

SINHALA AND TAMIL NEW YEAR MESSAGES

NEW YEAR BRINGS FRESH HOPES AND RENEWED DETERMINATION - PRESIDENT

Welcoming the dawn of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year with fresh hopes and renewed determination to materialize them is a valuable tradition deeply rooted in our culture, states President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his Sinhala and Tamil New Year message.



The message: "Although adverse health conditions prevented us from celebrating last year's Sinhala and Tamil New Year, this year all of us together have made it possible to enjoy the New Year fes-

tivities, duly observing the age-old customs and traditions while adhering to health guidelines. It is a fulfillment of the hopes of young children who look forward to the New Year, with excitement, as well as all other citizens.

The Sinhala and

Tamil New Year is our principal cultural festival. We have a strong belief that the prosperity of the coming year will be the result of all our citizens performing the rituals at the same auspicious time.

The cheerfulness of the adults is reflected through their children who are delighted with their new clothes, sweets and games for the New Year. In addition, the pleasant changes in the environment bring us physical and emotional bliss. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

EMBARK ON A NEW PATH TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS COUNTRY - PM

It is time to embark on a new path towards a prosperous country, facing all the challenges with a new mindset and with fresh aspirations in this Sinhala and Tamil New Year, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said.



The message adds: "It is with great pleasure that I greet the dawn of the Sinhala - Tamil New Year that fulfils the fresh hopes of all Sri Lankans. The people of our country have been participating in this great cultural festival since time

immemorial, giving priority to the customs and traditions in this cultural extravaganza of the nation. Customs and rituals attached with the Sinhala and Tamil New Year depict the connection between mankind and nature.

As a disciplined nation, people have followed the guidelines issued by the government with a myriad of sacrifices, therefore the opportunity has arisen to celebrate the New Year to this extent freely.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of all of us to preserve our cultural values while keeping in mind health practices. The Government is striving to reduce the burden on people and create a prosperous future for the nation. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

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AUSPICIOUS TIMES FOR SINHALA AND TAMIL NEW YEAR 2021

- PUNYA KALAYA (ONAGATHAYA)**
Begins at 8.09 p.m. on Tuesday April 13 and ends at 8.57 a.m. on Wednesday April 14.
- DAWN OF THE NEW YEAR**
The Sinhala and Tamil New Year dawns on Wednesday, April 14 at 02.33 a.m.
- PREPARATION OF MEALS**
The auspicious time to prepare meals is at 6.17 a.m. on Wednesday, April 14. Prepare milk, rice and a sweetmeat containing green gram. Dress in light green, face the East.
- STARTING OF WORK, TRANSACTIONS AND PARTAKING MEALS:**
Starting work, transactions and consuming meals should begin on Wednesday April 14 at 7.41 a.m. clad in light green and facing the East.
- SETTING OUT FOR OCCUPATIONS:**
Leaving for occupations begins on Monday April 19 at 6.39 a.m. One should be dressed in white and face the South when leaving the house.
- ANONTING OIL**
The auspicious time for anointing of oil is 7.16 a.m. on Saturday, April 17.
- PLANTING A TREE**
Plant a tree at 6.40 a.m. on Friday, April 16.

CHINA PROVIDES US\$ 500 MILLION LOAN



PACT INKED WITH CHINA DEVELOPMENT BANK

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to China Dr. Palitha Kohona, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, signed a US\$ 500 million Loan Agreement with the China Development Bank yesterday.

"This loan will infuse vitally required foreign exchange into the Sri Lanka economy. These funds will help with Government efforts to facilitate

rapid economic recovery following the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," a statement issued by the Sri Lankan embassy in China said.

After the signing ceremony, Dr. Kohona stated that the timely assistance from China in providing these funds will help fuel Sri Lanka's recovery efforts and stimulate growth. Dr. Kohona further opined that this

WELCOME INFUSION OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE

US\$ 500 million loan will encourage investor confidence in Sri Lanka and strengthen the Sri Lanka Rupee.

"China, as a loyal friend and reflecting the depth of our friendship, has been generously extending its helping hand to Sri Lanka when difficult challenges confront us. Two weeks ago, China's gift of 600,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses were air-freighted to Sri

Lanka adding to our vaccine stock," the Ambassador noted.

He welcomed further cooperation on trade, investment, tourism, education, sports and other areas. "We expect more Chinese tourists to visit Sri Lanka in the post COVID-19 period with the prospect of travel restrictions being relaxed in the near future". **▶ TO PAGE 02**

No Daily News on April 14, 15

The *Daily News* will not be published on April 14 and 15 on account of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year holidays. Publication will resume on Friday, April 16, 2021.



A customer checks out a new clay pot for the New Year rituals at a shop in Kaduwela yesterday, as people engage in last-minute shopping to buy their Avurudu needs. *Picture by Sulochana Gamage*

SIA increases flight frequency

Singapore's national air carrier, Singapore Airlines will increase its air connectivity to Sri Lanka by increasing its flights to five per week from the present three.

Singapore Airlines in a statement said that as the aviation sector gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore Airlines will increase its frequency to Colombo. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



3,000 buses for New Year journeys

ASELA KURULUWANSA

State Minister of Transport Dilum Amunugama says that an additional 3,000 buses will be operated from the 15th of this month to enable people to return to work in the City without any hindrance following the New Year holidays.

He said that a regular and planned bus service was provided to people traveling from the City to the villages for the New Year and in the same manner commuters traveling from the villages to the City after the New Year too will be provided with a comfortable and safe journey. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



People going to their villages for the New Year queuing at the Central Bus Stand in Petah yesterday. *Picture by Sudath Malaweera*

Brother sues brother for Rs.6.5 million

LAKMAL SOORIYAGODA

It was contended in the Colombo District Court that one of brothers Baba Arfiene Haseef Preena residing in Australia has sued his own brother Abdul Karman Haseef Preena of Athul-Kotte Sri Jayawardanapura through his lawful Power of Attorney holder Baba Mohammed Haseef Preena of Ragama for the recovery of a sum of Rs.6.5 million approximately

lent and advanced to him by the Plaintiff. Action was filed in 2011 through Plaintiff's attorney and subsequently the instructing attorney counsel Yasanthi Karunathilake proceeded in Colombo Additional District Court in a long and winding trial which according to the plaintiff submitted to Court which construed a sum of Rs. 6.5 million due from the **▶ TO PAGE 02**

Rs. 1 m reward for tips on fraudster

The Inspector General of Police (IGP) has approved a reward of Rs. 1 million for information leading to the arrest of a suspect who is said to have been involved in a number of frauds in various parts of the country and is now absconding.

The Crimes and Organized

Crime Division has commenced an investigation to arrest the suspect who has been hiding in various parts of the country after fraudulently obtaining luxury cars and cash worth over Rs. 50 million.

Police investigations have revealed that the suspect had

impersonated a doctor, an engineer, a teacher and a businessman.

The suspect while posing as a doctor had sold a stolen vehicle for Rs. 16.5 million and fraudulently obtained a vehicle worth Rs. 1,550,000 with forged signatures. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



The vessel 'Barbara' was brought to the Colombo Port yesterday to re-freight the controversial carcinogenic crude coconut oil back to the Port of Origin. *Picture by Wimal Karunathilake*

13 Kgs of ICE seized

LAHIRU FERNANDO

The Police Narcotic Bureau (PNB) in a special operation seized 13 Kilograms of crystal methamphetamine also known as 'ICE' worth Rs.130 million from a house at Nawandama in the Ja-Ela Police area on Sunday evening (11), Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said.



Six suspects including two females have been taken into the PNB custody during the raid, he said. The ice was packed in small plastic boxes and hidden in two school bags, police said.

They have been brought to the PNB for further questioning. Investigations are going on, he said. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

Police to minimize accidents, spread of COVID-19

LAHIRU FERNANDO

The Police are taking every possible action to prevent the public being victim of COVID-19 pandemic or traffic accidents by the end of the upcoming festive season, Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said.

He said special plans are in effect to monitor and prevent the spread of COVID-19 through public gatherings during the festive season. Accordingly, it is compulsory for the organizers of the New Year festivals to seek permission from the health authorities and also the police before the event. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



PNB seizes 100 kg of ICE in Sapugaskanda, five arrested

Five individuals were arrested with 100 kilogrammes of ICE (Crystal Methamphetamine) at Sapugaskanda yesterday, Police Media Spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana said.

The arrest has been made by the officers of the Police Narcotics Bureau

(PNB) at the Rakgahawatta area in Sapugaskanda.

On Saturday (April 10), the PNB arrested an individual at Ja-Ela with 100g of ICE and 100g of heroin in his possession.

Further investigations into the inci-

dent had led to the arrest of six more suspects yesterday (April 11) along with 13kg of ICE.

Interrogations of the suspects had led to another raid in Sapugaskanda where the PNB had recovered 100kg of ICE, yesterday (April 12).

Investigations into Expressway reckless driving case

SHAVINI MADHARA

The driver of the vehicle which was driven on the Expressway in a very dangerous and reckless manner and the group of men who were inside it were summoned to the Expressway Division Police Unit yesterday.

The Police launched an investigation with regard to video footage circulated on social media depicting the neglectful and highly reckless manner of driving by a group along the Expressway, Police Media Spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana stated.

DIG Ajith Rohana also stated that the video shows that four per-

sons had lowered the shutters and were seated on the doors facing each other from both sides of the vehicle.

DIG Ajith Rohana further stated that the suspects have been summoned to Highway Traffic Headquarters yesterday.

He further noted that the investigations have revealed that the registered owner of the car is a resident of Kandy and in 2015 he had sold the car to a person in the Akurana. Their unruly behaviour had caused a disturbance and distraction to the fellow motorists who were driving along on the Expressway.

Rehabilitation Bureau for drug addicts

DHANUSHKA GODAKUMBURA

The Government is preparing to set up a Rehabilitation Bureau for drug addicts, war affected and members of violent extremist groups.

The Government has directed the establishment of this Bureau by an Act of Parliament to carry out the functions of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, which is currently in operation, within a more sustainable legal framework.

A Commissioner General of Rehabilitation was appointed in 2006 to rehabilitate former LTTE members and the responsibility of rehabilitating drug addicts has been placed under it since 2013.

Sri Lanka Railways introduces new hotline

The Sri Lanka Railways has introduced a new Hotline 1971 for train passengers to lodge complaints or inquiries in case of an emergency and to obtain any other information related to trains, Railways Department said.

Issuing a statement, the Railway Department said that this hotline 1971 is used for all complaints and other inquiries related to the Railway Department.

COVID infections: India overtakes Brazil

India on Monday overtook Brazil as the country with the second-highest number of coronavirus infections and Bangladesh halted international flights and shut offices as a new wave battered South Asia.

The region - home to almost a quarter of the world's population - has been hit by soaring infection rates in recent weeks. India reported a new daily record of more than 168,000 cases on Monday to take the total toll to 13.5 million cases, above Brazil's 13.48 million. India has recorded more than 873,000 cases in the last seven days - an increase of 70 percent compared to the previous week, according to data compiled by AFP.

In comparison, Brazil recorded about 497,000, about 10 percent higher from the previous week. The United States - the worst-hit country - reported just under 490,000 cases with a rising trend of nine percent. The spike in India, after daily rises in cases fell below 9,000 in early February, has seen many badly affected states and territories impose restrictions on movement and activities.

India's wealthiest state Maharashtra, which has been the main driver of the infection spike, last week imposed a weekend lockdown and night curfew. (AFP)

13 Kgs of ICE... From Page 01

Meanwhile, the police media spokesman said that there could be an increased availability of synthetic drugs in the market due to the dearth of heroin.

The Police and security forces in recent times have detected large quantities of heroin and have arrested several major drug dealers.

DIG Rohana said the police will intensify operations on drug trafficking in the coming days.



Rs. 1 m reward for tips... From Page 01

He is also accused of breach of trust in a vehicle purchased from a finance company, fraudulently obtaining a car worth Rs. 2.8 million and stealing a van worth Rs. 3 million, among other crimes.

The suspect is identified as Rafiq Mohamed Feroq and his National Identity Card number is 761350446V.

Information about the suspect can be provided to the DIG Crime and Organized Crime Division 0718592604 and the DIG Crime and Organized Crime District Office 0112685958. The confidentiality of informants will be maintained.



Brother sues brother for... From Page 01

Defendant to the Plaintiff, and the said sum was given to the Defendant Abdul Karman Haseef Preena to open up a new business in embroidery in the garment sector.

According to the plaint, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Plaintiff and the Defendant and large sums of money amounting to Rs.6.5 million was given by the Plaintiff to the Defendant.

The Defendant had filed an answer through his lawyer Avini Gunaratna and took out the position that Power of Attorney was bad in law and that Rs.6.5 million was given by the Plaintiff to the Defendant as a joint investor in the said business to open up an embroidery factory sharing profits equally and the money was to be utilized for the commencement of the business. The Defendant also contended that the Plaintiff has fraudulently filed action against the Defendant for the recovery of the said money amounting to Rs.6.5million and therefore has acted unlawfully in asking for the said money to be paid back to him.

Preliminary objection had been taken by the Defendant's counsel citing that the Power of Attorney was faulty and dismissed by the court in the first instance.

In the course of a lengthy trial, the Plaintiff's case was pursued by the Senior Counsel Ian J.Fernando with counsel Sumudu Ratnayake and the Defendant was ably represented by the counsel Thushitha Nanayakkara, instructed by Avni Gunaratna.

The Judgement was delivered in favour of the Plaintiff against the Defendant on 24 April 2019, giving the Plaintiff all the reliefs prayed in the plaint, the recovery of the total amount of Rs.6.5 million with legal cost.

Thereafter the Defendant filed notice of appeal for which the Petitioner's lawyer Ian Fernando told court, it was out of time when the matter proceeded for the execution of writ by the Plaintiff-Petitioner against the Defendant-Respondent. The writ pending appeal enquiry commenced in June 2019 and the Defendant-Respondent gave evidence that substantial loss would be caused to him if the writ was executed against him for the recovery of the afore-said sum of Rs.6.5million with legal interests and cost of suit.

On March 22, 2021 writ was allowed by Colombo Additional District Court Judge Sadun Vithana.

NEW YEAR BRINGS FRESH HOPES AND RENEWED DETERMINATION - PRESIDENT

From Page 01

It is also a noble attribute of the New Year season that adults who struggle in life with complexities, settle grudges and animosities and reconcile with each other.

It is my hope and expectation that all citizens without any discrimination will join the Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations with tender and righteous thoughts.

I respectfully commend the commitment and sacrifice of all those who are engaged in essential services



and who are employed overseas and unable to be with their families during this season of New Year.

May the dawn of Sinhala and Tamil New Year bring happiness, good health and prosperity to all".

EMBARK ON A NEW PATH TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS COUNTRY- PM...

From Page 01

It is time to embark on a new path towards a prosperous country, facing all the challenges with a new mindset and with fresh aspirations.

At the dawn of the New Year, let us all resolve to strengthen our ties with each other and rise to the forefront of the world as a Sri Lankan nation.

May this be a peaceful and a prosperous New Year to all of you".



CHINA PROVIDES US\$ 500 MILLION LOAN... From Page 01

Dr. Kohona said that they were in discussions with Chinese producers with a view to shooting a tourism-oriented movie in the near future.

The Mission was also holding talks to improve access to Sri Lankan exports to the lucrative Chinese market while encouraging increased Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) flows to Sri Lanka. All

these would assist our economy to recover in the shortest period, Dr. Kohona stated.

This US\$ 500 million loan was a part of US\$ 1 billion loan, out of which US\$ 500 million was released last year.

The Sri Lankan Mission in Beijing had worked closely with Chinese counterparts to secure these funds.



3,000 buses for... From Page 01

The Minister made this statement while participating in an inspection tour of the Kandy Railway Station.

He said normally 500 SLTB buses and 500 private buses were operated during the New Year season but this year 3000 buses were operated and the decision was taken to allow the public to travel without any inconvenience as per the COVID-19 health recommendations.

SIA increases flight... From Page 01

"With this increase in frequency, over 50 percent of Singapore Airlines capacity into Sri Lanka will be resumed," the airline said.

"Flights from Singapore to Colombo will operate on every Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday whilst flights from Colombo to Singapore will be on every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday," the Airline added.

Passengers will get a 'Singapore Airlines Care Kit' which has a face mask, hand sanitizer and disinfectant surface wipe, the airline said.



Police to minimize... From Page 01

Such events conducted with no prior permission would be considered as illegal and legal action would be taken against the organizers, he said.

He also requested the public to wear face masks whenever they go to public places and use public transport.

The DIG said Police are conducting 24-hour traffic operations to net drunk and speeding drivers.

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Opposition Leader Sajith making ridiculous statements - Minister Prasanna

DINULI FRANCISCO

Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga said that the statements made by current Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, who was a Cabinet Minister in the Good Governance Government and the Deputy Leader of the UNP at the time of the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks, accusing the Government of trying to hide the masterminds of the terror attacks is ridiculous.

The Minister further pointed out that the previous Good Governance Government was trying to hide the masterminds behind the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks and the current Leader of the Opposition who was a prominent member of it should also

bear responsibility for these attacks. The Minister was responding to a statement made by the Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa accusing the present Government of trying to hide the masterminds of the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks.

Minister Ranatunga pointed out that providing security to the country and the people is the ultimate responsibility of every Government and pointed out that the Government of Good Governance has failed in their duties and therefore everyone in the Good Governance Government should be held responsible for Easter Sunday Terror Attacks.

He also pointed out that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the



JVP, which helped maintain the Good Governance Government could not escape their responsibility.

"Following the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks, the former President appointed a Presidential Commission to look into the matter. In addition, the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Security conducted a separate inquiry into the matter. And a Parliamentary Select Committee was also appointed. We cannot be satisfied with the investigations and that there were allegations that the then Good Governance Government had used these investigations to save those responsible for the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks," the Minister highlighted.

The Minister added that even though Premadasa held a highly responsible position in the previous

Government, he did not raise any voice against the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks or its investigations. "People of the country should understand why the present Leader of the Opposition, who was silent then, is shedding crocodile tears over the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks today," he added.

"The recommendations of the Easter Commission have now been forwarded to the institutions responsible for implementing the relevant recommendations. The Attorney General's Department, the Ministry of Defence and the Police Department will take further steps in this regard," Ranatunga said. Minister Ranatunga emphasised

that the Government intends to enact new laws or punish those responsible for the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks if there are no legal provisions currently sufficient to enforce the law on the wrongdoers.

"The motive of the former Good Governance team including Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa is to create displeasure among the people towards the Government.

"The present Government has no interest in protecting those responsible for the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks. Therefore, the people should not be deceived by the lies and falsehoods uttered by the Opposition," the Minister said.

Minister Mahinda Amaraweera praises Airman Roshan Abeysundera's record breaking feat

The country should be thankful for the effort rendered by Roshan Abeysundera, a War Hero of the Air Force who swam across the Palk Straits, giving the message to the country not to release polythene and plastic into the ocean, said Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera.

Sri Lanka has been named as the 5th country to add plastic and polythene to the ocean by a foreign organisation. That is completely untrue. The population of our country is very much less than other countries in this region.

There are cities in this region that are a hundred times as populous as Colombo. However, it is seen that the use



of polythene and plastic is increasing day-by-day in comparison to the population of our country.

"In such a situation the War Hero Roshan Abeysundera of the Air Force recently gave a message to the whole country. He swam across the Palk

Strait and asked the country not to add polythene and plastic to the ocean. He risked his life to carry out this heroic deed out of love for the environment. Therefore, the entire nation should express its gratitude to those who love the environment," Minister Amaraweera said.

The Minister expressed these views while participating in a sapling distribution ceremony held in the Angunakolapeessa area yesterday (11).

The Minister distributed these saplings for the auspicious sapling programme to be implemented by the Ministry of Environment on April 16.

The Minister further said during a discussion with the

top management of our country's supermarket chains, I was told that one billion silly bags are distributed annually by the country's supermarket chains alone. One billion bags of silicon a year is no small feat. The damage done to the environment cannot be over-emphasised.

"They told me to let them charge at least one rupee per bag. Now these bags are given free. So one customer uses at least seven or eight bags at a time. They also agreed to donate the proceeds for the bags to an environmental fund. But we have not taken a final decision in this regard. However, this causes huge environmental damage.

And so is the lunch sheets. Sri Lanka is the only country in the world that uses lunch sheets.

Ten million lunch sheets are used daily in our country. So in the future we will have to come up with stricter rules to reduce the use of these silly bags and lunch sheets. The people of our country are not yet aware of the environmental damage," the Minister said.

He said that as the Minister of Environment, he highly appreciated the heroic act of Roshan Abeysundera in conveying a message to the public to reduce the use of plastics and polythene, a communique from the minister's media unit said.

More showers expected

Showers or thundershowers will occur at several places over most parts of the island in the evening or night.

Fairly heavy falls about 75 mm can be expected at some places in Sabaragamuwa, Central, Western and North-Western Provinces and in Galle and Matara Districts.

"Misty conditions can be expected at some places in Central, Sabaragamuwa and Western Provinces during the morning," the Meteorology Department said.

General public is requested to take adequate precautions to minimize damages caused by temporary localized strong winds and lightning during thundershowers.

The Sun is going to be direct-

ly over the latitudes of Sri Lanka until April 14.

The nearest areas of Sri Lanka over which the sun is overhead today (13th), are Tikali, Mallavi, Vannivilankulam, Idaikkadu and Andankulam at about 12.10 p.m.

The sea areas around the island can be slight to moderate. Temporarily strong gusty winds and very rough seas can be expected during thundershowers.

Winds will be South-Easterly in the sea areas extending from Kankasanturai to Galle via Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Hambanthota.

Winds will be variable in the other sea areas around the island. Wind speed will be (20-30) kmph.

Qatar, Sri Lanka to witness new areas of cooperation

Qatar and Sri Lanka are poised to witness new areas of cooperation in the next five years, with both countries currently exploring mutual investments and partnerships in the finance sector as well as in a number of industries including tourism, shipping, government security, logistics, food security, and hospitality, State Minister of Money, Capital Markets, and State Enterprise Reforms Ajith Nivard Cabraal said yesterday.

Speaking to the media, Cabraal said Sri Lanka also eyes providing additional professional and manpower services for the upcoming Qatar World Cup.

"A Qatar Sri Lanka Joint Business Council is also planned to be established this year to facilitate direct business-to-business cooperation between private sectors of both countries," he said.

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Qatar Mohamed Mafaz Mohideen added that works are currently underway to launch the new joint business council by the third or fourth quarter of this year. As part of his regional tour, Cabraal has met with the heads of Qatar's Ministry of Finance, Qatar Central Bank, Qatar National Bank, Doha Bank, and Qatar Airways to chart plans for future action in foreign direct investments. He was also expected to meet with officials from the Qatar Investment

Authority. "Sri Lanka has been an important provider of professional as well as manpower services to Qatar. And that is something we want to enhance. In particular, in areas where we can provide services in the forthcoming mega event (Qatar World Cup). We are also keen that we establish financing rings and provide a good return for Qatari investors, as well as enhance the cooperation levels between Qatar and Sri Lankan banking sectors. In the next five years, we'll see new areas in which Qatar and Sri Lanka will be cooperating," said Cabraal.

He said Sri Lanka, which expects to see a 5.5 percent economic growth this year, is keen to develop its existing relations with Qatar, which could also serve as its gateway to the region. He added that the Sri Lankan Central Bank has also provided 100 percent protection for investors to attract foreign direct investments.

"Sri Lanka is on track to become a lot more vibrant as an economy in the next few years. The opportunities for investors who come in now are enormous," he added. Speaking about the possibility of Sri Lankan companies setting up their businesses at the Qatar Free Zones and the Hamad Port to take part in the country's growing shipping and food security industries, he said: "There are many Sri Lankan companies

which have now reached fairly high levels of activity. They have become billion dollar companies and they have ventured out to other parts of the world. Many are doing that already. And I would like to see that partnership being built up and happening here". He added: "We have already given licence to Islamic banking entity in Sri Lanka.

There are also several Sri Lankan banks which already have Islamic banking outlets. There is possibility of enhancing those as well, and that's an area that we would like to definitely cooperate further with Qatar". During the press conference, Cabraal went on to highlight Qatar's successful stimulus programme in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and reiterated that the upcoming World Cup now serves as an automatic stimulus for the Qatari economy. "Qatar has responded well during the pandemic. Stimulating the economy was vital, and Qatar has done that quickly. The country has also maintained macro fundamentals at reasonably healthy levels. The government investment was also enhanced, at a time when others are reducing their overall levels. The football on the horizon also acted as an automatic stimulus. Qatar did well, and now you're going to reap the benefits," the Minister added.

- The Peninsula

Illegal distillery inside guest house raided

LAHIRU FERNANDO

Jaffna Divisional Crime Detective Bureau official raided an illegal distillery located inside a guest house at Hospital Road Jaffna on Sunday.

A 48-year-old suspect has been taken into the custody along with 3,000 litres of illegal liquor, 710 bottles of illegal liquor and fake labels during this raid.

According to Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana, the distillery had been conducted in the guise of a permitted distillery. The arrested person is a resident of the Malakkam area was to be produced before the Jaffna Magistrate yesterday. The DCDB is investigating the incident.

Meanwhile, the Police Media Spokesman further said that the Police with the support of the Excise Department will be conducting further raids to nab people distributing illicit hooch during this festive season.

Couple arrested with 4 kgs of Cannabis

LAHIRU FERNANDO

Galgamuwa Police arrested a couple along with four Kilogrammes of Cannabis at a roadblock in the Naneriya area on Sunday, Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said. "The 40 and 37-year-old suspects were taken into custody along with their vehicle," he said. They were to be produced before the Galgamuwa Magistrate yesterday. Meanwhile, the Media Spokesman requested the public to inform Police on drug trafficking incidents via Hotline 1997.

"Those who provide true information would be rewarded," he further said.

Police recover "Kasippu" hidden under flower beds

ARIYAPALA WANSHATHILAKE, Kurunegala Central Special Corr.

Kurunegala Police recovered 30 packets of "Kasippu" hidden under flower beds of the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital premises. A suspect who was taken into custody is believed to have sold the "Kasippu" to patients. The suspect is also wanted in connection with several robberies at the Malakaduwa Seraliyawa Industrial Zone.

He is expected to be produced before Court today.



MAY ALL SRI LANKANS BE BLESSED WITH PEACE, HAPPINESS & GOOD HEALTH.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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Avurudu

A heartfelt tribute to Nature



Avurudu or Puthandu (in Tamil), is primarily celebrated by Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, but over the years it has transcended such man-made boundaries and become a National Festival celebrated by all Sri Lankans wherever they live. That is what Sri Lanka should be – a country where all live in harmony and take pride in each other's cultural norms and traditions.



daily life – around the movements of the Sun and the Moon for millennia.

The festival is based on the fact that Sun gives us life. Our food is literally made by the Sun through the process of photosynthesis, which is really the basis of all life on Earth. Thus the New Year traditions evolved as a result of farmers expressing their gratitude to the Sun and Nature for a bountiful harvest. One cannot get any closer to Nature than that. The traditional New Year (or variations of it) is a common festival all over Asia, but here in Sri Lanka, it is the most important National Event of the year. In fact, the Sinhalese word "Bak" for the month of April signifies "fortune", being a derivative of the Sanskrit root word "Bhagya".

Avurudu teaches us many lessons apart from bringing us closer to Nature. What other National Festival unites an entire country to do certain activities at the same time? Some may disregard and even make fun of the Avurudu Nekath or auspicious times, but they help make us more punctual and disciplined. While cooking and partaking meals in accordance with auspicious times is certainly very important, the foremost place in Avurudu traditions should go to the age-old tradition of *Ganu Denu*, which literally means Give and Take. That is sadly a factor that is missing from our lives for the most part, but Avurudu reminds us of the importance of compromise and the joy of sharing.

The symbolic conduit for *Ganu Denu* in Sri Lanka (as well as in neighbouring India) is the humble sheaf of betel leaves. There are many legends associated with the betel leaf which has become a pivotal item in New Year festivities. Again, the betel leaf symbolises our close affinity with Nature. It is thought of as a harbinger of prosperity.

Peaceful co-existence

Avurudu reminds us of the importance of respecting our elders. Hence the practice of worshipping parents and elderly relatives when the New Year dawns. But there is another higher purpose – giving someone a sheaf of betel leaves means that you have forgotten or forgiven any enmity, misunderstanding or anger that may have caused a rift in the old year. Thus Avurudu is a season for Giving – as well as for Forgiving. It is a time where everyone in the family and the neighbourhood gets together in a spirit of harmony and

peaceful co-existence. Another important part of *Ganu Denu* is commencing some sort of work for the first time in the New Year. Called *Weda Alleema* in Sinhala and *Er Mangalam* according to Hindu traditions, this calls for starting some work that would bring prosperity to oneself and the family throughout the year. For example, a student can study a lesson and a farmer can work on his field. This year, there is an additional auspicious time – for planting a sapling. This brings Nature right into the heart of the festival.

Avurudu is a joyous occasion - what would it be without all those sweetmeats? Some of the Avurudu sweetmeats are found nowhere else on Earth. Kavum, Kokis, Athirasa, Bibikkan, Mun Kavum, Peni Walalu, Aasmee and many other types of sweetmeats adorn the Avurudu table, along with alien arrivals such as cake and biscuits. No Avurudu table can be complete without the obligatory Kiribath (Milk Rice), which is the first item cooked to mark the dawn of the year. The overflowing of milk in this instance symbolizes happiness and prosperity for the entire family. In many Hindu households, a sweet rice is made with new raw red rice, jaggery, cashew nuts, ghee and plums.

The Avurudu table brings everyone together. This is a very important in a society where the tradition of family sit-down meals has disappeared for all intents and purposes. Today's pressures to relentlessly pursue money and differing interests/work hours of family members mean that no one has the time to enjoy a sit-down meal over free-flowing conversation and plenty of laughter. At best, the whole family might have eyes glued to the television while having dinner with no conversation at all. Family bonds have taken a severe beating due to modern lifestyles, but Avurudu reminds us that we can – and should – do better to keep families together.

The demands of commercialism have enveloped everyone in our families, including the children. Unlike in the days gone by, today's children are pressured by parents, teachers and the wider society to study all the time in order to do well at examinations at the expense of their playtime. However, Avurudu literally gives them a break from the tedium of studying and attending classes non-stop. Avurudu is playtime, from the Onchillawa (swing) to nearly forgotten indoor games such as "Panchi" and "Keta". It is also a time when the children get a lot of gifts, from new clothes to toys. Naturally, it is the children that enjoy Avurudu the most, starting with the delicious sweetmeats on the table. Of

course, Avurudu games and festivities have no age limit – everyone is free to join in the fun, though organisers have been asked to limit the crowds.

Bak Maha Ulela

Most villages do have "Bak Maha Ulela" events where the entire village comes together for a bit of downtime, though these cannot be held on a very grand scale this year too. Participating in many traditional games such as Pillow Fighting (not allowed this year), Tug-O-War (not allowed this year), Cadjan Weaving and Raban playing give the villagers an opportunity to reaffirm their bonds with each other. The authorities must also make an effort to preserve some of the more traditional games such as olinda keliya, eluvan keliya, mevara sellama, buhu keliya, muthu keliya and mee sellama. Of course, these events are open to all, regardless of communal or religious differences. This is significant at a time when there is a dire need to reinforce the bonds among different communities and religious groups.

But Avurudu cannot be confined to one's home or village. Avurudu gives us an opportunity to visit far-flung friends and relatives at least once a year with plenty of gifts and sweetmeats in hand. There is a massive rush to go to villages, with buses and trains filled to capacity. This is also one of the few chances for those based in the cities to go back to their villages for a few days to get in touch with their roots, so to speak. Again, this year too we have been asked to limit our travels lest the contagion spread.

Avurudu also has a spiritual or religious element, though the commercial elements may sometimes overshadow it. The *Punya Kaalaya* (literally a time for meritorious deeds) or *Nonagathaya* (literally a period with no auspicious times) is designed to let us visit the temple or the Kovil to purify our souls. Due to the restrictions in place, we will have to engage in religious observances from home or through the television.

Thus the Avurudu brings to the fore the nexus between the village and the temple/place of worship. Many of the problems in our lives can be traced to the gulf between us and the place of worship – Avurudu gives us an opportunity to renew this bond. The temple is also often the location for anointing oil for the New Year, an age-old tradition that is said to bestow fortune and good health. This is usually done by the head priest or a village elder.

Avurudu is sometimes likened to a person, through the reference to an *Avurudu Kumaraya* (New Year Prince). He is supposed to be a radiant individual who brings prosperity to the whole village and the whole country. In fact, in keeping with this theme, many Avurudu festivals select an *Avurudu Kumaraya* and as well as *Kumariya* (Princess).

There are many other rituals and traditions associated with the New Year, such as bathing for the new and old year and leaving for work in the New Year. We might not have the time for observing all Avurudu traditions, but the lesson is clear – togetherness pays dividends in the form of peace and harmony.

Avurudu is a time for a fresh start in every sphere of life. From new clothes to a new coat of paint to new aspirations, it marks a deviation from the old routine and signals that life is ready to take on new challenges in the coming year. Avurudu thus gives us fresh hope for a successful, bountiful year ahead. And let us be determined in the New Year to fight this new contagion with all our might in line with the recommendations of health authorities and the Security Forces so that we can all resume our normal lives and even belatedly observe some of the time-tested Avurudu traditions and beliefs.

PRAMOD DE SILVA

Erabadu flowers. The sounds of a Koha (Koel) in the distance. The feeling of a fresh spring is definitely in the air. It can mean only one thing - Avurudu is here again. Another Sinhala and Tamil New Year will dawn tomorrow (14), signifying one of the most important National Events in the country.

Yet, Avurudu this year is more different than all the other Avurudus that we have experienced in the past. That is because we are in the midst of a pandemic caused by an invisible pathogen. Although not as bad as the last Avurudu in 2020, this time too we cannot engage in many of the Avurudu traditions that we have taken for granted all this time. The keyword here is social distancing.

But how do we reconcile this with the very spirit of the Avurudu – togetherness? It is simple, really. We bond even more closely within the family unit. We have access to modern technology and social media that can bring even relatives living abroad to our living rooms to share the spirit of Avurudu. Separated by oceans and a global pandemic we may be, but in our hearts we will be together. That, after all, is the very meaning and purpose of Avurudu.

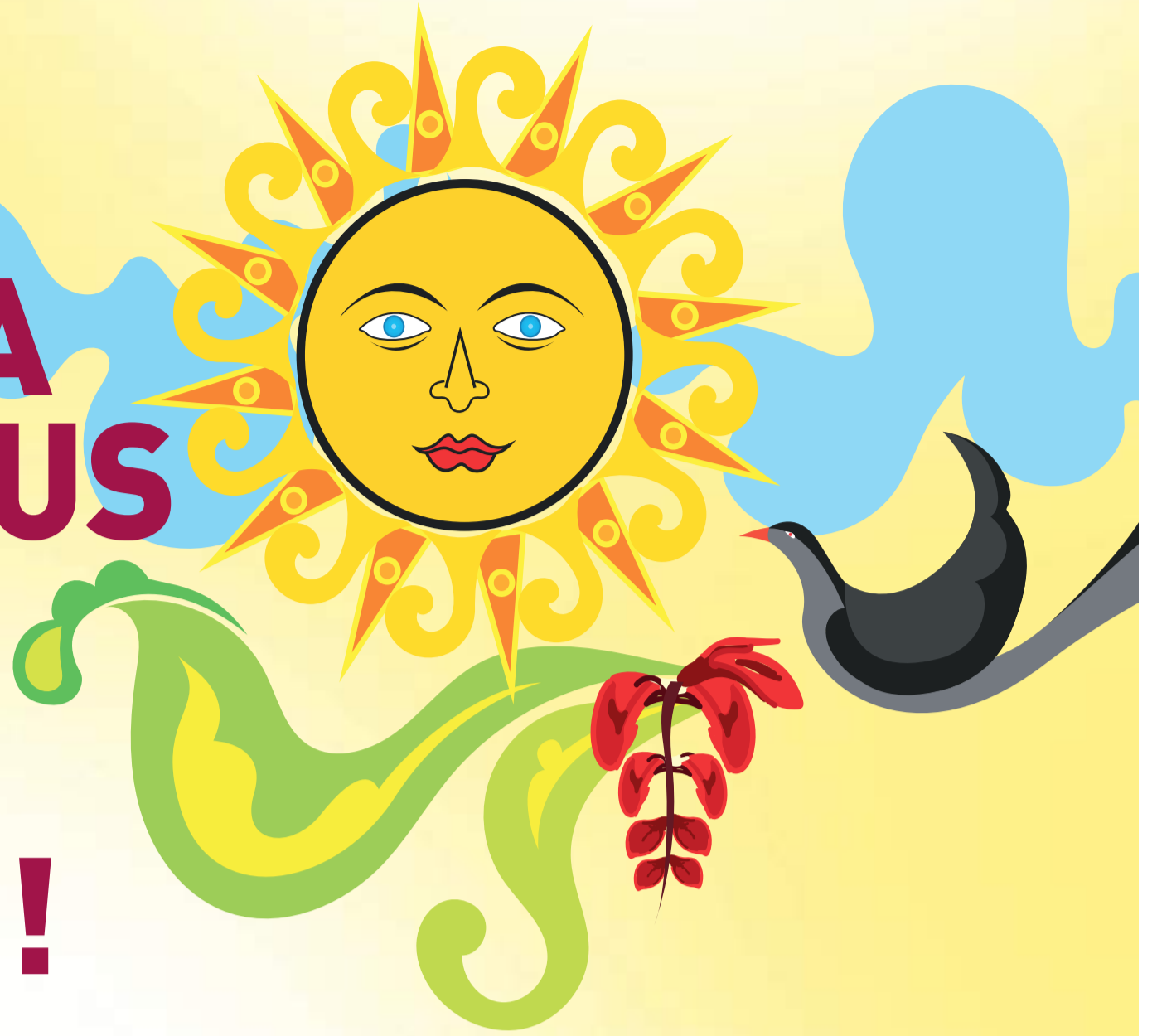
Yes, Avurudu or Puthandu (in Tamil), is primarily celebrated by Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, but over the years it has transcended such man-made boundaries and become a National Festival celebrated by all Sri Lankans wherever they live. That is what Sri Lanka should be – a country where all live in harmony and take pride in each other's cultural norms and traditions.

But above all, Avurudu celebrates our very close bond with Nature. In a way, it is our annual tribute to the Sun, whose movement from the Meena Constellation (Pisces) to the Mesha (Aries) Constellation is the very basis of the traditional New Year. This is distinct from the modern Gregorian calendar introduced just 436 years ago. On the other hand, the roots of the traditional New Year go back thousands of years. In fact, Oriental cultures have based their calendars – and



Vendors selling cooking utensils make brisk sales as people buy the items to cook the first meal of the New Year.

WISH YOU A PROSPEROUS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR !



DEVELOPMENT LOTTERY
Enriching Your Life

Chelliah Umapathy

A dedicated family man

With a very heavy heart, I forced myself to write this appreciation to our beloved uncle on his first death anniversary. We were very attached to him from our early childhood. On many occasions, I forced myself to write an appreciation, but inner emotions prevented me from doing so. But at last, I strengthened my heart and forced myself to write it.

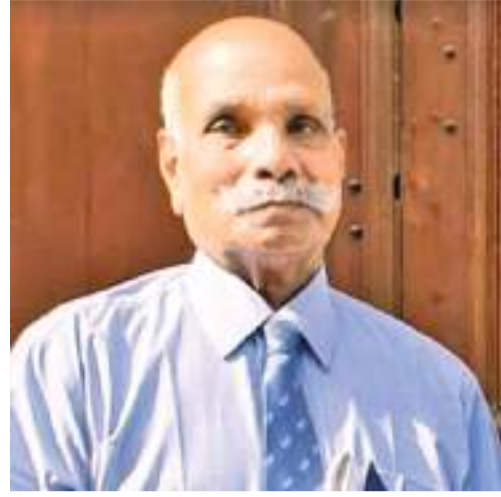
Among our three maternal uncles, Uma Mama was very attached to his only sister's children from our early days. More than an uncle, he played the role of a best friend with us throughout our life. As the last younger sibling to my mother, he was very attached to my mother as well.

When we were very small, he joined the Sri Lankan Air Force as a technical officer and served his motherland until 1983. During his tenure, he never failed to prove his sincerity and dedication. As a result, he won many prestigious awards. After retirement, he migrated with his family to the United Kingdom.

When he was working at the China Bay Air Base in Trincomalee, he used to visit us every fortnight. We were waiting for his arrival as he used to bring big boxes of chocolates and biscuits. He was a very open-minded, outspoken, and a strict disciplinarian. He always cultivated very good virtues among us.

When we were small, he used to play so many outdoor and indoor games with us. He was very much close to my mother. As the last sibling of my mother, he was more than an uncle, as he played the role of a good playmate, friend, and mentor to us. He used to take us for outings and treated us to delicious ice cream, cakes, and grams. He was very much delighted to eat peanuts and grams.

During his vacations, he cleaned our house and polished all brass and silverware. He loved gardening and brought plants from faraway places and planted them. With my maternal grandfather, he made our ancestral house garden look like a paradise in Jaffna. Even after he migrated to the United Kingdom in 1991, he



Uma Mama was blessed with a very good personality, yet outside he looked like a very tough person. He was very liberal in nature and also he felt happiness in giving and sharing his wealth with others. He married my aunt Shiva in 1967 and led a very happy and prosperous life. She was a very quiet, soft-spoken, and humble lady. She was a great gift to our uncle.

never failed to maintain close links with his earlier friends with whom he was serving at the Air force.

He was very attached to his sister (my mother) and parents (my grandparents). Until his

last breath, he was concerned about my mother's health and our welfare. Every year until June, 2019, he visited us and spent time with us. Unfortunately, we never expected that was his last visit. He never felt that we were grown-ups. He always treated us like small children and brought boxes of chocolate from London.

Until he was admitted to the hospital, he used to speak to us on alternate days. He considered us as his own children and never showed any discrimination.

He was a proud uncle who spoke about our achievements with others. Until the end of his life, his thoughts were with us. When I spoke to him a few days before his admission to the hospital, he spoke with me full of emotions. I never thought that was my last meeting with him. We never expected his unexpected demise by the deadly COVID-19 virus, which took thousands of precious lives from this world.

Uma Mama was blessed with a very good personality, yet outside he looked like a very tough person. He was very liberal in nature and also he felt happiness in giving and sharing his wealth with others. He married my aunt Shiva in 1967 and led a very happy and prosperous life. She was a very quiet, soft-spoken, and humble lady. She was a great gift to our uncle. He was blessed with two daughters: Damayanthi and Krishanti. Both of them are very good cousins of mine.

He was a good father-in-law to both of his sons-in-law. He was a very proud and caring grandfather to all of his grandchildren. He was very attached to his only grandson Arun, who excels in his studies and completed his post-graduate studies at the University of Oxford. Today, he is reading for his PhD. Uma Mama never failed to show his love and affection to his two granddaughters Shivani and Banu as well.

I hope Uma Mama was blessed with a very good worldly life and practised virtues. May his soul rest in peace!

His ever-loving niece,
DR. SUBASHINI PATHMANATHAN

APPRECIATIONS

DIG Camillus Abeysoonewardena

Steadfast and brave



*The officer and gentleman
Who shined in Sri Lankan Police
One of the smartest in uniform
To adorn that high-ranking office
Through skill and ability
He brought honour to his office
With honesty and integrity
He served with rejoice
Commencing his career
In the upcountry range
In Traffic and Road Safety
Soon he gained a name
Many national events
And international frame
He skillfully handled with
Honour and fame
Being one of the assignments
In his illustrious career
He was privileged to serve
In the VIP frontier
In those challenging times
Without any fear or favour
He served President JRJ
With promptness and cheer
Another milestone
In his colorful career
Was being appointed
To Lead the northern frontier
During the height of the war
That was becoming severe*

*He showed his mettle
Without any iota of fear
Humaneness was in his heart
All the time
Everyone he treated with kindness
And a smile
Whilst he had friends from many
walks of life
Never lost the common touch
With his unassuming style
To his family and friends
He was a pillar of strength
Reputation and respect
Was his much earned wealth
To many in distress
He did support in stealth
His greatness will remain
Our hearts as an epitome of strength!
INDRAJITH SENADHIRA*

R.M. Fernando

A versatile sportsman

Ranjit Mervin Fernando, who passed away on June 29, 2020, was the son of W. Reginald Fernando and Mercy Joan Fernando, and a scion of the late W. Hendrick Fernando of the 'Moratu Sangamaya'.

Ranjit was admitted to the kindergarten of S. Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia. As his father was on paramedical duty at Kurunagala, Ranjit was left in the care of his mother's cousin Lydia de Silva at Lunawa. Later, he was placed in the care of his father's siblings at Lakshapathiya.

I took him and my faithful aide Andiris by train from Angulana to Mount Lavinia and then to S. Thomas' College. Andiris used to take him home after school until Ranjit was old enough to look after himself. When Ranjit's father was transferred to Colombo, he took Ranjit to school.

From his early days at S. Thomas' College, Ranjit showed prowess in both studies and cricket. He was made the captain of the Under 12 and Under 14 teams. In 1959, Ranjit was selected for the First XI cricket team and played in the Royal-Thomian Tournament under A.D. Fernandes.

Ranjit was a stylish left-handed batsman. His batsmanship was commended in a college magazine. In 1960, he played under M.L. Idroos, and captained in 1961. He was the second Moratuwite to captain the college's cricket team and was also Head Prefect at that time.

While Ranjit was living in Lakshapathiya, he attended St. Matthias' Sunday School and won several prizes at the annual prize-giving. He later became a Sunday school teacher, was elected as a warden of the church, and also served as a treasurer of the church. As a treasurer, his accounting background enabled him to make prudent decisions. At the recently-held Annual General Meeting of the St. Matthias' Church, Ranjit was remembered for the wise decisions he took when he was the treasurer/warden.

At the end of his school career, Ranjit, his father, and I went to meet a paternal uncle of



mine to enquire whether he could accept Ranjit as a creeper on one of his estates. He went through Ranjit's credentials and suggested that it was better for him to become an accountant than become a planter.

Ranjit then followed a Chartered Accountancy Course and passed its intermediate examination. This qualification enabled him to become an accountant of the Ceylon Fertiliser Corporation. After some time, he was promoted to Shipping Manager. He left the corporation after rising in ranks to become its General Manager.

Thereafter, Ranjit joined CIC Holdings PLC as its Human Resources Manager and later continued as a Human Resources Consultant. He captained the respective cricket teams at both places and played cricket for Moratuwa SC under D.D. Jayasinghe. He later captained Moratuwa SC.

Ranjit was a prominent member of S. Thomas'

College Old Boys' Association. He helped them with their payroll work for 10 years. He was also a guest of honour at the 136th 'Battle of the Blues', which was held on March 15, 2015. He had a long and close association with his alma mater from 1950 until his demise.

Ranjit married Preetha, daughter of J.H.L. de Silva and Julie de Silva. They became an exemplary and loving Christian couple. He was a devoted father to his two daughters Rammika and Shehara, as well as to his two sons-in-law Mandana Abeyswardena and Samitha Fernando.

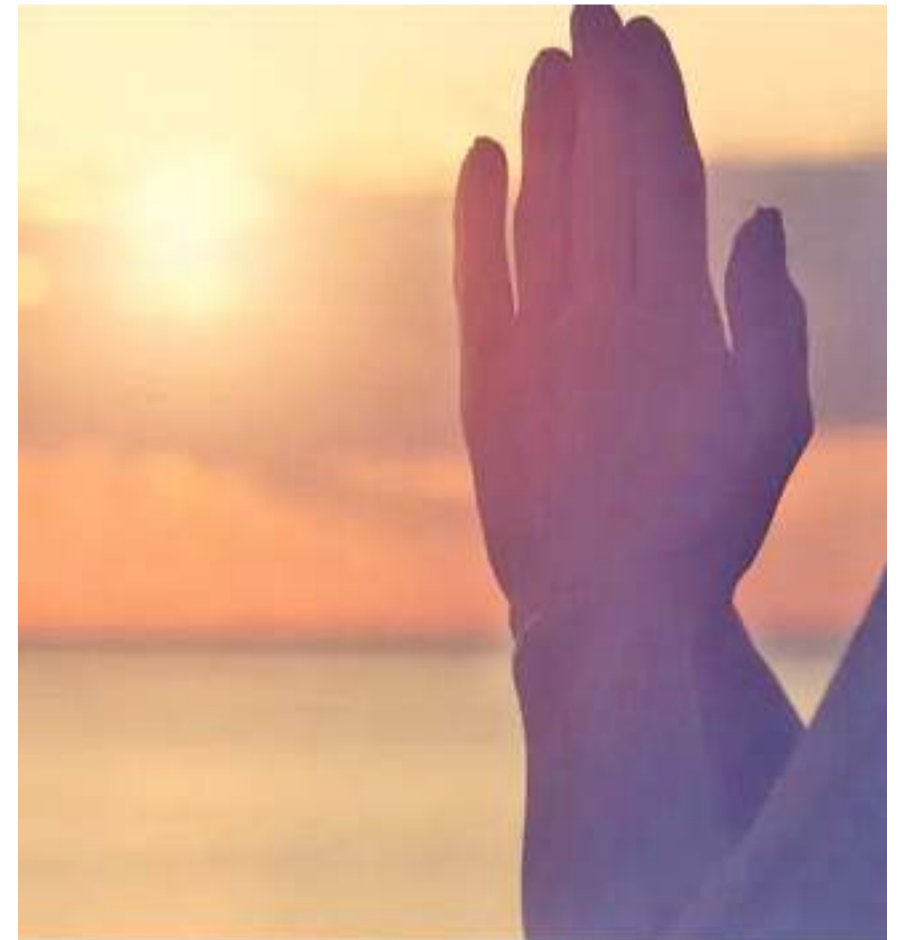
Ranjit was also an adoring grandfather to Devishka, Ramishka, and Shenura. They all knew how much he loved them. They were a united and closely-knit family. His sudden passing was painful to all his family and friends. It was especially heartbreaking for Rammika and Shehara and their families as they could not say their final goodbyes to him due to COVID-19 restrictions; they are living in South Africa and the UK, respectively.

On June 29, Ranjit and Preetha attended the 7:00 a.m. Holy Mass at St. Matthias' Church and returned home after the service was over. He had later collapsed while giving his dog a bath. He was admitted to the Kalubowila Hospital and was later pronounced dead. A physician had said that even if he had recovered, he would not have been able to lead a normal life. Therefore, God, in his mercy, called him home.

Ranjit had implicit faith in the Lord. With all his achievements and talents, he was a humble person who lived a simple life. He was also a very considerate and upright, and always stood up for what was right. He always maintained cordial relations with his relatives and neighbours.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.
N.T.B FERNANDO

From his early days at S. Thomas' College, Ranjit showed prowess in both studies and cricket. He was made the captain of the Under 12 and Under 14 teams. In 1959, Ranjit was selected for the First XI cricket team and played in the Royal-Thomian Tournament under A.D. Fernandes. Ranjit was a stylish left-handed batsman. His batsmanship was commended in a college magazine... He was the second Moratuwite to captain the college's cricket team and was also Head Prefect at that time.



TRIBUTE

Ven. Meegasthane Chandasiri Thera

He rendered a yeoman service to the public

with Sincere Gratitude... ..

There are no words to fully express the heartfelt gratitude for the sympathy, love and support that was extended to our family during the time of the loss of my beloved husband **Mr. V. Sivagnanasothy**.

To all those who attended the funeral, sent very caring messages, beautiful wreaths of flowers, and delivered very appreciative memorial speeches at the funeral, we thank you sincerely for your thoughtfulness.

The inability to thank everyone individually is much regretted.

Wife
Brothers and Family Members

This article is written with regard to the 70th birthday of Ven. Meegasthane Chandasiri Thera that fell on February 22.

As Chief Incumbent of the Mahindarama in Ethul Kotte, Chief of Sri Jaywardenepura Sri Kalyani Samagi Dharma Maha Sanga Sabha and Chief Secretary of Sri Lanka Nippon Educational and Cultural Centre, Ven. Meegasthane Chandasiri Thera is an eminent Bhikkhu who has shown great leadership and rendered countless social services.

Born on February 22, 1951, in Meegasthanna, Kalutara, the Bhikkhu had his initial education at the Meegasthanna Primary School. Being much devoted to Buddhism from childhood, he was ordained as a monk on February 15, 1963. Subsequently, the Thera mastered Dhamma, discipline, and languages at the Meegasthanna Vidyarama Pririvena.

The Thera rendered a yeoman

service not only as a Dhamma teacher, but also as the Deputy Principal of the Ananda Sashthalaya in Kotte. The most memorable of his undertakings is the establishment of the Sri Lankan Nippon Educational and Cultural Centre. For the past 35 years, Ven. Chandasiri Thera has provided an unstinted service as the centre's Chief Secretary.

Around 14,000 students in 118 Divisional Centres have been awarded scholarships under the patronage of Japanese Foster Parent scholarships programme that the Thera initiated with Japanese aid. Moreover, 14 preschools have been constructed with the patronage of Japanese donors. Ven. Chandasiri Thera's other activities include the establishment of a Japanese Language School for youth looking for foreign employment, assisting special needs children in Kotte, conducting student personality development pro-

grammes, and providing urgent accident benefits to students.

The Bhikkhu also set up a temple and biodiversity garden in Diyawanna. He was able to get contributions from past scholars of the Nippon Centre, as well as from Sri Lankan expatriates. Ven. Chandasiri Thera is the one and only Sri Lankan who got the rare opportunity to address the Japanese Members of Parliament at the Silver Hall, regarding 'Peace and Development in Sri Lanka'.

The annual commemoration of all late Sri Lankan and Japanese donors could not be held last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, Ven. Meegasthane Chandasiri Thera and the Nippon Centre decided to donate pharmaceuticals worth Rs.1 million to the Maharagama Apeksha Hospital.

VEN. GAWARAGIRIYA PAMARATHANA THERA
Senior Dhamma Instructor,
Royal College, Colombo 07

In Memoriam

One Month Remembrance - 12/04/2021. Mr. PATRICK FERNANDO. We miss you much and hope you are safe with Jesus. Fondly remembered by your wife Moreen, kids Dinika, Eron, Nalaka and Sonau, grandchildren Shaveen, Sheraya and Ethan.

028437

Obituaries

PERERA - SRILATH. Son of late Godfrey Perera & late Rita Perera of Nandana Gardens, Bambalapitiya, husband of Udeshi, father of Andrea & Shalan, brother of Suralini, brother-in-law of Suminda. Remains lie at **A.F. Raymond's Funeral Directors.** Cremation at 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday 13th April at **General Cemetery, Borella.**

028532

Treasury allocates Rs.330 million for school uniforms

BAKTHI MENDIS

The Treasury has allocated Rs.330 million to provide uniforms to schoolchildren for 2022. It will take steps to provide these funds to the State Ministry

of Infrastructure and Education Services for Women and Child Development, Pre-Schools, and Primary Education Schools in the future.

The government has decided to

procure school uniform suppliers only from local textile manufacturers registered under the Ministry of Industry and Supply Management.

The Ministry of Education has

been providing free school uniforms to students of government and government-affiliated schools, and to student monks and lay-students of government-approved piritvenas since 1993.



A special ceremony to felicitate prominent female personalities in the Eastern Province was held at the Trincomalee Jubilee Hall recently. Eastern Province Governor Anuradha Yahampath was the chief guest at the event. Here, Governor Yahampath handing over an award to Eastern Province Indigenous Department Commissioner Dr. R. Srithar. Picture by I.L.M. Rizan, Addalaichenai Central Corr.

Navy seizes 770kg of smuggled kendu leaves

A naval operation conducted in the seas off Kochchikade, Negombo, led to the arrests of six persons with 770kg of kendu leaves that was to be smuggled into the island last Saturday.

In the operation, the Western Naval Command intercepted three dinghies approaching the island and found 770kg of kendu leaves in 22 packages. Concealed in the dinghies were also 5kg of cardamoms. The suspects also had Rs.155,000 with them at the time.

The suspects have been



The seized kendu packages. Picture courtesy: Navy Media Unit.

identified as residents of Bangadeniya and Andaragama. The individuals, together with the seized

contraband, have been handed over to the Katunayake Customs Office for legal action.

Government to set up statutory body for traffic accident prevention

DHANUSHKA GODAKUMBURA

The Government is focusing on establishing a statutory body with the aim of lowering the rising numbers of traffic accidents.

Accordingly, the current National Council for Road Safety is to be converted into a National Commission for Transport Safety with jurisdictional expansion under a formal legal frame-

work. The Government has taken this decision due to the increasing number of traffic accidents that have had a negative impact on economic and social development in the country.

A Government spokesperson said that the main objectives behind the establishment of the institute were to minimise traffic accidents and address their aftermaths.

Police warn public over stolen goods cyber sales

RAKSHANA SHRIYANTHA

Police uncovered a racket where stolen goods were being sold over the internet recently. They have urged people to be careful when buying goods online.

The suspects are selling electrical and electronic equipment, as well as jewellery and books over the internet at low prices, police said.

They deliver the goods in a place where there are no close-up surveillance cameras, which the public does not pay much attention to, officers added.

Currently, the EMI numbers of all stolen mobile phones are published on the website www.ineed.police.lk maintained by Sri Lanka Police. Investigations are continuing.

925 arrested in Special Police Operation

SUBASHINI SENANAYAKE

Police arrested 925 over various offences during a special operation conducted in the Western Province between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The Police Media Spokesman's Office stated that 40 suspects have

been arrested over criminal offences, 306 over arrest warrants, and 518 over corruption.

Police Media Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana stated a number of special search operations will be carried out throughout the country during the next few days.

Indictments against Kurunegala Mayor, three others to be heard on May 3

ARIYAPALA WANSATHILAKE,

Kurunegala Central Special Corr.

The indictments against the Kurunegala Mayor Thushara Sanjeeva Witharana, his father, and two others, will be heard on May 3 before Kurunegala High Court Judge Mapa Bandara.

In this case, Mayor Witharana, along with his father Sunil Witharana, H.P. Nihal Justin, and Sunil Tharanga, were charged with abducting a person along with a motorcycle worth of Rs.85,000 on September 07, 2007, at Doratiyawa in Hewapola.

Two-day Handicraft Exhibition and Fair held in Karaithivu



Ampara Additional District Secretary V. Jegatheesan and others inspecting the exhibits. Picture by I.L.M. Rizan, Addalaichenai Central Corr.

I.L.M. RIZAN,

Addalaichenai Central Corr.

A two-day handicraft exhibition and fair organised held by Samurdhi beneficiaries from the Ampara District was held at the Kannahi Amman Temple in Karaithivu, recently.

Karaithivu Divisional Samurdhi Bank Manager S. Sathes inaugurated the event. Karaithivu Divisional Secretary S. Jegarasan, Ampara Additional District Secretary V. Jegatheesan, Nintavur Divisional Secretary M. Ansar, and Karaithivu Assistant Divisional Secretary S. Partheepan were also present.

Products made of reed, palmyrah, coconut and palm, as well as traditional sweetmeats, handloom products, rice flour products, recycled products, exotic plants, toys, and household items were among the products on exhibition and sale.

Rear Admiral Nishantha Samarasinghe retires

Rear Admiral Nishantha Samarasinghe retired after a 34-year Naval Career yesterday, the Navy stated in a press release. The outgoing senior officer, who also celebrated his 55th birthday yesterday, was welcomed by Navy Commander Vice-Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne and a Guard of Honour at the Naval Headquarters, the statement read.

Rear Admiral Nishantha Samarasinghe joined the Sri Lanka Navy in 1986 as an officer cadet of the 14th intake and rendered a yeoman service to the organisation. He has held key appointments such as Director Naval Electrical and Electronic Engineering (P&U), Director Naval Electrical and Electronic Engineering (System), Commodore Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department (West), as well as Director Naval Electrical and Electronic Engineering (Fleet, Weapons, and Electronics).



Rear Admiral Nishantha Samarasinghe with Navy Commander Vice-Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne. Picture courtesy: Navy Media Unit.



Sri Lankan Ambassador to Qatar Mohamed Mafaz Mohideen presented his credentials to Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani at the Amiri Diwan, recently. Picture by Ruzaik Farook



SINCE 1844
Cargills

When Avurudu rings in door to door,
Prosperity blooms than ever before.
Let heartfelt joy, peace and love,
Greet you and your loved ones.

BEST WISHES FOR A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

Daily News



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TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2021

A time for festivity

People celebrate the Sinhala and Tamil New Year with renewed hope on this occasion after over a year of anxiety about a pandemic that resulted in an effectively cancelled *Aluth Avurudda* in 2020. Though there are some restrictions this year as well, by and large the people are in a celebratory mood, and they may as well enjoy the season because it is primarily ordinary folk that shouldered the burden that came their way unexpectedly due to the disruption of the economy and normal life due to COVID.

However, even in this year of renewal, and one might even say redemption after the stultifying restrictions of last year, we still have the ghoulish elements that seem determined to rob people of the celebration and renewal that they so richly deserve after all they have endured. The striking train workers simply should have had better timing. The matter seems to have been settled at least for the moment — but it is not the status of the strike but the fact that the people were dealing with very anxious moments as they faced the crucial Avurudu weekend, that is important.

This comment will come back to the subject of Avurudu disruptions, but the purpose of these words in this space is to encourage people of all walks of life belonging to whichever religion, class or creed to partake in the spirit of renewal that this year's celebration in particular embodies. The worst is certainly behind us. Without our traditional rituals marking the transition from the old year to the new, we as a people are not complete. But last year, those rituals of transition were largely abandoned in the larger interests of the community. It does not mean that this year's good cheer in this time of renewal, will be marked by excess.

An abundance of caution is being advised, and all will relate to that sentiment. Even so, there is some anxiety that certain over exuberant elements will take the season as a licence to abandon restraint. Though such anxieties are natural, it seems safe to say that there will not be a significant breach of the rules — written and unwritten — that would call for a guarded but abundant celebration.

The people have shown remarkable maturity in the last year in which we faced the COVID crisis. The community has been exemplary. We have not had vigilantes causing ugly confrontations over issues such as mask-wearing, which other countries have witnessed and the people have shown a remarkable aptitude to police themselves.

This spirit will be retained through the New Year holidays, and though there may be some inconvenience at a minimal level, ordinary folk are ready to override these negatives and come together in celebration. Above all, they know they owe it to each other. There isn't a single person who has not made tremendous sacrifices these past 12 months or so, and this accounts for the healthy dose of mutual empathy that prevails, and that is the social unguent that will make this festive season a memorable one that it deserves to be, despite the tribulations still faced by the people due to the lingering effects of a pandemic now on its way out.

There have been Avurudu Celebrations before, that have been marred by crisis. Significantly, it is 50 years since the first JVP insurrection and its worth remembering that the tumultuous events of that crisis occurred just before the Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebration. The first rumblings of the crisis occurred on April 5, 1971, and the disruptive events went on for almost two months.

Be it train strikes or insurrections that mar the spirit of festive celebrations in the Avurudu season, it has always been the case that the people's spirit has prevailed over the mistimed misdeeds of disruptive elements. This reality is true for 2021 as it was true 50 years ago in 1971. Those who may be planning more disruptions including strikes or similar tactics are advised not to try.

There is no public sympathy for these actions. It is not to say that legitimate worker grievances or any other airing of grievances is not legitimate, but anyone who disrupts, or even thinks of disrupting the quiet but vibrant celebrations on the cards particularly this year after the cancelled festivities at this time in 2020 — will simply be ghoulish, period.

There will be no public empathy for any of these elements, and hence, they will be doing a disservice to whatever cause they seek to espouse. The people are silently sensitive to all the activities of political campaigners etc. even as they get about their normal lives. They certainly will have little patience for those who are seeking narrow advantage when the vast majority of society has been selfless, and has been functioning in a spirit of sacrifice and dedication to a grander cause than just themselves and their own.

There is little doubt that the festivities will fully embody that spirit of survival, and of overcoming any challenge, no matter how daunting.



Avurudu Aroma around the corner

LIONEL WIJESIRI

The Sinhala and Tamil New Year is upon us. This is the time of family togetherness, the tempting aroma of the fragrant sweets, whole variety of traditional games - and the unique celebrations made up of a complex motley that includes facets of indigenous, Sinhala, Hindu and astrology-based customs and rituals.

Astrologically, when the sun moves from the *Meena Rashiya* (House of Pisces) to the *Mesha Rashiya* (House of Aries) in the celestial sphere, Sinhala Buddhists and Hindu Tamils will begin celebrating their *Aluth Avurudda* and *Puthandu* respectively. According to Hindu mythology, once in every year, 'Indradeva', the Prince of Peace descends upon the earth to ensure peace and happiness among individuals. The colour of dress he wears varies each year and the astrologers advise us to wear that particular colour during the festival season.

The timing of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year coincides with the New Year celebrations of many traditional calendars of South and Southeast Asia. The festival has close semblance to the Thai New Year, Bengali New Year, Cambodian New Year, Lao New Year, and Thingyan in Myanmar. In India, we find *Vaisakhi* in North and central India, *Rongali Bihu* in Assam, *Puthandu* in Tamil Nadu, *Vishu* in Kerala, *Bishuva Sankranti* in Odisha and *Poila Boishakh* in Bengal.

The *Aluth Avurudda* has been one of the most significant annual festivals for Sinhala Buddhists, but its exact beginning is lost in the history. Robert Knox recalls that *Aluth Avurudda* was a major annual festival of the Sinhalese which was grandly celebrated in late March with royal patronage. This was during the period 1659 to 1678 when Knox was a prisoner in Kandy.

The historians believe that the Nayakkar Kings of Southern India who ruled during the latter part of the Kandy Kingdom would have shifted the festival to April to fall in line with the Tamil New Year, thus preventing Sinhalese and Tamils having two separate festivals in successive months. Historical records indicate that the British rulers declared Sinhala and Tamil New Year as a holiday in 1885.

Customs and rituals

The Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus get ready for this traditional and cultural festival from March itself. Homes are cleaned and all unwanted items are disposed, making the setting clean and tidy to mark a new beginning. Sweetmeats are prepared and new clothes purchased. The traditional oil lamp is lit at the auspicious time.

The sound of firecrackers and the rhythm of 'Rabana' signal the dawn of the 'Aluth Avurudda'. As the *Aluth Avurudda* sets in, the hearth is lit by the lady of the house and the traditional pot of milk is boiled. The traditional *Aluth Avurudda* dish "kiribath" follows. At the table, kiribath, bananas and many other delicacies become the centerpiece. Families sit around the table and share the kiribath, as the head of the family offers it to all members. After this the oil lamp is lit and the feast commences.

Every ritual is performed at an auspicious time. After meals, children show respect to their elders by offering sheaves of betel and

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elders bless them. Plates of sweets and other delicacies are exchanged between neighbours. After main rituals including oil-anointing are over, the celebrations move out into available open spaces where various traditional games and other activities begin.

The Tamil Hindus also celebrate the same *Aluth Avurudda*, commonly known as 'Puthandu', by observing the customs and rituals practised by ancestors over the years. However, they are slightly different to those of the Sinhalese. The auspicious occasion of Puthandu is also popularly known as *Varusha Pirappu* or the birth of *Aluth Avurudda*.

People celebrate Puthandu by following specific customs and rituals. On the day of the Avurudda, during the auspicious time, *Maruthu Neer* - clean water boiled with various herbs, selected flowers and leaves, milk, saffron and other ingredients are made by the priests in temples. They take bath with this "maruthu neer" by placing some water on the head.

After this event, new clothes are worn and once the *Aluth Avurudda* is born families assemble for prayer at their home. The worshipping begins with lighting the traditional lamp (*Kuthu Vilakku*). Then the whole family heads to the temple for pooja and prayers. The elders in the family bless the children, who worship them and seek their blessings and good wishes.

Critical part of culture

During the New Year festival, the respect for ancestral ways, backed by rites and rituals, cus-

tom and traditions has opened our vision to understand that it is important to adhere to basic principles of morality. It is a festival which conveys to us the simple way of life possessed with good sentiments including the maintenance of social order. It is also a festival which communicates to us the value in all matters needed to maintain peace and prosperity among the community.

Customs and rituals followed in the *Aluth Avurudda* represent a critical piece of our culture. They help form the structure and foundation of our families and our society. They remind us that we are part of a history that defines our past, shapes who we are today and who we are likely to become. Once we ignore the meaning of our traditions, we're in danger of damaging the underpinning of our identity.

Customs and rituals contribute a sense of comfort and belonging. It brings families together and enables people to reconnect with friends.

They reinforce values such as freedom, faith, integrity, personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, and the value of being selfless. They provide a forum to showcase role models and celebrate the things that really matter in life. They offer a chance to say "thank you" for the contribution that someone has made. They enable us to showcase the principles of our past generations, celebrate diversity, and unite as a country. They serve as an avenue for creating lasting memories for our families and friends. They offer an excellent context for meaningful pause and reflection.

During this festive period, as leaders, role models, and parents, we must strive to utilize every opportunity available to us to reinforce the values and beliefs that we hold dear. The alternative to action is taking these values for granted. The result is that our beliefs will get so diluted, over time, that our way of life will become foreign to us.

It's like good health. You may take it for granted until you lose it. If we disregard our values, we'll open our eyes one day and won't be able to recognize "our world" anymore. The values that support the backbone of our country, our family, and our faith will have drifted for so long that the fabric of our society will be torn.

These customs and rituals have come down to us through the ages because they are ingrained in our history and culture. For thousands of years our ancestors, the inhabitants of this island built up a highly organised agrarian civilization based on the principles of harmonious co-existence with nature, non-violence, tolerance and peace.

The *Aluth Avurudda* demonstrates our national ethos with its characteristic emphasis of the renewal and reaffirmation of goodwill within families and among neighbours and in the series of ritualistic customs, practices and observances that are meant to revitalize an essential link between man and nature.

Sinhala and Tamil New Year, is a festival that has stood the test of time. It has enriched our culture, emotionally aroused our society and blessed our nation so much so that today the "Aluth Avurudda" has emerged as the country's premier National Festival.

(This article, first published in the Daily News on April 12, 2020, is republished in tribute to journalist and author Lionel Wijesiri who passed away recently).



THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.
- Karl Barth



LIBOR Phase-out, RFR Adoption: A Path Forward for Sri Lanka

LALINDA SUGATHADASA

There is indeed little doubt that Central Banks and major firms around the world have heaved a sigh of relief in light of the announcement from LIBOR's administrator, ICE Benchmark Administration (IBA), that it would continue to publish overnight and one, three, six and 12 month USD LIBOR settings until June 30, 2023.

Sri Lanka, with a relatively high dollarised debt (USD 56 billion, or 67% of the GDP in 2019), is likely to have a substantial exposure to USD LIBOR and the current picture is expected to remain more or less the same for the next five years.

The Alternative Reference Rate Committee (ARRC), the body that is tasked with facilitating the USD LIBOR transition, has identified SOFR as the preferred replacement rate and is urging market participants to continue to push ahead with the transition.

It is true that the postponement has greatly eased Sri Lanka's worries in this respect, but that should not be a reason for market participants to be complacent and treat it as a simple administrative change in the benchmark rates.

Orderly transition from LIBOR and the adoption of Alternative Reference Rates (ARRs) should continue to be encouraged to promote financial system stability. This requires the collective efforts of Sri Lanka's regulator, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) and other domestic market participants.

The purpose of this article is to serve as a primer on the path forward for LIBOR phaseout and the adoption of a Risk-Free Rate (RFR) in Sri Lanka.

Developments in the region

The COVID-19 crisis may have hindered transition progress in the region, however several milestones were still met last year. First and foremost, the conventions for a series of SOFR linked cross-currency basis swaps (CNY/USD, SGD/USD, MYR/USD) were finalised in Asia last year.

Meanwhile, billions of dollars worth of SOFR referenced debt instruments have already been issued in Asia. Moreover, major jurisdictions in the region have adopted their own overnight RFRs to replace existing interbank offer rates (IBORs) – including in Hong Kong (HONIA), Japan (TONIA), Australia (AONIA), Thailand (THOR), Indonesia (INDONIA), Malaysia (AOIR) and Singapore (SORA).

Unfortunately, the South Asian market is lagging behind its East Asian counterparts. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the regulator that the CBSL often turns to for inspiration, has taken some strides with respect to the LIBOR transition, putting plans in motion to replace India's widely used MIFOR, which is linked to LIBOR. In addition, the Central Bank of the South Asia's third largest economy, Bangladesh Bank, has released a policy document outlining a strategy to phase out LIBOR.

As of now, Sri Lanka does not have a synthetic LIBOR linked index such as SOR, MIFOR or THBFIX. The CBSL suspended compilation and publication of Sri Lanka Interbank Offered Rate (SLIBOR) last year and announced that an ARR is in the works for market participants to use in future.

Sri Lanka's context

The magnitude of Sri Lanka's exposure to LIBOR in the form of loans, bonds, derivatives, and deposits is hard to judge – let alone measure those that expire after the end of June 2023. Though comparatively a shallower market, it is worthwhile to investigate the nature of LIBOR-linked instruments in Sri Lanka.

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) is the entity with the single most exposure to LIBOR in the country. The GoSL bor-

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) is the entity with the single most exposure to LIBOR in the country. The GoSL borrows long-term (over 10 years) from bilateral agencies or multilateral institutions to fund large-scale development projects. Typically, these are denominated in USD or EUR, hence the loans with variable interest rates are linked to USD LIBOR or EURIBOR, both of which are set to be phased out.

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In addition, the GoSL raises medium-term syndicated credit lines (for instance the Foreign Currency Term Financing Facility recently set up by the GoSL) from international and domestic banks and investment houses from time to time which may have exposure to a base rate such as LIBOR. The GoSL also issues Sri Lanka Development Bonds (SLDBs), a series of Eurobonds, from time to time to raise foreign currency (FC) reserves, where the floating rate notes are linked to USD LIBOR.

By far, domestic banks are the most vibrant of all when it comes to exposure to LIBOR. Domestic banks have LIBOR exposure on both the asset and liability side of their balance sheets and have exposure through a myriad of modalities. The bulk of the exposure on the liability side are through long-term subordinated loans from international banks and multilateral agencies. In addition, a limited number of banks offer variable interest rate eurocurrency deposits, which pays LIBOR plus a margin.

Exposures on the asset side are mainly from lending to large corporates, typically as bilateral loans with relatively softer securities, and sometimes as syndicated loans. State banks also have large FC exposures to Sri Lanka's largest State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) such as utilities and the national airline.

Domestic banks also have considerable amounts of floating rate SLDBs on their balance sheets. Banks hedge the interest rate risk arising from FC floating rate instruments through interest rate swaps (IRS) and offer OTC IRS as a part of their product offerings to cli-



ents. However, the market for FC IRS is comparatively small in Sri Lanka.

Some of the large non-bank SOEs have obtained short-term FC floating rate loans from international banks, typically against pledged securities. In certain instances, state banks have extended overdraft facilities linked to LIBOR to these SOEs. It is also quite possible for Sri Lanka's state-owned petroleum company to have some LIBOR exposure via non-financial contracts.

In addition, large private firms occasionally fund their short to medium-term offshore operations through FC borrowings, often from non-state domestic banks as collateralised floating rate loans. There are few instances where large scale borrowings were obtained as syndicated loans. The use of derivatives among Sri Lankan corporates to hedge their interest rate risk is limited; even in these limited cases, they use plain vanilla swaps.

Risks

There seemed to be widespread incredulity about the repercussions of the LIBOR phaseout among both banks and corporates alike, which has led to complacency. The risks for firms range from operational risk to reputational risk, and the lack of market readiness could have a substantial impact on the profitability and access to Eurodollar markets.

Borrowers run the risk of facing a potential increase in interest expense if the existing credit agreement triggers an alternative rate once LIBOR ceases to exist, such as the prime rate, which has historically been higher than the LIBOR. To avoid this fate, borrowers must either seek an amendment or prepay the loan in advance.

The vast majority of derivative contracts in Sri Lanka are either standard 2006 ISDA master agreements or some version of them. The existing fallback provisions in these contracts are grossly inadequate to handle a permanent cessation of the reference rate and hence, the floating leg of such derivatives will be impaired rendering the instrument completely inoperable.

There seemed to be a divergence of fallback protocols (i.e., mode of the benchmark replacement, spread adjustments, trigger events) between derivatives and cash products which results in some degree of basis risk for market participants.

Roadmap

Given the risks associated with LIBOR transition, it is absolutely necessary for the CBSL, banks, and firms to act with urgency to formulate exit strategies at the product, firm, and market levels.

At the product level, two main approaches have emerged to deal with the LIBOR phase out. Under the Amendment approach, the borrower, agent or originator chooses a replacement rate and spread adjustment and the lender or majority of the lenders have five days to object. An objection triggers the parties to adopt a prime-based rate in

the absence of a mutually agreeable replacement rate. The second approach, the Hardwired approach, considers a preset fallback to change the replacement rate to an ARR (SOFR in most cases in Sri Lanka) plus a modified spread prescribed or recommended by ARRC or ISDA.

The derivatives market is more likely to adopt the Hardwired approach where the RFR is compounded in arrears. For common legacy derivatives such as IRS, it is necessary for the parties to adhere to the ISDA fallbacks protocol while for new contracts they should apply the ISDA fallbacks supplement. In certain cases, the parties may decide that the unwinding of legacy derivative positions is more prudent than making contractual amendments.

For legacy cash products – including collateralised loans, credit lines, syndicated loans, and term loans – the ARRC has recommended to follow the Amendment approach, while newer issuances should incorporate the Hardwired fallback. For cash products, the ARR will be calculated in advance in the absence of forward-looking term rates.

Existing floating Eurocurrency deposits are less likely to be a problem for banks due to the limited number of such deposits. Banks can either allow the rate to fall back to a fixed rate or amend the rate after acquiring consent from the deposit holders. For new deposits, it is recommended to adopt the ARRC floating rate debt fallback to avoid any ambiguity arising from the permanent cessation of LIBOR.

The postponement of the LIBOR end date has helped to diminish the complications in SLDBs significantly. The bulk of the SLDBs that mature past June 2023 are fixed-term bonds, while only USD 6 million are floating rate notes at the time of writing.

Amending the fallback language requires unanimous consent from the instrument holders. Therefore, consent solicitation should be initiated in an appropriate time frame ahead of the envisaged end date for LIBOR. Optionally, the latest ARRC recommended fallback language can be incorporated into contracts and the consent threshold level can be lowered for new issuances.

Multilateral agencies and major international banks that are primarily on the sell-side have laid out plans to transition away from LIBOR. As such, solicitation of amendments to sovereign and non-sovereign loan agreements are underway to support the transition for borrowers. This reduces the risks for the GoSL and domestic banks that are on the buy-side of these instruments.

However, the amount of effort put in by domestic banks to transition the sell-side of their portfolios is inadequate. With Sri Lanka's poor credit rating standing, it is less likely that banks' FC exposures would grow space for the next few years; they are exposing themselves to huge reputational risk if they decide to play a more reactive role.

Banks and companies need to do more to actively transition away from LIBOR. The first task for firms is to ascertain their LIBOR exposure levels in both financial and non-financial contracts. A cross-functional team can be formed to roll out firm-level transition plans, monitor market developments and determine the optimal timing for exit. Technological and operational readiness is of foremost importance in this regard.

Though there is no legal mandate for the CBSL to facilitate LIBOR transition, it is not realistic to expect the market will do this on its own. Therefore, as the regulator, the CBSL, should play a more active role in facilitating the transition in Sri Lanka. A good starting point is to establish a working group comprising key stakeholders to implement a comprehensive market-wide strategy.

In addition, the CBSL can seek firm-level plans from financial institutions to assess market readiness. There is also a severe knowledge gap among the market participants in Sri Lanka about the LIBOR transition. This must be addressed urgently to bridge the gap. It is also crucial for the CBSL to ensure the required infrastructure is in place for the transition. Another issue that is not directly linked to LIBOR transition but potentially will serve to enhance the functioning of the domestic financial market and promote integration with the global market in future is the adoption of an RFR in Sri Lanka. Currently, loans and debt instruments such as commercial paper are priced using the Average Weighted Prime Lending Rate (AWPLR), a rate compiled by the CBSL based on short-term unsecured lending to prime customers by commercial banks.

While the domestic RFR which can replace AWPLR is currently under development, it is preferable that the rate is compliant with the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) standards. Therefore, much work is still remaining to introduce and operationalise the upcoming ARR among the market participants.

(Lalinda Sugathadasa is an economist and currently heading the research vertical at ICRA Lanka, a credit rating agency associated with Moody's Investors Service)

- Regulation Asia



The Central Bank of Sri Lanka



Ramadan

The month that teaches Spirituality & Patience

Prophet Muhammad told his fellow Muslims, "the people who come from different faiths or religions cannot be discriminated and disrespected for their beliefs. If a person claims to be Muslim, he is not allowed to insult or disrespect another religion." People of other faiths were considered members and citizens of Madinah society regardless of religion, race or ancestry and they were protected from harm as much as Muslims. During the period of His ruling, there were different groups of tribes in the state of Madinah.



During the month of Ramadan, the Muslims recite the Holy Qur'an to understand the message given by Almighty Allah to the whole of humanity.



During the night time of the holy month, special prayers called 'Tharaweeh' are conducted in every mosque.



FARHATH FAYIZ SALEEM

Muslims across the world begin fasting from today (13) or tomorrow (14) when the New Moon is sighted. Ramadan is a holy month of fasting; introspection and prayer for Muslims, followers of Islam.

Muslims believe the month of Ramadan is the holiest month which teaches about spiritual purification. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Every year, Muslims around the world fast during daylight hours – from dawn until dusk abstaining from drinking, eating, immoral acts and anger. Fasting (Sawm) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, which forms the basis of how Muslims live their lives. The other pillars are faith (Shahada), prayer (Salat), charity (Zakat) and the pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj).

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims wake up early in the morning before 'Fajr' morning prayer to have a pre-dawn meal called 'Suhoor' and they end fasting for the day with a meal referred to as 'Iftar' after the sunset. Fasting in the month of Ramadan is mandatory for all healthy adult Muslims. Children who have not reached puberty, the elderly, those who are physically or mentally incapable of fasting, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and travellers are exempt.

Significance of the Holy Month

The month of Ramadan is significant for Muslims because it is celebrated as the month during which Prophet Muhammad received the initial revelations of the Qur'an – the Holy Book of Islam. The Holy Book was bestowed not only for Muslims. It gives a message to the whole of mankind. It teaches every good deed to the whole of humanity. The Holy Qur'an does not teach violence. It teaches love and compassion for every human being, regardless of their religion or faiths. The Holy Qur'an teaches generosity. During the month of Ramadan, the Muslims willingly recite this holy book to understand the message given by Almighty Allah to the whole of humanity. It talks about good deeds. It describes human life – how to live with other communities. The holy book guides the law of charity: 'Zakath' and 'Sadaka'. In this holy month of Ramadan, the Muslims generously donate for charitable causes according to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. They help the needy people and neighbours. It is the time to strengthen the relationship with the neighbours of different faiths, understanding each other. The Holy Qur'an provides an environment where people can fully enjoy freedom of thought and

freedom of religion and allows people to live by the faith and values they believe.

It teaches us how to live in a society with other communities with peace and tranquillity, especially understanding the diverse culture of different faiths giving respect and dignity to other religions. When living with peace and tranquillity, it avoids personal hostility. The month of Ramadan is the opportunity to "purify" our bodies as well as our souls by developing a greater sense of humility and spirituality. It teaches a greater sense of generosity and forgiveness. Fasting develops feelings of generosity and goodwill towards others. Fasting also practices self-control or restraint, good manners and good habits.

Islam is the religion that follows the teaching of the Holy Qur'an. Islam teaches to treat neighbours whoever Muslim or non-Muslim the way they would like to be treated by others. Prophet Muhammad said, "He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while the neighbour to his side goes hungry". Also, the Prophet teaches to help the neighbours with charities. Prophet Muhammad said, "The Angel Gabriel was so adamant in reminding me to be charitable with my neighbours that I thought he might make him my heir" (Al-Bukhari). So, several charity organisations work hard especially during the month of Ramadan to help their neighbours and the people living in surrounding areas since they believe that they would be benefited with more rewards during this holy month compared to other months. Further, they willingly involve in several religious activities such as prayers, reciting the Holy Qur'an. During the night time, special prayers called 'Tharaweeh' is conducted in every mosque with many people.

Exemplar of Islam

After the Holy Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad during the month of Ramadan, He showed His followers how to live according to the teachings of the Holy Book. He taught the followers how to treat the people of other faiths. During the time of Prophet Muhammad, the Arabian Peninsula was a region in which various faiths were followed. There were Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Polytheists and others not affiliated with any religion. When one looks into the life of the Prophet, there are many examples to portray the high level of tolerance shown to people of other faiths. When Prophet Muhammad ruled the state of Madinah, as a lead-

er, exemplar, social reformer and an administrator of the state, He made the constitution with the framework of political principles, procedures and power of government including equality - to treat the people of other faiths without any harm. All people, no matter what religion, race or class they come from are supposed to be treated equally – they have the same rights as the majority Muslims in the state of Madinah.

Prophet Muhammad told his fellow Muslims, "the people who come from different faiths or religions cannot be discriminated and disrespected for their beliefs. If a person claims to be Muslim, he is not allowed to insult or disrespect another religion." People of other faiths were considered members and citizens of Madinah society regardless of religion, race or ancestry and they were protected from harm as much as Muslims. During the period of His ruling, there were different groups of tribes in the state of Madinah. The Prophet gathered these different tribes under one system of governance. Any attack on other religion or tribe was considered an attack on the state. Prophet Muhammad strictly warned against any maltreatment of people of other faiths saying, "Beware! whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will, I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against the person on the day of Judgement" (Abu Dawud).

Medical benefits of fasting

Medical experts point out neurological and nutritional benefits for the human body and brain because of fasting. Murat Alemdar who is an Associate Professor of Neurology at the Medical School of the Sakarya University, Turkey conducted extensive research on how fasting affects the activities of the human brain and came to a conclusion that it offers major benefits for people to maintain a healthier life.

Ceren Kucukvardar, a Turkish Nutritionist, describes that fasting increases the hormone called 'adiponectin' which helps to protect our heart health, keeping our body glucose level low. Yoshinori Ohsumi, the Japanese Cell Biologist who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2016 for his research on how cells recycle and renew their content through a process called 'autophagy' describes that 'fasting activates the process of autophagy which helps to slow down the ageing process and has a positive impact on cell renewal.'

Dr. Michael Mosley, a British TV Presenter, Journalist, Trained Doctor

and Scientist, points out that 'fasting helps to burn fat and reduce cholesterol levels and if someone fast at least twice a week like the Muslims do, he would be very energetic.'

Government regulations

Normally Muslims gather larger in mosques for prayers and other religious activities, especially in the holy month of Ramadan.

In the midst of the current pandemic situation, mosques follow the Government regulations under the guidance of community leaders and the Wakf Board – the monitoring body of the Muslim mosques of Sri Lanka. Special prayers and Friday Jummah prayers are also conducted as per the safety regulations given by the Government, maintaining social distance and other safety guidelines.

In this holy month of Ramadan, it is a good opportunity to be involved more in charity activities to help our nation during this hard time. So far, several Islamic charity organisations have actively been involved in helping other communities without any religious or racial barriers because many people have faced difficulties in obtaining their necessities due to the pandemic situation which has paralysed the entire world.

Lessons from Ramadan

According to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, the wastage of food and other resources is completely prohibited. In this holy month of Ramadan, we can channel that wastage towards needy people who are struggling for their necessities in day-to-day life. When we remain thirsty and hunger in the month of Ramadan, we experience the affliction that the poor and needy people of the society experience the whole year. Hence, fasting is a way of bridging the gap between the different classes and groups in society. We will take this opportunity to help the families who suffer as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supplication (Dua)

Muslims believe that Almighty Allah accepts whatever supplications (Dua) submitted to Almighty Allah will definitely be accepted during the Holy Month of Ramadan. It is the opportunity to pray for the nation and the whole world seeking the help of Almighty Allah for protection from this infectious virus. May Almighty Allah make life easy for the whole of humanity.

*Ramadan Mubarak!
(The writer is based in the UK)*

The Holy Qur'an does not teach violence. It teaches love and compassion for every human being, regardless of their religion or faiths. The Holy Qur'an teaches generosity. During the month of Ramadan, the Muslims willingly recite this Holy Book to understand the message given by Almighty Allah to the whole of humanity. It talks about good deeds. It describes human life – how to live with other communities. The holy book guides the law of charity: 'Zakath' and 'Sadaka'. In this holy month of Ramadan, the Muslims generously donate for charitable causes according to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.



Husma Dena Thuru National Tree Planting Programme

Over 107,000 saplings planted in four months - Amaraweera

M. IRFAN ZAKARIYA,
Hambantota group corr

Over 107,000 saplings have been planted with the introduction of the *Husma Dena Thuru* National Tree Planting Programme in the last four months, said Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera.

Amaraweera said that this National Tree Planting programme is now very popular and many parties have extended their support for it and have even initiated their own programmes.

Minister Amaraweera was speaking while participating in a tree planting programme held in the Angunakolapelessa area he also distributed plants to the people of that area.

He said, "After I started my tenure as the Minister of Environment, I introduced the 20-point environmental programme called *Haritha Hetath*. Its main tree planting programme is the *Husma Dena Thuru* National Tree Planting Programme.

"Under this we aim to plant two million saplings in the next four years," he said.

"The Government did not spend a single rupee for this. All the money was given to us by the private sector. People from all walks of life have come forward to extend their support to this National Tree Planting Programme. Therefore, we will continue to expand this programme for the next four years without spending any Government

funds," he said. "A tree is a wonderful life giving source. Mother Earth gives us trees by composting the garbage we dump on the earth as human beings. Not only do trees provide us with food, but they also supply us the Oxygen we need to breathe. That's why we called this programme *Husma Dena Thuru*, he added.

"A human being needs 550 litres of Oxygen per day to live. It weighs about 2.5 kilograms. To provide this quantity of Oxygen for one person to breathe, at least 10 trees must produce Oxygen. Some people who live on the oxygen that produces 10 trees a day do not plant at least one tree for the rest of their lives. Our ancient ancestors treated Mother Nature with utmost

respect. Today, people in their greed for money are cutting down the trees that give us breath. "Seattle, the leader of the Red Indians, has said that once a man cuts down a tree, eats the last fish and drinks the last drop of water, he will realize that money cannot be eaten," Minister Amaraweera said.

"If someone destroys the forest, he is like a murderer. Therefore, we are doubling the penalties for destroying the environment under the new National Environmental Act. Also, the fines will be increased by 10 fold more than that of the current levels. Those who work for the protection of the environment will be evaluated and they will be honoured at an awards ceremony.

SEUSL secures prestigious Emerald Literati Award

(Text and Picture by I. L. RIZAN, Addalaichenai Central Correspondent)

Samsudeen Sabraz Nawaz, Senior Lecturer in Management and Information Technology (MIT) & Head of the Department of Management and Information Technology (MIT), attached to the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) has been honoured with the Outstanding Paper award for his research work titled 'University Students' Intention to Use E-Learning Systems: A Study of Higher Educational Institutions in Sri Lanka and published in a top-ranked journal named *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*.

Samsudeen Sabraz Nawaz is the only Sri Lankan academic to receive this award.

This honour was announced in the Literati Awards 2020 of Emerald



Senior Lecturer in Management and Information Technology (MIT) & Head of the Department of Management and Information Technology (MIT) Samsudeen Sabraz Nawaz and Vice-Chancellor of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) M.M.M. Najim with the prestigious award.

Publishing Limited which is one of the world-class prestigious publisher based in UK publishing more than 350 academic journals and books in the fields of management, business, education, library studies, health care, and engineering. Its

publications are abstracted in prestigious indices like Web of Science, Scopus as well as ABDC.

For more than 25 years, Emerald Publishing has rewarded outstanding and impactful contributions to scholarly research through its pres-

tigious Emerald Literati Awards for Excellence.

The awards are one of the largest, independent award schemes led by a publisher to celebrate and reward the outstanding contributions made by Emerald's scholarly community. Judged by Emerald's journal and book series editorial boards based on the ability to demonstrate excellence and impact in their field.

The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka has taken a very big leap in academic and research activities after Prof. M.M.M. Najim came as the Vice-Chancellor of this University. It is learned that he has taken many steps to ignite the academic staff to involve more in research activities by allocating grants for outcome-based researches and publications in high-impact journals.

Also, the Vice-Chancel-

lor introduced various awards for promoting and recognising research culture in this university. To name a few, in recognition of individuals: Outstanding Senior/Junior Researcher, Outstanding Early Career Researcher, Outstanding Inventor of the University, Senate Award for High Impact Publication, Top 10 Researchers of the University, The Researcher with the highest number of publications, etc. At the same time, Faculties are also appreciated for having the most number of articles published in Journals too. Hence, all these have motivated the staff to extensively engage in research activities and last year more than 100 articles have been published by the staff from this university in high-impact journals to make a contribution to the nation and the world at large.



A two day workshop organised by ORAM Pvt Ltd under the theme "Mastering Root Canel shapping protocols with modern approach" was held in Colombo recently. Thirty doctors who participated in workshop were presented certificates. The programme was spearheaded by Restorative Consultant Dr. Srimeven Samarakoon, Restorative Consultants Dr. Chanaka Nuwan Dissanayake and Dr. (Ms) Uthpala Malwatte along with ORAM Group Chairman Jabir Sally.

BASL must help ensure due process of justice

- Muslim intellectuals

A group of Muslim intellectuals yesterday said shifting the alleged mastermind of the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks from Zahran Hashim to Naufer Maulavi and then to any one else is a matter that must be left to the Attorney General of the country, in the interest of justice and fair-play.

Issuing a joint media statement M. M. Zuhair PC, former MP Latheef Farook, Journalist and Author Mass L Usuf Attorney-at-Law and Advocacy Columnist and Mansoor Dahlan, Theology Scholar said the Government has announced time and again that the

process of justice will be left to the Attorney General and then to the Courts in certain cases and for rehabilitation in other cases.

"It is for the Attorney General to decide who should be prosecuted, who should become witnesses, who should be discharged for lack of evidence and who should, in accordance with the regulations, be committed for rehabilitation", they said. "We need to mention however, that there is no need for us or for parties who may represent the legal interests of the perpetrators or the victims to draw attention to the

need for due process of justice to be ensured, if the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) will speak up to ensure due process".

"No doubt the Attorney General by now may be possessed of all the material. He must be allowed to decide who was the mastermind of the 21/4 attacks on the material that is before him. It may be Zahran Hashim or Naufer Maulavi or Pulasthini Rajendran alias Sarah or the ISIS allegedly under US handlers or possibly any of the world's intelligence agencies notorious for toppling non supportive gov-

ernments. Maybe the Police Department has not fully investigated some of these aspects. The bottom line is that the country must know the truth. That is vital to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy that those innocent Christians and unfortunate tourists had undergone".

"Perpetrators of crime and those who knowingly aided, abetted, conspired or neglected must be punished. That is very clear. But punishments or incarceration should not extend to those innocent of any criminal intention or knowledge. Due punishment and rehabilita-

tion are also necessary to prevent a recurrence".

"Muslims of Sri Lanka have and will cooperate in all genuine efforts to end the recurrence of all forms of violence in the country. But any attempt to punish Islam or the Muslim community as a whole or its civil society or political leadership for collateral purposes will violate the Constitution as well as international treaties".

"We need to be united as a country, without discrimination, if we are to marginalize and end violent extremism in the country," the statement said.

Special Prayer Service to commemorate Easter Sunday Terror Attack victims

The Catholic Church has organised a Special Prayer Service to commemorate the second year remembrance of those killed by the Easter Sunday Terror Attacks which falls on April 21, 2019.

Three days of Prayer (Triduum) beginning from April 19 and Vigil Services preceding the religious ceremonies both at St. Anthony's Shrine, Kochchikade, Colombo and St. Sebastian's Church, Katuwapitiya.

Catholic Churches in the Western Province and other churches around the country are scheduled to observe two

minutes' silence at 8.45 a.m. on April 21, as a mark of respect to those innocent victims.

At St. Anthony's Shrine, Kochchikade, Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thera will conduct Buddhist Religious observances, Siva Suresh, Chief Kurukal will conduct Hindu Religious observances and Al-Haj As-Sayed Ash-Sheikh Dr. Hassan Maulana will conduct Muslim Religious observances. The religious service at Katuwapitiya will begin at 5 p.m. on April 21 with His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith as Chief Celebrant.

Virtual panel discussion to mark World Earth Day

DINULI FRANCISCO

Marking the 51st Anniversary of World Earth Day, a virtual Zoom panel discussion will be hosted by the America Sri Lanka Photographic Art Society in Los Angeles California, USA (ASPAS) on April 18.

The objective of the discussion is to showcase the beauty of world fauna and flora and promote environmental conservation in the context of nature photography and tourism, with a special focus on the grandeur of Sri Lanka's natural habitat.

This webinar commemorates World Earth Day and supports Worldwide efforts to conserve the planet Earth.

This will be the 17th Virtual discussion hosted by the America Sri Lanka Photographic Art Society. It is also a member of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) and the International Federation of Photography of Art in France (FIAP).

President of the America Sri Lanka Photographic Society, Suri-

ya Jayalath Perera brings forward ten young people from the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Sri Lanka to voice their concerns and present their ideas during the occasion.

Youth from ages 6 to 18, will address the entire gamut of environmental issues on April 18 at 8.30 pm.

More information can be obtained through www.usacaaspas.com and the session can be viewed live through the USA ASPAS Facebook page.

Marriage
♥ *Proposals*
in the
Sunday Observer
Is the best way to fulfil
your Future Dreams

English Letter & Winning Numbers

Draw No.: 714 Colour: Yellow

Date: 11.04.2021 Sunday

S 06 32 70 78

Total Value of Prizes
Rs. 2,996,460/-

Next Super Jackpot
Rs. 79,898,600/-

Yellow, Pink and Green coloured tickets are valid on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays respectively. Winning tickets are valid for 6 months.

Development Lotteries Board
356, Dr. Colvin R. De Silva Mawatha, Union Place, Colombo 02
Tel: 0112 333 546-47
Hotline: 0114 824 824, 0112 333 778 or 1919
SMS: DLB+space+LOT+space+KK & send to 999
For Interactive Voice Response Service - Call 0114 825 825

Date :11-04-2021
Draw Number : 3131
Colour : Purple

Super Jackpot
Rs. 2,000,000/-

The winning ticket will be valid for 6 months.

Winning Numbers

23 32 37 45

Libra

TOTAL VALUE OF PRIZES
Rs. 10,584,620/-

Development Lotteries Board
No. 356, Dr. Colvin R. De Silva Mawatha, Union Place, Colombo 2.
Tel: 0112 333 54647. Hotline: 0114 824 824
Result Hotline: 0112 333 778
Interactive Voice Response Number: 011 4 825 825

SUNDAY Draw No.: 3580

Date: 11.04.2021 Colour: Pink

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Total Value of Prizes
Rs. 5,419,780/-

Winning Numbers

32 60 61 67

English Letter
I

Winning tickets are valid only for six months

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For Interactive Voice Response Service - Call 0114 825 825

SUPER BALL

Draw Number ▶ 1424 Colour ▶ Red

Draw Date ▶ 11.04.2021 Date ▶ Sunday

Winning English Letter and Numbers

W 06 53 61 77

The winning tickets will be valid for 6 months.

Total Value of Prizes
Rs. 3,287,400/-

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SMS: DLB+space+LOT+space+98 & send to 999
For Interactive Voice Response Service - Call 0114 825 825

Sunday

Date: 11.04.2021 Total Value of Prizes
Rs. 4,935,740/-

Draw No.: 1250 Colour: Green

Winning Numbers

10 37 61 69

English Letter
D

Winning tickets are valid only for six months

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Textile shops and pavement hawkers in Batticaloa are seen doing brisk business with the public in large numbers flocking to make their New Year purchases. Picture by Sivam Packiyathan, Batticaloa Special Correspondent

THE MANY FACETS OF THE HUMAN FAMILY

RAMU DAMODARAN

When did we lose that phrase, “human family”, to what we now so snappily call the “international community”? I was conjuring its many vibrant, tactile associations when, on the weekend of March 27, I came across an article in the Jamaican Gleaner where Prathit Misra, an Indian diplomat in Kingston, celebrates 175 years of the Indian community in Jamaica and quotes Bob Marley’s granddaughter Donisha Prendergast, as she recalls that “sharing energy with the sadhus (ascetics) on the riverbank in Varanasi (in India) was parallel to the experience of being with the Rastaman in Jamaica. There’s an old connection between these cultures: when Indian indentured labourers were brought to the Caribbean plantations, they brought with them ideas of spirituality, spices and the beautiful plant that would become a central part of the Rastafari culture.”

As vivid a manifestation of the “human family” as any. That weekend was also the one where Indians around the world celebrated Holi, the festival of colour and spring; it was just after its observance in 1979 that the music group Boney M, with its star Jamaican members, released the aptly, if unintentionally, titled song “Holi Holiday”, its refrain “a world of fun for everyone” conjuring the delights and possibilities of the human family.

April 5 was the International Day of Conscience which the United Nations General Assembly declared to regularly mobilise “the efforts of the international community to promote peace, tolerance, inclusion, understanding and solidarity;” in establishing the Day, the assembly recalled “the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which it is stated that disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of humankind.”



And, as I write this, on April 8, it is Yom HaShoah, the “Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and Heroism” in Israel, commemorating both the savage lack of conscience some humans demonstrated and the assertive acts of affirmation of conscience other human beings demonstrated.



Among those was Carl Lutz, the Swiss diplomat whose birth anniversary we commemorated on March 30, in the recollection of Rabbi Arthur Schneider, founder of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, “I escaped with my life because a Swiss consul in Budapest, Carl Lutz, risked his diplomatic career to save Jews.”

Twenty years after the Foundation’s work began, the United Nations adopted the “Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which They Live,” reading it today, I am struck how academically prescient its drafter authors were. As I learned from Susan Hussein of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Harvard University has decided to remove permanently the phrase “illegal alien” from its collection descriptions on the premise that it is not individuals who are legal or illegal, but their actions, a distinction the careful wording in the United Nations document respects.

This has been a religiously contemplative week, with Easter and Passover; Andrew Sullivan wrote movingly about “the one thing that endures in religious practice: something transcendent that makes the failure in our lives redemptive, and sees politics merely as the necessary art of attending to the imperfect.”

I thought of those three elements—attending to the imperfect, of common sense and of the facing of each other as one human family—in the context of conscience; what collective expression of a realized if, at times hesitant, conscience could there better have been than in the attending to the imperfect with common sense that the one human family sought to realize in the Sustainable Development Goals?

Almost on cue, I found I was not alone in this thought; the resolution establishing the International Day of Conscience asks that “the Culture of Peace with Love and Conscience” be built “in accordance with the culture and other appropriate circumstances or customs of their local, national and regional communities, including through quality education and public awareness-raising activities, thereby fostering sustainable development.”

A fostering whose shape was hastened by the global community of scholarship; much like the logic of the Academic Impact itself, it soon became clear that there was no field of research or enquiry which could not invigorate that mission. It was 110 years ago that “superconductivity” was discovered by Heike Kamerlingh Onnes, then studying the resistance of solid mercury at cryogenic temperatures using the recently produced liquid helium as a refrigerant.

Fast forward to later this 2021 year and a volume edited by Muralidhar Miryala “High-Tc Superconducting Technology Towards Sustainable Development Goals” slated to be released in August which argues “clean environment, global peace, mitigating climate change, financial growth, and future development of the world require new materials that improve the quality of life.

Superconductivity, in general, allows perfect current transmission without losses. This makes it a valuable resource for sustainability in several aspects. High-temperature superconducting (HTSC) materials will be crucial for sustainable everyday applications and more attractive for the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

Or the United Nations Day of Human Space Flight which was observed on April 12, this year marking the 60th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin’s flight into the feared, the beginning of an era when, in the phrase of Chris Churchill of New Mexico State University “even with millions of moving parts in the industry, of logistics, and economic machinery, we learned that when individuals embrace being part of something bigger than themselves, a single generation can transform humanity into something greater than it was,” much like the SDGs themselves.

A transformation from unexpected connections; who would have thought of a link between human space flight and osteoporosis? And yet, in this timely reference from the United Nations Office on Outer Space, which I came across on World Health Day in April 7 “some medical research can only be performed in orbit, aboard the space station, where there is only microgravity. The same weightlessness that lets space-suited astronauts move massive objects easily also offers a unique learning opportunity, as in the case of zero-gravity’s effects on astronauts’ skeletal systems and loss of bone and muscle mass.

In the end, the SDGs, like conscience and faith, are about liberation; the observances and celebrations of this past week extended that metaphor, the liberation of Christ from his crucifix on Easter, the liberation of the Hebrew slaves commemorated in Passover, a liberation and a return, as in the chorus.



Va Pensiero from Verdi’s “Nabucco” to “thoughts, on golden wings that settle upon the slopes and hills, where warm and soft and fragrant are the breezes of our sweet native land,” the version of that chorus we are proud to share so evocative of our times, where our individual talents and creativities, within the compelled confines of our own space, can soar, one and together, #onlytogether, elevating that “sweet native land” from one beyond immediate reclaimed geography to the home, collective like conscience, of the “human family.”

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights was the first United Nations mention of the “human family” in its very opening lines with reference to “the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” and its going on to assert in its first article that “all human beings...are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

The phrases may have seemed contradictory (how can mankind possess a collective conscience if the exercise of that in individual human beings is aspirational) but they could equally be mutually reinforcing (the collective conscience is the aggregate of that with which individual human beings have been endowed).

That collective conscience has brought the promise, and possible permanence, of sustainable development within our grasp.

But will it realize the respect, indeed affection, caring and, yes, responsibility for the person rather than the people, where numbers transform into names, where, as in all families, identities are defined by the relationship and not the degree of separation.

March 29 was also the day the trial relating to the death of George Floyd began. Could he have recalled blessings to count? Was he in a position to practice kindness? Did he let go of what he could not control of his own volition? Could he listen to his heart? Could he have remained calm, leave alone productive?

Those answers will remain conjecture. But what he unequivocally could not do was “just breathe.”



[The writer is Chief, United Nations Academic Impact hosted in the Department of Global Communications].

afc Gold Loan PUBLIC AUCTION SALE

Gold articles pawned at the undermentioned Gold Loan Centers of the Alliance Finance Co. PLC, for the period elapsing on 2020.01.31 not redeemed up to now, will be sold by Public Auction on 2021.04.28 at 9.30 a.m. at the undermentioned place.

GOLD LOAN CENTERS

Aluthgama, Ambalangoda, Ampara, Anuradhapura, Athurugiriya, Avissawella, Badulla, Balangoda, Batticaloa, Chankanai, Chawakachcheri, Chilaw, Chunnagam, Dambulla, Galewela, Monaragala, Hatton, Homagama, Horana, Ja Ela, Jaffna, Kadawatha, Kaduruwela, Kaduwela, Kalawanjikudi, Kalpitiya, Kelaniya, Kilinochchi, Kiribathgoda, Kirindiwela, Malabe, Matarana, Negombo, Nittambuwa, Panadura, Piliyandala, Point Pedro, Pugoda, Ratnapura, Rikillagaskada, Thirunelveli, Trincomalee, Vauniya, Welimada, Dehiattakandiya, Galgamuwa, Kaluthara, Kegalle, Kelaniya, Kurunegala, Nawalapitiya, Ragala, Rajagiriya, Wellawaya, Kohuwala, Nuwaraeliya, Nikawaratiya, Mathale, Hingurakgoda, Medawachchiya

DATE AND PLACE OF AUCTION
No. 722, Kotte road, Rajagiriya.
2021-04-28

All those who are participating in the Auction should bring their National Identity Card. The Alliance Finance Co. PLC reserves the right to cancelling, postponing or amalgamating the Auctions without any intimation.

Head of Division - Gold Loan Alliance Finance Co. PLC
No. 722, Kotte road, Rajagiriya.
Tel : 0115 573600

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Bare land for sale.
Extent: 17.15 perches with road frontage to Maradana Road, opposite Ananda College. Principals only. Offers open only for 7 days from today. Contact: 0759959490. 028498

INVITATION FOR BID (IFB-2021/05)

DEPARTMENT OF IRRIGATION, NORTHERN PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

- The Director, Department of Irrigation, Northern Province invites sealed bids from eligible and qualified bidders for civil works as described in the table below.
- Bidding will be conducted through National Competitive Bidding (NCB). Since the Estimated Value of work to be performed under this procurement (excluding VAT and other taxes) is below Rs. 50 MN, regional preference and CIDA grade preference shall apply as stipulated in Public Finance Circular No. 04/2016(iii).
- To be eligible for contract award, the successful bidder shall not have been blacklisted and shall meet the CIDA registration and qualification requirements listed below. Additional details are provided in the Bidding Documents.
- Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from Deputy Director of Irrigation of respective ranges and inspect the Bidding Documents at the address given below during office hours.

Vavuniya & Mannar District	Kilinochchi District	Mullaitivu District
Deputy Director's Office, Vavuniya Range, Provincial Irrigation Department, Station Road, Vavuniya. T.P: 024 2222347 / 024 2222352	Deputy Director's Office, Kilinochchi Range, Provincial Irrigation Department, Wilsion Road, Kilinochchi. T.P: 021 2285867	Deputy Director's Office, Mullaitivu Range, Provincial Irrigation Department, A9 Road, Mankulam. T.P: 024 3244122

- A complete set of Bidding Documents in English language should be purchased by interested bidders on the submission of a written application to the Director of Irrigation, Department of Irrigation, Northern Province, New Colony Lane, A9 Road, Mankulam from 15.04.2021 to 05.05.2021 from 09:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, upon payment of a non refundable fee of Rs. 2,000.00 for Lot No :- 2,3,5,6 and other lots' fee shall be Rs. 3500.00. The method of payment shall be by cash.
- Bids shall be delivered to the Chairman of the respective Procurement Committee as indicated in the table below at Department of Irrigation, Northern Province, New Colony Lane, A9 Road, Mankulam on or before 14:00 hrs on 06.05.2021. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be opened immediately after the closing in the presence of the bidder's representatives who choose to attend.
- Bids shall be valid as indicated in the form of bid. (Section -4).
- All bids shall be accompanied by a bid security in the form of Bid Security included in Section-9. The amount and validity of the bid security shall be as per details given in Section -5.
- Pre-bid meeting will be held at Department of Irrigation, Northern Province, New Colony Lane, A9 Road, Mankulam commencing at 10.00 hrs on 28.04.2021.

The Table referred to above is:

Lot No	Title of Contract & Contract Identification Number	PC	Proposed contract Price (Rs.Mn)	Bid Security Amount (Rs)	Construction Period (Days)	Required CIDA Grade
Mullaitivu District						
1	Rehabilitation to Lift Irrigation Scheme at Visuvamadu Indian Housing Scheme PSDG/MUL/MIK/2021/01	RPC	23.00	450,000.00	180 Days	C6 or C5 Irrigation & Drainage canals
2	Renovation of Udayarkaddu RB Main Channel Road Contract No: PSDG/MUL/MIK/2021/03	RPC	4.630	90,000.00	180 Days	C8 or C7 Irrigation & Drainage canals
Jaffna District						
3	Improvements of Vadamarachchi Lagoon & Upparu lagoon REC/KOC/JAF/2021/02	Div.PC	1.840	35,000.00	60 Days	C8 or C9 Irrigation & Drainage canals
Vavuniya District						
4	Construction of Nachadichchapallam Anicut Contract: No: PF/VAV/VAV/2021/01	DPC	46.000	600,000.00	120 Days	C5 or C4 Irrigation & Drainage canals
5	Rehabilitation of pampaimadu Tank head works & Downstream developments PSDG/VAV/VAV/2021/01	Div.PC	4.629	90,000.00	90 Days	C7 or C8 Irrigation & Drainage canals
6	Rehabilitation of Mamaduwa Tank head works & Downstream developments PSDG/VAV/CHE/2021/04	Div.PC	2.777	50,000.00	90 Days	C7 or C8 Irrigation & Drainage canals

PC: Procurement Committee, Div.PC: Divisional Procurement Committee

RPC: Regional Procurement Committee DPC: Department Procurement Committee

Director of Irrigation, Irrigation Department, Northern Province. T. P: 021 2285472, 021 2285652

Date :13.04.2021

Harry to attend "dear Papa" Philip's pared-back funeral

UK: The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II's husband, Prince Philip, will take place next week, Buckingham Palace said on Saturday, announcing a stripped-back ceremony due to coronavirus restrictions, and a return for exiled royal Prince Harry but not his wife, Meghan.

The announcement came as the couple's eldest son, heir to the throne Prince Charles, 72, paid a heartfelt tribute to his "dear Papa", and said he and the royal family missed him "enormously".

"My dear Papa was a very special person who I think above all else would have been amazed by the reaction and the touching things that have been said about him, and from that point of view we are, my family, deeply grateful for all that," he added.

"It will sustain us in this particular loss and at this particularly sad time."

The Duke of Edinburgh - the 94-year-old Queen's husband of 73 years - died peacefully on Friday just two months short of his 100th birthday, triggering eight days of national mourning.

Royal officials said his funeral, which will be televised, will take place at 1400 GMT on Saturday, April 17 in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, west of London.

It will be preceded by a national minute's silence.

Government guidelines

Prince Philip
Consort of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II
dies at age 99, April 9

- June 10, 1921: Born in Greece into the Greek and Danish royal families
- 1939: Joins the British Royal Navy following the outbreak of WWII
- 1943: Appointed first lieutenant
- 1947: Abandons Greek and Danish royal titles. Becomes British subject
- Nov 20, 1947: Marries Princess Elizabeth, the future monarch, at Westminster Abbey
- 1951: Abandons naval career, shortly before Elizabeth becomes queen
- 2017: Retires from public engagements
- 2019: Gives up driving after causing a car crash. Suffers several bouts of ill health, including hospital stay just before Christmas
- 2021: Feb 17: admitted to hospital as a precaution; Mar 4: undergoes a successful heart procedure; Mar 16: leaves hospital; April 9: death announced by Buckingham Palace



A crowd kept a respectful silence at the Tower of London as they watched the Honourable Artillery Company fire shots.

"thanks, as a nation and a kingdom, for the extraordinary life and work of Prince Philip".

Political and faith leaders in Britain, and from the United States, Europe and Commonwealth countries including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and Pakistan also paid their respects.

Global royalty also paid their respects, while Pope Francis praised the Prince's "devotion" to his family and marriage, and sent his "heartfelt condolences" to the Queen.



Prince Harry and Prince Philip

restrict mourners to just 30 people and close attention has been paid to the pared-down guest list for the funeral, particularly whether the duke's grandson Harry would attend.

Palace officials confirmed he would but his American wife, Meghan, who is pregnant with their second child, had been advised against travelling from the United States on medical

grounds. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will also not be attending the funeral because of COVID restrictions, Downing Street said.

Westminster Abbey, where the couple married in 1947, tolled its tenor bell 99 times on Friday, once for each year of the prince's life.

The duke's death dominated Britain's newspapers on Satur-

day. "We're all weeping with you Ma'am," The Sun tabloid said on its front page.

The Daily Mail splashed a picture of the Queen looking at her husband along with the headline "Farewell, my beloved" on the front page of its 144-page souvenir edition.

Tributes poured in from home and abroad, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson giving

Trump blasts McConnell, Pence and Fauci in expletive-filled Mar-a-Lago speech

US: Addressing a meeting of affluent donors and top Republican officials, Donald Trump spent more time lashing out at fellow Republicans - and most sharply at their Senate leader - than at Democrats, news media reported Sunday.



Former President Donald Trump speaking to members of the Republican National Committee (RNC) at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The former President, speaking Saturday to members of the Republican National Committee (RNC) at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, called for party unity in the wake of his loss to Joe Biden and the party's loss of Senate control.

But his polarizing ways and piercing criticism of fellow party members have created awkward complications for Republican leaders as they look to 2022 mid-term elections and beyond.

As Trump continued on Saturday to assert falsely that he won the November election, he particularly excoriated Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, calling him a "dumb (expletive)" and a "stone cold loser."

Trump has blamed McConnell for not fighting to block Congress's January 6 certification of Biden's election victory - certification that took place only after a pro-Trump mob violently stormed the Capitol building. McConnell later declared that Trump was "practically and morally responsible" for the deadly attack.

He then said he was "disappointed" in his own Vice President, Mike Pence, for his role in certifying the election result.

And he again attacked top

US scientist Anthony Fauci, saying the epidemiologist is "full of crap."

Without mentioning the more than 560,000 Americans who have died of COVID-19, Trump praised Republicans such as Florida governor Ron DeSantis for reopening their states early, in defiance of experts' advice.

During the Mar-a-Lago meeting, which some Republicans said they hoped would focus more on the party's path forward, Trump instead rehashed past grievances, including his criticism of Republican officials in Georgia and Pennsylvania who had refused to support his claims of a stolen election.

Describing the crowd at his January 6 rally - several thousand people drawn to Washington by Trump's frequent pleas on Twitter - he claimed that "some people say it was over a million people," a considerable exaggeration. McConnell did not attend the Mar-a-Lago event.

He has told advisors he has not spoken to Trump in months and never plans to do so again, according to The Washington Post. - AFP

Caribbean volcano erupts



Volcanic ash clouds spread from St Vincent to Barbados

ANTIGUA, BARBUDA: Ash covered much of the Caribbean island of St Vincent and the stench of sulphur filled the air after a series of eruptions from a volcano that had been quiet for decades.

The thick dust was also on the move, travelling 175 kilometres to the east and starting to affect the neighbouring island of Barbados.

"Barbadians have been urged to stay indoors as thick plumes of volcanic ash move through the atmosphere," the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency said.

The whitish powder caked roads, homes and buildings in St Vincent after the powerful blasts from the La Soufriere volcano that began on Friday.

Visibility in some areas was extremely

limited, while in the capital city Kingstown in the south of the island - the volcano is in the north - the ash caused a thin haze of dust, the portal said.

"Vincentians are waking up to extremely heavy ash fall and strong sulphur smells which have now advanced to the capital," the local emergency management agency tweeted.

The eruptions prompted thousands of people to flee to safety. Around 16,000 people live in areas under evacuation orders.

The 1,235-metre La Soufriere - the name is French for "sulphur mine" - had not erupted since 1979, and its largest eruption happened over a century ago, killing more than 1,000 people in 1902. - AFP

Vanuatu's Prince Philip worshippers say his spirit lives on

VANUATU: The chief of a remote Pacific village which worshipped Prince Philip with religious fervour said Monday it was too early to know whether the British Royal's descendants will receive similar deification.



Yakel village chief Albi and members of his family hold a portrait of Britain's Prince Philip in the remote Pacific village of Vanuatu on Monday. - AFP

While many outsiders assumed Philip's eldest son Charles or grandsons William and Harry would succeed him in having a special place in the villagers' hearts, Albi said nothing was certain. "The spirit of Prince Philip has left his body,

but it lives on - it is too soon to say where it will reside," he told AFP.

Beneath a British flag flying at half mast, Albi joined elders Monday at Yaohnanen, another village that worships Philip, for discussions on how to mark the momentous death.

Chiefs spoke in turn during painstaking discussions on what the death means for their customary belief system, with a resolution likely to be days away. Albi had words of comfort for Queen Elizabeth II, wishing her joy because even though Philip's body was lost, his spirit lived on. The Yakel chiefs said they were sending a confidential message to the royal family following Philip's passing.

The Prince Philip Movement is believed to have started in the late 1970s following a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh to Vanuatu earlier that decade.

British officials investigating the phenomenon concluded it stemmed from an age-old legend of a returning son who had pale skin. - AFP

NEPAL'S RHINO POPULATION INCREASES BY 107 IN 6 YEARS

NEPAL: Nepal's population of endangered one-horned rhinoceros has grown by more than a hundred over the past six years, officials said, with campaigners hailing the increase as a conservation "milestone".



Nepal's population of endangered one-horned rhinoceros sees an increase.

The population rose to 752 across four national parks in the southern plains, up from 645 in 2015, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation said Saturday.

"The increase of rhinos is exciting news for us," the department's information officer, Haribhadra Acharya, told AFP on Sunday.

"But we have challenges ahead to expand the habitat areas of this animal to maintain the growth." Thousands of one-

horned rhinos once roamed the southern plains, but rampant poaching and human encroachment on their habitat reduced

their numbers to around 100 in Nepal in the 1960s.

Since 1994, the Himalayan nation has conducted a rhino census once every five years, as authorities stepped up their efforts to boost population numbers for the species listed as vulnerable by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. In the first census in 1994, 466 rhinos were counted.

Some 250 personnel - including enumerators, soldiers and veterinarians - rode on 57 elephants for nearly three weeks from late March to count the rhinos. "Rhinos were counted

through a direct observation method, where the counting team reached as close as 100 metres (330 feet) from the wild animal," Acharya added.

The rhino population has climbed in recent years amid the government's anti-poaching and conservation initiatives.

But the illegal trade of rhino horns - prized in China and Southeast Asia for their supposed medicinal properties - remains a threat.

Some 26 rhinos died in Nepal last year, including four from poaching, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation said. - AFP

DATE 2021.04.11	SUNDAY OFFICIAL RESULTS	www.nlb.lk
MAHAJANA SAMPATHA		DRAW NUMBER : 4454 Value of prizes won in this draw Rs. 11,411,520.00
WINNING LETTER V	WINNING NUMBERS 6 3 9 2 2 0	THE SUPER PRIZE OF THE NEXT DRAW Rs. 18,876,440.00
Govisetha		DRAW NUMBER : 2749 TOTAL PRIZE WON IN THIS DRAW Rs. 7,332,380.00
WINNING LETTER H	WINNING NUMBERS 16 19 59 76	THE SUPER PRIZE OF THE NEXT DRAW Rs. 64,728,276.40
SEVANA		DRAW NUMBER : 330 TOTAL PRIZE WON IN THIS DRAW Rs. 2,154,580.00
ENGLISH LETTER Q	WINNING NUMBERS 14 23 24 68	THE SUPER PRIZE OF THE NEXT DRAW Rs. 14,000,000.00
Dhana Nidhanaya		DRAW NUMBER : 491 TOTAL PRIZE WON IN THIS DRAW Rs. 3,223,840.00
WINNING LETTER O	WINNING NUMBERS 32 43 65 69	THE SUPER PRIZE OF THE NEXT DRAW Rs. 92,902,915.20
DARU DIRI SAMPATHA		DRAW NUMBER : 34 TOTAL PRIZE WON IN THIS DRAW Rs. 3,215,280.00
ENGLISH LETTER E	WINNING NUMBERS 32 42 60 90	THE SUPER PRIZE OF THE NEXT DRAW Rs. 7,196,614.80
11.04.2021 - TOTAL PRIZE WINNERS PRODUCED BY NATIONAL LOTTERIES BOARD 686,483		
TOTAL PRIZE MONEY DISTRIBUTED AMONG WINNERS Rs. 27,337,600.00		
Rs. 2,000,000 PRIZES 01 Rs. 1,000,000 PRIZES 01 Rs. 1,00,000 PRIZES 30		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Winning Prizes above Rs. 500,000 are subject to government taxes Winner has to submit National ID when receiving Prizes All Winning lotteries are valid only for 06 months from Draw Date 		
ජාතික ලොකරැසි මණ්ඩලය National Lotteries Board Tel: 011-4607006, 011-2324324 Fax: 011-4669416		
32, Deshamanya N. W. J. Mudalige Mawatha, Colombo - 01.		

CHINA MULLS MIXING VACCINES TO IMPROVE EFFICACY OF JABS

CHINA: China is considering the mixing of different COVID-19 vaccines to improve the relatively low efficacy of its existing options, a top health expert has told a conference.

Authorities have to "consider ways to solve the issue that efficacy rates of existing vaccines are not high", Chinese media outlet The Paper reported, citing Gao Fu, the head of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

His comments mark the first time a top Chinese expert has publicly alluded to the relatively low efficacy of the country's vaccines, as China forges ahead in its mass vaccination campaign and exports its jabs around the world.

China has administered around 161 million doses since vaccinations began last year – most people will require two shots – and aims to fully inoculate 40 percent of its 1.4 billion population by June.

But many have been slow to sign up for jabs, with life largely back to normal within China's borders and domestic outbreaks under control.

Gao has previously stressed the best way to prevent the spread of Covid-19 is vaccination, and said in a recent state media interview that China aims to vaccinate 70 percent to 80 percent of its population between the end of this year and mid-2022.

At the conference in Chengdu on Saturday, Gao added that an option to



Work at a factory of Chinese vaccine maker Sinovac Biotech in Beijing.

overcome the efficacy problem is to alternate the use of vaccine doses that tap different technologies.

This is an option that health experts outside China are studying as well.

Gao said experts should not ignore mRNA vaccines just because there are already several coronavirus jabs in the country, urging for further development, The Paper reported.

Sinopharm's vaccines have efficacy rates of 79.34 percent and 72.51 percent respectively, while the overall effi-

cacy for CanSino's stands at 65.28 percent after 28 days.

Venezuela to produce Cuban COVID-19 vaccine

Venezuela hopes to produce two million doses per month of a Cuban coronavirus vaccine, President Nicolas Maduro said Sunday.

The South American country will also take part in Phase 3 trials for the Abdala vaccine produced by its socialist

ally. "We've signed an agreement to produce in our laboratories... two million vaccines a month of the Abdala vaccine... for August, September, approximately," said Maduro in a television address.

Cuba has developed four vaccines that are in various stages of clinical trials.

Germany's COVID-19 infections pass 3 m

The number of COVID-19 infections in Germany has crossed the three million mark, according to figures published Monday by the Robert Koch Institute disease control centre.

The total number of infections now stands at 3,011,513, with 78,452 deaths, the institute said.

China gives 200,000 vaccine doses to Cameroon

Cameroon received a gift of 200,000 doses of China's Sinopharm vaccine against Covid-19 on Sunday, state television reported.

The country of around 26 million people is one of the hardest hit on the African continent, with 61,700 cases and 919 deaths recorded. Neighbours Equatorial Guinea and Gabon have already begun inoculation campaigns using the Sinopharm vaccine. - AFP

Over 52.2% of Brazil's ICU COVID patients are under 40



Medical workers treat a COVID-19 patient at the intensive care unit of a hospital in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

BRAZIL: The number of COVID-19 patients under 40 in intensive care in Brazil surpassed older groups last month, a researcher said Sunday, amid a deadly surge driven partly by a new coronavirus variant.

The number of people aged 39 or younger in intensive care units with COVID-19 in March rose sharply to more than 11,000, or 52.2 percent of the total, said the Brazilian ICU Project.

That was up from 14.6 percent of total ICU patients early in the pandemic and around 45 percent from September through February. Patients over 80, who fell from 13.6 percent to 7.8 percent of the total in Brazil's ICUs in March, are now

largely vaccinated. Young people are also more likely to expose themselves to the virus, whether because they have to leave home to work or believe they are less vulnerable, he said.

Another factor may be the new Brazilian variant, known as P1, which experts say is partly responsible for the country's COVID-19 death toll exploding in March.

Brazil registered more than 66,500 COVID-19 deaths in March, more than double the hard-hit country's previous monthly record in July 2020.

The disease has claimed a total of 351,000 lives in the country of 212 million people, a death toll second only to that of the United States. - AFP

Myanmar youth fight internet outages with underground newsletter

MYANMAR: Myanmar youth are fighting the junta's internet shutdown and information suppression with an explosive underground printed newsletter they are secretly distributing across communities.

For 56 days straight there have been internet outages in coup-hit Myanmar, according to monitoring group NetBlocks.

The country has been in turmoil since democratically-elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted in a February 1 coup, triggering a mass uprising that has resulted in a brutal security crackdown and more than 700 civilian deaths.

Thirty-year-old Lynn Thant, not his real name, started the underground newsletter and gave it the edgy name Molotov to appeal to young people.

Police and soldiers have arrested more than 3,000 people since the coup, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Two hundred high profile celebrities including actors, singers and social media influencers are on an arrest warrant list and could face three years' jail if convicted of spreading dissent against the military.

He said the publication had a reach of more than 30,000 people on Facebook so far and the main audience was Generation Z activists.

Copies of the newsletter are also being distributed under the radar at produce markets. Myanmar lived under military rule for 49 years before it transitioned to democracy in 2011. - AFP



Myanmar activists are producing and printing the Molotov newsletter to get around the junta's internet shutdown and suppression of the media. - AFP

Five things to know about Gagarin's journey to space



Yuri Gagarin

RUSSIA: Sixty years ago on Monday cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person in space, securing victory for Moscow in its race with Washington and marking a new chapter in the history of space exploration.

Decades later, his journey has become shrouded in myth after many details about the historic mission were for years kept secret by the Soviets.

Here are five things to know about Gagarin's legendary flight: A trained steel worker turned military pilot, Gagarin was selected from thousands of candidates to undergo the rigorous training required for a space flight.

Apart from showing excellent results in his tests, Gagarin, then aged 27, also reportedly stood out by removing his shoes before entering the Vostok spacecraft designated for the mission, a custom in Russia when entering a home.

On April 12, 1961, as Gagarin's flight took off from the Baikonur spaceport in Kazakhstan, he exclaimed his iconic catchphrase "Poekhali!", or "Let's go!" in Russian.

The flight lasted just 108 minutes as the Vostok completed one loop around the Earth.

Once Gagarin safely returned home, the success of his mission outshone the fact that not everything went according to plan.

Among a dozen technical glitches, his spacecraft entered into orbit at a higher altitude than expected.

If its brakes system had malfunctioned, Gagarin would have had to wait for the spacecraft to begin descending on its own. And while the Vostok was stocked with enough food,

water and oxygen to last 10 days, the higher altitude meant the wait would have been much longer and Gagarin would have run out of supplies. Luckily for the Russian cosmonaut, the brakes worked.

But Gagarin came down miles away from his expected landing point, ejecting from his capsule over the Saratov region in southern Russia.

He landed in a field where the first people he saw were a young girl and her grandmother digging up potatoes.

Clad in a white helmet and orange spacesuit, he struggled at first to convince them amid Cold War tensions that he was not a foreign spy.

Legend has it that before takeoff Gagarin asked the bus driver bringing him to the launchpad to pull over so he could relieve himself.

For years Russian cosmonauts repeated the ritual before launching into space, but the decades-old superstition may soon be forced into retirement: the new design of the Russian spacesuit presented in 2019 is not equipped with a fly and is too heavy to nimbly remove.

While Gagarin became a household name in the Soviet Union, for years nobody knew about the mastermind of the country's space programme: Sergei Korolyov.

The Soviets even rejected a Nobel prize awarded to their "Chief Designer", determined to keep his identity a secret. Only after his death in 1966 was his name revealed.

Under Korolyov's leadership, the USSR sent not only the first person to space, but later the first woman, as well as conducting the first spacewalk. - AFP



Yuri Gagarin's Vostok 1 descent module after landing on April 12 1961, in the rural Saratov region of Russia. Gagarin was greeted by a shocked farmer.

U.S. POLICE SHOOTING OF BLACK MAN IN MINNEAPOLIS SPARKS FRESH PROTESTS

US: Protests broke out Sunday night after US police fatally shot a young Black man in a suburb of Minneapolis – where a former police officer is currently on trial for the murder of George Floyd.

Hundreds of people gathered outside the police station in Brooklyn Center, northwest of Minneapolis, with police later firing tear-

gas and flash bangs to disperse the crowd, according to an AFP videojournalist.

The National Guard was on the scene, police had declared an illegal assembly, and the Brooklyn Center mayor said he would "be issuing a curfew order shortly".

The mother of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, told a crowd earlier Sunday

evening that he called her to say he had been pulled over by police, local media reported.

Katie Wright said she heard officers tell her son to put his phone down, and then one of the officers ended the call. Soon after, her son's girlfriend told her he had been shot.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension confirmed to AFP it was "investigating an officer-involved shooting incident" in Brooklyn Center but declined to identify the victim. According to a statement from the Brooklyn Center Police Department, officers pulled over a driver for a traffic violation. When they discovered he had an outstanding warrant, they tried to take him into custody.

He got back into his car, and one of the officers fired their weapon, striking the driver, who died at the scene.

A female passenger in the car suffered "non-life threatening injuries" and was transported to a local hospital, said the statement, which did not identify the woman.

Photos from the protest showed men stomping on the windshield of a police cruiser. Police fired rubber bullets to try to disperse the protesters, according to the Star Tribune. The shooting comes during the ongoing trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin, who is facing charges of manslaughter and murder over the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis last May. Floyd's killing sparked months of protests in the United States against racism and police brutality and attracted international outrage. - AFP



Protesters clashed with police in Minneapolis after an officer shot and killed a Black man during a traffic stop.

IRAN'S SAYS NUCLEAR FACILITY HIT BY ACT OF 'TERRORISM'



The Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant in Iran.

IRAN: Iran's atomic energy organisation said Sunday the Natanz nuclear facility was hit by a terrorist act, hours after it said an "accident" had caused a power failure there.

The episode came a day after the Islamic republic said it had started up advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges at the site, in a breach of its commitments under a troubled 2015 deal with world powers.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Iran Atomic Energy Organisation (IAEO), condemned a "futile" act, while urging the international community to "confront this anti-nuclear terrorism", in a statement carried by state television.

The attack was carried out by "opponents of the country's industrial and political progress, who aim to prevent development of a thriving nuclear industry," he said, without specifying what country or entity might be behind the alleged sabotage.

IAEO spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi had earlier reported an accident at the enrichment facility caused by a "power failure". No one was injured and there was no radioactive release, the official Pars news agency reported, citing the spokesman.

Kamalvandi said there had been "an accident in part of the electrical circuit of the enrichment facility" at the Natanz complex near Tehran. - AFP

