

WHAT IS SRI LANKA'S STANCE ON SLAVERY?

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RAMESH MENDIS TAKES SIX, YET MATCH POISED EVENLY
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CPC BRINGS DOWN SUB-STANDARD FUEL?

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Gas cylinder accessories must be strengthened if composition changed

- Experts urge accessories such as regulator be sufficiently strengthened
- Alagiyawanna says gas quality will be tested before hitting market

BY PAMODI WARAVITA AND BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

Amidst a spate of gas cylinder-based explosions around the country over the past few weeks, energy experts have requested the Government and the relevant authorities to ensure that the durability of all accessories attached to a gas cylinder are strengthened relative to any change in gas composition, in order to prevent such explosions.

"Experts and all others have stated that the gas cylinders do not explode, but the durability of other accessories, including the regulator, must be enhanced in proportion to the change in gas composition," noted State Minister Lasantha Alagiyawanna.

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State Minister Lasantha Alagiyawanna

If gas composition 50:50, higher risk of leak occurring

- SJB's Harsha quotes Alagiyawanna confirming CPC report
- Litro to seek independent third party opinion
- SLSI to update standards soon
- Sajith requests details on no. of 50:50 ratio gas cylinders in circulation

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Trade Consultative Committee's emergency meeting on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinder-based explosions yesterday (1) has revealed that the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation's (CPC) report on the gas composition, which is yet to be publicised, confirms that if the gas composition is 50% propane and 50% butane, there is a higher risk of gas leaks.

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Ministry officials in a hole over buried LTTE gold

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

An official of the Public Security Ministry has been suspended of his duties on suspicion of attempting to secretly unearth a stockpile of gold which is believed to have been buried by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Puthukkudiyiruppu area in Mullaitivu during the war, while an inquiry is to be carried out on a Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development Ministry official involved in the same incident, *The Morning* learnt.

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Basil pursues stronger economic ties with India

- Meets India's Finance Minister in New Delhi

Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa has sought ways and means of further enhancing economic co-operation with India, when he met the Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi, yesterday (1).

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Rs. 10 per USD incentive for remittances

- Central Bank's December offer to attract foreign exchange

In an attempt to boost Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) will pay an incentive of Rs. 8 per US dollar for workers' remittances, in addition to the existing incentive of Rs. 2, when such funds are remitted through licensed banks (LBs) and other internationally accepted formal channels and converted into Sri Lankan rupees during the period from 1 to 31 December 2021.

Accordingly, the total incentive for inward workers' remittances converted into Sri Lankan rupees during the month of December 2021 will be Rs. 10.00 per US dollar, the CBSL announced in a press release yesterday (1).

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Spending ceiling likely for election campaigns

- New laws may also require candidates to reveal campaign finances

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The new legal provisions regarding the regulation of election campaign finances would most likely include an expenditure ceiling and a requirement to reveal all campaign finances following the

end of an election, *The Morning* learnt.

"Our main focus is putting a ceiling on campaign spending and ensuring that all candidates reveal details of their campaign finances following the elections."

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SJB queries why New Fortress deal not public

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Parliamentarian Ranjith Madduma Bandara has questioned why the controversial agreement with the US-based energy company, New Fortress Energy Inc., has still not been presented to the Parliament...

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No more after-hours emergency power restoration

- CEB engineers escalate TU action against New Fortress

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

The Ceylon Electricity Board Engineers' Union (CEBEU) said yesterday (1) that they would escalate their ongoing work-to-rule trade union (TU) action against the Yugadanavi deal



from today (2), where they will not address emergency power restoration activities which fall outside their eight hours of work.

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'Fertiliser mafia bigger than Sigiriya' blamed for policy failure

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage has claimed that a chemical fertiliser mafia larger than the Sigiriya rock fortress, with the support of the banks and the media, ensured that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ban on chemical fertiliser imports was lifted after only six months.



Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage addressing the event at BMICH

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'Reduce bread loaf weight to drop price'

- Bakery owners to request Govt.

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

The All Ceylon Bakery Owners' Association (ACBOA) has pointed out that if the Government takes steps to amend the legal provisions to reduce the weight of a loaf of bread to a certain extent, there is a possibility of comparatively reducing the price of bread.

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Sirisena seeks dismissal of all Easter civil damages cases

- Claims cases filed when Sirisena not Prez and on erroneous assumption
- Queries what about cases against ex-Presidents for old terror attacks

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

The order on the motion filed by former President and incumbent Government Parliamentarian Maithripala Sirisena seeking the dismissal of all 128



cases filed against him and several others by family members of those affected due to the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 21 April 2019 in toto (entirely) and in

limine (at the outset), without taking them up for hearing, is due to be issued on 7 January 2022.

In the lawsuits, the plaintiffs have charged that they have become victims of the said terror attacks due to the negligence of duties by Sirisena and the other defendants.

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HIV infections spike among local youth

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEERA

The National Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Control Programme has pointed out the need for the provision of proper sex education, citing the significant increase in the infection of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) among youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years over the past five years.

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COVID-19 CASES

ACTIVE CASES: 8,860

DEATHS: 14,346

RECOVERED: 540,783

TOTAL CASES: 563,989

SOURCE: HEALTH PROMOTION BUREAU

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AT A GLANCE

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GIRL DIES IN HOUSE FIRE IN WELIGAMA

An eight-year-old girl has died in a fire that broke out in a house located in Wewedadarawatta, Weligama. According to the Police, the fire had originated inside one of the rooms in the house on Tuesday (30 November).

As a result, the roof had collapsed onto the girl who was asleep in the room at the time of the incident. However, her grandmother and the 13-year-old sister who were sleeping in another room have managed to escape the fire.

Responding to the emergency situation, the Weligama Police had called the Matara Fire Brigade to douse the fire. The root cause of the fire is yet to be uncovered. Inspections carried out so far have revealed that no damages were caused to the LP gas cylinder or the gas cooker. It was observed that the fatal incident is not linked to gas leakage, the Police said.

SAUDI ARABIA CONFIRMS FIRST CASE OF OMICRON VARIANT OF COVID-19

Saudi Arabia yesterday (1) confirmed its first case of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 on a passenger coming from a north African country, state news agency SPA reported.

The passenger, a Saudi national, along with those he was in contact with has been isolated, SPA added.

"An epidemiological investigation has started and the case was sent to quarantine, where accredited health procedures were followed," the report said.

A health official from Saudi Arabia's health ministry has called on people to finish their Covid-19 vaccine shots and for travelers to adhere to quarantine and testing protocols upon their arrival.

LOW-PRESSURE AREA OVER ANDAMAN SEA TO DEVELOP INTO DEPRESSION

The low-pressure area over the south of Thailand and the neighbouring areas has emerged into the central Andaman Sea, said the Department of Meteorology.

It is likely to concentrate into a depression within the next 24 hours over south-east and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal. It will intensify into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours, the Department cautioned in a weather advisory issued yesterday (1).

The naval and fishing communities are advised not to venture into the deep sea areas of south-east Bay of Bengal and south or north Andaman Sea areas during next 72 hours. Those who are out at the sea in this region are advised to return to coasts or move to safer locations without delay.

'Don't focus on variants, but on general pandemic control'

● *Health Ministry notes Omicron's entry may be delayed, but cannot be made impossible*

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The Health Ministry has stated that in the current situation, it is more important to take necessary steps to protect against the Covid-19 pandemic in general than to look out for each Covid-19 variant.

Speaking at a media briefing held yesterday (1), the Health Ministry's Communications Director, Public Health Services Deputy Director General (DDG), and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head Dr. Hemantha Herath said: "The most important thing in this

situation is to take the necessary steps to prevent the Covid-19 pandemic in general, rather than to find out whether it is the Omicron variant or not."

He also said that since a large number of people from South African countries do not come to Sri Lanka,

there may be a delay for the Omicron Covid-19 variant to enter the country or for infections of the said variant of concern (VOC) to be reported. However, he pointed out that it is not possible to say that it would not enter the country at all.

Dr. Herath, on Tuesday (30 November), noted that no matter what variant enters the country, it will only spread if the people do not follow the health guidelines. Therefore, if everyone follows

the health guidelines, he said that the spread of this variant can be minimised. Even if it spreads, the adverse consequences of it can be minimised by adhering to the health guidelines, he added.

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

and Eswatini (Swaziland), within the past 14 days. However, when inquired as to whether the Health Ministry was taking steps to impose a ban on travellers who have been to other countries where cases of the Omicron variant have been reported, Dr. Herath, on 28 November, said: "A final decision has not been reached regarding the imposition of such a ban. However, the matter is constantly being analysed."

New Chairman appointed to Paddy Marketing Board

Former senior administrative officer Neil de Alwis has been appointed the new Chairman of the Paddy Marketing Board.

The appointment was confirmed by the Minister of Agriculture Mahindananda Aluthgamage yesterday (1).

The position was left vacant after the previous Chairman of the Paddy Marketing Board, Dr. Jatal Mannapperuma, resigned from the position on 15 September, citing several reasons.

Neil de Alwis had previously served as the Government Agent of Ampara District and is the former Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

He assumed duties as the Paddy Marketing Board Chairman in a brief ceremony held yesterday (1).

Meanwhile, M.D. Ranjani



Neil de Alwis assuming duties as the new Paddy Marketing Board Chairman yesterday (1)

Jayakodi has been appointed as an advisor to the Minister of Agriculture.

A senior officer of the administrative service, Jayakodi has previously served in the capacities of Divisional Secretary, Director General, and as the Chief Secretary of the Sabaragamuwa Province. She is a retired senior administrative officer with 32 years of experience in the service.

Three students killed, eight others injured in US school shooting

Three students have been killed and eight others injured, including a teacher, in a high school shooting in the US state of Michigan.

The dead include a 16-year-old boy, a 14-year-old girl and a 17-year-old girl, officials said.

Police said the 15-year-old suspect fired 15 to 20 shots with a semi-automatic handgun and acted alone.

The assailant's motives for the attack in the town of Oxford, about 40 miles (65 km) from Detroit, remain unclear.

Oakland County Undersheriff Mike McCabe told reporters at a news conference outside the Oxford High School on Tuesday that calls to emergency services began at 12:51 local time.

Within minutes, officials had received 100 calls to 911, he said.

Officials say the suspect, a second-year male student, surrendered five minutes after police were called.

A police officer stationed at the school helped to arrest the suspect, he said. No shots were fired during



PHOTO © REUTERS

the arrest, and the teenager was not injured.

"He gave up without any problems," said McCabe, who later added that the suspect had been in class before the shooting began.

The school was evacuated, and officials conducted three separate sweeps of the campus to ensure that

there were no additional victims.

Two of the injured were undergoing surgery, while the other six were in a stable condition with gunshot wounds.

In the news conference, officials said the suspect had so far refused to speak and was "not co-operating".

(BBC)

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Custodial deaths, dystopian truths

One thing Sri Lankans always advocate but rarely do is putting themselves in the shoes of another. We do it only when it resonates with what we always believed in, and there is hardly any room for a change of attitudes.

The same was observed during the past few years when a spate of deaths of suspects or accused implicated in organised criminal activities were killed in crossfire during attempts by the Police to find hidden weapons and raids, which the people thought was justifiable, because of the simple reason that they had been branded as hardcore criminals, and the inadequacies in the country's legal system which the people do not believe penalises such said figures. In short, good riddance of bad rubbish.

The mother of Janith Madushanka alias Podi Lassi this week wrote to the UN Resident Co-ordinator drawing attention to the alleged threats to the life of her son, who is currently detained at the Criminal Investigations Department (CID).

Her concerns are not new. On a few occasions in the past few months, rights groups had raised concerns about the safety of some of the high profile suspects/accused, who died in similar circumstances, mostly when they were taken to various places by the Police to find hidden weapons, according to the Police. The deaths of Mabalage Dinith Melan Mabula alias Urujuwa, Dharmakeerthi Tharaka Perera Wijesekera alias Kosgoda Tharaka, and Samarasinghe Arachchige Madush Lakshitha alias Makandure Madush, are some of the notable deaths, and the most recent death was of Hewa Lunuwilage Lasantha alias Tinker Lasantha.

Despite the settings and circumstances pertaining to most of these deaths bearing significant similarities, thus far, the concerned citizens have not heard anything from the law enforcement agencies apart from the usual answer that they are looking into these incidents. These incidents also have a direct and an extremely adverse impact on the country's human rights record. Furthermore, in a country such as Sri Lanka where politics is connected to nearly every field, it's unrealistic to expect that these underworld figures operate in isolation without political patronage. Therefore, when one of them dies in police custody the information they had on corrupt politicians and their other dirty secrets die with them, never to be publicised. In this case it's the politicians who benefit from the deaths of these figures.

Unfortunately, the country has not seen much progress on the part of the law enforcement agencies on matter. They conduct investigations, and conveniently say that these incidents were mere accidents which were unavoidable. Within a few months, everyone forgets what happened until another death during an alleged raid or an alleged attempt to find hidden weapons is reported.

There is no debate that proper investigations must be conducted to find out the truth about these alleged accused, or suspects, especially owing to the fact that almost all the allegations which led to these deaths concern high-profile cases. However, in addition to the safety of the public, the safety and the right to due process of these suspects also needs to be ensured, because they too are members of the public.

These spontaneous raids or attempts to find hidden weapons need to be monitored for the safety of the suspects and the police officers handling this process. Who can monitor the police investigations is the next question. Technically, aside from the suspects who are suspected or accused of terrorism related allegations, in which case a detention is only possible if the Defence Minister approves of such, those suspected or accused of other crimes can only be detained as per a court order. Therefore, technically, they are under judicial custody, which also suggests a certain responsibility on the part of the Judiciary when it comes to their safety.

Therefore, as a start, the authorities can look into several short term, immediate measures, including increasing the involvement of the Judiciary in this process. Informing the magistrate or a judge, who have the jurisdiction in which the Police conduct a raid or try to find hidden weapons with the involvement of a suspect/accused, before engaging in such activity involving a high-profile case, could perhaps be one of the steps we can take. It will give a sense of accountability to this process, because in addition to the police officers taking suspects for the said purpose, a member of the Judiciary will also be aware of particulars such as the exact individuals, places, times, and activities, such a raid or an attempt to find hidden weapons, involve.

However, finding the root causes of the issue is what can ultimately bring to an end these extremely suspicious deaths, and legal and/or policy changes are also necessary to see some solid change. To do that, the unbiased contribution of the experts in the field is necessary. This responsibility, however, has to be taken by the National Police Commission (NPC), the apex body that governs the affairs of the police force. It can include experts in custodial torture, extrajudicial killings, and human rights and the law, in addition to ex-cops who do not have conflicts of interest with the police officers and teams that are being monitored or investigated.

Most importantly, the silence, and sometimes celebration, on the part of the public towards these deaths is concerning.

Among other parties, the media has a huge responsibility to report facts without sensationalising such news. A person's right to be treated as a mere suspect or accused until proven guilty must not be neglected by the media to indirectly control the public opinion regarding such deaths.

"It is good that the Police are getting rid of the criminals who are most likely to be released if presented in court" – is a much more common opinion than we think.

The authorities have a responsibility to pay genuine attention to this spate of deaths which take place in eerily similar circumstances, leaving no witnesses except the police officers present at that time. The people on the other hand should be prudent enough to think that what happens to one person can happen to any person; and most importantly, the media has a responsibility to not glorify highly questionable acts that result in unwarranted deaths of citizens and instead initiate a discussion around it.

There is no question that most of the people who died in the said incidents had serious criminal charges against them. But, in a country where the laws still guarantee a fair trial to everyone, the criminal records of those who died is immaterial, and what matters is whether what they faced is legally justifiable. Put simply, Sri Lanka is a democracy where rule of law reigns, and must not be allowed to become a lawless dystopia. If an unlawful act against one citizen can go unaddressed, a similar act against another too can go unaddressed, and therefore, these deaths should be a problem for everyone.



Objections to the Code of Criminal Procedure Bill

There are many objections that can be taken against the proposed Code of Criminal Procedure Bill on the basis of the unconstitutionality of many of the provisions of the Bill.

Some of these objections are as follows.

The essence and core of the Bill is to dispense with the requirements of the presence of the suspect at the time the magistrate may make orders relating to him or her and the high court judge may also make similar orders, including the dispensing of the presence of the suspect at the time of the trial. This very idea of dispensing the presence of the suspect violates the very core of the constitutional principle that is at the heart of the Constitution, which is the protection of the individual

The very notion of the independence of the Judiciary is tied up with the possibility of playing the judicial role and the judicial function as required of a judicial officer. The exercising of the judicial mind on making a decision is at the core of the judicial role and the judicial function. If that function is modified in a way so as to interfere with the exercise of the judicial mind on issues of utmost importance, such as deciding on the legality of an arrest, the legality of a detention, and on the matters relating to a fair trial, these are all basic aspects of undermining the judicial role and judicial function and therefore, judicial independence. Judicial independence is enshrined very clearly in the Constitution and therefore, the core idea of the Bill allowing the magistrate or a high court judge to dispense with the presence of a suspect is a violation of the principle of the independence of the Judiciary

The exercise of the judicial mind requires that in making a judicial decision, the court is under obligation to respect the principles of natural justice. Natural justice requires that the Judiciary listen to both the parties to the case and in criminal cases – it means either the Police or the Attorney General (AG) on the one hand and the suspect on the other. For a suspect to be heard, the suspect must be in the presence of the judicial officer. If his/her presence is dispensed with, what takes place is essentially an ex parte process, where a prosecuting officer, the Police, or the AG could make requests without giving an opportunity for the defendant to know what is being presented to the court against him/her and thereby to be able to make an informed response to whatever that is being said to the judicial officer against him/her. Without that presence at the time when things are told against him/her to the court, the suspect is not



in a position to respond to the details of what is being said, and at the same time, also to reply in detail to what has been said. When the suspect is not given the opportunity to do so, this deprives the magistrate of knowing from the accused about what his/her views are about what is told against him/her. This is a fundamental violation of the rule of *audi alteram partem* (a basic rule of natural justice)

Thus, the core idea of dispensing with his/her presence itself is unconstitutional. Before going into the consequences of such dispensing with his/her presence, it is essential to go into the very notion about such suspension and its legality. Thus, the making of a law to dispense with the presence of a suspect violates the very notion of judicial proceedings, the very notion of the independence of the Judiciary, and the fundamental notion of the duty of the courts to protect the rights of an individual. Thus, the very idea that has been proposed is in itself unconstitutional. On that basis alone, this whole Bill – and not just particular provisions of the Bill – should be rejected. If the idea that the presence of an accused is to be dispensed with in itself is unconstitutional, then the rest of the Bill it follows is completely unconstitutional.

Then, we could go into the unconstitutionality of the various provisions of the Bill, which contravene the different Articles of the Constitution. Empowering various officers such as police officers, the AG, the Superintendent of Police, etc. to make an application for dispensing with the presence of the suspect is in itself unconstitutional in that this is not a function that could be exercised by anyone in exercising Executive powers. All these officers are pursuing Executive power when they arrest, detain, investigate crimes, or prosecute crimes in court. However, it is not within their power as to how the court should conduct itself in dealing with arrests, detentions, investigations, and fair trials.

These are matters that are determined by constitutional principles and those basic principles of criminal justice. It is

not within the power of the Executive to determine these principles or to make requests to the courts to undo the judicial function that is inherent in the very functioning of the Judiciary. The Executive has to act within the framework of the judicial system and its fundamental principles in exercising their powers. It is not within their power to ask that some or more of these principles should be dispensed with. For example, if any of these officers make a request for dispensing with the right of cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses by the suspect, this is a similar request to dismissing the right to be present in the court when decisions are being made regarding his/her life or liberty. The judicial process itself is tampered with when such requests are authorised by way of a statute. Then the statute itself will be violating the fundamental aspects of the judicial process. Thereafter, it will cease to be a judicial process.

The Bill violates the right against illegal arrest as enshrined in Article 13 of the Constitution. The right of arrest is subject to producing a suspect within the shortest possible time before a magistrate, where the suspect is able to challenge the legality of the arrest itself. Suppose a suspect is arrested on a charge that does not in fact exist or on the basis of facts about the suspect's conduct which are not at all illegal in any way. Many instances have already come up before courts in recent times when a person peacefully demonstrating on some issues has been arrested and brought to court where they were able to inform the magistrate about what they had been engaged in, which were perfectly legal activities, and then the magistrate released them or immediately enlarged them on bail on the basis that there was no ground for the arrest. Thus, the right to challenge the legality of the arrest itself at the earliest possible opportunity is part of the constitutionally enshrined right against illegal arrest.

The evolution of the law for producing the suspect as early as possible before a magistrate has been a well-enshrined principle actually achieved through centuries. It is such

a fundamental aspect relating to an individual's right for liberty and rights that without the protection of which, this right cannot exist. Therefore, the possibility of dispensing with the presence of an accused during a trial is a total violation of the constitutionally enshrined principle against illegal arrest.

It is also the provision for dispensing with the presence of a suspect that is contrary to the right against torture and ill treatment as enshrined in Article 11 of the Constitution and the relevant provisions of the international covenants to which Sri Lanka is a State Party. Producing a suspect before a magistrate as early as possible ensures that the magistrate has an opportunity to examine the appearance of the suspect to see whether his/her rights against torture and ill treatment have been violated. There have been many instances that have come up before the courts where the magistrates have noted such disturbing features on the body of a suspect and thereafter, having questioned the suspect as to whether he has been ill treated and when he/she has confirmed, he/she has been referred to a medical examination. Such intervention by the magistrate on the one hand is an opportunity for the suspect to get medical treatment as early as possible and on the other hand, to be on record as evidence of such illegal treatment of the suspect.

In the same manner, the presence of the suspect at the earliest possible opportunity after arrest provides the suspect an opportunity to inform the magistrate about the condition that he/she is in as a result of the illegal arrest and torture. This again has the same consequences as being able to get the magistrate's protection, get medical treatment through the magistrate's intervention, and also leave a record of evidence for future use. All these will be deprived if the presence of the accused or the suspect is dispensed with.

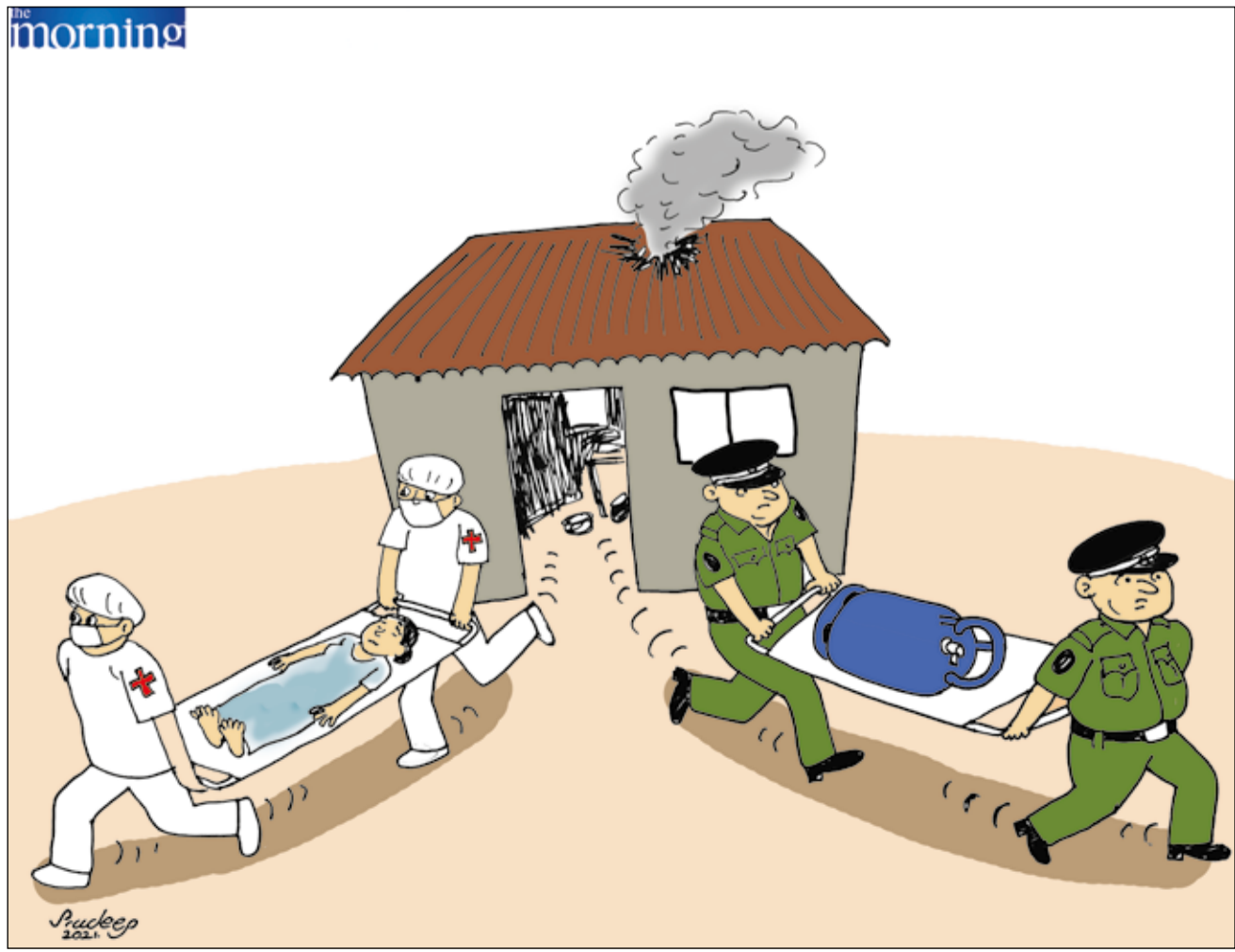
This will also be contrary to Article 13 of the Constitution, relating to illegal detention. It is unconstitutional to illegally detain a person. If the suspect's presence is dispensed with, it is quite possible that an order can be made ex parte on the basis of incorrect information placed before the magistrate, whereby otherwise illegal detention becomes legal detention due to the fact of the magistrate making an order for detention. If the suspect were to be present, he/she could provide a detailed objection to further detention and thereby either obtain bail or release as a result of this. In the circumstances as envisaged by this Bill, this opportunity will be denied in the first instance to the accused and he/she could be unnecessarily detained because his/her version of the facts has not been placed before the magistrate.

To this, it may be added that the making of false representations regarding the suspect is not an infrequent practice in Sri Lanka. Many of the cases decided under Article 126 of the Constitution on fundamental rights by the Supreme Court have held that illegal arrest and illegal detention has taken place. In all these instances, the Police, or the prosecution, have given versions about the incident which the court has rejected in deciding in favour of the petitioners in these cases. As this is an overwhelming prevailing practice to provide inadequate and inaccurate reports to courts, the present Bill paves the way for violations against illegal detentions and therefore is contrary to the provisions of Article 13 of the Constitution.

Dispensing with the presence of the suspects also violates the right to a fair trial. It is a fundamental notion enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Sri Lanka is a State Party, and the Supreme Court has recognised this Covenant as part of the Sri Lankan law – that a fair trial should take place in a fair and open manner. The principle of hearing a trial in open courts is one of the most fundamental aspects of a fair trial. It has evolved as against secret trials which have taken place over a long period in many countries and it has become a sacrosanct part of the notion of a fair trial to have the trials in open courts, except in the instances which are expressly recognised by the Constitution.

These are just initial reflections, and many more reflections may be added to this to demonstrate that this whole Bill is opposed to the Constitution and the ICCPR as well as the long history relating to a fair trial and judicial processes which are part of our law by way of numerous decisions of the Supreme Court.

(The writer is the Asian Human Rights Commission's Policy and Programmes Director)
The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.



'Tis the season to be safe

• How Sri Lanka is gearing up for the Omicron variant

Unlike the great challenges the world has encountered in recent times, the Covid-19 pandemic is constantly evolving, making the fight against it more and more arduous, and our experiences during the past two years bear witness to it.

According to scientists, the newest Covid-19-related development, i.e. the emergence of a new variant called Omicron (B.1.1.529), could be more challenging than all previously identified variants.

Even though Sri Lanka has not reported the presence of this variant in the country, authorities have expressed concerns about it entering the country, and are taking measures to prevent the same.

Omicron variant

As the news about this new, supposedly more aggressive variant shocked the world, the World Health Organisation (WHO), last week, explained what it knows about the Omicron variant, adding that more studies are necessary to conduct a proper assessment about the said variant.

WHO Spokesman Christian Lindmeier said that while early analysis has shown that this variant has a large number of mutations that require and will undergo further study, it will take a few weeks for them to understand what impact this variant can have.

He told the UN: "Researchers are working to understand more about the mutations and what they potentially mean for how transmissible or virulent this variant is, and how they may impact diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines. This variant was reported at a remarkable speed, and the WHO recommends that countries continue to apply a risk-based, scientific approach when implementing travel measures, in accordance with the temporary recommendations of the WHO's Ninth Emergency Committee for Covid-19. It is important to note that every travel measure should always be weighed and that countries can do a lot in terms of surveillance and sequencing, and work together with affected countries or globally."

He also stressed that the more Covid-19 circulates, the more opportunities the virus has to mutate and develop into different forms, and that it is, therefore, essential that countries continue to work to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

Meanwhile, local experts noted that it is unrealistic to assume that Sri Lanka would be able to stop the Omicron variant from entering the country, and that the country must strive to delay it from happening.

Expressing this opinion, University of Sri Jayewardenepura Allergy, Immunology, and Cell Biology Unit Director Dr. Chandima Jeewandara and Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) President Dr. Padma Gunaratne further noted that adhering to the basic safety guidelines such as wearing facemasks and getting vaccinated would be immensely helpful to achieve that.

Adding that the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant is the predominant Covid-19 variant that is present in Sri Lanka currently, Dr. Jeewandara emphasised that there is a huge concern among the scientific community with regard to the Omicron variant.

He further said: "The Omicron variant has been named as a variant of concern because it might have different properties compared to the known variants. For example, it can have higher transmissibility, or sometimes it may show different symptoms or differences pertaining to the severity of the illness. Also, sometimes, it might be capable of escaping the immunity, which was acquired either through natural infection or through vaccines, or evading the diagnostic testing. Usually, if a variant fulfils those criteria, they are designated as a variant of concern, which is a higher level of classification, and on 26 November, the WHO did so.

"Previously, we had identified only the Alpha (B.1.117), Beta (B.1.351), Gamma (P.1), and Delta variants as variants of concern, and we now have Omicron as the fifth variant of concern because it has about 30 S gene mutations which concern the scientific community. Out of that 30, 10 are in the area which might have an effect on the transmissibility. So,

scientists predict that it may spread even faster than the Delta variant. But these have not been proven, and are predictions. When they predict something, scientists get together and alert the WHO, which then takes the right decision by classifying it as a variant of concern. Many countries, including Sri Lanka, have now taken the initial steps to stop people coming from countries in the South African region where this variant is mostly found. Apart from that, a few sporadic cases have been reported in countries like Hong Kong and Belgium, and they have found this particular variant in travellers. So, in Sri Lanka, we have banned people coming from the affected countries, which is a very good initial step to prevent, or delay, the variant from coming into Sri Lanka, because no country is successful in stopping new variants coming into their country."

Dr. Jeewandara also noted the importance of the coming few weeks, as the scientists are yet to find out a great deal of details about this variant. "The initial steps taken by the Health Ministry are very commendable, and apart from such measures, the scientists are investigating the biological properties of this new variant. In the coming weeks, we will get to know the real properties of this new variant, and until such time, it is very important that we take the maximum efforts to delay the new variant from coming into the country. I think that Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella has taken the correct decisions, and as the genetic sequencing unit, we also plan to increase our genetic sequencing, especially to detect new variants coming into the country. We don't have any concrete, proven data to show that this variant will escape the vaccine-induced immunity or natural immunity, but based on the collection of mutations, scientists predict that it may escape the vaccine induced immunity or the naturally acquired immunity."

He noted that in this context, countries have taken the necessary steps based on their past experiences with Covid-19 to prevent the new variant entering countries.

"There are a few cases where despite vaccination, people were infected, and despite having contracted the Delta variant infection, some were infected with the Omicron variant. This is possible," he added.

Meanwhile, Dr. Gunaratne emphasised that the risks posed by the Covid-19 pandemic are not over yet, and that therefore, strict adherence to safety measures is still necessary.

"We wish to remind that the outbreak is not over, and not only is it not over, a new variant has also emerged. This new variant named Omicron poses a serious threat to the community," she added.

She noted that owing to the mutations Omicron contains, it is thought to have extremely high transmissibility qualities, and also the ability to evade the immunity provided by vaccination. She noted that, therefore, there is a very high risk of the new variant spreading throughout the world, including in Sri Lanka.

"What we can do at this point is refrain from believing that we will be able to stop this variant from entering Sri Lanka. What we must do is, using this window of opportunity, to delay it from happening as much as possible," she opined.

Tourism and foreign arrivals

The available data suggests that Omicron has not entered the country. Although preventing it from happening at all is practically difficult, the health authorities claim that they are taking all the necessary measures to prevent it. However, at a time when the country is endeavouring to rebuild the tourism industry, restricting the arrival of foreigners, or tourists, is likely to be challenging.

When queried in this regard, Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga noted that although steps have been taken to restrict tourists

coming from Omicron-hit countries from entering Sri Lanka, it is less likely to affect the tourism industry because no such restrictions have been imposed on tourists arriving from other countries.

He added: "The Health Ministry's Technical Committee had decided to provisionally ban people of six countries, including South Africa and Zambia, from coming to Sri Lanka owing to the prevalence of the newly found variant, and we have done that. This decision was taken to ensure the country's safety, but it will not have a significant impact on Sri Lanka because other tourists can enter the country without any restriction. This decision is taken by the Health Ministry, after taking into account the international situation concerning the pandemic and the nature and seriousness of the variants. It is our responsibility to put those decisions into action."

He also said that according to Health Ministry reports, so far, no infected person has entered the country, and that the said measures are being taken to prevent it from happening. In response to a question about tourists who are currently in the country, Ranatunga said that the priority is preventing the variant from entering the country, and that no restrictions have been imposed with regard to flying to South African countries that have been identified as Omicron-affected countries.

Speaking about the cricketers and fans who will enter the country for the upcoming Lanka Premier League (LPL), Ranatunga said that attention has been paid to introduce a health pass for the fully vaccinated, in order to allow them to attend cricket matches freely. He noted that regardless of the vaccination status, adhering to basic safety guidelines, such as wearing facemasks, will be mandatory.

Meanwhile, speaking of the same, Health Ministry Communications Director, Public Health Services Deputy Director General, and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head, Dr. Hemantha Herath explained the precautionary measures Ranatunga mentioned.

He said: "With regard to the safety measures at the airports, we have already taken many steps to ensure that Covid-19 patients from overseas are not entering the country. We cannot take any measures to stop the people infected with a specific variant from coming, because it is practically impossible to do gene sequencing on all passengers arriving in the country. Therefore, firstly, we have imposed restrictions on people travelling from the countries which have reported a large number of Covid-19 cases.

"However, new variants have been reported in many parts of the world including countries from which a large number of people come to Sri Lanka. Therefore, at the moment, in accordance with the existing guidelines, anybody who is coming into the country should have a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test performed 72 hours prior to embarkation, and they should be fully immunised (two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine). If those requirements are fulfilled, then the passengers will be released from the airports, and if those requirements are not fulfilled, they will be subjected to quarantine measures stipulated by the existing guidelines. That will be the most important action that will be taken at the airports.

"Also, we have already taken measures to increase the staff at the airports in order to manage the increasing number of passengers and thereby, we will be able to make sure that infected persons are not coming into the country or that the arrival of such persons is minimised. However, it is important to take every possible measure to prevent the spread of the disease, whether it is Omicron or any other variant, and in order to make sure that Covid-19 is not spreading within the country, it is important to have stringent health guidelines and ensure 100% adherence to them."

Festive season

The world is facing the emergence of the Omicron variant at a time when the world is preparing to celebrate the beginning of a new year and the end of this year. During this festive season, which also includes Christmas, local



As the Omicron variant's emergence has put the world on high alert, Sri Lanka will also need to ramp up its health safety measures to avoid an outbreak similar to when the Delta variant hit the country

PHOTO LALITH PERERA

authorities fear the increased spread of Covid-19, and they think that this situation may worsen upon the advent of the Omicron variant in the country, which is said to be more transmissible and aggressive than the previously identified variants.

Speaking about it, Dr. Herath urged the people to act responsibly in the coming festive season, especially when organising or attending various events.

He added: "I would like to make a special request from those who are organising events related to Christmas or during the New Year season. Make sure that the events you are planning to organise are organised in accordance with the existing health guidelines and that those who are planning to attend these events adhere to the health guidelines. Otherwise, in January 2022, we might have to see an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases like what we observed last year."

Meanwhile, Dr. Gunaratne noted that if Sri Lanka uses the opportunities it has, it would be possible to prepare the country to face the threat posed by the Omicron variant in the future. She noted that in the discussions surrounding this new variant, it is vital to understand that while there are steps that need to be

taken by the Government, there are also measures that need to be adopted by the people.

She said: "The Government has already taken certain steps and we need to strengthen the hospital facilities to face the situation in case of a need. But as far as the people are concerned, I think that there is no point in worrying about this particular variant. What we need to do instead is to adhere to the basic health habits that we have been adhering to over the past two years. Continue to wear facemasks, maintain social distancing, wash hands frequently, avoid crowded places, and ensure good ventilation in the immediate surroundings."

She also urged the people to understand the gravity of the pandemic situation, and to act responsibly, while saying that contracting the virus also means transmitting the virus to loved ones who live at home.

"Don't think that your elders don't have a risk of contracting the disease merely because they don't leave the home. They still face a higher risk of contracting the disease, because the people who come from outside can still transmit the disease to them," she noted.

Speaking of vaccination, Dr. Gunaratne stressed that the most

important point is all eligible persons getting vaccinated.

"If you are not vaccinated at all, make sure that you get the first dose, and if you have not received the second dose, make sure that you get your second dose on time. The people who are older than 60 years should get the third dose," she said, adding that a system has been set up to vaccinate the people who are unable to leave their homes to get vaccinated, and that the people must use that service as well.

"If you maintain your immunity with a good diet and exercise, the vaccine is scientifically proven to give you protection," Dr. Gunaratne further said.

She emphasised that by getting vaccinated, people are fulfilling a responsibility for themselves, and also a duty for the nation.

Dr. Jeewandara also noted the importance of adhering to the safety guidelines and getting vaccinated, adding: "A majority of Sri Lankans received the Sinopharm vaccine, and our researches have shown that in about three months, the antibody level is likely to drop. Therefore, it is the right time to get the booster dose in order for the body to boost the immunity system and to prevent severe complications. It is very important that you get the booster dose whenever you get the chance, especially because Sri Lanka is giving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as the booster dose, which is considered to be one of the very good vaccines."

As those who spoke about the newest developments relating to Covid-19 mentioned, we can never be too careful, and everyone fulfilling their individual responsibility would be the key to managing the pandemic, especially if the new variant enters the country. During this festive season, everyone has an undeniable duty, and it could be as simple as limiting gatherings to immediate family or close friends.

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Hearing voices in the dark

● *Academics highlight challenges in diagnosing patients with non-psychotic auditory hallucinations*



BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

Inadequacies of the main diagnostic classifications, a lack of familiarity with symptoms, and the cultural factors influencing clinical presentations may lead to difficulties in diagnosing children and adolescents presenting with non-psychotic auditory hallucinations, thus the chance of them being inappropriately managed and labelled as “psychotic”, local case studies on the matter noted. Therefore, understanding the psycho-social contexts in which non-psychotic auditory hallucinations occur among children and adolescents may help to reduce such, local researchers observed.

These observations were made in an opinion piece on “Non-psychotic auditory hallucinations in children and adolescents”, which was authored by Prof. H. Perera (attached to Colombo University’s Medical Faculty’s Psychological Medicine Department), U. Attygalle (Registrar in Psychiatry), C. Jeewandara (Medical Officer in Psychiatry), and V. Jayawardena (Senior Registrar in Psychiatry at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children) and published in the *Sri Lanka Journal of Psychiatry* 2 (1) in June 2011.

In B.J. Sadock and V.A. Sadock’s *Kaplan and Sadock’s Concise Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry*, the clinical phenomenon of auditory hallucinations is defined as auditory perceptions in the absence of identifiable external stimuli. The presence of auditory hallucinations is viewed, as per Perera et al., as being synonymous with psychotic disorders, which in turn indicate serious psychopathology and an unfavourable prognosis. However, auditory hallucinations in children and adolescents are relatively less significant audiotactically speaking and a range of other mental health problems may produce this symptom.

Auditory hallucinations have been described in children and adolescents with conduct and emotional disorders (M. Garralda), difficulties in coping, bereavement, affective syndromes (illnesses that affect the way one thinks and feels), migraine, anxiety, and adjustment disorders (as per T. Yates and J. Bannard’s “The haunted child: Grief, hallucinations, and family dynamics”; H.A. Schreier’s “Auditory hallucinations in non-psychotic children with affective syndromes and migraine: Report of 13 cases”; and S. Kotsopoulos, J. Kanigsberg, A. Cote, and C. Fiedorowicz’s “Hallucinatory experiences in non-psychotic children”). In “Hallucinations in children and adolescents: Considerations in the emergency setting”, G.A. Edelson found that out of children presenting with non-psychotic hallucinations to a psychiatric emergency service, 34% were depressed, 22% had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and 12% had a disruptive behavioural disorder.

On the other hand, in “Visual, tactile, and phobic hallucinations: Recognition and management in the emergency department”, M. Pao, C. Lohman, D. Gracey, and L. Greenberg found a related condition as being benign phobic hallucinations present in preschool and early school age children, where visual and tactile phenomena are associated with anxiety, are transient, and present mostly at night. In clinical populations, the reported incidence of auditory hallucinations in non-psychotic children and adolescents range from 1.1% to 5.7% (as per Garralda; “Hallucinations in children” by P. Burke, M.D. Beccaro, E. McCauley, and C. Clark; “Hallucinations in non-psychotic children: More common than we think?” by H.A. Schreier; and “Hallucinations in non-psychotic children and adolescents” by J.F. Simonds). The incidence for the same was high (9%) in abused children (as per R. Famularo, R. Kinscherff, and T. Fenton’s “Psychiatric diagnoses

of maltreated children: Preliminary findings”).

In follow-up studies (“Independent course of childhood auditory hallucinations: A sequential three-year follow-up study” by S. Escher, M. Romme, A. Buiks, P. Delespaul, and J.V. Os) of non-psychotic children and adolescents, the discontinuation rate of auditory hallucination was 60%, thus suggesting that the hallucinations are non-psychotic in nature in the majority. However, Perera et al. noted that psychotic states are rare in children and that the discontinuation of hallucinations is less common when they do occur. Studies (A. Moskowitz and D. Corstens’ “Auditory hallucinations: Psychotic symptom or dissociative experience?”) have suggested that non-psychotic hallucinations are a dissociative phenomenon. Personal and family stresses, according to Perera et al., have also been identified as precipitants.

The change of school, admission to hospital, actual or threatened separation from parents, and the loss of friends or relatives through death have all been described as causative factors (Yates and Bannard). A higher rate of having a positive family history of psychosis and depression has also been reported, when compared to non-hallucinating children (Burke et al.). Non-psychotic auditory hallucinations have also been recognised, as per Perera et al., as indicating high levels of arousal, arising from chronic stress, the evidence for which comes from significant rates of family disruption, dysfunction, and domestic violence (Kotsopoulos et al., Edelson, and M. Manosevitz, N.M. Prentice and F. Wilson’s “Individual and family correlates of imaginary companions in preschool children”). Schreier has hypothesised neurological disturbances such as migraine and anxiety disorders associated with it as a cause, especially in the presence of a strong family history of both disorders.

Also, children may, according to Manosevitz et al., P. Bouldin, and C. Pratt’s “A systematic assessment of the specific fears, anxiety level, and temperament of children with imaginary companions” and N.T. Best and P. Mertin’s “Correlates of auditory hallucinations in non-psychotic children”, describe their thoughts as voices due to their cognitive immaturity and their natural tendency for illogical thinking, where sometimes, children talk to themselves and to imaginary friends in order to alleviate loneliness and to assist in allaying various fears.

Perera et al., therefore, presented a case series of 12 children and adolescents where auditory hallucinations were a prominent feature in the clinical presentation.

Case one

A 12-year-old male heard a male voice that commanded him to read the book *Lord of the Rings* and asked questions on the story. He had acted out the contents of the book. He had attended school but refused to work at school, and had read books during lessons and late into the night and had disturbed sleep. He had no other interests. He had always been a loner. He was worried about contamination with germs, leading to

frequent hand washing. He was bullied at school. He was initially diagnosed with schizophrenia (symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, disorganised speech, trouble with thinking, and the lack of motivation). He was initially managed with an atypical antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia, but due to the poor response, another atypical antipsychotic was later prescribed. He was not compliant with it.

The revised diagnosis was Asperger’s syndrome (neuro-developmental disorder characterised by significant difficulties in social interaction and non-verbal communication, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests). The outcome was that he improved with social skills training and behavioural interventions. No medication was given. He was eventually able to function at school and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case two

A 15-year-old female heard the voice of a neighbour planning to send toxic fumes through the windows to kill her. She refused food believing that it was poisoned. She refused to leave her bed for fear of contamination with germs and engaged in repeated hand washing. She was suspicious and quarrelsome and accused her family of conspiring against her. The change of residence was a possible precipitant. The initial diagnosis was schizophrenia. She was initially managed with an atypical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD – chronic and disabling conditions characterised by recurrent intrusive thoughts and compulsive acts). The outcome was partial improvement with an antidepressant and atypical antipsychotic. There was poor compliance with medication and behaviour therapy. At the follow-up, however, hallucinations were not a consistent complaint.

Case three

A 16-year-old female heard voices that predicted that some harm will befall her parents and therefore, she avoided passing the cemetery believing that her parents would die if she did so. She feared contamination with germs and engaged in repeated hand washing. She was suspicious of others and had poor anger control. She failed the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level examination. The initial diagnosis was schizophrenia. The initial management was with an atypical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was OCD. The outcome was that she responded to treatment with an antidepressant and behavioural management, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case four

A 10-year-old male heard the voice of his dead grandmother. He refused to go to school and had poor academic skills with difficulties in reading and spelling. The parents also believed in the grandmother’s presence as an invisible force in the house. The school teacher had admonished him for getting low marks at an examination. He suffered a viral fever just before the onset of the symptoms. The initial diagnosis was low academic performance. No specific interventions were made in terms of the initial management. The revised diagnosis was ADHD with specific developmental disorder. The outcome was that he improved following treatment with a central nervous system stimulant and remedial teaching, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case five

A 17-year-old male heard an unknown being comment on all his actions and believed that neighbours and teachers were making negative comments about him. He had a low mood. He avoided school. He lost interest in previously pleasurable activities. He slept and ate poorly. He was socially withdrawn. He drew pictures of demons, believed in supernatural forces, and preferred to wear black clothes. He had a breakup of a relationship with his girlfriend before the onset of the symptoms. He had no previous contact with psychiatric services. The diagnosis was depression and Asperger’s syndrome. The outcome was that he improved on an antidepressant and when helped with problem solving strategies for coping with adversities, and subsequently, the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case six

A 17-year-old male heard a voice commanding him to leave the home and live elsewhere and he felt compelled to act on this command. He talked to himself. He served tea and biscuits to an imaginary person. He had a homosexual relationship with a friend he had contacted over the internet. He refused to attend school. He defied his parents. Delusional thinking was not elicited. He was initially diagnosed with

schizophrenia. He was initially managed with a typical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was bipolar affective disorder (causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs or mania or hypomania and lows, or depression), a manic episode without psychotic symptoms. The outcome was that he improved with sodium valproate and was able to cope with the voices he heard, which were inconsistent upon follow-up.

Case seven

A 16-year-old female heard the voice of the priest at the local temple and the voice of her class teacher, both directly addressing her. The voices were not present when she was engaged in an activity she liked. She was suspicious of and aggressive towards her family members. She claimed that her body was changing its shape. She demanded that a job be found for her, but rejected opportunities when they arose. She was restless, irritable, and slept and ate poorly. She blamed her family for her problems. The onset was attributed to a failure at an examination. She was a loner with few friends. The initial diagnosis was schizophrenia. She was initially managed with an atypical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was Asperger’s syndrome. The outcome was that she was treated with an antidepressant and sodium valproate for mood dysregulation. She, however, continued to have behavioural difficulties, but the hallucinations were inconsistent and not considered a major problem by the patient at the time of follow-up.

Case eight

A 16-year-old female heard the voice of an unidentified person commenting about the Buddha and the voice also asked her to hit her mother. She refused to go to school due to the fear of contamination with germs and frequent hand washing was present. She was initially diagnosed with schizophrenia and initially managed with an atypical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was OCD. The outcome was that she improved on an antidepressant and behavioural interventions, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case nine

A 12-year-old female heard voices threatening to kill her parents. She was irritable, had poor sleep and episodes of excessive crying, and constant restlessness and pacing. She ran away from home on one occasion. There were many somatic (relating to, or affecting the body, especially as distinguished from a body part, the mind, or the environment; corporeal or physical) complaints. The failure at an examination occurred before the onset of the symptoms. No definite diagnosis was made. The initial management was with atypical antipsychotic, an antidepressant, and sodium valproate. The revised diagnosis was that she had an anxious temperament and that she reacted to the depression in her mother, and had features of side effects of psychotropic medication. The outcome was that she improved after the medication was discontinued. The mother was treated for a depressive disorder. The girl was provided help with problem solving, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case 10

A seven-year-old male heard the voice of his grandmother who died of a brain tumour, calling his name, and he was preoccupied with thoughts about his grandmother’s death. He complained of recurrent headaches and attributed a superficial lump on his scalp to a malignancy in his brain. His mother had the same worry and recurrently sought medical help and reassurance. He had a period when he complained that he could not recognise his mother. The initial diagnosis was temporal lobe epilepsy. He was initially managed for anxiety disorder. The revised diagnosis was OCD. The outcome was that he improved following psycho-education of the mother about the child’s condition, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case 11

A 12-year-old male heard the voice of the demon Badrakali commanding him. He believed that there were ghosts around him and was persistently fearful of them. He was restless and impulsive. He was aggressive towards his parents. His cognitive skills were below normal for his age. His family shared the beliefs about ghosts. He was punished by a teacher for poor school performances. A computerised tomography scan of the brain and the electro-encephalography test were normal. Delusions were not elicited. He was initially diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was initially managed with an atypical antipsychotic. The revised diagnosis was intellectual impairment with challenging behaviour.

The outcome was that the medication was discontinued which initially led to a reduced food intake and loss of weight, thus causing anxiety to the parents. However, he improved with behavioural interventions targeting both the child and the family, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Case 12

A 11-year-old female heard a voice commanding her to come to a nearby cemetery and the voice also threatened to kill her. She had visions of a dark unidentifiable face that was very frightening. She had panic attacks in school with abdominal pain, difficulty in breathing, and palpitations. She was irritable, had crying spells, marked agitation, social withdrawal, and muttered to herself. She attempted to dismiss fears by reading religious texts but failed. She attained menarche four months ago and the family believed that she was influenced by a bad spirit. There was no evidence of child abuse. She had no previous contact with psychiatric services. The revised diagnosis was anxiety disorder. The outcome was that she improved with an antidepressant and atypical antipsychotic at night and behavioural interventions for anxiety, and the hallucinations completely disappeared.

Discussing the findings, Perera et al. explained that in children and adolescents, the content of auditory hallucinations themselves may not provide a useful guide to diagnosis, as the content of the hallucinations, both of a psychotic and non-psychotic nature, is remarkably similar. According to Kotsopoulos, and Moskowitz and Corstens, in the presence of low mood, stress, and anxiety, the voices may urge aggressive action against others and warn of danger and possible harm. Inaccurate diagnosis, Perera et al. noted, may occur, unless auditory hallucinations in children and adolescents are evaluated from a broader clinical perspective than in adults, and the application of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) diagnostic criteria is done with due consideration to the associated phenomena.

D. Bhugra and K. Bhui pointed out in the “Clinical management of patients across cultures” that unfamiliarity regarding the phenomenon of non-psychotic hallucinations is likely to promote the tendency to look for a more familiar diagnosis that would fit in with the patient’s presentation, even if all clinical criteria are not fulfilled. I. al-Issa observes in “The illusion of reality or the reality of illusion: Hallucinations and culture” that auditory hallucinations in a child or an adolescent are likely to cause much anxiety to the parents and the child or adolescent, and that their emotional reaction to the symptoms in turn may also influence the psychiatric evaluation, unless all aspects of the presentation are carefully evaluated. Therefore, Perera et al. emphasised that the associated behaviour involved in the presentation may help to a certain extent in making the distinction between psychotic and non-psychotic hallucinations.

Moreover, M. Garralda’s “Characteristics of the psychoses of late onset in children and adolescents: A comparative study of hallucinating children” elaborated that children and adolescents with a psychotic disorder have associated disturbances in language production, diminished motor activity, incongruous mood, bizarre behaviour, delusional beliefs, and social withdrawal. Evaluating auditory hallucinations in children and adolescents with neuro-developmental disorders, especially those with mental retardation, pose, Perera et al. added, a particular challenge to the clinician, as due to the nature of the predisposing cerebral vulnerability in such a child or adolescent, auditory hallucinations could be associated with a psychotic disorder or the prodromal (relating to or denoting the period between the appearance of initial symptoms and the full development of such) stage of a psychotic disorder, or it could also be associated with emotional and behavioural disorders as well as seizure disorder (A.D. Hurley’s “The misdiagnosis of hallucinations and delusions in persons with mental retardation: A neurodevelopment perspective”).

Additionally, K. Bhui and D. Bhugra’s “Communication with patients from other cultures: The place of explanatory models” noted that cultural influences related to ethnicity, religious beliefs, rural or urban living, and family values on the presentation of symptoms of mental disorder may also challenge the clinician’s familiar tried and tested strategies in diagnosis and management. Hence, clinicians familiarising themselves with the manifestations of cultural beliefs under psychologically demanding experiences could improve their diagnostic skills.

Did Budget 2022 address the elephant in the economy?



BY REHANA THOWFEEK

Sri Lanka is in crisis. The chickens, as they say, have come home to roost.

Sri Lanka's post-war economic growth, fuelled largely through debt-financed infrastructure projects and increasing public expenditure, has proven to be a costly endeavour, and the country is now staring down the barrel of overwhelming external debt repayment obligations to the tune of \$ 4-5 billion every year till 2025.

On top of ever-growing fiscal deficits, Sri Lanka also contends with balance of payments deficits. Credit rating downgrades have locked Sri Lanka out of international finance markets. Coupled with lower tourism earnings and worker remittances, foreign exchange reserves have depleted to record lows. In order to preserve what is left of its reserves, the country now faces strict import restrictions, impeding business operations, as well as increasing cost of living.

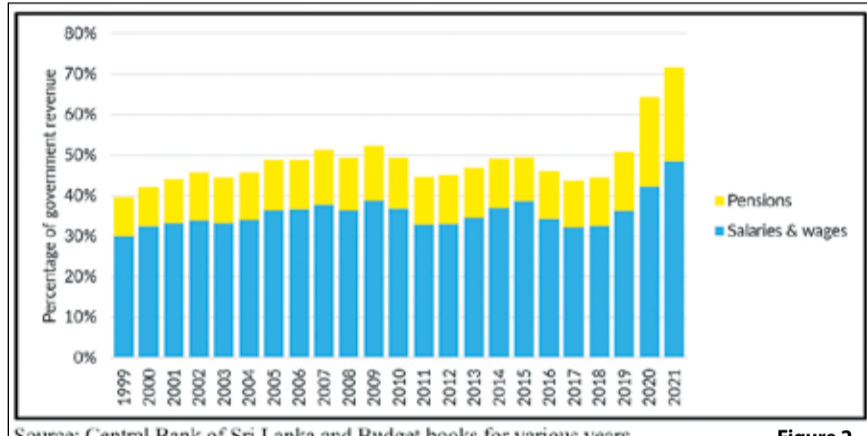
While we may be tempted to blame Covid-19 for this mess, Sri Lanka has been on a precipice of its own making long before. The economy is at a critical juncture – a time for reform: To check unchecked public spending, prune the excess, and usher Sri Lanka into a better state of being or risk permanent and lasting damage.

In this context, everyone looked on in anticipation at the newly minted Finance Minister's maiden budget with bated breath. The second reading of the Budget was passed last week with a majority. In this article, I provide my analysis of whether adequate steps have been taken to address the matter of the perennial fiscal deficit (commonly referred to as the budget deficit).

The budget that is always in deficit

As Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa rightly said, the Sri Lankan Government has run on a deficit since the 1950s (except in 1954 and 1955). This pace was amped up in 2009 for post-war economic growth. While the government's budget deficit has been tumbling downhill over the years, its revenue position deteriorated most disastrously in 2020 following a spate of tax reductions brought on soon after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's electoral victory in November 2019. Government revenue fell by nearly a third in comparison to 2019, causing the 2020 budget deficit to hit a record high of Rs. 1.6 trillion (1).

There appears to be an attempt



Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka and Budget books for various years

to right this wrong: The Finance Ministry has announced steps to increase government revenue in the upcoming year through a variety of new taxes: A one-time tax surcharge, a Social Security Contribution tax, increasing VAT (Value-Added Tax) on financial services, increasing cigarette and excise taxes, and a rather bizarre motor vehicle accident tax.

The budget deficit for 2022, however, is still massive (8.8% of projected GDP), which would have to be funded by even more loans (this time, domestically, I suppose). According to its Fiscal Management Report, the Government hopes to bring the deficit down to 4.8% of GDP by 2025, not by pruning its expenses but by increasing its revenue. This brings me to the first structural issue I wish to speak about.

1. Taxes that burden the poor

One of the many structural ills of the government's revenue collection is the unfair burden it places on the poor and middle-class income groups through its overdependence on indirect taxes (taxes on imports and exports, taxes on goods and services). In 2019, there was an attempt to shift it slightly, and the share of tax revenue, which came from income taxes, increased to 28% from 20% in 2018.

One of the main purposes of taxes is to redistribute wealth. Budget 2022 has restored the composition back to 2019 levels with 26% of tax revenue expected from income taxes, but it fails to reduce the burden on the poor and middle class by shifting the brunt of the tax burden to the higher income earners.

The Government's plan till 2025 appears to be much the same; the share coming from income taxes as a percentage of GDP is expected to grow by 0.4% points from 2022 to 2025, while on the other hand, the share coming from taxes on goods and services as a percentage of GDP is expected to grow by 1.4% points in the same period. Therefore, there is little effort to address this issue.

In my previous post ("The 2022

Budget: What we know so far") covering the expenditure allocations in the Appropriations Bill, I categorised the expenses based on ministries. In Figure 1, I have gone one step ahead and categorised based on the sector. The values within denote the allocations as a share of programme expenditure (Rs. 2.5 trillion, which does not include debt service expenditures).

Accordingly, the single largest programme-wise allocation is made for defence, with Rs. 373 billion allocated for defence activities. Rs. 106 billion is allocated for public security. National and provincial (2) allocations for education amount to Rs. 319 billion. On healthcare and pharmaceuticals (3), Rs. 300 billion has been allocated. Highways receive Rs. 270 billion. Civil pensions receive Rs. 309 billion, the third largest programme-wise allocation in the Budget. This brings me to the next structural issue I want to raise: Overstaffing in the public sector.

Sri Lanka currently has some ~1.5 million public sector workers (including military and police), which means ~1 in 5 of the country's labour force is employed by the government, and there is one public sector worker for every 13 citizens in the country. This is a ridiculously large public workforce for such a small country.

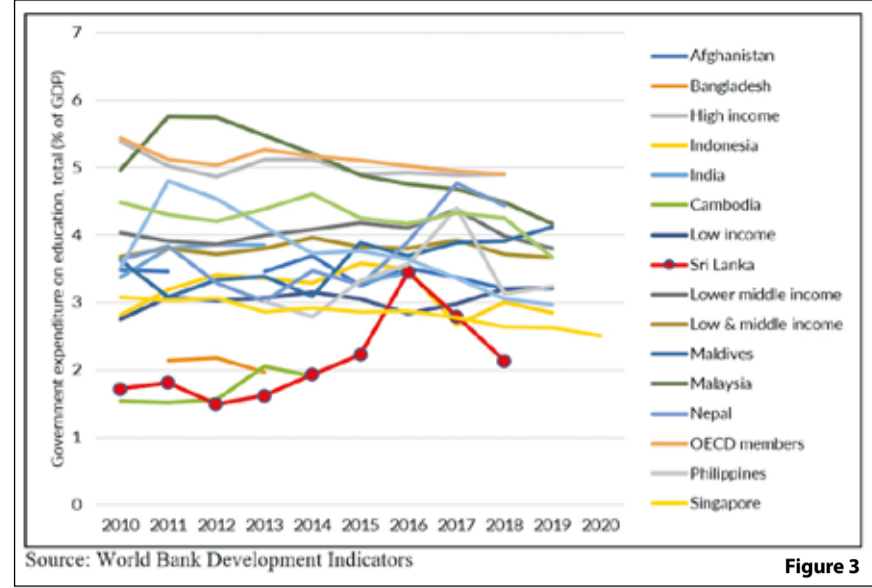
2. The public sector: Overstaffed and inefficient

A significant portion of government expenditure goes towards paying public servants their salaries and pensions. It is best illustrated with Figure 2. In 2021, the government's salary and pension bill amounted to a whopping Rs. 950 billion, which was 73% of government revenue for the year.

This overstaffing results in lower salaries across the board (since there are so many salaries to pay). Sectors which are human resource-intensive, like education and health, which depend heavily on their staff to deliver quality outcomes, therefore, undoubtedly struggle to pay competitive salaries. But this is not the case for every state entity. Take a look at Samurdhi, for example.

Cost vs. benefit – the Samurdhi programme is the country's flagship social assistance programme. In 2021, Rs. 70.9 billion was allocated to the Samurdhi Department, out of which Rs. 53.5 billion was paid out to beneficiaries. This means 25% of the allocation is channelled to meet administrative costs which are largely salaries and perks to employees: Rs. 17 billion was allocated for salaries and perks, to be exact.

Given that there were 1.8 million beneficiary families receiving Samurdhi, the average monthly Samurdhi benefit per beneficiary family was ~Rs. 2,400. On the other hand, the Samurdhi Department employs 25,485 staff members. Therefore, the average monthly salary



Source: World Bank Development Indicators

per Samurdhi staff member was ~Rs. 55,650. The outcomes expected from the Samurdhi programme are not human resource-intensive, as it is a cash transfer programme for poverty alleviation. Therefore, such a disproportionately high salary bill is unjustified and begs the question, then, of its efficiency.

2.1. Excessive military and police force

The more we investigate, the clearer it becomes: It is not merely just an issue of public sector overstaffing; it's also an issue of military and police overstaffing.

To illustrate this, consider the following figures: In 2021, the government's salary bill amounted to Rs. 634 billion, out of which Rs. 204 billion was spent on Defence Ministry salaries while Rs. 113 billion was spent on Public Security Ministry salaries. In combination, the Ministries of Defence and Public Security employ around ~350,000 people.

Therefore, despite employing only ~25% of the total public sector workforce, the Ministries of Defence and Public Security account for ~50% of the government's salary bill. Again, this impacts sectors like education and health which are desperately in need of more funds to invest in capital and pay more competitive salaries. Does the Minister indicate any move to address this matter of public sector overstaffing?

Despite the Finance Minister's statement to the media claiming no respite for public sector workers from the 2022 Budget, in his budget speech, he says two things which contradict this: (1) Give permanent government jobs to 53,000 graduate trainees, allocating Rs. 35 billion for it, and (2) extend the retirement age to 65. The extension of the retirement age is a good idea, as it would reduce the pensions bill somewhat, but if the government simultaneously stacks the other side with younger recruits, the purpose is lost, as it will only lead to an increase in the salary bill.

Trimming the defence and public security cadre would be a good first step to trimming the entire public sector; it can immediately reduce the government's salary bill significantly and free up much-needed money to invest in sectors like education and healthcare – to pay teachers more competitive salaries, for example.

An interesting way to think about this is by framing the public sector salary bill in the context of the government's tax revenue composition. Even though all public servants do not contribute income taxes (some do, like employees of state-owned enterprises and those earning more than Rs. 3 million per annum), nor make contributions for future pensions, they do pay taxes in the form of taxes on goods and services (like VAT). Recall the tax composition in Section 1: Public sector workers are, in effect, subsidising the government for their own salaries (to an extent). Imagine that – paying your employer to pay you.

2.2. Affordability of a non-contributory pension scheme

Pensions by themselves are a serious drain on public funds. Sri Lanka is an aging society (changes in the age composition of a population such that there is an increase in the proportion of older persons) with long life expectancy, and a non-contributory pension scheme such as the civil pensions scheme is just not a sustainable solution anymore.

The pension bill (similar to the salary bill) is paid entirely through tax revenue and borrowings. The pensions bill for 2022 is 10 times greater than it was 20 years ago; in another 20 years, how much more could it be? And more importantly, can the public coffers continue to support this unaided?

Changing to a contributory pension

scheme would be suitable, but the Sri Lankan Government has a bad history with those too. The Farmers' and Fishermen's Pension Scheme (FFPS), for example, was set up in 1987 to provide pensions for the farming and fishing community. Enrollees were expected to contribute regularly to the fund and at the age of 60 would become eligible for a monthly pension.

The programme, however, was administered terribly: Contribution amounts were too small to support the promised monthly pension, contributions were never increased over time to account for inflation, contributions were not collected on time (some never contributed more than a few times), there were no clearly defined exit rules (to kick non-contributors out), etc.

By 2013, the fund had collapsed. Since 2005, when FFPS pension expenditures overtook contributory incomes for the first time, the government has continued to channel funds to bridge the ever-increasing gap through Treasury allocations. They did not stop enrolling more beneficiaries either. The programme has become, in effect, another burden on the public coffers – hence it is not merely a matter of changing the modality of the pension programme, but its proper administration.

The crowding out effect

The issue with having such massive amounts of funds trapped in contractual obligations like public sector salaries is that it crowds out investments which would be made into more productive sectors like education and healthcare. Sri Lanka spends far less on education than its regional and income peers. Investments to improve the quality of education and education outcomes are something education specialists have urged for decades.

It also leaves little wiggle room in case of an emergency, like Covid-19, which suddenly placed a massive strain on the existing resources of the state healthcare system, but rapid investment into building capacity would not be possible in the case the funds are trapped in obligatory payments.

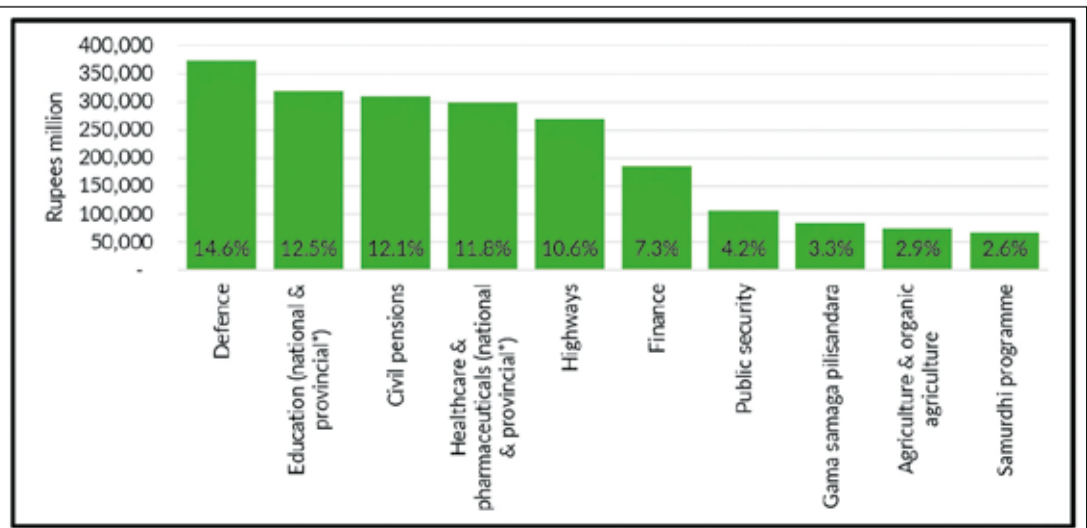
It is also problematic from a labour market perspective; there is a huge pool of the country's labour force trapped in unproductive jobs, all the while the more productive private sector is faced with labour shortages. Whereas a young person may be contributing to economic growth through entrepreneurship or a job in, for example, tourism, they are instead a drain on scarce public resources, stunting the country's potential.

3. Reforms for an efficient public sector

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) are a key source of public sector inefficiency. While there are undoubtedly some institutions which deliver efficiently, the best way to illustrate this issue is to look at the losses made by SOEs between 2006 and 2017:

- The Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) made net losses amounting to Rs. 177 billion
 - The Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) made net losses amounting to Rs. 187 billion
 - SriLankan Airlines made net losses amounting to Rs. 156 billion
 - Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) made net losses amounting to Rs. 58 billion
- They also borrow heavily, and these are mostly government-guaranteed debts, which means the government is duty-bound to honour them. In 2020, total SOE debt amounted to Rs. 1.2 trillion – we simply cannot afford to keep bearing these losses and the mounting debt.

Contd. on page 8



Source: Appropriation Bill 2022 | *provincial allocations are estimated based on previous years' allocations

Figure 1

the morning

business

ASPI	S&P SL20	Market
11,409.08	3,909.34	Market Closed
-30.65	33.38	Share Volume
-0.27%	1.08%	402,005,629
		Turnover
		11,075,225,300.30

CPC brings down sub-standard fuel?

- Private bus owners complain fuel 'cheaper, low quality'
- Says no institute in Sri Lanka to check standards
- Energy Ministry defends quality of fuel
- CPC says engine issues are due to bus drivers mixing diesel, kerosene

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

The Lanka Private Bus Owners' Association (LPBOA) has filed a Police complaint alleging that the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) has resorted to importing cheaper, low-quality fuel, due to the existing foreign currency shortage in the country, resulting in their buses suffering breakdowns.

When contacted by *The Morning Business*, LPBOA President Gemunu Wijeratne claimed that he had filed a complaint with the Inspector General of Police (IGP) that over the past two to three weeks, their members had reported that their buses were breaking down and that they believe the cause to be the inferior quality of fuel available in the market.

He further alleged that this suspicion regarding the quality of fuel was strengthened by the decrease in fuel efficiency which has been noted over the past few weeks.

Wijeratne stated that they had informed the IGP to examine the quality of the fuel that has been imported, but the issue is that there is no institute in Sri Lanka to test the quality of fuel. Moreover, he claimed the tests conducted by the CPC cannot be relied upon, because, according to him, it would be like asking the thief's mother about the whereabouts of the thief since the CPC is the entity that imports the alleged low-quality fuel.

He further drew parallels between this issue of low-quality fuel and the prevailing issue regarding the

composition of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and claimed that the root cause in both issues is the lack of an independent entity to test them.

"We have received various complaints by our members regarding the breakdown of their buses and we are currently going through them and hope to carry out an investigation regarding this. The biggest problem for us is the increase in fuel consumption. If we pump diesel to our buses, we cannot earn any profit," stated Wijeratne.

The Ministry of Energy emphatically denied the recent allegations made by the LPBOA.

Speaking to *The Morning Business*, Ministry of Energy Secretary K.D.R. Olga described these allegations as pure fabrications and claimed that certain people are trying to utilise the situation in the country to create public fear.

She also pointed out that previous attempts were made to create public fear regarding a gas shortage and when that failed, she claimed that they had now resorted to making allegations that the fuel imported is of inferior quality.

"What I can say regarding this issue is that we have not imported fuel of an inferior quality and that all fuel is tested before being brought into the country. The Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) and the Ceylon Petroleum Storage Terminals Ltd. (CPSTL) have their own fuel-testing laboratories. Further, under the tender conditions, the fuel is tested prior to loading by an independent inspector at the port of loading and once the fuel reaches Sri Lanka, samples will be taken and tested before the fuel is unloaded," stated Olga.



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Moreover, CPC Chairman Sumith Wijesinghe too dismissed these allegations and claimed that the private bus drivers shouldn't be complaining due to engine troubles when they are known to pump kerosene to their buses since it's cheaper.

"When you pump kerosene to your bus, the deterioration of the bus engine is inevitable. Once you use kerosene because it's cheaper, after three years it's cheaper to replace the engine," stated Wijesinghe.

He further noted that he had scheduled a press conference to be held today (2) morning, where he intends to address these allegations, and expressed: "I have informed the IGP to take the necessary legal measures to stop the use of kerosene by public bus owners."

Previously, Minister of Energy Udaya Gammanpila, at a press conference held in early November, commenting on the

shortage of kerosene in the country, claimed that the significant gap in prices between diesel (Rs. 111) and kerosene (Rs. 73) has resulted in the increased utilisation of kerosene by bus owners.

This increased demand for kerosene was described as unsustainable by Gammanpila, who claimed that kerosene was sold at a subsidised price by the CPC in order to provide some relief to farmers and fishermen. He further claimed that the CPC bears a loss of Rs. 33 per litre of kerosene, which translates to a daily loss of Rs. 23 million.

Therefore, according to him, the supply of kerosene to areas where fishing and agriculture are not prevalent industries will be limited, as its continued misuse by businessmen will inevitably lead to a situation where it would be impossible to continue to grant this relief to persons who actually require it.

UNP asks Cabraal to make public IMF conditions

- Casts doubts about Governor's claims of rupee devaluation and state job cuts

BY AAZAM AMEEN

The United National Party (UNP) has questioned the claims made by Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal regarding the conditions that would be laid down by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) if the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) was to seek its assistance or a programme.

Speaking to the media, UNP Working Committee Member Dinouk Colombage, requested

the CBSL Governor to reveal whether the IMF has actually instructed GoSL to devalue the Sri Lankan Rupee by 30% or reduce state sector jobs in order to be eligible for IMF assistance.

"The Governor has claimed that if Sri Lanka was to seek out assistance from the IMF we would have to devalue the currency by 30% and we would have to reduce government jobs. Where has the IMF made these demands? In 2009, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's

Government entered into an agreement with the IMF; on that occasion Cabraal was the Central Bank Governor and he did not oppose such an agreement. Why is he opposing seeking assistance from the IMF this time?" Colombage questioned.

Speaking further, Colombage stated that the country is facing a dollar shortage in the banks.

"Today citizens are unable to withdraw dollars from the banks; they are forced..."

Contd. on page 10

Central Bank reviews responses for securitised financing arrangement

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) announced that responses received for the request on the arrangement of a medium-term foreign currency financing facility by securitising the foreign currency receipts, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), are currently under review.

Issuing a press release yesterday (1), the CBSL said: "There were seven responses, among which there were five leading international banks and two established investment

arrangers." It further said that these responses are being reviewed in order to determine the most suited modality to initiate the securitised financing arrangement.

The CBSL requested proposals from the international investor community on 12 November for the aforesaid arrangement of a medium-term foreign currency financing facility under the mandatory sale of 10% of workers' remittances converted into Sri Lankan rupees by licensed commercial banks (LCBs).

CCPI-based inflation soars to 9.9% in Nov.

The Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) Year-on-Year (YoY) inflation has been increased to 9.9% in the month of November 2021 from 7.6% in October 2021, the Statistics Department of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) announced.

At the same time, the CCPI measured on an annual average basis increased to 5.3% in November 2021 from 4.8% in October 2021.

The monthly change of the CCPI was recorded at 2.57% in November 2021 due to price increases observed in items of both food and non-food categories,

which were 1.76% and 0.81%, respectively. In the food category, prices of vegetables, rice, milk powder, big onion, chicken, and fresh fish increased, while in the non-food category, the prices of housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), maintenance or reconstruction, and miscellaneous goods and services, such as hair cutting and shaving charges, during the month also increased. The core inflation (YoY) increased to 7% in November 2021, while annual average core inflation increased to 4% in November 2021.

Harsha Randeny appointed Microsoft Country Manager for SL

Microsoft has appointed Harsha Randeny as the Country Manager for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. He will focus on accelerating digital transformation for public and private sector businesses, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), communities, and industry verticals, collaborating with Microsoft's extensive partner ecosystem.

"I am excited to take up this new role at a time Sri Lanka and the Maldives are on the cusp of reimagining a digital future and digital economy," said Randeny.

Randeny has been with Microsoft since 2007, and prior to this role, he led teams focused on cloud technologies, established strategic partnerships,



Microsoft Country Manager for Sri Lanka and the Maldives Harsha Randeny

and acted as an advisory to the partner ecosystem.

"One of the reasons I am so proud to lead the Southeast Asia new markets is because of the

incredible talent we have in all the countries. Harsha brings a deep understanding of the local business landscape, industry needs, and technical expertise, and I know he will add immense value to every organisation. At Microsoft, we are committed to developing our employees, providing opportunities for them to expand their remit, and grow their careers. Which is why I'm so excited that Harsha will play a crucial role in leading the business in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, as he reinforces his position as a trusted advisor to the countries and a mentor to his teams," noted Microsoft Southeast Asia New Markets General Manager Sook Hoon Cheah.

'Govt. has no plan to attract the \$ 6 b it needs in 3 months'

- AKD says \$ 350 m needed for loan repayment in Nov., Dec.
- Claims Cabinet not coming up with solutions to economic crisis

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake said yesterday (1) that the Government needs over \$ 6 billion within the next three months for the import of goods, the payment of letters of credits (LCs), and the payment of debt instalments but has no proper plan to attract this required amount of foreign exchange.

"In the next three months, the Government needs over \$ 6 billion for a number of activities. For the months of November and December, we need \$ 350 million for loan repayment. On 18 January 2022, a \$ 500 million international sovereign bond will be completed. The Government has opened

\$ 1.1 billion worth of LCs by 30 September 2021 with People's Bank for the import of goods. Similarly, it had opened \$ 1.3 billion worth of LCs with Bank of Ceylon (BOC). Thus, in total, the Government needs over \$ 6 billion in the next three months for these

activities," said Dissanayake at a press conference held yesterday.

He raised serious concerns about the decrease of income into the country, including the downfall of income from migrant workers in 2021, when compared to 2020.

"In June 2020, the income from migrant workers was \$ 573 million. In June 2021, it was reduced to \$ 475 million. That is a 16% reduction. The income from migrant workers faced a 50% reduction in September 2021, when compared to September 2020. The Government has no proper plan this year to bring money from migrant workers back to Sri Lanka."

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JVP Leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake

COPE urges Govt. to use Kalpitiya Islands for tourism



Kalpitiya Islands

Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) Chairman and MP Prof. Charitha Herath has directed the Ministry of Tourism Secretary and the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) to expedite the preparation of a programme to utilise the 12 islands in the Kalpitiya area, under the SLTDA, for the benefit of the tourism industry.

It was revealed that, although an investor had applied for five of the 12 islands, which was of 2,055 acres in 2011, it had been delayed due to the inability to identify a proper institution to obtain approval for the investor's water bungalows project.

The COPE Chairman pointed out that the delay of such a project, for example, due to the inability to grant approval for an investor who already owns hotels of similar nature in the Maldives, is an obstacle to the development of the tourism industry as well as of the country.

Dr. Herath stressed the need to utilise these beautiful islands for tourism and directed Ministry of Tourism Secretary S. Hettiarachchi and SLTDA Chairperson Kimarli Fernando to implement a special project within a strong legal framework since cabinet approval has been granted for the same.

He also recommended putting forth a Steering Committee with all relevant parties, including the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA), the Central Environmental Authority (CEA), the North Western Provincial Council, and the Coast Conservation and Coastal Resource Management Department.

Additionally, the Committee paid attention to the audit observation that there was a payment of Rs. 11 million out of Rs. 29 million for the renovation of the Kataragama Resort a few years ago for work not done. It was also disclosed that the value of this Rs. 11 million has been estimated at Rs. 4.8 million by a re-appointed expert committee.

It was also brought to the notice of the Committee that despite a committee being appointed through the Ministry of Public Administration, which has made recommendations that the Attorney General conduct an investigation into the incident and take necessary action, no action has been taken so far. Instead, the Auditor General revealed that only a warning letter had been issued to the officer involved in the said incident, for which the committee expressed its strong displeasure.

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{ CORPORATE/NEWS }

The uphill battle towards pharmaceutical self-sufficiency: Can the local industry do more for less?

Sri Lanka's pharmaceutical sector has stepped up to the plate during the past two years working tirelessly to cater to the national demand for drugs in the midst of import restrictions compelled by the global pandemic. The industry revival is a result of the Memorandum of Understanding followed by a Joint-Venture Agreement signed between State Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Corporation (SPMC) and the members of the National Chamber of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers of Sri Lanka (NCPM) in 2017.

At present, 15-20% of the total local drug requirement is fulfilled by SPMC, joint venture partners of SPMC – under strict adherence to quality standards stipulated by the SPMC and other homegrown manufacturers.

Pharmaceutical self-sufficiency falls in line with the national priority of retaining foreign currency in the country. Empowering local pharma is a win-win for all parties involved because it gives citizens better access to Government (SPMC) approved high quality medicine for affordable prices while generating occupational opportunities for local youth. In order to achieve self-sustainability local industry would require FDIs which would in turn bring



international technology and know-how to Sri Lanka paving the way for the country to emerge as a "pharma hub" capitalising on the country's strategic location in the Indian Ocean. The construction of three "pharma zones" has already commenced in Anuradhapura,

Hambantota and Millawa intending to attract such investments. The Millawa SPMC zone, largest of the three, is slated to house four state-of-the-art factories within it.

NCPM President Dr. Lohitha Samarawickrema in a letter to the media

dated 4 August however said that the biggest impediment for yielding the optimum benefit from this joint venture is misinformation. He went on to say that contradictory reports create a sense of anxiety among the Sri Lankan public as well as demotivate potential local & foreign investors.

According to Dr. Samarawickrema, up to 80-85% of the local production catering to 15% of the total demand is supplied by SPMC joint venture stakeholders. The stakeholders collectively manufacture over 300 varieties of drugs which are then quality-tested and distributed through the state manufacturer (SPMC). He said the success of this Public-Private Partnership could augur well for the country's economy as well as the general wellbeing of citizens and thus should not be stigmatized without a fair assessment.

Given the strategic location of Sri Lanka, Dr. Samarawickrema went on to add that Sri Lanka was being seriously considered to be developed as a hub for vaccine manufacturing with Asian and African markets in mind. In that regard, a feasibility study is already underway to establish a vaccine manufacturing enterprise as a joint venture between Sri Lanka's Kelun Life Sciences and China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd. The local partner of this venture is the first homegrown manufacturer of saline &

is credited with propelling Sri Lanka to full self-sufficiency.

It has been reported that since the beginning of Covid-19, 200 new vaccine manufacturers have joined the production pipeline. The US, Canada, Brazil and Mexico are considered the top vaccine manufacturers while some Latin American countries are among the top 20 ranked vaccine manufacturers with self-sufficiency up to about 72%.

This NCPM-SPMC venture is especially meaningful considering that it served to positively disrupt the state monopoly on pharmaceutical drugs thereby ushering in new possibilities and opportunities for private sector stakeholders for productive collaboration. The Chamber firmly believes Pharma Industry's initiative to work closely with the private sector sets a welcome precedent for other state sector enterprises, too, to follow suit.

Combining the state sector's integrity and welfare-mindedness with the private sector's efficiency and ingenuity can elevate the local pharma sector from self-sufficiency to unprecedented heights from a trade standpoint. Pharma has immense potential to become one of the top foreign revenue earners for Sri Lanka in the ensuing years with due patronage from the state.

AFI Corp launches structured therapy mobile app 'iWill'

● Set to transform mental wellbeing in Sri Lanka

AFI Corp, a premier provider of leading technology solutions, is partnering with "iWill", a space for therapy designed by experts to help individuals beat depression, anxiety, and other stressors and empower them to achieve their optimum self as people and professionals.

iWill is a complete mental and emotional care system available online through the iWill app (Android and iOS). It includes specialised therapy programmes and sessions, mental wellbeing classes, assessments, and other tools. iWill has a proven success rate of 98%.

The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of all people, irrespective of age, profession, etc. The sudden and unexpected change in our way of life over the past 18 months has put immense pressure on us. These stresses have been expressed through depression, anxiety, anger, frustration, fear, etc. which in turn have significantly lowered productivity and general satisfaction in life.

iWill is a platform that assesses each user to understand their current emotional and mental concerns, creating a customised therapy journey and connecting the user with their best-matched therapists. iWill therapists are qualified and experienced psychologists, therapists, counsellors and psychologists who have proven to be experts in their areas of specialisation.



AFI Corp Chief Growth Officer
Hifnaz Jiffrey

Available in English, Sinhala and Tamil, iWill can also be used by individuals by downloading through the Play Store or App Store as appropriate, completing the free assessment, and paying only for the sessions they book. Consultations are available every day, from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. Each session lasts 50 minutes long.

iWill is also available as a platform for corporates. "iWill for Corporates will allow future-minded corporations to help employees optimise their wellbeing without infringing on their privacy, resulting in happy and productive employees who in turn lead to a successful business," stated AFI Corp Chief Growth Officer Hifnaz Jiffrey. They will provide overall insights on the psychological wellbeing of its workforce, allowing them to initiate positive HR interventions that

work for their employees.

AFI Corp Business Development Manager Sachin Munasinghe stated: "iWill is provided through an app, users are not only provided convenient and customised access to the support they need in the comfort of their home, but don't have to deal with the stigma that is still unfortunately associated with mental health and wellbeing. All they have to do is download the app, answer a few questions to customise the support they need, and they are good to go."

AFI Corp is a fast-growing technology company that provides technology solutions and support to companies in the US while providing Sri Lankan businesses the opportunity to utilise game-changing technology products and solutions from across the world, helping them level up and attain global competitiveness. AFI Corp also runs an executive search operation, connecting top Sri Lankan talent with leading firms in the US and the EU.

Launched in 2017, iWill is the first structured therapy app in the world. It is a product of ePsyClinic, a social enterprise focused on creating digital public mental health systems that provide effective care. iWill's assessment methodology, customised mental health journeys, bank of expert mental health professionals, and complex algorithm that matches users with their best-suited carers generates a 98% rate of success.

IFC supports first SL chapter of women corporate directors

● Aims to promote diversity in the boardroom

In a bid to promote boardroom diversity and establish a network of existing and prospective women directors, the Women Corporate Directors Foundation (WCD) – the largest organisation of women corporate board members globally – launched its first local chapter in Sri Lanka recently.

Supported by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), under the IFC-DFAT Women in Work programme, this initiative aims to offer a platform for Sri Lankan women board members to share industry expertise while helping the country increase its pipeline of aspiring and qualified female board members.

In Sri Lanka, despite higher education, women are significantly underrepresented in the labour force. Only around one in three women of working age are employed. This gap further widens among senior managers, board members, and business owners. The percentage of women among board members of listed entities in Sri Lanka is also low, compared to South Asian peers such as India (12%) and Bangladesh (17%). According to IFC's latest findings, around 9.5% of board directors in companies listed on the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) are women.

"Despite the low numbers of women on boards, Sri Lanka has a

well-accomplished pool of women directors representing a wide spectrum of industries. In this context, as part of WCD's growing presence in Asia-Pacific, we are delighted to launch our first-ever local chapter in the country," said WCD CEO and Chairman Susan Stautberg. "As a WCD member, Sri Lankan women directors will have better access to trends and expertise from global economies, helping strengthen their knowledge when advocating for improved corporate governance practices for businesses."

A significant and growing body of research points to the business benefits associated with gender diversity on boards and in senior management, including increased financial performance and productivity as well as improved environment, social, and governance (ESG) practices. In Sri Lanka, IFC's research highlighted that the top 30 CSE-listed companies with higher gender diversity perform better in terms of financial measures, including return on equity, return on total assets, and price-to-earnings ratio.

"Diversity is not just a moral imperative; it also makes perfect business sense," said IFC Vice President for Asia and Pacific Alfonso Garcia Mora. "The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that companies with better ESG practices and board diversity have been more resilient in recovery."

The launch of the Sri Lanka Chapter of Women Corporate Directors will be a significant step in raising the profile of women board directors who help create value for businesses in the country. The demonstration effect of this competitive advantage of having aspiring women board members or senior managers who are "board-ready" is critical to build leadership pipelines for boards.

"Australia has a steadfast commitment to be at the forefront in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Through this latest initiative under the IFC-DFAT Women in Work programme, we hope to continue our push towards enhancing greater equality and diversity in Sri Lanka's private sector," said Australian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka David Holly. "I believe that the 16 founding members of the Sri Lanka Chapter of Women Corporate Directors would play a significant role in taking this agenda forward. My congratulations to them."

The Women Directors Forum of Sri Lanka Institute of Directors (SLID) will play a catalytic role in this initiative as the co-chair of the local WCD chapter. In addition, the Sri Lanka chapter will also be supported by KPMG LLP, one of the largest professional services firms and also the oldest chartered accountancy firm in the country.

MY Kalizma at Port City Colombo Marina

The Port City Colombo Marina welcomed the MY Kalizma – The Classic Superyacht, once owned by Hollywood screen idols Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. The first superyacht to sail into the Port City Colombo Marina, established Colombo as a calling port in the Indian Ocean with facilities for berthing luxury superyachts.

Pierre Pringiers, Chairman of the Sail Lanka Yachting Group which manages the Port City Colombo Marina stated: "The 145' Kalizma – built in 1906 by G.L. Watson in Scotland – arrived from the Maldives on Sunday (28), marking a milestone in the development of Colombo as a superyacht destination. To see this historic superyacht berthed at the marina is the fulfilment of a dream for me, and is a fitting tribute to our staff who have efficiently handled the logistics and administrative details. I also want to express my sincere thanks to the officials of the Port City Colombo and the Customs, Immigration, and all the agencies involved. I'm hoping that the arrival of Kalizma will augur well for the success of visiting superyachts and the opening up of Sri Lanka for cruising and yacht charters – one of the new pillars of the tourism industry."

MY Kalizma has served in both world wars as part of the British Royal Navy. It was in 1967 that two of Hollywood's most famous actors, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor chartered the yacht for a cruise on the Mediterranean. They fell in love with the yacht and Burton bought it and gifted it to Taylor. They named



The superyacht MY Kalizma at the Port City Colombo Marina

the yacht Kalizma, after their three daughters, Kate, Liza and Maria.

Aashim Mongia, Managing Director of West Coast Marine Yacht Services in India who manages the yacht stated: "The MY Kalizma has been cruising the Indian Ocean region through the last season. The opening of the Port City Colombo Marina is a boon for superyachts that visit the region, and hopefully we will see more superyachts coming into the Indian Ocean region for nautical tourism. We are thankful to the Sri Lankan authorities, the Sail Lanka Yachting Group and the management of Port City Colombo, for their assistance in making MY Kalizma's visit a success. With this first visit we are hoping to bring more yachts to Sri Lanka to explore the untapped potential that the island nation has to offer."

The Port City Colombo Marina is expected to be one of the region's most modern and largest international yacht

marinas. When it is fully operational, it is expected to have the facility to anchor 200 yachts and become one of the largest such venues in the region. It is also expected to have a mini yacht repair facility, duty-free terminal, customs and facilities for several other maritime related businesses.

Sail Lanka Yachting Group, founded in 2014 by Pierre Pringiers, operates a fleet of 10 luxury catamarans around the island and has been designing manufacturing boats and developing marine infrastructure and boats for export since 2008. Sail Lanka Yachting Group is also now managing the Port City Colombo Marina operations.

The vision of SLYG is to develop Sri Lanka as one of the main hubs for boat and yacht building, ownership, and chartering in South and South-East Asia and make Sri Lanka a key world-class destination for experiential tourism and marine tourism.

Contd. from page 9

'Govt...

"The Cabinet of Ministers is not finding solutions for the economic crisis that we are in. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa does not even seem to know what the crisis is. His decisions reflect that he is unaware of the depth of the crisis as his decisions are not those that a President should take during a crisis; his decisions worsened the crisis. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa is focused on other things. Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa has not divulged proper details about this crisis to Parliament," accused Dissanayake.

He further said that there are clear indicators of the worsening economic crisis all around us.

"Over 1,000 containers with essential goods are trapped at the Colombo Port. Even though the goods are imported, banks are not releasing dollars to release them. The Sapugaskanda Oil Refinery has been closed as there are no dollars for the import of crude oil. There is a heavy shortage of goods, and prices of goods are increasing daily."

COPE...

Further, the Committee inquired about the payment of an additional Rs. 10 million for the construction of the Kalpitiya Thorapadi Jetty and the road near the Wannimundalama Lagoon. The SLTDA Chairperson said that upon inquiry, the authority was informed that further action could not be taken due to the absence of the relevant documents. The Auditor General revealed that although the COPE Committee had given a recommendation in 2016 to look into this matter, the investigation process only began in 2018.

The Committee then drew attention to the obstacles faced by Sri Lanka in comparison to the Maldives. Fernando stated that only the highest priced luxury hotels in the Maldivian tourism industry are active, promoting globally through active public relations, operating under a small team of 15 international-level experts, and making a significant impact by bringing in leading international investors. She also said that the authority has played a major role in uplifting the tourism industry in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

UNP...

"...to purchase dollars from the black market where they are being sold at over Rs. 240. The Government can pretend that the currency is not being devalued, but the rate that banks advertise is not the rate that citizens are able to purchase at," he said.

He went on to request Cabraal to present the Government's strategy regarding the depleted foreign reserves. "In November 2019, the UNP handed over the Government with \$ 7 billion in foreign reserves. In the space of two years, this Government has reduced our foreign reserves to \$ 1.3 billion. Without foreign currency available, how will this Government pay for food, medicine, and fuel?"

Colombage added that if the Government was not interested in seeking the assistance of the IMF, they must present an alternative plan to the public to prevent an economic disaster. "This Government has the responsibility to take decisions based on the interests of the public, and not based on individual bias. The public is facing grave economic hardship; the first step this Government must take is to present a solution to the foreign exchange crisis. If they cannot do this, then many of the other issues in the country will remain unsolved."



Mercedes-Benz Service Team at DIMO

DIMO reigns supreme at Mercedes-Benz Service Excellence – Regional Award Ceremony

DIMO has once again earned the prestigious “General Distributor Award” by Mercedes-Benz AG, outperforming others in the region, in the General Distributor category, at the recently held Mercedes-Benz Service Excellence – Regional Award Ceremony. DIMO has created new standards in regional service excellence by gaining a higher Customer Satisfaction Index and Net Promoter Scores.

Mercedes-Benz Service Excellence – Regional Award Ceremony also recognised Hirun Korallage, Amantha Yapa and Sahinda Wasalathanthrige – three members of DIMO’s Mercedes-Benz Service Facility, as “Top Service Advisers of the Year” in the region. These recipients are selected based on several criteria and they have once again raised the bar in Service Excellence and have demonstrated their superior professionalism and commitment in serving their customers, which has earned them this incredible accolade.

This phenomenal accomplishment further showcases DIMO’s focus on creating and delivering exceptional customer

service, even during challenging times similar to the Covid-19 pandemic. The continuous success at the Mercedes-Benz Service Excellence – Regional Award ceremonies solidifies DIMO’s commitment to delivering the best in terms of service and experience, to its customers.

DIMO believes that continuous technical training supplemented with knowledge shared by Mercedes-Benz certified trainers plays an integral part in delivering a pleasant and luxurious journey for the customer. DIMO’s investments on software, special tools and equipment recommended by Mercedes-Benz AG always guarantee the best quality of service, at each customer contact point.

DIMO also adheres rigorously to all Mercedes-Benz repair processes and guidelines to ensure that every vehicle repaired or serviced at DIMO 800, is attended to with the utmost care and efficiency, as it is the only Mercedes-Benz AG authorised Service Centre in Sri Lanka, fully equipped with the latest technology and technical experts, catering to all Mercedes-Benz vehicles.

HNB continues steadfast support to CBSL’s LankaQR campaign



State Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development and Minister of Youth and Sports Namal Rajapaksa and CBSL Assistant Governor Dharmasiri Kumarathunga with SOLO Merchant Dilani Sandamini, HNB Head – Digital Business Chamika Weerasinghe, HNB Regional Business Head – Southern Region Rajitha Wijenayake, HNB Tangalle Customer Centre Manager Pramod Uhanovitage and HNB Tangalle Customer Centre Operations Manager Ravi Silva with the SOLO team at the event

Hatton National Bank PLC, continued its steadfast support to accelerate the adoption of digital payments in the country, by joining the “Rata Purama LankaQR” campaign of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) in Tangalle.

From its launch in late 2020, HNB has persistently backed the programme, which seeks to increase the usage of Sri Lanka’s national QR platform, facilitating, fast, secure and affordable digital payments, benefiting customers and merchants. The bank, participating in the day-long promotion, demonstrated the benefits of its LankaQR-integrated HNB SOLO payment app, while engaging with and onboarding merchants to its platform. CBSL’s other partners in

the initiative, including financial institutions and telecommunication companies, also attended the event held at Mahinda Rajapaksa Grounds Tangalle.

Most recently, the bank introduced Dynamic QR in partnership with both Keells supermarkets and Singer, in which a unique code is generated for each transaction. This allows customers using an app linked with the LankaQR to make contactless purchases at stores by simply scanning the Dynamic QR, which appears on the display screen of the Point of Sale (PoS) machine. By eliminating the need to manually enter the payment value, this mechanism increases customer convenience and avoids errors.

Akbar Brothers ‘Globally Outreached Brand of the Year’

Akbar Brothers (Pvt.) Ltd. was bestowed with the “Globally Outreached Sri Lankan Brand for the Year” for 2020/21 at the recently concluded Presidential Export Awards. The company also received the “Best Exporter Award” in the Tea Industry category for the 12th consecutive year.

The awards recognise the substantial proceeds from Akbar Brothers’ exports, boosting Sri Lanka’s economy. Even amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Akbar Brothers continued its operation adhering to



Akbar Brothers Director Hatim Akbarally receiving the award from Co-Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Ramesh Pathirana and Trade Minister Dr. Bandula Gunawardana

health guidelines and ensuring a steady flow of export revenue.

The Presidential Export Awards are the most prestigious awards presented by the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka (EDB) to exporters in recognition of their exceptional

contribution towards the development of the nation. It is awarded by the President of Sri Lanka and the selections are based on multiple criteria, giving an opportunity for all export enterprises, both large and small, to be eligible for an award.

NDB Jayagamu Sri Lanka conducts exporters’ forum in Kurunegala

In an effort to address the country’s foreign currency shortage by promoting exports in Sri Lanka, NDB Bank’s North Central Regional office, Kurunegala branch along with the Business and Transaction banking units recently organised an exporters’ forum under the bank’s Jayagamu Sri Lanka scheme.

The event was held with the participation of a panel of experts, novices, authorities and approval seekers. The forum focused on recognising well-established leading exporters in the area with an additional idea of sharing their expertise for the benefit of novices and less experienced exporters, creating



The exporters’ forum in Kurunegala in session

opportunities to meet all stakeholders relevant to exports by extending the panel list with authorised representatives from Export Development Board, Industrial Development Board, agriculture experts,

and financial sector experts, assisting prospective exporters who wish to walk in a comfortable path to thrive in export businesses, assisting innovators who can ignite a rapid expansion of economy

through novel ideas and concepts to manufacture new things and introducing import substitutes as well as process improvements and ensuring that all export stakeholders and supplier network is in a single location at the same time so as all participants would be benefited immensely.

Accordingly, all participants left the symposium with an expectation to continue with their enhanced contribution to the Sri Lankan economy and to take the country’s economy to the next level with improved foreign currency reserves while winning the international market by themselves, thanking NDB Bank for creating and organising a meaningful event to achieve overall objectives of all.

‘DFCC Agile’ named an Innovation Centre of Excellence

DFCC Bank in striving towards the goal of becoming the most customer-centric and digitally-enabled financial institution by 2025, recently launched its own innovation centre of excellence (Innovation Hub) in collaboration with Innovation Quotient (IQ).

DFCC Agile the title given to the Innovation Centre of Excellence (ICOE) was based on employee feedback who will be the key stakeholders in this endeavour. This hub referred to as the DFCC Agile – Innovation Centre of Excellence will develop an innovation road map with external partners and varied teams in the bank through multiple iterations and reviews on an ongoing basis. This process will facilitate the outcome of many out of the box initiatives that will be taken to market as new financial



Handing over the partnership agreement by Innovation Quotient (IQ) CEO Mafaz Ishaq (fourth from left) to DFCC Bank PLC CEO Lakshman Silva (fifth from left)

propositions for customers.

The process of creating future value requires its own process and facilitation. This was a key realisation by strategists at DFCC Bank and the potential in collaborating with external expertise to bridge the gap between human insights, bold creativity and technical capabilities on innovation management and design thinking. This will also help accelerate the development of next-generation banking solutions and services using technology and consumer

insights at its core.

In order to set up such a hub, DFCC Bank has chosen Innovation Quotient (IQ) to be a partner in their journey to collaborate and implement the innovation management process and strategy in two phases. DFCC selected IQ due to its local expertise in innovation, design thinking and business design with over 100,000 hours of expertise will be leveraged to co-create an innovation roadmap, build capacity, launch a DFCC innovation toolkit and facilitate creative transformation.

Amana Takaful Life Insurance partners with Orient Finance for Fixed deposit insurance

Amana Takaful Life Insurance, which excels in providing innovative and tailor-made long-term insurance solutions has partnered with Orient Finance PLC (OFF), a top-player in the finance sector with successful operation for over four decades. The collaboration, signed recently as a MoU, brings protection benefits of life insurance and critical illness insurance from Amana Takaful Life, to fixed depositors of OFF.

The MoU was signed by Amana Takaful Life Insurance PLC Executive Director/CEO Gehan Rajapakse and Orient Finance PLC Executive



Board and representatives from Orient Finance and Amana Takaful Life Insurance during the occasion

Director/CEO K.M.M. Jabir on 23 November.

The Amana-Orient MoU implements a unique and exclusive value addition to the Fixed Deposit account holders of OFF. At the time of opening a new FD account each account holder is eligible for a life insurance plan, offered at a special premium rate. Each OFF FD account

holder will be eligible for two covers; Basic Life Cover and Critical Illness Cover. Policy values will be decided based on the total value of the fixed deposit placed at Orient Finance PLC. All customers receiving this benefit will be receiving a specially designed co-branded insurance card that indicates their life insurance cover.

Elephant House bottled water reaches another milestone

Ceylon Cold Stores, trading under the iconic household consumer brand “Elephant House”, has taken yet another step in the right direction, in an effort to expand its ongoing operations.

Ceylon Cold Stores has acquired the water manufacturing plant located in Kotagala from their subcontracted partner Worldwide Enterprises (Pvt.) Ltd. which was engaged in the production of premium-quality Elephant House bottled water. Fulfilling the company’s objective of offering hydration in its most pure form, the new facility will be operated exclusively



Cold Stores management team.

as the “Water Bottling Plant of Ceylon Cold Stores”, allowing greater expansion possibilities for the company. The official inauguration of the factory under the ownership of Ceylon Cold Stores took place early November and was ceremoniously opened by President of Consumer Foods Daminda Gamlath, in the presence of the Ceylon

The acquired plant is situated within the Kotagala Industrial Estate as a venture listed under the Industrial Development Board. With the new acquisition, Elephant House bottled water plans to disrupt the bottled water market with exciting innovations, elevating brand presence and consumer satisfaction. Operating under ISO 22000 and SLS 894:2003, the facility is equipped with an experienced team and proven performance exceeding three years of operation with Ceylon Cold Stores.

Dialog Enterprise extends ‘Smart Fleet’ management solution to Perera and Sons

Keeping abreast with the very latest digitisation developments in supply chain management, Dialog Enterprise, the corporate solutions arm of Dialog Axiata PLC, extended “Smart Fleet”, a practical solution for fleet management to Perera and Sons (P&S).

Dialog’s Smart Fleet solution enables the monitoring of key environmental conditions and also vehicle telematics ensuring the safety of goods, the fleet and the staff. Equipped with temperature sensors, real-time data is made available for monitoring and decision making. The solution is a Global Positioning System (GPS) driven, cost-effective IoT solution providing end-to-end visibility to

the entire transportation process by gathering diagnostics and operating information from commercial vehicles.

Smart Fleet facilitates scheduling and monitoring of the entire order delivery process, with the possibility of assigning upcoming jobs/orders based on real-time vehicle availability. Its geofencing feature ensures that the fleet remains within specified boundaries, with alerts enabled for notification if and when vehicles move out of allotted boundaries and reach high-risk or locked down areas during the pandemic, while real-time system alerts are triggered in the event of an emergency or if the vehicle deviates from its assigned task.

Singer exclusive distributor for Imou Wi-Fi cameras

Singer Sri Lanka joined forces with Imou to become the sole distributor of its comprehensive and smart IoT (Internet of Things) security solutions – including CCTV cameras, smart alarm systems and much more – bringing smart, secure and simple security solutions to Sri Lanka.

Imou serves global IoT users with a “3-in-1” business system encompassing Imou Cloud, smart devices and intelligent technologies. Designed for homes and small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), Imou provides comprehensive smart IoT solutions for different scenarios. Its open cloud platform allows third-party integrations, which makes Imou perfect for building smart IoT ecosystems, creating greater value for partners and users.

Singer Sri Lanka’s current Imou portfolio includes security

camera models and alarm systems with WiFi capabilities and IoT solutions. The company seeks to expand its inventory of wireless products and solutions under the Imou brand – with the inclusion of smart locks and doorbells among others – to cater to the country’s wireless security needs. The goal of this partnership is to become number one in the field of wireless security by 2022.

Offering a wide range of first-class local and international brands to its growing consumer base across the country, Singer Sri Lanka is driven by the mission to improve quality of life by providing comforts, services and convenience at great value.

Imou security products and solutions are now available at Singer, Singer Mega showrooms, on www.singer.lk, and dealers islandwide.

Alpha Apparels named ‘Best Apparel Exporter’ at Presidential Awards

Alpha Apparels Ltd., a part of the group operating under Italy-based Calzedonia S.p.A, recently emerged as the “Best Exporter – Apparel” in the Medium category for the year 2019/20 at the 24th Presidential Export Awards organised by the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka (EDB).

The awards ceremony took place on 26 November at the Bandaranaikie



Alpha Apparels CEO/Director Felix A. Fernando receiving the award from Minister of Trade Dr. Bandula Gunawardana

celebrated some of the most relentless organisations for their exceptional contribution to uplifting the country’s export sector and economy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY



"Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start."
— Nido Qubein

Adele's upcoming Las Vegas residency

The *Hello* singer announced Tuesday (30 November) that she will begin a Las Vegas residency at the Caesars Palace hotel's Colosseum on 21 January 2022. At the *Weekends With Adele* residency, the Grammy winner will perform two shows each weekend through Saturday, 16 April, for a total of 12 weeks.



the morning brunch

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

The pandemic, with all the anxiety, death, and despair it brought along, simply sucked all the small pleasures of life. But, with Sri Lanka returning to normalcy, or the "new normal", as we call it, the spirit of Christmas has stirred up and just two days ago, Rohan and Ishan – the De Lanerolle Brothers – were able to take the stage after a year of living in lockdowns.

Of course, the De Lanerolles need no introduction; preceded by their reputation and their concerts that are revered amongst young and old alike, they have revolutionised the genre and established their name.

The Morning Brunch had the pleasure to witness one of their concerts live, at Hilton Colombo, under the theme "Can't Wait for Christmas" on 30 November.

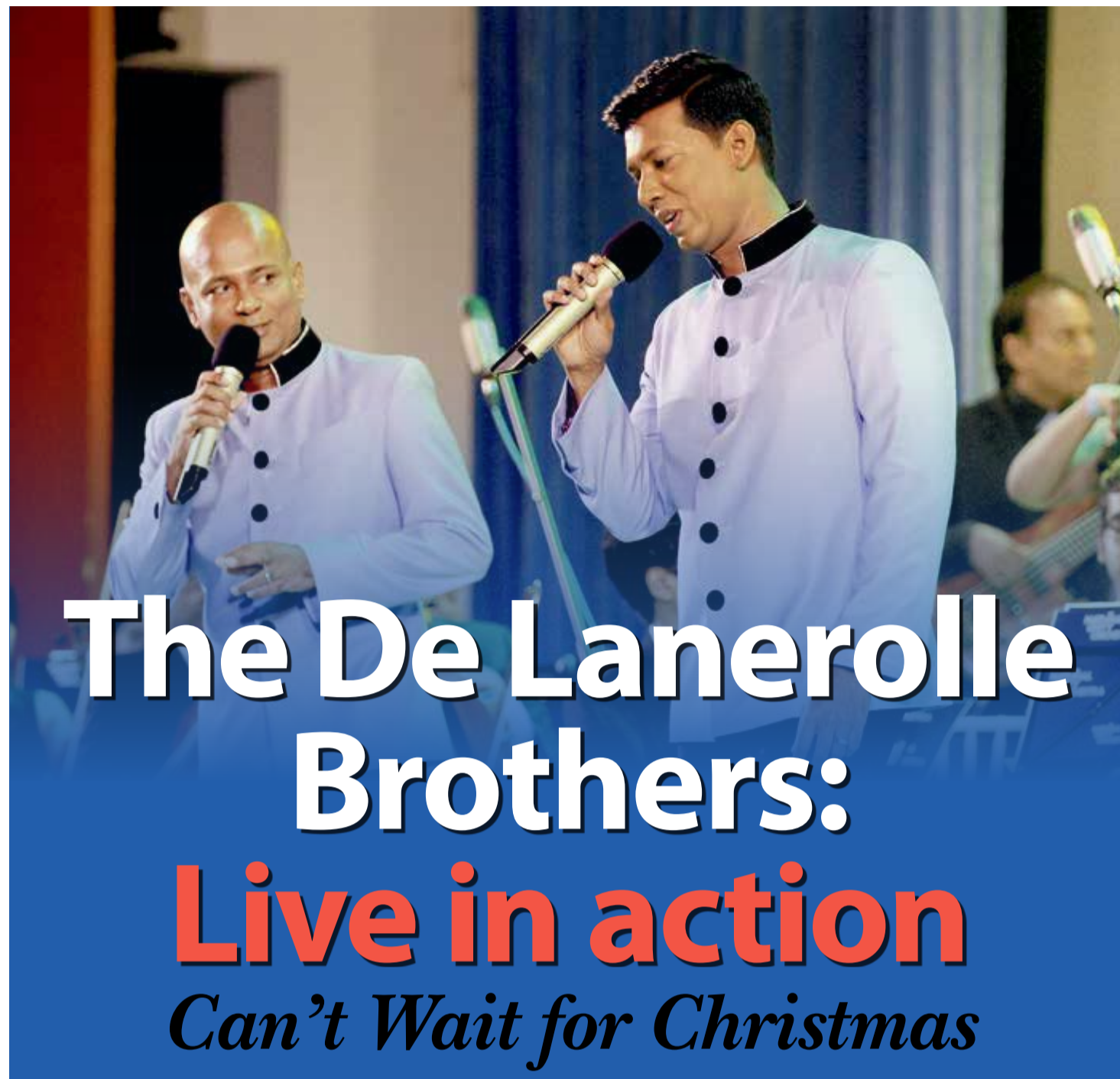
Unfortunately, as the concert began, the duo faced some technical difficulties, but had the situation handled in almost no time. Rohan, taking the stage, mentioned that this was the first time in 10 years that they had to delay a concert. We too, were quite impressed at the punctuality of it all – an hour-long concert that stuck to the agenda – which is not something us Sri Lankans are used to, as the typical mindset is that no event here ever begins on time.

Warming up the audience, the two sung some of their usual hits; undoubtedly, to get the feel of being back on stage in front of a live audience again – a feeling, Rohan told us, that they sorely missed.

The two took a few seconds before they began singing to voice this as well, reminding their audience – all adorned in various shades of red, adhering to the Christmas-themed dress code – that they were missed as much as the audience missed them.

As their first few numbers were performed, the lady next to me, buzzing with excitement, leaned in and whispered that I was in for an experience of a lifetime. Reading the room, we could tell their fans too were overjoyed to be there in person, finally watching their favourite musicians perform after a year long hiatus.

Soon, they sparked the flame of Christmas and went into a few beautiful



The De Lanerolle Brothers: Live in action *Can't Wait for Christmas*

renditions of carols we all know and love. The duo did the theme of "Can't Wait for Christmas" justice as they had their audience all feeling the spirit of Christmas; we too, felt warm and tingly and simply could not wait for Christmas!

The first few notes of *Santa Claus* is

Coming to Town, cue Santa's entrance on stage. Walking in from the side of the ramp, doing a little jig, the audience watched on in high spirits as Rohan and Ishan welcomed Santa on stage to "discuss who's been naughty and nice".

This was around the time the two

encouraged the audience to sing along with them to everyone's favourite carols, which they did enthusiastically. We, too, found ourselves tapping our feet to the beat of the music and singing along. Right after, the duo wrapped up their performance and went on to thank the audience for all their support

over the years. Sharing a few words with *The Morning Brunch*, Rohan emphasised how happy he was with the concert and their seamless performance.

To all those who think the De Lanerolle Brothers cater to a mature audience, we can assure you that is not the case. There were a few youth in the audience, including ourselves, of course, that seemed to be having a blast. The two sure know how to put on an enthralling performance and keep the audience engaged at all times – even us, with our generally short attention span – found ourselves enraptured by their performance. We suppose that is what puts them on the top of the list of Sri Lankan musicians.

We must also make note of how strictly, and impressively, Hilton Colombo adhered to the health and safety regulations. The seating arrangement was properly socially distanced – it didn't make a very pretty picture, nor was the whole stage visible from the back, but Rohan and Ishan ensured to move around on stage to give everyone in the audience a chance to see them properly so no one felt they were missing out. The staff at Hilton also walked around during the concert, prompting those with their masks off to kindly keep them on properly. Hats off to them for doing their part to prevent the spread of the virus.

The reception

The Morning Brunch also had a quick chat with a few members of the audience to see what they had to say about their experience.

Binuri Nanayakkara shared that this being her first time to the De Lanerolle Brothers' concert, she was blown away by their voices. "Even through these difficult times with Covid-19, they brought Christmas cheer in a responsible yet fun manner. Coupled with Hilton's hospitality, we had a great time!" she added.

Akasha Abeyrathne too, shared similar sentiments. She told us: "It was a spectacular event, as always. Most definitely the best way to start off the season." Akasha found their singing to be absolutely mind-blowing and had a great time. She added that, from start to finish of the show, everyone had smiles on their faces, and the brothers really brought colour into a monotonous period of time.

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

Today marks the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery – a day set aside by the UN since 1986 to celebrate the abolishment of slavery the world over.

While slavery, as we know it in the traditional sense, has been largely abolished, the concept of slavery has, over the years evolved, and today, some traditional forms of slavery still persist in their earlier forms, while others have been transformed into new ones. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), more than 40 million people worldwide are victims of modern slavery. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term covering practices such as forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, and human trafficking. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

We are all familiar with slavery in the west, especially in the US, where African communities were put to work in plantations as slaves, and even in the east, closer to home, the concept of slavery is by no means unheard of. But what has Sri Lanka's relationship with slavery been like over the years? *The Morning Brunch* chatted with University of Peradeniya Department of Classical Languages Professor in Western Classics Dr. Chandima Wickramasinghe for a quick look at Sri Lanka's history with slavery.

Slavery isn't colonial

As Sri Lankans who were colonised for over 400 years by European powers who embraced the concept of slavery as a workable business practice, we tend to always associate slavery with colonial powers or as an issue that other countries have had to resolve but not something that, until we were colonised, happened in our own backyards (if at all).

However, Dr. Wickramasinghe shared, there is a history of slavery in Sri Lanka dating back to ancient times. How this slavery was implemented, though, is different from how we see slavery today. We find references to slavery through the



International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

What is Sri Lanka's stance on slavery?

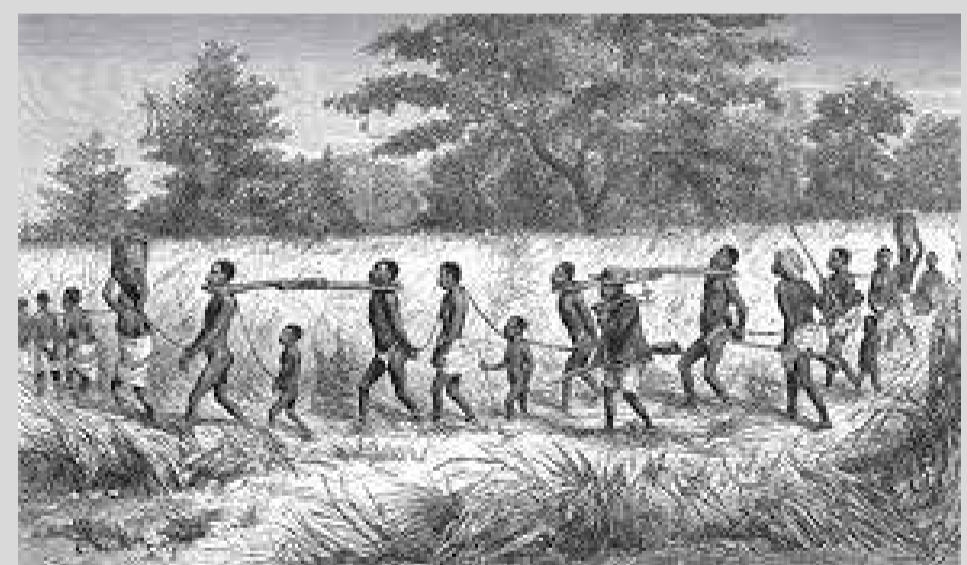
use of different terms in many different historical sources. The first occurrence or mention of slaves that Dr. Wickramasinghe shared with us was from the Second Century AD with the terms *dasa* and *dasi* used to refer to male and female slaves respectively. Another term, *vahal* (unisex) comes into play from the 11th to 12th Centuries as well. Another term, *midhi*, found in a 10th Century inscription in Mihintale, also refers to slaves.

"The problem is all these terms have different nuances," Dr. Wickramasinghe said, adding: "The citations and social statuses of slaves vary as well, from serfs to chattel slaves to bondsmen; these terms encompass all forms of servitude. All these indigenous terms were generally translated into English using the blanket term 'slave' but the setup in precolonial Ceylon was

far different to what happened in the west. What is clear is that these systems don't seem to be economically driven to obtain profit like in the west with slave owners and plantations. We see slaves being used more to show off the rank of the person."

Additionally, slavery in ancient Sri Lanka was sometimes temporary, a means to pay off debt, and also, with the *rajakariya* system, a way of paying tax – the *rajakariya* system is partly how the kings of old were able to build their huge construction projects like reservoirs and temples. Expanding on the *rajakariya* system, Dr. Wickramasinghe explained that this was a traditional system of land tenure, where instead of paying tax for land, people performed services for free for their king and country.

It is important to note that throughout



ancient slavery in Sri Lanka, regardless of what form this slavery was, the dignity of different castes was always preserved, and some of the work these slaves did was related to maintaining this caste dignity. Sri Lankan caste distinction only became more and more pronounced as time went on and by the time the Kandyan kingdom rose to power, it was a cornerstone of Sri Lankan life and culture. There were legal measures to guard the caste dignity of a person who had fallen into slavery out of unpaid debt or poverty.

Colonialism and slavery

The western powers and their activities in Sri Lanka, starting with the Portuguese from 1505, changed the face of slavery in Sri Lanka. This is when slavery became economically driven, and finding it hard to force the Sri Lankan people to work the way they wanted, the Portuguese began importing slaves from Africa and South India, which appeared more profitable.

Addressing how this changed the atmosphere regarding slavery in Sri Lanka, Dr. Wickramasinghe shared the perspective that this was when slavery came to be regarded as something inferior because the Sri Lankan people saw these imported slaves (who were often quite dark-skinned,

and possibly more dark-skinned than the locals of the time) coming in and working for a white-skinned master with whom they shared no common culture or background – a marked difference to slavery systems within Sri Lanka up to that point. The Portuguese, and then the Dutch, treated their slaves brutally, with Dr. Wickramasinghe even sharing that Sri Lankan children were often kidnapped by the Portuguese and sold off as slaves to other countries.

Ironically, in the 18th and 19th Centuries, British colonists, who took over from the Dutch, looked to abolish slavery, both in a colonial context and especially in the local context, though their motives for this were less altruistic than one might expect. "This was a political move, and why I say that is because when they abolish slavery from the island, they can easily keep other nations out of the island. It was a way to eliminate foreign powers eyeing on the island," Dr. Wickramasinghe added, noting: "First attention was paid to eliminate slavery in the northern region (Jaffna) and in coastal areas, which were under British control much before the central regions came under British rule."



University of Peradeniya
Department of Classical
Languages Professor in
Western Classics Dr. Chandima
Wickramasinghe

Contd. on page 13

Red Bull kicks off 'Car Park Drift Clinic'



Abdo Feghali instructing a driver on technique



Abdo Feghali flagging off



Abdo Feghali instructing the audience



Lebanese champion driver Abdo Feghali

Red Bull kicked off Sri Lanka's first "Red Bull Car Park Drift" on 27 November, with over 35 drivers participating and taking part in the master class in drifting conducted by Lebanese champion driver Abdo Feghali.

The Red Bull Car Park Drift was an anticipated event on the Red Bull events calendar. The sport attracted a lot of interest not only among racing enthusiasts and drivers, but also among spectators. As a first for Sri Lanka, the event was doubly special as it offered

Sri Lankan drifters an opportunity to put their skill to test and learn from champion drifter Feghali. Feghali came into the spotlight as a drifting legend when he became the rally champion at the inaugural Red Bull Car Park Drift event held in Lebanon in 2008.

Having begun his career in 1998, Feghali's passion for drifting pushed him to develop his talent and become a drifting veteran. In 2013, he won the overall Lebanese Rally Championship. Feghali broke the Guinness World Record for the longest drift in Abu Dhabi, the UAE in 2012 and won the overall Lebanese Rally Championship the following year. He came in second at the Rally of Lebanon

in 2000, 2004, 2006, and 2012 and was ranked third in 2002, 2003, and 2011. He has also been the Middle East's Hill Climb Champion from 2007 to 2010 and the Lebanese Hill Climb Champion from 2006 and 2012.

The drifting circuit itself has various types of drifting challenges. The judging criteria covers car design, sound, and smoke levels in addition to the driver's overall drifting skills and skill through obstacle courses and other competitive challenges.

Local drifters and racing enthusiasts have more to look forward to next year, as Red Bull Sri Lanka is planning to host Red Bull Car Park Drift qualifiers in 2022.



CINNAMON BENTOTA BEACH

Experience a profusion of art and architecture

Travellers looking for a distinctive cultural and aesthetic experience need not look further than Cinnamon Bentota Beach. Cinnamon Bentota Beach is a genuine masterpiece of one of Asia's most well-known and influential architects – Geoffrey Bawa.

Bawa designed the property in 1967 as a masterpiece that would be rooted in time and place. Five decades later, in 2019, it has been refurbished by leading architect Channa Daswatte, who has recreated the interiors with the same original artists, ending with 16 suites with unique sets of artworks expressed by local people and local languages.

The piece de resistance is the rich batik ceiling envisioned and brought to life by Ena de Silva, a notable artist credited with re-establishing Sri Lanka's batik industry. Credited to Anil Gamini Jayasuriya, the artwork is rendered on wax resist and dye on cotton cloth mounted on ply board.

Another striking feature is the handloom fabric-covered ceiling by Barbara Sansoni and Marie Gnanaraj, just as it was in 1967. The colours of the ceiling depict spectacular sunsets and contrast the plain white floor for its dramatic reflection of sunlight. Sansoni and Gnanaraj are the artists of the handloom fabric mounted on ply board.

Many of artist and architect Ismeth Raheem's drawings decorate



Karabu Suite



Pruthugisi Suite



Cinnamon Bentota Beach exterior



Peacock Lounge

the walls of the resort in keeping with instruction from Bawa only to use felt tip pens and Samara pigment on limewash. These have been restored by Raheem himself recently.

The majestic peacock, a work of art made of welded copper and brass sheets, was created by Laki Senanayake and was the only sculpture that stood its ground while the entire building was brought down, brick by brick, during its architectural archiving process. Protected by a steel box during the demolition and rebuilding process, it has been cleaned and repaired by

artist Pradeep Manamperi.

The striking brass panels on a copper backdrop of the lift door were originally designed by architect Anura Ratnavibhushana working in the studio of Bawa and reminiscent of the then fashionable designs of the Scandinavian designer Marie Mekko. The current panels are a copy of the original made in the 1990s.

Providing the perfect mood to set off the colour and aesthetics is the frangipani tree on the property that has been a silent witness to the march of time.

Commenting on the restored

property and the valuable art and architecture it houses, Cinnamon Bentota Beach General Manager Dilan Bandara said: "Cinnamon Bentota Beach has once again been restored to its iconic status as a distinctive property that transcends time and place, and encompasses the microcosm of Sri Lanka. Tourists who want to experience the arts and culture of the island need only stay at Cinnamon Bentota Beach to understand the rich legacy of native culture. There is no other such resort in the region that truly speaks to its residents and extends a unique 'wow' factor."

Guests can revel in this "wow" factor in the 16 suites with their unique sets of artworks. Six archival Barefoot fabric designs by Sansoni were selected to be displayed behind the bed heads. The art within every suite is made with 100% locally sourced material and craftsmanship. In addition, the accommodation comprises 159 rooms that fuse traditional design elements with contemporary and vibrant interiors, luxury amenities, the finest fittings, and in-room comforts.

For bookings and reservations, visit the Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts official website or call the 24x7 hotline at 0342 275 176.



www.cinnamonhotels.com/cinnamonbentotabeach

FH by Hameedia presents sustainable men's resortwear at CFW Swim Week



FH by Hameedia recently extended its long-standing affiliation with Colombo Fashion Week (CFW) by presenting its unique men's resortwear collection at the CFW Swim Week two-day resortwear fashion extravaganza held at Shangri-La Colombo and the Marina at Port City Colombo.

This year's CFW Swim Week focused on "Luxury Resortwear" with an emphasis on the festive season of December and destination weddings. Sustainability was a key focal point of all designs at the event.

This season's inspiration for the FH by Hameedia resortwear collection came from the elements of mother nature's abundant resources. The collection was created with natural fabrics and colours as well as sustainability in mind. The designs used tea waste that has been converted into natural fabric dyes for the fashion industry, which is known to be a more environmentally friendly

brunch
in
style

alternative to traditional fabric dyes. These dyes have been infused into natural cotton or linen fabric to create an eco-sustainable product. A variety of dip-dye has been used to upcycle clothing, where it has been combined with various cultural elements in Sri Lanka to give an

extraordinary look.

With over 30 years of experience, menswear fashion consultant and Hameedia Managing Director Fouzul Hameed has carved out a niche for himself in the fashion industry by focusing on how men should dress and is widely considered to be Sri Lanka's "menswear specialist". During his long journey in the fashion industry, he has consistently emphasised the importance of transforming men into "real men". With this core philosophy, he was able to create a number of distinct brands for men such as FH by Hameedia, Envoy London, Le Bond, and Signature.

Speaking about this year's CFW Swim Week, Hameed stated: "I am thrilled to be a part of the Colombo Fashion Week's Swim Week once again. Given the recent difficulties faced due to the pandemic, it is exciting for us to showcase our latest creations and present the future of the fashion industry as we all strive to get back into our familiar routine in today's new normal."



Contd. from page 12

What is...

When the system was established in those regions, they started focusing on slavery in the Kandyan region, where aristocrats were the owners of slaves. The British had to persuade local elites to agree with their suggestions towards abolishing servitude, as local elites needed the services of those unfree. It took decades for the British to abolish these systems."

From 1806 till about 1844, the British persistently worked to abolish slavery within Sri Lanka through various laws, ordinances, and incentives, focusing heavily on slaves needing to be registered. The Kandyan kingdom and culture, in particular, resisted these movements heavily, again, because Sri Lankan slavery, service, and caste systems were inextricably tied together, and many aristocrats were concerned about losing their retinues and

social prestige should all forms of local slavery (not all of which were exploitative) be abolished.

Eventually in 1844, after decades of manoeuvring, the British achieved their means through a controversial law that declared all non-registered slaves as free at a time when the majority of slaves were non-registered by their aristocratic owners either in protest or to avoid scrutiny.

What happened then?

With slavery in Sri Lanka being abolished in the 1840s, we asked Dr. Wickramasinghe what happened to the slaves who were freed. The answer is not exactly clean cut. While most of the slaves of African descent appear to have returned to Africa, some did stay, and to date, Sri Lanka has a community descended from those who remained on the island, the Sri Lankan Kaffirs, who have maintained a rich and distinct cultural tradition.

Likewise, many of the slaves

of South Indian descent would have also returned to their places of origin, especially because the journey back would not have been a difficult one, but a fair proportion of these slaves chose to stay behind in Sri Lanka and integrate into the local community. Many of these slaves, Dr. Wickramasinghe noted, are likely to have become the base of estate workers in today's plantations. Sri Lanka's modern-day relationship with slavery is largely forgotten.

Unlike the west where these slaves formed very vibrant and distinct cultures, the origin of the slaves who came to our shores may have made it easier for them to assimilate into our social fabric. However, to leave it at that paints a rather unequal picture. Take, for example, estate workers, a famously marginalised community who are arguably modern-day slaves, and are in fact likely to have descended from actual slaves, though they may simply have not been referred to as such at the time. Of course, the relationship between Sri Lanka and this community is heavily nuanced

and complex, but there are undertones of slavery that come through, right from when they were first officially brought into Sri Lanka in the 19th Century as a means of cheap labour through to our policies regarding them post-independence.

Sri Lanka's relationship with slavery is immortalised by the name of one of its commercial hubs – Slave Island – which draws its name because this was where slaves were regimented – in line houses and shanties (a rather familiar state of affairs given how estate workers live today) – and was even the base for a rebellion led by slaves against the Dutch in the 18th Century. However, this nuance is often forgotten all these years later as we simply call it by its name without reflecting on what this name means. This International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, which takes place at a time of great social awakening for the entire world, allows us to pose a critical question to ourselves: Is slavery truly gone in Sri Lanka, or does it simply have other names? And what reparations can we be making?

The human-elephant conflict: Protecting people

BY ROHAN WIJESINHA AND DR. SUMITH PILAPITTHA

Conservation has always been about the protection of people. Without fresh air, clean water, abundant oceans, adequate forests, healthy biodiversity, and every other ecosystem service, we will all die. In addition, these natural wonders contribute enormously to the economy of Sri Lanka, especially through tourism, which constitutes approximately 5% of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Sri Lanka at the top, or at the bottom?

As per figures released by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), between 2010 and 2020, 919 humans and 2,953 wild elephants lost their lives due to the human-elephant conflict. Sri Lanka has the highest rate of human-elephant conflict in the world. This is, perhaps, not that surprising as it also has the highest density of wild elephants per land area, among Asian elephant range states.

Wild elephants are found in 62% of the landscape of Sri Lanka, 44% of which they share with people, with the balance being protected areas. While this is a tribute to the tolerance of the Sri Lankan people, especially those who once lived with

wild elephants as neighbours, this has changed dramatically. In the last few decades, major irrigation schemes opened large areas of the country for the development of agriculture. With it came new settlers with little experience of living with wildlife, and the conflict began to escalate.

As is human nature, the methods of killing have become more and more brutal, as evidenced, once again, by DWC's records. Between 2015 and 2020, 318 elephants were shot, 186 were electrocuted, 44 were poisoned, and, worst of all, 349 were killed by hakka patas (jaw bombs), where explosives are secreted into fruit or vegetables that detonate on being bitten into. Rarely do these elephants die from the explosion, but with their mouthparts blown to bits, they soon succumb to blood loss and infection, or starvation, should they survive this initial suffering.

Effective protection of the people

The tolerance is still there, amongst most. Ask the communities most at risk of conflict and the majority will state that they do suffer. They seek a solution to the intrusion of wild elephants into their cultivations and homesteads, but without harming the elephants. In acknowledging that the elephant has a right to exist, their tolerance comes from knowledge. They understand that until the natural habitat of the elephant was encroached on, and their normal food and water sources destroyed or access to them blocked,

there was no need for them to seek it in human cultivations and homesteads. They know that the true enemy is not the elephant or development, both of which this country desperately needs, but unplanned development.

At present, electric fences seem to be the best way of keeping elephants from moving between one place and another. These fences, however, have to be in the right places. Currently, there are enough electric fences in place to encircle the island three times over, and the DWC is asking for more. If the placement of the existing fences had been done correctly, on the boundaries that elephants relate to, then there should have been a dramatic reduction in human-elephant conflict. The reality is otherwise, with conflict increasing year on year with a corresponding rise in deaths.

Every life is precious

Many of the fences have been erected between DWC and Forest Department lands, with elephant habitat, and elephants, on both sides of them. Elephants travel in search of food

and water. Block them from finding these essentials for their survival, they will seek it elsewhere – in human cultivations if needs be. Rather than erected in the ad hoc manner they are now, fences should be placed on ecological boundaries that are between the natural habitat of elephants and human cultivations and dwellings. It is this that will result in a dramatic reduction in conflict and thus the saving of lives.

In addition, the priority should be to protect human life – keep the people safe by placing fences around the villages and their cultivation. This would allow elephants to roam freely, as they once did, on their traditional ranges, with the inevitable reduction in conflict and the further saving of lives.

Tried and tested – it works

How do we know this? Because it has been tried and tested for many years now. In several parts of the country, Dr. Prithviraj Fernando and the Centre for Conservation and Research (CCR), and others, have been piloting these schemes where

human-elephant conflict is prevalent, and it works. The CCR has tested these methods in approximately 50 villages, and they have been 100% successful, as evidenced by the villagers' comments.

An added advantage is that the fences are maintained by the people, the responsibility taken for the village and seasonal paddy field fences by the village communities and the local farmers' associations, with each member paying a nominal fee for the costs involved. This is largely to create a sense of ownership by the communities.

This approach has been enshrined in the Cabinet-approved Policy for the Conservation of the Wild Elephant in Sri Lanka and in the National Action Plan drafted by a special committee appointed by H.E. the President to suggest measures for reducing the human-elephant conflict. Sadly, these rest on ministry shelves gathering dust, while people and elephants keep dying.

The committee report points out that the method of constructing the fences around the village proposed by Dr. Prithviraj Fernando is a method that has been successful at present and that it is important to obtain the financial contribution of the villagers for the maintenance of this fence and thereby motivating them to protect it.

– Second Report of the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) for the First Session of the Ninth Parliament



Community-based fencing in Thanmannama

Sysco LABS celebrates 'Inclusion Month' with discussion on diversity



From left: Diversity Collective Lanka VP Bani Chandrasena, Sri Lanka Unites and Global Unites President/Founder Prashan De Visser, EQUAL GROUND Executive Director/Founder Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, Enable Lanka Foundation Co-Founder Janitha Rukmal, and Sysco LABS Director – Marketing Kushani Kalpage

Sysco LABS Sri Lanka commemorated "Inclusion Month" recently by hosting a thought-provoking panel discussion titled "Diversity in Motion: A diversity, inclusion, and equity panel discussion". The discussion explored diversity and inclusion in Sri Lankan workplaces, the challenges and scrutiny faced by individuals belonging to these groups, and the importance placed on organisations to foster a more inclusive environment for everyone.

As an equal opportunity employer, Sysco LABS is committed to driving a sound diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) strategy and policy framework. By organising the panel discussion, Sysco LABS intended to delve into deep-rooted diversity and inclusion issues while also addressing how social issues affect the dynamics of the workplace and how corporates in Sri Lanka can embrace these changes.

The discussion focused on four key areas important to Sri Lankans: Ethnicity and religion,

females at work, persons with disability, and sexual orientation and gender identities. The eminent expert panellists included Diversity Collective Lanka Vice President (VP) Bani Chandrasena, Sri Lanka Unites and Global Unites President and Founder Prashan De Visser, EQUAL GROUND Executive Director and Founder Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, and Enable Lanka Foundation Co-Founder Janitha Rukmal, who elaborated on what these concepts mean in practice, the skills necessary, and how individuals can strengthen their organisations. The discussion was moderated by Sysco LABS Director – Marketing Kushani Kalpage.

Offering an earnest analogy, De Visser emphasised the value of embracing diversity. "You can dig for oil or gas, but if you dig deeper into the beauty of your diversity, there is a far greater, more valuable resource in our nation that we have not tapped. This is a vital issue that we must address, and every Sri Lankan needs to be part of it. It is an important conversation in the

workplace, in schools, our villages, and communities."

Providing an insight into the female workforce in Sri Lanka, Chandrasena observed that the contribution of females in workplaces and in employment cannot be overstressed. "Having diversity makes a huge difference in how decisions are made and how you review situations and problems," she shared, also noting that a correlation existed with an increase in revenue in companies that promoted ethnic diversity and encouraged female participation, especially in the boardroom, compared to companies that did not.

Discussing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and efforts towards social progression, Rukmal explained: "Stigma is the first barrier. The main challenges we encounter begin from society itself, where there is an unyielding stigma, and opportunities that should be given to persons with disabilities have been taken away. The second barrier is the lack of infrastructure to accommodate

persons with disabilities in meaningful ways in society."

Championing change for the LGBTQ+ community, Flamer-Caldera pointed out that most of the issues stemmed from archaic mindsets and ignorance about this community. "We look at not only educating and sensitising the public, but also educating and sensitising our own LGBTQ+ community because of years and years of marginalisation and discrimination. We have a lot of bright, amazing, creative, and very intelligent individuals who can contribute a lot to the growth of this country," Flamer-Caldera said.

Kalpage noted that at Sysco LABS, the DE&I journey is to acknowledge each person's role in creating a more gender equal world, adding: "I hope this session will inspire your own learning journey and build deeper empathy for the people around you."

Watch the full discussion on the Sysco LABS blog: <https://syscolabs.lk/blog/video/diversity-in-motion-a-sysco-labs-collective-initiative/>.



Digital advertising platform 'Evoplay' launched

Evoke International Ltd. recently launched Evoplay, an on-demand platform designed as the go-to app to access and view Sri Lankan movies, teledramas, talk shows, music videos, and other content across sports, comedy, pop culture, documentaries, astrology, and more, completely free of subscription fees.

Offering an assortment of entertainment aspects, from classical to the latest, Evoplay spans a variety of genres, with 10,000-plus content hours available through Android, iOS, and web. It can be accessed by visiting Evoplay.lk or by downloading the app. Evoplay hit an exceptional

milestone recently when it became the No. 2 trending app for entertainment on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store during September and October 2021.

For the first time in Sri Lanka, Evoplay offers the opportunity for brands to advertise on local premium content such as movies and teledramas to maximise their reach within the target audience spread across the globe. This indicates a new age in the consumer advertising experience and Evoke International's strategy to build a single advertising platform to the Sri Lankan audience and offer marketers a massive scale.

{ SPORTS }

THE MOVIE '83' TO REVISIT CRICKET'S GREATEST UPSET

● *The much-awaited Ranveer Singh-starrer set to hit Indian theatres on 24 December*

The wait is over as the trailer for 83 is finally out! India cricket fans would have definitely got goosebumps seeing the 3:50-minute-long clip as the team's historic 1983 cricket World Cup triumph under Kapil "Devil" Dev has been brilliantly summarised, wrote Gaurav Jr. of CricTracker in a review of the 83 film's trailer on Tuesday (30 November).

Ranveer Singh seems to have perfectly moulded himself into Dev as his accent, body language, and vibe was pretty much the same as that of the former Indian Captain.

Meanwhile, the trailer was of two halves. One showed India's struggle at the event while the other narrated the side's thrilling comeback.

The video starts with the Indian team suffering a batting collapse against Zimbabwe.

Again, Ranveer as Kapil declares that India is "here to win" at the press conference. A handful of reporters, who attended the event, mocked the all-rounder after knowing his ambitions.

There were also some clips showing how Indian players reacted to England culture. However, things changed after Pankaj Tripathi, who plays the then team Manager P.R. Man Singh, tells Kapil, "35 saal pehle hum log azaadi jeete, magar izzat jeetna baaki hai, kaptaan (We won independence 35 years ago, but we are yet to win respect, captain)."

Then comes the thrilling part! Kapil smashes one six after another, probably from his iconic 175-run knock against Zimbabwe. One of the sixes even smashed the Indian dressing room window. Actress Deepika Padukone, who plays Kapil's wife Romi Dev, supports him off the field.

While the trailer was all about emotions, it also had some hilarious moments. One of the scenes even showed Ammy Virk as Balvinder Singh Sandhu pulling the leg of a West Indies player.

Hardy Sandhu as Madan Lal, Saqib Saleem as Mohinder Amarnath and others also featured in the emotional trailer. While the trailer has left the fans heart-welcomed, there are some points which are to watch out for.

Things to watch out for

● Is this Kapil Dev's biopic?

With Ranveer Singh being the lead in this film, the majority of the focus is set to be on Kapil Dev. However, the biggest question is how much light would be on Ranveer? Will the film also showcase his childhood, struggle, and journey, like the previous biopics of sportspersons. If that happens, it will apparently be Kapil's biopic. Hence, it would be interesting to see how the movie has been directed.

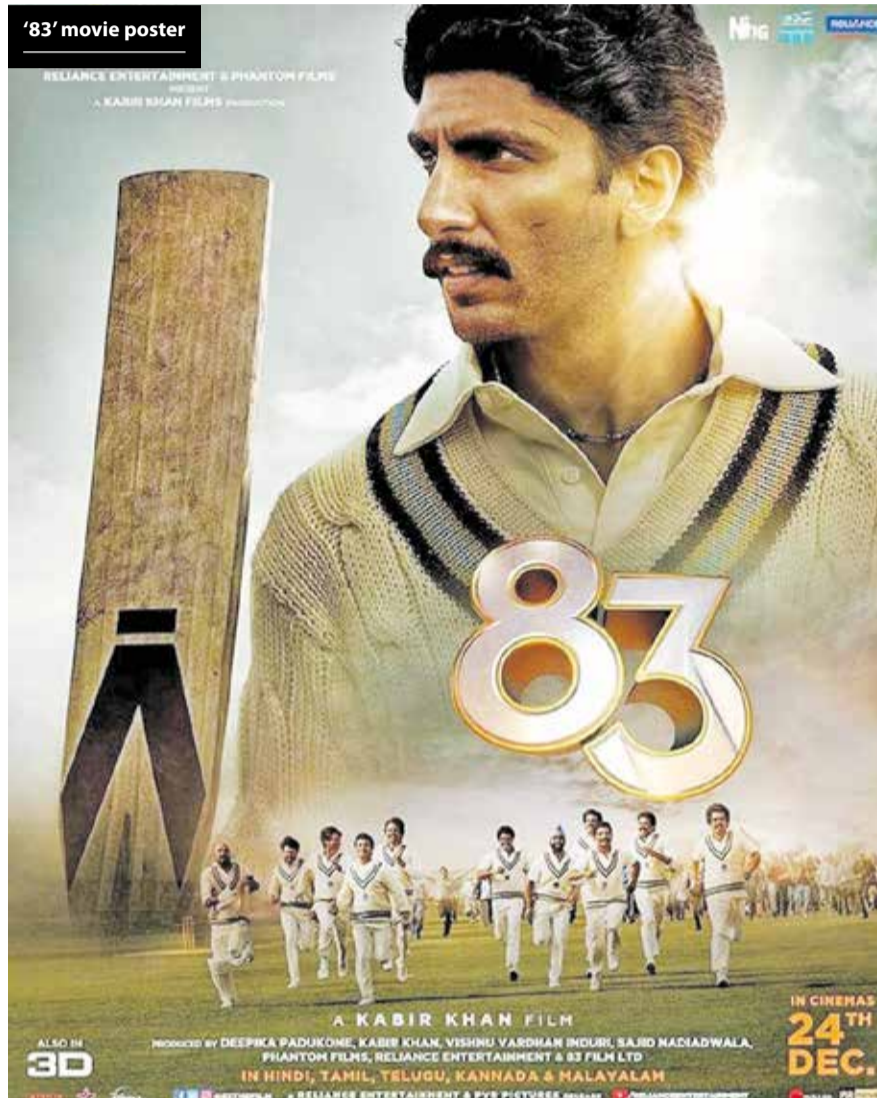
● Deepika Padukone's screen time

One of the finest and most prominent actresses going around, Deepika Padukone, also features in this film as Kapil's wife Romi. With the story revolving around India's 1983 World Cup triumph, it would be interesting to see how magnanimous Deepika's role will be. Not to forget, she is also one of the producers of the sports drama.

In the trailer, she was seen supporting her husband. With Ranveer, Deepika's real-life beau, being the lead, the temptation of giving the couple a significant amount of screen time would



India squad for 1983 World Cup. Seated from left: Dilip Vengsarkar, Syed Kirmani (wk), Kapil Dev (Captain), Mohinder Amarnath (Vice Captain), Sunil Gavaskar, and Madal Lal. Standing from left: Man Singh (Manager), Yashpal Sharma, Krishnamachari Srikkanth, Balwinder Sandhu, Ravi Shastri, Sandeep Patil, Roger Binny, Kirti Azad, and Sunil Valson



have been high. However, that might hamper the plot of the film. Hence, the direction and storyline needs to be spot on.

● Will all players get substantial light?

The casting team has made some strong selections in the side. While Ranveer is in the lead, other actors like Ammy Virk, Saqib Saleem, and Harddy Sandhu are also prominent figures as well. Hence, it would be interesting to see if every character gets a substantial

'83' THE MOVIE

83 is an upcoming Indian Hindi-language biographical sports film directed by Kabir Khan and jointly produced by Khan, Vishnuvardhan Induri, Deepika Padukone, and Sajid Nadiadwala, Reliance Entertainment, Phantom Films, and 83 Film Ltd.

Direction: Kabir Khan
Story: Kabir Khan, Sanjay Puran Singh Chauhan, and Vasan Bala
Dialogues: Kabir Khan and Sumit Arora
Cinematography: Aseem Mishra
Editing: Nitin Baid
Music: Score by Julius Packiam, Songs by Pritam

Release date: Friday, 24 December 2021
Main language: Hindi
Distribution: Reliance Entertainment, PVR Pictures, Raaj Kamal Films International, YNOT X, Annapurna Studios, Global Cinemas, Kichcha Creations, Shalini Arts, E4 Entertainment, and Prithviraj Productions

Cast:
 Ranveer Singh (Kapil Dev)
 Deepika Padukone (Romi Bhatia / Kapil's wife)
 Pankaj Tripathi (Team Manager P.R. Man Singh)
 Tahir Raj Bhasin (Sunil Gavaskar)
 Jiiva (Krishnamachari Srikkanth)
 Saqib Saleem (Mohinder Amarnath)
 Jatin Sama (Yashpal Sharma)
 Chirag Patil (Sandeep Patil)
 Dinker Sharma (Kirti Aazd)
 Nishant Dahiya (Roger Binny)
 Harddy Sandhu (Madan Lal)
 Sahil Khattar (Syed Kirmani)
 Ammy Virk (Balwinder Sandhu)
 Adinath Kothare (Dilip Vengsarkar)
 Dhairya Karwa (Ravi Shastri)
 R. Badree (Sunil Valson)

Highlights

- Reliance Entertainment and Vibri Media hosted an event in September 2017 to announce the film along with the entire former team that won the Cricket World Cup in 1983
- The cast and their roles were announced in February 2019
- Amiya Dev, the daughter of Kapil Dev, joined as an assistant to the



The toss of the 1983 World Cup final, made by Clive Lloyd and Kapil Dev, as is depicted in the film '83'

director, Kabir Khan

- Mali Marshall was cast to play his father, West Indies fast bowler Malcolm Marshall
- Composer Pritam joined to create an iconic anthem for the film
- Deepika Padukone joined the cast as Kapil Dev's wife, Romi Bhatia, while also co-producing the film

- Tamil actor Jiiva was signed to play Krishnamachari Srikkanth, marking his Hindi debut

Casting and shooting

- In the first week of April 2019 at a camp at Dharamshala Cricket Stadium, the cast trained at cricket with former cricketers Balwinder Sandhu and Yashpal Sharma.
- Singh was learning the game from Dev before the start of shooting in June
- Khan announced that the major shooting of the film would start in England in May 2019
- The cast of 83 flew to London on 28 May 2019

- Principal photography began on 5 June at locations in Glasgow, Dulwich College in London, Edinburgh Cricket Club, Nevill Ground at Royal Tunbridge Wells in Kent, and The Oval cricket ground

- Khan stated: "Now that it's going on the floors, starting with the Glasgow schedule, everyone's excited to recreate a journey that made history, all thanks to our cricketing heroes of



In July 1983, India PM Indira Gandhi felicitates Dev as Team Manager P.R. Man Singh (centre) looks on

INDIA'S 1983 WORLD CUP CAMPAIGN

Group stage:

1. India (262/8) beat West Indies (228) by 34 runs at Manchester on 9 and 10 June
2. India (157/5) beat Zimbabwe (155) by five wickets at Leicester on 11 June
3. Australia (320/9) beat India (158) by 162 runs at Nottingham on 13 June
4. West Indies (282/9) beat India (216) by 66 runs at The Oval, London on 15 June
5. India (266/8) beat Zimbabwe (235) by 31 runs at Tunbridge Wells on 18 June
6. India (247) beat Australia (129) by 118 runs at Chelmsford on 20 June

Semi-final:

India (217/4) beat England (213) by six wickets at Manchester on 22 June

Final:

India (183) beat West Indies (140) by 43 runs at Lord's, London on 25 June

amount of light or not. With Deepika in the film, some screen time is likely to be dedicated to the love story.

The question now arises whether all players will be able to make a mark. It has to be noted that India's 1983 World Cup squad comprised of several other legendary players like Sunil Gavaskar, Dilip Vengsarkar, and Mohinder Amarnath. Hence, fans would like to see their characters in substantial light.

● Final word!

The trailer couldn't have been better as many aspects of India's campaign were showcased. Hence, fans must buckle up and mark 24 December in their calendars. With the trailer promising so much, the film is set to get a grand opening. However, the storyline needs to talk if the movie aims to go big in the box office.

Into the Past

WITH THILAK

'With those little pals of mine, Ramadhin and Valentine'

● *West Indies win their first Test at Lord's in 1950*



Those two little pals of mine, Sonny Ramadhin (left) and Alf Valentine

CRICKET LOVELY CRICKET – VICTORY TEST MATCH CALYPSO BY EGBERT MOORE ('LORD BEGINNER') – 1950

(This calypso was written after the Windies won the Test in 1950 against England at Lord's)

Cricket lovely cricket,
 At Lord's where I saw it;
 Cricket lovely cricket,
 At Lord's where I saw it;
 Yardley tried his best,
 But Goddard won the Test;
 They gave the crowd plenty fun,
 Second Test and West Indies won;
 Chorus: With those two little pals of mine,
 Ramadhin and Valentine
 The King was there well attired,
 So they started with Rae and Stollmeyer;
 Stolly was hitting balls around the boundary,
 But Wardle stopped him at twenty;
 Rae had confidence,
 So he put up a strong defence;
 He saw the King was waiting to see,
 So he gave him a century
 Chorus: With those two little pals of mine,
 Ramadhin and Valentine
 West Indies first innings total was three-twenty-six,
 Just as usual;
 When Bedser bowled Christiani,
 The whole thing collapsed quite easily;
 England then went on,
 And made one-hundred-fifty-one;
 West Indies then had two-twenty lead,
 And Goddard said, "That's nice indeed."
 Chorus: With those two little pals of mine,
 Ramadhin and Valentine
 Yardley wasn't broken-hearted,
 When the second innings started;
 Jenkins was like a target,
 Getting the first five into his basket;
 But Gomez broke him down,
 While Walcott licked them around;
 He was not out for one sixty eight,
 Leaving Yardley to contemplate
 Chorus: The bowling was superfine,
 Ramadhin and Valentine
 West Indies was feeling homely,
 Their audience had them happy;
 When Washbrook's century had ended,
 West Indies voices all blended;
 Hats went in the air,
 People jumped and shouted without fear;
 So at Lord's was the scenery,
 It bound to go down in history;
 Chorus - After all was said and done,
 Second Test and the West Indies won!

The famous calypso song, "With those little pals of mine, Ramadhin and Valentine", was sung by the West Indian cricket fans when they won their first-ever Test match at Lord's. That was in 1950.

West Indies' Alfred Valentine's match figures were 116-75-127-7 (the 75 maidens are still a Test record), and Sonny Ramadhin's 115-70-152-11 was the slowest torture imaginable.

They were also abetted by 168 runs from Clyde Walcott, an innings that John Arlott described as being "of thunder of almost biblical intensity".

Englishmen were bamboozled

England never recovered and lost 1-3 a series they had expected to win. It was a wonderful performance by the Windies considering the fact that they have only played a few first-class matches before this.

Alf Valentine was a slow orthodox left-arm spinner from Jamaica whilst Ramadhin, another right-arm wrist spinner, was from Trinidad and Tobago with a Malay descent. The English batsmen were completely bamboozled by their mystery spin.

Walcott, belonging to the famous "3 Ws", was a tall, burly left-handed batsman who, on his day, could massacre any bowling attack.

Over 140 cricket calypsos

There are as many as over 140 documented cricket-themed calypsos dating back to 1928.

Probably the most famous of those is Lord Beginner's (Egbert Moore) "Victory Test Match" alias "Cricket Lovely Cricket, at Lord's where we saw it", which heralded the West Indies' historic defeat of the English team at Lord's in 1950.

Calypso music has always been an integral part of Caribbean cricket. The steel bands at cricket grounds in the West Indies, with their own distinctive charm, have lent a refreshing dimension to many matches played in the region.

Not surprisingly, the history of West Indian cricket is replete with timeless calypsos dedicated to this great game.

the morning sports

Racism: BBC expects to work with Vaughan

The BBC "expects to work" with ex-England Captain Michael Vaughan in the future and says he "remains on contract" with the organisation. Vaughan was named in the Yorkshire report by ex-team-mate Azeem Rafiq, who alleged he made a racially insensitive remark to a group of Asian players. Vaughan has repeatedly denied the claim but will not be involved in the BBC's coverage of the Ashes that starts in Australia on Thursday (8).

Max and Lewis set for thrilling F1 finale

The most intense Formula 1 championship fight for years will be decided over the next two weekends in the Middle East. Red Bull's Max Verstappen leads Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton by eight points. Races in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi bring the season to a close, both on tracks that contain unknowns for the teams and drivers. Verstappen has the advantage with his points lead. He can become champion on the new street track in Jeddah this weekend if results go his way. But, experts say Hamilton has the momentum.



SOBERS-TISSERA TROPHY 2021 GETTING INTENSE

RAMESH MENDIS

takes six, yet match poised evenly



Oshada Fernando attempts to get a catch off Windies' Skipper Kraigg Brathwaite

COMPILED BY RANJIKA PERERA

Ramesh Mendis' maiden five-for restricted the visitors to 253 all out yet two run-outs late in the day pegged Sri Lanka back as they still trail by three runs in the second innings at stumps on day-three in the second and final cricket Test against West Indies, for the Sobers-Tissera Trophy, at the Galle International Stadium yesterday (1).

Braithwaite lead from the top

The first hour was dominated by the Windies. Sri Lankan straight away opted for spin and after a string of tight overs, Sri Lanka leaked a few runs to help Windies start their day positively. The only breakthrough came a few minutes before the lunch break when Nkrumah Bonner was dismissed by Mendis. The second wicket partnership of 74 runs between skipper Kraigg Braithwaite and Nkrumah Bonner made sure that Windies got closer to the first innings total of Sri Lanka.

Mendis comes to the fore

The pitch was beginning to spin after the lunch session and the hosts got the big fish of Braithwaite after a well made 72. From there on, Mendis took charge of the proceedings. Roston Chase was the first to go, caught at leg slip, before Hope joined him a few overs later, adjudged leg before. Following him, Jason Holder



Wanigamuni Ramesh Tarinda Mendis, 26, from Dharmasoka College, Ambalangoda playing in his fourth Test, has already taken 21 Test wickets. His 6/70 yesterday (1) in Galle is his first-ever five-for

PHOTOS © SLG

found himself rapped on the back pad. Mendis then put himself on a hat-trick, getting one to spin back and clip Joshua Da Silva's off stump.

The Windies have the last laugh

After cleaning up the tail quickly after tea, Sri Lanka got on to bat 49 runs behind the Windies. Their second innings had a huge drawback at the very beginning when Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne got run out. Few overs later, Oshada Fernando was also caught short of the crease which put Sri Lanka at 46 for 2 at the end of the day.

Mathews out for six to seven weeks

Apart from conceding a lead in the first innings, Sri Lanka also lost their most senior batter in Angelo Mathews.

After he withdrew from the crease with an injury while batting, he was sent for scans and it turned out to be

bad news for the team and himself.

He is most likely to miss the Lanka Premier League (LPL) and will be out for six to seven weeks. It's a huge blow for Mathews who is making a comeback after some time away from cricket.

Loose bowling in morning session

Sri Lankans would have ideally wanted to start the day with a couple of wickets. But it was the exact opposite. The spin trio struggled

yet again, pretty similar to how they were in the first innings whenever there was a break in play. The first session probably cost Sri Lanka the lead and this could potentially be a deciding factor as the game progressed.

ON THIS DAY

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DECEMBER

1932 The first use of the word "bodyline", on the first day of the first cricket Test at the Sydney Cricket Grounds. Hugh Buggy sent his copy to the Melbourne *Age* using the phrase "body-line bowling" and his sub-editor, Ray Robinson, shortened this to one word. It was quickly picked up on. In the match itself, Australia batted and the sixth ball of Harold Larwood's first over - to an orthodox field - almost took Bill Woodfull's head off. Bill Ponsford and a padded Jack Fingleton also took painful blows



Australia batsman Bill Woodfull lost his bat whilst playing a delivery from England fast-bowler Harold Larwood during the infamous "bodyline" series in January 1933

1945 Birth of the first man to take a One-Day International (ODI) cricket wicket. Australia's Alan "Froggy" Thomson has Geoff Boycott caught by Bill Lawry at the Melbourne Cricket Grounds in 1970-71

1973 Birth of Yugoslavian-American female tennis legend Monica Seles who won nine Grand Slam singles titles, eight of them as a teenager representing Yugoslavia

win over the Knicks at New York's Madison Square Garden, recording their 15th straight National Basketball Association (NBA) win

1979 Birth of a Pakistani all-rounder Abdul Razzaq

2008 Manchester United's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo won his first FIFA Ballon d'Or while Barcelona forward Lionel Messi came in second

1950 South African world bantamweight boxing champion Vic Towel set a record for knockdowns in a title fight against Englishman Danny Sullivan in Johannesburg by flooring the latter 14 times in 10 rounds before the fight stopped

1993 Houston Rockets scored a 94-85



Aged 16 and 6 months, Monica Seles became the youngest Grand Slam singles winner in the Open Era (since 1968) by winning the 1990 French Open, only to be surpassed by Martina Hingis seven years later

2019 Barcelona forward Lionel Messi won his record 6th FIFA Ballon d'Or



Thehan Wijemanne clinched his maiden Colombo Championship men's singles title yesterday (1) at SLTA clay courts

PHOTO © ISHAN WANNIARACHCHI

106TH COLOMBO CHAMPIONSHIP TENNIS 2021

Thehan Wijemanne clinches men's singles title

Royal College, Colombo schoolboy and current Sri Lanka Davis Cup player Thehan Wijemanne won the men's singles title of the 106th Colombo Championship Tennis, one of the highest-rated (Grade 1) annual competitions in Sri Lanka, yesterday (1) at the Sri Lanka

Tennis Association (SLTA) clay courts at Green Path, Colombo.

He beat his Davis Cup teammate Chathurya Nilaweera in the event's final 6-4, 4-6, 10-7. Wijemanne had beaten Archana Lokuge 6-2, 6-2 in his semi-finals and Kiran Vairavanathan 4-2, 3-5, 11/9 in the quarter-finals.

Colombo Championship 2020 was staged in 2021

The *Morning Sports* inadvertently said in our Wednesday (1) Colombo Championship report, on the women's single event, that the 2020 edition of the tournament was not held due to the pandemic.

In fact, the 2020 edition of the Championship was held

later in February 2021 and Anika Seneviratne clinched the women's singles title.

That means, this year's (2021) women's singles champion Anjalika Kurera has won that title thrice; in 2018, 2019, and 2021 whilst Seneviratne winning it in 2020. Kurera was absent from the 2020 Championship.

ASIA RUGBY SEVENS - AN AFTERWORD

Mongolia becomes newest Asian full member



BY RANJIKA PERERA

The World Rugby Council (WRC) has approved the recommendation of the Executive and Regional Committees to elevate the Mongolian Rugby Football Union (MRFU) to full member status, continuing the global expansion of the sport which has 128 members across six regions.

The MRFU was established in 2003 following its initiation by one of Mongolia's famous wrestlers, Tserenpuntsag Tsendendamba, who now serves as the member of Mongolian Parliament. The union became an Associate Member of the international federation in November 2004 and has now met the necessary governance criteria to achieve World Rugby full-member status.

Tough challenge

Mongolian rugby, which had started with occasional social matches between locals and expats, has grown to become one of the most exciting

new team sports in the country.

In a country where the temperature can range from -35 to +35 degrees throughout the year and the capital Ulaanbaatar is the coldest capital city in the world, developing an outdoor team sport is a tough and unique challenge.

Winning Asia Division 4

While the Mongolian sport culture is predominantly based on individual sports such as wrestling, judo, boxing, archery, and others, Mongolian team sports are beginning to thrive and achieve success with increased access to facilities and infrastructures.

The MRFU has achieved numerous milestones in recent years having won Division 4 of the Asian Rugby Championship in 2014 and finishing fourth in the 2019 Asia Sevens Trophy. Rugby has been included in the Mongolian Armed Forces Sport programme too, since 2018.