

## PANDEMIC POSTPONES PC ELECTIONS

Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera yesterday said a decision to postpone the Provincial Council elections was taken at the Party Leaders meeting on Monday evening after considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The decision to postpone the Provincial Council Elections was taken after considering the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country and the request made by the members of the Maha Sangha," he said.

Amaraweera was addressing a media briefing held at

the Environment Ministry yesterday (29).

The Minister also requested Sri Pada pilgrims to desist from dumping garbage, polythene and plastic waste into the Sri Pada Forest Reserve during the pilgrimage season that commenced yesterday. Only a limited number of devotees will be allowed to climb the Sri Pada due to the pandemic situation.

The Minister also said that the Environment Police has been given directives to enforce the law against those who dispose plastic

and polythene to the environment.

He said there was an opinion in political and social circles that the Provincial council system should be abolished. "However, others say that the country should have Provincial Councils."

"As MPs representing the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, we have pointed out that it is not appropriate to hold the Provincial Council elections at this time due to COVID-19 pandemic and the economic problems in the country."

He said they are of the

view that the election should be held under a new electoral system.

"It will not be easy to abolish the PC system. Although the Provincial Council election has not been held, the Provincial Councils are still functioning. The Provincial Councils were established under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. Some countries in the world are watching us closely. Therefore, we cannot forget the world and decide. There is no need to start a new war for the abolition of provincial councils," he added.

**DECISION TAKEN AT PARTY LEADERS MEETING**

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### Greetings for 2021 from China's President, PM

Chinese President Xi Jinping signed and sent New Year greetings cards to his Sri Lankan counterpart President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on December 25, a statement issued by the Chinese Embassy in Colombo yesterday.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also delivered his best wishes for 2021 to his Sri Lankan counterpart Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the statement states.

"Besides Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China Li Zhanshu and Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, sent warm greetings for the coming new year respectively to Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena and Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena"



### Sripada pilgrimage season begins under strict guidelines

Chief Incumbent of Sri Pada, Ven. Bengamuwe Dhammadinna Thera conducting religious rites at

The Sripada pilgrimage season commenced yesterday (29) with the participation of a limited number of devotees under the patronage of the Incumbent of Sri Pada, Chief Incumbent of the Uva Wellassa

### 300 repaired buses to be put into service

**DILSHAN THARAKA**  
The Transport Ministry said 300 buses taken out of service by the Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) will be repaired and put back into operation from December 31.

State Transport Minister Dilum Amunugama said the 300 buses that were repaired will be added to the fleet again on December 31 and that there will be two double decker buses as well.

He said this will address the demand for buses on rural roads across the country.

At present there are around 6,000 SLTB buses out of which about 5,000 are in operation.



### Gen. Shavendra Silva, an example for others - Chief Prelate

**ASELA KURULUWANSA**  
The services rendered to the country by Gen. Shavendra Silva to defeat terrorism and his leadership in heading efforts and guiding the security forces in rescuing the country and the people from the COVID pandemic cannot be underestimated, Mahanayake of the Asgiri Chapter Most Venerable Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera said.

He said that the whole country should appreciate the efforts taken by the Army Commander and his team to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the country on the instructions of the President and the Prime Minister.

The Maha Nayaka Thera said this when the Army Commander, who was promoted as General, visited the Chief Prelate of the Asgiri Chapter in Kandy yesterday (29) to receive his blessings.



### Livelihood development for Samurdhi recipients from 2021 Budget

**DILSHAN THARAKA**  
Presidential Task Force on Economic Revival and Poverty Alleviation Chairman Basil Rajapaksa said Samurdhi managers and Samurdhi Development Officers will lead the process of directing Samurdhi recipients to livelihoods under the Rural Economic Building Programme.

He was speaking at a discussion with Samurdhi managers at Temple Trees yesterday on future steps to be taken regarding Samurdhi home economic, micro finance, self-employment and business development.

This year's budget focuses on empowering rural women and providing solutions to the problem of youth unemployment by selecting women entrepreneurs at the Grama Niladhari Division level and providing



### No political revenge on anyone - Defence Secretary

**ASELA KURULUWANSA and NIHAL JAYAWARDENA**  
Central Province Group  
Defence Secretary, General (ret'd) Kamal Gunaratne said the government will not resort to taking political revenge from anyone.

Speaking to the media after paying homage to the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy yesterday (29), he said if the government had resorted to political retaliations after coming to power, many would have been in prison today. He said no arrests have been made for any reason other than those who have been convicted of wrongdoing to now.

He said that the President, the Prime Minister, the government and government officials will not resort to political retaliation.



### UNP to launch mass protests

**SHIROMI ABEYSINGHE**  
The United National Party has planned a series of protests demanding the government to provide

have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn in the country.

A senior UNP member who wished to remain anonymous said that the

ceeded in controlling prices of essential items while effectively facing a number of challenges within the country and outside.

He said that the present government has failed to

### Increased PCR tests to expedite repatriation, tourism

**IRANGIKA RANGE**  
The government has decided to increase the number of PCR tests to detect more COVID-19 patients, Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga said.

This is aimed at expediting the

ensuring that tourists entering the country are not infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The decision was taken during a meeting with Tourism Development Authority and Health Ministry officials and representatives

Tourism Ministry yesterday. The Minister requested health officials to take measures to increase the number of PCR tests conducted daily as the country is now open for tourists and was repatriating more Sri Lankans stranded abroad

