have high rates of vaccination. "That is hard to predict," said University of Southampton, UK Epidemiologist Nisreen Alwan, who has had long Covid. "We still need to see how much long Covid there is and how long it lasts after vaccination."

Determining the risk of long Covid from breakthrough infections is challenging. Many people with mild or asymptomatic infections might not be tested for Covid-19, said Karolinska Institute in Stockholm Immunologist Petter Brodin. "Doing any kind of assessment of how many people develop long-term symptoms after they are vaccinated is going to be incredibly difficult," he said. "We will miss so many people."

More data should arrive as



PHOTO LALITH PERERA

countries continue to roll out vaccines, including booster shots, and as research funding for studying long Covid is deployed - including more than \$ 1.1 billion from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). Long Covid is still a poorly defined syndrome with a wide range of symptoms. A UK study estimates that between 7% and 18% of people who had Covid-19 went on to develop some symptoms of long Covid that lingered for at least five weeks (3).

For some individuals, long Covid symptoms are mild; for others, they are life changing. Nearly one-third of the people with long Covid at Putrino's clinic have severe cognitive difficulties that can affect their ability to concentrate, speak, and remember, and which were not present before their illness. About 60% of Putrino's patients have had to change jobs or stop working as a result of their

illness. "If you're young and healthy, death from Covid may be highly unlikely," Putrino said. "But severe debilitation is not."

The cause of long Covid - also known as the post-acute sequelae of a SARS-CoV-2 infection - is as unclear as its definition. One possibility is that a reservoir of the coronavirus lingers after the acute infection, lurking in various tissues - such as the intestine, liver, or brain - and continues to cause damage. Another possibility is that the broad immune response triggered by the initial infection can generate antibodies and other immunological reactions against the body's own tissues. That could continue to cause complications after the infection has been cleared.

Vaccination could reduce the likelihood of these scenarios. If a vaccine induces high levels of antibodies and T cells capable of

recognising SARS-CoV-2, the immune system could stop the virus during its first few replications before it can establish hidden reservoirs in the body, said Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut Immunologist Akiko Iwasaki.

Vaccination allows the body to launch a more targeted immune response from the moment a coronavirus infiltrates the body, reducing the chance that non-specific immune reactions will target normal tissue. "The immune system is already sort of pointed in the right direction," said Brodin. "You're calling in these very specific cells to attack this specific virus."

Both anecdotes and data suggest that such protection against long Covid is partial at best, but it is difficult to tease out exactly how common long Covid is in breakthrough infections. One Facebook poll of about 1,950 fully vaccinated people found 44 breakthrough cases, 24 of whom reported long Covid symptoms. The survey was done by the long Covid patient advocacy group Survivor Corps, and the results are reported in a preprint (4). But because the poll was not a random sampling of people, the findings cannot be used to estimate the rate of long Covid after vaccination - they show only that such cases exist.

Another study in Israel, of around 1,500 vaccinated healthcare workers, found that seven (19%) of the 39 breakthrough infections produced symptoms that linger for more than six weeks (5). However, the numbers of infections studied are too small for

firm conclusions to be drawn about the absolute risk.

One of the largest studies so far has gathered data from 1.2 million people who received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and logged their experience in the Covid Symptom Study app, which was developed by the London-based data science company ZOE and King's College London. The team found that a full two-dose regimen of vaccination reduced the risk of long Covid - as defined by persistent symptoms for at least 28 days after infection - by about half among those who had breakthrough infections. But the study contained disproportionately more women than men and fewer people from lower income areas.

Still, the message is clear, said King's College London Geriatrician and lead author of the study Claire Steves. Vaccination considerably reduces infection rates and the severity of symptoms; even with waning immunity and the emergence of the more-infectious Delta variant. One study of US veterans found that the Covid-19 vaccines for that group offered about 50% protection against coronavirus infection, even during the Delta surge. Steves and her colleagues found that vaccination then further reduces the risk of long Covid in those who develop a breakthrough infection by another half; about 11% in the unvaccinated group had persistent symptoms for at least 28 days compared with about 5% in the vaccinated group of breakthrough infections (1).

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ASPI	S&P SL20	Market
10,910.06	3,747.30	Market Closed
-18.54	-0.23	Share Volume
↓ -0.17%	↓ -0.01%	316,842,320
		Turnover
		7,560,644,986.65

People's Bank maintains non-personnel operating expenses



People's Bank
Chairman Sujeewa
Rajapakse



People's Bank
CEO/GM Ranjith
Kodituwakku

People's Bank announced that non-personnel operating expenses were maintained at around Rs. 11.6 billion without any increase during its nine-month period ended 30 September 2021.

Commenting on the results, People's Bank Chairman Sujeewa Rajapakse stated: "We are pleased with the role and contribution of the institution more so during a time of extraordinary challenge, change, and need. We measure our success not

by a typical top or bottom line, but by our contribution to safeguard the pandemic-stricken economy and our role to assist in its revival.

"It also demonstrates our efficiency and productivity even during the most challenging circumstances, thereby debunking any myth to the contrary. Above all, with our job being far from over, we remain committed to continuing to play our part to help the country navigate through these uncharted waters."

The bank also reported an asset growth and deposit growth of Rs. 349.7 billion and Rs. 276.6 billion, respectively – a record-high growth by 15.7% and 15.1%, respectively, during the said period. Growth in net loans and investment in Treasury securities were Rs. 167.4 billion and Rs. 191.4 billion, respectively.

On a standalone basis, the bank accounted for close to 20% of the banking sector's asset and net loan growth during the 21-month period

ended 30 September 2021, which is a feat self-attesting to the contribution made by the institution to the national cause and the Government. As of 30 September 2021, close to 50% of the bank's gross loans were to the State and other state-owned enterprises.

During the said 21-month period, the bank introduced multiple loan schemes in view of supporting its customers. These included, amongst other, over Rs. 60 billion in credit to support small and medium-scale

enterprises (SMEs), over Rs. 160.1 billion in home loans to over 9,000 customers, over Rs. 6 billion to retired and disabled officers of armed forces, and over Rs. 560 million to artists of varying disciplines. In addition, the bank extended Rs. 750 million to support the development of a techno park in Galle, over Rs. 485 million to support women entrepreneurship, and over Rs. 260 million to university students to purchase laptops.

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India to be granted fuel monopoly in Trincomalee?

- Duminda Nagamuwa claims India to solely control oil unloading, sale of fuel in Trinco
- Alleges monopoly is a term of the upcoming \$ 500 million credit line to Sri Lanka
- Gammanpila, LIOC deny allegations



Duminda Nagamuwa

Nagamuwa claimed: "In addition to the numerous agreements previously entered into and the diplomatic pressure currently being exerted to seize the 99 oil tanks owned by Sri Lanka, India is also seeking to introduce a term in the new loan which will remove the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation's (CPC) monopoly over activities such as the sale of fuel, unloading fuel, and the sale of bunker fuel in the Trincomalee region and grant Lanka IOC (LIOC) the total control over such activities."

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BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Frontline Socialist Party politburo member Duminda Nagamuwa alleged yesterday (24) that India is seeking to include as a term in the \$ 500 million credit line for fuel sought by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), the right for India to have the complete monopoly over the unloading and sale of fuel in the Trincomalee region.

Budget proposals weigh on insurers' near-term earnings: Fitch Ratings

- One-off surcharge tax, other recurring taxes constrain near-term profitability

Fitch Ratings said that the Sri Lankan Government's proposal to introduce new one-off as well as recurring taxes on companies will likely constrain the near-term profitability of some insurers.

However, the ratings agency said that it expects the proposals to have only a limited impact on most insurers' capital positions because of their sound capital buffers accumulated before and during the Covid-19-led

lockdowns in the country.

Taxable income of the remaining Fitch-rated Sri Lankan insurers will likely fall below the Rs. 2 billion threshold. If the authorities decide to use group or consolidated taxable income as the basis to calculate the tax, the taxable income of some insurers that are subsidiaries of larger parent companies could be considered in the calculation of the one-off tax.

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Sarvodaya Development Finance IPO oversubscribed

Sarvodaya Development Finance's (SDF) Rs. 1 billion Initial Public Offering (IPO) was oversubscribed on the initial opening day. The company secretary issued the announcement of the oversubscription within two hours of the opening.

Underwritten by NDB Investment Bank and Sampath Bank, the IPO was aimed at raising Rs. 1 billion, through 45 million ordinary voting shares at a price of Rs. 22.00 per share. The stake offered was 30.38%.

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Sri Lanka's first-ever national coffee association launched

Sri Lanka's first-ever national coffee association was inaugurated as "Lanka Coffee Association" (LCA) under the Sri Lanka Agripreneurs Forum (SLAF).

Issuing a statement, it stated that it represents the collective interests of all stakeholders working towards developing Sri Lanka's coffee industry to reach new heights.

"Our goal is for all stakeholders to work together in a strategic manner, to elevate the Sri Lankan coffee industry. In

addition, the LCA will provide a common platform to voice the industry's concerns to the Government, and also assist the Government in efficiently disseminating support provided to the industry," stated LCA Chairperson Rinosha Nasar.

Sri Lanka was once the third-largest producer of coffee in the world. However, the coffee leaf rust disease wiped out the country's plantations in the 1860s and exports have remained low ever since.

The initiative was supported by the

Market Development Facility (MDF), Australia's flagship private sector development programme that has actively partnered with the Sri Lankan coffee industry over the past four years in championing the growth of the specialty coffee sector.

LCA will aim to create global recognition for the "Ceylon Coffee" brand and the local specialty coffee industry. Spearheaded by the private sector, the association will build and expand the

export profile of Ceylon Coffee through industry-wide collaborative efforts, create standards for coffee farming in Sri Lanka, incentivize farmers to increase coffee production, improve the coffee supply chain via knowledge sharing, research, and technology, facilitate price uniformity, lead market-focused initiatives to educate consumers, improve industry co-ordination, and advocate for the local coffee industry.

Contd. on page 10

Divisions within Govt. on seeking IMF help

- Cabinet's views contradict with parliamentary group
- Cabinet discusses pros and cons of turning to IMF
- Gammanpila in favour; Basil, Bandula, Vasu oppose

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Amidst proposals and recommendations by various economists and international rating agencies to seek International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance, the Government of Sri Lanka is divided on seeking such assistance, both within the Cabinet of Ministers and the parliamentary group, according to Co-Cabinet Spokesman and Minister of Mass Media Dullas Alahapperuma.

Speaking during the Cabinet press briefing held yesterday (24), he admitted that there exists contradicting views within the aforementioned groups and stated that the Government will consider the pros and cons of both views and will implement the more favourable view. However, he further claimed that as of now the Government is yet to reach a final decision on the matter.

"Last week, an extensive discussion was held on whether to seek IMF assistance and various views were put forward by the Cabinet of Ministers on the pros and cons of working with the IMF. Similarly there exist two contrasting views among the parliamentary group as well," he added.

According to Alahapperuma a comprehensive discussion on the matter was carried out by the Cabinet of Ministers last week where differing views were disclosed, setting out the pros and cons

of working with the IMF.

During the press briefing, the need to explore the possibilities of securing a bailout from the IMF due to the increasing foreign reserves crisis was discussed.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves have, as per Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) data, fallen to \$ 1.6 billion by the end of October from \$ 2.1 billion at the end of September.

During this Cabinet meeting, Minister of Energy Udaya Gammanpila cautioned that the country was treading a very dangerous path if it didn't formulate a proper plan to address the foreign reserves crisis. He proposed that the Government approach the IMF.

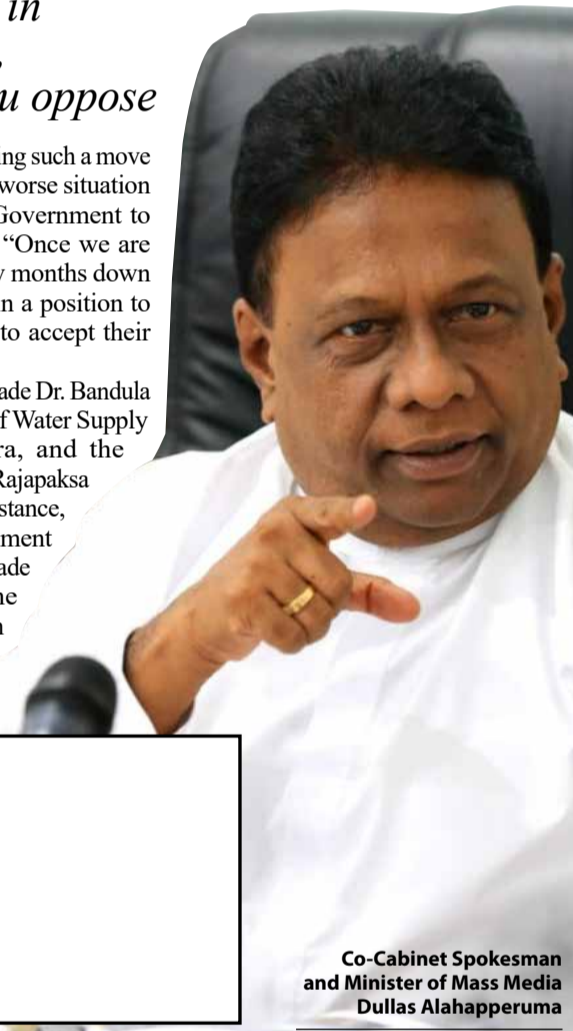
Explaining further he stated: "Although the IMF will lay down conditions in order to support us, we are still in a situation where we could bargain and negotiate the conditions," Gammanpila explained to the

Cabinet, adding that delaying such a move would put Sri Lanka in a worse situation that might compel the Government to go begging to the IMF. "Once we are in a worse situation a few months down the line, we will not be in a position to negotiate and will have to accept their (IMF) conditions."

However, Minister of Trade Dr. Bandula Gunawardana, Minister of Water Supply Vasudeva Nanayakkara, and the Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa opposed seeking IMF assistance, claiming that the Government would not be able to persuade the people to accept the IMF's conditions in return for financial support.

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Co-Cabinet Spokesman
and Minister of Mass Media
Dullas Alahapperuma

BOI, Melwa Hotels sign up for \$ 52 m expansion project

- DoubleTree by Hilton Negombo to get 84 additional rooms



Melwa Hotels and Resorts (Pvt.) Ltd. expects to expand the room capacity of DoubleTree by Hilton Negombo.

Accordingly, Melwa Hotels and Resorts entered into an agreement with the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI), locking an investment of \$ 52 million to augment room capacity to reach a total

of 141 rooms.

BOI Chairman Sanjaya Mohottala commented: "We commend this initiative by Melwa Hotels and Resorts to expand its property, as the tourism sector reopens to international visitors, and welcome this great new addition to the Sri Lankan tourism portfolio."

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Blockchain tech recommendations report in 2022

The interim report that comprises recommendations on digital banking, blockchain technology, and cryptocurrency was submitted to Parliament on Tuesday (23).

These recommendations are expected to provide information to the Cabinet of Ministers on the formulation of rules and regulations that can be imposed for the purpose of attracting investments to companies in the areas related to digital banking, blockchain technology, and cryptocurrency.

Prior to the submission of said recommendations, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval for the appointment of a committee in this regard on 5 October 2021. The committee was composed of eight members and chaired by Sujeewa Mudalige.

Accordingly, the Cabinet granted approval for the proposal by Minister of Development Co-ordination and Supervision Namal Rajapaksa to submit the final report of the committee on 30 June 2022.

Contd. on page 10

Alliance Finance raises Rs. 1 billion

- Aims to strengthen regulatory capital of company

Alliance Finance Company PLC (AFC) raised Rs. 1 billion in Tier II capital, with the aim of strengthening the regulatory capital of the company to financially empower and facilitate the development of the micro, small, and medium-scale enterprise (MSME) sector in Sri Lanka. The Tier II subordinated debt has a

tenure of five years and has been structured and arranged by Capital Alliance Ltd. (CAL).

Commenting on this, AFC Deputy Chairman and Managing Director (MD) Romani de Silva stated: "This is a reflection of the confidence our investors have in our sustainable business philosophy."

Contd. on page 10

Crescat Boulevard reopens its doors

Crescat Boulevard reopened its doors on 19 November after an extensive refurbishment in time for seasonal shopping. The newly revamped mall features enhanced interiors and fresh shopping and dining experiences within the familiar venue in the heart of the city.

“As one of the pioneering shopping malls in the city, Crescat Boulevard holds fond memories for its loyal customers over the past 24 years. With its refurbishment, Crescat returns to offer a revitalised, upmarket shopping and dining experience for Colombo’s shoppers whilst still maintaining nostalgic familiarities. The refurbishment was completed despite challenging conditions of the pandemic, and we are now ready to take on the season. We are grateful for the trust our tenants have placed in us – some have been a part of Crescat Boulevard for the past 20 years and are a part of this new journey. Crescat Boulevard has been a familiar fixture among Colombo’s shopping destinations and we are excited to embark on this

new chapter amidst a changing city,” commented John Keells Holdings Executive Vice President and John Keells Properties Sector Head Nayana Mawilmada. Crescat’s new look, feel, and ambience positions the mall within Colombo’s leading commercial centres and its evolving landscape. Its uniqueness lies in its convenience, variety of choice, and intimate shopping experience in comparison to conventional malls. To date, Crescat also has the most easily accessible supermarket out of the other malls in Colombo, convenient parking, and well-equipped amenities and grocery options. “Crescat’s layout is carefully designed so that shoppers can easily



Crescat Boulevard relaunched after extensive refurbishment on 19 November

avail a host of options with little hassle. Whether it is stationary, cosmetics, footwear, tourist souvenirs, a haircut, grocery shopping, or even to get a car wash or a meal or quick snack – Crescat Boulevard offers a vibrant one-stop shopping and dining experience for everyone through a carefully curated selection of establishments and options,” said John Keells Properties

Tenants at Crescat Boulevard

Lobby Level Tenants	Ground Level Tenants	Basement
Sugar Bistro Yoland Collections Fullstop Dilly's Fashions CARATS Mlesna Tea Rancrisp Cashew Exclusive Lines Parfumarie Dilmah Tea W.A. De Silva Spa Ceylon Kadapatha Clothing Carlo Vision Care Gerard Mendis Chocolatier Chamathka Jewellers	Headturners Footrub Swarovski Shopping girl The Dunstons Barbers	Keells Supermarket Thai Express Ichiban Japanese Foods Roots Royal Cashew Nations Trust Bank Kleenpark car wash

Assistant Vice President and Head of Asset Management Theekshana Jayarathna.

John Keells Properties has been at the forefront of shaping Colombo’s new landscape, building and nurturing new spaces and experiences. Crescat Boulevard’s relaunch and refurbishment reflects the conglomerate’s vision for the city

and commitment to its growth. With the Christmas season and the holidays approaching, Crescat Boulevard is poised for the season, while adhering to Covid-19 protocols. It welcomes back visitors to immerse themselves in upgraded shopping and dining experiences, along with a host of seasonal activities, promotions, and sales to entice shoppers.

CA Sri Lanka Past President Nishan Fernando to lead AOSSG



CA Sri Lanka Past President and newly appointed AOSSG Chair Nishan Fernando delivering his speech during the meeting

Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CA Sri Lanka) Past President Nishan Fernando made history on Tuesday (23), when he became the first Sri Lankan to Chair the Asian-Oceanian Standard-Setters Group (AOSSG), a regional organisation tasked with contributing to the development of a high-quality set of global accounting standards. Fernando was formally inducted as the new AOSSG Chair for the period from November 2021 to 2023 at the 13th AOSSG Annual Meeting held in Colombo under the patronage of Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal and other local and foreign dignitaries, many who connected with the event virtually.

Vietnam joined the event. Fernando is a Fellow Member of CA Sri Lanka and an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants of the United Kingdom. He has a master’s degree of business administration from the Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jaywardenepura and is a graduate of the Sri Lanka Institute of Directors. He has chaired multiple committees at CA Sri Lanka and has also served in numerous regional and international committees. He was the President of CA Sri Lanka from 2008 to 2009 and was also a Commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka (SEC) during the same period, apart from serving in the Council of CA Sri Lanka as a Member from 2000 to 2011. Fernando has also served as a Member of the Sri Lanka Accounting and Auditing Standards Monitoring Board from 2007 to 2011. He is the incumbent Chair of the IFRS Implementation and Interpretation Committee of CA Sri Lanka and the Research Committee of CA Sri Lanka and is also a member of the Sri Lanka Accounting Standards Committee.

He has served as a member of the International Accounting Education Standards Board of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) from 2007 to 2009 and was also a member of Consultative Advisory Group of the International Accounting Education Standards Board. Until 2009, he was a Member of the Board/Assembly of the South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA). From 2006 to 2008, he chaired the SAFA Centre of Excellence for Standards and Quality and was also a Technical Advisor. At present, Fernando is the Managing Director, Advisory of BDO Sri Lanka and the Maldives. He is also the independent Chairman of First Capital Holdings PLC and subsidiaries.

Contd. from page 9

Divisions within...

Nanayakkara observed that based on past experience, the IMF would call for the slashing of subsidies and harsh measures to bridge the budget deficit. Dr. Gunawardana also agreed and observed that the people would not be able to bear the conditions. Adding to this view, Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa had stated that the Government will not be able to justify turning to the IMF. He added that the IMF conditions would not be marketable to the people. Meanwhile, CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal too stated on Tuesday (24) that Sri Lanka will not seek assistance from the IMF. Accordingly, as per reports, the Cabinet of Ministers had debated on the pros and cons of seeking IMF assistance for a one-hour period, where they had considered slashing subsidies now and resolving the crisis in the long term against continuing with the status quo and eventually being compelled to cut back on the import of essential items to resolve the forex issue. The Cabinet meeting had concluded without reaching a final decision on the matter nor had they come to an agreement on an alternative programme to address the foreign reserves crisis.

People’s Bank...

Looking at some of the highlights for the nine-month period in 2021, net interest income rose by 38.9% whilst total operating income grew by close to 30%. Impairment charges rose by 10.7% whilst non-personnel operating expenses were maintained at around Rs. 11.6 billion without any increase. The bank’s gross stage three loans, as a function of total gross loans, was close to 8.1% at 30 September 2021 whilst its gross non-performing loans excluding SOEs was 6.1%. Total taxes and dividends to the government during the said period was Rs. 9.7 billion. The bank’s Tier 1 and total capital adequacy were 10.2% and 15.5%, respectively, at end-September 2021, compared with a minimum 8.5% and 12.5%, respectively. People’s Bank Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and General Manager (GM) Ranjith Kodituwakku stated: “The year to date period has put to test our continued commitment, our continued access, our digital capabilities, our customer centricity, and our ultimate ability to rise to our national duty. Notwithstanding the many challenges, including those beyond our reasonable control as seen in the recent past, our delivery remains testimony to our strength, resilience, and collective capability. Fully aware of the many challenges which lie ahead, we look forward to the future with a great degree of hope and optimism.”

BOI, Melwa...

“This infrastructure development combined with DoubleTree by Hilton’s expertise in managing a hospitality chain of over 580 hotels and resorts across the globe will further add value to the Sri Lanka tourism and hospitality sector.” The agreement was signed by Mohottala on behalf of the BOI and Melwa Hotels and Resorts Directors Periyasampillai Muruganathan and Periyasampillai Anandaraja. DoubleTree by Hilton Negombo is designed by renowned architectural firm Design Consortium International, along with Hilton Worldwide’s technical, architectural, technological, and operational inputs, to conform to its international standards. The hotel would consist of 141 rooms inclusive of superior rooms, deluxe rooms, and suites. The interiors of all rooms and suites adhering to the Hilton Worldwide brand’s standards overlooking the Negombo beach are designed by SODA Interiors in Thailand.

Alliance Finance...

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Sri Lankan MSME entrepreneurs need more support than ever before, and raising of Rs. 1 billion as subordinated debt strengthened our Tier II capital, which gives us an enormous capacity to develop MSME entrepreneurs of Sri Lanka using our proven business models. “Furthermore, we extend our sincere appreciation for the investor (CAL) for the trust placed in us. Subsequent

to an internal restructure with the technical assistance of International Finance Corporation (IFC) in 2019, all of the performance metrics of the company have improved tremendously, with a loan book growth of 1.6%, profit growth of 169%, and a highly commendable reduction in NPLs by 23% for the financial year ended 2020/21, validating the impact of the restructure. As the oldest finance company in Sri Lanka and as a net lender to the rural economy, AFC is focusing on financial inclusivity and sustainable development of all communities.”

Sri Lanka’s...

Under the mandate of the Sri Lanka Coffee Constitution, a jointly drafted and accepted legal framework by the LCA members, an executive committee was appointed for a tenure period of two years to realise the association’s objectives in a sustainable and equitable manner. Through its primary and associate member categories, the LCA intends to connect farmers, collectors, processors, roasters, input providers, exporters, students, baristas, and other stakeholders onto a single consensus building platform working towards the development of the national coffee sector. All interested parties who share the interest of developing the local coffee sector are cordially invited to join the association and to actively contribute to the unified goal of developing a sustainable coffee industry for Sri Lanka.

Sarvodaya Development...

There was active interest from a range of investors, both individuals and institutions alike. Commenting on the resounding positive conclusion of the IPO, SDF Chairman Channa de Silva stated: “We are pleased to receive such overwhelmingly positive feedback to SDF’s IPO and would like to offer a sincere note of gratitude to all those who subscribed, placing their confidence in our enterprise and its journey. The tremendous success of our IPO will successfully aid the growth in our rural loan portfolio, which will in turn assist in developing many rural villages across the country and is a true reflection of both local and international investors’ faith in the good work that SDF does.” He emphasised the organisation’s commitment to engage the rural and village-based public in the mainstream of the capital market and national economy. “We will also bring new thinking and new ideas through our village-based platform to the economy and will be committed to empower rural and village businesses and entrepreneurs.” Discussing the achievement further, SDF CEO Nilantha Jayanetti stated: “Today marks a momentous day for all of us at SDF. Not only does the oversubscription of our IPO reflect the confidence that investors have in us as a company, it also strengthens SDF’s goal of continuing to be Sri Lanka’s fastest growing development finance company, uplifting and empowering rural masses all across the nation. We at SDF recognise the importance of meeting shareholder expectations and reassure our investors of the attractive valuations and consistent returns they will experience, having subscribed to our IPO. We look to the future with much confidence and believe this milestone will aid in catapulting SDF to the next level of business.”

Budget proposals...

Nevertheless, in spite of taxation, the rating agency believes that the capital positions of most insurers will remain satisfactory as their capital buffers were strengthened, especially helped by the low motor and medical insurance claims following lockdowns and insurers’ high retention of profits in 2020. Further, Fitch said that it believes that the Government’s proposed introduction of the 2.5% Social Security Contribution on annual turnover exceeding Rs. 120 million will narrow the profit margins of insurers in the near-term. However, the rating agency said that it thinks the burden will gradually be transferred to policyholders through price revisions. “It remains unclear if insurers will be liable to pay the Value-Added Tax (VAT) on financial services, which is subject to a proposed one-time increase to 18% from 15% under the 2022 Budget. Most Sri Lankan insurers previously appealed against paying VAT on financial services with the view that the VAT Act does not specify insurance companies as liable.

If imposed, the impact of this tax on near-term profit margins will be more pronounced as companies are not allowed to pass the increase in the VAT to customers,” the statement added. In addition to the tax proposals, the Government announced that it plans to impose a fee on vehicles involved in accidents and allow policyholders to be reimbursed for this fee by insurers. Insurers will likely price the additional risks in their motor insurance policies, although changes to policy terms may be required as penalty charges or fines are generally excluded from the motor insurance policy coverage. Still, the penalty charge and the nature of traffic accidents on which a fee will be imposed remain unclear and are yet to be determined. The agency also expects the potential influx of new motor vehicles into the market, following the Government’s decision to release vehicles that are currently held in customs due to non-payment of taxes, to be insufficient to result in a material recovery in motor insurance policy volumes. Fitch believes that the Government’s ban on motor vehicle imports will remain, at least in part, over the near-term and most insurers are likely to continue to seek opportunities to diversify their products into non-motor insurance lines. The Government’s 2022 Budget presented on 12 November 2021 introduced a 25% one-off tax on companies with a taxable income over Rs. 2 billion for the fiscal year ended 31 March 2021. The agency believes that Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation Ltd. (CCC+) and potentially the National Insurance Trust Fund Board (A+) may need to pay the one-off tax as they have larger pre-tax profit bases among Fitch-rated Sri Lankan insurers.

India to...

He further claimed that this is a “very dangerous development” for Sri Lanka and that a similar agreement was entered into under the previous government with China. “Under the terms of the agreement to sell the Hambantota Harbour signed by the previous government, CPC has no authority or power to sell fuel within a 100 km radius of the Hambantota Harbour. And this year Chinese companies have commenced supplying bunker fuel from the Hambantota Harbour and they have described it as a highly profitable venture,” Nagamuwa alleged. However, when *The Morning Business* reached out to LIOC Managing Director Manoj Gupta yesterday to confirm the veracity of the allegations made by Nagamuwa, he emphatically denied the said allegations. “This is absolutely baseless and we completely deny it. There is absolutely no element of truth in it,” stated Gupta. Similarly Minister of Energy Udaya Gammanapila speaking to us, also denied the above allegations and described it as an “absolute lie”. GoSL has over the past few months sought credit lines from India and Oman to fund its fuel import purchases due to the dangerous foreign reserve position of the country. Sri Lanka’s foreign exchange reserves have, as per Central Bank data, fallen to \$ 1.6 billion as of end-October from \$ 2.1 billion in end-September. In September, the GoSL had requested a \$ 500 million credit line from India to sustain fuel supply to the island, amidst concerns that there would be a fuel shortage by the end of the year. It was disclosed to us last month by a senior Treasury official on the condition of anonymity, that the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of India has handed over the relevant documentation relating to the credit line sought by Sri Lanka to the respective Indian parties for negotiation with the GoSL. However, Sri Lanka is yet to receive such documents from the Indian parties. The credit line from Oman for \$ 3.6 billion which is expected to fund the purchase of fuel for a period of 12 months was granted Cabinet approval at the beginning of this month. However, it was reported that a proposal made by the Omani Government to grant them an offshore block in the Mannar basin to explore oil deposits, in lieu of the interest payments of the credit was rejected by the GoSL.

Blockchain tech...

Cabinet approval was also granted for the appointment of two other technical professionals to the aforesaid committee in their relevant fields. However, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said that the transactions would be conducted at their own risk.

Ideal First Choice introduces Gulf Oil lubricants to Sri Lanka

Ideal First Choice (Pvt.) Ltd. continues to set the pace by introducing Gulf Oil lubricants to the Sri Lankan market.

Ideal First Choice is recognised as a pioneer in luxury motor vehicles and the after-sales service industry in Sri Lanka. With its state-of-the-art facilities across the country, Ideal First Choice has partnered with world renowned brands such as Bosch diesel and non-diesel spare parts and launching a diesel service centre, Akzonobel for distributorship of automotive paints and also as the distributor for multi-branded two-wheeler and three-wheeler spare parts available through the company's islandwide network. The strategic partnership with the Gulf Oil Lubricants India is the latest addition to Ideal First Choice's expansion of its global brand offerings and thereby, continuing to provide a world-class service experience.

Gulf Oil is a well established player in the global lubricant industry with a



Present at the launch of Gulf Lubricants in Sri Lanka, from left: Ideal First Choice Head – Business Sanjeeva Kasthuriratne, Ideal First Choice Deputy General Manager Danushka Walpola, Ideal Group Founder/Chairman Nalin Welgama, Ideal Motors Director Chaminda Wanigaratne, Gulf Lubricants India Head – Business Development-Cluster Markets Gagan Mathur, and Lanka Ashok Leyland Deputy General Manager Vipin Ohri

strong presence in over 100 countries. Gulf Oil has appointed Ideal First Choice (Pvt) Ltd. as its national distributor for its products and to launch the brand in the Sri Lankan market. A celebratory event

marking this momentous milestone was held at the Hilton Colombo Residences recently.

Gulf Oil is a part of the Hinduja Group, one of the largest diversified groups in

the world spanning across continents. Gulf Oil enjoys a respectable market share in Asian countries given its strong distribution network across the SAARC region including Bangladesh and Nepal.

HNB, Swadeshi launch gift scheme for newborns

Hatton National Bank PLC partnered with local herbal cosmetics manufacturer Swadeshi Industrial Works PLC's baby brand Kohomba Baby to offer new parents exciting gifts on the happy occasion of the birth of their baby.

The partnership will offer an exciting Swadeshi Kohomba Baby gift pack and vouchers valued at Rs. 1,000 each from HNB solely for new Singithi Kirikatiyo accounts. The campaign was launched at the Durdans Hospital in the presence of HNB Deputy General Manager – Retail and SME Banking Sanjay Wijemanne, Swadeshi Industrial

Works PLC Deputy Chairperson/ Managing Director Chulodhara Samarasinghe, and Durdans Hospital Senior Manager – Operations Rukshan Perera.

The gift pack will include herbal products from Swadeshi's range of Kohomba Baby care products manufactured with Kohomba (neem/margosa) that naturally protects the baby's skin from germs and provide essential nourishment. New parents will also be gifted with an informative booklet, "Kohomba Baby Kiri Suwade Kathawa", with instructions to ensure the baby's health and wellbeing during the first year.



From left: HNB Kollupitiya Customer Centre Senior Manager Samuddika Mendis, HNB Head – Network Management and Business Development Supun Dias with HNB Deputy General Manager – Retail and SME Banking Sanjay Wijemanne as he exchanges the MoU with Swadeshi Industrial Works PLC Deputy Chairperson/Managing Director Chulodhara Samarasinghe in the presence of Swadeshi Industrial Works PLC CEO Amila Udawatte, and Swadeshi Industrial Works PLC General Manager – Marketing Chaminda Jayasinghe

New Nokia T20 tablet introduced in Sri Lanka

HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, has unveiled the first ever HMD Global tablet – the Nokia T20. A device which offers users a suite of cutting-edge functionalities will be available in Sri Lanka islandwide for purchase from mid-December onwards.

The Nokia T20 is configured for users to love, trust, and keep – it comes with a powerful 8200 mAh battery, offering longer hours for work, play and learning. In addition, the device comes equipped with two years of Operating System (OS) upgrades and three years of monthly security updates with an optional fourth year for Enterprise customers, ensuring greater security and data privacy for users.

As part of its long-lasting commitment to security, last year, the company announced the acquisition of Valona Labs and the launch of a brand-new Centre of Excellence



From left: HMD Global Head of Marketing – Sri Lanka and Nepal Gayan Wijethilaka, HMD Global Business Manager – Sri Lanka and Nepal Dharmesh Naicker, HMD Global Executive Director/Sector Head – Mobile Business Ranjan Perera, and Softlogic Holdings General Manager – Mobile Sector Kalana Gunaratne

in Tampere, Finland. The well-loved and trusted Nokia smartphones are a part of the industry-recognised Android™ Enterprise Recommended Programme.

The new Nokia T20 is designed with the same Scandinavian design philosophy as Nokia phones,

a simplified and pure design where every detail, edge and surface finish are curated with ease of use from the outset. The solid metal body structure and polished 3D display frame attach the large display perfectly to the thin metal body, so it's built to go the distance.

Nations Trust Bank introduces 'Smart Statements'

Nations Trust Bank takes the next step of its digitalisation journey, introducing "Nations Trust Bank Smart Statements" in line with the bank's vision of providing financial information conveniently. Nations Trust Bank Smart Statements, which offers customers the option to replace current e-statements, will help them achieve today's goals and tomorrow's aspirations.

Nations Trust Bank Smart Statements are designed to act as a canvas for continuous customer interaction. Using an interactive approach with graphs and simple charts for clear understanding to showcase the customer's entire banking portfolio, Smart Statements provide convenient overviews or detailed reports as per customer discretion. For easy transition to other planning tools used by customers for financial management, Smart Statements can also be downloaded in PDF,

Text or CSV format.

Nations Trust Bank forges ahead with its leadership in digital shape by giving customers the best experience. The bank is now on a journey to own a share of the customers' life, integrating banking to day-to-day life, supporting them with transaction control, and financial discipline, and participating in every aspect of their lives.

Nations Trust Bank PLC is among the top 15 business establishments in Sri Lanka as ranked by Business Today. Stemming from its vision of "helping people and businesses by providing financial services and information to achieve their goals and aspirations in a sustainable way", the bank serves a diverse range of customers across both individual and corporate, with an enviable portfolio of banking and financial products and services.

Hatch awarded 'Best Co-Working Space in the World' at Global Startup Awards 2021



The Hatch team

Hatch, a Sri Lankan co-working space, startup incubator and accelerator was awarded "The Best Co-Working Space in the World" at the Global Startup Awards 2021. This is the first time a Sri Lankan or a South Asian organisation has secured a win in this category, marking a momentous milestone for Sri Lanka's startup ecosystem.

The award for best co-working space acknowledges a "co-working space that deserves the recognition of its services, support and resources to fast-growth startups, and for creating a culture and environment that fosters innovation and focuses on positively impacting the world". Hatch was selected from two rounds on a regional and global level from more than 18,000 nominees. To secure the coveted final win, Hatch won

against five world-class global finalists who had been awarded regionally. The Global Startup Awards seeks to recognise the "future-shapers" of the world and has awarded companies like UiPath, Zendesk, Supercell, Turbine and Grab over the last decade.

With locations in Colombo 1 and Jaffna, what sets Hatch apart is its commitment to offering much more than physical space. Since its inception in 2018, Hatch has worked to nurture startups and offer a vibrant atmosphere in which entrepreneurs and disruptive organisations can thrive. With hybrid working options for corporates, SMEs and startups, Hatch's spaces and facilities are designed to enable effective co-working and collaboration with an emphasis on user-friendliness and creativity.

Vivo rises to 4th place in global smartphone shipments in Q3 2021

Global smartphone brand vivo has been ranked first in China's smartphone market in the third quarter of 2021, leading China's smartphone sales with a market share of 23% and a year-over-year growth rate of 21%, according to Counterpoint Research's Monthly Market Pulse Service. Vivo earned the top spot as its product portfolios continued to support its position in the mainstream price segment.

In addition to the above, vivo also rose to the fourth position in global smartphone shipments for the first time with a market share of 10% in the third quarter of 2021, according to Canalis. Previous quarterly numbers from Canalis indicated that

vivo remained among the top five in global smartphone shipments in the past four quarters, and it topped China's smartphone market in Q2 2021, according to IDC Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker, maintaining strong growth momentum.

Leveraging a local mindset and its understanding of local culture and management, vivo continues to expand to more markets and accelerate its globalisation. As of now, vivo has branched out its sales network across more than 50 countries and regions, and is loved by more than 400 million users worldwide.

Stay informed of the latest vivo news at www.vivo.com/en/about-vivo/news.

The Rainforest Alliance extends support to Nuwara Eliya District Hospital and Bulathsinghala Hospital during the pandemic

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 the smallholders and women-led farmers in Sri Lanka. These challenges continue despite the slowing down of the pandemic spread. Vulnerable communities require targeted support – both financial and other forms to cope with the "new normal" that they are facing. A key priority and urgent requirement is that the health infrastructure in the country is further strengthened in order to support the needs of its population and vulnerable communities from any such situation occurring in the future.



Rainforest Alliance Global Board Director Anisha Rajapakse, Rainforest Alliance Director – South Asia Dr. Madhuri Nanda, and Nuwara Eliya District Hospital Director Dr. Mahendra Seneviratne at the handing over of vital medical equipment

Alliance has donated vital medical equipment to the hospitals in Nuwara Eliya and Bulathsinghala that most of the smallholder tea growers and plantation workers employed by Rainforest Alliance-certified tea plantations access for their health and medical needs. This

level of support and strengthening of capacities will enable the hospitals to effectively respond towards the treatment and care of communities in the area for Covid-19.

The Rainforest Alliance remains strongly committed towards protecting and safeguarding the well-

being of its stakeholders in these unprecedented times; and hopes that this level of long-term strengthening of capacities will help the small tea growers and plantation communities receive uninterrupted medical services throughout the current and future challenges they may face.

Purest Group takes Sri Lankan aquaculture to new heights

Purest Group is an agriculture consultancy firm based in Puttalam that is driven by the mission to revolutionise agriculture and aquaculture in Sri Lanka by unlocking its growth and harvest potential – in terms of quality, size and standards – through organic and innovative means. Its ultimate vision is to solve food-related crises and shortages by harnessing biotechnology and specifically, food production technology, for sustainable mass production practices.

Purest Group's chief initiative is the AEIOU project which is currently disrupting the country's crab farming sector. The revolutionary project has been successful thus far in maximising crab harvest up to four times its usual



The Purest Group team with the National Aquaculture Development Authority of Sri Lanka (NAQDA) Director

output, reaching potentials of up to 1kg from the previous 250g per crab. Purest Group is now ready to implement this system across farms islandwide.

With a dedicated mission to proliferate the crab farming community in Sri Lanka, Purest Group is supported both technically and financially through HackaDev; the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka's flagship youth and innovation programme, which empowers Sri Lanka's youth to be more innovative and entrepreneurial and take leadership in solving the most pressing development challenges in a sustainable manner, by providing them with opportunities and the necessary next-generation skills.

The HackaDev Enterprise

Support Programme (HESP) is an initiative which is aimed at rebuilding enterprises and empowering entrepreneurs of the HackaDev alumni network affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. With the first cohort successfully implemented in 2020/21, it provided six months of comprehensive further development support to 15 enterprises.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky."

— Rabindranath Tagore

Mammoth tusk recovered from an unlikely place: The bottom of the ocean

Mammoths are long to be known as ancient land dwellers, so scientists were shocked to find remains from the animal at the bottom of the ocean. Pilot Randy Prickett and scientist Steven Haddock, researchers with Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI), discovered a Columbian mammoth tusk 185 miles offshore and 10,000 feet deep in the ocean in 2019, the institution said in a news release.

(CNN)



the morning brunch

UNFPA launches 16 days of global activism

Mayoress of Colombo Rosy Senanayake



Municipality and across Sri Lanka, she is pleased to be collaborating yet again with UNFPA to raise awareness on this very pertinent issue.

Highlighting the importance of policies that take the evidence of the WWS into account High Commissioner of Canada in Sri Lanka Counsellor and Head of Development Co-operation Daniel Joly stated that the Government of Canada is committed to supporting Sri Lanka and several other countries to end all forms of violence. "It has been a long journey but I am pleased to see the results of the WWS we supported come to light today in the form of crucial evidence. Surveys like this are an essential building block in working towards ending all forms of violence against women and girls," he further noted.

Also speaking at the event, National Programme and Policy Analyst for Women's Rights and Gender Officer in Charge Sharika Cooray stated: "Intimate partner violence doesn't just affect women but also has an effect on children, families, and communities at large. We all have a responsibility to end violence against women and challenge the norms that perpetuate gender-based violence."

On the same topic, she highlighted that this is why the 16 days initiative is important for UNFPA, not just to raise awareness but to collectively call to action for an end to all forms of violence against women and girls.



National People's Power MP Dr. Harini Amarasinghe

Emphasising the importance of quality support services, the event also featured a special live performance of the *Nidahase* song by Ashanthi de Alwis which was launched earlier this year to raise funds for women's shelters while empowering more women to seek help.

The UNFPA will continue advocating with its partners beyond the 16 days initiative to encourage collective action to take the message of 16 days of advocacy forward to different audiences in Sri Lanka for a world free of gender-based violence and harmful practices towards women and girls ahead of the 2030 Agenda.

PHOTOS KRISHAN KARIYAWASAM



Ashanthi de Alwis performing 'Nidahase' at the event

CMC illuminated orange to honour the launch

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

The iconic Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) building was illuminated in orange with messages of the national women's helpline and Mithuru Piyasa hotline on 23 November to place a spotlight on intimate partner violence and encourage more women to seek help.

The illumination organised by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with the CMC and the High Commission of Canada, launched the 16 days of global activism against gender-based violence in Sri Lanka with a focus on intimate partner violence.

The event was held with the aim of highlighting evidence from the Women's Wellbeing Survey (WWS), Sri Lanka's first national survey on

women and girls. The survey found that one in five (20.4%) women in Sri Lanka have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Yet, close to half (49.3%) of the women who experienced sexual violence by a partner did not seek



State Minister of Primary Healthcare, Epidemics, and Covid Disease Control Dr. Sudarshini Fernandopulle

formal help anywhere. The survey also found that one-third (35.7%) of women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner had contemplated suicide; highlighting the serious repercussions violence has on the lives of women and girls. These statistics coming to light will help in encouraging more victims to seek help and ensuring support systems are available and accessible is essential for the recovery and prevention of violence against women and girls in Sri Lanka.

Speaking on the importance of collective action to end intimate partner violence, Mayoress of Colombo Rosy Senanayake stated that violence against women can happen to anyone, anywhere so it is vital that we talk about this issue widely. She further explained that in order to both encourage more women to seek help and to ensure women and girls are aware of the support services available to them within the Colombo

A new partnership to champion inclusivity

MAS Innovation and National Paralympic Committee sign landmark MoU

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

Tuesday (23) saw MAS Innovation and the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) sign a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that promises to empower disabled athletes around the island to represent Sri Lanka on the national stage.

With the stress of the pandemic, it has been easy for us to forget the power of sport – something that binds us all together in a powerful sense of camaraderie and national spirit.

Sri Lanka is home to some of the most talented sportsmen and sportswomen in the world, and a huge number of paralympic athletes as well who have the power to be international champions in the same vein as Dinesh Priyantha and Dilan Kodithuwakku, the paralympic athletes who won gold and bronze at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games earlier this year.

Sri Lanka alone has more than 1.7 million people living with some form of disability. Many between the ages of 15 and 35 who are eligible and interested in para sports often go unidentified due to infrastructure and socioeconomic challenges, with only a few having the opportunity to participate at a club or national level.

These landmark wins by para athletes on the international stage have the power to influence a whole new generation of para athletes.



NPC President Lt. Col. Deepal Herath

However, many of these athletes struggle to achieve these dreams because of their disabilities.

In a bid to help create a more empowering and inclusive environment for para athletes around Sri Lanka, MAS Innovation (Pvt.) Ltd., a subsidiary of MAS Holdings, has entered into a landmark partnership with the NPC to provide innovative, best-in-class sports attire for Sri Lankan national para athletes. This partnership follows an MoU signed between MAS and the NPC on Tuesday establishing MAS as the official clothing partner for the NPC, and will be applicable for local training, selection trials, and competitions held both locally and internationally for the Sri Lankan paralympic contingent.

Through this partnership,

MAS will be the official clothing partner for the NPC over the next two years, with Sri Lanka's Asian Youth Paralympic team being the first recipients of sporting gear provided by MAS, South Asia's largest apparel and sportswear manufacturer for the world's leading sportswear brands.

Speaking at a press conference held to commemorate the signing of the MoU, MAS Innovation Chief Innovation Officer Ranil Vitarana shared that this occasion marks an important day in MAS Holdings' diversity and inclusivity journey. "Our purpose is to be changemakers and enrich the fabric of life on our planet," Vitarana said, adding: "We inspire our people to make change for good and make products that transform people's lives and protect the environment."



MAS Innovation (Pvt.) Ltd. Chief Innovation Officer Ranil Vitarana speaking at the conference



The signing of the MoU. From left: NPC Secretary Brig. Bandula Bandara, NPC President Lt. Col. Deepal Herath, MAS Innovation (Pvt.) Ltd. Chief Innovation Officer Ranil Vitarana, and Linea Aqua (Pvt.) Ltd. Chief Executive Officer Muditha Ferdinando

Vitarana went on to explain that MAS has always strived to create an inclusive environment for its 300-plus employees with disabilities, adding that the commitment of these employees in going above and beyond in their duties is something everyone at MAS aspires to.

Vitarana also explained that recognising the challenges persons with disabilities face with conventional clothing which requires the full usage of both arms or legs, MAS ventured into the adaptive apparel space in 2019, catering to persons with temporary and permanent disabilities and mobility restrictions. Through

comprehensive research with medical professionals, caregivers, and users from the US and Sri Lanka, MAS creates products that enable independent dressing and incorporate adaptive functionality into mainstream clothing.

NPC President Lt. Col. Deepal Herath also addressed the gathering expressing his excitement at embarking on this new journey with MAS. In an accompanying statement, Herath shared: "Sri Lanka will be represented by six young athletes and two swimmers at the third edition of the Asian Youth Para Games held in Bahrain

with an overall participation of more than 35 countries. The athletes will be competing under different categories and are now undergoing the last lap of their training in Colombo. This partnership with MAS will greatly benefit our athletes, elevating their performance and status as representatives of Sri Lanka."

Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games gold medalist Dinesh Priyantha also addressed the gathering, expressing his hopes for the partnership between MAS and the NPC and recognising the partnership's potential to provide opportunities for aspiring para athletes.

One year of the CHAKRE SHOP

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

Kumarini and Tiffahny – both undergraduates – never got the opportunity to work together despite going to the same school their entire lives. After leaving school and upon finishing up their degrees, they decided to start

something of their own and try and make a difference through their business. So, they launched Chakre Shop – a thrift store that believes in sustainable concepts.

The Morning Brunch had a chat with the two to learn more about their values and what to expect in the future.

➔ **How did you land on the idea of running a thrift store? Was this a dream you pursued or just an impulsive decision?**

We always liked the idea of running our own business, but we were not quite sure of what we wanted to commit to. As a recent undergrad and a university student at the time, we knew that any initiative we embarked on required an affordable investment. What we both (and perhaps many other young women and men in Colombo) had in common was an unprecedented number of clothes which we never got the chance to wear, or which would no longer be worn. This is how we decided to start a thrift store.

➔ **What inspired the name Chakre Shop? Does it hold special meaning?**

We wanted our business to be meaningful to its core. The term Chakre (not Chakra) means cycle in Sinhala. Thrifting is essentially circular fashion. Which is why we thought it to be most appropriate. But the cycle we had in mind wasn't merely where a customer



purchases an item previously owned by another, but also to allow their money to be channelled towards a charitable cause.

➔ **Tell us about your aim. What was on your mind when you started running a thrift store?**

With so many businesses starting up in the wake of the pandemic, our goal was to create an impact through the success of our business. It's not the profit we earn, it's the precedent we create and the inner feeling of achieving something by helping someone else.

➔ **What about your store sets you aside from the many other online thrift stores?**

All online thrift stores are absolutely essential to lower the demand for fashion. It also provides consumers with an opportunity to purchase various items on a single platform at affordable prices. Perhaps the environmentally friendly angle



Kumarini and Tiffahny

which we have taken to promote circular fashion, in conjunction with our charitable projects, have been the key elements to distinguishing our business.

Throughout the year, our packaging has been simple and unique, i.e. through the use of newspapers. At the end of every month, we calculate our profits to set aside a portion towards a charitable cause. Last year in December, we distributed protective facemasks to homeless people on the street. Following this, we manufactured masks for patients in state hospitals. We also donated money towards the purchase of relief supplies for garment factory workers in the free trade zones. At the same time, we partnered with our primary donor to allocate her commission towards the AMI Tsunami Children's Foundation. More recently, we collaborated with a consciously produced clothing line to upcycle an item where its profits will be allocated towards the Sri Lanka Cancer Society.

➔ **You will be celebrating your anniversary soon. Where do you see your store in a few years?**

Chakre will be turning one tomorrow (26). We are very happy with how the store has developed and the impact it has made. Although we don't know what the future holds, we hope to grow in terms of sales, through which we can make a bigger impact on communities that are in need of help.

➔ **Why should the general public indulge in thrift shopping?**

There is definitely a stigma around thrift shopping which is prevalent in our country. We have been hoping to remove the stigma of secondhand clothing being perceived as "unclean" or "unfashionable".

Fast fashion brands that are popular amongst the public have a negative impact on the environment. A lot of unused clothes are sent to landfills every year, which is a huge waste. The issue is that many people are unaware of the consequences of their purchase, and they don't think that thrift shopping is necessary.

It is important for more people to buy preloved clothes, rather than brand new ones. In a way, people will also be sending a message to clothing stores to reduce any exploitative working conditions that their staff are subjected to.

➔ **How do you buy and sell secondhand goods?**

The way the cycle works is by accepting clothes from third parties. This approval process takes into account our probability of selling it, and the quality of each item. Once the items do sell, we pay the owners a nominal commission.

Purchasing from the Chakre Shop is simple. You direct message us on Instagram with your order, upon which you're asked to fill out a form to confirm your purchase. Accordingly, payments and deliveries will be made.

➔ **Do you like to thrift? Why?**

After understanding the consequences of fast fashion, we have really minimised our rate of purchasing. But when we do see an opportunity to purchase something, we resort to secondhand clothing. It just makes us feel really happy to know that we are doing something good for others and for the environment.

@chakre.shop



brunch
in
style

Leena Hari's Bridal Studio

Where luxury meets value

With the ever-growing nature of social media, one thing is clear – aesthetics are everything. Weddings and occasions require the finest quality service in order to make the experience one where everyone can look their best, and Leena Hari's Bridal Studio will offer just that! Catering to the needs of the Sri Lankan public, the salon will offer an array of beauty and wellness experiences for every occasion. From exclusive treatments to high-end products from some of the world's most innovative beauty brands, this luxury bridal studio is creating a new standard for salons in Colombo. This will be headed by the illustrious Leena Hari, who has been at the forefront of the Sri Lankan beauty industry for many years, being praised as one of the most influential make-up artists on the island. Known for her unique, adventurous and innovative make-up techniques, Leena is extending her originality and ambition into this avant-garde salon on Edmonton Road, Colombo 5, which will be unlike any other in the country.

Throughout her long and illustrious career in some of the top salons in the country, Leena has earned many distinctions, winning many national and international awards in high definition makeup, bridal and party makeovers, as well as her evening makeup. She stated that "makeup is something that has to come from within. It's a passion and you need to dedicate yourself to it". Nevertheless, Leena's expertise has always been with bridal beauty. In the past, when dealing with her bride clients, Leena would always end up sending them around to other places for their various beauty needs, and more often



Leena Hariram

than not they were not happy with the outcome. Thus, Leena decided to make her own salon – one where all a bride's needs would be met – offering full bridal pampering sessions and treatments done in a one-stop shop; thereby bringing together beauty, hair, nail and make-up together for a truly holistic experience.

To provide this top-quality service, Leena has brought together a team of staff, all experts in different fields to help run this beauty powerhouse. Kevin Vantwest will be joining the team as the head hairstylist, overlooking all hair treatments done in the salon. Anne Vantwest will be joining as their nail technician, Petula Nissanka and Anne as the beauticians. When it comes down to the look of the bride, Leena herself will be deciding on a cohesive style. The expert stylists and technicians are always on hand to offer customers a fresh, sleek cut, facials, eyelash extensions, a new colour to express themselves better, a blow-dry for that dramatic look, or even just a mani-pedi to get into that self-care mood. Essentially, Leena's services extend to a much wider range that will suit your every occasion – not just for your wedding.

With the constant beauty industry in flux due to the pandemic and the never-

ending cancellations of events, it has been challenging for this to come together. Nevertheless, Leena has been set to achieve this goal and hopes to emerge with her salon soon to serve the public better, offering a highly distinctive look that has not been seen in this country before, with luxurious interiors littered with foliage and modern decor; all while maintaining a warm and cosy atmosphere to ensure all customers are at ease. The ground floor follows this rustic theme with the varnished wooden floors and various plants at every glance; maintaining this homely aesthetic. Meanwhile, the first floor will dazzle the eyes with its gorgeous pastel theme that is very welcoming and mellow. Blush sofas, decor, and a wall covered by frames add to the modern feel that makes a beauty appointment less stressful and more like an afternoon with good girlfriends. These decor choices will also offer some great photo shoots, as Leena

also ensures that brides can also take their "getting ready" shots for their wedding album as a part of the bridal package!

Leena added: "Having my own salon is the biggest dream come true. The idea behind the whole concept is to give my clients the luxury service to feel pampered and fabulous when they walk out of the salon."

Essentially, the definition of luxury has evolved; luxury is no longer synonymous with being exorbitant or exclusive. At Leena's salon, it has all moved beyond high price points and labels and now revolves around the uniqueness of the experience and pleasure gained from the service. At Leena's salon, they care about first impressions and take care in creating a bond of trust with the clientele; and from their service to their decor, Leena only hopes to provide the best!

For more information on Leena's Bridal Studio, you can contact them via 0762234776 or leenaliz82@gmail.com.



Vision Care collaborates with CFW as 'Official Eyewear Partner' at Swim Week 2021



Vision Care, Sri Lanka's largest eye care solutions provider, continued its longstanding partnership with Colombo Fashion Week (CFW) by participating as the "Official Eyewear Partner" at the CFW's Swim Week two-day resortwear fashion extravaganza that was held at the Shangri-La Hotel and the Marina at the Port City Colombo recently.

During the event, Vision Care's world-class collection of top eyewear brands were used by several designers including Charini Suriyaga and Karma Collection on Day One and Indi Yapa Abeywardena, Divya Jayawickrama and Hameedia on Day Two in their fashion creations to complete the perfect luxury resortwear look. They used renowned global eyewear brands marketed by Vision Care including D&G, Versace, Bvlgari, Prada, Ray Ban and Vogue in their creations. In addition to these brands, Vision

Care also offers customers a wide array of leading international brands for frames and sunglasses such as Emporio Armani, Michael Kors, Polaroid, Carrera, Coach, Oakley, Gucci, Porsche and many others. These brands are available at Vision Care branches located islandwide and also on their online store shop. visioncare.lk.

This year's edition of Swim Week focused on luxury resort wear with emphasis on the upcoming festive season of December as well as destination weddings. Held in accordance with the current health restrictions, the show was a hybrid event that was telecast live with a limited number of guests attending.

Vision Care General Manager Harsha Maduranga stated: "Vision Care extended the partnership with Colombo Fashion Week earlier this year when the main CFW event was held

back in April. Building on this collaboration, our top eyewear brands have now been utilised by the designers in the Swim Week edition of CFW, marking another milestone in our ongoing journey. Our expansive range of world-class, premium eyewear brands are widely sought after in the world of fashion. The perfect resort wear look is not possible without sunglasses as they are an integral part of it. These highly-talented designers have demonstrated how perfectly they are able to mix and match our eyewear products to complete the individual's unique resort wear look."

Colombo Fashion Week is a developmental project that aims to drive progressive change in every aspect of the fashion industry in Sri Lanka. Since its inception in 2003, CFW has focused on nurturing the next generation of Sri Lankan fashion designers.

Cinema has finally been recognised as an industry

BY CHANDRAN RUTNAM

Finally, Sri Lanka has joined the world of international cinema and accepted the obvious fact that cinema is an industry.

We were 40 years behind but that is a norm for Sri Lankan cinema. We were 10 years behind in our entry to digital projection.

"It has also been observed that the cinema industry in most of the countries in the world has been improved with the recognition of cinema as an industry." (*Daily Mirror*, 17 November 2021)

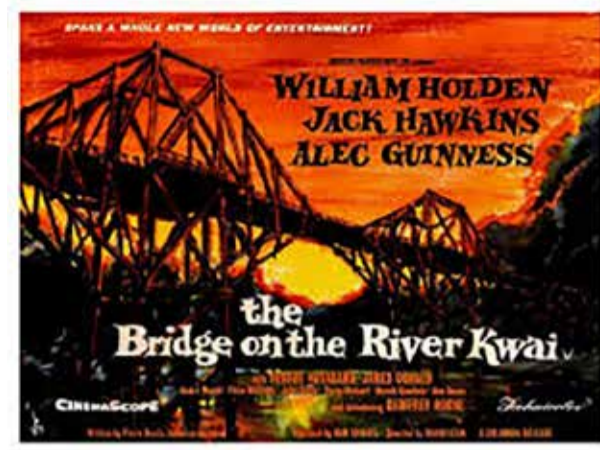
Where have we been? Sleeping in the trenches?

The motion picture business is a multimillion dollar business throughout the world except Sri Lanka. Why?

In all our neighbouring countries, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, the business is booming. Better than it has ever been, even after the pandemic. What are we doing wrong? Why didn't we ask our successful neighbours how to do it, or address the issues in an unbiased, impersonal and logical manner.

The answer is very simple: Personal agendas within agendas and of course, the Sri Lankan brand of jealousy and envy embedded in our genes.

The manufacturing and marketing of films, like the manufacturing of any product, is primarily an industry and must come under the Ministry



William Holden and Chandran Rutnam during the shooting of 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'

of Industries. A selected film, if considered of cultural value, then that particular item could be transferred to the Ministry of Culture, to enhance, promote or exhibit, if desired.

Distribution of the product must be at the discretion of the cinema owner (the shop owner). It is up to them to decide whether it's marketable or not.

If the government wishes to accommodate loss-making films often erroneously referred to as "art films and award winners" the government (Ministry of Culture) must take the credit and the loss. They could, if they wish, place it for exhibition in their special cinema circuit.

The cinema owner must not be forced to distribute any potentially loss making/non-marketable product and take a loss. It is, "my shop and I decide what I wish to sell in my shop".

Four important factors in show business

There are four main factors in show business and they are production, exhibition, profit, and quality.

- **Show:** It is a business that produces a product that people wish to pay and watch
- **Business:** The fact that it covers the cost and makes a profit so that the investor will continue to invest in the next film

- **Production:** The liberty and the funding to produce a film with the co-operation of the authorities with available equipment and a choice of talent

- **Exhibition:** The liberty to exhibit the completed film in any cinema that wishes to screen it for any agreed period of time, at the discretion of the cinema owner

- **Profit:** The division of revenue as agreed between the exhibitor and the producer of the film

- **Quality:** The quality determines the desire for the exhibitor to screen the film expecting to make a profit

The expectation of profit is determined by the cinema owner who decides whether to engage with the film or not.

If the quality of the product is not worthy and therefore not accepted,

the filmmaker has to find another outlet that is non-profit (possibly a government-sponsored mechanism).

In the next attempt by the filmmaker, the film may be of better quality with better revenue expectations by the cinema owner or another rejection.

Quality improves with competition, not by protectionism through influence or any other nefarious activity.

And the award goes to...!
The best film very rarely wins the Best Picture award.

The best director very rarely wins the Best Director award.

All jurors at the awards are influenced to a great degree on personal relationships... respect, adulation, friendships, animosities, personal events and circumstances.

A thesis could be written on the deplorable, dishonesty and sometimes vulgarities involved in the award process. There are many very notable, glaring instances.

There are numerous award-giving film festivals emerging with various sub-categories of the "Best Picture" which are too many to mention.

Awards at film festivals are fun to watch and generates publicity for the films that win the award, but not to be taken seriously and definitely not to be taken as a monetarily valuable asset



Director David Lean with Chandran at the Academy Awards

because it is the paying audience that is the real jury that may sit through the movie with pain or walk away from the cinema in disappointment and dismay.

This is not to say that there are no valuable award winning films, but this is a very rare commodity. The cinema owners must not be forced to bear the financial loss of an award winning "dud". It is a well known fact that several award winning directors and their loss making producers are estranged and no longer friends.

If we push the major circuits to promote an inferior award winning film and force the circuits not to remove the film for a period of time with hardly an audience, our filmmakers will not upgrade the quality and commercial value of their films.

Competition stimulates the mind and effort to keep doing better and thereby raise the benchmark quality of the product.

As an "industry", the cinema owners must be encouraged to give a better ambiance and a better service. They must be given the liberty to exhibit any film in any language which they feel will fill their cinemas for their survival. The survival of the cinemas is of paramount importance if the cinema industry is to prosper.

Our local Sinhala and Tamil films must upgrade their quality and audience appeal to compete for exhibition in the cinemas. We have the talent... we have the technology and most of all, we now have a worldwide audience.

In the true definition of the cinema, it has finally found its place as an industry.

Better late than never.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan filmmaker and entrepreneur. He has hosted numerous Hollywood films for their location shoots in Sri Lanka and Malaysia)

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



Actors Alec Guinness, William Holden, and Jack Hawkins from 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'



Nurdle Free Lanka volunteer campaign against nurdles

The Pearl Protectors, in partnership with other volunteer organisations have successfully removed over 1,200 kg of nurdles since the commencement of Sri Lanka's largest volunteer campaign - Nurdle Free Lanka. The campaign was initiated in July, following the MV X-Press Pearl maritime disaster, and was established to mitigate the impacts caused by the spillage of billions of plastic pellets, referred to as nurdles, into the ocean. The disaster has been termed the worst maritime and environmental disaster to be recorded in Sri Lanka.

Although the number of containers contributing to the spillage of nurdles has not been determined, it is anticipated that there are containers still carrying nurdles under the wreckage of the MV X-Press Pearl, currently submerged ten nautical miles away from Sarakkuwa in Gampaha District. The presence of nurdles in the marine and the coastal environment has had significant consequences. The discoloration and deformity of nurdles resulting from chemical and natural processes has made the identification and collection of nurdles, a challenging task for volunteers. Due to the extensive spatial distribution of the nurdles, and the long-term impacts they can have on the environment and communities, the Nurdle Free Lanka volunteer campaign was introduced to implement urgent



measures to minimise the extent of the disaster.

The campaign commenced in July with 13 volunteers and was supported by site monitoring, weekly surveys and public awareness content on the impact of nurdles on the environment. To facilitate the cleaning process, a range of sieving tools and trolleys were manufactured. Nurdle portals were positioned at beach sites, to enable interested individuals or communities to borrow sieving equipment and collect nurdles along the shoreline.

Funding support was received through the public and in the form of patron support where Lanka Environment Fund, Tiqri Corporation, Mitra Innovation, and Jetty Rock Foundation were exclusive patrons while Mount Lavinia Hotel was a campaign patron. MAS Kreeda supported the initiative as the support patron. Several crowdfunding initiatives such as "Friends of the Pearl" ensured the campaign received the much-needed support during its infancy.

Mobilising of volunteers took place along the shorelines

of Moratuwa, Egoda Uyana, Moratuwella, Mount Lavinia, Wellawatte, Galle Face and Negombo. A collective effort of over 1,000 volunteers contributed to the cleanup of 1,200 kg of nurdles including a handover to the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA). Volunteer organisations representing Rotaract, Leo clubs, and community-based youth organisations participated in the cleanup efforts. Additionally, corporate staff from various institutions and business entities collaborated to support the process.



Nurdle Free Lanka campaign will formally end its initial phase on 5 December which also is International Volunteer Day. The Pearl Protectors will be hosting a volunteer recognition ceremony coinciding with this day, honouring and recognising the volunteer's contributions. A report outlining the campaign and its findings, is expected to be published in January. An extension to the Nurdle Free Lanka campaign is being planned to facilitate monthly nurdle cleanups, while expanding nurdle portals to other parts of Sri Lanka's coastline.

Standard Chartered hosts virtual 'Home Olympics 2021'

Standard Chartered Sri Lanka hosted the first-ever virtual Home Olympics for its staff to promote employee engagement and camaraderie. Keeping their competitive spirits up was the main event, where a total of 120 employees walked an accumulated distance of 14,935 km - the approximate distance from the Standard Chartered Sri Lanka head office to the London head office and back - across a period of 20 days.

Broadcasted live from a studio at the head office in Colombo, the virtual Home Olympics saw Standard Chartered Sri Lanka employees and their families participating in a number of events



Houses Godwin, Stuart, Tudor, Wessex, and York participated in the Home Olympics, with Godwin taking away the final trophy

from the comfort of their homes. The event created a very high level of engagement, while also promoting fitness and good health practices. Employees who had been homebound due to lockdowns and in need of a boost to their mental and physical wellbeing were motivated by healthy competition among the five houses vying for the maximum amount of points in the competition, which also

featured separate events for the families of the employees to participate in, including e-gaming for the children.

Standard Chartered Sri Lanka Head of Transaction Banking and Sports Club President Roger Norton, speaking about the outcome of the virtual Home Olympics, said: "Standard Chartered Sri Lanka has a close-knit family of employees, and we feed off the energy and motivation from each

other. The lockdown put a dampener on our moods and the Home Olympics were the perfect response. We had more staff engagement in these few weeks than we have in the recent past. On top of that, we were able to spotlight fitness and motivate each other during challenging times. The teamwork, commitment, and competitive spirit the Standard Chartered Home Olympics fostered in our teams will stand us in good stead as we take the business forward past these tough times into a rejuvenated future."

Houses Godwin, Stuart, Tudor, Wessex, and York participated in the Home Olympics, with Godwin taking away the final trophy.

ComBank flags off festive season with bonanza for cardholders

Commercial Bank of Ceylon (ComBank) is stepping into the festive shopping season by offering discounts of up to 50% for its credit and debit cardholders at more than 3,500 merchant outlets islandwide.

Covering every conceivable seasonal craving, from vacations at luxury hotels, overseas travel, and home makeovers to wardrobe upgrades and an assortment of shopping, entertainment, and dining options, the seasonal offers can be enjoyed on specified days or periods until the end of 2021 and also includes easy payment



plans for up to 60 months on a range of credit card purchases.

The bank has partnered with 350 merchants, encompassing 165 clothing and fashion accessories partners, 25 shoe and leather wear partners, 19 jewellery partners, 27 lifestyle store partners,

nine salon, spa, and cosmetic boutique partners, eight watch and accessory partners, 39 online shopping partners, six supermarket partners, six healthcare partners, and 36 travel agents.

The easy payments plans will be available on credit card purchases of electronic home appliances and furniture from 20 leading lifestyle brands. Other special promotions during this period include discounts of up to 60% on holiday stays at 80 partner hotels and "Dine and Smile" promotions at 50 popular restaurants.

