

HOW MUCH SHOULD LAWS GOVERN RELIGION?

MISUSE OF BLASPHEMY

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the **morning**

'IMPUNITY HAS BECOME THE NORMAL IN SRI LANKA'

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Minority parties to write to India

● Set of common proposals to be submitted | ● Special focus on 13A

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

BY F. ASLAM

The seven main political parties representing Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking population, led by Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Leader R. Sampanthan, plans to send a document with a set of common proposals to India and the international community by 21 December, with a special focus on the removal of the 13th Amendment by the proposed new Constitution.

This was decided at a discussion between the political party leaders yesterday (12).

Speaking at a press conference held following the meeting, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Parliamentarian and Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) Leader Mano Ganesan explained the reasons for turning to India.

"India also has a responsibility towards the 13th Amendment. Do not criticise us by saying that we are taking Sri Lankan problems to the international community. It was Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa who first took Sri Lankan problems to the international community in 1989."

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From left: TPA Leader Mano Ganesan, TMTK Leader C.V. Wigneswaran, TNA Leader R. Sampanthan, and SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem at the press conference

'Prez told Finance Ministry to consult CEB Engineers'



● Engineers to be consulted on Yugadanavi matters | ● CEB Engineers' Union claim Prez issued instruction

BY PAMODI WARAVITA

Following opposition and protests by the Ceylon Electricity Board Engineers' Union (CEBEU) over the controversial Yugadanavi deal, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has instructed the Finance Ministry and Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle to consult with the CEBU prior to making any decisions with regard to the deal, the CEBU claimed.

week, who listened to and understood our concerns with regard to the liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal with New Fortress Energy Inc. (NFE). Mr. Attygalle was also present at the meeting and the President instructed him to not do anything with regard to it before discussing with us, the engineers, first," CEBU President Eng. Saumya Kumarawaddu told *The Morning* yesterday (12).

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World's largest blue sapphire found in SL

The largest single natural corundum as a single crystal (blue sapphire) in the world has been found in Sri Lanka, the National Gem and Jewellery Authority (NGJA) announced yesterday (12).

kg (1.550,000 carats), it has been named as the "Queen of Asia". The Authority said the gemstone had been discovered in the Batugedara area and that it belongs to Gemological Institute and Research (Pvt.) Ltd.

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The world's largest single natural corundum (blue sapphire) has reportedly been found in Ratnapura

PHOTO © ADA DERANA

Jayasumana opens booster for over 20s with 'tsunami' warning

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

State Minister of Production, Supply, and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals Prof. Channa Jayasumana has announced that a decision has been taken to administer the third dose or booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine to everyone over the age of 20 years, shortly after warning that if those who are eligible to receive the booster dose opt not to, the country would face a Covid-19 tsunami in late December.

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More people are travelling about due to the festive season, prompting the need for the rollout of Covid-19 vaccine boosters

PHOTO SAMAN ABESIRIWARDANA

Still no fertiliser in several areas

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

Farmers in several areas are still facing difficulties due to the shortage of fertilisers, in a background where the ban on the importation of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals including pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides/weedicides has been lifted by the Government.

Farmers of the Polonnaruwa Minneriya Agrarian Colony Movement charged that they have

not yet received any fertilisers for the Maha cultivating season. As a result, farmers in the Hingurakgoda, Batukotuwa, and Yoda Ela areas belonging to the Minneriya Agrarian Colony have been severely inconvenienced.

Speaking to the media, farmers in the area said: "Currently the water in farmlands is being wasted. We have been promised fertilisers on a number of occasions..."

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Catholic Church wants probe into Prasanna's Sirisena allegation

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

The Catholic Church has lodged a complaint with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), seeking an impartial and comprehensive investigation into a statement made by Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga that

former President and incumbent Government MP Maithripala Sirisena is fully responsible for the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 21 April 2019.

Colombo Archdiocese Social Communication...

Contd. on page 2

No Cabinet talks today on IMF: Gammanpila

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Despite reports stating that the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Secretary, and the Central Bank Governor are being convened for a meeting today (13) to discuss whether Sri Lanka should seek International Monetary Fund (IMF) support or not, Co-Cabinet Spokesman Minister Udaya Gammanpila vehemently denied

having such a meeting today.

Speaking to *The Morning Business* yesterday (12), Gammanpila denied these rumours and claimed: "I saw that a newspaper had published this rumour as a headline; there is absolutely no truth in these rumours whatsoever. Even the President won't be there tomorrow as he will be abroad."

See full story on Business page 9

US State Department sanctions 'pardoned' Sunil Ratnayake

The US State Department sanctioned Sri Lanka Navy intelligence officer Chandana Hettiarachchi and Sri Lanka Army former Staff Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake, who was granted a Presidential Pardon last year, for "their involvement in the gross violation of human rights" on Human Rights Day, which fell last Friday (10).

The press statement by the US State Department states that Hettiarachi has been sanctioned for his "flagrant denial of the right to liberty of at least eight Trincomalee 11 victims, from 2008 to 2009". Meanwhile, Ratnayake has been sanctioned for "the extrajudicial killings of at least eight Tamil villagers in December 2000".

Ratnayake and Hettiarachi are among 14 individuals who have been newly sanctioned by the US State Department.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa granted a presidential pardon to Ratnayake last year. Rathnayake was convicted for his role in the "Mirusuvil Massacre", which occurred in 2000, and was on death row.

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'Not fair to highlight fertiliser explosions'

● Mahindananda claims over 800 K farmers given good fertiliser

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

Minister of Agriculture Mahindananda Aluthgamage stated that it is not fair to talk only about the explosion of liquid fertiliser cans given to four or five farmers, when more than 800,000 farmers have been provided quality fertiliser.

There have been several incidents of explosion of liquid fertiliser cans that were provided to farmers

through the Agrarian Service Centres in several areas.

Commenting on the matter at a media briefing on 11 December, the Agriculture Minister said: "Liquid fertiliser cans given to four or five farmers have exploded due to their high nitrogen activity, and we will look into the issue. However, it is not fair to talk about..."

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Prez appoints new members to RTI Commission

Under the provisions of Section 12 (1) of the Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has appointed new members to the Right to Information Commission, headed by Supreme Court (SC) Judge (Retd.) Justice Upali Abeyratne.

This was announced by Presidential Spokesperson Kingsly Rathnayaka last Saturday (11).

Abeyratne also headed the controversial Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into alleged acts of political victimisation during the tenure of the United National Front (UNF)-led Government which was appointed last year and submitted its report this year. It was appointed to inquire into alleged acts of political victimisation that...

Contd. on page 2



The main suspect behind the Sialkot lynching, currently in prison

The provincial Government of Punjab in Pakistan decided on Saturday (11) to hold the trial of the suspects in the Sialkot lynching case within prison premises, Pakistan's *The Express Tribune* reported.

The decision to hold the trial inside the prison had been reached after a meeting of the prosecution team and the

Sialkot lynching trials to be held inside prison

Punjab government, and the prosecution has asked the jail administration to make the necessary arrangements to conduct the trial.

Police have also been directed to complete the necessary legal procedures and submit the completed documents to the court as soon as possible, the report

added. Regional Police Officer (RPO) said that official documents to carry out jail trials of the arrested suspects have been

issued. The Judge of Anti-Terrorism Court's (ATC) special court will head the proceedings in the jail, he added.

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COVID-19 CASES

ACTIVE CASES: 13,061

DEATHS: 14,614

RECOVERED: 545,051

TOTAL CASES: 572,726

SOURCE: HEALTH PROMOTION BUREAU. THE ABOVE STATISTICS ARE CONFIRMED UP UNTIL 7.12 PM ON 12 DECEMBER 2021

Kumudesh urges PCR testing for all arrivals

● *Notes Omicron has already spread worldwide; no point in imposing country-specific restrictions*

in the face of new SARS-CoV-2 variants, mainly the Omicron SARS-CoV-2 variant (B.1.1.529), the College of Medical Laboratory Science (CMLS) has pointed out that instead of imposing restrictions on people coming to Sri Lanka from specific countries, authorities should instead take steps to conduct on-arrival polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests on all those entering the country from abroad.

In view of the Omicron variant, the Sri Lankan authorities recently 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), and the said ban was lifted on Friday (10).

Accordingly, speaking to *The Morning*, CMLS President Ravi Kumudesh said that given the fact that the Omicron variant had been reported in many countries at present, there is no point in imposing restrictions only on people arriving from the six countries where the Omicron variant was initially detected. However, he said, if every person

arriving in the country through the airport is subjected to an on-arrival PCR test regardless of whether they had been vaccinated against Covid-19 or not, it would be possible to easily detect new variants. "Currently, about 99% of those entering the country through the airport, especially those who have received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccines, are not undergoing PCR tests, according to existing health guidelines. Therefore, the health guidelines should be revised so that all those who enter the country can be tested," Kumudesh said. He said that the medical laboratory professionals are in a capacity to conduct PCR tests on everyone entering the country and release the test reports just within

two hours if the authorities are taking necessary steps. Taking into account the possibility of the Omicron variant entering the country, the Sri Lankan authorities, late last month, 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. The travel restrictions imposed on those arriving from six African countries were lifted on Friday. Meanwhile, commenting to the media on the lifting of the said restrictions, Colombo South Teaching Hospital Kalubowila Deputy Director Dr. Rukshan

Bellana has stated that although there is no issue in lifting the restriction, the airport screening procedures should be followed in a more organised manner. Director General of Health Services Dr. Asela Gunawardena and Health Ministry Communication Director Dr. Hemantha Herath were unavailable for comment on the matter.



CMLS President Ravi Kumudesh

Polish Ambassador calls on Foreign Minister Prof. G.L.

Ambassador of Poland to Sri Lanka Adam Burakowski met Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris last Wednesday (8) at the Foreign Ministry premises, where the two discussed issues of mutual interest.

Ambassador Burakowski was on a visit to Colombo to coincide with the recommencement of direct flights of LOT Polish Airlines to Sri Lanka.

Referring to the commemoration of 65 years of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Poland in 2022, Foreign Minister Peiris reiterated Sri Lanka's commitment to further advancing its multi-faceted partnership with Poland. Emphasis was placed on the promotion of political as well as

trade, investment, tourism ties and people-to-people contacts, with a view to adopting a holistic approach in furthering bilateral co-operation. In this regard, the need for regular interactions between the business chambers of the two countries was noted. The Foreign Minister apprised the visiting Ambassador on EU-Sri Lanka co-operation in the context of the significance of the EU market for Sri Lankan exports. The Ambassador informed of an event planned in 2022 in Sri Lanka to promote Polish processed food, as well as two-way tourism.

The visiting Ambassador also met senior officials of the Foreign Ministry during the visit.



Polish Ambassador to Sri Lanka Adam Burakowski and Sri Lankan Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris

US imposes sweeping sanctions on China, Myanmar, and North Korea

The US has imposed extensive human rights-related sanctions on dozens of people and entities tied to China, Myanmar, North Korea and Bangladesh, and added a Chinese artificial intelligence company to an investment blacklist.

Canada and the UK joined the US in imposing sanctions related to human rights abuses in Myanmar, while Washington also imposed the first new sanctions on North Korea under President Joe Biden's administration and targeted Myanmar military entities, among others, in action marking Human Rights Day. "Our actions today, particularly those in partnership with the United Kingdom and Canada, send a message that democracies around the world will act against those who abuse the power of the state to inflict suffering and repression," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement. "On International Human

Rights Day, the Treasury is using its tools to expose and hold accountable perpetrators of serious human rights abuse." The North Korean mission at the UN and the Washington embassies of China, Myanmar and Bangladesh did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The measures are the latest in a raft of sanctions timed to coincide with Biden's two-day virtual Summit for Democracy, where he announced initiatives to bolster democracy around the world and support for pro-democracy legislation in the US. Biden said on Friday (10) that commitments made by some of the more than 100 world leaders at the summit would push back against rising autocracy, fight corruption and

promote human rights. "This is going to help seed fertile ground for democracy to bloom around the world," he said in a speech closing the summit. The Treasury on Friday added Chinese artificial intelligence company SenseTime to a list of "Chinese military-industrial complex companies," accusing it of having developed facial recognition programmes that can determine a target's ethnicity, with a particular focus on identifying ethnic Uyghurs.

Mass detention of Uyghurs As a result, the company will fall under an investment ban for US investors. SenseTime is close to selling

1.5 billion shares in an initial public offering (IPO). After news of the Treasury restrictions earlier this week, the company began discussing the fate of the planned \$767 million offering with Hong Kong's stock exchange, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said. UN experts and rights groups estimate more than a million people, mainly Uyghurs

and members of other Muslim minorities, have been detained or imprisoned in recent years in a vast system of camps in China's far-west region of Xinjiang. China denies abuses in Xinjiang, but the US government and many rights groups say Beijing is carrying out genocide there.

(Al Jazeera)

AT A GLANCE

ONE INJURED AS THREE-WHEELER COLLIDES WITH TRAIN

One person was injured and hospitalised after a three-wheeler collided with a train at a railway crossing in Thandikulam, Vavuniya. The three-wheeler had reportedly been dragged away a small distance after coming into contact with an express train traveling from Colombo to Jaffna, yesterday (12).

The driver of the three-wheeler had sustained injuries in the incident and has been admitted to hospital. Police said that the three-wheeler driver had attempted to pass through the railway crossing without paying any attention to the signal system, resulting in the collision.

A major accident had been thwarted reportedly due to the train travelling at a slow speed. Residents of the area meanwhile say that there is an issue with the signal system at the Thandikulam railway crossing and that it lights up red even when there are no trains arriving. Meanwhile in a separate incident one person has died after being struck by a train near the Maha Ambalangoda railway gate last evening. A 38-year-old resident of Eravur, who had arrived at the Ambalangoda town to sell fish, has been identified as the victim.

REMAINS OF LTTE MEMBERS FOUND IN KILINOCHCHI

The skeletal remains of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) members, along with their uniforms and a cache of weapons, were unearthed in the Muhamalai area of Kilinochchi yesterday (12).

The Palai Police stated that a non-governmental organisation (NGO) engaged in de-mining operations in the area alerted them upon discovering the remains. Among the items uncovered were skeletal remains, an LTTE outfit, a rocket-propelled grenade and an accompanying launcher, a bullet magazine. The Kilinochchi Magistrate Court ordered further excavations to be carried out, to search for more remains and weapons possibly in the area.

BANDULA PROMISES REASONABLE PRICES FOR FESTIVE SEASON

In line with the festive season, Minister of Trade Bandula Gunawardena says that rice will be sold at a price below Rs. 100. "A kilogramme of nadu rice will be sold at Rs. 99.50 at all Sathosa outlets in the country. A kilogram of quality samba priced at Rs. 130 will also be available in Sathosa outlets,"

he told a media briefing on Saturday (11).

Further, he also said that a kilo of sugar will be sold at Rs. 125, a kilo of dhal will be sold at Rs. 240, and a packet of noodles will be sold at Rs. 125. The Minister also promised that the prices of 50 other goods, including soap, will be reduced significantly.

TWO GUNMEN ROB JEWELLERY SHOP IN BORELLA

Two suspects on a motorcycle conducted a robbery of a jewellery shop in Borella at around 2.30 p.m. last Saturday (11).

According to the Police, the duo shot in the air to strike fear into the jewellery shop employees. Footage of the suspects approaching the store were captured on CCTV.


The Police believe that the suspects made away with jewellery amounting to a considerable value. Following the heist, the suspects fled the scene.

The Colombo Crimes Division is conducting further investigations into the incident.

SIX SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS RECEIVE TRANSFERS

Three Deputy Inspectors General of Police (DIGs) and three Acting DIGs have been transferred based on service requirements. According to the Police Headquarters, the transfers were greenlit by the Secretary to the Public Security Ministry and the Public Service Commission. Accordingly, DIG in charge of Nuwara Eliya Division V.G.D.A. Karunaratne has been appointed as the DIG in charge of the Crimes Division. DIG E.M.U.V. Gunaratne has been transferred to the post of DIG in charge of the Community Police and Environmental Protection Division in addition to the post of DIG in charge of the Naval and Tourism Division.

Meanwhile, DIG S.W.M. Senaratne has been transferred from the post of DIG Naval and Tourism Division to the post of DIG in charge of the Matara and Hambantota Divisions. Further, Acting DIG in charge of the Kilinochchi District J.S. Weerasekera has received a transfer as the DIG in charge of the Ratnapura Division while Acting DIG S.P. Ranasinghe was appointed as the DIG in charge of the Nuwara Eliya District from the Police Headquarters. Acting DIG in charge of the Crime Division, H. Samudrajewa was meanwhile transferred to the post of DIG in charge of the Kilinochchi District.



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இலங்கை மத்திய வங்கி
CENTRAL BANK OF SRI LANKA

NOTICE TO PUBLIC

If you possess foreign currency that you have obtained by....

- I. Purchasing from a bank or an Authorized Money Changer for travel abroad and brought back unutilized into Sri Lanka (up to USD 15,000 or equivalent),
- II. Withdrawing from a Personal Foreign Currency Account (PFCA) for travel abroad (up to USD 15,000 or equivalent),
- III. Earnings from employment, profession, or business while abroad and brought into Sri Lanka,
- IV. Acquiring and bringing into Sri Lanka for deposit in Special Deposit Accounts (SDAs) on or after 01 January 2020.

You may.....

- Convert such foreign currency into Sri Lanka Rupees at any bank (at Sri Lanka Rupees 210* per USD or equivalent) during the month of December 2021; or
- Deposit such foreign currency into Sri Lanka Rupee Accounts at any bank (at Sri Lanka Rupees 210* per USD or equivalent) during the month of December 2021; or
- Deposit such foreign currency into your PFCA or SDA at any bank; or
- Invest such foreign currency in Sri Lanka Development Bonds through your bank.

* Exchange Rate - Rs. 200 + Special incentive of Rs. 10

Note: The necessary instructions regarding the above have been issued to all banks by the Central Bank.

Department of Foreign Exchange, No. 30, Janadhipathi Mawatha, Colombo 01
☎ 0112477255 📠 0112477716 @ dfe@cbsl.lk 🌐 www.dfe.lk



The pigs, the dogs, and the Pearl of the Indian Ocean

BY FR. RASHMI MADUSANKA FERNANDO

Since recently, I have been encountering people who seem to share one common feeling towards the current situation of the pearl of the Indian Ocean – Sri Lanka. Among them are highly learned personnel, university professors, senior lecturers, administrators, teachers, religious leaders, social analysts, thinkers, friends, and colleagues. All of them seem to be hinting quite overtly at one and the same thing: “This country has gone to the dogs. There is no way out. They ruin it and eat it up, the dirty pigs.”

It is this common opinion that reminds me of the proverb “don’t cast your pearls before swine”, which has its origin from the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament of the Bible: “Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6, King James Version).

Even though such a gem of wisdom has been passed onto us since 2,000-odd years ago, one could possibly argue that the truth of this wise saying is more justified today, especially when it is seen against Sri Lanka in the current geo-political contextual backdrop, than whatever may have been its original cause in history. It is needless, however, to cite examples here to substantiate this claim for two reasons. Firstly, because they are being rigorously and vehemently exposed and analysed by the country’s popular media around the clock, and secondly, because any such effort to replicate them here could and would

definitely be looked at through coloured glasses as catering (*kade yanawa*) to some vested interest or the other. For better or for worse, it is, in fact, the bitter truth that almost all the news providers in the country today, be it television channels, the print media, or social media, have their own agendas.

The points of this essay, therefore, are the following four assumptions which are taken for granted as factual: 1) There is a famous country known as the pearl of the Indian Ocean; 2) This “pearl” has been thrown away; 3) It has been thrown to the pigs; and 4) It has gone to the dogs.

What shall we do then? It is indeed the main purpose of this essay. What shall we do with Sri Lanka, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, being thrown to the pigs and having gone to the dogs? This is perhaps the question that practically every intelligent Sri Lankan living in this country or outside it, is asking at this moment in history.

Answering this question needs an explanation and it could be done better by understanding the following scenario. One day, a motivational speaker asks the audience the following question after showing them a Rs. 5,000 note. Who wants this? Understandably, all the hands show up. Then, for the second time, he crunches the note in his hand and asks the same question again. Who wants this note now? Once again, all the hands show up as quickly as possible. Then, for the third time, he tramples the note under his foot and asks the same question once again. Now, who wants this note? Still, almost all the hands show up except for a few indecisive ones raised reluctantly halfway through. Then, for the last time, the speaker shreds the note into pieces and asks the same question again. Well, who wants it now? All the hands which were very enthusiastic till that moment, drop lifeless as the audience sinks back in their seats in dismay. While many start murmuring against the speaker, a courageous few vent their frustration out aloud spontaneously. Is it not the fate of the pearl of the Indian Ocean to be thrown to the pigs and having gone to the dogs at this moment in its history?

It is commonly known that pearls, as they are precious, should be given to those who know their worth and appreciate their beauty. By throwing them to the pigs

instead, we not only devalue the pearls but we neither enhance the value of the pigs. For the pigs do not use them for the right purpose they are meant to be used for. However, there is something more here which we often miss as in the case of the Rs. 5,000 note of the motivational speaker. That is, no matter whether it is thrown to the pigs or trampled upon or muddled with dirt, the pearls always remain pearls until their pearliness is ruined and robbed.

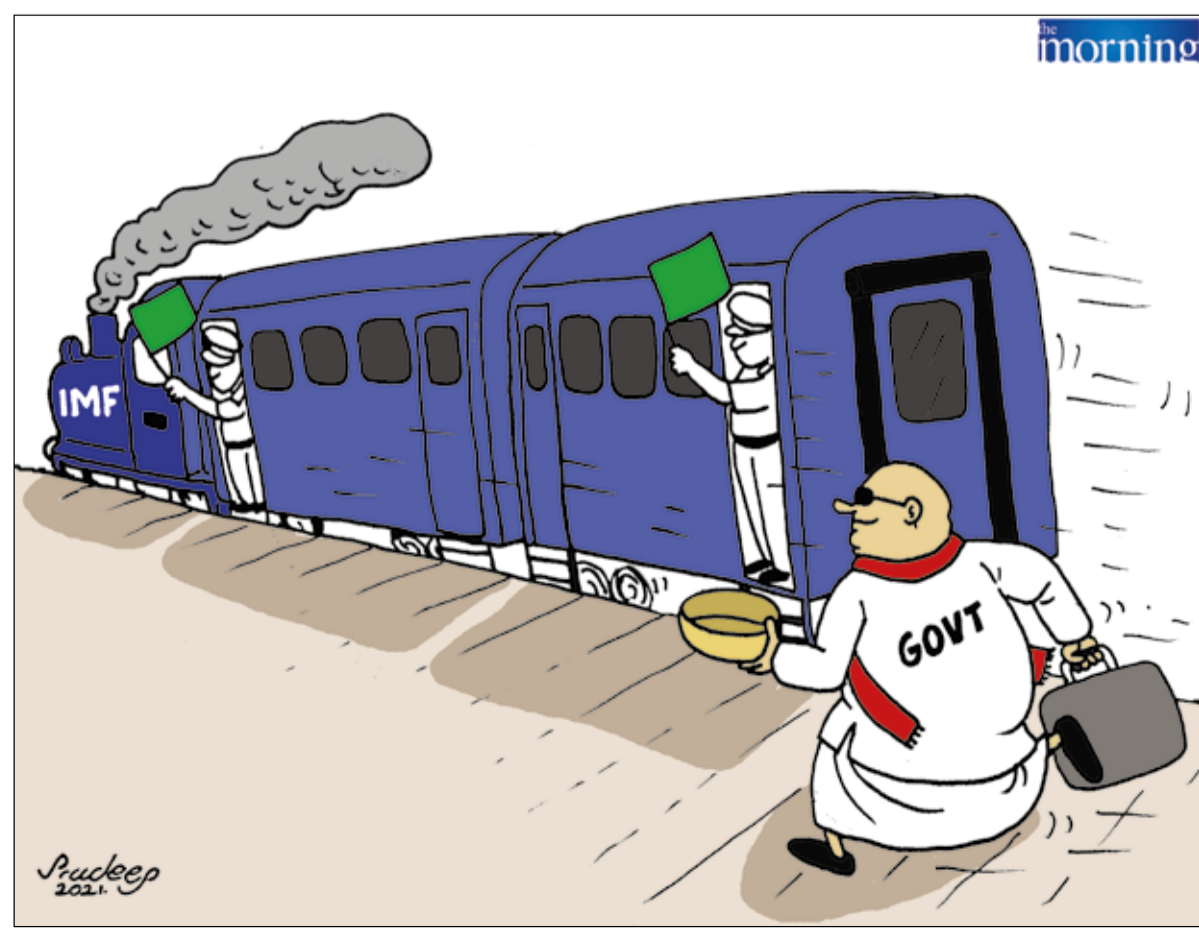
Imagine for a second; supposing actually you see a pearl thrown to the pigs. Do you not pick it up even if it happens to be in the dirtiest place of the piggery? Likewise, it should be kept in mind that no matter how precious the pearls that are thrown to the pigs, the pigs always remain pigs. Think for a second again; if you find a pearl under the foot of a pig, do you carry that pig in your arms, pet it, and put it on your pillow? I am afraid not. Rather, one would perhaps barbecue the pig to celebrate the joy of finding a pearl.

There is another aspect here we often tend to overlook. I believe that a better understanding of it would definitely lead people towards certain progressive measures needed to be taken concerning two areas: Through the cleansing of the pearls found in the piggery, to re-establish their original beauty, and to deal with the pigs as pigs. It is important, therefore, to understand that neither the pearls nor the pigs change their nature from being pearls and pigs as giving up on them would not result in them ceasing to be the pearls and the pigs.

What is needed, therefore, is to understand that none of them, neither the pearls nor the pigs, are the doers of the action of throwing. Rather, the decision lies on a responsible third party who has the democratic power to decide either to throw the pearls to the pigs or to make a necklace out of them, or having the pearls found under the feet of the pigs, either to leave them there or to pick them up for a thorough cleansing or having them found with the pigs, either to pet the beasts in the bedroom or to have them barbecued in the celebration of the pearls found. It is the same when it comes to the pearl of the Indian Ocean – the mother nation of Sri Lanka.

Therefore, my dear citizens, unless we make our decision about the pearl wisely, correctly and urgently, the pearl risks being shifted from being “thrown to the pigs” to having “gone to the dogs”. Either way, the pearl will always remain a pearl, but in a place where it does not belong – in the piggery or in the kennel.

(The writer is a Jesuit Priest in the Society of Jesus, Sri Lanka, and the Director of the Satyodaya Centre for Social Research and Encounter, 30, Pushpadana Mawatha, Kandy, and can be contacted via madurashjferns@gmail.com) The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.





Pakistan's laws on blasphemy have come under fire for allowing people to be prosecuted for various, sometimes unrelated, reasons, highlighting the need for caution when laws intermingle with religious beliefs

How much should laws govern religion?

● *The existing and ideal legal framework around religion in Sri Lanka*

BY SUMUDU CHAMARA

After the tragic death of a Sri Lankan national in Pakistan, Pakistan's laws and practices pertaining to blasphemy have initiated an international-level discourse. Even though Sri Lanka does not have laws criminalising blasphemy, there are certain laws that can be used to take legal action against those engaging in acts against other religions.

However, in the Sri Lankan context, freedom of religion or belief has sometimes been a controversial matter, and the enforcement of laws that are in place, sometimes, leads to violation of the rights of minority religious groups. In addition, the lack of specific laws and policies regarding propagation of religion has resulted in different experiences for different religious groups.

In this context, there is a need for a much larger discourse about not only people's constitutionally guaranteed freedoms pertaining to religion or belief, but also about how the enforcement of those provisions should be done in a way that protects the rights of all religious groups.

These matters were discussed during a webinar held on the International Human Rights Day (10). The discussion, held by MinorMatters, a movement dedicated to protecting the rights and liberties of religious minorities in Sri Lanka, and was joined by several Attorneys-at-Law (AALs) coming from national and international-level research and human rights backgrounds, namely Dr. Gehan Gunatilleke, Juanita Arulanantham, Malsirini de Silva, and Yamini Ravindran.

Law and religion

Speaking on the Sri Lankan context regarding freedom of religion and blasphemy, Dr. Gunatilleke said that even though Sri Lanka does not have any law specifically to address blasphemy, the enforcement of some of the laws can result in situations amounting to a punishment for blasphemy.

"Unlike Pakistan, Sri Lanka does not have any law that directly prohibits blasphemy. But, we do have Penal Code provisions, which talk about wounding religious feelings, and that provision can be deployed in a way to punish those who say things that can be offensive towards a particular religion, particularly Buddhism or Buddhist clergy. Consequently, we end up having a de facto prohibition on blasphemy. If we take the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it has been enforced against writers such as Shakhthika Sathkumara for writing a short story that was deemed offensive."

Pointing out incidents of taking legal action against individuals for publications, radio shows, having certain tattoos, and vandalising Buddha

statues, he noted that even though the ordinary law does not have blasphemy, there are prohibitions for blasphemy-like behaviour.

"While it is true that Sri Lanka does not have blasphemy laws, per se, and certainly no law that imposes death penalty for blasphemy like Pakistan has, in practice, we sometimes operate as if there is a prohibition on blasphemy, and ordinary laws are deployed to achieve similar aims. While we can condemn blasphemous laws in other countries, we need to start looking at our own legal system and the way laws are enforced because we seem to have similar undercurrents," Dr. Gunatilleke opined.

What is more, de Silva noted that Sri Lanka has several other laws outside the Constitution that affect minority religious actors negatively, and that one of them is certain provisions of the Penal Code such as Section 291.

Sections 291, 291A, and 291B identify disturbing a religious assembly, uttering words with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings, and deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class, by insulting its religion or religious beliefs, as offences.

In this regard, Dr. Gunatilleke added that some of the colonial legal provisions that Sri Lanka has, such as wounding religious feelings, can be very problematic, because those laws are applied selectively. He further said that it is not always the text of the law that leads to problems; sometimes, it is the implementation of those laws.

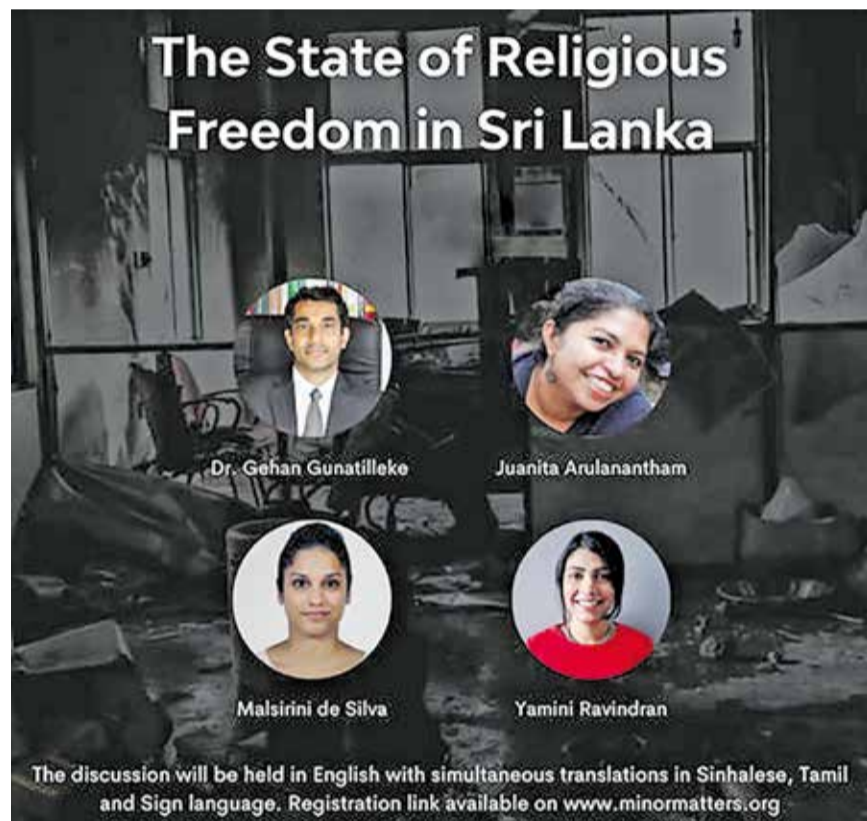
Taking the ICCPR Act into consideration as an example, he pointed out how it is used in some situations in a way that violates the meaning of its provisions.

"Even though we have issues with regard to certain provisions of the Penal Code and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), we have a more serious problem, which is selective enforcement of the law, and that problem cannot be solved by adjusting the text," he stressed.

Propagation of religion

With regard to a question about the judicial mind regarding the refusal to recognise the right to propagation of religion in Sri Lanka, in a context where that right has not been recognised by the Supreme Court (SC) as coming under the freedom of religion or belief, Arulanantham noted that there are a couple of landmark cases that specifically state that Sri Lankans do not enjoy the right to propagate a religion as a part of the freedom of religion. She noted that there are two cases in this regard, i.e. one case pertaining to a Jehovah's Witness case, and another case pertaining to a special determination on a particular Bill.

Speaking about propagation of



Right to propagate religion questioned and lacks recognition in Sri Lankan legal system: Juanita Arulanantham

religion and judiciary, including the rationales (behind the verdicts of the said cases), she explained: "The words 'worship', 'observance', 'practice', and 'teaching' are there. The Court's thinking was that the words 'worship' and 'observance' refer to more ritualistic practices and actions that religions typically involve and does not include the right to propagate, which is the right to go around and share with others your religion. As far as the word 'teaching' was concerned, the Courts' thinking was that that the word 'teaching' therein referred to a case of consensual teaching, perhaps a pre-arranged one, between two or more individuals.

"We are learning from this, as opposed to a situation where individuals practising a particular religion, going door to door, or approaching other people and trying to share with them aspects about their religious beliefs and teachings. This particular thinking was expressed in the Jehovah's Witness case, and they were talking about the practice of individuals of that denomination going from house to house to share about their religion. In addition, another part of the rationale was a comparison with the particular Article in the Indian Constitution that protects religion as part of their rights Chapter, and in the Indian Constitution, there is a specific reference to propagation of religion.

The court's thinking was that the failure to explicitly mention, or the omission of propagation of religion from our (fundamental rights) Chapter, was deliberate. One of the reasons was to maintain political amity and harmony."

She opined that, that was most likely the court's thinking as to why the drafters have omitted this.

Adding that another reason that was referred to was Article 9, which bestows a special status on Buddhism, Arulanantham said that there might have been the thinking that propagation of other religions would pose some kind of perceived or real threat to Buddhism.

She said that another interesting rationale the court expressed was that, in some instances, propagation of religion can actually violate one's fundamental rights, specifically Article 10 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion).

She explained: "They mentioned circumstances where propagation of religion is accompanied by what they referred to as 'improper inducements', which can be referred to as unethical convergence. So, the thinking was that there are inducements that are not proper, where a person can affect the way in which another person's natural thought process works regarding a particular religion or religious belief, and therefore, that can affect their freedom of thought and religion."

Meanwhile, de Silva spoke of the concept of breach of peace and religious freedom among minorities in Sri Lanka. She noted that there is a tendency to prioritise what is called breach of peace, and that when looking at cases from the SC to lower courts, this trend could be observed. "The majority community of an area would see the religious activities (of a minority religion) as a public nuisance, and they can think that there would be threats, and it could evolve to a whole different issue. When the matter is taken before the Police, they take it as a potential breach of peace issue. As a result, minority religious parties' freedom

may be restricted, because there is a threat to public order. This does not come from their conduct, but from others who react to these religious activities," she said, adding that this situation compels the court to strike a balance, which leads to making a call with respect to breach of peace that might take place if the majority community's demands are not met in that situation.

"This tendency to prioritise breach of peace or the risk of breach of peace over the freedom of religion damages this freedom, because what essentially happens is the court legitimising the demands of the majority group, because they are threatening to cause public disorder. That in itself restricts the religious conduct of minority groups," de Silva added.

Minority and majority

Dr. Gunatilleke also noted how enforcement of laws and regulations, in certain circumstances, have affected minority religious groups.

Speaking of the ban on burial of those who died of Covid-19, he added: "It was done under the guise of public health interests, but it turns out that there is no public health risk in burials. The restriction was really an opportunistic restriction that targeted the Muslim community, and was mainly there to appease majoritarian and generally Islamophobic elements in society. We need to be extremely careful and sceptical about the good faith of the State when it imposes restrictions. So, in practice, the interests that are really being advanced through these restrictions are just the interests of the majority, which then gets passed off as public interest.

"I think law can often come in handy when it comes to majoritarian agendas, and even seemingly neutral laws, such as the ICCPR, which are modelled based on an international treaty, can actually be deployed to restrict freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression in a manner that is discriminatory and in a manner that advances the interests of the majority religion."

With regard to research done by civil society groups on or pertaining to the freedom of religion and belief, Dr. Gunatilleke added: "When looking at the gamut of research out there, I can say that there are a lot of good research, and I do not think that there is a gap in terms of the focus on freedom of religion or belief. What I would say is that there are some uncomfortable areas that are avoided, for example, propagation of religion. I do not think you would find civil society defending the rights of individuals to actually spread their religion, because that might cause offence."

Explaining the idea that only mainstream religions must have the freedom to propagate religion, he added: "They all benefit from this idea that only the established religions should be allowed a particular space, and that other smaller religions vying for space should not be allowed that space. But, all religions at one point or the other engaged in propagation of religion. We would not have a Buddhist majority country if someone did not come and propagate the religion, and we would not have Christianity if not for missionary activities. I find looking at propagation of religion as something inherently bad problematic. In this context, I would say that one aspect of research is perhaps missing, and I think we have to be willing to take a religion-neutral position on that. The people should be able to propagate religion peacefully, and in a way that is non-coercive and is not a nuisance to others."

While religions and beliefs have always been recognised as inherently sensitive and controversial topics, the priority is to create an environment where different ideologies can co-exist. As was mentioned during the discussion, there should be no issues in practising and propagating religions as long as they do not cause discomfort to those of other beliefs.

Changing laws inadequate; enforcement needs to be revisited: Dr. Gehan Gunatilleke

Majority religious groups tend to see minority religious groups' activities as nuisance, possible threat: Malsirini de Silva

Parents must be made aware of warning signs of child sexual abuse: Local psychiatrists



BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

Given the high prevalence of child sexual abuse and the devastating psychological consequences, for the purpose of prevention and early recognition, all parents should be aware of the importance of supervision, the characteristics of perpetrators, and the common signs of child sexual abuse, child psychiatrists noted.

This concern was raised in an article on "Child sexual abuse: What parents need to know" which was authored by Y.M. Rohanachandra and was published in the *Sri Lanka Journal of Child Health* 50 (4) in December 2021.

Child sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he/she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or that violates the laws or social taboos of the society, and may include the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices, or the exploitative use of children in pornographic performance and materials.

The prevalence of child sexual abuse in Sri Lanka ranges between 14-44% (A.S.A. Abeywardene, S.H. Atukorale, K.K.D.C.C. Abeynayaka, and T. Athauda's original article on "A (retrospective) study on the knowledge and prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse among school boys in the Colombo District" showed a prevalence of sexual abuse among adolescents of 21.9%, with the rates of sexual harassment being as high as 78.5%.

Even though child sexual abuse is a major public health problem, studies show that parental awareness about child sexual abuse is limited and that myths and beliefs held regarding child sexual abuse are common (parents oft believe that it is a rare phenomenon, and that most children are abused by strangers, and that in the case of delayed disclosure on the

part of the child, the latter was a voluntary participant in the abuse) and that this lack of knowledge may in turn lead to the delayed recognition of the same.

In a research based letter to the editors of the *Ceylon Medical Journal* in January 2016, on the "Characteristics of victims of alleged child sexual abuse referred to a child guidance clinic of a children's hospital", which was authored by Rohanachandra, D.M.A. Dahanayake, P.A.S. Pathigoda, and G.S. Wijetunge, they referenced the findings made from a retrospective, descriptive study (with a consultant psychiatrist assessing the psychological consequences and diagnosis being carried out per the *International Classification of Diseases 10th Edition*) carried out on all 35 children referred through courts or the relevant judicial medical officer to a Child Guidance Clinic conducted at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children, from 2010 to 2014-2015, due to alleged child sexual abuse.

In terms of biological sex, the majority (57.1%) was female. Age wise, the commonest (nine) age group was 12-14 years. With regard to the location, the majority (60%) were from the Colombo District. In nine (25%) cases, the parents were separated and in five cases (14%), the mother was abroad. In all the cases, the perpetrator was male and the majority (29 - 83%) were known to the child (a neighbour in seven cases, the father in six cases, an uncle in four cases, a teacher in two cases, and an older child in two cases). In the majority (29), only a single perpetrator

was involved. In 23 (66%) cases, the abuse occurred on several occasions at the hands of the same person. Threats or violence were used in 17 (49%) cases and rewards were given in seven (20%) cases. The commonest form of sexual abuse was non-penetrative contact (17 - 49%) (which, Rohanachandra et al. pointed out, may often go undetected by the parents due to the lack of physical evidence) while co-existing forms of child abuse such as physical abuse and neglect were present in 13 (37%). There was penetrative contact in 17 cases (genital in eight, anal in six, and oral in three). Psychological consequences were present in 24 (68%), with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) being the commonest (seven - 20%), followed by adjustment reaction (in six), sexualised behaviour (in five), anxiety disorder (in three), adjustment disorder (in two), and depression (in one).

Per M. Stoltenborgh, M.H.V. Ijzendoorn, E.M. Euser, and M.J. Bakermans-Kranenburg's "A global perspective on child sexual abuse: Meta analysis of prevalence around the world", child sexual abuse is commoner in females. D. Glaser's "Child sexual abuse" notes similarly that the highest rates of child sexual abuse have been reported from among adolescents.

Abeywardene et al. have shown that the mother living abroad is a risk factor.

Also per Glaser, worldwide, the majority of abusers are male and known to the victims. That said, T. Dias, A. Kociejowski, S. Rathnayake, S. Kumarasiri, S. Abeykoon, and T. Padeniya's "Sexual violence against women: A challenge" showed most perpetrators to be strangers. Most abuse occurred at the child's home (15 - 43%) and at the perpetrator's home (11). This, Rohanachandra observed, shows that the perpetrator is someone who has easy access to the child. S.W. Smallbone and R.K. Wortley's "Child sexual abuse: Offender characteristics and modus operandi" shows that perpetrators gain the compliance of children by way of grooming behaviour (where the offender pays special attention to the child and gains the child's and the caregivers' trust by using tactics such as gift giving, flattery, gifting money, and meeting other basic needs), rather than by threats. In contrast, threats or violence had been used in 17 (48.6%) cases with rewards being given only in 20% of the cases.

Abeywardene et al. showed oral and intra-crural sex (a type of intercourse generally regarded as non-penetrative

sex, in which a male partner places his penis between a male or female partner's thighs, and thrusts to create friction and achieve orgasm) to be the commonest forms, with 10.7% being penetrative sex. In the present study, the percentage of anal penetrative sex in boys was higher (17.1%). Glaser too has reported that different forms of child abuse and neglect frequently co-exist.

Psychological consequences have been reported in up to two-thirds of victims, per Glaser while PTSD was present in 48%. In the present study, the rate of PTSD was lower (20%), which according to Rohanachandra et al., is most likely because the data included findings at the first visit following abuse, while PTSD may develop up to six months after the initial abuse.

Rohanachandra et al. also noted that the study sample was derived from referrals to a Child Guidance Clinic and, therefore, may not represent all children subjected to child sexual abuse as only some make complaints and are then referred for assessment.

In their recommendations, Rohanachandra et al. emphasised that since a majority of the perpetrators are known to the victims, public education programmes should address the need to recognise the danger that exists at home in addition to the danger posed by strangers. They also called for clinicians to be vigilant about the fact that child sexual abuse frequently co-exists with other forms of abuse. Also, since the majority show psychological consequences, Rohanachandra et al. called for all children to be screened for psychological problems following abuse so as to minimise the adverse outcomes.

Hence, Rohanachandra reiterated and highlighted the fact that both the parental lack of supervision and neglect are risk factors for child sexual abuse.

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

Police Child and Women Bureau:
011 2444444
NCPA: 1929
LEADS:
011 495 4111
Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs helpline: 1938



A frontline health worker in Sri Lanka receiving the booster dose against Covid-19

PHOTO LALITH PERERA

Covid-19 booster increases protection against Omicron, say scientists

A booster dose against Covid-19 increases the amount of circulating antibodies and is shown to increase protection from symptomatic infection with Omicron, scientists have said, underlining that boosters can be the simplest step forward, especially for the immunosuppressed.

Reacting to the statement of UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) that the booster dose of Covishield vaccine effective against Omicron and a third booster dose of Covid-19 vaccine provides 70-75% protection against symptomatic infection from the Omicron variant, the virologists and epidemiologists underlined that booster doses of any vaccine (except live attenuated like oral polio vaccine or OPV, measles) exponentially raises antibody level.

Eminent virologist Dr. Shahid Jameel said a booster shot after two doses increases the amount of circulating antibodies and is shown to increase protection against symptomatic infection with Omicron.

"We don't know how well two doses continue to protect against severe disease," he said. On what India should do where majority of population is vaccinated with Covishield, the former head of the advisory group to the Indian SARS-COV-2 Genomics Consortium (INASACOG) said it must be ensured that those who get only one dose of Covishield get the second dose in eight-12 weeks instead of 12-16 weeks.

"Carry out lab studies with Omicron to learn how well sera from Indian vaccines of Covaxin and Covishield neutralise the virus. Make a policy on boosters. What vaccines to use? Who should get it? And when? Make a policy and start vaccinating children starting with adolescents," he said.

Dr. Jameel said in India, four vaccines can be used as boosters: Covaxin in people who got Covishield and vice versa, DNA vaccine ZyCov-D, Covovax protein vaccine from SII and Corbev ax-E protein vaccine from Biological E.

The Health Ministry told the Lok Sabha last week that the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC) and the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) are considering scientific evidence related to justification for booster doses against the coronavirus.

Noted virologist Dr. T. Jacob John said booster doses of any vaccine (except live attenuated like OPV, measles) exponentially raises antibody level: "Pfizer vaccine some 40-fold high".

"If we are interested in being cautious about the unknown risks of Omicron, boosters for as many as possible is the simplest step forward, especially for the immunosuppressed, seniors and those with comorbidities. This is in the best interests of their welfare," he said.

Dr. John, the former director of the ICMR's Centre of Advanced Research in Virology, stressed that children must be vaccinated too since an unvaccinated large

segment of population can act as reservoirs - "plus Omicron seems to go after children".

"Better to prevent than to wait for evidence. Protection delayed can also mean protection denied," he said.

Dr. Giridhara R. Babu, professor and the head of lifecycle epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India, said the evidence is gradually mounting in stressing the need for boosters eventually to everyone.

"However, data on physical outcomes are important in prioritizing the booster doses; Protection against hospitalisation or deaths is important in analysing the need for prioritising boosters compared to receiving only two primary doses," he said.

Dr. Babu said for developing countries, the priority still remains to reach the unreached (providing two primary doses to those not already vaccinated). Among the fully vaccinated, the available evidence points to the usefulness of providing booster doses to the elderly and those at high risk, including immunocompromised, he said.

Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, physician epidemiologist and public policy specialist, however, said booster is not a priority for the country and at least for Indian context, Omicron has not changed anything and India should do to collect more indigenous data and evidence for decision making on booster.

"The vaccines being used in India continue to protect against severe disease, hospitalisation and deaths. Therefore, the focus continues to be administered first and second shot to as many adults as possible," he said.

Elaborating further, he said "In the current stage of pandemic, every study on vaccine effectiveness (in general and against Omicron) should be interpreted in the context of that setting".

"What all vaccine effectiveness studies are pointing out is that existing vaccines continue to hold up against the key objective of Covid-19 vaccination drives that is to prevent severe diseases, hospitalisation and deaths. This holds true for the Omicron variant," Dr. Lahariya added.

Lahariya said neutralising studies are also pointing out that hybrid immunity through natural infection and at least one shot of vaccine provides far greater protection than vaccines alone. India has the situation of hybrid immunity where high prevalence and one dose coverage gives assurance that people are protected.

"Considering the effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccines being used in India against all symptomatic diseases is unknown or very limited data is available, therefore, we should not use studies and arguments of administering booster doses to improve protection from symptomatic diseases. As preventing all symptomatic diseases is not, at least at present, the purpose of ongoing Covid-19 vaccine drive in India," he said. (PTI)

'School closures affect over 400 m children'

● UNICEF report highlights Covid-19's impact on education in South Asia

More than 400 million South Asian children have been affected by school closures extending into a second year in some countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report.

The United Nations (UN) agency has urged the region's countries to fully reopen schools, warning that the consequences of lost learning are huge and will be long-lasting in a region where access to remote learning is limited.

"The remarkable achievements our region has made in advancing child rights over recent decades are now at risk," said UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia George Laryea-Adjeki. "If we fail to act, the worst impacts of

the Covid-19 pandemic will be felt for decades to come."

School closures in South Asia have lasted longer than in many other parts of the world, with schools remaining fully closed on an average for nearly 32 weeks between March 2020 and August this year, according to the report.

In Bangladesh, schools were shut for 18 months, until September, one of the longest closures in the world. In countries such as India and Nepal, they have only partially reopened.

The transition to remote learning has been difficult in a region, where many houses do not have internet connectivity and where access to smartphones is limited - an earlier study showed that in India for example nearly half of the students between ages six and 13

reported not using any type of remote learning during school closures.

Many teachers also found they lacked the training to make remote learning work effectively, according to UNICEF.

The loss of learning happened in a region where many children were already lagging.

Citing examples, the report said that one study in India showed that the proportion of Grade Three children who could read a Grade-One-level text fell from around 42% in 2018 to 24% in 2020.

It said girls were at a particular disadvantage because they had more limited access to mobile devices and were under increased pressure to perform domestic work.

There have been some successes - in Sri Lanka and Bhutan, the distribution of published material to continue out-of-school learning helped children keep up with their studies.

UNICEF has called on countries to prioritise helping students catch up on the learning they have missed, pointing out that South Asia is home to more adolescents than any other part of the world and will need 21st Century skills to gain a foothold in a region where jobs remain scarce.

The report also flagged concerns about the disruption of health services such as regular immunisation drives due to the pandemic. It said that key actions are needed to "reverse the alarming rollback in child health and nutrition".

The report said that the picture in South Asia remains bleak compared to developed countries, where more people are immunised and economies are recovering.

Only 30% of South Asians are fully vaccinated, the report said, adding: "And as the region braces itself for future waves of the virus, more children and families are slipping into poverty."

'Impunity has become the permanent normal in SL'

● *Former HRCSL Commissioner Ambika Satkunanathan's testimony before the US Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission*



Former HRCSL Commissioner Ambika Satkunanathan

On 9 and 10 December 2021, the US Government held the first of two "Summits for Democracy", which brought together leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector from a list of nations around the world to set forth an agenda for democratic renewal and to tackle the threats faced by democracies. However, Sri Lanka was not included on this list.

In this backdrop, the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, earlier this month, had written to US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, urging the State Department to focus on a "durable political solution" which provides "meaningful devolution of power in an undivided Sri Lanka".

This search for a political solution to the ethnic question in Sri Lanka – an issue that put the country through nearly 30 years of civil war – has seen inputs from various parties, including Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs M.A. Sumanthiran PC and Shanakiyan Rasamanickam, who, along with representatives of the Global Tamil Forum (GTF), met with a number of senior US political figures, including members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, during a visit to the US last month.

Similarly, last Wednesday (8), human rights lawyer and former Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka Ambika Satkunanathan testified before the US's Tom Lantos Commission on the Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka – alongside several others, including Harvard Law

School Co-President of Advocate for Human Rights Sandra Anton, Women's Action Network Head Shreen Abdul Saroor, Wake Forest University Professor of Politics and International Affairs Neil DeVotta, Amnesty International USA Asia Advocacy Director Carolyn Nash, and Human Rights Watch Asia Advocacy Director John Sifton – regarding where the island nation currently stands on its promise of ensuring human rights and accountability.

Excerpts from Satkunanathan's testimony are reproduced below:

Successive Sri Lankan governments, including the government that came to power in 2015, failed to deal with accountability for human rights violations, thereby entrenching impunity. For instance, police brutality and torture are systemic in Sri Lanka. The reluctance of successive governments to address wartime violations can be attributed to their fear of losing their support base and being seen as "too accommodating" of the "demands" of non-majority communities. Due

to this, they refused to acknowledge and address the majoritarian nature of the Sri Lankan state, which is driven by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, and normalises the discrimination of other ethnic communities. Impunity hence has become the permanent norm in Sri Lanka.

The current government, which has authoritarian tendencies and shows contempt for the rule of law, makes no effort to even pretend to adopt an inclusive approach to public policy making and governance. Instead, it re-affirms the majoritarian



US Representative James P. McGovern, who co-chairs the US Congress Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

nature of the state at the macro and micro levels at every opportunity. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and militarisation are the two pillars of the President's ideology that drive his decision making and action. The politics of hate fueled by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism targets Tamils and Muslims, who are subject to ethno-religious profiling of different forms giving rise to discrimination and marginalisation. All this is aided by a historically unchecked national security regime, which has been rapidly expanding since November 2019.

For example, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and militarization converge in the takeover of land in the north and east by the Archeological Department in the guise of reclaiming Buddhist sites, often aided by the military. In this instance the law is instrumentalised to effect demographic change that adversely impacts Tamils and Muslims.

The regime's understanding of governance is feudal and patronage driven, and bullying is a common strategy used to deal with states that call for accountability for rights violations. The regime will use inter-state rivalries, such as that with China, but it also craves the validation of the West, which has been amply illustrated. Any action the regime has taken, however minimal, is due to pressure and not praise. Examples are the UNHRC resolution and the European Union's GSP plus trade privileges.

While accountability for wartime violations is integral to the Tamil community, impunity for wartime violations needs to be viewed within the broader context of the absence of accountability generally, where elected and appointed public officials break and abuse the law with impunity. Although the government makes promises to advance accountability, its actions illustrate the disingenuous nature of these promises.

Civic space is shrinking and rights activists, journalists and dissenters all over the country are at risk of state reprisals. The North and East are occupied by the military, and civil society, families of the disappeared, journalists who report on militarization and issues such as state appropriation of private land in Tamil majority areas, and former combatants are subject to surveillance, threats and intimidation.

Due to the war on drugs, we note extrajudicial killings as well as a large number of arrests and imprisonment of persons who use drugs. Compulsory drug

rehabilitation, which violates human rights standards and is contrary to the UN Common Position on Drugs and the UN joint statements on compulsory drug rehabilitation, is still legal in Sri Lanka. People detained in drug treatment centres – some of which are managed by the Sri Lanka army – suffer physical and psychological violence, inhuman conditions of detention, and lack of evidence-based treatment.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act continues to be weaponised against Tamils, Muslims and dissenters. The most recent example is the "Deradicalisation from Holding Violent Extremist Religious Ideology" regulations issued in March 2021, which create a new predictive style of offence based on a broad legal definition that enables the arrest and detention of citizens contrary to the procedure set out by Sri Lankan law and international human rights standards. The regulations allow investigations to commence after an arrest – thereby depriving persons of knowledge of the reason for their arrest. The subjective determination of what is deemed an offence risks the decision being influenced by personal prejudice and unconscious bias.

The regulations also violate the right to a fair trial because they allow a person to be deemed guilty and sent to rehabilitation for up to two years without trial – a decision made solely on the recommendation of Sri Lanka's Attorney General. There is no mention of the criteria by which the decision to send a person to rehabilitation is made, nor is there information on the contents of the rehabilitation programme.

Recommendations to the US Government

- Support to the government of Sri Lanka should not be unconditional. It should always adhere to the principle of "do no harm", and align with UN Human Rights Council Resolution 46/1
- Support the pursuit of accountability by victims through multiple means, including universal jurisdiction, Magnitsky Act and public designation measures via Section 7031 (c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programmes Appropriation Act
- Actively support, both via public pronouncements and other means, vulnerable populations, such as human rights defenders
- Support a political solution that addresses the root causes of the ethnic conflict

Pointing out that the country is facing a severe financial crisis owing to the collapse of all sectors and the overall economy, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Eran Wickramaratne charged that Budget 2022 contains no proposals that will resolve any of these issues.

Speaking at the debate during the final vote on Budget 2022 held in Parliament last Friday (12), he stated: "At a minimum, this Government should properly identify the fundamental reasons for the crisis, and its failure to recognise the depth of the crisis is pushing the country further into the abyss and plunging it into financial bankruptcy."

Further speaking on the expenditure vote of the Finance Ministry, Wickramaratne said that as the Opposition understands the extent of the crisis in which the country has fallen, they are not merely speaking vindictively about the Government.

"In fact, the first of the serious problems we face is the widening budget deficit. The second is the balance of payments deficit, leading to a foreign reserve depletion and now pushing the country into near financial bankruptcy. The objective and the policy of this Government is not to develop the country, but to deceive the people using various slogans such as national economy, national security, and narrow nationalism or racism," he charged. Wickramaratne further recalled that government revenue stood at 17.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) when current Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa first became President in 2006, but had dropped to 11.4% by 2014.

"But in a very short time, during the previous regime, the national revenue began to grow again. Accordingly, by 2018, government revenue had increased to 13.5% of GDP. During this period, there was a constitutional coup. Further, despite the unfortunate Easter attacks in 2019, we were able to maintain government revenue at 12.6%. What has happened now?"

"When we took over the Government in 2015, the government revenue was Rs. 1,000 billion, and by 2019, it had almost doubled to Rs. 1,997 billion. This is what a country needs to improve its economy." Claiming that the current

Government was employing "accounting gimmicks", Wickramaratne stated that government revenue for 2021 was initially estimated to be Rs. 2,029 billion, which was later revised to Rs. 1,561 billion, but pointed out that this would drop by a further Rs. 100 billion, creating a shortfall of Rs. 500-600 billion from the initial estimate.

"Even under this Budget, government revenue for 2022 is projected to be at Rs. 2,284 billion – an impossible target. That means an increase of Rs. 800 billion in revenue within a year. This is again a false assessment. I urge the Government to tell the truth and face reality. What are the proposals in this Budget to increase revenue by 40%? Public officials should not knowingly sign reports where it is abundantly clear that estimates are unrealistic.

"According to the Government's false estimate, the budget deficit will be 8.8% by 2022. But the Verite Research institute states that it will exceed 11%. The balance of payments of deficit over a period of time has led to a foreign reserve crisis. Imports should be reduced, and exports should be increased. No budget proposals have been put forward to address any of these structural issues. So how could the economy and financial stability be improved?"

He went on to charge: "The Rajapaksa regime constitutes family rule in which the

economy of the ruling cohorts is strengthened rather than the upliftment of the country and its people. It was during the first term of Mahinda Rajapaksa, that excessive and unproductive borrowing led to a debt trap. Who was the Finance Minister at that time? That is the present Prime Minister. Who was the Secretary to Finance? The present Secretary to the

President. Who was the then-Governor of the Central Bank? It is the present Governor of the Central Bank. It is the same bunch of people running the show, with a major portion of the annual budget allocations at their disposal.

"When the country was short of foreign currency in 2007, they introduced International Sovereign Bonds (ISBs) to the

market. Ajith Nivard Cabraal was then the Governor of the Central Bank. These were short-term bonds at a high commercial rate. The country is still repaying these loans rolled over many times obtained during the period of Rajapaksa. It was gambling without the management of fiscal policies.

"Amidst strikes, threats, political conspiracies, and Easter attacks, when the government was handed over in 2019, foreign reserves stood at \$ 7.2 billion. Today the cash reserves are about \$ 1 billion as stated by the State Minister of Finance in Parliament; possibly the lowest foreign currency reserves for any country in the world. Could there be a more dangerous situation facing the country than this? This Government and its members perhaps may not understand what we are saying or the severity of the situation of the country," he said. "When a country plunges into such a low rating, who gives us credit? In addition to paying off debts, how do we import essential goods? Already, thousands of containers stuffed with essential goods are stuck at the port for want of dollars for banks to pay for letters of credit.

"Thousands of small businesses have been left stranded due to the arbitrary import ban. There are about 85,000 registered SME (small and medium enterprise) businesses in the country. Of those, 29,000 have been shut down or crippled. The private sector is the only real engine to create employment. The Finance Minister said that the public service is a burden on the economy. It goes without saying that the public sector of 1.4 million is heavily overstaffed. Real jobs must be created in the private sector. The private sector requires a stable fiscal policy regime, and governments have failed in providing that climate. This Budget is no different.

"If the debt is not paid, the country will face a bankrupt economy. Then, the country ratings will be gone. By the beginning of 2022, we are close to this major catastrophe, as the Budget does not address any of the burning issues facing the country," he stressed.

Wickramaratne thus urged that Parliament pay attention to these issues before it is too late.

'Budget 2022 doesn't address any of SL's burning issues'

● *Eran Wickramaratne charges that Sri Lanka is on the brink of financial bankruptcy*



SJB MP Eran Wickramaratne
PHOTO SAMAN ABESIRIWARDANA

{ NEWS/PICTORIAL }

Not necessary to read terms of Yugadnavi deal: Johnston

● Expresses confidence in judgement of Cabinet and AG

Chief Government Whip Minister Johnston Fernando opined that it is not important to read the controversial Yugadnavi agreement in its entirety.

Speaking to the media last Friday (10) after the Budget was passed in Parliament, he stated: "When the Cabinet grants approval for an agreement to be signed with the Attorney General's (AG) approval, I do not believe that we have to read the entirety of it."

He also said that since this is an agreement which has been approved by the Cabinet, once the signing of the agreement is done, ministers need not inquire into the contents of the same.

Fernando also remarked that the Government has "faith" in the agreement.



The Yugadnavi Power Plant in Kerawalapitiya

Northeast monsoon taking shape over SL

The northeast monsoon condition is gradually establishing over the island, announced the Department of Meteorology. Hence, the showery conditions in the Northern, North Central, Eastern, and Uva Provinces as well as the Hambantota District are expected to enhance to some extent.

Showers will occur at times in the Eastern, Northern, North Central, and Uva Provinces and in the Hambantota and Matale Districts. Fairly heavy rainfall of about 50 mm can be expected at some places in these areas.

Showers or thundershowers will occur at a few places in the Western and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and in the Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, and Matara Districts.

Misty conditions can be expected at some places in the Western, Sabaragamuwa, Central, Southern, and Uva Provinces.

The public is thus requested to take adequate precautions to minimise damages caused by temporary localised strong winds and lightning during thundershowers.

Additionally, showers or thundershowers will occur at several places in the sea areas extending from Kankasanturai to Hambantota via Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Pottuvil. Showers or thundershowers will occur at a few places in the other sea areas during the evening or night.

Winds will be north-easterly and the wind speed will be 20-30 kmph in the sea areas around the island.

Wind speed can increase up to 40-45 kmph at times in sea areas extending from Trincomalee to Puttalam via Kankasanturai and Mannar and in sea areas extending from Matara to Pottuvil via Hambantota.

Sea areas extending from Trincomalee to Puttalam via Kankasanturai and Mannar and in sea areas extending from Matara to Pottuvil via Hambantota can be fairly rough at times. Other sea areas around the island will be slight.

Temporarily strong gusty winds and very rough seas can be expected during thundershowers.

Modi's personal Twitter handle 'very briefly compromised'

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal Twitter handle was "very briefly compromised", the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a Tweet early yesterday (12).

The matter was escalated to Twitter and the Prime Minister's personal twitter handle @narendramodi was immediately secured, PMO India's Tweet said, adding any Tweet shared during the brief period when the account was compromised must be ignored.

It was not immediately known



how long the personal Twitter handle of Modi, which has over 73 million followers, was compromised.

Twitter took the necessary steps to secure the compromised account as soon as it became aware of the activity, a Twitter Spokesman said in an e-mailed statement to Reuters, adding that an investigation revealed no signs of any other impacted accounts at present.

A similar incident had occurred with the Twitter handle of Modi's personal website @narendramodi in September 2020, with a series of Tweets asking followers to donate to a relief fund through cryptocurrency.

Recently, the Twitter accounts of many famous personalities in America - from President Joe Biden, Barack Obama, Kanye West, Bill Gates, to Elon Musk - were hacked to post the message: "Send Bitcoin and the famous people would send back double your money."

The microblogging site had to suspend broad swaths of its service, including the ability of verified users to Tweet, for a couple of hours as it scrambled to prevent the scam from spreading further.

(Reuters)

Israeli study finds Pfizer booster protects against Omicron

Israeli researchers said last Saturday (11) that they found a three-dose course of Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine provided significant protection against the new Omicron variant.

The findings were similar to those presented by BioNTech and Pfizer earlier in the week, which were an early signal that booster shots could be key to protect against infection from the newly identified variant.

The study, carried out by Sheba Medical Centre and the Health Ministry's Central Virology Laboratory, compared the blood of 20 people who had received two vaccine doses five to six months earlier to the same number of individuals who had received a booster a month before.

"People who received the second dose five or six months ago do not have any

neutralisation ability against the Omicron. They do have some against the Delta (strain)," Sheba Infectious Diseases Unit Director Gili Regev-Yochay told reporters.

"The good news is that with the booster dose, it increases about a hundredfold. There is a significant protection of the booster dose. It is lower than the neutralisation ability against the Delta, about four times lower," she said.

The Israeli team said they worked with the actual virus while the companies used what is known as a pseudovirus, which was bio-engineered to have the hallmark mutations of Omicron.

The Israeli research follows a study from South Africa that found the Omicron variant can partially evade protection from two doses.

(Reuters)

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY



Under the national vaccination programme, the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 booster dose was administered to the public at Viharamahadevi Park yesterday (12)



'TIS THE SEASON

With only a few more days for Christmas, shoppers were seen at Second Cross Street in Pettah over the weekend to purchase Christmas decorations and gifts



the morning

business



'No cabinet discussion today regarding IMF'

● **Gammanpila denies rumours** | ● **Says even the President will not be in the country today** | ● **Keheliya too says no IMF discussion on the agenda** | ● **Economists, Opposition keep pushing SL to seek IMF support**

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Despite reports stating that the Cabinet of Ministers and the Secretary to the Treasury are being convened for a meeting today (13) to discuss whether Sri Lanka should seek International Monetary Fund (IMF) support or not, Co-Cabinet Spokesman Minister Udaya Gammanpila vehemently denied having such a meeting today.

Speaking to *The Morning Business* yesterday (12), Gammanpila denied these rumours and claimed: "I saw that a newspaper had published this rumour as a headline; there is absolutely no truth in these rumours whatsoever. Even the President won't be there tomorrow as he will be abroad."

Similar statements were made by Cabinet Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, who stated that such a discussion is currently not on the agenda for today's meeting. However, he did admit that if an important point regarding the IMF does come up, it can be addressed in the meeting, but as of right now, there are no such plans.

Rambukwella also mentioned that the Cabinet of Ministers had discussed the IMF issue several times during previous meetings and considered the pros and cons of such a decision.

It was widely reported yesterday that Ministry of Finance and Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle and Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal will also be summoned to the cabinet meeting today. Despite numerous attempts by *The*

Morning Business to contact Attygalle, all attempts proved futile.

Calls for Sri Lanka to seek IMF help have increased since the recent publication of the country's end-November foreign reserve data by the CBSL, which indicates that Sri Lanka's official foreign reserves had fallen to \$ 1.6 billion by the end of November, down 30% from October. From the remaining reserves, liquid foreign currency reserves amount to only \$ 1 billion, which is sufficient to cover only around three weeks of imports, according to CBSL data.

However, Minister of Trade Dr. Bandula Gunawardana stated last Saturday (11) that before Sri Lanka goes seeking assistance from the IMF, there are several matters that should be considered. He claimed: "The IMF will introduce a series of conditions which includes reducing the fiscal deficit below 5%. In order to reduce the fiscal deficit as such, we have to reduce government expenditure.

"When reducing government expenditure, the main expenditure is the salary and pension of government



Co-Cabinet Spokesman Minister Udaya Gammanpila

workers. Is the public willing to allow salary and pension cuts? They will require us to follow a cost-reflective pricing policy; as a result, we will have to increase the price of fuel and gas. They will also require us to float the exchange rate and remove import restrictions. We will be required to allow the free import and export of goods to and from the country. If we as a country are ready to accept these conditions, then we can go to the IMF."

Over the past week, several Opposition ministers have pointed out the precarious economic situation of the country and have claimed that seeking IMF assistance is the only path available to Sri Lanka. Such sentiments were expressed by Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP and senior economist Dr. Harsha de Silva in Parliament last Wednesday (8), where

he claimed that Sri Lanka will be bankrupt by January.

"During the months of December and January, we have to repay \$ 114 million in short-term funds. In addition, we have to repay \$ 1,137 million in other loans as well as \$ 194.7 million in interest payments. Therefore, by the end of January, we will have only \$ 140 million left from the existing total foreign reserves, and when considering in terms of liquid foreign currency, our balance will be negative \$ 437 million. How can we go forward like this? Our reserves at hand have never fallen like this," stated Dr. de Silva.

While a majority of government MPs continue to oppose IMF assistance, there appears to be a shift of mindset as reflected by the stance taken by the Minister of Trade on Saturday.

Contd. on page 10

Mohottala reiterates desire to resign from BOI

● **Requests new leadership team to be appointed** | ● **Expresses gratitude for President's confidence in him**

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI) Chairman Sanjaya Mohottala has, during a meeting held recently with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, reiterated his desire to resign from his post despite the President previously refusing to accept his resignation as per a statement issued by the BOI.

According to the BOI statement, Mohottala had informed the President "of his desire to be released from his duties. He requested for a new leadership team to be appointed, so that they may continue with the efforts already made to further improve the services offered to investors, and thereby realise the vision set out by the Government of Sri Lanka to double GDP (gross domestic product) over a decade".

He had further expressed his gratitude to the President for "placing highest confidence in him and the Board and for requesting them to continue to serve and contribute effectively to promote foreign investments to help the post-Covid-19 economic transformation of Sri Lanka".

Early this month, it was announced that Mohottala, BOI Director General Pasan Wanigasekara, and Board Members Harsha Subasinghe,



BOI Chairman Sanjaya Mohottala

Dr. Harsha Cabral, and Sanjaya Kulatunga would be resigning from their posts.

This mass resignation occurred as a result of BOI staff protests against a recent decision to hire private sector professionals for a new unit and the recent parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) summoning, which inquired about the BOI's recruitment of a number of officials at very high salaries and misleading the Cabinet.

Consequently, the Presidential Secretariat had, by a letter dated 2 December signed by Secretary to the President Dr. P.B. Jayasundera, informed all BOI members who had resigned that the President had refused to accept their resignations.

Contd. on page 10

Planters request speedy solution on other agri inputs

The Planters' Association of Ceylon (PA), issuing a statement two days ago, has urged the authorities to provide an urgent solution to facilitate the availability of appropriate herbicides, weedicides, fungicides, and pesticides which are essential for the sustenance and health of the country's plantation sector.

In addition to requesting the Government to fast-track the implementation of the decision to allow private fertiliser imports, the PA also highlighted the increasing risk of Sri Lankan tea and rubber plantations facing a similar situation to the "coffee rust blight" which decimated Sri Lanka's coffee cultivations in the late 1800s.

In the absence of inputs required to mitigate such challenges, the industry is already grappling with similar issues. The "Circular Spot Disease of Rubber", for instance, is spreading rapidly across Sri Lanka's rubber plantations and has affected more than 20,000 hectares of cultivations by end-August 2021. As a result, production has plummeted in rubber estates affected by the disease.

"While we appreciate the Government's eventual decision to allow our industry to acquire fertiliser, plant nutrition is only one of the several key requirements of

the plantation industry. Additional inputs are also required to mitigate issues such as diseases, pests, and weeds. These are essential for plantations to produce economically feasible volumes and given that our crops are nearly entirely exported, we must also adhere to stringent quality and maximum residue limits (MRL) parameters," PA Media Spokesperson Dr. Roshan Rajadurai said.

"With the ban on glyphosate being reinstated for the third time now, we are yet again left with no immediate solutions to the problem of weed management. On behalf of all regional plantation companies (RPCs), and the broader industry, we urge the Government to provide any kind of guidelines as to how the industry can arrive at a lasting solution to these related issues," Dr. Rajadurai stressed.

In the recent past, the country has seen several major changes in its policy with regard to the import and usage of agri inputs. As of November 2021, glyphosate was removed from the list of controlled substances, only for the ban to be reinstated by the end of the month. Even prior to the overall ban of fertiliser and agrochemical imports, the country has vacillated repeatedly in...

Contd. on page 10

\$ 1 b swap with Qatar to strengthen reserves

BY SHENAL FERNANDO

Sri Lanka has entered into discussions with the Qatar Central Bank to obtain a foreign currency swap exceeding \$ 1 billion as part of the Government's plan to strengthen foreign currency reserves of the country, according to State Minister of Samurdhi, Household Economy, Microfinance, Self-Employment, and Business Development Asanka Shehan Semasinghe.

This revelation was made by Semasinghe last Thursday (9) in Parliament, where he claimed that the Government had taken several steps to strengthen the reserve position of the country.

Explaining further, he stated: "The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has commenced discussions with the Qatar Central Bank to obtain a swap of over \$ 1 billion. Furthermore, under the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) financial facilities, we have obtained a foreign currency swap

of \$ 400 million from the Indian Reserve Bank. In addition, we have also taken steps to obtain \$ 300 million through combined loan schemes.

"The Government is also hoping to receive \$ 500 million through the securitisation of foreign worker remittances. Additionally, the Finance Minister has obtained from his Indian visit a \$ 500 million credit line for fuel purchasing and a \$ 1 billion credit line for essential goods and medicine purchases. Financial institutions such as Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank have also indicated that they will support us."

These statements were made by Semasinghe on the back of increased public concern over the foreign reserve position of the country. Currently, Sri Lanka's official foreign reserves have fallen to \$ 1.6 billion by end-November, down...

Contd. on page 10

Sri Lanka should have got into IMF train 8 months ago: Harsha

● **Says the train has gone now, a debt default is imminent** | ● **Adds forex crisis should have been discussed a year ago**

BY IMSHA IQBAL AND PAMODI WARAVITA

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) could have gotten into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) train eight months ago and the country could have also managed without a debt default, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Dr. Harsha de Silva stated at a press briefing yesterday (12).

He stated, "paying debts - we will have to restructure it the way we can know. The IMF's structural assessment or stabilisation, that train has gone. Now the problem is deeper. Tell the cabinet that we cannot pay our debts and we need a few years to go back to normal, with international help.



SJB MP Dr. Harsha de Silva

We are ready to support the Government, for the sake of the public, we are willing to leave political differences aside.

"If this (forex crisis) was discussed in November last year (2020), the country could have managed. The application for the IMF was postponed on multiple occasions, saying that money comes from

here and there, and then swaps," said Dr. de Silva, criticising the delay.

In addition, de Silva said that what can be understood now is that without the IMF, the crisis cannot be averted by restructuring.

Speaking on summoning the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle and Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal to the cabinet meeting, Dr. de Silva stated: "Tomorrow (13), it is going to be discussed about the IMF at the cabinet meeting. Now it is too late to go to the IMF - if we go to the IMF now, the exchange would be limited."

Contd. on page 10

India working on economic aid package for Sri Lanka

BY ANURAG KOTOKY

India is working on an urgent package of assistance for Sri Lanka to help the island nation out of an economic crisis, *The Economic Times (ET)* reported on Saturday (11), citing officials that it didn't identify.

The measures will cover areas including food and health security, energy security, and a currency swap, the officials said. The move follows a recent visit by Sri Lanka's Finance

Minister to India, the paper reported. The plan is to extend credit lines for Sri Lanka to import food, medicine, fuel, and other essential items from India.

Sri Lanka is at risk of a possible default amidst dwindling foreign exchange reserves, even as its Central Bank Governor said he's confident the Government will service all its overseas debt. It's also trying to revive its Covid-19-hit tourism industry with the reopening of borders following

extended pandemic lockdowns, and is expecting increased remittance inflows as more Sri Lankans head overseas to seek employment.

The two countries have "identified ways and means through which the existing bilateral economic relationship between the two countries could be further broadened and deepened," ET noted, citing a statement from the Sri Lankan Government.

(Deccan Herald)

Budget deeply flawed: Nishan de Mel

BY IMSHA IQBAL

The Budget for the fiscal year 2022, which was passed with a majority of 93 votes at its third reading in Parliament, is flawed, pointed out Colombo-based think tank Verité Research Executive Director Nishan de Mel.

He made this statement last Saturday (11) via a Tweet while quoting a web article that depicted Speaker of Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena endorsing the certificate for the Appropriation Bill No. 30 of 2021.

"Yesterday, the 2022 Budget that is seriously flawed, and set to steer



Verité Research Executive Director Nishan de Mel

Sri Lanka into deeper trouble, which got passed with 153 of a significant majority," de Mel said.

He criticised Sri Lankan parliamentarians, saying they seem to be serving in fear to their party

leaders instead of their own voters. Issuing a public report on Budget 2022, Verité said that it fails in establishing a stable fiscal regime.

Further explaining, the aforementioned report said: "In January 2020, a new tax structure was established, introducing substantial reforms to major taxes including corporate and personal income tax, and VAT (Value-Added Tax). The stated objective of that change was to establish a stable and predictable regime of lower taxes for at least five years.

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"It is only in sorrow bad weather masters us; in joy, we face the storm and defy it."
— Amelia Barr

Kim Kardashian wants to be legally single

Keeping Up With the Kardashians star Kim Kardashian, 41, reportedly filed paperwork on Friday, asking a judge in her divorce case to declare her a legally single woman. The move comes hours after the rapper, formerly known as Kanye West, publicly asked for her back (again). According to TMZ, Kardashian wants the judge to separate issues of child custody and property from marital status. It's a move her high-powered attorney Laura Wasser has done with other celebrity clients. The SKIMS Founder also asked that her maiden name be restored. A source confirmed the report to E! News.



(Yahoo)

the morning brunch



Get Tiked at Trace Expert City Auditorium



Panel discussion. Top row from left: Chethana Ketagoda, Amanda Amarasekara, Ramod Malaka, and Fahad Farook. Bottom row from left: Denathi Pussegoda, Chethana Ketagoda, Amanda Amarasekara, and Ramod Malaka



TV presenter and content creator Saasha Karunarathne

Get Tiked

Sri Lanka's biggest creator event hosted by Tikable

BY VANESSA MENDIS

On 9 December 2021, Tikable, the premier Gen-Z marketing agency in Sri Lanka, hosted the island's largest ever creator event at the Trace Expert City Auditorium. With Domino's Pizza (Jubilant Foodworks Lanka Ltd.) as the title sponsor, along with SLT-Mobitel (Pvt.) Ltd. as the main sponsor, the event saw Sri Lanka's top platform influencers under one roof for an evening full of creativity, inspiration, and fun. Brunch was the official digital media partner for the event.

The event kicked off with TV presenter and content creator Saasha Karunarathne taking the audience through a walk down memory lane, as she got candid about how she first saw TikTok, and how that impression changed to a much more positive one as time went by. She spoke about her learning curve and how she discovered her creativity through the platform, as she was constantly pushed to be as creative as possible. Speaking to Brunch, the Media Partner for the

event, Karunarathne shared: "I feel that TikTok really pushes you to be as creative as possible, because it is a scroll fest and people will move on to the next thing if you don't grab their attention in seconds." She also added that TikTok has all the filters and tools, and offers a lot of help to any content creator, on the app itself, to become as creative as possible, without the need to use external apps.

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Model and content creator Amanda Amarasekara



Content creator, attorney-at-law, Hindi lecturer Chethana Ketagoda

Tikable originated initially as the first company in Sri Lanka that offered TikTok marketing services. However, we are now transforming into a Gen-Z marketing agency. So, the vision for this event, Get Tiked, was to bring content creators who are predominantly on platforms that create short form content, like TikTok, under one roof
Tikable Founder and Blendmedia CEO Nipun Liyanapathirana



CREATING A CENTURY OF MEMORIES FOR SRI LANKANS

Cyril Rodrigo's offering brunch and high tea

BY VANESSA ANTHONY

In 1884, Mudaliyar Thomas Rodrigo laid the foundation for one of the country's most legendary restaurants. Under its brand names Pagoda and Green Cabin, the restaurant has created fond memories for Sri Lankans for over a century.

Considered one of the very few generational family-owned restaurants that has withstood the test of time, the chain is currently managed by its passionate fifth generation who strives to continue the tradition and legacy set by its founding fathers.

Cyril Rodrigo's recently launched its brunch and high tea menu, the latter of which we actually had the opportunity to experience.

Modern meets traditional
Located on No. 7, Visaka Road,

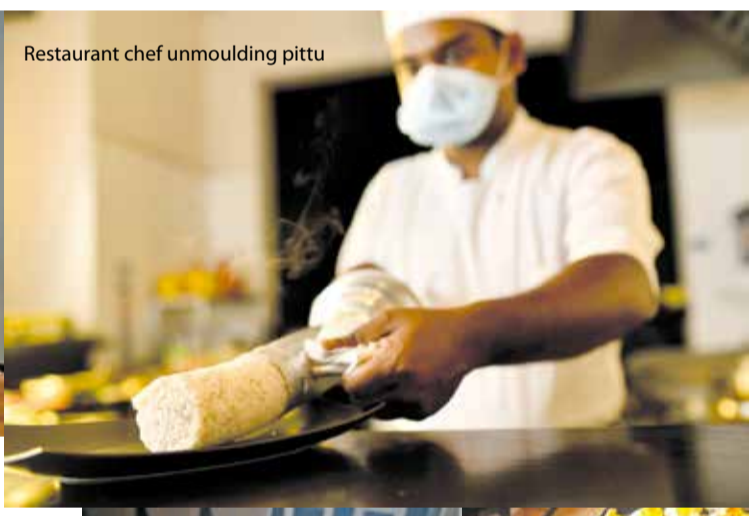
Bambalapitiya, Colombo 4, the restaurant is a haven for traditional Sri Lankan cuisine, combining their rich heritage with traditional family recipes.

With family traditions at its core and modern gastronomy at its fingertips, their latest restaurant has

now opened its doors to warmly welcome guests with the traditional Sri Lankan hospitality they are known for.

Paying tribute to Cyril Rodrigo himself, the all-new Cyril Rodrigo's Green Cabin restaurant serves from a 100-year-old house, refurbished to reflect his own unique personality and blend both traditional and modern dining experiences.

www.cyrilgreencabin.com
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Outstanding Role Models of 2021 Sri Lanka Unites

BY DIMITHRI WIJESINGHE

Sri Lanka Unites' 12th consecutive Future Leaders Conference came to a close on 11 December. The closing ceremony was held in conjunction with the "Outstanding Role Models" awards ceremony at the Jasmine

Hall of BMICH, and the event was graced by Guests of Honour British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Sarah Hulton and Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka Trine Jorlanli Eskedal.

Sri Lanka Unites is a youth movement for hope, reconciliation,



and youth leadership development and has been active as a movement for 14 years, serving all 25 districts of the country, with nearly a 1,000 volunteers and 50 staff members serving in their right centres in eight districts.

The organisation recently passed an important milestone of 30,000 members and their total engagement since inception has passed a million youths from all 25 districts.

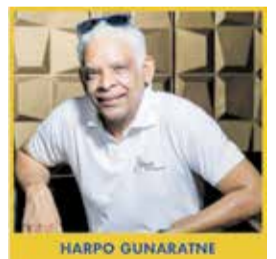
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DANU INNASITHAMBY



OTARA GUNewardENE



HARPO GUNARATNE

Dilmah Ecovation Awards empowers eco-innovators

Shortlists 16 promising contestants for 2021

Despite Covid-19 hitting economies hard this year, the Global Innovation Index 2021 illustrates a boom in innovation around the world. This goes to show that ideas are crucial for overcoming the economic challenges of post-pandemic economic growth. Therefore, the Ecovation Awards, inaugurated in 2019 to create an innovation culture and empower Sri Lankan eco-innovators, couldn't have resumed its second edition at a better time.

Dilmah Tea Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dilhan C. Fernando said: "Ecovation seeks to

encourage practical or scientific innovation from youth, women, and men in academia or any field, in designing creative and impactful solutions to our most urgent ecological issues. Our schools and universities have an abundance of brilliant ideas and our hope is that we can deliver recognition, support the creative innovators with mentorship to refine the idea into an actionable plan, and initiate collaboration that will deliver positive impact on our environment while benefiting the innovator."

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{ EVENTS }

Women gamers break the glass ceiling as SL's first National Women's Team for Dota 2



Meet Sri Lanka's first national women's team for Dota 2: FoXy, Stardust, Nerd, Prince\$\$, JollyGood!, and Chansica

Electronic sports, the competitive play of video games, has become the fastest growing sport over the last few years both worldwide and within Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Esports Association, founded in 2012, has been recognised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Sri Lanka as the governing body for esports in the country. The Association has also provided the pathway for national esports athletes to represent Sri Lanka at international events such as the 18th Asian Games, the Esports World Championships, and many more.

The Association has grown significantly since its inception and is now taking its first steps into female representation in the national esports team by enlisting six female *Dota 2* esports athletes, creating the nation's first National Women's Team for *Dota 2*.

The members of the team are Nadeeshani "FoXy" Jayasinghe, Tikiri "Stardust" Diasena, Zahra "Nerd" Thajudeen, Nardhya "Prince\$\$" Greero, Semini "JollyGood!" Perera, and Jessica "Chansica" Devendra.

Tikiri "Stardust" Diasena has been passionate about role-playing and strategy video games all her

life but moved into competitive form more recently in 2020.

Nardhya "Prince\$\$" Greero has been a *Dota 2* player for six years and compares the game to love. "It is both complex and beautiful. It can be difficult, but in the end it's worth it."

Zahra "Nerd" Thajudeen has played the game since 2014, and is driven by a strong competitive spirit that combines teamwork and passion.

Semini "JollyGood!" Perera joins the team with four years of experience within *Dota 2*'s intricate systems. She's drawn to the game both by her competitive spirit and also a family of

like-minded individuals she's discovered through it.

Jessica "Chansica" Devendra brings six years of experience to the team. What started as a casual hobby, evolved into a regular grind to climb up the ranks in 2018.

Nadeeshani "FoXy" Jayasinghe is a seasoned esports athlete across multiple genres, consistently competing within the nation's top tournaments and now taking her experience to the world.

The team will represent Sri Lanka at international tournaments for *Dota 2*, the first of which was the Global Esports Games 2021 organised by the Global Esports Federation. The team competed within Region 1 of the Regional Qualifiers going head to head with Mongolia in their first match. After hours of intense and strategic gameplay by the Sri Lankan girls, Mongolia emerged the winner.

However, the team acquired a significant amount of exposure and experience that will be instrumental in honing their skills for the future.

Dota 2 is one of the world's most popular competitive multiplayer online battle arena games that requires strong strategic thinking, teamwork, and co-ordination. It is commendable that despite the steep learning curve demanded by the game, the National Women's Team built a strong level of competency within just one month of assembly to hold their own at an international platform.

The girls of the new National

Women's Team for *Dota 2* have since continued their training in preparation for more international tournaments in the coming months. Sri Lanka esports is backed by the strength and commitment of its main sponsor Dialog and geared with Asus Republic of Gamers (ROG) as the official gaming laptop partner alongside Gamer.LK as the strategic partner.

Dialog is known for their home broadband and wide range of data plans, which connects gamers all around the country. Dialog also has a gaming subsidiary called Dialog Gaming, which hosts gaming and esports competitions. Recently, Dialog Gaming in collaboration with local developers launched MegaPlay, an all-in-one e-gaming mobile app, featuring a gamut of hyper-casual games, to the delight of gamers islandwide. ASUS ROG, with their lineup of high-end gaming laptops, which include the Zephyrus, Zephyrus Duo, Strix Scar, and ROG Flow series, offers gamers a complete line of innovative products known for performance and quality, such as their laptops, desktops, motherboards, graphics cards, monitors, audio equipment, routers, and peripherals. ROG also participates in and sponsors major local and international gaming events.

Along with the support of these partnerships, Sri Lanka esports is poised to grow Sri Lanka's presence in the rising wave of esports globally.

CR&FC brings the festive spirit to Lady Ridgeway Hospital



CR&FC's Chamod Fernando and Kanchana Mahendran visited children warded at the LRH and distributed Christmas cake

Chamod Fernando, the senior most player of the Ceylonese Rugby and Football Club (CR&FC) Men's Rugby Team and CR&FC Women's Rugby Team Captain Kanchana Mahendran visited children warded at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital (LRH), accompanied by the club's General Manager Group Captain (Retd.) Lalith Abeyssekera. Individually wrapped Christmas cakes were handed to over 150 children in three wards.

The visit conducted under strict social distancing protocols was facilitated by Dr. H.S.J. Senapathi and Dr. Vasan and

co-ordinated by Dr. Maadhavi.

Children and parents were overjoyed by the gesture. The players too were pleased to bring smiles to the faces of the children.

Fernando noted: "This was a very humbling experience. Despite the health challenges faced by these children, they are brave, and spoke with a positive spirit."

Mahendran added: "The children inspired me. They were so happy even though some of them are quite unwell. I am so glad I was able to bring some happiness to these children today."

Yohani joins Brandix's family of 60,000 members

Brandix Apparel Ltd., home to over 60,000 team members in Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, and beyond, announced the signing of inspirational musical sensation Yohani Diloka de Silva as its Brand Ambassador. A company with local roots and global reach, Brandix resonates with Yohani as a personality representing the positive culmination of effort, hard work, and commitment to take her brand to the world.

Speaking on her partnership with Brandix, Yohani stated: "I'm so happy to be the newest member of Team Brandix representing this inspired team as its Brand Ambassador. As an artist, I am proud to see the efforts made by Brandix



Brandix Apparel Ltd. Brand Ambassador Yohani Diloka de Silva

to take Sri Lanka global! Everyone at Brandix is inspired to succeed and become the best versions of themselves. It is amazing for me to join this empowered team who have been such an integral part of our growth as a nation in the past decades, and I look forward to more

inspired solutions with them."

In her capacity as Brand Ambassador, Yohani is set to visit Brandix locations in Sri Lanka and India, becoming part of Brandix's journey to inspire its team members and supporting efforts to ensure their wellbeing.



The consecration service of the cathedral of the Believers Eastern Church

Believers Eastern Church Colombo Cathedral consecrated in a blaze of festivity

The consecration service of the cathedral of the Believers Eastern Church was held on 23 November 2021. His Grace Samuel Mor Theophilus and His Grace Geevarghese Mor Makariose, along with the clergy, consecrated the cathedral amidst the faithful and well-wishers. The cathedral was dedicated to St. Peter the Apostle.

This was followed by a public event with the participation of MPs such as Dr. Kavinda Jayawardana, Premnath C.



SDIG Deshabandu Tennakoon lighting the oil lamp

Dolawatta, Dr. Gayeshan Nawandana, Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (SDIG) Deshabandu Tennakoon, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Indika Hapugoda,

President's Media Unit Assistant Director Thilan Punchihewa, Prime Minister's Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs Udith Lokubandara, and other guests of honour.



The Spiritual Head of Believers Eastern Church is Metropolitan Bishop Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I. The Metropolitan, along with 25 bishops, give spiritual leadership to the Church

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Top 10 richest F1 drivers of all time

With the 2021 Formula 1 season coming to a scintillating end, we look at excerpts from *SportingFree* of the top 10 richest drivers who made a fortune off the sport in history.

F1 drivers earn millions for their courage and bravery on the racing track. They are amongst the richest sportspeople in the world. Apart from salary, they also endorse numerous brands and products to earn. Do you know who the world's wealthiest F1 driver is?

The list comprises the top 10 richest F1 drivers in the world right now, in 2021.

10. Nico Rosberg

Nico Rosberg had a short career in F1. He retired in 2016 after his one and only victory in the world championship. The German's net worth is around \$ 30 million. Rosberg launched the Rosberg Extreme E team after retiring from F1.

9. Sebastian Vettel

Sebastian Vettel represents Aston Martin in Formula 1. He has been racing for a decade now. Presently, Vettel has a \$ 17 million contract with Aston Martin for three years. He also earns from sponsorship. The German accumulated net worth is \$ 50 million.

8. David Coulthard

The Scottish won 13 Grand Prix during his racing days. Post his retirement, he has been busy in the broadcasting field. David also owns numerous properties and hotels in Monaco, Switzerland, and London. Coulthard's net worth is estimated to be \$ 70 million.

7. Jenson Button

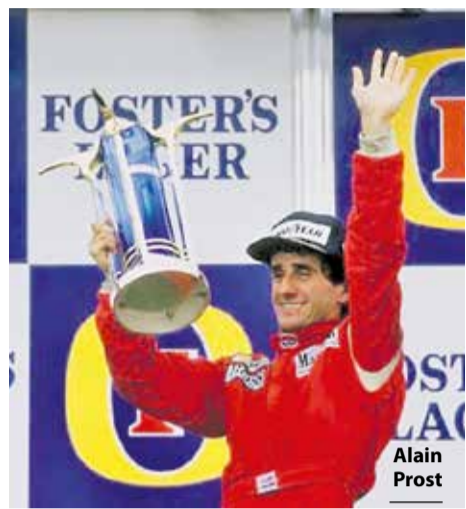
Former F1 driver Jenson Button had a pretty decent career, and he won a single world championship title. Currently, he owns a luxurious yacht and also works as a sports pundit. With a net worth of \$ 105 million, Button is one of the richest F1 drivers in the world right now.

6. Eddie Irvine

He drove for Ferrari, Jordan, and Jaguar. He partnered with legend Micheal Schumacher

at Ferrari. Post retirement, Irvine has been actively investing in properties. Due to his smart investment, he has a net worth of \$ 180 million.

5. Alain Prost



Alain Prost is the fifth richest Formula 1 driver in the world. Prost is one of the best the sport has produced. He has four world championship titles to his name. After retiring from the sport, he jumped to investment and made decent money through investments. His net worth is estimated to be \$ 185 million.

4. Kimi Räikkönen

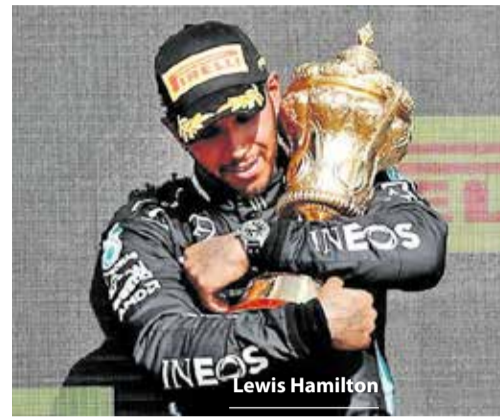
Kimi Räikkönen is the fourth richest F1 driver in the world right now. The 41-year-old is still going strong at the circuit. He has been racing for two decades now. Räikkönen won the world championship title in 2007 with Ferrari and was named as the second-highest-paid athlete in the world. Räikkönen has a net worth of \$ 200 million.

3. Fernando Alonso

After a hiatus, Fernando Alonso is making a comeback in racing with Alpine in the 2021

season. He has won two world titles with Renault in 2005 and 2006. Despite taking a break from F1, he is one of the richest Formula 1 drivers in the world right now, with a staggering net worth of around \$ 220 million.

2. Lewis Hamilton



Lewis Hamilton is the highest-paid F1 driver in the world. With seven world championship titles, he is one of the most decorated racers in F1 history. He currently gets \$ 30 million from his contract with Mercedes. Apart from this, he earns a huge amount of money for sponsorship.

Lewis is sponsored by Monster Energy, Tommy Hilfiger, and various other brands. The British driver's net worth is estimated to be \$ 280 million and he is the richest Formula 1 driver in the world who is still active on the race track.

1. Michael Schumacher

Michael Schumacher is the richest F1 driver in the world. He is, no doubt, the greatest in the sport. Schumacher won four consecutive world titles with Ferrari during his prime days.

After spending a long time with Ferrari and retiring, Michael made a comeback in 2010 with Mercedes. Currently, Schumacher is the world's richest F1 driver even after retirement, with a whopping net worth of around \$ 780 million.



FOOTBALL SNIPPETS

Sterling joins the 100 club

During Manchester City's Premier League victory over Wolves, Raheem Sterling joined the 100 club. Ederson claimed his 100th clean sheet in a City shirt but spent the majority of the match 50 yards away from the action; his only meaningful save was a simple tip over deep in injury time to ensure there was no shock result. Sterling became the 32nd player to score a century of goals in the Premier League and the eighth-youngest, after turning 27 on Wednesday (8).

Lindelof taken off after breathing difficulty

Manchester United defender Victor Lindelof was "struggling to breathe" after being forced off during Saturday's (11) Premier League meeting with Norwich City. With 20 minutes to go of the match, the Sweden international went down seemingly with no



Manchester United defender Victor Lindelof was taken off after complains about a breathing difficulty in their match against Norwich City

other players in close proximity. He was swiftly taken out of the action, shortly before Cristiano Ronaldo put his side ahead from the penalty spot.

"He's in the changing room. He felt a bit of discomfort," Harry Maguire told *Sky Sports* when asked about his defensive partner.

"We don't really know too much details, but he seems fine in there. He felt discomfort and we all wish

him well."

United manager Rangnick added: "He can't even remember himself how it happened. I think he had a collision with another player and he had problems breathing for more than 10 minutes; his heart rate was higher than normal and therefore, he was a little bit shocked and he didn't know how to deal with it."

Auba dropped after breach in discipline

Arsenal Captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has been dropped from the squad due to a disciplinary breach, Mikel Arteta has revealed.

The striker failed to report to London Colney for the final training session ahead of Saturday's (11) Premier League match against Southampton. Originally it was thought the Gabon international might have been unwell, but Arteta has since stated that Aubameyang has been dropped due to falling afoul of club rules.

Speaking ahead of the Saints clash, Arteta said: "Unfortunately (he's been dropped) due to a disciplinary breach. I think we have been very consistent that we have certain non-negotiables in the team that we have set ourselves as a club and he's not involved today."

"It's not an easy situation and not a situation we want to have our club captain in."

RUGBY SNIPPETS



All Blacks duo Will Jordan and Jordie Barrett

Jordan and Barrett eagerly explore Aussie rugby

All Blacks stars Will Jordan and Jordie Barrett have revealed they are eager to explore opportunities in rival codes rugby league and Australian football.

Both players were standouts for the All Blacks this season, as reflected by their nominations for All Blacks Player of the Year at the upcoming New Zealand Rugby Awards.

Jordan enjoyed a particularly successful year as he won the World Rugby's Breakthrough Player of the Year award and selection in World Rugby's Men's 15s Dream Team of the Year after crossing for 15 tries, the second-most scored by any player in a single international season. As such, the 23-year-old has made a name for himself as one of the hottest properties in the sport, and he may look to continue his rapid development by spending some time in another sport in Australia.

All Blacks and Springboks dominate Best XV

In a team dominated by All Blacks and Springboks icons, you could be excused for raising an eyebrow to see the only non-New Zealand or South African player in the RugbyPass Hall of Fame Fan 1st XV hails from Georgia.

However, that is exactly how things have transpired since the launch of the RugbyPass Hall of Fame, home to the greatest rugby players of all time two weeks ago.

Three Springboks and four All Blacks have been included in the forward pack, while Kiwi stars Aaron Smith and Dan Carter currently occupy the halves positions, with the rest of the backline available to vote for from next week onwards.

But one player stands out from the rest of his teammates in the composite XV.

That player is Georgian rugby great Mamuka Gorgodze – widely regarded as the best player to have ever played for The Lelos, who has been voted into the RugbyPass Hall of Fame Fan 1st XV at No 8.

Current RugbyPass Hall of Fame Fan 1st XV:

1. Os du Randt (South Africa, 1994-2007)
2. Sean Fitzpatrick (New Zealand, 1986-1997)
3. Owen Franks (New Zealand, 2009-2019)
4. Eben Etzebeth (South Africa, 2012-present)
5. Victor Matfield (South Africa, 2001-2015)
6. Jerome Kaino (New Zealand, 2004-2017)
7. Richie McCaw (New Zealand, 2001-2015)
8. Mamuka Gorgodze (Georgia, 2003-2019)
9. Aaron Smith (New Zealand, 2012-present)
10. Dan Carter (New Zealand, 2003-2015)

ON THIS DAY



1884 Adelaide's first test almost didn't happen. An unseemly dispute between Billy Murdoch's Australia side and the ground authorities over money and then Murdoch's objection to James Lillywhite as umpire, threatened to cause the match to be scrapped

1952 Birth of Sri Lankan spinner Ajith de Silva. He was a highly rated left-arm orthodox spinner within his homeland. De Silva was selected in the inaugural test team that played England at Colombo



1954 Birth of the tragic Wilf Slack, who died suddenly of a heart attack while playing on a tour in the Gambia in 1989. He was only 34. Slack, a left-handed opener who was very successful with Middlesex, played two of his three Tests, and made his only fifty

1960 Birth of Sri Lankan wicket keeper Amal Silva. Making his debut against New Zealand Silva scored 8 and 0, hardly an inspiring debut with the bat – with the gloves he snared two catches. In the 1984 tour of England Silva opened the batting making an assured unbeaten 102 in the second innings to complement his three catches behind the wicket. In the first Test at SSC he took nine catches as Sri Lanka drew the Test. In the second he had a sensational all-round match, scoring 111, taking eight catches and making one stumping



1960 Barcelona midfielder Luis Suarez was named Ballon d'Or winner in Europe ahead of Real Madrid's Hungarian forward Ferenc Puskás and Hamburg striker Uwe Seeler

1960 Birth of American beach volleyball player Randy Stoklos. He was the first player to earn \$ 1 million, a five-time

World champion

1981 The birth of Yuvraj Singh. He matched Garry Sobers' feat of six sixes in an over, carting Stuart Broad into orbit in the course of making the fastest international T20I half century off 12 balls – during the World T20 in 2007. He took India to the 50-over World Cup in 2011, with a Player-of-the-Series performance

1984 A wrong-footed left-arter was born. Sohail Tanvir caused batters many problems with his unusual bowling style when he first came on. Tanvir took six wickets in six games and landed himself an IPL contract with the eventual champions Rajasthan Royals. He ended the tournament as the highest wicket taker 22 wickets

1988 Birth of American golfer Rickie Fowler. He was US Masters 2018 runner-up and Ryder Cup 2010, 14, 16, 18

2004 Milan's Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko is named Ballon d'Or winner ahead of Deco (Porto/FC Barcelona) and Barcelona midfielder Ronaldinho

2007 The Mitchell Report is publicly released listing the names of 89 Major League Baseball players that have presumably used anabolic steroids and human growth hormones

2015 Irishman Conor McGregor knocked out Brazilian Jose Aldo in 13 seconds to win his first featherweight title in Las Vegas



2017 Chris Gayle broke his own record by one of most sixes in a T20I game hitting 18 in a title-clinching innings of 146 not out for Rangpur Riders in the BPL. Four Dhaka Dynamites bowlers went for more than ten runs an over in the 57-run defeat

2018 German basketball forward Dirk Nowitzki took the court for his record 21st NBA season with the Dallas Mavericks, surpassing Kobe Bryant's 20 seasons with the LA Lakers

2020 British Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton finished third in the season-ending Abu Dhabi GP to claim record equalling 7th F1 World Drivers Championship by 124 points from teammate Valtteri Bottas

the morning SPORTS



Three Windies players contract Covid-19

West Indies squad's Sheldon Cottrell (pictured), Roston Chase, and Kyle Mayers are among four members who have tested positive for Covid-19 upon arrival in Pakistan on Thursday (9). The trio, and another management staffer, will be unavailable for the T20I series. Windies had come on a commercial flight via Dubai. Tests had been done after their arrival in Karachi where they will play three T20Is on 13 (today), 14, and 16 Dec. (all games from 6.30 p.m. Sri Lankan time) and three ODIs on 18, 20, and 22 Dec. (from 1.30 p.m.).

Abu Dhabi GP: Nikita Mazepin tests positive

Haas driver Nikita Mazepin testing positive for Covid-19 did not have a "wider impact" on the title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix (GP), said Formula 1 last afternoon. The 22-year-old Russian was not to race after returning the result on-site, with a re-test also positive. "Mazepin is experiencing mild symptoms and is now isolating in accordance with Covid-19 protocols," said Formula 1. He was due to start the race - a title decider between Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen - in 20th position.



Max Verstappen takes title win for the first time

● Overtakes Hamilton in matter of seconds, and claims World Championship title for 2021

Lap 6: Lewis Hamilton stretched the lead to 2.1 seconds yesterday (12) at the Abu Dhabi Formula 1 as Hamilton and Max Verstappen faced off for the 2021 Formula 1 World Championship title from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m. local time at the Yas Marina Circuit in what was arguably the most intense title decider in the sport's history, with Verstappen winning the championship title for the first time ever!



The battle between Red Bull's Max Verstappen vs. Lewis Hamilton was enticing to watch last evening, as in the last few seconds, the Dutchman took the lead away, after having just gotten on soft tyres. The two drivers were equal on the scorecard with 369.5 points. At one point in time, Verstappen looked favourite but the genius in Hamilton pipped in the last few races to take the game to the deciding Abu Dhabi

Grand Prix. The top-of-the-table race in Abu Dhabi was dealt a blow when Haas' Nikita Mazepin tested positive for the Covid-19. It left the grid to 19 drivers. Verstappen had claimed the much necessary pole ahead of the biggest ever Formula 1 clash - the decider of the 2021 season. Hamilton had already won in seven seasons (2008, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020).

ROHIT SHARMA BRUSHES ASIDE RIFT WITH KOHLI

After being named India's One-Day International (ODI) skipper, Rohit Sharma has talked in length for the first time in an interview yesterday (12).

Speaking on various topics, Sharma brushed aside the rift with former white-ball skipper Virat Kohli and has said it's always going to be high-pressure when you are playing for India and foremost important thing is to focus on the job irrespective of being a captain. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) yesterday released a short video on its official Twitter handle with the caption: "The pressure will always be there. As a cricketer, it is important to focus on my job."

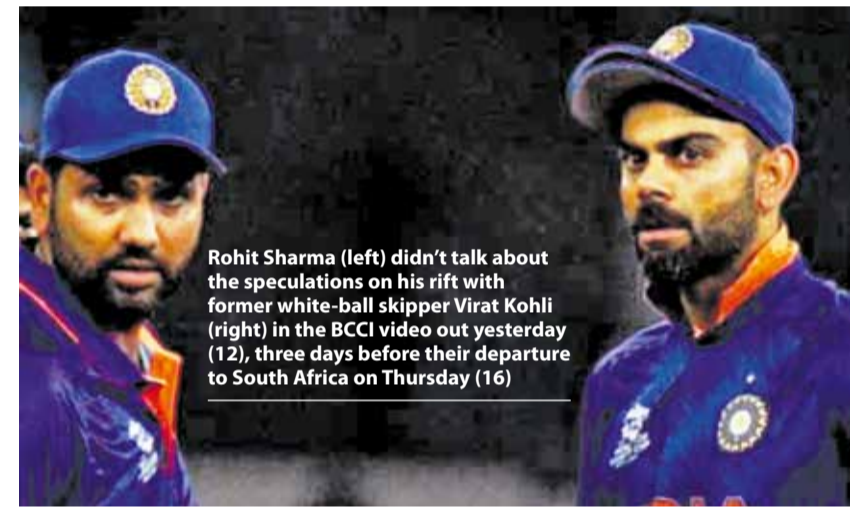
Outside talks immaterial

In the video, Sharma talks about various topics such as the pressure while playing for India, his take on being named ODI skipper, and a few other things including the rift with Kohli.

Speaking further in the video, though Sharma didn't directly talk about the speculations on his rift with former white-ball skipper Kohli, he said that the outside talks are immaterial.

He further says that what he thinks about an individual is more important than the talks happening outside.

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Rohit Sharma (left) didn't talk about the speculations on his rift with former white-ball skipper Virat Kohli (right) in the BCCI video out yesterday (12), three days before their departure to South Africa on Thursday (16)

High pressure always

"I think those talks that happen outside are immaterial. For us, it's important what we think of each other. You know that is more important. What I think of X, Y, Z... that is important. You want to create a strong bond between the players and that is what will help us in achieving the goal we want."

Speaking about the new challenge or the pressure on playing for India, Sharma says it's always going to be high pressure. And the focus should be on the job and nothing else.

Focus on your job

"When you are playing cricket for India, it's always going to be high pressure. The pressure is always going to be there....there will be a

lot of people talking about it...you know positive, negative. But for me personally as a cricketer, not as a captain, as a cricketer, it's important for me to focus on my job and not focus on what people are talking about."

India ODI and T20 International (T20I) skipper further says that the message for the team is pretty much simple and similar to what he has said perhaps a million times before, i.e. focus on your job and don't focus on the talks around in media or outside.

Leave for South Africa on Thursday

"Even the team understands that... when we are playing a high-profile tournament, you know there will be a lot of talks. It is important for us to focus on what we have in hand, which is to go and win the games, play the way you are known to play."

India's tour of South Africa begins later this month with the first Test scheduled for 26 December. The Indian stars will assemble in Mumbai before travelling to South Africa on Thursday (16).

LOCAL FOOTBALL ROUNDUP

Colombo FC dominate Ratnam

BY RANJIKA PERERA

Colombo FC 4-1 Ratnam FC

Colombo FC got the lead thanks to a goal-keeping error in the 26th minute. Chamod Dilshan's cross was poorly handled by the keeper who missed the ball completely. He got his second when Zarwan Johar put in a cross which Dilshan guided through to the net. He found the hat-trick in the second half to seal the game for Colombo. Shortly afterwards, Mohammad

Aakib made it 4-0. Ratnam managed to draw one back through a penalty from Mohommad Hakim before the final whistle.

Defenders FC 2-2 Sea Hawks

Defenders came back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 against Sea Hawks, who found themselves down to nine-men. Early on, Sea Hawks got the lead through Danushka Madusanka opened in the 27th minute. Four minutes later Madushan

added a second guiding in a cross from the right.

In the second half, defender Sajith Kumara made it 2-1 for the soldiers scoring a brilliant 25-yard shot. Minutes later Rifkhan Mohamed equalised with a back heel. Things got out of hand as the Sea Hawks found themselves down to nine men. Nagoor Meera received a direct red card while, three minutes later, Samuel Kingston too was sent off for an elbow to the head of a defender.

PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE 2022 PLAYER DRAFT NEWS



The 2022 Pakistan Super League (PSL) draft was held yesterday (12) in Lahore. Top cricketers from around the world went into the player pool. Ahead of the draft, each team retained a maximum of eight players, with the remaining players going into the pool for the draft picks. Each team could pick a further eight in the draft. "A Right to Match" card has also been introduced for this season. Over 425 players have registered for the PSL 2022 draft.

- 2022 will be the seventh season of Pakistan's main franchise Twenty20 cricket league
- It was established by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in 2015
- Participating teams: Six
- Dates: 27 January to 27 February 2022
- Lahore will host 19 matches while Karachi will host 15
- The finals to be played at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
- The 2022 PSL edition will have new broadcast and commercial partners after the previous deals concluded in 2021, following a three-year run

FIRST EDITION: 2016
 Current champions: Multan Sultans (1st title)
 Most successful team: Islamabad United (2 titles)
 Most runs: Babar Azam (2,070)
 Most Wickets: Wahab Riaz (94)

FULL LIST OF PLAYERS RETAINED, RELEASED, AND TRADED

1. ISLAMABAD UNITED	2. KARACHI KINGS	3. LAHORE QALANDARS
Players retained: Platinum: Asif Ali, Hasan Ali / Diamond: Faheem Ashraf, Shadab Khan (Brand Ambassador) / Gold: Alex Hales (Mentor), Azam Khan, Mohammad Wasim Jnr. / Silver: Paul Stirling Players released: Colin Munro, Hussain Talat, Iftikhar Ahmed Trades: Iftikhar Ahmed to Quetta Gladiators	Players retained: Platinum: Babar Azam, Imad Wasim / Diamond: Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Nabi / Gold: Joe Clarke (Brand Ambassador), Aamir Yamin, Sharjeel Khan / Silver: Mohammad Ilyas Players released: Colin Ingram, Chadwick Walton Trades: (Nil)	Players retained: Platinum: Rashid Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi / Diamond: Harris Rauf (Brand Ambassador), David Wiese, Mohammad Hafeez / Silver: Ahmed Daniyal, Sohail Akhtar, Zeeshan Ashraf Players released: Fakhar Zaman, Ben Dunk, Samit Patel Trades: (Nil)
4. MULTAN SULTANS	5. PESHAWAR ZALMI	6. QUETTA GLADIATORS
Players retained: Platinum: Mohammad Rizwan, Rilee Rossouw / Diamond: Imran Tahir (Mentor), Sohaib Maqsood / Gold: Khushdi Shah (Gold), Shahnawaz Dahani, Shan Masood Players released: Sohail Tanvir, Usman Qadir, Sohail Khan, Carlos Brathwaite Trades: James Vince and Shahid Afridi to Quetta Gladiators	Players retained: Platinum: Liam Livingstone, Wahab Riaz / Diamond: Haider Ali, Sherfane Rutherford, Shoaib Malik / Gold: Hussain Talat, Saqib Mahmood (Brand Ambassador) / Silver: Tom Kohler-Cadmore Players released: Kamran Akmal, Imam ul Haq Trades: (Nil)	Players retained: Platinum: James Vince, Sarfaraz Ahmed / Diamond: Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz / Gold: Shahid Afridi (Mentor), Mohammad Hasnain (Brand Ambassador), Naseem Shah (Gold) Players released: Chris Gayle, Faf du Plessis, Tom Banton, Ben Cutting, Usman Shinwari, Cameron Delport and Dale Steyn Trades: Azam Khan to Islamabad United



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