



RUBBER EXPORTS ON TRACK TO REACH \$ 1 B IN 2021

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the morning



RAINFORREST ALLIANCE OUTLINES HIGH HOPES FOR SL IN YEARS TO COME

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ALLOWING PREDATORS IN THE PLAYGROUND

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SRI LANKA SET TO MAKE ONE CHANGE TODAY

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Sajith requests April gas cylinder reports

- Claims reports prove 50:50 propane-to-butane ratio

- Alagiyawanna to present his report today

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Following the series of gas cylinder explosions around the country, Opposition and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Leader Sajith Premadasa has

requested the Government to publicise three reports, which, he claimed, show that the gas cylinders in the market have a composition of 50% propane and 50% butane, and not 30% and 70%, respectively, as claimed by the Government.

“On 26 April this year, if I remember correctly, a company called Intertek provided three reports to the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA). These reports show that Litro Gas’ 12.5 kg cylinder and the 18-litre cylinder, and also Laugfs’ 12.5 kg cylinder had a composition of 50% propane to 50% butane, and not 30% and 70%. Please table those reports in Parliament for everybody’s information,” urged Premadasa in Parliament last Saturday (27).

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Chemical fertiliser price to be regulated but not fixed

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The Ministry of Agriculture does not expect to introduce a fixed price for chemical fertilisers and other agro chemicals, including pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides/weedicides, which would be imported by the private sector, but will soon formulate a mechanism to regulate their prices, The Morning learnt.

- Agriculture Ministry wary about overpricing

When contacted by *The Morning*, Agriculture Ministry Secretary Prof. Udith K. Jayasinghe-Mudalige said that this mechanism would be formulated with the involvement of all relevant institutions.

He added that such regulation would be necessary since suppliers of fertilisers and agrochemicals at the ground level may try to sell them at exorbitant prices in the

- Mechanism to regulate prices soon

future to make large profits. “We do not say that everyone does it, but when it comes to pricing any product or service, ground level suppliers are setting their own prices. Therefore, all relevant institutions including the Agriculture Ministry hope to formulate a programme to avoid such issues,” he said.

However, when asked if there were any plans to impose fixed prices on imported chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals, he said that there would be no fixed prices.

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No decision to ban arrivals from outside Africa yet

- Omicron discovered in 9 non-African nations

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The Ministry of Health has stated that no final decision has been taken regarding the imposition of restrictions on people coming to Sri Lanka from countries where the Omicron SARS-CoV-2 variant (B.1.1.529) has been reported, which are outside the African Continent.

In view of the Omicron variant, the Sri Lankan authorities took steps to ban the arrival of foreign travellers who have been to six countries in the African Continent, including South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho,

and Eswatini (Swaziland), within the past 14 days.

Accordingly, when inquired as to whether the Health Ministry was taking steps to impose a ban on travellers who have been to other countries where cases of Omicron variant have been reported, Health Ministry Communication Director and Deputy Director General of Public Health Services (DDGPHS) Dr. Hemantha Herath said: “A final decision has not been reached regarding the imposition of such a ban. However, the matter is constantly being analysed.”

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Foreign intervention against custodial deaths?

- Rights group says domestic mechanisms exhausted
- Follows ‘Tinker Lasantha’ death last week

BY PAMODI WARAVITA



CPRP President Senaka Perera

The Committee for Protecting the Rights of Prisoners (CPRP) said yesterday (28) that it would have to seek international intervention regarding the spate of custodial deaths that recently occurred in Sri Lanka, as domestic mechanisms have already been “exhausted without any proper progress made”.

“The latest incident of a death in custody is that of Hewa Lunuwilage Lasantha, alias ‘Tinker Lasantha’. We write the same letters to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) and to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) when such an incident happens. We have exhausted our options and it is clear that the domestic mechanisms are not working.”

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Health TUs to hold protest on Wednesday

- ‘Large’ protest planned for Colombo

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Health Services Trade Unions Alliance will be engaging in strike action with a “large” gathering in Colombo on Wednesday (1 December), to urge the Government to meet their basic demands, including that the junior healthcare staff be paid for their sixth work day of the week, *The Morning* learnt.

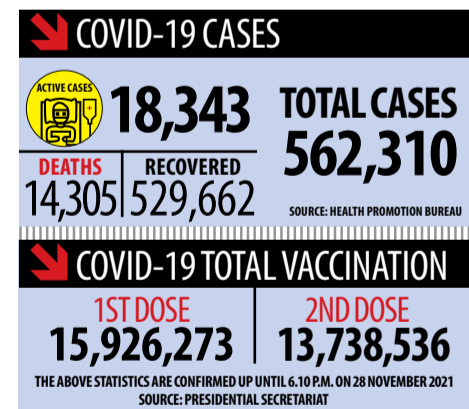
“We will go for strike action on 1 December, with a large protest in Colombo. From 6 December, we will continue prolonged strike action if our demands are not met. We have been raising our basic demands with the Government for one-and-a-half years now. Although we were promised

intervention by the Health Ministry in the 2022 Budget, this year’s Budget has actually slashed the Health Ministry’s budget by Rs. 6 billion. We work for six days of the week, including on Saturdays. On Saturdays, we are not paid a salary,” the Alliance’s Convenor Ven. Tempitiye Sugathananda Thera told *The Morning* yesterday (28).

The Thera added that there is a huge shortage in the work staff, which the Government is yet to fulfill.

“We are also demanding that our official staff uniform remittance be increased to Rs. 15,000 and that the monthly special remittance be increased to Rs. 7,000.”

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UNP slams Prez over allegations on Easter Attacks

The United National Party (UNP), via a statement released yesterday (28), condemned the allegations levelled by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in regards to the Easter Sunday attacks while declaring the new Kelani Bridge named “Golden Gate Kalyani” open.

“The UNP would like to point out that neither the Presidential Commission of Inquiry report nor the Select Committee of Parliament report have stated that the former Prime Minister or any former Minister of the Cabinet was responsible for the attacks,” the UNP said.

Through the statement, the UNP said that the President is suggesting that persons not responsible for the Easter Sunday attacks, and against whom there are no judicial decisions to that effect, be deprived of their civic rights by legislation.

“This is contrary to the fundamental principles of democracy.”

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Mullaitivu Press Club condemns alleged assault

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Mullaitivu Press Club engaged in a wide range of protests yesterday (28), condemning the assault of an individual by the name of V. Vishwachandran Mullaitivum last Saturday (27), who they claim is a freelance independent journalist who was assaulted by three officers attached to the 59 Brigade of the Sri Lanka Army.

Video footage shows Vishwachandran claiming that he was merely taking a photo of the “Mullivaikal” road sign when he was assaulted using “barbed wire”.

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Fort to Badulla and Puttalam trains resume

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The Railway Department has taken steps to resume train services from Colombo Fort to Badulla and Puttalam which were suspended due to damages caused to the Puttalam and upcountry railway lines by inclement weather, according to the Sri Lanka Railway Station Masters’ Union (SLRSMU).

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Bread price up after wheat flour price hike

- Rs. 10 hike from today

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The All Ceylon Bakery Owners’ Association (ACBOA) has decided to increase the price of a loaf of bread by Rs. 10 with effect from today (29), after Serendib Flour Mills (Pvt.) Ltd. and Prima Ceylon (Pvt.) Ltd. increased the price of 1 kilogramme (kg) of wheat flour by Rs. 18.50.

Speaking at a media briefing yesterday (28), ACBOA President N.K. Jayawardena stated that the price of bread had to be increased reluctantly due to the increase in the prices of wheat flour and gas. However, he noted that the ACBOA



has not made a decision on the prices of other bakery products.

“The bakery owners will increase the prices of those products by a reasonable amount. We, as the ACBOA, have requested them to increase the prices of other bakery products at reasonable prices such as Rs. 5 or Rs. 10, so as not to inconvenience consumers,” he said.

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Car topples into Mahaweli River, killing one person

A car toppled into the Mahaweli River at Ilukamodera on the Kandy-Gurudeniya Road last Saturday (27) night, with reports indicating the car lost control, veered off the road, and toppled into the river at around 11 p.m.

Three persons were inside the vehicle at the time of the incident. Two of them, including the driver, managed to jump out of the car and were subsequently rescued. The backseat passenger was reported missing, while the car itself was not to be found, with search operations having continued throughout the night.

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Random PCR and RAT tests urged to detect Omicron

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The College of Medical Laboratory Science (CMLS) has called on the Ministry of Health to formulate a programme to conduct random polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and rapid antigen tests (RAT), taking into account the possibility of the Omicron SARS-CoV-2 variant (B.1.1.529) entering the country.

Speaking at a media briefing yesterday (28), CMLS President Ravi Kumudesh said that the number of random PCR and RAT tests conducted in the country...

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Six-year-old’s death takes Kinniya death toll to seven

- Passed away Saturday night at Trinco Hospital

The death toll from the capsizing of a passenger ferry in the Kuringankerni Lagoon in Kinniya has increased to seven after another child injured in the accident succumbed to injuries.

The Kinniya Police said that a six-year-old girl who was being treated at the Trincomalee

Hospital, after being injured in the ferry incident, had passed away Saturday night (27).

Earlier, six people, including four schoolchildren, were reported dead after a ferry capsized in the Kuringankerni Lagoon in Kinniya, Trincomalee on 23 November...

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PHOTO © LAKMAL K. BADUGE

India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives conduct joint maritime security exercise

A two-day trilateral maritime drill conducted by the coast guards of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives to bolster security in the Indian Ocean, enhance mutual operational capability, and exercise interoperability between these three countries culminated in the Maldives yesterday (28).

The 15th edition of the trilateral engagement

termed "Dosti" is conducted biennially, and 2021 marks 30 years since these maritime drills were first introduced, the Indian High Commission said.

However, it began primarily as a bilateral engagement, involving only Indian and the Maldivian Coast Guards. Sri Lanka joined in 2012 to make it a trilateral exercise.

"The two-day exercise under the aegis of Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) is a pioneering effort to collaborate efforts towards the Pillar of Maritime Security", the Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a statement.

The CSC Focused Operations are aimed at streamlining Standard Operating Procedures

(SOPs) and enhanced interoperability amongst the three navies.

The operation had a platform for co-ordinated maritime surveillance in the Exclusive Economic Zones for counter narcotics, search and rescue, air tracking, and establishing effective communication.

(PTI)



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Sajith...

He went on to state that former CAA Executive Director Thushan Gunawardena had alleged that the propane-to-butane ratio in gas cylinders had been changed to 50:50, while energy expert Nimal De Silva has said that by making the ratio 50:50, the pressure would change and lead to gas cylinder explosions.

Gunawardena told *The Morning* earlier this year that test samples from the 18-litre gas cylinder and 12.5 kg gas cylinder of both Litro Gas Lanka and Laugfs Gas have found that they contain a 50:50 composition of butane and propane.

"This is dangerous for domestic use and we are, therefore, concerned about the safety of the public. The usual composition is 80% of butane and 20% of propane. We have informed the relevant ministries regarding the matter," Gunawardena told *The Morning* at the time.

The 18-litre gas cylinder was then removed from market circulation by Litro Gas Lanka. Gunawardena, speaking to the media recently, has blamed the gas companies for the recent kitchen explosions.

Premadasa made these remarks responding to an explanation made by State Minister of Co-operative Services, Marketing Development, and Consumer Protection Lasantha Alagiyaawanna in Parliament earlier on Saturday.

The Morning's attempts to contact Alagiyaawanna yesterday (28) for further details on the reports mentioned by Premadasa, both via calls and text messages, proved futile.

Alagiyaawanna said prior to Premadasa's speech that a report on the recent incidents of reported gas explosions will be presented in Parliament today (29), following investigations by the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC).

Alagiyaawanna said: "Earlier this year, Litro Gas PLC introduced the 18-litre gas cylinder. The very next day, the CAA asked Litro Gas Lanka to remove the said cylinder from the market. At the time, Litro Gas said that by making the composition of the 18-litre cylinder 50% butane and 50% propane, the heating efficiency would increase. However, the University of Moratuwa said at the time that this is not possible. Thus, the cylinder was removed from the market."

"The gas cylinders which are in the market now have 30% propane and 70% butane, with 5% changes either way. We have directed samples of both Laugfs Gas PLC and Litro Gas to the CPC and to a private company to test the quality of them. I will receive a report on this and I will discuss it with all the relevant institutions first. By Monday (today), I will present a report to Parliament on this."

The State Minister further said that between 2015 and 2021, 23 incidents linked to gas cylinders were reported by Laugfs Gas.

"These were due to a number of reasons, including using low-quality equipment, lack of proper knowledge when handling equipment, not using the 'hose' attached to the cylinder properly, using the gas cylinder close to kerosene or wood-fired fireplaces, electric sparks, using the cylinder inside a pantry cupboard, and using a regulator which operates at a higher pressure than the hose," he said.

He went on to say that all equipment that is imported by Laugfs and Litro is of a quality standard.

"These kind of incidents happen to date. The Sri Lanka Standards Institute (SLSI) introduced a standard for the cylinder, gas, hose, regulator, and other equipment, alongside the CAA in 2012. Thus, all equipment that is imported by Laugfs and Litro is of a quality standard. The University of Moratuwa is also co-operating with a number of international partners to try and find solutions to the problems we are currently facing. We have also requested these two companies to raise awareness among the consumers about the safe usage of gas," said Alagiyaawanna.

He further claimed that none of these incidents were because the gas cylinders themselves exploded.

"In the recent incident at McDonald's (Raecourse), the gas cylinders were placed outside the restaurant and supplied gas to four restaurants. The fire occurred at McDonald's because they had forgotten to close the supply pipe inside the restaurant," he claimed.

During the past month, several explosions were reported at both industrial commercial

establishments as well as the domestic household level, including two restaurants in Weligama and Colombo 7 as well as a bakery in Ratnapura.

Speaking to *The Morning* last week, Litro Gas Lanka Chairman Theshara Jayasinghe assured that the composition of gas in the cylinders has not been changed in an unsafe manner, adding: "The composition is 30% propane and 70% butane. We are strictly in compliance with the Sri Lanka Standards Institute (SLSI)."

Meanwhile, Laugfs Gas Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Chaminda Ediriwickrama told *The Morning* that there is no relationship between the product composition and the incidents of the recent explosions.

Chemical...

However, Prof. Jayasinghe-Mudalige said that it is planned to register all fertiliser and agrochemical outlets islandwide and develop a methodology for selling fertiliser and agrochemicals in a prescription-based system.

"Currently there are only 1,073 fertiliser and agrochemical outlets registered, out of nearly 3,000 in the country, and we have no way of knowing what is going on in such outlets. Therefore, it is planned to register all these shops and set up a system to record everything sold in them. We hope to implement it in a very short time," he said.

Speaking further, he said that when importing chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals through the private sector, the relevant tests will be carried out in prescribed procedures, so that no party will be allowed to import substandard products.

A proposal to ban the use and importation of chemical fertiliser, pesticides, and herbicides/weedicides was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the same was granted approval, following which the relevant Gazette notification was issued on 6 May 2021.

However, throughout the past few months, farmers in several areas were seen charging that there is a serious shortage of fertiliser for their cultivations, while a number of protests have also been organised by farmers' organisations and various parties demanding the Government provide a solution to the fertiliser shortage.

Against this backdrop, the Government decided to revoke Extraordinary Gazette No. 2226/48 of 6 May 2021, which banned the importation of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals, and to thereby allow the private sector to import the same on 24 November. However, as of last night, the relevant Gazette was yet to be issued, and therefore the import ban is legally still in effect.

Foreign...

"This is why we may have to seek international intervention for justice," CPRP President Senaka Perera told *The Morning* yesterday (28).

He said that these incidents rise as a result of the Police having no regard for the rule of law, as transparency and accountability mechanisms have weakened following the rule of law.

"Following the introduction of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, the relationship between the President of the country and the Police has become a sort of 'employer-employee' one. The President is free to appoint an IGP, without any supervisory body looking into the matter," he stated.

Perera added that these incidents indicate "political commands in action" and raised concerns over what they mean to the safety of society.

Hewa Lunuwilage Lasantha, alias "Tinker Lasantha", was shot dead in a shootout on 25 Thursday which involved the Police, when he was taken to recover hidden weapons, according to the Police. This occurred following his arrest in Kalutara when Lasantha had allegedly attempted to open fire at the Police, following which the crossfire ensued.

"On the night of 25 November 2021, Sanjaya Ariyadasa, Attorney-at-Law contacted the President of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) to inform him that he has instructions that a client by the name of H.L. Lasantha, alias Tinkering Lasantha, had been apprehended by the officers of the Kalutara Divisional Criminal Investigation Bureau and that he has information that his client will be killed in custody by the Police under the pretext of it happening during a shoot-out whilst being taken to show weapons. Immediately, thereafter, the President of the BASL informed

this to the IGP C.D. Wickramaratne via email and text message. He further informed the Commissioner of the HRCSL in charge of Inquiries and Investigations as well as the Director Inquiries and Investigations of the Commission. As an additional measure, the President of the BASL also informed the Governor of the Northern Province Jeewan Thiyagarajah, who also heads the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) of this information. The HRCSL and Thiyagarajah confirm that they had contacted the authorities and informed them of the complaint and requested them to intervene to ensure the safety of the suspect," the BASL said about the incident on 26 November.

Last week, the Scotland Police announced that it would halt its training programmes with Sri Lanka due to concerns regarding human rights abuses happening in the country. Although there has been a long-standing relationship between the two police forces (since 2010), the Scotland Police said that it will not renew the contract once it expires in March 2022.

Meanwhile, Perera said that the mother of underworld figure "Podi Lassi", who is currently in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on a detention order, had met the CPRP last Saturday (27) and raised fears about threats to her son's life.

"Podi Lassi's detention order will end on 15 December. His mother is concerned about his life as well as there are rumours that a similar incident will occur once his detention order ends. Thus, his mother is hoping to go to the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about her suspicions soon," said Perera.

On 11 May 2021, underworld figure Mabaluge Dineth Melan Mabula, alias "Urujuwa", died in a shoot-out while in police custody. Two days later, on 13 May 2021, Dharmakeerthi Tharaka Perera Wijesekera, alias "Kosgoda Tharaka", also died in a shoot-out while in police custody. On both these occasions, Police Media Spokesman at the time Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Ajith Rohana told the media that incidents that had occurred while the suspects had been taken for special police operations had led to their deaths.

In a similar incident in October last year, underworld figure Samarasinghe Arachchige Madush Lakshitha, alias "Makandure Madush", was killed while in police custody. The Police at the time claimed that the victim was killed in crossfire between the Police and suspected gang members, as the latter group had attempted to release him from police custody.

Bread price...

"The two main wheat flour companies have increased the price of 1 kg of wheat flour by Rs. 18.50. Never in the history of Sri Lanka has there been such a huge increase in price. In this situation, the price of a loaf of bread should be at least Rs. 100. But with the customers in mind, we increased the price by only Rs. 10," he went on to say.

Claiming that there are about 7,000 bakeries in the country, he revealed that 5-10% of them have been closed down due to economic hardships faced by bakery owners. As a result, he said that a large number of people who depend on the bakery industry have lost their sources of income.

"Currently, the bakery industry is in a state of huge crisis. The main reason for this is the current shortage and price increase of wheat flour. When we ask the flour companies, they say that there are no US dollar reserves in the country to import wheat. Therefore, an immediate intervention is needed from the Government in this regard," he added.

Following repeated requests from companies, the Government last month decided to remove the control prices imposed on milk powder, liquified petroleum (LP) gas, wheat flour, and cement.

Wheat flour companies increased the price of 1 kg of wheat flour by Rs. 10 on 11 October 2021. Following the said companies' decision to increase the prices of wheat flour, the ACBOA on the same day announced that the price of a loaf of bread would be increased by Rs. 5. Accordingly, the price of a 450 g loaf of bread was increased by Rs. 5 last month.

Health...

"The daily living cost is steadily increasing and reports show that about Rs. 64,000 is needed for the survival of a four-person family. We only get Rs. 24,000 as a basic salary. How are we supposed to survive like this? We are demanding that the Government increase the salaries of all government sector workers by Rs. 10,000."

He said that the unions have been continuously raising these concerns with the

Health Ministry, which has repeatedly refused to enter into a dialogue with them.

"We will be forced to take strike action from 6 December if we do not receive a satisfactory response. The Ministry and the Government will be directly responsible for this."

Mullaitivu...

Pictures of Vishwachandran's hands show injuries and he had later been admitted to hospital for treatment.

Three army officers attached to the 59 Brigade of the Sri Lanka Army, who were allegedly involved in the said assault, were reportedly arrested by the Police yesterday and later released on bail. However, *The Morning's* attempts to contact Police Media Spokesperson Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Nihal Thaldudu regarding this proved futile.

"He was beaten with palmyrah fronds wrapped with barbed wire. He suffered serious injuries and was admitted to the Mullaitivu District Hospital for treatment. Journalists in Sri Lanka, especially those in the war-affected North and East, are subjected to serious challenges amidst severe threats to their lives and profession. Despite 44 Tamil journalists being abducted or subjected to forced disappearances or killed, none of the perpetrators have been brought to justice," the Mullaitivu Press Club said in a statement yesterday.

The assault had occurred on the day of "Maaveerar Naal", a commemorative day observed across the North and East as a mark of respect and remembrance of those who died during the civil war. Although reports show that several courts denied requests by the Sri Lanka Police to ban the planned commemorative events, many media outlets detailed the heavy military presence during the events last Saturday.

No decision...

First discovered in South Africa, the variant has now been detected in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Botswana, Israel, Australia, and Hong Kong.

He also said that it was important for people to follow the Covid-19-related health guidelines as it was not definite that this variant would not enter the country through such bans on foreign travellers.

"The spread of any variant can be controlled if people follow proper health guidelines such as wearing facemasks properly, maintaining social distance, and washing hands. In particular, so far, no variants have been found that can transcend health guidelines," he added.

The Omicron variant is said to have 50 gene mutations in total, with 32 of them found on the spike protein gene. A total of 10 of these changes occur within the receptor binding domain (RBD). The new variant was first detected in Botswana on 11 November 2021. So far, around 100 confirmed cases have been recorded in the Gauteng Province in South Africa (an area that encompasses both Pretoria and Johannesburg), and may account for around 90% of the new cases in this location. It is likely to have spread to other provinces in South Africa. There have been four cases in Botswana and one in Hong Kong, but it is likely that the new variant has spread more widely.

Accordingly, passengers with a travel history – including transit – to South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini (Swaziland) within the past 14 days were banned from entering Sri Lanka with effect from midnight on 28 November. In a communication, Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr. Asela Gunawardena noted that irrespective of the Covid-19 vaccination status, travellers aged 12 years and above, who arrived in Sri Lanka on 26 and 27 November from the aforesaid countries, would be referred to a PCR test upon arrival. Even if the PCR test turns out to be negative for the virus, such travellers will have to undergo 14-day mandatory quarantine.

Car...

However, the body of the person reported missing was recovered yesterday (28) with the victim being a 39-year-old resident of Maligathanna in Gurudeniya. The vehicle involved in the accident was also retrieved.

Ada Derana reported that the Sri Lanka Navy divers had recovered the body at around 3 p.m. yesterday after much effort and that the car was discovered a few feet away, submerged around 40 feet underwater.

Six-year...

...while 11 others sustained injuries and were admitted to the Kinniya Hospital. Following the incident, residents of the Kuringankerni

area attacked the house of Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Trincomalee District MP M.S. Thowfeek, severely damaging the house. Multiple attempts by *The Morning* to contact Thowfeek proved futile.

Kinniya Urban Council (UC) Chairman S.H.M. Naleem was arrested on 25 November in relation to the boat tragedy, although it is still unclear as to whether Naleem had given the letter of permission used by the boat owners to operate a ferry service.

Police Media Spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Nihal Thaldudu told *The Morning* last week that Naleem was arrested under the Penal Code. He confirmed that the boat that had toppled, leading to the accident, had had a letter of permission to operate a ferry service.

However, Naleem told *The Morning* last Wednesday (24) that he had only authorised an outboard service with an affixed, standard motor to fulfill the public's need, under several safety conditions.

The ferry owner and two operators were also arrested in relation to the incident on Wednesday.

UNP...

"This brings into conflict the judicial and legislative process. Therefore, this also violates Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. This statement is also a violation of the President's oath to uphold the Constitution," the UNP noted.

Fort to...

Train services between Colombo Fort and Badulla, which were suspended last August due to the Covid-19 pandemic, resumed on 8 November. However, due to landslides at various places on the upcountry railway line caused by the heavy rains, the Railway Department took steps to suspend the train services again.

Accordingly, the train services between Colombo Fort and Badulla are scheduled to resume from today (29) as the damages to the railway line have been repaired, said the SLRSMU General Secretary Kasun Chamara yesterday (28). He said that one train will run from Colombo Fort to Badulla at 5.55 a.m. and another from Badulla to Colombo Fort at 8.30 a.m.

Furthermore, Chamara said that the Colombo Fort to Puttalam trains which were suspended due to a section of the Puttalam railway line between Mundalama and Palavi having been washed away, have been resumed from yesterday (28).

However, all night mail trains except for the Colombo Fort to Galle night mail train are not yet in operation and the SLRSMU General Secretary said that they have made requests to the Railway Department to resume the same as soon as possible.

Random...

...should be increased and that the scientific data obtained through it should be made available to the public.

"Random tests should, in particular, be carried out in large crowded places such as schools, factories, and supermarkets across the country using a methodology such as mobile laboratories. Especially the public should be prepared for the situations that may arise in the future and random tests must be carried out to do so," he said.

Speaking further, Kumudesh claimed that the Omicron variant may have already entered the country due to the Health Ministry not having taken steps to carry out PCR and RAT tests in a systematic manner, especially for persons entering the country from other countries over the recent past.

"This variant may already have entered the country. If it has not, it may enter and see a gradual development in the future. However, if the Health Ministry continues with the current testing methodology, it will be able to identify this variant only after there is an uncontrollable spread of it," he alleged.

However, when inquired about this, the Health Ministry's Communication Director, Public Health Services Deputy Director General (DDG), and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head Dr. Hemantha Herath told *The Morning* that PCR and RAT samples are continuously being referred for gene sequencing to identify, if any, new Covid-19 variants.

"Gene sequencing is not something that started very recently. Especially when samples from foreign travellers are taken, they are being sent for gene sequencing," he added.

The Omicron variant is said to have 50 gene mutations in total, with 32 of them found on the spike protein gene. A total of 10 of these changes occur within the receptor binding domain (RBD). The new variant was first detected in South Africa on 11 November 2021 and has now been detected in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Botswana, Israel, Australia, and Hong Kong.

AT A GLANCE

ELLA-PASSARA ROAD CLOSED DUE TO LANDSLIDE

A landslide was reported yesterday (28) along the 16th milepost of the Ella-Passara road due to heavy rains, according to the Road Development Authority (RDA). The road had been closed due to a landslide warning, as there were rocks and mud falling onto the road. It is expected to be reopened after inspection by the National Building Research Institute and the RDA who will then decide whether or not the road is to be opened for the safe passage of vehicles.

18 TAMIL NADU FISHERMEN DETAINED IN SL SENT HOME

18 Tamil Nadu fishermen who were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy were sent home last Saturday (27).

Indian media reported that a total of 23 fishermen from the district were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy near Kodyakarai on 13 October for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and venturing into Sri Lankan waters.

They were kept under custody in Jaffna till 14 November, and were released on 15 November. However, when the Indian Consulate was preparing to bring them back to India, five of them tested positive for Covid-19.

TRAIN COLLIDES WITH VAN AT RAILWAY CROSSING

One person was hospitalised following an accident on the railway crossing at Kandegoda in Ambalangoda yesterday (28).

The "Ruhunu Kumari" train travelling from Matara to Colombo had collided with a van at the crossing, according to the Department of Railways.

Only the driver of the van had been travelling in the vehicle at the time, and had been admitted to hospital with injuries.

Several countries sound the alarm over Omicron

● Cases of new South African Covid-19 variant detected in at least 10 other nations

The new Omicron coronavirus variant kept spreading around the world yesterday (28), with 13 cases found in the Netherlands and two each in Denmark and Australia as at 7:30 p.m. Sri Lanka time, even as more countries tried to seal themselves off by imposing travel restrictions.

Dutch health authorities announced that the 13 cases of the variant were found among passengers who were on flights from South Africa that arrived in Amsterdam on Friday (26).

Authorities had tested all of the more than 600 passengers on those two flights and had found 61 coronavirus cases, going on to test those for the new variant.

"It is not unlikely more cases will appear in the Netherlands," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge told a news conference in Rotterdam. "This could possibly be the tip of the iceberg."

First discovered in South Africa, the variant has now been detected in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Botswana, Israel, Australia and Hong Kong.

The discovery of Omicron, dubbed a "variant of concern" last week by the World Health Organisation (WHO), has sparked worries around the world that it could resist vaccinations and prolong the nearly two-year Covid-19 pandemic.

Omicron is potentially more contagious than previous variants, although experts do not know yet if it will cause more or less severe

Covid-19 compared to other strains.

Denmark's infectious disease authority said on Sunday it has registered two cases of the variant in travelers from South Africa.

Health officials in Australia's most populous state, New South Wales, said two passengers who arrived in Sydney from southern Africa on Saturday (27) evening had tested positive for the variant.

Austria was investigating a suspected case on Sunday and in France Health Minister Olivier Veran said the variant was probably already circulating there.

Countries have imposed a wave of travel bans or curbs on southern Africa to try to stem the spread. Financial markets dived on Friday as investors worried that the variant could stall a global recovery. Oil prices tumbled by about \$10 a barrel.

On Sunday, most Gulf stock markets fell sharply in early trade, with the Saudi index suffering its biggest single-day fall in nearly two years.

Israeli measures

In the most far-reaching effort to keep the variant at

bay, Israel announced late on Saturday it would ban the entry of all foreigners and reintroduce counter-terrorism phone-tracking technology to contain the spread of the variant.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said the ban, pending government approval, would last 14 days. Officials hope that within that period there will be more information on how effective vaccines are against Omicron.

Many countries have imposed or are planning restrictions on travel from southern Africa. The South African government denounced this on Saturday as unfair and potentially harmful to its economy - saying it is being punished for its scientific ability to identify coronavirus variants early.

In Britain, where two linked cases of Omicron identified on Saturday were connected to travel to southern Africa, the government announced measures to try to contain the spread, including stricter testing rules for people arriving in the country and requiring mask wearing in some settings.

British health minister Sajid Javid said on Sunday he expected to receive advice imminently on whether the government can broaden a programme of providing

booster shots to fully vaccinated people, to try to weaken the impact of the variant.

The German state of Bavaria also announced two confirmed cases of the variant on Saturday. In Italy, the National Health Institute said a case of the new variant had been detected in Milan in a person coming from Mozambique.

Zhong Nanshan, a Chinese respiratory disease expert, said it could take some time to reach a conclusion on the harmfulness of the new variant, state television reported on Sunday.

Vaccine disparities

Although epidemiologists say travel curbs may be too late to stop Omicron from circulating, many countries - including the US, Brazil, Canada, European Union nations, Australia, Japan, South Korea and Thailand - have announced travel bans or restrictions on southern Africa.

More countries imposed such curbs on Sunday, including Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.

Mexico's deputy health secretary, Hugo Lopez Gatell, said travel restrictions are of little use in response to the new variant, calling measures taken by some countries "disproportionate".

"It has not been shown to be more

virulent or to evade the immune response induced by vaccines. They affect the economy and well-being of people," he said in a Twitter post on Saturday.

Omicron has emerged as many countries in Europe are already battling a surge in Covid-19 infections, with some reintroducing restrictions on social activity to try to stop the spread.

The new variant has also thrown a spotlight on huge disparities in vaccination rates around the globe. Even as many developed countries are giving third-dose boosters, less than 7% of people in low-income countries have received their first Covid-19 shot, according to medical and human rights groups.

Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI Vaccine Alliance that with the WHO co-leads the Covax initiative to push for equitable distribution of vaccines, said this was essential to ward off the emergence of more coronavirus variants.

"While we still need to know more about Omicron, we do know that as long as large portions of the world's population are unvaccinated, variants will continue to appear, and the pandemic will continue to be prolonged," he said in a statement to Reuters on Saturday.

(Reuters)



Dutch envoy hands 'Orange the World' banner to G.L. Peiris

To mark the annual "Orange the World: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" international campaign, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Colombo Tanja Gonggrijp handed over the "Orange the World" banner to Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris at the Foreign Ministry last Friday (26).

Accepting the banner, Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris reiterated Sri Lanka's commitment to combat gender-based violence and briefed on initiatives taken by the Government of Sri Lanka in this area. He recognised that prevention and addressing sexual violence is an integral part of achieving Sustainable Goal 5 on Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls.

PM awards professorial titles to Ob-Gyn doctors

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa conferred the title of "Clinical Professor" on 16 Obstetricians and Gynaecologists at the 54th Annual Congress of the Sri Lanka College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (SLCOG), held at BMICH on Friday (26).

Obstetricians and Gynecologists Prof. W.I. Amarasinghe, Dr. Erandi Samarakoon, Dr. M. Sadanandan, Dr. S.L.F. Akbar, Dr. S.K. Ranaraja, Dr. Sanath Lanroll, Dr. S.B. Ekanayake, Dr. Gauri Senthilnathan, Dr. S. Shivasumithran, Dr. Rani Seethambapillai, Dr. Dharshana de Silva, Dr. M.N. Geoffrey, Dr. T. Kotgajan, Dr. Krishan Silva, Dr. Nishendra Karunaratne, and Dr. H.A.N. Herath received the Certificate of Clinical Professor title



Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa awarding the titles at the SLCOG's 54th Annual Congress on Friday (26)

from the Prime Minister.

The Late Prof. D.A. Ranasinghe Memorial Lecture was delivered by Prof. S.H. Dodampahala at the invitation of SLCOG President Dr. P.H. Pradeep De Silva.

Minister of Health Keheliya

Rambukwella, Secretary to the Ministry of Health Dr. S.H. Munasinghe, Health Services Director General Dr. Asela Gunawardena, SLCOG Patron Prof. W.I. Amarasinghe, and other members of the SLCOG were also present at the occasion.

Johnston tells Catholic clergy not to fall for 'Opposition conspirators'



Highways Minister Johnston Fernando inaugurating the RDA's premix asphalt plant at Andigamawatte in Katugampola on Saturday (27)

Chief Government Whip and Highways Minister Johnston Fernando last Saturday (27) called on the members of Catholic clergy not to fall for tactics used by Opposition political parties.

Addressing a ceremony held at the launch of the Road Development Authority's (RDA) premix asphalt plant at Andigamawatte in Katugampola on Saturday, the Minister alleged that the Opposition's conspirators have infiltrated the Catholic Church.

"I call on all reverend fathers and other members of the clergy not to fall for the Opposition conspirators' tactics and thereby become their catspaws. We have seen that they capitalised on the summoning of Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini to the CID to spread hate against this Government. Rev. Cyril Gamini's visit to the CID was to record a statement. He made public statements and the CID wants an official record from him. That is in accordance with the existing laws of the country. Rev. Cyril Gamini made his statements on Easter Sunday incidents. The CID is the investigating body of the Easter Sunday terror attacks, so

it is natural they would record a statement from the Reverend father," he claimed.

Minister Fernando also extended his gratitude to the RDA's Chairman and staff members for commencing operations at the new premix asphalt plant.

"When I visited the premix asphalt plant at Ganepola in January this year, there were heaps of machinery to be auctioned as scrap iron. After inquiries I found that these could be repaired and put back to use. Some workers said they could repair them, and did so within a couple of months. They spent Rs. 28 million to build a premix asphalt plant worth Rs. 152 million. Today, we opened this new plant with equipment put back to use by our workers. This plant has the capacity to turn out 4,000 metric tonnes of premix asphalt per month. That means it could supply 48,000 metric tonnes of premix asphalt per year to our projects working to complete the road development project envisaged by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' manifesto," the Minister said.

S'pore to allow quarantine-free travel for six more countries, including SL

Travellers from Thailand, Cambodia, Fiji, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Turkey will be able to enter Singapore quarantine-free from the middle of next month, with the launch of six new vaccinated travel lanes (VTLs), the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) said.

This will take the total number of air VTLs announced so far to 27.

Pre-pandemic, these 27 countries contributed to about 60% of the total daily arrivals at Changi Airport, CAAS said.

The new travel lanes will further broaden Changi's network and help reclaim and rebuild Singapore's status as an international aviation hub with global connectivity, CAAS added.

Travellers from Thailand may enter Singapore under the VTL from 14 December. Applications for vaccinated travel passes under the travel lane will

open on 7 December at 10 a.m.

Travellers from Cambodia, Fiji, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Turkey may enter Singapore under the VTL from 16 December, and they can start to apply for travel passes from 10 a.m. on 9 December.

With the launch of the six new VTLs, the daily quota of travellers allowed to enter Singapore under the VTL scheme will also be raised from 10,000 to 15,000.

This quota is about a third of the total pre-Covid-19 flows from the 27 countries that have established VTLs with Singapore, Transport Minister S. Iswaran told reporters at a virtual briefing on Friday (26).

"This is a further calibrated expansion of the VTL scheme to reconnect Singapore with the world while managing the public health risk," he said.

Under the VTL scheme, fully vaccinated travellers from VTL countries may enter Singapore without quarantine and just need to undergo Covid-19 testing.

Children aged 12 years and below in the calendar year who are not vaccinated will be allowed to travel under the VTL into Singapore if they are accompanied by a VTL traveller who meets all VTL requirements.

Cambodia, Fiji, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Turkey are all in Category 2 of the Ministry of Health's Covid-19 risk classification for border measures, and have similar or lower Covid-19 infection rates than Singapore and the other VTL countries, CAAS said.

Thailand will be reclassified as Category 2 from 1 December.

Cambodia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand have already opened their

borders to quarantine-free general travel for vaccinated travellers.

Fully vaccinated travellers from Singapore have been able to travel to Thailand without quarantine since 1 November and to Cambodia since 15 November.

Turkey has also already opened its borders to quarantine-free vaccinated travel from Singapore. The extension of the VTL scheme to the country will enable Singapore to connect with another major aviation hub, CAAS added.

Meanwhile, Fiji will be reopening its borders to vaccinated travellers from Singapore and 39 other countries from 1 December.

From today (29), air VTLs with Kuala Lumpur, Indonesia, India, Sweden and Finland will also begin.

(The Straits Times)

Advertisement for islandpulse featuring a DJ and the text: "NEWEST TRACKS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE", "24/7 NONSTOP MUSIC TO KEEP YOU GROOVIN'", "islandpulse #LivingIt", "WWW.ISLANDPULSE.LK"

PHOTO © EARL JAYASURIYA/UNICEF



Protecting every child in Sri Lanka

BY ACHINI PAHALAWATTE

On 20 November every year, the world celebrates World Children's Day, which is the same day on which the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was established, leading the cause of ensuring the protection of every child everywhere. In July 1991, the Convention was ratified by Sri Lanka, committing to undertake "all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures" for the full realisation of the rights it contains. More than three decades into the establishment of the CRC, where are we, as a society, in protecting the rights of the child?

In the past, there was no standardised method of protecting children. They were raised in difficult and unsanitary living conditions and engaged in perilous labour alongside their adult caretakers. At the end of the First World War in 1918, the need for better mechanisms to protect children was raised. It was children and women who were the most affected by war, residing in an unsafe environment, being subjected to various precarious post-war complications such as the slave trade, the trafficking of children and the employment of children in dangerous labour such as mining. It was identified that children's needs were much in contrast to those of adults, and that there needed to be a different set of mechanisms to ensure the safety of children.

For this reason, in 1924, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations, making it the first international instrument acknowledging the rights of the child.

Three decades after the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, on 20 November 1989, the CRC was adopted by the UN General Assembly. This was a milestone by the international community in child protection, setting the minimum standards for protecting the rights of every child in all capacities.

Sri Lanka was one of the Member States to sign the CRC as soon as it was adopted, becoming a signatory on 26 January 1990. It was ratified by the Government on

12 July 1991 and following that the Government formulated the Children's Charter in 1992.

Within the three decades since the ratification of the CRC, the Government has made a few significant improvements with regard to child protection. Under the recommendation of a Presidential Task Force, the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) was established in 1998 under the Presidential Secretariat. The Ministry of Women's Affairs included Child Development into the Ministry's legislation in 2006, and in 2015, the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, which is the Government body responsible for implementing the CRC. The Department of Probation and Child Care Services was established in 1956 and has been functioning under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs since 2015. Sri Lanka also reports to the CRC Committee, explaining measures taken by the Government towards protecting the rights of the child every five years.

Currently, there are a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are committed to the protection of the rights of the child. The work of NGOs in this arena includes facilitating the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Convention. NGOs also contribute in monitoring and reporting of a country's implementation of the CRC along with their input to the Government when developing the report.

It has been more than three

decades since the implementation of the CRC and although there have been significant actions taken by the Government, not much could be said about the progress of the CRC, especially observing the current state of the rights of the child.

One of the major issues in the unsuccessful implementation of protecting children's rights is the separation of Government bodies that are responsible for the cause. There is the NCPA, the Department of Probation and Child Care Services and the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development coming under the Ministry of Women's and Child Development and also the Bureau for the Prevention of the Abuse of Children and Women affiliated to the Police, which were established for the cause of child protection. However, their function as independent bodies with no co-operation with one another, with different mandates and policies. The information on child abuse and exploitation collected by different bodies is often contradictory.

There is also the lack of understanding of what constitutes the rights of the child, which was observed in how statutory rape is reported by the Police as "women under the age of 16 years". The age of consent to sexual relationships under the Constitution is 16 years, however, as Sri Lanka has ratified the CRC, the Constitution recognises the minimum age of a child as 18 years. The fact that a governing body committed to protecting the rights of the child identified a female child aged 16 years as a woman questions the accountability of the Children and Women Bureau in this regard.

It is also questionable that the yearly reports of the NCPA and the Police on child abuse and exploitation are completely different from each other, and also that it includes one column as "Miscellaneous". Although it is a vague term to report crimes

against children, it is this column that reported the highest number of crimes. The number of cases reported under cybercrimes against children, incest and various other forms of abuse do not correspond to the number of these crimes being reported every day. For instance, while more than 18,000 material of child sexual abuse have been located from Sri Lankan sources, the number of cybercrimes against children as reported in 2020 is recorded as none.

There were also a number of incidents of incest against children reported in the local media, yet the NCPA reports of the year 2020 showed the recorded incidents as only two. There is a lack of sources for statistical information on child abuse and exploitation and if the only existing sources lack credibility as well, the efforts being put by the civil society organizations, NGOs and various stakeholders working on such would be of little use as incidents of violating child rights would continue to rise and continue to be under reported.

Sri Lanka's legal system is another one of the drawbacks in protecting the CRC. One of the major issues in the current legal system is the inconsistency in defining a child. The Age of Majority (Amendment) Act No. 17 of 1989 places the age of majority at 18 years as well as the Penal Code Amendments of the years 1995, 1998 and 2006, with offences under the Obscene Publications of a Child (Section 286A), Cruelty (Section 308A), Sexual Exploitation of Children (Section 360B), Trafficking (Section 360C), and Grave Sexual Abuse (Section 365B). However, the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (CYPO) No. 48 of 1939 defines a child as being under 14 years and a young person being between the ages 14 and 16 years.

The general Marriage Registration Ordinance places 18 years as the minimum age of marriage. In special laws related to marriage which differ for different communities, the minimum age of marriage may vary as well. As opposed to the minimum age of marriage, according to the Penal Code (Amendment) Act (PCA) No. 22 of 1995, the age of consent is 16 years. Therefore, consensual activity of children aged between 16 to 18 years is not considered statutory rape. It is deemed as statutory rape only if the involved persons, despite being consensual, are under the age of 16. Under Sections 75 and 76 of the Penal Code, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 12 years.

Sometimes, the best interests of the child may not be taken into account. Children are often pressured into education based competition due to the different levels of the school system, and their ambitions and desires are ignored or overridden by the desires of their parents or the schools. Not enough mechanisms are put in place with regard to child mental health issues, especially those of boy children due to the society's perception of the male child.

This often forces male children to suppress their emotions, which is also a reason behind the sexual abuse of boys remaining unreported, as boys will be shamed and ostracised for expressing the abuses they have been subjected to. The rights of the child are not being protected by the society itself, which perceives children as objects owned by parents and therefore children are obliged to fulfil their parental expectations. It is perceived in Sri Lankan society that adults are entitled to the ownership of their children.

That is not to say that the rights of the child are always ignored and violated. Many NGOs and civil society organisations have taken it as their sole responsibility to ensure that child rights are promoted and protected at all cost. The responsibility must be undertaken equally by everyone in the effort to ensure the protection of all the children.

(The writer is the Communications Officer at the Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere [PEACE]/End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism [ECPAT] Sri Lanka) The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.

The pernicious perversion of party policies for personality politics is the pervasive principle of political posterity. In Sri Lanka.

Last week, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his immediate predecessor, incumbent Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) coalition Government Parliamentarian and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Chairman Maithripala Sirisena, exchanged veiled threats on different platforms, albeit not directly at each other, but which nonetheless have the effect of boomeranging on the duo.

A troubled Rajapaksa, speaking at the opening of a bridge, citing past precedent, took the opportunity to remind his predecessor that the option of taking action against those in the Sirisena-led former Government – including specifically Sirisena, the then-Prime Minister who is a current Opposition MP, and the Cabinet of Ministers at the time, who have been clearly implicated, according to Rajapaksa, in the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry that probed into the corpus delicti of the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 21 April 2019, including due to their negligence of related responsibilities, which were deemed tantamount to the failure to prevent the said bombings despite ample prior forewarnings – through an Act of Parliament, is available, if expeditiousness of the ongoing judicial process into the matter and the revocation of the rights of those responsible, is required. He noted that if that was what was wanted, they were prepared to make good on such delivery as they had the power to do so, possessing a two-thirds majority.

Not one known to take the high road on such matters, speaking in the Parliament in response to various allegations leveled against him by a Minister, Sirisena reminded the ruling SLPP-led Government of which he is a part of, that the two-thirds Parliamentary majority it enjoys is entirely owing to the SLFP's Parliamentary group of 14 MPs led by him, and that to therefore be mindful of such when taking potshots at him and their group, as all post-Independence Governments had collapsed in part due to losing the support of key coalition partners due to intra-Government interecine conflicts along the eventual way of all such political flesh. Hence, Sirisena called on those to whom his statement was addressed to, to think deeply, in a complex fashion, intelligently, in an enlightened manner, and with erudition regarding the two-thirds majority that they so mightily speak of.

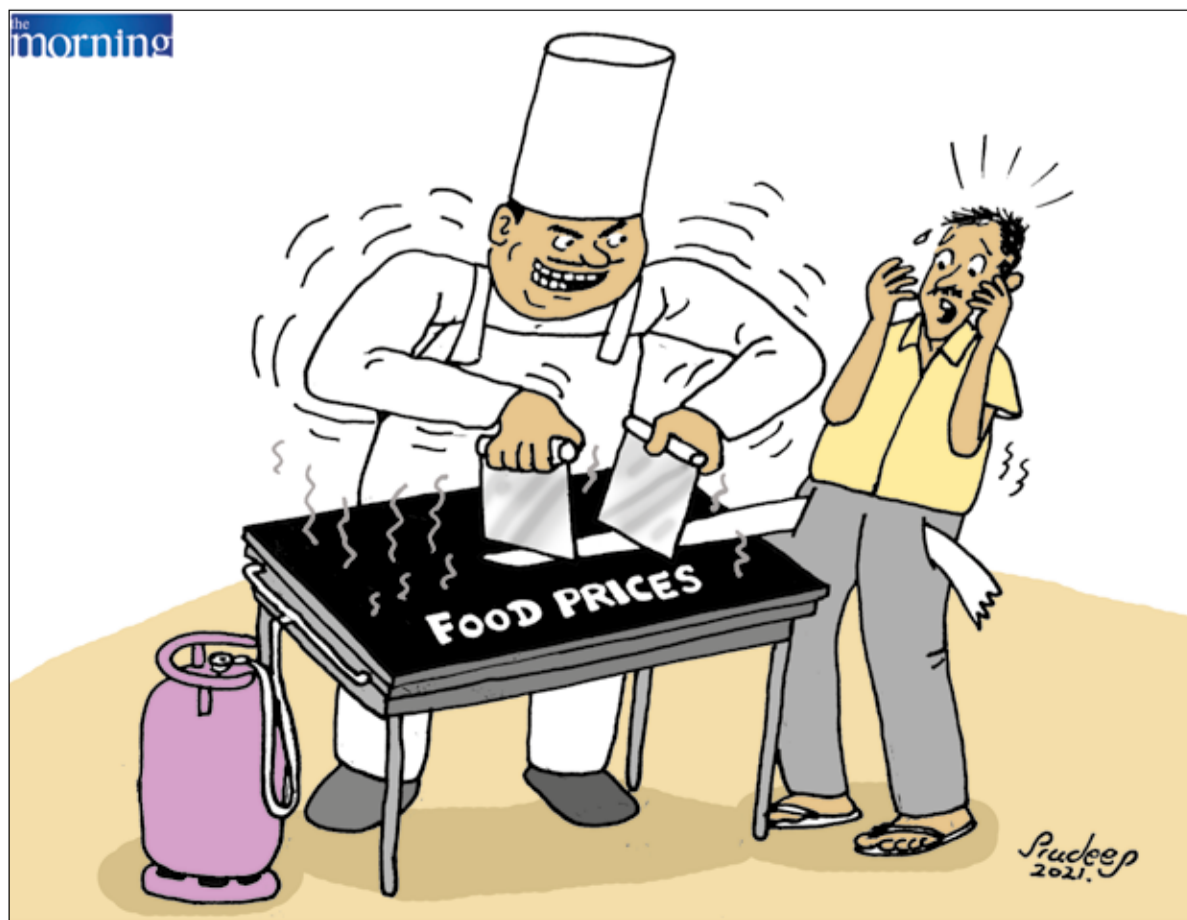
Another factor compounding Sirisena's "don't attack us who are also a part of the Government under the very same Leader (a reference to Rajapaksa) whose image Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage is attempting to shore up" situation is the fact that the Sirisena-led SLFP has, since Rajapaksa's ascendancy to power, for the most part, with only a few exceptions, been politically ostracised by the SLPP, both at the national and grassroots Local Government level, with Sirisena in particular being given the cold shoulder by being deliberately excluded from any position of power befitting an ex-President. Yet by the same token, as openly noted by Rajapaksa – whose words uttered on the day chose however to err on the side of the Government having faith and trust reposed in the judicial branch of Government when it came to the matter of taking action in connection with the Easter Sunday massacre and the Government thereby purportedly adopting a policy of non-interference in the judicial process – is the very fact that it is the incumbent administration that is providing a safe haven to Sirisena with regard to Easter culpability. "Therefore, be careful what you wish for," were Rajapaksa's very words.

Together, these words spoken and their meanings unsaid, assemble the exquisite corpse (the game) of that yet-to-be-composed requiem on the meting out of justice to the 260-odd Easter dead and the associated living dead.

Aside to the vainglorious braggadocio and fragile egos that belie such political chest-beating, and taking into note the fact that there are only very few post-Independence Governments that have been formed without colluding with other parties, one way or another, there is the question as to the basis on which parties, in particular political parties, with seemingly disparate, or for that matter exceedingly consonant, policies and ideological persuasions, align themselves, to achieve homogeneity. There are obvious answers. They range from simple necessity in order to establish political power and a corresponding need to ensure political survival and gain – which is incidentally also synonymous with personal survival and gain – to a loftier, yet most often than not, ultimately misguided, attempt to work together towards a shared common agenda or set of objectives. There is also another equally obvious answer that has an almost Arendtian ring of the banality to it – that is the ready sacrifice of any political policies and political principles held by individual political parties (and which form their political identity), untethered as they are from any notions of policies based on values and the principle of integrity, in the face of changing political climes and fortunes, at the altar of democracy.

If democracy, among its mélange of shape shifting iterations, is also a form of governance, is the form of governance a version of democracy? If this is the case, the bedrock of all that is allegedly democratic in terms of the representative democracy aspect of things, rests on the nadir of a participacy – denoting a de facto machine of Government, monopolising power through forming, as present and past regimes have shown, multi-party strategic alliances, which when rent from uncompromising ideological or other differences, translates into the ultimate Mad Hatter's Tea Party. In that sense, Sri Lanka has essentially been in the grips of a mono-party State, where every party claiming to represent the people has had less affinity with the public interest and some affinity to each others' interest. To paraphrase former UK Premier Henry John Temple in an address to the House of Commons, there are "no eternal allies", "no perpetual enemies", only "eternal and perpetual" "interests", the pursuit of which "is our duty". It just so happens that much to the nation's chagrin, these "interests" of political parties and their leaders and those vying for the same, are rarely in the public's best "interests". The operative rule of thumb should therefore be, as noted by American political sociologist L.J. Diamond: "In a democracy, one group does not always win everything it wants. Different combinations of groups win on different issues. Over time, everyone wins something."

The pernicious perversion of party policies for personality politics is the pervasive principle of political posterity. This however should never be the case. Instead, let us offer its inverse as a model or perhaps, tool – the conspicuous conversion of personality politics within and into the confines of party policies is the perspicacious principle of political prosperity. Simply put, the more a political party is internally aligned in terms of the bond forged together between the polarities of personalities and the intricacies of policies and vice versa, and their confluence with the shared values of common denomination and the principia of ethica, the more it is aligned with its purpose itself, and thus less prone to lose its essence should any politics-based requirement of transference or transmutation of a political kind, including the formation of political alliances such as coalition Governments, occur. Of course, it is wishful thinking on the part of those susceptible to political abstraction and the desiderata of pragmatic theorising that these policies of political parties have a basis in democratic values and that their implementation is in keeping with the principle of integrity. This, however, should be the case.



Allowing predators in the playground

● Gaps in Sri Lanka's legal system that leave children vulnerable to abuse

BY SUMUDU CHAMARA

Even though child sexual exploitation and abuse is considered a grave crime in Sri Lanka, society and various institutions have shown great ignorance towards it, and in some cases, even insensitiveness, when it comes to such abuses faced by boys and young men. To make matters worse, the legal system does not adequately identify such cases. This situation stems mainly from social and cultural norms that teach that boys/men are strong and invulnerable, and are therefore less likely to be victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.



PHOTO © AMANTHA PERERA/IPS

Changing the status quo is necessary and urgent, and it requires a number of law and policy reforms as well as awareness raising and attitudinal changes at various levels of society.

The nature of this issue was discussed in a report titled "Sexual Exploitation of Boys (Sri Lanka Report)", which was issued this month by international child rights group ECPAT International and Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere (PEACE), or ECPAT Sri Lanka. The report analysed the findings of a survey which involved discussing with frontline social support workers who have provided assistance to children, especially boys, who have experienced sexual exploitation or abuse, and also Sri Lanka's legal framework that protects children from sexual exploitation with a focus on boys.

The problem

For the survey, a total of 54 support workers from 21 different cities or municipalities, with more than 35% from Colombo, joined as respondents. They had responded that overall, 57% of the cases they handle were related to boys, which the report said may indicate a bias because some of the organisations the respondents were attached to were providing services with a focus on boys.

According to the respondents, an estimated number of 37% of the boys they had provided assistance to had experienced sexual exploitation, and 78% such boys had been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse between 11 and 18 years of age while as many as 10% of these cases involved boys who were abused before they turned five. They had further motioned that 47% of the girls they have supported had experienced sexual exploitation.

The average percentages of girls and boys who had experienced sexual exploitation at different age groups were notably close – 10% of boys and girls were in the 0-5 age group; 23% of boys and 21% of girls were in the 6-10 age group; 46% of boys and 45% of girls were in the 11-15 age group; and 33% of boys and 36% of girls were in the 16-17 age group.

The respondents had estimated that 62% of these cases involved a male offender while 38% of cases involved female offenders, and that two-thirds of offenders were Sri Lankans and the rest were foreigners.

In regard to the most common relationship between boys and the perpetrator/s, the report identified five categories, i.e. adult relatives, relatives within the community, parents or step-parents, person in authority, and family friend, with relatives recording the highest percentage (41%). In the case of girls also, adult relatives were among the most common perpetrators (39% of the cases).

The report had further stated that the participants were also provided with the option to describe any work they had done with other genders or non-binary young people. Among other responses, one response had described a common challenge faced by such children, which said: "I find that children who identify as non-binary or even lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) have a greater fear of reporting incidents of abuse since they are terrified of being

victim-blamed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity."

Based on the responses, the survey said that more than a third (38%) of the respondents had direct experience with boys who had been groomed for sexual purposes, 17% had direct experience with boys who had been involved in self-generated sexual content, 19% had worked directly with boys who had been subjected to child sexual exportation and abuse, 29% had direct experience with boys who had been trafficked for sexual purposes, and six support workers had direct experience with boys who had been exploited through live-streaming sexual exploitation. With regard to the issues boys and girls presented with when seeking help, the respondents had indicated that a significant portion of both groups had described trauma or other effects of abuse, while some notable thematic differences had been observed between girls and boys.

"For instance, boys seem to be more likely to be referred for behavioural issues, while girls appear somewhat more likely to be referred specifically for sexual abuse or exploitation," the report said.

In response to the question/s focusing on the challenges the respondents had observed in establishing whether a child may be experiencing sexual exploitation, the respondents had described a range of communication issues, including struggles with building trust and rapport, as well as a range of contextual factors which complicate identification, such as economic or emotional attachment to an abuser or exploiter.

Describing the findings further, the report said: "Qualitative differences emerge, however, when looking at the specific issues raised with boys and with girls. For instance, contextual factors raised with girls tended to focus on recognition by respondents of conflicting feelings or emotional dependencies on the exploiter, leading to the hiding of details of the abuse or exploitation to protect the offender. In these instances, support workers tended to recognise vulnerability and focused on threats or other fears facing girls which prevent them from disclosing. In contrast, contextual factors raised with boys tended to highlight the boy's agency and willingness to earn money from offenders."

Highlighting the assumption of resilience, strength, and agency on the part of boys (and absence of what may be considered obvious signs of vulnerability), the report quoted one respondent as saying: "...boy's sexual relationships are not an issue in our society. So boys (being victimised) also does not seem (to be) an issue. They are telling us they (were) given food and (have) fulfilled their basic needs."

The report also noted that peer-related issues seemed to factor much more significantly into victim identification challenges with boys in comparison with girls, and in this regard, one respondent had stated that sometimes, there is a confusion among male victims about consent – they tend to confuse it with peer pressure.

Constraints and causes

With regard to the question/s as to why social support services for boys tend to suffer from quality constraints, the social workers (respondents) had noted a community, family, and support context in which the sexual exploitation of boys is seen, but largely appears to be dismissed in support responses and undervalued as a child protection issue.

They had pointed out four main concerns in this regard: (i) Lack of resources available for boys (one respondent had stated: "No such formal

service [for boys] has been installed."); (ii) sexual exploitation of boys not being considered important (one respondent had said: "It is not considered a problem and the focus is only on the females."); Another had said: "The importance of [boys has not been] brought to light; [there is] a lack of data."); (iii) the existence of a gender focus which excludes consideration for boys (one respondent had said: "Because most of the welfare services often focus on girls, so many who work in this field are not even aware of the kinds of abuse faced by male children."); and (iv) lack of general awareness of boys as victims.

According to the survey, extreme poverty, alcohol, or drug abuse in the family; being left behind by parents or guardian (migrating for employment); dropping out of school; and violence within family were among the top five social and economic factors that make boys vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.

In addition, the top five barriers to disclosing child sexual exploitation and abuse, which the survey results indicated, were talking about sex and sexuality being considered a taboo, stigma and shame the victims often experience, negative attitudes to/fears/difficulties pertaining to asking for help and support, fears about how others will respond to disclosure, and beliefs related to masculinity.

Social, cultural norms

Discussing how the social and cultural norms affect cases of sexual exploitation of boys being reported, the report noted that the culture of stigma and stigmatisation towards survivors – in this case, boys and young men – is one of the major reasons that hinder families (of survivors) from taking action. It said that in Sri Lanka, protecting family honour and social respectability are considered very important, and gender norms relating to masculinity, where boys are supposed to be stoic, brave, and able to deal with their own problems, are also common.

In other situations, the sexual exploitation of boys may be ignored, and families may be reluctant to report because of shame, lack of willingness to engage in the criminal justice process, or pressure from others to ignore the offence, including influential people ("Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia: A Review of Research Findings, Legislation, Policy, and Programme Responses" by J. Fredrick).

"The influence of gender norms around masculinity and femininity are important to consider in understanding child sexual exploitation and abuse, and we can observe that what is attributed to one gender is often denied to others. These norms typically hold that males are strong and invulnerable, less likely to be victimised and seriously affected, and more resilient – while females are considered vulnerable, more often abused, more significantly affected, and in need of support. Such beliefs often hamper equitable and necessary discourse on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders, but especially for boys where the development of policies, practices, advocacy, and research methodologies about the sexual exploitation of children regularly underrepresents or even completely excludes boys," the report stressed.

Quoting several international and local reports discussing sexual exploitation of boys and young men, the report said that male relatives and those in positions of authority are commonly named as perpetrators, and that sexual abuse takes place at children's homes, religious establishments, and schools, among other places. It also noted that a number of researches and also the Government of Sri Lanka have identified that sexual exploitation of children, including boys, is

prevalent in the tourism industry, and that some researches have also suggested that a characteristic of child sexual exploitation in Sri Lanka is that organised crime groups target boys more than girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Among the perpetrators are both men and women, according to researchers.

"While these circumstances are sometimes portrayed in terms of the boys actively initiating relationships with tourists ('Exploring the Relationship between Beach Boys and Tourists using Host-Guest Theory: The Case of Bentota, Sri Lanka' by W. Amarantunga), this is a misdirection, as children are never responsible and cannot 'give permission' to be exploited by adults. In addition, pressure brought on by poverty or even exerted by facilitators coerces boys into such survival sex. It is important to note that regardless of a child's (perceived) active engagement, when the parties involved include adults obtaining sex from children, this is clearly child sexual exploitation ('Summary Paper on the Exploitation of Children in Prostitution' by EXPACT International)," the report described.

Gendered legal provisions

Analysing the legal framework, the report noted that in order to establish a proper legal framework to address issues, especially sexual exploitation and abuse faced by children, it is vitally important that the national legislation adopts a uniform legal definition of the term "child" to be consistently used across different laws, in line with international standards, since the existing laws have a lack of inconsistency.

The report described: "One cause of significant concern is the statutory rape law in Sri Lanka. Section 363(e) of the Penal Code of Sri Lanka, which criminalises statutory rape and thereby establishes the age of sexual consent, only protects girls. It fails to recognise that boys can be victims of rape and that women can commit rape. This section uses a gendered definition of rape stating that a 'man' is liable for rape if he has sexual intercourse with a 'woman' below the age of 16 years, with or without her consent, unless the woman is his wife, over 12 years of age, and not judicially separated from him. As per the Explanation (i) attached to Section 363, evidence of penetration is needed to prove that rape has taken place. Therefore, only penetrative sexual intercourse committed by men against girls below 16 years is currently criminalised.

"Further, the law does not provide for any close-in-age exemption which would prevent same-aged peers from being prosecuted for willing sexual interactions. Section 364 allows for a reduced penalty of less than 10 years (of) imprisonment for a boy below the age of 18 who commits rape of a girl under 16 years, if the intercourse was engaged in willingly, which oddly acknowledges the circumstances may exist for peer-aged sexual interactions, but retains a severe punishment."

The report said that as a result of the above-mentioned legal situation, the law discriminates against boys by not only denying them protection against rape, but also by potentially treating them as offenders even in the case of consensual sexual acts. It also explained that the current substantive laws on rape in Sri Lanka use gendered pronouns to define sexual offences, potentially rendering male victims (including children) invisible.

"The use of gendered pronouns can also be found under other legal provisions relevant for sexual exploitation of children, such as Section 360A of the Penal Code and Section 72 of the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, which (only) refer to the

procurement of girls for prostitution," it said, adding that currently, the offences relating to sexual intercourse with boys below the age of 18 could fall under Section 365, Section 365A, or 365B of the Penal Code, which criminalise "unnatural offences, gross indecency, and grave sexual abuse", respectively.

According to "Legacies and Lessons: Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Sri Lanka and Bosnia and Herzegovina" by UCLA/All Survivors Project, legal discrimination against boys seems to translate into procedural discrimination, resulting in a lack of medical support, counselling, and other support services for boy victims of sexual offences.

With regard to legal and policy changes, the report added: "Within relevant policy documentation, the inclusion of boys (and men) is often conspicuously absent. For instance, in a reference guide for (the) Police, designed to help them investigate and prevent sexual and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka, (produced by the United Nations [UN] and the Sri Lankan Police in 2014), no reference to men and boys as potential victims of sexual violence is included (according to 'Unsilenced: Male Survivors Speak of Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka' by H. Touquet)."

However, Sri Lanka has ratified several instruments that apply to child exploitation, including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (ratified in 1991); Optional Protocol (to the CRC) on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC) (ratified in 2006); the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (ratified in 2001); and UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (ratified in 2015).

It observed that gendered legal provisions and cultural attitudes towards family honour, masculinity, and sexuality, therefore, allow offenders to continue to act with impunity and ensure that boys who experience sexual exploitation and abuse will continue to suffer in silence.

Sexual exploitation of boys largely dismissed in support responses and undervalued as a child protection issue

Changes

The report presented a number of recommendations, including providing children with sex education, reflecting on norms and assumptions related to gender with a focus on the fact that boys too can be victims, addressing discomfort around the discussion on sex and sexuality, and strengthening communication/relationship with boys.

In addition, for lawmakers, the report recommended ratifying the UNCRC Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure; revising and standardising the definition of a child within all Sri Lankan legislation and related policy documentation to include all under the age of 18 years; setting minimum age of marriage and age of sexual consent (which is currently at 16 years of age) as 18 years of age; revising current legislation terminology and guidance, including removing gendered pronouns to be inclusive in terms of gender, to ensure that all victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse are recognised; and clarifying the confusion arising out of the existence of the "with/without consent" clauses in the national legislation related to rape, and provide clear guidance for law enforcement.

As the survey suggested, even though the country's legal system contains provisions to address incidents of sexual exploitation or abuse, such laws focusing predominantly on girls/women is one of the major issues which could also affect the incidence of such abuses as offenders get to enjoy a certain impunity. Therefore, legal reforms are a matter that has a significant impact on serving justice.

Even though such reforms may take a long time, society has the ability to expand the ongoing discourses on boys and young men facing sexual exploitation or abuse. A simple acknowledgement that a person of any gender (or sexuality) can be a victim or an abuser can make a huge difference.

Gendered legal provisions, social norms, stigma hinder boy victims of sexual exploitation/abuse from seeking/getting justice

Intimate partner violence prevalent across urban, rural, estate sectors: Local study

• Plantation sector females found to be most affected • Physical and psychological abuse needs to be treated equally, note researchers



BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is an important public health issue across the urban, rural and estate sectors, especially in the latter case concerning estate sector females where the prevalence is high, which should be addressed through specifically designed and targeted socio-communal level interventions including service provision to the victims which pays equal attention to both the physical and psychological aspects of the abuse.

These suggestions were made in an original research article on the "Prevalence of IPV across urban, rural and estate sectors: A preliminary study" authored by H.P. Reyal and D. Guruge (attached to the Rajarata University's Applied Sciences Faculty's Health Promotion Department) and M.N. Perera (attached to the Kelaniya University's Medical Faculty's Public Health Department) and published in the *Journal of the College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka* 27 (2) in September 2021.

IPV includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and controlling behaviours.

As found by studies (V. Jayasuriya, K. Wijewardena and P. Axemo's "IPV against women in the Capital Province of Sri Lanka: Prevalence, risk factors, and help seeking" and M.M. Muzrif, D. Perera, K. Wijewardena, B. Schei and K. Swahnberg's "Domestic violence: A cross sectional study among pregnant women in different regions of Sri Lanka"), there are negative consequences on the well-being of Sri Lankan women due to issues pertaining to IPV.

While the reported lifetime prevalence of IPV in Sri Lanka varies between 18.3-72%, studies (Jayasuriya et al., L. Senanayake, J. Navaratnasingam and L. Moonesinghe's "Domestic violence",

J. Perera, N. Gunawardane and V. Jayasuriya's "Review of research evidence on gender-based violence in Sri Lanka", A. Jayatilleke, K.C. Poudel, K. Sakisaka, J. Yasuoka, A.U. Jayatilleke and M. Jimba's "Wives attitudes toward gender roles and their experience of IPV by husbands in the Central Province" and S. Guruge, V. Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, N. Gunawardana and J. Perera's "IPV in Sri Lanka: A scoping review") reported fluctuations between 25-35%. Muzrif et al. who focused on the urban, rural and estate sectors in Sri Lanka, reported that both ever abused (persons who have been abused at least once in their lives - 393/50.8%) and currently being abused (200/25.8%) were significantly higher among females living in the tea plantation sector. Jayasuriya et al. who focused on different and diverse sectors in the Western Province found a high lifetime prevalence of physical violence (251/34%).

IPV, per studies (E.G. Krug, L.L. Dahlberg, J.A. Mercy, A.B. Zwi and R. Lozano's "World report on violence and health", J.C. Campbell and L.A. Lewandowski's "Mental and physical health effects of IPV on women and children" and the World Health Organisation's "Understanding and addressing violence against women: IPV"), results in an increased burden on females in terms of health problems with physical, sexual, psychological and behavioural outcomes, occurring through direct and indirect pathways in women while children who witness IPV have a high risk of developing psychological and behavioural problems with both short and long term consequences. As pointed out by Krug et al., IPV also has an impact on the economy due to the loss of productivity and associated healthcare-related costs.

As far as the Sri Lankan population is concerned, the urban sector constitutes areas administered by the Municipal and Urban Councils and according to

the Census and Statistics Department's (DCS) Population and Housing Census of 2012, a population of 3,705,418/18.2%, while the estate sector comprises all plantations with a land area extent of 20 or more acres and with 10 or more resident labourers and a population of 895,816/4.4%, and the rural sector has a population of 15,758,206/77.4%. Muzrif et al., Perera et al., and Guruge et al., have identified varying prevalence of IPV between and within different settings.

Hence, Reyal et al. conducted a cross sectional survey in the Nawalapitiya (located in the Central Province) Medical Officer of Health area which has a population of 59,917 and in it a satisfactory representation of the ethnic communities with females in the urban (23,874/33.9%), rural (26,983/38.3%) and estate (19,652/27.9%) sectors. The study population consisted of ever married (persons who have been married at least once in their lives) females between the ages of 15 and 49 years.

A multi-stage cluster sampling method (random and systematic sampling) was used to recruit females matching the inclusion criteria. The primary sampling units were the 10 public health midwife (PHM) areas selected by simple random sampling using computer generated random numbers. During the second stage, 35 villages were selected and the number of clusters from a PHM area was calculated using probability proportional to size comprising 14 urban clusters, 11 rural clusters and 10 estate clusters. In the final stage, 20 participants from the eligible couple registry of the selected cluster, fulfilling the eligibility criteria, were randomly selected using the lottery method. The study utilised an interviewer-administered questionnaire on the knowledge, attitudes, practices, determinants, and the prevalence (this section dealt with socio-demographic information, physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, controlling behaviours, and the impact of physical abuse) of IPV.

In terms of data analysis, the abuse experienced by the participants (prevalence during the lifetime and over the past 12 months) were categorised into physical, psychological and sexual acts and controlling behaviours and were defined, with physical violence taking the form of slapping, pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, choking, burning, and the use, or the threat of the use of a weapon such as a gun, knife or object, psychological abuse taking the form of being threatened, being insulted, being belittled or humiliated, and being scared or intimidated, sexual abuse taking the form of forceful sexual intercourse, engaging in sexual activities because of fear, and degrading or humiliating sexual behaviour, and generally controlling behaviour taking the form of a range of behaviours that reflects control by the partner. If a participant had experienced any of these abusive acts, she was recognised as an abused female despite

the type of act, the frequency of the act, or the severity of the impact.

Respondents from urban, rural and estate sectors significantly differed in all socio-demographic characteristics except marital status. Further, the study sample varied in age, educational level, employment status and household income level.

Among all the participants, the prevalence of any abuse was 357/59.5% and the prevalence for the past year was 248/41.3%. The lifetime prevalence of physical abuse was 237/39.5% and for psychological abuse it was 234/39%, both of which were high in the study population. The highest prevalence for the past 12 months was recorded for psychological abuse (158/26.3%) followed by physical abuse (89/14.8%). In the estate sector, the prevalence of lifetime abuse and the same for the past year was considerably high compared to the urban and rural sectors which reported similar prevalence rates. With regard to estate sector females, 143/79.4% have experienced some type of abuse during their lifetime.

Among all three sectors, they reported the highest level of physical abuse (110/61.1%), psychological abuse (99/55%), sexual abuse (29/16.1%) and controlling behaviours (62/34.4%). Among the women who were physically abused, 55/23.2% reported physical injuries. Among the injured, 25/45.5% have experienced injuries during the past year. Injuries were the highest in the estate sector (15/55.6%) and lowest in the rural sector (four/44.4%). The lifetime prevalence of any abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse varied significantly between the sectors. Discussing the results, it was noted that the finding that among all women, approximately three out of five married women have experienced IPV during their lifetime, is high compared to other recent studies (Jayasuriya et al., and A.C. Jayatilleke, K.C. Poudel, J. Yasuoka, A.U. Jayatilleke and M. Jimba's "IPV in Sri Lanka") which indicated two out of five married women.

During their lifetime and over the course of the past year, estate sector females suffered more violence in all forms compared to their urban and rural counterparts. Urban females experienced more physical abuse and controlling behaviour while rural females experienced more psychological and sexual abuse. Perera et al. have identified that IPV is higher in the urban sector compared to the rural sector. The present study also reports a comparatively low prevalence in the rural sector.

The identified IPV prevalence of physical abuse in the estate sector (110/61.1%) is comparatively higher and approximately double than the reported national prevalence between 25-35% (Jayasuriya et al., and Jayatilleke et al.'s study on "Wives experience of IPV by husbands"). However, the physical violence reported by urban (78/32.5%) and rural (49/27.2%) sectors approximately aligned with the reported national

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
- **Sri Lanka Police Child and Women Bureau:** 011 244 4444
- **Courage Compassion Commitment (CCC) Foundation:** 1333
- **Women In Need (WIN) 24-hour hotline:** 077 567 6555
- **Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs helpline:** 1938

prevalence and prevalence identified in the Western Province (251/34%) by Jayasuriya et al. and Guruge et al.

In this study, lifetime physical and psychological abuse was similarly high. Yet, the prevalence of psychological abuse over the past year was high compared to physical abuse. This was common in all three sectors. The lifetime prevalence of psychological abuse of 234/39% was considerably high compared to the Western Province (140/19.3%), the latter per Jayasuriya et al. That said, Perera et al. emphasised that the aspect of psychological abuse has received less attention in Sri Lanka.

As the least reported form of IPV, sexual abuse ranged between 5-18% in Sri Lanka, according to Perera et al. Similarly, this study identified a prevalence of sexual violence of between 7.5-16.1%. The risk of sexual abuse may not be statistically significant due to the low number of events reported, noted Reyal et al.

Controlling behaviour reported by this study (188/31.3%) is similarly reported by Jayasuriya et al. (218/30.1%). A total of 55 women reporting injuries due to physical violence, indicates that approximately one out of 10 women has a risk of being injured due to IPV.

This study also coincides with Perera et al. in indicating the high prevalence of IPV in the estate sector. As per the DCS, the most economically active females of the country who are living in the estate sector, suffer with the comparatively highest level of difficulty when it comes to their personal relationships. C. Lanier and M.O. Maume ventured in their study on "IPV and social isolation across the rural/urban divide" that the difficulty in accessing service providers combined with their social and geographic isolation may be the reasons for this high rate. Hence, both Perera et al., and Lanier and Maume noted that the amplified prevalence in the estate sector requires service provision and the recognising of stakeholders involved in IPV prevention.

Don't let guard down, WHO tells Southeast Asia

• Urges increased surveillance to curb threat of the new Omicron variant of Covid-19

In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases elsewhere globally and detection of a new variant of concern (VOC) Omicron, the World Health Organisation appealed to countries in the Southeast Asia region to scale up surveillance, strengthen public health and social measures, and enhance vaccination coverage.

"Though Covid-19 cases have been declining in most countries of our region, the surge in cases elsewhere in the world and confirmation of a new VOC, is a reminder of the persisting risk and the need for us to continue to do our best to protect against the virus and prevent its spread. At no cost should we let our guards down," said WHO Southeast Asia Regional Director Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh.

Countries must enhance

surveillance and sequencing. They should assess the risk of importation through international travel based on updated information on circulating variants and response capacities, and take measures accordingly, the WHO noted.

"Comprehensive and tailored public health and social measures to prevent transmission must continue. The earlier the protective measures are implemented, the less restrictive they would need to be in order to be effective. The more Covid-19 circulates, the more opportunities the virus will have to change and mutate, and the pandemic will last longer," the Regional Director said.

The WHO highlighted that the most important thing people must do is reduce their risk of

exposure to the virus - wear a mask and wear it properly covering nose and mouth, maintain social distance, avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces, keep hands clean, cover the mouth and nose when coughing/sneezing, and get vaccinated.

"As of today 31% of the region's population is fully vaccinated, 21% is partially vaccinated, while nearly 48%, or about a billion people are yet to receive even a single dose of the Covid-19 vaccine," she said, adding that they continue to be at risk of contracting severe disease due to the virus and spreading it further.

Even after getting vaccinated, people are urged to continue to take precautions to prevent becoming infected

and to infect someone else who may get severely affected by the virus.

The WHO's Technical Advisory Group on Virus Evolution designated B.1.1.529 as a VOC and named it Omicron. Researchers are working to understand how transmissible or virulent this variant is, and how it will impact diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines.

"We must not forget that the pandemic is far from over. As societies open up, we should not get complacent. Festivities and celebrations must include all precautionary measures. Crowds and large gatherings must be avoided. The current situation warrants further stepping up efforts on all fronts," the Regional Director said.

(WHO)



What do we know so far about the Omicron variant?



Sri Lankan authorities have banned the arrival of travellers who have been to six countries in the African continent in a bid to prevent the spread of the new Omicron variant of Covid-19

PHOTO © AJITH PERERA/XINHUA

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) has affected more than 250 million individuals worldwide and caused over 5 million deaths. Until three days ago, the World Health Organisation (WHO) classification had four SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern (VOC): Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. On 26 November, the WHO classified the new severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) variant as the fifth VOC and gave it the Greek name Omicron.

There is already a lot of talk about the Omicron variant and it is reported that it can spread faster than all the previously reported SARS-CoV-2 variants. In view of this situation, the Sri Lankan authorities took steps to ban the arrival of foreign travellers who have been to six countries in the African continent.

Accordingly, passengers with a travel history – including transit – to South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini (Swaziland) within the past 14 days will not be allowed entry to the country with effect from midnight on 28 November.

In a communiqué, the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) noted that irrespective of the Covid-19 vaccination status, the travelers aged 12 years and above, who arrived in Sri Lanka on 26 and 27 November from the aforesaid countries, would be referred for a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test upon arrival. Even if the PCR test turns out to be negative for the virus, such travelers will have to undergo 14-day mandatory quarantine.

Currently, the Omicron SARS-CoV-2 variant has been reported from the aforesaid six countries and Professor and Consultant in Clinical Immunology and Allergy at the Institute of Immunity and Transplantation and Health Services Laboratories, London, UK, Prof. Suranjith L. Seneviratne shared with *The Morning* the latest findings about this variant.

What is the Omicron variant?

Viruses multiply and spread from cell to cell and person to person. During the process of multiplication, changes may occur in the genetic make-up of the virus. Thus, all viruses including SARS-CoV-2 change over time. Most of the changes that occur are of little clinical significance, but from time to time, a clinically significant variant comes up. The Omicron variant is highly mutated and has an unusual set of mutations. Some of the mutations are different to those seen in the other VOC that were spreading during the past several months.

This Omicron variant (originally termed B.1.1.529) has 50 gene mutations in total, with 32 of them found on the spike protein gene. A total of 10 of these changes occur within the receptor binding domain (RBD). In comparison, the currently globally widespread Delta SARS-CoV-2 variant, has two changes in the RBD region. The spike protein is used by the Virus to bind to angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) receptors on cells, and at present, is also the target of most Covid-19 vaccines.

Are there any special characteristics found in this variant?

We know that the number of mutations present per se is not what determines the true clinical significance of a viral variant, but that it is the actual change that occurs and the combination in which they occur. Some mutations may make it easier for the virus to spread (that is result in increased transmissibility), whereas others may make it more difficult for antibodies (that are formed following a SARS-CoV-2 infection or Covid-19 vaccination) to bind to the virus. A combination of adverse properties may be more relevant to the clinical effect. For instance, the Delta variant had both transmissibility and moderate immune escape effects and took over as the dominant global variant very quickly. On the other hand, the Beta variant had important immune escape properties but the transmissibility was less. The Omicron variant is very different to the virus that was

originally identified in Wuhan, China in early 2020. The new variant has some mutations seen in other variants that are known to be associated with both higher transmissibility and immune escape.

Are immunodeficient individuals at higher risk of developing SARS-CoV-2 variants?

The Omicron variant may have evolved during a chronic infection in an immunocompromised individual, possibly an untreated human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) patient. During the past months, several teams have found the virus to evolve in immunocompromised patients who had chronic Covid-19. Patients with untreated HIV or other immunodeficiency disorders – such as cancer or following immunosuppressive medication use may find it difficult to control the viral infection. They could effectively act as an evolutionary training gym for the virus to mutate. Currently just over eight million South Africans are infected with HIV. However, only around 45 and 71% of children or adults with HIV are on treatment.

Is the Omicron variant more transmissible and does it cause more severe disease?

Early evidence suggests it is more transmissible and carries a higher risk of re-infection than other SARS-CoV-2 variants. So far, the variant has been seen spreading mostly among young people, particularly in schools. We still do not know if this variant causes more severe disease and this aspect should become clearer in the coming days. The variant harbours a spike mutation that allows it to be detected by genotyping tests that deliver results much more rapidly than genome sequencing.

Where have cases with the Omicron variant been found?

The new variant was first detected in Botswana on 11 November 2021. So far, around 100 confirmed cases have been recorded in the Gauteng Province in South Africa (an area that encompasses both Pretoria and Johannesburg), and may account for around 90% of the new cases in this location. It is likely to have spread to other Provinces in South Africa.

There have been four cases in Botswana and one in Hong Kong, but it is likely that the new variant has spread more widely. The Hong Kong case was of a 36-year-old man who was PCR negative before flying from Hong Kong to South Africa on 22 October 2021. He stayed in South Africa till 11 November and tested negative on his return to Hong Kong. However, on 13 November 2021, he tested positive whilst in quarantine.

Single cases have been detected in Israel and Belgium. The person from Belgium involved an unvaccinated person who had travelled from abroad. They developed symptoms and tested positive on 22 November. Two people in Essex and Nottinghamshire have also tested positive for the Omicron variant. Isolation of these individuals and mass testing in the affected areas



Professor and Consultant in Clinical Immunology and Allergy at the Institute of Immunity and Transplantation and Health Services Laboratories, London, UK, Prof. Suranjith L. Seneviratne

is taking place, to identify further cases. According to reports the two cases are connected and have a link with travel to Southern Africa.

There are reports that the Covid-19 vaccines would not be of much help in bringing this under control. Is there any truth to such reports?

Laboratory studies are ongoing to delineate the exact properties of the new variant. It would take a few weeks for us to understand what potential impact this variant has on the currently used vaccines. Studies are being carried out to assess the extent to which it may be able to evade immune protection post-illness or vaccination. Vaccine manufacturing companies have reacted to the finding of the Omicron variant. Pfizer-BioNTech has stated it could produce and transport an updated version of its vaccine within 100 days if the new variant is found to evade existing immunity. The company Novavax has already begun work on a newer version of its Covid-19 vaccine, targeting the Omicron variant and hopes to have it ready for testing and manufacturing within a few weeks. Moderna has said that it would develop a booster dose for the new variant and AstraZeneca is currently studying how their vaccine is performing against the new variant.

What steps can a country take to prevent this variant from entering a country at the initial stage? and to bring it under control?

The Omicron variant needs to be assessed rapidly and monitored carefully. Precautionary steps may be needed before we have all the answers and this has contributed to some of the travel advisories that have been instituted in the the UK and other countries. On 25 November, the UK announced that it would temporarily suspend all flights from South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe as a precaution. Israel has also imposed a travel ban for those six countries, as well as Mozambique. European Union states have also temporarily suspended travel to southern Africa. The restrictions are

to apply to the same six countries already affected by the UK's directive and also Mozambique. Shortly after this the US said it would restrict travel from the seven countries and include Malawi too. Canada has stopped the entry of foreign nationals who have travelled through southern Africa. In the face of the regular appearance of new variants, people should get appropriately vaccinated, practice hand hygiene, wear masks, maintain social distance, and gather in well ventilated spaces, in order to limit its spread.

Will the Omicron variant cause a situation such as what was seen in India in early this year?

With the Omicron variant steps appear to have been taken at an earlier time point. Because of this it may have a more positive impact than in the case of Delta where proactive steps were delayed. Time is needed to do good laboratory experiments on the properties of the Omicron variant or to assess both laboratory and real-world effects of vaccine efficacy.

Vaccination against Covid-19 is of much importance when considering these new trends. How would you assess the vaccination programme worldwide?

Several countries missed the WHO target for 10% of the world's population to be fully vaccinated by the end of September 2021. Many of these countries were in Africa. Overall in South Africa, approximately 41% and 35% of adults have received one and two vaccine doses, respectively. However, in the Continent of Africa, the average double vaccination rate is much lower at less than 7%. In some countries it is as low as 3%. The rate is also very low in Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar and Yemen. Such a failure in ensuring adequate vaccination of all regions of the world could risk the emergence of more significant variants. The WHO has continuously called on richer nations who have fully vaccinated significant proportions of their populations to share vaccine doses with other countries or regions. The continued emergence of VOC should revitalise such a process.

How important is it to follow Covid-19-related health guidelines that are already in place in relation to this variant?

Wearing facemasks, washing hands and maintaining social distance are among the basic Covid-19 health guidelines. When considering any variant, all these guidelines are very important. Especially, by adhering to guidelines such as wearing facemasks, the viral load that may potentially be transmitted would be reduced. This means, even if the virus is transmitted from one person to another, the viral load would be much lesser. The spread of the virus should be controlled as much as possible as increased transmission increases the chance of developing more viral variants.

South Africa says it's being 'punished' for detecting new variant

South Africa has complained it is being punished – instead of applauded – for discovering Omicron, a concerning new variant of Covid-19.

The Foreign Ministry made the statement as countries around the world restrict travel from southern African countries as details of the spread emerged.

Early evidence suggested that Omicron has a higher re-infection risk. The World Health Organisation (WHO) said last Friday (26) that the new variant was being considered as “of concern”.

Hundreds of passengers arriving in the Netherlands from South Africa are being tested for the new variant.

Some 61 people on two KLM flights tested positive for Covid-19 and have been quarantined at a hotel near Amsterdam's Schiphol airport while they have further tests, Dutch officials said.

The Netherlands is currently struggling with a record-breaking surge in cases. An extended partial lockdown was scheduled to come into force there from yesterday (28) evening.

The new Omicron variant was first reported to the WHO from South Africa on 24 November.

It has also been identified in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong, and Israel.

More suspected cases were reported in Germany and the Czech Republic last Saturday (27).

An official in the German state of Hesse Tweeted (in German) that the variant had most probably arrived in the country after “Omicron-typical mutations” were found in someone returning from South Africa.

'Excellent science'

A statement by the South African

Foreign Ministry last Saturday strongly criticised the travel bans.

“Excellent science should be applauded and not punished,” it said.

The bans were “akin to punishing South Africa for its advanced genomic sequencing and the ability to detect new variants quicker”.

The statement added that the reaction had been completely different when new variants were discovered elsewhere in the world.

Last Friday and Saturday, a number of countries announced new measures:

- Travellers from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini will not be able to enter the UK unless they are UK or Irish nationals, or UK residents
- US officials said foreigners would be blocked from travelling from South Africa, Botswana,

Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi, mirroring earlier moves taken by the EU. They are scheduled to come into effect today (29)

- Australia announced last Saturday that flights from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, the Seychelles, Malawi, and Mozambique would be suspended for 14 days. Non-Australians who have been in those countries in the past two weeks are now banned from entering Australia
- Japan has announced that from last Saturday, travellers from much of southern Africa will need to quarantine for 10 days and take a total of four tests during that time

- India has ordered more rigorous screening and testing for travellers arriving from South Africa, Botswana, and Hong Kong
- Canada is barring all foreign nationals who have travelled through South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, or Mozambique in the last 14 days

The WHO said the number of cases of this variant appeared to be increasing in almost all of South Africa's provinces.

“This variant has a large number of mutations, some of which are concerning,” the UN public health body said in a statement last Friday. It said “the first known confirmed B.1.1.529 infection was from a specimen collected on 9 November”. The WHO said it would take a few weeks to understand the impact of the

new variant, as scientists worked to determine how transmissible it was.

A top UK health official warned that vaccines would “almost certainly” be less effective against the new variant.

But University of Oxford Structural Biologist Prof. James Naismith added: “It is bad news but it's not doomsday.”

Only about 24% of South Africa's population is fully vaccinated.

The US Infectious Disease Chief Dr. Anthony Fauci said that while the reports on the new variant threw up a “red flag”, it was possible that vaccines might still work to prevent serious illness.

The WHO has warned against countries hastily imposing travel restrictions, saying they should look to a “risk-based and scientific approach”.

(BBC)

{ VIEWS/PICTORIAL }

Sri Lanka bows to Chinese pressure again



The 'Hippo Spirit' vessel, which carried the shipment of fertiliser that resulted in a controversial back-and-forth between the two governments

BY SUDHA RAMACHANDRAN

A Sino-Sri Lankan spat over fertiliser has ended in China's favour. Sri Lanka has reportedly agreed to pay 70% of the claim made by a Chinese organic fertiliser company for a shipment that Colombo had rejected as it was found to be contaminated.

According to Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Sri Lanka will pay \$ 6.7 million to

Qingdao Seawin Biotech Group for the shipment of 20,000 tonnes of fertiliser. In addition, Sri Lanka has agreed to buy fresh stocks from the company, a national newspaper quoted the Minister as saying.

Only a month ago, Aluthgamage had stated that the Chinese organic fertiliser shipment would not be accepted nor would Sri Lanka make any payment towards this shipment.

Sri Lanka has shifted away from that position. "We cannot afford to

damage diplomatic relations over this issue," Aluthgamage said, explaining the Government's volte face.

China and Sri Lanka have strong relations. Over the past decade, China has emerged as Sri Lanka's largest investor and has played a huge role in the island's infrastructure development. So deeply steeped in Chinese debt is Sri Lanka that it is said to be caught in a Chinese debt trap. Importantly, Beijing has repeatedly defended Sri Lanka from censure at global human rights forums. An important component of the Sino-Sri Lankan relationship is the strong equation between Beijing and Sri Lanka's ruling Rajapaksa family.

The recent spat between China and Sri Lanka relates to a consignment of organic fertiliser.

On 29 April, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced plans to make the island the world's first fully organic farming nation. The Government imposed a total ban on agrochemicals. Since Sri Lanka does not manufacture organic fertiliser, it had to import urgently. Qingdao Seawin won a government contract to supply 99,000 tonnes of organic fertiliser.

In September, when the ship "Hippo Spirit", which carried the first consignment of 20,000 tonnes, was heading toward the Colombo Port, Sri Lankan soil scientists found plant pathogens like Erwinia in samples of the fertiliser. Since the application of such fertiliser to Sri Lankan soil would have serious implications for Sri Lankan biosecurity and impact agriculture for generations to come, the ship was not permitted to dock at Colombo.

A war of words ensued and was followed by tit-for-tat actions.

"The unscientific detection method and conclusion" of Sri Lanka's National Plant Quarantine Service (NPQS) "do not comply with international animal and plant quarantine convention", Qingdao Seawin said in a statement. It accused NPQS of having also "irresponsibly conveyed false and even controversial remarks to the media". The Chinese company also slammed the media for using "derogatory words" like "toxic, garbage, pollution" to describe the fertiliser consignment. This was aimed at "seriously slander(ing) the image of the Chinese enterprises and the Chinese Government," it said.

When a Sri Lankan commercial high court halted the payment of \$ 9 million for the fertiliser onboard the Hippo Spirit, the Chinese Embassy in Colombo waded into the dispute. It blacklisted Sri Lanka's state-owned People's Bank for not making the payment to the company.

In subsequent talks with Sri Lanka's Agriculture Ministry, Qingdao Seawin put forward several conditions for resolving the dispute. Sri Lanka would have to pay 70% of the agreed price in the original tender agreement and additional freight charges, it said. Moreover, the Agriculture Ministry would have to issue a statement that the shipment was rejected because of an import permit dispute and not because of the quality of the fertiliser. Clearly, Qingdao Seawin did not want the controversy over the quality of its shipment to Sri Lanka to impact its trade with over 50 countries, including the US.

This is not the first time that Sri

Lanka has buckled under pressure from China.

Back in 2017, for instance, when the Sri Lankan Government was unable to repay \$ 1.2 billion loan it had taken from China for the construction of the Hambantota deep-sea port, it was forced to hand over the port on a 99-year lease to China Merchants Port Holdings, along with along with 15,000 acres of surrounding land in lieu of repayment of loans.

Attempts by successive governments in Colombo to revisit the Hambantota port agreement to secure better terms for Sri Lanka did not work. Sri Lanka had no choice but to hand over the strategically located Indian Ocean port to the Chinese.

Even as China came out victorious in its spat with Sri Lanka over the organic fertiliser controversy, the Rajapaksa Government has partially lifted the ban on chemical fertilisers. It has permitted the private sector to import fertilisers and farmers will have to purchase it from the open market.

If Chinese pressure forced Colombo to buckle down on a toxic consignment of organic fertiliser, mass protests by farmers forced the Government to retreat on its fertiliser policy.

(The writer is the South Asia Editor of The Diplomat. This article was first published by The Diplomat on 26 November 2021)
The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.

SILENT IN SOLIDARITY



The signing of the banner 'Stop Gender-Based Violence Against Women' and a silent protest was organised by the Protect Association in front of the Fort Railway Station yesterday (28)

PHOTOS KRISHAN KARIYAWASAM



PAINTING THE TOWN ORANGE



Ambassador of the Netherlands to Sri Lanka and the Maldives Tanja Gonggrijp participated in a cycling drive to deliver 'Orange The World' banners to diplomatic missions and organisations in Colombo on 25 November to support the global '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' campaign. They will all raise the banner throughout these 16 days to urge people to 'Say NO to violence against women and girls'

PHOTOS PRADEEP DAMBARAGE

SL must honour int'l commitments: Eran

Claiming that Sri Lanka's external relations are currently at a "regrettable state", Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne stated that the nation must honour its commitments on international treaties and obligations rather than ignoring them.

Speaking at the committee stage debate of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Mass Media in Parliament last Thursday (25), Wickramaratne noted how the late Mangala Samaraweera, during his tenure as Foreign Minister, had worked to strengthen deteriorating foreign relations with India, while strengthening ties with key allies and trading partners at the time.

"It was also Mangala who convinced the world that we were serious about building a new Sri Lanka, addressing the effects and causes of our violent conflicts and abiding by our international covenants and obligations in both letter and spirit," he noted.

However, he noted, in the current context, the world is seeing an increasingly rules-based approach to diplomacy.

He thus stated: "It is towards this end, that the United Nations (UN), other treaty bodies, and inter-governmental organisations strive to achieve, and Sri Lanka can and must have a robust engagement with the world. We must honour our commitments in international treaties and obligations without dismissing them, disingenuously ignoring them and treating these regulations with contempt."

The end of the war, he added, called for a shift in policy interests towards economic diplomacy and reconciliation efforts.

However, he stated: "Regrettably, in the past two years, we have not engaged with the international community in either a wise or rational manner. The Government has sought to treat the international community the same way it treats its domestic constituency. But the international community does not buy or believe the evening news telecasts of the Government's public and private TV channels and propaganda organisations. They go with facts, figures, and ground realities, which is far removed from the myths that pass for policy by this Government."

Further criticising the Government's stance, he went on to list some imperatives in terms of foreign relations.

racist approach to national life and policies and implement a programme of national reconciliation. The example of Rwanda was cited, and fellow African nation South Africa also comes to mind. We must have reforms that ensure the Sri Lankan State reflects the diversity of her society, and also deal with the effects and root causes of our war and political conflicts. Sri Lanka is a divided society; we must seek to heal the wounds and bring about unity. We must build a post war Sri Lanka that is inclusive, pluralist, non-racist, and accommodative of the diversity of our people.

"As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet observed in a statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), "Regrettably, surveillance, intimidation, and 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. Several peaceful protests and commemorations have been met with excessive use of force and the arrest and detention of demonstrators in quarantine centres". This must change.

"Focusing on the Generalised System of Preferences-Plus (GSP+), privileges from one of our leading export markets of the European Union (EU), we need to commit to honouring our international obligations. Concerns relating to enforced disappearances, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, extra-judicial killings, detentions, and other accountability related issues such as impunity raised in UNHRC resolutions, feed into wider EU processes as well as their GSP+ review exercises. Our international commitments are vital to our standing in the world and our national interest. We must bring the necessary legal and policy changes that will facilitate honouring these commitments. In simple terms, we need to stop just talking about doing these things and we need to start showing results. It's only if we show results of change that we can gain the confidence of the international community to support Sri Lanka and be a friend of Sri Lanka once again.

"The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was at its introduction, brought in as a temporary measure. Its key features including of administrative detention without trial, non-judicial oversight of detention, and the

admissibility of (forced and coerced) confessions as evidence all make the PTA incompatible with international best practices on laws dealing with terrorism suspects and the PTA needs to be urgently reformed. Instead post-2019, there has been a rapid expansion of the use of the PTA, for among other things to establish 'de-radicalisation centres' now temporarily halted by the Supreme Court and to incarcerate Lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, since declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International as well as teacher and poet Ahnaf Jazeem. It goes without saying how unjustly MP Rishad Bathiudeen was held in custody for several months.

"I also wish to touch on the issue of the Indian Ocean region and the Asia Pacific. Our Government speaks excessively of neutrality and non-alignment, but the rhetorical resort to both of these concepts in the absence of any clarity on our national priorities in the region has only proved counter-productive, as we have seen in the last two years. The use of these concepts in the strategic landscape of the Indian Ocean region without having a pragmatic vision of Sri Lanka's own place in the emerging regional order, and appropriate plans and strategies is meaningless."

Noting Sri Lanka's aim of becoming a hub in the Indian Ocean, Wickramaratne further pointed out the need to engage with India on key issues, including claims over the continental shelf shared by both countries, as well as the matter of bottom-trawling across the Palk Strait. He also highlighted how Sri Lanka, which had been placed on the blacklist of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2011, had managed to work its way out of this notorious status by 2019 through enhancing its standards related to Anti-Money-Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism. However, he went on to say, decisions taken by the Government and the Foreign Ministry have now put the country at risk of again being placed on this blacklist, stating: "I would like to ask those officers in the Foreign Service, some of them who may be here in this House today to consider what kind of country they want to represent on the international stage?"

He concluded: "I urge you to think. The time has come for you to reflect and speak to your conscience. The time has come to take a stand in the long-term interest of the country and generations to come."

ASPI	S&P SL20	Market
11,197.68	3,822.61	Market Closed
171.95	55.20	Share Volume
↑1.56%	↑1.47%	335,149,218
		Turnover
		9,145,264,648.35

Rubber exports on track to reach \$ 1 billion in 2021

- Milestone expected to be achieved despite low yield
- Industry calls on Govt. to expand cultivation area
- Existing rubber import ban to bring down rubber export revenue in 2022

Sri Lanka's rubber exports are on track to achieve \$ 1 billion in export revenue this year, making it the first time the annual rubber exports will touch the \$ 1 billion mark.

During the budget debate last Saturday (27), Minister of Plantation Dr. Ramesh Pathirana described 2021 as a historic year for Sri Lanka's plantation industry and stated that as per forecasts, export revenue from rubber products is expected to exceed \$ 1 billion for the first time in history.

This remarkable performance will be recorded despite the fact that many local rubber plantations have been devastated by a leaf fall disease caused by pestalotiopsis (a fungus). So far, around 20,000 hectares of the 107,000 hectares of rubber cultivated land have been impacted by this disease.

According to the Rubber Research Institute of Sri Lanka (RRISL), this leaf fall disease is expected to decrease productivity by 70-90% in the worst-affected areas and by around 30-50% in moderate-affected areas.

Speaking to The Morning Business, RRISL Additional Director Dr. V.H.L. Rodrigo stated that the disease is still ravaging through local plantations and in certain areas it has gone out of control.

He further explained that Sri Lanka was able to achieve an export revenue of \$ 1 billion in 2021 from rubber product exports – despite the yield drop observed as a result of the leaf fall disease – due to the fact that only a



limited amount of export earnings from rubber is generated from the export of raw material; the remainder is generated from value-added products and the value-added rubber industry supplements its input requirements through natural rubber imports.

"In Sri Lanka, around 90% of locally produced rubber is value-added within the country. Only around 10% of the rubber produced in Sri Lanka is exported in raw form, and that too is exported to niche markets such as medical industries which require high-grade rubber. The remainder is consumed locally and value-added in the form

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

of tyres and gloves. The rubber requirement for such value addition requires the importation of rubber – especially BOI companies are allowed to import rubber in order to run their companies at full capacity," stated Dr. Rodrigo.

Only around 50% of the local demand and value addition is satisfied by local rubber production, thereby resulting in more than 50% of raw materials being imported by other countries to facilitate local manufacturers.

Contd. on page 10

Prof. Samarajiva proposes SriLankan divest shares

- Suggests to follow Air India
- Says SriLankan losses Rs. 129 million daily

LIRNEasia Founding Chair and Advocata Institute Advisor Prof. Rohan Samarajiva, during a recent event, suggested that the Government divest SriLankan Airlines on the same lines as Air India.

"The objective is to protect the taxpayers of this country from having to continually cover the losses of this technically bankrupt state-owned company," he said, highlighting the importance of immediate measures to improve public finances.

The national carrier makes a daily loss of Rs. 129.03 million. In the last four years of operation, it has cost the economy Rs. 137 billion in the form of accumulated losses.

Prof. Samarajiva also stressed the importance of building a national consensus to implement immediate reforms to tackle a wide range of issues ranging from unsustainable debt to shortages of essential items in the country.

"We are no longer talking



Prof. Rohan Samarajiva

macroeconomic instability lies in the failure of the state to implement deep structural reforms to the economy for nearly 20 years. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed Sri Lanka's fundamental weaknesses that have plagued the economy for a long period of time. The event brought together politicians representing the main political parties to discuss the importance of a united course of action, to drive Sri Lanka's economy towards a path of growth.

Prof. Samarajiva explained the seriousness of the crisis, noting: "We cannot get out of the crisis without taking some bitter medicine. It is increasingly becoming clear that debt restructuring in the context of an IMF (International Monetary Fund) programme is essential. Unlike in previous IMF programmes, we cannot afford to abandon discipline at the earliest opportunity. Unless we make reforms, we will keep falling back."

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CLC pre-tax profit reaches Rs. 2.4 b in 1H 2021/22

Commercial Leasing and Finance PLC (CLC) has recorded a profit before tax (PBT) of Rs. 2.4 billion and a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs. 1.8 billion in 1H 2021/22, the company noted in a press release.

This performance can be attributed to portfolio management, with non-performing loans (NPLs) maintained at 5.7% in contrast with an industry average of 12.99%. The company also sustained its growth momentum during the six months under review, evidenced by a growth in the gross portfolio by 12% for six months and 24% for the last 12 months. Interest income also rose by 12% over the corresponding period in the previous year.

The company's Tier 1 Capital reached 20.22% while Tier 2 achieved 20.61%, well above regulatory requirements of 7% and 11%, respectively. CLC's overall equity rose



LOLC Group MD/CEO Kapila Jayawardena



CLC Executive Director/CEO Krishan Thilakarathne

to Rs. 23 billion during the period. The company possesses a diversified funding base consisting of deposits, capital market products, foreign funding lines, bank credit lines, and a substantial level of equity. Reaffirming the strength and stability of CLC, ICRA Lanka Ltd. once again rated

the company as SL (A), with a Stable outlook in 2021. CLC continued to expand its geographic footprint during the period, opening three new branches in 1H 2021/22, bringing the total branch network to 70. Another seven are scheduled to be opened by the end of the financial year.

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The 24 award winners with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and other officials

President commends export sector contribution

- Presents Presidential Export Awards to 24 exporters

The President appreciated the commitment and the courage of exporters that had to remain in the export sector in the face of Covid-19 epidemic.

"Several policy interventions, however, such as the restrictions on certain imports in place since last year, have had beneficial consequences. They have created space for new local industries to develop. It is essential that these new industries are fostered intelligently," President Rajapaksa said.

The President made these remarks addressing the Presidential Export Awards Ceremony (PEA) held at the BMICH last Friday (26).

"I urge you to recognise and understand that these measures are being imposed because we have little other choice in our present situation," the President further said.

This is the highest and most exclusive award an exporter can receive in Sri Lanka and the Presidential Awards are given to exporters who have made

the highest contribution to the development of the export sector. Additionally, this was initiated by the Export Development Board (EDB) in 1981, and this marked the 24th awards ceremony.

This year, 63 outstanding export companies of Sri Lanka received the awards for the financial years 2019/20 and 2020/21. The award winners were selected by a panel of judges chaired by a retired Supreme Court judge.

A number of new awards such as "Best Exporter in Product Diversification", "Best Value Added Exporter of the Year", "Best Performing Exporter in Emerging Markets", and "Emerging Exporter of the Year" as well as new sectoral awards were introduced at this year's ceremony.

The President presented 24 awards.

"There are, therefore, significant opportunities for investments into organic fertiliser, organic agricultural production and processing, and for fostering new export markets for this produce."

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SL Convention Bureau highlights MICE venues

Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB) recently organised its first ever virtual familiarisation tour of the newest and unique MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) venues located in the areas from Colombo up to Beruwala and Colombo to Waikkal.

Issuing a press release, SLCB noted that the participants had positive remarks about the tour as they were able to get information pertaining to MICE facilities/activities of around 10 hotels in one go. They are now well geared to market these properties

to foreign meeting planners who are on the lookout for different meeting experiences at exciting locations.

Over 100 participants representing local professional conference organisers, professional exhibition organisers, professional event organisers, meeting planners, wedding planners, and destination management companies registered to attend the tour and update themselves about the newest and unique locations available for MICE activities.

Contd. on page 10

New variant cripples global shares

Stock markets across the world have fallen sharply after the discovery of a new Covid-19 variant raised fears over the economic recovery.

The FTSE 100 index of leading UK shares closed 3.7% down, while main markets in Germany, France, and the US also sank.

Shares in airlines and travel firms were hit hard, with British Airways-owner IAG and Wizz Air going down 15% and Tui shedding 10%.

The UK and other nations have introduced a ban on flights from six southern African countries.

UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid said scientists were "deeply concerned" about the new Covid-19 strain and its potential to evade immunity.

The UK has temporarily banned flights

from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini starting from midday last Friday (26) until 4 a.m. yesterday (28).

All six countries are being added to the UK's travel red list. It means that any British or Irish resident arriving from the countries after 4 a.m. on Sunday (28) will have to quarantine in a hotel, with those returning before that being asked to isolate at home.

The FTSE 100 index suffered its biggest one day drop in more than a year. Shares of major UK lenders HSBC, Lloyds Bank, NatWest, and Barclays all fell about 7% as investors scaled back expectations of a Bank of England interest rate rise in December.

The biggest FTSE 100 riser was food delivery firm Ocado, up 4.5%, on

anticipation that online firms could be a beneficiary if tighter restrictions are reintroduced.

Cruise operator Carnival suffered a 15% slide, making it the biggest faller on the FTSE 250, while EasyJet tumbled 11.5%.

Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com said investors fear a new Covid-19 variant "will lead to fresh lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and lower economic growth".

On Wall Street, the Dow Jones index slumped 2.8% in its shortened trading day following last Thursday's (25) Thanksgiving holiday.

"It's Black Friday today (26) for the retailers, but it's 'Red Friday' right now for the stock market," said Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com.

Concern the new variant could slow

global economic growth sent oil prices sharply lower. The US WTI crude tumbled 11.3% to \$ 69.53 per barrel, while European benchmark Brent retreated 10.2% to \$ 73.81. The price of gold, a haven for investors in troubled times, rose.

Despite the fall in the FTSE 100, the index is still trading nearly 12% higher than it was a year ago.

A number of other countries – such as Germany, Italy, and Israel – have banned flights from the six southern African nations. Both Germany and France's leading stock market indexes fell by more than 3% on Friday.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen Tweeted that other EU nations should also "activate the emergency brake" to stop travel from these countries.

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SLASSCOM to host first-ever conference in Sri Lanka on emerging technologies

In the global run towards economic growth and building a healthier and safer world, emerging tech has transformed almost every business. In order to help Sri Lankan businesses to keep up with this fast-accelerating trend, Sri Lanka Association of Software and Services Companies (SLASSCOM) is hosting the first-ever conference on emerging technologies to be held in Sri Lanka, from 8-9 December 2021.



SLASSCOM Chairperson Sandra De Zoysa (left) and SLASSCOM Technology Forum Lead Calvin Hindle

The event's panellists include R3's Vivek Gupta, who will be speaking on a blockchain roadmap for Sri Lanka, Brandon Quitem, who will be focusing on cryptocurrency and bitcoin, Axiata Digital Labs' Namal Jayathilake, who will be talking about digital and AI application in telecommunications, Dr. Kalana Withanage from Lockheed Martin who is set to cover the topic of "Advanced Computer Vision", Global Wavenet's Suren Pinto, whose topic is "Low code, no code application in telecommunications", Vega Innovations' Dr. Beshan Kulapala, whose key focus will be the future of the electric vehicle industry, Arvind Neelakantan, who represents Epic Games/Unreal Engine, will cover extended reality AR/VR in gaming; a representative from Huawei who will be talking about 5G and IoT; and Alchemy AI's Jennie-Marie Larsen, who will be covering AI and sustainability.

Two panel discussions will take place on the exciting topics of gaming, featuring Arimac Director and Head - Game Development Thilina Premasiri, Ingame Entertainment CEO and Sri Lanka eSports Association President Raveen Wijayatilake, and an esteemed speaker from the Indonesian Gaming Association. The second panel on the space industry and technology, will feature Kavindi De Silva, Isi Casad del Valle, Sue Kaur, and Abilasha Purawar the likes of who are representing Space Hero and the International Space University.

SLASSCOM Chairperson Sandra De Zoysa stated: "Providing a supportive platform for businesses in emerging tech to scale up and expand is one of SLASSCOM's five key focus areas aimed at developing and growing the industry to \$ 5 billion by the year 2025. As a catalyst for growth in the Sri Lankan IT and

BPM sphere, we hope to continue facilitating trade and business, propagating education and employment, and encouraging research and innovation. This conference is just one step in our long-term efforts to bring Sri Lanka's IT/BPM industry to the forefront on the global stage."

SLASSCOM Technology Forum Lead, Calvin Hindle highlighted: "The science fiction part of movies is now becoming a reality. The speed of innovation and disruption is unprecedented. The SLASSCOM Emerging Technologies Conference 2021 will help the attendees to understand the practical use cases and the potential opportunities of these technologies, and it will also highlight how Emerging Tech can be used to solve challenges around sustainability."

This event is supported by platinum sponsor Axiata Digital Labs, gold sponsor Global Wavenet, silver sponsor Huawei and corporate sponsor Dialog Enterprise.

HCL Technologies expands its presence in Sri Lanka

● *Opens new facility at 'The Offices' in Cinnamon Life*



Board of Investment of Sri Lanka Chairman Sanjaya Mohottala, John Keells Holdings Chairman Krishan Balendra, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay, Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa, HCL Technologies Chief Financial Officer Prateek Aggarwal, and HCL Technologies Corporate Vice President Srimathi Shivashankar

HCL Technologies (HCL), a global technology company, opened its new facility at the state-of-the-art Cinnamon Life complex. HCL continues to expand and grow in Sri Lanka and this new facility will be its largest in the country, accommodating 4,000 employees.

HCL entered Sri Lanka in 2020 with the aim to make it a global technology and IT services delivery hub for some of the largest corporations in the world. In continuation with its commitment to build first class capabilities and create local employment, HCL intends to occupy 80% of Cinnamon Life, a project by John Keells, with plans of taking up 10 floors now and 10 floors at a later stage. The architectural design and world class interiors of HCL's new development center has been delivered by Tikri Bibile Associates (TBA), supported by WIDAC Commercial Interiors (Pvt.) Ltd. and Leema Associates. From this new development HCL will provide IT services to global clients in the areas of digital applications and system

integration services, product development and support, and infrastructure management services including digital workplace solutions.

The Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa and the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay inaugurated the office in the presence of HCL Technologies Chief Financial Officer Prateek Aggarwal, HCL Technologies Corporate Vice President Srimathi Shivashankar, and John Keells Holdings Chairman Krishan Balendra.

"As a nation, we are thankful for the opportunities HCL continues to offer our youth and make them global IT professionals. The company's commitment and growth drive in Sri Lanka are also reflective of the long-term business

resilience of Colombo's ascent as a commercial hub in South Asia. I take this opportunity to congratulate the management of HCL Technologies and extend my very best wishes," said Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa.

"We are delighted to welcome HCL as the anchor commercial tenant for 'The Offices' at Cinnamon Life, and to provide a platform for their growth in Sri Lanka. HCL will most certainly add tremendous value to the Cinnamon Life development and community. The team at HCL will experience the full benefit of working in our landmark integrated development with the conveniences of the hotel, mall, residential and convention facilities just a few steps away," said John Keells Holdings Chairman Krishan Balendra.

"Since the time HCL entered into Sri Lanka, it has been on a growth path. It is extremely heartening to see how HCL is not only building a talent pool in the country but also

working to create thousands of jobs for Sri Lankan youth and bringing global opportunities to Sri Lanka," said the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay.

"Sri Lanka is one of HCL's key global delivery hubs and we are very excited to continue expanding our operations in the country with the opening of our new office here," said HCL Technologies Chief Financial Officer Prateek Aggarwal.

In Sri Lanka, HCL Technologies recently surpassed a milestone of recruiting more than 1,000 local employees, including recent graduates and seasoned industry professionals.

"With Cinnamon Life's strategic location at the heart of Colombo, this iconic signature structure reflects HCL as a next-generation global technology company that constantly reimagines business for a digital age," said HCL Technologies Corporate Vice President Srimathi Shivashankar.

Hirdaramani Group's 'Future First' Sustainability Roadmap for 2025

● *The plan lays out meaningful business impact in line with COP26 targets*



Hirdaramani Group Director Nikhil Hirdaramani

Hirdaramani Group has launched its Sustainability Roadmap, "Future First" - a unified and holistic sustainability plan with ambitious targets for 2025.

The group's Future First roadmap collates and builds on several years of sustainability efforts and investments by the company. It takes stock of existing sustainability mechanisms, outlines the group's ethos and sets new goals for the company to achieve globally across all its facilities in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

"Hirdaramani has always been a leader in sustainability, holding itself accountable to rigorous standards while championing better business practices. 'Future First' is a unified, global approach and sets new targets for our sustainability efforts. What sets it apart is that it takes on sustainability through a nuanced, multi-dimensional approach and was designed through extensive consultation with multiple stakeholders," said Hirdaramani Group Director Nikhil Hirdaramani.

The Future First roadmap expands its scale and unifies independent sustainability endeavours internationally into a cohesive, amalgamated approach. The Group is also investing in new technology and reporting standards for greater transparency and accountability.

"It is clear that existing ways of doing business must change. There is a growing call for organisations to hold themselves accountable in issues of sustainability and we are proud to have always led the way. 'Future First' is a unified roadmap that builds on and is developed from decades-long sustainability efforts at Hirdaramani and is cognizant of changing local and global conditions, especially given the pandemic and environmental and social developments in recent years," commented Hirdaramani Group Senior Manager - Environmental Sustainability Demith Gooneratne.

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Rubber...

DSI Samson Emeritus Managing Director Kulathunga Rajapaksa, speaking to us, called on the Government to expand the rubber planting area and set up new plantations. According to him, previously local plantations produced around 10,000 kg of natural rubber, including latex per month, but now this has fallen to around 5,000 kg per month, which is insufficient to satisfy the requirement of the local consumption and value addition.

"Local rubber manufacturers are currently facing a shortage of natural rubber, and to ease this shortage, the Government must encourage the expansion of rubber planting areas. The main reason why many people don't venture into rubber planting is that the gestation period is six to seven years. Therefore, the Government should have a long-term plan to plant rubber and support the planters for six years (gestation period) by having another under-cropping or some other source of income. The previous Government had such a plan and asked rubber end-product manufacturers to encourage planters to replant rubber. Accordingly, our company started a rubber nursery in Monaragala, where we planted 5,000 hectares of rubber, and those plants are now producing natural rubber," he explained.

In the absence of adequate local production of natural rubber, local manufacturers are forced to rely on rubber imports, which constricts the value addition component. Also, considering the prevailing foreign liquidity crisis of the country, efforts must be made to substitute natural rubber imports with local production.

Another issue plaguing local rubber plantations is the low productivity. Speaking to us previously in July 2021, Dr. Rodrigo claimed that the low productivity of rubber land is an key issue plaguing the industry, adding: "In Sri Lanka, the productivity is very much below the par in comparison to other countries. Hence, we are taking several steps to improve the productivity of the existing land."

The previous Government introduced a nine-year Rubber Industry Master Plan. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ministry of Plantation Industries and the Sri Lanka Society of Rubber Industry on 12 September 2019, with an aim to make Sri Lanka's existing \$ 1 billion rubber industry a \$ 3 billion industry before 2026.

Accordingly, as of September 2020, the Ministry of Plantation began developing 10 selected rubber projects at a cost of over Rs. 12 billion, out of the 25 overall projects under the nine-year Rubber Industry Master Plan.

However, industry sources claimed that many of the policy reforms set out in the master plan are yet to be implemented.

According to Dr. Rodrigo, the new rubber testing laboratory is expected to be operational by early 2022. This laboratory is expected to asset local small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) engaged in tyre manufacturing to test their products and assist them in approaching the international market.

"We have finalised the tender procedures and ordered the necessary equipment, and they are expected to be imported within three to four months. Renovations of the building for setting up the equipment have already commenced and we are only waiting for the equipment to arrive to commence operations," stated Dr. Rodrigo.

The Minister of Plantation further claimed in Parliament: "Revenue from export of coconut-related products is forecasted to reach an all-time high of \$ 900 million this year and export revenue from export crops such as cinnamon is also forecasted to reach a historic high of \$ 450 million this year. Total export revenue from the plantation industry is also forecasted to reach all-time high of \$ 3.8 billion in 2021."

He further stated that currently, the largest export contributor is the local textile industry, which is forecasted to generate \$ 4.8 billion in export revenue. He said: "However, the hope of the Ministry of Plantation, and the three state ministries under it, is to increase the export contribution of the plantation industry to Sri Lanka's economy to \$ 5 billion within two years."

SL Convention...

Presenters from selected hotels got the opportunity to reach out to a large, targeted audience in a very short time period and present their products via audio/video presentations.

SLCB is a government institution functioning under the Ministry of Tourism which is working for the development as well as promotion of the MICE industry in Sri Lanka. This virtual tour was organised as part of its mandate to educate the local MICE industry and work towards its development. The original plan was to organise two separate physical tours to Bentota and Negombo. However, given the pandemic situation prevailing in the country at the moment, SLCB decided to convert them into a combined virtual tour.

New variant...

Overnight stock markets in Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia also fell as did indexes in India and South Korea. Oil prices also declined on fears the new Covid-19 strain could lead to restrictions and dampen demand. Brent crude

extended earlier declines to fall by 5.86% to \$ 77.43 a barrel by early afternoon.

"The drop in the oil price is the market's way of saying it is worried about a reduction in economic activity," said AJ Bell Investment Director Russ Mould.

In London, shares in oil giant BP dropped by 6.2% while rival Shell also saw its share price fall by more than 4.6%.

But Mould added: "The flipside of falling commodity prices is that a weaker oil price should provide some relief in terms of inflationary pressures. That may cause central banks to be more cautious towards raising rates in the near-term, however it does depend on whether the new Covid-19 strain causes significant disruption or can be contained as best as possible in a rapid manner."

Javid said more needed to be learned about the new Covid-19 variant. Only 59 confirmed cases have been identified in South Africa, Hong Kong, and Botswana so far. However, he said the variant had a significant number of mutations, "perhaps double the number of mutations that we have seen in the Delta variant".

He said that adding the six countries to the red list was about "being cautious and taking action and trying to protect, as best we can, our borders".

British Airways said: "We'll be contacting affected customers with information about their flight."

It added it was advising passengers to monitor the latest travel advice with the UK government and on the British Airways website. Virgin Atlantic said its flights from Johannesburg to London Heathrow would be cancelled between midday on Friday to early on Sunday morning.

"We're currently reviewing our schedule of South Africa operations for the coming week," it added.

The carrier said any customers booked to travel to or from South Africa with Virgin Atlantic should check on the company's website. If they have booked through third parties or agents, they should get in touch with them.

(BBC)

Prof...

Trade reform is another area to boost productivity and achieve growth. Speaking on this topic, senior economist Dr. Harsha de Silva said: "The import substitution mentality should be abandoned. We need to face and compete in the competitive international economy. We have been excluded from the global value chain because of our narrow mindset of import substitution and complete self-sufficiency."

Also speaking at the event, Samaja Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Patali Champika Ranawaka commented on the importance of energy sector reforms to address the present

crisis. "The power issue is the next crisis. We need to sell to India. If the rain dries out for six weeks, then we are certainly headed to a big power crisis. Substitutes to generate electricity (kerosene) are also scarce," he noted.

This crisis could lead to a rift in society, highlighting the urgency of reforming the energy sector. Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Dr. Suren Raghavan was of the opinion that "we need national consensus which capitalises on the unique competencies and skills of the different communities", and further emphasised on the message of a common plan of action to come out of the present economic crisis.

Advocata Institute is an independent policy think tank based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. They conduct research, provide commentary, and hold events to promote sound policy ideas compatible with a free society in Sri Lanka.

CLC pre-tax...

Commenting on the results, CLC Executive Director and CEO Krishan Thilakarathne said: "The true mettle of an organisation can be seen in tough times and CLC has proved itself yet again by delivering a forceful financial performance in the first half of the 2021/22 financial year against a backdrop of many challenges in the market. CLC adopted a strategy of careful management of the credit portfolio while ensuring close monitoring of overheads and NPLs, making CLC one of the strongest financial institutions in the country."

President...

"Infusing more technology to increase agricultural productivity and improve traceability will also create further value that will benefit our economy in the long run," the President noted.

"I strongly encourage you to explore such opportunities that can generate great long-term value to you while also benefiting our nation," added the President.

Assuring that the issues in the export sector would be resolved expeditiously, the President said that the Government and the private sector should work hand-in-hand to achieve the goals of the export sector. Trade Minister Dr. Bandula Gunawardana stated that steps will be taken to promote the export sector under a clear export development plan from next year.

The Minister pointed out that the role played by those engaged in the export sector in the midst of many challenges during the global economic crisis has helped to protect the country's economy and added that he would like to pay tribute to all exporters.

Cabinet and state ministers, secretaries to ministries and other public officials, investors in the trade and export sectors were also present.

CSE Corporate Debt Securities

The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) facilitates the secondary trading of Corporate Debt Securities (Debentures). Debentures are unsecured, medium or long term, interest-bearing bonds issued by private sector companies.

The holders of debentures are considered creditors and are entitled to payment before shareholders in the event of the liquidation of the issuing company. An investor in a debenture is essentially providing a loan to the company, and is entitled to receive interest on that loan. In market terminology, the loan interest is referred to as coupons and there are different types of debentures available in the market depending on the basis of the coupon paid.

- In most debentures the coupon rate would be fixed and will be paid based at promised intervals (monthly, quarterly, semiannually or annually) mentioned at the point of issue
- Some debentures carry floating rate coupons where the coupon rate

changes with market interest rates. If interest rates in the market are going up, investors would receive higher cash flows from these types of debentures and vice versa

- In zero coupon debentures a coupon is not paid until it matures. The investment will accrue interest during the tenure of the debenture, however, will not be paid to the investor till maturity

Trading debentures in the secondary market will pave the way for investors to possibly make capital gains on their investment in addition to interest payments mentioned above.

The following list shows the latest trade details of Corporate Debt Securities that are currently listed on CSE. CDS account holders have the ability to trade in the corporate debt market. Contact your stock broker for more information on opportunities on trading Corporate Debt Securities in the secondary market.

Company Name	Security Code	Coupon Rate	Coupon Frequency	Issued Date	Maturity date	Next interest due date	Par Value
ABANS PLC	ABNS/BD/19/12/24-C2436-12.5	12.50	1	19-Dec-19	19-Dec-24	17-Dec-21	100
ACCESS ENGINEERING PLC	AEI/BD/17/11/23-C2325-10.95	10.95	2	18-Nov-15	18-Nov-23	17-May-22	100
ACCESS ENGINEERING PLC	AEI/BD/18/11/22-C2327-10.72	10.72	2	18-Nov-15	18-Nov-23	17-May-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/05/10/23-C2456	10.76	1	05-Oct-20	05-Oct-23	01-Oct-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/05/10/23-C2455-10.28	10.28	1	05-Oct-20	05-Oct-23	01-Oct-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/20/08/24-C2488-8.76	8.76	1	20-Aug-21	20-Aug-24	19-Aug-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/20/08/26-C2489-9.26	9.26	1	20-Aug-21	20-Aug-26	19-Aug-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/20/08/26-C2487	9.43	1	20-Aug-21	20-Aug-26	19-Aug-22	100
ASIA ASSET FINANCE PLC	AAF/BD/20/08/24-C2486	11.49	12	20-Aug-21	20-Aug-24	17-Dec-21	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/21/09/22D8.25	8.25	1	22-Sep-14	21-Sep-22	17-Sep-22	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/21/09/22E7.42	6.45	2	22-Sep-14	21-Sep-22	17-Mar-22	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/28/12/24-C2377-12.75	12.75	1	29-Dec-16	28-Dec-24	24-Dec-21	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/28/12/21-C2376-13.25	13.25	1	29-Dec-16	28-Dec-21	24-Dec-21	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/05/10/23-C2321	8.24	2	06-Oct-15	05-Oct-23	04-Apr-22	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/28/12/21-C2379	6.42	2	29-Dec-16	28-Dec-21	25-Dec-21	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/05/10/23-C2317-9.5	9.50	1	06-Oct-15	05-Oct-23	04-Oct-22	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/28/12/24-C2378	6.42	2	29-Dec-16	28-Dec-24	25-Dec-21	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/24/10/22F13.25	13.25	1	25-Oct-13	24-Oct-22	22-Oct-22	100
BANK OF CEYLON	BOC/BD/24/10/23H13.75	13.75	1	25-Oct-13	24-Oct-23	22-Oct-22	100
BOGAWANTALAWA TEA ESTATES PLC	BOPL/BD/23/07/26-C2425-13.5	13.50	4	24-Jul-19	23-Jul-26	22-Jan-22	100
BOGAWANTALAWA TEA ESTATES PLC	BOPL/BD/23/07/25-C2423-13.25	13.25	4	24-Jul-19	23-Jul-25	22-Jan-22	100
BOGAWANTALAWA TEA ESTATES PLC	BOPL/BD/23/07/24-C2424-13	13.00	4	24-Jul-19	23-Jul-24	22-Jan-22	100
CEYLON ELECTRICITY BOARD	CEB/BD/15/04/26-C2475-9.35	9.35	1	16-Apr-21	15-Apr-26	15-Apr-22	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/09/12/24-C2434-13.43	13.43	2	10-Dec-19	09-Dec-24	08-Dec-21	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/30/01/24-C2413-15	15.00	2	31-Jan-19	30-Jan-24	29-Jan-22	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/27/03/23-C2391-14.2	14.20	1	28-Mar-18	27-Mar-23	26-Mar-22	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/30/01/24-C2414-15.5	15.50	1	31-Jan-19	30-Jan-24	29-Jan-22	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/27/03/23-C2392-13.75	13.75	2	28-Mar-18	27-Mar-23	24-Mar-22	100
CITIZENS DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS FINANCE PLC	CDB/BD/09/12/24-C2435-13.88	13.88	1	10-Dec-19	09-Dec-24	08-Dec-21	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/20/09/28-C2492-9.5	9.50	2	21-Sep-21	20-Sep-28	20-Mar-22	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/20/09/26-C2491-9	9.00	2	21-Sep-21	20-Sep-26	20-Mar-22	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/27/10/26-C2359-12.25	12.25	2	28-Oct-16	27-Oct-26	26-Apr-22	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/08/03/26-C2441-11.25	11.25	2	09-Mar-16	08-Mar-26	07-Mar-22	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/22/07/23-C2374-12	12.00	2	23-Jul-18	22-Jul-23	20-Jan-22	100
COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON PLC	COMB/BD/22/07/28-C2405-12.5	12.50	2	23-Jul-18	22-Jul-28	20-Jan-22	100
COMMERCIAL CREDIT AND FINANCE PLC	CCFR/BD/04/03/26-C2471-9	9.00	1	05-Mar-21	04-Mar-26	04-Mar-22	100
COMMERCIAL LEASING & FINANCE PLC	CLC/BD/23/09/25-C2454-10.5	10.50	2	24-Sep-20	23-Sep-25	22-Mar-22	100
COMMERCIAL LEASING & FINANCE PLC	CLC/BD/23/09/25-C2453	10.52	2	24-Sep-20	23-Sep-25	22-Mar-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/28/03/24-C2416-13.5	13.50	1	28-Mar-19	28-Mar-24	26-Mar-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/29/03/23-C2393-12.6	12.60	1	29-Mar-18	29-Mar-23	26-Mar-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/09/11/23-C2367-12.75	12.75	1	09-Nov-16	09-Nov-23	05-Nov-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/28/03/29-C2417-13.9	13.90	1	28-Mar-19	28-Mar-29	26-Mar-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/29/03/25-C2394-13	13.00	1	29-Mar-18	29-Mar-25	26-Mar-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/23/10/27-C2457-9.25	9.25	1	23-Oct-20	23-Oct-27	21-Oct-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/23/10/25-C2458-9	9.00	1	23-Oct-20	23-Oct-25	21-Oct-22	100
DFCC BANK PLC	DFCC/BD/28/03/26-C2418-13.75	13.75	1	28-Mar-19	28-Mar-26	26-Mar-22	100
FIRST CAPITAL HOLDINGS PLC	FCFV/BD/07/02/26-C2467	9.00	1	08-Feb-21	07-Feb-26	06-Feb-22	100
FIRST CAPITAL HOLDINGS PLC	FCFV/BD/07/02/26-C2465-10	10.00	1	08-Feb-21	07-Feb-26	07-Feb-22	100
FIRST CAPITAL TREASURYS PLC	FCT/BD/30/01/25-C2445-12.75	12.75	2	30-Jan-20	30-Jan-25	29-Jan-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BC/31/07/22B16.75	16.75	1	01-Jul-07	31-Jul-22	29-Jun-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BC/31/03/24D0F	-	-	07-Jul-07	31-Mar-24	-	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BD/22/09/24-C2430-12.3	12.30	1	23-Sep-19	22-Sep-24	21-Sep-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BD/28/07/31-C2480-9.5	9.50	1	28-Jul-21	28-Jul-31	27-Jul-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BD/01/11/23-C2361-13	13.00	1	01-Nov-16	01-Nov-23	29-Oct-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BD/14/12/24-C2275-8.33	8.33	2	15-Dec-14	14-Dec-24	29-Dec-21	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BD/22/09/26-C2431-12.8	12.80	1	23-Sep-19	22-Sep-26	21-Sep-22	100
HATTON NATIONAL BANK PLC	HNB/BC/29/08/23A08	8.00	1	30-Aug-13	29-Aug-23	27-Aug-22	100
HAYLEYS PLC	HAYL/BD/26/08/24-C2427	7.70	2	26-Aug-19	26-Aug-24	24-Feb-22	100
HAYLEYS PLC	HAYL/BD/26/08/24-C2428-13	13.00	2	26-Aug-19	26-Aug-24	24-Feb-22	100
HAYLEYS PLC	HAYL/BD/31/07/23-C2406-12.5	12.50	2	31-Jul-18	31-Jul-23	29-Jan-22	100
HAYLEYS PLC	HAYL/BD/31/07/23-C2407	6.65	2	31-Jul-18	31-Jul-23	29-Jan-22	100
HNB FINANCE PLC	HNB/BD/30/12/24-C2444-12.79	12.79	2	30-Dec-19	30-Dec-24	28-Dec-21	100
HNB FINANCE PLC	HNB/BD/30/12/24-C2443-13.2	13.20	1	30-Dec-19	30-Dec-24	28-Dec-21	100
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE CORPORATION BANK OF SL	HD/BD/20/11/25-C2330-12	12.00	1	20-Nov-15	20-Nov-25	19-Nov-22	100
KOTAGALA PLANTATIONS PLC	KOTA/BD/31/08/25-C2463-7.5	7.50	1	01-Sep-20	31-Aug-25	30-Aug-22	100
KOTAGALA PLANTATIONS PLC	KOTA/BD/31/08/26-C2464-7.5	7.50	1	01-Sep-20	31-Aug-26	30-Aug-22	100
KOTAGALA PLANTATIONS PLC	KOTA/BD/31/08/23-C2460-7.5	7.50	1	01-Sep-20	31-Aug-23	30-Aug-22	100
KOTAGALA PLANTATIONS PLC	KOTA/BD/31/08/24-C2461-7.5	7.50	1	01-Sep-20	31-Aug-24	30-Aug-22	100
KOTAGALA PLANTATIONS PLC	KOTA/BD/31/08/22-C2462-7.5	7.50	1	01-Sep-20	31-Aug-22	30-Aug-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/30/07/22-C2385-13	13.00	2	31-Jul-17	30-Jul-22	29-Jan-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/24/02/26-C2470-10.25	10.25	1	24-Feb-21	24-Feb-26	23-Feb-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/24/02/26-C2469-9.85	9.85	4	24-Feb-21	24-Feb-26	22-Feb-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/24/02/31-C2468-12	12.00	1	24-Feb-21	24-Feb-31	23-Feb-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/27/09/24-C2433	8.96	2	27-Sep-19	27-Sep-24	24-Mar-22	100
L O I C HOLDINGS PLC	LLOI/BD/27/09/24-C2432-15	15.00	2	27-Sep-19	27-Sep-24	24-Mar-22	100
LB FINANCE PLC	LFIN/BD/11/12/22-C2387-12.75	12.75	2	11-Dec-17	11-Dec-22	10-Dec-21	100
LB FINANCE PLC	LFIN/BD/11/12/22-C2388-13.25	13.25	2	11-Dec-17	11-Dec-22	10-Dec-21	100
LOLC CEYLON HOLDINGS LIMITED	LOLC/BD/06/10/23-C2493-9.5	9.50	1	06-Oct-21	06-Oct-23	05-Oct-22	100
LOLC FINANCE PLC	LOFC/BD/31/07/23-C2409-0	-	0	31-Jul-18	31-Jul-23	-	100
LOLC FINANCE PLC	LOFC/BD/31/07/23-C2408-14.75	14.75	2	31-Jul-18	31-Jul-23	29-Jan-22	100
MERCHANT BANK OF SRI LANKA & FINANCE PLC	MBSL/BD/02/05/22-C2382-15	15.00	1	03-May-17	02-May-22	30-Apr-22	100
MERCHANT BANK OF SRI LANKA & FINANCE PLC	MBSL/BD/02/05/22-C2380	10.00	2	03-May-17	02-May-22	01-May-22	100
MERCHANT BANK OF SRI LANKA & FINANCE PLC	MBSL/BD/02/05/22-C2381-14.5	14.50	2	03-May-17	02-May-22	01-May-22	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BD/30/03/24-C2419-13.5	13.50	2	31-Mar-19	30-Mar-24	29-Mar-22	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BD/30/03/24-C2420-13.95	13.95	1	31-Mar-19	30-Mar-24	29-Mar-22	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BC/19/12/23C13.9	13.90	1	19-Dec-13	19-Dec-23	30-Dec-21	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BC/19/12/23D14	14.00	1	19-Dec-13	19-Dec-23	30-Dec-21	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BD/24/09/25-C2452-9.5	9.50	1	25-Sep-20	24-Sep-25	23-Sep-22	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BD/23/11/26-C2494-11.9	11.90	2	24-Nov-21	23-Nov-26	23-May-22	100
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK PLC	NDB/BD/23/11/28-C2495-12	12.00	2	24-Nov-21	23-Nov-28	23-May-22	100
NATIONALS TRUST BANK PLC	NTB/BD/20/04/23-C2401-13	13.00	1	20-Apr-18	20-Apr-23	16-Apr-22	100
NATIONALS TRUST BANK PLC	NTB/BD/20/04/23-C2402-12.65	12.65	2	20-Apr-18	20-Apr-23	18-Apr-22	100
NATIONALS TRUST BANK PLC	NTB/BD/23/12/26-C2442-12.9	12.90	1	23-Dec-19	23-Dec-26	21-Dec-21	100
NATIONALS TRUST BANK PLC	NTB/BD/23/12/24-C2441-12.8	12.80	1	23-Dec-19	23-Dec-24	21-Dec-21	100
NAWALOKA HOSPITALS PLC	NHL/BC/30/09/22E14.4	14.40	4	30-Sep-13	30-Sep-22	29-Dec-21	100
NAWALOKA HOSPITALS PLC	NHL/BC/30/09/22F14.45	14.45	4	30-Sep-13	30-Sep-23	29-Dec-21	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/18/04/23-C2398-12.8	12.80	1	18-Apr-18	18-Apr-23	16-Apr-22	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/18/04/22-C2399-12.4	12.40	1	18-Apr-18	18-Apr-22	16-Apr-22	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/05/08/26-C2485-0	9.00	1	05-Aug-21	05-Aug-26	04-Aug-22	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/05/08/24-C2484-8	8.00	1	05-Aug-21	05-Aug-24	04-Aug-22	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/05/08/26-C2485-0	-	0	05-Aug-21	05-Aug-26	-	100
PEOPLE'S LEASING & FINANCE PLC	PLC/BD/05/08/24-C2483-0	-	0	05-Aug-21	05-Aug-24	-	100
SAMPATH BANK PLC	SAMP/BD/21/12/22-C2389-12.5	12.50	2	21-Dec-17	21-Dec-22	18-Dec-21	100
SAMPATH BANK PLC	SAMP/BD/20/03/23-C2390-12.5	12.50	2	20-Mar-18	20-Mar-23	17-Mar-22	100
SAMPATH BANK PLC	SAMP/BD/28/02/24-C2415-13.9	13.90	1	28-Feb-19	28-Feb-24	25-Feb-22	100
SAMPATH BANK PLC	SAMP/BD/12/04/28-C2474-9	9.00	1	12-Apr-21	12-Apr-28	11-Apr-22	100
SANASA LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED	SIC/BD/04/05/31-C2479-9.28	9.28	2	05-May-21	04-May-31	03-May-22	100
SANASA LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED	SIC/BD/04/05/26-C2478-9.05	9.05	2	05-May-21	04-May-26	03-May-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/30/08/24-C2429-12.875	12.88	2	30-Aug-19	30-Aug-24	27-Feb-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/18/04/24-C2421-14.5	14.50	2	18-Apr-19	18-Apr-24	15-Apr-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/29/03/25-C2396-13.2	13.20	2	29-Mar-18	29-Mar-25	27-Mar-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/15/07/23-C2354-13.75	13.75	2	15-Jul-16	15-Jul-23	13-Jan-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/29/03/28-C2397-13.5	13.50	2	29-Mar-18	29-Mar-28	27-Mar-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/29/03/23-C2395-12.85	12.85	2	29-Mar-18	29-Mar-23	27-Mar-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/18/04/24-C2422-15	15.00	1	18-Apr-19	18-Apr-24	16-Apr-22	100
SEYLAN BANK PLC	SEYB/BD/12/04/26-C2472-9.75</						

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you."
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Stars pay tribute to Stephen Sondheim

Fellow musical theatre icon Barbra Streisand has led tributes to Stephen Sondheim, who has died aged 91. Regarded as one of the foremost artists of the 20th Century, Sondheim wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story* and composed *Into the Woods* among many others including *Sweeney Todd* and *Company*. His friend and lawyer F. Richard Pappas announced his death, which he described as "sudden". Jake Gyllenhaal shared a photograph of Sondheim to his Instagram. In it, he is seen clapping in the audience of a theatre production. *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda took to Twitter to pay tribute to the late composer who appears as a character — played by Bradley Whitford — in Miranda's recently released film *Tick, Tick... Boom!*



the morning brunch

Rainforest Alliance outlines high hopes for SL in years to come

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

With the need for responsible business practices in our agricultural industry at an all-time high, the Rainforest Alliance, an eminent international non-profit organisation (NGO) working across 70 countries in exactly this field, held a reception to bring together key organisations and individuals to speak about the work they do and explore opportunities to strengthen their sustainability footprint in Sri Lanka through partnerships and collaborations with Sri Lankan organisations and individuals.

Expanding on the type of work they do, Rainforest Alliance Consultant Jehan CanagaRetna explained that the Rainforest Alliance is committed to creating a landscape-level intervention in the region to address critical sustainability challenges and that Sri Lanka is indeed a key priority country for the organisation, given the scale of impact it has generated in the tea sector. He added that the tea industry is currently facing huge scrutiny on an environmental and sustainable level, and that is vital for the tea industry to develop more sustainable practices for its stakeholders moving forward. This is something the Rainforest Alliance hopes to work closely with the tea industry on.

The Rainforest Alliance looks to create a more sustainable world by using social and market forces



Rainforest Alliance Consultant Jehan CanagaRetna

to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities. By bringing farmers, forest communities, companies, and individuals together, it addresses some of the most pressing social and environmental challenges of today. The organisation changes the way the world produces, sources, and consumes, with a focus on cocoa, coffee, tea, bananas, forest products, and palm oil through its certification programme, supply chain services, landscape management, and advocacy.

In 2020, more than 6.8 million hectares of land and more than 2.3 million farmers were certified according to the Rainforest Alliance or UTZ standards, which are designed to improve economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Speaking on some of the Rainforest Alliance's core values, Rainforest Alliance Director for South Asia Dr. Madhuri Nanda explained that chief among the Rainforest Alliance's values and methods of working is sustainable certification. The Rainforest



Rainforest Alliance Director for South Asia Dr. Madhuri Nanda

Alliance works with accredited bodies who verify agricultural and business practices to ensure a responsible intersection between business, agriculture, forests, and the environment.

Another core value of the Rainforest Alliance is driving landscape-level intervention, identifying key issues that challenge an overall landscape, and working with different stakeholders, private and public, to drive change that preserve land, cultures, and biodiversity.

The Rainforest Alliance also works to transform supply chain practices, working with companies to see how they can support sustainability within supply chains and help companies more easily make the shift towards sustainable agriculture.

Since 2008, the Rainforest Alliance has created a positive environmental and social impact on 150,000 hectares of land and 200,000 metric tonnes (MT) of produce by bringing them under sustainable agriculture practices.

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Sakina Mohammed



MY POETIC PLACE

'The writer in me awakes during dead silence at night'

Sakina on her latest book and her journey as a writer

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

Sakina Mohammed, a written and spoken poet on social media, full-time mom, and henna artist on a break, is also basically someone in search of her own identity and is currently on a quest to spread positivity and share her messages in any little way she can.

She recently published a book of poems, titled *My Poetic Place: The Journey to Self-Discovery*, and had a chat with *The Morning Brunch* to take us through the inspiration and meaning behind the book. Here's what she shared with us.

➔ What inspired you to become a writer?

Back in school, I started writing stories and poems; then I later studied literature as a subject for my Ordinary Levels (O/Ls). I always loved reading and writing. I've had such amazing teachers growing up that it surely is at school that the inspiration and passion for my writing came from. Rudyard Kipling's *If* is my all time favourite and I'm a fan of Emily Dickinson's poetry too!

➔ What is your book about?

As the name suggests, *My Poetic Place: The Journey to Self-Discovery*, my poetry is my comforting spot and these poems are messages to my soul in good times and bad, dedicated to different walks of life and human emotions and experiences through my journey of discovering myself. There is life, realities, positivity, motivation, love, importance of emotional, and mental wellbeing that I have penned down, finding inspiration in nature, my surroundings, and lessons that life taught me.

➔ What was the inspiration behind it?

As a sensitive person, capturing my emotions into poems has been therapeutic. I began my blog as a means to connect with myself at a point of the many complexities I was facing. After receiving appreciation from family and friends, I moved to social media and it has been so fulfilling. This book is my childhood dream come true, and my writings help me cope, heal, and march ahead with hope.

➔ Was there anything interesting that you had to edit out of your book?

Oh, it has been a never-ending cut and chop process. I initially wrote close to a hundred poems during the pandemic and the lockdowns alone; I was taking part in many prompts and challenges, so I was left with a large collection of poems and other writings I had penned in my idle time. I have left out many, many more poems I wish I could have included.

➔ What is the biggest challenge you face when writing?

My challenge is time! I just cannot focus when I have other things happening, unless it's a random thought. Then I make sure to jot it down. So I end up writing at night in the dead silence — that is when the writer in me wakes up.

➔ What advice would you give aspiring authors?

Write, no matter what you choose as a profession. Express yourself; words do have a lot of power. Your times it may seem like no one is interested, with the world shifting more to digital entertainment, but if you search enough, there are many platforms where writers share and connect that you can use to further your writing and express yourself, surrounded by like-minded people.

➔ What do you enjoy the most about writing?

It's definitely that I don't have to limit myself. I can drain all my excess energy with my ink and calm myself down. Later, when I begin re-reading what I wrote, it really helps, especially since I'm able to look at things in different perspectives as well.

➔ Do you have anything coming up for 2022?

This year is about taking this book as far as I can. Readings, spreading the word, and connecting. I'm hopeful; I occasionally get anxious, but I'm undoubtedly looking forward to the coming year.

"My Poetic Place: The Journey to Self-Discovery" by Sakina Mohammed can be purchased via *The Jam Fruit Tree publications.*

Sri Lanka is not the same as the Maldives

BY DIMITHRI WIJESINGHE

Speaking at the Committee on Public Enterprises MP S.M. Marikkar noted that the tourism strategy of Sri Lanka must undergo some changes, pointing out that the Maldives still account for 70% of pre-pandemic tourist arrivals, while Sri Lanka is yet to reach these levels.

In response to the MP's statement, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) Chairman Kimarli Fernando stated that Sri Lanka does indeed have many lessons to learn from the Maldives, and also noted that while working with a much smaller team of fewer members in their tourism departments they are quite efficient.

She stated that we can certainly pick up a few things from the Maldives and their tourism promotion strategy, especially when it comes to targeting the elite. However, she added there's also the fact that the Maldives has set up global agencies to promote tourism around the world, and that Sri Lanka does not have such a strategy, but

Cabinet approval has been gained to set up such agencies.

SLTDA Director General Dhammika Wijesinghe, speaking to *The Morning Brunch* expressed her thoughts on the matter as well, notably with regards to MP Marikkar's comments making comparisons between Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

She said that it is not quite possible to make such direct correlations primarily because of geography. She stated that the geographical features of the two countries are incredibly different, so much so that it is absolutely incomparable when it comes to Covid-19 safety. "Over there each island is on its own, the hotels are far enough apart, so much so that they are in their own quarantine, in the most effective way," she said, pointing out that in Sri Lanka it is a very different story: "If you go to a beach, let's say somewhere like Bentota, people are going to mingle, interact, there are hotels next to each other," she stated.

She also added that unless everyone is going to travel in a bio-bubble entirely

isolating themselves or their group from the rest, it is quite difficult to ensure Covid-19 safety in our island.

Are we on track?

Wijesinghe stated that Sri Lanka's tourism strategy is on track, and that they do have their projections for 2025. "We are on track up to now, however there is rising concern with the new strain," she shared. She noted that there is cause for concern due to the new strain of the virus — Omicron, and because of it they are being cautious, especially considering that it has been found in six countries up to now.

"The future is all up to the Ministry of Health, especially considering the new variant and the challenges it brings," she added, noting that they will have to await and abide by the guidelines that the Health Ministry implements.

Director General Wijesinghe provided that there is a tourism strategy in place and there is much work being done to revive and sustain tourism on the island. However, she also noted that the process will take time and stated that the circumstances and nature will be affecting the cause, so for the time being we must wait and see.



SLTDA Director General Dhammika Wijesinghe



M+ celebrates its opening in Hong Kong



M+ Museum Director Suhanya Raffel

M+, Asia's first global museum of contemporary visual culture in the West Kowloon Cultural District of Hong Kong, was declared open to the public on 12 November 2021, with three weekends of celebratory programmes planned for everyone to enjoy.

The opening displays feature M+'s pre-eminent collections of visual art, design, and architecture, and moving images from Hong Kong, Greater China, Asia, and beyond. The presentations showcase approximately 1,500 works across 33 galleries and other spaces in the museum.

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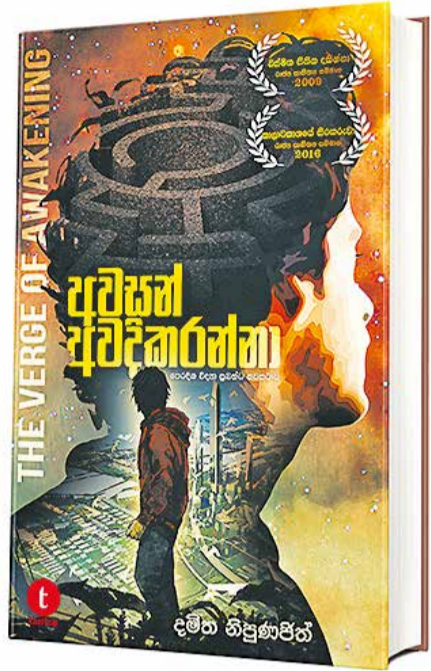
DAMITHA NIPUNAJITH'S 'AWASAN AWADIKARANNA' TO LAUNCH ON 2 DECEMBER

State Literary Award winning writer, Damitha Nipunajith's debut novel *Awasan Awadikaranna* will

launch on Thursday, December 2 at 9 a.m. at the Ahasa bookshop, Boralessgamuwa.

Nipunajith's previous science fiction short story collections, *Vismitha Sihina Dakinna* and *Kalawakashaye Sirakaruwa* both won the State Literary Award for the best independent work of science fiction in 2009 and 2016 respectively. It should be noted that his debut novel falls into the Eastern science fiction genre, which readers have hardly been exposed to. A graduate of Sri Jayawardanepura University, Damitha Nipunajith is an established science communicator, and currently the editor-in-chief of *Vidusara* science magazine.

Signed copies of Awasan Awadikaranna, the first book published by Ahasa Publishers under the brand Thantra, will be available for a discounted price on the launch date. For doorstep delivery, the book can be ordered via the Ahasa Books Facebook page.



SUROL celebrates 50 years of service to disabled leprosy-affected people

Established in 1971, being made a Government-approved charity by 1973, SUROL (The Society for Upliftment and Rehabilitation of Leprosy Affected Persons) has focused on one goal for the past 50 years, which is to enable disabled persons affected by leprosy to stand as equals with their counterparts within the community and be accepted by society at large.

One of SUROL's greatest champions was Fr. Glen Fernando, who dedicated his life to this cause. With the auspices of Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the current General Secretary, Rev. Fr. Neil Dias Karunaratne has taken over the responsibilities of SUROL in February 2012, and works tirelessly to bring awareness through education programmes, coordinates relief work, and conducts rehabilitation programmes to make the organisation's vision a reality.

The reality, however, is that leprosy is an infection that affects the skin and nerves, and has long-lasting effects on the afflicted who face economic hardships as they are shunned by society. Many of the cases regularly reported throughout the island have severe deformities such as clawed hands and feet, and fingers and toes which require amputation. This is where SUROL steps in, to bring relief to the "poorest of the poor" in society, who when afflicted with this disease are left to fend for themselves. A predominantly donor-driven organisation, SUROL requires Rs. 36,000 per year or Rs. 3,000 per month to sponsor a patient. With the increasing cost of living, this sum is barely sufficient for the patients and their family to exist, however, the organisation strives to make a positive change in the lives of the marginalised. Although there are many such cases identified for support, SUROL finds it difficult to take on more to their fold with the reduction in funding, especially in the last few years due to the pandemic and other financial constraints of beneficiaries, most of whom are retirees.

Relieving the suffering, while offering aid to those afflicted by leprosy is a tough task at the best of times, the present situation has made that task an uphill challenge for SUROL. However, the organisation is determined to remain true to its cause, and to that end, SUROL has been supporting 238 patients, and distributed hampers worth Rs. 7500 with essential provisions during the Christmas season and the Sinhala and Tamil New Year to the marginalised individuals throughout the country. In addition, 30 patients at the Hendala Hospital have received clothing and nutritional items during this time. Currently, stationery items, school bags, school uniforms, and shoes are donated by the educational assistance programme conducted by SUROL to the children of 37



families. The organisation has aided projects with special requirements, such as building toilets, repairing houses especially roofs, purchasing bicycles, tricycles, wheel chairs, along with crutches, spectacles, and special footwear for those in need.

As SUROL arrives at a milestone, its 50th anniversary, SUROL plans to forego the celebrations and concentrate on providing our beneficiaries with a one-off gift of cash from a special collection through this appeal, an apt means of commemorating 50 years of uninterrupted service to the poorest disabled leprosy affected persons and their families. SUROL hopes that more generous individuals would come forward to support and donate to this worthy cause, especially now as it would make a difference to those marginalised in society by giving them hope.

You can partner SUROL in its cause by providing a gift of Rs. 36,000 annually to sponsor a family, or contribute any amount towards a special Golden Anniversary one-off gift by end November this year in celebration of this 50th year of SUROL in Sri Lanka.

SUROL bank details

- Account name: SUROL
- Account number: 1201103401
- Name of bank: Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC
- Branch: Borella Branch
- Bank branch code: 7056 019
- Bank SWIFT code: CCEYLKX

Please visit the website www.surol.lk or get in contact via email info@surol.lk.



A.R.P. WIJEYESEKERA on his 100th birth anniversary

BY MALA SALGADO

On his 100th birth anniversary, we remember our father with pride. He was always fearless and honest. He said what he believed. This trait of his sometimes led to co-workers, friends, and relations misunderstanding him.

He was a Royalist, an engineer, an UNPer, a journalist, a husband, and a loving father.

Ceylon Government Railway (CGR) and Ceylon Transport Board (CTB) were two large Government sector institutions in which he shone. While at the CGR, he was in charge of the train that took Her Majesty the Queen to Kandy in 1952.

He had several stints at the CTB. He was the chief engineer when the bus companies were nationalised. In 1968, he went back as Chairman under V.A. Sugathadasa. When the UNP was elected back to power in 1977, the trade unions wanted him back as Chairman. He refused to bow down to the minister in charge and resigned from the chairmanship post within a short time of assuming the office.

He worked in many other Government and private sector



Institutions. Among them were Lever Brothers, Lanka Sugar Corporation, State Hardware Corporation, and Richard Peiris.

He tried his hands at entrepreneurship. He started Tractors and Road Way (Pvt.) Ltd. He had pride in Walauwewatte Industries where he manufactured foam rubberised coir and foam mattresses. He nurtured the family coconut property Walahena Estate, where the yields per tree were one of the best in the Chilaw/Puttalam areas.

Leadership roles were held by him in various professional bodies. Among them were the Institution of Engineers, Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and National Chamber of Industries.

He was a strong UNPer. He was the joint secretary along with G.V.P. Samarasinghe of the committee that drafted the 1977 UNP manifesto. This manifesto included a section on the protection of local industry which was dear to his heart.

In his later years he was blind, but he continued to write various articles to newspapers and journals. His varied interest and knowledge could be seen in articles such as "Corruption must cease", "Small and medium scale enterprise development", "An export drive and an import substitution effort are complementary", and "Oil, bicycles and electric power".

He lived by the premise "Do not ask what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country".

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Deepthi Amarasekera presents 'Seeing Life In Colour'



Deepthi Amarasekera

"Seeing Life In Colour" is a celebration of Amarasekera's creative journey that commenced over a decade ago when she finally embarked on pursuing her childhood desire to paint. The deep yearning for creativity had remained unrealised until now, since most of her formal education was science-based. She pursued a bachelor's degree in microbiology and an MPhil in virology at the University of Aberdeen and then went on to work and live in Scotland for many years before embracing the role of motherhood. The very fabric of her artwork was built on a framework of interwoven memories from her childhood, adulthood and motherhood interspersed and interconnected with her faith. Discovering and unleashing the creative side in her later life has been such an amazing journey and she hopes that the excitement and joy of the process has translated to all the pieces that will be displayed in her debut exhibition which will be open to the public from 4-5 December 2021 at the Harold Peiris Gallery.

Marche de la foi, which means walk of faith in French, was conceived devoid of structure, inhibitions and time constraints, where each piece of artwork had her undivided attention for as long as it was needed to reach perfection and became a form of worship to God who made her life exceedingly beautiful from within, filling her with a peace that surpassed all understanding. There is

something cathartic in the creative process, whereby she enjoyed having complete control of the outcome of what was produced regardless of the errors, flaws and blemishes that are inevitable while creating art. The external beauty of any piece, masks the many layers of imperfections, fears, insecurities, and flaws of the creative process, finally unveiling the near perfect image that is finally displayed.



This aspect fascinated her, since life in itself resembles the very same, so unique to one's own journey and experiences but encompassing so much beauty whether it be latently buried within.

Unlike many other artists who most often have a formal training, Amarasekera had none, other than a passion to explore my creative side and a still small voice that guided and directed her path. She believes that unspoken and unmaterialised aspirations have every chance of becoming a

reality when circumstances align themselves preempting almost a divine intervention which has been so evident in her life. She hopes that her work captures and illustrates the very energy of what predisposed the painting in the first instance. She has no grand illusion that her artwork will appeal to all who view her work but she does hope that her work would speak to the hearts of some, and evoke a sense of peace, calm, hope, joy and even give a glimpse of the unlimited capabilities



and talents buried within people that usually remain dormant and hidden until a cataclysmic event is faced, which instigates and arouses the latent possibilities that people are born with to arise to the surface.

Her abstractions reflect certain motifs and shapes infusing into her work from her scientific background quite unconsciously which illustrates the fact that life experiences, whether it be in the form of formal education or otherwise, have an innate tendency to get ingrained in the recess of the subconscious mind and adds to the composite human being that people get moulded into. Amarasekera uses art to externalise the myriad of emotions that are buried within using a melange of vibrant and contrasting colour juxtaposed with shapes and motifs that keep repeating trying to emphasise the fact that human beings are created to live an abundant life, experiencing the diversity of colour, hoping that one would become intoxicated with the beauty of it, thereby elevating the mood and attitude of the soul, rather than be

confined to a mere existential type of living simply to survive, seeing life through the visionary lens encompassing just a few colours when there is such a varied compilation of vibrancy to choose from.

"The aspect of colour and the brief discussion of it, makes one ask the empirical question whether we are truly living that abundant life that is waiting to be experienced, lived and celebrated? Or do we simply exist in a bare minimum reality, confined, and imprisoned by our own doing, almost afraid to live and experience life to the fullest?" questioned Amarasekera.

After almost a decade of an incubation period, Marche de la foi is excited to transition into the next stage of its life, hoping to create customised art, based on the ambience, space and vision of the client whether it be for a home or office.

Deepthi Amarasekera's exhibition "Seeing Life In Colour" will be held from 4-5 December 2021 at the Harold Peiris Gallery at the Lionel Wendt.



Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne launches her autobiography

'In the best interest of every child' reflects her remarkable journey in the public health sector of Sri Lanka

Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne who is well known for her role at UNICEF Sri Lanka as a national professional for 27 years contributing her expertise to many children related projects pre/post and during the civil war of Sri Lanka has launched her autobiography.

Titled as *In the best interest of every child* tells readers about the relentless pursuit of her journey to give every child the best possible healthcare in Sri Lanka, how they achieved remarkable healthcare milestones during the peak of the war, her international experience serving at the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Geneva and many inspiring real-life stories.

When asked about the inspiration behind the book she shared: "In today's world, particularly in the international sphere, there appear to be subtle efforts to bully poorer and less developed countries like Sri Lanka, by some well to do



Public health veteran Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne presenting her autobiography to the UNICEF Country Representative to Sri Lanka Christian Skoog

Western nations. This is a growing phenomenon of people passing judgment on countries like Sri Lanka with no real knowledge of the country or its people. This is why I decided that the truth must prevail. The fact that Sri Lanka successfully won a brutal battle against one of the most dreaded terrorist organisations is a victory of no mean proportion. In addition, as I have articulated, amid a war priority was given to help and support the people of the country, especially families and children, and uphold their best interest. Focused in this book are my experiences of



Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne with her autobiography 'In the best interest of every child'

working in the midst of a conflict."

Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne holds a medical degree from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo and a master's degree in public health from the Harvard School of Public Health in the US.

During her remarkable career, she has contributed her skills and expertise to the Sri Lanka Peace Secretariat, the National Child Protection Authority and the Department of Probation and Child Care. She was also one of the nine candidates elected to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 2010 to serve in Geneva. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been celebrated on 20 November annually since its adoption in 1989.

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Rainforest...

About 65,000 small farmers are already part of the Rainforest Alliance certification system in the country. Jointly with the businesses, the Rainforest Alliance has been engaging with farmers to train them towards sustainable agricultural practices and address issues such as deforestation, watershed conservation, biodiversity conservation, and human-wildlife conflict (HEC).

The Sustainable Agriculture Standard promotes climate-smart and regenerative agriculture practices, alongside management of human rights issues in the plantations – for instance, child labour, forced labour, gender rights, and other rights-based issues.

Through the next few years, Dr. Nanda shared that the Rainforest Alliance, which has been working in Sri Lanka for over a decade, wants to build a bigger team locally and drive a bigger impact within the country.

"Our ongoing work in Sri Lanka needs to be consolidated and partnerships curated to work towards a common agenda for sustainable development for the country. Although the Rainforest Alliance-certified members and many in the plantation sector know about the value we bring in terms of sustainability, we feel the need to raise more awareness about our mandate for Sri Lanka and join forces with more like-minded organisations, as there is indeed strength in a collective approach when it comes to sustainability," Dr. Nanda said in a statement released at the event.

M+...

To inaugurate the new galleries, six exhibitions enabled visitors to explore the overarching multi-disciplinary and interregional themes and narratives at the heart of the collections M+ has built since 2012.

Designed by a global team of the world-renowned architecture

practice Herzog and de Meuron, in partnership with TFP Farrells and Arup, the 65,000 square metre M+ building is among Hong Kong's most iconic landmarks, both monumental and radically open in its position in the urban landscape.

M+ Museum Director Suhanya Raffel said: "Our vision for M+ is to build a community of learning that encourages empathy, respect, multiple perspectives, and creativity through visual culture for all our audiences to benefit from. By offering an open and welcoming platform with creative learning experiences, M+ is dedicated to creating an active culture that connects people, objects, and spaces. It is our hope that the museum inspires the city's residents and international visitors alike."

To celebrate the opening of the museum, M+ will stage opening programmes for the public across three Fridays and weekends following the launch, featuring special tours, making workshops, sensory experiences, live performances, screenings, and digital engagement.

AIIESEC partners with Lanka Hospitals to spread awareness on serious illnesses

Project 'ON-CALL'

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

The first session of the four-day webinar series titled "ON-CALL: Power Up to Prevent Diabetes – a growing concern affecting both the young and the adults", which was organised by AIIESEC in University of Peradeniya in collaboration with Lanka Hospitals PLC, was successfully concluded on 23 November with over 400 participants on both Zoom and Facebook Live.

AIIESEC in University of Peradeniya is the fifth local committee of AIIESEC in Sri Lanka, which was promoted to the highest

level very recently, followed by the excellent performance within a brief period since its establishment while contributing its best to the vision of AIIESEC. They were also recognised as an entity with the best value delivery globally. Currently, it runs more than 10 different volunteering programmes on six different United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with an active, talented membership of 200-plus individuals.

What is project ON-CALL?

ON-CALL is a new initiative by AIIESEC in University of Peradeniya in partnership with Lanka Hospitals, which aims to tackle a timely issue regarding non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and their significant rise as a result of the lifestyle change that came about with the pandemic.

This project will consist of four sessions conducted by the country's most renowned medical personnel and will address four all-around relevant and significant topics.

Striving to achieve SDG No. 3, this project will ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages. In an attempt to battle the deadliest

Representatives of AIIESEC in University of Peradeniya and Lanka Hospitals



health crisis of the modern world, NCDs, and prevent the already concerning statistics from taking a turn for the worse, this joint venture hopes to instill awareness among communities to create change that comes from within each individual.

The knowledge one will gain from these webinars could be the key to rejuvenating one's wellbeing for a longer and healthier life. It could be the proper first step to let your life take a turn for the better and revolutionise a generation to come.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to equip yourself with the proper knowledge that could enrich the lives of you and your loved ones.

Power up to prevent diabetes

The keynote speakers of the session were National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL) Consultant Endocrinologist, Sri Lanka Diabetes

Federation (SLDF) President, Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) Vice President, and Lanka Hospitals Visiting Consultant Dr. Manilka Sumanathilake and Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children Consultant Paediatric Endocrinologist and Lanka Hospitals Visiting Consultant Dr. Navoda Athapattu.

The panellists discussed the effective ways of improving diabetes management, preventing complications, and improving the quality of life of people who are living with diabetes, including adults, children, as well as adolescents.

Dr. Sumanathilake discussed diabetes, Covid-19, and the connection between the two conditions. He pointed out that people with diabetes are more likely to have worse complications of Covid-19, if they are infected with the virus.

"The more health conditions

someone has (for example, diabetes plus heart disease), this can add to their risk of getting those serious complications from Covid-19," he said, also emphasising the importance of taking the vaccine for Covid-19 and making healthy lifestyle modifications to control diabetes in this new normal era.

Dr. Athapattu specifically explained and elaborated on how to keep a strict eye on the blood glucose levels of a child, identify the symptoms of diabetes and pre-diabetes in children, and obtain proper diabetes care. She also explained how to manage child obesity, which, she stressed, can lead to type 2 diabetes. As experts in their field, they related how new findings in the field can be incorporated into clinical practice and how to apply clinically relevant highlights to improve patient lives.

Scan the QR code below or visit: <http://aiiesec.lk/oncall-registration> to register for the events.



SRI LANKA BECOMING RUNNERS-UP IN SOUTH ASIAN BASKETBALL

A great achievement by a young team: Timothy Nithushan



Sri Lanka national basketball team which became runners-up in the recently concluded SABA Championship in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with the Sri Lanka Basketball Federation President Aelian Gunawardene who travelled with the team to Dhaka as Chef de Mission

Sri Lanka national basketball team became runners-up in the 8th SABA (South Asian Basketball Association) Championship 2021 in Dhaka, Bangladesh recently.

SABA oversees the sub-zone of South Asia in the FIBA (Fédération Internationale de Basketball or the International Basketball Federation) Asia region. The SABA Championship serves as a qualifier for various FIBA Asia events such as the FIBA Asia Championship and the FIBA Asia Cup.

Introduced in 2002, the SABA Championship has been held eight times now, including the 2021 event which was staged at Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 15-19 November.

Won two out of three

Four countries out of eight regional federations took part in the tournament this year. They were Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka.

At the start of the tournament this year, India had the best world country ranking out of the four participating countries. They were ranked 78 as Sri Lanka (132), the Maldives (142), and Bangladesh (146) followed consecutively.

Overall, there were six matches this time. Sri Lanka played three. They beat Bangladesh on 15 November to a score of 67-56, lost against India 114-48 on 17 November, before beating the Maldives 77-45 on 18 November.

Sri Lanka became second in the final standings and thus qualified for the 2025 FIBA Asia Cup Qualifiers.

Sri Lanka won the title in 2018

In fact, Sri Lanka had won the SABA Championship when it was held last time, also in Dhaka, in 2018. That time, hosts Bangladesh were the runners-up.

In the previous six tournaments, India had won five (in 2002, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017). In 2015, Sri Lanka became the runners-up.

In 2013, Bangladesh won the title beating Pakistan in the final.

Following are excerpts from an interview with Sri Lanka national basketball team's Timothy Nithushan, mainly on the country's achievement at the recent SABA Championship. Born in 1991, the Batticaloa-based forward played a key role in Sri Lanka's campaign.

Can you explain briefly your basketball background and your involvement with the Sri Lanka team?

I am from Batticaloa and I played for St. Micheal's College in my college years. In 2014 I was first selected for the Sri Lanka men's national team. I also represented SL Navy and Hambantota Sports Club in the local tournaments. I was also a member of the Sri Lanka 3x3 men's team in 2017 and 2018.

Please explain about the importance of the SABA Championship runners-up achievement this time.

SABA Championship is only played between South Asian nations. The tournament is considered as a qualifier for FIBA Asia Cup. So it was very important for us to be among the top two in the region.

How has Sri Lanka fared in the tournament in previous years?

Sri Lanka always played really well in the South Asian region. We never missed an opportunity to place in the top three since 2014 in the SABA Championship. Only India gives us a tough time.

How was the tournament this time? A word on how Sri Lanka performed against the other nations.

This time was very different from previous other tournaments we had participated in. That is because we had to leave our loved ones behind and go into a bio-bubble due to Covid-19 fears.

It wasn't an easy task, but as a team we stayed together and overcame the tough times. We performed really well in this tournament since we had good practice.



Timothy Nithushan during a practice session at the SABA Championship in Dhaka

Our only loss came against India. We beat Bangladesh and the Maldives to get the silver medal. All the youngsters stepped up and showed their character which is a good sign going forward.

A word about the team and coaches. What from here? What are the challenges coming up in the near future?

This team is very young. There are

very experienced players too who have been in the scene for many years. Their contribution in this tournament was superb and they always helped the younger players by sharing their experience.

The main challenge is to play well in the next qualifiers and get into the next round. We have already started our individual training sessions. Therefore, we all are expecting a better result in the coming tournaments.

ON THIS DAY



Younis Khan was born today

1956 Chris Brasher became the first Briton to win an Olympic gold medal in track and field since 1936, when he claimed the 3,000 m steeplechase in 8:41.2 seconds at the Melbourne Games. He was initially disqualified but the decision was reversed on appeal

1973 Birth of Welsh footballer Ryan Giggs

1975 British auto racer Graham Hill died while trying to land a plane in the fog near London at the age of 46. He was the Formula 1 World Champion twice, winning in 1962 and 1968

1977 Birth of Pakistan's highest run-getter in cricket, Younis Khan

2009 Nikolay Davydenko of Russia won his only Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) World Tour Finals over Argentine star Juan Martín del Potro in the final in London, England

2015 In the 104th Davis Cup, Great Britain beat Belgium 6-3, 7-5, 6-3, which was their first win since 1936

2015 British Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton finished second in season-ending Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix, his third overall, and his second consecutive World Drivers' Championship by 59 points from team-mate Nico Rosberg



Former NFL player Darren Sharper at a court hearing

2016 Former National Football League (NFL) player Darren Sharper was found guilty of rape. Following Sharper's 2010 retirement, allegations surfaced that he drugged and raped several women across various states, leading to him being charged in 2014. Sharper pled guilty to the rape and drug-related charges and was sentenced in 2016 to 20 years in prison



In 1956, Chris Brasher became the first Briton to win an Olympic gold in track and field since 1936

FOOTBALL NEWS FROM EUROPE



Conte surprised on the lack of quality at Spurs

Antonio Conte has admitted that it will "take time to bring Tottenham back" while slamming their "poor" display in an upset defeat to Mura. Spurs slumped to their first loss under Conte in the Europa Conference League, losing 2-1 to Slovenian minnows Mura last Thursday (25). A stoppage-time winner from Amadej Marosa gave the hosts all three points, leaving Spurs' new Manager fuming on the touchline.

Conte expressed his disappointment in his post-match press conference, telling reporters: "This a bad loss for us. The performance was poor. We know we have a lot of work ahead of us. This is a difficult moment for us."

Wenger to make Arsenal return

Mikel Arteta has held talks with Arsene Wenger over a return to the club. The Gunners' boss has never hidden his desire to have Wenger back at Arsenal in some capacity and has recently installed a giant picture of the legendary Frenchman on the wall at the entrance to the club's training ground.

And Arteta has now revealed that

he has held discussions with his former Manager about returning for the first time since he left in 2019.

When asked whether a formal offer had been made to Wenger to come back, Arteta said: "Well, we have been in communication. I saw him and I talked to him when we went to see the film (*Arsene Wenger: Invincible*) and it was incredibly pleasant to chat to him and hopefully we can bring him close."

Game called off after players were reduced to six

Belenenses named just nine outfield players in a match against Benfica last Saturday (27) night, with the game called off at 7-0 when injuries reduced the team to six.

The Portuguese side could not field a full strength side due to a Covid-19 outbreak at the club, and rather than cancel the fixture and potentially suffer further penalties, the club went ahead without subs, and without the full complement of players.

Two goalkeepers were named to bulk out the team, and Benfica showed little mercy as they went ahead after just one minute through an own goal.

Indian batters who scored debut test hundred at home

The 26-year-old Mumbai-born Shreyas Santosh Iyer struck a vital century against World Test Champion New Zealand last Saturday (27) on the second day of their first Test at Green Park, Kanpur. Who had done the memorable feat for India before Iyer?

Batsman score opposition venue year

1. Lala Amarnath 118 England Mumbai 1933
2. Deepak Shodhan 110 Pakistan

3. Kripal Singh 100* New Zealand Hyderabad 1955
4. Hanumant Singh 105 England Delhi 1964
5. Gundappa Viswanath 137 Australia Kanpur 1969
6. Mohammad Azharuddin 110 England Kolkata 1985
7. Shikhar Dhawan 187 Australia Mohali 2013
8. Rohit Sharma 177 West Indies Kolkata 2013
9. Prithvi Shaw 134 West Indies Rajkot 2018

10. Shreyas Iyer 105 New Zealand Kanpur 2021
- *Not out

Notes:

1. Six more Indian batsmen have scored debut Test hundreds away from home: i. Abbas Ali Baig (in England in 1959), ii. Surinder Amarnath (in New Zealand in 1976), iii. Pravin Amre (in South Africa in 1992), iv. Sourav Ganguly (in England in 1996), v. Virender Schwag (in South Africa in 2001), and vi. Suresh Raina (in Sri Lanka in 2010)
2. India played her inaugural Test in 1932 and 16 batsmen have scored debut centuries so far
3. Four Sri Lankans have done the feat, either home or away: i. Brendon Kuruppu (201 n.o. vs. New Zealand in 1987), ii. Romesh Kaluwitharana (132 vs. Australia in 1992), iii. Thilan Samaraweera (103 vs. India in 2001), and iv. Pathum Nissanka (103 n.o. vs. West Indies in 2021)
4. Sri Lanka played her inaugural Test match in 1982



In Green Park, Kanpur last Saturday (27) Shreyas Iyer became only the 10th Indian batsman to score a Test century on debut at home

CENTURIES ON DEBUT FOR INDIA IN HOME TESTS				
	SCORE	OPPONENT	VENUE	YEAR
LALA AMARNATH	118	ENGLAND	MUMBAI (GYM)	1933
DEEPAK SHODHAN	110	PAKISTAN	KOLKATA	1952
AG KRIPAL SINGH	100*	NEW ZEALAND	HYDERABAD	1955
HANUMANT SINGH	105	ENGLAND	DELHI	1964
GUNDAPPA VISWANATH	137	AUSTRALIA	KANPUR	1969
MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN	110	ENGLAND	KOLKATA	1985
SHIKHAR DHAWAN	187	AUSTRALIA	MOHALI	2013
ROHIT SHARMA	177	WEST INDIES	KOLKATA	2013
PRITHVI SHAW	134	WEST INDIES	RAJKOT	2018
SHREYAS IYER	100*	NEW ZEALAND	KANPUR	2021



On 20 November 1969, legendary Gundappa Viswanath made his debut century against Australia in Green Park, Kanpur

the morning sports



Dasun Shanaka ousted from Abu Dhabi T10 captancy!

Sri Lanka white-ball cricket Captain Dasun Shanaka was the Skipper of the Chennai Braves team in the ongoing Abu Dhabi T10 League. But in their match yesterday (28), against Team Abu Dhabi, Angelo Perera led the team as Shanaka just played as a top-order batter. Was it due to the Braves' poor performance under his leadership in the tournament so far? Braves have now lost eight out of eight and are lagging in the bottom of the six-team tournament. Will the situation affect his national credential as well? Fingers crossed!



Is Chamari Athapaththu retiring?

Prominent women's cricket batter in the world stage and current Sri Lanka Captain Chamari Athapaththu is going to retire from international cricket and going to migrate to Australia, the social media reports appearing yesterday (28) hinted.

106TH COLOMBO CHAMPIONSHIP TENNIS 2021

Nilaweera, Wijemanne enter Men's Open Singles final



Tuvini de Alwis serves in her women's semi-final against Anjalika Kurera at the Colombo Championship tennis now on at the SLTA Playing Section in Colombo

PHOTO ISHAN WANNIARACHCHI

Here are some of the latest results of the above tournament, one of the highest-rated annual tennis competitions in Sri Lanka, now being held at the Sri Lanka Tennis Association (SLTA) clay courts in Colombo.

- Wijemanne beat Archana Lokuge 6/2, 6/2

Final:

- Nilaweera vs. Wijemanne today, Monday (29)

Women's Open Singles

Quarter-finals:

- Anjalika Kurera beat Hasali Gajaba 4/1, 4/2

Semi-finals:

- Anjalika Kurera beat Tuvini de Alwis 6/1, 6/1
- Neyara Weerawansa led Savini Jayasuriya 6-1, 5-5 (5-1) (match interrupted due to rain. To be continued today)

Men's Open Singles

Quarter-finals:

- Chathurya Nilaweera beat Meshal Sinnen 4/2, 4/1
- Thehan Wijemanne beat Kiran Vairavanathan 4/2, 3/5, 11/9

Semi-finals:

- Nilaweera beat Vibuda Wijebandara 6/1, 6/2

Kiwis chase 280 to win on last day

First cricket Test, India vs. New Zealand, day 4 report from Kanpur

India ended day four on a high after half-centuries from Shreyas Iyer and Wriddhiman Saha allowed them to set New Zealand a target of 284 before Ravichandran Ashwin struck late to get the scalp of Will Young.

Brief scores:

- India 345 and 234/7 declared (Shreyas Iyer 65, Wriddhiman Saha 61 n.o., Ravichandran Ashwin 32, Axar Patel 28 n.o., Kyle Jamieson 3/40, Tim Southee 3/75)
- New Zealand 296 and (target 284) 4/1



Tajjul Islam took 7/116 for Bangladesh

First Test, Bangladesh vs. Pakistan, day 3 report from Chattogram

Sajjul Islam ran through the Pakistan batting line-up and returned with a seven-wicket haul to give Bangladesh a crucial first-innings lead before Shaheen Afridi and Hasan Ali wrestled back control.

Pakistan had got off to a brilliant start on day two after skittling Bangladesh out for

330. The visitors finished the day on 145/0, with Abid Ali seven runs away from a century and Abdullah Shafique on 52.

Brief scores:

- Bangladesh 330 and 39/4
- Pakistan 286 (Abid Ali 133, Abdullah Shafique 52, Faheem Ashraf 38; Tajjul Islam 7/116, Ebadot Hossain 2/47)

Sri Lanka set to make one change today

• Sri Lanka vs. West Indies second and final Test begins in Galle

BY RANJIKA PERERA

Triumphant Sri Lanka will take the field for the second and final test against West Indies at the Galle International Stadium today.

The hosts put together a dominant performance in the first test in all three departments. From winning the toss and scoring runs at the top, skipper Dimuth Karunaratne had the perfect game. His century in the first innings, supported by half centuries from Pathum Nissanka and Dhanajaya De Silva, set the platform for the hosts. The young spinning trio of Lasith Embuldeniya, Praveen Jayawickrama and Ramesh Mendis did the rest with the ball. Rain almost spoiled the party on the fifth day, but "Embula" bagged the final wicket minutes before the heavens opened up, reminding us of that famous win over Pakistan in 2014.

Two seamers underused

In the first game, Sri Lanka opted to go with two seaming options. At the post match press conference, Karunaratne said: "We opted for two seamers expecting some sort of support from the pitch on the first day. There was rain around the last couple of days. But we realised the pitch wasn't assisting the seamers." Both Suranga Lakmal and Dushmantha Chameera only bowled 18 overs in the test while Lakmal didn't even get a ball in the second innings.

At the pre-match press conference, Dinesh Chandimal confirmed that Dushmantha Chameera will be rested for the second test. It is the best choice for the team and for Chameera who has been playing continuous cricket for a long time. He could do well with a break away from cricket.



Sri Lanka recorded an encouraging win by 187 runs in the first Test last Thursday (25)

PHOTO © SLC

Debut for Asalanka?

With Chameera out of contention for the second test, who will replace him on the side? Extra batter or another spinner? Opting for another spinner is highly unlikely and that is why Charith Asalanka is the only viable option for the hosts.

Given the form that Asalanka is in and the confidence that he has in his game, Sri Lanka would only merit with him in the side. He will add more batting depth and his expertise against spin would be an added advantage for the hosts.

Pitch is more dry compared to the last game: Chandimal

The news on the pitch is that it would assist the spinners more compared to the last game. Which makes the toss all the more important as the team batting first will have a big advantage. "It was pretty

hot and humid in Galle in the last couple of days which means it will be assisting the spinners more and I think the spinners will enjoy bowling in this pitch," added Chandimal. This almost confirms that there won't be another seamer added as a replacement for Chameera.

'Mickey's experience helped us a lot'

Today's game will be Coach Mickey Arthur's final game in charge of the Sri Lankan team. Despite having suffered many losses during his reign, Chandimal was full of praise for the outgoing coach. "Mickey has a lot of experience with coaching the Australian side and he was also in charge of the Pakistan side for a long time. He emphasised a lot on fitness. There is expectation to win every game. His ideas and tactics really

helped the players to become better in our game. It's his last game and we hope as a team to finish off this game well."

Vital points in the WTC

With last week's win, Sri Lanka climbed up the World Test Championship (WTC) ladder with 100% winning ratio. In the post match press conference, skipper Karunaratne emphasised on the importance of getting maximum points out of the home series. Since of late, Sri Lanka haven't been able to utilise the home advantage and it was mainly due to the weakness in batting against spin. In the last game however, Sri Lanka showed grit and determination against spin and they will be hoping to continue the same in today's game.

CANCELLED WOMEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS IN ZIMBABWE

Six Sri Lanka women players, official test positive for Covid-19

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) yesterday (28) said that six players from the national women's team and an official, who were with them in the now-cancelled International Cricket Council (ICC) Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2021 in Zimbabwe, have tested positive for Covid-19.

Whether what they have contacted is the much-feared Omicron is not certain nor has been reported so anywhere until this edition went to press last afternoon.

Steps were being taken to bring back the Sri Lanka women's team from Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said yesterday (28).

Cancelled on Saturday

Play in two of the three Qualifier matches scheduled for Saturday (27) – Zimbabwe vs. Pakistan and U.S.A. vs. Thailand – started as scheduled but the third fixture of the day, between the West Indies and Sri Lanka, could not be staged as a member of the Sri Lanka team support staff had tested positive for Covid-19, ICC revealed in its report on Saturday.

On Saturday night, the ICC announced that the qualifying event in Zimbabwe had been abandoned, due to the emergence of the latest Covid-19 variant.

Sri Lanka thrown out

Following the detection of a new Covid-19 variant in South Africa, named Omicron, and placement of Zimbabwe on the pandemic's red list by various countries, the ICC on Saturday



Sri Lanka will not feature in the next Women's Cricket World Cup, to be held in New Zealand

cancelled the Women's World Cup Qualifier in Harare, Zimbabwe only seven days into the 15-day competition.

Only 11 matches had been completed in the 25-game tournament as the ICC called off the event.

With the development, Sri Lanka was unfortunately thrown out of the World Cup in New Zealand next year. They will, as a result, only occupy, along with Ireland, the two slots in the 2022-25 cycle of the ICC Women's Championship, the pathway for the 2025 World Cup.

Covid-19 fears

That also meant Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the West Indies will be the nations heading to New Zealand next year for the 4 March to 3 April event.

Last Sunday (21), it was reported that three players of the Sri Lankan team participating in the Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe had tested positive for Covid-19.

It was also reported that the rest of the members in the Sri Lankan team had tested negative but were isolated as a precaution.

Continued trouble by pandemic

The tournament, which was postponed twice and moved to Zimbabwe from Sri Lanka due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was expected to decide the three teams who will play in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup to be held in New Zealand next year.

The three teams will be joining five already-qualified teams via the ICC Women's Championship – Australia, England, India, South Africa, and hosts New Zealand.

On 8 November, Papua New Guinea (PNG) announced that they had been forced to withdraw from what was originally a ten-team qualifier tournament due to several of its players testing positive for Covid-19.

EIGHT COUNTRIES THAT QUALIFY FOR 2022 WOMEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP IN NEW ZEALAND

- New Zealand – hosts
- Australia, England, South Africa, and India – from 'the ICC Women's World Championship 2017-20'
- Bangladesh, Pakistan, and West Indies – from ICC WODI rankings

Countries banned

The participating teams in the Zimbabwe qualifiers were Bangladesh, Ireland, the Netherlands, Pakistan, West Indies, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the US, along with hosts Zimbabwe.

On Friday (26), world media reported that a new and dangerous Covid-19 variant has been discovered in Southern Africa. Many European countries have imposed travel bans on various South Africa countries over Omicron fears.

The UAE suspended on Friday both direct and indirect flights to and from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe,

Mozambique, Lesotho, and Eswatini due to the reason.

Original arrangement

Sri Lanka beat the Netherlands in their first match of the Qualifiers on Tuesday (23) on the back of a century (111 in 70 balls) by Captain Chamari Athapaththu.

Originally, the top three teams from each group were to enter the Super Six Stage of the Qualifiers which was to commence on 1 December. Out of those six, the top three were to join the already qualified five nations to the 2022 World Cup.