

Yonakapura East and West isolated

Yonakapura East and Yonakapura West in Dickwella, Matara have been isolated with immediate effect, the Department of Government Information announced yesterday.

The directive was issued by the National Operations Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 following the detection of new COVID-19 cases from the area.

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Re-opening of BIA

Air Astana, Aeroflot first to operate flights

Tourism drive begins

FIRST CHARTER FLIGHT HERE ON DEC 29



RAVI LADDUWAHETTY

The first charter flight carrying foreign tourists following the re-opening of the Bandara-naike International Airport (BIA), will arrive in Sri Lanka with 300 passengers from Kazakhstan on Tuesday (29).

These passengers will be arriving on the Kazakhstan flag carrier Air Astana, a Tourism Ministry spokesman said.

This follows the Government lifting the ban on passenger Charter flights to Sri Lanka from today to kick start a tourism drive. Due to

logistical reasons, the first flights will however arrive from December 29.

The Tourism Ministry spokesman also asserted that Russian flag carrier Aeroflot which was to fly 300 passengers to Colombo today, will now operate the flight on December 31. A spokesman for the Airport and Aviation

and Services (Sri Lanka) also confirmed this date.

The person who has masterminded this tourism promotion among 54,000 tourists from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is Sri Lanka's former Ambassador to Russia, Udayanga Weeratunga.

Commercial scheduled flights (i.e. non-charter) to and from the BIA and the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA), will start operating from mid January, despite the exact day not being finalised yet. **▶ PAGE 02**

Probe into possible fraud by local company

Agri waste to be re-exported to Ukraine

PICTURE AMARAWERA

Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera has instructed Secretary Dr. Anil Jasinghe to lodge a complaint with the Basel Convention Office regarding agricultural waste contain-

ers imported into Sri Lanka from Ukraine.

According to the Basel Convention, the export of agricultural waste from one country to another is strictly prohibited. **▶ PAGE 02**



CBSL to contain Rupee depreciation

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) is of the view that the recent increase in volatility of the exchange rate is unwarranted and unacceptable. Therefore, the Central Bank will take appropriate action aggressively to contain this volatility in the domestic foreign exchange market, the CBSL said yesterday.

The Central Bank expects that these actions, together with the continuation of the curtailment of non-essential imports, will enable the Rupee to appreciate within the next few days towards the levels of below Rs. 185 per US dollar observed in November 2020.

The Central Bank reiterates **▶ PAGE 02**

Devotees barred from Sri Pada Pilgrimage

ASELA KURULUWANSHA

This year's Sri Pada pilgrimage season begins on the 29th (Unduvap Poya Day), but pilgrims have been barred from converging in the area because of the rising number of COVID-19 infections, the Central Province Governor said.

Governor Lalith Gamage said that the decision was made after lengthy discussions with officials and Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) regarding the spread of COVID-19 in the Nuwara Eliya District. He told the media at the COVID-19 Provincial Committee Meeting that rituals of inaugurating the Sri Pada pilgrimage season will be carried out with the participation of a limited number of people.

The pilgrimage season will commence on the Full Moon Day of Unduvap and end on the Full Moon Day of Vesak.



Ranil asks to resume cases at Hulftsdorp

SHIROMI ABAYASINGHE



United National Party (UNP) Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has instructed party lawyers to request the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) and the Attorney General to resume the hearing of cases, which were halted at Hulftsdorp due to the rise in COVID-19 cases and to consider shifting the location as necessary. **▶ PAGE 02**

54 face mask violators arrested

Police have arrested 54 suspects in the last 48 hours for failure to wear face masks and maintain social distancing.

"Since October 30 to-date, 1,794 people have been arrested for the violation of COVID-19 regulations including not wearing face masks and not maintaining social distance," Police Spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana said.

The isolation order in respect of 12 police jurisdictions including nine police jurisdictions in Colombo-North and Central Colombo, remains in effect, he said, adding that the isolation order is also in effect in the Avissawella, Kosgama, and Ruwanwella police jurisdictions.

Rajinikanth hospitalised



Indian Superstar Rajinikanth has been admitted to the Apollo Hospital in Jubilee Hills,



Despite concern pandemic, Chris socially distanc of Colombo Can mas Eve mass a Cardinal called has severely imj See also page 0

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9,000 Police Officers conduct traffic operations

The Police have deployed 9,000 officers around the clock to conduct traffic operations and apprehend motorists who Drive under the Unfluence of Liquor (DUI), Police Media spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana said.

During these operations, motorists who fail to abide by road rules and DUI drivers will be arrested, he cautioned. According to DIG Ajith Rohana, 400 drivers have been arrested for DUI since December 20.

"Traffic operations will continue. Five people were killed in road traffic accidents yesterday; while around 30 have sustained injuries," he said. He added that there is a trend of increasing road accidents during the festive season.

'Cremation only' policy has no scientific basis - SJB MP

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) National List MP Imtiaz Bakeer Markar, who made a courtesy call on the Chief Prelate of the Ramanna Nikaya Most Ven. Makulawe Wimala Maha Nayake Thera in Mirigama, yesterday told journalists that it was unfortunate the Government was stubbornly carrying on a policy of "cremation only" for the COVID dead as this could lead to the isolation of Sri Lanka from the rest of the world. **▶ PAGE 02**

Public urged to exercise caution as robberies increase

The public have been warned to secure their houses and valuables during the festive season due to an increase in robberies.

Police Spokesman, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Ajith

Rohana said that motorcycle borne snatchers, and motorcycle and three-wheeler thefts were rampant during the holiday season.

He said a number of robberies has been reported when

people have attended church, left on trips, or when visiting friends and family.

DIG Ajith Rohana said there is a significant increase in those addicted to drugs being engaged in the thefts.

Cyber Security: Lanka ranks 98th

Sri Lanka has ranked 98th in the Global Cyber Security Index compiled by the UK-based National Cyber Security Index (NCSI).

Sri Lanka scored 27.27 in the index. According to the index published on the NCSI website, Bangladesh with a score of 44.16 is ahead of all other South Asian neighbours except India. Bangladesh has made a jump from 73rd to 65th place. In this region, Pakistan ranked 66th with a score of 42.86 and China ranked **▶ PAGE 02**

Betel becoming major Forex earner

S.M.WIJAYARATNE, KURUNEGALA CORR

About 4,000 farmers in the Kurunegala District are planning to cultivate betel for export in 2021 as betel has proved to be very profitable. During this year, about 3,739 tonnes of betel have been exported and Rs. 2,792 million has been earned as foreign exchange by the Department of Export Agricultural Affairs.

In 2019, about 4,677 tonnes of betel were exported and Rs. 3,406 million rupees were earned as foreign exchange. Farmers are to be given concessionary bank loans by the Government for growing betel from next year. Betel is exported to Pakistan, Japan and the U.K. and the prices of betel would go up in the future paving the way for the Sri Lankan farmers to earn a good profit, Kurunegala District Director of Agriculture W.M. Ariyadasa said at a meeting with betel farmers of the Kurunegala District on Thursday at the Bingiriya Agrarian Centre, Kurunegala.

Christmas & New Year

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