

**'MJ' APPOINTED SL CONSULTANT COACH**



»SEE PAGE 16

# the morning



**KAVINDU MADUSHAN TALKS A LIFE OF DANCE**  
»SEE PAGE 13



**SRI LANKA'S CIVIC SPACE RATED AS 'OBSTRUCTED'**  
»SEE PAGE 4

**'USERS OF INFORMAL MONEY CHANGERS FACE LEGAL ACTION'**



»SEE PAGE 8

# World body wants HRCSL downgraded

- Global Alliance of National HR Institutions recommends 'B' status
- Appointments to HRCSL and its failure to address HR violations noted
- Decision following interview of HRCSL

**BY PAMODI WARAVITA**  
The world's leading organisation of national human rights bodies has recommended that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) be downgraded to a "B" status, primarily due to its appointment process and its failure to adequately address human rights violations.

Contd. on page 2



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

# Litro Gas unveils Rs. 1 m insurance scheme

- Damages claimable if proven fatality, bodily injury, or damage caused by Litro cylinders



State-owned Litro Gas Lanka Ltd. has introduced an insurance scheme for customers who purchase Litro Gas cylinders, covering up to Rs. 1 million in damages, a senior official at Litro told *The Morning* yesterday (13). The beneficiaries will be able to claim damages if it is proven that the death, bodily injury, or damage was caused as a result of using Litro Gas cylinders or caused

by cylinder explosions and accessories or directly related to a manufacturing defect in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders. Over the past one-and-a-half months, a series of gas cylinder-based explosions have been reported at both industrial commercial establishments as well as at the domestic household level from all around the country. The Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) has said that it will consider legal action against the LPG companies, Litro and privately-owned Laugfs Gas PLC, if wrongdoing on the part of any official or company is revealed. Furthermore, the CAA said that it has instructed Litro Gas and Laugfs Gas to recall all sealed and unused gas cylinders currently in the gas distribution outlets that were distributed before 4 December.

# Planters counter UN Rapporteur's assessment of workers' living conditions

The Planters' Association of Ceylon (PA) has expressed concerns over comments made following the recent visit to Sri Lanka by United Nations (UN) Rapporteur Tomoya Obakata on the living conditions of estate workers, and stated that regional plantation companies (RPCs) have ensured that facilities like housing, water and sanitation, child care, etc. are being provided without considering the cost incurred to relevant companies while continuously engaging with stakeholders to ensure these facilities are provided uninterrupted.

Contd. on page 2

# On-arrival PCR for all only if Committee recommends

**BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA**  
In response to requests made by certain parties to conduct on-arrival PCR tests on all those entering the country from abroad, the Health Ministry said that it can only be implemented if the Advisory Committee on Covid-19 makes a recommendation to the effect.

Contd. on page 2

# ITSSL Chairman says unidentified group raided house last week

Information Technology Society of Sri Lanka (ITSSL) Chairman Rajeev Yasiru Kuruwitige claimed that on 10 December, five people in civil attire forcefully entered and raided his house without a warrant. Speaking at a media brief held last Sunday (12), he stated: "Five people clad in civil attire raided my house, claiming to be from the Special Task Force (STF). One of them produced his identification card and slipped it back inside his pocket."

Contd. on page 2

# Vegetable prices skyrocket as supply plummets

- Supply to economic centres down by 85%: Traders
- Customers deterred by exorbitant prices

**BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA**

Despite the ban on the importation of chemical fertiliser and agrochemicals having been lifted by the Government, traders and consumers have pointed out that vegetable prices are continuing to rise abnormally in the market, as the supply to economic centres has dropped drastically.

Contd. on page 2



# Half of X-Press Pearl crew permitted to exit Sri Lanka

- Travel ban remains on four



**BY PAMODI WARAVITA**  
The travel ban imposed by the Colombo Magistrate's Court on four crew members of the MV X-Press Pearl ship were lifted on 10 December, thus allowing them to leave Sri Lanka. In total, eight crew members

faced a travel ban following the MV X-Press Pearl fire in Sri Lankan waters earlier this year. However, the travel ban on the ship's Captain, imposed by the Colombo Magistrate's Court, is still intact.

Contd. on page 2

# Parliament prorogued until 18 January 2022

Despite the first session of Parliament for 2022 being scheduled to be held on 11 January 2022, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa prorogued Parliament from midnight on Sunday (12) through an extraordinary gazette notification. Accordingly, the next session of Parliament will commence at 10 a.m. on 18 January 2022. The President prorogued Parliament by virtue of the powers vested in him by Article 70 of the Constitution. The gazette, issued by the Secretary to the President, prorogues Parliament with effect from midnight of 12 December 2021 and fixes the commencement of the next session and summoning of Parliament for 18 January 2022 at 10 a.m.

Contd. on page 2



# Liquor at hotels on Xmas despite Cardinal's criticism

**BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA**  
While no liquor store will be allowed to remain open on Christmas Day on 25 December, liquor will be available for guests occupying rooms of hotels approved by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), within the premises of these hotels. Archbishop of Colombo His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith last Sunday (12) strongly criticised the Ministry of Tourism for reportedly seeking permission from the Government to sell liquor at hotels on Christmas Day.

Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith speaking to the media last Sunday (12) PHOTO ESHAN DASANAYAKA

# Seek medical advice if post-booster Covid symptoms last 48 hrs

**BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA**  
Pointing out that it is normal for someone to have symptoms similar to those of Covid-19 after receiving the third dose of a Covid-19 vaccine or the booster shot, the Health Ministry has stated, however, that if such symptoms persist for more than 48 hours, such individuals should seek medical advice. The Head of the Ministry's integrated home-based healthcare programme for asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic Covid-19 patients, consultant family physician Dr. Malkanthi Galhena

recently stated that people receiving the third dose of a Covid-19 vaccine may experience symptoms similar to Covid-19 symptoms such as mild fever, cough, headaches, and body pains. Accordingly, when contacted by *The Morning*, Health Ministry Communications Director, Public Health Services Deputy Director General, and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head Dr. Hemantha Herath said that people receiving the Covid-19 vaccine third dose (Pfizer-BioNTech) may develop mild Covid-19 symptoms.

Contd. on page 2

# JVP alleges Thirukumar Nadesan transferring money around

- 'Bribery or Corruption Commission' still investigating
- Confirms recording statement from Nirupama on 1 Dec.

**BY PAMODI WARAVITA**

Former Parliamentarian and current Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Politburo Member Wasantha Samarasinghe yesterday (13) accused business tycoon Thirukumar Nadesan of transferring money to different bank accounts following the Pandora Papers

revelations concerning him and his wife Nirupama Rajapaksa. "Nadesan was in a five-star hotel suite in Singapore this month with his son who lives in Australia. They had meetings with representatives from different banks to transfer cash everywhere."

Contd. on page 2



Thirukumar Nadesan

# Prez on private visit to S'pore

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa left for Singapore yesterday (13) on a private visit, the President's Media Spokesperson said. He had left aboard a Singapore Airlines flight, with a group that included the First Lady and three others. Although several media reports have cited sources close to the President as claiming that the visit is believed to be for medical purposes, President's Media Spokesperson Kingsly Rathnayaka had stated yesterday that he could not reveal the purpose of this visit.

**COVID-19 CASES**

ACTIVE CASES	12,855	TOTAL CASES	572,902
DEATHS	14,614	RECOVERED	545,433

SOURCE: HEALTH PROMOTION BUREAU THE ABOVE STATISTICS ARE CONFIRMED UP UNTIL 7.00 PM. ON 13 DECEMBER 2021

# { NEWS }

## Contd. from page 1

### World...

The recommendation was made last week by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), a partner of the United Nations (UN), and is contained in the report and recommendations of the virtual session of its Subcommittee on Accreditation (SCA), held from 18 to 29 October 2021.

The SCA noted that it questioned the HRCSL about the appointment process for its Chairperson and Commissioners; pluralism in the current membership, including the staff; the impact of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution on the HRCSL's mandate; the responsiveness of the HRCSL to international human rights mechanisms; and actions taken by the HRCSL in connection with the intimidation of human rights defenders, the detention of protestors, deaths in police custody, and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No. 48 of 1979.

"In February 2021, the GANHRI's Subcommittee on Accreditation (SCA) received correspondence from civil society organisations regarding the appointment process of the HRCSL, and related concerns with respect to the lack of pluralism in the HRCSL's membership and staff, as well as its effectiveness in discharging its human rights mandate. During the 2021 session, the SCA conducted a telephone interview with the HRCSL in which the HRCSL was asked to provide responses in relation to a number of issues. While the SCA acknowledges that the HRCSL has provided some information in relation to the above-mentioned issues, in both its interview and written submission, it considers the responses insufficient to address the substance of its concerns," the GANHRI said in its Accreditation Report released last week.

The previous review conducted by the SCA was in 2018, when it considered an application for re-accreditation from the HRCSL. On that occasion, the SCA recommended that the HRCSL be re-accredited with an "A" status.

The SCA said the recent downgrade is set to be effective only from the second half of 2022, unless the HRCSL could convince the SCA to reverse it.

"In view of the information before it, the SCA is concerned that the institution's independence and effectiveness has not been sufficiently maintained in line with the requirements of the Paris Principles. The SCA notes that the HRCSL maintains 'A' status until the SCA's second session of 2022. This allows an opportunity for the HRCSL to provide the documentary evidence necessary to establish its continued conformity with the Paris Principles," it further stated.

The Paris Principles are a set of minimum standards put forth by national human rights institutions (NHRIs).

The SCA also encouraged the HRCSL to continue to actively engage with global human rights bodies and other national human rights institutions, as well as relevant stakeholders at international, regional, and national levels, in order to continue strengthening its institutional framework and working methods.

It also noted that the HRCSL has challenged the recommendation in accordance with Article 12.1 (ii) of the GANHRI statute, which is being reviewed.

Last year, Dr. Jagath Balasuriya was appointed as the Chairman of the HRCSL, and the appointment was widely criticised by a number of Opposition politicians and civil society activists who claimed that Dr. Balasuriya was actively involved in politics. He is a former Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) organiser for the Kegalle District. Prior to that, he was the Minister of National Heritage and the Acting Governor of Central Province in 2005 from September to December, both during Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidency between 2005 and 2015.

Dr. Balasuriya stepped down in November 2021 due to health reasons, and The Sunday Morning reported that Supreme Court Judge (Retd.) Rohini Perera Marasinghe, who was nominated by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was approved by the Parliamentary Council as the new Chairperson.

### ITSSL...

"When I asked if they had a court order, they said they didn't need a court order and that the Defence Ministry had informed them that narcotics are being sold at my place."

He went on to say that his room was forcefully entered and searched, further mentioning that he has a court case pending hearing on 16 December.

"I have a suspicion that they are trying to search for evidence to produce against me," he concluded.

Earlier this year, Kuruwitige was arrested for allegedly publishing a misleading news item over a cyberattack, which claimed that several government websites, including the Presidential Secretariat website, were hacked.

### Vegetable...

Speaking to the media yesterday (13), traders at economic centres said: "The average supply of vegetables to economic centres has reduced by about 85% so far, but it is not possible to sell even that small quantity of vegetables as

prices are rising daily."

Peliyagoda Manning Traders' Association Chief Organiser Anil Indrajith said that customers who come to buy vegetables turn back after knowing their prices. "Consumers are coming in large numbers, but at the current prices, they can't afford to buy vegetables, so most of them go back," he added.

Consumers in several areas, meanwhile, complained that vegetables are too expensive to buy. "For example, 250 g of beans cost between Rs. 120 and Rs. 150. How can the people survive in this situation?" they queried.

According to data available on the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) website, as of 10 December 2021, the wholesale price of a kilo of beans in the Manning Market was priced at Rs. 275, a kilo of carrot at Rs. 260, a kilo of cabbage at Rs. 310, a kilo of tomato at Rs. 410, a kilo of eggplant at Rs. 250, a kilo of pumpkin at Rs. 50, a kilo of snake gourd at Rs. 250, a kilo of green chillie at Rs. 425, and a kilo of lime at Rs. 215.

In addition, the wholesale prices of vegetables at the Dambulla Dedicated Economic Centre were Rs. 315 per kilo of beans, Rs. 275 per kilo of carrot, Rs. 245 per kilo of cabbage, Rs. 345 per kilo of tomato, Rs. 295 per kilo of eggplant, Rs. 38 per kilo of pumpkin, Rs. 245 per kilo of snake gourd, Rs. 525 per kilo of green chillie, and Rs. 175 per kilo of lime.

The retail prices at Pettah were Rs. 325 per kilo of beans, Rs. 310 per kilo of carrot, Rs. 375 per kilo of cabbage, Rs. 475 per kilo of tomato, Rs. 290 per kilo of eggplant, Rs. 80 per kilo of pumpkin, Rs. 280 per kilo of snake gourd, Rs. 525 per kilo of green chillie, and Rs. 265 per kilo of lime. The highest retail prices were recorded from the Narahenpita Economic Centre, where the retail price of a kilo of beans was priced at Rs. 360, a kilo of carrot at Rs. 360, a kilo of cabbage at Rs. 400, a kilo of tomato at Rs. 480, a kilo of eggplant at Rs. 360, a kilo of pumpkin at Rs. 90, a kilo of snake gourd at Rs. 320, a kilo of green chillie at Rs. 700, and a kilo of lime at Rs. 600.

Meanwhile, commenting on the vegetable prices during a recent media briefing, Minister of Agriculture Mahindananda Aluthgamage suggested that the rise in prices was seasonal.

"The prices of vegetables usually go up in November and December, because this is not a period of vegetable harvests. A month ago, the vegetable prices went up when it came to the organic fertiliser issue, but the prices of vegetables went down as soon as we said chemical fertiliser would be imported. This is a social opinion that is being formed," he claimed.

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

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

Against this backdrop, the Government decided to revoke Extraordinary Gazette No. 2226/48 of 6 May 2021, which banned the importation of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals, and to thereby allow the private sector to import the same, with effect from 24 November. Accordingly, an extraordinary gazette notification was issued last week, allowing the importation of organic and inorganic compounds, and phosphorous derivatives of fertilisers.

### Planters...

The PA made these points in a response it issued to an article published in The Morning on 6 December, titled "Plantation Ministry to discuss relief for estate workers", which quoted the assessment made by UN Rapporteur Obokata.

The Association, which represents commercial growers of tea, rubber, and other crops, said that while the workforce of the RPCs only amounts to 125,000, the RPCs provide many services for more than one million people residing within estates managed by the RPCs.

"As private sector companies involved in the supply of price-sensitive commodities to the global market, RPCs are severely constrained financially. Yet, together with other stakeholders, RPCs have supported the construction of 40,000 new housing units and upgrading of a further 111,000 houses in RPC estates and have invested significantly in establishment of child development centres, water supply, as well as sanitation improvement projects," it said.

Furthermore, the PA said it wishes to highlight that the improvement of housing for residents of estates who are not employed by the RPCs are being carried out with the relevant stakeholders, in order to allocate land and resources wherever possible for the construction of homes.

"No other sector in the country provides the range of services, including housing, childcare, and a host of other facilities, which the RPCs provide," PA Media Spokesperson Dr. Roshan Rajadurai stated. "Despite many RPCs incurring heavy losses in the recent past, we have continued to provide these services to the best of our ability, in collaboration with organisations such as the Plantation Human

Development Trust (PHDT), donors, and other stakeholders, despite limited resources to provide welfare services for those who are not employed by us."

Moreover, in prior discussions on the subject of housing, even government officials have acknowledged that the only viable solution is the creation of new townships outside of the estates, instead of continuously reducing the size of productive agricultural land of the tea estates, the statement said.

"Besides statutory obligations such as Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees' Trust Fund (ETF) payments provided by other employers in the country, RPCs, at their own expense, additionally provide services relating to housing, water, sanitation, childcare (such as crèches and immunisation of children), social services, and community/support services. More than 1,400 childcare centres are located in RPC estates. Additional initiatives have also been undertaken to improve nutrition standards in estates, through the ongoing establishment of community kitchens, led by the RPCs and PHDT," it added.

With regard to wages, the RPCs said they have strived to provide the best possible level of remuneration for employees, while being mindful of the economic realities. "Many RPCs have been incurring losses on both tea and rubber, given Sri Lanka's high production costs – due to many reasons including the relatively smaller size of Sri Lankan estates, which limits benefits of economies of scale. Despite this, RPC employees are the highest paid across Sri Lanka's Wages Board and receive far greater remuneration than employees of competitor nations, despite our labour productivity being much lower than those countries," it said.

For instance, it said that the daily wage of a tea plucker in Sri Lanka who plucks 18-20 kg a day is nearly 50% higher than that of neighbouring countries like India (Rs. 542) who, on average, pluck 35 kg a day. In Sri Lanka, the cost of production of tea has increased by 913% (from Rs. 72 to Rs. 730), primarily driven by the increase in labour wages by 631% (from Rs. 78 to Rs. 570) between 1993 and 2018.

Given that the RPCs produce a commodity produced by many other competitors around the world, a further increase in labour wages would financially cripple the industry, it added. "Wages constitute more than 60% of the cost of production of tea. The only meaningful way of reducing these costs is to drastically increase productivity in order to match what is already being achieved by competing countries. Hence, it is well understood by all stakeholders that 18-20 kg is below the bare minimum needed for Sri Lanka's plantations to achieve financial sustainability."

Given these factors and the aspirations of the employees, it noted that the RPCs have repeatedly proposed models to enable workers to earn higher amounts – including a "revenue sharing" model and productivity-based remuneration. However, labour unions which have been commended so strongly in recent reporting are responsible for rejecting such win-win solutions outright, thereby closing off the only remaining avenues for improving both earnings of workers and productivity, benefiting all stakeholders, it claimed.

"With the additional stress of hyper-inflated costs associated with agricultural inputs, any further sharp increases in wages without the requisite reforms to structure of wage to incentivise greater productivity will definitely result in the total collapse of the plantation industry. This would result in drastic reversals of all progress made up to this point, and lead to far greater concerns around all of the issues that are currently being highlighted," the statement further said.

In conclusion, it added that it should be noted that estate sector poverty headcount has also dropped remarkably, from 38.4% in 1995 to 8.8% in 2016. The estate sector has also seen marked progress in aspects such as nutrition and maternal and infant mortality. The RPCs, with the support of other stakeholders, including the PHDT, have consolidated their efforts in order to drive further improvements in these indicators moving forward, it said.

### Liquor...

When inquired about the plans pertaining to liquor sales on Christmas Day, Deputy Excise Commissioner (Law Enforcement) Kapila Kumarasinghe told *The Morning* yesterday (13) that all liquor stores islandwide will be closed on Christmas Day. However, he said that hotels approved by the SLTDA have been given permission to serve liquor to those staying in rooms.

"The no-sale days are published at the beginning of each year. Therefore, this year also, Christmas Day was published as a no-sale day. However, those who are staying in SLTDA-registered hotels can enjoy the facilities of liquor bars operating in those hotels. All other liquor shops across the country are to be closed on the day," explained Kumarasinghe.

Speaking to the media in Gampaha last Sunday, the Cardinal said that Christmas will be scorned by planning to sell liquor on Christmas Day.

"The Tourism Ministry has asked permission to sell liquor on Christmas Day at Ministry-approved hotels and restaurants. Isn't that great? To celebrate Christmas, people can drink themselves to death. What is this? Is this the miracle of Asia? Is this the vistas of prosperity and splendour? Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga should realise this. This

devalues Christmas. If the sale of liquor is banned on Vesak Day, it should also be banned on Christmas Day. Religions are not about partying or drinking and wasting your life away," the Archbishop opined.

### Half...

Following the lifting of the ban, X-Press Feeders said in a statement that arrangements are underway to immediately repatriate the four crewmen to their families, whilst the company is working to lift the travel ban on the remaining crew members.

In what is termed as the "country's largest marine environment disaster", the MV X-Press Pearl ship caught fire on 20 May this year, approximately nine nautical miles away from the Colombo Harbour. A subsequent explosion on 24 May led to the fire spreading and a number of containers aboard it falling into the sea, thus releasing pollutants including plastic pellets into the water. Since then, debris and deceased marine life have washed up on the country's western coastline, heavily affecting both the fisheries industry and the country's marine environment.

### On-arrival...

The College of Medical Laboratory Science (CMLS) on Sunday (12) pointed out that instead of imposing restrictions on people coming to Sri Lanka from specific countries, the authorities should instead take steps to conduct on-arrival PCR tests on all those entering the country from abroad.

When contacted by *The Morning* to inquire whether such requests would be considered by the Health Ministry, Health Ministry Communications Director, Public Health Services Deputy Director General, and Disaster Preparedness and Response Division Head Dr. Hemantha Herath said that all measures taken so far in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic have been taken upon expert advice.

"The conduct of on-arrival PCR tests on everyone entering the country can only be implemented if an expert recommendation is made in that regard. There is an Advisory Committee comprising experts which makes recommendations on the actions to be taken in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. If they recommend an on-arrival PCR test on everyone entering the country, we will definitely do it, but it is not practical to implement all the proposals made by various parties," he explained.

Dr. Herath further noted: "There are so many ideas. Even we feel that this and that should be done, but without getting a proper endorsement, we are not in a position to implement them because ultimately, all these programmes cost the public money. Therefore, we should be careful in implementing these."

Speaking to *The Morning* on Sunday, CMLS President Ravi Kumudesh said that if every person arriving in the country through the airports is subjected to an on-arrival PCR test, regardless of whether they have 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 airports, especially those who have received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccines, are not undergoing PCR tests, according to the existing health guidelines. Therefore, the health guidelines should be revised so that all those who enter the country can be tested," Kumudesh said.

He added that the medical laboratory professionals are in a position to conduct PCR tests on everyone entering the country and release the test reports within two hours if the authorities take the necessary steps in this regard.

### JVP...

"A total of 8,500 Swiss francs is needed per day for a suite there, and with the cost of the visitors, it costs 12,000 Swiss francs per day. They stayed for 15 days," alleged Samarasinghe, addressing a gathering.

Samarasinghe stressed that the money that was allegedly stolen from Sri Lanka by individuals must be brought back into the country and used for public service.

"An Act can be passed in Parliament to request foreign countries to send the money in those private bank accounts," he added.

Meanwhile, the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) confirmed to *The Morning* that Rajapaksa had given her statement to the CIABOC on 1 December with regard to the ongoing investigations into the Pandora Papers revelations.

Nadesan has been called into the CIABOC twice to make statements so far, while the CIABOC also said that it is studying the documents received from the Inland Revenue Department of Sri Lanka (IRD) and local banks.

The CIABOC also told *The Morning* yesterday that while it is unlikely that Nadesan and Rajapaksa will be called to the CIABOC to make another statement in this regard, the investigations, however, are ongoing into the matter.

were involved in shell companies (inactive companies used as vehicles for various financial manoeuvres or kept dormant for future use in some other capacity) located in tax havens, which in turn obtained lucrative consulting contracts from foreign companies doing business with the Government of Sri Lanka.

President Rajapaksa, on 6 October, instructed the CIABOC to launch an immediate investigation into the allegations against Sri Lankans implicated in the Pandora Papers file leak in connection with transactions, including the maintenance of large cash deposits. Presidential Secretariat Director General of Legal Affairs and Attorney-at-Law Harigupta Rohanadheera, in his letter to the CIABOC, has requested a report regarding the matter within a month from 6 October. Neither Nirupama Rajapaksa nor Nadesan were named in the letter. However, despite the deadline, only an interim report was given on 8 November, informing the President that the investigation is yet to be concluded.

In 2016, when incumbent Finance Minister Rajapaksa was accused of using public funds to build a villa in Malwana, Nadesan was also charged with embezzlement in connection with the incident. Although the pair has since denied any wrongdoing, the legal case into the matter is still ongoing.

The ICIJ, which exposed the Pandora Papers, also claimed that when Nadesan was arrested on embezzlement charges related to this case, he wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe proclaiming his innocence. He had said that he was unaware until he read news reports that Basil Rajapaksa had built a house on his property. He had added that the land was then sold to avoid "harm to his name and reputation".

"I request you to appreciate that I have not done anything improper or illegal and to therefore do justice by me. My transactions are transparent and a matter of record," Nadesan had written, according to the ICIJ.

The ICIJ further said that Asiatic Trust, a Singapore-based offshore services provider which managed some of Nadesan's offshore accounts, had stated in confidential electronic mails that as of 2011, Nadesan's overall wealth was \$ 160 million. An analysis by the ICIJ has found that Asiatic Trust alone managed assets valued at about \$ 18 million for Nadesan.

### Seek...

However, he said that if the symptoms do not go away within 48 hours, it is important that such individuals seek medical advice.

"When considering the Covid-19 infection, it is a reaction that occurs when the virus enters the body, and a similar reaction occurs when the Covid-19 vaccine is given, but the reaction following the receipt of the vaccine is not going to be as serious as the Covid-19 infection. Symptoms that occur due to the vaccine usually go away quickly. Therefore, if someone has Covid-19 symptoms for more than 48 hours after obtaining the third dose, it is important that they seek medical advice," he explained.

Dr. Galhena told the media on Sunday (12) that people should not have undue fears about the mild Covid-19-like symptoms experienced after receiving the booster third dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. "When you get the vaccine, you will develop some mild Covid-19-like symptoms. Developing these symptoms means that the job is having a positive impact on the immune system," she added.

According to the data available on the Epidemiology Unit website, Sri Lanka, as of yesterday (13), has administered a total of 1,308,022 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses as the third dose of Covid-19 vaccines.

### Parliament...

The first session of Parliament for 2022 was previously scheduled to be held on 11 January 2022, according to Leader of the House and Minister of Education Dinesh Gunawardena. On 9 December, he had noted that this decision was taken at the meeting of the Committee on Parliamentary Business chaired by Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena.

Thus, under the President's directive, Parliament will instead convene one week after this initially scheduled date.

Since 1947, Parliament has been prorogued 50 times, and after 1978, 25 new parliamentary sessions have been held.

Once Parliament is prorogued, the Speaker of Parliament will continue to perform his duties. Accordingly, the duties to be carried out from the new term will be able to proceed from the current stage.

When the term ends and a new session begins, it is ceremonially opened by the President. The President has the power to present a policy statement of the government. In the past, this was known as the Throne Speech and was presented by the Governor. According to the current practice, it is neither debated nor put to vote.

Although the Third Session of the Eighth Parliament ended on 12 December, the Select Committee of Parliament to study and report to Parliament its recommendations to ensure Communal and Religious Harmony in Sri Lanka, chaired by the Speaker, and the Select Committee of Parliament to study and report to Parliament its recommendation to ensure National Evaluation Capacity in Sri Lanka, chaired by the Deputy Speaker, are still in function.

In addition, the Committee on High Posts and all the Sectoral Oversight Committees in Parliament continue to function.



The World Of  
**Hayleys**<sup>®</sup>  
Since 1878

SRI LANKA'S  
NUMBER 1  
CORPORATE  
FOR 2021

RANKED  
**No.1**  
LMD  
TOP 100

RANKED  
**No.1**  
BUSINESS  
TODAY  
TOP 40

# The Yugadanavi exposé and a Government exposed

The controversial Yugadanavi agreement, to which only select members of the Government were privy, is no longer a secret.

Last week, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) Leader and Parliamentarian Anura Kumara Dissanayake revealed the agreement, which the Government has shown a reluctance to publicise despite mounting demands and criticism. Following the stunning exposé, the implications of certain clauses of the agreement and the party with which it has been signed, have intensified the criticism against the Government and the agreement.

The Government's response to this criticism has been muddled. While some backbenchers have claimed that they had not read the agreement and were not aware of the contents of the agreement, Minister Wimal Weerawansa claimed that not only was the agreement presented to the Cabinet two weeks ago, but that it was also reviewed and discussed, which led to the identification of detrimental and questionable clauses about which Weerawansa said that he had raised concerns about in writing. However, Minister Johnston Fernando said that he had not seen the agreement and that there is no particular need for him to read it as he has absolute confidence in the Government.

These statements come in a context where three members of the Government and of the Cabinet, namely Weerawansa, Vasudeva Nanayakkara and Udaya Gammanpila, have filed objections in the Supreme Court (SC) in support of the Fundamental Rights (FR) petitions that have been filed with regard to the agreement through their personal lawyers.

One of the major revelations made by Dissanayake when tabling the agreement in Parliament was that it has been signed with a company by the name of New Fortress Energy Sri Lanka Power Holding based in Delaware, USA, when Cabinet approval was granted for an agreement to be entered into with New Fortress Energy Inc.

Furthermore, confirming speculation that the agreement could not be made public for a period of two years, Dissanayake revealed that the agreement contains a non-disclosure clause which prevents either Sri Lanka, or New Fortress Energy Sri Lanka Power Holding, from revealing anything pertaining to the agreement for a period of two years without the consent of both the parties.

All this begs the question as to where transparency and accountability is on the part of the Government regarding an agreement of this magnitude, which is crucial not only as an agreement that can have a direct and irreversible impact on the country's power sector, but also as a move, which, according to Gammanpila, can jeopardise the country's sovereignty in the near future.

Essentially, the exposure of the agreement changed the discourse on whether the Government can sign an agreement without a consultative process with the participation of all the relevant parties, to a controversy surrounding as to why the Government would suggest, or agree to, a non-disclosure clause which prevents the citizens of the country and other lawmakers from learning what the Government has actually agreed to.

The common question many who criticise the Government's intentions ask is, how public representatives can enter into agreements on behalf of the Government if the public is not made aware of the contents and the implications of such.

Furthermore, the aforementioned contradictory statements demonstrate the Government's unwillingness to admit the fact that its actions with regard to the agreement have shown a disregard for accountability and transparency. Thus far, the Government has not challenged or denied the allegations that the agreement contains clauses which can be detrimental to the country, nor has it rejected the existence of the non-disclosure clause the agreement tabled by Dissanayake contained. However, almost all members of the Government seem to be defending the Government, and evading their responsibility to answer the questions raised by the people, the civil society and the Opposition parties, by saying that they were not aware of the questionable clauses.

If this is how the Government deals with the public furor resulting from the agreement, and justifies its lack of accountability and transparency, it paints an incorrect picture about the Government's role. The least it can do is respond to the people's questions responsibly and honestly.

The matter has been taken to the SC, and the outcome, or the SC's verdict, would be a landmark decision in the history of public private partnerships (PPP) and energy sector contracts in Sri Lanka, as this matter pertains to a number of aspects regarding public representatives accountability, the country's sovereignty, and also, the public's power in a democratic governing system.



Several parties have alleged of attempts by the authorities to prevent or disrupt protests and arrest peaceful protesters  
PHOTO LALITH PERERA

# Sri Lanka's civic space rated as 'obstructed'

● Majority of Asian countries suppressing civic freedoms, says online monitoring platform



**R**estrictions and attacks on activists and the civil society has persisted across the Asian region according to a new report released by the CIVICUS Monitor, an online research platform that rates and tracks fundamental freedoms in 197 countries and territories. The report, "People Power Under Attack 2021", shows that out of 26 countries or territories in Asia, four – China, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam – are rated as "closed", 11 are rated as "repressed" and seven as "obstructed". The civic space in Japan, Mongolia and South Korea is rated "narrowed" while Taiwan remains the only country rated as "open".

In reality, this means that the basic freedoms of speech, peaceful assembly and association are not being respected in most countries in this region. This decline marks a trend worldwide, as data from the CIVICUS Monitor shows that 89% of the world's population now live in "closed", "repressed" or "obstructed" countries.

In Sri Lanka, where the civic space is rated "obstructed", the CIVICUS Monitor documented in 2021, the use of the draconian anti-terror law, the disruption of protests and the targeting of journalists and critics.

The notorious Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA) was used to enable arbitrary detention, despite commitments made to repeal the Act. The PTA allows for the prolonged incarceration, based on the mere suspicion, of any person who "causes or intends to cause the commission of acts of violence or religious, racial or

communal disharmony or feelings of ill will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups".

Among activists detained under the Act include the lawyer and minority and civic rights activist Hejaaz Hizbullah and a poet and a teacher Ahnaf Jazeem.

There have been systematic attempts by the authorities to prevent or disrupt protests and arrest peaceful protesters. In February 2021, Sri Lankan Magistrates across Districts in the North and the East issued bans and injunctions against civil society members, journalists and other individuals ahead of a walk for justice organised by Tamil war victims families and civil society organisations. In July, the Police arrested 31 persons, shortly after they began a protest against the Kotelawala National Defence University (KNDU) Bill, which seeks to "militarise" higher education in Sri Lanka.

Journalists and critics have also been targeted by the Government to stifle dissent. In July 2021, the Batticaloa-based Tamil journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan was interrogated for nearly three hours and he was asked whether he had any links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and was questioned extensively about his work. In the same month, social activist Shehan Malaka Gamage was summoned by the Police. He had been outspoken over the investigations into the 21 April 2019 Easter Sunday attacks.

This year, Singapore has been downgraded from "obstructed" to "repressed" as the Government continues to use various tactics to silence dissent. A repressive anti-fake news law was used against Government critics and independent media outlets. Journalists and bloggers also faced defamation charges with exorbitant fines imposed. A vaguely worded contempt of court law has been used to prosecute activists for the criticism of the courts under the guise of protecting the judicial system, while activists organising peaceful gatherings, including solo protesters, have been arrested or charged. The civil society has also raised concerns that a new Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act, passed in October 2021, will further curtail the civic space.

A staggering number of people in the Asian region are living in countries with "closed" or "repressed" civic space where their freedoms to

speak up, organise or mobilise are severely restricted. Now Singapore, which claims to be a democracy, is joining this notorious list, due to its array of restrictive laws used to stifle dissent, the attacks on the independent media, and a chilling new Foreign Interference Law.

In Asia, the top civic violation this year is the use of restrictive laws in 21 countries, as Governments use legislation to muzzle dissent. Human rights defenders were detained under such laws in at least 19 countries and in 11 countries they were prosecuted.

China continued to prosecute scores of human rights defenders under vaguely worded offences while in Hong Kong, the draconian National Security Law has been weaponised to target dozens of activists. In Vietnam, activists and bloggers are facing long sentences for anti-state propaganda and abusing democratic freedoms while in Cambodia, incitement laws are systematically used to target dozens of activists.

Criminal defamation laws were deployed to criminalise activists and critics including for lèse-majesté (royal defamation) in Thailand. Such defamation legislation was also used in Bangladesh for online dissent.

Another major violation is the crackdown on protests with protesters detained in at least 14 countries. In Myanmar, thousands of protesters were arbitrarily detained by the junta following the February 2021 military coup and some were even met with deadly force; in Thailand, the authorities disrupted pro-democracy protests, at times using excessive force, including live ammunition, and in Indonesia, activists protesting the unilateral renewal of the Papua Special Autonomy Law.

Other major violations documented in the Asian region include the harassment and intimidation of activists, including surveillance, smear campaigns, cyber attacks, torture, ill treatment and the detention of journalists.

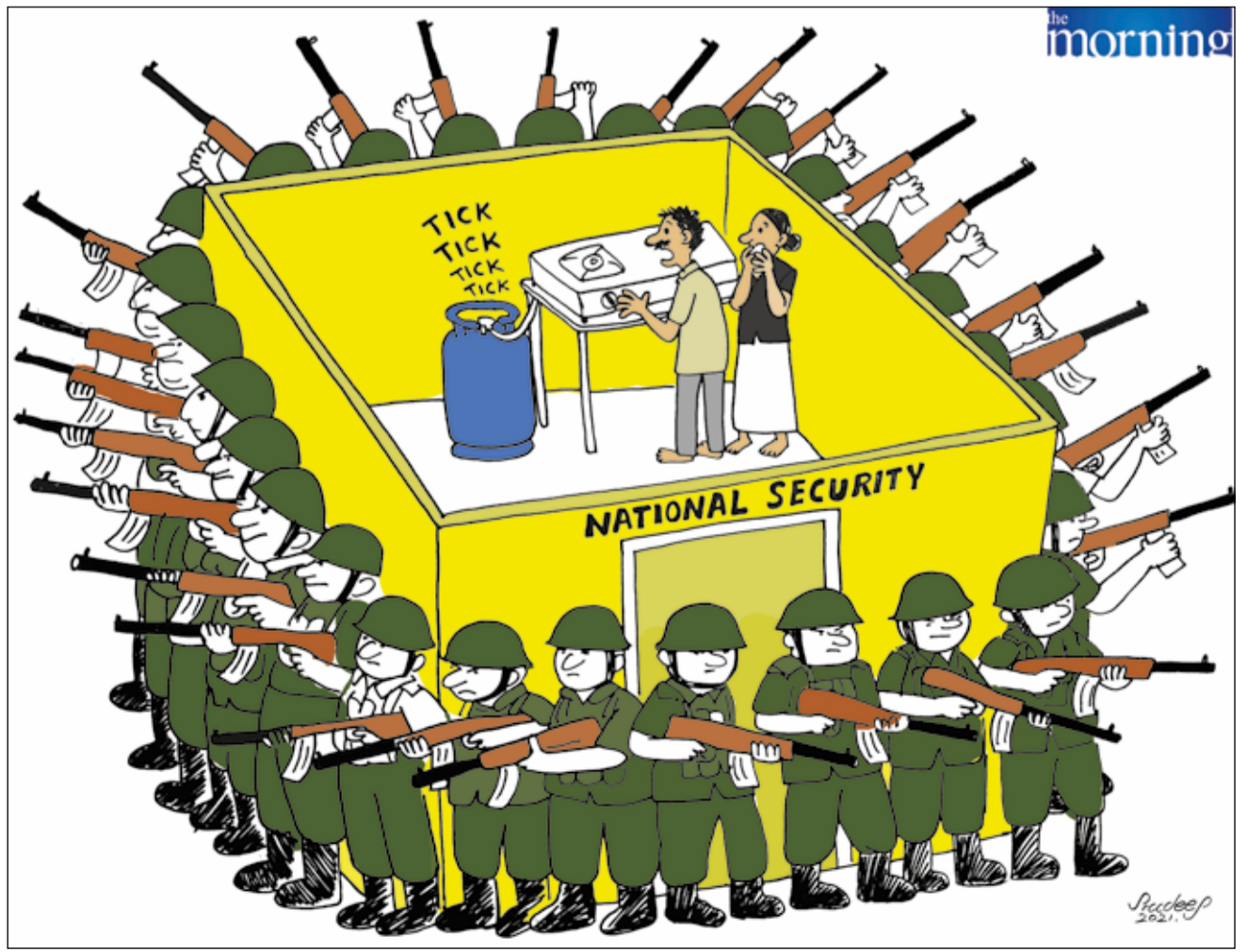
As authoritarian leaders in Asia seek to hold onto power, they have deployed restrictive laws to arrest and criminalise human rights defenders. Scores of activists and journalists are behind bars, facing trumped up charges, and some have been tortured and ill treated. Instead of listening to people's demands, the authorities have also resorted to disrupting peaceful protests in numerous countries, at times under the guise of the Covid-19 pandemic, with excessive or deadly force. Despite these attacks, the civil society has not relented and are finding new ways to push back and to demand their rights.

Countries of concern in the region were Myanmar which saw a rapid decline in fundamental freedoms following the coup with the crackdown on protests, the arrest, detention and criminalisation of hundreds of activists, the targeting of journalists, as well as the torture and ill treatment of political prisoners. Another country is Afghanistan – following the Taliban takeover, protests - especially by women – were met with excessive force leading to deaths and injuries, and there have been reports of intimidation and attacks on activists and journalists.

Despite these threats to civic freedoms, there has been some good news. Mongolia's civic space rating has been upgraded from "obstructed" to "narrowed". In April 2021, the country adopted a new law for the protection of human rights defenders, making it the first country in Asia to provide a legal framework for their protection. Other positive developments include progress in the campaign by activists to hold Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte accountable at the International Criminal Court, and the decriminalisation of same-sex relations in Bhutan.

*(The writer is the Asia Pacific Civic Space Researcher at the CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. Over 20 organisations collaborate on the CIVICUS Monitor, providing evidence and research that help target countries where civic freedoms are at risk. The Monitor has posted more than 550 civic space updates in the last year, which are analysed in the "People Power Under Attack 2021". Civic freedoms in 197 countries and territories are categorised as either "closed", "repressed", "obstructed", "narrowed" or "open", based on a methodology that combines several sources of data on the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression)*

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



# A new transport agenda for sustainable development



BY ARMIDA SALSIAH ALISJAHBANA

**T**ransport ministers from across Asia and the Pacific are meeting this week to consider a potentially transformational agenda for how people and goods are moved around the region and across the globe.

Pre-Covid-19 transport connectivity weaknesses in the Asia-Pacific region became even more apparent during the pandemic: landlocked developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing states were particularly affected. Therefore, it is imperative that we accelerate meaningful change in transport systems as countries seek to put their development agendas back on track.

It is against this backdrop that officials meeting at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for the fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport are debating a Regional Action Programme (RAP) for 2022-2026: A new roadmap for a transport system needed to attain the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The new RAP would address such issues as increasing freight and passenger volumes, reflecting rising demand for freight transport and mobility. Indeed, two-thirds of global seaborne trade is concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, which also is home to nine of the world's busiest container ports. The region is currently responsible for more than 40% of the global surface freight transport flows and by 2050 the continent's demand for freight transport is projected to triple. Asia and the Pacific is expected to face greater trade exchanges, further substantial demographic growth and rapid urbanisation coupled with high motorisation rates in coming years.

To cope with such changes and demands, the RAP would encourage greater digitalisation and innovation for transport; as the pandemic unfolded, we saw that accelerated adoption of digital technologies helped governments and private enterprises keep activities going amid border closures and other containment measures. Further deployment of smart transport systems to improve efficiency, resilience as well as social and environmental sustainability is undoubtedly a key priority for building back better.

Other key provisions of the RAP include speeding up transitions to low-carbon transport systems. The transport sector is one of the highest contributors to climate change and Asia and the Pacific remains among the highest CO<sub>2</sub>



The third session of the Ministerial Conference on Transport of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific took place in Moscow in 2016

emitting regions in the world. There is a strong need for rapid decarbonisation of the regional transport networks and related operations, including urban and public transport. Shifting to railways would also greatly boost sustainability of international freight transport and move to a more sustainable post-Covid-19 world. An abundance of renewable energy in some countries is an opportunity to switch to electric mobility in public transport. To support these efforts, ESCAP last month unveiled at the climate change conference in Glasgow plans for an Asia-Pacific Initiative on Electric Mobility.

In this vein, the outbreak of Covid-19 also had a profound impact on urban transport, accessibility and mobility. These challenges provide new momentum to transport and city

planners to rethink forms of mobility as a service that is affordable, accessible, reliable and safe. Furthermore, gender gaps and inequalities in terms of access to transport and related opportunities persist, further inhibiting the capacity of the sector to equally address the social dimensions of sustainable development.

In the context of sustainable development, we cannot disregard the fact that 60% of global road crash fatalities occur in the Asia and Pacific region. The General Assembly has proclaimed 2021 to 2030 as the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety, with a goal of cutting by half road traffic deaths and injuries; in response, ESCAP is preparing an Asia-Pacific Regional Plan of Action.

International freight transport remained largely operational

throughout the pandemic, as countries took policy measures to preserve freight transport connectivity to support supply chains. The Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway and dry port networks established under ESCAP auspices serve as the backbone for land transport infrastructure connectivity and logistics in the region. They are also increasingly integrated with inter-regional transport corridors and port and shipping networks. In 2020 and 2021, these links brought countries together to capture and analyse their responses to the pandemic and the impacts of those actions on regional connectivity. Moving forward, they can be further leveraged to promote infrastructure and operational connectivity reforms in support of a seamless integrated web of intermodal transport connections underpinning the regional and global economy.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted progress in Asia and the Pacific towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals and, in some cases, reversed years of achievement. The transport sector, which is instrumental to attaining the SDGs, took a significant hit during the pandemic, but countries demonstrated an ability to move swiftly towards automation and innovation to maintain functionality and resilience, and support access to social inclusion. This also points to the capacity of the sector to take bold new steps towards low-carbon development. A new Regional Action Programme can prove to be pivotal in addressing the region's lagging performance and enhancing resilience to future crises by reducing deep-rooted social, economic and environmental challenges.

*(The writer is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)*



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

## Opposition MPs representing Tamil speakers underscore 13th Amendment

BY MEERA SRINIVASAN

A group of Opposition MPs in Sri Lanka, representing Tamils from the north and east, hill country (Malaiyaha Tamils), and Tamil-speaking Muslims on Sunday sought the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to ensure "existing rights are not snatched away".

The contentious 13th Amendment, born out of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, has remained in Sri Lanka's Constitution for nearly four decades without seeing full implementation, as successive regimes in Colombo have refused to part with power over crucial areas including land, and law and order. Some within the Rajapaksa administration are calling for its repeal deeming the provincial councils, created consequent to the Amendment, "white elephants". The 13th Amendment is the only legislative guarantee thus far for a measure of power devolution that many in the southern Sinhala majority consider "too much", and most in the Tamil polity consider "too little".

India has repeatedly asked the Sri Lankan leadership to ensure the full implementation of the 13th Amendment. While Colombo has in turn given many assurances to "go beyond" the legislation, to ensure meaningful devolution, "that has not happened so far," said senior Tamil politician and Tamil National Alliance Leader R. Sampanthan. "We have gathered today from different political parties to discuss the situation. We exchanged our views on the subject, and will be taking this discussion forward," he told a press conference, following the MPs' meeting at a Colombo hotel last Sunday (12).

"There is now talk of a new Constitution, but simultaneously we see the Government's efforts such as 'One Country One Law'," the 88-year-old Trincomalee parliamentarian said, of an ongoing initiative of the Government that critics fear might further impair even the limited legislative powers of the Provincial Councils.

The parliamentarians will finalise a "comprehensive document" by 21 December, said Mano Ganesan, Leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance that represents Malaiyaha Tamils. "We are challenging this government and asking them to fully implement what is already in our Constitution. Nothing has changed in this country 12 years after the war ended. Our message is not only to the Sri Lankan leadership, but also to India, the international community and UN bodies," he said. As a signatory to the Accord of 1987, "India has an obligation," Ganesan added. The final document coming out of the discussion would also be sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, according to the organisers.

Sri Lanka's nine Provincial Councils are defunct for about two years, after their terms lapsed in 2018 and 2019. "Meanwhile, the centre through various presidential task forces is trying

to snatch our powers. If that has to be stopped, we must emphasise our rights highlighting what is guaranteed in our Constitution," said Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Leader and legislator Rauff Hakeem.

Jaffna MP and former Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran said in demanding the full implementation of the 13th Amendment, the MPs were not abandoning the call for a federal political solution to Sri Lanka's historic Tamil national question. "While we don't see the Amendment as a permanent solution, we recognise its importance in the interim, until there is an acceptable permanent solution," he said, adding: "India will be able to intervene only as long as the 13th Amendment is there."

### Tamil polity divided

In this renewed emphasis on the 13th Amendment, Sri Lanka's Tamil polity appears divided. While TNA constituents Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) are part of the MPs' initiative centred on the legislation, the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) – chief constituent of the TNA that Sampanthan and Sumanthiran belong to – have been focusing on the prospect of a political solution in the promised new Constitution, turning the spotlight away from the 35-year-old Amendment that few Tamils consider adequate.

In August this year, Sampanthan wrote to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa expressing keenness to meet him and discuss the new Constitution. "The 13th Amendment to the Constitution was enacted in 1988 this was found to be inadequate and since 1988 every successive government has taken steps and agreed to build on the 13th Amendment to bring about meaningful devolution. There has been substantial consensus derived from these processes," Sampanthan said in the letter reminding Rajapaksa of a pending meeting. President Rajapaksa was scheduled to meet the TNA in June, but the meeting was postponed, and his office is yet to announce a new date.

Further, TNA's Jaffna legislator M.A. Sumanthiran recently led a delegation to the US, where the Alliance sought a US-India collaboration in pushing for a political solution in Sri Lanka by way of a constitutional settlement. Remarking on the MPs' initiative, Sumanthiran said in a Jaffna meeting last Saturday (11): "If 13th Amendment were enough, why would we have lost so many lives? Lakhs of our people died after it came into effect... The Amendment is not a meaningful way of devolving power. Even (PM and former President) Mahinda Rajapaksa has acknowledged that in the past. Why are we now asking for something that is not meaningful?" The TNA has been in discussion with India at every stage, he added.

*(The Hindu)*



ශ්‍රී ලංකා මහ බැංකුව  
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

# Multiple outside factors affect cognitive performance of teenage girls: Local study

● Finds negative impact from poor socio-economic state, stress, stunting, and fatness



Significant physical, psychological, social, and cognitive transformation occurs during early adolescence

BY RUWAN LAKNATH JAYAKODY

**P**oor socio-economic state, stress, stunting, and fatness, a local study found, is negatively linked with the cognitive performance (CP) of female adolescents while the school type, family type and size, place of residence, the percentage of school attendance, the age group, the body mass index (BMI) for the age Z-score (BAZ) and the waist height ratio (WHtR) were not significantly associated with CP.

These findings were made in an original article on "Poor socio-economic state, stress, stunting and fatness are negatively associated with the CP of female adolescents" which was authored by H.J.H. Madhushanthi (Ruhuna University's Allied Health Sciences Faculty's Nursing Department's Senior Lecturer), S.W. Wimalasekera (Sri Jayawardanepura University's Physiology Department's Physiology Professor), C.S.E. Goonewardena (Sri Jayawardanepura University's Medical Sciences Faculty's Community Medicine Department's Community Medicine Professor), A.A.T.D. Amarasekara (Sri Jayawardanepura University's Allied Health Sciences Faculty's Nursing and Midwifery Department's Senior Lecturer) and J. Lenora (Ruhuna University's Medical Faculty's Physiology Department's Physiology Professor) and published in the *Sri Lanka Journal of Child Health* 50 (4) in December 2021.

Agnes 11 to 14 years, considered early adolescence, is, as noted by the World Health Organisation's "Nutrition in adolescence: Issues and challenges for the health sector: Issues in adolescent health and development", characterised by significant physical, psychological, social and cognitive transformation. The prefrontal cortex of the brain, involved in high order cognitive outcomes, E. Sowell's "Mapping continued brain growth and gray matter density reduction in dorsal frontal cortex: Inverse relationships during post-adolescent brain maturation" explained, undergoes a different development trajectory during adolescence. Since CP is influenced by nutritional, environmental and genetic factors, any issues with regard to nutrition and environmental factors during adolescence, B.T. Crookston, M.E. Penny, S.C. Alder, T.T. Dickerson, R.M. Merrill, J.B. Stanford, C.A. Porucznik and K.A. Dearden's "Children who recover from early stunting and children who are not stunted demonstrate similar levels of cognition" noted, lead to the alteration of cognitive tasks governed by the frontal lobe. Hence, in the early years of life, as M. Bornstein and D. Putnick observed in "Cognitive and socio-emotional care giving in developing countries", nutrition and socio-emotional factors play a major role in cognitive development. Studies (G. Fink and P.C. Rockers's "Childhood growth, schooling and cognitive development: Further evidence from the Young Lives

study", N. Sokolovic, S. Selvam, K. Srinivasan, P. Thankachan, A. Kurpad and T. Thomas's "Catch up growth does not associate with cognitive development in Indian school age children", Sandjaja, B.K. Poh, N. Rojroonwasinkul, B.K.L. Nyugen, B. Budiman, L.O. Ng, K. Soonthornhdada, H.T. Xuyen, P. Deurenberg, P. Parikh and the South East Asian Nutrition Survey Study Group's "Relationship between anthropometric indicators and CP in South East Asian school-aged children", K. Noble, M. Norman and M. Farah's "Neuro-cognitive correlates of socio-economic status in kindergarten children" and D.A. Hackman, M.J. Farah and M.J. Meaney's "Socio-economic status and the brain mechanistic insights from human and animal research") reported that school-aged children with protein energy malnutrition have poor performance on cognitive tasks like attention, memory, executive function, visuo-spatial ability, learning and intelligence quotient (IQ), while poor non-verbal intelligence scores of school aged children is associated with being underweight and stunting, and poor socio-economic status is associated with several cognitive deficits, language and executive function reading and school achievements.

Therefore, Madhushanthi et al. sought to assess the nutritional and psycho-social factors affecting the CP of early female adolescent school children in the Galle educational zone. Hence, they conducted a descriptive, cross sectional study in randomly selected schools (including schools and classes representing all school categories) with 218 female adolescents between the ages of 11 to 14 years who were residing in the Galle City being recruited as participants.

With regard to anthropometric measurements, the weight, height, waist circumference (WC) and the hip circumference (HC) were measured; the BMI, the fat mass percentage (FM%), the waist hip ratio (WHR) and the WHtR were calculated to assess the nutritional status; and the height for age Z-score (HAZ), the weight for age Z-score (WAZ) and the BAZ were calculated. Adolescents with HAZ, WAZ and BAZ reference values below the minus two standard deviation score were categorised as stunted, underweight and thin, respectively.

Concerning the measurement of socio-economic and psycho-social adversities, it is noted that the socio-economic status (SES) is a composite index of parental education, occupation and income (the income to need ratio was calculated by dividing the total family income with the official poverty threshold published by the Census and Statistics Department for a family of that size).

An interviewer administered psycho-social adversity scale was used to assess psycho-socially adverse factors. Adolescent stress was assessed using the interviewer administered adolescence stress

questionnaire comprising 51 items measuring nine dimensions of adolescent stress including the stress of home life, school performance, school attendance, romantic relationships, peer pressure, teacher interaction, future uncertainty, school-leisure conflict and emerging adult responsibility, with each item rated as not at all stressful/irrelevant to me, a little stressful, moderately stressful, quite stressful and very stressful.

When it came to the measurement of CP, three cognitive test batteries, intelligence tests (to measure various cognitive skills where eight subtests were used to assess four cognitive domains, namely, the verbal comprehension index on similarities and comprehension, the working memory index on the digit span and symbol search, the perceptual reasoning index on picture completion and matrix reasoning, and the processing speed index on cancellation and arithmetic), tests of non-verbal intelligence (examines cognitive function that do not require verbal or motor skills and used to measure abstract reasoning) and two computer-based executive function tasks (inhibition control and visuo-spatial working memory) were used.

The mean (average) age of the study participants was 12.31 years.

On the psychological stress of adolescents, 158 (72.5%) belonged to the stressed group while 60 (27.5%) belonged to the non-stressed group. Stress was observed for school attendance (93.1%), future uncertainty (92.7%), school performance (84.9%), emerging responsibility (85.3%) and the conflict of school-leisure time (81.7%). Most adolescents considered the stress of future uncertainty and school attendance as the greatest stress inducing factors.

On the association of the cognitive test scores and the adolescent stress questionnaire (ASQ) total score, the results indicated a significant effect of stress on the entire cognitive function test scores.

On the association of the cognitive test scores and the demographic variables, the effects of the family type, the number of siblings, the place of residence, the percentage of school attendance and the school type on all cognitive test profiles were not statistically significant.

On the association of the cognitive test scores and the socio-economic variables, the SES index was positively correlated with the verbal comprehension index (VCI), the working memory index (WMI), the estimated full scale intelligence quota (EFSIQ), the perceptual reasoning index (PRI), the processing speed index (PSI), and the visuo-spatial working memory. Poor inhibitory control (increased stop signal delay) was associated with a low SES index. Except for the visuo-spatial working memory, an inverse relationship was found between the future ready (PA) index (a collection of school progress measures related to school and student success) and the scores of the VCI, PSI, WMI, PRI, EFSIQ, the tests of non-verbal intelligence (TONI) and

inhibitory control.

On the association of the cognitive test scores and the nutritional parameters, the HAZ is significantly and positively associated with the PSI, WMI, PRI, EFSIQ and visuo-spatial working memory. Decreased HAZ is correlated with poor inhibitory control. WAZ was not correlated with most cognitive indices except the visuo-spatial working memory. No significant correlations were observed between the BAZ and WHtR with any cognitive test scores.

On the predictors of the CP of female adolescents, the school type, family type, place of residence, family size, the percentage of school attendance and age group, the BAZ and the WHtR were not significantly associated with CP. The anthropometric parameters (the HAZ, WAZ, FM%, WC, HC, and WHR) and the psychosocial variables (the SES index, the PA index score, and the ASQ total score) were significantly associated with the cognitive function test scores. The data showed multi co-linearity between the SES index and the PA index. The SES is a significant factor influencing child cognitive development.

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent of the variance of the cognitive tests as explained by the anthropometric and socio-economic parameters, and the results showed that the regression model was statistically significant for the dependent variables (the VCI, PRI, WMI, PSI, EFSIQ, TONI score, visuo-spatial working memory and inhibitory control).

A combination of the SES index, the ASQ total score and the HAZ significantly accounted for a 10.9% variance of the EFSIQ. The SES index was found to be positively and significantly associated with most cognitive variables including the VCI, PSI, WMI, PRI, EFSIQ, visuo-spatial working memory and inhibitory control. Increased HAZ was found to be positively associated with the PSI, EFSIQ, visuo-spatial working memory and inhibitory control scores. A single unit increase of FM% resulted in a unit reduction of the PSI score, the TONI score and the visuo-spatial working memory.

Madhushanthi et al. showed that anthropometric nutritional indicators (the HAZ, FM% and WC), stress, the SES index and ASQ total score were significant predictors of CP amongst early female adolescents. As shown by Poh et al. and A. Eilander, S. Muthayya, H.V.D. Knaap, K. Srinivasan, T. Thomas, F.J. Kok, A.V. Kurpad and S.J.M. Osendarp's "Under-nutrition, fatty acid and micronutrient status in relation to CP in Indian school children: A cross sectional study", the chosen cognitive abilities are vulnerable for macronutrient deficiencies.

Stunting (low HAZ) is negatively associated with cognitive outcomes, Madhushanthi et al. explained. Per Sokolovic et al. and B. Kar, S. Rao and B. Chandramouli's "Cognitive development in children with chronic protein energy malnutrition", the decreased availability of energy and micronutrients during the adolescent growth period resulted in decreased linear growth, reduced neurodevelopment of the brain and changes in behaviour and cognition. J. Bryan, S. Osendarp, D. Hughes, E. Calvaresi, K. Baghurst and J.V. Klinken's "Nutrients for cognitive development in school aged children" noted that long-term protein energy malnutrition leads to altered brain architecture and neuronal functions while per D. Benton, P. Winichagoon, T. Ng, E. Tee and M. Isabelle's "Symposium on nutrition and cognition towards research and application for different life stages" observed the retardation of growth in the hippocampus (complex brain structure embedded deep into the temporal lobe and has a major role in learning and memory), frontal lobe and temporal lobes which are involved in higher order cognitive tasks. According to the social isolation theory (S. Grantham-McGregor and H. Baker-Henningham's "Review of the evidence linking protein and energy to mental development"), under-nutrition has a role in deficit cognitive outcomes as undernourished children are less explorative and

apathetic with reduced activity which contributes to poor environmental stimulation and in turn to poor cognitive development. Impaired cognitive function in adolescence is more likely to continue into adult life and may hinder development of the full intelligence potential as an adult (K. Hanscombe, M. Trzaskowski, C. Haworth, O. Davis, P. Dale and R. Plomin's "Socio-economic status and children's intelligence: In a United Kingdom representative sample: SES moderates the environmental, not genetic effect on IQ").

Madhushanthi et al. found that the family SES index is a robust indicator of most cognitive indices of female adolescents. This shows a strong positive association of higher parental SES with higher scores on cognitive measures and academic tests from early childhood through adolescence (V. McLoyd's "Socio-economic disadvantage and child development" and Hanscombe et al.). Evidence (Hackman et al.) suggested that the SES-related difference in neural development begins in utero. Madhushanthi et al. found that the SES index significantly predicts verbal comprehension and executive functions (inhibitory control and visuo-spatial working memory). Hackman et al. elaborated on the role of the underlying SES associated differences in neuro-cognitive abilities as being attributed to multiple factors including pre-natal influences, post-natal care and cognitive stimulation. On the other hand, M. Wadsworth, T. Raviv, B. Compas and J. Connor-Smith's "Parent and adolescent responses to poverty-related stress: Tests of mediated and moderated coping models" observed that inappropriate parenting practices are correlated with emotional and behavioural problems in children that even contribute to problems in later life.

Compared to adolescents from higher SES backgrounds, adolescents from low SES backgrounds show more psychopathologies like internalised behaviours (depression and schizophrenia [symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, disorganised speech, trouble with thinking, and the lack of motivation]) and externalised behaviours (S. Qin, E. Hermans, H.V. Marle, J. Luo and G. Fernandez's "Acute psychological stress reduces working memory-related activity in the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex"). Persistent stress, according to A. Arnsten and B. Li's "Neurobiology of executive functions: Catecholamine (hormones made by the adrenal glands which are released into the body in response to physical or emotional stress) influences on prefrontal cortical (relating to the outer layer of the cerebrum) functions", activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and elevates stress hormones which adversely affect brain neurodevelopment and compromise cognitive and academic achievements. For R. Romeo, as noted in "The impact of stress on the structure of the adolescent brain: Implications for adolescent mental health", continued maturation of the cortico-limbic regions in adolescence makes the adolescent brain more vulnerable to stress. Studies (S.P. Walker, T.D. Wachs, J.M. Gardner, B. Lozoff, G.A. Wasserman, E. Pollitt, J.A. Carter and the International Child Development Steering Group's "Child development: Risk factors for adverse outcomes in developing countries") suggest that stress exerted structural changes in the prefrontal cortex during adolescence would cause long lasting psychopathologies compared to stress experienced during adult life. There is evidence (H. Saint Clair-Thompson, R. Stevens, A. Hunt and E. Bolder's "Educational psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology") that school-based working memory training boosts the performance in mathematics, IQ and the classroom performance of children and adolescents.

In conclusion, Madhushanthi et al. found that SES plays a crucial role in the neuro-cognitive profile of female adolescents with the study highlighting the influence of low HAZ, SES, psychological stress and increased fatness as indicators that contribute to the poor CP of female adolescents.



**People not forced to convert foreign currency; regulations in this regard lawful: CBSL**

**More people seeking to buy USD; less people willing to sell USD: Foreign currency changers**

Thus, the rule was changed to allow them to use those funds.”

**Informal channels**

After the CBSL set rates for USD, there was a rise in Sri Lankans living abroad sending money via informal channels, according to certain local media reports, which quoted a Sri Lankan expatriate as saying that sending money via such channels is more profitable than sending money via formal channels such as banks.

Earlier this month, the CBSL had also warned that it has received information that some Sri Lankans residing abroad send remittances to their dependents in Sri Lanka, knowingly or unknowingly, through various racketeers. “The CBSL is aware that there have been instances where certain brokers collect foreign currency from Sri Lankan employees in other countries and credit the accounts of their dependents in Sri Lankan rupees by way of cash or transfers through the financial system. The public may not be aware that they are committing offences punishable in terms of the law for the violation of the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Further, available information indicates that these transactions could be linked to drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Hence, the CBSL informs all Sri Lankans residing abroad and their dependents not to be victims of such illegal activities, knowingly or unknowingly. The CBSL emphasises the need for all concerned parties not to become victims of illegal operators and to ensure that they remit their foreign remittances to Sri Lanka only through banks and financial institutions which are supervised by the CBSL or other international banks and financial institutions.”

This situation is concerning not only to Sri Lankans who send the foreign revenue they have earned by working as migrant workers; those working for foreign clients based abroad from Sri Lanka also express concerns regarding the same.

Export proceeds, the abovementioned gazette notification said, include proceeds required to be repatriated into Sri Lanka under and in terms of the Foreign Exchange (Classes of Miscellaneous Capital Transactions) Regulations No. 4 of 2021, as well as payments received in foreign exchange by a person resident in Sri Lanka for the services provided including professional, vocational, occupational or business services provided to a person resident outside Sri Lanka.

With regard to these regulations, a person who provides consultancy services to a Europe-based online platform told *The Morning* that even though he understands the gravity of the foreign reserves-related issue Sri Lanka is facing, imposing rules and regulations on those who have been earning foreign currency for years is not acceptable. Also, he said that what the Government should do is to encourage, and not force people to convert their foreign currency earnings into local currency. He also noted that despite the legal situation regarding such regulations, those providing services to foreign clients and getting paid in foreign currency may tend to save their money in digital wallets instead of having the money sent via banks.

The foreign reserves crisis is becoming an issue that affects most essential imports such as crude oil, milk powder, fertiliser, and medicines, and the Government has expressed uncertainty regarding resuming other imports such as motor vehicles.

While this situation calls for prompt action, with a focus on boosting foreign earnings and reducing expenses on imported goods and services, hasty decisions can be counterproductive. As was noted by those who spoke with *The Morning*, poorly planned measures can deter those earning foreign currency, instead of encouraging them.

Speaking in this regard, SJB Parliamentarian and economist, Dr. Harsha de Silva, told *The Morning* that requiring people to convert their money is not a proper solution to the foreign exchange crisis Sri Lanka is facing, and that doing so is tantamount to an act of expropriation. He added: “Many Sri Lankans are doing freelance work, especially in the information technology (IT) field, and forcing them to convert USD they earn is not acceptable. This is their personal wealth, and it is meant for their own use.” He noted that even though the Government’s intention was fair and genuine, the implementation of such regulations should be carried out in a way that does not affect the people negatively: “If the Government has a national need to compel the people to do something, such as in the case of acquiring private lands to build roads, it is understandable. However, when acquiring land, the Government compensates them. If the Government is forced to take private property, it has to compensate for what it takes, and in this case, pay foreign exchange earners the market price for USD. In fact, the current market rate for USD is around Rs. 240, while the Government is saying that it will give Rs. 200. However, some reports claim that the rates are sometimes as low as Rs. 193.” Dr. de Silva further said that what the gazette notification is trying to do is an act of expropriation, which is completely wrong and unethical, even though it cannot be deemed illegal because there are laws in that connection. He also stressed that this is absolutely not a wise thing to do.

Moreover, speaking of the prevailing foreign reserves crisis, Dr. de Silva opined that the Government has to change its approach to resolve the crisis.

He explained: “The situation is extremely bad. It is too late to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and I don’t think that it is possible now. However, had Sri Lanka sought the IMF’s assistance a year or at least six months ago, perhaps, we would have been able to get some kind of a stabilisation package, and Sri Lanka would have been able to come out of this crisis without facing issues of this severity. We have delayed it, and going to the IMF therefore, which some claim to be the solution, is not going to work. We had only around \$ 1,900 million in cash at the end of last month. I assume now that it has further reduced. We have \$ 1.4 billion of loan repayments to be made this month and the next month. The Government has to discuss with creditors, and find a way to restructure Sri Lanka’s debt repayments and perhaps delay payments.”

However, as *The Sunday Morning* reported on 12 December, the CBSL denied allegations that the gazette notification in question had led to forcible conversions of foreign currency earnings, and pointed out that the instructions pertained to export earnings and were in line with the law. Speaking to *The Sunday Morning*, the CBSL Deputy Governor T.M.J.Y.P. Fernando had stated: “If there are Sri Lankan citizens providing a service to an overseas customer or non-resident and receiving some income in foreign currency, that is an export of a service, and in that case, the rule that the CBSL recently issued on export proceeds – the requirement to convert earnings after setting off certain expenses – is applicable for such a person.” With regard to allegations that resident Sri Lankans who earn foreign currency salaries had been forced to convert their foreign earnings into Sri Lankan rupees, Fernando had noted that there is no forcible conversion, as this process is a law, adding that “In 2016, in relation to the export of merchandise goods, we required a person to bring the earnings to Sri Lanka within 180 days, a time period which was later extended. That rule has been there for a long time. Then, earlier this year, we wanted a 25% conversion for export proceeds of merchandise goods. Then, very recently, after the six-month road map was announced, the rule was changed further, taking note of the presentations made by exporters of goods, who wanted some foreign currency to fulfil certain expenses.

**Tendency among foreign currency earners to send money via racketeers: CBSL**

An extraordinary gazette notification issued by the CBSL on 28 October imposed rules with regard to the receipt of export proceeds into Sri Lanka and the conversion of such proceeds into Sri Lankan rupees. These rules, known as the “Repatriation of Export Proceeds into Sri Lanka Rules, No. 5 of 2021” were imposed under Section 10 (c), read with Section 68, of the Monetary Law Act No. 58 of 1949 as amended. It says that every exporter of goods and services should, “mandatorily receive the export proceeds in Sri Lanka, in respect of all goods exported or services provided outside Sri Lanka, within 180 days from the date of shipment or the provisioning of the services, as the case may be” and “immediately upon all and every receipt of export proceeds being received, forthwith submit all related documentary evidence on each and every receipt of export proceeds, in respect of every export of goods and services to the respective licensed commercial bank or a permitted licensed specialised bank that receives such proceeds in Sri Lanka”. Adding that all licensed banks are required to strictly and mandatorily monitor the receipt and conversion of export proceeds as stipulated, and have and present them to the CBSL officials, the gazette notification further read that the Director of the CBSL’s Foreign Exchange Department shall have the right to initiate action against any non-compliance with, or the transgression of the said rules, by any exporter of goods or services or a licensed bank. However, it allows exporters of goods or services to make authorised, necessary payments.

This gazette notification was criticised by different parties including politicians, claiming that it is not right to force people to convert their money into Sri Lankan rupees. Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, recently urged the Government to withdraw the gazette notification, and expressed concerns as to how it would affect investments.

activities which are not in compliance with the directions issued under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Act, the CBSL is conducting a series of spot examinations at the places of authorised money changers, thereby strengthening the monitoring and supervision of the authorised money changers.” In the event the errant authorised money changers fail to rectify the issues communicated through the notices, the CBSL will be compelled to suspend and revoke the permits issued to such authorised money changers. The public is also informed that authorised money changers have no authority to transact foreign exchange at rates higher than those offered by the banks to such money changers, the CBSL added.

As action against money changers who fail to adhere to CBSL-issued guidelines continues, several money changers explained to *The Morning* how the prevailing situation pertaining to USD has affected their business and customer base.

Several foreign currency exchange service providers based in the Colombo and Negombo areas lamented that the crisis situation surrounding the lack of USD has affected their business to a considerable extent during the past few months because it is one of the most sought after currencies.

When queried about the availability of USD, one service provider said: “There is nothing much to complain about the USD situation. However, overall rates in the market have gone up, and the demand for USD, on the other hand, is on the rise.”

Another such service provider said that the demand for USD seems to be increasing, which he attributed to the increasing number of people leaving the country for different purposes. He also said that while customers seem to be resultant to purchase USD as freely as before, the number of people selling USD to foreign currency changers has decreased significantly. “Unlike before, people are not willing to sell USD now, because they think that the rates will go further up in the coming few months. They think that USD is an asset of which the value will continue to increase, and they refrain from selling the USD they have because buying USD in the future would be more difficult than it is now,” he added.

**Foreign currency earnings**

While the sale and purchase of USD within the country is facing the said challenges, those earning foreign currency from Sri Lanka are now concerned about converting their earnings into local currency.

BY SUMUDU CHAMARA

**Even though the Covid-19 pandemic has subsided to some extent, some of the crises the pandemic created have been worsening and persisting during the past few months. In fact, some of these crises have led to multiple national-level issues.**

Dwindling foreign reserves is one such issue, and it is worsening at a pace that is difficult for the country to manage. To make matters worse, it has affected all sorts of imports, and also exports and domestic production. According to official data, by mid-November 2021, Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves had plummeted to \$ 1.5 billion, and various parties have pointed out the importance of finding a prompt solution while also claiming that the failure to do so will result in an unmanageable crisis.

As a measure to obtain more foreign currency revenue, especially through the earnings of migrant workers and Sri Lankan residents providing services or goods to foreign clients, the Government took several decisions during the past few months, which have not received positive responses. As a result, there is now a discussion about sending foreign currency earnings, converting money, and taking action against those failing to adhere to regulations in this regard.

**Sale and purchase of USD**

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) last week issued notices to four authorised money changers, who had been found to have failed to comply with the directions issued under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Act No. 12 of 2017, to adhere to those provisions within a specific period of time. The four institutions, based in Colombo and Wennappuwa, had been subjected to spot examinations during the last month and this month. In a statement, the CBSL said: “In response to several complaints that certain authorised money changers are engaged in

# Falling of forex and restrictions on remittances

● An overview and critique of Government responses/solutions to our foreign exchange crisis

**Requiring foreign currency earnings to be converted into Sri Lankan rupees is an act of expropriation: Dr. Harsha de Silva**

**Those working for foreign clients may tend to use alternative methods to save money: Sri Lanka-based foreign currency earner**

# Maradana Telegraph Office station masters on 24-hour token strike

● *Claim hazardous signal systems/derelect compartments endangering lives*

BY BUDDHIKA SAMARAWEEERA

**T**he railway station masters attached to the Railway Telegraph Office in Maradana are engaged in a 24-hour token strike since yesterday (13) midnight, alleging that the hazardous operation of the signal systems of the Railways Department and the decrepit train compartments which are currently in use, are endangering the lives of passengers, according to the Sri Lanka Railway Station Masters' Union (SLRSMU).

The SLRSMU stated last week that they will go on a strike action within this month over several issues, including the failure of the Railways Department to rectify faults in railway signal systems and to repair decrepit train compartments.

When contacted by *The Morning* yesterday, SLRSMU General Secretary Kasun Chamara said that the former general managers (GMs) of the Railways Department and present Railways General Manager Dhammika Jayasundara have been informed on a number of occasions regarding the hazardous operation of railway signal systems.

However, he said that the station masters attached to the Telegraph Office in Maradana had decided to launch a strike action to protest against the Department's failure to provide solutions to these issues. He also warned that if the Railways Department does not take action to resolve these issues even after the strike action, the station masters and a number of other trade unions within the Department have decided to go on a continuous strike from the

midnight of 26 December. He said that necessary discussions have already been held with other trade unions in that regard. "On a number of occasions, we have pointed out that the Railway Telegraph Office needs to be modernised under the new communication system to be introduced, but so far the Railways Department has not taken the necessary steps to do so, despite the possibility of repairing it within a short period of two days," claimed Chamara.

In addition, he charged that the Railways Department is placing the passengers at risk by using decrepit train compartments and, therefore, emphasised the need for such compartments to be repaired immediately, thereby ensuring safe transport facilities for the passengers. Jayasundara was unavailable for comment on the matter.

Claiming that official communication activities of all the nine sub departments of the Railways Department are being carried out through the Telegraph Office in Maradana, Chamara said that due to the strike action, train faults, signal faults, train accidents, and emergency train announcements will not be communicated properly. He added that the trains would not be cancelled due to the strike, but that there could be train-related delays. "The Railways General Manager gave us an opportunity to discuss this matter at 1 p.m. yesterday, but we didn't attend. The reason for that is that these issues have been discussed on a number of occasions but have not yielded any results. Therefore, these issues cannot be suppressed further under the pretext of discussions," he claimed.

Communication activities of all the nine sub departments of the Railways Department are being carried out through the Telegraph Office in Maradana, Chamara said that due to the strike action, train faults, signal faults, train accidents, and emergency train announcements will not be communicated properly. He added that the trains would not be cancelled due to the strike, but that there could be train-related delays. "The Railways General Manager gave us an opportunity to discuss this matter at 1 p.m. yesterday, but we didn't attend. The reason for that is that these issues have been discussed on a number of occasions but have not yielded any results. Therefore, these issues cannot be suppressed further under the pretext of discussions," he claimed.

Jayasundara was unavailable for comment on the matter.

## 18 more suspects arrested and remanded in Sialkot lynching case

Pakistani Police have arrested 18 more suspects purportedly involved in the killing of Sri Lankan national Priyantha Kumara, who was the manager of a sports equipment factory in Sialkot. A mob of hundreds of enraged individuals including employees descended on the factory after he was accused of blasphemy. The mob grabbed him, killed him, and burned his body. A first information report (FIR) was registered against 900 staffers of the business on the application of Uggoki Station House Officer (SHO) Armaghan Maqt under sections 302, 297, 201, 427, 431, 157, 149 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and 7 and 11-WW of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA). With the latest arrests, the total number of suspects in custody has risen to 52, said a spokesperson of the Sialkot Police. The suspects were later produced before a special anti-terrorism court in Gujranwala

which remanded them in police custody for 15 days, Pakistani media reported. The Judge directed the Police to present the suspects again on 28 December. "Thirty-four primary suspects are already in remand with police. More than 100 individuals are (now) under investigation," the spokesman said. Last week, the Government of Punjab decided to conduct the trial in the case on a daily basis. In a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order, Punjab's Law Minister Basharat Raja, who presided over the sitting, directed the investigators to file the case challan in court within 14 days. The prosecution was also directed to set up a special cell to monitor the case trial. The meeting was attended by all the regional police officers (RPOs) and commissioners of the Province via video link.

(Pakistan Today)

## Ambulances allowed toll-free access to expressways

The Ministry of Highways says that a gazette notification has been issued declaring that all government and private ambulances can use the country's expressways toll free. Chief Government Whip and Highways Minister Johnston Fernando stated that all ambulances, whether they belong to state or private hospitals, would be allowed to travel toll free on expressways with immediate effect. Previously, a toll was



levied from every ambulance using the expressways; however, following the Covid-19 outbreak they were exempted from paying the toll from 20 May until further notice. It has now been decided to declare that the ambulances could use the expressways without paying any fees, the Minister said.

## UN ASG Kanni Wignaraja arrives in Sri Lanka

United Nations (UN) Assistant Secretary General (ASG) Kanni Wignaraja, who is also the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Assistant Director and UNDP Asia Pacific Director, arrived in Sri Lanka yesterday (13) to conduct an official visit. Upon her arrival, she met with UN Sri Lanka Resident Co-ordinator Hanaa Singer-Hamdy and UNDP Resident Representative Robert Juhkam yesterday.



UN Sri Lanka Resident Co-ordinator Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, UN Assistant Secretary General Kanni Wignaraja, and UNDP Resident Representative Robert Juhkam

The UN ASG is visiting Sri Lanka with the aim of better understanding country priorities and exploring new avenues of support from UNDP to Sri Lanka; particularly focusing on follow up to the recently concluded UN Climate Change Conference COP26, post-Covid-19 socio-economic recovery in the region, and leveraging of more development financing to the country.

The official visit will focus on the human development agenda and the acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also given Covid-19's socio-economic impacts, while importantly celebrating the human development achievements of Sri Lanka. During her visit, ASG Wignaraja is to meet with high-level government officials and other partners, having a first-hand look at some of the UNDP-supported work on the ground.

## Police seek public assistance to find missing children

Sri Lanka Police is seeking public assistance to locate two boys - aged 10 and 12 - who have gone missing from their home at Banduragoda, Wattemulla in the Kotadeniyawa police area. Issuing a media release, the Police Headquarters said that Kotadeniyawa Police have received a complaint regarding the sudden disappearance of the two boys, who are cousins, who have been missing since 23 November. The Police said that investigations carried out so far have failed to uncover any information regarding the whereabouts of the boys. The following information regarding the missing boys has been released:

- Name:** Kaveesha Sandakelum
  - Age:** 10 years
  - Appearance:** Around four feet in height, with short hair, and was last seen wearing a blue t-shirt and black checkered shorts.
  - Name:** Jayasekara Mudalige Akila Dedunu
  - Age:** 12 years
  - Appearance:** Around four feet and 10 inches in height, with short hair, and was last seen wearing a blue collared t-shirt and red shorts.
- Police request the public to provide any information regarding the two boys (picture above) using the following phone numbers:  
**Kotadeniyawa OIC:** 071 859 1634  
**Kotadeniyawa Police Station:** 033 224 0050 / 033 227 2222

## Will India's planned bailout package snatch Sri Lanka from China's hands?

BY ABISHEK KUMAR SINGH

China's neo-colonial dream is slowly but steadily biting the dust. The latest blow to its derailment train has come from India, as the South Asian giant has embarked on a mission to permanently snatch Sri Lanka, its southern neighbour, from Chinese hands.

### Multi-sectoral economic arrangements between India and Sri Lanka

The government of India and Sri Lanka are in the final rounds of talks to chalk out the modalities of a multi-sectoral economic cooperation partnership. According to a report published in Economic Times, both countries are working on a bailout package that will assist the Sri Lankan government on an urgent basis. The package is expected to boost investors' confidence in the Island nation's dwindling economy. According to reports in the public domain, India will be making available four kinds of economic incentives to the Sri Lankan government.



Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister of India Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman greeting Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa during his visit

the Sri Lankan government so that they could serve their population's requirements. **Energy security package:** Like food and health, Sri Lanka is heavily dependent on India for its energy needs as well. India will be providing a line of credit to the Rajapaksa government to meet its overall import requirement for crude oil. Moreover, India will also be assisting in the early modernisation of Trincomalee Tank Farm. **Currency swap agreement:** Currently, Sri Lanka is under a balance of payment crisis. Simply put, Sri Lanka's forex reserve is extremely low and it needs money in a currency other than its own (preferably the American dollar). India has in

principle agreed to approve a currency swap agreement with the Rajapaksa government. Under this agreement, India will be providing loans to Sri Lanka in dollars. For Sri Lanka, it will be cheaper than borrowing from the international market, while for India, it will be helpful in reducing Sri Lanka's economic dependence on China. Facilitation of investments in Sri Lanka- India and Sri Lanka will also be cooperating on diplomatic as well as ministerial levels to assist Indian businesses working towards upscaling Sri Lankan economic development. Sri Lankan finance minister Basil Rajapaksa, Indian finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and foreign

minister Shri S. Jaishankar have given approval to a direct line of communication between respective ministries of both countries. **The key role played by Finance and External Affairs ministers** The deal is said to have been finalised during Sri Lankan finance minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit to India in early December. Briefing media about Basil's visit, the Sri Lankan government said: "The Sri Lankan finance minister's discussions with his Indian counterpart and the external affairs minister focussed on a whole gamut of issues of mutual importance pertaining to the bilateral

relationship with particular attention on the economic cooperation aspect. Both sides expressed satisfaction over the evolving trajectory of the bilateral relationship. During the discussions, they identified ways and means through which the existing bilateral economic relationship between the two countries could be further broadened and deepened."

### The age-old alliance between India and Sri Lanka

Except for Rajiv Gandhi's poor decision to interfere in Sri Lankan internal civil war, India and Sri Lanka had a largely peaceful and cooperative relationship. The bilateral free trade agreement between both countries became operational in 2000, which led to an exponential rise in bilateral trade between both countries. Similarly, cultural ties between both countries are extremely strong as they have shared history, which is believed to be thousands of years old. Ravan, a terrorist of his time, was dethroned by Bhagwan Ram, who crossed over the sea in order to relieve Lankans from his cruel regime. Similarly, Buddhism, the dominant religion in Sri Lanka, owes its origin to India. Based on shared history, both countries are working to chalk out a plan to start a joint tourism venture. **China's debt-trap diplomacy** The mid-2010s witnessed a slight dip in the relationship between both countries due to Chinese intervention

in Sri Lankan affairs. In terms of militaristic hegemony, China became a huge supplier of military weapons to Sri Lanka with the official excuse of modernising its military. Taking advantage of Sri Lanka's dependence on the communist nation, China started to send businesses, students, and migrants to the island nation. These developments coupled with China financing development of Hambantota port led to Sri Lanka almost handing the port's sovereignty to China.

Currently, Sri Lanka is heavily dependent on India to save its sovereignty in the wake of Chinese economic offence through debt-trap diplomacy. With massive amounts of debt dumped on it by Beijing, the country has been looking for a way out, and India under Prime Minister Modi has graciously accepted the olive branch extended to it by Colombo. Recently, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have been looking for a solid trilateral pact that could act as a buffer to Chinese transgression in the region, especially naval and economic ones. The recent military exercise by three nations coupled with India's massive bailout to Sri Lanka is just enough to signal Xi Jinping that the "big boy attitude" does not work in international diplomacy. (TFIPost) *The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.*



ASPI	S&P SL20	Market
11,662.38	4,200.29	Market Closed
268.90	125.66	Share Volume
↑ 2.36%	↑ 3.08%	909,210,475
		Turnover
		8,169,023,361.00

# 'Users of informal money changers face legal action'

**රට විරුවන මේ ඔබේ අවධානය පිහිසයි**

ඔබ වෙහෙසව උපයන මුදල් ඔබේ ආදරණීයයන්ගේ දියුණුවට පමණක් නොව රටේ දියුණුවට ද හේතු වේ.

එම මුදල් මව් රටට එවීමේ දී ජාත්‍යන්තරවලින් ගොදුරක් බවට පත් නොවන්න.

එය ඔබගේ මුදල් අතිවිමරණ පමණක් නොව ඔබ අපරාධයක කොටස්කරුවෙකු වී නීතියෙන් දඬුවම් විඳීමට ද හේතු විය හැක.

අවිධිමත් ක්‍රම හරහා ශ්‍රී ලංකාවට මුදල් එවීම වාර්ෂයට නීති දැඩිව ක්‍රියාත්මකයි.

ජාත්‍යන්තරවලින් නොරැඳවෙන්න.

**නීරණය ඔබේ අත්!**

අධ්‍යක්ෂ ජනරාල් ජී. ජයවර්ධන ජයවර්ධන  
අධ්‍යක්ෂ ජනරාල් ජී. ජයවර්ධන ජයවර්ධන  
අධ්‍යක්ෂ ජනරාල් ජී. ජයවර්ධන ජයවර්ධන

- CBSL warns the public amidst foreign exchange crisis
- Says their hard-earned money contributes to country's development
- Members of the public mock new announcement

**A**fter initiating legal action against four of the "errant" money changers last week, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) is now warning that legal action may be taken against people who use "unauthorised" channels to send remittances into the country in order to earn a bigger value for their foreign currency earnings, *The Morning Business* learns.

The CBSL, publishing a notice on its official Facebook page yesterday (13), also noted that in addition to being in danger of facing legal action for being a part of a racket, people could also lose their money in the process.

"Your hard-earned money not only contributes to your loved ones' development, but also to the country's growth. In the process of sending that money to your country, do not become a prey of racketeers. This will result in you losing the money while also being subjected to legal action for being part of a crime. Stern laws will be strictly implemented to prevent such crimes," the notice added.

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

However, this post on the CBSL Facebook page was ridiculed by many Facebook users with mocking comments.

*Contd. on page 10*



## People exchanging dollars to get Rs. 10 extra per US dollar

- Bonus for migrant workers extended to those living in SL too
- Central Bank says new initiative is to encourage reserves

**T**he Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has issued a notice to the public to convert any foreign currency which is in their possession within the month of December to enjoy an incentivised exchange rate of Rs. 210 per USD or such equivalent amount, following a similar offer extended to Sri Lankan migrant workers earlier this month.

Accordingly, any person in possession of foreign currency obtained by purchasing from a bank or an authorised money changer for travel abroad and brought back underutilised into Sri Lanka (up to \$ 15,000 or an equivalent amount); withdrawn from a personal foreign currency account (PFCA) for travel abroad (up to \$ 15,000 or an equivalent amount); earnings from employment, profession, or business while abroad and brought into Sri Lanka; and acquiring and bringing into Sri Lanka for deposit in special deposit accounts (SDAs) on or after 1 January 2021 may receive this incentive exchange rate during the month of December.

*Contd. on page 10*

## Co-operative Insurance IPO on 20 December

**C**o-operative Insurance Company Ltd. recently announced the date of their initial public offering (IPO), which is set to take place on 20 December 2021. The IPO will be managed by the Merchant Bank of Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the IPO, Co-operative Insurance Chairman Susil Weerasekera said: "This IPO is an important milestone for Co-operative Insurance, and is a firm testament to the continued dedication and passion of our staff and the firm loyalty of our clientele. Our steady, undeterred performance continued to demonstrate stability and resilience during a period that was characterised by numerous restrictions forced into play by the global pandemic. Right now, we are bullish on what Co-operative Insurance can achieve during our IPO, and in turn how it will help elevate our portfolio in 2022."

The past year, Co-operative Insurance's (general) market share has increased to 4.42%, in comparison to 4.27% as in 2019 (iresl.gov.lk, 2020). Compared to the general insurance industry gross written premium (GWP) growth, which was -2.24% during the past year, the company recorded GWP growth of 2%. The company reported a five-year average annual GWP growth rate of 21% of GWP, while the general insurance industry's five-year GWP average annual growth was at 8.95%.

Co-operative Insurance also noted that its contribution to increasing general insurance penetration in the country has increased during 2020 with 945,743 policies issued by CICL. Profit after tax (PAT) for 2020 rose to Rs. 695 million, an increase of 155% YoY. Profit before tax (PBT) grew by 120% compared to the previous year to stand at Rs. 940 million.

"We are delighted to announce that our IPO will take place on 20 December 2021, following



Co-operative Insurance Chairman Susil Weerasekera



Co-operative Insurance MD Wasantha Ranasinghe

a strong financial performance this past year. Our robust cost management initiatives, proactive drive to innovate, digital-first process re-engineering efforts, and, most importantly, the strength of our passionate and deeply dedicated team have helped propel Co-operative Insurance to an elite league of top insurance providers within the country. I believe these traits have helped prepare us for this IPO and continue to offer unparalleled standards of insurance to people from all different backgrounds across Sri Lanka," remarked Co-operative Insurance Managing Director (MD) Wasantha Ranasinghe.

Affirming its financial strength, the company, which secured a strong financial performance for the past year, was able to grow their net earned premium (NEP) by an impressive 5% in a challenging...

*Contd. on page 10*

## Sarvodaya Development Finance to be listed in Main Board today

**S**arvodaya Development Finance (SDF) will be listed in the Main Board of the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) today (14) and will be classified under the "Consumer Finance - 4020" sector.

Accordingly, 149.6 million ordinary voting shares will be listed in the Main Board of the CSE under the security code "SDF-N-0000".

During the initial public offering (IPO) process, 45.5 million ordinary voting shares were allotted at an IPO price

of Rs. 22 per share. According to a CSE disclosure dated 2 December, it was announced that retail investors and unit trusts were allotted 100% of shares applied for, while institutional investors were allotted a minimum allotment of 4,500 shares plus 78.6% of the shares applied for over and above the minimum allotment of 4,500 shares rounded down to the nearest 100 shares.

The SDF IPO opened on 23 November and was oversubscribed within the day, following which the

subscription list was closed. The IPO process intended to offer 45 million ordinary voting shares in two tranches: An initial tranche of Rs. 500 million and a green shoe option of Rs. 500 million to be exercised upon oversubscription. Since the IPO was oversubscribed, a total capital of Rs. 1 billion was raised, which amounted to a 30.4% stake in the company.

The primary objectives of the SDF IPO is to satisfy the regulatory core capital

requirements of the CBSL and to part-finance the growth in its loan portfolio, which is forecasted to grow at a six-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24%.

SDF had previously successfully carried out a private placement across eight tranches in early 2021, also at Rs. 22.0, which raised Rs. 806 million. Seventy-six percent of the share issue was obtained by Sarvodaya-linked entities; of the remaining 24%, a majority was acquired by external individuals.

SDF is a licensed finance company formed in 2010 as the economic arm of the Sarvodaya Movement, which is one of the oldest non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Sri Lanka. Following the IPO, Sarvodaya Economic Enterprises Development Services (Guarantee) Ltd. will possess a 36% majority share, while Gentosh Total Asset Consulting Inc. Japan will possess a 30% share and the remainder will be with the public.

## BOI to attract investors in EV manufacturing sector from Indonesia

**T**he Embassy of Sri Lanka in Jakarta, along with the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI), plans to attract investors from Indonesia with the expectation of exploring opportunities in the electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing sector, including the possibility of assembly of EVs.

Accordingly, the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Jakarta

organised a virtual meeting with the BOI and the members of the Indonesian Electric Vehicle Industry Association (Periklindo). The meeting was held on 7 December 2021.

Sri Lankan Ambassador to Indonesia Yasoja Gunasekera said that Sri Lanka is developing a strategic plan to promote EVs in line with

the renewable energy policy. BOI Director of Investment Promotion Nilupul De Silva and Deputy Director of Investment Promotion Sudath Jayasekera presented investment regulations and current market information, and also answered several questions raised by the members of Periklindo.

*Contd. on page 10*

## Kapruka hosts investor forum

**E**-commerce enterprise Kapruka Holdings Ltd. will host an Investor Forum on 16 December 2021 at 4 p.m. as a virtual event, ahead of its initial public offering (IPO).

This event will give Kapruka's leadership an opportunity to present their value proposition and allow investors to raise any clarifications they may have. The issue, managed by Acuity Partners, will see Kapruka Holdings offer investors a 20% stake in the company at an offer price of Rs. 15.40.

The company plans to use the IPO proceeds to fund its expansion growth plans, which include upgrading existing technology and infrastructure, alongside launching various Kapruka platform services to carry forward new initiatives.

Kapruka.com is Sri Lanka's first e-commerce enterprise, founded in 2002 by Dulith Herath. Since then, it has grown into a multibillion-rupee enterprise. The organic growth of Kapruka to date is a unique attribute of its strong business model.

## Vehicle importers request Govt. to get their opinion

**T**he Vehicle Importers' Association of Sri Lanka (VIASL) has requested that the Government obtain their opinion and assistance when the latter decides to allow the resumption of importing vehicles into the country.

The VIASL held a discussion on the matter in Colombo recently. During the discussion, VIASL Treasurer Prasad Priyanga Manage stated that the Government would one day have to allow resuming vehicle imports and

that it should be done under a system. He urged the Government to involve the Association when this is done, as they are individuals who have been engaged in this industry for the past three to four decades.

Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa recently said the importation of vehicles and recruitment of public sector employees will not be carried out in 2022.

*Contd. on page 10*

# Tracified enables 10,000 Sri Lankan farmers to move up the value chain

**T**racified Technologies initiated a blockchain-based traceability solution targeting 10,000 farmers in Sri Lanka who export to the EU. Funded by GIZ, the solution will be a platform for farmers to provide transparency on the origin of the food source, harvesting and processing dates, and processing techniques used. Based on the product, these parameters can also be extended to capture temperature, humidity, storage, and handling data along the distribution chain as well. The solution will enable farmers to negotiate premium prices with discerning customers by transparently showing the quality of the produce from farm to fork. In the longer term, it is also expected to give farmers easier access to international markets as traceability is a proven method of assuring product quality.

Tracified Co-Founder Dileepa Jayathilaka stated: "Having been the platform of choice for supply chain traceability in a number of large-scale projects both within and outside of Sri Lanka, this new endeavour is a definitive step for Tracified towards proving its effectiveness once again in building trust in global supply chains by harnessing the power of blockchain technology. We are excited to join forces with international organisations to help Sri Lankan farmers to acquire a competitive advantage in global markets through a new level of transparency. We are

confident that this is a timely initiative that will strengthen Sri Lanka's agro exports with high technology in an era where the entire world is on a quest to explore the capabilities of digital technology to reshape industries."

Tracified has seen significant business growth and adoption over the past year. In April 2021, Tracified won an international Asian Development Bank (ADB) tender to implement a food traceability project in Azerbaijan. In July 2021, Tracified also secured a new project in Japan, to



Tracified Co-Founders Dileepa Jayathilaka and Uthpalie Thilakarathna

enable traceability of "sake" across the value chain. In August and September, the blockchain-based platform secured a project to promote Sri Lankan handicrafts in socially responsible ventures industries, engaging with Selyn and Kantala in a US Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project.

"Our vision has always been to use our Tracified platform to improve Sri Lankan industries and uplift the standards of

farmers and artisans at the grassroots level. These projects allow us to do this in Sri Lanka and expand this same model to other parts of the world, which is exciting. There is so much we can do for other industries in Sri Lanka like tea, fashion, coconut-based products, etc. that already have an export market to improve their value in the global market with the use of technology," added Tracified Co-Founder Uthpalie Thilakarathna.

Tracified Technologies is a blockchain-based traceability solution that connects the entire supply chain. The solution can be applied to scenarios when it's crucial to assure the integrity of the supply chain. Whether it's organic produce or Atlantic salmon, Tracified can identify and record movement, temperature, and storage durations across every stage, using a multitude of tracking technologies.

Tracified has been recognised in both national and international forums. In August 2020, Tracified received an equity investment from 360ip, a venture capital firm based in Tokyo. In 2018, it won the Founder Institute Scholarship for the Best Sustainability Startup Pitch at the Oslo Innovation Week. The product was also recognised at the 2017 E-Swabhimi Digital Social Impact Awards, where it emerged winner of the Business/Commerce category and at the National Best Quality Software Awards (NBQSA), where it won Gold in the e-Logistics and Supply Chain Management Category.

## TikTok launches new dedicated Transparency Centre

Announcing the launch of a dedicated Transparency Centre yesterday (13), TikTok reinforced the app's commitment to accountability and transparency to users. The updated Centre will house the platform's historical annual and quarterly Transparency Reports, in addition to upcoming interactive reports. The launch accompanies the latest H1 2021 Content Removal Requests Reports, also released yesterday.

The platform diligently releases Transparency Reports, in recognition of the importance of staying accountable for the actions taken to safeguard the platform and protect its integrity. To build trust through transparency, TikTok began releasing reports in 2019 and have continued to develop the studies and findings with new, deeper, and industry-first data disclosures. Key highlights include the volume of suspected underage account removals made and the number of ads rejected for not meeting TikTok's stringent standards.

Continuing its pledge to transparency, TikTok incorporated feedback from civil society organisations and experts to further develop refreshed report formats, now offering downloadable data in machine-readable formats. Additionally, reports aim to be visually appealing, with interactive charts and graphs to better illustrate data and actions taken. To best reach its global audience,

the reports will be published in 26 languages, to ensure that users around the world are ensured access.

"TikTok aims to make the Transparency Centre a one-stop shop to learn about how the app moderates and recommends content, develops products, and safeguards user information. The latest H1 2021 Content Removal Requests Reports updates are a continuation of that goal," noted a spokesperson. The Centre also comprises previous reports, including:

Community Guidelines Enforcement Report that offers quarterly insight into the actions taken to uphold Community Guidelines and Terms of Service Information Requests Report that provides bi-annual data on the legal requests for user information received from government and law enforcement agencies and the nature of the platform's response

Government Removal Requests Report that details the requests received bi-annually from government agencies to restrict content and any actions taken as a result

Intellectual Property Removal Requests Report that shows the volume of copyright and trademark content take-down notices and resulting response on a bi-annual basis

**For access to all Transparency Reports, visit the Transparency Centre.**

## SriLankan IT bags Silver award at FITIS Digital Excellence Awards

SriLankan Airlines won the Silver award in the "Corporate IT Awards" category at the Digital Excellence Awards organised by the Federation of Information Technology Industry in Sri Lanka (FITIS) which was held recently.

The "Corporate IT Awards" recognises and rewards companies that deliver outstanding operational excellence, measurable business advantage, tangible customer experience or outstanding impact through leading-edge implementation, and usage of information technology. The assessment criteria is chiefly based on how digital transformation is achieved through a given product or system. Further, "Corporate IT Awards" aims to identify and celebrate IT organisations that go the extra mile to sustain their new technology and operational capabilities in the long run by addressing the critical business



SriLankan Airlines officials receiving the Silver 'Corporate IT' award at the Digital Excellence Awards

needs of their organisation and people. "Digitalised Flight Operations through AeroOps (Tech Crew VR) and

CabinOps (CCVR – Cabin Crew VR)" was the entry forwarded by SriLankan Airlines, which mainly highlighted the

operational transformation achieved onboard with the automation of Voyage Report processes related to

both tech and cabin crew members. This enabled productivity and efficiency in the operations while

streamlining the back-office support services for improved user and passenger experience.

Digitalising the flight crew Voyage Report (VR) capturing process; safety details capturing and analysis process, workflow configurations, and providing comprehensive management information for decision-making in terms of safety, regulatory, and operational aspects are the main benefits. Regulatory information capturing, sharing, and storing electronically in secure and reliable form has aligned this system with compliance requirements. A strategic decision was taken to develop a solution with in-house software engineering resources who possess expert knowledge in airline domain, systems integration, and mobile app development. Through this initiative, the airline has saved \$ 2 million cash outflow.

### Contd. from page 9

#### 'Users...

"Why do we have to give our hard-earned dollars to you? Do you think we still live under a stone? I advise people not to send money to Sri Lanka but to save them wherever they are," one user stated.

"I have been sending money to Sri Lanka for the past 10 years. Did I get a recognition or concession for that?" another user questioned.

"Still the Central Bank rates do not match the black market prices. Unfortunately, we have to go through the same channels till you correct your mistake," a user alleged.

"People use illegal methods because they are not getting a fair rate for their earnings. It's very sad to see the Sri Lanka economy collapsing due to politics. The Central Bank should act independently to stabilise the economy. When the Central Bank collapses, the economy collapses. Without addressing the issue we can't get over this mess. Do the right thing for the sake of 20 million people. Don't play with our lives. Let the market act independently," another comment noted.

"Give us USD at Rs. 230, we will send it through formal channels," demanded another user.

"Go for the IMF, everything will be solved," the comments further added.

In 2020, regardless of the initial two waves of Covid-19, Sri Lanka witnessed a worker remittance inflow of \$ 7.1 billion. However, worker remittances have been recording a slump since June this year. In October, the monthly remittance inflow was recorded as \$ 317.4 million. Economists blame the directive issued by then CBSL Governor Prof. W.D. Lakshman a few days before his retirement, advising the banks to keep the selling rate of the USD below Rs. 203.

As a result, there is a significant difference between the selling rate of the USD in licensed commercial banks (LCBs) and a hawala agent. The difference is beyond Rs. 35-40, and Sri Lankans who live overseas mostly preferred these money changers instead of LCBs in order to earn extra rupees for their US dollars.

Considering this loophole, the CBSL announced that it will pay Rs. 210 per US dollar that is being remitted through legal channels during the month of December, while also announcing that it will take legal actions against money changers who offer Rs. 235-240 per US dollar.

Issuing a statement last week, the CBSL stated that in response to several complaints that certain authorised money changers are engaged in activities, notices have been issued to four money changers to comply with the relevant directives, within a specified time period.

The four money changers that were issued notices are New Natasha (Pvt.) Ltd. and George Michael Holdings (Pvt.) Ltd. in Wennappuwa, and Royal Money Exchange (Pvt.) Ltd. and Prasanna Money Exchange (Pvt.) Ltd. in Colombo 6.

The statement noted that they are not in compliance with the directives issued under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Act No. 12 of 2017 (FEA), and as such, the CBSL is conducting a series of spot examinations at the places of authorised money changers, thereby strengthening the monitoring and supervision of authorised money changers.

The CBSL is desperately attempting to attract remittances into the country with its foreign exchange reserves remaining at \$ 1.5 billion, out of which a mere \$ 1 billion are the foreign currency reserves. According to the CBSL, this amount is sufficient only for three weeks of import cover.

#### People...

Such persons can obtain this incentivised exchange rate of Rs. 210 per US dollar or such equivalent amount by converting their foreign currency in to Sri Lankan rupees at any bank during the month of December 2021; depositing such foreign currency into Sri Lankan rupee accounts at any bank during the month of December 2021; depositing such foreign currency into their PFA or SDA at any bank; or investing such foreign currency into Sri Lankan development bonds through their banks.

Previously, the CBSL announced at the beginning of December that it would be granting foreign workers who remit their earnings through licensed banks (LBs) and other internationally accepted formal channels an incentive of Rs. 8 per US dollar in addition to the existing incentive of Rs. 2 during the month of December. Accordingly, this new development has extended the beneficiaries of this incentivised exchange rate to all persons who may possess foreign currency. Speaking to *The Morning Business*, CBSL Deputy Governor K.M. Mahinda Siriwardana stated that this new initiative was introduced by the CBSL to increase the foreign reserves of the country and described it as "part of several additional measures implemented by the CBSL to complement measures to strengthen foreign reserves already targeted under the CBSL six-month roadmap".

Responding to our query as to whether there are other similar initiatives in the pipeline to strengthen the foreign reserve position of the country in the near term, he claimed that the CBSL will be focusing on the other areas mentioned in the six-month roadmap to increase foreign exchange (forex) inflows to the country.

The aforementioned six-month roadmap, published by the CBSL, mentions several ways through which the Government of Sri Lanka plans to increase forex inflows, including tourism cash flows, increase in foreign direct investments (FDI)

with the Port City and industrial zones taking off, export earnings above \$ 1 billion per month, government-to-government financing with \$ 1 billion expected by end of 2021, and monetising selected non-strategic and under-utilised assets to gain \$ 1 billion.

Other measures include facilitating inflows from the implementation of the Tax Amnesty through the Finance Act to gain \$ 100 million, continuing the scheme to pay an extra Rs. 2 per US dollar remitted and converted by workers abroad, negotiating short-term currency swaps with international counterparts to acquire \$ 1.5 billion, and pursuing efforts to attract foreign investments into government securities targeting \$ 1 billion.

However, this new development of extending the beneficiaries of the incentivised exchange rate was criticised by Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP and senior economist Dr. Harsha de Silva on his official Twitter handle, who claimed that as a result of these initiatives, there are two official exchange rates within the country during the month of December, similar to the dual exchange rate implemented in Sri Lanka during late 1960s to early 1970s – one exchange rate for importers and exporters and a separate exchange rate for foreign workers and the general public in possession of foreign currency.

"Back to the early 1970s! Here is the new and improved Foreign Exchange Entitlement Certificate Scheme (FEECS). So now Sri Lanka has two official exchange rates. As per CBSL the TT (Telegraphic Transfer) buying rate is Rs. 198.50 and here it's Rs. 210. It didn't work then, it won't work now."

From independence to 1977, Sri Lanka had a fixed exchange rate which was initially pegged to the sterling pound and then to the US dollar. However, by the mid-1960s, the country was facing a severe balance of payment (BOP) crisis due to decreasing export prices and increasing imports. Therefore, in 1968, the FEECS was introduced to decrease the pressure on the country's BOP. The dual exchange rate system introduced under this scheme involved one

official rate applicable to essential imports and non-traditional exports, and another higher official rate applicable to all other exports and imports.

While the objective of this dual exchange rate system was to ensure export diversification and import compression, it amounted to subsidising the cost of providing the foreign currency at lower rates to the non-traditional exporters, which eventually had to be borne by the government.

#### Co-operative...

...economically crippling environment impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic to post a profit of Rs. 695 million for the fiscal year 2020, up by a commendable 155% from the year before.

The company was awarded a Fitch Rating of BBB+ Positive outlook over the past few years. The strategic expertise of its management and its proven financial stability has enabled the company to continue to deliver dividends higher than the general weighted average treasury bill rate.

#### BOI...

Participation in the meeting from the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Jakarta included Third Secretary (Commercial) Heshani Premathilaka, Government Relations Officer Genesa Lahope, and Public Diplomacy Executive A. Febri Falahuddin.

#### Vehicle...

Addressing an event last week, he stressed that the Government will have to impose restrictions on the aforementioned. Accordingly, new vehicles will not be imported and approval will not be given for recruitment to the public sector next year, he added.

## 'SLT Check-In' offers Hoteliga cloud-based property management system



From left: Representing the SLT SME Product Development Team: Manager – Marketing Chamila Dharmasena, Deputy General Manager Ravin Tharinda, Engineer Muditha Costa, General Manager Sanjewa Jayamaha, and Chief Marketing Officer Prabhath Dahanayake. Representing Secvision (Pvt.) Ltd.: Director/Chief Technology Officer Sampath Subasinghe, Chief Executive Officer Sasanka Gunawardena, Manager – Enterprise IT Solutions Ranindu De Seram, and Manager – Managed IT Services Kaushalya Disanyaka

Addressing the challenges of hoteliers, SLT-Mobitel has launched its new "SLT Check-In" solution partnering with the world-class cloud-based property management system, Hoteliga, to provide the local hospitality market a comprehensive and unique technological offering. SLT-Mobitel and Secvision (Pvt.) Ltd., the authorised local partner for Hoteliga, signed the agreement recently. "SLT-Check-In" is part of SLT-Mobitel's business solutions portfolio encompassing the next-generation voice, networking, data hosting, and managed services as a one-stop-shop to facilitate local enterprises and small and medium enterprise (SME) businesses to compete in the global arena. As an all-in-one cloud solution for managing hotel properties, SLT Check-In provides dynamic features and modules such as a Booking Engine with bookings integrated with respected

payment gateways Sampath Bank (Master and Visa) and Nations Trust Bank (Amex), in addition to convenient integration with online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Agoda, Booking.com, Expedia, AirBnB, and Hotels.com, an interactive Calendar Management offering a complete and user-customisable calendar for the management of manually inserted reservations, and a Payment Module for payments acceptable in cash, via bank transfer, or by credit card. The flexible Invoicing Module ensures customers are offered a range of options for their reservations, payment receipts, deposits, invoice layouts, choice of language for foreign customers, etc. For information on the solution, connect with SLT Check-In by contacting the SLT SME team on 0112 389 389 or WhatsApp on 0705 004 000.

## TCL 20 Pro 5G wins CES 2022 Innovation Award

Consumer Electronic Show (CES), the most influential tech event in the world, is paving the way for breakthrough technologies and global innovators. It's where the world's biggest brands do business and meet new partners, and the sharpest innovators hit the stage. TCL's next-generation smartphone flagship, the TCL 20 Pro 5G offering awe-inspiring visuals with true-to-life colour, clarity, and contrast across its powerful 6.67-inch AMOLED display has been selected as the CES 2022 Innovation Award Honoree. TCL 20 Pro 5G comes with the upgrade NXTVISION, advanced display optimisation technology which is an exclusive experience showcasing sharper details and greater contrast boosting colour accuracy to enhance the user's real-life visual experience while offering elevated levels of eye protection to reduce eye strain and it boasts the TÜV Rheinland low blue light certification. It offers revolutionary



speeds, faster streaming, quicker downloads, and enhanced artificial intelligence (AI) features with its Qualcomm Snapdragon processor. Both front and back-facing cameras leverage premium Sony IMX sensors, accompanied by Optical Image Stabilisation technology and Backlight Selfie mode. Equipped with a mega 256 GB memory and 4,500 mAh battery, TCL 20 Pro 5G ensures consumers that they won't have to charge up or delete anything from this smartphone any time soon. A dual matte and glossy finish provides a balanced design that's sleek in the hand.

## ComBank first Sri Lankan bank to win IFC's CAFI Climate Impact Awards

Sri Lanka's first fully carbon-neutral bank, the Commercial Bank of Ceylon has emerged and the only Sri Lankan bank – to win two Climate Assessment for Financial Institutions (CAFI) awards from the International Finance Corporation (IFC). These ground-breaking climate impact awards were conferred on Commercial Bank in acknowledgement of the bank's estimated greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and for completing the highest number of climate finance transactions in South Asia in 2020. The awards were presented for the first time by the IFC to recognise financial institutions that outperform their climate finance targets. Commercial Bank's climate finance achievement included the reduction of 208,400 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e) of greenhouse gas which is equivalent to removing more

than 40,000 cars from the roads, and the disbursement of 416 green loans or climate finance transactions that meet the CAFI criteria. Commercial Bank uploads data pertaining to its green projects and green loans and leases granted to the CAFI platform as a practice. Using CAFI, the bank is able to verify whether or not a project meets internationally agreed-upon criteria for climate finance. The bank also finances projects that focus on renewable energy, energy and resource efficiency, waste management, emission reductions, smart agriculture and green buildings. The bank's Green Financing is geared towards the fight against climate change, meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 12: Affordable and Clean Energy, and Responsible Consumption and Production.

# Effies Awards Sri Lanka 2021 jury announced

**E**ffie Awards Sri Lanka announced its 2021 jury lineup. Organised by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), the Effies Awards are open to all agencies and brands that strive to be recognised for their most effective marketing efforts. This year's awards programme is special in it being a bumper year where more than two years' worth of marketing campaigns (from January 2019 to March 2021) will be considered for awards compared to the usual one-year period.

Established to lead, inspire, effectiveness, the 2021 campaign is and champion creative marketing themed "Dare to Inspire", in line with

the extremely challenging conditions the country faced during the years under consideration.

The independent jury comprises leading client marketers, agency strategists and creative leads, digital marketing and media frontrunners, and research experts led by Jury Head Gamika De Silva (Assistant General Manager – Marketing and Sales of Seylan Bank PLC). The star-studded

panel carries years worth of local and international experience in judging similar awards and this time's jury also consists of two international jury members.

Entries closed on 13 November and owing to the record-breaking number of entries this year, the judging will happen on 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, and 20 December at BMICH in strict compliance with all safety precautions.

## Microsoft announces Imagine Cup Southeast Asia New Markets Regional Competition for 2022

Microsoft recently held a virtual launch event for its upcoming Imagine Cup Southeast Asia New Markets Regional Competition, an annual innovation challenge for students and technology enthusiasts. The event featured an eclectic line-up of speakers and a panel discussion designed to inspire students to create innovative solutions that tackle some of the world's biggest social, environmental, and health challenges.

More than two million competitors from 163 countries have signed up for Microsoft's global student technology competition to build something that matters to them, make a difference in their communities, and innovate for impact. For the Imagine Cup's 20th anniversary this year, the brightest young minds will build, learn, and compete together to solve global challenges in four categories: Earth, education, health, and lifestyle.

A trio of past Imagine Cup winners and finalists — Virtusa Consultant – Technology Chathusha Wijenayaka, Shequal Foundation Managing Director Melisha Ghimire, and SochWare CEO/Product Designer and Covid Connect Nepal Co-founder Eeda Rijal — shared their experiences during the panel discussion, which



was moderated by Microsoft Southeast Asia New Markets CMO Lead Thilanka Abeywardena.

The event also featured a line-up of guest speakers such as Minister of Youth and Sports and State Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development Namal Rajapaksa, Bangladesh's State Minister of the Information and Communication Technology Division and Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology Zunaid Ahmed Palak, and University Grants Commission Chairman Prof. Sampath Amarantunge.

At Imagine Cup 2022, students and technology enthusiasts aged 16 or older are invited to build unique technology solutions leveraging Microsoft's technology to build purpose-driven solutions. To register or learn more, visit [www.imaginecup.com](http://www.imaginecup.com).

## Sri Lanka@100 shares post-Covid growth strategies with Hambantota SMEs

Sri Lanka@100, a private sector-led business development platform supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), hosted a capacity building workshop in Hambantota recently, in partnership with the Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce (HDCC) and National Development Bank PLC (NDB Bank). Representatives from over 60 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) attended the workshop to learn strategies on understanding the customer to revive their businesses post Covid.

Stax Senior Manager Thivanka Bandara, who led the workshop, stated: "Our training today is based on curated content to share knowledge and industry best practices that can enable these firms to become consumer-centric organisations. This reflects our commitment towards uplifting the growth of the broader SME ecosystem in our country as we embark on the post-Covid road to recovery."



HDCC Director General Tilar Nadugala

The core session on "Understanding the Customer", conducted by Bandara, focused on changes in customer perceptions and strategies that companies need to adopt to retain customers in a more competitive and challenging environment. NDB Bank, Sri Lanka@100's banking partner, also conducted a session on financial literacy and practical aspects SMEs need to focus on to become more resilient.

## Fourth PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards returns

Organisers of the PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards revealed today the winners and highly commended awardees of the fourth Annual PropertyGuru Asia Property Awards (Sri Lanka).

Sri Lanka's real estate awards programme made its highly awaited return this year with accolades for the premier development companies in the island nation. A leading name in high-quality, luxurious residential developments in key locations, Home Lands Skyline (Pvt.) Ltd. won the title of Best Developer, one of seven awards the company garnered this year. Kelsey Developments PLC, a pioneer behind gated community and lifestyle residential community concepts in the country, won Best Lifestyle Developer, a title presented for the first time this year.

Projects by Home Lands Skyline (Pvt.) Ltd. dominated the coveted Best of Sri Lanka awards. Canterbury Golf Resort Apartments was named Best Condo Development (Sri Lanka), in addition to Best Condo Development (Colombo Metropolitan Region). Canterbury Golf Villas garnered the Best Housing Development



Kelsey Developments PLC CEO Lalinda Kalubowila (left) and Home Lands Skyline (Pvt.) Ltd. CEO Yasas L. Pathirana

(Sri Lanka) title, as well as the Best Housing Development (Colombo) and Best Townhouse Architectural Design awards.

Central Park Ja-Ela by Kelsey Developments PLC won Best Housing Architectural Design, plus the highly commended award for Best Housing Development (Colombo). Kelsey Developments PLC also earned the highly commended award in the Best Condo Development (Colombo Metropolitan Region) category for Urban Gateway Kottawa.

For more information, email [awards@propertyguru.com](mailto:awards@propertyguru.com) or visit the official website [AsiaPropertyAwards.com](http://AsiaPropertyAwards.com).

## CDB: Overall first runner-up at BCCS Awards 2021

Building its business on visionary sustainability principles that have been translated into tangible action, Citizens Development Business Finance PLC (CDB) was recognised for its commitment to "People.Planet.Profit" with a total of five awards at the Best Corporate Citizen Sustainability Awards 2021 organised by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Championing each sustainability fundamental, CDB won the overall first runner-Up award in the companies category with an annual turnover above Rs. 15 billion being evaluated alongside the country's top-most corporates and conglomerates.

In addition, CDB was chosen among the Top Ten Corporate Citizens for the fourth consecutive time; its best practices during the pandemic recognized with the award for Demonstrated Resilient Practices during Covid-19, the Category Award for Employee Relations underscoring its extraordinary



CDB MD/CEO Mahesh Nanayakkara holds the trophy for the Overall First Runner-Up at the Best Corporate Citizen Sustainability Awards 2021 with the certificate held by Executive Director/Deputy CEO/ CFO Damith Tennakoon, which were presented by Ceylon Chamber of Commerce Chairman Vish Govindasamy and Ambassador for Norway Trine Eskedal

team, and the Best Presentation of an Application showcasing CDB's creative spirit.

It is the embracing of these core pillars of sustainability and tech disruption that have pushed CDB to look beyond the conventional norms of business in every single principle embedded in "People. Planet.Profit". As CDB moves forward with its ambitions and future aspirations, it remains

committed to make that journey with the least carbon footprint, continuing its quest towards carbon-neutral status, while being a highly socially impacting organisation. CDB's tech strategy in turn, complements its sustainability agenda by helping it expand its capacity devoid of brick and mortar distribution, contributing towards a more resource-efficient organisation.



Commercial Bank Chief Operating Officer Sanath Manatunge (right) receives one of the CAFI awards from IFC's South Asia Regional Director Hector Gomez Ang

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY



**"I believe in living today. Not in yesterday, nor in tomorrow."**  
— LORETTA YOUNG

### India's Harnaaz Sandhu becomes the 70th Miss Universe

Harnaaz Sandhu of India was crowned the 70th Miss Universe on Sunday (12), topping a field of some 80 contestants in a pageant that was touched by politics and the pandemic. The previously reigning Miss Universe Andrea Meza of Mexico, crowned her successor, a Bollywood actress, in the Israeli Red Sea resort town of Eilat. The pageant was held in the middle of the night, wrapping up at 5 a.m. local time (10 p.m. EST) to accommodate the primetime schedule in the US. (Yahoo)



# the morning brunch

## A Christmas chat with

# Harpo Gooneratne

### ➔ What's your most unforgettable Christmas memory?

The most unforgettable memory is when I went Christmas shopping with my mom and dad when I was younger. We would go to Pettah and visit a famous toy store at the time. After a day of shopping, we would head to Akasa Kadé, which was a great rooftop restaurant back then, and have dinner together.

### ➔ What would your perfect Christmas look like?

My perfect Christmas would be where everybody enjoys themselves and celebrates the birth of Christ. Being around my family and close friends and celebrating is all I want this season.

### ➔ Best gift you've got and given?

From a business perspective, throughout the year, we give to a less fortunate school. This year, we have decided to provide them with dry rations as well as some gifts to the kids in order to get into the spirit of

Christmas. We will continue to do this tradition for the coming years as well.

I get the opportunity to be with my family and friends this Christmas, so that's the best gift I could ever ask for.

### ➔ Are you taking a different approach to Christmas in the 'new normal'?

Of course. We have to approach it with the new precautions we have been given and we must encourage people to get their booster vaccinations. Personally, my family and I are adhering to the current regulations, and we're hoping for the best for the upcoming days and the new year.

### ➔ Holidays can be stressful sometimes. How do you like to unwind?

From the perspective of a restaurateur, the holiday season is one of the most stressful and busy months of the year. The season has a lot to do with making sure we look after our customers as well as to give them the best experience, so it is quite

a hectic season. We try to make our customers happy and be a part of their celebrations.

### ➔ Any New Year's resolutions?

Again, from a business perspective, we hope to concentrate on and keep offering everything that we do offer and keep doing what we do best.

Personally, it is to be more health-conscious; seeing the situation with the pandemic, this is the time to keep our health in mind. Eventually, we can hope that the country comes together and we'll be able to celebrate together in greener pastures.

### ➔ What's 2022 looking like for you?

Personally, this is a really tough question because I cannot even predict what tomorrow will look like anymore because of this unpredictable situation. We have to be positive and hope that the situation eases and everything picks back up again. I hope for the best and pray that everything will be better.

Happy Christmas everyone!



Harpo's Hotels, Cafes, and Restaurants Founder/CEO Harpo Gooneratne

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

### It's that time of the year again – cold air, busy streets, and an overall buzz of excitement and cheer.

This season, *The Morning Brunch* decided to speak to a few familiar faces to see what they'll be up to this Christmas.

Today, we had a conversation with Harpo's Hotels, Cafes, and Restaurants Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Harpo Gooneratne, who went into detail on what his plans are this season and let us in on some of his family's seasonal shenanigans.

Following are excerpts of the interview.

### ➔ How will you be spending Christmas this year?

I will be spending it with my family and friends. We'll be going to church and then spending the rest of the time together.

Every year, we meet at my brother's house, have a lovely lunch surrounded by family and friends, and join together by singing some Christmas carols and generally having a great time.

### ➔ What does Christmas mean to you?

For me, Christmas is a time of coming together and celebrating the birth of Christ. It is also a time to concentrate on the less fortunate and uplift the lives of other people.

## A look at the fabric of our society

### Chamila Gamage on his newest exhibition

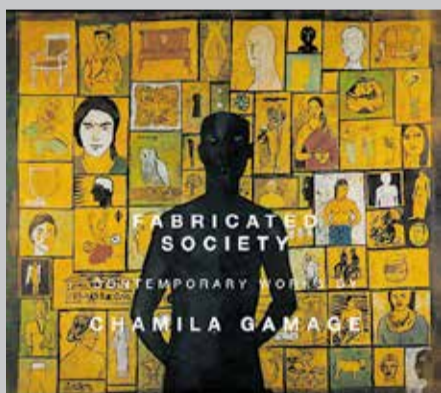
BY NAVEED ROZAIS

This Friday (17) sees the Barefoot Gallery Colombo unveil its newest exhibition, *Fabricated Society* by Chamila Gamage. A visual artist with over 20 years of experience, Chamila's work is rooted in painting, drawing, sculpting, and set design. He studied Painting and Sculpture at the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo Sri Lanka (Bachelor of Fine Arts) and Master of Fine Arts at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

For Chamila, drawing is one of our oldest forms of communication, and it can still be very relevant today. Through his work, Chamila attempts to investigate our collective memory and explore universal themes.

Interested in art from childhood, Chamila really got into art and realised the value of the subject when he was doing his Advanced Levels (A/Ls), and after completing his exams, he enrolled at the Vibhavi Academy of Fine Art in 2000, before going on to enter the University of Visual and Performing Arts, completing his arts education while working as a set designer at the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation. Over his 20 years as an artist, Chamila has collaborated with groups of artists and done solo as well as group exhibitions.

"I wanted to be an artist because, through art, I can express my emotions," Chamila shared with *The Morning Brunch*, adding that he lost his mother when he was three years old, and art helped him process his feelings: "I know that I can express my life emotions powerfully through visual art."



Giving us some insight into his newest exhibition *Fabricated Society*, Chamila explained that the exhibition is inspired by Sri Lanka's cultural diversity. As an art director, Chamila found himself fascinated with and inspired by the diversity of cultures within our island nation. "From Jaffna to Hatton to the South, diversity is a beautiful, huge part of our social values," he shared, adding: "I studied it a bit, and within that diversity is several individual identities in costumes, cultures, traditions, and the exhibition captures the diversity of these values."

The pandemic gave Chamila more time to be able to properly analyse the subject, and also gave him the chance to collaborate with his family on the exhibitions, because everyone was home. "The term 'fabricated' in the name *Fabricated Society* refers in part to the



media I have used for the exhibition," Chamila explained, adding: "Because the exhibition is made up of experiments I have done with batik. As an artist, I always like to work with new media and expand my boundaries."

Having found an excellent batik teacher, the artisan Upachanda Thilakawardhana, who worked with the late Mangala Samaraweera, Chamila played with Indonesian wax techniques, African tie-dye, and heavy linen to create the fabric that would eventually cover his canvas.

Keen to do the subject justice, Chamila spent over a year working on the concept and researching, visiting different places around Sri Lanka and studying elements of the lives of different communities and then a further eight months working on the batik and testing out techniques, moving away from traditional batik techniques, and instead approaching the process from scratch to create something unique.

"We can't categorise art with terms like paintings, sculpture, performance art, and so on anymore. Those are traditional definitions," Chamila said, adding: "We are living in a new age, where we can travel the globe and be seen on the internet. With these new methods for displaying art, I try to put out work constantly; to throw images into the great river of information; to cross borders and cultures and search for common threads and understandings."



**Fabricated Society by Chamila Gamage will be on exhibition at the Barefoot Gallery Colombo from Friday, 17 December to Sunday, 16 January.**



## Christmas at the Boulevard

Crescat Boulevard of Colombo, with its refurbished interior and exterior, will compensate for all the missed Christmas cheer in the past year, with its grand reopening which took place on 19 November, inclusive of many fun-filled activities and competitions up until 24 December. With an ultimate goal of providing shoppers with an exceptional seasonal shopping experience, the newly restructured and redecorated Crescat Boulevard presents an aesthetically pleasing modernised interior and a plethora of trending shopping and dining opportunities.

Adopting the theme "Christmas at the Boulevard", the Boulevard is ready to rekindle the blissful Christmas spirit with a wide range of exciting activities to partake in. Crescat, managed by John Keells Properties, is one of the oldest shopping malls in Colombo, which has been transformed into one of the most exclusive shopping malls in the area with a selection of designer, high-end stores and brands.

The Christmas tree light-up ceremony which took place on 3 December was graced by John Keells Properties Sector Head and John Keells Group Executive Vice President Nayana Mawilmada, John Keells Properties Sector Financial



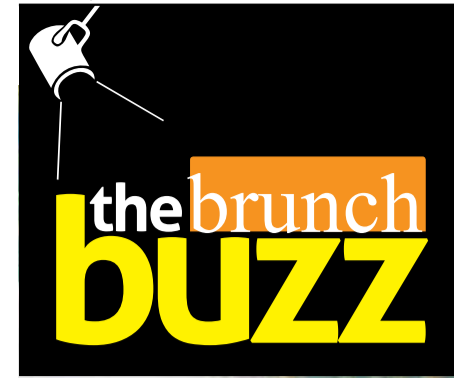
Controller and John Keells Group Executive Vice President Ravi Wijewantha, and John Keells Properties Head of Asset Management and John Keells Group Assistant Vice President Theekshana Jayarathna. "Jingle Bell Rock" will take place on 18 December, all day from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., to give kids of all ages a rocking time. With magic shows happening from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., kids will be too engrossed in fun activities to disturb parents while they shop. Moreover, kids will have the opportunity to test their vocal skills during the karaoke session for kids and they will also be able to participate in fun quizzes and games, standing a chance to walk away with valuable prizes.

Crescat Boulevard also presents a Christmas carol festival on 22 December from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., so that shoppers could feel the true spirit of Christmas.

Apart from being a pioneering shopping destination offering shoppers a variety of stores and service centres, Crescat strives to give shoppers elite entertainment and convenience to enrich and enhance their shopping experience. With live music every day, including the famed Yohan and Honorine and other walk-around choirs, shoppers are sure to be mesmerised with music while they shop.

Many other fun competitions await shoppers such as "Selfie and Win". Shoppers can stand a chance to win a gift voucher worth Rs. 2,000 from any selected store in the Boulevard by simply snapping a photo and sharing it on the Crescat social media platforms. Also, if an amount exceeding Rs. 5,000 is spent on Christmas shopping, shoppers can enter a raffle draw and stand a chance to win valued prizes.

The opportunities for shoppers at Crescat Boulevard are endless this Christmas season.



PINI KANDULU  
A Sinhala opera piece

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

**Opera and Sinhala are not two things that one would imagine go hand in hand, but extraordinary classical baritone Sanjeev Niles has blended the two with the release of his first original operatic Sinhala song, *Pini Kandulu*.**

A tale of loss brought to life with his powerful voice, *Pini Kandulu* is something of the first of its kind – an operatic song that blends the musical influences of western opera with the Sinhala language. Chatting with Sanjeev, we learned that most other mergers of Sinhala and opera lean heavily on eastern and oriental influences, while *Pini Kandulu* is the opposite, featuring simple western music that accompanies this tale sung in Sinhala.

**Holding opera close to his heart**

Sharing some background of his love for music and opera,

Sanjeev shared that Christian and sacred music was a big part of his life growing up, leading to him always being in choir in church and gradually towards classical music and opera, following the operatic greats like Pavarotti and Caruso, as well alternative singers like Andrea Bocelli who showed him how opera and classical music can be adapted to suit modern styles.

Having been a part of The Colombo Philharmonic Orchestra as well as other major choirs for years, Sanjeev decided to embark on a solo career in 2015 with *Cadence of Your Tears*, a piece that he collaborated on with Suresh de Silva of Stigmata



Sanjeev Niles

fame. This was the first of many musical collaborations.

On why he decided to pursue opera, Sanjeev shared that it had a lot to do with what his voice could do. “My vocal capabilities are more towards opera,” he explained, adding:

“I really enjoy the kind of techniques you use when you sing opera. It’s not easy, and you have to practise a lot. But once you really get into it, you can bring out some really great sounds, and it is amazing for you and your audience.”

**‘Pini Kandulu’**

The story of *Pini Kandulu*, Sanjeev said, was one of coming to terms with loss. *Pini Kandulu* was composed in collaboration with lyricist Gayan Srigarasinghe, who Sanjeev had worked with previously on other songs as well. On listening to Sanjeev’s melody, it became clear that the song was meant to be a nuanced one that captures the different feelings when processing the death of a loved one.

“When I sent the music to Gayan to write lyrics, he listened to it and connected to it, without knowing what it was supposed to be about – that brought around the story of someone losing their loved one,” Sanjeev said.

*Pini Kandulu* speaks about someone dealing with loss and how they look out into nature to find that person who is no longer with them. It talks about the despair someone feels when mourning and how that gives way to hope.

The music video for *Pini Kandulu* was created to be simple, with award-winning short film director Nilmini Perera (who also directed the video for his first song *Cadence of Your Tears*).

**Opera and the Sri Lankan listener**

Even with English audiences, Sanjeev shared that opera is something of a niche genre, and to date, there hasn’t been a single Sri Lankan production of an opera – there have only rarely been troupes from abroad who come here for the odd performance.

Having just released a Sinhala operatic audience, we also asked about what the landscape is like for opera in Sri Lanka, especially in the Sinhala language.

“There are definitely a lot of people who have not heard it before, so it is a process to get people to hear it at first. But lots of people, once they hear it, are thrilled and want to hear more. There’s definitely a market open to be found. From the initial feedback I’ve gathered on *Pini Kandulu*, there is definitely an opportunity, and this opportunity can be a big one because of how diverse the Sinhala audience is,” Sanjeev shared.

To listen to *Pini Kandulu* and Sanjeev’s other work, you can visit his YouTube page.



BY VENESSA ANTHONY

Twenty-four-year-old Kavindu Madushan is a dance choreographer, influencer, and actor. He set his journey as a dancer in motion at a very young age and has come to love all styles of dance. *The Morning Brunch* had a chat with Kavindu on his career, journey as a dancer so far, and more.

Following are excerpts of the interview.

**➔ How did you become a professional dancer?**

My journey as a dancer started years back when I was very small. I have been to multiple dance classes under different dance teachers, and I loved learning new dance styles. One day, my parents saw me dancing at home and they actually sent an application for *Derana Little Star* in 2009. That is where I actually stepped into the industry. I was the first runner-up in the competition and was eventually loved by a lot of people in the community.

After the competition, I started learning to dance more professionally with a lot of commitment. I learned different styles on my own while I was studying for my O/Ls (Ordinary Levels). My dream was to become a versatile dancer, so I worked really hard for it.

In 2014, I was able to join Gayan Srimal Sir’s dance group through *Sirasa Dancing Star*. This was a great opportunity for me, and I was able to meet and work with a lot of people in the industry as well. In 2017, after winning the *Derana* dance competition, I was very passionate about dance choreography, as I knew I had a special talent for that. I learned different techniques of dance on my own through YouTube and other social media platforms. Gayan Sir has always supported me throughout my journey, and I have learned so much from him throughout my career as well.

In 2019, I emerged as the second runner-up in *Hiru Super Dancer* and also became the first runner-up in *Hiru Mega Star* in 2021. Throughout



Kavindu Madushan and Shanudrie Priyasad in *Hiru Mega Star*

those competitions, I was able to showcase my ideas and concepts through my own choreography, which I am proud and happy about.

**➔ When and why did you decide to make dance your professional career?**

Actually, I never decided that I wanted to be a dancer, but I have always practised dancing since my childhood – I guess I was born to be a dancer myself. In fact, nobody in my family has danced or learned dancing before. I remember, though, when I was small, it was my ambition to be a dancer, but I never thought I would engage in dancing this much. However, I am extremely happy and feel gratified when I look back at everything I have achieved so far through dancing.

**➔ Describe the best performance you’ve ever put on. What did you learn from it?**

It is so hard to choose one. However, I do think the ones I performed with Shanudrie (Priyasad) in 2021 in *Hiru Mega Star* are some of my best performances. For all those acts, I worked hard to build the concepts and ideas as well as to demonstrate them creatively through dance.

‘I was born to be a dancer’

Kavindu Madushan on his professional journey and life



**➔ What is your favourite style of dance and why?**

I love almost all the dance styles around the world, and they are all so beautiful and influential. As I said earlier, I want to become a versatile dancer. However, I do love Indian and Sri Lankan dance styles the most – both to dance and to choreograph.

I also love to follow Channa (Wijewardena) Sir’s dance styles because he has a very unique style of dance. Since my childhood, I wanted to be like him and receive good comments from him, so that I can work on my dancing and choreography skills. Luckily, I was able to work really close with him and learn from him through *Hiru Mega Star*, which I consider a real blessing.

**➔ Any unforgettable experiences during dance performances?**

Oh yes! I have forgotten dance steps on stage about three times in

my life. It was actually a very bad experience for me and I felt bad about myself, especially during the competitions. Usually, it happens to me when I am stressed or scared on stage. So, to avoid it, I practise a lot and try to be very relaxed before a performance.

**➔ What do you consider to be the most important trait/s as a dancer?**

I think the most important traits as a dancer are motivation and determination. If you are a dancer, you need to be very committed to what you create and put yourself into it. Practice makes it perfect, and there’s no way around it. Hence, no matter how talented or professional you are, practice is essential in dance. Apart from that, I think a dancer should be well disciplined and enthusiastic at the same time.

**➔ Tell me about the biggest challenge you’ve faced as a dancer in your career.**

I have not encountered such a big challenge in my life yet. However, I am hoping to be a part of the Indian or Sri Lankan film industry in the future, so I believe I may encounter major challenges in the future in that regard.

**➔ How has dancing inspired you?**

Dancing has inspired me in a lot

of ways; it has allowed me to be who I am and understand what talents I have inside me. It has also allowed me to be more creative and passionate in what I do. More than that, dancing has also helped me to be healthier and more active. It has brought a lot of stamina and energy into my life. I think dancing is a very good exercise and practice for everyone for their mental and physical health. I also think that dancing helps to bring people together and provides them with a sense of community to have the same interest and passion in creativity together.

**➔ What hobbies/passions do you have outside of dancing?**

I love to act, and I am currently involved in the *Sihina Genena Kumariye* teledrama on Hiru TV. Apart from that, I love to cook. I also enjoy making TikToks and especially going out for movies with my friends and loved ones.

**➔ Speaking of TikTok, you have a big following. How did you grow your following and what was your best video?**

Yes, currently I have five million likes and about 450 K followers on TikTok. I have done so many TikTok videos up until now and again, it is so hard to choose just one. I have received so much love and comments for a lot of videos from my fans on TikTok.

I usually do TikToks with my friends. Whenever I am bored, I do TikTok videos with Lochi, Shanudrie, and Harshi. I love to do new trends and they are so fun and creative. I also do my own dance choreographies.

**➔ What plans do you have for 2022?**

In 2022, I’m hoping to do a lot more creative dance covers. Apart from that, I’m planning on taking part in another teledrama. I am looking forward to it.

I’m also planning to start my new dance class and dance group in 2021, so I’m hoping to give you guys more creative and versatile dance choreographies in the future.

# LESTER JAMES PERIES – Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts de des Lettres



Lester James Peries



**In a cinematic career spanning more than half a century, France has undoubtedly been the only country with which Sri Lanka's legendary film director Dr. Lester**

**James Peries has had a long and fertile relationship, one that has enriched both his personal and professional lives.**

The story began when he took his first film *Rekawa* (The Line of Destiny, 1956) to the 1956 Cannes Film Festival and his meeting with the 21 year-old Sumitra Gunawardena who became his wife eight years later.

Lester James Peries has the distinction of being the only Sri Lankan filmmaker who has had not one, but five of his films screened at the

Mecca of World Cinema – the Cannes Film Festival. After *Rekawa* were *Beddegama* (The Village in the Jungle, 1981) and *Kaliyugaya* (The Age of Kali, 1982).

In 2003, Cannes screened *Wekande Walawwa* (The Mansion by the Lake, 2001) out of competition as a special tribute to his lasting contribution to Asian and world cinema.

Then again in 2008 *Gamperaliya* (The Changing Village, 1964) was screened at Cannes as a part of the classics of world cinema.

Over the years, France has hosted countless retrospectives of his films. During the summer of 1971 the highly respected and prestigious Cinemathèque Française in Paris held a retrospective of seven of his films. This august institution has been the spiritual home to a host of international filmmakers including Lester James and Sumitra Peries.

In 1984 more honour and recognition were bestowed on him by France when the Festival de la Rochelle paid homage to him.

In 1988 came more honours from the Cinemathèque Française in the form of a highly acclaimed joint retrospective of the entire body of work of Lester James and Sumitra Peries. They were both made honorary life members of this celebrated institution. Small wonder then that *Nidhanaya* (The Treasure, 1970) is today part of the Cinemathèque's collection of the

classics of world cinema.

The same year, the Festival of the Three Continents in Nantes, celebrating its tenth anniversary, heaped more honours on him. It recognised him as "one of the few best filmmakers of the three continents" (Asia, Africa, and Latin America). "This was a very satisfying experience because Nantes specialises in Asian, African and Latin American cinema," he said. Here again it was *Beddegama* which took top honours.

In 1992, the 45th Cannes International Film Festival invited Lester James to serve as a member of its jury, presided over by legendary French actor Gerard Depardieu. Fellow members of the jury included John Boorman, Pedro Almodovar, Jamie Lee Curtis and Carlo de Palma among others.

"That experience was one of great jubilation, one of real happiness, of being recognised at least to be worthy of being a member, it is in itself a great honour," he recalled.

From 1995 to 1999 Lester James Peries was compulsorily (and he loved it) stationed in Paris when Sumitra was Sri Lanka's Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary for France and Spain. She was also Sri Lanka's Ambassador and permanent delegate to UNESCO during this period.

It was during this time that the Government of France bestowed on him one of its highest national honours – "Commander dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres" – in recognition of his contribution to Asian and world cinema.

This is the greatest honour France has ever bequeathed on any Sri Lankan to date. The date chosen for the ceremony was 19 June 1997, their 33rd wedding anniversary and the venue was the BMICH. They made a special trip from Paris to be present at this glamorous event. The Sri Lanka film industry's glitterati were there in full force as was the media.

Chandrika Kumaratunga was President at that time. I remember her discreetly slipping in and taking her seat that evening. She had wanted to be present as a "private citizen" and not as the President of Sri Lanka. Lester James was visibly touched. After all, he had been an attesting witness at her marriage to Vijaya Kumaratunga years prior.

And as the Ambassador of France to Sri Lanka Elisabeth Dahan placed the ribbon and medal around his neck, there was thunderous applause. The entire audience rose to its feet in salutation. Lester bowed his head in humble acknowledgement.

"My links with France have been spread over a long period of time. The most striking thing in my career is my relationship with France. If one goes through the coincidences of what has been happening, one would not believe the many things that have happened. All have been like a recurring theme, a recurring motif in a musical symphony. And that is the strangest thing," he said.

Soon after and much to the couple's surprise a large cake bearing 33 candles was wheeled in. Being at the podium that evening I requested them to cut it. They obliged. I then requested S.H.E to feed the first piece to H.E. (see Chapter 13). Madame l'Ambassadeur Peries blanched in embarrassment and refused. She finally had no choice but to finally concede since the mic was with me and everyone heard my repeated requests. *Bonsoir* was as usual there in full force to capture every moment and share it with our thousands of viewers across Sri Lanka the following Monday.

"The Bonsoir Diaries" by Kumar de Silva is a cocktail of chapters bursting at their seams with pithy asides, a trail of faux pas, and tit-bits from behind the scenes, marinated with anecdotes and drizzled with nostalgia, revealing everything you never saw on your favourite television show... from the '80s through the '90s into 2000.

## Community kitchens to close the nutritional gap for plantation workers

It may seem counterintuitive at first, but the problem of malnutrition – both globally and locally – is not solely caused by a scarcity in food or calories consumed, but rather from lack of access to a balanced diet with sufficient quantities of fibre, and essential vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Sri Lanka's estate communities have a highly wheat-centric food culture, with simple wheat based meals given that it is easy to make. Breakfast on the estates is usually *rotti*, with *lunu miris* and a flask of tea. Lunch would be either a wheat-based meal or rice with a side of vegetable curries. Given cultural prohibitions on the consumption of beef, lunch and dinner may see the addition of a source of protein like soya meat, chicken or fish.

"While high in calorific value, the average diet of estate communities tends to be very starch-heavy given the nature of work that they do, and also tends to lack in accompanying essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Even though prior initiatives had resulted in extensive establishment of home gardens for vegetables, these communities are generally unfamiliar with using these resources in their cooking," explained PHDT Community Kitchens Nutritionist Priyanga Mohan.

This results in the above average consumption of wheat flour at many households' in the estate sector, when compared with the average Sri Lankan household according to research conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Increasing income levels can over the medium-long term have marked positive impacts, however, an equally important tool in the battle for improving nutritional standards is knowledge. In order to consolidate on progress made in improving nutritional standards among estate communities, new approaches are being pioneered in Sri Lanka that may have the potential for local and global replication.

One such model which is already showing early signs of progress has been the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) "Community Kitchens" programme. Established with the goal of reducing child malnutrition by 10% by the end of 2021, the total project envisions the establishment of 60 nutrition enhancement projects across Sri Lanka's RPC Estates.



Tea estate workers provided nutritious meals and beverages by a community kitchen

At present, as a pilot project, a total of 3 kitchens have started operations, staffed and managed purely by members from local communities that have been trained by PHDT's dedicated nutritionists. Each kitchen provides daily healthy, balanced meals at affordable prices, and prepared using readily available ingredients, and inventive new recipes to nearly 250 estate workers, factory staff and their families in the areas surrounding Maturata, Talawakele and Bogawantalawa Plantations PLC in the Hatton and Nuwara Eliya region.

Based on the strength of its early successes, the PHDT is also actively working to expand the initiative to another seven estates by the end of April 2022.

### Novel recipes, nutritious meals

"In order to create a lasting positive change, we quickly understood that simply explaining best practices would be insufficient. We had to create a model in which the community had a chance to become familiar with new recipes, and understand how easy they would be to prepare before they accepted they would be willing to try them out at home, and incorporate these new meals into their culture and daily routine. As a result, our first task was to understand existing diets and preferences, in order to introduce simple but nutritionally dense new recipes which would appeal to preferences of these communities, while being affordable and containing ingredients which could easily be obtained," the nutritionist stated.

Following a careful study of a typical diet on the estates, the Community Kitchens soon began introducing new, healthy and highly nourishing items like pumpkin soup and smoothies, mushroom quiches, and spinach porridge. In addition to

such new recipes, the programme also sought to supplement existing staples, leading to new dishes like mallung roti and kurakkan (finger millet) string hoppers.

Each recipe was designed with anchor ingredients containing nutrients which directly address some of the most commonly prevalent deficiencies found in these communities. For example: spinach contains high levels of iron which is essential for treating and preventing anemia – one of the most common conditions on estates.

By increasing iron content in estate community diets and substituting tea for pumpkin juice – which is also rich in vitamins A, C, K and B6, as well as key minerals like iron, potassium, and magnesium – the Community Kitchens may have a real chance at reversing anaemia in the estates.

"Food has a way of bringing people together, and with the community kitchens initiative, we saw an opportunity to not only directly make a positive impact on what has long been thought of as an intractable issue by elevating nutritional standards, but to also strengthen ties and create opportunities across the estate community.

"The Community Kitchens programme has the potential to be scaled up exponentially, because it's not just about providing meals, it's about empowering members from the estate community to bring healthy practices home and incorporate it into their day-to-day, and even inspire entirely new dishes that incorporate the same approach of encouraging healthy eating habits through delicious meals. It also creates employment opportunities for those who run the kitchens. As the programme expands, this will be another increasingly valuable contribution of the Community Kitchens."

## NAGARRO SRI LANKA PLEDGES TO ACCENTUATE WOMEN IN TECH AND UPLIFT GENDER EQUALITY

With the view of fostering gender equality at its workplace, Nagarro, a global leader in digital product engineering and technology solutions, recently highlighted that one of its key strategic initiatives is to inspire and build strong women leaders. This is essential for expanding to a 500-plus strong diverse team of top-tier professionals in Sri Lanka.

The IT/technology industry in Sri Lanka actively empowers many women to lead. Nagarro shares great pride in joining this moral and strategic effort. Nagarro will sponsor the "Emerging Women Technopreneur of the Year" award at the annual SLASSCOM Ingenuity Awards from the coming year.

Nagarro works consciously towards the goal that each leadership group has at least one-third women representation through its "Glass Window" programme. This well-designed initiative identifies and enables aspiring female leaders to participate in many activities with access to all information shared within the management group. This has brought a rich range of diverse ideas and perspectives and inspires everyone at Nagarro.

Nagarro's work from anywhere (WFA) option allows all Nagarrians, including working



Nagarro women in tech

parents, to flexibly manage their workday to have the best possible work-life balance.

Nagarro actively pursues mentorship programmes both in-company and externally with renowned women leaders and provides many virtual courses and webinars by its very own Nagarro University for continuous learning and development.

The language used daily in and around the workplace plays a critical role in breaking away from gender-related stereotypes, beginning even with the most commonly used gendered nouns. This is advocated from the helm of the leadership at Nagarro, with Co-founder Manas Fuloria actively taking a stance on "gender-appropriate addressing".

The Nagarro Constitution enables zero tolerance for sexism and harassment, and everyone is encouraged to observe and report any inappropriate behavior to its Prevention of Sexual Harassment

(PoSH) committee. Nagarrians across all workspaces participate in mandatory training modules that recognise even the tiniest discrimination incidents.

Nagarro (FRA: NA9) is a global digital engineering leader with a full-service offering, including digital product engineering, digital commerce, customer experience, AI and ML-based solutions, cloud, immersive technologies, IoT solutions, and consulting on next-generation ERP. Nagarro helps clients to become innovative, digital-first companies through an entrepreneurial, agile, and CARING mindset and delivers on its promise of thinking breakthroughs. The company employs over 12,000 people in 27 countries.

For more information, visit



## Healthcare Heroes honoured by Wellawatta Nithyakalyani Jewellery and Rotary Colombo East

The "Deepavali Upahara" ceremony organised by Wellawatta Nithyakalyani Jewellery, together with the Rotary Colombo East was held on Deepavali day at the Nithyakalyani premises adhering to Covid-19 health guidelines. The ceremony was held to pay tribute to some of the heroes who bolstered the wellbeing of the country during this pandemic period.

Paying tribute to these healthcare heroes who have been on the frontline during Covid-19 to ensure health and hygiene in Wellawatte, A.P. Jayarajah stated the importance of all those heroes who have served tirelessly during the pandemic period and reiterated that Wellawatta Nithyakalyani



Healthcare heroes honoured at the 'Deepavali Upahara' ceremony

Jewellery annually engages in several social welfare activities. "Your service is more valuable

than gold," stated P. Sivakumar as part of his closing remarks during the vote of thanks.

**SPORTS AND ARTS**

{ *SPORTS* }

# LPL'S MUSIC CULTURE



**Jaffna Kings theme song**

Last year, it was Jaffna Stallions and this time, Jaffna Kings, the title defenders, who are owned this time by Subaskaran Allirajah of Lyca Group. The team was owned last year by a consortium consisting of Sri Lankans and Indians, including Arnold Anandan and Rahul Sood.



The unforgettable *Vaadaa Machan* – last year's Jaffna Stallions' official theme song – was a hit. It was made by the then franchise owners in partnership with famous artists La Signore, aka. Lahiru Perera, and Dinesh Gamage, with lyrics included in both Sinhalese and Tamil. It was released on 16 December 2020 and has so far had a viewership of over 779,000. Jaffna Kings' theme song for the 2021 LPL is titled *Adidaa Macha*.

- **Artistes:** Satheeshan, Hana Safa, and Krish Manoj
- **Music:** Chamath Sangeeth
- **Sinhala lyrics:** Sandun Perera
- **Tamil lyrics:** Rahul Raj
- **Sinhala rap lyrics:** Dulan ARX
- **Recording engineer:** Milan Fernando
- **Mixing and mastering:** Chamath Sangeeth of C Music Studio

*\*The song had YouTube views of over 56,000 within about a day, after being premiered last Sunday (12)*

**A**s the Lanka Premier League (LPL) second edition gathers momentum at Khetarama in Colombo, with 13 of the 20 league games being over by Sunday (12) and the play-offs set to begin in Hambantota on 20 December, about three of five franchise teams of the championship had released their official theme songs on YouTube.

It only depicts the growing trend of music and arts – popular arts – becoming part and parcel of the game of cricket on a consistent basis in this social media age, indicating that the ancient, traditional game of cricket, too, is overwhelmingly leaning towards popular culture in our time.

**Ekwa Jayagamu – LPL 2021 theme song**

- **Artistes:** Bathiya and Santhush, Umaria Sinhawansa, Yohani de Silva, ADK, Sanka Dineth, and Sajitha Anthony
- **Composition:** Santhush Weeraman and Chrishan Fernando
- **Music arrangement and mix:** Chrishan Fernando of Saregama Music
- **Mastered by:** Chrishan Fernando of Saregama Music
- **Lyrics:** Yohan Abeykoon and Santhush Weeraman (Sinhala), Randhir Witana (English), ADK (Tamil rap), and Rapzilla LKM (Sinhala rap)

*\*The song had YouTube views of over 525,000 by this week after being premiered on 23 November, or three weeks before*

**Dambulla Giants theme song**

Dambulla Giants, previously Dambulla Vikings, is owned by Qamar Khan of the Hamro Foundation. Their 2021 official franchise video is more interesting for the fans of the game because it features actual team members in it, in the likes of Dasun Shanaka, Niroshan Dickwella, Chamika Karunaratne, Ramesh Mendis, et al., all of them in very exciting yet strange attire.

- **Vocals:** Chichi, Neo Navy, Tony T, Dinesh Kanagaratnam, and Tehani Imara
- **Sinhala lyrics:** Kasun Kondasinghe
- **Music production:** Neo Navy
- **Mastered by:** Pasan Liyanage of Redfox Studio
- **Video director:** Priyanga Ranasinghe

*\*The song had YouTube views of over 221,000 by yesterday (13) after being premiered on 4 December, barely 10 days*



**Colombo Stars theme song**

Ashok Pathirage of Softlogic Holdings owns the franchise Colombo Stars, formerly known as Colombo Kings.

- **Artistes:** Randhir Withana, Romaine Willis, and Kaizer Kaiz
- **Composition:** Chrishan Fernando of Saregama Music
- **Music and mix:** Chrishan Fernando of Saregama Music
- **Lyrics:** Randhir Withana (English), Shehan Galahitiyawa (Sinhala), and Kaizer Kaiz (rap)
- **Mastered by:** Vinod Melpitiya
- **Video director:** Tharindu Ranepura
- **Executive producer:** Santhush Weeraman
- **Producer:** Lasitha Malaviarachchi

*\*The song had YouTube views of over 178,000 by yesterday (13) after being premiered on 7 December, barely a week ago*

## IN HIS LAST-LAP TRIUMPH OVER LEWIS HAMILTON ON SUNDAY Verstappen's Abu Dhabi win a stolen title?



Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday (12): Max Verstappen overtakes Lewis Hamilton in the final lap

- *Verstappen passed Hamilton on the last lap to become F1 champion*
- *The gap between the pair was closed up after late safety car drama*
- *Red Bull would be up in arms if they lost the championship in the same way*
- *Michael Masi may have got the title decided in a court of appeal or arbitration*
- *Did Hamilton deserve to win the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix over the Dutchman?*



Michael Masi is the Australian who has been F1 race director since 2019

It was billed as Formula 1's (F1) greatest climax. So F1 gave the world what it wanted. Yet, in doing so, the sport appeared to reverse over the concept of fairness, of sporting justice, and a level playing field, wrote Martin Samuel of *The Daily Mail* in his report yesterday (13) on the title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday (12). It did a wheel spin on the rulebook and decided the title on the need for the promised drama and spectacle. And, watching, we loved it, the above report added.

*It continued thus:*  
This will no doubt stream well on Netflix at some future date. Right now, however, sober reflection on how Max Verstappen came to be 2021's champion driver is leaving more than a few observers feeling nonplussed, not to mention a little queasy.

Will F1 win new fans with a manufactured finish that is close to incomprehensible outside the four walls of race control, that seems to fly in the face of fair-mindedness?

Was this the first Drive To Survive title, won on what it is believed the audience demands? Michael Masi's official title is Race Director, but isn't he taking the second part of that role too much to heart?

Here was orchestrated action, strings pulled,

plot-line and drama almost scripted from the director's chair, a hasty late rewrite. Whatever the teams and their drivers signed up for this season, it surely wasn't *The Truman Show*.

Red Bull were happy on Sunday night, but would be up in arms if this happened to them.

There was a reason that on the balcony of the Paddock Club at turn-one of the Abu Dhabi circuit, stood Paul Harris of Monckton Chambers. If F1 was just about having the fastest car, Mercedes wouldn't have felt the need to engage the Barrister of the Year for 2021, as awarded by the Litigation Tracker team of *The Lawyer*.

Harris represented Manchester City against UEFA at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. For a City supporter, as he is, that was something of a late away win. This, it is fair to say, must have felt like losing to a 90th-minute offside winner at Old Trafford, punched into the net by the Manchester United centre forward, while the referee was unconscious, having been knocked over while tying his boot laces, and facing the wrong way. He wakes up, gives the goal, then immediately blows the final whistle.

Forget, for a moment, whether Verstappen deserved his prize over the year. Forget whether it is good for motor racing to have a new champion, to have broken the domination of Lewis Hamilton. Forget even that anyone who loves sport thinks finals and titles should be decided in the arena in the most dramatic way possible – and this was.

It still doesn't make it right. By trying to shape and deliver the finish the season deserved, Masi may have decreed instead that it gets decided in a court of appeal or arbitration.

What happened prior to the final lap in Abu Dhabi on Sunday will be picked over, the way

F1 fanatics still discuss the rights and wrongs of the Senna-Prost era, or of Michael Schumacher's dirtiest tricks. But first it may be debated by silks and independent arbiters.

Not that sharp practice gave Verstappen the drivers' championship against all odds. He did that himself over one season and one very special final lap here. How he came to be level with Hamilton for that lap, however, is the issue that will concern Mercedes' legal team and maybe that of the FIA over the coming days. The watching world may have revelled in the spectacle of a single lap shoot-out for the drivers' championship, but the way that was set up was as unfathomable as it was seemingly unfair.

Mercedes immediately lodged two protests, which they unsurprisingly lost given the body considering the appeals had already presented the trophy and sent celebratory fireworks into the night sky.

Beyond that, it was suggested, all options remained open although wise heads feel Mercedes would be smart not to antagonise the FIA further.

Decisions made, decisions reversed, instructions given, instructions modified. You'll find the baffling specifics elsewhere.

The quick capsule review is that Hamilton was 12 seconds ahead on lap 52 of 58, Nicholas Latifi of Williams bunged his car into a wall at turn 14 one lap later and the race continued under a safety car, during which Verstappen pitted for new, fast, soft tyres. Then when it reconvened with a lap to go, the Dutchman was allowed to start ahead of all the lapped traffic that would have sat between him and the leader.

Hamilton had to go through those cars in real time, Verstappen didn't. He even admitted that, had the race played out without Latifi's misjudgment, there is no way he would have caught Hamilton. It became the finale F1 wanted, except Hamilton's tyres were older and slower and he was at a huge disadvantage.

Meaning Verstappen won – the race and the championship. Crazy, yes. Exciting, yes. Dramatic, yes. The way a sporting contest should ideally be decided? Undoubtedly. But fair? Correct? Logical? Reasonable? It is mighty hard to argue that case, even if the Barrister of the Year wasn't staring daggers at you across the room.

the morning

## sports

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



# 'MJ' appointed SL Consultant Coach

At last takes up key national responsibility, that too with a 'packed year' ahead



Mahela Jayawardene taking up major responsibility of the national coaching structure is a significant move by SLC. The appointment is coming up as a heavy schedule is awaiting Sri Lanka next year

PHOTO © SLC

BY REVATHA S. SILVA

**Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) announced yesterday (13) the appointment of former Sri Lanka Captain and current prolific coach Mahela Jayawardene as the Consultant Coach for Sri Lanka national teams for a one-year period, with effect from 1 January 2022.**

Jayawardene, in his new role, is to be "in charge of the overall cricketing element of the national teams and will provide invaluable strategic support for the players and management teams at the (SLC) High-Performance Centre".

"We are extremely happy that Mahela is joining the national team for an extended role, especially given the context that Sri Lanka has a heavy international calendar during the year 2022," SLC CEO Ashley de Silva had said.

## Heavy schedule

Sri Lanka are to tour Australia for five T20 Internationals in February next year, the first of a series of hectic bilateral series and multi-team competitions stacked up for the Sri Lanka men's team through 2022.

There will be a Test tour of India and New Zealand while Australia, Pakistan, and the West Indies are scheduled to be here for Test cricket. These are in addition to the scheduled Asia Cup as well as the next T20 World Cup to be held in Australia in

October-November 2022.

In addition to the above men's team assignments, Sri Lanka "A", Emerging, and Under-19 teams' cricket too look to be coming under Jayawardene's new responsibility.

## U-19 World Cup first challenge

"Mahela's contributions during the first round of the International Cricket Council (ICC) Men's T20 World Cup, which ended in November in (the) UAE, became invaluable for the overall performances of our team in the concluded event," de Silva had further added.

Despite the new appointment, Jayawardene will continue to perform in his role with the Under-19 team, as it

## Technical glitch: CL initial draw cancelled

The Champions League (CL) last-16 draw was to take place again at 7.30 p.m. (Sri Lanka time) after a "technical problem" caused an error in the initial one held hours earlier. The initial draw saw Manchester United, featuring Cristiano Ronaldo, setting up a meeting with Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), featuring Lionel



Messi. What went wrong? Man United were initially

drawn to face Villarreal, but this was not permitted

UEFA said the draw had been "declared void"

under tournament rules as they had been in the same group. Instead, the La Liga side were paired with Man City, while United drew PSG. In a statement, organisers

## Man United suffer Covid-19 outbreak

Manchester United are the latest Premier League club to suffer an outbreak of Covid-19. A number of players and staff returned positive lateral flow tests last Sunday (12) morning and were sent home from training. There are fears the outbreak could spread even further, putting today's (14) Premier League trip to Brentford in serious doubt. News of this latest outbreak comes just days after Tottenham's Europa Conference League tie against Rennes last Thursday (9) was postponed after 13 Spurs players and staff tested positive for the virus.

# Virat Kohli still missing!

India Test Captain yet to join team and begin quarantine before leaving to South Africa



Perhaps the most successful India Captain so far on record, Virat Kohli. The way Kohli was asked to leave his limited-over cricket captaincy by the BCCI last week is deriving dissatisfaction from many quarters

Reduced to only Test skipper, Virat Kohli hadn't yet reported to India's hotel in Mumbai. All the players were supposed to begin a three-day quarantine ahead of their scheduled departure for Johannesburg, South Africa on Thursday (16). Kohli had been ignoring selectors and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) calls for the last few days as he is allegedly upset over losing One-Day International (ODI) captaincy, reported Dheeraj Singh of *InsideSport* yesterday (16).

"What rift? There is no problem between the two (Kohli and India's newly appointed ODI and T20 International Captain Rohit Sharma). It's all cooked up. They are professionals and have mutual respect. Virat bhai is well respected amongst (his) teammates. He is yet to join but should be here in some time," an India team player, currently in the Mumbai team hotel, had said.

## No answer

Last Sunday (12), the Indo Test cricket team underwent a short camp in Mumbai, but Kohli was missing. "Virat was obviously informed. But he hasn't joined the camp. We expect him to join tomorrow (yesterday). The players will enter a three-day bio-bubble

before travelling to Johannesburg," a senior BCCI official has added.

Even though the selectors and some BCCI officials tried calling Kohli, he didn't return or accept calls. Earlier, his childhood coach Rajkumar Sharma had said Kohli's phone was switched off.

## He should've returned the calls: BCCI

As the series will be played under strict bio-bubble due to the Omicron variant outbreak in South Africa, the players were asked to attend a short camp in Mumbai, under India Bowling Coach Paras Mhambrey at the Bandra Kurla Complex in Mumbai, before entering their bio-bubble.

The first Test will be played from 26 December, or Boxing Day, at SuperSport Park, Centurion.

When asked if Kohli is ignoring their calls, the official dismissed the idea. He said that Kohli will join as he also lives in Mumbai.

"Why should a player ignore our calls? He is a professional cricketer and will join shortly. But, of course, he should have returned the calls," the above BCCI official had said.

## Many return to Test arena

It should be noted that Kohli hasn't

## India's Test squad:

Virat Kohli (Captain), Rohit Sharma (Vice Captain), Lokesh Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Jayant Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur, and Mohammed Siraj

## Standby players:

Navdeep Saini, Saurabh Kumar, Deepak Chahar, and Arzan Nagwaswalla

## Schedule:

• **First Test:** 26-30 December 2021 from 1.30 p.m. at Centurion Park, Centurion\*

• **Second Test:** 3-7 January 2022 from 1.30 p.m. at Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg

• **Third Test:** 11-15 January from 2 p.m. at Newlands Cricket Stadium, Cape Town

• **First ODI:** 19 January at 2 p.m. at Boland Park, Paarl

• **Second ODI:** 21 January at 2 p.m. at Boland Park, Paarl

• **Third ODI:** 23 January at 2 p.m. at Newlands Cricket Ground, Cape Town

\*All times in Sri Lanka time

even congratulated Sharma on his appointment as India's new ODI Captain. However, he posted a couple of videos on his Instagram handle wishing Yuvraj Singh on his birthday.

The South Africa series will also see the return of Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Lokesh Rahul, Jasprit Bumrah, and Mohammed Shami who were missing from the home series against New Zealand.

## NEXT SL COACH AVISHKA OR NAVEED!

# MJ everywhere: Why is there a Board?

With the appointment of Mahela Jayawardene (MJ) as the high-handed Consultation Coach yesterday (13), it is evident that the former Captain and Mumbai Indians Coach is now having an overwhelming controlling

power over local cricket.

He is Head of the National Sports Council, his colleague Kumar Sangakkara is in the Technical Advisory Committee, and now he is to oversee coaching of all national teams. Naturally,

one can ask: What the heck of a use of the Cricket Board?

In this context, it is possible that the authorities tend to have a local for the vacant Sri Lanka Head Coach's position. It will

likely be either Avishka Gunawardene or Naveed Nawaz, sources revealed. But South African Graham Ford too has been contacted by the Technical Committee over the appointment, it was learnt.

## 87TH JOE-PETE CRICKET ENCOUNTER

# Joes take upper hand on day one

BY RANJIKA PERERA

St. Joseph's College, Colombo dominated the first day's play of the 87th Battle of the Saints cricket encounter against St. Peter's College, Colombo before rain washed out the final session of play yesterday (13) at the SSC Grounds, Colombo. After being put into bat first, Joes made 233/6 in 55.3 overs when the day's play was called off.

## Peterites punished for indiscipline bowling

Peterite skipper Nipunaka Fonseka won the toss and sent Joes into bat. Despite the early assistance for the seamers at the SSC, Fonseka opted to share the new ball with right-arm off-spinner Chamelker De Silva and left-arm seamer Danal Hemananda. The strategy didn't work as the Joes got off to a fine start. Stand-in Captain Sheran Fonseka and Yesith Rupasinghe added 120 runs for the first wicket. The Peterites were out of sorts in the field as the two left-handers brought up half centuries before lunch.

However, Fonseka was the first to be dismissed, lbw De Silva. In the very next over, Rupasinghe too fell trying to play a reverse-sweep off Niman Umesh. Despite the loss of the two set batters, Hiran Jayasundara and Mithira Thenura made sure they saw off the remaining overs until the abrupt ending.

## Joes put the pedal down

Later on, with 26 overs remaining out of 60 mandatory overs in the first innings, Josephians looked for quick runs. Jayasundara played the anchor



Yesith Rupasinghe struck valuable 57 for Joes

while Thenura scored an 18-ball 20. Shenuka De Silva made a quick 21. Jayasundara remained unbeaten on 49 when rains came down. Umesh bowled best for the Petes picking up 3/55.

## Joes hampered

Due to national commitments, St. Joseph's missed skipper Dunith Wellalage, Shevon Daniel, and wicket-keeper-batter Sadeesh Jayawardene. Peterites too missed Wanuja Sahan all of whom were not released by Sri Lanka Cricket, as they are preparing

for the U-19 World Cup starting on 14 January 2022.

The two-day encounter is restricted to 60 overs in the first innings, unlike other traditional games. Today (14) is the second and final day.

## Brief scores:

St Joseph's 1st innings 233/6 (55.3) (Yesith Rupasinghe 57, Sheran Fonseka 52, Hiran Jayasundara 49 n.o., Shenuka De Silva 21, Mithira Thenura 20; Niman Umesh 3/55; Shannon Rodrigo 2/48; Chamelker De Silva 1/32) vs. St. Peter's