

Work to overcome challenges as one nation - Speaker



Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena said that everyone should work together as one nation in order to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19.

The Speaker was addressing the oath/affirmation ceremony of Government officials for 2021 at the Parliament complex yesterday.

The Speaker encouraged everyone to be determined to not waver in the face of challenges.

The Speaker hoisted the National Flag near the main entrance in front of the Parliament Building inaugurating the dawn of the New Year, followed by a two-minute silence which was observed to commemorate the War Heroes and all those who sacrificed their lives for the country. The oath/affirmation of the staff members of Parliament took place afterwards.

"Last year was uncertain not only for Sri Lanka but for the whole world. The same situation is likely to persist this year. Therefore, it is essential that everyone acts with a sense of understanding and attention. It is possible to overcome the COVID-19 challenge by working in coordination with everyone. Everyone must work towards this common goal. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lankans have been victorious in the name of democracy. **TOP PAGE 02**

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President tells Ministers, MPs and staff

WORK WITH DETERMINATION, COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVE PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS



Commencing duties in the New Year President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met Ministers, Members of Parliament and his staff at the Presidential Secretariat yesterday.

Mingling with the gathering, President Rajapaksa said that it is necessary to work with optimism, determination and commitment to achieve the aspirations of the people while being conscious about the challenges facing the nation. Extending

his warm wishes to the Ministers, MPs and his staff, the President was engaged in a cordial discussion with them.

Secretary to the President Dr. P.B. Jayasundera administered the oath marking the commencement of official duties by public servants 2021.

"The entire public service should be sincerely committed to an efficient and effective public service

as per the "Saubhagayee Dekma" policy framework," the Secretary to the President stated. The country is moving towards professional leadership.

Jayasundera said the President hoped for a public service that would fulfill the aspirations of the people under the "New Normal" situation that has evolved following the COVID-19 pandemic. "Despite severe financial difficulties, ours is

the only Government in the world that has paid salaries and allowances to over 1.5 million public servants and over 600,000 retirees on time without any deductions," the Secretary pointed out.

The Government led by President Rajapaksa is committed to protect the public servants.

The Secretary to the President emphasized that it is the responsibility of all public **TOP PAGE 02**

We must forge ahead despite COVID-19 threats - Keheliya

CAMELIA NATHANIEL

The New Year will be a year full of challenges, but the country must forge ahead under challenging COVID-19 threats. However, even under such conditions, the Government is ready to overcome these challenges and forge ahead, said Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella.

The Minister was addressing staff members at the Government Media Department yesterday, commencing work in the New Year.

Minister Rambukwella commended the members of his Ministry who had worked with commitment during the most decisive situations, making special note of the dedicated staff of the Postal Department who had carried out the delivery of medicines during the height of the COVID pandemic. **TOP PAGE 02**



PM participates in religious ceremonies in Kataragama

TEXT AND PIX BY K.D. DEWAPRIYA, KATARAGAMA CORR.

On the eve of the New Year 2021, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and members of the public were present at religious ceremonies in Kataragama to seek the blessings of the Triple Gem and the Gods. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa

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Will ensure a society free from fear and suspicion - Minister

CAMELIA NATHANIEL

The New Year wish of the Public Security Ministry should be to ensure a society free from fear and suspicion for all Sri Lankans. To achieve this goal we need to eradicate the underworld, drugs, child abuse, abuse against women, extortion and abductions from Sri Lanka, said Public Security Minister Rear Admiral Dr. Sarath Weerasekera.

He said this during the commencement of work for the New Year where a pledge was taken to work to make the country a safe place. **TOP PAGE 02**



Nobody would be allowed to take up arms - Defence Secretary

There will be no room for separatism and extremism to raise its ugly head this year (2021) since steps have been taken to thwart such attempts, said Defence Secretary Gen.(Retd) Kamal Gunaratne.

Responding to a question from the media he also affirmed, "Nobody would be allowed to take up arms" citing recent information disseminated in the society.

"Remand prisoners involved in large-scale drug rings were not released even though we have prison space constraints and the spread of the Coronavirus," Gen. Gunaratne said, elaborating the situation in prisons. The Defence Secretary underlining that "there is no room to handle drug rings from overseas" said: "We had several rounds of discussions with the countries where mega level drug ring leaders live and have also issued 18 Red Notices through Interpol to nab such notorious characters evading justice".

The Defence Secretary also explained the plans afoot to arrest persons involved in mega drug deals from overseas during next year. "We conduct weekly discussions about these issues including the underworld activities," he noted. Operations to curb illegal drug rings in the island would be further strengthened during next year (2021), he also reiterated. Further responding to alleged human rights violations likely to be raised yet again during the early quarter of new year, he recalled "These allegations have been levelled against our military since 2009" and asserted "no such war crimes were committed since we led a humanitarian operation".



Funds to increase number of courts - Justice Minister

LAKMAL SOORIYAGODA

Funds have been allocated to increase the number of courts after adding new technology to improve the quality and efficiency of the Judiciary, Justice Minister Ali Sabry, PC, said yesterday.

The Justice Minister made these remarks while speaking at the Justice Ministry to commence duties for 2021.

The Minister briefly explained the objectives he expected to achieve within the next three years.

The Justice Minister said that the Government was able to bring 37 legal amendments in an unprecedented manner, expecting to bring relief for the public through the Judiciary.

The Minister said the construction of a building complex named 'Adhikarana Piya-sa' will be commenced during this month under four projects. **TOP PAGE 02**



Complete overhaul of education sector - GL

CHAMINDA PERERA

Education Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris yesterday said the education sector will undergo a complete overhaul this year focusing on developing soft skills of students.

He said the education sector will be reformed after obtaining opinions from all stakeholders including students, citizens and the business community. "The private sector demands graduates with a

high level of soft skills knowledge. New education reforms will be introduced this year to meet this requirement," the Minister said.

The Minister was speaking at the laying of the foundation stone of the Building complex of the Sri Jayawardenapura University Engineering Faculty in Mattegoda yesterday.

The Government has allocated over Rs.3.6 billion for the project. "The university intake will be increased by 10,000 this year. More students will receive higher education opportunities in all fields including medicine," he said. He added that only 19 per cent of students facing the Advanced Level examination receive higher education in the country. "The Government is striving to increase the number of students entering universities by establishing ten more universities this year," he said. **TOP PAGE 02**



Concessionary period for theatre owners to settle electricity bills

The National Film Corporation (NFC) announced that Minister of Power and Energy Dullas Alahapperuma has agreed to grant a one year grace period for cinema theater owners to settle due electricity bills with the aim of providing relief for their financial difficulties caused by the closure of cinemas from March 2020 due to COVID-19 virus outbreak. The NFC states that the decision was

Programme to uplift rural poor from micro finance debt trap

CAMELIA NATHANIEL

An island wide programme to uplift financial literacy and rescue the rural poor from the micro finance debt trap will be launched in Anuradhapura today (2).

This programme is implemented by the Department of Samurdhi Development under the auspices of the Ministry of Samurdhi, Home

Economics, Micro Finance, Self Employment and Business Development under the guidance of State Minister Shehan Semasinghe. In addition, the empowerment of 200,000 Samurdhi beneficiary families is scheduled to begin this year.

These facts were revealed at a ceremony held at the Ministry yesterday morning. **TOP PAGE 02**



CMC mechanism to use "Electronic Signatures" to sign official documents

DINULI FRANCISCO

The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) has initiated utilizing "Electronic Signatures" with the latest technology to sign official

Give scientific process priority in