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## Disaster Relief Fund to help employees in emergency situations

**RASIKA SOMARATHNA**  
The Government is considering setting-up an Employee Disaster Relief Fund to provide assistance to employees experiencing severe financial need due to unexpected and unavoidable emergencies such as the current COVID 19 pandemic.  
Labour Minister Nimal Siripala de

Silva said yesterday it is high time for Sri Lanka to have a guaranteed fund like some other countries have to provide emergency assistance to employees during an unexpected disaster.  
The Minister told the 'Daily News' that his ministry has already set the wheels in motion to establish such a fund and talks have begun with employ-

ers, trade unions and International Labour Organization among others.  
He said employers, employees and if possible, other donors could contribute to such a fund where the monies will be kept in reserves.



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## CAPITAL HEIGHTS



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## DIVI NEGUMA CASE: 'PROSECUTION FAILED TO PROVE THE CHARGES'

# BASIL RAJAPAKSA, THREE OTHERS REQUEST ACQUITTAL

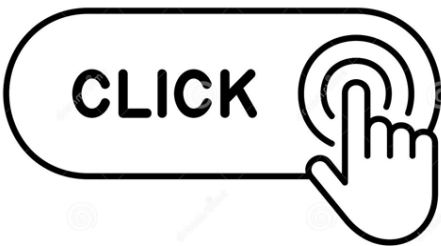


Travel ban lifted

**LAKMATH SOORIYAGODA**  
Former Minister Basil Rajapaksa and three others who had been indicted in the Colombo High Court had made a request through their lawyers to acquit them from the Divi Neguma case, without calling defence evidence, on the basis that the prosecution evidence has failed to establish the commission of the offence charges against accused in the indictment.  
The Attorney General had filed indictments against former Minister Basil Rajapaksa, former Secre-

tary to the Ministry of Economic Development Dr. Nihal Jayasinghe, former Director General of Divi Neguma Department Kithsiri Ranawaka and former Deputy Director General of Divi Neguma Department Bandula Tillekaseri in the Colombo High Court for allegedly committing criminal breach of trust with regard to Rs.2,992 million while being utilised for the 'Isurumath Nivahana' program during the January-2015 presidential election.  
President's Counsel Gamini

Marapana with Navin Maranana PC and Jay, appearing for this applicant Judge R. G Section 200 Criminal Pr Court to recall, on behalf accused, in the evidence totally commission against the ment.



## Nivar cyclone to intensify over next 48 hrs

**RUKSHANA RIZWIE**  
A low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal which has developed into a depression, 370 km away from Trincomalee is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm named Nivar within the next 48 hours.  
The Meteorology Department warned that although the cyclone may make landfall in Tamil Nadu coast, those living in the North and East belt should take necessary precautions.

## Relief period for hotels to settle electricity bills extended

Minister of Tourism Prasanna Ranatunga says the Electricity Board has been requested to grant hotels and holiday inns registered with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority a grace period of six months to settle electricity tariffs.

## Independent Commissions were not independent'

**SANDASEN MARASINGHE, CAMELIA NATHANIEL and AMALI MALLAWARACHCHI**  
The Independent Commissions set up by the previous Good Governance Government were never independent, said Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) Kal-

utara district Parliamentarian Mahinda Samarasinghe in Parliament yesterday.  
He said he made this statement as a representative of the then Constitutional Council and the same fact was obvious as it consisted of Civil Society activists.

## PCol probing Easter Sunday terror attacks

### 'Rs. 4 bn worth transactions made through two bank accounts belonging to former EP Governor'

**LAHIRU FERNANDO**  
Monetary transactions amounting to four billion rupees had allegedly taken place through two bank current accounts belonging to former Eastern Province (EP) Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah between 2016 - 2019.  
This was revealed during the testimony of the former Manager of the Bank of Ceylon's Kollupitiya branch before the Presidential Commission of Investigation (PCoI) probing the Easter Sunday terror attacks

yesterday.  
She said these bank accounts by the name of Sri Lanka Hira Foundation (SLHF) and Batticaloa Campus Private Limited which were founded by Hizbullah had been allegedly opened in the Kollupitiya branch and Hizbullah himself and two other individuals namely Abdul Cadre Mohamed Samsudeen and Ahmed Faeel Mohamed had been named as authorized persons to handle the transactions of these accounts.

## Scientists see success with Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine

**Sri Lankan born doctor leading vaccine development**  
Scientists at the University of Oxford say their experimental COVID-19 vaccine shows a strong immune response among older people. The early results raise hopes that the vaccine can protect the people most at risk of getting severely ill from the new coronavirus.  
Dr. Andrew Pollard leads the University of Oxford study. He told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on Thursday that he was "delighted" that early results show a strong immune response "even in those over 70 years of age."

## National List slot: UNP Working Committee nominates Ranil

Former Prime Minister and Leader of the United National Party Ranil Wickremesinghe's nomination to the UNP National List post to Parliament which is currently vacant, was finalized yesterday, former Minister Arjuna Ranatunga's media division announced in a release.  
The release cited that Ranil Wickremesinghe was previously nominated for the post of National Member of Parliament by the National Organization of the party Navin Dissanayake and former Member of Parliament Arjuna Ranatunga.

## Akila Viraj resigns as UNP General Secretary

**SHIROMI ABEYSINGHE AND S.M.WIJAYARATNE**  
Akila Viraj Kariyawasam has resigned from the post of General Secretary of the United National Party stating that it was time to give an opportunity to newcomers to hold the mantle in the party.

## COVID-19 positive cases top 20,000; total recoveries 14,497

**ISHARA MUDUGAMAUA**  
Sri Lanka has recorded 400 new COVID-19 infected persons yesterday increasing the country's total number of COVID positive cases to 20,171 while total infections from the dual clusters reached 16,642.  
Of them, 3,059 were from the Minuwangoda cluster and all other 13,580 were from the

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