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Construction work on third stretch of Central Expressway begins today

IRANGIKA RANGE

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa will inaugurate the construction work on the third stretch of the Central Expressway from Pothubera to Galagedara today. The groundbreaking ceremony will be held at Liangiriga area on the Pothubera-Walukada Road. **NEWS 02**

President instructs officials Facilitate villagers' economic activity

● No legal action against legitimate traditional activities

● Teacher shortages in remote schools addressed

● Infrastructure development gets priority

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday instructed officials not to hinder the activities and traditional ways of life of villagers who enter forests for legitimate purposes such as tapping Kithul trees.

President Rajapaksa gave this directive during a visit to the Ravankonita village in the Inbalupe Divisional Secretariat Division in Balangoda under the "Conversation with the Village" programme (Gana Sanaya Ebbandana).

The President was responding to villagers who drew his attention to the problems faced by Kithul tappers. The President gave specific instructions to the Police and Wildlife and Forest Conservation Department officials to ensure that these Kithul tappers can carry out their livelihood without any obstruction.

He also gave instructions to the officials concerned not to institute legal action in an arbitrary manner against villagers who enter the lands belong-

ing to forest Conservation and Wildlife Departments to carry out their livelihood such as tapping Kithul and plucking tea leaves.

His visit to this remote village in the extreme corner of the Ratnapura district bordering the Nuwara Eliya district is the third such programme implemented on the instructions of the President.

The first programme was conducted in the Haldimulla Divisional Secretariat Division in the Haldulla district and the second was held in the Wipimuna US division in the Matale district in September and October this year.

The President embarked on this programme "Conversation with the Village" to identify the problems faced by the people in underprivileged villages by himself and provide lasting solutions for them. The issues faced by the people in this village were discussed at a meeting held at the Thorawekanda Vidyalaya grounds. **NEWS 02**



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa being presented two books written by Grade 2 student Chavali Chamundika Jayawickrama of Thorawekanda Vidyalaya, during the President's visit to the school. Ministers Pavithra Wanniarachchi, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, State Minister Janaka Wakkumbura, Parliamentarian W.D.J. Senewiratne, Milla Ellawala, Ganini Welebadu and Muditha De Soyza were present. Picture courtesy President's Media Division

PM meets Bishop of Colombo:
Focus on celebrating Christmas by following health guidelines



AMALI MAILAWARACHCHI

A special discussion was held between Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Bishop of Colombo Rev. Dushantha Rodrigo concerning the celebration of Christmas under proper health guidelines in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting between the Prime Minister and the Bishop of Colombo was held at the Bishop's Office on Thursday evening, states the Prime Minister's Office.

During the meeting, the Bishop of Colombo drew the attention of the Prime Minister to the celebration of Christmas while protecting Christians and all Sri Lankans during the festive season. The discussion also focused on the commencement of schools and the formulation of the new Constitution. **NEWS 02**

Govt. will not sign any agreement detrimental to country - Kobbela



ASELA KURULUWANSA and Corina Group Nihal Jayawardena

Minister of Mass Media and Information, Cabinet Spokesman Kobbela Ramanakwella stated that the present Government will not settle on any agreement that is detrimental to the country, no matter how financially beneficial it may be. The Government's decision not to move forward with the MCC Agreement is a reflection of this stance, Ramanakwella pointed out.

"After a proper study of the agreement, we have made it clear that we do not agree with it." **NEWS 02**

Rs. 1 billion allocated monthly to boost domestic economy - Basil



MAHINDA ALI HEDDARA

Minister Basil Rajapaksa said that one billion rupees has been allocated for a month from this year's budget for the development of the domestic economy along with the aim of rebuilding the country's economy which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accordingly, he pointed out that a sum of ten billion rupees has been allocated from next year's budget for the development of the domestic economy.

He was speaking at the Uva Provincial Committee. **NEWS 02**

India, Sri Lanka to hold talks on fisheries issue

India and Sri Lanka will hold a virtual meeting of their joint working group on fisheries on December 30 that will take up the issue of the recent apprehension of 35 Indian fishermen and seizure of five fishing vessels by the Sri Lanka Navy. **NEWS 02**

Country registers over 75% COVID-19 recoveries



ISHARA MUDUGAMUWA

More than 75% of COVID-19 positive patients reported so far in the country have totally recovered and been discharged from hospitals, Editor of the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) Dr. Ishara Mudugamuwa stated.

Dr. Mudugamuwa further said that around 9,363 patients have totally recovered and were discharged from hospitals during the past 17 days. **NEWS 02**

Random Rapid Antigen Tests on people leaving Western Province

ISHARA MUDUGAMUWA

The Health Ministry in collaboration with Sri Lanka Police has taken measures to conduct random Rapid Antigen Tests on people leaving the Western Province (WP) from yesterday (18) onwards.

Under the guidance of Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi, Rapid Antigen Tests will be carried out till further notice on passengers crossing the borders of the Western Province with the intention of preventing the further spread of COVID-19 to other areas of the country.

Director General of Health Services Dr. Asela Gunawardene said. **NEWS 02**

Errant I t

The Government of officials' attacks (DMT) who have | corruption for long Vehicle Regulation, payments State Ml These officials w duties in accordance to assist from eng soon. But, they have fa we have decided to transfer these officers, amunugama said.

"There are several false news items being circulated on social media that 600 DMT officers are to be transferred. There are only 650 officers working at the DMT and we do not want to transfer all of them," he added.

"A systematic procedure will be formulated to implement these transfers which also include DMT regional offices as well," he said.



claim days
adding drivers



increasing the number of licenses to 10," he said, adding that there is an increase in the number of road accidents taking place.

Therefore, the DIG said that the Traffic Police is planning on conducting a massive operation over the weekend to nab speeding and drivers under the influence of liquor and other substances. Hence, he appealed to all road users including drivers and pedestrians to stay safe and not become victims of road accidents or perpetrators of such offences. **NEWS 02**

Ven. Rathana Thera appointed to OPPP's National List MP seat

DISHA MUDALIGE

Ven. Athuraliyge Rathana Thera has been appointed by the 'Our Power of People Party' (OPPP) (Ape Jans Bala Pakshaya) to fill its National List seat in Parliament.

National Election Commission (NEC) Chairman Nimal Panbura told the Daily News that the Commission on Thursday decided to make the relevant appointment and the Gazette was to come out last night.

He said 'Ape Jans Bala Pakshaya' Chairman Saman Perera presented an affidavit that they would withdraw the Court case pending in this regard. He said Ven. Rathana Thera's name has been jointly proposed settling the Party's dispute over the National List seat.

The newly set-up Ape Jans Bala Pakshaya **NEWS 02**

Contempt of Court case against Ranjan fixed for further clarification



LAMNAL SOORIYAGODA

The first Contempt of Court case filed against Senaga Jena Eshwegoya (SJE) Campala District Police Station in Ranjan Ramanayake was yesterday fixed for further clarification by the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court has listed this matter for January 12 to be taken up for further clarifications.

This matter was yesterday taken up before the Supreme Court three-judge bench comprising Justice Vijith Malagoda, Justice S. Tharanga and Justice Marjina Fernando.

The Supreme Court has already reserved its judgement in the Contempt of Court case filed against Ranjan Ramanayake for allegedly scandalizing the judiciary by making statements to the media. Both prosecution and respondent parties

Three Tamil political parties to hold talks on presenting UNHRC resolution

RASUL DEHARA GAMAGE - NORTH SPECIAL COR.

Three major political parties in the North have begun discussions to present a resolution on behalf of their constituents at the 46th UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) meeting in Geneva next March.

Parliamentarian M.A. Sumanathirana on behalf of the Tamil National Alliance, former Northern Province Chief Minister CV Vigneswaran on behalf of the Tamil MaIlalat Theivu, Ruttani and Parliamentarian Sajjadur Rahman on behalf of the **NEWS 02**

Bogus patriots deprived country of US\$ 480 mn grant

Partha Ranga Bandara

SHIROU ABEYSINGHE

Former Parliamentarian Partha Ranga Bandara yesterday said that those who are bragging about their patriotism should be held responsible for the country losing the US\$ 480 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant.



Health officials yesterday started collecting random samples