

We wish all our readers a happy, healthy and peaceful

Christmas



## BAN NEW YEAR PARTIES IN HOTELS - PHI UNION

ISHARA MUJUGUMAWA

Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) Union of Sri Lanka has urged authorities to tighten rules on social gatherings during the festive season.

The Union's Secretary M. Balasooriya told Daily News that the indoor and outdoor parties are banned as per the health guidelines gazetted by the Health Ministry and under current rules, any

one hosting such social gatherings can be fined up to Rs. 10,000.

"But when we monitor social media, we can see some hotels and restaurants organizing Christmas and New Year parties without considering the legal background. Fines of Rs. 10,000 is not a big deal for them. So we urge authorities to tighten the rules by at least cancelling the licence of hotels and restau-

rants who deliberately put other people's lives into danger," Balasooriya said.

He said PHIs have been deployed to conduct raids on such events, but the PHIs cannot do this task alone. So we urge authorities to deploy a Special Task Force to assist in raids if required.

Balasooriya said if such festivities are held without heeding warnings, the country may see a



sudden spike in COVID-19 cases in January 2021.

The PHIs union also urged authorities to keep a strict vigil on the movement of people, especially from the Western province to other parts of the country to control the spread of COVID-19 during the festive season.

## Economy grows by 1.5% for first time in third quarter

Economic activity has seen a 1.5% growth in the third quarter of 2020 with the normalisation of business activities and return to near-normality, after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Census and Statistics Department (DCS) said yesterday.

Estimates of Sri Lanka for the third quarter, the DCS said this favourable condition affected on economic activities to perform well, especially in the third quarter and has resulted in recording a 1.5 percent positive growth rate in the economy for the first time for 2020. **10/21/20**

Releasing the National Accounts

## No curfew; Isolation in several areas

- Army Commander

MAHINDA ALUTHDEERA

Army Commander Lt. Gen. Shrawendra Silva has said that the rumours that a curfew is being imposed in the next few days are untrue.

The Army Commander who is also the Chief of Defence Staff and the Head of the National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOCPCO) stated that despite such rumours no decision has been taken to impose a curfew during the festive season. **10/21/20**

## Wear masks or face fines - Police

RAKSHANA SHRIYANTHA

Police have arrested 1,710 people so far for violating quarantine rules, including not wearing face masks and not adhering to social distancing rules.

Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana stated that 35 persons who were not wearing masks and breached social distancing rules were arrested during the 24 hours ending at 6.00 am yesterday (24).

The police spokesman said that the police were constantly on the lookout for violators of the quarantine rules and urged them to follow the instructions of the health authorities and to comply with any instructions from the health services to appear for PCR tests and rapid antigen tests.

## Traffic police on full alert this season

RAKSHANA SHRIYANTHA

Over 9,000 Police personnel have been deployed for traffic operations, throughout the country during the festive season.

Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said they have been especially deployed to arrest drunk drivers, reduce fatal accidents and ensure road safety.

The DIG said that so far 350 drunk drivers have been arrested. According to the latest data, the period between December 20 and January 3 is the period where the highest number of traffic accidents is reported. **10/21/20**



Christmas is being celebrated this year on a low key in keeping with the prevailing health guidelines. Here an elderly couple taking a nativity stable for their Christmas decorations. (Picture by Subashantha Gamage)

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CEYLON ELECTRICITY BOARD

## Health Ministry guid

The Health Ministry yesterday issued a set of guidelines on how to maintain the country's economic centres.

Health Minister Pawanar Warnaratchchi yesterday stressed that the economic centres in the country should be maintained in accordance with health guidelines.

The Health Ministry has prepared a series of special guidelines to ensure that traders and consumers visiting the 13 Economic Centres islandwide adhere to the guidelines. She emphasised that the economic centres play a vital role in the



economic development of Sri Lanka and it is important to ensure the health and safety of both traders and the consumers.

A special meeting was held yesterday at the Health Ministry to make the managers of economic centres islandwide

aware about the the current COVID-19 epidemic and the measures need to be taken to prevent the spreading of virus through the economic centres.

The Minister said large quantities of goods are channelled to and from many

is centres, there is spreading through these economic centres. Steps must be taken to ensure that these activities are carried out in accordance with health care practices.

The Minister requested the managers of Economic Centres islandwide to strictly follow the guidelines issued by the Ministry and prepare a plan specific to each economic centre for COVID-19 preventive measures and appointing an officer to look into the implementation of those plans. **10/21/20**

## Rs. 517 mn to develop Botanical Gardens



Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranawana said Rs. 517 million has been allocated for the development of botanical gardens in the country next year.

The botanical gardens earmarked for major development are Penderanga, Gampaha, Haggala, Sedlavaka and Mirigawala.

## Bury or cremate Covid dead swiftly - UNP Leader



The Government should take immediate action to either bury or cremate COVID-19 infected corpses, instead of keeping them in freezers over a long period, UNP Leader and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe stated yesterday.

He emphasised that the cremation or burial of people who died due to COVID-19 should not be made a political issue

but should be done in accordance with the opinion of health experts.

Wickremesinghe made this observation when he met health officials at his residence in Colombo yesterday morning.

Wickremesinghe further said that the government should pay attention to the opinion of medical experts that the virus can remain strong and active when stored in corpses of corona infected people in freezers. **10/21/20**

## Private sector employees can retire after reaching 55 or 60 - Minister

RAKSHA SOMARATNA

Labour Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva said an employee has the preferential right to obtain his EPF and ETF deposits after completing service at 55 or to serve up to 60 years.

The Government's Budget 2021 proposed to raise the retirement age for the purpose of the Employment Provident Fund to 60 and remove the disparity between men and women.

Responding to queries by trade union leaders at a recent meeting the minister said the government decided to extend the private sector retirement age to 60 after considering requests made by the country's labour leaders over a long period of time.



"In implementing these decisions, trade union leaders must acknowledge that their members must be guaranteed the right to retire at 55 if they wish, and that it would be fair to provide them with their Provident Fund benefits at the time of retirement."

The Minister also said that the Provident Fund will provide benefits to employees who wish to serve up to 60 when they retire at the age of 55. The Minister made this statement at a meeting of the National Labour Advisory Council held at the Ministry of Labour recently. **10/21/20**