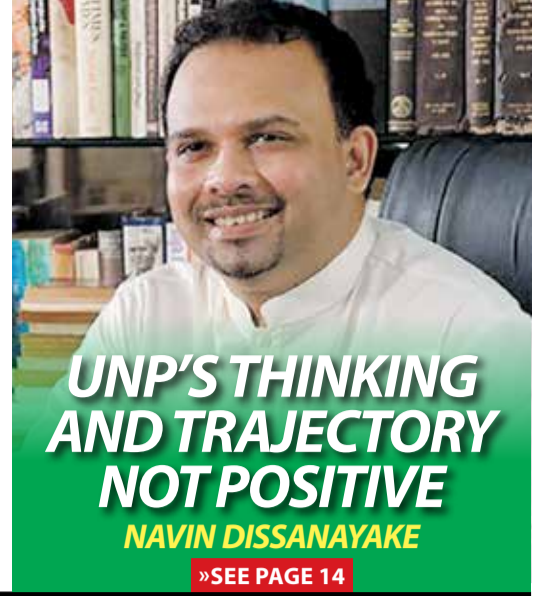


GOVT. TURNS TO INDIA FOR SUPPORT WHILE TAKING FLAK FROM ALL SIDES

the sunday morning

RS. 90.00 PAGES 68 / SECTIONS 7 VOL. 04 - NO. 10 SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2021



UNP'S THINKING AND TRAJECTORY NOT POSITIVE
NAVIN DISSANAYAKE
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SRI LANKA: INFLATING ECONOMIES AND INCOMPETENCE
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CSE REQUESTS EXTENSION OF 50% TAX CONCESSION
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RENEWABLE ENERGY GENERATION

Adani to take billion-dollar Mannar project

- Proposal to develop 1,000 MW wind energy project valued at over \$ 1 b
- Sent to BOI, CEB, and Cabinet-appointed committee on investments
- CAMCI approves proposal; MoU to be signed by BOI, CEB, SEA, Treasury
- Adani also looking at second renewable energy project in Pooneryn

BY UWIN LUGODA

India's Adani Group, owned by Indian business tycoon Gautam Adani, is to develop a 1,000 MW wind power project in Mannar valued at over \$ 1 billion, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

It is also learnt that Adani is looking at developing a second wind power project in another location in the Northern Province - Pooneryn. *The Sunday Morning*, on 24 October,

exclusively reported Adani's interest in entering the renewable energy generation sector in the Northern Province. The news report was published prior to Adani's visit to Sri

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Lanka in October. It is reliably learnt that Adani Green Energy had submitted a proposal to the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI) as well as the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB).

When questioned, CEB Chairman M.M.C. Fernando confirmed to *The Sunday Morning* the receipt of the respective proposal. He explained that the BOI had referred the proposal to the Cabinet-appointed Management Committee on Investments (CAMCI), which was set up to fast track investment proposals.

"Adani had referred a proposal to the BOI, and copied to me and the CAMCI

headed by the Treasury Secretary," he said.

According to Fernando, Adani's proposal had received the approval from the CAMCI last week.

It is learnt that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in that regard would be drawn up by the BOI and would be signed by the BOI Sustainable Energy Authority (SEA) Chairman, Treasury Secretary, and

CEB Chairman.

Through the proposal, Adani proposed to develop a 1,000 MW wind energy project in Mannar. "As for the investment, for 1,000 MW, it'll be more than \$ 1,000 million," Fernando said.

However, the CEB Chairman said he was unaware as to when the project would get off the ground.

Contd. on page 2

OMICRON IN SL
Major chaos unlikely, says expert

BY AAZAM AMEEN

Despite the detection of Sri Lanka's first case of the Omicron B.1.1.529 Covid-19 variant of concern, Sri Jayewardenepura University Allergy, Immunology, and Cell Biology Unit Director Dr. Chandima Jeevandara told *The Sunday Morning* that it was unlikely that the Omicron variant would cause major chaos in the country.

Contd. on page 2

WAVE OF FESTIVITIES



People in the bustling area of Pettah, buying goods yesterday (4), violating the health guidelines issued by the Government to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic

PHOTO PRADEEP DAMBARAGE

POWER BREAKDOWN IN NOVEMBER

CID commences probe

● Breakdown was only a technical fault: CEBEU

● CEB complains to CID about alleged sabotage

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has commenced a probe into a complaint filed by the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) over a suspected act of sabotage that had caused a power breakdown in many parts of the country last Monday (29 November).

Contd. on page 2

REFORMING THE CEB

New legislation to Parliament soon

A new Electricity Reforms Bill aimed at restructuring the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) is to be developed and submitted in Parliament soon, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

Contd. on page 2

LANKAN LYNCHED IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan urged to ensure safety of other Lankans

- Around 500 registered migrant workers in Pakistan: SLBFE
- Foreign Ministry finalising number of Lankans in Pakistan

BY YOSHITHA PERERA

The Foreign Ministry is in the process of getting the final count of Sri Lankans currently residing in Pakistan, including migrant workers and students, while President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday (4) appealed to Pakistani Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan to ensure the safety of Sri Lankans residing in Pakistan,

Khan calls President Rajapaksa

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan yesterday (4) called President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the UAE to

speak about the lynching of a Sri Lankan national in Sialkot, Pakistan last week.

Contd. on page 2

The Sunday Morning learnt. There are almost 500 Sri Lankan migrant workers currently residing in Pakistan registered with the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), and

the Pakistani Government has taken all necessary efforts to assure their safety, SLBFE Deputy General Manager Mangala Randeniya told *The Sunday Morning*.

Contd. on page 2

CBSL TO CRACKDOWN ON 'HAWALA' CHANNELS

\$ 300 m drop in foreign remittance

- FIU and Police probing suspicious account transfers
- Please use official channels: Cabraal urges expatriates

BY ASIRI FERNANDO

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) yesterday (4) announced that they will crackdown on unofficial channels used to move remittances into Sri Lanka, following an estimated \$ 300 million drop in inflows through official channels last month.

Addressing a special press conference, CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal told the press that the CBSL's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) was working closely with law enforcement agencies to target "grey economy" remittance channels, as authorities suspect these of being used for money laundering.

Contd. on page 2

RICE IMPORTS

Govt. moves to checkmate farmers and millers

BY MANESHA DULLEWE

The Trade Ministry has commenced arrangements to import rice stocks from Myanmar in a bid to maintain rice prices in the local market and prevent further price hikes, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

Contd. on page 2

SJB WALKS OUT OF CHAMBER

Boycotting budget debate?

BY SKANDHA GUNASEKARA

The main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) staged a walkout in Parliament yesterday (4), demanding that the Speaker of Parliament ensure the safety of Opposition MPs.

Contd. on page 2

COAL TO NOROCHCHOLAI

Successful bidder secured in last bid

The supply of coal to the Norochcholai Power Plant, which has caused much concern due to the country's foreign reserves crisis, has been addressed by securing a successful bidder at the last bidding process, it is learnt.

Contd. on page 2

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Contd. from page 1

Adani to...

"We don't know when it will be finalised, because after the MoU is signed, several regulatory authorities on renewable energy need to be consulted. We (CEB) are only the energy purchaser; the SEA is the energy developer and allocates resources. There are then other authorities such as the environmental authority for environmental clearance, and so on," Ferdinando explained.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy stated last Thursday (2) that China had decided to suspend the hybrid energy systems project by Sino Soar Hybrid Technology in three northern islands.

The Chinese Embassy in Colombo tweeted that the suspension was due to a "security concern" from a third party, and the company had inked a contract with the Maldivian Government on 29 November to establish solar power plants in 12 islands in the Maldives.

However, it was reported last Friday (3) that China had not withdrawn from the northern power projects.

Over 130...

The committee report is to be submitted in two weeks.

The issue was raised in Parliament yesterday (4) by Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Mujibur Rahman, who questioned the progress of the probe.

He called on the Speaker to inform the House of the outcome of the investigations.

The Opposition MP noted: "This is a grave situation, and the public are waiting to hear the official verdict on the matter," Rahman said.

Responding to Rahman's statement, Trade Minister Dr. Bandula Gunawardana stated that the special parliamentary advisory committee had to finalise and submit the report in order to present it to Parliament. He explained that since the committee did not consist of experts from the field, the President had also appointed a committee of experts to look into the matter.

"The committee has been given two weeks to submit the report, and till then, State Minister Lasantha Alagiyawanna is continuously monitoring the situation and has been informing Parliament of the progress in investigations," Dr. Gunawardana said.

The eight-member special parliamentary advisory committee appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa commenced its official investigations a day after releasing, to the public, several guidelines regarding the use of LP gas cylinders, it is learnt.

Special parliamentary advisory committee Head Prof. Shantha Walpalage told *The Sunday Morning* that the committee will closely investigate the issue and release a report in two weeks.

"Our main investigation has just begun, and we expect to resolve these (LP) gas cylinder fires and release a report in two weeks' time," he said.

Prof. Walpalage stated that an initial inquiry into the incidents revealed that a total of 131 LP gas-related fires/explosions had taken place from 1 January-1 December 2021. The

committee and the Police had made several inspection visits to houses in Kottawa, Athurugiriya, and Hanwell, where several such incidents were reported. Meanwhile, the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) was also conducting investigations into the matter. It recently obtained gas samples for testing from six districts, following reports of explosions related to leaks from domestic LP gas cylinders in those areas. Twelve of these samples were sent to the Moratuwa University for further testing. When contacted, the CAA stated the investigation was still ongoing.

Subsequently, the CAA had yesterday permitted both companies to recommence supply from today (5) under three conditions.

The conditions are: not to release previously imported stocks, include a standard percentage of mercaptan to ensure that there's a smell to determine a gas leak, and conduct sample checks on every 1 in 100 cylinders.

- Uwin Lugoda

New legislation...

The Power Ministry has formulated a document aimed at reducing the CEB's significant losses by transforming it into a profitable institution. This would be accomplished with the establishment of separate entities within the CEB under the supervision of eight new general managers, sources at the Power Ministry told *The Sunday Morning*.

The CEB Engineers' Union (CEBEU), meanwhile, expressed concerns over the proposed restructuring process becoming politicised.

CEBEU Secretary Dhammika Wimalaratne said the Power Ministry was moving for a restructuring process by unbundling the CEB into eight separate entities to handle power generation, transmission, and distribution.

"The people in this country will pay more for electricity as a result of this. The privatisation and politicisation of the entire institution are reflected in the board paper. This will undoubtedly allow the Government to carry out further illegal agreements, such as the one between US energy firm New Fortress and the Yugadanavi Power Plant," he alleged.

The CEB employs 23,000 personnel, including over 1,400 professionals.

- Yoshihitha Perera

Major chaos...

Explaining further, Dr. Jeewandara compared the current situation to what the country faced when the B.1.1.7 Alpha and B.1.617.2 Delta variants were responsible for most of the Covid-19 cases.

"When Delta hit the country, the immunity of the people was lower. Now, the situation is different. After two years (since the pandemic hit), we know the virus and our immune systems are more or less familiar with it. We speculate that Omicron will not have a similar effect as the Delta and Alpha variants of the past," he opined.

While highlighting Sri Lanka's progress in terms of vaccination, Dr. Jeewandara noted that with high-

risk groups already receiving Pfizer-BioNTech booster doses, and if people follow the health guidelines, risks of virus transmission, severe disease, and death can be minimised. It was also stressed that the unvaccinated population was more at risk of contracting the Omicron variant.

In terms of the rate at which the Sri Jayewardenepura University's Allergy, Immunology, and Cell Biology Unit conducts sequencing runs for the identification of the Omicron variant, Dr. Jeewandara detailed that approximately 96 samples were sequenced on a weekly basis.

Sequencing of PCR samples obtained from returning overseas travellers had also intensified, he said, adding: "These samples are specifically sent to our lab by the Epidemiology Unit of the Health Ministry. We will be doing another run next Thursday."

Pakistan urged...

However, Randeniya speculated that there could be more Sri Lankans in Pakistan, particularly students, and that the Foreign Ministry was working to corroborate the exact number.

Meanwhile, President Rajapaksa yesterday appealed to PM Khan to ensure the safety of other Sri Lankans currently residing in Pakistan, stating he was deeply saddened by the merciless lynching of the Sri Lankan professional. "As an ardent friend of Pakistan, Sri Lanka commends the actions taken by the Government of Pakistan led by Prime Minister Imran Khan to ensure justice, immediately after this brutal assassination," the statement issued by the President's Media Division noted.

Pakistani PM Khan, in a Twitter message, said he spoke to President Rajapaksa to convey his nation's anger and shame over the killing of Priyantha Diyawadana to the people of Sri Lanka, and informed him that over 100 persons were arrested and would be severely prosecuted. PM Khan had earlier stated that he was overseeing the investigations into the killing and that those responsible will be punished with full severity of the law. Last Friday (3), a mob in Sialkot, Pakistan, brutally murdered Priyantha Diyawadana, a Sri Lankan who worked as an export manager of a private factory, and set his body on fire over blasphemy allegations.

According to SLBFE's Randeniya, latest reports from Pakistan indicated that the Police had arrested a prime suspect and booked over 800 under the Pakistani Anti-Terrorism Act. The Police had stated that one Farhan Idrees, the key suspect, had been detained.

It had been reported that an initial report of the incident was submitted to PM Khan by the Punjab Police.

The initial investigation had noted that the Sri Lankan citizen was killed over allegations of blasphemy and that the matter was being probed from all angles.

The initial report submitted to Khan had further stated that at least 112 suspects, who were identified with the help of the factory managers, had been detained.

"The body of the deceased has

been handed over to the Police after a postmortem for legal formalities, and the remains will be brought to Sri Lanka within the next two days," Randeniya said.

Last evening, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Pakistan Vice Admiral Mohan Wijewickrama had stated that arrangements are being made to send Priyantha Diyawadana's remains to Sri Lanka tomorrow (6) from Lahore to Colombo in a special flight.

Khan calls...

"Spoke to Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa today in the UAE to convey our nation's anger and shame to people of Sri Lanka at the vigilante killing of Priyantha Diyawadana in Sialkot. I informed him 100-plus people arrested, and assured him they would be prosecuted with full severity of the law," Khan tweeted.

The victim, Priyantha Diyawadana, a general manager at an industrial complex in Sialkot, was lynched by a mob of extremists last week.

The spouse of the victim speaking to broadcast media last afternoon appealed to President Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Khan to do justice by her husband and her children.

"My husband was a kind and innocent person. I saw his inhumane death on the news and saw the same being shared on the internet. I ask the Sri Lankan Government, President Rajapaksa, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan to conduct a fair investigation into his killing and appeal to them to deliver justice to my husband and our two children," Nirishi Dasanayake told the media.

Limping without...

When questioned on how the BOI will function following the resignation of its Chairman, Director General, and several board Directors, an official at the BOI told *The Sunday Morning* that they will continue their duties.

However, the official was non-committal when asked how certain investment proposals could proceed without the participation of senior officials.

Issuing a statement about the resignations, the BOI blamed both internal and external factions that opposed necessary transformations happening within the BOI. They stated that these factions either failed or refused to comprehend the competitive realities of the international promotion landscape, in which Sri Lanka needs to compete if it is to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) at the scale the country needs.

However, despite the unfortunate developments, the BOI stated that its leadership remains confident about the significant potential their reforms programme can provide to support Sri Lanka's economic progress in the future if it is continued to its natural culmination.

The misconception mentioned came in the form of the parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) summoning, which inquired about the BOI recruiting a number of officials at very high salary levels and misleading the Cabinet, it is learnt.

However, COPE Chairman Charitha Herath stated that the committee never asked anybody to resign, and instead only did their oversight summons for the BOI. He explained that during the summons, COPE members inquired about all the points made in the Auditor General's report, which was regarding both the previous and current government's period. He stated that regardless of whose time it was, the incumbent officers have to answer and that there were no issues with their summons.

None of the resignees were available for comment.

- Uwin Lugoda

CID commences...

Police Media Spokesperson Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Attorney-at-Law Nihal Thaldudu told *The Sunday Morning* that the CID was recording statements from officials and engineers at the CEB regarding the complaint filed by the CEB management about the power outage last Monday.

"The Police had not received any complaint with regard to the islandwide power outage that occurred on 3 December (Friday). However, the CID investigation had already commenced with regard to the previous complaint filed by the CEB," he said.

Thaldudu noted that a special CID team had been deployed to investigate the incident and that said team was recording statements and commencing observations at the relevant sites. Disputing the statements issued by the CEB and the Government over a possible act of sabotage being the cause for the said breakdown, CEB Engineers' Union (CEBEU) Secretary Dhammika

Wimalaratne said that the power cuts experienced last Monday in many parts of Sri Lanka were a result of a technical issue experienced on the transmission cables from Kotmale to the Biyagama Grid Substation, according to the CEB.

He said the previous power outage affected grid substations in Biyagama, Kotugoda, Habarana, Galle, Matara, Pannipitiya, Ratmalana, Sri Jayewardenepura, Kurunegala, Kiribathkumbura, Athurugiriya, Kosgama, and Sapugaskanda.

The CEBU denied that the breakdown was a result of an act of sabotage. In regard to the most recent islandwide power outage that occurred last Friday (3), CEB Engineer Wimalaratne said it occurred due to the failure of two units at the Norochcholai Power Plant, and one unit at Sapugaskanda.

"People will have to endure islandwide power outages on and off during the next three to four days, owing to load shedding, but these cuts will only last one-and-a-half hours in each area," he said.

He estimated that it would take up to three days for the Norochcholai Power Plant to return to its full capacity.

Wimalaratne added that this outage was not a result of sabotage, and added that the engineers faced difficulties in resolving the problem.

The CEBU suspended its work-to-rule campaign following last Friday's islandwide power breakdown.

- Yoshihitha Perera

Govt. moves...

Trade Ministry Secretary Bhadrani Jayawardena told *The Sunday Morning* that the rice imports were to keep the market price of rice under control by providing rice to consumers at a low price.

She said: "The Myanmar Ambassador informed the Government that a quantity of rice would be supplied as a symbol of the co-operation between the two nations. While the initial amount discussed was 100,000 MT of rice, government approval has been granted to accept a 20,000 MT stock of rice as an initial step, and preparations with regard to this pending agreement are currently underway."

The Secretary, however, noted that there was no information on when the rice stocks will arrive, as the arrangement was still in its initial stages.

Jayawardena further noted that discussions were also progressing regarding the cost of importing the rice stock, as a significant portion of work regarding the deal still remained to be completed. The Trade Ministry Secretary added that the Government did not expect a future rice shortage, and that the Ministry was merely carrying out work to import rice as a precaution against possible arbitrary price increases of rice in the market. She further stated: "200,000 MT of rice is the fixed amount of rice that we require per month. The Agriculture Ministry has announced that sufficient stocks of paddy are available to cover our requirements, and there's usually a surplus as well."

The Cabinet of Ministers last Monday (29 November) approved the importation of 20,000 MT of rice from Myanmar on the basis of a government-to-government agreement between Sri Lanka and Myanmar at a cost of \$ 460 per MT.

However, All Ceylon Small and Medium Rice Mill Owners' Association President Muditha Perera said it was unnecessary to import rice at a time when Sri Lanka had sufficient stocks.

He alleged that this indicated the presence of "serious fraud", possibly related to attempts to obtain commissions through these rice imports. He said: "Sri Lanka has sufficient stocks of rice to last until February next year. The only reason we might potentially face a crisis with rice will be if the paddy harvests decline due to the fertiliser crisis."

Meanwhile, All Ceylon Farmers' Federation (ACFF) National Organiser Namal Karunaratne also expressed opposition towards the decision to import rice. "According to available government data, we have sufficient stocks of paddy for consumption until the middle of next year, even if we fail to produce a single grain of rice during the current Maha season."

He also alleged that the imported rice was substandard compared to home-grown rice, as the former was contaminated with toxins due to various treatments designed to prolong its shelf life.

Boycotting...

Chief Opposition Whip MP Lakshman Kiriella said that a government parliamentarian had tried to assault SJB MP Manusha Nanayakkara in the parliament lobby.

"Government MP Kanchana

Wijesekera tried to hit MP Nanayakkara in the lobby. We will not stand for this," he said, adding that the party would not attend sittings until the safety of the Opposition members was guaranteed by Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena. "The Speaker must ensure our safety. We will not attend parliament sessions until that is assured."

The incident occurred after Nanayakkara had made a statement in the House accusing Wijesekera of stealing two containers from the ports. Wijesekera had then tried to assault Nanayakkara in the lobby of Parliament in retaliation to the latter's allegations in the Chamber. A letter signed by 38 governing party parliamentarians was also handed over to the Speaker calling for a disciplinary inquiry to be initiated against Nanayakkara's alleged conduct in the Chamber last Friday (3).

Last Friday, the SJB staged a similar walkout after the Speaker, at around 5 p.m., ordered the disconnection of the mic while Nanayakkara was speaking and allowed government MP Minister Sarath Weerasekera to speak instead.

The SJB raised objections to the previous evening's incident in the House last morning, pointing out that it had been decided that budget debates would be extended beyond the normal parliamentary session that concluded at 5 p.m. The SJB claimed that Nanayakkara was deprived of using his allocated time to make his budget speech.

After protesting in the Chamber, the SJB staged a walkout on Friday.

Successful bidder...

The foreign reserves crisis and the difficulties in opening letters of credit (LCs), resulted in bidders shying away from bidding in several spot tenders in October, increasing fears of a shortage of coal for the Norochcholai plant.

Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) Chairman M.M.C. Ferdinando, speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, stated: "This matter is handled by the Lanka Coal Company. What I know is that there was a successful bidder at the last bidding process. One bidder came forward for the spot tender. The term tender is already finalised and the shipments are already scheduled."

He, however, noted that there was an issue in establishing LCs for the spot tenders due to the currency problem.

"The term tender, which are term contracts, are on schedule; a 65,000 tonne shipment of coal comes in once every five days from September to the end of April, and we have to get coal during this season. This is the only time we source coal for the entire year," Ferdinando added.

- Uwin Lugoda

\$ 300 m...

The move by the CBSL comes amidst a worsening foreign reserves crisis, with experts and Opposition politicians questioning Sri Lanka's reserves and capability to continue necessary trading and debt servicing in 2022.

Cabraal said the Government plans to prosecute persons who were sending, receiving, or facilitating the flow of remittances through unofficial channels, warning Sri Lankan expatriates not to take the risk of sending remittance to Sri Lanka through unofficial "hawala" channels, which may leave them open to be prosecuted.

"Over the last month, we have seen a drop of \$ 300 million through official channels. We suspect that a key reason for such a drop is the use of irregular, unofficial channels to send remittances. We understand that some such channels pay Rs. 240 per US dollar when the official exchange rate is at about Rs. 200 per dollar," Cabraal explained.

Expatriates were attracted to unofficial money transfer channels following the Government pegging the US dollar to around Rs. 200-203 earlier this year.

Cabraal added that some accounts with funds used for unofficial remittance services were already frozen by the CBSL, with the Police investigating the persons involved. However, when prompted, Cabraal did not elaborate on the ongoing investigations.

"We will be very vigilant of the accounts used to facilitate these actions and who is involved with them, so please use official channels via banks when you send remittance to Sri Lanka," he appealed to expatriates, pointing out that the use of unofficial channels to remit US dollars may expose their dependents to legal action under money laundering regulations.

Cabraal also called on the public who had information on "unofficial channels" to come forth with information.

The crackdown came days after the CBSL introduced a Rs. 10 per US dollar incentive to those who send remittances or change dollars via official channels at banks for the month of December.

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The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has received information that some Sri Lankans residing abroad send remittances to their dependents in Sri Lanka, knowingly or unknowingly, through various racketeers.

CBSL is aware that there have been instances where certain brokers collect foreign currency from Sri Lankan employees in other countries and credit the accounts of their dependents in Sri Lankan rupees by way of cash or transfers through the financial system. The public may not be aware that they are committing offences punishable in terms of law for the violation of the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Further, available information indicate that these transactions could be linked to drug trafficking and other illegal activities.

Hence, the CBSL hereby informs all Sri Lankans residing abroad and their dependents not to be victims of such illegal activities, knowingly or unknowingly.

The CBSL emphasizes the need for all concerned parties not to become victims of illegal operators and to ensure that they remit their foreign remittances to Sri Lanka only through banks and through financial institutions which are supervised by the CBSL or other international banks and financial institutions.

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ROUND-UP

MPs stuck in elevator

Last Friday (3), two MPs were stuck in an elevator in Parliament due to the sudden islandwide power outage.

The two MPs, it is learnt, were Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Thushara Indunil and Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Lalith Ellawala.

SJB MP Dr. Harsha de Silva, posting a tweet, stated that the power was out even at the Parliamentary Complex, which was then powered by generators.

However, as the islandwide power outage continued for several hours, power supply from



SJB MP Thushara Indunil
SLPP MP Lalith Ellawala

the generators in Parliament was directed only to the Chamber and public areas.

Interestingly, the power supply was once again reconnected after the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) Engineers' Union called off its work-to-rule campaign.

MR's editing days

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa last week went down memory lane, referring to his close links with the media, especially during his time as a minister under former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

Addressing an event held to present insurance schemes to

media personnel, the Premier said he was, at one time, accused of being a "reporter" by the then Head of State, who accused him of leaking information of the Cabinet meeting to the media.

However, the Premier said that he only provided edited news that did not cause any harm to the party or himself. Rajapaksa went on to say that he considered himself as more of an editor than a reporter.

Dhammika Perera in Parliament



Dhammika Perera
Billionaire businessman Dhammika Perera's actions were, last week, hailed in Parliament by Media Minister Dullas Alahapperuma.

Alahapperuma observed that the entire Parliament should express their gratitude to the likes of Perera for taking steps to provide online education facilities in Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages free of charge to students.

The Minister pointed out that Perera portrayed his civic duty by coming forward to help a large number of children gain access to free education amidst the pandemic.

Perera set up DP Education to provide online education facilities to students who lacked the necessary facilities to gain access to online education.

Wasn't me, says Rathana Thera

MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera, who has been an advocate for organic agriculture in the country, had recently refuted claims that he was behind the moves to ban chemical fertilisers from being imported to the country.

Ven. Rathana Thera had stated that he was not aware of the move until the relevant cabinet paper prohibiting chemical fertiliser was presented to the Cabinet by the President.

He told Parliament that although he was part of a group that launched a massive ideological campaign to promote

organic farming in the country, they had never stated that it was possible to introduce organic farming within 24 hours through a cabinet paper.

The Thera further noted that he was not included in any of the two committees appointed by the Government to implement this organic farming concept.

"When an important decision like this is taken, a committee of experts should be appointed. Is there any committee under the President or the Agriculture Minister appointed on weedicide and organic fertiliser production? We regret that the great concept of organic farming became a failure due to poor decision-making," the Thera added.

RW pushes policy changes

United National Party (UNP) Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe last Friday (3) night had joined the International Democratic Union's (IDU) online end-of-year meeting.

The UNP Leader had provided a country update and plans for the party going forward.

Speaking at the meeting, Wickremesinghe had said that the arrival of Covid-19 had seen a shift in the public's attitudes towards politics.

He had suggested that political parties undergo policy changes and adapt to the changing views of the youth, who are disgruntled with the political establishment.

The IDU comprises right-



leaning political parties from all over the world, including the Republic Party in the US, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, and the Conservatives in the UK.

Chamal takes on powerful official

News of Minister Chamal Rajapaksa recently taking on an all-powerful government official was published on social media last week.

Upon hearing the news, many governing party members had tried to uncover more details about the incident.

It was then learnt that the incident had taken place prior to the Cabinet meeting last Monday (29 November).

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa,

Minister Chamal Rajapaksa, and several others had been in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's room discussing issues faced by the country and its people, when a senior government official walked into the office.

Minister Chamal was asked by everyone in the room to explain to the official what governing party members had to say about him (the official).

The senior Rajapaksa had turned to the official and said: "You are apparently the cause of most of the problems faced by the Government. Government ministers say

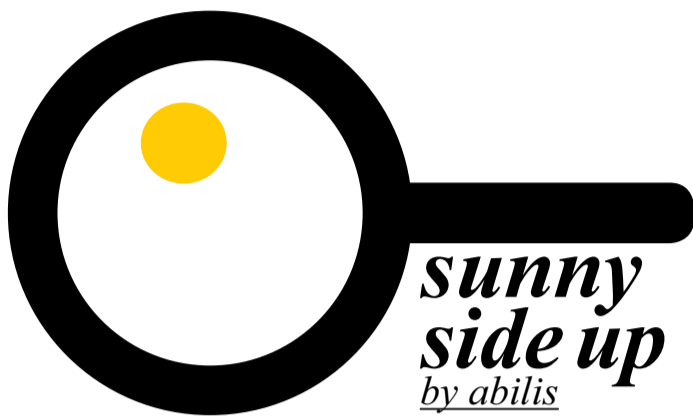
that it is your actions that have resulted in the President losing face in the eyes of the public, and people blaming even our dead parents."

The official had remained silent, listening to what Chamal had to say, and then walked out.

The official had then told several other officials at the Presidential Secretariat that he was fed up and wanted to leave. After the official had left, several other officials had said: "If only it was that easy to get rid of him."



Minister Chamal Rajapaksa



Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa experimenting cooking with biogas

Basil's cooking

Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa, who was on a two-day official visit in India recently, had visited the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation in India.

During the visit to the organisation, Rajapaksa had met with the organisation Founder Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak.

Rajapaksa had also experimented with cooking using biogas during the visit.

The Finance Minister's experiment on cooking with biogas comes at a time when Sri Lanka has experienced an abnormal number of LP gas cylinder explosions in houses.

Outdoor cylinders

Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa, last week, noted that LP gas cylinders were kept outside houses in rural areas.

He further noted that even the LP gas cylinder in his house was

placed outdoors.

These comments were made at a time when a large number of LP gas cylinders used for cooking were reported to have exploded in houses around the country.

The Minister made this comment to the media after attending an event.

Clash over jab cost



State Minister Prof. Channa Jayasumana
SJB MP Mujibur Rahman

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Mujibur Rahman and State Minister of Production, Supply, and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals Prof. Channa Jayasumana engaged in a heated debate over the cost of the vaccines that were purchased by the Government.

"An investigation must be conducted on the cost of the vaccines that were purchased

by the Sri Lankan Government. The Sinopharm vaccine cost \$ 10, whereas our country had purchased it at \$ 15. This needs to be looked into. The President came to power claiming to stop corruption and bring about a change. If that is what he claimed, then he also needs to investigate this fraud," Rahman told Parliament last Tuesday (30 November).

Responding to these allegations, Prof. Jayasumana said it was unfair that Rahman would make such accusations without having any backing proof and also not knowing the price of the vaccines at that time.

"Don't make assumptions without knowing the details. We purchased the vaccines at the given price at that time. No one made a profit from these vaccines," Prof. Jayasumana claimed.

However, the Opposition and Government traded charges and countercharges over the issue for a few minutes until the Speaker intervened to put a stop to it.

GR and RW meet

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and United National Party (UNP) Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe are both in Abu Dhabi to attend the fifth Indian Ocean Conference.



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa



UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe

Rajapaksa's and Wickremesinghe's participation in the meeting gave way for speculation last week that the two leaders will engage in a secret discussion in Abu Dhabi. Some reports claimed that Wickremesinghe was pondering joining forces with Rajapaksa.

Wickremesinghe is a former Chairperson of the Indian Ocean Conference,

having held the position from 2016 to 2019, and is scheduled to address the gathering today (5).

Several key regional government officials are attending the confab. Among them are Indian

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

The President is scheduled to meet with several foreign government members, including officials from the UAE, on the sidelines of the conference.

JVP ready to talk

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which is currently in the process of expanding its civil coalition - the National People's Power (NPP) - has increased its engagement with other political parties and civil society.

It is in this backdrop that JVP politburo member K.D. Lankantha had recently commented on several politicians whom he felt

the JVP could engage with politically if the need arose.

He made these comments during a political interview on YouTube.

"As a party, there is no official dialogue with Dullas Alahapperuma as of now. But I talk to him. I think Anura Kumara (Dissanayake), Vijitha Herath, and Harini Amarasinghe talk to him too because they are in Parliament," he had stated when queried if there was any deal between the JVP and Alahapperuma.

He said he engaged with Alahapperuma in a friendly manner.

As for other politicians the JVP could look at to have a political dialogue with in future if needed, Lankantha had named MPs Dr. Harsha de Silva and Harin Fernando, along with former MP Ranjan Ramanayake.

He had further stated that there were similar politicians elsewhere that the JVP could engage in a political discussion with in future.

Rohitha to play SLPL?



Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's youngest son Rohitha Rajapaksa was recently seen adorning a t-shirt of a team playing for the Sri Lanka Premier League (SLPL).

The No. 7 t-shirt belongs to the Dambulla cricket team, which includes several foreign cricketers as well. A picture of Rajapaksa in the team's attire was posted on the team's social media.

Rajapaksa, last month, participated in a cricket tournament organised by old boys of several leading boys' schools in Colombo.

Getting slammed

Minister Dullas Alahapperuma and governing party MP Nipuna Ranawaka recently faced an uncomfortable situation when a Buddhist monk decided to criticise the Government at an event graced by the two government members.

The incident had taken place recently in the Hakmana area in Matara, where a Buddhist monk

had taken the mike, at an event where the Minister and the MP were chief guests, to criticise the actions of the Government.

Ven. Getamanne Dhammalankara Thera had told the gathering that the 6.9 million who voted to bring the Government to power were disgruntled and were now left to regret casting their votes for the governing party.

The Thera had further observed that the military should be given the power to govern the country for 10 years.

Visitor to Sampur Police



An usual visitor had recently arrived at the Sampur Police station in Trincomalee.

A crocodile was spotted inside the Sampur Police Station recently, and the Police had taken steps to rescue and release the animal into the wild.

The crocodile was reportedly found near the

Transport Unit of the police station by officials. Police personnel had first taken steps to ensure the safety of the people in the area, and had later captured the crocodile with the assistance of the Trincomalee Wildlife Office rangers.

The crocodile was released into the Uppar Lagoon in the Batticaloa District.

Electric stove sales increase

The high price of a domestic LP gas cylinder and the most recent incidents of cylinder explosions recorded from various parts of the country had resulted in a record increase in the sale of electric cookers and electric hotplates.

The price increase in LP gas cylinders, and the shortage that followed, resulted in many consumers turning to firewood hearths

and kerosene cookers as alternatives.

However, with the recent gas cylinder explosions, consumers seem to be moving

away from using LP gas cylinders by resorting to electric cookers to meet household needs.

Many electric appliance stores have run out of electric hotplates.

However, the increase in usage of electric cookers will, in turn, see an increase in household electricity consumption.

Monkey business at the Police

A person who had recently visited the Bakamuna Police Station had faced an unusual encounter with a monkey.

The man had visited the police station on his motorbike and had left his belongings on the bike when

he had entered the building.

When had returned to the bike, he had seen a group of monkeys in the car park and one monkey on his motorbike going through a bag he had kept on the bike. He had also left his wallet inside the bag.

Just as he was nearing the motorbike, the monkey had

taken his wallet from the bag and dashed to the top of a nearby tree.

Unable to get his wallet back from the monkey, he was compelled to lodge a complaint with the Police about the incident, as his driving license, national ID card, and money were lost with the wallet.

LP GAS CYLINDER EXPLOSIONS

Consumers in dire straits

- **Govt. negligence led to this situation: NMPCR**
- **LPG composition changed due to cost, alleges ETU**
- **Laugfs claims cylinder incident due to human error**

BY MAHEESHA MUDUGAMUWA

Battered by the increasing cost of living in the midst of a pandemic, consumers now have to live in fear within their homes, due to a risk of possible explosions or fires linked to LP gas cylinders used for cooking. The added worry on the home front comes following a series of unusual incidents reported around the country during the past few weeks.

Even though there were a few isolated cases reported since 2015, as pointed out by State Minister of Co-operative Services, Marketing Development, and Consumer Protection Lasantha Alagiyawanna, a sudden rise in such incidents was recorded from November this year, prompting the Government to temporarily suspend the distribution of LP gas cylinders last Friday (3).

Subsequently, however, the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) yesterday (4) permitted both companies supplying LP gas cylinders to the market – Laugfs and Litro – to recommence supply from today (5) under three conditions. The conditions are: not to release previously imported stocks, include a standard percentage of mercaptan to ensure there's a smell to determine a gas leak, and to conduct sample checks on every 1 in 100 cylinders.

Many people are concerned and fearful, as the Government has not yet given a proper reason or solution for the possible risks, National Movement for the Protection of Consumer Rights (NMPCR) Chairman Ranjith Vithanage stressed.

He told *The Sunday Morning* that the Government had neglected its duty to protect the lives of the citizens of this country, as they had not given a proper short-term solution to rule out any possible danger.

"Now, they are finding faults in the gas cookers and regulators that the consumers had been using until the recent explosions. Luckily, as of now, no deaths were reported, but if somebody died from an explosion, who would take the responsibility?" Vithanage questioned.

Several probes launched

Given the unusual number of gas-related explosions and fires reported within a short period, several probes were launched into the spate of incidents.

Additionally, last Tuesday (30 November), President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed an eight-member expert committee to look into the reasons for the increasing number of LP gas cylinder-related explosions and fires, and recommend immediate solutions.

The committee is headed by Moratuwa University Chemical and Process Engineering Department Head Prof. Shantha Walpalage, and comprises of Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Deshabandu Tennakoon, Moratuwa University Prof. Ajith de Alwis, Sri Jayewardenepura University Prof. W.B.W. Jayathilake, Prof. Pradeep Jayaweera, Sri Lanka Inventors' Commission Commissioner Prof. Narayan Sirimuthu, Industrial Technology Institute Additional Director General Dr. Sudarshana Somasiri, and Sri Lanka Standards Institute Senior Deputy Director Sujeewa Mahagama.

Meanwhile, it was reported that a police probe was also underway. Senior DIG Tennakoon was appointed as the Co-ordinating Officer for the police investigations into the accidents caused by leaks, fires, or explosions in domestic gas cylinders. Representatives from Litro and Laugfs were also appointed to assist in the police investigations, as per reports.

In the event of a gas accident in any area, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the relevant area should inform the relevant gas company and the OIC of the relevant division. These instructions were sent by IGP C.D. Wickramaratne to senior DIGs in charge of provinces and districts and the officers in charge of divisions.

No regulations on gas composition

Meanwhile, speaking to the media last Monday (29 November), State Minister Alagiyawanna told Parliament that a total of 233 gas explosion incidents were reported from January 2015 to 31 October this year, while admitting that there was an unusual increase in gas explosion incidents recently.

The Minister said there had been no regulation of domestic gas since it was first introduced in 1960, while the several state institutions, such as the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) and Sri Lanka Standards Institute (SLSI), were vested with this responsibility.

He claimed that Sri Lanka lacked regulations governing the composition of gas (i.e. propane: butane) in the LP gas cylinders used for domestic purposes.

The State Minister also noted that 12 gas samples, which were taken from Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kurunegala, Ratnapura, and Galle, were sent to the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) for tests, and that the reports would be submitted to the Moratuwa University for study.

Against such a backdrop, differing views



PHOTO © ADADERANA.LK

were being expressed about the cause of these explosions. Some speculated that a change of pressure caused by the change in the gas composition could be the cause.

'Composition changed for financial benefit'

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Energy Trade Union (ETU) Convener Ananda Palitha alleged that the recent gas-related explosions were a result of a change in the composition of the gas, which was done for financial benefit.

"The price of propane is lower than the price of butane, and the reason for the pressure hike in the gas cylinder is the increase of the propane percentage. When the propane percentage is increased, the pressure is also increased in parallel," he stressed.

Referring to the Government's statement that there were no SLSI standards governing the composition of LP gas, Palitha stressed that the accepted composition percentages were either 30%:70% or 20%:80% (propane:butane), which was adhered to in Sri Lanka for many years until the recent change introduced by Litro.

He also added: "When government ministers are speaking about the gas-related incidents, they're speaking like Litro is a private gas company like Laugfs, which it is not.

"Litro is a state-owned company, and therefore, the entire responsibility lies not just with the management of Litro but with the entire Government," Palitha alleged.

Litro, Laugfs defend themselves

Meanwhile, issuing a media statement, Litro Gas Lanka stated that Sri Lanka adheres to internationally ratified compositions of propane and butane, certified and tested twice at point of loading and unloading by GEO-CHEM Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd. The company then assured that the LP gas that is loaded onto the ship at the supplier point is unloaded at Kerawalapitiya and stored in LP gas storage spheres, after which point cylinders of varied sizes are filled in the factory. The entire process, which is done under the strictest safety standards, does not involve any tampering in Sri Lanka, while LP gas is stored and filled into cylinders with the same specifications they have been shipped.

Concerning safety, Litro Gas Lanka Channel Safety Advisor Hemachandra Gunathilake stated that the globally accepted best practices should be deployed at all times when handling LP gas for cooking or for any other purpose. This means checking the hose, the regulator, the cooker, and the connecting system, which includes the safety clip of the cylinder, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, issuing a media statement, Laugfs Gas stated that it follows its own specifications related to LP gas and metal cylinders, and rechecks them against the given standards and specifications to ensure the safety of its customers.

"Propane is an expensive gas compared to butane. Last year, propane and butane prices were equal for only two months, but in the past, propane prices were much higher than butane. Certain social media reports stated that cylinders and valves are not capable of handling the high pressure inside the cylinder created by the additional propane. But the cylinders and valves are built to store LP gas at a high inside pressure," Laugfs' statement read. Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Laugfs Chairman W.K.H.

Wegapitiya said the company guarantees that it follows all specifications and added that only one Laugfs Gas related incident was reported, which was a result of human error.

Safety guidelines issued

In the meantime, even though a fixed solution had not been given by the expert committee recently appointed by the President, it nevertheless issued a series of guidelines for the public to follow to minimise and prevent such incidents from taking place.

It advised to ensure that the gas cylinder is inspected for leaks at the point of purchase; if there is a suspected leak in a domestic LP gas cylinder, the gas cylinder in question should be placed outside with good airflow, and the sales agent, local police, and the committee investigating such an incident should be immediately notified on 0115 811 927 or 0115 811 929.

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BY YOSHITHA PERERA

The discovery of the latest Covid-19 variant known as Omicron has redoubled international efforts to contain its spread and build Covid-19 resilience.

After detecting the first patient infected with Omicron in the island, health officials have taken the necessary measures to expand surveillance, testing, and quarantine facilities, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

Ministry of Health Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Samitha Ginige, last Friday (3), confirmed that the Allergy Immunology and Cell Biology Unit of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura had detected the virus, and that the Health Ministry was taking the necessary steps to control the spread.

"We are carrying out testing and early detection. Within the next two to three weeks, it is possible to get a clear idea of the behaviour of the Omicron variant. If resistance (levels) are high, there is no need to fear variants," he said.

Upon the Omicron variant recently being declared a variant of concern by the World Health Organisation (WHO), part of the response from the local health sector was to speed up the local vaccination drive.

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Health Promotion Bureau (HPB) Director Dr. Ranjith Batuwanthudawa said that health officials were closely monitoring new Covid-19 cases, and that random testing was being carried out continuously.

"Gene sequencing is ongoing across the country," he stated.

On 26 November 2021, the WHO designated variant B.1.1.529 a variant of concern, on the advice of its Technical Advisory Group on Virus Evolution. According to their study, Omicron may have several mutations that may have an impact globally.

Vaccination drive continues

According to Dr. Batuwanthudawa, health authorities were continuing the vaccination programme, despite differing opinions around the world on the effects of vaccination as a result of the discovery of the new variant of concern.

"Several findings have suggested that the Covid-19 Omicron variant could contribute to an increase in infections among those who have been vaccinated. However, the results are mixed, and we don't have enough evidence to believe that. We are administering the immunisations as usual," he said.

According to Dr. Batuwanthudawa, the first patient who reported contracting the Omicron variant of the virus in South Africa had not been vaccinated and had not received essential therapy for a long-term immunodeficiency illness.

"It has been revealed that this novel Covid-19 virus variant has the ability to spread quickly and also poses a threat to the natural immunity produced by infection," he elaborated.

Experts have opined that the higher frequency of mutations in the genome of Omicron, when compared to other variants, is a matter of concern, and that scientific research is underway to examine its influence on currently used vaccinations, Dr. Batuwanthudawa said.

COVID-19: THE RISE OF OMICRON

Health authorities urge vigilance and compliance

- **Omicron entered country last Friday**

- **Health officials expand surveillance, testing, quarantine facilities**

- **Govt. conducting random gene sequencing to detect Omicron infections**

- **PHIs worried about lax Covid screening at points of entry**

- **Get Covid booster shot ASAP: Dr. Jeewandara**

- **Jab led to reduction in patients being hospitalised: DGHPB**



Vaccination rates will be jacked up in order to combat the Omicron variant, health officials say
PHOTO LALITH PERERA

"As a nation, we must remember how we dealt with three Covid-19 waves, as well as the rapid spread of the Delta variant across the country, all of which were controlled without causing the country's health system to collapse. Regardless of the type of variant, sticking to the fundamental Covid-19 preventive measures we already know about, such as maintaining physical distance, wearing facemasks when leaving the house, and washing hands regularly, is critical," he said.

Dr. Batuwanthudawa added that the protection gained through immunisation against variants of concern, such as the fast-spreading Delta variant, was abundantly obvious, with nations with high vaccination coverage reporting a

considerably lower number of Covid-related deaths than before vaccination. According to him, an 84% reduction in hospitalisation was observed among individuals who have received two doses of the vaccine.

Unfortunately, vaccines for low-income countries have been delayed, and Africa as a continent continues to be at risk, with the lowest immunisation coverage in the world. The Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant from South Africa was added to the list of variants of concern, along with the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta Covid-19 variants that were responsible for the worrying Covid-19 waves seen around the world from time to time, Dr. Batuwanthudawa stated.

'Omicron entering SL was unavoidable'

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) President Dr. Padma Gunaratne said that the entry of the Omicron variant was unavoidable, even though health officials had taken precautions to prevent the new strain from entering the country.

"While the entry of the new variant may have been delayed, there was no assurance that it would not enter the country," she said last week.

She went on to say that it is important to strictly follow the health guidelines and get vaccinated on time.



We are carrying out testing and early detection. Within the next two to three weeks, it is possible to get a clear idea of the behaviour of the Omicron variant. If resistance (levels) are high, there is no need to fear variants
Ministry of Health Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Samitha Ginige

Public Health Inspectors' Union (PHIU) Head Upul Rohana claimed there were numerous loopholes at points of entry into the country, adding: "The airport's system is so frail that travellers could evade health officials once they arrive.

"Authorities should pay special attention to this and ensure that all methods of evasion are eliminated," he claimed.

Evidence pending on Omicron resilience to vaccines

Sri Jayewardenepura University Department of Immunology and Molecular Medicine Director Dr. Chandima Jeewandara also echoed similar sentiments, emphasising the need for Sri Lankans to remain watchful as global concerns about the highly mutated Omicron variant grow.

He said that there was no substantial evidence that the Omicron variant could evade vaccine-induced or natural immunity.



The booster dose boosts our immune system resistance. So, even if the Omicron variant enters the country, we won't have to be concerned. However, nobody knows how severe the Omicron variant's consequences are yet
Sri Jayewardenepura University Department of Immunology and Molecular Medicine Director Dr. Chandima Jeewandara

INCREASING COVID-19 CASES

Will schools face closure again?

- **Education TUs request adequate facilities**
- **Teacher-Student-Parent Safety Committee seek return to online learning**
- **Parents and adults should be more responsible: Dr. G. Wijesuriya**

BY SARAH HANNAN

As the number of Covid-19 infections across the country gradually rise amidst concerns of a new Covid-19 variant, education trade unions are urging the Government to provide necessary facilities for all schools to effectively adhere to the health guidelines.

Ceylon Teachers' Service Union (CTSU) General Secretary Mahinda Jayasinghe, commenting on the present status in the school education sector, stated: "Although the Government was enthusiastic about reopening schools over the past few weeks, they have not shared the same enthusiasm in providing the necessary facilities to safeguard schoolchildren and the school academic and non-academic staff from Covid-19. With several teachers testing positive for Covid-19, teachers who were close contacts of the infected teachers had to bear the cost of getting a PCR or rapid antigen test. It is also unclear as to how the teachers are to apply for leave if they are to undergo quarantine."



After almost two years of closure, schools finally reopened in October this year. However, they may be faced with closure once again
PHOTO KRISHAN KARIYAWASAM

Furthermore, Jayasinghe also revealed that the Ministry of Education Secretary had issued contradictory circulars about how the syllabus should be covered for students sitting for national examinations.

"Initially it was communicated that the fundamentals of each

subject would be covered according to the special learning recovery plan that was drawn up by the National Institute of Education. However, on 26 November, another circular was issued by the Education Secretary cancelling those instructions and specifying that the syllabus should be

How to safeguard your child from Covid-19

When asked as to how children could be safeguarded from Covid-19, Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children Director Dr. G. Wijesuriya noted: "We have identified four instances and have made parents and teachers aware of the need to monitor children under those circumstances. We

have instructed parents and teachers to pay close attention to the safety of the child on all four occasions and if a child shows any signs of illness, we have instructed them to seek treatment as well as to seek Covid-19 tests on medical advice as needed."

Contd. on page 14

covered in full for all subjects for the respective grades," Jayasinghe elaborated.

He pointed out that due to the indecisive actions of the Education Secretary, teachers were facing difficulties readjusting their lesson plans, and the students who were getting ready for national examinations were burdened with having to cram lessons within a short time.

Concerns over increasing infections

Meanwhile, the Teacher-Student-Parent Safety Committee (TSPSC) raised concerns over the various news reports that indicated

many teachers and students contracted Covid-19 since schools reopened. In a communiqué released recently, the TSPSC highlighted that over the past six weeks, more than 1,000 students and 100 teachers were infected in schools around the country.

According to Ceylon Teachers' Union President Priyantha Fernando, over 200 students from the North Central Province alone had tested positive for the virus. Additionally, the Southern Provincial Department of Education Director reported, on 15 November, that 148 students and 78 teachers had been infected in the Province. In the Kurunegala



As a nation, we must remember how we dealt with three Covid-19 waves, as well as the rapid spread of the Delta variant across the country, all of which were controlled without causing the country's health system to collapse. Regardless of the type of variant, sticking to the fundamental Covid-19 preventive measures we already know about is critical

**HPB Director
Dr. Ranjith Batuwanthudawa**

However, based on the collection of mutations, experts believe it may be able to evade vaccine-induced antibodies, he noted.

Dr. Jeewandara recommended that the public get their Covid-19 vaccination booster shot as soon as possible. "The booster dose boosts our immune system resistance. So, even if the Omicron variant enters the country, we won't have to be concerned. However, nobody knows how severe the Omicron variant's consequences are yet," he clarified, speaking to us earlier last week.

He claimed that, as the majority of Sri Lankans received the Sinopharm vaccine, which was manufactured in China and results in the antibodies fading after three months, there was a high necessity for the vaccine booster dose, particularly among the elderly.

Dr. Jeewandara went on to say that the Government's current efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19 had been successful. He also stated that the restrictions imposed on international travellers were adequate.

In light of recent events and in line with the decisions taken by a number of other countries, Sri Lanka has prohibited foreign visitors who had visited six African countries, from entering the country.

Passengers who have travelled to South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, or Eswatini (Swaziland) in the last 14 days, including those who transited in those destinations, are denied entry to the island nation, starting midnight on 28 November.

Last Friday, Sri Lanka detected its first case of Omicron. The Health Ministry announced the new Covid-19 variant was detected in a Sri Lankan national who had recently returned from South Africa. Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Ginige, speaking to the media, said the person was now in quarantine along with their family members, and added that contact tracing was underway.

SL equipped to detect new variant

Sri Lanka has the necessary laboratory resources to identify the virus strain, according to Dr. Jeewandara, who added that the country was fully prepared for the circumstance.

He emphasised that the public should not be concerned about the new coronavirus strain. "We can't ever completely prevent a viral strain from entering Sri Lanka."

The Omicron variant has more than 30 mutations in its spike protein, and according to findings, there was also evidence of an increased risk of reinfection.

The WHO on Friday said countries in the South-East Asian region should further strengthen Covid-19 response measures to curtail the spread of the virus and its variants.

District, a primary school in Kotawehera was closed after three teachers tested positive for Covid-19, and parents were reluctant to send their children to school thereafter; in the same district, eight teachers tested positive at the Maliyadeva Girls' School. Epidemiologists from the Kilinochchi District stated that over 100 students were among 1,500 people infected with the virus from the region in the two months up to 26 November. More cases are getting reported from other districts as well, the TSPSC stated.

The TSPSC noted: "The Government is not paying close attention to the situation in schools and has not compiled reports about the rising numbers of infections in schools. Considering the news reports, it is clear that keeping schools open is accelerating the spread of the deadly virus, placing the health and lives of students and teachers, and their families, in grave danger. By October, the number of Sri Lankan children infected with the virus since early 2020 had climbed to 59,000 with 67 deaths."

Contd. on page 14



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

- Litro Gas Lanka Ltd, the national LPG provider, reiterates that the LPG brought into Sri Lanka meets internationally ratified compositions of propane and butane, certified and tested twice at the point of loading and unloading by **GEO-CHEM LANKA (PVT) LTD.**

GEO-CHEM Reports



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LPG Quality For September to November 2021

Month	Date	Vessel Name	Total C3 %Weight	Total C4 % Weight	Vapour Pressure (Bar)
September	03.09.2021	Perikilis	37.27	62.48	6.89
			37.09	62.68	6.66
	06.09.2021	Bermuda	38.63	59.81	6.86
			38.59	59.85	6.85
	09.09.2021	Bird	34.15	63.93	6.42
			34.85	63.13	6.50
	14.09.2021	Bolivar	25.10	69.54	5.91
			25.27	67.87	6.16
	17.09.2021	Patreas	25.27	74.38	5.64
			25.12	74.83	5.65
	18.09.2021	Bermuda	39.39	60.15	6.89
			37.40	62.15	6.69
	19.09.2021	Bird	37.77	61.82	6.70
			37.49	62.11	6.67
	24.09.2021	Perikilis	38.54	61.29	6.85
		36.00	63.82	6.61	
25.09.2021	Bird	29.66	69.93	6.01	
		28.71	70.86	5.92	
30.09.2021	Bolivar	33.63	66.88	6.46	
		34.40	65.08	6.54	
October	02.10.2021	Bird	38.96	60.58	6.94
			38.39	61.16	6.88
	08.10.2021	Perikilis	36.80	62.77	6.72
			36.73	62.84	6.71
	11.10.2021	Bolivar	33.68	65.91	6.44
		36.14	63.44	6.69	
13.10.2021	Patreas	29.46	65.09	6.57	
		28.17	66.20	6.34	

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GEO - CHEM LANKA (PVT) LTD. :

Date	Vessel Name	Total C3 %Weight	Total C4 % Weight	Vapour Pressure (Bar)	
14.10.2021	Perikilis	39.92	59.67	7.07	
		37.20	62.41	6.80	
21.10.2021	Kilburn	36.16	62.09	6.82	
		34.58	63.57	6.45	
November	02.11.2021	Bird	36.10	62.31	6.57
			34.97	63.39	6.45
	04.11.2021	Bolivar	32.89	65.73	6.23
			33.00	65.44	6.26
	05.11.2021	Patreas	33.27	65.25	6.31
			37.41	60.99	6.86
	08.11.2021	Bird	34.03	65.16	6.38
			37.64	61.60	6.75
	11.11.2021	Bolivar	39.54	60.30	6.87
			39.45	60.40	6.85
	16.11.2021	Patreas	32.63	67.29	6.20
			33.67	66.13	6.32
	18.11.2021	Bird	36.18	63.61	6.54
			35.37	64.63	6.46
	22.11.2021	Patreas	38.45	61.35	6.77
		38.78	61.08	6.81	
24.11.2021	Bird	35.76	64.05	6.48	
		38.87	60.92	6.80	
26.11.2021	Bolivar	38.79	61.03	6.81	
		37.31	62.51	6.67	
29.11.2021	Patreas	39.54	60.25	6.89	
		37.04	62.77	6.64	
Average Values		35.20	63.76	6.55	



Specification of current signed contract for 2019-2021

L. LPG Quality Specification

Properties	Unit	Test Method	Result
Vapor Pressure, gauge @ 37.8 Deg.C	K Pa	ASTM D-1267 or ASTM D-2598	420 - 830 max
Density	-	ASTM D-1657 or ASTM D-2598	Report
Total Sulphur (After stetched)	PPHW	ASTM D-2784 or ASTM D-3246	50 max
Corrosion, Copper Strip 1 hour at 37.8 deg C	-	ASTM D-1838	1 max.
Free Water	-	Visual Inspection	None
Odorant (Ethylmercaptan) (if stetched only)	L/1000MT	* Smell Test	26
Olefin (required only from complex refinery sources)	% Mole	ASTM D-2163	5 max
C2 hydrocarbons	% Weight	ASTM D-2163	Report
C3 propane	% Weight	ASTM D 2163	Total C3 saturates 25- 40
C3 Propylene	% Weight	ASTM D 2163	Total C3 saturates 25- 40
C4 i-butane	% Weight	ASTM D 2163	Total C4 saturates 75 - 60
C4 N - butane	% Weight	ASTM D 2163	Total C4 saturates 75 - 60
C4 Butylenes	% Weight	ASTM D 2163	Total C4 saturates 75 - 60
C5 and higher hydrocarbons	% mole	ASTM D 2163	2 max (pentenes 0.5 Max)
Residue Test	MI/100ml	ASTM D 2158	0.05max.
Oil Stain		ASTM D-2158	Pass
Dienes content as 1,3 butadienes (Required only from complex refinery sources)	% Mole	ASTM D-2163	0.5max.
MON (Motor Octane number)	-	ASTM D-2598	89 min.

Odour should be distinctive, unpleasant and non-persistent at a dilution 1:250 with air. Sources shall control H2S and Fluorine to internal production limits.

- The LPG procured is explicitly based on the tender document submitted and once retrieved is checked by **GEO-CHEM LANKA (PVT) LTD.** As such, the consumer will only receive the same product that was shipped from the source without any other adulteration or alternation of the composition during the process.
- The recent incidents and confusion that have occurred have been caused by the use of inferior quality regulators, hoses, cookers, and user negligence.
- For any emergency or issues, consumers must contact the hotline on **1311** for assistance and guidance. Consumers must refrain from tampering or mishandling the production of their own accord.



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Sri Lanka: Inflating economies and incompetence

Govt. caught between global crises and local crises • Rising prices blamed on adverse weather, crippled supply chain, global prices

BY LAVANGA ABEYRATHNE

Last week, wheat flour importers Prima Ceylon (Pvt.) Ltd. and Serendib Flour Mills (Pvt.) Ltd. (SFML) increased the price of 1 kg of wheat flour by Rs. 17.50. With this increase, the price of bread and bakery products inevitably hiked as well, leaving the public, which was already unable to afford rice, out of options.

The latest price hike of an essential food item comes in the background where Sri Lanka has been facing a rapidly exacerbating economic crisis, with recent headline inflation changes in the Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) on a year-on-year (YoY) basis hitting a 12-year hike, increasing to 9.9% in November 2021 from 7.6% in October 2021.

According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Statistics Department, the CCPI, measured on an annual average basis, increased to 5.3% in November this year, from 4.8% in October.

While the inflation was driven by monthly increases of item prices in both food and non-food categories; as stated by the CBSL, the food category, driven by rising vegetable and rice prices, jumped by 4.7%, compared to the non-food category, which jumped by 1%.

What is inflation really?

At a basic level, inflation is the rate at which the value of a currency falls. As a consequence of this failure, the general level of prices for goods and services will rise, which is what we're currently seeing.

While generally a low level of inflation is expected and even viewed positively, a rapid rate of inflation leads to high prices and skyrocketing costs of living. Currently, the country is experiencing the latter, with this recent wheat flour hike becoming the straw to break workers' backs.

In 2020, Sri Lanka saw a steep rise in poverty. Estimates based on the "middle-income poverty line" of \$ 3.20 a day suggest that poverty rates in



The rise of milk powder prices resulted in panic buying, eventually leading to empty shelves in supermarkets

Sri Lanka increased from 9.2% in 2019 to 11.7% in 2020. This amounts to an additional half a million people in Sri Lanka, largely in urban areas and the informal sector, experiencing poverty due to the pandemic.

The pandemic had a large part to play in this, with the economy all but coming to a standstill after the initial wave and subsequent lockdowns, from which we and the rest of the world are still recovering. However, while the pandemic was a global crisis, it's undeniable that Sri Lanka seems to have it worse than most.

An increase in the supply of money is at the root of inflation, and unfortunately, Sri Lanka has been on a record-breaking money printing spree. In terms of the Monetary Law Act No. 58 of 1949, the CBSL is empowered as the sole authority to print money on behalf of the Government. Media reports stated that the CBSL printed Rs. 208 billion on 28 June, after printing Rs. 23 billion the previous week. These moves by the CBSL led to widespread criticism.

CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal had stated to the press in September that money printing had no impact on inflation, adding that "excess money issued can be absorbed by the CBSL whenever the need arises", causing outrage among the community.

Stock performance: Less prosperity, more desperation?

In the midst of denials regarding money printing and inflation, and a rising

economic crisis, one other rise was also noted; the rise in the Colombo Stock Exchange's (CSE) performance. Breaking multiple record highs during the past two months, CSE's performance has been garnering attention across the South Asian region.

However, as reported by *The Sunday Morning Business* early this year, the prevailing economic despair and the starkly contrasting buoyant market are correlated, and both are related to money printing. When money is printed and released into the economy, interest rates reduce, and subsequently, lowered interest rates make the stock market an ideal place for investment.

At the time, officials also attributed the market boom to lowered interest rates.

Thus, we are left questioning whether the boom was a sign of a prospering investment economy or of desperate citizens trying to save some of their money through investments.

Excuses, and more excuses

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning* last week, Agriculture Ministry Secretary Prof. Udith K. Jayasinghe said that the soaring vegetable prices were a result of adverse weather, the prevailing pandemic conditions, and the fertiliser crisis.

The same reasons were given for the increase in rice prices earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the rise in prices for a number of items, including milk powder and sugar, were attributed to import restrictions, and the imposition and subsequent

removal of price controls. Prices of other items such as fresh milk increased as a direct result of the shortages caused by the said hikes.

The wheat flour price increase, the third in just two months, was attributed by both Prima Ceylon (Pvt.) Ltd. and SFML as being due to the foreign exchange (forex) crisis. Following this announcement, the All Ceylon Bakery Owners' Association (ACBOA) also noted that they would be increasing the prices of bakery items. Speaking to the media last Sunday (28 November), ACBOA President N.K. Jayawardena stated that the price of bread had to be increased due to the increase in the prices of wheat flour and gas.

The walk of shame

To control food prices and hang on to its diminishing dollars, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in September set maximum retail prices (MRPs) for several food items, and limited purchases at subsidised government shops. The regulations backfired, with manufacturers hoarding items – as, with the MRPs imposed, they were unable to make a profit – and prices further hiking in the aftermath, with goods being sold at extremely high prices on the black market.

At a time when Sri Lanka could have imported goods from countries where the production cost was less and hence slow or halt the exacerbating crisis, it decided to impose import restrictions on several essential items not produced locally. These import restrictions resulted in mass panic, with items such as milk powder, sugar, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and cement being sold at a premium.

In the midst of pandemic recovery, the Government's sudden decision to stop importing chemical fertilisers and pesticides earlier this year, in an attempt to transition to organic farming, had devastating effects on the sector, which are still being felt in tea plantations and paddy fields.

Subsequently, the Government said that it would revoke Extraordinary Gazette No. 2226/48 of 6 May 2021, which banned the importation of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals including pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides/weedicides, and to thereby allow the private sector to import the same, with effect from 24 November 2021. However, as of last Friday (3), a gazette notification revoking the previous gazette notification had not been issued.



Various protests were staged recently demanding Rs. 10,000 wage hikes, amidst the rising cost of living

RISING PRICES VS. STAGNANT INCOME LEVELS

Hard times ahead

BY MANEESHA DULLEWE

The low-income people in any sector will be the most affected, because generally, a larger portion of their salary is spent on food. So when the prices of food items increase, they have to basically remain hungry, meaning they will be on the frontline of those who are affected (by the rising cost of living)
Advocata Institute COO
Dhananath Fernando

Sri Lanka has recently been hit by a surging cost of living, with prices of commodities such as domestic gas cylinders, cement, wheat flour, bread, assorted bakery and canteen foods, tea, and vegetables increasing successively.

In addition to the disruption of productivity and global supply chains that drove up prices of most exports, the country has been feeling the impact of a depreciating Sri Lankan rupee due to inflation.

Heavy rains and subsequent flooding have compounded the situation by devastating vegetable cultivations across the island. This comes in a backdrop where growers and farmers fear a drop in crop yields in tea plantations and paddy fields due to the Government's decision to stop importing chemical fertiliser earlier this year.

Against this backdrop, *The Sunday Morning* spoke to National Trade Union Centre (NTUC) Secretary Mahinda Jayasinghe, who said that it was not only prices of essential commodities that were on the rise, but also the prices of various other necessary goods ranging from feminine products to soap, indispensable for modern life. He noted: "As circumstances stand, we have a situation where people are unable to support themselves even for two weeks on their monthly pay."

At present, the minimum monthly wage for the private sector is at Rs. 16,000, which trade unions have called to be increased by a minimum of Rs. 10,000. However, Jayasinghe said that the NTUC was hoping to step up their campaigns, demanding a Rs. 10,000 wage increase in the near future, although he noted that, given the present price hikes, a wage increase of Rs. 10,000 would still leave much to be desired.

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Advocata Institute Chief Operations Officer (COO) Dhananath Fernando stated that several factors contributed to the steadily rising prices, including

the price hike in the global commodity market following Covid-19-induced disruptions, and the excessive money printing by the Central Bank. Apart from the inflationary pressures resulting from these conditions, the adverse weather conditions and inconsistent government policies regarding fertiliser also contributed, and Fernando added that the prevailing dollar crisis also played a part. "While the price controls on gas and imported items have been lifted, there is still a price control of Rs. 203 per US dollar. When you have a shortage of dollars, people can't open letters of credit (LCs)," he said. Given the restrictions surrounding opening LCs, especially for importers and exporters, costs incurred during the process are added to the final price of the goods, driving up the prices further.

Income inequality

The latest available data from the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) (from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey [HIES] last conducted in 2019), reports the monthly expenditure of the average household as Rs. 95,392 for urban areas, Rs. 57,652 for rural areas, and Rs. 38,519 for the estate sector. Given the minimum monthly wage of approximately Rs. 25,000 for the public sector, Rs. 16,000 for the private sector, and the Rs. 1,000 daily wage for the estate sector, a family falling under these parameters would face significant economic difficulties, especially

against a backdrop of the increasing cost of living.

Accordingly, Fernando noted: "The low-income people in any sector will be the most affected, because generally, a larger portion of their salary is spent on food. So when the prices of food items increase, they have to basically remain hungry, meaning they will be on the frontline of those who are affected (by the rising cost of living)." Even the demographics that exist somewhat above the poverty line would find it difficult to subsist on their current wages, leading to a cycle of arrested productivity. He explained: "People have too many issues to worry about, which creates demotivation and productivity issues. If your basic needs are unfulfilled, you will be burdened with worry about these. This is time that could have been spent on other things like family and work, but now that time is being sacrificed elsewhere on something unnecessary."

Economic outlook

While acknowledging this disparity, Fernando continued: "Of course people will feel the inflationary pressure. But if you increase the wages for the approximately 1.5 million state sector workers in Sri Lanka, the inflationary pressure will climb even more due to the resulting wage spiral, basically because the Government does not possess the money to increase these salaries. If they were to offer a wage increase, they have to borrow from the Central Bank, which means they have to print more money, leading to what is called an inflationary cycle. So, this is a very tricky situation.

"For private sector salary increases, first you have to make profits to increase salaries, unless the Government gives a subsidy or a budgetary allowance. Even for this, the Government does not have money since 70% of their income goes towards interest payments on early borrowings. The rest is reserved for healthcare, education, capital repayment from debt servicing, etc. Even with the Budget presented, a large budget deficit was estimated. So ultimately, increasing public sector salaries would bring about a very difficult time for everyone."

Fernando reasoned that the interruptions in the dollar flow and declining remittances were primarily due to the ceiling imposed by the Central Bank. "No exporter or foreign worker would like to send their dollars through official channels, because they know they can get a higher price outside. So, this is one reason why the dollars are not flowing in," he said.

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ADVOCATA Bath Curry Indicator (BCI)

The most expensive it's been since the beginning of 2019

An average family of 4, who spent Rs. 960 weekly for the following items in November 2019 had to pay Rs 1,390 for the same basket of goods in November 2021.

Year on Year price increase of BCI is 35%. Similarly, supermarket prices have increased by 38%.

Cash Receipt		Cash Receipt		Cash Receipt	
Date	November 2019	Date	November 2020	Date	November 2021
Item		Item		Item	
Samba Rice 1250g	120.25	Samba Rice 1250g	122.50	Samba Rice 1250g	194.00
Beans 250g	38.87	Beans 250g	54.67	Beans 250g	85.28
Dhal (Indian) 500g	55.80	Dhal (Indian) 500g	92.00	Dhal (Indian) 500g	121.00
Coconut 6.00	326.22	Coconut 6.00	474.00	Coconut 6.00	510.96
Fish (Balaya) 250g	114.45	Fish (Balaya) 250g	87.67	Fish (Balaya) 250g	126.00
Brinjals 1000g	144.83	Brinjals 1000g	87.67	Brinjals 1000g	220.75
Red Onion 200g	86.42	Red Onion 200g	65.27	Red Onion 200g	60.00
Pumpkin 250g	26.80	Pumpkin 250g	17.17	Pumpkin 250g	18.38
Tomatoes 100g	12.13	Tomatoes 100g	7.33	Tomatoes 100g	32.98
Green Chilli 100g	35.94	Green Chilli 100g	18.07	Green Chilli 100g	18.31
Total	961.71	Total	1027.42	Total	1387.65

*For a similar amount spent in 2019, only the bolded products could be bought in 2020 & 2021

FERTILISER CRISIS

Govt. yet to finalise quantity of fertiliser imports

- **Fertiliser subsidies only for organic farmers: DG Agriculture**
- **Says only private sector will import chemical fertiliser**
- **DGA unaware of State Ministry's fertiliser import policy**

agriculture policy is to continue. Meanwhile, Agriculture Ministry Secretary Prof. Udith Jayasinghe told *The Sunday Morning* that the Government had advised fertiliser firms registered with the Fertiliser Secretariat to import the highest quality chemical and organic fertiliser. "We've instructed fertiliser firms to get the best quality chemical and organic fertiliser required for crops. We've already given a roadmap to the Presidential Secretariat on how to handle the country's

food security," he said. He went on to say that over 60,000 hectares of paddy had been planted in the current Maha season and assured that there would be no shortage of rice the following year. "We have already put in place several safeguards to protect the country from experiencing a food shortage. One approach is to revise the Gazette on organic fertiliser and enable the use of chemical fertiliser.

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PHOTO © ADADERANA

BY YOSHITHA PERERA

Agriculture authorities were yet to determine the volume of organic and chemical fertiliser that needs to be imported for the Yala cultivation season, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

This comes at a time when farmers fear the outcome of the ongoing Maha cultivation season, following a sudden policy change on fertiliser.

The sudden change caught the agriculture industry off guard, with local farmers unable to source adequate stocks of organic fertiliser for their crops, and highlighted poor planning and capacity building by the Government to ensure a smooth transition.

The Government has indicated that it will continue to provide fertiliser subsidies only to farmers who practice organic agriculture. However, the diverse views expressed by legislators and state officials on the roadmap of going organic, add to concerns about the future of the agriculture sector and possible implications for food security.

Last week, Co-Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Ramesh Pathirana said that Sri Lanka was looking to boost agricultural productivity by combining organic and chemical fertiliser.

However, speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Department of Agriculture Director General Dr. Ajantha de Silva said that the Government's green agriculture policy had not changed, and that it would only provide subsidies to promote organic farming.

He said that the Government would neither intervene nor provide any subsidies for chemical fertiliser imports.

The Director General pointed out that the Government and President had stated that they were committed to green agriculture, and would thus provide subsidies to farmers engaging in the same only.

"The Government and the President have unequivocally said that they have not changed their minds about transitioning to green agriculture. As a result, the farmers who will benefit from the subsidies will be farmers who are adopting organic agriculture," Dr. de Silva explained.

Differing views on import policy

Dr. de Silva claimed that chemical fertiliser will not be imported by the Ministry of Agriculture or any other government institution, and that it would only be imported by the private sector.

Responding to a question about the organic and chemical fertiliser that would be imported into the country, Dr. de Silva said that the Agriculture Ministry had not yet decided on the quantities, and that a meeting would be held soon with experts on the matter.

"The Agriculture Minister will convene a meeting soon to discuss these challenges, particularly in preparation for the upcoming Yala season. Soon, we'll meet with an expert team to explore the possibilities and lay out a strategy for maintaining a proper organic culture with government assistance," he said.

However, last Tuesday (30 November), Co-Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Pathirana said that the Government had allowed the Agriculture Ministry to import the chemical fertiliser required for cultivation.

When questioned about this statement, Department of Agriculture Director General Dr. de Silva stated that he was unaware of the Government's decision in this regard, and was therefore unable to offer his views on it.

Recently, the Government stated it had decided to import agrochemicals and sell them at unsubsidised prices while continuing to promote organic agriculture.

Addressing a workshop on "The national dialogue on the progress of organic cultivation" held at the BMICH last week, National Fertiliser Secretariat Director Chandana Lokuhegawa stated that although the requirement of organic fertiliser for the current Maha season was 416,176 metric tonnes (MT), only 359,708 MT could be supplied. His statement highlights the urgent need for capacity building or imports to meet the shortfall in supply if the green

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ROOFTOP SOLAR PROJECTS

Short circuited by approval delays

- **Delays in approval system for rooftop solar panel installations: SIA**
- **Slow pace due to practical issues, not policies: CEB Chair**
- **Lack of consensus between industry and utility provider: Solar industry**

BY UWIN LUGODA

The Government's target of sourcing 70% of Sri Lanka's energy via renewable sources is at risk due to delays in government approval for rooftop solar energy systems, industry stakeholders told *The Sunday Morning*.

According to the Solar Industries Association (SIA), the current approval system in place for the installation of rooftop solar panels has major delays, which may deter people from implementing a solar energy system. Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, SIA President Kushan Jayasuriya stated that before each installation, the project needs to be pre-approved by the Government,

which can take up to four months. "Our current pre-approval system is such that it can take anywhere between three weeks to four months before being approved. By this time, consumers get fed up and walk away from installing solar panels," said Jayasuriya. He opined that this would be an obstacle in reaching the Government's target of sourcing 70% of its power needs through renewable sources. He also stated that the only way for rooftop solar to play its part in helping achieve this target is to expedite the approval process to around three weeks, which would encourage more people to install solar systems.

Rooftop solar is a part of the Government's plan for a more energy-efficient Sri Lanka, as stated in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" policy framework, which called for 70% of the country's energy to be generated via renewable sources by 2030. In it, this was highlighted as the most prominent solution to Sri Lanka's current energy crisis. When questioned about this delay issue, Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) Chairman M.M.C. Ferdinando stated that this was not a result of policy, but rather due to practicality issues.

He explained that the current pricing model for solar power is complex, since the systems are attached to the grid and work on a power import-export system for the consumers, and that currently,

“Since we plan on achieving 70% renewable energy by 2030, we put a lot of focus on hydro, solar, wind, and biomass. While we already source around 30% of our power from hydro, it is tapped out, leaving solar as the next option. And when it comes to solar, we cannot just install it just anywhere, since most of Sri Lanka's land is deemed fertile, so we have to depend on rooftop solar”

CEB Chairman M.M.C. Ferdinando

the CEB enters into 20-year contracts with consumers, such as net accounting contracts, which see the CEB buying power from customers at a price of Rs. 22 per unit for the first seven years, and then Rs. 15.50 per unit for the remaining 13 years. He stated that there is an ongoing debate between stakeholders and the CEB on whether to increase or decrease this tariff, leading to delays in approvals for rooftop solar.

"Some want to see this tariff increased, but the CEB's stance is that it is already too high. A decision has not been reached on whether to increase or decrease the price at which we buy units from consumers, and the Government has assigned a committee at the ministerial level to address this issue by coming up with a fair tariff. Until then, there will be delays," said Ferdinando.



He stated that a cabinet sub-committee meeting was held last Wednesday (1), where it was recommended that the tariff be increased only between 6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. every day, to help maintain public interest in rooftop solar.

"Since we plan on achieving 70% renewable energy by 2030, we put a lot of focus on hydro, solar, wind, and biomass. While we already source around 30% of our power from hydro, it is tapped out, leaving solar as the next option. And when it comes to solar, we cannot just install it just anywhere, since most of Sri Lanka's land is deemed fertile, so we have to depend on rooftop solar. Therefore, we are determined to encourage the installation of rooftop solar systems," said Ferdinando.

However, Jayasuriya opined that as of now, the CEB was incapable of revising the tariff due to the dollar crisis and international prices for solar panels having

“Our current pre-approval system is such that it can take anywhere between three weeks to four months before being approved. By this time, consumers get fed up and walk away from installing solar panels”

SIA President Kushan Jayasuriya

gone up by 30% during the pandemic. He explained that the only way the tariff can go is up, since if it reduces, the only thing driving rooftop solar – the private sector – would be negatively impacted. Jayasuriya added that during the SIA's last discussion with the Sustainable Energy Authority, they were promised a plan which would allow for approvals for solar systems to be given within the span of four weeks.

BY ASIRI FERNANDO

Sri Lanka, like many other countries, was poised to move towards a path of recovery next year, following an expedited Covid-19 vaccination drive alongside the resumption of global mobility early this year.

However, the emergence of the resilient Covid-19 mutation Omicron has dampened hopes as medical experts and governments across the world react to its spread. How will the Omicron mutation of the virus affect the world and impact Sri Lanka?

In an interview with *The Sunday Morning*, National University of Singapore Non-Resident Senior Fellow, international development expert, and policy advisor Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja discussed how Sri Lanka's recovery plans may be impacted by the new virus mutation.

Following are excerpts from the interview.

How is Omicron changing the global economic outlook?

During the summer of 2021, there was a lot of optimism about the world's recovery following the pandemic. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its World Economic Outlook report in October, projected that the world's growth would go to around 5.9% by the end of 2021, and a moderate 4.9% next year.

There was a sense of optimism that vaccines would contain the Covid problem, if a high proportion of the population was vaccinated. Despite persistent underlying issues, there were signs that the world economy was coming back.

What was perhaps not factored in significantly when the outlook was perceived was the risk of the Covid-19 virus mutating. The Omicron variant of the virus is now manifesting itself. It has shaken the markets; you can see some markets have reacted and fallen. It has affected travel plans and re-introduced travel bans for some countries.

So, the effects of Omicron will be widely felt, from stock markets to tourism, and will eventually affect supply chains as well. I suspect that the world may not reach the anticipated 5.9% or even 4.9% next year due to the impact of this mutation and other underlying issues.

Do you think that regional co-operation in South Asia will be

SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Navigating the Omicron challenge

Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja

● **Political consensus on economic crisis and policy options needed**



an important factor in recovery?

While there is a global economic downturn, there is much potential to further regional co-operation within South Asia.

One indicator is that inter-regional trade in South Asia is low, about 4% of total trade. South Asia is one of the least integrated regions with less monetary co-operation. So, by working together, South Asia can progress.

Enhanced co-operation would help the region better mitigate the impact of climate change and natural or man-made disasters, or share health and pharmaceutical resources during a pandemic.

We had an initial look at such co-operation when the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine and personal protective equipment (PPE) were shared. The spike in demand for medical oxygen during the pandemic was a good example of how South Asian states worked together to support each other and best utilise their health resources.

In the coming months and years, health authorities of Sri Lanka and other regional countries will have to work closely to contain any re-emergence of the virus. Health ministers and officials may benefit from a SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) or BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation)-level collaboration

to better respond to regional health issues.

One of the first facilities Sri Lanka got (when the Covid-19 pandemic started) was a \$ 400 million swap under the SAARC currency swap framework. The framework provided such facilities for countries that were in difficulty, like Sri Lanka. We need to expand that kind of financial co-operation. Such facilities are important to maintain health, trade, and support the Balance of Payments.

“The effects of Omicron will be widely felt, from stock markets to tourism, and will eventually affect supply chains as well. I suspect that the world may not reach the anticipated 5.9% or even 4.9% (world's economic growth) next year due to the impact of this mutation and other underlying issues”

Regional co-operation is very important for trade. The Colombo Port City project can only succeed if we manage to get regional investment for it from countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It may take some time for western investors to come to the Port City, and so, enhancing regional co-operation is important for Sri Lanka's Port City to succeed.

Sri Lanka is shifting from manufacturing towards a service industry. Therefore, the success of the Port City is very important. Furthermore, as Sri Lanka has made significant investments into the Colombo Port City project, we must get it to work.

Easier travel and connectivity within the South Asian region and opening up some of the service sectors will be key to improving trade in the region. The ease of movement of businesspeople and professionals will be helpful for the region and Sri Lanka.

How do you think the Covid Omicron variant will affect Sri Lanka?

Sri Lanka suffered one of its worst declines in growth since Independence, in 2020. The economy contracted by 3.6%. Also, the growth of poverty in urban areas is a serious cause for concern.

The rising cost of living affects daily wage earners and contributes to poverty. There is anecdotal evidence that poverty, malnutrition among children, and domestic violence against women are on the rise. The impact of Covid-19 has been terrible for Sri Lanka, and it has also derailed some of the domestic policies.

In the first half of 2021, there was swift recovery. Consumers were spending. A lot of hopes have been put into the tourism sector picking

up. However, tourism is vulnerable to the spread of Omicron and a possible resurgence of the pandemic. Sri Lanka is also vulnerable to remittance flow disruption.

Any impact by the Omicron variant may contribute towards aggravating ongoing local issues such as the forex shortage, rising cost of living, and energy security.

We need to be cautious that the projected growth, given by agencies such as the IMF before the emergence of Omicron, may not materialise. Despite the pick up in growth early in 2021, the economy is clouded by high uncertainty, a possible stop-go business cycle, high external debt repayments, and rising poverty.

How serious is Sri Lanka's external debt problem?

One of the core issues that has been in the Sri Lankan macroeconomy for years is the high level of external debt.

For a long time, we have spent more than we generate, and done so through borrowing. This is a long-standing issue. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has had a conflict for nearly 30 years, which results in revenue being spent on war, and also deters investment.

Sri Lanka has also, over the years, moved away from concessionary borrowings and towards commercial borrowing. The exchange rate has also changed over time. Therefore,

debt denominated in dollars is going to be more expensive over time.

It seems that Sri Lanka has to pay between \$ 25-29 billion in debt over the next five years. As such, Sri Lanka needs about \$ 5 billion per year to service debt repayment. Our foreign reserves are low.

The problem is that we are facing a Hobson's choice while the reserves are low: Pay for food, fuel, schools, and hospitals, or pay off our debt.

The Government publicly ruled out seeking an IMF programme, which would provide assurance to international financial markets and enable Sri Lanka to borrow again. But an IMF programme would come with conditions such as fiscal consolidation and liberalisation of imports, which limit domestic policy space.

The Government has said that it will pursue a home-grown approach of continuing with its unconventional policies, honouring all foreign debt obligations, increasing non-debt foreign inflows through the sale of state assets, and increasing exports and import restrictions.

Only time will tell whether Sri Lanka's home-grown approach, tinged by economic distortions and risks, can successfully revive the economy, reduce poverty, and improve its debt profile.

If it does not, a refined economic strategy supported by external financing will be urgently needed to deal with a simmering economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

In your opinion, if the current approach by the Government to manage the economic crisis fails, what needs to be changed?

If the current approach does not deliver, Sri Lanka may need to consider several changes.

Firstly, a national conference involving the major political parties should be convened to establish a political consensus on the scale of the economic crisis and the effects of policy choices.

Secondly, a team of domestic experts should be tasked with developing a comprehensive structural reform programme to stabilise the economy – which will help to mitigate the hardship on the people, deregulate the economy, and make the economy green. Existing work by think tanks on this issue can be helpful.

Thirdly, Sri Lanka should commence negotiations with the IMF on a programme of financial assistance and debt service relief.

CUSTODIAL DEATHS

Fundamentals of criminal law violated: BASL

- **Citizens' trust in public institutions undermined**
- **Long-term issue; requires significant changes: Activist**
- **Shift in mindset and culture needed**

President informed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) via email and text message. He further informed the Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission (of Sri Lanka) (HRCSL) in charge of Inquiries and Investigations as well as the Director – Inquiries and Investigations of the Commission. As an additional measure, the BASL President also informed Northern Province Governor Jeewan Thiyagarajah, who also heads the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), of this information.

“The HRCSL and Thiyagarajah confirmed that they had contacted the authorities and informed them of the complaint and requested them to intervene to ensure the safety of the suspect.

“However, this morning (26 November), the media has reported that the suspect had been shot dead while being taken to recover hidden weapons,” the BASL said in a statement following the incident.

The inaction over the warnings issued and failure to prevent or reduce the risk of a threat during the alleged visit with the suspect to recover weapons, point to a culture of impunity within the Police Department and a disregard for duty of care, experts said.

BASL Secretary Attorney-at-Law Rajeeva Amarasuriya told *The Sunday Morning* that the BASL would be taking prompt measures with regard to the incident.

“The basic fundamentals of criminal law are being violated. The BASL has decided that it will take measures on the most recent

incident (Lasantha). There are three areas: one is the inquest where the BASL will have a presentation. We will also be looking at the possibility of filing applications at the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal to address what took place and also to put an end to this happening in the future. This is something that has been happening from time to time in Sri Lanka starting from as far as back as the late 80s.”

He said that it was crucial to establish a deterrent so as to prevent future crimes of this nature in addition to penalising the culprits.

“Applications will be twofold. We haven’t referred those yet, as we are in the process of working it out. One is, of course, that those responsible must always be held accountable. Secondly, we need to also ensure that this

type of perpetration does not recur, because these things happen not only in Sri Lanka but in other countries also, but we need to have effective mechanisms that are deterrents, so that those who engage in these activities know that the consequences are serious.”

Amarasuriya noted that while people were quick to dismiss a criminal’s death while in custody owing to their criminal background, the real issue was the flouting of the rule of law by the law enforcement authorities.

“The authorities must work according to the rule of law, which cannot be flouted. You cannot take extrajudicial action. Due process must be followed. If there are offenses, it must be proved in a court of law and dealt with through the court system.”

Contd. on page 16

BY SKANDHA GUNASEKARA

Last month, a suspect, H.L. Lasantha alias Tinker Lasantha, was killed in police custody despite warnings to the authorities, from his family and lawyers, that his life was in danger.

Following the custodial death, the Police issued an all too familiar statement that the suspect was shot when he allegedly attempted to hurl a hand grenade at the officers as he was being taken to identify a hidden cache of weapons.

Sri Lanka is no stranger to such incidents. Custodial deaths occur frequently. However, little, if at all anything, has been done to address the issue.

Lasantha’s death, the latest in a long list of custodial deaths, came in the wake of a recent report by the United Nations Human Rights Council that highlighted several such incidents and questioned Sri Lanka’s resolve to uphold the rights of its citizens by providing due process in the pursuit of justice. Last month, the Scottish Police Service Chief Constable indicated that they would be withdrawing from training their Sri Lankan counterparts, citing allegations of human rights violations.

In the last few years, there has been a string of custodial deaths relating to suspects that the Police allege were involved in organised crimes such as drug trafficking, extortion, and murder.

This is a drug dealer who was shot dead: Minister Weerasekera

Minister of Public Security Rear Admiral (Retd.) Sarath Weerasekera, commenting on Lasantha’s death, emphasised that the Police had the right to open fire in self-defence if they believed a suspect was a threat.

However, he noted that an investigation into the murder of Lasantha had been ordered.

“I have already asked the IGP to conduct an investigation. It’ll be in the courts now, I think. So, it is up to the judiciary to take action. I don’t know what happened. It happened on the 25th, and the report hasn’t come to me. I’m not going to get involved. I’m a politician, so I’m not going to get involved in police work. I have already told the Police to do the correct thing,” Weerasekera said.

“Also, this is a drug dealer who was shot dead. They are a menace to society,” the Minister said, and then complained that the media was only reporting on the faults of the Police.

“You all write and talk only about the bad things the Police do. There are some 89,000 police officers in the country, and they have all done good, especially during the pandemic. You should write about that too.”

Minister Weerasekera then stated that a few bad incidents shouldn’t tarnish the reputation of the entire police force.

“These are only a few incidents of the Police doing the wrong. But there are so many instances the Police have done good, but the media never talks about that (sic).”

Police disregarding duty of care

Meanwhile, Police Media Spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Nihal Thalduwa confirmed that the IGP had ordered an investigation into the murder of H.L. Lasantha while in police custody.

“The IGP has instructed the Western Province Senior DIG to conduct an investigation into the incident.”

The victim’s lawyers had warned the authorities that he would be killed by the Police. However, the Police failed to ensure the safety of a suspect in their custody.

“On the night of 25 November 2021, Attorney-at-Law Sanjaya Ariyadasa contacted the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) President to inform him that he had been told 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 had information that his client would be killed in custody by the Police under the pretext of it happening during a shootout whilst being taken to show weapons.

“Immediately thereafter, the BASL

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Impunity and its perils

A change of regime in this country usually results in the henchmen who assisted and supported the winning party lining up and demanding their pound of flesh for services rendered.

However, if the foot does not come down at the right time, the result is the creation of a culture of impunity that inevitably leads to public agitation and turmoil.

For a government that rode to power on the singular platform of strengthening national security, two years down the line, the attainment of that goal continues to prove elusive.

For all intents and purposes, there is a great game of attrition afoot amongst the world's superpowers to further their strategic interests across the globe.

Given the new world order, a nation steeped in debt and begging for its daily bread is anything but secure, with its rulers, who are only temporary custodians of power, ever willing to sell off the country's assets in return for foreign exchange simply to tide over matters till the next election.

For instance, it took over a hundred cases of exploding gas cookers for the authorities to grudgingly acknowledge a problem and halt the distribution of cylinders.

What has transpired so far in the matter of the gas cylinder issue is shocking. It was on 12 April this year that state-owned Litro Gas announced the introduction of what became the controversial "hybrid" cylinder, which, according to reports, had a drastically altered composition as opposed to what prevailed up until then.

For what it was worth, the then Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) Chairman had ordered tests to be carried out on the new product, and the test results were made available to the authority on 27 April.

Now with explosions occurring across the country, the Minister in charge of the subject has gone on record that he suspects "meddling" with the gas composition. There is also the matter of ethyl mercaptan, the odour agent used in the composition to help identify leakages - tests have revealed that its level, which should be 14, has been deliberately brought down to 5 by the gas company concerned.

In what amounts to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted, it is only now that steps are being taken to diligently test samples of LPG gas obtained from supply ships arriving in Colombo.

Given the unprecedented degree of impunity enjoyed by scammers and criminals aided and abetted by an indifferent bureaucracy, it is little wonder that there is lukewarm interest among investors to pitch tents here.

Consequential to its economic woes, Sri Lanka has become a testing ground for all manner of dangerous products, the gas cylinder issue being just one. There are other examples such as the introduction of nano fertiliser and Chinese organic fertiliser, with Sri Lankan farmers being the guinea pigs.

The danger is that while the Government is desperately seeking ways and means of sourcing foreign exchange, the ganja proposal carries with it risks. According to reports, the illegal hooch industry grew by 300% last year alone.

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Sri Lanka, at present, has its plate full with a foreign reserves crisis, soaring cost of living, increasing inflation, and to top it all off, the threat of a new Covid-19 variant of concern.

Also, to add to the woes, the sudden islandwide blackout last Friday (3) that lasted hours resulted in the Norochchola Power Plant shutting down and creating a supply shortfall of 600 MW to the national power grid.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa are busily putting out fires on many fronts while the noose of economic woes continues to tighten its grip around the nation.

President Rajapaksa, who left for Abu Dhabi on Friday to attend the Indian Ocean Conference over the weekend, is expected to meet with several key foreign diplomats, including members of the UAE Government as well as India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the summit.

Government members are concerned about the growing economic crises, and the Cabinet of Ministers, at the last Cabinet meeting, discussed the growing economic concerns in the country and decided urgent remedies were needed to overcome the crisis situation.

A majority of the ministers expressed concerns over the rising prices and overall cost of living. They turned to Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa for solutions to arrest the rising prices.

However, the Finance Minister explained that given the precarious situation of the country's economy, there was no possibility of reducing taxes on commodities to bring down prices or to ensure their availability in the market.

Listening to all that was discussed, the President told the ministers to consider it their collective responsibility, as members of the Government, to address the economic crisis without passing the buck and turning to him (the President).

The ministers had also discussed the impending fuel crisis. Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila noted that if solutions were not sought now to address the foreign reserves crisis, the country could face an energy crisis next year, which, in turn, would have a cascading effect on economic activities.

Finally, a decision was taken to request that Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal do a presentation to the Cabinet at this week's meeting on the present economic and foreign reserves situation.

It was also decided that officials from the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) and Treasury would also be asked to make a presentation to the Cabinet this week. This presentation would be on the controversial agreement signed with regard to the Yugadanavi Power Plant and US-based New Fortress Energy Inc. (NFE).

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka, it seems, has now turned to neighbouring India to help it out of the current economic quagmire.

Govt. turns to India for support while taking flak from all sides

- India agrees to currency swap, focuses on projects and Trinco tank farm
India's Adani enters Lanka's renewable energy sector after port project
Opposition concerned over decline in foreign reserves, now at \$ 1.2 billion
MR summons SLPP MPs to ensure peace within governing coalition
Cabraal to go before Cabinet to explain economic crisis and forex reserves
CEB and Treasury officials to explain Yugadanavi agreement to Cabinet
US House Foreign Affairs Committee responds to TNA's request for solution

The Government's decision was evident when Finance Minister Rajapaksa, together with Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle last Tuesday (30 November) night, made their way to India to find solutions to Sri Lanka's burgeoning economic crisis.

It was Basil's first official visit after assuming the role of Finance Minister, and it was High Commissioner Moragoda's first high-level visit as well.

The two-day visit to India, from last Wednesday (1) to Thursday (2), saw meetings being held with key Indian government ministers including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh.

During the meeting with Sitharaman, Basil had sought ways and means of further enhancing economic co-operation with India, and they discussed ways and means by which the existing bilateral economic co-operation programmes between the two countries could be further developed and enhanced.

The Finance Minister then met India's External Affairs Minister Jaishankar.

the meeting between Basil and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which was expected to be held last Thursday, failed to materialise. Said meeting between Basil and Modi was a much-anticipated event. Upon inquiring into the reason for the failure to organise the meeting, it was learnt that it was mainly due to scheduling issues.

The Finance Minister met National Security Advisor Shri Ajit Doval and India's Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri last Thursday.

Sri Lanka's High Commission in New Delhi announced that India and Sri Lanka agreed to a four-pronged approach to discuss initiatives on food and energy security to help mitigate Sri Lanka's economic crisis.

Accordingly, the four-pillar initiative comprises: i) food and health security package on an urgent basis that would envisage an extension of a line of credit



Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa and Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle being welcomed by Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India Milinda Moragoda at the Delhi Airport, India

to cover the import of food, medicines, and other essential items from India to Sri Lanka; ii) energy security package that would include a line of credit to cover import of fuel from India and an early modernisation of the Trincomalee Tank Farm, iii) offer of a currency swap to help Sri Lanka address the current balance of Payment issues; and iv) facilitating Indian investments in cascading sectors in Sri Lanka that would contribute to growth and expand employment.

The bottom line of the agreements reached between India and Sri Lanka, last week, is the inflow of more Indian investments to Sri Lanka that would include the expediting of delayed Indian projects including the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm.

While Basil was making inroads in India, Prime Minister Rajapaksa held several meetings with foreign diplomats in Colombo.

A meeting with Deputy Chinese Ambassador Hu Wei was among these. The meeting took place last Wednesday at Temple Trees and the Prime Minister was accompanied by CBSL Governor Cabraal.

Rajapaksa, on his official Twitter

account, stated that he had discussed "an array of economic and political, global challenges faced due to the pandemic".

The meeting took place a week after the Cabinet of Ministers approved the signing of a loan agreement with China to secure ¥ 1.5 billion (\$ 300 million).

Prime Minister Rajapaksa also hosted a special reception for the foreign envoys from Muslim countries at Shangri-La in Colombo last Tuesday. The dinner was organised by Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris. Fifteen high commissioners and ambassadors representing Muslim nations had participated in the event.

The Premier had requested the help of Muslim countries to develop the Sri Lanka economy, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

Enter Adani

Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy in Colombo, last Thursday, stated that a proposed hybrid energy project in three islands off the Jaffna Peninsula had been suspended due to a "security concern" from a third party.

In a tweet, the Embassy said that the hybrid energy system to be built in three northern islands of Sri Lanka by Chinese high-tech renewable energy company Sino Soar Hybrid Technology, had been suspended.

It said that the same company had now inked a contract with the Maldivian Government to establish solar power plants at 12 of its islands.

"Sino Soar Hybrid Technology, being suspended to build hybrid energy system in three northern islands of Sri Lanka due to 'security concern' from a third party, has inked a contract with Maldivian Government on 29 November to establish solar power plants at 12 islands in the Maldives," the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka tweeted.

On 18 January, the Sri Lanka Cabinet of Ministers approved a proposal to involve the Chinese joint venture Sinosoar-Etechwin to install "hybrid renewable energy systems" in Nainativu, Delft (or Neduntivu), and Anaitivu, located in the Palk Bay.

However, it is reliably learnt that Indian business tycoon Gautham Adani is to invest in the renewable energy-generation projects earmarked in Pooneryn and Mannar in the Northern Province.

projects in the Northern Province through an unsolicited process.

Continuing woes

The dangerously low foreign reserves situation was highlighted in Parliament by main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne last week.

He noted that the net foreign reserves had plunged to an all-time low of \$ 1.2 billion and warned of a looming dark future.

Wickramaratne claimed that the reserves figure was very low, and excluded the gold reserves of \$ 300 million.

Interestingly, members of the Government did not refute Wickramaratne's statement of record low reserves, which amounts to less than one month's worth of imports.

The low reserves are believed to be the lowest the country has ever experienced.

The SJB MP also noted that the forex crisis would worsen the shortage of essential food items, aside from making them expensive. He also predicted a fuel shortage leading to power cuts, and warned of the country falling into a period of darkness.

Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also informed Parliament last Monday (29 November) that the country would face a power crisis by March next year.

Wickremesinghe also called on the Government to present to Parliament the documents on the country's economic conditions sent to the IMF the previous week by the CBSL.

"The reason as to why I am asking for this documentation is because I want to see what has been done in regards to the foreign exchange issue we are currently facing. In the Budget for 2022, it spoke about purchasing oil and coal. But, if we do not have forex, how are we to pay the other countries? In this state, Sri Lanka will have power cuts in the near future, as we do not have oil or coal," the former Premier said.

dollar crisis and import restrictions. Dr. Jayasundera had made this observation addressing the "Top German Brands in Sri Lanka" event at The Kingsbury Colombo recently.

"It's not a good time for Sri Lanka. I have been a long-standing Secretary to the President, and this is the worst time of my life. 2020 saw a negative economic growth; not just that, but several activities that kept the economy running have collapsed," he had added.

The CBSL's roadmap, released in October this year, had listed that there would be inflows amounting to \$ 2.8 billion between October and December through government initiatives, and a further \$ 2.2 billion through CBSL measures. Separately, \$ 800 million in inflows was attributed to the banking sector.

The CBSL had also expected \$ 6.15 billion in inflows via exports, workers' remittances, services exports, and tourism, also within three months.

However, two months after the prediction by the CBSL, there are doubts over the credibility of the announcement and the whereabouts of the purported inflows.

Governor Cabraal, nevertheless, had expressed confidence in measures announced in the short-term roadmap in October to boost the country's foreign reserves.

Meanwhile, the CBSL last week announced a "festival offer" for migrant workers, where migrant workers will be able to fetch an additional Rs. 10 for every US dollar they convert into rupees this month through legitimate channels.

TNA visit sparks US Congress

Meanwhile, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee swung into action shortly after the visit by several senior members of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) to Washington DC.

The two senior legislators, one Democrat and the other Republican, crossed party lines to jointly write to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to advocate a permanent solution to the ethnic troubles in Sri Lanka. Excerpts of the letter are below:

"Since the end of Sri Lanka's almost 30-year civil war, this committee has demonstrated an interest in ensuring that US policy continues to support reconciliation and accountability, while also addressing the root causes of the conflict. We strongly urge the State Department to refocus its efforts in Sri Lanka to emphasise the importance of a substantive and durable political solution.

"The US has rightly championed justice and human rights in Sri Lanka. Advancing these values will require solutions to political questions that remain unanswered years after the end of the civil war, including the meaningful devolution of power in an undivided Sri Lanka. We urge the Department to support the Government's engagement with Opposition parties, including Tamils and Muslims, to find such solutions.

"While the Sri Lankan people should lead the debate, the Department should make it clear that the US stands ready to support and facilitate this effort. Ultimately, however, it is imperative that any outcome is determined by and meets the needs of all citizens in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil and Muslim people."

The Sri Lankan Government was yet to respond to the accusations or demands in the congressional letter.

Yugadanavi saga

While the Cabinet of Ministers waits to be briefed on the controversial Yugadanavi deal with NFE this week, the Yugadanavi saga continues.

Court, headed by the Chief Justice, last Monday, fixed the fundamental rights petitions to be heard on 16 and 17 December.

Five petitions were filed against the Government's decision to transfer the shares. Among the petitioners are SJB General Secretary Ranjith Madduma Bandara, former Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) parliamentarians Sunil Handunnetti and Wasantha Samarasinghe, Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, and Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera.

The Attorney General, taking into account the national importance of these petitions, had requested that the Supreme Court consider these five petitions before a full bench of five or more judges.

On 26 November, Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya appointed a five-member bench of the Supreme Court chaired by him and including Justices Buwaneka Aluwihare, Priyantha Jayawardena, Vijith Malalagoda, and L.T.B. Dehideniya.

Cabinet Ministers Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Wimal Weerawansa, and Gammanpila had decided to present their case through a separate panel of lawyers before the Supreme Court. They retained a private counsel, Uditha Egalathewa PC.

The petitioners had named Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Cabinet of Ministers, NFE, West Coast Power (Pvt.) Ltd., the Ceylon Electricity Board, the Attorney General, and several others as respondents in the petition.

The petitioners had stated that on 7 July 2021, the framework agreement was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and NFE for the disposal of 40% of the total shares held at West Coast Power (Pvt.) Ltd. by Yugadanavi (Pvt.) Ltd.

The Finance Minister explained that given the precarious situation of the country's economy, there was no possibility of reducing taxes on commodities to bring down prices or to ensure their availability in the market. Listening to all that was discussed, the President told the ministers to consider it their collective responsibility, as members of the Government, to address the economic crisis without passing the buck and turning to him (the President)

The petitioners had further said that agreements had been further entered into for the execution of the Terminal Project, which includes a floating storage regasification unit (FSRU), mooring system and the pipelines, and the supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to West Coast Power.

The petitioners had noted that to the best of their knowledge, the share sales and purchase agreement (SSPA) pertaining to the sale of 40% of the shares in West Coast Power (Pvt) Ltd. and the gas supply agreements, had not been placed before the Cabinet of Ministers to date.

They had also noted that bundling the contracts for the LNG terminal, construction of pipelines, and LNG supply in a single unsolicited proposal and awarding them to a foreign-based company without following a transparent procedure, was an enormous threat to national energy security.

They had added that the proposal to purchase 40% of the shares in West Coast Power was contrary to the national energy policy and strategies.

Meanwhile, SJB MP Madduma Bandara had also questioned in Parliament why the controversial agreement with the US-based NFE had still not been presented to the Parliament, as promised by Power Minister Gamini Lokuge last month.

"They have sold our energy security,

a component of our national security, shamelessly to the US. They have given our Yugadanavi Power Plant without even showing the agreement to Parliament. Lokuge said that he will present it to Parliament over a month ago. Where is it? It was signed in July," queried Madduma Bandara in Parliament last Monday.

Lokuge was not present in Parliament on Monday, since he was under quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19 the previous week.

Deepening rift

Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and governing Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) have been at loggerheads for some time with their disagreements, which were suppressed for some time, and now being aired in the open by seniors of both parties, even in Parliament.

The SLFP said the public was losing confidence in the Government led by the SLPP.

SLFP National Organiser State Minister Duminda Dissanayake said that the public were not happy with some of the statements made and decisions taken by the SLPP.

He said the SLFP, as a party, will look to strengthen itself ahead of the next election.

Dissanayake also reminded members of the SLFP that their ancestral home is the SLFP.

He noted that even Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa won the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as the SLFP leader.

The State Minister said that the SLFP had been weakened as a result of some issues in the party.

However, he said the SLFP will look to regain lost ground, and no one could prevent it from doing so.

Meanwhile, SLFP Senior Vice President Prof. Rohana Lakshman Piyadasa said the Government was just straying around without a vision, and that people would make their sentiments known at the first possible instance.

"Although the SLFP is the main coalition partner of the Government, they (Government) have levelled various allegations against the party, insulted the party in various ways, and have now started to slam our Party Leader. They say the two-thirds majority can be used to punish, and have asked us to leave the Government. I cannot believe that these statements have happened without the knowledge of senior government members, because they could take the necessary steps to prevent these statements from being made. We cannot see such an effort being made," Piyadasa added.

SLFP Vice President Minister Mahinda Amarawansa also warned last week that around 50-60 government MPs would walk out if the SLFP decided to leave the Government at some point.

"Those who ask the SLFP to leave the Government didn't criticise us initially. They first criticised people like Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila, Industries Minister Wimal Weerawansa, and Water Supply Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara. Then, they started criticising the SLFP. They have told about 30 MPs to leave now. But it is a known fact that when these 30 MPs leave the Government, a group from the SLPP will also leave," he claimed, adding that between 50-60 MPs would leave the Government at such a point.

According to Amarawansa, the Government will not have the two-thirds majority in such a scenario, or even a simple majority.

He stated that the SLFP had no interest in destabilising the President and the Government, which was elected with the SLFP's support. "At present, we don't want to destabilise the President and the Government. We are trying to rectify the shortcomings of the Government," he added.

The clash between the SLPP and SLFP had been witnessed in the open over statements made against SLFP Leader Maithripala Sirisena by Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage.

The battle between the two ruling coalition partners continued in Parliament recently, with SLPP member State Minister Roshan Ranasinghe criticising Sirisena over a statement he had made earlier.

Sirisena had earlier noted that the Government enjoyed a two-thirds majority because of the SLFP.

Meanwhile, the SLFP has commenced the process to prepare for the impending local government and provincial council (PC) elections.

Accordingly, interviews are being conducted at the party headquarters to appoint new electoral organisers to the electorates that are vacant at present in order to carry out the party's organisational work at every electorate.

However, SLFP General Secretary State Minister Dayasiri Jayasekera, last week, observed that the SLFP had no intention of leaving the coalition government as yet.

"People can say various things, but as a party, we have not made such a decision. We will continue to work with the Government. We formed this Government, and we elected the President. We might not be able to agree with all the decisions made by the Government, but as a coalition party within the Government, we have spoken to the President, the Prime Minister, and SLPP leaders," Jayasekera told the media.

SLPP hits back

The SLPP, meanwhile, continues to hit back at its coalition partner.

Senior SLPP Minister Prasanna Ranatunga claimed that both the SLFP and its leader should keep in mind that they had contested the last general election under the SLPP and its flower bud symbol.

When queried about the infighting between the SLFP and SLPP in the Government, Ranatunga told the media that a two-thirds majority was not a requisite to operate a government.

He explained that a two-thirds majority would be needed only for a special reason, like getting a new constitution or amendment passed in Parliament.

Ranatunga reiterated that the Government would not fall even if the SLFP were to leave it.

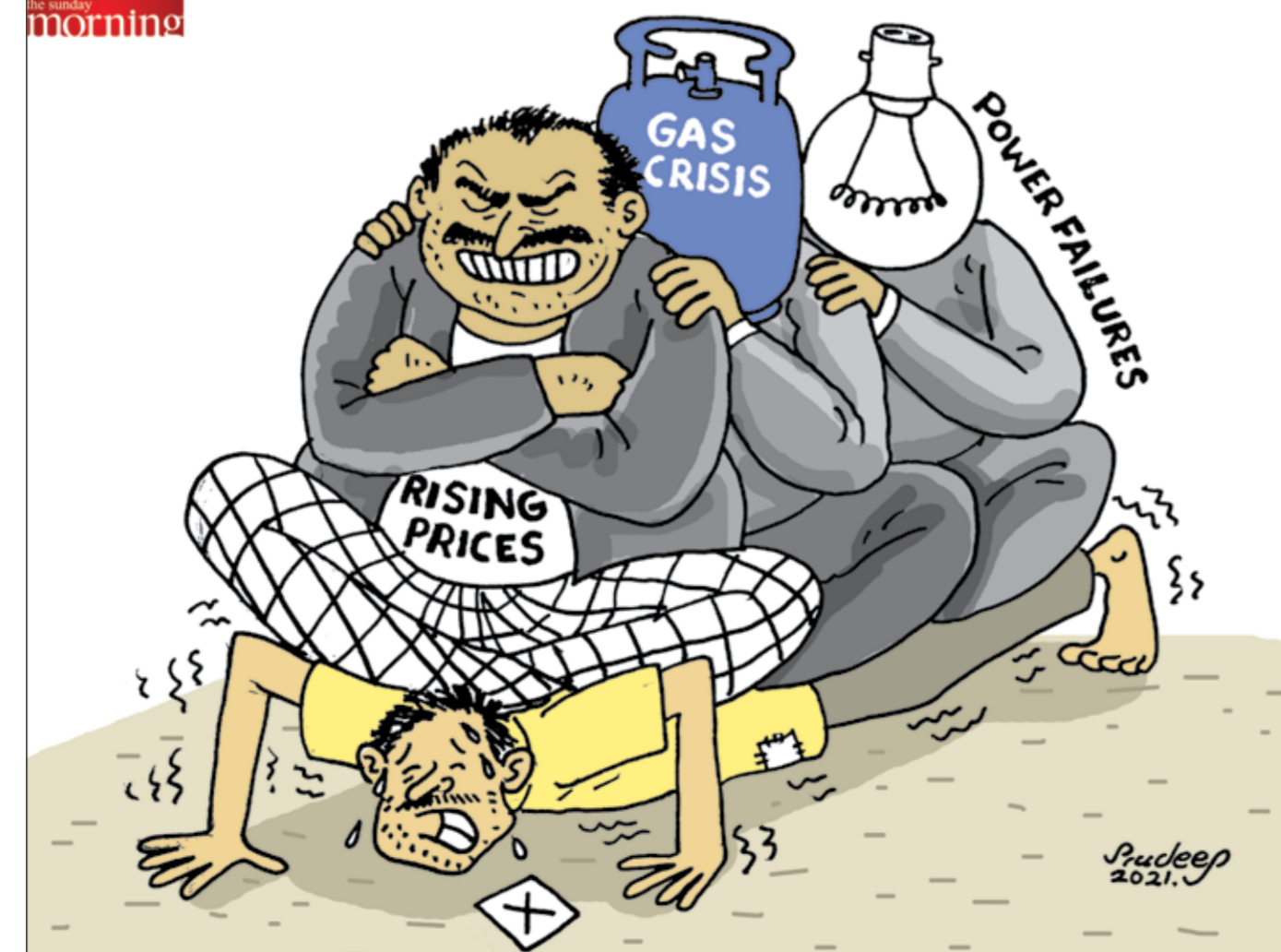
"Any one is free to leave the Government without making various statements and boasting about themselves," the Minister added.

SLPP General Secretary MP Sagara Kariyawasam reiterated that any coalition partner who has issues with the Government should leave.

Targeting the SLFP, Kariyawasam noted that the party should co-operate with the governing party if it was planning on remaining with the Government or, if critical comments were to continue, that the SLFP could continue to make them after leaving the party.

He further slammed the SLFP leadership saying that Sirisena would have been the first to step forward to take credit for the organic agriculture concept had it been successful. He was referring to the criticism levelled by the former President over the Government's organic agriculture policy.

Backbench SLPP MP Premindra Bandara Tennakoon also joined in the SLPP's attacks against the SLFP. However, his attack was more targeted towards the SLFP leadership.



BY SKANDHA GUNASEKARA

Respected public figure and cricketing icon Arjuna Ranatunga abruptly left the United National Party (UNP) last week, asserting that he felt his services served no purpose in the party. *The Sunday Morning* spoke with UNP stalwart Navin Dissanayake regarding Ranatunga's departure and its implications for the party. Following are excerpts from the interview:

Arjuna Ranatunga left the UNP recently. What do you think pushed him to do so?

I think the letter he issued is self-explanatory. He said, in the last paragraph of that letter, that he wanted reforms within the party. Actually, I was also involved with him in raising that issue. Reforms do not simply mean changing positions. It means fundamental reforms of the party, from the branding of the party, the organisational structure, marketing set-up, and having an honest analysis of what went wrong last time. Those are the pillars of actual transformational change. So without that kind of process, you can't really resurrect the party. Those are the key issues that the party highlighted.

What's the current status of the UNP?

I think after Arjuna's resignation, they have not issued any statement yet. But I would imagine that a lot of people in the party are unhappy about how Arjuna was treated. Personally, I feel Arjuna is a very marketable product – one of the few marketable products that the UNP had. I don't think there was a proper interaction with him to fathom what kind of position he wanted to have within the UNP. We'll have to wait and see as to how the UNP reacts to it.

Are there any moves by the UNP to convince him to return?

No, I think it is final. That letter is very clear – he said he wants to form his own movement or something to that effect. He had said that he would be interested if a corruption-free movement asked him to be a presidential candidate, and that he would consider it. I think those statements made it very clear that he doesn't want to come back to the UNP.

Were any changes made within the party after the defeat in 2020?

Changes were made. Three slots were filled – the Chairmanship to Vajira Abeywardana, the Deputy Leadership to Ruwan Wijewardene, and Assistant Leadership to Akila Viraj Kariyawasam. Arjuna and I said that we didn't want any positions, and Arjuna has left. I'm still there. So, I'm also wondering – I don't want to make any decisions about making a move yet, but the trajectory of the UNP and its thinking are not positive.

Your brother has left the UNP and joined the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). Will you also follow in his footsteps if you were to leave the UNP or will you join a different party?

No, I'd look at a broader coalition. I think to defeat the Rajapaksas, you need

● *I'm also wondering about the party, but won't leave just yet*

● *Reforms do not mean changing positions; it should be fundamental party reforms*

● *No proper interaction with Ranatunga to fathom his role in the party*



RANATUNGA'S RESIGNATION FROM THE UNP

UNP'S THINKING AND TRAJECTORY NOT POSITIVE

NAVIN DISSANAYAKE

a very broad coalition including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), SJB, UNP, and, if the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leaves the Government, then the SLFP as well. That is the need of the hour. Fragmented groups cannot defeat the Rajapaksas by themselves. Overall, a broader strategy is needed to defeat them.

How have talks between the UNP and the SJB progressed?

I think you can have intra-party talks. Intra-party talks are taking place continuously now, even with the UNP and the SLFP. The UNP is also holding discussions with the JVP. Informal discussions are happening all the time, and I think it's a positive sign that the anti-Rajapaksa groups want to work together to defeat the Rajapaksas. However,

“I think to defeat the Rajapaksas, you need a very broad coalition including the JVP, SJB, UNP, and, if the SLFP leaves the Government, then the SLFP as well. That is the need of the hour

anybody who says that the SJB can get 50.1% without the help of the JVP and the UNP and the other anti-Rajapaksa forces, I think, are living in a different world. Because in a “three-cornered” fight at a presidential election, it is always the incumbent who can benefit. Therefore, I believe that at a presidential election, you always need a two-cornered fight to defeat the incumbent.

The JVP has always had a policy of anti-corruption. If the JVP makes it a condition for any party forming an alliance with them to distance themselves from any person with allegations of corruption, is the UNP prepared to do so?

If they make that condition, I think that's a very fair condition. No one would ever want to have people with allegations of corruption on their platform. I certainly would not wish to have such a person on my platform. All of society is now rebelling against this, and they are disgusted by politicians who are making money. Whether it is through the current Government or the previous Government, people have a very apathetic view of politicians because politicians are associated with making money.



There is, of course, a problem of communication, marketing, and branding of the UNP. I have certain ideas on how to overcome that situation. However, I feel that any political party, after a huge defeat like what we experienced, has to dig deep and do a SWOT analysis and then come to a conclusion on what really went wrong

Would that mean Ravi Karunanayake would be dropped from the UNP?

Well, I think as far as Ravi Karunanayake is concerned, there's a case against him. I think that case has to run its course for anyone to make a fair and equitable decision about Karunanayake. The law of the land very clearly states that you are innocent until you are proven guilty. You can make allegations against people, but they have to be proven in a court of law. As far as Karunanayake is concerned, we'll have to wait until the outcome of this court case to see what exactly happens to him.

What about talks with the SLFP? Will the UNP look for a possible alliance with them, especially after the experiences of the Yahapalana Government?

No, I don't think so. After that bitter experience we had with Maithripala (Sirisena), where he basically unconstitutionally and unlawfully ditched the Government and brought in the Rajapaksas – whom he initially defeated and swore to the people to bring corruption charges against – I personally would feel very uncomfortable to work with Maithripala Sirisena.

Going back to the UNP leadership and its structure, do you think that in its current form, it can win any more seats in a parliamentary election?

Ranil Wickremesinghe has his pluses – he is an experienced leader and administrator, and people, especially the middle class and the intelligentsia in this country, feel that he is a person who can get us out of this mess that we are in. But there is of course a problem of communication, marketing, and branding of the UNP. I have certain ideas on how to overcome that situation. However, I feel that any political party, after a huge defeat like what we experienced, has to dig deep and do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and then come to a conclusion on what really went wrong. Then, even if the leadership is in question as a result of the SWOT analysis, and the leadership is seen as a major flaw involved in the defeat, that certainly has to be rectified.

How much of that defeat would you attribute to the split with the SJB?

I would say quite a lot. The fact of the matter is that approximately 2-2.5 million hardcore UNPers did not go to the polling booths and vote. This is the reality. They did not go to the polling booths because they were appalled by the division between Sajith (Premadasa) and Ranil. I would say that the split would have been contributed.

You mentioned that an analysis identified the leadership of the party as a weakness, and that there should be a change. In your view, who should take up the reins?

Soon after the general election defeat, there were about three working committee meetings. In my view, if Ranil Wickremesinghe was going to step down as communicated to us by him, the replacement should have been Karu Jayasuriya. But Wickremesinghe then said that he was not going to step down, and we came back to square one.

Are you expecting to leave the UNP if there is no change, or will you give the party some time to change before you decide?

I cannot give a specific answer to that, as I'm not in a hurry, nor do I want to make hasty decisions, because the political landscape seems to be changing every day. So I don't want to leave the UNP, but I would certainly be a democratic voice within the party for further changes, and I would espouse that cause.

The UNP is the oldest party in Sri Lanka and one which my father died for; that is the emotional link that I have to it. Therefore, I do not want to be a cause of the disintegration of the UNP; I want to be a factor that actually builds up the UNP.

Contd. from page 6

Will schools...

To save the lives of children, the TSPSC put forward the following demands:

- Close all schools and provide computer and high-speed internet facilities free of charge to all students and teachers until the pandemic is brought under control
- Close all nonessential production while providing workers and the masses with wages, allowances, and other basic needs
- Allocate adequate funding to increase Covid-19 testing, establish proper quarantining and treatment facilities, and properly staff the grossly underfunded health system
- The immediate provision of free vaccines for all

Important to conduct schools

The Sunday Morning spoke to Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children Director Dr. G. Wijesuriya on his thoughts about keeping schools open at a time there is an increase in cases of Covid-19 across the country.

Responding to our query, Dr. Wijesuriya noted: “Keeping schools open is important, as the student population of our country has lost more than a year and a half of their school life. Children were confined to their homes and were deprived of living a normal life, which resulted in many children becoming depressed and stressed. There was an increase in children being brought to psychiatric clinics in our hospitals. Among them were children suffering from various mental disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Reopening schools can have a positive impact on children and ensure their

How to...

He listed out the steps as follows:

- Check and prepare the child before sending him or her to school. If the child has symptoms such as cough, cold, or fever, it is not advisable to send the child to school at all. In addition, if a relative at home has Covid-19 or is displaying similar symptoms, and the child was in contact with that person, it is not advisable to send them to school. Parents should guide the child on how to protect themselves from germs by teaching them the proper handwashing techniques and respiratory etiquette. Moreover, they should be guided on how to wear a facemask properly
- The child should be concerned about safety while travelling from home to school. Parents need to clearly inform their children how to take precautions when travelling to school, whether on

public transportation, in a school van, or on foot. It is also important to follow the Covid-19 guidelines on those transportation services

- At school, the classroom should be kept clean, including desks, benches, etc. In addition, there should be constant supervision of children in school. Special attention should be paid if the child has any medical condition or develops any symptoms while at school
- Parents should pay close attention to their child when he or she returns home from school. Upon returning from school, their school clothes should be removed immediately and the child should take a wash and their uniforms should be washed as well. Parents should also pay attention to giving the child proper nutrition, food, and water that boosts their immune systems

mental wellbeing.”

According to Dr. Wijesuriya, the rate of infection among children was far less than the rate of infection among adults, and he noted that infected children have a higher rate of developing immunity than adults. Therefore, if there is no other disorder or illness the children were suffering from, they were less likely to become severely ill. “According to studies, Covid-19 is much less likely to be transmitted from child to child. But children are more likely to be infected by parents and adults. Therefore, parents and adults should pay close attention to not getting infected when they leave home for work or essential activities. It should be made clear that parents and

adults should not act irresponsibly with regard to health safety just because they have received the required vaccine doses. The vaccine is intended to reduce the risk of exacerbation and death. There is a possibility of infection even after vaccination. Therefore, it is imperative to follow all health guidelines regarding Covid-19 even after completing the number of injections,” Dr. Wijesuriya explained.

All attempts by *The Sunday Morning* to speak to the Minister of Education and the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, on the measures in place to reduce infection among children and teachers and on whether schools would be closed if infection rates hiked, proved futile.

Contd. from page 9

Govt. yet to...

We're still working on scientific explanations, and we won't be able to supply remedies right away,” he said.

Farmers' views

All Ceylon Farmers' Federation (ACFF) National Organiser Namal Karunaratne told *The Sunday Morning* that the farmers were pushing the Government to provide fertilisers, agrochemicals, and seeds for the Maha season at fair costs.

“Farmers, traders, and industrialists cannot benefit in these circumstances. The breakdown of fertiliser supplies has caused a significant increase in vegetable prices and damage to crops. Due to a lack of vegetables, the Nuwara Eliya Economic Centre was also shut down,” he claimed. He said if farmers do not receive fertiliser on time, the country's food supply chain will be affected. “The Government's refusal to provide fertiliser subsidies has laid the conditions for high costs. The private sector fertiliser import companies are the only winners here,” he stated.

Meanwhile, farmers said that they had visited agrarian service centres in recent weeks, but there was no fertiliser available there.

“Ministers say fertiliser is available at the agrarian service centres – but where is it? We have been visiting these centres for the past few weeks, but no fertiliser stocks were available,” Gune, a vegetable farmer from Kekirawa, claimed.

He emphasised that the Government was conducting an experiment by implementing the conversion to organic fertiliser and again to chemical, and alleged that the people were being used as lab rats. “A small number of vegetable farmers in the area harvested their lands using existing chemical

fertiliser stocks. Excessive rains had also affected our crops,” he said.

Gunatilake, a vegetable farmer from the Badulla District, said that he believed compost fertiliser was better suited for those who cultivate small pot plants, but was inadequate for cultivating large areas of land. “The authorities have to understand that the soil is now used to chemical fertiliser, and it is impossible to use compost (organic) fertiliser on it overnight,” he said.

He further stated that the Government had given no assurance about the availability of the other pesticides and inputs for vegetable crops that were required.

“Farmers have been using chemical fertilisers for decades, and so switching to organic overnight is impossible. Without appropriate pesticides, how can farmers prevent pests and illnesses from damaging their crops? Some of these compounds can be found on the black market, but at exorbitant costs,” he added.

Farmers expressed concerns about a decrease in crops, as well as damaged fruits and vegetables due to a lack of insecticides and weedicides. The Government attempted to import organic fertiliser from China and nano nitrogen fertiliser from India, but both attempts were tainted by corruption.

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Manning Market General Trade Association President Lal Hettige said that stocks of fruit were limited due to the shortage of fertiliser.

Sources from the Thabuttagama Economic Centre also stated that they had recorded a significant drop in vegetable stocks and a lower turnout of farmers and consumers. Within the last two weeks, supplies at the Dambulla Dedicated Economic Centre had also dropped due to the unavailability of fertiliser, sources said.

By
**Asela
Waidyalankara**



Data protection in a digital Sri Lanka

Privacy by design is an approach towards data protection that all businesses (including non-IT based businesses) should now take when creating digital products and building websites. PbD involves keeping data collection to a minimum and building security measures into all stages of a product's design

without the dedicated Legal Drafting Committee, headed by Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) General Counsel Jayantha Fernando, who was accommodative of the diverse opinions of stakeholders, and the committee did its best to accommodate and review each stakeholder's differing points of view.

The draft Bill takes its inspiration heavily from the EU's GDPR and introduces two vital data protection concepts into Sri Lanka's framework – privacy by design and rights of data subjects (users).

Privacy by design

Privacy by design (PbD) is an approach towards data protection that all businesses (including non-IT based businesses) should now take when creating digital products and building websites. PbD involves keeping data collection to a minimum and building security measures into all stages of a product's design.

If we examine Sections 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 of the Bill, we can observe that "Section 6: Obligation to define a purpose for personal data processing", which includes specified, explicit, and legitimate purposes, requires that the purpose for processing personal data be defined clearly by business entities or data controllers.

Each data controller (organisations that collect user data) has an obligation to limit the purpose of data collection to its defined purposes given in Section 7, thereby limiting the unauthorised usage and exploitation of customers' data, by stipulating conditions that data processed shall be adequate, relevant, and proportionate to its usage.

Section 8 relates to the accuracy of data and to ensure data is kept updated, and Section 9 defines periods of retention. Section 10 provides key safeguards for collected data, inclusive of encryption and other data protection methodologies, to ensure its protection by organisations that gather the data. Finally, all these are internally enforceable in an organisation by mandating that data controllers implement mature data protection management programmes (under Section 12).

The Countries With The Most GDPR Data Breaches

Personal data breaches notified per EEA jurisdiction (May 25, 2018 to Jan 27, 2020)*



* EEA - European Economic Area (EU-28 + Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein). Source: DLA Piper

Rights of data subjects

The Data Protection Bill vests new rights with users of services that collect their data, which is discussed under Part II: Rights of Data Subjects.

Under Sections 13, 14, 15, and 16, citizens are empowered to know exactly how their data is collected and used, request what information has been collected, and if there are mistakes/errors in their data, a citizen can request to have them corrected. A request can also be made to delete an individual's data from the records of a data collector.

Finally, citizens are allowed to refuse data processing, for example, marketing efforts, although it must be noted that these rights are subject to controls and exceptions discussed in later sections. Failure to comply with the rights and regulations laid down by the Bill would subject a data controller to a fine not exceeding Rs. 10 million for noncompliance as determined by the Data Protection Authority (state agency empowered and established under the Bill).

An additional aspect for citizen empowerment provided under this Bill would be the crackdown of the current wave of unsolicited messages received by many citizens for which their consent had not been given to receive such messages. The Bill would empower the Data Protection Authority to take action on these messages and their service providers.

Applicability to int'l businesses

Some other salient features of the Bill are that Section 2, specifying to whom this legislation would apply, makes special note, under 2(b)(v), "...specifically monitors the behaviour of data subjects in Sri Lanka including profiling with the intention of making decisions in relation to the behaviour of such data subjects in so far as such behaviour takes place in Sri Lanka".

This is a clear indication that global tech companies that have made data collection a trillion-dollar business will be subjected to review under this legislation. Therefore, companies like Meta (Facebook, Instagram) and Google will be likely to fall under the purview of the Data Protection Authority of Sri Lanka in terms of their data collection practices. It would be an interesting development in the future to see how these organisations would react to any rulings by the Sri Lankan authorities.

Data residency and sovereignty

The Data Protection Bill introduces the concepts of data residency and data sovereignty. Data residency refers to the physical or geographic location of an organisation's data or information. Data sovereignty refers to the jurisdictional control or legal authority that can be asserted over data because its physical location is within jurisdictional

boundaries. If we examine Section 26 of the Bill, it sets limits for when a public authority (government agency) processes citizens' data, which should be processed within the territory of Sri Lanka and not in a third country, unless approved by the subject minister in consultation with the Data Protection Authority. However, given the complexity of some IT systems, especially with cloud implementations, it would be interesting to examine how the Data Protection Authority would lay down the guidelines and frameworks for this type of data residency to be implemented.

SL entering new phase

Finally, Sri Lanka has suffered many setbacks in attracting high-net technology foreign direct investments (FDIs) into the country due to the lack of a clear legal framework on data protection. Additionally, Sri Lankan technology companies have had challenges such as non-tariff trade barriers to enter EU markets due to its weak privacy legislation. The Data Protection Bill, with its subsequent approval in Parliament, would lay the foundation to send a signal that Sri Lanka is mature enough to join the ranks of countries that empower and protect its citizens' data rights.

Sri Lankan technology companies have had challenges such as non-tariff trade barriers to enter EU markets due to its weak privacy legislation. The Data Protection Bill, with its subsequent approval in Parliament, would lay the foundation to send a signal that Sri Lanka is mature enough to join the ranks of countries that empower and protect its citizens' data rights

The Bill would also create new lines of businesses opportunities in data privacy services in Sri Lanka, such as virtual data protection officers, consultancy and audit services to implement internal controls for organisations for their data protection in line with the legislation, and training and education services for employees, management, and boards on the importance of data protection practices and their added liabilities.

Sri Lanka is entering a bold new phase in its technology laws with the introduction of the Data Protection Bill. As more mature, connected technologies emerge and are used to harness, and at times exploit, our data, more legislative vigour and agility may be required to curb these practices and ensure a safe digital environment for future generations. At least we have our start; let's build on this foundation for a better, secure, digital Sri Lanka.

(The writer has been a prominent personality in the sphere of cybersecurity, with over a decade of experience in progressive technology and digital strategy. Garnering extensive qualifications in both the legal and technical arenas, he is a pioneer trailblazer and avant-garde in the information security marketplace)

Data protection is commonly defined as the law designed to protect an individual's personal data. Among data protection advocates, the European Union's (EU) GDPR is seen as the gold standard. The EU enforces strict rules on how its citizens' data can be used by tech companies, as well as enforces hefty fines for noncompliance

After much deliberation and many rounds of legal consultations, since 2017, by various industry stakeholders including the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC), Sri Lanka Association for Software Services Companies (SLASSCOM), Federation of Information Technology Industry Sri Lanka (FITTS), etc., we can finally witness the fruition of this exercise in the form of the final draft of the Data Protection Bill that was published as a gazette on 19 November 2021. The Bill is expected to be presented to Parliament in early 2022 for approval, wherein it would become law. This historic legislation would not have been possible

Urgent need for justice reforms: Digitalisation can lead the way

By
**Tiffahny Hoole and
Sumhiya Sallay**



The Supreme Court, in the 1994 case of Jayasinghe v. AG, correctly asserted that "justice delayed is justice denied" (1). While the very apex of the justice system recognised that delays in court proceedings hinder litigants' access to justice, there is a major backlog of cases in Sri Lanka. The entire court process, from the point where a case is taken up to court until its final verdict, is an extremely time-consuming process.

The operation of a country's legal system significantly influences several components of its economic development such as the optimal allocation of resources and the increase in total factor productivity (2).

In 2021, a three-year plan targeting digitisation of courts was implemented to make the judicial system more efficient. Digitisation of the courts would mean a more streamlined process of court hearings.

Shortcomings of the Sri Lankan legal system

By the end of 2019, there were 4,767 pending cases to be heard in the Supreme Court, while 6,813 were to be heard in the Commercial High Court (3). In the speech delivered by the incumbent Minister of

By taking into account the complexity and gravity of court procedure, it was understood that reform needed to be holistic. Accordingly, digitisation is not limited to virtual court hearings but also envisions the registration component of the judicial system. This includes scheduling, managing documents, recording proceedings, etc.

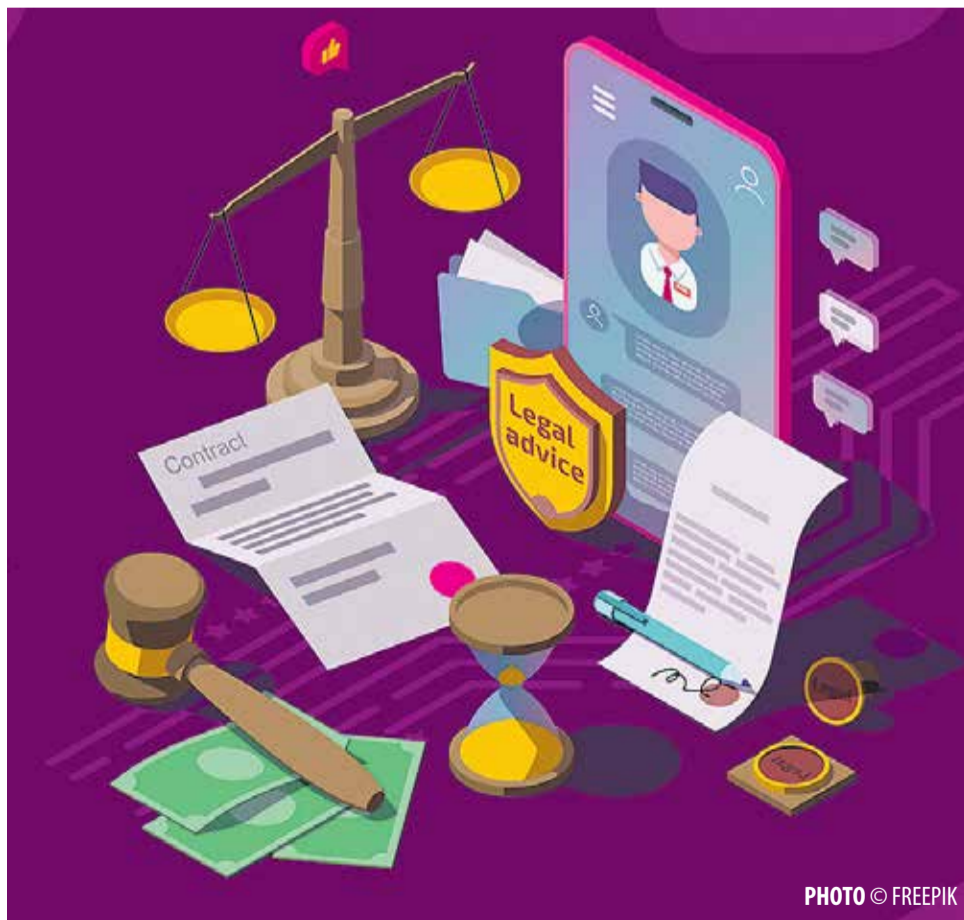


PHOTO © FREPIK

Justice at the Bar Association's 47th Annual Convocation, it was stated that a total of 766,784 cases were pending by the end of 2019, with approximately 350 judges to hear those cases (4). The situation was only exacerbated in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. With periodic lockdowns consequent to seasonal outbreaks of Covid-19 cases, both the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal suspended proceedings (5).

The increased backlog of cases prior to and during the pandemic is attributable to the very nature in which the justice system

operates. Sri Lanka's court procedure and practice has been heavily reliant on in-person proceedings, physical filings, and production of documents and evidence respectively (6); a system too archaic to withstand any external shocks such as natural disasters, fires, or more specifically, a pandemic.

Ease of doing business: A point of discussion

The continuous delay in court proceedings over the years is one of the key factors which contributed to Sri Lanka's low rank in the

World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business" index (7). Contract enforcement is one of Sri Lanka's worst performing pillars in the index, as it ranked 164 out of 190 countries in 2020 (8). The average time period required to enforce a contract stands at 1,318 days (3.61 years) (9). In comparison, New Zealand, which topped the index, takes 216 days (0.6 years) (10). In his speech, the Minister of Justice further stated that market research prior to any investment would result in flocking towards countries with higher indexes, concluding that we would be losing "big" (11).

The increased backlog of cases prior and during the pandemic is attributable to the very nature in which the justice system operates. Sri Lanka's court procedure and practice has been heavily reliant on in-person proceedings, physical filings, and production of documents and evidence, respectively; a system too archaic to withstand any external shocks such as natural disasters, fires, or more specifically, a pandemic

With the data highlighted by the index, in conjunction with prolonged lockdowns, the Minister of Justice soon realised that the backlog in cases had reached saturation. Speedy resolution in litigation is a prerequisite on foreign investments (12). Thus, with the aim of administering the public's access to justice, major reforms are finally underway.

Reforms: Future of court procedures in Sri Lanka

Upon comprehensive studies conducted in 2017 with the assistance of the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Justice embarked on a court automation and digitisation project (13). In the recent Budget

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2022 speech, the urgent need for reform was highlighted by Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa. Following this, a proposal to allocate a further Rs. 5,000 million towards this cause was presented (14).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to light how far behind Sri Lanka is in terms of judicial digitised systems. Many countries were able to quickly recover post-Covid, as they already had systems in place to shift to virtual court hearings. However, courts, and other dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration in Sri Lanka, were far behind.

Prior to the commencement of this project, digitisation in court proceedings was being experimented in selected courts on an incremental basis. In November 2020, the "Virtual Courthouse Programme" was pioneered by the Commercial High Court in partnership with Sri Lanka Telecom and the Colombo Law Library (15). Similarly, a key person interview conducted by the Advocata Institute brought to light the efforts made by the lawyers in the courts of Mount Lavinia to transform court proceedings to an entirely virtual platform. In response to the pandemic, reformation was witnessed on an incremental basis. Finally, operations of virtual court hearings were formerly recognised by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Temporary Provisions), Act No. 17 of 2021, subject to the condition that physical hearings cannot be held (16).

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MEDIA POLICY

Questions over motives: Media organisations



PHOTO © FREEPIK

freedom of speech and expression should not be violated in any civilised society.

“While there could be some restrictions, freedom of speech and expression cannot be restricted unless there are specific limitations in a country’s constitution or in international or universal conventions that are accepted by specific governments. However, past and current governments in Sri Lanka believed that by enacting such media laws, they could stifle freedom of speech and expression,” he stated.

De Silva told *The Sunday Morning* that the distrust surrounding the State’s motives for media regulation was a result of the behaviour of successive governments, stating that the use of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act in Sri Lanka was an example of how well-minded regulations are misused.

Human rights activists, legal experts, and the press have argued that the State has misused the ICCPR legislation to suppress dissent and political opponents, and to intimidate critics. A recent report by Amnesty International alleged that the Act was “used against social media users simply exercising their right to freedom of expression”.

International contempt

The misuse of legislation by successive governments and the shrinking democratic space for media and civil society have been highlighted by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) and the European Parliament (EU).

“Internationally accepted guidelines exist, but we do not follow them. Regardless of where we are on the world’s human rights or freedom of expression indices, governments have always believed that the task of expression should be managed by them,” he argued, adding that the FMM supports a self-regulatory approach to maintaining professionalism in the media sector.

“We understand that certain professionalism is required. Because professionalism is founded on ethics, the regulatory system we participate in and expect to support is, likewise, self-regulatory,” he explained.

De Silva explained that in some countries, there are independent authorities for mainstream media regulations. “Governments and

media institutions of these countries are partners of these independent authorities. However, there is no such thing in Sri Lanka. Although freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in the Constitution, nowhere does it state how these are ensured,” he said, highlighting the need to improve constitutional safeguards aimed at preserving the freedom of the media.

He stated that in countries like South Africa, when new constitutions are introduced, certain constitutional provisions are introduced regarding how freedom of speech and expression should be implemented.

Social media and citizen journalism

“There is a lot of criticism about social media right now, which has

evolved into a forum for citizens. Citizens act courageously on social media as they have some control over it,” he said.

De Silva used the example of citizens discussing the recent explosions and fires linked to LP gas cylinders across the country, which put pressure on the Government to take quick action to ensure the safety of consumers. He questioned the Government’s motives behind the media policy push, pointing out that it could be aiming to regulate social media due to such public pressure.

Government ministers, on several occasions in the recent past, advocated for the regulation of social media, as they claimed it was becoming the primary source of news for the citizens.

Meanwhile, Professional Web Journalists Association (PWJA) Convenor Freddy Gamage expressed similar sentiments, saying that as a media organisation, they were concerned that by enacting these policies, the Government would take steps to suppress social media and electronic media outlets.

“There is a shortage of media literacy among citizens in the country, and handling media websites requires ethics and expertise. That is something we always agree on. If we practised this, we would gain credibility and we can teach people how to use media correctly. Then the Government won’t be able to blame us,” he explained.

Gamage pointed out that although the Minister of Mass Media had said that media ethics should be

developed, the PWJA had developed a code of ethics for websites in 2014.

“The member websites of our association work on the basis of these ethics. Ethics, according to the Minister of Mass Media, should be developed. However, in 2014, we created a code of ethics for media websites. These ethics are followed by our association’s members,” he said.

Gamage acknowledged that many online media platforms have a credibility problem. With more and more online and social media information outlets being created each day, citizens with low media literacy find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between credible outlets and those that operate to promote agendas.

“We used to think that the web was an alternative medium, but today, most of those websites are operating by pumping a lot of money into promotions. These websites are operated for various purposes. Most of these websites publish gossip. Most websites do not use sources. Therefore, the credibility of websites as an alternative medium for news is affected,” he said.

Gamage explained the difficult position by stating that media websites that manage proper news could not function because of gossip websites.

“Citizen media activism is currently building on social media. Citizen media has great potential in bringing the right news to people. Therefore, this too must be built within a certain code of ethics,” he opined.

- **Self-regulation, ethics, and media literacy the need of the hour**
- **Lack of trust in state regulation due to history and misuse of legislation**

BY YOSHITHA PERERA

A Government decision to draw up a media policy has received criticism from several media organisations, with many concerned that introducing state regulations for print, broadcast, and online media platforms is an attempt to stifle freedom of speech and expression.

Media organisations have pointed out that self-regulation, education, and the development of ethics is better suited to ensure professionalism in place of state regulation.

While there have been attempts by the State to regulate, influence, or suppress media institutions and the freedom of expression in the past, the focus of the new drive to formulate a “media policy” seems to stem from the rise of social media outlets, citizen journalism, and concerns regarding misinformation and disinformation.

On 24 November, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a proposal by the Minister of Mass Media to appoint a committee with representation from individuals with experience in fields such as media, marketing, education, law, administration, and economy to make recommendations for a media policy.

A history of stifling attempts

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Free Media Movement (FMM) Convener Lasantha de Silva said that

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Fundamentals...

“No one can bypass the court system. This has to come to a stop,” he said, adding that the BASL had established a unit to help those who have been tortured or abused while in custody.

“We have now set up a unit on anti-torture for those who want to make complaints about custodial torture. The Legal Aid Unit will assist them to exercise their rights through the court mechanisms. That was set up last week and will be operational in the next couple of days. We will also issue relevant notices to the public so that they will have a number they can call to receive legal representation through the BASL,” he told *The Sunday Morning*.

‘Police find a way of rationalising killings’

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, the Law and Society Trust of Sri Lanka condemned the custodial death at the hands of the Police.

Law and Society Trust Executive Director Sakuntala Kadirgamar said: “I see the custodial killings and these extra judicial killings that are taking place almost as a continuum of what is a very bloody and dark side of our society.

“We have been extremely violent, especially since the 70s when political violence was a way of addressing issues. I think in the course of time, citizens have also been involved in acts of violence and the Police and military have also become a part of the problem.

“Although there was a break to some extent and some recognition that Sri Lanka had to change track, it seems we have gone back into this system. It’s extremely worrying.”

She said that categorising people as criminals portrays them as individuals without rights and resulted in the justification of such killings within law enforcement and some parts of society.

“In recent times, the Police have claimed that those who were killed in custody were underworld figures or drug dealers. So, when you categorise people like this, they are dehumanised and thereby stop being viewed as human beings who are being killed.

“In the past, they were JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) or LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) or terrorist. So, when you label these people, you strip them of their humanity and find a way of rationalising why they should be killed.

“So, I think when the Police function, they discredit any understanding of the rule of law and undermine a lot of these

institutions. We don’t need to be another Philippines,” Kadirgamar opined, adding that the killings of alleged drug dealers could be motivated by a need to bury information that could lead to the persecution of those with power and influence.

“They obviously don’t want to let these people go through the judicial process. This is a swift way of eliminating them rather than going through a judicial process where more information on their activities will come out.

“With drug trafficking and drug use, there must be a wide network. Now, who’s in that network, I wouldn’t know, but obviously they have some kind of patronage. In some of the cases, lawyers and family members had warned that their lives were threatened. So why weren’t special measures taken to protect them if they (authorities) wanted to make sure they (suspects) go through the judicial process? I think there is a network that supports underworld figures and I’m sure they have their tentacles and reach in different parts of our society,” Kadirgamar stated.

Kadirgamar also said that this issue had brought embarrassment to the country before the eyes of the international community, and that Sri Lankans were migrating for safety and security reasons in addition to economic factors.

Centre for Policy Alternatives Executive Director Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu said that a failure to implement laws contributed to these illegal activities by law enforcement.

“We have special rapporteurs and international organisations also drawing attention to these kinds of things. I think it is long past the time when we should have dispensed with all of this. This is really quite shocking, terrible, and absurd. We need to do something fast with regard to it. There are a number of laws that we have which suffer from a lack of implementation; we need to look at those laws and make sure that they’re implemented without fear of favour.”

He said that people had lost faith in the law enforcement authorities, resulting in such institutions being less effective in carrying out their mandated duties, and that CPA would be looking at taking legal action as well.

“The Police, who are supposed to be protecting the citizens of this country, are really the perpetrators of some of the worst crimes. A key institution of the country which really can only function through the trust of the citizens, is being considerably undermined. The CPA will look into taking steps through the court system,” he said.

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Urgent need...

Nevertheless, by taking into account the complexity and gravity of court procedure, it was understood that reform needed to be holistic. Accordingly, digitisation is not limited to virtual court hearings but also envisions the registration component of the judicial system.

This includes scheduling, managing documents, recording proceedings, etc. Furthermore, payment of court filing fees will be shifted to an online platform. In respect of court hearings, reformation is twofold; the first phase is a pilot project which covers 18 courthouses within the Colombo District (17). The second phase is expected to implement court automation procedures across 100 courthouses in Sri Lanka (18). In the interim, existing online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet will be utilised for this purpose.

A major challenge going forward will be data security and privacy. However, the issue of security already exists even with physical documents and in-person court hearings. Documents are tampered with, stolen, or even damaged. Witnesses may be coerced to perjure in or outside court. Thus, moving towards an online platform will circumvent the damages caused to case documents such as a fire, similar to the recent incident in the Supreme Court Complex (19). In order to minimise the concerns raised, the Ministry of Justice has partnered with professional experts in the ICT sector to build a data protection and data security plan and develop remote data storage facilities (20).

The long-term benefits of digitisation

In the long term, digitisation and automation will make the litigation process far cheaper. Litigation in Sri Lanka is known to be a very expensive procedure. Instead of requiring a 100-page document to be submitted to each judge on a panel prior to the case hearing, litigants would now be able to send a pdf through an online portal. Electronic delivery of paper documents would also speed up the filing procedures (21). Rather than having to commute all the way to a district court that is outside one’s residence, litigants are able to participate in court hearings through Zoom.

Reforms in the justice system play an essential role in restoring the confidence of investors. A representative of the World Bank in the Legal Department highlighted that encouragement of foreign direct investment is at the forefront of government thinking behind legal reform (22). In the wake of the pandemic, it is pivotal that the

State prioritises and ensures such essential reforms do take place so as to attract foreign investors. Justice is only delivered in the absence of delay.

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Govt. turns...

Tennakoon claimed that while the SLPP had a bond with the SLFP as it was the former party of a majority of the SLPPers, it had no connection with Sirisena.

He further noted that giving nominations to Sirisena from the SLPP to contest at the last general election was the party's (SLPP's) biggest mistake.

"We love the SLFP, but we don't have such a feeling for Maithripala Sirisena. It was not proper for the Pohottuwa (SLPP) to join with him (Sirisena). The Pohottuwa should not have given him nominations from the party at the last general election. He too should have not contested under the Pohottuwa. That was the biggest dissimilarity. It should not have happened from any point of view. I'm not saying this out of hatred, but it really was against all odds," Tennakoon stated, adding that although the SLPP was aware of Sirisena's corrupt actions, the party was now unable to expose them, as he (Sirisena) had contested under the SLPP.

Seeing the dangers of the increasing clashes between the SLPP and its coalition partners, Prime Minister Rajapaksa decided to intervene to ensure that peace prevails in the Government.

The Premier convened a meeting last (4) evening at 6 p.m. at Temple Trees with all parliamentarians of the SLPP. Coalition party members were not invited for the meeting.

A senior government source said the Prime Minister intended to discuss issues faced by the Government and the importance of maintaining peace with coalition partners while facing many challenges.

Finance Minister Rajapaksa had also spoken to several SLFP members in Parliament about keeping the peace within the governing coalition. SLFPers Dissanayake and Jayasekera had said the party only responded due to provocation by the SLPP.

SLPP General Secretary Kariyawasam, who had also walked into the discussion, had accused the SLFP of starting the clash.

However, Basil had told Kariyawasam that regardless of who started it, it was the responsibility of the main party to ensure that peace prevailed within the governing coalition. "This is what the Prime Minister also plans to discuss in the evening."

Advising the Church

Amidst the growing dissension among the Catholic Church against the Government's failure to bring to justice those involved in the Easter Sunday attacks, Chief Government Whip Minister Johnston Fernando had called on the Catholic clergy to not fall for tactics of the Opposition political parties.

Addressing a ceremony held at the launch of the Road Development Authority's (RDA) premix asphalt plant at Andigamawatte in Katugampola, the Minister had alleged that Opposition conspirators had 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 (Criminal Investigation Department) to spread hate against this Government. Fr. 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 the 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. Suppose the CID did not do so, then the very same Opposition would have clamoured that we did not do the investigation. That is the nature of Opposition we have in this country today," Fernando had claimed.

Sirisena cleared?

Meanwhile, former State Intelligence Service (SIS) Chief Senior DIG Nilantha Jayawardena told the Colombo Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar that definite intelligence information was not given to then President Maithripala Sirisena, who was overseas at the time, with regard to the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks until the attacks took place.

He had reportedly made this statement while testifying in court for the fifth day last Monday.

He had said that no definite information was given to the then Prime Minister, State Defence Minister, other relevant personnel in the political authority, or to the Inspector General of Police (IGP).

The senior police officer had, last week, testified at the Colombo Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar in the case filed against ex-Police Chief Pujith Jayasundera and ex-Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando, who are each charged under 855 counts for failing to prevent the 21 April 2019 attacks.

Jayawardena, the first witness in the case, was cross examined by Attorney-at-Law Roshan Dehiwala, who is appearing on behalf of Jayasundera.

During the cross examination, Dehiwala had questioned Jayawardena on whether the SIS had failed to convert the information

received on 4 April 2019 from a foreign counterpart of a terror attack, into specific intelligence information, and in turn make a prior warning before 20 April 2019. In response, Jayawardena had said that he did not have the information to make the said prior warning based on specific intelligence information until he received a telephone call at 4.12 p.m. on 20 April 2019, the day before the attacks.

Dehiwala had again questioned Jayawardena as to how he had informed then IGP Jayasundera of the foreign intelligence information received on 20 April 2019. The witness had replied that the message was sent to Jayasundera through a particular software used by the Police Department at the time. The attorney had then queried as to whether he (Jayawardena) would accept the motion if he suggested that the said notice had not been duly referred to Jayasundera as stated by the witness. Jayawardena had replied: "No, I

don't accept that. I sent the message through that software. I also called him and informed (him about) the matter."

When Jayawardena was questioned as to whether he had admitted that he had not given then IGP Jayasundera specific intelligence information about an attack during the period from 4 to 19 April 2019, he had said: "Yes, I accept it. I did not provide specific intelligence information about an attack until the day before the attacks, but I did provide information on the information which I received on 4 April 2019 and the dry run conducted by the group led by National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ) Leader Zahran Hashim."

Judge Mohamed Irshadeen had then questioned whether Jayawardena had passed on the specific intelligence information provided the day before the attacks to the Prime Minister, the Opposition Leader, or the Deputy Defence Minister in the absence

of the then Defence Minister, who was not in the country. In response, Jayawardena had said that he had not informed the political authorities in that regard.

Meanwhile, IGP Chandana D. Wickramaratne had also appeared before the Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar to testify in the case filed against former IGP Jayasundera.


Senior Deputy Solicitor General (SDSG) Dileepa Peiris, appearing on behalf of the prosecution, had requested the court to summon current IGP Wickramaratne, who is named as a witness in the case, to give evidence.

When questioned about the responsibilities of the IGP regarding national security, the witness had said that as a member of the National Security Council, the IGP had the powers to maintain law and order. "It is a heavy responsibility. It cannot be confined to a framework. The IGP has a huge responsibility regarding national security," he had said.

However, he had stated that the actions taken by him as the IGP in any case may be different from the actions taken by the previous IGPs, and that there was no rule that the actions taken by one IGP should be taken by all other IGPs.

Meanwhile, when queried as to whether the information provided by the SIS to the IGP should be 100% complete in order for an investigation to be commenced, Wickramaratne had said that there was no need for the information to be 100% complete. "The IGP should investigate and act on the information received. The IGP should always think that there is an invisible side and therefore, make decisions in consultation with other officers. There are also times when individual decisions have to be made. The IGP should be prepared for such," he had said.

The case is to be taken up again on 18 January 2022.



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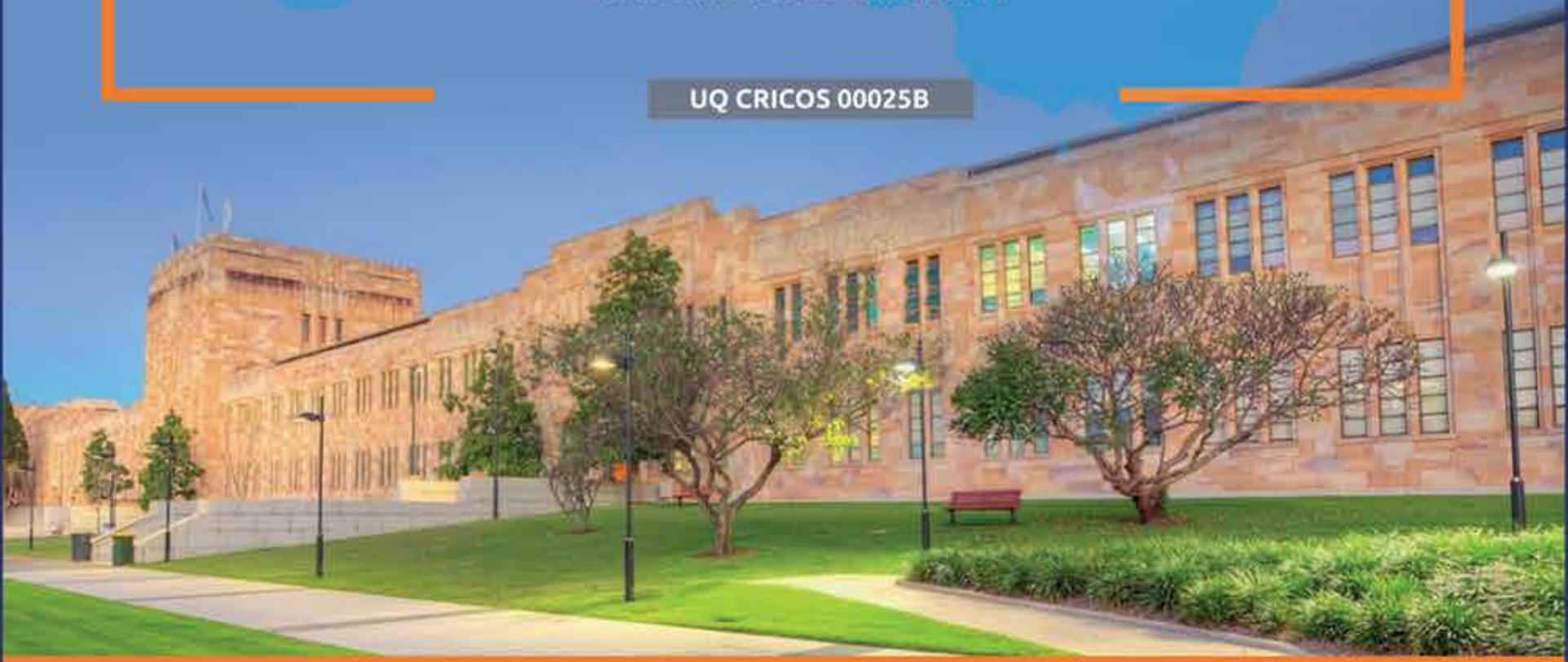
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BUDGET 2022: THE YOUTH AND FUTURE

We have to be a part of the solution: Milinda Rajapaksha

BY PUJANEE GALAPPATHTHI

Budget 2022 was delivered last month by Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa under the Government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in line with the "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" policy framework.

Coming at a very crucial juncture in the economic setting of Sri Lanka, this Budget has been called many things; praised by some for its progressive provisions, and criticised by others for simply scratching the surface of the cauldron of problems our island is faced with.

However, to assess the futuristic direction of said Budget in terms of its effects on the youth of the country, we spoke to Department of Government Information Additional Director General and Media Centre for National Development Director Milinda Rajapaksha.

Rajapaksha told *The Sunday Morning* that this was an unprecedented budget. "We know how to survive natural disasters such as the tsunami, we knew how to live through a war, but we had to learn how to survive a pandemic and the uncertainty that came with it."

"For example, after getting the majority of the population vaccinated, we gradually started to reopen our businesses and promote tourism again, but then came Omicron, and a majority of developed countries are closing again. So we do not know what will happen next."

"It is a very tough time to forecast the financial atmosphere of the coming year and set a budget to manage the national expenses that are so very uncertain," he said. He further added that since Sri



“*We know how to survive natural disasters such as the tsunami, we knew how to live through a war, but we had to learn how to survive a pandemic and the uncertainty that came with it. It is a very tough time to forecast the financial atmosphere of the coming year and set a budget to manage the national expenses that are so very uncertain***”**

Department of Government Information Additional Director General and Media Centre for National Development Director Milinda Rajapaksha

Lanka was facing one of its biggest economic crises, it is a very tricky situation and needs to be dealt with carefully; which, he believes, this Budget has done. Funds have been allocated for industries such as pharmaceuticals, agricultural development, women, persons with disabilities, and the public sector in terms of petrol allowances, he said.

"The Finance Minister, in the process of making this Budget, consulted over 102 organisations. Thus, this Budget was well researched and carefully scripted."

He mentioned that while many expected this Budget to impose more taxes and cut down the



The Budget 2022 being read in Parliament by Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa on 12 November

State's welfare bill, it did not, as it maintained the tax rates in line with the Government's policy and allocated significant amounts of money for public welfare. He said this would aid economic recovery efforts.

When asked if he thought the Budget empowered youths and future generations of the country, Rajapaksha responded: "Firstly, it has to be understood that the budget outline regarding the Ministry of Youth is only a small part of what the Government is doing for young people. There were several criticisms on how the Budget does not have any special provisions for youth welfare, but I disagree with this. This Government has kept youths at the centre of its policies from its inception."

"Policies have been made for skills development and vocational training, allocations have been made for the development of sports and facilities, provisions have been made to support and encourage young entrepreneurs and start-ups, for the digitisation of

“*It has to be understood that the budget outline regarding the Ministry of Youth is only a small part of what the Government is doing for young people. There were several criticisms on how the Budget does not have any special provisions for youth welfare, but I disagree with this***”**

Department of Government Information Additional Director General and Media Centre for National Development Director Milinda Rajapaksha

government services, to encourage the use of cryptocurrency, to obtain certificates digitally, and much more. All these provisions and initiatives are aimed at supporting the youth with their ventures, to help them dream big, make it easier for them to get into new industries, and equip them with the innovative skills to embrace fair competition in modern industries. That is the

bigger picture. Therefore, I believe the Budget is very much catered to empowering youths."

When asked about the provisions to develop the agricultural sector of the country, Rajapaksha stated that it was a misconception that the main interest of the Government was agricultural development. He clarified that the Government aims to build a toxic-free nation. "It could be in the fertiliser, the chemicals in the food, toxins in the air, or deforestation; we consume toxins on a daily basis and people are getting sick and dying of non-communicable diseases. This country doesn't deserve this. One key promise the President made was that he was going to clean up this mess, give the people a healthy meal, produce a healthy society, and deliver a toxin-free country to future generations. In order to get to this point, however, some changes need to be made to the lifestyles of the people. Earlier, the Government stopped importing various chemicals and wanted to invest in re-energising the soil. Investment in the agricultural

sector is part of this process. This will also help us become self-sufficient as a nation and will also give a big boost to our economy. Therefore, these provisions could be considered as investments for youths and the future generations of the country and probably one of the best ways to put our economy on an upward trajectory," he claimed.

“*One key promise the President made was that he was going to clean up this mess, give the people a healthy meal, produce a healthy society, and deliver a toxin-free country to future generations. In order to get to this point, however, some changes need to be made to the lifestyles of the people***”**

Department of Government Information Additional Director General and Media Centre for National Development Director Milinda Rajapaksha

Speaking of the tough times we have all been facing, Rajapaksha stated: "This is not the first time humanity has faced a crisis. There were global pandemics before, there were wars, natural disasters, and many other crippling socio-economic issues. We have helped each other through all these issues, treated everyone with love and respect, and eventually overcome them. Therefore, this is another crisis from which we can move forward."

He opined that the country had done well in certain aspects, with the majority of the population already vaccinated and the digitisation of the government sector. "Let's take a breath and support the initiatives of the Government. We have to be a part of the solution," he concluded.

BY GIHANI PERERA

At the fifth-year anniversary convention of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Party (SLPP), Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa made the following statement: "I remember in the early days of our victory, the youth of this country painted murals on walls everywhere. They used paint they had themselves paid for. It was a voluntary effort by patriotic young people with no affiliations. Today, we have no idea where those youths are... the youths' appeal to us, with their art, was to not sully the country with the brand of politics they had seen thus far. We must understand that message. We need to find out if those youths are now in the queues of people at the passport office waiting to leave the country. We need to engage in the kind of politics that will make them want to come back."

It is a statement he should have raised with his family first, considering that the Rajapaksa family easily controls over 50% of the national functions.

The youth only asked for an opportunity, an equal platform to thrive and achieve their goals. The most common notion that we are tired of hearing is that young people are not as committed, not as driven, or that they always complain and want the easy way out. But the current youth generation is the most educated and most qualified compared to previous generations of youth in Sri Lanka. They are just tired of lowering their heads and keeping quiet. They no longer accept the fate of not being born into the correct pedigree like their ancestors did. They try to have a better quality of life in Sri Lanka, failing which, they pick a country that serves them well.

Being an ambitious young person in Sri Lanka is not an easy task.

The youth only asked for an opportunity, an equal platform to thrive and achieve their goals. The most common notion that we are tired of hearing is that young people are not as committed, not as driven, or that they always complain and want the easy way out

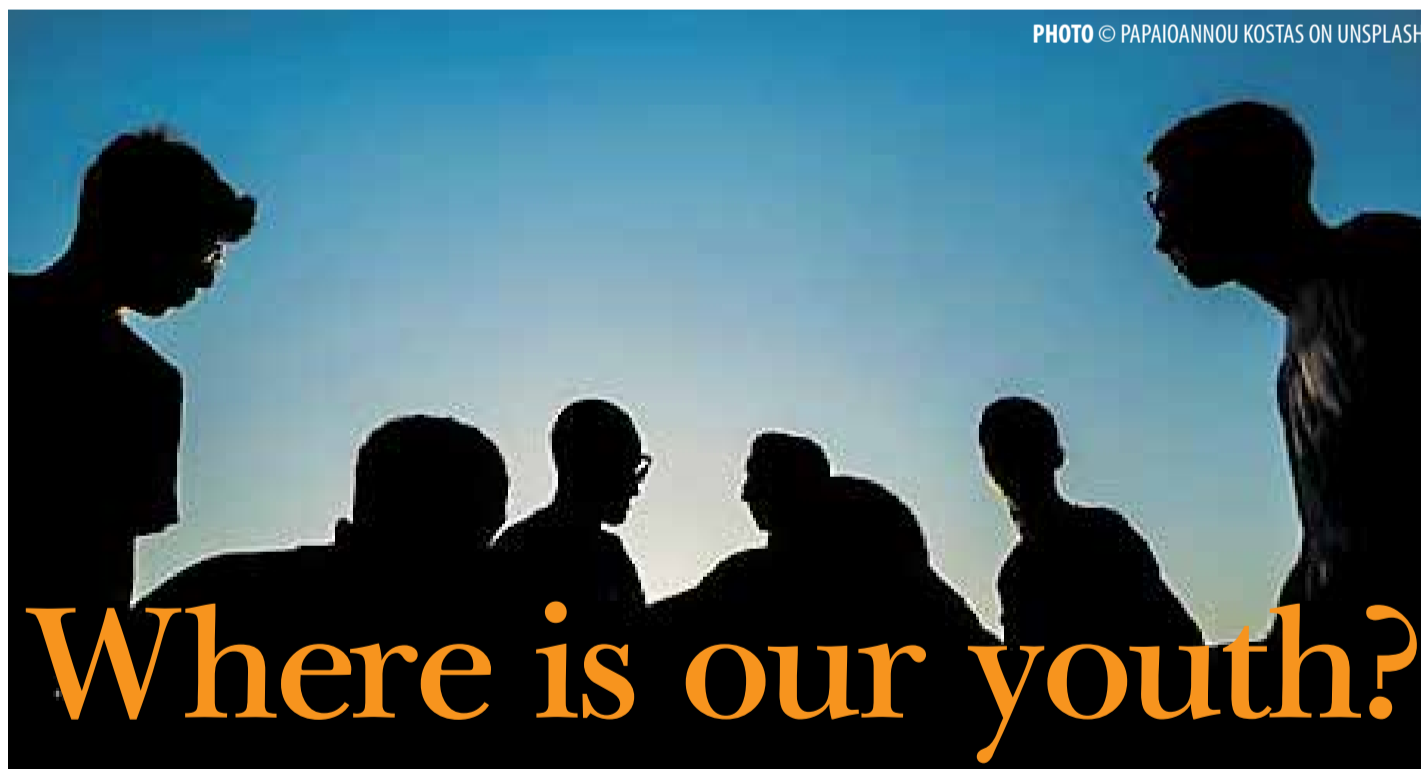


PHOTO © PAPAIOANNOU KOSTAS ON UNSPLASH

Administrative red tape and lack of political influence mean that even if you take one step forward, you're pushed two steps back. It is worse being a young woman, where you are treated as if you are at the lowest level of social hierarchy. While having to work and study as equals, young women must fight unequal treatment in educational and professional environments, sexual harassment offline and online, violence at the hands of intimate partners, and sometimes even face the wrath of the society if they do a little better than their male counterparts; all while maintaining their sanity, "smiling a little more", and "being motherly".

This Government came to power with the aim of giving equal and better opportunities for women. They pledged to make this country safe and secure for all citizens, especially for women and children. Page 13 of the "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" policy framework of the Government went on to say that they will assign high priority to increasing the labour force

Many youth-centric opportunities stem from policies rather than enforceable laws in Sri Lanka. Even where some policy frameworks are supportive of youth empowerment, discrimination still exists in the values and attitudes of adults as against young people, especially young women and girls. Young people are viewed as a problem and unable to take care of themselves

participation of women by promoting women entrepreneurs and promised to put a mechanism in place for women to be able to report violence or harassment to the nearest police station through their mobile phones (page 27). The most ironic of all was the promise to recognise the invaluable effort and involvement of the village women in farming and to provide relief to the victims of the predatory microfinance loans (page 77). Keep all that in mind when looking at the 2022 Budget.

Almost all the industries and informal economic activities that women are

dominating faced a major hit due to the pandemic. Migrant workers, the plantation sector, apparel sector, and agricultural sector are the obvious few. The 2022 Budget granted no relief for women in these sectors, other than proposals to establish hi-tech agro parks and a mini supermarket chain for women. In fact, the allocations made for women and children (including for primary education) were further reduced by 25%. There was no plan to facilitate workforce expansion to retain graduates, where 68% are female; no plan to upskill the workforce in the informal sector. The provision of creches, maternity benefits, and public transport, making workplaces free of sexual harassment, and providing flexible working hours and care facilities are essential for women to contribute to the economy more realistically. When basic facilities are lacking, women too migrate to places where the grass is greener, to places where their contribution is valued.

Many youth-centric opportunities stem from policies rather than enforceable

laws in Sri Lanka. Even where some policy frameworks are supportive of youth empowerment, discrimination still exists in the values and attitudes of adults as against young people, especially young women and girls. Young people are viewed as a problem and unable to take care of themselves rather than an active part of the population capable of participating in shaping communities and the future of Sri Lanka. The entire world is moving towards technical advancement and in no time, all ordinary activities will be digitised. Investment in tech plays a central role in poverty reduction, by increasing the productive capacity of the economy and generating increased employment. If we want to compete with the world, we need to invest in tech – not launch rockets but create digital citizens. There seems to be no interest or solid plan, which is what we see when a budget such as this is presented every year.

Being an ambitious young person in Sri Lanka is not an easy task. Administrative red tape and lack of political influence mean that even if you take one step forward, you're pushed two steps back. It is worse being a young woman, where you are treated as if you are at the lowest level of social hierarchy

In a context of economic instability, chaotic institutions, questionable authoritarianism, lack of faith in justice, and the deterioration of law and order, asking questions from the public about where the youth are today is nothing short of amusing. The ones who can, have already left. A much larger group is trying to leave. The ones who are here want to fight the system, because they owe it to the country and are growing increasingly tired of the madhouse. Unless some serious changes are made to the way of governance, there won't be a generation that can critically think in this country to pick up the reins.

(The writer is an Attorney-at-Law and a member of the Progressive Women's Collective)

DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Campaign to attract \$ 5 b in FDI for 42 projects

• UDA seeks \$ 200 m for logistics hub

BY UWIN LUGODA

The Sri Lankan Government made plans to launch a campaign targeting foreign direct investments (FDIs) worth \$ 5 billion for several ongoing projects.

According to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, the Government is planning to explore ways to expand investment opportunities in Sri Lanka. Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Ministry Spokesperson Prasad Manju stated these new plans were targeting \$ 5.26 billion in FDIs from this year to 2023.

“We announced this plan on 25 November, and right now, we have identified 42 projects currently in operation in the country that could use the \$ 5.26 billion. The plans will be developed under the guidance of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in his capacity as the Minister of Urban Development and Housing, and State Minister for Urban Development, Sewage Disposal, and Sanitation Dr. Nalaka Godahewa,” said Manju.

He explained that the above projects were identified by the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and were of several categories, including mixed development, residential tower development, hospitality and leisure development, office tower development, logistic hub development, and multi-storey car park development. He stated that these projects, spread across Sri



CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal (centre) with UDA and government officials



CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal with government officials



State Minister for Urban Development, Sewage Disposal, and Sanitation Dr. Nalaka Godahewa



We announced this plan on 25 November, and right now, we have identified 42 projects currently in operation in the country that could use the \$ 5.26 billion. The plans will be developed under the guidance of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and State Minister Dr. Nalaka Godahewa

Ministry of Urban Development and Housing Spokesperson Prasad Manju

Lanka, are expected to have a significant impact on foreign investment.

These opportunities include a mixed development project worth around \$ 4.2 million within the Colombo District, a

residential tower development project with a total investment of \$ 346 million currently being funded by the UDA, and a nation-wide hospitality and leisure development project with an investment of \$ 424 million. Additionally, office towers are to be completed at a cost of \$ 65 million, alongside an investment made by the UDA, and a logistics hub is proposed with a \$ 200 million investment.

Manju added that an investment of \$ 28 million was also expected for multi-storey car park development projects, explaining that these projects would contribute towards resolving Sri Lanka's congestion issues. The UDA is expected to work with the private sector to introduce progressive parking options, he added.

“In all these circumstances, the UDA Investment Forum is confident that these



In all these circumstances, the UDA Investment Forum is confident that these initiatives will attract FDI into the country. And in the coming years, we will partner with these investors

Ministry of Urban Development and Housing Spokesperson Prasad Manju

initiatives will attract FDI into the country. And in the coming years, we will partner with these investors,” said Manju.

He stated that the UDA Investment Forum on 25 November also revealed that these projects would aid foreign investors in choosing the best investment option for them in terms of maximising returns and minimising associated risks. According to

these plans, all the systems and facilities essential for the inflow of investment to Sri Lanka and the influx of investors will be provided, and the ports, forests, airports, and roads around the island will also be upgraded.

Manju stated that telecommunication facilities will also be developed and will be available in all parts of the country. He explained that this will ensure that investors have a conducive environment.

“Immediate approval will also be given through the relevant agencies when required. All of this creates a centralised promotion and facility centre, known as a ‘one-stop unit,’” shared Manju. Altogether, the UDA targeted \$ 5.26 in FDIs, and \$ 6 billion from both local and foreign investors under the proposed development projects.

ECONOMIC VISION FOR COLOMBO

UDA pens MoU to promote commercial venues

The Urban Development Authority (UDA) entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Colombo Businessmen's Association to promote several commercial venues under development in Colombo in a bid to meet their new economic vision for the city, *The Sunday Morning* learnt.

The MoU is viewed by the authority as an active agreement to launch new economic programmes, a senior official said.

According to the UDA, they have been instructed by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, in his capacity as the Minister of Urban Development and Housing, to develop key locations in Colombo under a new trade economy vision. UDA Director General Prasad Ranaweera revealed to *The Sunday Morning* that the Colombo Businessmen's Association had taken over the development of the Pettah Floating Market, Old Dutch Hospital, Colombo Gold Centre, and Racecourse.

“We saw that these economic hubs had been neglected by the previous Government and we decided to reactivate them as key economic hubs on the instructions and guidance of Prime Minister Rajapaksa, and under the supervision of State Minister of Urban Development, Sewage Disposal, and Public Sanitation Dr. Nalaka Godahewa. The resurrection of these locations was also a goal stated in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ‘Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour’ policy framework,” Ranaweera stated.

Commenting on the MoU, Ranaweera said: “Our hope is that with the implementation of this new programme and the subsequent development of these places, they will become better tourist attractions within Colombo.”

Accordingly, the UDA had made arrangements to open a tourist information office in the Floating Shopping Complex in Pettah for tourists visiting Sri Lanka. This will allow tourists the opportunity to stay informed about travel



The signing of the MoU between the UDA and the Colombo Businessmen's Association



UDA Director General Prasad Ranaweera (extreme left) and other officials at the signing of the MoU



We saw that these economic hubs had been neglected by the previous Government and we decided to reactivate them as key economic hubs...

Our hope is that with the implementation of this new programme and the subsequent development of these places, they will become better tourist attractions within Colombo

UDA Director General Prasad Ranaweera

routes, required accommodation arrangements, and destinations. The entire programme is set to be implemented digitally, to increase ease of access.

The Pettah Floating Market in question was reopened to the public last March, following renovations after years of neglect.

“We also plan to use this programme to improve the facilities of these places in such a way that they can attract both local and foreign tourists,” he added.

Another objective of this development is to improve the manufacturing process of small and medium-scale entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka, by increasing product sales. Ranaweera opined that this will support the overall economy, by helping to bring in foreign exchange.

Moreover, the UDA planned to implement business promotion programmes in these economic hubs for a period of six months in addition to economic and technology programmes to develop the knowledge of schoolchildren.

In order to supplement these objectives, the UDA had also planned to organise various events in the Pettah Floating Market this Christmas season, starting from 10 December and ending on 31 December.

“Entrepreneurship is enhanced through the processes of building the local economy, increasing production, and increasing exports. So, these programmes were implemented with the aim of developing the country's economy,” said Ranaweera.

– Uwin Lugoda



STATE MINISTRY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, WASTE DISPOSAL AND COMMUNITY CLEANLINESS

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Call Request For Proposals (RFP)



CONSTRUCTION OF COTTAGE TYPE HOUSES AND RENOVATION, MANAGEMENT & OPERATION OF DUN BUNGALOW (OAKLEY COTTAGE) AT UPPER LAKE ROAD, NUWARA ELIYA



Extent : 12A 2R 16.90P (5.1014 ha)
Mode of Investment : 99 years Lease Basis
Base Value : Highest Offer
Bid Bond: Rs.17,000,000/- (Rs.17 Mn.)

Interested bidder (Investor/Developer) may purchase the RFP document from Real Estate Management and Development Division, 8th Floor, Urban Development Authority, “Sethsiripaya” Stage I, Battaramulla from 9.00 a. m. to 2.30 p.m. on working days from **06.12.2021** **17.12.2021** upon payment of non - refundable fee of Sri Lankan Rupees Hundred Thousand (LKR 100,000/-) including taxes.

Accepting of proposals will be closed at **11.00 a.m. on 24th December 2021**. The Tenders will be opened immediately after the closing time at the office of Director General (Urban Development), State Ministry of Urban Development, Waste Disposal & Community Cleanliness, 17th Floor, Suhurupaya, Battaramulla.

A pre bid meeting will be held at Urban Development Authority Auditorium, 09th Floor, “Sethsiripaya” Stage 1, Battaramulla at **11.00 a.m. on 10th December 2021**.

Additional information could be obtained from the Director, Real Estate Management and Development Division, 8th Floor, Urban Development Authority, Sethsiripaya Stage I, Battaramulla. Hotline: **011-2875921, 011-3611950, 011-2875916-20** Ext: **2960-2967**, Mobile: **070-6450470**, Fax: **0112875900** Email: realestatedivisionuda@gmail.com.

Chairman, Standing Cabinet Appointed Negotiating Committee ,
17th Floor, State Ministry of Urban Development, Waste Disposal & Community Cleanliness,
“Suhurupaya” Baththaramulla.

PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT

Civil society responds to proposed reforms

In June 2021, the Government of Sri Lanka announced it would “reform” the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and appointed a cabinet subcommittee and a committee of officers for that purpose. It was reported in the media that the Head of the Committee of Officers, Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne submitted recommendations to the President last month.

Historically, for decades, the PTA has been weaponised against the Tamil community, and following the Easter attacks, against the Muslim community as well. This has resulted in the victimisation of members of these communities. It was also used against the Sinhalese during the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection and now against dissenters. Civil society said it reiterates that any process which seeks to tackle issues related to the PTA must address this factor, to ensure that those adversely affected by the law will receive justice, including reparations.

While the Government has not shared its plans for the supposed “reform” of the PTA with the public, civil society notes the Sri Lanka Consensus Collective’s (SLCC) statement of 29 November 2021 sets out proposals for reform that the Government shared with the said group. In the absence of official communication by the Government, civil society considers the elements contained in the SLCC statement as the changes being deliberated by the Government. Civil society notes that nearly all the so-called changes proposed, already exist in law and do not address any of the shortcomings in the PTA that enable grave human rights violations.

Civil society calls for the repeal of the PTA and in the interim, an immediate moratorium on the use of the law. This is in line with the requests of persons and communities adversely affected by the law. Civil society said it reiterates that any law that purports to deal with terrorism must adhere to international human rights standards. In this regard, civil society said it sets out below the provisions of the law that result in egregious human rights violations and the minimum standards that have to be followed to ensure the protection of fundamental rights.

Civil society said that the critical factor to take note of is that the PTA is a human rights deficient law that does not adhere to basic human rights standards enshrined in international conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the Government of Sri Lanka has ratified and hence has an obligation to respect and protect; nor does it adhere to the many provisions in the Constitution of Sri Lanka. In this context, the following are key provisions in the PTA that result in grave human rights violations:

- The PTA does not contain a definition of terrorism. Instead, the offences stipulated are those found in other



laws, such as the Penal Code, to which the PTA makes reference. Hence, the decision as to whether the PTA would apply in a certain instance is a subjective decision that can be shaped by personal prejudice and bias, rather than objective standards. In this regard, the PTA does not adhere to the definition set out by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Countering Terrorism while Protecting Human Rights. For instance, post-Easter attacks, even persons with books in Arabic and decorative swords were arrested. Similarly, those memorialising the lives lost at the end of the war had been arrested

- The lack of basic due process safeguards in the PTA enables arbitrary arrest and detention, which continue to date. This is exacerbated by the lengthy periods of administrative detention. For example, for decades, civil society said it witnessed persons who had any connection to a person accused of an offence in the normal course of their employment or personal life being arrested, without investigations being conducted, and detained for months
 - Civil society said it reiterates that arrests should be made based only on evidence following investigation or reasonable suspicion
 - The detention period should be that stipulated in the Code of Criminal Procedure and any extension of detention should be made by a judge, who should be satisfied of the reasons for continued detention and exercise discretion as to whether or not to extend detention
- There is documented evidence, including Supreme Court decisions and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka’s (HRCSL) reports, which illustrate that the admissibility of confessions made to an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) or above as evidence, has resulted in persons being tortured to extract confessions. This has normalised and entrenched the use of torture. Even if the confession is ruled inadmissible during trial, the existence of the

provision creates room for persons to be subject to torture. This not only violates basic due process and fair trial rights of a person accused of an offence, but also calls into question the competence of the criminal justice system that has to rely on confessions to prosecute persons. Such a provision, which is a deviation from the norm, has no place in law. Instead, current provisions in the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Evidence Ordinance should be followed with regard to the admissibility of confessions

- Section 7(3) allows a person to be taken out of judicial custody to any other place for investigation. Section 15A empowers the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence to determine a person’s place of detention even after the person is remanded. This removes a person from the protection of judicial custody and empowers the Secretary to override a judicial order. The incident in September 2021 of the Minister of Prison Reforms and Prisoners’ Rehabilitation entering the Anuradhapura Prison and reportedly threatening persons detained under the PTA with a weapon and verbally abusing them, illustrates the insecurity faced by such persons even when in judicial custody. Removing them from judicial custody would only exacerbate their vulnerability. As the HRCSL’s national study of prisons documented, persons remanded under the PTA were subjected to severe torture when taken out of judicial custody or held in other places upon the instructions of the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence
- Persons detained under the PTA spend a prolonged period of time in pretrial detention because the Act requires such persons to remain in remand custody until the conclusion of the trial, unless the Attorney General consents to the release on bail. For all arrests, provisions of the Bail Act should apply, and bail should be denied only if any of the exceptional circumstances set out in the Bail Act are met
- The PTA allows the Minister of Defence to issue restriction orders

for up to 18 months. Restriction orders can be used to prevent people from engaging in political activities, speaking at events, or advising an organisation. Such orders allow civic rights to be curtailed arbitrarily by the Minister with no due process, transparency, or accountability

Protections

The SLCC statement mentions the Government stated that for the very first time, a detained person would be able to challenge administrative detention in the Supreme Court. Civil society points out that the right to challenge arbitrary detention, including under the PTA, is enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and is not a new right that any proposed reform could bestow. The challenge many detained persons face in accessing this existing right is the administrative restrictions on access to lawyers and lack of financial resources to retain competent counsel.

Similarly, the HRCSL Act already mandates the Commission to monitor the welfare of persons deprived of liberty and empowers it to access any place of detention unannounced. However, following the 20th Amendment to the Constitution in 2020, the HRCSL is no longer a legally independent body, as appointment of the officers of the Commission is at the discretion of the President. This adversely impacts the activities of the Commission as well as public trust in the institution.

The Advisory Board established by Section 13 of the PTA, as pointed out in the past by civil society, is an inadequate protection mechanism that is not independent, as its members are appointed by the President. Furthermore, the Minister of Defence has the power to make rules on how the Board deals with representations made by detained persons. It, therefore, does not act as a safeguard against executive abuse of power. Any non-judicial mechanism that is established to decide on/recommend the release of persons detained under the PTA must be independent and entities, such as the Attorney General’s Department, should not be able to veto its decisions.

Way forward

The proposals shared by the Government with the SLCC fail to address the fundamental shortcomings of the PTA. Instead, they propose changes that already exist but are often observed in the breach.

Civil society noted with deep concern that the functioning of the aforementioned committees was not transparent, and the recommendations were formulated without any consultation with members of civil society who have been working on issues related to the PTA or persons affected by the law. Civil society calls for greater transparency in the reform process from this point onwards and requests the Government to inform the public of the process for consultation and the proposed timeline for reform.

Civil society said it reiterates that national security cannot be achieved

by creating insecurity for already discriminated against and marginalised communities, and calls for the repeal of the PTA. The repeal of the PTA must also be considered in light of the anti-terrorism and public security legal framework that Sri Lanka has in place, and the historical abuse of power by state entities. These entities should not be bestowed with additional power.

The way forward must give due recognition to the protection of physical liberty. Deprivation of physical liberty by the Executive must be used only as last resort and strictly require sufficient basis that is determined on objective factors, judicial supervision of such basis, prompt and free access to legal representation including legal aid, prompt trials or release, and an enforceable right to compensation for arbitrary detention. The prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of liberty has acquired customary international law status and constitutes a jus cogens norm which Sri Lanka is duty bound to secure for its citizens.

The balance the Government wishes to achieve between personal liberties and national security can only be achieved through addressing the root causes of conflict and violence. Attempts to further curtail civil liberties in the guise of national security will only exacerbate the insecurity of all communities and undermine the rule of law and democracy in Sri Lanka.

Signatories: S. Annalaxmy, Bisliya Bhutto, S.C.C. Elnokvan, Lawyer and Development Consultant Philip Dissanayake, A.M. Faaiz, Brito Fernando, Nimalka Fernando, Ruki Fernando, Aneesa Firthous, Amarasingham Gajenthiran, T. Gangeswary, K. Ginogini, Raniitha Gnanarajah AAL, B. Gowthaman, THALAM Director S. Hayakirivan, V. Inthrani, Noorul Ismiya, Vasuki Jeysankar, Dr. Sakuntala Kadrigamar, Social Activist S. Kamalakanthan, Mahaluxmy Kurushanthan, Kandumani Lavakusarasa, Human Rights Activist Jensila Majeed, Buhary Mohamed, Human Rights Activist, Juwairiya Mohideen, Voices Movement Chairman Jaabir Raazi Muhammad, P. Muthulingam, Thangaraja Prashanthiran, Dorin Rajani, Viluthu Executive Director Maithreyi Rajasingham, A.R.A. Ramees, V. Ranjana, Anuratha Rajaretnam, K.S. Ratnavale, Yamini Ravindran, AAL Kumudini Samuel, Thurainayagam Sanjeevan, Shreen Saroor, Ambika Satkumanathan, Rev. Fr. S.D.P. Selvan, S. Selvaranie, Vanie Simon, P.N. Singham, Usha Sivakumar, N. Sumanthi, Vani Sutha, Ermiza Tegal, Social Activist S. Thileepan, P. Vasanthagowrey, and Rev. Fr. Yogeswaran; the Adayalam Centre for Policy Research, Alliance for Minorities, Centre for Human Rights and Development, Centre for Justice and Change, Eastern Social Development Foundation, Families of the Disappeared, Forum for Plural Democracy, Law and Society Trust, Mannar Women’s Development Federation, Rural Development Foundation, Tamil Civil Society Forum, Viluthu, and Women’s Action Network.

Contd. from page 8

Sri Lanka...

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning* on an earlier occasion, All Ceylon Farmers’ Federation (ACFF) National Organiser Namal Karunaratne noted: “The Government decided to undertake an experiment regarding food at a time when the whole world is facing issues with food production and supply chains due to the pandemic. This decision is a foolhardy one, since ordinarily, under such circumstances, no country would consider embarking on such dangerous experiments. Furthermore, this decision was timed with the start of the Maha season, which is the season which bears the bulk of the country’s food production, at over 65%.”

Meanwhile, Former Manning Market General Trade Union Chairman Lal Hettige, speaking to us recently, said: “The prices of upcountry vegetables such as leeks, carrots, capsicum, and beans are extremely high. Additionally,

fewer quantities of vegetables arrive in the market. For instance, if there used to be five lorries’ worth of produce that arrived from one area previously, now you might only see one lorry’s worth.”

While the policies have been rolled back, the CBSL has continued to restrict banks from issuing letters of credit (LCs) to traders seeking to import food and other items, aggravating shortages.

‘Face the reality’

Meanwhile, speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, Ministry of Trade Secretary Bhadrani Jayawardhana said that the Government’s hands were tied when it came to this situation.

She explained that with tourism and foreign imports being impacted, the Government’s main revenue at the moment comes through taxes. “Asking the Government to do something means that you and I will be paying. This is the

reality,” she added, noting that the only concession the Government can make is by distributing essentials at lower prices through co-operative services.

She also elaborated on the supply chain, mentioning that on the one hand, ships and freighters were scarce, limiting imports, while the weather and only the truly desperate farmers resorting to cultivation, had led to issues in local production.

“In this situation, the fact that people are managing to put food on the table is an accomplishment,” she added.

How do we overcome this hurdle?

Advocata Institute Chief Operating Officer (COO) Dhananath Fernando, speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, stated that there were no short-term solutions for this inflation issue, because the problem itself has been around for some time.

However, he noted that even though he doesn’t personally recommend it, “one option we have right now is to sort out the dollar problem, and for that we

have to raise dollars, monetise some of the assets, and create dollars”.

“But the challenge with that is our financial track record is not that good, so people expect a crash,” he further said.

However, looking at the recent developments regarding the pandemic situation, University of Colombo Professor in Economics and CBSL Monetary Policy Consultative Committee Chairman Prof. Sirimal Abeyratne told us that, while he has no insight into the specifics regarding the situation, recovery might be further slowed down if the new Omicron Covid-19 variant causes a resurgence of cases and lockdowns, with impacts on the global economy. “Our recovery will be postponed through such measures,” he elaborated, adding: “When recovery is postponed, the problems will continue, but obviously inflation will come down.”

Whether we will wait for the situation to take its course or develop a long-term strategy to overcome this crisis, remains to be seen.

Hard times...

He said that without an influx of dollars, it would become increasingly difficult to import our essentials like fuel, which powers vehicles, electricity, water, etc., meaning that there is a potential for the supply of all essentials to be disrupted. He added that people would be compelled to spend more of their income on food items, since all these conditions would also contribute to food inflation. “People will have to cut down on non-food expenses such as education and healthcare,” he said.

When queried regarding potential solutions to the prevailing situation, Fernando said: “In my view, it seems a little late already, unless we have

some magic formula, since these reforms take time. These are also structural problems, not one-off ones.”

Addressing these prevailing conditions, Labour Ministry Secretary M.P.D.U.K. Mapa Pathirana said that while the Labour Advisory Council had discussed demands by trade unions for wage hikes on behalf of private sector workers, there was no agreement regarding the matter as yet. “We still need to get data from the DCS regarding how much the cost of living increased. Furthermore, there needs to be a consultation process between employees and employers to increase wages,” he said.

JOHN MICHAEL ARTHUR AS SRI LANKA HEAD COACH

● An analytical look back

BY REVATHA S. SILVA

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

- The second and final Test against the West Indies that ended on Friday (3) was Mickey Arthur's last assignment with Sri Lanka
- With the 2-0 series win, Arthur ended his two-year term with the Sri Lanka team and he is expected to take up a coaching post in the Derbyshire county team in England soon
- Mickey Arthur's coaching staff in Sri Lanka included Grant Flower (as batting coach), David Saker (bowling coach, who left the post in early 2021 to take up head coach position for Melbourne Renegades at the men's Big Bash League in Australia), and Shane

(A) Mickey Arthur overall record – 1 Dec. 2019 to 3 Dec. 2021

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

57 Matches / Won 19 / Lost 31 / Drawn 5 / No Result 2 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.612*

Formats breakdown

- Tests: 14 Matches / Won 4 / Lost 5 / Drawn 5 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.8
- ODIs: 18 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 10 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.700
- T20Is: 25 Matches / Won 8 / Lost 16 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.500

McDermott (fielding coach)

- Later Piyal Wijetunge (spin bowling coach since the July 2021 India tour of Sri Lanka) and Chaminda Vaas (fast bowling coach since the March 2021 Sri Lanka tour of the West Indies) joined the Sri Lanka coaching staff

- Arthur's term (December 2019-December 2021) can be divided into two glaringly different periods – the first one from December 2019 to July 2021, and the second from July to December 2021
- Yes, Sri Lanka's cricket is in somewhat of a better place now, compared to what it was when he took over as the Head Coach in December 2019, yet to what extent did his coaching contribute to this telling improvement of Sri Lanka? Here is an effort to delve into the matter from a statistical perspective.

(B) Record from 1 Dec. 2019 to 5 July 2021 (until the end of England white-ball tour)

The year 2020 saw the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This over-one-year-long period saw no major structural changes taking place in the Sri Lanka national ranks or in the captaincies or the team. Generally Sri Lanka's record across all three formats continued to be poor, deriving only huge criticism from the media and the public. It was all but an extension of the dismal run of the team that was evident since 2015 or so.

35 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 21

- / Drawn 5 / No Result 2 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.333
- Formats breakdown (from 1 Dec. 2019 to 4 July 2021)
- Tests: 12 Matches / Won 2 / Lost 5 / Drawn 5 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.400
- ODIs: 12 Matches / Won 4 / Lost 7 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.571
- T20Is: 11 Matches / Won 1 / Lost 9 / No Result 1 / Win-Loss Ratio 0.111

(C) Record from 6 July 2021 to 3 Dec. 2021 (from India white-ball series at home)

Many structural changes took place in the national ranks in July 2021. Three leading players – Danushka Gunathilaka, Niroshan Dickwella, and Kusal Mendis – were banned from the game for disciplinary reasons. New top-order batters took up their places and established themselves in the team. National selectors went for a clear-cut youth policy whilst leaving aside a few leading seniors,

especially from the white-ball formats. The national white-ball cricket captaincy went to Dasun Shanaka in July. Pathum Nissanka, Charith Asalanka, Chamika Karunaratne, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Praveen Jayawickrama, and Ramesh Mendis became some of the leading names to emerge across the formats during the last five months.

22 Matches / Won 12 / Lost 10 /

- Drawn 0 / No Result 0 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.2
- Formats breakdown (from 6 July 2021 to 3 Dec. 2021)
- Tests: 2 Matches / Won 2 / Lost 0 / Win-Loss Ratio 2.00
- ODIs: 6 Matches / Won 3 / Lost 3 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.000
- T20Is: 14 Matches / Won 7 / Lost 7 / Win-Loss Ratio 1.000



Mickey Arthur completed his two-year term as Head Coach of Sri Lanka's national cricket team last Friday (3) in Galle PHOTO © SLCC

(D) Conclusion

1. Mickey Arthur's coaching record with Sri Lanka is improving drastically from July 2021 until December 2021
 2. From 1 Dec. 2019 to 5 July 2021, the record is 35 matches, (only) seven wins, and 21 losses
 3. From 6 July 2021 to 3 Dec. 2021, the record is 22 matches, 12 wins, and 10 losses
 4. The Win-Loss Ratio improves from 0.333 of the initial period to 1.2 during the latter period
 5. The "game changer moment" of Arthur's tenure can be defined as Sri Lanka's debacle in England in June-July, both on and off the field
 6. Since the England debacle, the changes made in Sri Lanka cricket were not purely coaching related, but (i) administrative (i.e.: introduction of new selection criteria), (ii) structural (i.e.: change of captaincy), as well as (iii) purely accidental (i.e.: three leading batsmen being videoed by a passer-by whilst they were smoking in Durham streets in the night after a huge Sri Lanka loss in the T20 series, breaching the stipulated Covid-19 bio-secure protocols, and facing a one-year ban from the game)
- Notes:**
The Win-Loss Ratio is found by dividing the number of wins by the number of losses. The ratio is more than the figure 1, only if there are more wins than losses
ODIs=One-Day International T20Is=Twenty20 Internationals



Was this 'disappointing incident' in June this year in Durham, England the 'watershed moment' in Sri Lanka cricket's recent history?

The 'Draw Problem'

THE CHESS CORNER by Dulan Edirisinghe

Magnus Carlsen, the highest ranked chess player for the last decade and the World Champion since 2013, is currently defending his title in a best-of-14 contest against the Russian challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi. At the time of writing, there is nothing to separate the two players after five hard-fought games, yet there is more than just a murmur of discontent in the air. Why? The tone of the headlines after each game should provide a clue.

The first round ended in a "tense draw" after Carlsen sacrificed a pawn in the opening from the black side of the Ruy Lopez opening. The adventurous Carlsen played the Catalan opening in the second game, sacrificing a pawn and even more, only to "scramble his way to a draw" after an inaccuracy. Game three saw another Ruy Lopez draw where "neither player yielded in a tug of war". In game four, Carlsen tried 1.e4, only to be met with the "bulletproof" Petroff Defence. Nepomniachtchi's superior preparation gave him the initiative in game five, but Carlsen defended passively to "escape with a draw". Noticed the larger-than-average elephant in the room?

For all the talk of tense situations, pawn sacrifices, and resolute defending, the bottom line is it's been all draws. The fifth round game signalled the 19th consecutive drawn game in World Championships, so it's been a while since someone won one.

In fact, the last time someone won a

World Chess Championship game, Barack Obama was still the US president.

'Drawing' conclusions

After evaluating the moves from the opening five games, the all-knowing computer engines have concluded that we are witnessing the most accurate world title match in history. (Big deal, right?). Game three, in particular, was deemed the most accurate game played in the history of this flagship event.

Let's see what "perfection" looks like.
Ian Nepomniachtchi – Magnus Carlsen Round 3, World Chess Championship
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 O-O 8.a4 Bb7 9.d3 d6 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.Nf1 h6 12.Bd2 Bf8 13.Ne3 Ne7 14.c4 bxc4 15.Nxc4 Nc6 16.Rc1 a5 17.Bc3 Bc8 18.d4 exd4 19.Nxd4 Nxd4 20.Qxd4 Be6 21.h3 c6 22.Bc2 d5



22...d5 was a key moment
23.e5 dxc4 24.Qxd8 Rxd8 25.exf6 Bb4

26.fxg7 Bxc3 27.bxc3 Kxg7 28.Kf1 Rab8 29.Rb1 Kf6 30.Rxb8 Rxb8 31.Rb1 Rxb1+ 32.Bxb1 Ke5 33.Ke2 f5 34.Bc2 f4 35.Bb1 c5 36.Bc2 Bd7 37.f3 Kf6 38.h4 Ke5 39.Kf2 Kf6 40.Ke2 Ke5 41.Kf2 1/2/1/2



The final position

Let's face it. Perfection from one player is all good and enjoyable, but when it comes from both sides, it's just boring. This is Glenn McGrath's perfect line and length meeting the perfect forward defence of Rahul Dravid in a test match, for all five days.

One of the reasons for the longevity of chess is the apparent impossibility of achieving absolute perfection. In fact, if black manages to completely neutralise white's opening advantage, that's it for the game. Chess will simply become an advanced version of tic-tac-toe.

Why all the draws?

When the first official World Champion



Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi shaking hands after yet another draw

Wilhelm Steinitz lost his title to Emanuel Lasker in 1894, out of 19 games only four were draws. In the 20th Century things started to change. When Capablanca beat Lasker in 1921, 10 of their 14 games were draws. Later in 1984, Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov played a marathon 48-game match with a record 40 draws, including 17 in a row at one point. In 2018, the last time Carlsen defended the crown against Fabiano Caruana, all 12 classical games ended up drawn.

So what happened exactly? The answer is simple. People (and their computer engines) got better at chess. There is no doubt they will continue to get even better.

How to save chess from itself

What compounds the "draw issue" is the sheer length of these "classical" games. This is nothing new. Chess has always "suffered" from long-game-purism. In a way this is

similar to how Test Cricket is viewed by the sports loving public. When asked about the format, Carlsen himself voiced his unequivocal displeasure with: "When you have nothing good to say, it's better not to say anything at all".

With lots of new fans (thanks to the pandemic-induced chess boom) tuning in to watch this flagship event of chess, some entertainment in the form of decisive games is somewhat important. Moving ahead, the solution is perhaps to take a leaf out of cricket's book and incorporate Rapid and Blitz chess – the chess equivalent of limited overs cricket – into these matches.

I mean, who'd say no to having 120 rapid games of 14 minutes each instead of having 14 classical games of 120 minutes each? I know which one I'd rather watch. It could end up being the better way of determining the best player as well.

FOREIGN SPORTS: PAST AND PRESENT WEEKS

CORNER KICK BY MARADONA

Yorkshire dumps entire coaching staff, as Ashes begins in Brisbane

Yorkshire yesterday (4) announced the removal of Martyn Moxon and Andrew Gale from their positions as Director of Cricket and Head Coach respectively. It was as a part of a cull of the entire coaching staff following public outcry over the club's handling of allegations of institutional racism. In all, 16 members of staff have been let go, including the backroom medical team and some administrative employees. Yorkshire's Chair Lord Patel of Bradford has said that the changes were necessary in order to "move on from the past and become a culture which is progressive and inclusive".

In other news...

• **Pakistan Premier League (PSL) 2022 begins on 27 January**

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) will begin on 27 January 2022, with the draft to be held on 12 December. The league, which begins about a month earlier than usual to make room for Australia's upcoming tour in March-April, will have the final take place on 27 February. Unlike the last two years, only two venues will be used for the tournament, with the event beginning in Karachi, where 15 games will be played from 27 January to 7 February. All matches thereafter will take place at the Gaddafi Stadium, including the final.

• **BBL 2021 begins today**

The 2021-22 11th Big Bash League (BBL), the professional men's Twenty20 domestic cricket competition in Australia, is scheduled to run from 5 December (today) 2021 to 28 January 2022. The Sydney Sixers are the defending champions of the eight-team 61-match event.



Novak Djokovic (right) could not prevent his country Serbia missing out on the Davis Cup 2021 final after he and Filip Krajinovic (left) lost in the decisive doubles against Croatia last Friday (3)

• **Djokovic's Serbia loses in Davis Cup semi-finals**

Current world No. 1 Novak Djokovic could not prevent his country Serbia missing out on the Davis Cup 2021 final after he and Filip Krajinovic lost in the decisive doubles

against Croatia on Friday (3) in Madrid, Spain. Djokovic beat former US Open champion Marin Cilic in the singles, levelling the semi-final tie after Croatia's Borna Gojo won against Dusan Lajovic. Nikola Mektic and Mate Pavic,

the world No. 1s, put Croatia into the final with a 7-5, 6-1 win. Croatia will play either the Russian Tennis Federation (Russia) or Germany today in the grand finale.

• **Hamilton fastest in Saudi Arabian Grand Prix's second practice as Leclerc crashes**

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc emerged unscathed from a 150 mph crash, while Lewis Hamilton ended practice as the fastest at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Friday. Leclerc lost control at Turn 22, a corner identified by drivers as one of the biggest challenges on the new Jeddah street circuit. The crash, which badly damaged the Ferrari, brought the session to a premature end with five minutes to go. Hamilton was 0.195 seconds quicker than title rival Max Verstappen in fourth.

• **Euro 2020 final disorder: Ticketless thugs 'could have caused death' at England vs. Italy game**

"Ticketless, drunken, and drugged-up thugs" could have caused death as they stormed Wembley before the Euro 2020 final, said a review into the disorder. The report by Baroness Casey said there was a "collective failure" in planning for the match, which about 2,000 people got into illegally. It noted 17 mass breaches of disabled access gates and emergency fire doors. Lady Casey said the "appalling scene of disorder" as England played Italy led to a "day of national shame". Her report noted failure in planning for the match on 11 July, including a "vulnerable" stewarding operation lacking experience partly because of the pandemic and the police deployment arriving "too late". The knowledge that about 25,000 of Wembley's 90,000 seats would be left empty because of Covid restrictions contributed to a "perfect storm" of factors.

SCHEDULES AND TIMES

Today, Sunday, 5 December

• **Davis Cup tennis 2021 Finals (in Madrid, Spain)**

Semi final 1: Croatia beat Serbia 2-1 last Friday (3)

Semi final 2: RTF* vs. Germany yesterday (4) at 5.30 p.m. SL time

Final: Today (5) at 8.30 p.m. SL time

*The Russian team is officially being called RTF (Russian Tennis Federation) in the competition, amid its ongoing doping suspension in international sport

• **Abu Dhabi T10 cricket league**

Yesterday – Third Place Playoff: Bangla Tigers vs. Team Abu Dhabi

Final: Deccan Gladiators vs. Delhi Bulls

• **Big Bash League cricket in Australia**

Match 1: Sydney Sixers vs. Melbourne Stars today at 1.45 p.m. SL time

• **Saudi Arabian Grand Prix Formula 1**

Race to begin at 11 p.m. SL time today at Jeddah Corniche Circuit, Jeddah, a Street Circuit with a length of 6.17 km, on 50 laps

This week's action

• **Cricket**

■ **India vs. New Zealand** second and final Test in Mumbai – from 3-7 (Tue.) December

■ **Bangladesh vs. Pakistan** second and final Test in Dhaka – from 4-8 (Wed.) December

■ **First of five-match Ashes Test series, Australia vs. England** at Brisbane from 8 (Wed.)-12 December (from 5.30 a.m. each day SL time)

Revisiting Sri Lanka's 1995 SAARC Gold Cup win

One of the finest moments in Sri Lanka's football history was on 2 April 1995. Sri Lanka beat India 1-0 in extra time of the final that day to win the Bristol SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) Gold Cup at Sugathadasa Stadium, Colombo.

• Sri Lanka's first recorded victory in an international football match came in 1952 when they beat Burma 2-1 in the third Asian Quadrangular Tournament in Calcutta

• The 1995 SAARC Gold Cup began at the Sugathadasa on Saturday, 25 March 1995 on an extremely hot and humid day. Pakistan beat Bangladesh 1-0 in Group A in the curtain raiser

• India were the defending champions. They had won the previous SAARC Gold Cup in Lahore in July 1993. Sri Lanka were the runners-up then

• Sri Lanka played their first match on 29 March in a Group B game against India. The Maldives withdrew from the tournament in the last hour and the game became the only Group B encounter. Well-known Bhaichung Bhutia featured in the Indian team

• Manilal Fernando headed local soccer administration then, flanked by stalwarts such as J.N.S. Anandaraja, Chrysantha Perera, Hafiz Marikar, and T. Wanigarathne. There were also names like George Ferreira, Harold Anthony (Manager) and Rustam Akramon (the Uzbek Coach) in the forefront

• Members of the Lankan squad included Sampath Perera (Capt.), Rohan Perera, Mohamed Amanulla Mohideen, M. Kabeer, Lalith Weersinghe (goalie), T.S. Gajanayake, J. Hasheemdeen, Jagath Rohana, Antony Wanbeck, L.P. Perera, Sirisena Manjula, M.M.T. Gamage, Prabhath Ferdinand, R.

Imtiyaz, Ajith Prasana, M. Rafi, Isuru Perera, M. Riza, Ranjith Hettiarachchi, Priyantha Liyanage, D. Sugath, David Sarath, S.M. Riswan, Lavendran, and C. Stainwall

• On 29 March, Bhutia headed two goals for India to take the lead. Then entered Amanulla, who scored in the 62nd and 87th minute (a penalty) of the match to equalise. It was two all

• It was the first time Sri Lanka had not been beaten by India since 1952, when the two countries drew 1-1 in Calcutta

• In the semi-finals, Sri Lanka beat Nepal 2-1 with goals coming from Amanulla and his Ratnam SC playmate Roshan Perera. Deepak Amatya scored for Nepal

• Sunday, 2 April, the evening of the final against India turned out to be a remarkable one in the country's



Sri Lanka Captain Sampath Perera lifts the Bristol SAARC Gold Cup after beating India in the final on 2 April 1995 at Sugathadasa



Mohamed Amanulla Mohideen

soccer history. Sugathadasa had been surrounded by tuks, cars, and other vehicles all crammed with fans carrying flags and flares

• The ground had been full to its 25,000 capacity and around 10,000 more were reportedly locked out causing problems for the security staff

• After a goalless first-half, there was rain and lightning. Yet play had begun shortly after in a water-logged stadium

• There were no goals until 90 minutes; no sudden-death winners in the first period of extra time too. Amanulla had run out of ammunition and Roshan Perera was a marked man

• Cometh the moment of substitute W.L. David Sarath, a 25-year-old Corporal in the Sri Lanka Army who had come in, in the 68th minute, only to gain his first senior cap

• "In the 108th minute, about 12 minutes to 11 in the night, Perera broke down the left and his low-cross was met by Sarath whose diving header flew into the far corner. Match over. Sri Lanka champions. Rarely can a victory be celebrated so extravagantly," wrote Leslie Fernando of *Daily News*

Training young kids in tennis: Part II



Methwan Wijemanne, boys' U-14 singles champion

Following on from the article last week, this week we will further examine the necessary attributes in coaching and training young kids in the game of tennis.

Since these are kids from the ages of three to eight participating in these lessons, it is important that the coaches keep the lessons filled with fun, but also with variety.

Understanding the fact that these are kids and they are more interested in learning new things instead of repetitions is important.

Whilst it is important that the coaches let the kids have fun, it should always be done within certain boundaries. Therefore, it is the duty of the coaches to make sure that they keep discipline in their lessons at all times.

The coaches should certainly be very even-handed, as the kids normally pick on any favoritism extremely quickly. That should not be a consideration at all at any time.

At this level the coaches should also make sure that they keep their instructions simple and concise.



And the coaches should, as much as possible, encourage the kids to find the answers themselves. This will make the future player a more confident one.

Allow the kids to make mistakes at this level. But

they should be "good" mistakes. Or the mistake should be made whilst the player is trying to put an instruction of the coach into action.

These mistakes should be lauded and never criticised. No two kids are the same. As such, the coach should never compare the kids. But the coach should praise the player who should be praised so that the other players are also encouraged to achieve the maximum.

106th Colombo Championship Tennis

The above Grade 1 tournament is now being held at the Sri Lanka Tennis Association (SLTA) Playing Section clay courts at Green Path, Colombo.

U-12 singles final

Girls: Githmi Fernando (Seed 2, Ave Maria Convent, Negombo) beat Gehansa Methnadi (1, Musaeus College, Colombo) 4-1, 1-4, 10-8

Boys: Aahil Kaleel (2) beat Methika Wickramasinghe (1) 1-4, 4-2, 10-7

U-14 singles final

Girls: Dinara de Silva (1, St. Bridget's Convent, Colombo) beat Gehansa Methnadi (11) 4-2, 4-1

Boys: Methwan Wijemanne (2, Royal College, Colombo) beat Danushka Dias (4) 5-3, 5-2

U-16 singles final

Girls: Saajida Razick (1) vs. Vishmi Serasinghe (6)

Boys: Vichinthya Nilaweera (3, Stafford Int'l School, Colombo) beat Venuka Kithnula 0-4, 5-3, 10-8



Dinara de Silva of St. Bridget's Convent Colombo beat Gehansa Methnadi with marked ease to clinch the girls' U-14 singles title at the 106th Colombo Championship tennis yesterday (4) at Green Path, Colombo
PHOTOS ISHAN WANNIARACHCHI

LOCAL SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

The Morning's sister newspaper Aruna won the Best Sports Literature for Daily Newspaper Award for the second time running at the second Sabuddhi Sports Literature Awards, organised by the Sabuddhi Literary Organisation and sponsored by SLT-Mobitel. Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa was the chief guest at the ceremony held on Friday (3) at the Sports Ministry auditorium in Colombo.

This year's award winners:

Best Photo: Sameera Peiris (Merits - Kelum Chamara, Waruna Ananda), New Media: The Papare (Batsman.com, Srilankansports.com), Daily Newspaper: Aruna (Mawbima, Dinamina), Weekend Newspaper: Irida Lankadeepa (Silumina, Ravaya), Radio: Lakhanda (SLBC Commercial Service, Sitha FM 88.8), Television: ITN (Derana, SLRC), Publishers: Sandakadapahana Publishers, Research Book: Suraj Arangala and Pramesh Thotawatta (Nanduni Wijetunga), Multiple Subjects: "Sri Lankawe Ekdina Cricket Puranaya" by Sarath Jayasinghe ("Cheena Jana Wushu Shastreeya Pela" edited by M. Safir, "Vidyathmaka Kaayawardhanaya" by Janaka Samarasinghe), Academic Work: "Kreedawe Samaaja Chalyathaawa" by Dr. Samantha Nanayakkara, Sport Award: Paralympics gold medallist Dinesh Priyantha (Paralympics bronze medallist Dulan Kodituwakku), Yogananda Memorial Lifetime Gold Award: Veteran sports journalist Neil Wijeratne, Bandula Warnapura Gold Award for Best Sports Journalist of the Year: Susil Ranasinghe



Winners of the 2022 Sabuddhi Literary Awards, held on Friday (3) at the Sports Ministry auditorium in Colombo

Aruna: The best daily newspaper at Sabuddhi Sports Literary Awards

In other news...

- **SL U-19 trounce England in second ODI**

Sri Lanka Under-19 cricket team beat

England Under-19 by a massive 148 runs in their second Youth One-Day International (ODI) to level the five-match series 1-1 last Friday (3) at SSC, Colombo. England won the first ODI by 25 runs last Tuesday (30 November) at the same venue. The next match will be today (5), also at SSC, scheduled to start at 9.45 a.m.

Brief scores:

Sri Lanka U-19 (won toss) 251/4 in 50 overs (Pawan Pathiraja 113 in 131, Ranuda Somarathne 58 n.o., Dunith Wellalage 38 n.o.; Rehan Ahmed 2/41, Joshua Boyden 2/42)

England U-19 103 all out in 31.4 overs (James Rew 50, William Luxton 12; Wanuja Sahan 5/21, Yasiru Rodrigo 2/18, Matheesha Pathirana 2/20, Dunith Wellalage 1/1)

- **Sports Ministry to scout village talents**

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is to soon launch its Talent Identification

Programme to pick talents that are emerging from, mainly, the rural areas of the island. The media was informed of the new cause by Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa yesterday (4) in Colombo.

- **SL sambo, jiu-jitsu, scrabble National Associations cancelled**

Minister Namal Rajapaksa, in a gazette notification dated 2 December, nullified the three national sports associations of sambo, jiu-jitsu, and scrabble, using powers vested on him as the sports minister. Sambo is a Russian martial art and jiu-jitsu is a family of Japanese martial arts.

- **Four Lankans excel at Asian Youth Para Games in Bahrain**

Sri Lanka won four medals at the Asian Youth Para Games last Friday (3). The event will be over tomorrow (6). Out of 27 nations, 18 had won medals in the nine sports disciplines and Sri Lanka was placed 13th with one each of gold and silver, and two bronze medals. Iran,

Thailand, and Japan were leading the table respectively.

1. Yapa Basnayake: Gold in girls 16 to 18 400 m freestyle - class S6-10 Multi-Class (5:25.27 secs.);
2. Jason Jayawardana: Silver in boys U-17 shot put - class F40 (6.64 m);
3. Janani Wickramasinghe: Bronze in girls U-17 200 m - class T47 (29.36 secs.);
4. Naveed Rashin: Bronze in boys 12-16 400 m freestyle - class S6-10 Multi-Class (5:20.59 secs.)



Yapa Basnayake

Jason Jayawardana



Janani Wickramasinghe Naveed Rashin



Wanuja Sahan demolished England U-19 (5/21) to be greeted warmly by SL U-19 Captain Dunith Wellalage PHOTO © SLC

School rugby: Where are you my love?

- **Are we going to witness a further delay in the resumption of school rugby with the Omicron variant?**

THE OVAL BALL WEEK'S RUGBY ROUNDUP
by Ranjika Perera



War, but couldn't survive the coronavirus. Of course, it was not worth the risk of letting children get into the pitch and put themselves in danger just to keep the tradition going. Still, it shows how school rugby was affected by the pandemic.

After two years of absence

One would argue there is no point in looking back at the time that we lost. True, but after such a long break, it is no easy task to get the system up and running in quick time. Just for you to have an understanding of the magnitude of school rugby, there are more than 450 games played every year in the school arena. That is almost 10 times the amount of club games we see during a year. Now, imagine, restarting all those games after two years of absence?

So now you realise, the resumption of school rugby is far away from us. That is the reality. If you take the major schools like Royal, Trinity, S. Thomas', and St. Peter's, they spend approximately Rs. 5-25 million a year for their rugby.

From paying hefty amounts for the coaches, nutrition, jerseys etc., schools invest a lot for the boys. Given the economic situation in the country and the lack of rugby action, sponsors have moved on from schools. Training staff have been laid off, hence there hasn't been any preparation in the schools to restart rugby within a fortnight, a month, or even three months.

SLSRFA Head Abeyrathna's views

All these factors will come into play when the health authorities give the green light to resume schools rugby.

The President of the Sri Lanka Schools Rugby Football Association B.A. Abeyrathna, speaking exclusively to The Sunday Morning Sports, said: "We have already sent an action plan on how to resume rugby in the coming year. We are still to get the approval from the Sports Ministry, but we hope to get it within the coming weeks."

Hope is a tricky thing; sometimes it leads you to joy, sometimes it makes you end up in despair. School rugby, my love, I hope you will return. Will you leave me in joy or in despair?



SLSRFA President B.A. Abeyrathna



Trinity College, Kandy and Royal College, Colombo at a Bradby encounter (File photo)

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the sunday morning

Sports

Sunday, December 5, 2021

SRI LANKA WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM STRANDED IN ZIMBABWE

Special charter flight to pick up team soon

BY REVATHA S. SILVA

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is now arranging to send a special charter flight to take home the Sri Lanka women's cricket team now stranded in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The team, which was taking part in the 2022 International Cricket Council (ICC) World Cup Qualifiers in Harare, got stuck in the Zimbabwe capital city after the tournament was suddenly abandoned last Saturday (27 November) due to an alleged spread of a new Covid-19 variant Omicron.

"We are planning to send a special flight as soon as all the team members of the Sri Lanka team test negative. At least three are currently



Sri Lanka were out of next year's ICC Women's Cricket World Cup due to the sudden Covid-19 situation that erupted in Zimbabwe during the tournament's final Qualifiers

having Covid-19 and if we are to send a charter flight now, we'll have to send another one later," said SLC

CEO Ashley de Silva, talking to *The Sunday Morning Sports* yesterday (4) regarding the situation.

"We are waiting till all are testing negative," he said.

Due to the unfortunate situation, Sri Lanka missed their chance to get qualified to the World Cup, to be held from 4 March to 3 April next year in New Zealand.

As nine teams vied for the last three remaining slots in next year's eight-team World Cup, the Zimbabwe Qualifiers were called off due to Covid-19 fears as only 11 of the 25 games had been completed.

Due to unforeseen eventuality, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the West Indies were picked for the World Cup from the Qualifiers, depending on their better current world rankings than the other six participants, including Sri Lanka.

Russia doping scandal's Lamine Diack passes away

Lamine Diack, the disgraced former chief of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), now known as World Athletics, died last Friday (3) aged 88. Diack, who led athletics' world governing body from 1999 to 2015 and was a former member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), died in his Senegal home, reports said. "He died at home of a natural death," his son, Papa Massata Diack, had said. His funeral was due to be held later yesterday (4). Lamine was convicted of leading a clique that covered up Russian doping in return for millions of USD in bribes. In September 2020, a French court sentenced him to four years in prison, two suspended, though he had remained under house arrest and was later released on bail.



Langer still has nightmares about 2019 Ashes



Australia cricket Head Coach Justin Langer has said he "still has nightmares" about Ben Stokes' match-winning display in the third Ashes Test at Headingley in 2019. Then, the all-rounder kept England's hopes of regaining the Ashes urn alive with his astonishing unbeaten 135, steering the hosts to a one-wicket win. Stokes is back in the England squad for the Ashes in Australia after taking a break to prioritise his mental health.

DUBAI RUGBY SEVENS SERIES

Japan finish 11th at Dubai Sevens



Japan had a disappointing outing at the Dubai Rugby Sevens, which ended yesterday (4).

They started off the group stage with a massive 48-0 defeat against South Africa. Their second game was against Great Britain. Although Japan gave a good fight, Britain came out on top with a 36-14 win.

Yesterday, Japan were up against Spain in the ninth-place play-off. It was another disappointing defeat where the Spaniards won the game easily 31-7. Japan's only win came against Canada in the 11th

place play-off which they won by 21-12.

At the time this edition went to press last evening, Australia had beaten Argentina 40-0 in the Cup semi-final while South Africa had beaten France 19-12 to book their berth in the final.

South Africa won the earlier series in November beating the US handsomely in the gold-medal game.

In the women's segment, Australia will play against Fiji in the Cup finals whilst France takes on Russia in the bronze-medal game.

LPL 2021 Begins

● Tickets available now for spectators



Tickets for the Lanka Premier League (LPL) can now be bought daily at the R. Premadasa Stadium and Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) headquarters from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Ticket prices are: Rs. 300, 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, and 5,000.

They can be purchased online on Bookmyshow.com and Daraz.lk, and collected at their respective ticketing counters.

The event will move to Hambantota from the play-off stage and only 50% of the spectator area is to be filled. Spectators should carry proof of vaccination (either card or digital form) and should have completed the second vaccination at least 14 days before.

Members of the public who have purchased tickets for the opening game today will be permitted to enter the ground from 4 p.m. to witness the opening ceremony starting at 6 p.m.

Dates: 5 to 23 December 2021
Matches: 24, in 20-over-a side (T20) format

2021 Result: Jaffna Stallions beat Galle Gladiators in the final
Teams (5):

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



1. Colombo Stars

- Formerly: Colombo Kings
- Owner: Ashok Pathirage (Softlogic Holdings)
- Captain: Angelo Mathews
- Coach: Ruwan Kalpage
- Leading players: Dushmantha Chameera, Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Perera, Dinesh Chandimal, Dhyanjaya de Silva, Sherfane Rutherford, David Wiese

2. Dambulla Giants

- Formerly: Dambulla Vikings

- Owner: Qamar Khan (Hamro Foundation)
- Captain: Dasun Shanaka
- Coach: Stuart Law
- Leading players: Chamika Karunaratne, Niroshan Dickwella, Ramesh Mendis, Nuwan Pradeep, Lahiru Udara, Imran Tahir, Shoaib Maqsood

3. Galle Gladiators

- Formerly: (Same)
- Owner: Nadeem Omar (Omar Associates)
- Captain: Bhanuka Rajapaksa
- Coach: Umar Gul
- Leading players: Isuru Udana, Kusal Mendis, Danushka Gunathilaka, Dhyanjaya Lakshan, Pulina Tharanga, Mohammed Hafeez, Mohammad Amir

4. Jaffna Kings

- Formerly: Jaffna Stallions
- Owner: Subaskaran Allirajah (Lyca Group)
- Captain: Thisara Perera

- Coach: Thilina Kandamby
- Leading players: Wanindu Hasaranga, Avishka Fernando, Maheesh Theekshana, Upul Tharanga, Praveen Jayawickrama, Wahab Riaz, Shoaib Malik

5. Kandy Warriors

- Formerly: Kandy Tuskers
- Owner: Ravi Gupta (Safexpay), Pankaj Tripathi (Vernost Technologies)
- Captain: Angelo Perera
- Coach: Lalchand Rajput
- Leading players: Charith Asalanka, Lahiru Kumara, Binura Fernando, Kamindu Mendis, Minod Bhanuka, Rovman Powell, Ahmed Shehzad
- Venues: Match 1 (5 December) to 20 (17 December): R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo
- Three Play-offs and Final (from 20 to 23 December): Mahinda Rajapaksa Stadium, Hambantota
- Today's (5) match: Match 1 – Galle Gladiators vs. Jaffna Kings

AJAZ PATEL TAKES HISTORIC 10-WICKET HAUL

Yet the Kiwis shot out for 62 runs!



New Zealand's Ajaz Patel created history yesterday (4) in Mumbai by becoming only the third bowler to take all 10 wickets in a Test innings, after England's Jim Laker (10/53 in 1956 vs. Australia in Manchester) and India's Anil Kumble (10/74 in 1999 vs. Pakistan in Delhi)

Ajaz Patel created history, becoming only the third bowler to take all 10 wickets in a Test innings. Despite that, India were well in control by stumps on the second day of their second cricket Test yesterday (4) in Mumbai.

India ended the day with a commanding lead of 332 after bundling New Zealand out for just 62 in their reply to India's first innings' 325. It was the lowest-ever total in a Test against India.

Ravichandran Ashwin took a splendid 4/8, while Mohammed Siraj's opening burst of three wickets set the ball rolling.

There is only one instance where New Zealand registered a total lower than 62 since 1959, when they were bowled out for 45 against South Africa in 2013 in Cape Town. Until 1958,

New Zealand had as many as four all-out totals in Tests which were lower than 62.

Pakistan 161/2 in second Test

Pakistan ended the opening day of their second Test against Bangladesh at 161/2, with bad light forcing abandonment of the final session in Dhaka. Babar Azam, the Captain, had scored a breezy unbeaten 60 by stumps, and was accompanied by Azhar Ali (36 not out) when the umpires decided that stumps had to be drawn. Pakistan opted to bat and had gotten off to a good start, with Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique putting on 59 runs for the first wicket. The duo was untroubled by the Bangladesh pacers, with Ebadot Hossain and Khaled Ahmed struggling to threaten the duo.

Lowest Test totals in India

- 62 by New Zealand vs. India in Mumbai in 2021
- 75 by India vs. West Indies in Delhi in 1987
- 76 by India vs. South Africa in Ahmedabad in 2008
- 79 by South Africa vs. India in Nagpur 2015

Lowest Test totals against India

- 62 by New Zealand in Mumbai in 2021
- 79 by South Africa in Nagpur in 2015
- 81 by England in Ahmedabad in 2021
- 82 Sri Lanka in Chandigarh in 1990

FOOTBALL UPDATES FROM EUROPE

As Christmas arrives, EPL gets hotter



COMPILED BY RANJIKA PERERA

The English Premier League (EPL) is entering a hectic couple of weeks before it breaks for Christmas. At the end of match-week 14, Chelsea remained on top of the table with 33 points with their win over Watford, midweek. Defending champions Manchester City are in second place with 32 points, whilst Liverpool are just one point behind at third, despite their huge 4-1 win against Everton last Thursday (2). Man United is also turning things around after the sacking of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. Their win over Arsenal got them to 21 points, just three behind fourth-placed West Ham United.

Four-horse race in Italy

Napoli is heading the Serie-A table at the end of match-week 15 despite their 2-2 draw midweek against Sassuolo. AC Milan is one point behind, at the second place, after their 2-0 win over Genoa. Zlatan Ibrahimovich scored his second direct free-kick goal for the season in that game. Defending champions Inter Milan are at third place after their three successive wins while Atalanta sit at fourth place with 31 points. Massimiliano Allegri's Juventus are still at seventh place despite their 2-0 win over Salernitana last Wednesday (1).

PSG at top in France

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG)

suffered a minor drawback midweek when Nice frustrated them and earned a draw in the capital. Despite the draw, PSG remain firmly on top with 41 points whilst second-placed Marseille are on 29 points. Rennes are sitting at third place with 28 points after their defeat against Lille on Thursday. The defending champions needed the win badly, after a torrid run as they still remain out of the top ten. Nice fill up the remaining spot in the top four while Lens and Strasbourg take fifth and sixth spots at the end of match-week 16.

Bayern and Dortmund in a close tussle

Defending champions Bayern Munich held on to the top spot at the end of match-week 13 after their 1-0 win over Arminia yesterday (4). Dortmund are just one point behind after their 3-1 win over Wolfsburg yesterday. Erling Haaland, who was out injured, returned to the team with a stunning goal in that game. Bayer Leverkusen and Union Berlin sit at third and fourth spots in the table.

Real Madrid lead the race in Spain

Karim Benzema's red hot form has helped Real Madrid take a massive lead at the top of the table at the end of match-week 15. After their 1-0 win over Athletic Club Bilbao, they are currently on 36 points whilst defending champions Atletico Madrid are in second place with just 29.



BUILDING A CONSENSUS FOR A NEW NATIONAL ECONOMY
»SEE PAGE 4



Committee to be appointed to determine fuel prices

- Energy Min. Additional Secy to chair committee
- Petroleum Act to be amended to establish committee

BY YAKUTA DAWOOD

The Ministry of Energy will be establishing a new "Fund Management Committee" under the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund to determine fuel prices in Sri Lanka, *The Sunday Morning Business* learns.

Speaking to us, Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila stated that, regardless of the approval given by the Cabinet to proceed with the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund, it could not be implemented any sooner, as the current economic status was not viable. Therefore, the Ministry is currently in the process of amending the Petroleum Development Authority (PDA) Act, after which a committee will be appointed to determine the prices.

"The Fund Management Committee will be chaired by an additional secretary of the Ministry of Energy and will comprise officials such as the Director General of Fiscal Policy, representatives from Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) and Lanka Indian Oil Corporation (LIOC), economists and statisticians appointed by the Ministry of Energy, and nominees from the Ministry of Transport and Fisheries," Gammanpila said.

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CBSL FORECASTS

0.5 m tourists in 2022 despite Omicron

- Prasanna says can do better than this
- Seeks extension on moratoriums

BY IMESH RANASINGHE

Sri Lanka expects over 500,000 tourist arrivals in 2022, even amidst a new Covid-19 variant threat, *The Sunday Morning Business* learns.

Speaking to us, Minister of Tourism Prasanna Ranatunga said that the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has announced 500,000 tourist arrivals for 2022, to which more numbers could be added based on the promotion work started by the Ministry.

After reopening the country for tourists in December 2020 following the first and second waves of Covid-19, the Government expected 1.5 million tourist arrivals for the year 2021.

However, with the surge of Covid-19 cases starting from mid-April 2021 due to the Delta variant, tourist arrivals, which picked up in the first three months, saw a decline.

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CSE requests extension of 50% tax concession

- Budget 2021 grants 50% tax concession to companies that go public
- 34 companies went public so far
- Concession expires on 31 December
- CSE awaits response from Finance Ministry
- IRD says extension unlikely due to revenue drop

BY IMESH RANASINGHE

With more and more companies announcing initial public offerings (IPOs) at the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE), an extension of the 50% tax concession announced in the Budget 2021 for companies that go public is being sought by the CSE, *The Sunday Morning Business* learns.

An official of the CSE told us that they had submitted a request to the Ministry of Finance regarding the extension of the deadline, and were waiting for a response.

The Budget 2021 proposed a 50% tax concession for the years 2021/2022 for companies that get listed in the CSE before 31 December 2021, and to maintain a corporate tax rate of 14%



for the subsequent three years of these opting entities.

Following this, more and more private companies started to go public in the recent months and as of 31 October 2021, 34 companies had gone public, with a turnover of Rs. 109.6 billion in 2021, as we reported two weeks ago.

Accordingly, the 34 listings consisted of 13 IPO

debentures raising Rs. 76.4 billion, four IPO equities of Rs. 7.5 billion, two private placements worth Rs. 2.5 billion, 13 rights issues valued at Rs. 23.2 billion, and two introductions.

"Encouraging businesses to go public is a good move; it creates

transparency in terms of tax collection, as the earnings of the companies are disclosed. On the other hand, when shares trade, they have a different collection point, so the effect is twofold," the official said.

However, speaking to us, Inland Revenue Department (IRD) Commissioner General H.M.W.C. Bandara said that it's unlikely that this deadline will be extended.

When inquired about a possible loss of tax revenue through companies to the IRD, he said the amount could not be forecast until the deadline is over.

The CSE told us last week that only Myland Developments Ltd. was in the pipeline for an equity IPO this month so far.

All attempts to get a response from the Treasury on the matter were futile.

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SriLankan to divide business into 4 branches

- Division to increase efficiency and attract investors

BY YAKUTA DAWOOD

Loss-making state-owned enterprise SriLankan Airlines is planning to divide the SriLankan Group into four separate businesses as part of its restructuring strategy, *The Sunday Morning Business* exclusively learns.

A reliable source at Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) (Pvt.) Ltd. (AASL) told us that SriLankan's four departments, upon separation, would be cargo, engineering, ground handling, and catering. The AASL believes separation would increase the efficiency of the now loss-making SriLankan Airlines while also making it more attractive to investors.

"After breaking into four operations, SriLankan can attract investors for the company, earn a higher profit, and then allocate those funds to the loss-making flight operations division," the source said.

Furthermore, the source also mentioned that the discussion of privatisation was hyped up, as the Government had affirmed that it would not be providing any

financial subsidies to SriLankan Airlines for 2022.

As of last Friday (3), we were yet to receive a response from senior officials of SriLankan Airlines. Furthermore, attempts to reach Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle and other officials from the Ministry of Finance for further clarification proved futile.

Meanwhile, speaking to *The Sunday Morning Business*, the AASL stated that SriLankan Airlines was a predominant player, as it had 55% of flight movement in and out of the country whilst also bringing about 55% of the total passengers coming into the country.

"It's a product that pushes and advertises Sri Lanka all around the world. There are a lot of benefits coming in through SriLankan, although it is not profitable. So, while they have their own plan of restructuring, it is very important to give thought to the airline's existence, as it is our national carrier at the end of the day," the official said.

According to him, officials were presently discussing a feasible and profitable plan. Nevertheless, the final decision is yet to be taken

by the Government and the other officials involved.

According to the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE), the total loss incurred by SriLankan Airlines from the day it was taken over by the Government of Sri Lanka up to 31 March 2021 amounts to Rs. 240 billion (approximately \$ 1.84 billion).

In September 2021, COPE Chairman Prof. Charitha Herath, speaking to us, stated that the COPE had suggested that the Government reassess the company, rather than investing money in a "complete disaster that might continue for years without making any profit".

"They (SriLankan Airlines) have been submitting different kinds of business plans to the COPE, but we were of the view that those business plans do not lead to any accurate results," he added.

Therefore, he said that the COPE had instructed SriLankan Airlines and the State Ministry of Aviation and Export Development to submit three reports to it. According to him, the COPE had instructed the Secretary to the State Ministry

to provide a feasibility report of operating SriLankan Airlines as a government venture.

Based on the reports, Prof. Herath said the COPE had come up with four alternatives for SriLankan Airlines:

- Carry on the operations as usual with a very productive, proactive, viable, and profitable business plan
- Lose and restart using a new mechanism through which SriLankan can drop some burdens
- Go for a separate airline by completely closing down the present one, and starting three different companies – one each for the airline, catering, and for ground handling
- Completely close down the airline as a government entity

Adding, he stated that once the reports were submitted and thoroughly examined, the COPE would make recommendations to Parliament and the Ministry of Tourism, which oversees aviation, in order to make a decision based on the four alternatives.

Surge in inquiries for gas leak detectors



BY YAKUTA DAWOOD

There has been a surge in inquiries for gas leak detectors, as consumers fear possible gas explosions due to the recent incidents reported islandwide as a result of leaks from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders, *The Sunday Morning Business* learns.

Speaking to us, a large gas leak detector supplier and distributor in Sri Lanka who wished to remain anonymous, highlighted that there had been an increase in inquiries from consumers across the country, which shows the surge in demand for detectors.

"We are getting continuous calls and inquiries on the availability of detectors," the official said.

When speaking to another gas leak detector supplier named Fire Ring Fire Services (Pvt.) Ltd., an official representing the company stated that, even though there had been an increase in inquiries, "panic buying" had not yet occurred.

"We sell both gas leak detectors and fire extinguishers, but the stocks are low at present. However, an increase in inquiries is noticeable from consumers regarding gas leak detectors, although panic buying is not evident from consumers as yet," the representative added.

Similarly, another supplier, who wished to speak anonymously, stated that right now, the stocks of smoke detectors were comparatively low amidst surging inquiries from consumers across the island. However, the supplier mentioned that customers were not making purchases at the rate at which they were making inquiries.

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CBSL identifies informal remittance channels

- Provides extra Rs. 10 for USD remittance in December
- Concession not enough to attract remittances: Economists

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has identified several informal channels through which remittances are sent to Sri Lanka, *The Sunday Morning Business* learns.

Responding to a query, CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal said: "Several networks that are indulging in these money laundering practices have already been identified. We are also receiving a considerable amount of information about these distribution accounts and cash transfers now."

Moreover, he said that legal action will be taken regarding the informal channel operators in Sri Lanka.

"Initially, accounts that distribute such proceeds as well as receive such proceeds will be frozen. That process has already begun. In order to protect the integrity of our financial system, we will crack down hard on these networks," Cabraal said.

Last Wednesday (1), the CBSL announced that the Monetary Board had decided to pay an incentive of Rs.

8 per US dollar (USD) for workers' remittances, in addition to the existing incentive of Rs. 2 under the "Incentive scheme on inward workers' remittances". The incentive will be paid when the funds are remitted through licensed banks (LBs) and other internationally accepted formal channels and converted into SriLankan rupees during the month of December.

Accordingly, the total incentive for inward workers' remittances converted into Sri Lankan rupees during December

will be Rs. 10 per USD.

However, speaking to us, economic analyst Dr. Shanuka Senarath said that this incentive will not be enough to direct the remittances from migrant workers to formal channels, as the difference between the CBSL exchange rates and market rates for \$ 1 is about Rs. 30.

He also said that it would be nearly impossible for the CBSL to identify accounts through which remittances are transferred.

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CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal

CSE HIGHS AND LOWS

BY IMESH RANASINGHE

The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) passed a record market capitalisation of Rs. 5 trillion last Tuesday (30 November) while Expolanka Holdings PLC became the second listed company to achieve Rs. 500 billion market capitalisation last Monday (29 November).

The All Share Price Index (ASPI) closed at 11,202 recording all time high on Monday as Expolanka achieved a market capitalisation of Rs. 500 billion when it closed the day at Rs. 263.5, which represents market capitalisation of Rs. 515.1 million and an 8700% gain compared to its share price in January 2020.

Expolanka was the second most traded company in the exchange on Monday, with over 4,715 trades made at a volume of 7 million shares, behind only Ex-pack Corrugated Cartons Ltd., and closed the day at Rs. 263.5, up 6.6% (Rs. 16.25) from the previous day's close of Rs. 247.25.

"The Index peaked at an all-time high of 11,318 while gaining 121 points as soon as the market opened. Subsequently, index dropped down drastically to an intraday low of 11,150 within the 15 minutes of the session. Following a volatile trading session, the index closed for the day at 11,202, gaining four points," First Capital said regarding Monday's performance.

Dialog Axiata PLC notched the "Top Net Purchaser" slot of the day, with an inflow of Rs. 16 million while John Keells Holdings PLC notched the "Top Net Sellers" slot with an outflow of Rs 20.19 million.

Tuesday, yet again the ASPI closed at an all time high of 11,440 with a gain of 238 points in the index. Expolanka (150) and LOLC (58) were the top contributors to the index on the day.

"Index opened on an optimistic note and set out on an upward trajectory throughout the session. However, a slight repulse was witnessed following the first half hour. Subsequently, investors gathered momentum and recouped shortly before closing for the day at 11,441, gaining 238 points," First Capital said on Tuesday.

On the same day Odel PLC announced that its fully owned subsidiary Softlogic Brands (Pvt.) Ltd. (SBL) had entered into an operating lease agreement with the Kandy Municipal Council on 1 October 2021 via which SBL has been granted the rights to lease, operate, and manage the Mahanuwa Commercial Centre premises consisting approximately 164,000 square feet which will be known as the Kandy Odel Mall for a period of 15 years with the option to renew further five years subjected to the terms and conditions of the agreement.

Standard Capital PLC whose shares were suspended due to non-commission of annual reports from 31 March said that it will take necessary actions to publish its annual reports for financial year 2020 by 15 December 2021.

Foreign sales on the day amounted to Rs 797.86 million while the purchases were at Rs 383.6 million.

On Wednesday (1) Sarvodaya Development Finance Limited announced that it had received applications for the subscription of 50.81 million shares for a total value of Rs 1.12 billion from 1,220 applicants for its IPO of 45.45 million to raise Rs 1 billion, oversubscribing by 1.12 times.

"The market opened with a bullish sentiment and displayed a positive momentum even past mid-session reaching an intraday high of 11,650. However, the market failed to hold the momentum as investors resorted to profit taking resulting in the index plummeting with massive volatility and closed for the day at 11,410 losing 31 points," First Capital said.

BY YAKUTA DAWOOD

The Sri Lankan authorities are presently involved in a battle to contain the worsening financial crunch resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, but what is ingrained in people's minds is whether Sri Lanka will be descending into a debt trap that the Government will one day have a hard time recovering from.

Since assuming duties in 2019, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has desperately turned to China for a helping hand on more than just one occasion, regardless of the mounting debt from China that has been piling up over the decades.

Sri Lanka received the initial funding to offset the challenges endured by the pandemic and to pay off its looming debt repayments during March 2020. Accordingly, the People's Bank of China had approved a swap facility of \$ 1.5 billion to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), which is valid for three years.

Speaking on this occasion, former State Minister of Money and Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms Ajith Nivard Cabraal stated that they were "happy to confirm that the People's Bank of China has approved a swap facility of ¥ (yuan) 10 billion (\$ 1.5 billion) to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka".

According to Finance Ministry sources, we were informed that this swap agreement was put in place to maintain sufficient short-term foreign exchange liquidity whilst preserving the foreign currency reserves position of the country.

Expressing concerns over this swap facility, former State Minister of National Policies and Economic Affairs Dr. Harsha de Silva told *The Sunday Morning Business* that this swap is a "plaster solution" that has been put forth by the current Government.



Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa with Chinese President Xi Jinping

Rajapaksas and Chinese debt

"The Government needs to map out a medium to long-term debt restructuring plan to obtain sustainable confidence in the international market," he added.

Similarly, former Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera in a tweet posted on 11 March questioned the currency composition and the time period of the swap.

"Instead of working out a credible economic recovery programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sri Lanka buys time from the looming economic apocalypse with a \$ 1 billion currency swap with China," Samaraweera tweeted.

Nevertheless, just after this confirmation, Sri Lanka received the \$ 500 million in April out of the \$ 700 million swap agreement from China Development Bank

(CDB).

Issuing a statement following this, the Sri Lankan Embassy in China said: "This loan will infuse vitally required foreign exchange into the Sri Lanka economy. These funds will help with Government efforts to facilitate rapid economic recovery following the setbacks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic."

Speaking to *The Sunday Morning Business* recently, Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle stated that the remaining \$ 200 million was also received by Sri Lanka.

Even this swap facility, as confirmed by the Central Bank, was in Chinese currency and had faced widespread criticism from local economists and the Opposition, as Sri Lanka could only settle Sri Lanka's imports

from China using this particular swap, since most of Sri Lanka's external invoices are in US dollars.

In addition to all these funds, China had further agreed to provide a \$ 989 million loan to Sri Lanka to build an expressway that will connect its central region to the Chinese-run seaport, which is part of Beijing's plan for a line of ports stretching from Chinese waters to the Persian Gulf.

Addressing the concerns over this project to an international media platform – *Nikkei Asian Review* – Dr. de Silva had criticised the decision to borrow for the aforementioned road project.

"Such projects are not priorities for the moment. This loan is just to improve roads already built, and we can always improve the roads later," de Silva told the *Nikkei Asian Review*.

As a recent measure, it was learnt by *The Sunday Morning Business* that the Government of Sri Lanka is to secure another ¥ 1.5 billion (approximately \$ 300 million) loan from China.

Highly placed government sources, when queried, confirmed to us that the Cabinet had given the green light for the signing of the loan agreement with China. The Government is confident of securing this loan in December.

As of 2019, Sri Lanka's total debt to China is \$ 3,387 million (LKR 615 billion).

Verité Research (Pvt.) Ltd., issuing a publication on "Navigating Sri Lanka's debt" in February 2021, stated that in Sri Lanka, government financial reports do not provide ready visibility regarding the composition of external public debt by the indebted institution or by the lender.

Therefore, the report revealed that the above-mentioned numbers exclude the debt owed to China by Sri Lanka's state-owned enterprises (SOEs). According to the report, the debt owed by SOEs to China amounted to \$ 2,042 million (LKR 371 billion) as of 31 December 2019.

"When this debt is taken into consideration, the Sri Lankan Government's total debt to China – that is public debt – increases by 60% to \$ 5,429 million (LKR 986 billion). This example demonstrates that the failure to properly report public debt owed by SOEs can lead to a significant understatement in the reporting of Sri Lanka's actual debt obligations," the report added.

Giving the concluding remark, the report emphasised that, as Sri Lanka prepares to navigate the most challenging period the country has faced in terms of debt management, improving the reporting of debt to better reflect the actual debt position and dynamics is an important first step in the path to a solution.

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CSE...

Meanwhile, the CSE also passed the 11,000 ASPI mark in November for the first time in history, and the encouragement given by the Government resulted in the CSE passing a record market capitalisation of Rs. 5 trillion last Tuesday (30 November), while a year ago the market capitalisation was at Rs. 2.72 trillion.

Relaxed tax policies, improved processes established by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the CSE in listing applications, the establishment of an Empower Board for SMEs, and awareness drives from the SEC and CSE to debunk myths on the opportunities relating to listing (regional awareness drives and social media campaigns) and on international and national recognition that listed companies achieve, were among the reasons for the increased number of listings in 2021, the CSE told us last week.

Surge in...

Furthermore, speaking to *The Sunday Morning Business*, OnGuard Fire Protection Services Managing Director Nimal Dharmasiri stated that the rise in demand for gas leak detectors was only temporary due to the ongoing situation.

Commenting further, he mentioned that the gas explosions could have possibly occurred due to leaks from the tube that connects the LPG cylinder to the gas cooker, which happens when the tube is not properly checked.

Meanwhile, several insurance industry sources revealed that over the past week, there had been an increase in queries by the general public from insurance companies regarding the particulars of their home insurance policies.

However, one of the sources stated that it was too early to identify whether public fears relating to the safety of LPG cylinders would translate into an increase in gross written premiums (GWP).

Public fears regarding the safety of LPG cylinders arose following the recent spate of explosions and fires that was reported from around the country including Colombo 7, Weligama, Kandy, Homagama, Ratnapura, Pannipitiya, Nikaweratiya, Jaffna, and Puttalam.

On another note, the Government had vehemently denied reports and allegations that a change in the butane-to-propane gas compositional ratio led to these explosions.

Additionally, both privately owned Laugfs Gas PLC and state-owned Litro Gas Lanka Ltd. also denied these allegations.

Despite such assurances, the continued widespread reporting of explosions and fires linked to LPG cylinders has prompted not only Opposition MPs, but also government-

affiliated MPs to demand a proper investigation into the composition of the LPG in the cylinders as well as the quality of the cylinders.

It should be further noted that former Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) Executive Director Thushan Gunawardena had disclosed to us earlier this year that test samples from the 18-litre gas cylinder and 12.5 kg gas cylinder of both Litro Gas and Laugfs Gas, were found to 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 Sunday Morning* at the time.

In the meantime, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is considering appointing a special committee to look into the investigations pertaining to the recent gas cylinder explosions.

Commenting on this, President's Media Spokesperson Kingsly Rathnayake stated: "There have been several suggestions made to the President to appoint a special committee. Because of this, the President has considered appointing a special committee to look into the investigations which are currently underway on the gas cylinders."

0.5 m tourists...

The Minister said that by the end of November 2021, about 105,000 tourists had arrived in Sri Lanka, with about 45,000 tourists arriving during November, the highest number of arrivals in a single month for 2021.

Out of the tourist arrivals so far, he said only about 300 tested positive for Covid-19. Furthermore, he said that a total of 150,000 arrivals were expected by the end of December.

Ranatunga said that the Ministry had also held discussions with the CBSL on extending the moratorium given to the tourism sector by at least another six months.

The CBSL extended the moratorium given to the sector on several occasions, and it was last extended in September 2021, until 30 June 2022.

Ranatunga said about three million people in Sri Lanka were directly or indirectly dependent on the tourism sector.

In May 2021, the Government gave a one-time allowance of Rs. 20,000 to 2,510 guides and Rs. 15,000 to 2,236 drivers who had registered with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA).

According to the Minister, from about 25,000 hotels and service providers in Sri Lanka's tourism sector, less than 5,000 had registered with the SLTDA.

He said in order to encourage more

registrations with the SLTDA, the registration fee would not be charged until normal tourism activities were restored.

Furthermore, the Minister said that the Tourism Ministry had come to an agreement with the Foreign Ministry to appoint an existing staff member in each Sri Lankan mission abroad as a Tourism Promotion Officer starting from January 2022.

Moreover, he said that their target is to promote Sri Lanka as a brand rather than promoting the tea, culture, and beaches of Sri Lanka separately.

"All this will be decided depending on the Covid-19 situation," he said.

Sri Lanka banned the entry of travellers from six Southern African countries, including South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, and Eswatini last week over concerns about the new Omicron variant of Covid-19.

However, the origin country of the variant is yet to be found, as South Africa was simply the first country to identify the variant.

Committee to...

Adding, Gammanpila disclosed that the chairman of the committee and the other officials were not appointed as yet and would only be designated after the PDA, presently at the drafting stage, was amended.

"Currently, the fuel prices are determined by the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Finance, but after the amendment of the Act, the decision will be taken by the committee," Gammanpila added.

However, explaining the reason why the Ministry is unable to establish the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund at present, the Minister stated that this fund had only two sources of income – firstly, when the global prices are low, and secondly, when the Ministry of Finance decides to allocate sufficient funds.

Unfortunately, both of these sources of income were not feasible at present. Therefore, according to Gammanpila, the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund was on hold and would be established after the amendment of the PDA.

On 26 November 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval for the establishment of the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund after it had been temporarily suspended due to the recovery of global oil prices.

The Ministry of Finance imposed an additional duty per litre of fuel sold by LIOC and the CPC following the local outbreak of the pandemic, as the Government decided to maintain fuel prices despite the historical drop in global oil prices. Therefore, the aforementioned establishments were able to sell oil with a widened profit margin. This additional duty was channelled directly to the Fuel Price Stabilisation Fund.

Commenting with regards to this, Treasury

Secretary S.R. Attygalle told *The Sunday Morning Business* that this additional duty was lifted temporarily when global oil prices were returning to its previous levels.

"I cannot remember the exact day we lifted this duty. When the global oil prices went up again, we discontinued this charge," Attygalle said.

According to Attygalle, the fund had raised about Rs. 50-60 billion within six months, which was significantly less than the initial intention of the Government to collect Rs. 200 billion during the same period.

"There is no money in the fund at the moment. We paid some fuel dues to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. We lent the rest to the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) to settle their outstanding payments to the CPC. It is yet to be recovered," he added.

Expressing similar thoughts, in June 2021, a top source at the Ministry of Energy told *The Sunday Morning Business* that the said fund, which had accumulated between Rs. 18 and Rs. 20 billion at one point, was currently empty.

The fund had been used to settle outstanding payments owed by the CEB to the CPC. Thereafter, the relevant amount was used by the CPC to settle a loan due to Bank of Ceylon (BoC) and People's Bank.

"Due to these loan repayments, the expected objectives of setting up the fund could not be achieved," ministry sources said at the time.

CBSL identifies...

At the Monetary Policy Review held at the CBSL last week, Cabraal said that the CBSL will take action against people who use informal channels to send remittances to Sri Lanka.

In 2020, foreign remittances grew significantly by 5.8% on a year-over-year (YoY) basis, contrary to expectations that the repatriation of migrant workers and the pandemic-related lockdowns in foreign countries would cause a reduction in remittances.

This trend continued in the first half of 2021 as well, with remittances growing 11.6% in the first six months. However, it started to shift after June, when monthly remittances declined on a YoY basis.

Since August 2021, worker remittances coming to Sri Lanka started to decline as more and more remittances were sent through informal channels due to the Rs. 203 exchange rate given by the CBSL for the US dollar.

Remittances received in the month of September 2021 (\$ 353 million) were 50% lower than what was received in September 2020 (\$ 703 million). In total, Sri Lanka's remittances received in the period from January-September 2021 were down 9.3% compared to the same period in 2020.

Lessons from Singapore

● Where Sri Lanka went wrong and pathways to recovery



By
Dhananath Fernando



Aerial view of Singapore at dusk

Too many comparisons have been made between Sri Lanka and Singapore. Once upon a time, becoming Sri Lanka was Singapore's dream. Today, Singapore has been Sri Lanka's dream for quite some time. Many credit the success of Singapore to the charismatic leadership given by Lee Kuan Yew. However, little is known about the work done by Dr. Goh Keng Swee on setting up the right architecture for a series of market-oriented policies in Singapore.

Relatively, Sri Lanka's economy must grow at about 6% per annum for the next 40 years without failure in order to reach where Singapore is today, by 2061. In order to reach the kind of growth Malaysia has reached, Sri Lanka needs to grow at a steady rate of 6% until 2031.

Visionary Singaporean leaders realised that a country the size of Singapore cannot be self-reliant. With a minimum stock of resources, the country has to depend on imports to maintain the overall wellbeing of the people.

Policy consistency as well as establishing the right economic fundamentals set the country in the right direction. Consequently, the currency and monetary system became stable. Having a monetary system which focused on open market policies brought certainty and increased investor confidence. Special emphasis was placed by Singaporean policy makers to ensure that the wealth of the people was not eroded by unnecessary inflationary pressure.

Embracing open market policies attracted global multinationals and regional players to move their headquarters to Singapore, making Singapore a global hub

for strategic industries in the region. Many multinational oil companies which left Sri Lankan shores due to nationalisation were welcomed with open arms to operate in Singapore. Even today, without a drop of oil, Singapore is a key player in the fossil fuel trade. They became competitive, efficient, and productive as they embraced the global market with an open mind and attitude geared towards development and prosperity.

Singapore also realised the role of the government. In fact, the world class Singapore AirLines and public housing is still state owned. Many Sri Lankans take these two examples to showcase why a state sector should engage in business like Singapore does with their airline. Many who put forth this argument conveniently forget that the management of some of the state entities are done on a Temasek Model on a competitive basis, where the government has no intervention in business. The professionals running the business earn the same as in a private company and

the work culture is set right from the beginning to be competitive.

Unfortunately, Sri Lanka did not make any effort to create an open system. Instead, we closed ourselves from the world of trade and from connecting with global supply chains. In fact, many Sri Lankans once thought that Singaporeans would take over the jobs of Sri Lankans through the Singapore-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement. We missed an opportunity of a grand scale due to the pressure from trade unions and some professional groups to showcase to the world that we are trading with countries such as Singapore, and are ready for business and investment. As a result of shortsighted, irrational policies, our financial system became very fragile.

Another issue that holds back our potential is central bank intervention. Our Central Bank continues to intervene in market activity. "Price" can be looked at as being the same as body temperature. There has to be constant diagnosis by a physician. This monitoring

Sri Lanka's economy must grow at about 6% per annum for the next 40 years without failure in order to reach where Singapore is today, by 2061. In order to reach the kind of growth Malaysia has reached, Sri Lanka needs to grow at a steady rate of 6% until 2031

without intervening is the role of a central bank in achieving efficient resource allocation. Therefore, intervening in the price signaling function has caused Sri Lanka damage beyond recovery.

Recently released data by the Central Bank indicated about 9.9% Year-on-Year (YoY) inflation compared to November 2020. YoY food inflation is 17.5%. There are many contributory factors behind the price rises such as global commodity price hikes, fertiliser ban, and continuous rains. However, one key reason which cannot be ignored is that over the last few weeks, a money supply of about Rs. 1.48 trillion has been injected from July 2019

to September 2021. This is a primary reason for the uptick in inflation.

Poor people will be the most affected, and as per the Advocata Bath Curry Indicator, the cost of rice and curry for a family of four members has gone up by 35% compared to last year. The poorest sections of society, who spend a greater amount of their money on food, now have to either receive a pay hike or cut down on their regular food intake.

This could also add pressure on private sector businesses, with employees requesting more wages and driving an increase in the cost of production. The high cost of production would impact existing investments, and with inflation Sri Lanka would not be an attractive investor destination.

On the Government front, the 1.5 million state workers will add more pressure by requesting further pay hikes with the new election circle. Making this more complicated, we have now accelerated a dual exchange rate offering, with an additional Rs. 10 for remittances as a measure

to incentivise the usage of legal channels.

Singapore avoided most of the above problems we face by setting up a framework on a market based system, understanding the role of the government. As a result, they have developed a strong monetary system. This is a testament to getting macroeconomic policies right.

We can't simply copy Singaporean policies blindly. Often policies have to be evaluated based on culture and dynamics, from a socio-economic context. However, the principles behind the policies remain the same. It has to be based on price signals and driven by the private sector, with the government only taking the role related to essential public goods such as the judiciary system.

An easy point to begin with is making our Central Bank an independent institution and moving away from ad hoc interventions. Moreover, we should let the markets work rather than having central bank intervention in foreign exchange through different strategies from time to time. Simply, our Central Bank has to work similarly to a currency board and the structure has to be made to facilitate this requirement.

At the same time, the structure has to be revised to ensure the independence of the Central Bank as the monetary policy can erode the hard earned money of poor citizens.

If Sri Lanka is serious about economic growth, it is of paramount importance to have a stable financial system which is an outcome of an implementation of a market based economic policy package. As Karl Schiller famously said: "Stability is not everything, but without stability, everything is nothing".

(The writer is the Chief Operating Officer of Advocata Institute. He can be contacted via dhananath@advocata.org. The opinions expressed are the author's own views. They may not necessarily reflect the views of the Advocata Institute or anyone affiliated with the institute)

THE NEW SEC ACT : A SYMPOSIUM FOR LISTED COMPANIES

PANELISTS



Mr. Viraj Dayaratne PC
Chairman – SEC SL



Mr. Manil Jayasinghe
Commission Member
SEC SL



Mr. Chinthaka Mendis
DG – SEC SL



Mr. Dumith Fernando
Chairman - CSE



Mr. Rajeeva Bandaranaike
CEO - CSE (Moderator)



Dr. Harshana Suriyapperuma
Director – SEC SL



Mr. Renuke Wijayawardhane
CRO - CSE



Mr. Krishan Balendra
Chairman - JKH PLC



Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya
CEO - Telecom.
Axiata Group



Dr. Harsha Cabral PC
Chairman
Tokyo Cement PLC



Mr. Asite Talwatte
Chairman - Integrated
Reporting Council



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**“THE SEC ACT NO 19 OF 2021:
ASPECTS PERTAINING TO LISTED COMPANIES ”**

**Mr. Viraj Dayaratne PC,
Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka**

Date : 06th December 2021
Time : 6.30 PM – 8.30 PM
Venue : Galle Face Hotel - The Grand Ballroom
Limited Capacity (first come, first served basis)

Further Details: Julie 011 2143840 | Sachin 011 2143838
EMAIL : registration@sec.gov.lk

A game of gas and fire

Sri Lankans' gas woes are far from over; having just spent weeks queuing up to get their hands on a gas cylinder, those who depend on LP Gas for cooking are now in panic mode over leaky cylinders and mysterious kitchen explosions. One of the companies concerned has issued a statement that bears no responsibility for the sudden spate of gas-related incidents, nor empathy with its terrified customers. Instead, it blamed the "incidents and inferior" on the use of consumer quality regulators, hoses, cookers, and user negligence. Despite the denials and blame-shifting however, it is apparent that something sinister is going on.

Keeping its people safe is a government's fundamental responsibility. The onus is on the State to take steps to prevent harm to the people when there are early indicators of a potential danger. The important thing is to be proactive to prevent further harm, instead of reacting when the damage is done. Predictably enough, a special committee has now been appointed to study the gas issue and produce a report – in two weeks, by which time there may potentially be far more damage done.

Special committees aside, there are structures already entrenched within the public service to protect consumer rights in the country; the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) is vested with the protection of consumers, the regulation of internal



trade, and the promotion of effective competition. And it has already, months ahead of the current gas calamity, warned of similar dangers arising from the gas composition change proposed a few months ago. The CAA is also the apex body charged with determining consumer

complaints and conducting its own investigations. It now transpires that the country doesn't have a suitable testing facility nor the equipment necessary to conduct such tests and worse, that the Sri Lanka Standards Institute offers no standard for the composition of gas in cylinders.

The greater issue here is the culture of impunity that goes hand in hand with power and authority in Sri Lanka. The greater the responsibility, the more such positions should attract a strong sense of accountability and answerability, but this has long been missing in every sphere of politics, public service, and even business. Instead, for the most part, we are left with arrogant and belligerent dismissal of the tough conversations by a bureaucracy for

whom the admission of professional failure is the equivalent of personal weakness. Rank and status have become a cloak impenetrable by failure.

On the flip side, consumers know little of their rights, and what rudimentary knowledge they have limits "consumer rights" to food labels and food safety, instead of the universe of utilities and services it really covers. The lack of awareness has also resulted in the very low levels of consumer rights-related litigation in the country. It says a lot about corporate liability that Sri Lanka has never had a mass product recall (nor a mini one) nor significant fines imposed on companies in violation of consumer rights. Consumer education is critical, especially in the creation of

a mature, sophisticated consumption environment, but that is a long-term undertaking; the gas crisis is more immediate.

For businesses operating in a climate where every complaint can be amplified through the use of media, it is important to choose which issues they respond to and how. Many businesses don't find a few scattered consumer complaints a war worthy of battle, and know well that a lack of engagement would usually make the issue go away faster. But it is equally important that companies walk the talk of social responsibility; that they do the right thing by consumers and stakeholders, especially if a faulty product has even a remote chance of causing damage to a life.

In this particular instance, the very real fears of millions of households that depend on LP gas to cook their food deserve far more empathy and consideration than they've attracted.

BY IMESH RANASINGHE

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Prof. Ranjith Bandara said that Sri Lanka needs a new strategic direction to build a unique economic model, a requirement which the country has failed to realise in the last 100 years, since before Independence.

He said this at an event held by the Advocata Institute in Colombo to build a consensus for a national economy.

The MP said that the first thing that should be included in a unique economic model is consensus.

"We need to come to an agreement based on political, social or other factors to reach a consensus during this period to aim for certain objectives," he stressed.

'Outside the box'

Speaking at the same event, Prof. Rohan Samarajiva said that it's time for Sri Lankan policy makers to think outside the box.

"When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully," he said, quoting the famous English writer Samuel Johnson.

Samarajiva said that Sri Lankans are facing similar conditions: "We are hoping that with a great disaster in front of our eyes our minds will concentrate."

He pointed out that Sri Lankans have regressed to a period of standing in lines as they have started to feel shortcomings, while the food sub-index increased by 11.7% in October on a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis.

"I am talking about perception," he said.

Moreover, Samarajiva noted that people also felt that Government responses on various matters are disorganised, especially when it comes to the fertiliser issue.

"Anyone who is looking at this knows that this is a problem about perception," he said.

Further, he said many hoped that the Budget 2022 would provide sustainable solutions to the current account deficit and the fiscal deficit.

"I am not saying that this is a bad budget, but the solution we need at the moment can't be found in it," Samarajiva said.

He added that no new revenue paths have been introduced to cover the fiscal deficit in order to gain the confidence of international lenders, while 50% of the new taxes introduced are one off taxes.

This, he opined, is not a good signal when considering perception.

He also noted that the expenditure cutdowns proposed by the Budget are not daring enough.

"I wonder whether the people in power and the policy makers have sufficient understanding about our problems," he queried.



The majority of our population cannot bear these economic pressures anymore. Regardless of whoever is in power, there is no alternative but to take the bitter medicine. However, the problem we have is that no one likes to take this bitter medicine or give it to others

Prof. Rohan Samarajiva

He said that although the Government expected a V-shaped recovery after the pandemic, such a recovery pattern has failed to materialise, apart from a gain in certain exports.

Samarajiva said that due to the difficulties in importing essential goods and the confusion created by introducing and withdrawing regulations, restrictions and limitations have affected the lives of the people.

Further, he said that delays in opening

Building a consensus for a new national economy

● The way forward



PHOTO © FREEDOM HOUSE



Samagi Jana Balawegaya MP Patali Champika Ranawaka



Samagi Jana Balawegaya MP Dr. Harsha de Silva



Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna MP Prof. Ranjith Bandara



Prof. Rohan Samarajiva



National People's Power MP Vijitha Herath

letters of credit (LCs) have added more expenses to the small-scale importers and manufacturers which has affected them badly.

"I think this is also affecting exports as the new regulations put in place for the exporters of services have created new problems, which will cause them to leave the country," he added.

He noted that Sri Lanka has the highest income inequality in the region according to the Gini index.

"In a country with such high income inequality, the effects of the economic contraction will be felt sharply by the people in the lower income deciles," Samarajiva said.

He said that when the lockdowns affected the income sources of the people in the informal sector, the long queues that could be seen in front of pawn shops demonstrated the insufficient nature of the relief measures provided for these people.

"The majority of our population cannot bear these economic pressures anymore. Regardless of whoever is in power, there is no alternative but to take the bitter medicine. However, the problem we have is that no one likes to take this bitter medicine or give it to others," Samarajiva said.

'Outside the box' too old?

Prof. Ranjith Bandara noted that the "outside the box" approach is a very old concept as Sri Lanka had already tried it a long time ago.

"What we need now is a strategic direction," he said.

He said the country needs to create a consensus based on how the European countries rebuilt themselves after World

War Two, or how the world agreed on the Keynesian method when the prices of goods and services went up following the Great Depression in the 1930s.

"There is a need to create a consensus, but I don't have an understanding whether that should happen through a national government, or by getting all the parties together," the MP said.



We need to reach an agreement to aim for policy-consistent governance, and it would be good if we could learn something about this from countries like India, Pakistan, Singapore, and the US

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna MP Prof. Ranjith Bandara

However, he said that before going for a consensus, the country needs to identify and address problems which require immediate solutions, since failing to address these would result in widespread disappointment among the public, possibly leading to protests.

He also said that in addition to the aforementioned problems, "there are macroeconomic problems which remained unresolved for long periods of time regardless of which government was in power."

These long-term problems, Bandara said, were created due to inefficient management by successive governments: "These could be problems related to inflation, unemployment, and foreign exchange earnings."

"These are the problems we should think

about after addressing the ones that need immediate solutions," he said.

He added that policy inconsistency was yet another problem Sri Lanka faces, as policies adopted by former governments are changed when new governments rise to power, in an endless cycle.

"We need to reach an agreement to aim for policy-consistent governance, and it would be good if we could learn something about this from countries like India, Pakistan, Singapore, and the US," Bandara said.

Highlighting that any consensus reached by policy makers needed to cover the overall economy, he said that in forming such a consensus regarding the national economy, people who think "we are right" should be included instead of the people who think "I am right".

Debt crisis due to avoiding National Physical Plan

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Patali Champika Ranawaka said that in addition to the situation created by the pandemic, the other reason for Sri Lanka's debt crisis is not selecting projects based on the National Physical Plan which was instituted in 2008 and 2018.

He alleged that even today the Government is choosing mega projects which are outside the provisions of the National Physical Plan.

Ranawaka said that every major sector in Sri Lanka such as electricity, transport, and irrigation has long-term plans or master plans which should be followed.

"However, politicians have been choosing projects depending on their own needs and wants," he added.

As an example, the MP pointed out

that the proposed Kurunegala-Dambulla Expressway is not an economically beneficial project for the country at the moment.

Additionally, he said the fact that so many projects were initiated without a proper feasibility or economical study undertaken by the National Planning Department has strongly affected the country.

Ranawaka further noted that the use of commercial loans rather than concessional loans to invest in places which do not generate an income has also plunged the country into a massive financial crisis.

We need more jobs

Speaking at the event, SJB MP Dr. Harsha de Silva said that Sri Lanka needs to look at an economic plan that will create jobs, as people in various sectors have become unemployed due to the pandemic.

"We need to look into how we can enable a person to earn a salary by building the economy," he said.



Today, we have global supply chains. The telephone we used is produced in 43 countries, but we are not among those 43 countries. It is purely because of our mindset and nothing else

Samagi Jana Balawegaya MP Dr. Harsha de Silva

Moreover, he said that it is not possible for Sri Lankans to create jobs by manufacturing everything within the country.

"We need to discard the mindset of import substitution since all these problems are because of that mindset," de Silva said.

The MP said that problems faced by the Sri Lankan economy today could only be solved by a broader mindset so that Sri Lanka can rise in the international market.

"Today, we have global supply chains. The telephone we used is produced in 43 countries, but we are not among those 43 countries. It is purely because of our mindset and nothing else," he added.

Production-based economy

National People's Power (NPP) MP Vijitha Herath said the policy makers in the past 25-30 years have been looking for solutions for the problem that was at hand, which had resulted in the present crisis.

He said after the Hiroshima atomic bomb, people in Japan agreed on a national policy in order to progress, but Sri Lanka has been unable to follow a similar path for a while.

However, he said it is impossible to go for long-term reforms with a consensus of all the parties due to differences in political opinions, but it is possible to agree on short-term reforms.

"To save the Sri Lankan economy, we all should reach a consensus for a short period of one or two years," he added.

Herath said that Sri Lanka should move towards a production economy based on new technology while improving its food and agriculture sector to avoid importing these items to the country.

"We should improve our agriculture sector, since our production would collapse if we import everything while aiming for an open economy," the MP said.



Sri Lanka's race to meet ISB obligations

BY IMESH RANASINGHE

When President Gotabaya Rajapaksa took office in November 2019, Sri Lanka had to pay \$ 1.5 billion in International Sovereign Bonds (ISBs) for the upcoming year. With \$ 7.5 billion in foreign reserves at the time, the Government did not have any problem meeting these obligations.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic that hit the country in March 2020 started draining the reserves slowly even after the Government imposed an import ban for the first time in 40 years.

The Sri Lankan Government had already paid \$ 2 billion in ISBs since the start of the pandemic. The next \$ 0.5 billion is due in January 2022 while another \$ 1 billion in bonds will be maturing in July. The total debt repayment of about \$ 4.2 billion is due in 2022.

Sri Lanka had successfully issued its fifth ISB of \$ 1 billion in July 2012, with a comparatively lower yield of 5.875% per annum and a maturity of 10 years. Most of this inflow was directed to the continuation of major infrastructure projects which commenced in 2010 and 2011. This bond reaches maturity in July 2022.

The country pays 6.8% on average as interest on borrowing through ISBs, while earning a return of 1.4% reinvesting such earnings in Western countries.

The CBSL roadmap

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) launched a six month roadmap which stated that the rationale for the short-term focus is to provide clarity and restore certainty through the proper management of this period, which will enable the economy to rebound against the forex challenge and debt servicing concerns.

The CBSL mentioned several ways the Government planned to acquire foreign exchange to meet its debt obligation in the short run, including tourism cash flows, increase in FDI pipeline with the Port City and industrial zones taking off, exports earning above \$ 1 billion per month, government-to-government financing with \$ 1 billion expected by end of 2021, and monetising selected non-strategic and under-utilised assets to gain \$ 1 billion.

Other measures include facilitating inflows from the implementation of the Tax Amnesty through the Finance Act to gain \$ 100 million, continuing the scheme to pay an extra Rs. 2 per US dollar (USD) remitted and converted by workers abroad, negotiating short-term currency swaps with international counterparts to acquire \$ 1.5 billion, and pursuing efforts to attract foreign investments into government securities targeting \$ 1 billion.

The roadmap also plans to gradually reduce ISB exposures towards 10% of the GDP by 2024 and maintain that ratio thereafter, from around 18% of the GDP by the end of 2019, around 17% of the GDP by the end of 2020, and to around 16% of the GDP by the end 2021.

Further, the roadmap mentioned concerted efforts will be made to engage domestic and international financial intermediaries to tap potential investments for Treasury bills/bonds, while attractive returns and opportunity to swap forex with the Central Bank will remove the forex risk (zero cost swaps) and will facilitate new investments in the short term.

“Access for subscriptions either in the secondary market and/ or through direct issuances at prevailing rates for sizable volumes will be made available,” it noted.

However, the roadmap faced criticism for lacking precision.

Fitch Ratings stated that the roadmap has not indicated details regarding the sources as well as the timeline for the financial rollouts referenced.

During the commentary that was made on Sri Lanka as a part of the “What investors want to know: Emerging market sovereigns – 4Q21” report, Fitch Ratings Director – Sovereigns Sagarika Chandra said: “In a six-month roadmap published in October by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the authorities have outlined plans to secure funds through bilateral, multilateral, and other syndicated loans for 1Q22. However, the financing plans contain limited details, including the sources and timelines of financing arrangements.”

She further mentioned: “As positive rating sensitivities, we have flagged the need for more enduring improvements in the external and public finances.”

Less than a week after Fitch Ratings stated that the CBSL’s much-touted six month roadmap lacks precision about the sources and timelines for the inflows it has targeted, the CBSL has issued a statement specifying several sources of inflows and related timelines.

The statement announced that the CBSL and the Government of Sri Lanka are in the process of securing over \$ 1 billion in inflows before the end of the year, which is the first half of the period covered by the roadmap.

Titled “Progress of securing foreign exchange inflows as announced in the six month roadmap for ensuring macroeconomic and financial system stability”, the statement added that following the engagement with certain governments, central banks, financial institutions, as well as investors, they have entered into several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

This includes the two transactions involving the Chalmers Granaries land as well as the property behind One Galle Face, which alone amounts to around \$ 200 million. Thus,



“It is clear that the Government doesn’t want to make the data and the information (on the status of foreign reserves) available

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne

the CBSL said that an advance payment is expected within a shorter period.

Additionally, an investment of \$ 650 million has been finalised regarding the West Container Terminal (WCT) by the Adani Group of India with John Keells Holdings as the Sri Lankan counterpart, and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA), the CBSL pointed out.

Furthermore, a foreign inflow of \$ 250 million is expected to be secured in terms of a partial divestment of the West Coast Power Plant to the US company New Fortress Energy Inc. Accordingly, the first tranche of the investment is anticipated to be made in December 2021.

“Currently, ongoing discussions are taking place with the Reserve Bank of India, the People’s Bank of China, and several Middle Eastern central banks with the anticipation of expediting the finalisation of foreign currency swap arrangements,” the CBSL noted.

Moreover, the CBSL stated that there was a notable increase in labour migration to the Middle East and recovery in tourism with a month-on-month increase in arrivals. Furthermore, the exports sector surpassed \$ 1 billion of monthly earnings during the period from June to September this year, along with the repatriation and conversion of export proceeds during October.

Will the roadmap allow obligations to be met?

Speaking to us, Open University of Sri Lanka Emeritus Professor of Economics and a former Central Banker Prof. Sirimevan Colombage said that the CBSL roadmap has not addressed the fundamental problems pertaining to the foreign exchange crisis. Instead, he said it had envisaged easing the balance of payments



“(CBSL’s) narrow policy measures fail to address the severe BOP problem and the debt crisis. They are mostly short-term solutions that have an anti-export bias

Open University of Sri Lanka Emeritus Professor of Economics and former Central Banker Prof. Sirimevan Colombage

(BOP) problems mainly through the so-called non-debt forex inflows such as swaps, government-to-government borrowings, monetisation of underutilised assets, export proceeds conversion rules, monitoring forex inflows, attracting foreign investment to Sri Lanka Development Bonds (SLDBs), and maintaining a fixed exchange rate system at Rs. 199-203 against the USD.

Moreover, he said that non-debt inflows quoted in the roadmap are mostly debt-based inflows such as swaps and government-to-government borrowings, which will aggravate the debt crisis.

“Such narrow policy measures fail to address the severe BOP problem and the debt crisis. They are mostly short-term solutions that have an anti-export bias,” he said.

Further, he said since the announcement of the roadmap, the foreign payments situation has worsened resulting in a severe forex shortage, thus reflecting policy ineffectiveness.

Speaking to us, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne said that the CBSL should stick to central banking and not try to do the work of the Government.

He added that it’s not even worthwhile commenting on the roadmap presented by the CBSL. Former State Minister of Finance Wickramaratne said that so far, the current Government has been meeting its debt obligations through foreign reserves, which has caused the reserves to shrink from about \$ 7 billion in 2019 to about \$ 2 billion now, according to the latest report released by the CBSL.

On Monday (29 November), the MP raised the question in Parliament seeking an official

statement from the governing party on the status of the reserves.

He asserted that the same question which he had raised a year ago remained unanswered as the governing party had requested additional time to provide a response.

“It is clear that the Government doesn’t want to make the data and the information available,” he added.

Further, he noted that a year ago about 80 countries in the world secured an emergency funding called the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

He pointed out that Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Maldives secured the fund while Sri Lanka did not.

“We found that we have requested (the fund) from the IMF but Sri Lanka hasn’t received the assistance. The conclusion that we come to is that the RFI is basically not available to us. We are unable to service debts and the sustainability of our debts is in question,” Wickramaratne said.

The RFI provides rapid and low-access financial assistance to member countries facing an urgent balance of payments need, without needing to have a full-fledged programme in place.

It can provide support to meet a broad range of urgent needs, including those arising from commodity price shocks, natural disasters, conflict and post-conflict situations, and emergencies resulting from fragility.

“(If the Government and the CBSL were to default on an ISB) we will basically become a bankrupt country, the ratings will go further down, and the investors won’t approach us either

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne

As a single flexible mechanism with broad coverage, the RFI replaced the IMF’s previous policy that covered Emergency Natural Disaster Assistance (ENDA) and Emergency Post-Conflict Assistance (EPCA).

Moreover, Wickramaratne said that when the issue of reserves being at \$ 1.5 billion was brought up in Parliament this past week, the Government did not refute it.

“Basically since the Government did not refute it, we can conclude that the reserves are probably about \$ 1.5 billion. Maybe the cash reserves are lower because there is gold worth \$ 300 million,” he said. The MP said since Sri Lanka had

been using reserves to meet the debt obligations, the payment of the ISB is in a grave situation.

He noted that although various people in the Government had been discussing the deals and swaps they had arranged with other countries, the Finance Minister should instead make a statement regarding all this in Parliament since it is his responsibility.

Mismanagement: The main problem

The former State Minister said that the main problem with the Government is the mismanagement of resources: “They are now talking about restructuring debt, but they should have discussed this long before,” he said.

Regarding the IMF bailout, Wickramaratne said that it is not too late to approach the IMF. However, he said the solutions given at this moment would prove to be more difficult than if Sri Lanka had approached the IMF much earlier.

“It is like having a disease, if you treat it at stage one it will be easier, but if you delay it and treat it at stage three, it’s far more difficult. It’s the same with the economy,” he added.

Moreover, he said that the Opposition has not asked the Government or the CBSL to go anywhere to solve the debt crisis, adding: “All we have been telling them is that they are ruining the economy through their wrong policies.”

Wickramaratne said that defaulting on an ISB is only one part of the issue, as the consequence of defaulting will be unthinkable.

“We will basically become a bankrupt country, the ratings will go further down, and the investors won’t approach us either,” he added.

He pointed out that the former Yahapalana Government had a Medium-Term Debt Management Strategy (MTDS) which was formulated by CBSL and the Ministry of Finance.

“If that had been followed we wouldn’t be in this mess,” he said.

The MTDS which was introduced in 2019, aimed to improve the quality of foreign financing by switching instruments from short-term to medium and long-term, with plans to reduce the foreign debt as a share of the GDP to 38.5% by 2023, from 45.1% at the end of 2018.

A coherent medium-term macroeconomic framework

Instead of harping on a fragile home-grown solution, Colombage said that the CBSL should have formulated its monetary policy based on a coherent medium-term macroeconomic policy framework with consistent fiscal and monetary policies targeting price stability and BOP equilibrium.

The former Central Banker said that the CBSL should adopt a flexible exchange rate system instead of its present artificial fixed exchange rate system that discourages exports and encourages imports.

“There is a need to allow interest rates to be determined through market forces, instead of interest rate caps that are enforced by the CBSL at present,” he added.

He pointed out that it is the responsibility of the CBSL to urge the Government to approach the IMF and adopt a strict macroeconomic policy framework targeting fiscal deficit reduction and debt sustainability.

He noted that assistance from the IMF would not only enable the Government to reschedule the present unmanageable external debt commitments, but also to win foreign investor confidence.

Most importantly, he pointed out that the CBSL must be independent of political pressures.

According to him, the Central Bank Bill which was drafted three years ago to replace the present Monetary Law Act, would have been a launching pad to evolve an “inflation-targeting monetary policy” coupled with strict fiscal discipline under the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA).

“Following the recent postponement of fiscal targets stipulated in the FRA until 2030, economic revival backed by strong macroeconomic fundamentals seems to be a distant reality,” Colombage said.

Security	Maturity Date	Coupon Rate %	Secondary Market %	
			This Week	Last Week
International Sovereign Bonds	18-Jan-22	5.75	-	-
	25-Jul-22	5.88	-	47.94
	18-Apr-23	5.75	44.62	43.45
	14-Mar-24	6.85	33.32	32.70
	28-Jun-24	6.35	29.79	29.18
	3-Jun-25	6.13	24.19	23.83
	3-Nov-25	6.85	23.45	23.19
	18-Jul-26	6.83	21.58	21.40
	11-May-27	6.20	19.34	19.20
	18-Apr-28	6.75	18.52	18.36
	14-Mar-29	7.85	18.97	18.88
	28-Mar-30	7.55	17.58	17.50

Sri Lanka's ISBs as of 26 November 2021

Source: CBSL



There is little doubt that information technology (IT) has profound effects on business and society. However, there is significant sentiment that the academic discipline devoted to studying these effects, the Information Systems (IS) discipline, has not yet developed sufficient theory to help practitioners, policymakers, and researchers explain and predict these effects.

If the IS discipline is to realise its promise, the discipline must identify the key themes related to the impact of IT and develop theories to explain these themes. Process virtualisation occurs when a physically-based process is migrated to a virtual environment. This characterises a significant portion of IS phenomena, including the migration of social interaction to online communities and virtual worlds, the migration of shopping to the Internet, and the migration of education to distance learning environments.

We argue that process virtualisation represents one of the key themes of the IS discipline. Process virtualisation theory is designed to explain and predict whether a process is amenable or resistant to being conducted virtually. We discuss how to test the theory and provide an example using primary data from the wholesale automotive market, which is undergoing a shift from physical to virtual trading processes. The overall goal of this paper is to advance the IS discipline in its mission of providing a theoretical basis for understanding the impact of IT on business and society.

For this, Samsung has created the Brity RPA. Brity RPA makes implementing process automations quick and easy. The bots created in Brity RPA perform repetitive tasks so employees can focus on key business areas that require creativity. Intelligent bots integrated with advanced visual, conversational, and analytical AI technologies automate complex tasks so your enterprise can boost efficiency. You can experience Brity RPA now and start enhancing the productivity of your business, achieve the innovations you need to stay

Commanding the virtualisation movement

ahead, and present your customers with more value.

Samsung SDS's Brity RPA was also positioned in the 2020 Gartner Magic Quadrant report – "Magic Quadrant for Robotic Process Automation" as the first Korean company.

A Magic Quadrant is an evaluation of vendors in a specific market that meet a defined set of 15 distinct criteria. In the report, Gartner evaluated RPA providers' capabilities to deliver RPA application products on both their completeness of vision and ability to execute.

Gartner has recognised Samsung SDS's Brity RPA for its technology and innovation features to automate complex business processes and its strengths so that anyone, even the non-professionals, can easily discover and develop automation tasks.

Brity RPA not only performs simple, repetitive work, but it applies AI technologies such as chatbot "Brity Assistant", artificial intelligence character recognition (AICR), and text analysis to even automate more sophisticated, higher-value work that involves judgement, review, and evaluation.

Furthermore, Brity RPA enhances process speed and efficiency by providing the "Headless Bot" function which supports simultaneous running of multiple automation processes.



The solution also provides a "Step Recorder" function which records the PC screen while performing tasks and automatically generates an automation process which allows even the non-professionals to easily automate tasks.

Brity RPA is deployed in companies of various industries including Samsung Electronics, Samsung C&T, Suhyup Bank, ETLAND, and public institutions to automate tasks like manufacturing process management, firm banking payment, customer service, human resource management, and financial affairs.

Meanwhile, Samsung SDS is actively contributing to the expansion of Robotic Process Automation in Korea by hosting Brity RPA Academy in July to provide free RPA training for 61 companies and organisations, and plans to open a second academy in the remaining year.

Meanwhile, Samsung's cloud native,

fully virtualised RAN (vRAN) liberates operators from static hardware bound networks to enable flexible software centric networks. It takes advantage of IT benefits – including efficient management, flexible network architecture, and scalable rollouts, just to name a few. Built upon over 40 years of experience and expertise in the telecommunications industry, the solution ensures powerful performance, high reliability and time-stringent processing similar to traditional RAN. This is only possible with in-depth knowledge regarding optimised design, implementation, and operation of cellular networks. With its excellence proven in the field through a wide-scale commercial deployment in the US with a tier-1 operator, Samsung's vRAN is expanding its reach to diverse markets in Europe and Asia as well.

Purely based on software, Samsung's vRAN removes hardware dependencies from a network, running on commercial servers and cloud platforms. Up until recently, operators had no other option than proprietary RAN hardware and software that must be deployed together. However, Samsung's vRAN provides full interoperability with vendor-agnostic, commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) x86 servers and supports multiple platforms. It can also be integrated with any commercial cloud

platform as it is based on Kubernetes (k8s) open source. With the solution, operators are at liberty to choose the optimal option for each network element, including the OS, hardware and software, enabling a dynamic, multi-vendor network environment.

Samsung's vRAN is undergoing constant evolution and is a robust building block for operator networks. It provides complete scalability to meet the 5G bandwidth requirements of any operator. It is the world's first virtualised solution that supports not only low band FDD, but also wide bandwidths for mid band TDD. This has been a stepping-stone for interworking with Massive MIMO radios and ultimately significant improvements in data throughput and user experiences. Accordingly, Samsung's vRAN supports a wide range of radio products, such as radios, Massive MIMO radios and even indoor solutions across the entire 5G spectrum to widen operators' choices for flexible and optimal network deployments.

Samsung's vRAN also supports multiple generations of technologies on a single platform. Operators are able to carry out site design more easily and a unified system to minimise the overall footprint for site infrastructure.

In addition, hardware accelerators can be easily plugged into COTS servers to increase capacity without unnecessary server replacement. A hardware accelerator is a card that can handle high performance and high computational capacity. With an accelerator, Samsung's vRAN capacity enhances greatly without adjustment to the existing infrastructure.

Containers and micro-services create more scalable networks. The hardware boundaries of a traditional RAN are no longer an issue and fixed resources do not have to be dedicated to a certain cell or RAN component. Instead, resources can be pooled together and freely shared within a network. Operators can dynamically scale-in/out functions to reallocate resources depending on traffic patterns and network status changes to maximise resource utilisation and remove inefficiencies.



By
Chester
Wisniewski

The state of World Wide Web security in 2021

In a recent discussion, the topic of how much safer or more at risk the average internet user is now versus 10 years ago came up.

If you read the news headlines, you might think we have gone from bad to worse, yet my gut reaction is that we've never been safer. Clearly, we haven't "solved" security, yet it feels like we've checked a lot of items off the list.

To verify, I decided to take a look at the advancements we've made and see if they are making a difference.

Security in the early days

Today's world wide web is a very different place from when it sprung from the mind of Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1990. While the early web was free and open, it was a little too open. There was no privacy nor encryption to protect information moving between the numerous servers and routers involved in connecting the world.

Netscape helped solve this by introducing encryption through Secure Sockets Layer (SSL), later updated to a formal specification, Transport Layer Security (TLS). At the time, TLS was intended to secure your shopping cart, credit card information and occasionally your login ID and password.

Security by default

Strangely, this remained true all the way up until 2013, when an NSA contractor, Edward Snowden, decided to tell the world about how much online information the US was gathering – and was able to gather on almost everyone in the world.

Despite this, as late as October 2013, a few months after Snowden's leaks,

only 27.5% of web pages loaded by Mozilla Firefox were using some form of encryption.

This prompted people in the security industry to take an interest and work to improve the security and privacy of internet users globally.

The thinking was: the only way to solve this problem is to encrypt everything and make it a requirement, not an afterthought. This spurred on the introduction of new technologies and standards to ensure that things were secure by default and to prevent things from being downgraded to use old insecure methods.

New technology and standards didn't eliminate the risk though. If someone can meddle with your network connections, they can simply redirect to an imposter site to steal your private information. This is known as a machine-in-the-middle attack (MitM), which could be conducted by providing false DNS (Domain Name System) responses, operating an evil twin Wi-Fi access point, or directly by ISPs (Internet Service Providers), governments, law enforcement, and others. Companies can even intercept TLS traffic using middle boxes designed to inspect protected traffic.

Fixing the problem

Even if the site you're visiting is using HTTPS, it likely must listen on insecure HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol) and redirect users to the secure site, as web browsers typically default to trying HTTP first.

To tell the browser to make the initial connection over HTTPS, in 2012 Google proposed a new HTTP header: HSTS (HTTP Strict Transport Security).



This HTTP header allowed website administrators to indicate their website should only ever be loaded over HTTPS and that browsers should never attempt making connections over HTTP on port 80.

Of course, this still means you could be at risk of a downgrade to HTTP the very first time you visit a site, before your browser has observed the HSTS header. This is known as SSL stripping, which is the type of MitM attack HSTS was designed to cure in the first place.

To solve this problem, HSTS has been

extended with a "preload" option. Once appended to your HSTS header you can then submit your site to <https://hstspreload.org> to be listed as a built-in, always secure site for Chrome, Firefox, Opera, Safari, Internet Explorer, and Edge.

Late in 2013, to encourage all sites to deploy TLS encryption, Google announced its Chrome browser would begin to warn people when accessing insecure web pages and it would rank unencrypted sites lower in its search results.

Because of Google's policy and the

security community as a whole pushing hard, we doubled the number of sites supporting secure connections in just three years. Google statistics now show that in most countries, sites visited by Chrome users are encrypted ~95% of the time.

The most recent move by browser vendors to push us into an always encrypted world began in November of 2020 when Mozilla introduced an HTTPS-only option to Firefox. When enabled, this feature attempts all connections securely over HTTPS and falls back to a warning if HTTPS is not available. Chrome followed by adding a similar option and turned it on by default in April 2021.

Conclusion

The web has never been safer.

With 95% of web pages encrypted and those that aren't mostly not presenting much risk, this is great news, especially during any of the busy online shopping seasons.

Bit by bit, the security community has worked together to improve standards, apply pressure on laggards and lower the costs of communicating securely over the internet. The amount of progress that has been made is impressive considering what the scale of the problem once was.

However, the job is by no means complete. With only 31.6% of sites using HSTS, it shows that even features that are free and provide significant security improvements are not as widely deployed as they should be.

Securing the application layer has massive implications for users and safety. There's still a risk the providers of the networks we use will spy on us, sell us to advertising networks or will be compromised by cybercriminals.

But, because of HSTS and TLS, you can pretty much browse and communicate as freely as you please with negligible risk of a bad outcome, even over untrusted Wi-Fi and mobile networks.

(The writer is a principal research scientist at Sophos)



SL rubber exports on track

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 on 27 November, 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.



Divest SriLankan: Prof. Samarajiva

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.



Emerging markets face a 'double whammy'

Emerging markets will face a "double whammy" in 2022, caught between limited growth and reduced risk appetite as a result of monetary tightening, Citi Head of Emerging Markets Economics David Lubin said last Wednesday (1).

"EM growth will suffer for a variety of reasons to do with weakening external demand growth, lower global trade growth, and the effects of further domestic monetary and fiscal tightening in many countries," Lubin wrote in a note to clients.

Looking beyond next year, developing nations were facing a "broken growth model" caused by an irreversible slowdown in China, worsening demographics, and rising economic nationalism, Lubin added, which might affect the flow of foreign direct investment.



TRCSL engages with SpaceX

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) has held preliminary engagement sessions with SpaceX in exploring the introduction of Starlink internet services in Sri Lanka.

A tweet by the TRCSL detailed that the first round of discussions focused on regulatory aspects and prerequisites of initiating the service in the near future for Sri Lanka.

Using advanced satellites in a low orbit, Starlink enables video calls, online gaming, streaming, and other high data rate activities that historically have not been possible with satellite internet. Users can expect to see download speeds between 100 Mbps and 200 Mbps and latency as low as 20 ms in most locations.



VW battery, raw material drive to cost \$ 34 b?

Volkswagen's planned European battery cell plants and securing vital raw materials will cost as much as € 30 billion (\$ 34 billion), Board Member Thomas Schmall said, putting a price tag on the expansion for the first time.



Ranil asks forex figures; Government doesn't provide

Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe last Monday (29 November) in Parliament called on the Government to disclose the exact figures of the foreign exchange reserve assets and currency reserves of the country as of the previous Friday (26 November) in order to clarify the energy situation of the country going forward.

However, the Government did not disclose the figures to Wickremesinghe.

"According to what I'm hearing, the foreign exchange reserves have fallen to \$ 1.5 billion, of which \$ 300 million is in gold. Therefore, we have only \$ 1.2 billion on hand," claimed Wickremesinghe.

Wickremesinghe further stated that the documentation which was due to be presented by the Government to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been sent, but not yet presented in Parliament.



Sandun Hapugoda appointed Mastercard Country Manager

Sandun Hapugoda has been appointed as Mastercard's new Country Manager for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Hapugoda succeeds Rajesh Mani who has transitioned to another role within Mastercard.

"Sri Lanka and the Maldives have witnessed a rapid uptake in digital payments in recent years, and Mastercard has played a significant role in supporting governments, communities, and businesses as they develop their digital payments landscape. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to Mastercard's efforts to support the socio-economic growth of Sri Lanka and the Maldives," said Mastercard Country Manager - Sri Lanka and the Maldives Sandun Hapugoda.

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

Global shares hit, as new variant rattles investors

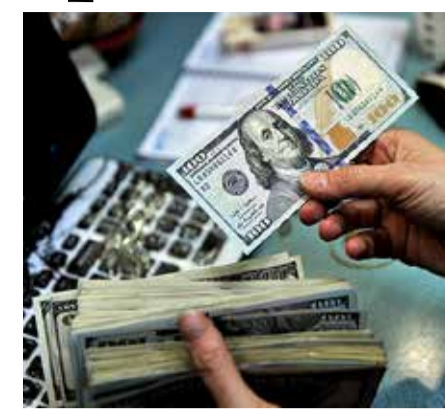
The FTSE 100 index of leading UK shares closed 3.7% down, while main markets in Germany, France, and the US also sank.

CPC debt rollover plan fails

The debt-ridden Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) had failed to secure a loan of \$ 2.5 billion from US-based PSL America Inc. to refinance the colossal sum of money the state institution owes to two state banks.

Addressing the allegations made by Opposition MPs regarding the \$ 2.5 billion loan sought by the CPC, Minister of Energy Udaya Gammanpila stated in Parliament last Monday (29 November) that this loan had not been obtained yet and added it was merely a proposal and that no commission had been paid as alleged.

"At the time, I specifically said that such a large sum of money wouldn't be received at such a low interest rate and as I predicted, we didn't receive yet. However, the Opposition, from time to time keeps alleging that a loan has been taken with a commission as if they had just woken up from a dream."



The Business Nutshell



Insurance inquiries surge on gas explosion fears

Fears regarding the safety of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders following a spate of explosions and fires in kitchens across the island has led to an increase in queries by consumers regarding home insurance policies, according to insurance industry sources.

Speaking to us, several insurance industry sources revealed that over the past week, there has been an increase in queries by the general public from insurance companies regarding the particulars of their home insurance policies.

However, one of the sources stated that it is too early to identify whether public fears relating to the safety of LPG cylinders will translate to an increase in gross written premiums (GWP).

EU seeks to forge new global trade rules with US

The European Union (EU) has experienced a "breakthrough year" with the US even if not all trade irritants are gone and now wants to work with its transatlantic ally to start forging trade rules for the future, the EU Trade Chief said.

A year on from Joe Biden's defeat of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, the two sides have suspended their disputes over aircraft subsidies and steel and aluminium tariffs and launched an alliance to co-operate on future technologies.

"One can say that this year was indeed a breakthrough year for EU-US trade relations," European Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis said in an interview for the Reuters Next conference.

Twitter Co-Founder Jack Dorsey steps down



Twitter Co-Founder Jack Dorsey is stepping down as Chief Executive of the company.

He will be replaced by the current Chief Technical Officer Parag Agrawal, Twitter said.

Dorsey, who co-founded Twitter in 2006, has been serving as Chief Executive of both Twitter and payment firm Square.

"It's finally time for me to leave," he wrote in a statement, saying the company was "ready to move on".



Cabraal refuses to float rupee

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) is unlikely to revoke the directive sent by them to licensed commercial banks (LCBs) by former CBSL Governor Prof. W.D. Lakshman days before his resignation, advising the banks to keep the selling rate of the US dollar (USD) below Rs. 203.

Current CBSL Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal confirmed this during a recent webinar in which he expressed his plans to maintain the Sri Lankan rupee at its current rate throughout the first quarter (Q1) of next year.

"We won't have a depreciation of the rupee in the Q1 2022, we are confident that the rupee would maintain its value, and it will probably have an opportunity of appreciating a little more in value," he said at a webinar held by the International Chamber of Commerce.



China to ban loophole used by tech firms for foreign IPOs

China is planning to ban companies from going public on foreign stock markets through variable interest entities, closing a loophole used by the country's tech industry to raise capital from overseas investors, Bloomberg News reported last Wednesday (1), citing people familiar with the matter.



Inditex: Zara Founder's daughter becomes fashion giant's chair

High street fashion giant Inditex, which owns brands including Zara and Massimo Dutti, has appointed the Founder's daughter as its new Chairwoman.

Marta Ortega will replace Pablo Isla, Chairman of Inditex since 2011.

Ortega has been with the firm for 15 years, starting out as an assistant at its high street brand Bershka.

"I have always said I would dedicate my life to building upon my parents' legacy," the 37-year-old said.

(Sources: CNN, BBC, Reuters)

ADVERTORIAL

Affirming internationally certified LPG global standards and industry specifications: Litro Gas Lanka

Litro Gas Lanka reiterated that the LPG brought into Sri Lanka meets internationally ratified compositions of propane and butane, certified and tested twice at point of loading and unloading by GEO-CHEM Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd.

The company assures that the LPG that is loaded onto the ship at supplier point is unloaded at Kerawalapitiya and stored in LPG storage spheres, after which point cylinders of varied sizes are filled in the factory. The entire process, which is done under strictest safety standards, does not involve any

tampering in Sri Lanka while LPG is stored and filled into cylinders with the same specifications they have been shipped with.

"The LPG shipped by Litro Gas Lanka undergoes rigorous testing at point of loading and unloading in Kerawalapitiya; additionally, we obtain independently verified and certified reports on the LPG composition from Geochem, an independent energy and LPG verification agency," said Litro Gas Terminals Director - Operations Pushpakumara Edirisinghe. "These standards have been internationally

accepted and further approved by the Cabinet of Ministers through a tender process. For over five years, these standards have been maintained for every shipment of LPG to Litro Gas Lanka."

Litro Gas Lanka says that the company possesses 8,000 MT LPG capacity, which means that a new LPG stock is required every six to seven days to meet the market demand; a new shipment of LPG arrives at the Kerawalapitiya filling plant every three to four days, ensuring that customers are given a seamless

supply of LPG.

Although the company introduced the 18-litre cylinder earlier this year, it was soon taken off the market by a Government directive, and is no longer available in the market since June 2021.

Concerning safety which forms a vital component in handling LPG, Litro Gas Lanka Channel Safety Advisor Hemachandra Gunathilake stated that the globally accepted best practices should be deployed at all times when handling LPG for cooking or for any other purpose. This means

checking the hose, the regulator, the cooker, and the connecting system, which includes the safety clip of the cylinder. "If there are any LPG leaks, it is detectable with the smell and visibility - additionally, the only correct method of checking for leaks is when the entire system is connected and observed."

While advising consumers to refrain from resorting to unverified methods such as a soap test to determine leaks, Litro Gas Lanka points out that the correct safety protocols must be followed at all times when using LPG,

and if there is indeed an emergency, 1311 must be contacted to help understand the situation and mitigate it.

The company pointed out that in all instances where customers have complained about possible LPG leaks, the compromising of safety has taken place as a result of broken or damaged hose, regulator, or cooker. "All of these devices must be checked and replaced regularly to ensure best possible safety performance," he added. He further added that the hose must be changed once every two years and the regulator every five years.

LOLC Al-Falaah launches Wakalah Speed-Draft

LOLC Al-Falaah has unveiled an innovative product option branded "Wakalah Speed Draft". This latest product addition is an alternate financial solution that complements the most popular conventional "LOLC Speed-Draft" or permanent or temporary overdraft facilities offered by commercial banks. As the name denotes, LOLC Al-Falaah customers can now obtain a speedy cash-advance conveniently with the "Wakalah Speed Draft" service from any of the LOLC Finance branches located countrywide.



LOLC Al-Falaah Deputy General Manager Shiraz Refai

The LOLC Al-Falaah "Wakalah Speed Draft" is formed within the precepts of the Wakalah-bil-istithmar concept. The customer is appointed as an agent of LOLC Al-Falaah, with an undertaking that the funds advanced are utilised for the purposes of trading transactions and working capital requirements for businesses. The customer is provided with short to mid-term finance to which repayment methods are flexible and are based on a methodology of profits share.



LOLC Finance PLC Product Head - Speed Draft and LOLC Finance East and Uva Region DGM Yanik Fernando

LOLC Al-Falaah "Wakalah Speed Draft" is most suitable for businesses that are engaged in trading and manufacturing that require short to mid-term working capital. It is a flexible option that caters to a multitude of financing needs such as asset purchases, trading stock and raw-material replenishments, factory renovations, and expansions as part of business growth. One of its main features is its ability to draw-down funds in flexible quantum based on the customer's cash-need and repayment capabilities. "Wakalah Speed Draft" helps increase the liquidity of the business and facilitate a greater level of business activity allowing greater flexibility of usage and repayment as and when the customer requires it. It is also structured to be less costly and more feasible for business purposes as profit-mark-up will be accrued purely based on usage or draw-down on funds.

Speaking about LOLC Al-Falaah's latest product addition, LOLC Al-Falaah Deputy General Manager Shiraz Refai said: "Wakalah Speed Draft is an extremely flexible financial solution, and it is ideal for the corporate and SME sector businesses that are in need of short to mid-term working capital solutions to meet dynamic requirements. In my view, it is a very useful and versatile product, especially considering the competitive business climate as more and more businesses require pre-approved financial services that can be drawn-down easily on a need-basis and settled based on existing cash-flows, instead of long term commitments. We saw a gap in the market, and decided to step in with a solution, in keeping up with LOLC Al-Falaah's reputation for introducing financial solutions that are innovative as well as in line with the needs of the modern customer. The product is also coupled with the most advanced technology to ensure that the customer experiences greater convenience, speed, and security."

Commenting about LOLC Al-Falaah's latest product initiative, LOLC Finance PLC Product Head - Speed Draft and LOLC Finance East and Uva Region DGM Yanik Fernando said: "This solution was introduced to bridge the gap between conventional products and Alternate Financial Services products in the local Non-Banking Financial Institution (NBFI) sector. It is a unique value added option to the conventional speed draft, covering all segments of the market. Having experienced the phenomenal response we received for the conventional 'Speed Draft', we believe that the 'Wakalah Speed Draft' introduced for the first time by LOLC Al-Falaah too will experience the same positive response from its clientele islandwide."

Nestlé Health Science launches Nestlé BOOST Original

Nestlé Health Science launched its latest product, Nestlé BOOST Original - a nutritional food drink which helps older adults get the nutrition they need as part of a balanced diet to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. Nestlé BOOST Original contains protein to help maintain muscle strength and 16 vitamins and minerals including vitamin C, D, zinc, and iron to help support immunity. It is also a low-fat product and has a low glycemic index.



A. Baur & Co. (Pvt.) Ltd. MD and CEO Rolf Blaser (centre) with other officials at the Nestlé BOOST Original launch

PHOTO LALITH PERERA

Nestlé Health Science consists of a team of experts who are

committed to helping people age well. With its purpose of

empowering healthier lives, Nestlé Health Science offers a range of

everyday, high-quality nutritional products developed based on innovative science supported by comprehensive research.

"As a company which strives to serve consumers across generations from early childhood to old age, we continue to introduce innovative nutritional solutions that can make a positive impact on people's quality of life. We hope the introduction of Nestlé BOOST Original will help Sri Lanka's growing older generation, as it is specifically designed to meet a variety of nutritional needs of older adults" said Nestlé Lanka Managing Director Jason Avanceña.

Distributed by A. Baur & Co. (Pvt.) Ltd, Nestlé BOOST Original is now available in supermarkets,

stores, and pharmacies island wide, in 480g value packs. "As the trusted and long-term marketing and distribution partner for Nestlé Health Science, we are very excited to add Nestlé BOOST Original to our portfolio. With a proven track record in this product category, we believe Nestlé BOOST Original will become a household name very soon.

Having done major investments in our sales and distribution network, today we stand as one of the most technologically advanced and best skilled sales forces in the country, ready to bring Nestlé BOOST Original to the market in the most efficient way," said A. Baur & Co. (Pvt.) Ltd. Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Rolf Blaser.

MoU signed to automate National Library Network

The Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka announced that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the National Library, Documentation Services Board of Sri Lanka, and 18 local authorities to implement the "Digital Libraries Project".

Under this project, 26 model digital libraries will be established, covering all districts in Sri Lanka and at the National Library. The model libraries will be equipped with the widely used "Koha" Integrated Library Management System, along with modern digital infrastructure.

One of the key objectives of this project is to ensure providing convenient and affordable access to electronic information/e-books, and educational materials to citizens. The project's pilot phase started in 2017. Along with this, the public libraries in Colombo, Badulla, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa, Kurunegala, Opnayake, and Kirimetiya,



The signing of the MoU between ICTA and the National Library

along with the National Library, were opened to the public. Phase one of the project started in 2020 to roll out the solution for 18 public libraries.

This initiative is one of the many initiatives spearheaded by the Digital Government vertical of ICTA in line with a long-term road map for digitalising the government sector services.

One of the critical objectives of digitalising the government sector is to improve processes with citizens' needs in mind to serve citizens efficiently and conveniently. Many projects are underway to create the necessary infrastructure of shared solutions, platforms, technology, and processes to build valuable user-focused services and improve ease

of doing business through policy reforms and integrated services focusing on business needs. Thereby ensure efficiency when transacting with the government.

The MoU was signed in the presence of ICTA Chief Executive Officer Eng. Mahinda B. Herath, ICTA Chief Digital Government Officer Kanchana Thudugalla, National Library of Sri Lanka Chairman Sonala Gunawardhena, and National Library and Documentation Services Board Director General W. Sunil, along with many representatives of local authorities involved in the project.

Upon successful implementation, a nationwide roll-out is expected in the near future.

Prima Sunrise Bread sponsors 13th Sri Lanka Junior Open Golf Tournery

For the 13th year, Prima Sunrise Bread has committed to sponsor the Sri Lanka Junior Open Golf Tournament.

Resuming after a lapse of one year, due to the inability to host the event during the pandemic, the Sri Lanka Junior Open Golf Championship is scheduled to be played between 15-17 December at the Royal Colombo Golf Club (RCGC). It remains the decisive test for juniors who are also required to make it through the gruelling regional junior opens, also sponsored by Prima Group Sri Lanka, as well as a number of club level tournaments throughout the year. The Sri Lanka Junior Open is thus the established benchmark for national rankings of junior golf. The winner of the Sri Lanka Junior Open will be crowned the National Junior Champion in both boys' and girls' categories.

"The committed sponsorship of junior golf by Prima Group Sri Lanka and Prima Sunrise Bread has been invaluable to the Sri Lanka Golf Union in promoting the sport island wide. The popularity of the sport is seen to be growing mainly due to the focused outreach programs carried out by Sri Lanka Golf to propagate the sport at the grassroots. This



Prima Sunrise Bread committing to sponsor the Sri Lanka Junior Open Golf Tournament

initiative was the brainchild of the Junior Sub Committee of Sri Lanka Golf to identify the nation's young golf talent with a view to nurturing and developing them for future national and international representation. This year we have slowly started the rollout of junior training starting from Anuradhapura golf academy," Sri Lanka Golf Chairperson - Junior Development Niloo Jayatilake said. "As the long standing partner in supporting junior golf in Sri Lanka, we are pleased to sponsor the Junior Open Golf tournament once again this year. As the most important tournament for young and upcoming golfers in the country, we look forward to some high standard golf this year as well. We are grateful to the Sri

ComBank partners with PayHere

• To offer Q+ users a unique ecommerce experience

The Commercial Bank of Ceylon has partnered with PayHere to offer users of its Q+ payment app a unique, user-friendly, and secure eCommerce experience.

Commercial Bank customers can now conveniently pay for their purchases via the Q+ app to over 3,300 registered PayHere online payment service enabled merchants. The bank's credit, debit and prepaid card holders who pay through Q+ will not be required to tap in their card details as this information is already stored on the app, the bank said.

Payments to PayHere merchants via the Q+ facility will enhance customer convenience, as the transaction will only require the entering of users' mobile numbers registered with the app. Disbursements via Q+ require authentication using a static PIN ensures the safety and security of transactions, making the Q+ App more secure than a normal card as the customers' sensitive data is not transmitted



Commercial Bank Group Chief Marketing Officer Hasrath Munasinghe (second from right) and PayHere Founder/CEO Dhanika Perera (second from left) exchange the agreement in the presence of PayHere Head of Development Karvin Mendis (extreme left) and Commercial Bank Senior Manager - Card Centre Seevali Wickramasinghe

to merchant websites.

The partnership also presents PayHere enabled merchants another conduit to collect payments, the bank said. PayHere merchants can now add the Q+ Online Pay facility to their websites and offer customers another option to settle their payments, in addition to the acceptance of all major credit cards, mobile wallets, and internet banking systems. Notably, Commercial Bank processes the highest number of card transactions in the country.

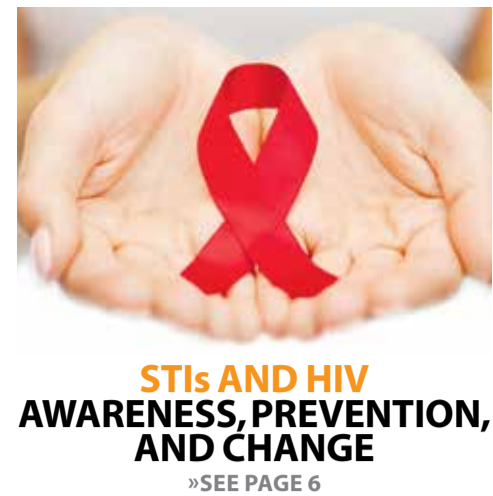
To pay through Q+, Commercial Bank card holders simply have to select the "Q+" payment option in the checkout page of the merchant's website or application, enter the registered mobile number, click on the alert that will pop up and complete the transaction by entering a four-digit transaction PIN in the Q+ online pay tab to which they will be directed. Once the transaction is complete, customers will receive a confirmation notification via SMS or email.



BoC's annual pirth chanting ceremony held in line with 82nd anniversary

In Celebration of its 82nd anniversary, Bank of Ceylon organised an all-night pirth chanting ceremony to invoke the blessings of the triple gems on the bank, its staff, and customers. The annual event, which usually takes place in line with the bank's anniversary in August, had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. The bank's Buddhist Association organised the event - following all safety guidelines - to ensure the safety of the participants.

Bank of Ceylon Chairman Kanchana Ratwatte, General Manager K.E.D. Sumanasiri, Additional General Manager Russel Fonseka, and members of the corporate and executive management, along with banks' other officials and well wishers of the bank, participated in this ceremony.



Having most likely gone through these sites at breakneck speed, treating it more like an obstacle course of sorts; racing your way to the top of Sigiriya, complaining about how hot Polonnaruwa was, or even how musty the museum smelled, it's unlikely that we engaged with these locations the way they were intended to be experienced.

Turns out, it may not be entirely our distracted brain's fault for not really appreciating what museums have to offer. To speak about what museums have to offer and how little we really interact with them, we reached out to University of Kelaniya Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology Professor Jagath Weerasinghe, who shared with us the story of the contested histories in archeological museums, and why these histories and their inclusion could potentially change the way that people interact with museums.

Weerasinghe explained this story of contested histories through two well-known examples – the Sigiriya archeological museum and the one in Polonnaruwa.

Sigiriya site museum

Weerasinghe shared that site museums exist primarily to further the experience that people have had with the archeological site they just explored. However, as a person responsible for curating and putting together the museum experience, he said that he wishes to raise the question: "Are we presenting these sites in their multiple histories?"

Often, what we would expect in museums is history as told by archeologists. They are the "authorised heritage practitioners" i.e. AHP who give way to the authorised heritage discourse.

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THERE'S MORE THAN ONE HISTORY

BY DIMITHRI WIJESINGHE

As Sri Lankans, if you were part of the state education system, then at some point in your school career you were loaded onto a bus together with your impressionable young classmates and carted off to either the Colombo National Museum, Sigiriya, or Polonnaruwa, all in the name of your historical education.

The elusive inner child

BY VANESSA MENDIS

Many professionals stand by the theory that the majority of the conflicts, personality issues, and challenges that we experience as adults, have their origins in our childhood. For that reason, "working with one's inner child" is a phrase that we often hear in psychology, or psychotherapy, as a means to remedy the root cause of an issue, instead of simply treating the symptoms superficially.

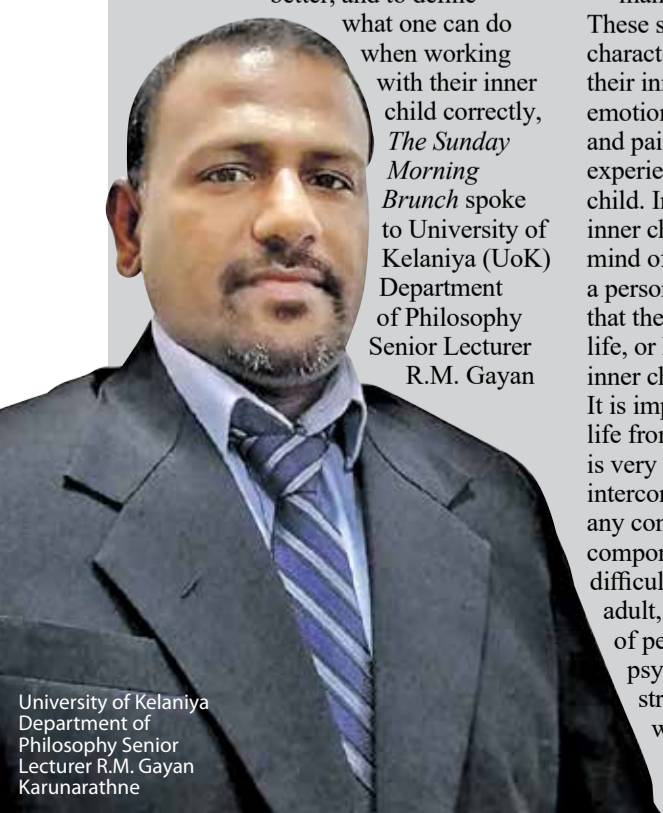
However, because of how ubiquitously this is spoken about today, the concept of the inner child is often somewhat misunderstood, or misconstrued. To understand working with our inner child better, and to define what one can do when working with their inner child correctly, *The Sunday Morning Brunch* spoke to University of Kelaniya (UoK) Department of Philosophy Senior Lecturer R.M. Gayan

Karunarathne (BA Psychology, MSc Psychology and MPhil). At UoK, he currently works closely with the teaching and training of students who aspire to become clinical psychologists, and oversees their research.

➔ **We hear the term 'inner child' commonly at present. What does this really mean?**

The inner child can be considered as the hidden part of an individual's personality according to both modern and analytical psychology. Even though an individual is an adult and is progressing in their life, they may occasionally portray certain childlike characteristics, or think in a manner that is not very adultlike. These sudden changes or displays of characteristics can occur owing to their inner child. On the other hand, emotions like anger, fear of darkness, and pain, can be attributed to childhood experiences, and therefore, their inner child. In analytical psychology, the inner child represents the unconscious mind of an individual. In other words, a person may not be aware of the role that their inner child plays in their adult life, or how the various aspects of the inner child may present themselves. It is important to remember that our life from childhood to adulthood is very much like a chain that is all interconnected. As such, if there are any conflicts within the childhood component of our life, we may have difficulty regulating ourselves as an adult, emotionally and even in terms of personality. This is why many psychotherapists and psychologists stress on the importance of clients working on their inner child.

What does working with one's inner child really mean?



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Sathis: Carving his way up the ladder of success

BY RAVINI PERERA

The heart and soul of every woodcarver lives in a slab of wood. Sathis Kumara Piyasena is no exception. Sathis developed an interest in the art of woodcarving as a child, inspired to try his hand at the craft after watching his father, a fellow woodcarver, in action.

His talent spoke for itself, and the recognition he received from school and all-island competitions as a student confirmed his calling to continue this craft, and on completing school in 2016, he launched his own business; Sathis Wood Carving.

His talent and jaw-dropping wooden sculptures have seen him win many awards and much



recognition. Some of Sathis's key achievements include the "Shilpa Abhimani Award", for the most outstanding wooden sculpture at the Presidential Awards Handicrafts Competition and Exhibition, and

most recently, he bagged all-island first place for wooden sculptures at the 42nd National Youth Awards for the second consecutive year.

The Sunday Morning Brunch caught up with Sathis for a chat on what it's like carving his way up the ladder of success while working to preserve an indigenous art form. "Not many people, especially the current generation, would opt for a career in woodcarving or start their own business selling these crafts," shared Sathis. "Generally, people do not like to be covered in sawdust or deal with minor injuries, both of which are highly probable consequences of this job. But I embrace all such experiences and hardships that this career entails."

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Contd. from page 1

There's more...

However, if you talk to the villagers in the vicinity of these heritage sites, for example, the inhabitants of the 22 villages that surround Sigiriya who have been there for several generations, their story of Sigiriya is slightly different to the kind of Sigiriya we present in the museum. Weerasinghe, being the current director of archeology at Sigiriya, said that he believes he is in a position to say this with some responsibility.

"It is not about which is the correct history. There is more than one past for anything, just as we have more than one present, or even future," he said, adding lightly that it is quite evident now more than ever: with all the media and documentation that happens on the daily, if you look at a newspaper that is pro-government, then you get one history of today, and if you read Facebook or somewhere else there's another, a potentially opposite story.

"As learned people, we talk about things and are well aware of the existence of these multiple histories. However, when it comes to archeological sites, we tend to think of a history that is more truthful, a history in terms of material data," he said. While noting that this is the nature of an archeologist, he added that however, what happens on such occasions is, we exclude the other kinds of narratives that exist about that site in the process.

He said that there's much to be considered; the history as told by villagers, which is the anthropological past, then the mythological past. He touched briefly on the infamous "Ravana" myths that is presently being tackled on to Sigiriya. Regarding this Ravana narrative, he said that archeologists are supposed to be incredibly upset by this, since according to their way of thinking, "it is a lie", but this is only based on the way that they operate. However, he also noted that he personally is of the opinion that "you will get upset by this only if you think there is only one true history or true past of these places".

The practical past

Prof. Weerasinghe further said that

while we have the archeological past, the anthropological past, and the mythological past, the practical past – which is a mixture of all of the above – is what people fight for, and therefore it is what elicits emotions. Thus, that is what we need to have in our museums.

He stated that this practical past is what motivates people to fight for something, it motivates action – an example would be when we say that we are fighting to preserve this land of ours where the Buddha visited three times; there is a level of gravitas to this. While there isn't any archeological evidence to support the fact that the Buddha visited our island, it is the practical past that we all believe. While not in archeological discourse, it is still a part of the history we experience.

Therefore, he said that with regards to museums, they too can acknowledge the existence of the practical past. It is a way of empowering the common man, and it will be presented as transparently as possible; not by misleading people and claiming there is archeological evidence, but by presenting the awareness that archeology is not the one and only history of that site. In this case, the site being Sigiriya, it would mean to tell people that the historical presence of Sigiriya has so many other narratives.

He stated that our historical past does not align with our archeological past when it comes to Sigiriya. Using the example of consulting the Mahavamsa for the historical tale, where it states that King Kashyapa was hiding at Sigiriya in fear of his brother, Weerasinghe noted that archeology tells a very different story instead. It says that the king was not hiding, but that he was in fact thriving and having a wonderful life. He was a part of major world trade connections, living in a very busy urban centre. This would be the history and archeology of this site. Then comes the anthropological past; what the people say, which also differs from all the rest.

However, Weerasinghe shared that in the museum all these histories are not



Entrance gallery of the museum, showing Sigiriya's prehistoric past



Buddhist finds from the Sigiriya area around Kashyapa's fortress

presented, and he argues: "Museums can be made more interesting, more relatable to people if we present these stories as well within their proper context, argument, and discourse, rather than claiming one as truth and the other as false."

Polonnaruwa site museum

He took Polonnaruwa as his second example. Taking us through the relics, he recalls that when you take the main entrance to the Polonnaruwa archeological site, you find the Shiva Devalaya to your left hand side, and to the right hand side you walk past the "sithalaya" where the palace and the rest of the structures are.

However, if you walk into the Polonnaruwa museum, the Shiva and Hindu aspects are at the further end.

"I am a government servant, and I don't know if I am capable of making any changes in any way, or maybe I can, but what I wish to propose is that in my opinion, the purpose of the site museum is to present the site in a way that enables the visitors to grasp it in its full complexity," he said, noting that perhaps in order to do that, the special organisation of an archeological



Central gallery of the museum with a replica of the entire Sigiriya area

site should be replicated and followed in the museum arrangement. He said that it is just a proposal and he does not mean to say that the histories are not represented at the museums; they are in fact told vibrantly. However, what is highlighted is the Buddhist story and perhaps the aim should be to take visitors on a familiar journey to the one they just experienced on the site.

Do we even know how to experience museums?

If each of us were to think back to those times we visited these historical and archeological sites in school, how much history do we actually recall? It's not even a matter of having forgotten what we learned, we simply didn't know how to experience these sites.

To be totally frank, to this day, speaking only for ourselves, we can

say that we do not truly know how to experience what museums have to offer. Often, it's just a bunch of interesting-looking artefacts that potentially tell a story, but we don't really know what.

Weerasinghe shared that this is quite literally what he means when he proposes that the museums represent more than the archeological history, and that we include those other histories that make the story more relatable to the visitor.

He said: "We do not really teach children how to spend time with images in museums, or even in Sigiriya with the frescoes. Museum education is very limited here." However, he added that the national museum is trying hard to diversify their offerings to the public.

He shared that it is very important to experience history for numerous reasons, the main reason being for the sake of modern consciousness. "It is a sign of being modern, to know that there was a time that was different to ours," he said, adding that since we reenact histories in a different way, this is necessary to understand contemporary society.

Museums are the only places where you can engage and have a dialogue with the past using your contemporary ideas. The museum allows you to fill the gaps between the labels of the relics and statues that it presents to you. "This is why you can spend hours in a museum observing and thinking deeply," Weerasinghe said, adding that this is why he always says that "the story of the museum lies between the statues."

So perhaps, if museums were to take on a more diverse representation of our many pasts, as kids race to the top of Sigiriya trying to reach the summit before everybody else, they'll stop for a moment to observe the frescoes and think deeply about the stories they tell.

Prof. Weerasinghe will be discussing this topic in more detail in the panel discussion "Contested Histories in Archaeological Museums" held as part of "Rethinking Museums", a series of conversations between French and Sri Lankan cultural professionals on the museum field, presented by The Embassy of France to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, in partnership with Brunch as Digital Media Partner

Sathis: Carving his way...

"It is then, and only then, that you can produce exquisite pieces of art that you can be proud of in the end. Alongside my designs, I also try to highlight the difficulties embedded in the process of producing these wooden sculptures, which people most often tend to overlook."

Developing a brand

Hailing from Embekka, Kandy, a village renowned for wood sculptures, Sathis has witnessed firsthand the lack of conservation around woodcarving as an ancient heritage craft. Hence, in his opinion, establishing his own brand in woodcarving was a step that he could take towards making a change. "I started my own workshop not only with the intention of building an identity for myself and to gain the freedom of doing what I like, but also to do my part in preserving this valuable art for generations to come," he said.

At present, entrepreneurs like Sathis are reaping the rewards of success from incorporating social media in their daily business activities, something the generations before him couldn't do. With the help of such platforms, Sathis is able to deliver phenomenal experiences to his fans. Moreover, he views social media as a cornerstone in his journey to success, with many people and potential clients watching and reaching out to him through these channels.

"In my father's time, orders for wood sculptures were placed by customers who gathered information through word of mouth. Learning from the past and utilising the current technology, I wanted to try out new strategies to attract the attention of the people and to reintroduce woodwork to society in a new way. I realised that publicity and communication were essential factors if I needed people to see my work and to inject an idea about this fine art to the society," Sathis shared.

Speaking about the dangers and challenges he has faced while developing his brand, Sathis explained that this career may be considered life-threatening simply due to the usage of dangerous tools and machinery. "Injuries are an imminent part of this job and one must take all necessary precautions to avoid such mishaps," he said, stressing that concentration and patience are key requirements for anyone involved in this field.

One major challenge for Sathis is



Sathis Kumara Piyasena designing his products

obtaining raw material for his work, mainly due to a lot of red tape in the procuring process. While noting that he doesn't expect the law related to the issuance of permits and licenses to obtain wood to change anytime soon, Sathis said: "Action should be taken by the authorities to make these materials available and affordable for us artists."

Some of the woods Sathis most popularly used based on customer demand are teak and mahogany, but the base wood does change based on customer requirements and the purpose they're commissioning sculptures for. For instance, white sandalwood is used for sculptures prepared for religious purposes and places.

Hard work pays off

The main reason for Sathis's success and popularity within the past few years has been his dedication to each piece of art. While certain sculptors allocate a small amount of time on each woodwork, intending to accommodate more orders

and to secure a profit margin, Sathis spends time on each masterpiece as he pleases. "I spend a significant amount of time and energy on each sculpture, and do not trouble myself with the profit made. Ultimately, my goal is to secure a high customer satisfaction rate while also being content with the end product as an artist. Furthermore, I want other people who see my work to appreciate it too. That is the best outcome an artist can receive," he said.

A wooden sculpture is brought to life following an extremely painstaking and time-consuming process. From perfecting a freehand design on paper to achieving the same on a slab of wood, all measures must be taken to match the request of the customer. Thus the minute details, the designs, and the wood utilised are some of the many factors that contribute to a costly finished product.

Commenting on the secret to his success and accomplishments thus far, Sathis highlighted that he has mostly focused on building an identity for his crafts rather than duplicating work that already exists. "It is easy to copy someone else's work, as people have done with mine, but the secret is to adopt the idea, improve the design, and add your own effects to the sculpture. This is what creates a new design," he explained. "Many iconic figures and monuments have been recreated through woodwork, but not all artists have been successful in capturing the hearts of the beholders, due to their lack of creativity."

Moreover, when inquired about his future plans and the possibility of exhibiting his creations to the public, Sathis shared his idea of holding an exhibition in the near future mainly to showcase his award-winning masterpieces.

Preserving what is ours

Although some artists discontinue their engagement in this career, Sathis is determined to remain in this profession and to take this culture to great heights. Although the woodwork of authentic Sri Lankan artists are already well-received and known globally, Sathis believes that the industry is yet to tap into its full potential.

"I believe that more people should be encouraged to try their hand at wood carving. Proper awareness can lead to kindling an interest within the community. Though wood sculpting is an integral part



Final products

of our culture and history, it is not being given the proper value it deserves," he said.

He went on to express that actors and singers are constantly being appreciated and recognised at award ceremonies and other platforms established to showcase their talents. Likewise, such opportunities must be afforded to other artists, including woodcarvers. "Though there are events and ceremonies highlighting talented handicraft manufacturers, no proper programmes have been established to focus on their future in the industry. An award and the prize money will not necessarily ensure a bright future for these entrepreneurs. Most designers lack the proper training, capacity, and material to meet international standards. Therefore, training sessions alongside other means to support them must be introduced."

Additionally, concessions granted by the Government for woodcarvers to obtain tools and equipment are being misused by certain individuals, as described by Sathis. Hence, as per his suggestions, the authorities must introduce a strict system to monitor and regulate such grants, while saving innocent designers from exploitation.

The famous "Embekka Devalaya" is a tourist hotspot and a place that represents the finest woodwork of the ancient times of Sri Lanka. Customarily, thousands of people visit this location. However, Sathis is of the opinion that sufficient development projects have not been carried out in this village. "A person who might have visited this popular place, even decades apart, may have noticed that there is nothing new to be seen in the area.



Everything is the same as it was years ago. Improving this area could eventually lead to the creation of incalculable amounts of opportunities for the villagers and artists."

Sathis's concepts to develop and preserve these locations and this culture, which were in the early stages of discussion with the authorities, were brought to an abrupt halt due to the global pandemic. However, he remains optimistic about the future and believes that these ideas could be implemented and used as the situation normalises.

Many people select easy routes to earn money, often neglecting their talents and capabilities. Sathis does not agree with such decisions. Although self-employment may be challenging, he believes that people must take risks: "Society promotes the concept that you must find employment rather than create it yourself. The ones that dare to establish a brand for themselves are the ones that make an actual difference. Even though starting your own business may involve countless sacrifices and disappointments, if you are truly dedicated, you will never regret your decision."

He added: "My journey was founded on trial and error. But I did not give up nor was I disheartened by the events that set me back. I turned all such experiences into lessons and continued. Therefore, I encourage everyone to try new things and to make use of one's talents. Do what you like, but at the same time enjoy what you do, that is the secret to success. Anything less would be unacceptable."

Find more information about Sathis's Wood Carving at: <https://www.facebook.com/sathiswoodcarving>

BY DIMITHRI WIJESINGHE

The first annual Jaffna Queer Fest concluded its successful 10-day experience from 21-30 November at Kalam, Jaffna. The Jaffna-based festival was the first of its kind, featuring queer excellence in creative and cultural sectors, with an emphasis on supporting local, national, and international exchanges in queer cultural production and circulation.

The collaborative efforts of an incredibly ardent community were brought to fruition courtesy of festival Founder and Director Kasro Ponnuthurai and festival Curator Hari Rajaledchumy.

The event, which was originally intended to be an entirely virtual affair, was readjusted to be a hybrid festival as soon as the lockdown across the island was lifted. According to festival Curator Hari Rajaledchumy, while there was some initial trepidation, considering that it is their very first effort, things went incredibly smoothly and far better than they could've ever hoped for.



Jaffna Queer Fest Founder and Director Kasro Ponnuthurai

With the festivities coming to a close – we found that everything went out with a bang, with the scheduled celebratory dinner for the closing event turning into an impromptu afterparty with an unexpected attendance – Hari generously gave us a recap of the events that took place at the festival.

Before we get into the events however, Hari shared her and festival Founder Kasro's journey leading up to the eventual launch of the festival, how they worked tirelessly in putting together something never done before in Jaffna. She said: "Kasro and I would have endless discussions over the phone, I was in Sri Lanka at the time but because of the pandemic and also with Kasro being a veterinarian, there was limited time between us." She shared that they went back and forth on whether this was in fact the time to put this into action: "Is this the moment, are we ready?" She said that thankfully, because they had originally hoped to do it entirely online, they felt a slight bit of relief, deciding that next year they would arrange a physical event.

"We had our anxieties. I am not going to lie, but we also knew that in the past 10 years things have been shifting. We have friends in the community, non-queer allies in the arts and literary fields," she said, and so they felt they had the strength to move forward.

Hari also noted that a key point in this festival is that it was not meant to be a purely human rights focused approach;



rather, it is borne out of literature and the arts. These fields have long embraced, for lack of a better word, queer avenues.

"So we knew that would give us some foundation in the community. We therefore steered it through those avenues, and I think these decisions paid off," she said.

She also noted that to their great surprise, the absolute success was in how far and wide the event had reached, as they saw the attendance of a variety of community members who would not have otherwise taken part in frontline events of the community. She shared that even Kasro himself, who has had years of working on the frontlines as an activist, was surprised by the sheer number of community members who chose to take part. "It was a moment of great pride for us," she said.



Regarding the ultimate goal in putting together the festival, Hari shared that what they were thinking of was the lack of spaces to engage and create queer cultural content, especially in the Tamil language. "There are many Sri Lankan Tamil people producing queer content, but it wasn't getting the reach it deserved; it wasn't circulating as is ideal," she said, and so they hoped to create a space for these discussions and works.

She also added that the frontline initiatives like the Jaffna Transgender Network, Jaffna Sangam, and others were inundated with the very pressing issues of rights-based queries and numerous other areas of concern, and they felt that there was a lack of a space where the queer arts were celebrated, for joy and cultural exploration.



Scenes from the Jaffna Queer Fest

Getting back to our event recap, Hari shared that the opening event itself was a rather attractive affair, with an artist performance taking centre stage – a dance performance by Sathurshan. The performance and the accompanying exhibition was devised by artist Kajendran Sivasubramaniam with Angel Queentus, Madhubala M, and Anton Uthayakumaran.

She said that day one consisted primarily of movie screenings, and a notable feature was the movie screening of *Roobha* (2018) which was directed by Lenin M. Sivam who was born and brought up in Jaffna. The film features a trans woman in a leading role. Written and acted by another Jaffna-born talent; writer and actor Anthonythasan Jesuthasan.

Hari provided that it was important for them to bring this film home to Jaffna, and similarly, the other screenings on the first day were focused on bringing queer content rooted in the vernacular and the regional. She extended her gratitude to Swarnavel Eswaran, Leena Manimekalai, and the Panmai Theatre Group, who were tasked with putting together the screenings, which were all well received by the festival audience.



Day three saw the workshop conducted by artist Yalini Dream, well-known and incredibly visible in the public for over two decades now, especially online as an iconic Sri Lankan Tamil lesbian presence. Hari shared that Yalini is also deeply committed to transformative, ethical potentials afforded by creativity and the arts, so she was quite a perfect addition to the festival and presented the ideal opportunity for attendees to learn from her.

Hari also noted that through their online screenings the festival was able to introduce their audience to the life and works of D'lo, another long-established queer and trans icon with Sri Lankan Tamil roots. Queer Fest screened the Crescent Diamond's short documentary "Performing Girl", based on the story of D'lo, which has played an important role in kick-starting difficult conversations around trans-masculine identities and negotiations of the past.

We would be remiss not to mention the online poetry open mic, which according to Hari was a huge success, an outcome which was a pleasant surprise to them all. She shared that originally they wondered if they would be able to encourage queer artists to share their

works, particularly amateur artists to share a piece of their experience in this way, in a public setting. However, she said that their concerns were all for naught because there was an incredibly enthusiastic response to this particular event.

She shared that they had participants from diverse locations (Kalmunai, Badulla, Point Pedro, and Vavuniya), adding that as a festival, it made them realise that there is a need for ongoing events/spaces for creative expression that go beyond meeting survival needs in the community. "We need spaces that nurture and develop talent and steer towards committed cultural production and engagement," she said, stating that this would certainly be one of the major takeaways from their event. She said that as the festival has drawn to a close, they will now be thinking about aligning these community talents and resources towards their next iteration in 2022.



Dance performance by Sathurshan at the opening event

Some other notable highlights throughout were the Queerness and Writing Workshop with Nadika and the spiritual predecessor to the poetry event – the open mic readings for prose which took place on day five. Hari noted that writer Gireesh read from his forthcoming novel "Swyambhulingam", and writer and activist Eelanila read from her recently published autobiography "Arikkan Lamp" (Hurricane Lamp).

They also featured a discussion with Wara Thiagarajah on the topic of "Decentralisation of Queerness within Sri Lanka", which proved to be insightful, echoing a lot of truth amongst the community. There was also a discussion with Moulee on "Developing and Sustaining Queer Cultural Spaces".

Finally came day 10, which featured a party with music curated by Imaad Majeed, who was one of the many who travelled from Colombo to attend the festival. Then came the incredible turnout at the afterparty and dinner, which Hari said was simply the perfect metric to gather how well the event was received, and they were all able to rest their fears knowing that all was so very well received.

Considering that the Jaffna Queer Fest has since come to an end, Hari shared that they do have some work they wish to do moving forward. She noted that community involvement and engaging local resources on a more extensive level was something they hoped to look into, while also building commercial partnerships in the region and creating talent development opportunities. She also said that they will be looking at Queer Fest 2022, and programmes to gather resources for and produce work exclusively for the festival.

i Learn more about Jaffna Queer Fest at: www.jaffnaqueerfestival.com

Contd. from page 1

The elusive...

➔ How does the inner child affect us in our adult life?

There are various stages of development in an individual's personality. At the same time, most of us have heard that our mind can be divided into three segments, namely, the id, ego, and superego.

The id is the part of our mind that is primitive and childlike, and if it is not correctly controlled by the ego, as an adult, certain childlike or sometimes even inappropriate behaviours may present themselves. On the other hand, most of the parents in our society try to raise children in an authoritarian manner, without respecting the mental health and the wishes of the child. This can create unhealthy childhood experiences psychologically for the growing child. A simple example would be parents refusing to give a child a toy that they really like. This constant withholding of what the child wants can wound the inner child, and make a child believe that they are not able to, or not worthy of getting what they really want and like in life, and that what they truly yearn for, will always be withheld from them.

This wound is what the unconscious mind carries on to the adult life of that child. In a similar manner, a child who experiences emotionally absent parents, abuse, and harsh childhood experiences, will grow up with trust and abandonment wounds as an adult, which can cause significant turbulence in their relationships. They may either try to hold on too tightly to the people they love,

or completely detach from connections in order to avoid potential pain. They may also suppress emotions, leading to psychological disturbances.

➔ So, would it be correct to assume that trauma then affects the inner child strongly?

Yes. Any form of trauma, be it neglect, abuse of any form, or any experience that a child encounters while growing up, that has a strong negative impact on their psyche, has the ability to potentially wound their inner child. This has a direct impact on their personality development. Even experiences such as bullying and feeling like an outcast in front of friends and peers or families, can throw a child into conflict about their personality. I would say that the inner child plays a big role in how our adult personalities and behaviours are shaped, and that trauma impacts a child's mind at a very subconscious level, presenting as unsavoury characteristics in their adult life.

➔ We hear a lot about meditation and mindfulness in healing the inner child. Is that sufficient? How can one actually work on their inner child?

I would say that the most important factor that anybody needs to consider is getting the help of a qualified psychologist or psychotherapist if they want to heal their inner child. Generally, we go to a

psychologist with a completely different issue, and the psychologist or therapist then identifies that there is an inner child issue that needs addressing. For example, if one is experiencing anger, mood swings, self-esteem issues, and so on, the therapist is the one who can identify the root cause of this, which is usually an inner child issue. I would say that one cannot, on their own, try to heal the wounds of their inner child through introspection alone, without the guidance of a qualified professional.

➔ What is the biggest misconception, according to your expertise, that exists about the concept of the inner child?

According to my experience, I feel that the vast majority of people underestimate the role of the inner child in one's adult life. The misconception therefore, is that they believe that there is no such thing, or that the concept of the inner child has been exaggerated. Additionally, most people disconnect the connection between childhood and adulthood. As I mentioned before, our life is like a chain that is interconnected. However, especially in Sri Lanka, because many of us ignore this relationship, providing people with psychoeducation and guidance to cope with mental health challenges can become difficult for a professional.

Another misconception is that some people believe that they can work on their inner child on their own using meditation, breathing techniques, and alternative forms of therapy such as art or music. While these methods are viable, they must only be attempted under the supervision of

a qualified professional. Attempting to tap into one's inner child and heal one's inner child alone, can aggravate any issues and conflicts that may exist in one's subconscious and unconscious minds.

➔ Can somebody working on their inner child experience relapses in whatever they are trying to overcome psychologically or in terms of personality?

Yes, they can, and that is why continuity of therapy is crucial. In psychoanalytical theories we say that the id is the primitive part of one's personality and mind, the superego is the "politically correct" part that is concerned with how others see us, and that the ego is the buffer between the two, balancing them out and coming up with the best possible and least painful solution for the person. If we discontinue therapy while working on the inner child, the id can overcome the ego and the superego, and therefore cause the person to relapse.

On the other hand, in behavioural psychology, we offer reinforcements to a person on a subtle, psychological level to resolve personality and behavioural issues. This stops an individual from relapsing back to square one. This kind of reinforcement is only possible through the motivation and guidance of a psychologist who is skilled at providing insights to a client's subconscious that assists them to keep on doing the healing. Therefore, relapses can happen when clients discontinue guided work before they are ready.

➔ Is there a specific method that is generally used to assist an individual to heal their inner child?

No. The approach and the methodology implemented will change widely on a case by case basis depending upon the nature of the issue, the personality of the client, their motivation to heal the inner child, and so on. Some clients may not even be able to reach inwards and heal their inner child at all. Some may prefer methods such as guided meditation. Others would simply like to stay with talk therapy. Therefore, generalising the inner child healing mechanisms is not possible, and not correct.

➔ What are the benefits of healing one's inner child?

The most important benefit would be increasing one's self-awareness. A lot of the conflicts that we experience happen because we lack self-awareness. Another benefit would be that this work allows us to heal our childhood wounds and traumas, bringing us relief and changing the perceptions and approaches that we have towards others in general, and our life. All of this helps one to lead a more fulfilling and rewarding life going forward. On the other hand, inner child work is empowering and enables a person to progress in life, and achieve their goals, despite the many challenges that they may encounter. It also helps one resolve any problematic behavioural patterns and break unhealthy cycles that they may have been caught in for years.

'Little choices lead to great things'

House of Lonali on 10 years of driving sustainability



consumer textile waste from ending up in landfills. This waste has been upcycled into 18,839 uniquely designed products. Their carbon emission saving in the upcycling process was 706.01 kg CO2e from 2019-2021 alone. In addition, they have also influenced, educated, and impacted over 15,000 people, across age groups, in advocating for sustainable fashion/lifestyle in Sri Lanka and around the world.



We are sharing this with the hope that it will help people look at things a bit differently, just like I did when I first decided to upcycle fabric waste into unique garments, which otherwise would have ended up in a landfill. We haven't covered all topics of importance in this video, but just enough to turn a head, or two, and we hope that will have a ripple effect on changing attitudes and perceptions on how even little choices can make a great impact – a positive one
**House of Lonali Founder
Lonali Rodrigo**



sustainability. "Help us make it go viral. Not the video, but the message – for all of us to do our part in designing a better future!" Rodrigo added.

Rodrigo concluded by saying: "From our humble beginnings as a sustainable fashion brand we have evolved as the premier sustainable lifestyle brand that upcycles pre-consumer waste in Sri Lanka. Today we design for both individuals and businesses alike, with people and the planet at the very core of our purpose. And as we move forward, we want our vision to be bigger and bolder to be responsible for each piece we create, and make sure our products last longer and to strive towards preventing our pieces from ending up in landfills. We will also continue to collaborate with other brands and businesses who share this ethos, to find creative sustainable solutions that will help us design a better future."



The first choice (and the most important one) I made as a designer, was to design with already existing apparel industry waste, exploring the concept of upcycling. Then I realised it is something that requires a lot of time, energy, and love to pursue. Upcycling was a whole new concept for local audiences at the time
**House of Lonali Founder
Lonali Rodrigo**

House of Lonali has planned more than just a video to help realise their vision for the future, including workshops, events, collaborations with brands that have similar values, and other branded content dedicated to educating and advocating

BY NETHMI DISSANAYAKE

The apparel industry has gone through many ups and downs over the last 10 years, especially during the last two years, what with the pandemic and the disruption and transformation it has brought.

Sticking to what has been done before is no longer an option. When it comes to brands in the apparel space, what's both old and new has to be new. And for established businesses, that means catering to long standing customers whilst evolving and adapting to new concepts. As such, getting through the last two years, in itself, is something to celebrate.



The environmental cost of our resource intensive lifestyles is frightening. Some say the damage is irreversible. Some don't even care about the repercussions. And then there are some, like us, who believe that even the little choices we make today could lead to greater things in the future
**House of Lonali Founder
Lonali Rodrigo**

Against this backdrop, it makes sense that brands are being louder and prouder about their legacies and milestones. One brand celebrating a big milestone this year is the ethical lifestyle brand House of Lonali, who will be celebrating their 10th anniversary in December.

From its inception, House of Lonali has set itself apart by being an environmentally ethical fashion brand in its true sense. In celebration of this big birthday, and in response to the times we live in, House of Lonali has launched an all-new campaign, #GREATLITTLECHOICES, to raise awareness on the importance of making lifestyle choices that are good for both people and the planet, and how that aligns with their vision to design a better future, as they reposition themselves as the country's premier sustainable lifestyle brand.

The Sunday Morning Brunch spoke to House of Lonali Founder Lonali Rodrigo about the last 10 years, what that has meant for the brand, and what they hope to inspire with #GREATLITTLECHOICES. Reflecting on 10 years of House of Lonali, Lonali said: "Looking back through our 10 year journey, making conscious little choices has led us to the sustainable lifestyle brand we are today. The environmental cost of our resource intensive lifestyles is frightening. Some say the damage is irreversible. Some don't even care about the repercussions. And then there are some, like us, who believe that even the little choices we make today could lead to greater things in the future. Join us – choose wisely and let's design a better future together."

"We believe the responsibility of reducing the impact any product has on the environment is equally divided between the producer and the consumer. It is up to each one of us to make the right choices to help design a better future."



Rodrigo also reminisced with us on how she started House of Lonali and what tough choices she had to make along the way to stay true to her vision. "The first choice (and the most important one) I made as a designer, was to design with already existing apparel industry waste, exploring the concept of upcycling. Then I realised it is something that requires a lot of time, energy, and love to pursue. Thus, I chose to work with cottage industry women. Upcycling was a whole new concept for local audiences at the time," Rodrigo recalled. "As tough as it was, we chose to advocate sustainable fashion through talks, forums, workshops, and pop-ups aimed at different age groups, both in and out of Colombo. We also chose to minimise fabric waste even from our production process. Any remaining scraps were later used as raw material for other small products. Some of those offcuts were patched and converted into other new pieces, to achieve our zero waste goal."

House of Lonali's efforts, to date, have prevented approximately 3,912 kg of pre-

HISTORIES OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SARANDIB

'Banishment and Belonging: Exile and Diaspora in Sarandib, Lanka and Ceylon' by Ronit Ricci: A review

BY PROFESSOR FARZANA HANIFFA

Ronit Ricci's "Banishment and Belonging" is a book about stories from literary texts. It describes connections between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia spanning several centuries, languages, naming practices, and religio-cultural worlds. The book is written based on texts in several different languages, and is a stellar example of the knowledge that can be produced when skills with multiple languages are deployed for inquiry across regions. Ricci unearths connections that might otherwise have been missed, and her close reading of manuscripts and documents gathered from Malay communities in Sri Lanka and the Indonesian peninsula has resulted in an important book that presents the island as a place of religio-cultural dynamism.

Ronit Ricci's book, which should be widely read, recounts the manner in which the Malay community in the country emerged from the Malay diaspora of the colonial period. The book traces the multiple names – Lanka, Sarandib, and Ceylon – used by the Malay diaspora to refer to what is now Sri Lanka, from the 17th Century onwards. The origins of the different names could be traced to the colonial administrations and to the

diasporic communities, who were either exiled to or stationed for military purposes on the island. The book discusses the meanings attributed through each name as it was used by the Southeast Asian kingdoms and the diaspora.

The Malays, an approximately 50 thousand strong minority Muslim community dispersed over several locations of the island, speak a specific Sri Lankan version of the Malay language and claim to originate from various parts of Indonesia (but mainly Java). Their preserved literary texts, as described by Ricci, record the history of exchange between the Island of Sarandib/Lanka/Ceylon and Java, and also the attempts at maintaining a literary culture across these vast distances.

The history of the Malays as told by Ricci through the reading of preserved manuscripts also describes the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia and the influence of the colonial powers in the dispersal of populations across vast distances – through banishment of political exiles, employment in imperial armies, but also through slavery. The book points to the usage of multiple languages in single texts as indications of the influences of both place and faith in the literary culture of the exiled/displaced communities. Texts are produced through the use of Javanese and

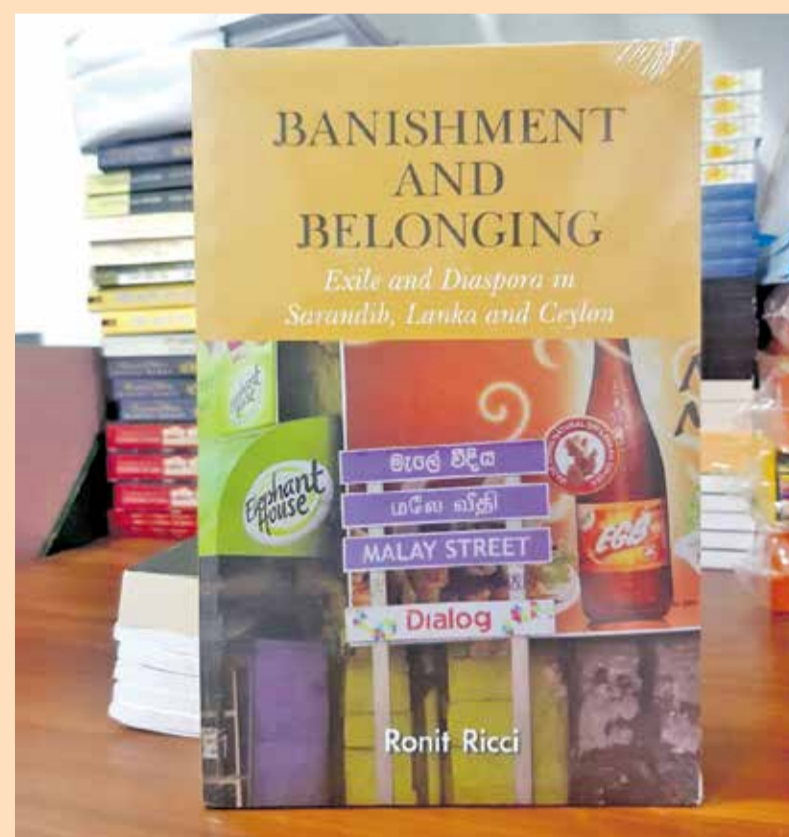
Arabic, and sometimes, Arabu-Tamil. The book also emphasises the cultivated interconnectedness of communities that were subject to banishment. It traces exchanges of letters among exiles within the country as well as exchanges with Java, and stories of longing to return to the places of origin. The book also presents the manner in which Ceylon – a location for exile – was looked upon by the Javanese. The experience of banishment is sometimes referred to by Javanese writers as "being Ceyloned".

I find the book interesting and look forward to including it in my teaching, as it serves to highlight Sri Lanka's place in global networks of literary and cultural exchange that is largely absent in conversations in the country. As Ricci points out, the trends in global history have bypassed Sri Lanka for the most part, and it is only now, several years in, that Sri Lanka is being integrated into these conversations. Ricci's book is important in the manner in which it inserts Sri Lanka into a narrative of connections that spans Southeast Asia during both Dutch and British colonial administrations.

As Nira Wickramasinghe and others have pointed out, history writing and teaching in Sri Lanka has been notorious in its commitment to a singular narrative that foregrounds the

Sinhala-Buddhist past alone. Part of a somewhat tragic nation building project in the immediate post-independence moment, Sri Lanka has suffered greatly due to the lack of stories regarding its "minority" peoples. This propensity has enabled one civil war between Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan state so far, and provided a fertile backdrop to the more recent cultivation of anti-Muslim animosity. The readily-available evidence of the country's plural past or the histories of the diverse communities that make up the larger Sri Lankan population are not part of existing conversations, either in popular media or in academic fora. Ricci's book compels us to pay attention to the richness of connections that emerge in the story of the Malays as a diaspora in Sri Lanka.

The attempt to integrate Sri Lanka into the global history framework is yet to include a detailed study of early Arab settlements or the arrival and spread of Islam on the island. The scholarly work on Sri Lankan Muslims is sparse in general, and is limited to contemporary accounts. Ricci's work – dealing with one of Sri Lanka's Muslim communities – gestures towards these large gaps in the literature. By looking at the manner in which the exiled Muslim Javanese made sense of their experience through the trope of the



prophet Adam's banishment from paradise, Ricci draws attention to the centrality of Ceylon/Sarandib in the imagination of the Muslim world and Muslim myth-making at the time. Ricci explains how the stories of those exiled discussed the stories of Adam's descent on to earth from heaven, and the stories of how Ceylon's Adam's Peak is closest to paradise. The text is also peppered with Javanese exiles' references to local Muslims. Ricci's book then serves to remind us that Sri Lanka was long in the middle of global networks, and points to the lacuna – the absent Muslims – that continue to haunt these stories of connection.

As an anthropologist, I was interested in the material culture of the preserved manuscripts that Ricci collected from Malay

families in Sri Lanka. What is the culture of manuscript preservation, what are the practices of reading these older literary works among the different Malay families that Ricci interviewed in her research? This is a story that the book does not attempt to tell. A greater exploration of that culture would be a noteworthy next step from this very important contribution to the study of Sri Lanka's different peoples.

The book is available in Sri Lanka from SL Books, Vijitha Yapa Bookshop – Thurstan Road, Barefoot Bookshop, and Perera Hussein Publishers.

(The writer is a professor at the University of Colombo. This review was first published in the IAS Newsletter.

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

When we talk about Sri Lankan film, Tamil films often tend to be overlooked for many reasons, from the Tamil demographic in Sri being smaller than for Sinhala films, and also because the Sri Lankan Tamil film industry, sadly, pales in comparison to the Indian Tamil film industry.

This Christmas marks the release of an entirely independent home-grown feature-length Sri Lankan Tamil film, "Puththi Kedda Manitharellam" (All the stupid people), directed by Raj Sivarajan.

The Sunday Morning Brunch chatted with Sivarajan ahead of the release of Puththi Kedda Manitharellam to learn more about the film and about the challenges of being an independent Tamil filmmaker in Sri Lanka.

Getting into film

Sivarajan was always interested in film, going on to study visual communication at SRM University Chennai and returning to Sri Lanka to make short films, working as an editor, cameraman, assistant director, and director.

Having made more than 15 short films to date, Puththi Kedda Manitharellam marks Sivarajan's first feature film.

As a director of short films, Sivarajan's work is acclaimed. His short films "The Balance", "Change", "Ini Oru Vithi Seivom", and "Unlimited" have all won awards at various editions of the Women's Media Collective Short Film Competition, and another of his short films, "Serukkulam" won third place at the National Short Film Competition in 2017.

Since 2013, Sivarajan has worked with a friend of his, Matheesan Thanabalasingam, on a Facebook page/media company of sorts; Poovan Media, forming a small team of film creatives who frequently band together to work on projects like short films and music videos. Poovan Media gave way to a small film production company - Blackboard International - and it is through Blackboard International that Sivarajan is releasing Puththi Kedda Manitharellam.

Speaking about the team behind Puththi Kedda Manitharellam, Sivarajan explained that the team was exclusively from and around Jaffna with the exception of the film's colourist, who hailed from Colombo.

Some of the key members behind the film include Sivarajan, people Sivarajan has worked with before through Poovan Media or Blackboard International, Matheesan Thanabalasingam as Music Director, Thirugnanam Tharmalingam as Director of Photography, Arun Yogathasan as Editor, and Nesakumar Saravanan as Art Director.

Puththi Kedda Manitharellam

Without giving away spoilers, Sivarajan shared that Puththi Kedda Manitharellam is a script based on several real-life incidents that have taken place during Sivarajan's career. One incident, for example, is going on a location shoot for a music video and realising he'd left some important materials behind. Sivarajan also shared that initially, the script was based on that one incident and what would have happened if they hadn't forgotten those materials on that particular shoot. Since then, the script was developed to include other incidents from his and his teammates' years on the job to create one full story.

Puththi Kedda Manitharellam goes behind the lives of a group of filmmakers, exploring university life, a love marriage, and other changes in the group's lives.

Sivarajan shared that, to his knowledge, Puththi Kedda Manitharellam is the first feature film of its kind to be made with a film cast and crew that is based fully in Jaffna, with the exception of one team member. It is also the first time this crew has worked on a feature-length film, with all the crew's past experiences having to do with short films.

With this in mind, we asked Sivarajan what it was like making the shift from shooting short films to feature films, and he shared that, for him, the biggest change between the two film formats was planning, saying that with short films, there isn't as much thought and care put into pre-planning, because the nature of short films is quite instinctive and reactive based on the resources and artists available, and they also tend to deal with simple narratives.

A feature-length film, on the other hand, requires a lot of planning and forethought, as well as rehearsals with cast and crew all having to be really well-planned out. Sivarajan has worked with other directors on feature-length films, so he knew the kind of planning that had to go into it and was able to plan it out easily.

Planning well doesn't mean there won't be hiccups, however, and Sivarajan explained one such hiccup had to do with costuming for a reshoot. While the actors had been asked to hold on to their costumes in case of a reshoot, there came a point in production where a reshoot had to be

Puththi Kedda Manitharellam

A completely home-grown Tamil film



Promotional posters for 'Puththi Kedda Manitharellam'

done, but the actor in question no longer had the same t-shirt he wore during the first take. The team scoured Jaffna in hopes of finding another t-shirt that could be worn for the reshoot, but were unsuccessful.

In the end, Sivarajan shared, he and the team had to be creative, and the actor wore a similar t-shirt, with the production team using careful camera angles and positioning to make sure the difference in t-shirts wasn't captured in film in the end.

Puththi Kedda Manitharellam is set to be released on the weekend of 24, 25, 26 December at cinemas in Jaffna with screening in other parts of the North like Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa planned for the following week. Following this release in the North, Sivarajan and his team hope to show the film in other parts of the country like Colombo.

The biggest challenge of releasing the film on a large scale is a lack of demand for Tamil films in Sri Lanka, Sivarajan explained, saying that while the South Indian Tamil film industry (which dominates the Sri Lankan Tamil film market) releases a couple of hundred films a year, Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers only release maybe one or two Sri Lankan Tamil films a year and these are independent films which make normal distribution channels and fees financially unsustainable.

Sivarajan and his team are promoting Puththi Kedda Manitharellam entirely on their own, using their channels to do so. The trailer for the film was scheduled for release on 3 December via the Blackboard International YouTube channel, and will be followed by the release of the film from 24 December.

However, Sivarajan stressed, the release date of the film is still tentative because he and his team have no way of knowing if they will be ousted from the theatres and have their release date rescheduled by the cinemas should they receive a South Indian Tamil film and be asked to play it that same weekend. The cinema will always choose the big South Indian films over the local independent films because those South Indian films are guaranteed to draw crowds and make a profit.

The Sri Lankan Tamil film industry vs. the Indian Tamil film industry

Addressing the differences between the Sri Lankan Tamil film industry and the (South) Indian Tamil film industry, Sivarajan shared that the South Indian industry definitely dwarfs the local one, especially in terms of output. Moreover, the frequency of films from South India makes Sri Lankan audiences become addicted to the films and that form of storytelling, making it harder for Sri Lankan films to make a mark. This is compounded by the fact that when a good Sri Lankan film is released, so much time passes before another one can be released that the audience has forgotten what they liked about the previous film because they've been inundated by Indian films in the meantime.

A huge barrier for the Sri Lankan Tamil film industry is its size and resources, with Sivarajan sharing that he knows several Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers who have been making only short films for more than 10 or 12 years because short films require so much less investment. You don't need a producer or investor with lots of money for a

short film. Feature films, however, are different and require lots of investment. Even Puththi Kedda Manitharellam was entirely self-funded by Sivarajan and other members of his team and crew.

While noting that not all Sri Lankan-made Tamil films are good, Sivarajan urged for more investment in the Sri

Lankan Tamil film industry, because this is the only way to grow the industry, both in size and quality.

Sivarajan also urged audiences, both within Sri Lanka and abroad, to help contribute to the success of Sri Lankan Tamil films, because the audience holds the power to help make a movie succeed.

However, this also tied back to quantity, with Sivarajan noting that if the Sri Lankan Tamil film industry was able to make, say, 10 to 15 movies a year, they would automatically be able to capture audiences in and out of Sri Lanka regardless of language.

Puththi Kedda Manitharellam is one such film, with Sivarajan sharing that while the film has been made to appeal to the Sri Lankan Tamil audience first, it has nevertheless been designed to connect with all audiences despite language and age.

Looking back on having been able to make his first feature film, Sivarajan said that Puththi Kedda Manitharellam has been his most challenging project to date, but also said he always feels this way about his current or most recent project, adding that if you don't feel your current project is your most challenging yet, maybe it's not the right project.

The trailer for Puththi Kedda Manitharellam is now available for viewing on the Blackboard International YouTube channel.



'Puththi Kedda Manitharellam' Director Raj Sivarajan

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STIs and HIV

Awareness, prevention, and change

BY DR. DINESHANI HETTIARACHCHI SIRISENA

World AIDS Day falls on 1 December each year. To increase awareness and reduce the stigma associated with this illness we spoke to Consultant Venerologist and National STD AIDS Control Programme (NSACP) Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission (EMTCT) of HIV and Syphilis Programme Co-ordinator – HIV Care Services Dr. Lilani Rajapaksa.

➔ What are STIs and how does one contract such infections?

The name itself implies that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are mainly transmitted through unprotected sexual exposures. A person can get an STI through penetrative sexual contact with a person having an STI. The sexual contact may be between a male and a female (heterosexual) or a male and a male (homosexual, men having sex with men). The type of penetrative sexual exposures can be oral, vaginal, or anal. If the person has not used a condom for penetrative sexual contact, it is an unprotected sexual act exposing them to STI and HIV.

There are many types of STIs, and of them, the common infections seen in Sri Lanka are genital herpes, genital warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and HIV infections.

➔ What is its true burden in Sri Lanka?

The true burden cannot be identified as many people infected with STI/HIV do not seek services. This may be due to multiple reasons such as not having symptoms, not perceiving the risk, not knowing where services are available, or reluctance to seek services due to stigma.

Available statistics are from the reported numbers from government STD clinics. According to the 2020 annual report from the National STD AIDS Control Programme, close to 83,000 visits have been made to STD clinics island-wide. These numbers just show the tip of the iceberg, and it is clear the actual burden is much more than this.

➔ When should one suspect the possibility of an STI?

Usually, the diagnosis is based on the symptoms and signs. However, in STIs, a significant number of infected people can remain asymptomatic. More females are asymptomatic than males. They may not have any symptoms or signs to indicate the presence of STI.

➔ What are the common symptoms observed in STIs?

A person who had a risky sexual exposure should seek services early if they experience the following symptoms:

- Genital ulcers
- Urethral discharge in males
- Scrotal pain or swelling
- Genital warts
- Vaginal discharge
- Lower abdominal pain in females



Consultant Venerologist and National STD AIDS Control Programme Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission (EMTCT) of HIV and Syphilis Programme Co-ordinator – HIV Care Services Dr. Lilani Rajapaksa

➔ What are the consequences if STIs are not diagnosed and managed early?

- The infected person may not be aware of the infection and can infect future partners
- Some STIs can be fully cured. But some viral STIs such as genital herpes or genital warts cannot be fully cured and need to be controlled for long periods. These can lead to physical as well as psychological distress to those infected
- STIs, if not managed early, can cause serious complications. The complications can involve the nervous

system in syphilis, cause cervical cancers in genital warts, and infection in the reproductive system can lead to chronic conditions such as pelvic inflammatory disease

➔ What are the services available for the management of STDs?

- Sri Lanka has a well-developed STD clinic system with 41 district STD clinics and several branch clinics based in major hospitals throughout the country. Comprehensive care services are offered free of charge to all who seek services at the STD clinics in a non-judgmental environment where seeking services are encouraged by having open clinics. Any person who is symptomatic or asymptomatic who needs a checkup can attend an STD clinic during working hours. Patients do not need referral letters etc. to receive services. The staff is appropriately trained, and 100% maintenance of confidentiality is assured
- Consider STD clinics as “Centres for Sexual Health”. Most of these clinics are equipped with the necessary facilities to provide the best services to needy people. However, the number receiving services at these clinics is much less than the number who really need services. A barrier has been created by identifying STD clinics as a place that serves people with unacceptable behaviour. This stigma attached to STD clinics prevents needy people from accessing available sexual health and STI services

The time has come to change this attitude and to accept STD clinics as a place having the best facilities to help persons with STI or sexual health problems. This place should be considered as a centre for sexual health.

➔ What is the prevalence of HIV in Sri Lanka?

Sri Lanka remains a country with a low prevalence of HIV, 35 years after identifying the first Sri Lankan with HIV in 1987. When many countries in the region experience worse epidemics, Sri Lanka was able to maintain a low prevalence of HIV due to the implementation of suitable strategies by many stakeholders under



the leadership of the National STD AIDS Control Programme. These stakeholders include health and non-health sectors of the government, as well as the private sector, NGOs, organisations of key populations, and people living with HIV (PLHIV).

The main modes of transmission of HIV are through unprotected sexual exposures, blood-to-blood contact, and contact with body fluids of infected persons. In Sri Lanka, more than 95% of diagnosed adults living with HIV were infected through unprotected sexual contact. In 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) certified Sri Lanka as a country that had eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Transmission risk through blood has been minimised by the policies implemented by the National Blood Transfusion Services, thus further reducing the transmission risk.

According to the integrated biological and behavioural surveillance conducted in 2018, the risk behaviours are common among important key population groups such as female sex workers, men having sex with men, and beach boys. There is evidence that youth are engaging in unprotected sexual exposures, leading to increased HIV and STI in the community. Risk for HIV and STIs are increasing in society while the level of knowledge on infections or services is far from satisfactory.

➔ Mitigation strategies currently in-place

Control of STI and HIV can be done through two strategies. It is important to maintain an uninfected status, for those not already infected, through prevention programmes for negatives. Identifying infected people early and starting treatment to reduce further transmission is another important strategy.

As a country with low prevalence, the main emphasis is placed on key populations such as female sex workers and men having sex with men to reduce the risk of transmission. NSACP works closely with NGOs and organisations of key populations to reach them through peers to

give information and to provide services. The Global Fund has been supporting these prevention programmes in the community since 2012.

➔ HIV prevention through positives

Currently available antiretroviral treatment is highly effective, and there is a marked reduction of illnesses and deaths of PLHIV on treatment. If a person takes treatment properly within six months, the HIV viral load reduces to undetectable levels. This does not mean that the virus is eliminated. A small amount of virus remains in the body which is not detectable. However, as the viral load is low the risk of transmission is minimal. Further, the persons' immunity increases with treatment, allowing them to live a normal life with increased life expectancy.

All PLHIV are started on antiretroviral treatment and closely followed up. Antiretroviral treatment has markedly increased life expectancy. Persons living with HIV who are on treatment are doing well, being actively engaged in employment and social activities.

➔ The role of creating awareness, especially among youth

Unprotected sexual exposures lead to STIs and HIV. Therefore, it is important to provide information on sexual health including services for prevention and care of STI and HIV. The topic of sexual health is taboo and the opportunities to get the correct information is limited.

Liberal attitudes towards sex among youth expose them to higher risk. When they are not well informed about the risks, they realise the gravity of risk behaviour only after the risk behaviour. Then it is too late. When a person gets infected with HIV, that cannot be reversed. Every step must be taken before that to avoid the risk of contracting HIV. All unprotected penetrative sex acts (anal, vaginal, and oral) expose a person to HIV. Anal sex carries the highest risk of HIV transmission, followed by vaginal and oral sexual encounters. Knowledge of condoms as a safer sex practice needs to be promoted. It is important to fund the implementation of the national HIV communication strategy which was published in 2017.

➔ What are the challenges and how do we overcome them?

Among the estimated 3,500 people living with HIV, close to 2,000 are currently on antiretroviral treatment. Most people are not aware of the infection and do not come forward for testing. Every person who had unsafe sexual exposure should get themselves tested for HIV. HIV tests are available from district STD clinics, main hospital OPD, or in the private sector. Further information can be obtained through the website “National STD AIDS Control Programme”.

Take home message

Sri Lanka remains a country with a low prevalence of HIV due to the dedicated efforts of many stakeholders led by NSACP over the last 35 years. Having a low prevalence for a long period can lead to complacency, which can lead to risks such as lowered funding and reduced resources. Sri Lanka is facing this risk amid the Covid-19 pandemic, stated Dr. Rajapaksa.

It is important to understand the seriousness of the HIV pandemic which contributed to 76 million infections with 36 million deaths globally over the last 40 years, and take necessary measures to maintain the low prevalence of HIV.

About the writer

The writer, Dr. Dineshani Hettiarachchi Sirisena, is a family physician with a special interest in rare genetic diseases and regenerative medicine currently working as a lecturer at the Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.



The most common methods of transmission of HIV are:



Unprotected sex with an infected partner



Sharing needles with infected person

Almost eliminated as risk factors for HIV transmission are:



Transmission from infected mother to fetus



Infection from blood products

How can I make brushing teeth a fun activity for my child?



Helping your kid brush their teeth can sometimes feel like you're going to battle. The second your kid sees you walking towards them with the toothbrush, they may start to scream and cry in an attempt to get out of brushing their teeth. And, if you miraculously manage to take them to the sink, you'll encounter the next issue – getting them to open their mouths wide enough to brush their tiny little teeth. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Try these simple tricks so that your kid has fun brushing their teeth routinely.

Allow them to pick their toothbrush

Show your kids a sense of ownership – let them pick their toothbrushes to uplift their interest and motivation to brush. One of the reasons why kids are reluctant to brush their teeth is because it is a chore and uninteresting to them.

Get them to brush their toy's teeth first

Getting your kids to brush their favorite toy's teeth helps them get rid of the fear of brushing. Brushing their toy's teeth first will help them get used to the toothbrush before they use it themselves.

Try a new fruity-flavoured toothpaste

Let your kid choose their toothpaste as well so that they feel involved in the task. Kids usually prefer fruity-flavoured toothpastes; they can try strawberry and mango flavoured toothpaste, which are two of the favourite flavours among kids.

Show your kids the way – brush with your kids

To encourage your kids to brush their teeth, show them how to brush, and you can even brush your teeth together. Once they see you doing it, your kids will be

more interested in doing it as well, and be more willing to brush their teeth.

Sing a happy song

Put on a song meant for kids that's about two minutes long with a happy tone, which is the suggested brushing time. After some time, your kid will start to associate that particular song with brushing their teeth and will feel happier about doing it.

Use rewards to motivate them

Using the reward system can help motivate your kids to brush their teeth as well. Just be sure that the prize isn't sweets or any unhealthy snacks because that will result in tooth decay. Instead, try something simple, like rewarding them with a sticker daily so that they can make a collection or planning a trip to the park.

BRUNCHEVENTS



Champagne and canapes with Will by Zac



Will by Zac recently launched its first physical store in honour of their second anniversary, with a launch event complemented by a flow of champagne and canapés. Will by Zac is a story of beautiful linen come to life. Linen, made from flax seed, is the most sustainable fabric known to man. They work hard to make sure the journey from flax to product is ethical and sustainable. Will by Zac's first physical store gives you the opportunity to indulge in soft, elegant fashion without feeling guilty about the environment. The conveniently located store is down R. A. De Mel Mawatha, Colombo 5.

PHOTOS ESHAN DASANAYAKA



The Body Shop unveils new formulation

When The Body Shop first introduced body butters in 1992, they took the world by storm. Fast forward to the present day, and one is sold every three seconds! The Body Shop recently unveiled a new formulation to its iconic product range, and its most sustainable body butters yet. Guests at the event were treated to exciting surprises, hand massages, and a smoothie prep demonstration using the all natural products in the new and improved body butter.

PHOTOS SAMAN ABESIRWARDANA



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